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Sounding Aztlán: Music, Literature, and the Chicana/o Sonic Imaginary

by

Wanda Alarcón

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree of

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and the Designated Emphasis

in

Women, Gender, and Sexuality

in the

Graduate Division

of the

University of California, Berkeley

Committee in charge:

Professor Laura E. Pérez, Chair

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Fall 2016

Abstract

Sounding Aztlán: Music, Literature, and the Chicana/o Sonic Imaginary

by

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Doctor of Philosophy in Ethnic Studies

University of California, Berkeley

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This dissertation explores the question: *What does Aztlán sound like?* Informed by decolonial feminist theory and sound studies concepts, I consider listening as a new praxis with which to remember complex narratives of belonging and citizenship against the assimilating force of national forms and political limits. This interdisciplinary research engages the idea of Aztlán, the mythical homeland of the Nahuas, and the imagined solidarity it mobilized in 1960s activism as a Chicana feminist concept with a history of generative interventions that challenge its nationalist logic. Taking up the contested notion of Aztlán as historically marginalizing to women and la jotería, I use a method of listening to “tune in” to multiple, heterogeneous, and alternate histories of Chicana/o belonging in the musical and literary soundscapes of Greater Mexico. This work explores the diverse audible markers of race, gender, sexuality, citizenship and migration that circulate in the Chicana/o musical, literary, performance and new media objects I examine. I argue that through the soundscape, Aztlán becomes a plural concept.

“Sounding Aztlán” is organized as four linked discussions that test the portability of sound as a new interpretive method and epistemology for Chicana/o Studies, sound studies, and decolonial feminism: Ch. 1, “Tuning In to Coalition: Listening to *This Bridge Called My Back*,” revisits the foundational feminist text, *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color*. I think of *Bridge* as an artifact of coalition, a multiplicity of radical voices embodied in its very form. Just as the act of writing for women of color is connected to life, the stakes of being heard are high. I claim that there is an aural dimension to *Bridge* beyond the textual that has to do with perceptions of the sound and noise women of color make. Practicing a decolonial feminist “listening,” this chapter engages *Bridge* anew as a soundscape of coalition. Ch. 2, “Decolonial Feminist Soundscapes in Post 1980s Chicana Literature,” and Ch. 3, “Soundtracks, Chicana Butches, and East L.A.: *Verónica Reyes’s Chopper! Chopper! Poetry from Bordered Lives* and Raquel Gutiérrez’s *The Barber of East L.A.*” posit that literature is noisy and therefore calls for the reader to listen as a new mode of interpretation. The soundscapes in Chicana/o

narratives have not been fully engaged in prior readings of the poetry, fiction, and drama by Sandra Cisneros, Luis Alfaro, Estella Gonzalez, Raquel Gutiérrez, and Verónica Reyes. I argue that literature becomes a site for hearing creative sonics of subjectivity, coalition, and queerness. Against the dominant imaginary of Aztlán, feminist solidarities, decolonial feminist poetics, butch/femme histories, alternative music scenes, and East Los Angeles become audible in these post 80s literary Chicana representations. Ch. 4, “Performing América On The National Stage,” examines a repertoire of three Chicana/o performances of “The Star Spangled Banner” by contemporary pop/rock, mariachi, and banda musicians. I take Jimi Hendrix’s iconic 1969 performance at Woodstock as a jumping off point to explore how dissonant moments between the visual and aural performance of nation captured on social media provide openings for multiple interpretations of citizenship. When the national anthem becomes part of the Chicana/o repertoire, what map of the Americas is sounded through these Chicano performances of the national anthem? These performances highlight meaningful disruptions, tensions, resistances, and variations on the theme of América.

For my abuelitos,
Guadalupe y Arturo Zapata,
my mother Guadalupe,
and my father,
Amando,
who filled my childhood with music and love.

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Graduate school is rigorous but luckily it is also fun and for this I have so my graduate colleagues to thank. Annie Fukushima, Ariko Ikehara, John Dougherty, Josh Troncoso, Jason Chang, Abraham Ramirez, Javier Huerta, Gustavo Buenrostro, and Alisa Sanchez. Your friendship means everything to me.

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Grad school has taken me far from Los Angeles and my oldest, dearest friends, Jose Legaspi, Rubi Fregoso, Gwen Dashiell, and Erin McLaughlin, yet I always know that you are there cheering me on. I can't wait to see you all for NYE 2017!

This would not have happened without the love and support of my family, my sister Amanda, my brothers Clifford, Amilcar, and Asdrual, and my nieces Eli and Maya. To my mother Guadalupe, your wisdom, strength, and kindness gives me faith in all things. I love you all.

Cindy, I saw you do this first. There is too much to say and too much to thank you for, not least the love, certainly always the adventure. I dedicate this this song to you, I think you'll know it: "This is a song about your wavelength and my wavelength, baby. You turn me on, when you get me on your wavelength... You never let me down, no, never let me down."

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Book Review, Leonard G. Ramírez, *Chicanas of 18th Street: Narratives of a Movement from Latino Chicago* (2011). *Aztlan: A Journal of Chicano Studies*, Vol. 37, No. 2, 2012.

"Could I Be Chicana Without Carlos Santana?" *SoundingOut!: The Sound Studies Blog*, 6 August 2012. Web. <http://soundstudiesblog.com/2012/08/06/chicana-without-carlos-santana/>

"Compartiendo Nuestras Historias: Five Testimonios of Schooling and Survival." Wanda Alarcón, Cindy Cruz, Linda Guardia Jackson, Linda Prieto, Sondra Rodriguez-Arroyo. *Journal of Latinos in Education*. Vol. 10, Iss. 4, 2011.

"New Wave Saved My Life," *SoundingOut!: The Sound Studies Blog*. 31 January 2011. Web.
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“A Soundscape of Coalition: Listening to This Bridge Called My Back.” Modern Language Association, Austin, TX—January 2016

“Variations on an Anthem: Chicanas/os Performing América on the National Stage.” National Association for Chicana and Chicano Studies, San Francisco, CA—April 2015

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“What is ‘Negra’ about this Dansa?: Camargo Guarnieri’s *Dansa Negra* and Caifanes’ *La Negra Tomasa*.” Critical Ethnic Studies Association, Chicago, IL—September 2013

“Mapping the Contours of Love and Life in a Decolonial Feminist Methodology.” National Association for Chicana and Chicano Studies, Chicago, IL—April 2012

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COMMUNITY ARTS PROJECTS

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Co-coordinator, poetry reading & art exhibit collaboration with *JOTA Vol. 2: La Ciudad/The City* and Casa0101, Boyle Heights, CA—July 2004

Coordinator, poetry reading and publication launch, *JOTA Vol. 1*, Espresso Mi Cultura Café, Hollywood, CA—August 2003

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Introduction

A Queer Musical Childhood

I grew up in a very musical household. I first remember listening to my mother's LP records when I was a little girl in the 1970's and our small family lived in a green linoleum tiled, two bedroom East Los Angeles apartment. The small dwelling was tucked away under an ancient avocado tree behind the intersection of Brooklyn Avenue and Soto Street. It seemed like it was always hot in East L.A. and everyday after school I looked forward to the cool shady walk down the long corridor that led from the street to our home and the beginning of my memories of music.

I don't remember anyone ever telling me what music to play or not to play from the first time I could turn on the hi-fi console and put the diamond-tip needle on a record. I was never censored, not even when I started to develop my own tastes and started listening to heavy metal, soul, and later new wave, jazz, and other "noisy" music. Back then my mother's mostly Spanish language vinyl record collection, bought over the years at the local record shop suited me just fine. I would listen and sing along to *cumbias* by La Sonora Santanera and Carmen Rivero, all of the Perez Prado *mambos*, Vicki Carr, marimba by Acerina, bossa nova by Jobim and Brazil '66, beautiful Cuban ballads by Beny Moré and a good dose of 60's and 70's pop recordings by the rising Mexican singer/songwriter Juan Gabriel¹ and Spanish superstar Raphael. Going about the daily housework she would also listen to Manuel de Falla's "Danza de Fuego" from *El Amor Brujo* and to "El Beso" by Los Churumbeles de España. Then there was *Connie Francis Sings Spanish and Latin American Favorites*. I remember the album cover distinctly: Francis is wearing a black and white dress, off the shoulder, snug to the waist with a ruffled, tiered, circular skirt. She sits poised on the edge of a fountain in the middle of a Spanish style plaza, the skirt of her dress spread out like an *abanico* that a Mexican or Spanish señorita might carry on a hot day. The album introduced to her American and Latina/o fans songs like, "Quizas, Quizas, Quizas;" "Besame Mucho;" and "Siboney" in lush, irresistible, Latin flavored orchestral arrangements that included parts for castanets, congas and acoustic guitar. At times the combined effect of hearing/listening to all this music in my home was that of a fantastic or fantasy Latin America somewhere between Spain, Cuba, and Mexico—in East L.A.

One song in particular anchors the beginning of my inquiry into music and sexuality, "Malagueña," although at the time I didn't know it. "Malagueña" is a haunting song about a man's sexual obsession for a woman. It is at once a declaration of desire for a woman and a confession of shame about that very same desire: "Malagueña de ojos negros / Malagueña de mis sueños / Me estoy muriendo de pena / Por tu, solo tu, querer!" This is not a love song, exactly, the affective emphasis does not lie in words like *amor* but in *querer*. Desire. Connie Francis sings this song precisely as written with the original Spanish lyrics by Ernesto Lecuona. She changed no gender pronouns the way one might expect, for example, as in a song like, "The Girl from Ipanema" which has been re-interpreted many times by female artists as, "The Boy from Ipanema."² But this song does not lend itself to re-gendering, nor to an easy I/you

¹ Juan Gabriel is considered Mexico's premiere songwriter. He is known for his elaborate concerts and flamboyant performances. His homosexuality is considered a "secreto de boca abierta" or open secret.

² House music singer Crystal Waters followed this accepted practice of re-gendering in her recording of this song for the album *Red, Hot and Rio* (1996). By contrast Amy Winehouse keeps the male pronouns in her version lending the song a more frank bi-sexuality. *Lioness: Hidden Treasures* (2011)

ambiguity such as Cole Porter's "Night and Day" or Consuelo Velazquez's "Besame Mucho" and other American standards and traditional Spanish language boleros. Hearing a woman sing the verse, "Malagueña rebonita te quiero besar!" was thrilling because of her powerful delivery--and because it made me question what I was hearing beyond the music. "Malagueña," that impassioned song about an elusive woman with alluring dark eyes became an unarticulated question for me for many years.

Amongst these records, the heartbeat of my household, I would file away Beethoven, Chopin, Bartok, Ravel and other classical music LPs bought especially for me as a reward for devoting all the Saturdays of my pre-teen life to piano lessons. My piano teacher from sixth grade through high school was Cuban and had been a concert pianist in her native country. When I met her she taught piano in her daughter's flamenco and ballet dance studio in Huntington Park where we now lived. She introduced me to the music of the Cuban pianist and composer, Ernesto Lecuona and his piano composition called "La Comparsa" or "The Procession" from the Afro-Cuban suite called *Danzas afro-cubanas*. I also learned pieces from his Andalusia Spanish Suite, an impressionistic work of the Andalusian region of Spain where the ubiquitous "Malagueña" comes from. I learned these songs along with well known preludes, nocturnes, and waltzes by Chopin, Sonatas by Beethoven, and preludes, fugues, partitas and piano suites by Bach and other great figures in Western canonical music. I studied all of this piano literature with the same degree of discipline and without a strong sense of hierarchal distinctions between them.

Later I would study music in college and audition with three pieces by Lecuona, Chopin, and Bach. But it would be a long time before I fully understood the power of the western musical canon. My interest in Latin American piano literature was noted by my professors, yet when I expressed interest in a piece by the Brazilian composer Camargo Guarnieri, it was suggested that I play a work by the Spanish composer, Isaac Albéniz, instead. I must note that from a Latin American perspective Lecuona, Villa-Lobos, and Guarnieri all represent the elite and "erudite" in music in their respective countries but not in my U.S. music program.³ Here they were most certainly marginalized and tokenized, as was I. A Chicana music student and Latin American repertoire yoked together in a strange racializing move I was not prepared for. My impulse to continue to study music in the manner I had learned from my childhood teacher, to center the music of my childhood home where I learned so much as a nexus for exploring what it means to be Mexican American in the U.S., a first generation Chicana lesbian daughter of Mexican immigrants in the U.S., bilingual and bimusical, was not encouraged. I was disciplined into reproducing the more legible sounds of the western musical canon. Over time I realized that my musical education did not merely comprise learning an unorthodox repertoire of piano literature—one that combined western classical music, 20th century Latin American art songs, and Latin American and Mexican popular music. I had learned an approach to music that crossed the disciplinary boundaries of formal music studies. I believe my family's strong appreciation of all music and my teacher's pedagogy both "undisciplined" my relationship to music in the best possible way. From an early age I learned a certain "spirit of theoretical indiscipline" as Jacques Attali might say. I learned to listen across musical genres, language, and in between the lines. I heard things larger than music, the capaciousness of music to hold many sounds, meanings, and variations beyond the notes printed on a score. This is an insight that would come to me long after my formal lessons ended.

³ Marion Verhaalen and José Maria Neves. *Camargo Guarnieri, Brazilian composer: a study of his creative life and works*. (Indiana University Press, 2005).

Remembering this part of my education and documenting it from this vantage point, I think of how these experiences converge into both a vast repertoire and a soundscape. Yet a repertoire does not simply stand alone. To remember this musical repertoire-as-history is a confrontation with the forces and events that produce it. The music I've been talking about carry their own histories, colonial, canonical, elitist, popular, gendered, racialized, geo-political and they bind up with my family's recent history in Mexico and in the U.S. Many movements are captured in this repertoire, many places are mapped, such as my teacher's migration from Cuba to the California, my family's movement from Mexico to East Los Angeles to our house in H.P., my walks every Saturday of my High School years to my music lessons. I am certain that my sense of who I am, how I think, and how I walk in the world has been shaped by a life-long relationship with music and sound. This lifelong relationship with music has become a way of knowing too, an epistemology. I cannot accept a grand narrative of what music is and I am skeptical of questions that presume a single answer. The problem boils down to the question of and ever present debate over authenticity. In the field of Chicano musicology, the notion that the *corrido* or border ballad is the authentic music of Chicanos is both complex and problematic and not to be taken lightly.⁴ For this claim not only props up an important musical form, the border ballad, which is marginalized in some contexts but perhaps overly centered in others. While I do not dispute its significance, to state it as the authentic Chicano musical form invalidates my own experience with music. As a first generation Chicana child of Mexican immigrant parents, I did not grow up hearing *corridos* or *musica norteña* and if my story is to count then I must "write myself into" these Chicana/o histories of music and sound.⁵ This is way Deborah Vargas's work to disrupt grand narratives in Chicano musicology is a necessary feminist-of-color intervention.⁶ She argues that distortions in the archive and problems in Chicano music historiography have rendered Chicana musical voices silent or hard to hear except as exceptions and "dissonances" which she theorizes as a methodological and analytical device. Musically speaking, however, dissonance is not necessarily undesirable or even unmusical. I would argue for ways to keep our ears attuned to Chicana voices so that we may hear beyond dissonance and more of what they sound like together. I agree with Alejandro Madrid that there is much more musical diversity in the Chicano borderlands than norteña, banda, and conjunto and that more interdisciplinarity is needed between fields in order to "establish critical intellectual conversations beyond the boundaries of the discipline and beyond the constraints of the conservatory mindset."⁷ I see meaningful possibilities for imagining Chicana/o histories through music, or more precisely, through sound.

"Sounding Aztlán: Music, Literature, and the Chicana/o Sonic Imaginary," engages the musical and literary soundscapes of Greater Mexico.⁸ I draw from the interdisciplinary fields of

⁴ Manuel Peña. *The Texas-Mexican Conjunto: History of a Working-Class Music*. (University of Texas Press, 2010).

⁵ Emma Pérez. *The Decolonial Imaginary: Writing Chicanas into History*. (Indiana University Press, 1999).

⁶ Deborah Vargas's concept of "la onda" is a critique of the heteronormative and patriarchal underpinnings of dominant narratives of Chicano historiography in music. Deborah R. Vargas *Dissonant Divas in Chicana Music: The Limits of La Onda*. (University of Minnesota Press, 2012).

⁷ Madrid, Alejandro. *Transnational Encounters: Music and Performance at the US-Mexico Border*. Oxford University Press, 2011. Garrett, Charles Hiroshi, Carol J. Oja, George E. Lewis, Gayle Sherwood Magee, Alejandro L. Madrid, Sherrie Tucker, and Robert Fink. "Studying US Music in the Twenty-First Century." *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 64, no. 3 (2011): 689-719.

⁸ Calderón, Héctor. *Narratives of Greater Mexico: Essays on Chicano Literary History, Genre, and Borders*. University of Texas Press, 2004.

Chicana/o cultural studies, decolonial feminism, and sound studies to explore the question: What does Aztlán sound like? Aztlán has been largely represented in visual art and literature as well as music but the soundscapes of these works have not been engaged in prior studies. By bringing sound studies approaches to this question I introduce new modalities of listening to Chicana/o cultural studies. By centering Chicana/o texts, works, subjects in this study of sound, makes race, gender, and the experiences of Chicana/os in the U.S. bear in sound studies research. I am interested in tuning into Aztlán in both musical and non-musical works, and hearing musical and non-musical sounds. I begin with the assumption that there is no single sound that defines the Chicano concept of Aztlán but rather many sounds. To ask what is “the sound” of Aztlán would aspire to capture and contain meanings rather than proliferate them. This is not to aspire to a kind of harmonious togetherness but rather towards hearing the multiplicity necessary to de-link from the assimilating force of grand narratives of nation and belonging that marginalize and silence alternative Chicana stories and sounds. A challenge in this study notes that the expected methods for interpreting culture privilege the visual, the image, and the text, and leave out sound as a significant site of meaning making. I am interested in new ways of listening to tune into the multiplicity of sounds, voices, stories, meanings that circulate in sound. I activate the concept of the soundscape throughout this work and I emphasize different ways of listening. To this effect, I consider that literature is noisy and therefore audible; and music is not simply music but contested forms with complex histories and contexts for listening. A unique challenge of the concept of Aztlán is its ambiguous sense of time and place simultaneously imagined as the American southwest stretching in time between pre-Colombian Mexico to the 1960’s and the present. As many studies of sound are concerned with place/space and physical acoustics, the imaginary of Aztlán demands attention to its sonics to amplify it in new capacious ways. I argue that listening is a critical praxis for remembering against the grain of power, nation, and the coloniality of gender. Sounding Aztlán is therefore a decolonial feminist project. In insisting on the aural dimensions of texts considered on purely literary terms, and in de-privileging literary texts as primary sites of study and inquiry, this work makes a theoretical and methodological innovation for ethnic studies research. In turn, this dissertation contributes to sound studies through examining the gendered and racialized histories evoked in and embedded in the sonic spaces of Chicana/o literatures.

Through sound, alternative Chicana representations become audible and gender and sexuality become amplified. Through the music and woman of color feminist politics that emerge in the literature, the post 1980s becomes an important new site for recovering Chicana stories, representations, and sounds. As this project is interested in hearing multiple sounds, this dissertation examines a select archive that gathers such varied forms as the anthology, short story, poetry, drama, and song/anthem, and soundtrack to hear how they all sound Aztlán together. Engaging these soundscapes opens possibilities to consider how written texts become audible, how Chicana/o narratives can be stories, geographies, and soundtracks all at once.

Sound is not only a method or approach, it is linked to epistemology and is itself a way of knowing. An interdisciplinary, decolonial feminist approach to sound interrogates the ways we hear and don’t hear gender and race under coloniality. Listening in a decolonial mode allows us to hear multiplicity. Writing has been an important site for Chicana voices and stories against deadly silence. This is tied to the so-called illegibility of women of color’s writing, stories, and theories which I link to ways that women of color are also perceived as inaudible on the one hand, or their claims to sonic space is considered noise on the other. In other words, noise is

political. We must defamiliarize our knowing through visual and written cues and practice new modalities of listening to tune into Aztlán.

The Non-Place of Aztlán

It has been nearly fifty years since the term Aztlán entered the Chicana/o cultural imaginary. The idea of Aztlán as the primordial homeland of the Nahuas, the ancient spiritual forbears of U.S. Mexicans, was visibly mobilized in the Chicano social movements of the 1960's. The historic document largely attributed to this, "El Plan Espiritual de Aztlán," calls for the adoption of Chicano nationalism, espouses a strong brotherhood, and presents a plan of action to unify "La Raza de Bronze" against the exploitation of Mexicans in the U.S. and the forces of U.S. Imperialism.⁹ The document and the entwined Chicano movement's male centric, patriarchal, heteronormative, separatist politics have earned rigorous critiques by Chicana feminist and queer scholars from the outset. Angie Chabram's classic essay, "I Throw Punches for My Race but I Don't Want to Be a Man: Writing Us—Chica-Nos (Girl, Us) Chicanas—into the Movement Script" offers one of the finest feminist critiques of Chicano nationalism in the cultural realms of literature and art.¹⁰ This is important to consider in relation to the call from "El Plan" which states: "We must insure that our writers, poets, musicians and artists produce literature and art that is appealing to our people and relates to our revolutionary culture."¹¹ That is, the idea of Aztlán needs to be represented. Indeed, the idea of Aztlán is alive in Chicana/o literature, art, music, politics, popular culture since the 1960's and has helped create a vast cultural field. While these cultural productions have traceable histories, the notion of Aztlán remains interestingly a "non place."¹² As texts, visual art, music, these productive representations do not have to name "Aztlán" to be considered of Aztlán. For instance, the often cited poem, "I am Joaquin" attributed to Rodolfo "Corky" Gonzales does not mention the word Aztlán yet the aesthetics - the imagery, symbols, intertexts of the poem which invoke the clash of pre-Columbian America and Mexican nationalism and a tormented yet triumphant mestizaje in such lines like, "I am Aztec prince and Christian Christ," clearly represent a world that could be imagined and recognized as Aztlán.¹³ On the tip of the tongue the same idea can be heard the expression, "¡Viva la raza!" and slogans like, "El pueblo unido jamas sera vencido." Representations of Aztlán as land, place, and people abound in the Chicana/o cultural imaginary yet it is not accurately locatable to a specific time or place apart from their relationship to each other. As much as these early documents render a strongly male homosocial world, their narrow definition of gender keeps any discussion of queer desire in Aztlán at bay. Without further intervention, this mode of imagining Aztlán retains and perpetuates the deep problems of hetero-

⁹ "El Plan Espiritual de Aztlán" whose preamble was written by the poet Alurista was a catalyzing document in the Chicano movement. González, Rodolfo. "El plan espiritual de Aztlán." In *Aztlán: An Anthology of Mexican-American Literature*, edited by Luis Valdez. New York: Vintage Books (1972).

¹⁰ Maylei Blackwell's comprehensive work on Chicana movements continues this critique in *¡Chicana Power! Contested Histories of Feminism in the Chicano Movement*. (University of Texas Press, 2011).

¹¹ The action plan of, "El Plan de Aztlán," was written by Rodolfo "Corky" Gonzales.

¹² Alica Gaspar de Alba states, there is "No Place like Aztlán" in the most literal sense yet the idea of Aztlán remains important.

¹³ Rodolpho Gonzales. *I am Joaquin, Yo Soy Joaquin*. (Bantam Press, 1972).

patriarchal nationalist logic.

I turn to Cherríe Moraga who proposes the concept of a “Queer Aztlán” as a re-formed nation without the violence of nationalism that has historically excluded women and queers from its vision and from belonging.¹⁴ Confronting this vexed relationship, she provokes a bold re-imagining of a “new Chicano nationalism” arguing, “I cling to the word “nation” because without the specific naming of the nation, the nation would be lost.” She further states that: “*Aztlán* gave language to a nameless anhelito inside me. To me it was never a masculine notion. It had nothing to do with the Aztecs and everything to do with Mexican birds, Mexican beaches, and Mexican babies right here in Califas.” Moraga grounds the idea of Aztlán as people, animals, and land giving it a materiality and corporeality different from the work of representation. This is an important reminder that there is a “corresponding lived reality” to imaginaries.¹⁵ For the work of imagining Aztlán has real life effects tied to how politics are lived, relations are built, broken, or betrayed. But I note that she also names a place that is not fully or wholly or actually locatable within ideas of nation or the materiality of place by imagining Aztlán as an “anhelo.” As a longing or a desire Aztlán retains a sense of “non place” that makes the conceptual room to imagine a “Queer Aztlán,” named as such, but defined on much different revolutionary terms through the notion of desire.

As an imaginary, Aztlán is powerful because it circulates in culture. Playing on this, in her cleverly titled article, “There’s No Place Like Aztlán,” Alicia Gaspar de Alba engages Chicana visual art and elaborates what she calls “Aztlán aesthetics” as part of a larger dialog with other culturally specific aesthetic theories. Ultimately she remains skeptical of the power of representation. In the context of colonization, she asks, “through the Aztlán aesthetic, will Chicanos and Chicanas be fully present, or merely represented in the art world? An imaginary homeland, I argue, like a virtual gallery, is not a place, but a conceptual *space* that only perpetuates our “non-existence.” I note Gaspar de Alba’s concern in marking this limit especially when considering further the politics of display but I do not accept the idea of colonization as thorough and exhausted. It’s not a done deal. There are always resisters to domination and one must make room to imagine this possibility in the most unlikely spaces – or non-spaces. I do not see art as only representing colonial legacies but actively resisting them and I find the proliferation of feminist representations of Aztlán as its saving grace. To a degree, I also reject Moraga’s strong nationalism and I place her idea of Queer Aztlán in conversation with Laura Pérez’s more capacious and flexible critique that “We (Chicanas/os) occupy a nation that does and doesn’t exist. We practice a nationalism that we do and don’t believe in. We produce art and thought from the useful scraps of norms we mock.”¹⁶ I’m not very interested in a single narrative of authenticity, I’m much more interested in a larger conversation that has been elaborated in the energetic and prolific “non-place” of the imaginary. The great elephant in the room about Chicano claims to Aztlán or wanting to locate Aztlán, whether as place or myth, is that any claim to a mestizo or indigenous past has to contend with the presence of North American Indians on this very same imagined land, place, and time. The claim to authenticity is never quite relinquished in Chicano claims to indigeneity or returns to tribe. Gloria Anzaldúa’s

¹⁴ “Cherríe Moraga. “Queer Aztlán: The re-formation of Chicano tribe.” *The Last Generation: Prose and Poetry* (1993): 145-74.

¹⁵ Edward W. Said. *Orientalism*. (Vintage, 1979.)

¹⁶ Laura Elisa Pérez. “El desorden, nationalism, and Chicana/o aesthetics.” *Between woman and nation: Nationalisms, transnational feminisms, and the state* (1999): 19-46.

theories of duality or a “new mestiza consciousness” are never fully adopted within these aspirations and the possibility of imagining many worlds stay unpracticed at the level of potential.¹⁷ In her lecture, “Mestizaje and the Communal” Maria Lugones proposes Anzaldúa’s important work, *Borderlands/La Frontera*, as a modern Chicana cosmology in which she asks the elephant-in-the-room question: “Why did she seek metamorphosis in the company of the Mexica rather than in the company of the nations that inhabit the southwest, the Nde, Yaqui, Pueblo, Mohave, Paiute?” She answers, “As a Chicana mestiza feeling terrorized in her mestizaje, she transforms it and herself through a circuitous route to the Nahuatl cosmology and the Nahuatl knowers/shamans in a way that the Nde could not.” I see Lugones’ notion of a “circuitous route” at work with the idea of a “non-place” to theorize the complexity of Anzaldúa’s thinking in ways that both enrich the imaginary of Aztlán while exiting nationalist discourses of authenticity.¹⁸ Lugones is one of Anzaldúa’s great interlocutors and her body of work does more than this but my larger point is that we can activate the “non-place” of Aztlán in new ways. Aztlán is begging for a soundscape.

In some sense the idea of Aztlán both inspires and haunts Chicana/o scholarship because its close association to cultural nationalism and its hopeful vision of solidarity are bound together. This troubled relationship has been part of what gives rise to such pernicious notions as a “Chicana Falsa” and the many misrepresentations of Chicanas as Malinches, vendidas, Adelitas, malfloras as well as the important correctives by historians, theorists, critics, and the many artists, writers, and musicians that challenge these ideas with alternative, more complex representations of Chicanas, lesbianas, and la joteria.¹⁹ I think of the field of feminist critique created by the work of Emma Perez, Norma Alarcón, Cindy Cruz, Deborah Vargas, Diana Tey Rebolledo, Ricky T. Rodriguez, Catriona Rueda Esquibel. Aztlán has been thought of as land, as place, as music, but not yet as a soundscape. What would happen to the soundscape of Aztlán if the sonics of “¡Viva la Raza!” and “¡Si Se Puede!” recalled just as easily a new slogan like “Panocha Power!” where Chicana lesbians could be heard? I engage the idea of Aztlán because the important feminist and queer interventions have made it a much more interesting and urgent topic of study. It is a Chicana feminist concept already. And because it still invokes a political, anti-assimilating edge. But this cannot be enacted through the “narrow nationalism” of chingón politics, but through coalition; not by marginalizing women and queers, but by placing them at the center.²⁰ In this sense, *Sounding Aztlán* is a decolonial feminist project informed by the important intersectional thought and coalitional ethos of U.S. third world feminist thought.

Decolonial Feminism

I engage decolonial feminism specifically through the “theoretico-praxical” decolonial gender theory of Maria Lugones proposed in her seminal article, “Heterosexualism and the Colonial/Modern Gender System” (2007) and further advanced in the essay “Toward a Decolonial Feminism”(2010). There are other feminisms that help inform the current conversation on decolonial feminism, most significantly, U.S. third world feminism, as defined in part by the work of Barbara Smith, Audre Lorde, Cherrie Moraga, and Gloria Anzaldúa and the tenets of intersectionality and coalition that ground Lugones’ work. On this note, I think of

¹⁷ Gloria Anzaldúa. *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*. San Francisco: (Aunt Lute Press, 1987).

¹⁸ Keynote talk by Maria Lugones given at the conference, “The Feminist Architecture of Gloria Anzaldúa: New Translations, Crossings, and Pedagogies in Anzaldúan Thought,” held at UC Santa Cruz on April 11, 2015.

¹⁹ Michelle Serros. *Chicana Falsa, and Other Stories of Death, Identity, and Oxnard*. (Riverhead Books, 1998).

²⁰ Elizabeth Sutherland Martinez. *De Colores Means All Of Us: Latina Views for a Multi-Coloured Century*. (South End Press, 1999).

decolonial feminism as a continuation of the project of U.S. third world feminism. Decolonial feminism offers a shift in scale in that it is not primarily interested in a critique of patriarchy but rather in interrogating the colonial historical contexts for hegemonic gender.

Decolonial feminism as articulated by Maria Lugones engages with Anibal Quijano's concept of the "coloniality of power" which can be understood as the confluence of the production of race and gender/categories, labor, capitalist economy, and Eurocentric epistemology. Lugones's major intervention to this analysis is that "gender was a colonial imposition." Decolonial feminism, as proposed by Lugones is engaged with the concept of coloniality yet remains thoroughly grounded in US third world feminism emphasizing a "theoretico-praxical" approach. The intersectional and anti-colonial analysis of relations of power such as race, class, and gender in both US third world feminism and decolonial feminism critically reflect the experiences of people of color in the US as deeply marked by histories of colonialism and racism. Lugones's intervention to Anibal Quijano's concept of the coloniality of power is its narrow conception of gender which is reduced to biology.²¹ Lugones agrees with Quijano in that the colonial constructions of race and difference created the hierarchies of knowledge and the social classification of people, but disagrees with his analysis of gender that is understood in biological terms and relating to reproduction. Lugones argues that gender is not simply a category under the axis of power or an aspect of coloniality but rather it is co-constitutive of coloniality. In other words, there can be no decoloniality without the decoloniality of gender. Therefore, decolonial feminism brings together two distinct fields of thought together: the decolonial thinking from the global south and U.S. third world feminism. This theoretical meshing also maps out two specific geopolitics of knowledge and two time-spaces. Modernity here begins with the colonization of the Americas, not with European enlightenment and capitalism. These given premises in decolonial thought are at work when using the language of "coloniality" and not, for instance, colonialism or colonization—while obviously related, they are not interchangeable terms. As Walter D. Mignolo states, "the understanding of "modernity" as a "European narrative that hides its darker side is, 'coloniality.'" Therefore, coloniality is constitutive of modernity—Modern/Colonial—there is no modernity without coloniality."²² From this perspective modernity begins with 1492 and the colonization of the Americas and not with European capitalism, industrialization, or enlightenment thought of the 18th and 19th centuries.

Another central concept at work in decolonial feminism is the debate over humanity, as Lugones puts it: "I understand the dichotomous hierarchy between the human and the non-human as the central dichotomy of colonial modernity." To this, Lugones's major intervention is that: "The gender system is not just hierarchical but racially differentiated, and the racial differentiation denies humanity and thus gender to the colonized." Lugones arrives at this in part through an intersectional analysis: "The semantic consequence of the coloniality of gender is that "colonized woman" is an empty category: no women are colonized; no colonized females are women." There is much at stake in denaturalizing gender in its hegemonic understanding and interrogating our loyalties to the categorical logic of the gender system that so violently orders our world and invisibilizes other possibilities, other ways of relating than by domination,

²¹Anibal Quijano. "Coloniality of power and Eurocentrism in Latin America." *International Sociology* 15, no. 2 (2000): 215-232.

²² From "Coloniality : The Darker Side of Modernity" in *Modernologies. Contemporary Artists Researching Modernity and Modernities*. Catalog of the exhibition curated by Sabine Breitwieser. Barcelona : Museo de Arte Contemporaneo de Barcelona, 39-49 .

other socialities. Another way to think of this is to ask: For people racialized and gendered by coloniality, what does it mean to aspire to be a “woman” or “man”?²³

Colonialism introduced gender by imposing, “a new gender system that created very different arrangements for colonized males and females than for white bourgeois colonizers.” The colonial gender system became, “a mode of organizing the relations of production, property relations, of cosmologies and ways of knowing.” Like race, gender became part of the new social classifications of people needed to meet the “cognitive needs” of capitalism. Constructions of white bourgeois European femininity and masculinity were not extended to the colonized who were instead bestialized, hypersexualized, and through their dehumanization made to work to death. Lugones posits that, “The gender system has a light and a dark side. The light side constructs gender and gender relations hegemonically, ordering only the lives of white bourgeois men and women and constituting the modern/colonial meaning of men and women.” In the colonial context, as with mainstream 20th century feminism, I add, “only white bourgeois women have consistently counted as women so described in the West. Females excluded from that description were not just their subordinates. They were also understood to be animals... in the deep sense of “without gender,” sexually marked as female but without the characteristics of femininity.” Lugones further suggests that, “Men do not seem understood as the resources in sexual encounters.” We can see the problem in feminist analysis that does not interrogate further the very logic of its categories of analysis. That there is something like “gender” either biologically or socially defined still accepts the idea of gender as given. Yet U.S. third world feminists, “Unlike white feminists who have not focused on colonialism, these theorists very much see the differential construction of gender along racial lines...thus they think not only of control over sex, its resources and products, but also of labor as both racialized and gendered. That is, they see an articulation between labor, sex, and the coloniality of power.” This theory has resonances with Michael Omi and Howard Winant’s theory of racial formation in that it departs from biological and essentialist definitions of race to make a more complex social analysis.²⁴ A key difference between them is the context of scale from the national to the colonial, from the U.S. to America.

In her seminal essay, “Heterosexualism and the Colonial/Modern Gender System,” Maria Lugones states, “I do not believe any solidarity or homoerotic loving is possible among females who affirm the colonial/modern gender system, and the coloniality of power.”²⁵ The stakes in being able to recognize the imbrication of race, gender, and capitalist oppression in the “coloniality of gender” is the political desire for coalition and lovingness with other women. As with U.S. third world feminism, theory and action are brought together here anticipating the praxis that would characterize an enactable decolonial feminism. Lugones’s explicit challenge is: “We need to place ourselves in a position to call each other to reject this gender system as we perform a transformation of communal relations.” Hence, the “theoretico-praxical vein” of decolonial feminism. Lugones’s main assertion in “Heterosexualism” is that gender is a colonial introduction. This claim both historicizes gender formation and critiques the Eurocentric conceptions of gender in mainstream feminism. Historicizing the discussion of gender within the

²³ In seminars and lectures I have attended, Maria Lugones often speaks of disenchanting ourselves from these categories adding the provocation, “If gender is our destiny, we are doomed.”

²⁴ Michael Omi & Howard Winant. *Racial Formation in the United States: From the 1960s to the 1980s*. (Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1986)

²⁵ Maria Lugones. “Heterosexualism and the Colonial/Modern Gender System.” *Hypatia* 22, no. 1 (2007): 186-219.

colonization of the Americas we can see how the, "heterosexualist patriarchy has been an ahistorical frame of reference." Shifting the geopolitics of knowledge from Europe to the global south, we can go with the proposal that, "Gender does not need to organize social arrangements, including social sexual arrangements. But gender need not be, that is, either heterosexual or patriarchal. They need not be, that is, as a matter of history." Lugones's intent, as she puts it, is "to make visible the instrumentality of the colonial/modern gender system in subjecting us--both women and men of color--in all domains of existence." Visibility here should be understood as recognition.

In, "Toward a Decolonial Feminism," which builds on "Heterosexualism," Lugones clarifies the relationship between the "coloniality of gender" and "decolonial feminism": "I call the analysis of racialized, capitalist, gender oppression 'the coloniality of gender.' I call the possibility of overcoming the coloniality of gender 'decolonial feminism.'"²⁶ She also illuminates the concept of "active resisting" at the epistemic level that is part of the praxis of decolonial feminism: "That is, the decolonial feminist's task begins by her seeing the colonial difference, emphatically resisting her epistemological habit of erasing it. Seeing it, she sees the world anew, and then she requires herself to drop her enchantment with "woman," the universal, and begins to learn about other resisters at the colonial difference." So it becomes important to understand the relationship between oppression and resistance which she defines thus: "Resistance is the tension between subjectification (the forming/informing of the subject) and active subjectivity, that minimal sense of agency required for the oppressing---resisting relation being an active one, without appeal to the maximal sense of agency of the modern subject." Thinking with this resistance theory and applying it facilitates a method that can be practiced, for example: "In thinking of the methodology of decoloniality, I move to read the social from the cosmologies that inform it, rather than beginning with a gendered reading of cosmologies informing." A closely related idea here is not simply to see a single alternative but many within the understanding that with oppression there is always resistance at many levels. Lugones proposes, then: "But, instead of thinking of the global, capitalist, colonial system as in every way successful in its destruction of peoples, knowledges, relations, and economies, I want to think of the process as continually resisted, and being resisted today." My mathematical interpretation sums up that to see both the oppressing and the resisting does not equal two, rather it is to see the tense and unstable "oppressing—resisting" relationship as a multiplicity—two active processes alive at once. To learn to see this multiplicity in the understanding of gender is crucial to seeing decolonial possibilities. Multiplicity reflects a logic that goes against the grain of binary thinking and sexual dimorphism. As she cautions, "Without the tense multiplicity, we see only either the coloniality of gender as accomplishment, or a freezing of memory, an ossified understanding of self in relation from a precolonial sense of the social." The coalitional politics of U.S. third world feminism also embrace multiplicity.

Laura Pérez' article, "Enrique Dussel's *Ética de la liberación*, U.S. Women of Color Decolonizing Practices, and Coalitionary Politics Amidst Difference," takes a comparative approach to outline key points of convergence between the M/C thinking group and US third world feminism as two projects with stated decolonizing and liberatory goals.²⁷ Although her analysis is specifically about Dussel's "Ética," her questions can be directed to the wider

²⁶ Maria Lugones. "Toward a Decolonial Feminism." *Hypatia* 25, no. 4 (2010): 742-759.

²⁷ Laura E. Pérez. "Enrique Dussel's *Ética de la liberación*, U.S. Women of Color Decolonizing Practices, and Coalitionary Politics amidst Difference." *Qui Parle: Critical Humanities and Social Sciences* 18, no. 2 (2010): 121-146.

Modern/Colonial group due to his special influence in decolonial thought. As Nelson Maldonado-Torres states, “Enrique Dussel is the most senior scholar and the most widely published among all the contributors in these two special issues. He has also been, and continues to be, an important reference in the exploration of coloniality and decolonization at the philosophical and theoretical levels.”²⁸ Pérez states her goal this way: “My focus in reading *Ética* has primarily been to locate key nodes of intellectual solidarity with his project, from a U.S. feminist of color and queer-centered perspective, however also identifying elements of his work that call for further reflection.” This is a generous but also a rhetorically rigorous exercise that shows a healthy skepticism towards the compatibility between the two project’s aims. She states, “The feminist critiques of patriarchal racialized imperialism and capitalism are basic observations in Chicana and African American feminist thought dating at least to the late 1960s and throughout the 1970s.” This is to say and emphasize that the complex understandings of how power, race, gender, and class converge and profoundly mark people of color is the point where radical feminist thought begins – not a goal to work towards. Pérez’ final assessment of the liberatory aims of Dussel’s *Ética* is based on a significant contradiction she identifies between in his stated aims and his method/approach. Pérez recognizes that part of Dussel’s aim is to express a “quotidian ethic”—an everyday and highly accessible ethic. Tracing carefully through his work, Pérez’s final assessment is that: “It is, however, ultimately a work for philosophers trained in European intellectual history, particularly in the philosophy of those with whom Dussel’s work is most in dialogue, including Marx, Levinas, Foucault, and Karl-Otto Apel”. Quoting Audre Lorde’s famous adage that, “the master’s tools will never dismantle the master’s house,” Pérez pointedly states: “And it cannot be any other way under the legacy of cultural imperialism and neocolonizing patriarchal, heteronormative, and classist Eurocentrism.” From this perspective, the *Ética* falls short. But I argue that is not the main purpose of this article. Rather, having shown this fundamental divergence helps underscore Pérez’s more important charge, “to elucidate what it might mean to engage in coalitions that take feminist queer of color critical thought seriously as central to the work of decolonization.” This question has wide implications to decolonial thought and decolonial feminism by proxy. The urgency of her question considers the limits of the intellectual coalitions she imagines and how this sets up the conditions for the intellectual betrayal of a significant body of work. Though she does not put it quite this way, this point of view resonates with Pérez’s larger discussion of violence: “what other forms of violence, such as discursive violence, sustain the thought and practice of both (neo) colonialism(s) and capitalism?” Going a step further, the implication is that the Eurocentric vein of Modern/Colonial thinking performs its own epistemic violence in not engaging seriously the work of U.S. third world feminism.

Pérez also points to the work of Chela Sandoval whose project in *Methodology of the Oppressed* she describes as “in essence a project similar to Dussel’s in *Ética*. The significant difference is that the archive Sandoval draws from to put forth her “coalitionary theory of social change rooted in a politics of love... is primarily the creative and intellectual writings of African American, Asian American, Chicana and Native American Women.” Sandoval’s methodology, though genuinely engaged with European intellectual thought, maintains, like Lugones, a U.S.

²⁸ Maldonado-Torres, Nelson. “Thinking through the Decolonial Turn: Post-continental Interventions in Theory, Philosophy, and Critique—An Introduction.” *Transmodernity. Journal of Peripheral Cultural Production of the Luso-Hispanic World*. (Fall, 2011).

third world feminist grounding.²⁹ Given Pérez's critique of decolonial thought and by extension decolonial feminism begs the question of compatibility.

I argue that decolonial feminism is both an intervention to and a departure from decolonial thought. I agree that there can be "no decoloniality without the decoloniality of gender" which marks the limit of my engagement with decolonial thinking at large and why decoloniality must be synonymous with decolonial feminism. I also engage decolonial feminism to expand the scale for the analysis of gender, race, and sexuality from a patriarchal critique to a critique of coloniality. Decolonial feminism both extends U.S. third world feminism and amplifies the scale for analysis without dropping such important concepts as intersectionality and coalition borne out of their specific U.S. contexts. The "theoretico-praxical" vein of decolonial feminism and U.S. third world feminism is the key feature they share as both feminisms center the lived experiences of women of color to develop the epistemologies, methodologies, and practices necessary to transform our world. We must learn to see the coloniality of gender to get in the habit of being disloyal to it. In our disloyalties to the logic of domination, oppression, marginalization we can practice other ways of being with each other, other ways of relating.

Soundscapes, Noise, Listening

My project draws from sound studies research, music, and literature to shape my approach to soundscapes, noise, and listening. In the field of sound studies, which is still being described as "an emerging field," the engagement with literature is the least developed. The field has been greatly shaped by scholarship that calls attention to the role of technology in the production of sound and ways of listening through those technologies. For example, Jonathan Sterne's influential book, *The Audible Past: Cultural Origins of Sound Reproduction* (2003), traces the development of such sound technologies as the stethoscope, telegram, telephone, phonograph, and others, underscoring the emergence of a new "sonic regime" by the early 20th century, what he describes as an "Ensoniment" as significant as the "Enlightenment" as a marker of modernity.³⁰ My project engages the concepts of the soundscape, noise, and listening. To enter this conversation I will need to mediate these terms so that race, gender, and coloniality are not subsumed.

R. Murray Schafer's generative concept of the "soundscape" can easily be understood as, "any acoustic field of study. We may speak of a musical composition as a soundscape, or a radio program as a soundscape or an acoustic environment as a soundscape."³¹ Relatedly, the term "acoustemology" introduced by the music anthropologist Steven Feld connects "epistemology" or ways of knowing with the expansive notion of the "acoustics" of a place.³² The term combines both ideas in such a way as to greatly enhance both meanings—I see the intervention going in both directions: a way of knowing through sound, sound as a way of knowing. In his book *Noise: The Political Economy of Music*, Jacques Attali declares: "For twenty-five centuries, Western knowledge has tried to look upon the world. It has failed to understand that the world is not for the beholding. It is for hearing. It is not legible, but audible."³³ In her

²⁹ On a related note, I want to add here that I see part of the methodological position decolonial feminism shares with ethnic studies. However closely they may be engaged with larger discussions, indeed indebted to various intellectual histories, ethnic studies and decolonial feminism as a *methodology* cannot come from the West.

³⁰ Jonathan Sterne. *The Audible Past: Cultural Origins of Sound Reproduction*. (Duke University Press, 2003).

³¹ R. Murray Schafer. *The Tuning of the World*. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1981).

³² Steven Feld. "A Rainforest Acoustemology." *The Auditory Culture Reader*. Edited by Michael Bull and Les Back. (Berg Publishers, 2004).

³³ Jacques Attali. *Noise: The political economy of music*. Vol. 16. (Manchester University Press, 1985).

insightful *Afterword* to Jaques Attali's *Noise*, musicologist Susan McClary further states that narrow definitions of music and musicology, "depend upon and reinforce the concept that music is autonomous, unrelated to the turbulence of the outside, social world."³⁴ Adding further that, "Now it is quite clear to most listeners that music moves them, that they respond deeply to music in a variety of ways, even though in our society they are told that they cannot know anything about music without having absorbed the whole theoretical apparatus necessary for music specialization." McClary's critique of music is important and goes beyond musicology, but sound studies is not synonymous with musicology. To clarify this distinction I also note that the disciplinary boundaries of musicology are generally restricted to the study of Western art music of what is called the common practice period (1500s – 1900). Relatedly, ethnomusicology tends to be positioned Eurocentrically in its study of non-Western music and culture via predominantly ethnographic methods.

Disciplinary distinctions and their concerns become more clear when literary scholar, Jennifer Stoeber defines sound studies as, "an interdisciplinary site of inquiry into audio culture from multiple vantage points: historical, theoretical, textual, and material." Additionally, "sound studies addresses how sound—and ideas about sound—are embedded in our institutions, technologies, laws, histories, and cultures."³⁵ This rich definition stresses interdisciplinarity and introduces the term "audio culture" and fundamentally considers "sound" as something to interrogate, not a given. For example, Stoeber asks, "How and why has 'blackness' historically been linked to 'noise' in American racial formation? What is the connection between 'noise' and power: socially, politically and legally? Why have particular black American musical forms like jazz, rock and roll, and hip hop, been labeled 'noise' by the dominant culture? Conversely, how has 'noise' been used as resistance within black American culture?" Building on W.E. B. Dubois's famous phrase which posits the notion of color racism as, "the relations of the darker to the lighter races of men," primarily within the visual field, Stoeber's notion of the "sonic color-line" posits "listening as an interpretive site where racial difference is coded, produced, and policed."³⁶ The basic idea is that we can hear race in addition to seeing it. Stoeber notes that such "sonic phenomena like vocal timbre, accents, and musical tones are racially coded, like skin color, hair texture, and clothing choices," sound can bear "historical accretions of sonic phenomena and stereotypes" that misrepresent racialized subject positions and at times even stand in for them. Similarly situated in the interdisciplines of American studies, popular music, and ethnic studies, Josh Kun states that, "There is no history of racial formation in the Americas that is not a history of popular music, and there is no history of American popular music without a history of racial formation."³⁷ His book, *Audiotopias: Music and Race in America*, is "an attempt to re-think the relationship between American identity, American race, and American music—an intersection we might summarily think of as the American audio-racial imagination—by focusing on the spaces of music, the spaces of songs, and the spaces of sounds." Kun's argument moves with Foucault's concept of heterotopias to think about music stating that, "the

³⁴ Susan McClary is part of the new turn in musicology that introduces gender, queer, and socio-cultural contexts to music analysis in texts like McClary's *Feminine Endings: Music, Gender, and Sexuality* (1991) and the collection *Queering the Pitch: The New Musicology* edited by Philip Brett, et al. (1994) and *Queering the Popular Pitch* (2006) edited by Sheila Whiteley and Jennifer Rycenga.

³⁵ My thanks to Jennifer Stoeber for making her course syllabus for the seminar: "Introduction to Sound Studies: Noise (fall, 2009)," available to me as an added resource.

³⁶ "Splicing the Sonic Colour-Line: Tony Schwartz Remixes Postwar Nueva York" in *Social Text*, spring 2010.

³⁷ Josh Kun. *Audiotopia: Music, Race, and America*. Vol. 18. (University of California Press, 2005).

audiotopia is a musical space of difference, where contradictions and conflicts do not cancel each other out but coexist and live through each other. Thus, in a sense, audiotopias can also be understood as identificatory “contact zones,” in that they are both sonic and social spaces where disparate identity-formations, cultures *and* geographies historically kept and mapped separately are allowed to interact with each other as well as enter into relationships whose consequences for cultural identification are never predetermined.” As a method, listening audiotopically one can, “listen for music that is already made but not yet heard, music that makes audible racialized communities who have been silenced by the nationalist ear.”³⁸ This kind of listening works against what he further theorizes as “easy listening” which is an American nationalist listening, “tuned into the frequencies of cultural consensus and univocality.”³⁹ Taking up Walt Whitman’s famous poem, “I Hear America Singing,” Kun shows how the idea behind it has become a way of listening that hears an American sound as a false unity precisely because it selectively tunes out difference, especially in times of national crisis.

In 2005 the Cambridge journal *Popular Music Studies* published a special issue on “Music and Literature.” The same year, a short-lived journal called *Chapter and Verse* appeared. That popular music scholars were seeking to engage a closer, formal, relationship with literature ten years ago in some sense anticipates the emergence of sound studies scholars focusing on literature now. The Shakespeare scholar, Bruce R. Smith offers a unique contribution in that after his book titled, *The Acoustic World of Early Modern England*, which has been described as a “historical phenomenology of sound.”⁴⁰ Smith confronts the methodological problem of “cataloguing sounds” in his research with the article, “Listening to the Wild Blue Yonder.”⁴¹ Smith proposes that, “Even in the absence of a tune, even in the absence of illustrations, printed broadsides in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries might still carry the imprint of sound.” Part of the methodological work, he shows, involves “unairing sound” from the written document, but one must also, “find a syntax for making sense of sound.” This is where any commonalities in a sound studies approach to literature end. The small sample of differently located sounded interventions in literary criticism that follows points to the relative newness of the field. It also shows the growing interest in developing these methods across multi-ethnic literatures and their diverse political stakes.

Leslie Marmon Silko’s provocative essay, “Language and Literature from a Pueblo Indian Perspective,” proposes an alternative way of approaching language that reflects powerful notions of kinship and solidarity as connected historically, spiritually, across time and space through the “boundless capacity of language.”⁴² She begins her argument by asking the reader to *listen*: “I have intentionally not written a formal paper because I want you to *hear* and to experience English in a structure that follows patterns from the oral tradition.” This proposition is skeptical of the narrow definition of literature as only written expression “detached from the occasion and the audience,” and reflects a position that resists the erasure of oral tradition. Silko’s approach to literature considers the Pueblo Indian worldview as embedded in every aspect of story, language, and words. She tells, “Thought Woman, by thinking of her sisters, and

³⁸ Kun, *Audiotopias*, 25.

³⁹ Kun, *Audiotopias*, 30

⁴⁰ Bruce R. Smith *The acoustic world of early modern England: Attending to the O-factor*. (University of Chicago Press, 1999).

⁴¹ Smith, Bruce R. "Listening to the wild blue yonder: The challenges of acoustic ecology." *Hearing Cultures: essays on sound, listening and modernity* 3 (2004): 21-33.

⁴² Silko, Leslie Marmon. "Language and Literature from a Pueblo Perspective." *English Literature: Opening Up the Canon* (1981): 54-72.

together with her sisters, thought of everything there is.” Thus, the notion of a “story within a story” reflects how the Pueblo creation story makes room for many kinds of “individual” stories to be folded into the larger body of story. Repetition is also an important feature that emphasizes stories are meant to be remembered, implying the presence of an active listener. Similarly, the title of Edwidge Danticat’s collection of short stories, *Krik? Krak!*, refers to the Haitian storytelling ritual that sets up the story within the call and response relationship between the storyteller (Krik?) and the audience (Krak!).⁴³ Danticat invokes a sense of sociality and story and aurality/orality by invoking this expression in her title which I understand as more than a literary device. The *Epilogue* reveals the gendered social expectations for young Haitian women when the narrator asks: “Are there women who both cook and write? Kitchen poets, they call them. They slip phrases into their stew and wrap meaning around their pork before frying it. They make narrative dumplings and stuff their daughter’s mouths so they say nothing more.” Despite the felicitous title, in the end, the desire for voice or stories is haunted by the reality of violent silencings.

In, *Listening to Salsa: Gender, Latin Popular Music, and Puerto Rican Cultures*, Frances Aparicio traces a dialogic relationship between “two female voices who have been socially antagonistic and opposed,” in her close reading of the short story called, “When Women Love Men,” by Rosario Ferré.⁴⁴ The character of Isabel Luberza is represented as the “literary embodiment of the lady, dama, or senora” and her counterpart, Isabel La Negra is “a fictional rendering of the well-known prostitute in Ponce.” These characters are represented musically by the European derived Puerto Rican “danza” and the African-derived Puerto Rican “plena,” respectively, and which they implicitly embody.⁴⁵ Aparicio’s multilayered reading traces Isabel Luberza’s desire to become her racial Other, her desire for Isabel la Negra’s sexual freedom, while Isabel la Negra’s projects her own desires for class mobility. By the end of the story, the voices of the two Isabels are indistinguishable. Aparicio shows how the phrase representing the fusion of their two voices depends on the African-derived verb “tongonear” or “to sway” back and forth: “tongoneandome yo ahora para atras.” This marks what she calls an “ambivalent Afro-Antillean and erotic discourse that constitutes the majority of Isabel la Negra’s descriptions.” Thus, Aparicio shows how Ferré’s story works within these complex constructions of race, class, and gender and rewrites them as “a critique of class conflicts in Puerto Rico, divisions marked by clear racial boundaries and with profound implications for women’s roles.” Although Aparicio’s work prefigures Stoeber’s “sonic colour-line,” Aparicio’s analysis works well within that critique.

To date, I have only encountered one article offering a sounded reading of Chicano literature. Lydia French's "Woman Hollering Creek a Través de la Musica: Articulating Mexicanidad to Pochismo" examines the musical epigraphs that introduce the three sections of Sandra Cisneros' short story collection, "Woman Hollering Creek."⁴⁶ The epigraphs all quote Mexican songs and in this French notes both a partial adoption and a critique of the discourses of Mexicanidad, whether "romanticized or despised" that the songs bring into the understanding of

⁴³ Edwidge Danticat. *Krik? Krak!*. (Soho Press, 2015).

⁴⁴ Aparicio, Frances R. *Listening to Salsa: Gender, Latin popular music, and Puerto Rican Cultures*. (Wesleyan University Press, 2010).

⁴⁵ Aparicio states that the title of the story is a feminist appropriation of the first line of a traditional plena that “narrates the tricks and strategies used by women in their efforts to control love relations, rituals based on folkloric beliefs of African origin.”

⁴⁶ Lydia French. "Woman Hollering Creek a Través de la Música: Articulating Mexicanidad to Pochismo." *Aztlan: A Journal of Chicano Studies* 36, no. 1 (2011): 99-127.

Cisneros' decidedly Chicana narratives. She notes how notions of Chicana/o nationalism and articulation of "pocha/o voice" resonate in the complex "relationship between song and story." Beyond the lyrics of the songs, however, French does not engage the soundscape that the title of the main story, "Woman Hollering Creek," evokes. Ana María Ochoa's, "García Márquez, macondismo, and the soundscapes of vallenato," takes precisely this approach.⁴⁷ Ochoa shows how through the journalistic writings and memoirs of Gabriel García Márquez, "macondismo--the Latin American celebration of magical realism--becomes an interpretive metaphor for Colombia and vallenato music become the sonorous emblem of this metaphor." Noting that the author "has often affirmed the importance in popular music in his literary work," ultimately, she is able to show how "different elements coalesce in constructing a genealogy of aurality for vallenato." Part of her methodology seeks to "entexualize vallenato" and brings together literary concepts like mimesis with Schafer's notions of "schizophonia" and of course the "soundscape." Focusing more on the practice of listening, Marília Librandi-Rocha, detects "a sharp sense of hearing" in Brazilian literature. Her article "Writing by Ear: Clarice Lispector, Machado de Assis, and Guimarães Rosa and the Mimesis of Improvisation," proposes that "at the heart of Brazilian literature, we can hear the pulse of an "auditory writing."⁴⁸ Librandi-Rocha begins by attempting to understand what the iconic Brazilian writer Clarice Lispector means by the statement, "I write by ear." Her larger project ambitiously calls for "thinking about a sense that has largely been unexplored in the relationship between orality, music, and literature in Brazil." I approach Chicana texts with the understanding of the broader contexts of Latin American and Latino studies for doing sound studies. Collectively, this research anticipates an approach like "tuning into" Chicana literature.

Thinking further with Héctor Calderón, whose article, "The Mexico City--Los Angeles Cultural Mosh Pits: Maldita Vecindad, a Chilanga-Chicana Rock Banda de Pueblo," performs its own methodological "mosh" in its rigorous exploration of Mexican and Chicano musical and literary genres.⁴⁹ Calderón notes that the band members describe their debut album *Circo* (1991) as a "disco-novela." He is expressly interested in forms and the notion of, "cross-border musical fusions," but he also reminds us of the stakes involved in crossing genres and other political borders. With the Mexican rock band, Maldita Vecindad as his focus, he aims to, "move beyond scholarly, linguistic, and political borders," further adding that "U.S. scholars engaged in 'border studies' more often than not stop at the border." Tracing the band's success over a twenty-year period he remarks that, "It is evidence of how in a post-Chicano movement world Maldita has become a Mexican borderless cultural institution influencing a generation of mexicanos on both sides of the international divide." Part of the band's appeal for U.S. Chicanos is its early identification with the Chicano movement and with the rebellious figure of the "Pachuco." Analyzing themes in their lyrics, Calderón notes how Maldita "sings of the colonial past and present where power is used to divide Mexicans because of perceived differences between "chilangos, cholos, pochos, jotos," while clearly insisting that, "We are our differences." Ultimately Calderón is interested in how, "a progressive Chicano studies can take up a productive dialogue with greater Mexican cultural diasporas."

⁴⁷ Ana María Ochoa. "García Márquez, macondismo, and the soundscapes of vallenato." *Popular Music* 24, no. 02 (2005): 207-222.

⁴⁸ Marília Librandi-Rocha. "'Writing by Ear': Clarice Lispector, Machado de Assis, and Guimarães Rosa and the Mimesis of Improvisation." *Critical Studies in Improvisation/Études critiques en improvisation* 7, no. 1, 2011.

⁴⁹ Héctor Calderón. "The Mexico City—Los Angeles Cultural Mosh Pits: Maldita Vecindad, a Chilanga-Chicana Rock Banda de Pueblo." *Aztlán: A Journal of Chicano Studies* 31, no. 1 (2006): 95-137.

In some sense decolonial feminism and sound studies are still being thought of as emerging fields or emerging conversations. This very notion of emergence gets in the way of thinking of them as compatible. Bringing them together offers ways to think about the world/our perceptions of the world that interrogate the accepted divisions between visual/aural, spiritual/material, and male/female constructions. More than identifying a new site of inquiry, bringing these seemingly distant concepts and terms together—the operating logic behind a "mash-up"—points to the many kinds of questions that can be asked, boldly and creatively, by bridging both sound studies and decolonial feminist methodologies. The urgency of centering Chicana stories and sounds in *Sounding Aztlán* raises the stakes beyond method.

Chapter Summaries

Chapter One, “Tuning In to Coalition: Listening to *This Bridge Called My Back*” revisits the foundational feminist text, *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color*. *Bridge* can be thought of as an artifact of coalition, a multiplicity of radical voices embodied in its very form. The letters, poetry, essays, interviews, and art that form the anthology resound the radical politics of women of color envisioned by co-editors Cherríe Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa to reflect a diversity of perspectives, linguistic styles, and cultural tongues in the service of revolution. The section, *Speaking in Tongues: The Third World Woman Writer* in particular addresses the many silences women of color negotiate in their writing. The radical act of writing for women of color is connected to the very possibility of life, the stakes of being heard are high. I suggest that there is an aural dimension to *Bridge* beyond the textual that has to do with perceptions of the sound and noise women of color make. Noise is political. Practicing a decolonial feminist "listening," this final chapter engages *Bridge* anew as a soundscape of coalition and how chicana histories link with women of color. I link M. Jacqui Alexander's "remembering" with listening and shift Maria Lugones's coloniality of gender from visual terms to sound. Listening to *Bridge* and listening to the case of the Napa Valley Wine train controversy and the Sisters on the Edge reading club, a larger point this chapter makes is about women of color's under-entitlement to sound.

Chapter Two, “Decolonial Feminist Soundscapes in Post 1980s Chicana Literature” presents a discussion soundscapes in Chicana literature. The preferred method of “close-reading” seems commonsensical and without contradiction in the interpretation of literature yet literature is full of references to sound, music, lyrics, noise, silence, timbre, sonic technology, and many audible clues/markers beyond “voice” that suggest that we try something else—they suggest to me that we “listen.” To put it simply, Chicana/o literature is noisy. I want to “tune in” to the noises in Chicana/o literature. My claim is that sound is not neutral backdrop to the written word. While the theme of music and the ethnic novel is not new in literary studies, the *soundscapes* embedded in Chicana/o narratives have not been fully engaged in prior readings of the poetry, fiction, and drama by Sandra Cisneros, Luis Alfaro, Estella Gonzalez, Raquel Gutiérrez, and Verónica Reyes. Taking up the question of form, I explore the possibilities that these texts may be called stories, maps, and mix-tapes all at once. I argue that the musical soundtracks in these narratives should be understood in terms beyond intertextuality and that they may be considered rich sound archives that narrate creative sonics of subjectivity, coalition, and queerness in Chicana/o literature.

Chapter Three, “Performing América,” examines a repertoire of three Chicana/o performances of “The Star Spangled Banner,” as performed by pop/rock, mariachi, and banda

musicians. I take Jimi Hendrix's iconic 1969 performance at Woodstock as a starting point to explore how dissonant moments between the visual and aural performance of nation captured on social media may provide openings for multiple interpretations of citizenship. This chapter explores the linked questions: What does it mean when the national anthem becomes part of the Chicana/o repertoire? What map of the Américas is sounded through these Chicano performances of the national anthem? These performances show a tension between visual and audible representations of nation. The sounding of a Mexican "grito" in the performance of the "Star Spangled Banner" is a highpoint. Read together as a repertoire these Chicana/o performances sound a broader history of contested performances of nation by artists of color. Hearing "América" is not only an alternative story to the dominant narrative of nation as song but a disruption with stakes and claims for Chicana/o and Latina/o belonging.

Chapter 1

Tuning Into Coalition: Listening to *This Bridge Called My Back*

What might black women say to Chicana women to help ease the pain of their loss? We want to mourn with you the passing of your sister warrior. Your loss of her gentle footprints is also ours.

M. Jacqui Alexander

We have come to realize that we are not alone in our struggles nor separate nor autonomous but that we--white black straight queer female male -- are connected and interdependent. We are each accountable for what is happening down the street, south of the border or across the sea.

Gloria Anzaldúa

And we're all on the line.

Toni Cade Bambara

Introduction

In trying to answer, like so many have feminist scholars have done, the question of what *Bridge* is in formal terms, I have come to think of *Bridge* as an artifact of coalition, a self authored and authorizing document that captures a multiplicity of radical voices embodied in its very form.⁵⁰ The letters, poetry, essays, interviews, and art that form the anthology resound the radical politics of women of color envisioned by its co-editors Cherríe Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa. The vision was to "reflect a diversity of perspectives, linguistic styles, and cultural tongues" against considerable opposition, in the service of revolution.⁵¹ Describing the editorial practices adopted by Moraga and Anzaldúa, they state "In editing the anthology, our primary commitment was to retaining this diversity, as well as each writer's especial voice and style...As editors we sought out and believe we found, non-rhetorical, highly personal chronicles that present a political analysis in everyday terms." Thus, making room for multiple stories to be told that would otherwise remain marginalized or silenced in mainstream feminist discussions. These inextricably linked editorial decisions and radical feminist practices express an anti-canonical politics of form. To center the experiences and knowledges of women of color is to enact a radical politic which changes the terms and the stakes of the conversation. I hear the expression to be "on the line" as a radical move towards solidarity. Toni Cade Bambara states in the

⁵⁰ In a special panel on *Bridge* at MLA 2016 in which I presented a version of this chapter, *Bridge* was described as a palimpsest, as an event, and a soundscape all at once.

⁵¹ Cherríe Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa, eds. *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color*. (Kitchen Table: Women of Color Press, 1983), xxiv.

powerful *Forward to Bridge* that *Bridge* can, "coax us into the habit of listening to each other and learning each other's ways of seeing and being."⁵² I want to tune in to *Bridge* differently, to listen for the decolonial possibilities in considering sound as a site for decolonial feminist epistemology/decolonial feminism and for reconceiving Aztlán.

This chapter engages the anthology, *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color* as a sonic text containing such audible sounds as chants, cries, music, and noise in its soundscape. The original *Forward* by Toni Cade Bambara frames a way to approach *Bridge* in a listening mode through the metaphor of a telephone conversation and "being on the line." I argue that this is a metaphor for coalition and that coalition is audible in *Bridge*. Furthermore, there is an aural dimension to *Bridge* beyond the textual that has to do with perceptions of the sound and noise women of color make. What is considered "noise" is a political topic with high stakes and life and death consequences for women of color. I place *Bridge* in conversation with an event I call the Napa Valley Wine Train Controversy to show the stakes of hearing women of color and their under-entitlement to sound. In my consideration of sound in *Bridge*, I argue that listening is a critical praxis for remembering histories of feminist of color solidarity. To activate a decolonial feminist politics of listening from the written text to the larger social become inextricably linked decolonial feminist practices. Therefore, to "tune into" *Bridge* is to remember *Bridge* and the coalitional histories Chicanas have been a part of.

How Do You "Close Read" Sound?

The unique problem with privileging sound in literature is that it is counter-intuitive as this shift upsets the paradigm of the visual over the aural. As a method for interpretation, sound has been considered a neutral space, backdrop to where we are accustomed to look for meaning. In the close reading of the text, visual, the image, and the symbol--that's where the action is in the privileged methods for cultural studies/our fields. How do you "close read" sound? There isn't a primer, really. Scholars of sound have to reinvent the wheel, in some sense, tweak existing approaches to fit the task at hand. "Close listening," Liana Silva suggests in her 2014 *SoundingOut!* post in which she approaches the "audiobook as a text in itself" to propose an "aural reading practice" that does not rely exclusively on the visual or written text.⁵³ Or we develop methodologies and taxonomies to "un-air the sound from the text," as the sound historian Bruce R. Smith does in his piece, "Listening to the Wild Blue Yonder."⁵⁴ Smith likens himself as a kind of "acoustic archaeologist" and sets about the task of cataloguing the sounds he "hears" in the "graphic evidence" in order to find a syntax to make sense of the sounds. In her theorization of the *sonic colour-line*, Jennifer Stover proposes that "auditory cues" abound in literary texts that let us "hear race as well as see it." In particular, her re-reading of Frederick Douglass's *Narrative* shows how Douglass "unites written and aural literacies--evoking sound's emotive power and housing agency in nonverbal sounds." In insisting on all of these strategies and forms of "deep listening" as my privileged method, I begin to think of *Bridge* as something quite different from a written document capturing a point in time and bound to its publication

⁵² Moraga and Anzaldúa, eds. *Bridge*, vii.

⁵³ Liana Silva, March 24, 2014, "This is How You Listen: Reading Critically Junot Diaz's Audiobook." *Sounding Out!: The Sound Studies Blog*, May 28, 2016, <https://soundstudiesblog.com/2014/03/24/canyouhearmenow/>.

⁵⁴ Bruce R. Smith. "Listening to the Wild Blue Yonder: The Challenges of Acoustic Ecology." In *Hearing Cultures: Essays on Sound, Listening, and Modernity*. Ed. Veit Erlmann. (Bloomsbury Academic, 2004), 21-33.

date but rather as a soundscape of voices that continues to resound its relentless vision of coalition. By tuning into *Bridge* I approach the idea of a soundscape differently from what R. Murray Schafer means by soundscape as “any acoustic environment” in terms of place—there is no place here—I am interested in the acoustics on the page.

Anthologizing the writing of women of color has the effect and power to sound many voices and enact the coalitional. As a sonic object, you find chants, cries, music, noise, and “the sound of our feet dancing, the sound of our thoughts flying” in Chrystos’s “poem to give-away” - all of the ingredients that make up a soundscape. As an anthology, the effect of all of these voices together is that they are also louder, stronger, more powerful together and therefore compelling. Perhaps it is also a chorus. It is a specific kind of labor to write one’s story, and yet another to compile these stories, altogether producing a complex narrative of women of color struggle and an unintentional sonic archive. Yet the question remains: Who is listening? Echoing in these feminist practices of anthologizing is the documented history that woman of color theorizing and writing have been, “excluded from feminist theorizing on the subject of consciousness” as Norma Alarcón so aptly states.⁵⁵ For all that *Bridge* has been to me and other feminist scholars of color, as writing, theory, method, as a primer and as pedagogy, as Cindy Cruz has stated in a recent talk, could it be that we are too invested in the written word?⁵⁶ Rethinking *Bridge* through its sonic dimensions or audible aspects helps me detect a significant tension in the project of *Bridge* between *writing* and *listening*.

Activating the Aural Metaphor in Bridge

The move that women of color make in *Bridge*, the explicit, conscious, radical move is to talk to each other and to articulate a new way of listening. This move is audible in the metaphor of being “on the line” Toni Cade Bambara writes in the Forward:

Sisters of the yam sisters of the rice Sisters of the corn
Sisters of the plantain putting in telecalls to each other.
And we’re all on the line. (vi)

This quote captures the critical exit strategy of breaking away from a mainstream feminist conversation and enunciates a new conversation among women of color. The idea that “we’re all on the line” implies a sense of timeliness, an overdue-ness, an urgency. It also captures the refusal of women of color to be assimilated into a program of feminism that does not recognize them. Thus the work of feminists of color becomes more clear and “awakens us to new tasks” as Bambara states:

And a new connection: US
A new set of recognitions: US

⁵⁵ Norma Alarcón. “The Theoretical Subjects of *This Bridge Called My Back* and Anglo American Feminism.” In *Making Face, Making Soul/Haciendo Caras: Creative and Critical Perspectives by Feminists of Color*, edited by Gloria Anzaldúa. (Aunt Lute Books, 1990, 356-369).

⁵⁶ Cindy Cruz. Notes on Crossing Disciplinary Borderlands: Anzaldúan Pedagogies and a Defense of Experiential Knowledge. *El Mundo Zurdo: Proceedings from the 7th Annual Conference of the Society for the Study of Gloria Anzaldúa*. (San Francisco: Third Woman Press, 2015).

A new site of accountability: US
 A new source of power: US (vi)

In this passage, Bambara offers four ways to hear what the work of solidarity and coalition sounds like: “US.” In capital letters. Is that shouting? Or is it an affirmation? I say it’s both. Coalition is never easy and the unmistakable loudness of “US” alerts those who are listening. The “US” of coalition is also visually haunted by the imperial habit of reading “U.S.” This is a tense juxtaposition that draws out the epistemological implications of placing women of color at the center of nation. By tuning into *Bridge* I am able to hear what coalition and resistance to erasure sounds like in these pages. By “tuning into” *Bridge* I activate Bambara’s aural metaphor as a frame and as a modality for listening against the grain of power. The soundscape in *Bridge* is comprised of the sounds captured on the page, the silences, and the mode of listening. I want to listen to the ways the authors of bridge “hear” each other in their writings.

Hearing the Soundscape

The section titled, *Speaking in Tongues: The Third World Woman Writer in Bridge* addresses the many silences and silencing women of color negotiate in their writing. Nellie Wong writes of the dangers of writing for women of color in the essay, “In Search of the Self as Hero: Confetti of Voices” subtitled: “A Letter to Myself.”

If you sing too often of woe, yours or your sisters’, you may be charged with being “too personal,” “too autobiographical,” too much a woman who cries out, who acknowledges openly, shamelessly, the pain of living and the joy of becoming free. (178)

When she warns that “sing(ing) too often of woe, yours or your sisters” she shows the bitter awareness that there is a limit to what others want to hear. What is considered “too often” is not important but knowing that there is a quota for some people’s ears is enough to silence and self-censor speech or song before it’s even begun is critical. She does not describe this as a unique phenomenon or an individual experience, she writes this with other women of color in mind, “your or your sisters.” What we hear in this passage is an internal conversation where she does not conceive of herself as totally alone. There is solidarity with others in these lines, but as a letter addressed to herself, the typewriter in this essay is also necessarily imagined as a “long, lost friend.” However, one cannot relax into the idea of writing as a friendly task.

The intervention to the so-called “illegibility” of women of color feminism, narratives, experiences, and scholarship that *Bridge* powerfully makes is largely dependent on “reclaiming our tongues” as writers. Collectively, the authors of *Bridge* make some of the most compelling arguments for the need to write. In, “Speaking in Tongues: A Letter to 3rd World Women Writers,” Gloria Anzaldúa states:

Why am I compelled to write? Because the writing saves me from this complacency I fear. Because I have no choice. Because I must keep the spirit of my revolt and myself alive. Because the world I create in the writing compensates for what the real world does not give me. By writing I put order in the world, give it a handle so I can grasp it. I write

because life does not appease my appetites and hunger. I write to record what others erase when I speak, to rewrite the stories others have miswritten about me, about you.
(169)

These powerful claims are strained by the jarring realization that, “our speech, too, is inaudible,” which Anzaldúa also writes in this letter. The implication in the statement that writing can, “record what others erase when I speak,” assumes writing to be the more durable, authoritative form for lesbians of color to mediate their world and come to voice. If the speech of lesbians of color is inaudible, what is the difference that writing makes? In this anthology, the difference is that the subject of this work, while intensely individual, becomes more audible when it is done in the company of others. Anzaldúa’s manifesto-like tone in this passage defers the strong “I” point of view to “you” reminding the reader that this is a letter addressed to an imagined audience of “mujeres de color, companions in writing.”

Echoing Audre Lorde’s famous adage that, “poetry is not a luxury,” Wong also captures the nuances of the labor of writing under hostile conditions: “And you will not stop working, and writing because you care, because you refuse to give up, because you won’t submit to the forces that will silence you, a cheong hay poa, a long steam woman, a talker, a dancer who moves with lightning.” The interplay between, “the forces that will silence you,” and the aural image of a “cheong hay poa” illustrates the deep asymmetry of this relation. This kind of “talker” must also have stamina, she must use her whole body like a dancer, and the words themselves must be astute and powerful like a force of nature. These are the conditions for women of color to write.

It is perhaps Hattie Gossett who presents the most compelling reflection on the stakes for women of color writing. On being asked to write an introduction to her book, which is to say that the work cannot speak for itself, she articulates a widely shared fear - the profound self-doubt in the irrepressible question that is also the title to her essay, “who told you anybody wants to hear from you? you ain’t nothing but a black woman!” A fuller quote reveals the depth of her insight:

This ain’t the 60s you know. Its the 80s. Don’t nobody care nothing about black folks these days. We is definitely not in vogue. This season We are not the rage. Ain’t nobody even seriously courting our vote during this presidential election year. (175)

Her summary of the height of civil rights activism comes down to the whim of fashion and the plain observation that African American people are definitely, “not in vogue.” I also find that in a listening mode, the 60’s and 80’s take on a sonic quality and I hear what I imagine to be the soundtrack of 60s activism which I have studied but did not experience myself. But I do remember what the 80s sounded like in the time of Ronald Reagan, the culture wars, and AIDS. I find it compelling that she brings these political imaginaries together, distilled to their most elemental truths. It’s a bitter rupture with the past. Reading Gossett, I wonder what does seeing her name in lowercase do to the way I read it? Further quoting Gossett:

and you know what happens when a black woman opens her mouth to say anything other than do it to me! do it to me! do it to me daddy do! dont you? (176)

In this essay I read the lowercase as a solid vantage point from which her words gain their force. hattie gossett wrote this passage LOUD with three exclamation marks followed by a defiant question mark. I read her words and I hear them in concert, intersubjectively with the plurality of radical women of color voices that populate this anthology. This close, tense relationship between the written and the aural implicates the entwined problem of women of color's legibility and audibility.

The soundscape of *Bridge* is made up of both sound and a coalitional mode of listening. The capital letters, exclamation points, the sounds of singing, the sounds signal the limits of the page and testify to the conditions of writing while knowing nobody is listening, the struggle against silence, and the labor of illegibility. And they are the making of noise too - the taking up of sonic space in a written form. These sonics in *Bridge* become more audible when we commit to the aural metaphor of "being on the line" to hear what coalition sounds like and to develop new ways of listening.

Chrystos's poem, "Ceremony for Completing a Poetry Reading" provides a rich aural offering. She calls this a "give-away" poem figured as a capacious, circular basket that cannot be depleted. She invites the reader to take as much as she needs for the abundance is only transferred, "when my hands are empty, I will be full." The sense of offering defies a linear understanding or a purely visual understanding of its message and imagery. What the poem gives away requires listening and prompts remembering:

I give you the moon shining on a fire of singing women
I give you the sound of our feet dancing
I give you the sound of our thoughts flying
I give you the sound of peace
moving into our faces & sitting down (191)

This poem, like so many found in *Bridge*, is deeply coalitional in its form of address, in its structure, in its intimacy, its message. Reading *Bridge* in a listening mode the, "sound of our thoughts flying," is no more abstract and image than the "sounds of our feet dancing."

When writing becomes so connected to the very possibility of life, as these testimonies tell, the stakes for women of color to be heard are high. In the Venn diagram between writing and listening of things that are true, I argue: If as women of color we have struggled to write in order to translate our own lives, surely we have also struggled with under-entitlements to sound. If we do not activate sound politically we cannot tune into what's going on, both the hostilities and the resistances that occur in sonic space. In other words, noise is political. I suggest that there is an aural dimension to *Bridge* beyond the written that has to do with perceptions of the sound and noise women of color make.

A Decibel is Not a Decibel

There is a documented history of the debate over noise in America which comes to bear in this discussion to show the changing perceptions and definitions of noise in America and the social and legal control of noise. A basic conclusion is that noise, however it is defined, historically and now, causes conflict. Some prominent studies include, "Sound and Fury: The Politics of Noise in a Loud Society," by Garret Keizer; "Sounds in the City" by Tony Schwartz,

The Responsive Chord; and “Cacophony at Thirty-Fourth and Sixth: The Noise Problem in America 1900-1930 by Raymond Smilor, and there are many more.⁵⁷ These works trace the changing perceptions of what counts as noise, its impact on individuals and society, and the social and legal control of noise in the 20th century. Some of the changing perceptions of noise parallel the rise of industrialization, the movement of people, and the growth of cities in the U.S. Smilor, for example, considers noise part of larger environmental issues such as pollution. Noise equals a type of pollution therefore it is a problem that cannot be ignored on a large scale. Noise was associated with Progressive Era views that emphasized civility with quiet even in national celebrations: “The conviction that noise indicated a barbarous civilization resulted in a campaign to civilize, that is to make quiet, Fourth of July celebrations.” Smilor contends that, “The angry and widespread public response to din was more than a call for quiet. It reflected deep feelings of uncertainty accompanying an industrialized way of life.” Yet these public ambivalences yielded legal and enforceable anti-noise ordinances in every city all over the nation as early as 1913. Sounds that qualified as “din” and “public nuisances” included boat whistles, pets, dogs and birds, peddlers, delivery/work trucks, automobiles, and musical instruments. By 1928, measurement of noise by decibels becomes popular and made possible by the “audiometer” invented by Bell Telephone Laboratories in 1925. While this may provide scientific tools and terms to measure noise, it does not begin to explain the social and cultural aspects of noise. For instance, Keizer offers a quite unscientific definition of noise as an “unwanted sound.” in the vein of a personal assault as “unwanted attention.” While this comparison is unfortunate, it serves to illustrate the larger point that “the traditional noise ordinance has usually been aimed and enforced against the individual.” His main targets of critique are large scale noisemakers like airports yet he does not lament the closure of the Office of Noise Abatement and Control in 1982. Keizer’s engagement of more contemporary debates over noise is instructive of how race and class matter in studies of sound. He asks, “Might at least some of the noise assailing us amount to a protest against the threat of cultural or economic extinction... ‘I make noise therefore I am.’ The Hispanic gardeners who recently went on a hunger strike to protest an L.A. ban on leaf blowers said that the law was aimed at their race. In effect, they were saying that a noise *identified* them; silencing it was an attack on them.” This is extremely helpful for while Keizer also states in the same argument that “On the one hand, a decibel is a decibel is a decibel,” it’s very clear that that is only a weak concession and that we must explore this issue with more nuance. Schwartz also offers a definition of what noise is and what it is not: “A sound is not noise because it is loud. It is a noise because it disturbs us or interferes with our activity. Noise is an *unwanted* sound.” But to a degree, noise is also an unheard sound. His main claim is that there has been a, “shift in the location of sounds we want to hear,” so that “Outdoor sounds therefore become noise, since they interfere with sounds coming into our homes via electronic media.” There is a competition over what we are meant to hear, how we listen, and what kinds of responses we give to certain sounds and the spaces and places in which they occur. A woman crying for help on the street is no longer audible to someone who has become habituated to listening to and privileging indoor sounds coming in through various media. Although this article predates the iPod and iPhone, the logic certainly follows. To the critique that society has perhaps become callous to cries of someone in distress on the street, he

⁵⁷ Garret Keizer. “Sound and Fury: The Politics of Noise in a Loud Society.” *Harper’s Magazine*. (March, 2001); Tony Schwartz. *The Responsive Chord*. (Doubleday, 1973); Raymond W. Smilor. “Cacophony at 34th and 6th: The noise problem in America, 1900-1930.” *American Studies* 18, no. 1 (1977): 23-38.

suggests that: “If we cannot identify the sound as an element in a larger behavioural pattern, it is likely to become impersonalized for us.” I argue that this very same notion can be extended to interrogate the ways we hear and don’t hear race and gender.

More the point, the concerns, controversies, conflicts and the social and legal actions to control noise continue now in recent local events and across the country.⁵⁸ They tell us that the stakes are high, between life and death and freedom, when it comes to encounters with other people’s “noise.” Which is why engaging questions/issues of noise critically is not simply a matter of decibels. When you bring an intersectional analysis of gender, race, and class into how we define and respond to noise, a decibel is simply not a decibel. Listening to the writers of *Bridge* say that their words, stories, voices are “unwelcome” should teach us that how we listen is socially constructed and differentiated by powers of relation. Relations of power structured by U.S. racism and coloniality map on to how the sounds and noise women of color make are perceived. The degree to which these sounds are policed has everything to do with the historical marginalization and dehumanization of women of color in the U.S. I make connections between *Bridge* and these studies of the “noise problem” in America to inform my reading of the recent conflict over noise in the Napa Valley Wine Train Controversy of 2015.

The Napa Valley Wine Train Controversy and the Apology Letter Genre

I want to apologize for your experience on the Napa Valley Wine Train on Saturday, Aug. 22. We accept full responsibility for our failures and the entire chain of unfortunate events you experienced.

Clearly, we knew in advance when we booked your party that you would be loud, fun-loving and boisterous—because you told us during the booking process that you wanted a place where your Club could enjoy each other’s company. Somehow that vital information never made it to the appropriate channels and we failed to seat your group where you could enjoy yourself properly and alert our train’s staff that they should expect a particularly vibrant group.

We were insensitive when we asked you to depart our train by marching you down the aisle past all the other passengers. While that was the safest route for disembarking, it showed a lack of sensitivity on our part that I did not fully conceive of until you explained the humiliation of the experience and how it impacted you and your fellow Book Club members.

We also erred by placing an inaccurate post on our Facebook site that was not reflective of what actually occurred. In the haste to respond to criticism and news inquires, we made a bad situation worse by rushing to answer questions on social media. We quickly removed the inaccurate post, but the harm was done by our erroneous post.

⁵⁸ The 2012 murder of the African American youth Jordan Davis in Florida due to playing “loud” hip hop music at a gas station is one extreme and tragic example. In Oakland, CA, longstanding African American churches have received complaints over the loudness of their congregation’s singing during services raising questions about how gentrification is connected to sound policing.

In summary, we were acutely insensitive to you and the members of the Book Club. Please accept my apologies for our many mistakes and failures. We pride ourselves on our hospitality and our desire to please our guests on the Napa Valley Wine Train. In this instance, we failed in every measure of the meaning of good service, respect and hospitality.

I appreciate your recommendation that our staff, which I believe to be among the best, could use additional cultural diversity and sensitivity training. I pledge to make sure that occurs and I plan to participate myself.

As I offered in my conversation with you today, please accept my personal apologies for your experience and the experience of the Book Club members. I would like to invite you and other members to return plus 39 other guests (you can fill an entire car of 50) as my personal guests in a reserved car where you can enjoy yourselves as loudly as you desire.

I want to conclude again by offering my apologies for your terrible experience.

--Anthony Giaccio

The San Francisco Gate and other media reported in August of 2015 a small group of African American women, part of the book club called, “Sisters on the Reading Edge” were escorted off the Napa Valley Wine Train for “laughing and talking too loud.”⁵⁹ On social media the hashtag quickly became #LaughingWhileBlack. This was a small group of eleven women. Staff received complaints from other riders and the group was told by staff to “tone it down” and that “this isn’t going to work.” There were contests over what kind of experience was being had on this train among the riders: “This isn’t a bar” one woman told the group. Lisa Johnson, who posted this story on social media said quite simply, “Um, Yes it is.” Johnson considered these complaints and the humiliation of being escorted off the train into the hands of police a “racist attack” and demanded a Public Apology. It was received and it was published in the online publication *Clutch Magazine* with the headline: “Napa Valley Wine Train Admits They Were ‘100 Percent’ Wrong For Kicking Black Women Off.”

CEO of the Napa Valley Wine Train, Anthony Giaccio, stated that “The Napa Valley Wine Train was 100 percent wrong in its handling of this issue,” adding, “We accept full responsibility for our failures and for the chain of events that led to this regrettable treatment of our guests.”⁶⁰

He also penned a letter directly to the group saying “I want to apologize for your experience on the Napa Valley Wine Train on Saturday, Aug. 22. We accept full responsibility for our failures and the entire chain of unfortunate events you experienced.” The letter goes on to detail every step in which they failed, including their hospitality, and the means they will take to ensure this does not happen again by participating in “additional cultural diversity and sensitivity training.” All moves typical to the genre of racist, sexist, homophobic, transphobic public apology letters so common in public culture now. There is no doubt that the CEO takes full responsibility. You can read it for yourself, in black and white. But what I’m reading and what

⁵⁹ Evan Sernoffsky. “Black Women ‘Humiliated’ After Getting Kicked Off Napa Valley Wine Train.” *SF Gate*. August 24, 2015.

⁶⁰ <http://www.clutchmagonline.com/2015/08/napa-valley-wine-train-admits-they-were-100-percent-wrong-for-kicking-black-women-off>

I'm hearing are two different things. For in the space of a single paragraph, the letter finds five ways to say that the women were still somehow being L-O-U-D:

Clearly, we knew in advance when we booked your party that you would be *loud, fun-loving* and *boisterous*—because you told us during the booking process that you wanted a place where your Club could *enjoy* each other's company. Somehow that vital information never made it to the appropriate channels and we failed to seat your group where you could *enjoy yourself properly* and alert our train's staff that they should expect a *particularly vibrant* group. [emphasis mine]

Even as the CEO offers to spring for a future free ride in a reserved car for 50 – as his “personal guests,” he invites them to “enjoy yourselves as loudly as you desire.” Altogether, these polite but dangerous euphemisms for the noise black women make betray the act of the apology or apology letter, in this case, and allows it to rescue itself rhetorically in its positive spin. That is, the loyalty here is to the expected form, the force of the narrative.

Thinking with *Bridge*, which is not an isolated act of sound policing is: When women of color speak, what do we hear? If the Napa Valley Wine Train riders and the management did not hear coalition in the laughter or “noise” made by the “Sisters on the Edge of Reading Book Club,” can we? As longtime readers of *Bridge*, how do we now become listeners? Building on Maria Lugones's theory of the *coloniality of gender*, I propose a decolonial feminist critique of sound as the means to disenchant our ears from hearing coloniality precisely so we can do the work of coalition. I ask: How does sound as embodied epistemology and as entitlement to sonic space shape what we consider decolonial feminist practices? Sound lets me think of *Bridge* beyond the textual artifact I thought it was. When I listen, I hear a soundscape of coalition rising from the pages. A decolonial feminist deep listening or sounding of *Bridge* lets me hear distortions when women of color take up sonic space and it also lets me hear those resistances. Thus activating a decolonial feminist politics of *listening* is crucial to what Maria Lugones calls the “lived transformation of the social.”

Amplifying the Coloniality of Gender

The decolonial feminism articulated by Maria Lugones engages with Anibal Quijano's concept of the “coloniality of power” which can be understood as the confluence of the production of race and gender/categories, labor, capitalist economy, and Eurocentric epistemology. Lugones' major intervention to this analysis is that “gender was a colonial imposition.” Decolonial feminism, as proposed by Lugones is engaged with the decolonial theories from the global south yet remains thoroughly grounded in U.S. third world feminism emphasizing a “theoretico-praxical” approach. The key tenets of intersectionality and coalition persist across U.S. third world feminism and decolonial feminism as they critically reflect the experiences of people of color in the U.S. out of which theory begins.⁶¹ The project of decolonial feminism becomes clear in Lugones' statement: “I call the analysis of racialized, capitalist, gender oppression “the coloniality of gender.” I call the possibility of overcoming the coloniality of gender “decolonial feminism.” She also illuminates the “active resisting” at the

⁶¹ To say “decolonial” then, denotes a particular genealogy which cannot be confused with “decolonizing.” I speak of the decolonial theory of the global south via Maria Lugones's intervention with her concept of the coloniality of gender which extends U.S. third world feminism.

epistemic level that is part of the praxis of decolonial feminism, “the decolonial feminist’s task begins by her seeing the colonial difference, emphatically resisting her epistemological habit of erasing it. Seeing it, she sees the world anew, and then she requires herself to drop her enchantment with “woman,” the universal, and begins to learn about other resisters at the colonial difference.” The appeal to drop the enchantment with “woman” has to do with the problem of categorial logics and categorial thinking. Lugones challenges us to, “place ourselves in a position to call each other to reject this gender system as we perform a transformation of communal relations.” Theory and action are brought together anticipating the praxis that must characterize an enactable decolonial feminism.

The coloniality of gender lets us see coloniality at work so we may disenchant ourselves from categories of gender. How do we disenchant our ears from hearing coloniality? I build on Lugones’s theory in this simple act of transposition of the terms Lugones uses *from sight to sound*. I do not take Lugones’s phrasing as literal, rather, I take this as an opportunity to demonstrate how we are accustomed to put even the most complex concepts in visual terms. To *see* the coloniality is about recognition and recognition does not depend on the visual. By sounding decolonial feminism, putting it in another key, so to speak, an important decolonial feminist practice becomes evident. If part of the goal for decolonial feminism is for us to recognize other co-resisters to coloniality, I argue that *listening* is an important practice to allow that recognition. To listen decolonially, against the grain of power, and in solidarity and coalition with other co-resisters is inextricable to decolonial feminist praxis. Moving towards a decolonial politics of listening we must remember that decolonial feminism, like woman of color feminism, is inherently praxical. This connects with M. Jacqui Alexander’s non-linear notion of remembering. In the next section I discuss listening and remember “go” together and why we should we remember.

Between Remembering and Listening

I was not part of the sweat and fire that birthed a woman of color politics in this country in the 1970s and 1980s. This is why I want to remember that I have been shaped by it.

M. Jacqui Alexander, *Pedagogies of Crossing*

In the chapter, “Remembering *Bridge*, Remembering Ourselves,” Caribbean feminist scholar, M. Jacqui Alexander defines memory and remembering by connecting it to her own experience of being shaped as feminist of color by her encounter with *Bridge*.⁶² Two things strike me that let me propose a decolonial theory of listening: Alexander does not express memory or remembering in exclusively visual terms or as a process one can understand with a single definition. What kind of remembering is this? For Alexander, remembering is multiple in at least three ways: remembering is “different from looking back,” it is “not a pure act of access;” and it is “embodied.” I argue that remembering and listening are connected.

Alexander states that, “Remembering is different from looking back. We can remember sideways and not bring things into full view.” Looking back is positioned here literally as a glimpse from the side or a glance over one’s shoulder. One cannot sustain a view in this way. One can just as easily look away. Remembering of this sort is by definition brief and somewhat

⁶² M. Jacqui Alexander. *Pedagogies of Crossing: Meditations on Feminism, Sexual Politics, Memory, and the Sacred*. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), 275.

passive and does not require much discipline. It is indirect, partial, and unreliable in this mode. Alexander connects the act of writing with remembering: “For me remembering *Bridge* is a way of remembering myself, for even as I write I am aware that memory is not a pure act of access.” Here, the definition against “a pure act of access” implies that whatever is being remembered will come forth intact like information on a computer file. This is a type of retrieval to which one is somewhat at a distance, not necessarily involved in the process. Maybe some remembering is like that, like recalling ingredients list for a recipe, a rote memory easily activated that’s not in serious danger of being lost. The kind of remembering Alexander writes about is in significant tension with forgetting, “a forgetting so deep you had forgotten that you had forgotten.” Alexander’s remembering therefore is not a purely intellectual act, something the mind does without passing through the body. Like the act of writing, remembering is also embodied. It takes work to remember, to not forget. Remembering takes practice. As with Lugones, it benefits recasting Alexander’s remembering within an aural paradigm. If we can think of remembering as embodied through the senses like, “the scent of home,” then sound is also a critical site for the, “multiple ways that remembering occurs.” Alexander’s own remembering is mediated by her encounter with *Bridge*, a coalitional artifact whose provocative writings mediate the authors’ complex experiences with relations of power and collectively articulate a U.S. woman of color consciousness. Alexander recognizes a part of herself across time, place, experience, nation-state through these writings and writers of *Bridge*. The particularities, the differences across, are what make the recognition possible. “We are not born women of color. We *become* women of color. In order to become women of color, we would need to become fluent in each others’ histories,” she states. Which is how we can begin to understand the seemingly abstract act of “remembering ourselves” in terms of a deep recognition. When Alexander states that, “We cannot afford to cease yearning for each other’s company,” it brings into relief how tensely remembering is set off against “forgetting.” This quote is taken from the section subtitled, *We Have Recognized Each Other Before*, which further bolsters my point is that remembering here about recognition which lets me assert that recognition is not dependent on the visual.

This recognition of learning each other’s histories is the pre-condition necessary for coalition. The practice here is listening. For ultimately Alexander’s charge is that a “new moment has emerged that has produced the need for a different kind of remembering - the making of different selves.”⁶³ Remembering, in all the ways it occurs, including through sound/listening is part of the “making of different selves.” Making is not the same as the capitalistic notion of productivity. Here, I connect the “making” with Anzaldúa’s notion of Making face, making soul... Finally, here is the space where we can go from theory/definition to practice: “It is in the daily practice the will bring about the necessary shift in perception that make change possible.” Listening is that practice. Approaching/engaging *Bridge* as a sonic object signals that there are limits to the narrative form that we can cross. Tuning into *Bridge* and hearing coalition interrupts the impulse to call these sounds of anger, joy, protest, music, woe, and conflict noise. In a recent talk I gave at UT Austin, a colleague commented on a concern Cherrie Moraga expressed that contemporary readers of *Bridge* do not see the authors behind the stories. So she presented photographs of the authors as part of her talk on the new edition of the anthology.⁶⁴ I believe that Moraga’s concern also had to do with the danger of

⁶³ Alexander, *Pedagogies*, 268.

⁶⁴ My thanks to Laura Gutierrez who asked me to discuss Moraga’s concern with “seeing” with my proposal to “listen” to *Bridge* at a talk I gave at the Center for Mexican American Studies at UT Austin on April 14, 2016.

forgetting these coalitions and her way of remembering was visual in that instance. I argue that listening offers a new modality through which we may learn each other's histories and "recognize each other again." Why should we remember? Coalition articulates another logic of relating. The radical move that the editors and authors of *Bridge* was the move they made towards each other. This move exits the logic of domination, marginalization, and dehumanization that women of color confronted among white feminists/movement. Remembering these histories of coalition among women of color requires multiple approaches, methods, and theories. Linking Lugones and Alexander give me the tools to propose listening as a decolonial feminist practice.

Remembering Coalition

The interrelated concepts of coalition and intersectionality are central to woman of color feminist thought. I say that they are interrelated because the politics of coalition emerge from the analysis of intersectionality. That is, intersectionality is a powerful analysis of race, class, gender, and processes of power, yet its full meaning becomes activated in the practice of the coalitional politics it informs. This concept can be understood through the co-authored, "A Black Feminist Statement" by the Combahee River Collective (1977) reprinted in *Bridge* that states: "The most general statement of our politics at the present time would be that we are actively committed to struggling against racial, sexual, heterosexual, and class oppression and see as our particular task the development of integrated analysis and practice based upon the fact that the major systems of oppression are interlocking."⁶⁵ Here, the relationship between analysis and practice is immediately identified and expressly stated. As a collective, the three named authors include Barbara Smith, Beverly Smith, and Demita Frazier. However, they acknowledge the many unnamed activists the document includes stating that they too had "a shared awareness of how their sexual identity combined with their racial identity to make their whole life situation and the focus of their political struggle unique." This inclusivity expresses solidarity with their contemporaries as well as their forebears involved in activist struggle. This act also imagines the work as widely shared. I am interested in thinking of this widely shared work out.

Both Maria Lugones and M. Jacqui Alexander emphasize coalitional and communal relationalities to activate decolonial possibilities against the grain of colonial logics of relation. The initial Crossing Alexander invokes in *Pedagogies of Crossing: Meditations on Feminism, Sexual Politics, Memory, and the Sacred* is of Middle Passage. She states, "Not only humans made the Crossing, traveling only in one direction through Ocean named the Atlantic. Grief traveled as well."⁶⁶ These twin ideas are at work in the chapter titled *Remembering This Bridge Called My Back*. As a Caribbean feminist, Alexander was not part of U.S. third world feminist movement but she acknowledges that she has been shaped by it. Thus, Alexander states: "Remembering is not the same as looking back." In her reflection on the passing of Gloria Anzaldúa, whom she never met, she asks, "What might black women say to Chicana women to help ease the pain of their loss? We want to mourn with you the passing of your sister warrior. Your loss of her gentle footprints is also ours."⁶⁷ I am charged to respond to Alexander and I suggest that what is "remembered" here are the enduring practices of coalition in US third world feminism in this expression of the shared loss. It is significant too that she addresses Anzaldúa

⁶⁵ Combahee River Collective. "A Black Feminist Statement." *Bridge*, 210.

⁶⁶ Alexander, *Pedagogies*, 289.

⁶⁷ Alexander, *Pedagogies*, 286

directly, saying, “I did not know you, Gloria, although we worked together.” This statement is not merely a poetic way to address one who has passed, or crossed over, this is not an imagined relationship of solidarity. This is a potent spiritual crossing between the living and the dead enabled by the coalitional, intersectional, feminist political work they share. That is, in the act of remembering Alexander activates political meaning in the spiritual and this has profound epistemological implications as it rejects a division between the spiritual and the material world. That the material and spiritual worlds are thought of as separate requires thinking about ways to cross that division. Surely it’s not a stretch to think of this text also crossing the formal limits between word and sound.⁶⁸ And as I read that phrase out loud, “I did not know you, Gloria,” I wonder where does the address go? How is the “you” imagined? I want to suggest that a turn towards the aural is part of what makes some crossings possible. I do not believe the message is necessarily meant to be read but rather it is meant to be heard.

As a final mediation she offers the following:

What might black women say to Chicana women? We grieve with you and we want ceremonies of reconciliation that link our goddesses and gods to each other, patterning new codices of forgiveness and triumph, sisters of the cornsilk and sisters of the yam as your *comadre* Cherrie Moraga put it. We petition the basket weavers to weave a new pattern of our knowing that binds the permanent impermanence of our footprints in the sand. (286)

And it is here where I suggest that we think of this "new pattern of our knowing" in terms of *sound*.

Sounding Aztlán at the Intersections of Woman of Color Feminist Thought

Sounding Aztlán in the 21st century must begin at the intersections of women of color political thought or there’s no hope! In the final chapter of my dissertation I explore three popular Chicana/o performances of the “Star Spangled Banner” and I suggest that an audience who hears, recognizes, or “tunes in” to the intertextual presence of Mexican musicianship, such as the mariachi and banda vocal styles performed by Sebastien de la Cruz and Jenni Rivera, in their performances of the U.S. national anthem – that is by being able to listen to more than one musical form, performance practice, even the smallest rebel sound pushing through – is an example of remembering and recovering multiple and complex narratives, histories, and traces of migration, citizenship and belonging and resistance in sonic space.

Bridge is part of Chicana history. That is to say, the coalitional history of *Bridge* includes by definition and practice Chicanas and other women of color. As difficult as it is to practice coalition, these histories are too easily forgotten. The fact that *Bridge* was out of print until very recently documents the fragility of that history. I know I’m not the only one who had bootleg PDFs of chapters of *Bridge* stored in my electronic files just in case.⁶⁹ Again, here is where I think that we may be too bound to the page, so to speak.

In both of these discussions, the bookends to my project, *remembering* and *listening* are deeply connected. I argue that listening is a critical practice for remembering against the grain

⁶⁸ Joseph Keith. “At The Formal Limits,” *Interventions*, 11:3, 352-366, doi:10.1080/13698010903255643

⁶⁹ In 2015 the newly revitalized Third Woman Press, originally launched by Norma Alarcón, published the greatly anticipated fourth edition of *Bridge*.

and logic of power, nation, and coloniality. Listening is one of the ways we can remember histories of feminist of color solidarity. If we can remember solidarity, if we can “tune in” to the soundscape of coalition enacted in *Bridge*, we can practice it again. Sounding Aztlán at the intersections of woman of color history amplifies Aztlán beyond the entwined national imaginaries of Aztlán and the U.S. and opens up decolonial possibilities in these rich, audible, reverberations.

Why must we remember? Without remembering women of color, Chicana histories are incomplete, lost, erased, silenced. This is a loss. Remembering links/bridges Chicana histories with women of color lived experiences & intellectual histories. It proposes, like the Combahee River Collective Statement, to place women of color, specifically African American women, at the center of an expansive decolonial politics. This has implications for the notion of Chicana/o autonomy and self-determination espoused by early Chicana/o activist platforms and interrogates the limits of Chicana/o theoretical frameworks for examining Chicana/o and Latina/o histories. Sounding Aztlán at the intersections of woman of color feminist thought recasts this strategy, demarcating a narrowly defined solidarity, as one of wider interdependence with others, “on the line.” Furthermore, Chicana feminist interventions remain limited when they only talk back to patriarchy. The move that the authors of *Bridge* make, the explicit, conscious, radical, and ultimately decolonial move is to talk to each other. I have argued that this soundscape of coalition is audible in the pages of *This Bridge Called My Back*. What is implicated in this move to speak to one another, vis-a-vis the radical act of writing, is the practice of listening.

Chapter 2

Decolonial Feminist Soundscapes in Post 80s Chicana Literature

Introduction

Luis Alfaro's short story, "Minnie Riperton Saved My Life" is a queer Chicano coming of age tale told from the adult protagonist's point of view remembering his adolescence through music. The story travels many places within and outside of Los Angeles including the farm working communities of California's Central Valley where the narrator's family lived before moving to the city. The narrator remembers being bused from the racially mixed African American and Latino Pico-Union area of Los Angeles to the predominantly Mexican San Fernando Valley. Alfaro's story hinges on the reader hearing or listening to one single note the narrator recalls in a memory. This impossibly high note is sung by the American soul singer, Minnie Riperton, who was known for her five-octave range and the 1975 hit song "Lovin' You" (is easy cause you're beautiful). In this memory, the song she sings is the provocative, "Come Inside My Love," that sparks a long remembrance: "And that's when I heard it. At the noon dances. A song. One of those songs that stays inside you and wraps itself around your soul." This single soulful note holds all of his key childhood memories such as being bused to an all Latino school in Los Angeles, going to gospel concerts in his old neighborhood, and sneaking into a blues club on Vermont Avenue with his brother's fake I.D. that eventually shape him into the adult queer Chicano poet he becomes by the end of the story.

From the point of view of a boy "who ain't lived yet" as Alfaro says, the full meaning of Riperton's sexy song escapes him. But he identifies deeply with the single *sound* of the high note she sustains when he says, "I understand that note like I understand how to roller-skate without trying." As the narrator encounters more and more music by joining the Columbia Record Club, listening to the radio, and going to nightclubs, he begins to detect and hear an important connection between African American blues and Mexican border ballads: "They call it The Blues on K-Day, but in my neighborhood we call them Rancheras or Corridos." For the narrator, being queer and Chicano depends on this connection between black and brown experiences/histories and musical genres. Indeed, they are one and the same all at once in a climactic moment of subject formation when he declares: "I was in the world of my people... I was free. I was a queer Mexican boy from the barrio, but I was also one of the *Soul Train* dancers. I was one of the Three Degrees. I was one of Harold Melvin's Bluenotes. I was the guy in Bloodstone who sang the falsetto in 'Natural High.'"

The story is at once joyous, painful, funny, serious, and bittersweet. Most importantly, it is about the relationship between life and death: "Minnie Riperton died and I started to grow up." Although the narrator never says directly how Minnie Riperton saves his life, it's clearly true. The question is perhaps also partly answered here: "Thanks to all those records, every day that I get ready for high school, I feel like I know who I am, more and more." Broadly speaking, "Minnie Riperton Saved My Life" is about music, migration, memory, and queer Chicano subjectivity. But I argue that the full meaning of the story, how the story makes sense to a reader, depends on the capacity to imagine the rich musical world through which the narrator imagines himself into becoming. That is, how this story conveys its meaning cannot be confined to the written text. There are so many musical intertexts in this short story that the effect of

reading it is like tuning a radio or listening to a mix tape.⁷⁰ There is something to gain in the idea of a reader “tuning into” a story. The implication for reading this story as a music listener allows me to reconsider Chicana/o literature as a site with rich sonic archives we have yet to hear.

Traditional approaches to literary criticism almost unquestionably privilege the written text as a site of meaning over sound. Yet literature is replete with references to sound, music, lyrics, noise, silence, and other aural cues that suggest that we try something else—they suggest that we listen. I begin with this story as one example of a soundscape in Chicano literature. The music is not secondary to the text rather it is what enables this queer Chicano story to be told and heard. By tuning into the text’s soundscape we can hear the queer and racialized classed meanings captured and produced in what Frances Aparicio calls the “musical subtexts and intertexts” of the story.⁷¹ In sounding Luis Alfaro’s story, the complex experience of growing up in the fields and in the city, in Latino and African American neighborhoods, and being both Chicano and queer becomes amplified in the capacious and temporally capacious high note of a soul diva where such things are remembered all at once.

Among Luis Alfaro’s prolific and critically acclaimed work in theater, this single short story has stayed with me since I first heard it read aloud by Alfaro at the “Otro Corazón: Queering the Art of Aztlán” conference at UCLA in 2001. I have heard him read the story again, most recently as a featured guest in the Living Writers Series at the UC Santa Cruz in 2015. While the musical references Alfaro sites are not quite from my own generation, the sentiment that music can save your life resonates true for me. In the select literary archive I present in this chapter I show how sound and music embedded in the text enables the representation of certain queer Chicana characters not often seen or heard. I propose that tuning into these soundscapes offers new and nuanced ways to understand gender, sexuality, and queerness in Chicana/o literature.

This discussion is organized in two parts and looks at four Chicana narratives including short stories, poetry, and a play all set in the 1980s. The first two stories, “Woman Hollering Creek” by Sandra Cisneros and “Chola Salvation” by Estella Gonzales treat two different apparitions—La Llorona, La Virgen de Guadalupe and Frida Kahlo—all larger than life Chicana icons. For this part, chapter two, I de-privilege the visual in this reading to allow other meanings than that of the normative feminine archetypal figures to emerge in the sound. I argue that gender is embodied and transgressed through speech and it is specifically in the character’s use of slang and pachuca caló that we can hear these transgressions. After all, these are tough Chicanas with audible attitude. There is an auditory dimension to the butch and chola characters in particular that is important to hear in order to understand these characters more fully and to hear new forms of Chicana poetics. In the following chapter I look at two new works, *Chopper! Chopper! Poetry from Bordered Lives*, by Verónica Reyes, and the play *The Barber of East L.A.*, by Raquel Gutierrez. For this part I pull out the musical soundtracks from the narratives to listen more closely to the relationship between the music and the story.

The worlds of both *Chopper! Chopper!* and *Barber* share three main kinds of music: 80s new wave/punk, R&B oldies, and classic Mexican boleros. As with “Minnie Riperton Saved My Life,” the music tells the story of Chicana queerness, class, and place. In order to hear Chicana lesbian stories in Chicana/o literature I extend Alfred Arteaga’s exploration of how “language

⁷⁰ I heard Alfaro read “Minnie” again at the UC Santa Cruz Living Writer’s Series held on, February 12, 2015. In this performance Alfaro riffed on the story and named even more singers, quoted alternate lyrics from the songs, and invited the audience to sing along which turned the reading into an impromptu musical performance.

⁷¹ Aparicio, *Listening to Salsa*, 4, 59.

takes on the act of being Chicano” to include music, vis-à-vis the soundscape.⁷² An implication in focusing on the abundant references to music is how these narratives assume a musically knowledgeable audience. Altogether, these four Chicana narratives whose soundscapes comprise of sounds, speech, and musical soundtracks sound Aztlán in ways that make Chicana voices and narratives more audible. These soundscapes contain listenable, audible representations of gender important to hear against the historically negative representations of the Chicana characters they portray. Furthermore, these select works announce a new generation of alternative queer and butch Chicanas whose point of reference is the 1980s and make a significant break from 60s and 70s imaginaries in Chicana/o literature. In these new narratives, the eighties emerge as an important new site for recovering Chicana histories.

Gritonas, Laughter, and Queer Noises in Sandra Cisneros's "Woman Hollering Creek"

La Gritona. Such a funny name for such a lovely arroyo. But that's what they called the creek that ran behind the house. Though no one could say whether the woman had hollered from anger or pain.

Sandra Cisneros, "Woman Hollering Creek"

As subjects of study, both Sandra Cisneros and La Llorona have many interpreters. Chicano scholars have provided numerous readings of, *Woman Hollering Creek*—both the collection and titular story.⁷³ Cisneros's powerful feminist intervention to patriarchal narratives has not gone missed by critics. The major themes include: marriage, patriarchy, hetero-normative gender roles, domestic violence, the family and the US-Mexico Borderlands. Sonia Saldívar-Hull, possibly her greatest interpreter, presents a new way to understand Cisneros and other Chicana writers whose narratives are located in the borderlands and concerned with US-Mexican women's linkages and solidarities as "transfrontera feminism."⁷⁴

Among the abundant scholarship on Cisneros, I'm attentive to any engagements with the soundscape of the text understood as either music, lyrics, sound, noise, auditory culture and sonic technologies. Héctor Calderón's work that bridges popular music and literature offers context for thinking about the significance of the musical epigraphs that frame the collection. In his reading of "Woman Hollering Creek" he goes so far as to make a parallel between El Grito de Dolores for Mexican independence with Cisneros's protagonist's Grito for feminist independence: "Recrossing that newlywed threshold, Woman Hollering Creek/La Gritona, Cleofilas hears a different reenactment of the Grito de Independencia, the Grito de Dolores, given at the birth of the Mexican patria."⁷⁵

⁷² Alfred Arteaga. *Chicano Poetics: Heterotexts and Hybridities*. (Cambridge University Press, 1997).

⁷³ Sandra Cisneros. *Woman Hollering Creek: And Other Stories*. (Vintage, 1992), 44-56.

⁷⁴ Sonia Saldívar-Hull. *Feminism on the Border: Chicana Gender Politics and Literature* (University of California Press, 2000).

⁷⁵ Furthe quoting Calderón from his chapter, "Sandra Cisneros's Feminist Border Stories.": The "official" Fiesta del Grito, ¡Viva Mexico! given throughout Mexico and Mexican United States on the evening of 15 September and which had been a rallying cry for the farmworkers and activists in their campaigns for social justice during the first phase of the Chicano Movement, is not uttered by Felice against women's oppression, against the Marian cult of Martyrdom." Héctor Calderón, *Narratives of Greater Mexico: Essays on Chicano Literary History, Genre, and Borders*. (University of Texas Press, 2004), 188.

For Calderón, like Saldívar-Hull, a critical engagement with the borderlands and US-Mexican cross-cultural contexts, what he calls "Greater Mexican cultural diasporas" is important to reading Cisneros.⁷⁶ To date, I have only encountered one article offering a full reading of sound in *Woman Hollering Creek* (and in Chicana/o literature). Lydia French's, "*Woman Hollering Creek* a Través de la Musica: Articulating Mexicanidad to Pochismo," examines the musical epigraphs that introduce the three sections of Sandra Cisneros' short story collection, "*Woman Hollering Creek*." The epigraphs quote lyrics from Mexican songs in which French notes both a partial adoption and a critique of the discourses of Mexicanidad, whether "romanticized or despised" that the songs bring into the understanding of Cisneros' Chicana narratives. She notes how notions of Chicana/o nationalism and articulation of "pocha/o voice" resonate in the complex "relationship between song and story." Both Calderón and French treat the musical intertexts in *Woman Hollering Creek* however a fuller engagement with the soundscape of the text and specifically the title story remains to be done.

The figure and legend of La Llorona is ubiquitous in Chicana/o cultural studies. There are numerous sources to draw from (folklore, art, film, popular culture). In literary studies, Tey Diana Rebolledo counts her as an important female archetype along with Coatlicue, Guadalupe, La Malinche, La Adelita, Soldaderas, and Sor Juana Inéz de la Cruz.⁷⁷ Catriona Rueda Esquibel's chapter, "The Mystery of the Weeping Woman" gathers some of La Llorona's appearances having discovered in her research that, "Chicana lesbian literature, too, is haunted by this mysterious woman of sadness."⁷⁸ Domino Renee Perez's critical work, *There Was A Woman: from Folklore to Popular Culture* provides the most comprehensive study of La Llorona to date.⁷⁹ Chicana authors have sustained meaningful dialogues about La Llorona and offer innovative readings and revisions in such diverse stories as, "The Cariboo Cafe" by Helena Maria Viramontes and "La Llorona Loca: El Otro Lado" by Monica Palacios, whom I often place alongside "*Woman Hollering Creek*."⁸⁰ These are all feminist critiques of the La Llorona legend.

The function of La Llorona lore is always cautionary and discourages women from making many kinds of possible transgressions: social, gendered, sexual, raced/classed, linguistic, perhaps even formal. As Rueda Esquibel states, "Her cries echo in the night, striking fear in the hearts of children." Renee Domino Perez further elaborates in this statement about her research:

Categorically, traditional or conventional representations of La Llorona frequently, but not exclusively focus on La Llorona as a despairing figure who has lost both her man and her children. Renderings of this type usually position or promote La Llorona as selfish, vain, vengeful, whorish, worst of all, a bad mother, while excusing or ignoring the behavior of the man. Elements from the originary

⁷⁶ Héctor Calderón. "The Mexico City--Los Angeles Cultural Mosh Pits: Maldita Vecindad, a Chilanga-Chicana Banda de Pueblo." *Aztlan: A Journal of Chicano Studies*, (Spring 2006).

⁷⁷ Diana Tey Rebolledo. "From Coalicue to La Llorona: Literary Myths and Archetypes" in *Women Singing in the Snow: A Cultural Analysis of Chicana Literature*. (University of Arizona Press, 1995).

⁷⁸ Catriona Rueda Esquibel. *With Her Machete in Her Hand: Reading Chicana Lesbians*. (University of Texas Press, 2006) 23.

⁷⁹ Domino Renee Perez. *There Was a Woman: La Llorona from Folklore to Popular Culture*. (University of Texas Press, 2008).

⁸⁰ Helena Maria Viramontes, *The Moths and Other Stories* (Arte Publico, 1985), 75-83; Monica Palacios. "La Llorona Loca: El Otro Lado." in *Chicana Lesbians: The Girls Our Mothers Warned Us About*, edited by Carla Trujillo. (Third Woman Press, 1991), 49-51.

portent (water, weeping, wailing, and children) are often included or foregrounded within traditional renderings. The primary characteristic of these productions is that they represent the lore and the various ways in which it is put to use without critiquing, overtly, La Llorona, her story, or the misogyny at the center of the tale. Because the image of La Llorona as threatening figure remains the most salient and persistent element in the traditional versions, the majority of works considered for this study represent her in this way. (23)

In reading Chicana feminist interventions to this legend I want to note how the cautionary function and meanings are maintained, abandoned, or re-directed towards those structures, discourses, and colonial relations of power that both shape and interrupt Chicana subjectivities and implicate Chicanas/os as a community. Cisneros's "Woman Hollering Creek" indeed leads us to the edge of the water—but she leads us toward less predictable ends.

The Aural/Visual Paradigm and the Problem With Apparitions



Whether it's a family version heard growing up or through any number of Chicana/o cultural productions that tell the story in as many ways, La Llorona is a familiar figure in the Chicano cultural borderlands and she may not need much introduction in popular or academic spaces. This "Overly familiar(ity)" with her is what informs Américo Paredes's editorial decision not to include it in his collection and translation of *Folk Tales of Mexico*.⁸¹ I consider it a significant omission. But I agree that even in vastly changing popular cultural contexts La Llorona remains absolutely contemporary. I happen to own a sticker that says, "Honk if you've seen La Llorona." It's curious that it doesn't state "Honk if you've *heard* La Llorona" since her name describes the sound of both weeping and wailing. Yet her story may be difficult to engage within a sound studies perspective because she's often thought of an apparition or an encounter to be more precise. As the bumper sticker shows, La Llorona lore is often imagined, written about, told within a visual paradigm. This is a problem for an interpretation that insists in listening and destabilizing the visual/aural paradigm. The challenge then is to re-imagine the experience of an apparition or an encounter as always having sound.

As important as grasping the deep sense of place in "Woman Hollering Creek" Cisneros renders in her fictionalization of Coahuila and Seguin, the Texas-Mexico borderlands, the waterways, the houses inhabited by widows and isolated brides, and local histories lost in translation, I want to attempt another kind of mapping through sound. I argue that not all

⁸¹ Américo Paredes, ed. *Folktales of Mexico*. Vol. 9. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970).

apparitions or encounters necessarily privilege the visual.⁸² I also propose that some stories simply invite alternate engagements and readings, “Woman Hollering Creek” demands to be listened to much more closely than prior readings have done. Yet, my purpose is not to provide a new argument, per se, but a new approach with which to hear Cisneros’s feminist intervention to the La Llorona legend. I consider two key events: the phone call between Graciela and Felice and Felice’s sonic entrance or audible appearance in the story. I am interested in listening more closely to what feminist friendship and intimacy sounds like as facilitated through the telephone, I want to explore the ways Felice’s butchness is embodied in her speech and the volume of her voice as a stand in for La Llorona.

The Sense of Place Or How Do We Know This Is a La Llorona Story?

The short story, “Woman Hollering Creek” is a Sandra Cisneros’s retelling of the Mexican legend of La Llorona, or the Weeping Woman. La Llorona is a tragic figure traceable to the pre-colonial era of Mexico but she remains absolutely contemporary to U.S. Chicanas/os.⁸³ Her ghostly figure is said to roam along rivers and creeks, rural or urban, accompanied by remorseful cries for her drowned children: “¡Ay mis hijos!” Domino Renee Perez describes it this way, “According to a popular traditional version of the legend, La Llorona is a woman abandoned by the man she loved and left alone to raise their children. Grief or desire for revenge compels La Llorona to murder her children and throw their bodies into a river. Despair ultimately contributes to La Llorona’s death, and in the afterlife she is condemned to wander for all eternity until the bodies of her children are recovered.”⁸⁴ La Llorona has a long and complex history and this version of the legend has been told as a cautionary tale against sexual and interracial, classed, social transgressions. It has also been re-told and recovered by many Chicana feminist artists and writers including Sandra Cisneros. In her version, the young Mexicana protagonist, Cleófilas, having left her family home in Coahuila, Mexico, for her husband’s home in Seguin, Texas, quickly finds herself in an abusive marriage and slowly realizes that she needs to leave. While getting a sonogram at a local clinic during a prenatal check up she meets a sympathetic nurse named Graciela who witnesses her body’s abuse “black-and-blue marks all over” and arranges for Cleófilas and her young child, Juan Pedrito, to cross the river to get medical help in San Antonio but also to leave her husband. The creek is called “La Gritona” or “Hollering Woman,” not crying or weeping, but shouting. I take this as my first cue to listen more closely to the sounds in this story.

In the Chicana/o borderlands imaginary, a mother and child by a creek’s edge is an unsettling image that signals great danger to both of them. Indeed this is where we actually find Cleófilas and where her story actually begins and returns to over and over:

Only now as a mother did she remember. Now, when she and Juan Pedrito sat by the creek’s edge. (43)

For the moment they are only sitting by the creek’s edge but the force of the river and the

⁸² I am reminded of the apparition scene in Evelina Fernandez’s play, “Dios Inantzin, La Virgen de Guadalupe,” which is performed annually for Christmas at the Los Angeles Theater Center and the Los Angeles Cathedral. Juan Diego detects a “calorcito” in his heart, smells the scent of roses, and hears her musical voice before seeing her.

⁸³ Domino Renee Perez states that La Llorona makes an appearance in the Florentine Codex.

⁸⁴ Domino Renee Perez, *There Was A Woman*, 2.

legend are not passive:

The stream sometimes only a muddy puddle in the summer, though now in the springtime, because of the rains, a good-size alive thing, a thing with a voice all its own, all day and all night calling in its high, silver voice. Is it La Llorona, the weeping woman? ...La Llorona calling to her. She is sure of it. (51).

This water's edge precarity is a place Cleófilas finds herself in throughout her days and nights as a young, married, and disillusioned woman:

This is what Cleófilas thought evenings when Juan Pedro did not come home, and she lay on her side of the bed listening to the hollow roar of the interstate, a distant dog barking, the pecan trees rustling like ladies in stiff petticoats—shh-shh-shh, shh-shh-shh—soothing her to sleep. (51)

The “shh-shh-shh” of the rustling is both sound and silence, shorthand for “shush,” and it indexes the themes of domestic violence and Cleofilas's isolation in the story. But it is also meaningful in terms of locating the time-place for the story, which based on the telenovelas she watches is set in the 1980s. While the noises Cisneros describes are not unusual as a reference to trees, the reference to rustling “petticoats” is an anachronism. The presence of this garment works as a sign of bourgeois European femininity and centuries old fashion that has long gone out of style. This auditory detail tells us that this is an old story, a legend, and brings an element of what Annemarie Perez calls “Chicana/o gothic” into this contemporary story.⁸⁵ Listening closely to this tell-tale sound is how we know that, “Woman Hollering Creek,” is a La Llorona story.

A Phone Call Between Comadres: Graciela and Felice

The intimacy between Graciela and Felice is so palpable that reading it feels like I'm eavesdropping on a conversation. Yet I want to listen even more closely so that I keep my ears open to the interplay between sound and silence. Although we know there are two people speaking, the reader only hears Graciela's voice. We don't hear Felice's side of the conversation but their close connection is audible nonetheless.

Felice, it's me, Graciela.
 No. I can't talk louder. I'm at work...
 I can't talk real loud 'cause her husband's in the next room...
 Look, I need kind of a favor. There's a patient, a lady here who's got a problem...
 She needs a ride.

Not to Mexico, you goof. Just to the Greyhound. In San Anto.
 No, just a ride. She's got her own money. All you'd have to do is drop her

⁸⁵ In her syllabus for *The Chicana/o Gothic*, Anne Marie Perez asks: “Are Chicana/o novels and poems using elements of the horrific, the violent, the unorthodox, and/or the supernatural to guide the reader through the story's action and explore anxieties about the instability of identity and nation?”
<http://citedatthecrossroads.net/blog/2011/08/23/building-a-class-the-chicanao-gothic/>

off in San Antonio on your way home. Come on, Felice. Please? If we don't help her, who will?

It's a date, Felice. Thursday. At the Cash N Carry off I-to. Noon. She'll be ready.

Thanks, Felice. When her kid's born she'll have to name her after us, right?
Que vida, comadre. Bueno bye (54-55).

This one sided conversation leaves a conspicuous silence on the other side of the line that creates tension and suspense. Graciela whispers conspiratorially so as not to be overheard by Cleófilas's husband, Juan Pedro, only Felice. Graciela is resolved and make her case by persuasion, pleading with Felice playfully and affectionately: "Not to Mexico, you goof," she teases. There is a sign of resistance on Felice's side which I suspect is not genuine, just part of their warm rapport. Successful in getting her special favor, Graciela confirms, "It's a date." This is a flirtatious expression that implies at the very least a very close and familiar relationship. When Graciela suggests that Cleófilas "name her (kid) after us," I cannot help but wonder what kind of "us" is this? Does the line "on your way home" mean a home with Graciela? These small intimacies and ambiguities are amplified by the phone call and how Graciela literally speaks for Felice. The final line of the exchange confirms that their friendship is platonic, "*Que vida, comadre,*" but it is not casual or simply professional. Graciela and Felice are *comadres* which makes them like kin. They do not live together but they are very familiar with each other's daily routine, for instance, Graciela knows which way Felice takes home. Whether their intimacy was ever sexual or not, the bond is strong. The phone call confirms that Graciela and Felice share a powerful platonic bond like family, but it also amplifies the intimacy of that connection and makes it ambiguous, and opens more possibilities for women to be together. We don't actually hear Felice until she appears.

Hearing Felice

In her important work on Sandra Cisneros's border narratives, Sonia Saldivar-Hull states that she reads Felice as lesbian.⁸⁶ I don't think anyone who reads this story needs to be persuaded on this point, however, I want to highlight the sonic aspects that support this reading. As a stand in for La Llorona, we have to be able to hear Felice as well as see her. The first description of Felice is, "the woman in the pick up."⁸⁷ She is in mid action driving up to Cleófilas who awaits nervously and tells Felice to, "Put your bags in the back and get in." Her speech is direct and commanding, almost rude, which compared to Cleófilas, Grace, and the other women in the story makes her sound unfeminine. Catherine Ramirez's work on Pachucas shows how language, gender, and class intersect and expose how "super polite" forms of speech become the social markers of acceptable femininity.⁸⁸ Based on notions of "agreeable speech" and "women's language" that Ramirez interrogates, Felice would not be considered normatively feminine.⁸⁹ However, the story demands an urgent tone because this is a getaway scene. They

⁸⁶ Saldivar-Hull, *Feminism on the Border*, 123.

⁸⁷ Cisneros, "Woman Hollering Creek," 55.

⁸⁸ Catherine Ramirez. *The Woman in the Zoot Suit: Gender, Nationalism, and the Cultural Politics of Memory* (Duke University Press, 2009).

⁸⁹ Ramirez's critique connects Emily Post's notions of etiquette and Robin Lakoff's discussion of language.

need to get across Woman Hollering Creek:

But when they drove across the arroyo, the driver opened her mouth and let out a yell as loud as any mariachi. Which startled not only Cleofilas, but Juan Pedrito as well. (55)

This description of Felice's yell denotes uncommon strength and loudness as mariachi singers are known for their powerful, operatic, voices. Visually, the reference to "mariachi" also refers to the charro or horseman costume typically worn by male singers. We can certainly imagine a female mariachi in this scene but the predominant cultural image of a mariachi yokes together a national Mexican musical genre and masculinity. Yet because it is Felice who sounds like a mariachi, the reference becomes more open and ambiguous. What remains important is how Felice is associated vocally with the power of a male mariachi and not a clearly feminine reference to vocal strength.

Pues, look how cute. I scared you two right? Sorry. Should've warned you. Every time I cross that bridge I do that. Because of the name, you know, Woman Hollering, *Pues*, I holler. She said this in a Spanish pocked with English and laughed. (55)

Speaking Spanglish and not proper Spanish marks Felice as a U.S. *pocha* which has class implications and further genders Felice as potentially "butch," linguistically. This is emphasized in the following lines: "That's why I like the name of that arroyo. Makes you want to holler like Tarzan, right?" Perhaps the most telling details is how Felice herself likens her desire to holler to Tarzan and not the well known ranchera singer, Lola Beltran, not La Llorona, or other female figure. To "holler like Tarzan" associates Felice with a primal type of masculinity as Tarzan's signature sound is a wild yodeling done as he swings on a vine nearly naked. This cross-gender identification with both the Tarzan's image and his "holler" performs what Elizabeth Wood calls a "sonic crossdressing" and confirms on auditory terms Felice's queerness.⁹⁰ This image stays with Cleofilas who takes pains to retell this story: "Can you imagine, when we crossed the *arroyo* she just started yelling like a crazy, she would say later to her father and brothers (56)."

At this point it cannot go unsaid that "like a crazy" is unusual syntax in English, but in Spanish the phrase has a double meaning, "como una loca," means both crazy/mad and queer."⁹¹ We can register how the truck driver sounds by Cleófila's surprised reaction:

Everything about this woman, this Felice, amazed Cleófilas. The fact that she drove a pickup... she didn't have a husband. The pick up was hers, she herself had chosen it. She herself was paying for it.

And how she dwells on Felice's way of talking:

I used to have a Pontiac Sunbird. But those cars are for Viejas. Pussy cars.

⁹⁰ Elizabeth Wood uses the phrase "sonic cross dressing" in her theorization of "sapphonics" as a type of sound.

⁹¹ Put in conversation with Monica Palacios's story "La Llorona Loca: El Otro Lado" amplifies this coded/double meaning even more.

Now this here is a real car. “What kind of talk was that coming from a woman? Cleofilas thought. But then again, Felice was like no woman she'd ever met. (56)

I suggest that Felice was like no woman she'd ever *heard*.

An Unanswered Question

La Gritona. Such a funny name for such a lovely arroyo. But that's what they called the creek that ran behind the house. Though no one could say whether the woman had hollered from anger or pain. (46)

This brief passage introduces the creek in the story. We get everything in this compact sentence - the beauty of the arroyo, the odd name, the question about translation, and a serious question that haunts the protagonist until the last lines. I wondered if this is a question the reader is meant to answer? How does the story itself answer the question of “anger or pain”? Cleófilas only says “perhaps.” We know that Felice hollers for fun, amid bouts of loud laughter.⁹² We've seen the anger, the pain, the isolation, and doubts Cleófilas experiences as a young married woman. In some way, to answer this question literally is a trap. To answer this question literally would be joyless. Cisneros offers us “perhaps” and Felice's “yodel” and Cleófilas's “ribbon of laughter” and renders a feminist soundscape that makes room to imagine other reasons more joyful and life affirming for women hollering.

The next soundscape takes us from Texas to East L.A. I place them together because I see Felice as a transitional figure that links these narratives. Like my exploration of Felice's voice and speech, I will keep on listening to what non-normative gender sounds like in Estella Gonzalez's characters. Whereas Cisneros's Felice was more “pocha,” Gonzalez gives us new literary characters rendered as iconic cholas speaking caló.

The Decolonial Feminist Poetics of Caló in Estella Gonzalez's “Chola Salvation”

La Virgen looks like my Tía Rosa in the picture she sent to Dad. She has blonde hair, lots of eyeliner and white eye shadow, and she's wearing chola clothes.

Estella Gonzalez

By using incorrect grammar and allegedly substandard diction, she appeared both unladylike and un-American.

Catherine S. Ramírez, *The Woman in the Zoot Suit*

The short story, “Chola Salvation,” by Estella Gonzalez revolves on Isabela, a young Chicana who is about to turn fifteen years old and is loathe to experience her Quinceañera, the ceremony which interpellates her as a marriageable, heterosexual, Catholic, Mexican woman.⁹³ Under multiple pressures from her violent and abusive parents and her desire to create art, this

⁹² There is quite a queer collection of sounds associated with Felice in this story. Apart from her yell, there is also a “hoot” worth exploring.

⁹³ Estella Gonzalez. “Chola Salvation.” In *Kaleidoscope: Martindale Literary Award Winners 1988-2006*, Edited by Nancy Wall and Meg Files. (Pima, AZ: Pima Community College Foundation, 2007), 259-277.

dilemma calls for divine intervention. One day while Isabela is minding her parents' restaurant, Frida Kahlo and the Virgen de Guadalupe walk in like twin portraits come to life to give her some sound and irreverent advice. Isabela immediately recognizes La Virgen who, "looks like my Tia Rosa," as someone resembling family. What they wear and how they speak have been updated to the East Los Angeles landscape and alternative musical soundscape of the 1980s. La Virgen's dyed blonde hair and the clothes she wears such as a, "tank top with those skinny little straps, baggy pants, and black Hush Puppy shoes," reveal a Chicana chola style of the 1970s and 1980s.⁹⁴ Gonzalez amplifies this geographically specific sartorial aesthetic with their sharp, savvy manner of speaking. The dialog for La Virgen and Frida is distinguished by how they employ English, Spanglish, and specifically, pachuca caló. Together they are archetypal comadres armed with practical wisdom who speak a direct tough-edged speech with a macho quality reinforced at times by taking on masculine gender pronouns. The result of Gonzalez's careful crafting – visually, the Chicana/chola aesthetic, and audibly, with their deft use of Spanglish, caló, and slang makes the apparition of La Virgen and Frida as East L.A. homegirls intelligible, that is, visible and audible, to the fifteen year old protagonist. This apparition depends on both the visual and audible aspects to create the sense-making quality of the linguistic and geographic/spatial world of the story. I approach this story audibly with an ear tuned to La Virgen and Frida as new literary pachuca characters speaking caló.

Pachuca Caló

There is an extensive body of work on the linguistic varieties of Chicano Spanish, Spanglish, and Pachuco or Chicano caló in the field of Chicano cultural studies. An established corpus of literary analysis, social and linguistic research including various dictionary projects are dedicated to speakers of caló and works that employ caló.⁹⁵ I situate this discussion through the woman of color and decolonial feminist interventions made by scholars working in this area. I use the term "pachuca caló" to re turf the so-called male domain of caló that is often rehearsed in literary studies of caló and which continues to link masculinity with criminality in too tight a relation. In *Borderlands/La Frontera*, Gloria Anzaldúa defines pachuco language as "a language of rebellion, both against standard Spanish and standard English. It is a secret language. Adults of the culture and outsiders cannot understand it."⁹⁶ I take Anzaldúa's elaboration on Spanish, home languages, and caló as an important linguistic history and anti-colonial corrective to deficit perceptions of hybrid languages. Yet I do not disconnect it from the first person testimony she offers to frame a larger critique of the gendered contexts and stakes for Chicanas speaking in unofficial languages.⁹⁷

In her important study, *The Woman in the Zoot Suit*, Catherine S. Ramírez states that for Mexican American women of the 1940s WWII era, speaking pachuco caló was taboo and was associated with "the sort of woman who deviates from the home, such as a puta or cantinera."⁹⁸ Ramírez further states that, "while *el pachuco* would come to embody an idealized Chicano masculinity and subjectivity during the Chicano movement, the so-called tough-tongued pachuca would be ignored or maligned."⁹⁹ The coolness, hipness, and bravado that Chicano men can

⁹⁴ Catherine Ramírez calls them "heirs to the Pachuca style of the 40s."

⁹⁵ Such often cited figures include the poets Jose Montoya, Alurista, Raul Salinas, and the playwright Luis Valdez.

⁹⁶ Anzaldúa, *Borderlands*, 78.

⁹⁷ Anzaldúa, "How to Tame a Wild Tongue," *Borderlands*, 75-86.

⁹⁸ Ramírez, *Woman in the Zoot Suit*, 93.

⁹⁹ Ramírez, *Woman in the Zoot Suit*, 94.

perform through this “linguistically improper” language does not stick to Chicanas. In this regard, caló is has been considered the domain of Chicano authors and it remains strongly associated with masculinity. This is why Ramirez’s challenge and critique of the limits of caló to represent Chicana stories still stands when she asks: “Yet how thoroughly Chicano--or Chicana--is “El Louie” when it is written in pachuco slang, a linguistic variety that has been designated male and masculine?”¹⁰⁰ Yet caló is not any “one” language in a formal or official sense. While there are many well-known dictionaries and compilations of caló such as, *El Libro de Caló*, *Barrio Language Dictionary*, *Regional Dictionary of Chicano Slang*, some compilers and editors acknowledge how these projects disrupt the concept and function of a dictionary noting that, “No sooner has a dictionary been published than it is, at least in part, obsolete.”¹⁰¹ Caló is by practice an improvisatory, neologistic, traveling, transgressive, social, living language with complex inter-lingual constructions bearing traces of Nahuatl, Spanish, archaic Spanish, and English. In her study of two “linguistically improper” dictionaries that include *El Libro de Caló*, Maria Lugones emphasizes an important aspect of caló: “Caló does indeed constitute a linguistic restructuring of linguistic binaries in a spatial mode. An in-between tongue indeed, not captured by bilinguality, but obliterating it.”¹⁰² So to engage caló in literature is not simply about accessing a new vocabulary with word equivalences. One must also resist the impulse to translate or to desire a full knowledge, etymologically, for the sociality of any caló is surely part of the living quality of that caló and some worlds cannot be traveled with language alone.

The linguistic history of caló bears complex histories of Mexican American struggle and belonging in the U.S. Approaching caló in literature carries a danger of reinscribing the largely untroubled association of criminality and marginality with masculinity. To denaturalize and “de-link” this pernicious association I ask: How does caló both reflect and resist a history of coloniality?¹⁰³ What alternate meanings can we trace by listening to the caló decolonially?¹⁰⁴ My approach is to shake out the caló vocabulary from the story to give it some distance from the burden of signifying both masculine criminality and feminine taboo. In “Chola Salvation” the theme of *vice* is turned on its head and likend to *advice*. This tells me that Gonzalez rejects the notion of taboo, so do I.

Who is Speaking Caló?

¿Que ondas comadre?” Frida says, smiling. (259)

Orale. Don’t you know us esa?” La Virgen says and lights up her own cig, a skinny brown one. (260)

¹⁰⁰ This poem by Jose Montoya is often lauded as an exemplar of calo poetry. Ramirez responds to Arteaga’s claim that it is a quintessential Chicano poem.

¹⁰¹ Harry Polkinhorn, Malcolm Lambert, and Alfredo Velasco. *El Libro de Caló*. (Florissant Press, 1977); Dagoberto Fuentes and José Armando López. *Barrio language dictionary: first dictionary of Caló*. (El Barrio Publications, 1974); Librado Keno Vasquez. *Regional dictionary of Chicano slang*. (Jenkins Publishing Company, 1975).

¹⁰² Maria Lugones. “Wicked Caló: A Matter of the Authority.” *Feminist Interpretations of Mary Daly* (2000): 246-253.

¹⁰³ Walter Mignolo. “Delinking: The Rhetoric of Modernity, the Logic of Coloniality and the Grammar of Decoloniality” *Cultural Studies* 21, no. 2-3 (2007): 449-514.

¹⁰⁴ My approach to caló is greatly informed by the readings and activities that were part of a special topics class on “Pachuco Caló” given by Maria Lugones at Binghamton University in spring 2009.

Both Frida and La Virgen address Isabela in an intimate manner. Frida calls her, “comadre,” a term relegated for intimate female friendships, often bound by the familial duty and honor, of serving as a child’s godmother, but also denotes a sisterhood between friends not related by blood. La Virgen addresses her as an equal, not a child, she calls her “esa” leveling the communication turf. Frida wears a white men’s suit a young MTV viewer would associate with David Byrne, and “no woman things.” They are Mexicana historical figures recast as Chicana archetypes into East Los Angeles circa 1984. They speak a tough speech peppered with slang, bad words, calo-isms, and audible attitude. La Virgen is a sensual being, not virginal, as described in the subtly erotic, clever line, “And she has on this lipstick like she just bit a chocolate cake.” La Virgen offers Isabel drink and cigarettes--vices--without hesitation and still retains her divinity, fascinating to Isabela:

“Quieres otro?” she said handing me another cigarette. I look at her nails. They’re painted blue, covered with little gold stars. It looks like she’s holding a galaxy in her hands. (261)

La Virgen dispels her own myth by embodying an earthly, sensual, womanly form with none of the mystery or otherworldly effects of the apparition of the Virgen de Guadalupe to Juan Diego on Tepeyac. There are no soft musical sounds, no scent of flowers, no warming of the heart as the classic apparition narrative describes.¹⁰⁵ She also condemns the hypocrisy and damages that have been committed in her name:

It’s about you homegirl and about your pinche parents and this quinceañera pendejada they wanna force down your throat,” La Virgencita tells me. “You probably don’t wanna hear it from me, especially since your Mom is always throwing me in your face, saying how much you’re hurting me every time you don’t listen to her but I want you to hear it from your carnal, not some chisme your Mom picked up from your abuela. (260)

Isabela hears it first hand from La Virgen that the quinceañera ceremony is sheer stupidity and doom for her and that generations of passed down guilt and gossip have obscured the truth about it what it really means. La Virgen calls Isabel “homegirl” showing that she’s on her side. She also calls herself Isabela’s “carnal.” This is the first instance of gender pronoun troubling in “Chola Salvation.”

“Carnal” is typically understood as masculine. Yet coming from La Virgen’s lips it cannot simply be masculine. We must either hear the corresponding feminine pronoun “carnala” which is subsumed under the Spanish language or we must stretch it widely across gender as La Virgen herself does. This is a disruption of the linguistic logic of this highly gendered language, as the belabored criticism of the inherent sexism of Spanish shows. But “carnal” is a slang word therefore it cannot be purely Spanish in the formal sense. More precisely, *caló* is not Spanish. *Caló* is untranslatable by nature, its many neologisms cannot be parsed out, and ambiguity of meaning is part of its improvisatory nature. Polinkhorn and Velasco state in the User’s Guide to *El Libro de Caló*, “Because of the changing, evanescent nature of slang, the “definitions” that follow should be viewed as approximations rather than fixed equivalencies.”¹⁰⁶ Try to translate

¹⁰⁵ The Nican Mopohua and Evelina Fernandez’s play both describe these sensorial things as part of the apparition.

¹⁰⁶ Polinkhorn and Velasco, *El Libro de Caló*, v.

carnal! Is it flesh of my flesh, blood sister-brother? Three different sources offer three different “definitions.” It is a linguistically imprecise exercise to translate this word yet those in the know use it to clearly reflect a strong bond. Because there is an audible ambiguity of meaning in calo language, I suggest that spoken by La Virgen and Frida, it is also possible to hear an ambiguity of gender. La Virgen never says “carnala” in this story. I find this linguistic ambiguity on top of gender ambiguity a generative path towards exploring what I am calling *the decolonial feminist poetics of caló*.

Not every character in this story speaks caló, so it matters who is speaking caló. Except for one instance, only Frida and La Virgen speak caló. Caló here has something to do with gender that goes with and against the ways it is already gendered, by default, as masculine. The equation I’m making goes like this: If caló is transgressive to proper language then it follows that caló speakers are transgressive to proper socialization and gender. Upside down go all the rules about being proper and proper speaking. Being proper to one’s gender in this story is to be obedient and silent and dangerous for Isabela. It’s dangerous to her body, her art, her future, her independence, and her sense of self. The soundscape of the chola salvation in this story resounds with caló and I want to hear the story’s caló vocabulary more closely.

A Caló Vocabulary

besalo
 cachuchas
 carnales
 chubs
 chunfi
 clicka
 cuates
 cuete
 esa
 Friducha
 homes
 mera, mera
 morenaza
 mota
 panocha
 papacitos
 pedo
 pelona
 ¿que ondas?
 vata loca
 wachale

These are the caló words spoken by Frida and La Virgen. In a brushstroke, they do not make reference to a male criminal underworld or obvious taboos. They emphasize friendship, tough girls, being the best, and solidarity. There is warning too, “wachale,” and a gun or “cuete” which indicates danger. But there are overwhelmingly more words for female solidarity. Frida and La Virgen also use many compliments and terms of endearment in Spanish when they address Isabela. Words like “hermosa” and “preciosa” are not only loving and affirming, but

they take on a sacred and protective quality when Frida and La Virgen speak them. The term “muñeca” is somewhat ambiguous and could be taken as flirtatious, infantilizing, and objectifying when Frida greets her “hola muñeca” and “adios muñeca.” Coming from a man “doll” would sound patronizing, even cheesy, but Frida gives it a swagger that works with her masculinity yet not in a dominating way. Altogether this constellation of the Spanish and caló terms of endearment spoken from Frida and La Virgen’s lips take on a divine quality. These terms envelop Isabela with affection and are meant to protect her, encourage her, and save her from self-doubt. There is limited use of diminutives and augmentatives, only one “pobrecita shy girl” and one amazing augmentative: “morenaza.”

The Decolonial Feminist Poetics of the Augmentative in Pachuca Caló

The opposite of a diminutive is an augmentative. Spanish diminutives are used to express small size, affection, charm, they can soften a harsh word and are generally considered positive variations of everyday words. “Pobrecita shy girl” is a good example of this effect caused by the suffix “ita.” Poor little shy girl. Augmentatives have a less generally agreeable effect on language. An augmentative doesn’t simply indicate largeness but also a notable difference of character. The quality of the word can change/intensify so much that it becomes distinctly negative or harsh or undesirable.¹⁰⁷ The suffixes “aza/azo,” “on/ono,” “ote/ota” are some examples of augmentatives. Whereas the “azo” in “exitazo” can indicate great success or a big hit, the “azo” in “perrazo” can mean big “mean” dog as well as simply a large dog. In the same way, “cabezón” doesn’t literally mean someone with a large head but can mean big headed, stubborn, or unattractive. The status of “mujerona” is equally up for interpretation. I consider that a good thing, that these meanings can co-exist, not negate the other, but work with each other in caló. It’s clear that rules for diminutives and augmentatives are not hard and fast and that meaning is also made in context and in practice.

Frida and La Virgen bring rules of their own design to help Isabel. They include sex positive advice with practical do’s and don’t’s. They advise her to, “Have as much sex as YOU like” but “don’t get pregnant;” “go to school;” and that she is in charge of her “panocha.” I am interested in their advice in “Rule #5”:

We’re all indias. Don’t let your mom fool you. No one’s a hundred percent. Be proud of the indigena inside of you. I know your old lady is down on you for behaving like an Apache but believe me we can’t all be blond, blue-eyed gueros. Your mom heard the same lies about the gueras being the only ones worth anything from her own mami, a pure blood Tarahumara. Morenaza, you’re beautiful too. Check my little brown self out one of these days, hanging in my gold frame right near the altar. I have the place of honor, not these other little wimpy marias. (262)

This rule addresses the danger of internalized self-loathing, colorism, racism and colonial standards of beauty that her family has passed on to her. Gonzalez describes Isabel as dark skinned and fat and Isabel’s defiance of her mother earns her being called an Indian savage,

¹⁰⁷<http://www.spanish411.net/Spanish-Diminutives-Augmentatives.asp> “Augmented words indicate either that something is large or that it is undesirable.”

“como un apache.” Within this abusive family dynamic, a word like “morena” which is negatively linked to Indian-ness could never be a term of endearment for Isabel as it sometimes used among Latinas/os.¹⁰⁸ La Virgen disrupts these colonial, racist, and anti-indigenous tropes when she tells her, “Morenaza, you’re beautiful too.” The word “morena” starts out as Spanish but augmenting it with “aza” makes it caló. At the very least, it is now slang. Although “morenaza” affirms dark skin and dark hair as beautiful, to accept this simple definition works within the colonial reduction, domination, and objectification of mestiza women whose racial “otherness” to European whiteness becomes desirable. I believe that the caló word “morenaza” sounds/articulates a way out of this colonial logic. Morenaza is an ample word that makes room for both Isabel’s color and her size, large not overweight, dark like the Virgen herself, divine and entitled to the taking up of space.¹⁰⁹ As a diminutive, “morenita,” evades a racial critique, makes a woman into a girl, offers no transformative possibilities. Spoken aloud “morenita” sounds weak, “morenaza” sounds strong. The “aza” in morenaza makes Isabel larger to the reader yet it does not indicate excess or too muchness. Words have histories and the difference between “morena” and “morenaza” is the possibility caló offers to change the character of a word, to give it another history. La Virgen de Guadalupe is also known as La Virgen morena which La Virgen stresses to Isabela. “I have the place of honor, not these other little wimpy Marias.” Morenaza is not just a linguistic augmentative for dark skinned woman. Morenaza is a sonic amplification for someone whose quality and character must be imagined in both visual and audible terms. A decolonial feminist interpretation of “morenaza” in this story challenges the racial logics within which “morena” gains its meaning. As pachuca caló, “morenaza” sounds a powerful, resonant, amplification of “morena” that de-links from a purely colonial interpretation and offers an alternate “world of sense” with decolonial possibilities.¹¹⁰

Saving One’s Soul

Frida and La Virgen represent many kinds of transgressions of heteronormative gender and social roles by appearing as cholas to Isabel and resounding their empowering feminist message in pachuca caló. They present, visually, a butch/femme image, Frida in her suit with no “woman things” and Lupe with her painted nails and hair flowing to her feet. Although they boast to each other about their male conquests, their advice for Isabela is female centered and empowering. Their advice shifts the location of Chicana subjectivity away from the domestic sphere to the artistic and through this, the sacred.

Not wanting a quinceañera like other Mexican girls and railing against what it represents is part of Isabela’s rebellion. Wanting to paint like Frida Kahlo, to study and make art, to question the authority of the family and cultivate the love and support of true homegirls and comadres is the path to Isabela’s salvation. With La Virgen and Frida’s counsel, she can remake the notions of vice and advice and she learns to see the sacred in the everyday, a straight line from La Virgen, to her favorite aunt, Tia Rosa, and even herself. Ultimately, Isabela does not make the fine art she loves and posts on her bedroom walls but she is learning to become a tattoo artist at the Chola Temple Tattoo, a telling name in this story of salvation. A more telling detail comes towards the end of the story when Frida becomes jealous that Isabela has a tattoo of La

¹⁰⁸ Juana Maria Rodríguez. *Queer Latinidad: Identity Practices, Discursive Spaces*. (NYU Press, 2003).

¹⁰⁹ Here I recall the poem, “My Lady Ain’t No Lady,” by Pat Parker

¹¹⁰ Maria Lugones. “Playfulness, “World”-Travelling, and Loving Perception.” *Hypatia* 2, no. 2 (1987): 3-19.

Virgen on her arm and demands one of her own. Isabel eventually gets both tattoos but not before she states: “But she’s my carnal and I owe her some blood.” At this point there is no need to hear the femininely gendered translation “carnala” because La Virgen has already remade those rules, unwritten but spoken and clearly heard in the generative decolonial feminist poetics of pachuca caló.

Conclusion

This chapter has focused on speech as a predominant feature of these feminist soundscapes. The *pocha* and *chola* characters rendered by Cisneros and Gonzalez require a closer listen. Bilingualism is not new or unusual in Chicana/o literature but how it is heard and interpreted depends on how one is listening. I’ve paid special attention to their character’s use of Spanglish and pachuca caló. Because part of the history of caló is linked to criminality, and this carries over to Pachuca speakers as a taboo language, I have attempted a reading and listening that delinks them from these histories. Listening in a decolonial feminist modality. Speech and volume is connected to non-normative representations of gender. Not just non-normative but transgressive in important ways. In Cisneros, the legend of *la Llorona* is changed on sonic terms. The mournful crying and weeping of the betrayed wailing woman are left behind in favor of shouting—the itself river is called “*La Gritona*” and the legend of *La Llorona* is humorously renamed as a “*Woman Hollering*.” In terms of volume or loudness a wail and a shout might be the same but affectively they are very different. A wail indicates pain and sorrow, a shout can indicate much more – joy, rage, as well as pain, and implies a defiant shouting back stance. This level of loudness is a sonic quality ascribed to Felice’s way of speaking and it is integral to how we read her, as she says, “Pues, I holler.” There is no doubt that she is a *bulldyke* who drives a truck and objects to cars for “*viejas*” – she does not see herself gendered in this way. Hearing her at full volume amplifies her queerness. On a symbolic level her name, Felice for Felicidad, signals alternatives for *Cleófilas* – the possibility of happiness. Is this a queer alternative? We’ll never know, but that is precisely what is important in this simultaneous rewriting of the legend that dooms women to colonial gender and the introduction of a queer character whose sonic mode is perpetually amplified.

Gonzalez’s *Friducha* and *La Virgen* are skillful speakers of caló whose important soul saving advice goes against the dominant messages of appropriate Mexican femininity the young *Isabela* has heard all her life. Heard from their lips displaces caló from the overrepresented domain of male speech in that it defamiliarizes the reader from hearing men as the authoritative speakers of caló. These tough talking *cholas* debunk myths of gender and race. Spoken from their lips, caló terms such as “*morenaza*” become resignified when heard in a decolonial feminist listening mode. As caló remains a language of resistance for some Chicanos, here it becomes a way for Chicanas to resist the coloniality of gender. The creative sonics in the augmentative of “*morenaza*” amplifies racial logics and delink from their colonial meaning pointing towards decolonial possibilities within future studies of caló. There is an affinity between the augmentative I theorize and the volume of Felice’s voice that I want to explore further.

I have argued that the Spanglish and caló the characters in stories speak facilitate transgressive representations of gender as well as the embodiment of *butchness*. There is something both feminist and queer at work here via the caló however the fundamental incompatibility between queer and decolonial theories will challenge a longer and more focused study. My goal to draw attention to these soundscapes responds to Catherine Ramirez’s similar

quest to see the Woman in the Zoot Suit. I argue that when we tune into the soundscapes of Aztlán, we hear more Chicanas. These apparitions have also become intelligible on auditory terms expanding the way we imagine such characters as La Llorona, La Virgen de Guadalupe, and Frida Kahlo in their literary representation. Cisneros's and Gonzalez's decolonial feminist soundscapes also recover place and time and link them across Texas and California within the long decade of the 1980s. Anecdotally speaking, the original title for "Chola Salvation" was "Love Hangover" after the 1976 song by Diana Ross. The editorial decision to rename it to "Chola Salvation" more aptly describes the theme of the story. Helpfully, it also sets the story's soundscape more squarely within the 1980s, which is where the next chapter begins.

Chapter 3

Soundtracks, Chicana Butches, and East L.A:
Veronica Reyes' *Chopper! Chopper! Poetry from Bordered Lives* and
Raquel Gutierrez *The Barber of East L.A.*

Have you ever entered a book geographically? Have you ever entered
a word-book—a book of meaning—where the words are of a place,
constitutive of a geography, turf-taking in an anti-colonial mode?

Maria Lugones, “Wicked Calo”

In *Chicano Poetics*, Alfred Arteaga sets out to show how “language takes on the act of being Chicano,” highlighting such poetic tropes as difrasismo, caló, and pre-Colombian imagery that characterize the select archive of Chicano poetry he explores. He argues that mestizaje has something to do with being Chicano in the U.S. and this concern shows up in Chicano poetics. In his discussion on caló he claims that Jose Montoya’s widely cited poem, “El Louie,” is a quintessential Chicano poem whose “verse is as thoroughly Chicano as is Louis’s life.”¹¹¹ Catherine Ramirez responds to this claim, asking simply: “how “thoroughly Chicano” – or Chicana—is “El Louie” when it is written in pachuco slang, a linguistic variety that has been designated male and masculine?”¹¹² Her larger point notes that while there’s much to say about this poem and other caló works by Chicano writers but it’s not the final word. Ramirez’s work is concerned, in part, with seeking more Chicana stories, as am I. In her introduction to, *The Woman in the Zoot Suit*, she describes the experience of encountering Judy Baca’s triptych, “Las Tres Marias,” at an art exhibit in which three full length panels represent a 1970s or 1980s Chicana chola on the left, a glamorous 1940s Pachuca on the right, at the center is a mirror capturing the viewer in its reflection. This work by Baca is a provocative artwork and a lasting commentary on Chicana representation. Thinking with Ramirez who sets out to see the woman in the zoot suit, I want to hear her; thinking with Arteaga, I argue that certain Chicana representations requires not only language but music as well.

In this chapter I focus on the music in a poem by Verónica Reyes from her book *Chopper! Chopper! Poetry from Bordered Lives* (2014) and the play *The Barber of East L.A.* (2008) by Raquel Gutierrez.¹¹³ Both writers feature East Los Angeles as their major geographical and cultural location and prominent Chicana butch lesbian protagonists. The soundscapes in these works capture three main musical genres: Mexican ballads or boleros; oldies; punk and alternative rock of the 1980s. The references to songs and musicians in these works are so ubiquitous that I consider them soundtracks rather than simply intertexts. These soundtracks, when unpaired from the texts, can also be considered curated playlists of their own making these literary works new sites for hearing music. As with Alfaro’s short story, I argue that the music in Chicana literature is integral to understanding the story and characters in more complex and nuanced ways. Without engaging the music en par with the narrative, key meanings and sounds are lost. What becomes audible through the soundscapes of these works,

¹¹¹ Ramirez, *The Woman in the Zoot Suit*, 90.

¹¹² Ibid

¹¹³ Verónica Reyes. *Chopper! Chopper! Poetry from Bordered Lives*. (Red Hen Press, 2014); Raquel Gutiérrez. *The Barber of East L.A.* (Unpublished manuscript, 2009).

specifically their musical soundtracks, are the characters' sense of identity, place, class, culture, and desire as Chicana lesbian working class subjects in East Los Angeles. The conspicuous audibility of music in these works also has implications for the imagined audience of readers who in some sense are asked or assumed to be listeners. While literature and representations of East Los Angeles are not particularly lacking in Chicana/o cultural studies, including various Hollywood misrepresentations, queer Mexican American and Latina voices have not been thought of as the authoritative storytellers of this rich Chicana/o landscape. The work of Helena Maria Viramontes and Marisela Norte is certainly synonymous with East Los Angeles but Chicana lesbians are not central to their stories.¹¹⁴ This points to how East Los Angeles has not been engaged as an important site for Chicana literature. In this sense, Reyes and Gutiérrez as co-contemporaries are thoroughly new literary voices whose works not only present new Chicana lesbian stories but they make a shift to the long decade of the 1980s. They do this explicitly through the music, which effectively remaps and retunes East Los Angeles as a nexus whose soundscapes recover Chicana lesbian histories, alternative musical scenes, and butch/femme representations. I argue that their work ushers in a moment for Chicana literature that is both post 1980s and post *Bridge* making them important in the ways we hear Aztlán in East Los Angeles.

Chopper! Chopper! Poetry from Bordered Lives by Veronica Reyes

Verónica Reyes's debut collection of poetry, *Chopper! Chopper! Poetry from Bordered Lives* (2014) is a landmark in Chicana literature. This is the first major published collection of poetry by a first generation Chicana lesbian from East Los Angeles. Her book won multiple awards including Best Poetry by the Golden Crown Literary Society, Best Poetry by the International Latino Book Awards, and was a Finalist for Best Lesbian Poetry by the Lambda Literary Awards. A lifelong writer, Reyes studied creative writing as an undergraduate student at CSULB where she graduated with a BA in English in 1995, and as a graduate student at the University of Texas, El Paso, where she earned her MFA in Creative Writing in 2000. Reyes has been widely published at the national level in such prestigious poetry, art, and feminist journals as *The North American Review*; *Minnesota Review: A Journal of Creative and Critical Writing*; *Calyx: A Journal of Art and Literature by Women*; *Feminist Studies*; *Sinister Wisdom*; *The New York Quarterly*; and internationally in the *Canadian Woman Studies/Les Cahiers de la Femme*. Her poetry has also been published in journals such as *Pearl*; *Borderlands: Texas Poetry Review*; *Rio Grande Review*; *Haight Ashbury Literary Journal* and in the community zines and newsletters *Las Girlfriends*; *Noticiera de MALCS (Mujeres Activas en Letras y Cambio Social)*; and *JOTA*.¹¹⁵ She has won several writing residencies and awards such as Lucas Artists Residency Program, Ragdale Foundation, Virginia Center for the Creative Arts, Vermont Studio Center, and Macondo Writers' Workshop, and the Emerging Artist Award for Poetry from Astraea Lesbian Action Foundation. Verónica Reyes was born and raised in East Los Angeles. Through her education and her writing she has been able to live for significant amounts of time in El Paso, Texas and Toronto, Canada and she has traveled to Berlin and Italy. These places are the vantage points from which she writes about East Los Angeles.¹¹⁶ In a phone conversation

¹¹⁴ Helena Maria Viramontes's *Their Dogs Came With Them: A Novel*. (Simon and Schuster, 2007); and Marisela Norte. *Peeping Tom Tom Girl*. (Sunbelt Publications, 2008.)

¹¹⁵ I was fortunate to publish some of Verónica's poems in my zine, *JOTA*, between 2002 and 2006.

¹¹⁶ In a phone conversation she once said to me that, "sometimes you have to leave home in order to write about home."

she once told me that, “sometimes you have to leave home to write about home.” Indeed this is a topic her writing returns to many times.

Chopper! Chopper! captures portraits of Chicana/o life from multiple “borders” whether they are conceptual or geographic, as local as East L.A. to Montebello, and farther north across the “blue frontera.” As the poet writes, “These poems emerged from the barrio, my corazón, my realities, my homes, and beautiful energies beyond the calles of East L.A. They are me and reflect the barrio life from where I’m from.” She is the self-named “East L.A. Poet” and this work is an offering to all of her communities of, “Chicanas/os, immigrants, Mexican Americans, and la joteria.” The rich collection addresses the intersecting themes of labor, migration, the barrio, gangs, masculinity, queerness, feminist solidarity, borders, family, Mexican American identity, and East L.A. The collection is replete with musical and nonmusical soundscapes, as heard in the title poem, “Chopper! Chopper!” The opening poem, “Desert Rain,” a moving tribute to her mother, makes an important link between the U.S. and Mexico: “She inhaled the desert aroma over concrete, nopales, and limones beneath splintered street telephone wires. Socorro breathed in once and inhaled México in East L.A.”¹¹⁷ This perspective reveals a first generation Chicana experience that is important to hear. Reyes crafts new Chicana poetics traceable in strong visual and aural imagery of the streets and sounds of East Los Angeles, audible in the deft English-Spanish bilinguality of her poems. The politics of her poetics are evident in the lack of translation or italicization of Spanish words and assumes an audience accustomed to code switching. The influence of *Bridge* and woman of color feminist consciousness can be traced in such poems as, “Praise the Word, Audre Lorde is Still Alive!” and “This is My Angela Davis Poem,” and in the rousing, “Panocha Power!,” a feminist anthem for Chicana/Latina solidarity that both invokes and critiques the gender politics of Chicano activism. The call and response form of “Panocha Power!” juxtaposed onto the ubiquitous sounds of the UFW slogan, “¡Si Se Puede!” entwines them aurally and implicates them in how we hear Aztlán.

Drawing from the rich soundscape of this collection, I want to focus on the abundance of music in her poems as an important theme in her writing. It is telling that Reyes gives special thanks to the musicians for permission to print their lyrics in her poems.¹¹⁸ Out of the thirty-one poems, eight make reference to popular songs and/or quote song lyrics. They include: “Torcidaness: Tortillas and Me,” “Mariachi Plaza 1990,” “El Violinista,” “The Nopal Garden,” “Cholo Lessons Por Vida,” “Super Queer,” “Panocha Power!,” “The Queer Retablo Series: Butch-Femme Dialogue.” The poem I discuss in this section is, “Torcidaness: Tortillas and me” which traces the formation of a Chicana queer subjectivity through a 1980s soundtrack.¹¹⁹

Torcidaness: Tortillas and me

You know, a homemade tortilla de maiz when you see it
All crooked, lopsided and torcida like queer Silver Lake
Ya sabes, que it ain’t round and curved like una pelota
Tú sabes, homegirl, esta pura chueca like the owner (22)

¹¹⁷ Reyes, *Chopper! Chopper!*, 11.

¹¹⁸ In the acknowledgements she writes, “Gracias for the lyrics.”

¹¹⁹ Reyes, *Chopper! Chopper!*, 22.

In this opening stanza to “Torcidaness” or twistedness, Reyes introduces the metaphor for queerness that runs through the poem in the image of the homemade corn tortilla, “crooked, lopsided and torcida.” The poem is not about universal queerness, however, and this is quickly contextualized, gendered, and given cultural and class context. The poem is a woman of color centered story told homegirl to “homegirl.” When the narrator says “pura chueca” she exalts the term, amplifies it in the pachuca caló sense, and imbues it with pride and power “like the owner.” The expression “pura chueca” works like an audible queer Chicana feminist placa taking turf side by side the frequently heard “pura raza” putting pressure on the erasure of Chicana lesbians in the dominant imaginary of Aztlán. Silverlake is not East Los Angeles, however, and its association with queerness in the poem implies a distance traveled, a journey that begins early in East Los Angeles.

Back when I was a little chamaca or mocosa
 A kid, a rowdy one, from the barrios of East L.A.
 I knew I was a little torcida, just a little
 a little off to the side on the edge, tú sabes
 Not straight, you know what I mean
 I had it in me to be a little torcida and I loved it!
 Tú sabes, homes how it is in—el barrio (22)

The narrator locates her queer story that begins in childhood as “a little chamaca” in the Mexican barrios of East Los Angeles. She describes the sense of knowing herself as different and “a little off to the side on the edge” much like a hand formed tortilla. Part of Reyes’s queer aesthetics prefers a slightly imperfect shape to her metaphorical tortillas rather than one perfectly “round and curved like a pelota. As a tongue-in-cheek stand-in for Mexicanness, the narrator privileges the homemade quality of “torcidaness” versus a perfect uniformity to her queerness. In the last line of this stanza the narrator conveys a shared knowing between herself and the imagined reader. Again, addressed as “homes” signals a keen familiarity with another Chicana homegirl, possibly lesbian, who understands where she’s coming from. The next stanza brings East L.A. more into relief naming the cross streets to an old corner store hangout.

Back then on Sydney Drive and Floral in Belvedere District
 Oscar’s store at the esquina near the alley was the place to be
 We’d hang out and play: Centipede Asteroids Pac Man
 or Ms. Pac Man (Oh yeah, like she really needed a man)
 and even Galaga... Can you hear it? Tu, tu, tu... (very Mexican ?que no?)
 Tú, tú, tú (Can you hear Eydie Gorme? Oh how so East L.A.) Tú, tú, tú...”
 Coming at you ... faster faster—Oh, shit. Blast! You’re dead. (22)

This is an aurally rich stanza filled with the names of classic video games of the early 1980s and references to some of their iconic sounds. Reyes reminds us that video games are not strictly visual, they’re characterized by distinct noises, quirky blips and beeps, and catchy “chiptunes.”¹²⁰ The speaker riffs off the playful noises in the space game Galaga asking the reader to remember it through sound: “Can you hear it?” Capturing the shooting sounds of the game in the percussive phrase, “tú, tú, tú” prompts a bilingual homophonic listening that

¹²⁰ These are the electronic synthesizer songs recorded on 8-bit sound chips that you hear in video games.

translates “tú” into “you.” The phrase is only a brief quote, a sample you could say, and the poem seems to argue that you’d have to be a homegirl to know where it comes from. The full verse goes like this: “Me importas tú, y tú, y tú / y solamente tú / Me importas tú, y tú, y tú / y nadie mas que tú” as sung by the American singer Eydie Gorme with the Latin American Trio Los Panchos in their 1964 recording of “Piel Canela.”¹²¹ To some extent the poem is not overly concerned with offering full translations - linguistic or cultural - but the reader is invited to fill in the blank like a game of Name That Tune. The assumption is that Gorme’s Spanish language recordings of boleros with Trio Los Panchos are important to many U.S. Mexicans and they remain meaningful across generations. It is not an anachronistic reference here, rather it says something about its enduring status and the musical knowledge expected of a homegirl. Therefore Reyes’s juxtaposition of the electronic sounds of the video game with the Spanish language sounds of a classic Mexican love song is part of what the narrator means by, “Oh how so East L.A.”

This poem locates the 80s in part through plentiful references to the new digital/electronic toys that became immensely popular yet Reyes does not fetishize the technology nor does she abstract Mexican experiences from these innovations. She situates the experience of playing these new toys in a corner neighborhood store among other Mexican kids. In these ways the poem makes claims about belonging and puts pressure on how we remember. There is a danger in remembering only the game as a nostalgic collective memory and not the people. The larger implication I see here is that we cannot remember the 80s and forget East L.A.

Reyes’s poem remembers the 80s through extensive references to the alternative rock music and androgynous and flamboyant artists of the MTV generation. This musical lineage becomes the soundtrack to the queer story in the poem. Through the music, the narrator produces a temporally complex “flashback” where queer connections, generational turf marking, and Mexicanness all come together.

No more pinball shit for us. That was 1970-something mierda
We were the generation of Atari—the beginning of digital games (22)

This was Siouxsie and the Banshees’ era with deep black mascara
The gothic singer who hung out with Robert Smith and Morrissey
The Smiths who dominated airwaves of Mexican Impala cars (23)

In these lines the narrator shows no nostalgia for the 1970s and boasts intense pride for all things new ushered in with the new decade. She brags about a new generation defined by new cultural icons like video games and synthesizer driven music. This music isn’t just about a sound, however, it’s about a look where “deep black mascara” and dark “goth” aesthetics - for girls and boys - are all the rage. Simply dropping a band or artist’s name like “Siouxsie” or “Morrissey” or quoting part of a song conjures entire musical genres and brings into relief a new kind of gender ambiguity and queer visibility that flourished in the 1980s. The poem is dotted with names like Boy George, Cyndi Lauper, Wham!, Elvis Costello, X, Pretenders, all musicians one might hear during a “flashback 80s” hour on the radio or theme night at a club. Yet remembering this music is mediated by a Chicana lesbian coming of age story who is tuning in to these sounds and signs of alternative music and gender from East Los Angeles. The line, “The

¹²¹ Eydie Gorme and Trio Los Panchos. “Piel Canela.” *Amor*. Columbia B004UC4DP2, Vinyl, 1964.

Smiths who dominated airwaves of Mexican Impala cars,” has implications that she was not alone in these queer listenings as Reyes casually juxtaposes the image of lowrider car culture associated with Chicano hypermasculinity, with the more ambiguous sexuality of the Manchester based band’s enigmatic frontman, Morrissey. Morrissey and lead guitarist Johnny Marr captivated generations of music listeners with their bold guitar driven sound, infectious melodies, and neo-Wildean homoerotic lyrics. Recalling the song, “This Charming Man” against the poem’s reference to a lowriding Impala complicates how I hear the lyric: “Why pamper life’s complexities when the leather runs smooth on the passenger seat?” The effect is that the gap between the UK and East L.A. is somehow bridged in this queer musical mediation. Although the poem reads like a celebration, there is a critique here in lines such as these. For who is imagined to be “alternative” in histories of alternative music? I argue that this poem not only remembers but it documents Chicana/o presence in these music scenes. The narrator further describes this marginality of representation in the following lines:

Or trying to get a bootleg copy of *The Decline of Western Civilization*
 Just to see a few brown Mexican faces: Alice Bag, Robert Lopez
 Slamming, screaming in the static Penelope Spheeris’s film (23)

The documentary film *The Decline of Western Civilization* (1981) was meant to give coverage to the punk scene in Los Angeles neglected by music journalists.¹²² Among the bands featured, most male fronted, the film captures an electric performance by the Chicana punk singer Alice Bag, née Alicia Armendariz. In contrast to the other musicians in jeans, bare torsos, and, combat boots, Bag is visually stunning and glamorous. She dressed in a fitted pink dress reminiscent of the 1940s pachuca style, she wears white pointed toe pumps, her hair is short and dark, her eye and lip makeup is strong and impeccable. In the four brief minutes the band is on camera Bag sings in a commanding deep voice, slowly growling out the words to the song “Gluttony” and before the tempo picks up speed, she lets out a long visceral yell on the “y” that is high pitched, powerful, and thoroughly punk. It’s a superb performance yet Bag is not interviewed in this film. Reyes’s poem draws attention to that omission as the narrator searches for a mere glimpse of “a few brown Mexican faces.” This speaks to the longing and the difficulty for Chicanas to see themselves reflected in the very same spaces that offer the possibility of belonging. Over thirty years since the film, Bag is now experiencing a surge in her career and has sparked renewed interest in histories of Chicanas in punk. She has written two books including the memoir: *Violence Girl: From East L.A. Rage to L.A. Stage - A Chicana Punk Story* (2011) and is sought out for speaking engagements on university campuses. Bag is able to tell her story now through writing, something a film dedicated to documenting punk music was not able to do. In retrospect, thirty-five years later, Bag’s current visibility emphasizes the further marginalization of Chicanas in punk the film produces by silencing her speaking voice against the audible power of her singing voice. As a dominant population in Los Angeles and California, it is preposterous to imagine that Chicanas/os or Mexican-Americans were not a significant part of alternative music scenes in Los Angeles.¹²³ Yet the poem’s most resounding phrase is, “We were eighties kids all the way.”¹²⁴ Recovering Chicana histories in

¹²² Penelope Spheeris. "The Decline of Western Civilization." *Documentary film. Produced 1981.*

¹²³ <http://www.pewhispanic.org/2013/08/29/mapping-the-latino-population-by-state-county-and-city/>

¹²⁴ Reyes, *Chopper! Chopper!*, 25

music may not happen through film, I propose that it is happening in the soundscapes of new Chicana literature.

Ultimately “Torcidaness and Me” captures the joy and the struggle of queer Chicana belonging in this new narrative of Queer Aztlán. She writes, “Yep, this was the eighties and I was learning my crookedness.”¹²⁵ At the same time, the compatibility of the term “queer” to tell Chicana stories is challenged by the presence of alternative ways to indicate ambiguity of gender and sexuality. In this poem, “crookedness,” “torcidaness,” “my torcida days to come,” and “marimacha” all convey queerness in forms more audible and meaningful to a homegirl from East L.A. By the poem’s end “torcidaness,” a Spanglish term, comes to mean lesbian, working class, and Chicana of the eighties generation all at once. Tuning into the poem’s soundscape enables the possibility of hearing all of these queer meanings simultaneously as well as the possibility of hearing Aztlán, vis-a-vis Eydie Gorme, in a video game. In these ways, Verónica Reyes’s sonically rich poem renders East Los Angeles and the 1980s as an important nexus for recovering Chicana histories and Chicana lesbian representation. Furthermore, these findings suggest to me ways to begin a theorization of the “flashback” in the soundscapes of Chicana literature as a tool for remembering.

The Barber of East L.A. by Raquel Gutiérrez

Raquel Gutiérrez is a writer, performer, film actor, playwright, curator and cultural organizer who has performed in solo and group performances predominantly in the Los Angeles and Bay Areas. She studied Journalism and Central American Studies at California State University, Northridge and she earned a Master of Arts in Performance Studies from New York University. She hails from Bell in Southeast Los Angeles, of Salvadoran and Mexican descent which informs her writings about queer Latinidad. She is a producer of three self-published chapbooks titled: *Breaking Up With Los Angeles* (2014); *#whiteboo* (2014); and *Running in Place: Poems about INSTITUTIONALITY* (2015). Her years with the co-founded queer butch theater ensemble Butchlalis de Panochtitlan who were active between 2002 and 2010 produced such provocative stage works as: *Teenage Papi: The 2nd Coming of Adolescence* (2005); *BdP Get Ugly* (2007); and *Dickwhipped!* (2008) leading up to the production of *The Barber of East L.A.* in 2008.

The Barber of East L.A. is both a love story and a ghost story that treats the notion of home and belonging for three Chicanas whose lives are inextricably linked. The play revolves around a Chicana butch lesbian barber named Chonch Fonseca who returns to East Los Angeles after some time away doing jail time and training at a local Moler Barber College. Chonch is haunted and imprisoned by the memory of her deceased lover, a Chicana femme called Isabel, affectionately nicknamed, “Chiquis.” Barber is set on the eve of the 1980s marked by the infamous closing of the Vex in East Los Angeles, which was an all ages venue for local punk bands. The narrative employs flashbacks giving the play a dual temporality as well as a sense of things to come. For Chonch, remembering Isabel brings into the present the rejection and violence they experienced that doomed their romance. The play treats the themes of gender, identity, queerness, gender policing, violence, gentrification, family, memory, history, intergenerational kinship, punk music scenes, space/place, home and belonging. A key question it explores is whether one can ever really leave home, even if you’re queer.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

Centering Chicana lesbian characters in the play contests the mainstream mythology for queer becoming and belonging. *The Barber of East L.A.* rejects the privileged status of the metropole as the locus for Chicana self-actualization. With the encouragement of her Barber college buddies, two working class butch lesbians, Chonch returns to stake her claim in her barrio. She eventually confronts her painful past by reconnecting with Isabel's niece, Betty Basta, a teen punk rocker who unbeknownst to Chonch is the bearer of an intimate sonic archive that chronicles the early love story between Chonch and Isabel. Betty is on the verge of leaving East L.A. for Hollywood in hopes of making it big with her punk band, "Toxic Crayons." Re-encountering Chonch makes her think twice about it. When she eventually leaves she takes a bit of East L.A. with her by renaming the band "The Izzy's" in honor of the memory of her aunt. As a parting gesture, she gives Chonch a lunchbox full of records, 45s the couple made in a Woolworth's recording booth when she was little. Betty's gesture to preserve her family history is renaming her band, her gesture to pass on the recordings to Chonch underscores the greater importance of archives for documenting Chicana lesbian histories.

Karen Tongson has written at length about *Barber* in her book *Relocations: Queer Suburban Imaginaries* as a queer historicizing project bringing to the forefront stories from "lesser Los Angeles."¹²⁶ Her chapter, "The Light That Never Goes Out: Butchlalis de Panochtitlan Reclaim "Lesser Los Angeles," provides ample context for the play's production as well as Gutiérrez's background in performance with the theater group Butchlalis de Panochtitlan or BdP.¹²⁷ Tongson suggests that Barber stages a pre-history of gentrification in Los Angeles which can be traced throughout BdP's larger performance history up to that point. In particular, she explores the intergenerational and familial bonds between Chonch and Betty as mirrors on twin paths linked by Isabel. Her discussion on what it means to document these histories raises the issue of queer archives. Indeed, Tongson's research was conducted in deep collaboration with Gutiérrez which troubles the idea of a formally preserved archive, emphasizing the fragility of Chicana lesbian histories in particular. The play is a fictionalization of events in the life of Nancy Valverde, a Chicana butch lesbian who owned a barbershop in East Los Angeles in the early 1980s.¹²⁸ *Barber* is a rich source for discussion as performance, literature, and music and queer histories. I am interested in the play's soundtrack. Tongson begins a discussion of the soundscapes of the play in part by referencing the song by The Smiths in the chapter's title, which looms over her reading of Gutiérrez's work. Describing BdP's flexible and portable stage productions, necessitated by means, the music in the form of MP3 playlists worked double duty "for soundtracking as well as scene transitions."¹²⁹ She further suggests that, "The music for the show--itself another 'character' as well as an element of setting—was curated by Gutiérrez."¹³⁰ I take these preliminary observations of the role of music in the play as my point of entry to explore the play's soundtrack more closely. Certainly the thirteen songs listed work in these practical capacities but I argue that they also perform another kind of work that extends the narrative. Specifically I explore how Chonch emerges as a Chicana butch character through the soundtrack. I suggest that there is also something else happening with the music, another kind of work the music does to audibly render Chonch's character as distinctly butch. Apart from curating a mood, time, and place, the songs also curate a Chicana butch character.

¹²⁶ Karen Tongson. *Relocations: Queer Suburban Imaginaries*. (NYU Press, 2011).

¹²⁷ Names after the song by The Smiths.

¹²⁸ Valverde has recently been the subject of a new film titled: *Nancy from East Side Clover* (2015).

¹²⁹ Tongson, *Relocations*, 179.

¹³⁰ Tongson, *Relocations*, 191.

Curating Butchness

A formative moment in Chonch Fonseca's story is the moment she is given her street/butch name by the veterana "bulldagger" in her neighborhood, Juana Chingas, whom she calls "giver of my name."¹³¹

CHONCH

Chonch.

That's what happened the first time I saw two *rucas* kiss.

I looked out the window and I see... her.

Ella. La mas firme de todas.

A bulldagger leaning against the bus top, doing it like she does it every day.

Sabia.

That's where I wanted to live, in *her* body.

Her broad shoulders fill out the bright blue Pendleton - it makes her look like a prince - she wears her *pantalones caquis* with a killer crease.

But it's her HAIR, that does me in! *Es puro cholo* pompadour!

Elvis, Ritchie Valens and Buddy Holly with hips, tits, lips and power.

CHONCH

Dios mio, Juana Chingas is the bee's knees.

I, a pipsqueak *escuincle* no taller than a fire hydrant.

Ayy, but you shoulda seen it. You shoulda seen it the way I seen it. *Le estaba echando los perros big time!* My eyes got real big. My stomach rides roller-coasters. I get scared.

Hijole... Juana pulls *la Lori* into her Pendleton for a long, wet kiss! Alli in front of the whole goddam projects, todo mundo stopped to stare...

IT happens... and... only one utterance captures this moment! Only one sound comes out of my mouth...

ALL

CHONCH!

CHONCH

Chonc-chonch-chonch-chonch!

When Juana Chingas hears that come out of my mouth, she laughs real cool and tosses her head back to see who the fuck this *traviesa* is.

JUANA CHINGAS

"Quihubole, Chonch?"

CHONCH

She gave me my name...¹³² (8-9)

¹³¹ Bulldagger is an older African American term for butch lesbian. Juana Chingas's ethnicity is not specified except as "bulldagger," I think Gutiérrez borrows this term to denote a particularly admirable type of masculinity.

¹³² In the live performance of the play, Gutierrez who plays Chonch, changes the line to "Me bendicio," heightening the moment, very Catholic, a blessing. <https://vimeo.com/35643903>

[The sound of Sonny Zouna’s “Put Me In Jail.”] (9)

The butch visuality in this scene is strong as the aesthetic Chonch clearly describes is a Chicano homeboy masculinity. Such points of pride Chonch notices is Juana Chingas wearing her khaki pants with a “killer crease” and the “bright blue Pendleton shirt” that continues to carry status in any true East L.A.’s homeboy’s wardrobe. The potential tension in Juana Chingas’s gender presentation makes full sense to young Chonch who sees all including “hips, tits, lips and power” yet thinks she “looks like a prince.” “Her visceral response to seeing this butch style and swagger and butch/femme intimacy so publicly on display is the humorous and unintelligible utterance “Chonch.” When Juana Chingas speaks it back as a name, “Quihubole, Chonch?” she effectively baptizes her. As a baby butch origin story this act folds Chonch into a queer lineage and marks the beginning of queer familia and belonging. In her excitement to tell the story in detail, Chonch urges the audience, “You shoulda seen it the way I seen it.” To an extent butch visibility on the streets and representation in literature depends on precisely being able to see or read butchness. The play’s soundtrack provides an opportunity to also hear it. This scene ends with the song “Put Me In Jail,” one of the five songs that plays during Chonch’s on stage time. It helps to hear Chonch’s songs in contrast to the larger soundtrack. The following are the play’s scenes with their corresponding songs and artists as listed in Gutierrez’s script:

SOUND

ONE | Pre-show
 TWO | Daddy’s Home | The Duprees¹³³
 THREE | Put Me in Jail | Sonny Ozuna
 FOUR | El Ladron | La Sonora Santanera
 FIVE | They Say I’m Different | Betty Davis
 SIX | Welcome Home, Darling | Thee Midnitters
 SEVEN | Attitudes | The Brat
 EIGHT | Hijo del Pueblo | Chelo
 NINE | Fix Me | Black Flag
 TEN | The Town I Live In | Thee Midnitters
 ELEVEN | White Minority | Black Flag
 TWELVE | Y Volvere, Los Angeles Negros
 THIRTEEN | Corazon, Corazon | Lola Beltran
 FOURTEEN | Perfidia | Trio Los Panchos

The play’s thirteen songs broadly reflects punk, Mexican, and oldies songs. There are no 80s songs yet however the time and action of the play is set on the cusp, just stepping off the 1970s. Out of this eclectic English and Spanish language song list, I identify five songs that encapsulate Chonch’s story. I think of it as a mini soundtrack, or in record lingo, an EP, which I’ve listed to follow the play’s structure in chronological order:

1. Daddy’s Home
2. Put Me In Jail
3. Welcome Home Darling
4. Hijo del Pueblo

¹³³ Corr: Shep and the Limelites

5. Perfidia

Gutiérrez's soundtrack curates Chonch as a butch character whose sense of belonging and home is deeply connected to her barrio and her Mexicanidad despite the storyline which charts her reluctant return to East L.A. and the painful memories of her time with Isabel/Chiquis. The songs reveal something about her interiority, her identity as a Chicana butch, and they show how she is not outside of the world of East L.A. but rather her queerness is a way of being Chicana and butch that is expressly of East L.A. In the songs we can hear the different ways she belongs or has claims to belonging in her various roles as a father figure to Betty, as a lover to Isabel/Chiquis, as well as belonging to her barrio. In a live performance the songs do not play all the way, they fade out and the next scene begins. The audience only hears a few bars with a brief amount of time to register the song, recall the lyrics, artist, melody and fold it into the story as the play moves along. I attempt for a similar sonic impression as I discuss these five songs.

Chonch Fonseca: The Extended Play

The song "Daddy's Home" (1961) comes on at the end of the Prologue where the cast addresses the audience in a Shakespearean style chorus to establish some basic truths about the world they are about to enter. In unison, they players declare:

ALL
 There's a butch in every barrio
 There's a butch in every 'hood
 Every barrio has its macha
 Not every barrio treats her good (5)

The question of what happens "When queers come back into the fold" is seen as heroic as the chorus's final proclamation is, "A butch hero so great." To end the scene, Gutiérrez's stage directions say in brackets: "[The sound of the Duprees' "Daddy's Home.]"¹³⁴ The established context of the Prologue is important for listening to the song whose first verse is: "You're my love, You're my angel, You're the girl of my dreams, And I'd like to thank you, For waiting patiently for me, Daddy's home, Your daddy's home to stay." The song is easily recognizable as an African-American doo-wop oldie in three-part harmony with deeply romantic lyrics that match the action of the play. In the context of the play's butch hero, the line, "your daddy's home," rather playfully takes on another meaning. The heteronormativity of such a phrase and the infantilization of the woman being addressed in the song as "girl" in contrast to "daddy" is deftly resignified to queer the song and gender Chonch as butch. This move also helps imagine the object of affection being addressed in the song, "my love, my angel," as a lesbian femme possessing the beauty and delicateness valued in normative femininity. Chonch's role as a father figure to Betty also maps onto this destabilized use of the term "daddy." The mood the music creates is nostalgic, idealistic in that it describes an easiness and reassurance that the protagonist does not actually enjoy for most of the play. As the first song of the play, "Daddy's Home," creates a queerly nuanced bittersweet soundscape for the return of the Barber of East L.A.

¹³⁴ I could not locate a version of this song by The Duprees. The song played in the video is sung by Shep and the Limelites, co-written by James Shepperd, Charles Bassett, and Charles Baskerville.

The country western inflected love song, “Put Me In Jail” (1966) by Sunny Ozuna and the Sunliners looms over the scene called “Daddy Tank” which was named for the infamous prison cell block at Los Angeles’s Sybil Brand where visibly butch, lesbian, or otherwise gender transgressive women were placed and segregated from other women prisoners.¹³⁵ The start of the scene finds Chonch in the interrogation room where she is accused of murder. Chonch never actually serves jail time as the charges never stick and it is later revealed that it was Isabel, Chonch’s lover, who plunged the knife into the body of her attacker. As the song is only minimally related to the plot, it follows that the lyrics correspond to another sense of imprisonment. The song’s plaintive refrain is, “Put me in jail if I fail / To give you all the love that’s yours / Put me in jail if I fail in loving you.” While Chonch is sure that she did all she could, in the end she could not save Isabel and part of her struggle is to come to terms with that. The song creates an opening through which to imagine Chonch feeling guilt and moments of self-doubt, an emotional jail. In a later scene we see that she also struggles with fear as she returns to, “the streets that put the yellow in me in the first place,” and carries herself with a self-acknowledged, “ten-ton chip on my shoulder.”¹³⁶ The mild lover’s protest in “Put me in jail if I fail in loving you” sounds less self-assured if we imagine Chonch as the first person speaker in this song. While it’s not a perfect correspondence between the play’s action and music, there is an ebb and flow effect where the two touch and merge. Another transitional song, “Welcome Home Darling” (1967) by Thee Midneters is a raucous rock and roll party song which closes the high-energy scene set at Moler Barber shop, where Chonch is encouraged by her “fella” barbers, Bertie and Laylow, a white lesbian and black stud, to go home and become who she was meant to be. But the celebration never happens as, “Welcome to Chonch’s Barber Shop,” begins with only a fleeting moment of pride. Her first customer is Chonch’s old nemesis, a crooked cop called Martinez, who proceeds to harass and shake Chonch down for a free haircut and future favors. The song’s driving rock beat and punchy blues horns coupled with the verse, “Welcome home darling / It’s so good to have you home / Ah yeah,” that introduce this scenario lets the irony of the scene ring through.

However, these two songs do another kind of work in the play’s soundscape. Sunny Ozuna and the Sunliners and Thee Midneters are both self-described Chicano bands who recorded music about the same time. The release dates of these two songs are only one year apart. Both of these groups are considered iconic Chicano bands in their respective hometowns of San Antonio, Texas and East Los Angeles, California. A listener of Chicano Tejano music, recognizing a song from their esteemed catalog would also recall Sunny Ozuna’s big hit, “Talk to Me,” (1963) which they performed on American Bandstand. Likewise, someone familiar with Thee Midneters could list such hits as “Land of a Thousand Dances” and “Whittier Boulevard.” Hearing songs from both Sunny Ozuna and Thee Midneters in the span of this play does some interesting musical mapping that widens its soundscape across the southwest in a return motion from Texas to California. Gutiérrez’s selection of this particular music for *Barber* literally puts East Los Angeles on the map. As songs that help build the character of Chonch Fonseca, they extend her local barrio credibility fitting to her title.

Whereas the first three songs in this EP strengthen the audience’s understanding of Chonch’s claims to belonging in terms of her queer family and her Mexican barrio, the song “El Hijo del Pueblo” (1999) as sung by Chelo in her album *Chelo Interpreta a Jose Alfredo Jimenez*

¹³⁵ Tongson, *Relocations*, 187.

¹³⁶ Gutiérrez, *Barber*, 23-24.

speaks specifically to Chonch's claims to Mexicanidad.¹³⁷ The song was written by Jose Alfredo Jimenez and recorded by the important Mexican ranchera singer, Vicente Fernandez, as well as the phenomenally successful group, Los Tigres del Norte. This version by Consuelo "Chelo" Perez Rubio changes the original first person lyrics to third person. She does not adopt the male persona, which allows her to perform homage to Jimenez making him the subject of the song. She sings accompanied by a mariachi band consisting of horns, guitars, and violins that evoke the national sound of Mexican music. As the song's slow paced and somber tones are heard, Chelo's voice sings the first line: "Fue su orgullo haber nacido en el barrio mas humilde / Alejado del bullicio de la falsa sociedad / El no tuvo la desgracia de no ser hijo del pueblo / Se contaba entre la gente que no tiene falsedad."¹³⁸ These lofty and sentimental lyrics reflect a salt of the earth hometown boy who values his humble origin and the simple everyman above all. We can hear how this applies to Chonch and her barrio but "pueblo" is a stronger, more vast and diffuse term. It invokes a belonging amongst people, different from a community or neighborhood, bound by something deeper.¹³⁹ This kind of belonging so deeply felt has no borders in the soundscape of Aztlán that binds East Los Angeles and Mexico together.

When the scene, "Betty and the Barber," begins we find Chonch organizing her neighbors to stand up against Martinez. Chonch makes her case quoting well-known protest language: "Pues, si, el pueblo unido, si se puede and all that good stuff, you know? If we can stop eating grapes, stop riding buses, and keep demanding nuestros derechos, then I think we can band together against one bad cop."¹⁴⁰ This is also a key scene where Betty finds out the truth about her aunt Isabel. She has an implicit trust of Chonch, telling Julian, her best friend and co-band member, "She might be the only bit of truth in this fucking zombie movie called East L.A." Betty confronts Chonch by asking her, "Don't miss my mom, can't stand my dad. I needed Izzy. Why did you leave?... We were happy weren't we?"¹⁴¹ This is where Chonch tells Betty the truth about how Izzy died and why it is painful to return to a place where Chonch and Izzy were so violently betrayed by their pueblo. Young men they'd known since childhood, as Chonch put it, "didn't like the way me y tu tia looked together. Like she was too pretty..."¹⁴² It is fitting then that the last line of the song, "El Hijo del Pueblo," expresses a fear that comes true in this scene: "El compuso sus canciones pa' que el pueblo se las canten / y el dia que el pueblo le falle / ese dia voy a llorar." Or, "He wrote his songs so the people could sing them, and the day that his people fail them, that day I will weep." While the listener can hear echoes of Chonch's story in the song and vice versa, told in third person transforms it into more of a corrido or border ballad. If this is indeed a hero's story, then heroes don't sing their own songs. Furthermore, Chelo's feminine voice also echoes the butch/femme dynamic of the play and remind the audience that the hero is a Mexicana or Chicana butch lesbian.

The play's final scene and final song perform a sort of reveal of Chonch's real name that interplays with the first scene in which the audience is given the queer history of her street name. Gutierrez's stage directions draw out multiple layers of sounds bookending the single line Isabel/Chiquis delivers:

¹³⁷ Written by Jose Alfredo Jimenez and originally recorded in 1963.

¹³⁸ Trans: "It was his pride to have been born in the humblest barrio, far from the hustle and bustle of false society, he never had the disgrace of not being a son of the pueblo, he counted himself among people who are never false."

¹³⁹ Benedict Anderson's notion of "Imagined Communities" could apply here in some sense.

¹⁴⁰ Gutiérrez, *Barber*, 40.

¹⁴¹ Gutiérrez, *Barber*, 49.

¹⁴² Gutiérrez, *Barber*, 50

[CHONCH, alone with the lunchbox of records, pulls one out and takes it to her record player on a shelf. ISABEL appears and the sound of her voice fills the barbershop]

CHIQUIS

I can't believe I love a girl named Chonch. *Pero no se llama Chonch.* Her name...her real name...is *Perfidia, como la cancion.*"

[ISABEL hums a few bars. CHONCH stands in the middle of her barbershop, laughing and listening.

Trio Los Panchos's song, "Perfidia" plays.

A slide "Fin" appears.] (67-68)

The sound of the record player, the room filled with Isabel's voice, Chonch's laughter, and the opening verse of the song, "Perfidia," (1961) by the Trio Los Panchos close this poignant scene. In this flashback that travels to another time through the store made recording that preserves Chiquis's voice, no betrayal has happened, although the song's title plants a doubt. In this final scene Chonch listens while Chiquis speaks an intimate detail, "I love a girl named Chonch," and an important clarification, "*Pero no se llama Chonch.*" Izzy, as her femme lover sees this duality and performs a final naming/unnaming, "*Perfidia, como la cancion.*" In Chiquis's voice, the name, "Perfidia," does not sound traitorous as the song's title would imply. This final act produces an important destabilization of the "truth." Instead, what is captured in this moment is Chiquis's recognition of Chonch as a gender outlaw staged in a legibly and audibly Mexican vein through the music:

Nadie comprende lo que sufro yo
Canto pues ya no puedo sollozar
Solo temblando de ansiedad estoy
Todos me miran y se van

Mujer
Si puedes tu con Dios hablar
Preguntale si yo alguna vez
Te he dejado de adorar

Y al mar
Espejo de mi Corazon
Las veces que me ha visto llorar
La perfidia de tu amor

Hearing this song played by the internationally renowned Trio Los Panchos whose classic recordings of Mexican and Latin American boleros are so highly esteemed is arguably the ultimate name check in Mexican music. For many first generation Mexicans of the 80s generation, this is the music of our parents and grandparents and an important source of pride in Mexican musical forms and Spanish language. It's a strong curatorial choice that inextricably

connects Chonch's queer story to the soundscape of Mexican music. Heard together in the play's soundtrack, clear juxtapositions emerge: the song speaks of never ending love, but Chiquis is gone. The narrator in the song is crying, but we find Chonch laughing. If Chonch has betrayed her name and her gender, then she has also been truthful to herself. In the end, answering the question, "Who betrayed whom?," which the song implies, must be also be left behind. The larger work of *The Barber of East L.A.* is ultimately in being loyal to telling this queer Chicana history whose fragility is amplified in this scene. Were it not for these recordings which Betty kept all those years, "under my bed in a box with some dusty *conjunto* records," the butch/femme love story of Chonch and Isabel would be not be audible in the dominant soundscape of Aztlán.

I have explored this mini-soundtrack to hear how Chonch's butchness is rendered in the soundscape of the play beyond the written cues. I argue that the music provides the aural setting for understanding the protagonist's desire, her struggle, her sense of masculinity and Mexicanidad, and her claims for belonging in East L.A. Through these five songs I argue that we can hear how Chonch is claimed by Isabel as a lover and as a father figure by Betty; her sense of being the homegrown daughter of a humble Mexican and Chicano pueblo; and her status as a gender outlaw is articulated and openly admired by her femme. In addition to providing scene transitions and setting, the music carefully curates Chonch's butchness in tandem with the narrative. To see these butch stories, these characters must also be heard, audibly rendered, and sounded into history. As the chorus states in the Prologue: "Every barrio has its butch!" Curating is important to consider for the ways popular music help narrate this Chicana lesbian story, of which there are many, and more broadly. Gutiérrez's musical choices provide important nuances into Chonch's homegrown East Los Angeles Chicana butchness not explicitly provided in the dialogue or stage directions. In *The Barber of East L.A.* butchness is given a soundtrack that has special resonances for listeners of Chicana/o music as these five familiar songs become tailored, bespoke to the character of Chonch Fonseca.

As a listening experience, using music as a narrative device can also be profoundly jarring to music fans. Juxtapositions of music and action can produce problematically entwined narratives such as the performance of Cherrie Moraga's play, *A New Fire*, where the decision to use the music of Santana as the soundtrack to a rape scene worked to indict Chicano men, macho culture, and Chicano music in one fell swoop.¹⁴³ The action of the scene overburdened the music, which in turn somewhat diminished the narrative. As a member of the audience – and a Santana fan – I found this choice alienating. As there are many other differences between these two plays, I leave this particular point for future debate.

Conclusion

Both Reyes and Gutiérrez present musical soundtracks integral to the queer Chicana narratives in these new works. The ubiquitous presence of music in these works points to the ways literature can be new sites for hearing music as well as new Chicana lesbian stories. Across both stories, three main music genres are heard: oldies, boleros, and 70s punk/80s alternative music. Through these carefully curated literary soundtracks Chicana lesbian and Chicana butch stories become more audible in the soundscape. I depart from and expand Arteaga's notion of

¹⁴³ Wanda Alarcón, August 6, 2012. "Could I Be Chicana Without Carlos Santana?," *Sounding Out!: The Sound Studies Blog*, 12/16/2016, <https://soundstudiesblog.com/2012/08/06/chicana-without-carlos-santana/>

Chicano poetics as language alone is not enough to capture these Chicana stories. I argue that the soundscape must be considered more widely in order to recover stories that have been historically marginalized or left out of literary studies. Furthermore, these timely works announce a new generation of Chicana writers shaped by woman of color feminist theories and alternative music of the 1980s narrated from the vantage point of East Los Angeles. These two works put East Los Angeles on the map with fresh new narratives and new Chicana lesbian voices. As the notion of the “flashback” is fitting to 80s music, I consider it an important tool for remembering Chicana histories. Thinking with the flashback through these post 80s Chicana narratives, listening to 80s soundscapes are situated in East Los Angeles which works against nostalgic ways of remembering. Yet the “flashback” is also retains a complex temporality as a tool for remembering, such as Minnie Riperton’s high note in which queer Chicano becomings are possible. These are the beginnings of a theorization of the flashback.

Who is Listening? Eavesdropping from East Los Angeles

The nation’s longest running Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer and Intersex Radio News Magazine. Out Loud & Out Front since 1974.

IMRU Home Page

Late on Sunday nights, there's a show that I listen to on K-Day from the small portable radio that I sleep with on the upper bunk.

Luis Alfaro, “Minnie Riperton Saved My Life”

Headphones changed my life. When I was a teenager I discovered a radio program called "IMRU." It was a one hour-long show on Sunday nights that specialized in news from around the world of special interest to the gay and lesbian community. The acronym is a play on sound that asks the question, "I am, are you?" I was not "out" then, merely curious and questioning and finding a great deal of information about "the life" via the privacy of my portable Walkman-style Panasonic AM/FM radio. This show has been running for over 40 years on 90.7 KPFK and now includes "LGBTQI" as its stated audience. Listening from my tiny, makeshift bedroom in Huntington Park those early days, I did not fully believe that IMRU really had me, a Chicana high school student, or my predominantly Mexican, working class, Southeast Los Angeles neighborhood in mind when it said "gay and lesbian community." In some ways I still don't imagine myself as the intended audience within that acronym, even today. Although I was listening, it felt more like eavesdropping.

Encountering Luis Alfaro’s story was an important discovery. I no longer tune into gay and lesbian programming on the radio, it’s frustrating, the work of constantly reading and listening between the lines. Reading, “Minnie Riperton Saved My Life,” was a powerful musical experience that opened a way for me to think about the boundaries of literature. Alfaro’s story has references to events before my time but it still feels like a story that was made with me in mind. Although I don't know all of the musical references in this story, I know enough about the genres to understand the story without listening between the lines. But does that make me reader or a listener? I suggest that Chicana/o literature may also have listening audiences. Tuning into the soundscapes in these works further reveals to me that a shift is happening in Chicana/o

literature. I am concerned that the time for Chicana stories of the 1980s is long overdue. Yet the musical soundscapes in these work announce the time is now. Lastly, while there is a wider body of literature by Chicana authors to consider as part of post 80s literature, few write about and from East Los Angeles. These two key findings reveal a larger project beyond these two chapters.

Chapter 4

Performing América on the National Stage

Jimi Hendrix died the year the ship that brought us from Manila docked in San Francisco.

Jessica Hagedorn, *Gangster of Love*

I'm an American so I played it. I used to have to sing it in school... it was a flashback.

Jimi Hendrix

They say the grito can be heard in space.

Javier Huerta

The U.S. national anthem, “The Star Spangled Banner,” has a history of contested performances in the public imagination. Even now, Jimi Hendrix’s solo electric guitar performance of, “The Star Spangled Banner,” at Woodstock in 1969 remains both iconic and disruptive in U.S. popular culture. Easily accessible, the performance is viewable on the internet and listenable on Spotify and iTunes. Human geography scholars, John Connell and Chris Gibson describe Hendrix’s playing as, “through a wall of swerving, mangled and psychedelic distorted sound,” and note that it was widely interpreted as a “savage critique of the United States’ involvement in the Vietnam War.”¹⁴⁴ Visually, the image of Hendrix, a black man holding a white guitar symbolic of black-white race relations also factors into some music journalist’s interpretation heightening the perceived sonic tension. A current iTunes biography simply refers to the performance as his, “famous machine-gun interpretation.”¹⁴⁵ Listening to the song now, I hear Hendrix’s solemnly paced manner of playing draw expertly from the entire range of the guitar, from simple vibrato giving the melody depth, to bending the strings to create distortion and effects that sound like falling bombs. Near the end of the solo he incorporates a musical quote from the military bugle call, “Taps,” invoking the image of fallen soldiers. That his performance was deemed controversial rather than virtuosic tells me that the critique of his performance was not solely about music. Hendrix’s “Star Spangled Banner” reveals the racial and national anxieties expressed in the negative reception of his performance.

The folk and soul influenced performance of the national anthem by the Puerto Rican singer and songwriter Jose Feliciano at the 1968 World Series in Detroit, which Hendrix most likely heard, was also deemed controversial.¹⁴⁶ Feliciano was twenty-three at the time and despite the success of his cover of “Light My Fire” by The Doors and Grammy Award win for Best New Artist that year, radio stations stopped playing his music, a critical blow with material consequences for the rising star. Jose Esteban Munoz addresses some of the controversy with Feliciano’s reception by suggesting that his deeply emotive performance sounds on an affective

¹⁴⁴ John Connell and Christ Gibson. *Sountracks. Popular Music, Identity and Place*. (Routledge, 2003) 128.

¹⁴⁵ Richie Unterberger and Sean Westergaard, “He closed woodstock with a sprawling, shaky set, redeemed by his famous machine-gun interpretation of the Star Spangled Banner.”

¹⁴⁶ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x1ZQawbo4Mo>

register the “sorrow and disappointment that the minoritarian subject feels,” or what he calls the “transmission of Brownness.”¹⁴⁷ He states that part of the audience’s negative response has to do with hearing how the song “sings America Brown.” I don’t hear Feliciano’s performance through the same melancholic lens as Munoz but I agree when he says that, “The familiar lyrics became something else through the brown singer’s voice.” The national context of the Vietnam war is certainly part of how any performance that deviates from the expected formality would be received, and also the status of popular music forms has always rubbed up against elitist and nationalistic notions of musical decorum. In my own listening, I find Feliciano’s vocal performance is reminiscent of the Righteous Brothers’ “Unchained Melody” and his guitar accompaniment is not very far from “Bob Dylan’s “Blowing in the Wind” which together should have sounded right on the pulse of American popular music. However, Feliciano’s skillful interpretation avoids the expected leaps in intervals up the scale and pulls back on hitting such notorious high notes on the phrases “and the rockets red glare” and “for the land of the free.” Perhaps the lack of a more clear or straightforward audible resolution is part of what made the audience so uncomfortable. The generation gap is also made apparent when Feliciano ends the song with a hip and youthful “hey yeah!” on the heels of “home of the brave.”¹⁴⁸ These two performances are viewable online as well as other unorthodox performances of the national anthem and traces of these debates continue in the comments sections of these videos today. As Christine Zanfanga states, “National anthems have the power to articulate a singular vision of nationhood as well as disrupt unitary notions of national identity.”¹⁴⁹ Certainly this was the case for Jimi Hendrix when he was asked by the talk show host, Dick Cavett, to comment on his “unorthodox” electric guitar performance of the national anthem at Woodstock. Hendrix famously stated, “I thought it was beautiful.”¹⁵⁰

National anthems are contested forms because they are assimilating forms. Offering a simple definition, Connell and Gibson state: “The culmination of the role of music in construction of national identity is the national anthem--the embodiment of nation in song.”¹⁵¹ That is to say that there can be no confusion or ambivalence in the nation’s official story or its song.¹⁵² By this assimilating logic, many stories and sounds are easily forgotten or not audible by the nation. The established repertoire of performances of the, “Star Spangled Banner,” by Jimi Hendrix and Jose Feliciano traces the public anxiety about how Americanness is performed, who can claim the song as their own, and to what degree one can interpret it with their musical style. There is a racialized and often racist debate in these performances by musicians of color which hides in the critique of so-called departures from the original. The scandal over how a musician’s soulful interpretation or a folk version or an electric guitar solo rather than an a capella vocal breaks with the military ceremony of, “The Star Spangled Banner,” and the allegiance to the country it represents points to the idea that there is an original version and therefore an authentic way to perform the national anthem. When people of color perform the national anthem it raises matters of race, class, gender, and belonging and therefore the critique

¹⁴⁷ Jose Esteban Munoz “Chico, what does it feel like to be a problem?” The Transmission of Brownness

¹⁴⁸ Feliciano already had an album out called “A Bag Full Of Soul” featuring his breakthrough cover of “Light My Fire” by The Doors as well as songs by The Beatles, Bob Dylan, and the Mommas and the Poppas.

¹⁴⁹ My thanks to Christine Zanfanga for her comments on an early version of this chapter I presented at the American Studies Association Annual Meeting in 2014.

¹⁵⁰ An appearance on the Dick Cavett show, link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B-ZYUaRKQkk>

¹⁵¹ Connell and Gibson, *Soundtracks*, 127.

¹⁵² Yet the song “Lift Every Voice and Sing” adopted as the “Negro National Anthem” is one form that contests the validity of the national anthem to speak on behalf of African Americans.

can never simply be about a musical variation or performance practice.¹⁵³ As Josh Kun insists, “there is no history of racial formation in the Americas that is not a history of popular music.”¹⁵⁴ What these well known musical performances of the national anthem make audible is the contest over national belonging.

These important 20th Century performances by Hendrix and Felciano inform my reading of three contemporary Chicana/o performances of “The Star Spangled Banner” by Marisoul Hernandez (2012); Jenni Rivera (2012); and Sebastien de la Cruz (2013) in this chapter. Marisoul Hernandez and her band La Santa Cecilia have performed the nation’s anthem more than once, so have other Chicana/o and Latina/o musicians. Because social media platforms are able to capture recent performances almost immediately through both official and unofficial recordings it provides me access to a small archive to explore these performances as a repertoire. Thinking with Diana Taylor’s idea of “performance as an episteme” and the repertoire as plural underscores how meaning carries/builds with repetition.¹⁵⁵ What does it mean when singing “The Star Spangled Banner” becomes part of the Chicana/o repertoire? Which is to say, what map of America is sounded in these performances? Thought together, these Chicana/o performances of the national anthem mark productive disruptions, interruptions, or, musically speaking, variations on the theme of America. I argue that what is different with these Chicana/o performances and the discourse they raise is a marked shift from the contest over national belonging in the imagined sense to the contest over citizenship that surrounds Latinos in the U.S. This is not always easy to hear on first listen. The habit of what Josh Kun calls, “easy listening,” a type of selective hearing, makes us deaf to the sounds of blackness and brownness in America.¹⁵⁶ This kind of listening is supported visually with the ubiquitous colors of Old Glory setting the stage for listening. Tuning into other sounds means learning to listen against the grain of both national sounds and signs and distilling the difference. Listening with an ear for sonic details becomes important to parse out the visual from the audible. In these sonic details, however seemingly minor or fleeting, lies the potential to tune into many Chicana/o stories that would otherwise remain subsumed and forgotten under “The Star Spangled Banner.”

Contexts for Listening in Los Angeles

Two of the performances I discuss happened at Los Angeles Dodger Stadium which shapes the context for these listenings. “Viva Los Dodgers Days” was part of a marketing campaign that began in 2000 to cultivate a Latina/o audience. An April 25th press release announced a comprehensive outdoor marketing campaign called “Los Dodgers Te Invitan.” The hired firm, Alternative and Innovative Marketing (AIM) organized several events including, “Dia De Los Niños Con Los Dodgers,” “Pechanga Azul,” and the first ever “Viva Los Dodgers” on September 3, 2000 “kicking off the ‘Fiestas de Independencia’ held throughout Los Angeles

¹⁵³ I have read descriptions of Feliciano’s performance as “Latin jazz” when there is no musical evidence that was the genre he was playing—simply being Puerto Rican was enough to call it Latin jazz.

¹⁵⁴ Josh Kun. *Audiotopia: Music, Race, and America*. (University of California Press, 2005), 20.

¹⁵⁵ Diana Taylor. *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas*. (Duke University Press, 2003).

¹⁵⁶ Kun, *Audiotopia*, 29-47.

and the surrounding areas.”¹⁵⁷ The press release describes how this particular outreach effort builds on a longer history of Latino outreach by the LA Dodgers. The announcement recalls the “Fernando-mania” of 1981 when “left-handed Mexican pitcher Fernando Valenzuela entered the Major Leagues and pitched his way into the hearts of Hispanic fans across the United States, Mexico, and Latin America.” Indeed it boasts seven important details communicating a positive and even reciprocal relationship between the LA Dodgers and Mexico City, Nicaragua, and Latin America. What the press release does not tell is the much older story of the razing of the poor, rural Mexicano neighborhood, Chavez Ravine, where Dodger Stadium now stands:

Mister, you're a baseball man, as anyone can plainly see.
 The straightest game in this great land. Take a little tip from me.
 I work here nights, parking cars, underneath the moon and stars.
 The same ones that we all knew back in 1952.
 And if you want to know where a local boy like me is coming from:
 3rd base, Dodger Stadium. –Ry Cooder

The linked history of Chavez Ravine and Dodger Stadium is widely documented in newspapers, history books, and popular culture.¹⁵⁸ The lyrics from the song “3rd Base Dodger Stadium” from the album *Chavez Ravine* (2006) by Ry Cooder are just one instance of how historical events are recovered in popular music.¹⁵⁹ The album is a collection of fifteen songs sung in both English and Spanish and is the result of Cooder’s collaboration with such luminary Chicana/o musicians as Flaco Jimenez, Lalo Guerrero, Ersi Arvizu, and Willie G. Conceived as a musical response to Don Normark’s rare photographic work, “*Chavez Ravine: A Los Angeles Story*” (1999), the album’s portrait-like songs and extensive liner notes offer a musical history that both remembers and re-imagines the destruction of the Chavez Ravine neighborhood that occurred in the 1950s.¹⁶⁰ The lilting melancholy song anchors the event in a single year and links it to an even longer sense of history, “the moon and stars, the same ones we all knew in 1952.” Without being overtly literal, the song’s poetic license brings a deep irony to the simple enjoyment of going to a ball game. The question asked and answered in the lyric: “And if you want to know where a local boy like me is from: 3rd Base Dodger Stadium,” pushes against the celebratory narrative of a national sport to stress its local impact. If one wanted access to this particular history it is easily searchable and many written texts can be found on the subject. Yet I cite this song as a way to temporarily suspend the desire to “read all about it” and expand the site for encountering and hearing Chicano histories and how they circulate in popular music.

¹⁵⁷ Dodgers Public Relations. “Dodgers AIM to Please the Los Angeles Hispanic Community.” <http://www.pnewswire.com/news-releases/dodgers-aim-to-please-the-los-angeles-hispanic-community-72818002.html>

¹⁵⁸ Some notable references include Mike Davis’s *City of Quartz*, also documented in Helena Maria Viramontes’s novel *Their Dogs Came With Them*. The play by Culture Clash. Photography by Don Normark called Chavez Ravine 1949: A Los Angeles Story.

¹⁵⁹ Sung by the Hawai’ian blues musician James Bla Pahinui

¹⁶⁰ Precipitated by the National Housing Act of 1949



Marisol Hernandez: Los Angeles Dodger Stadium Viva Los Dodgers Day (2012)

When I learned on Twitter that Marisol Hernandez, lead singer of the Los Angeles based Grammy award winning band, La Santa Cecilia, had performed “The Star Spangled Banner” at Dodger Stadium, I immediately clicked on the link that led to the YouTube video to see and to listen for myself.¹⁶¹ I was familiar with her silky and jazzy vocal style and having sung in many choruses myself, I admired her capable alto range. Despite my ambivalence about the song she was about to sing, I anticipated her performance with optimism. In fact, she gave a flawless and moving performance that filled my heart with pride as she sang the last line “home of the brave” with a soulful flourish true to her stage name, Marisoul – spelled s-o-u-l. I remember watching her performance on YouTube and feeling connected with the live audience who clearly approved. Yet as emotionally moved as I felt, I didn’t feel particularly patriotic, that is no more and no less than on any other occasion. Instead, I was proud of Marisol’s accomplishment, of the enthusiastic audience reception, of how well she performed on a very high profile stage, and all the more because I recognized her as a Chicana from the heart of Los Angeles. I felt a sense of solidarity with her and with the predominantly Latino “Viva Los Dodgers Day” audience rather than with the familiar melody and objectionable war imagery of “The Star Spangled Banner” itself. This feeling of ambivalence to her excellent performance raises three things for me: It matters who is singing, “The Star Spangled Banner,” as Muñoz suggests, who is listening, and it matters where.

Marisol Hernandez, who goes by the stage name, La Marisoul, is the lead singer of the Los Angeles based band La Santa Cecilia who formed in 2008. Other band members include

¹⁶¹ The video currently has 2077 views & 24 likes. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I5txdeQrBEE>

Jose “Pepe” Carlos, accordion and requinto; Miguel “Oso” Ramirez, percussion; Marco Sandoval, guitar; Alex Bendana bass; and former guitarist, Gloria Estrada. La Santa Cecilia won a Grammy Award for Best Latin Rock Urban Alternative Album in 2014 for their fourth album titled, “Treinte Dias.” The range of musical styles they play include Mexican rancheras, Latin American cumbia and tango, rock, and Beatles and 80s covers are often labeled a “fusion” band. Lyrically, they have consistently addressed such issues affecting their communities like water conservancy, immigration, and agricultural labor. Their Spanish language single called “El Hielo,” a play on words on the acronym ICE or Immigration Customs Enforcement, and their bilingual version and accompanying video for “Strawberry Fields Forever” are two examples of how their music engages larger community and social issues. Part of the history of the band is the undocumented status of one of the members which they openly discuss and take up thematically in their songwriting. In an interview with the NPR journalist, Amy Goodman, the band explain the origin of their name which they take from the patron saint of musicians and how they noticed in their travels between the U.S. and Mexico that many bands and musician groups called themselves, “La Santa Cecilia” for their particular town. Marisoul states that they thought, “it would be cool to be La Santa Cecilia of Los Angeles... we feel like it’s a powerful name, and it represents our faith in music.”¹⁶² The group members all met as teenagers in Los Angeles and Marisoul Hernandez in particular grew up in the historic Placita Olvera and tourist destination spot in downtown Los Angeles where her father owns a souvenir shop. The sense of communality and solidarity with other musicians expressed in the way the band imagines themselves as simply one of many “La Santa Cecílias” has cross-border resonances. The name gathers an integral part of its meaning because it is connected to a larger aural landscape beyond Los Angeles. These are some of the biographical details that fans of the band know and they are part of what forges a personal connection. Part of the receptivity for a solo performance by Marisoul is that there are fans in the crowd. Yet another context for listening here is the work of cultivating a Latino audience for such a performance in the first place.

¹⁶² “And we noticed that, in a trip that we did to Mexico, that there’s a lot of—all over the world, there’s a lot of mariachi bands or orchestras, all kinds of musicians and musical bands that are named La Santa Cecilia of whatever pueblo or city, you know, that they’re from.” And, you know, when we were making this band, we thought, “Wow, it would be cool to be La Santa Cecilia of Los Angeles, no?” And that’s how we chose the name of La Santa Cecilia. And we feel like it’s a powerful name, and it represents our faith in music, no? And the magic and the beauty of what music can do, no? Interview with Amy Goodman, March 22 2016 “Grammy-Winning Band La Santa Cecilia Perform & Discusses the Message Behind Their Music: http://www.democracynow.org/2016/3/22/watch_grammy_winning_band_la_santa



Marisol Hernandez's 2012 seemingly straightforward performance of the national anthem at Dodger Stadium in Los Angeles is a far cry from Jimi Hendrix's controversial electric guitar solo at Woodstock festival. But I suggest that Marisol's performance is no less complex or difficult to interpret simply because it does not immediately produce the visual or aural dissonances that Hendrix's performance did.¹⁶³ Arguably, there is no reason to consider her performance an anti-war protest or in any significant way controversial and unorthodox in 2012. If anything, Marisol's R&B inflected vocal styling lends the eighty-three year old song a fresh contemporary feel while still maintaining an appropriate degree of reverence towards the song.¹⁶⁴ Yet her delivery is not straightforward, she does not sing the anthem as one would sing a hymn. Marisol's style bends notes, elongating them, which imbues the song with a plaintive feeling. She also adds a small controlled run at the end of "home of the brave" reminiscent of someone raised on a healthy diet of Whitney Houston and Ella Fitzgerald. Indeed some of her vocal trademarks are playful scat singing and subvocal growling which is why this performance sounds subtle in comparison. Visually, the flamboyant singer's choice of dress echoes the red, white, and blue of the American flag. I read the bold and playful combination of a blue and white raglan sleeved baseball shirt, bright red, knee-length, circular skirt topped with white suspenders with printed red hearts as crowd pleasing because the singer is known for her colorful sartorial style. On first glance her performance seemingly accomplishes the "embodiment of nation in song." But Connell & Gibson also remind us that anthems may yet "remain open to (re)interpretation in ways that subvert the dominant meanings of nation they usually convey." I am interested in

¹⁶³ "La Marisol singing the national anthem at Dodger Stadium" .

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I5txdeQrBEE&list=UUekcmQqIM3qy_1K8GSyLUCQ&index=1&feature=plcp

¹⁶⁴ "La Marisol from La Santa Cecilia" (2011) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h3MZDYhnjPU&noredirect=1>

exploring those reinterpretations further. The possible tensions or contradictions of a Chicana singing the U.S. national anthem at L.A. Dodger Stadium may not become immediately perceptible or audible in this single performance. When one considers these contexts for listening: fans of the artist, a cultivated audience, and sedimented local histories, the performance becomes more complex to read and the stakes for listening go up.



Jenni Rivera: 8/26/12 Dodger Stadium, Viva Los Dodgers Day

The singer Jenni Rivera was a musical powerhouse in the industry genre of Regional Mexican music with the sales numbers to match—a phenomenon that has continued since her death.¹⁶⁵ Her honorary title was “La Gran Señora,” after her own composition as well as “La Diva de la Banda.” Jenni Rivera was a native of Long Beach, California and her public biographies frequently mention the life-long connection she had with the Los Angeles Dodgers including marrying Esteban Loaiza, a pitcher for the team. For these reasons OC Weekly editor and writer, Gustavo Arrellano’s indictment of media outlets such as the Los Angeles Times and NPR for their lack of reporting on Rivera during her prolific career is completely warranted, his fiery riposte is titled, “Death of Jenni Rivera Proves—Again—How Clueless Los Angeles Times and MSM Continue to be About Mexican Anything.”¹⁶⁶ Arrellano pointedly critiques the mainstream media for their paucity of coverage on Rivera while she was alive. He states that

¹⁶⁵ Rivera has received 15 Billboard awards posthumously and sold 15 million albums internationally: <http://voxxi.com/2014/05/16/jenni-rivera-billboard-music-awards/>

¹⁶⁶ <http://www.ocweekly.com/music/death-of-jenni-rivera-proves-again-how-clueless-los-angeles-times-and-msm-continue-to-be-about-mexican-anything-6590847>

this gross omission, too late to make up for after her death, was because Rivera “was a Mexican mostly popular to other Mexicans.” I agree. So how do we remember these stories that the official narrative and the official music of the nation want to forget?

Jenni Rivera’s performance of “The Star Spangled Banner” at the Los Angeles Dodgers stadium on August 26, 2012, nearly four months before her death captures a moment that serves as a reminder of the audible presence of Mexicans in the U.S. In this photograph, Rivera presents the familiar Dodger Blue image and wears legible official Dodger attire in which to perform. These visual cues build on each other and produce a comforting narrative of Americanness. Yet, aurally, her performance is much more ambivalent in its relationship to the national sound she visually represents in that moment.¹⁶⁷ Listening closely, Rivera’s vocal performance practice contains many of the details particular to the highly emotive style of Mexican ballads, corridos and rancheras she sang: Dramatic pacing, and pauses, a powerful lower register chest voice, with a dark, husky, edge that enhances tortured love songs or bawdy cantina music. The small accented grace notes such as the appoggiatura on “brave” she uses to bring emotional weight to the line “home of the brave” produce compelling effects one can hear in the last few seconds of the posthumous video recording, “Remembering Jenni Rivera.”¹⁶⁸ But Rivera was known for “banda,” a distinctly Mexican music that originated in the state of Sinaloa in Northern Mexico and is popular in the Southwest of the U.S., as well as the “canción ranchera” made famous by Mexican female music icons such as Lola Beltrán, Lucha Villa, and revitalized by Linda Ronstadt in the late 1980s. These musical forms have been important vehicles for women musicians to perform strong, alternative, and non-normative femininities called the “estilo bravío.” Antonia García Orozco defines this distinct performance style as one in which several aspects cohere:

The estilo bravío consists of 10 characteristics: a woman’s adoption of a powerful presence on stage, an unwillingness to allow the audience to disrespect her, demanding respect as professional musician from other musicians; changing the pronouns of the songs, changing the intent of the lyrics, creating alternate interpretations of the song, questioning male privilege, mocking male privilege, challenging sexual norms, and interweaving personal narrative with performance.¹⁶⁹

Certainly this describes Jenni Rivera’s irrepensible persona.

On the field that day Rivera was accompanied by the famous Roland Organ housed at Dodger Stadium but haunting those distinctly American sounds were the sounds of the Mexican percussion and brass banda ensemble that usually accompanied Rivera—undetectable here but certainly remembered and anticipated by her fans even in their absence.¹⁷⁰ In a fan made video shared on the Stadium Bound YouTube channel, shot from far away, behind the stage with Rivera’s back to the camera an audible “grito” at the 33-second mark by fans in the audience attests to that recognition. In contrast to the visually coherent photograph of the performance, this spontaneous “grito” encapsulates a moment of productive disruption to the national narrative

¹⁶⁷ <http://www.billboard.com/biz/articles/news/1483986/video-jenni-rivera-sings-star-spangled-banner-at-dodger-stadium>

¹⁶⁸ Remembering Jenni Rivera video:

¹⁶⁹ Antonia García-Orozco (2008) Lucha Villa's erotization of the estilo bravío and the canción ranchera, *Women & Performance: a journal of feminist theory*, 18:3, 269-286, DOI: 10.1080/07407700802496017

¹⁷⁰ This gets complicated as Roland is a Japanese company.

despite the nearly impossible scenario of the national stage.¹⁷¹ It articulates the presence of Chicanos, Mexicanos, and Latinos in the audience giving their idol a shout out claiming sonic space on this contested stage. It is also a generative, playful, and irreverent moment rich with possibilities of what it means to be a member of that audience, in that stadium, listening to the sounds of the “Star Spangled Banner,” on that particular day in Los Angeles.

El Grito de Dolores is an important sonic event that links the Chicano present to the Mexican colonial era of revolution, to war, independence and nation formation. Cries of “¡Viva Mexico!” can be heard every year on September 15 from the balcony of the National Palace in Mexico City, in Mexican neighborhoods across the U.S., and it can be traced in Chicana/o music, art, and literature. Yet El Grito de Dolores is only one rebel yell among many that have marked histories and moments of large and small rebellions across the Américas. How do we listen to everyday expressions of “el grito”? What do we make of a single playful, irreverent grito heard over a solemn national ceremony? Here I want to think with Joshua Price and Maria Lugones and their statement on translation addressing the “á” in América: “the accent marks a difference from what would be known and familiar to the English-language reader. It provides a certain textual resistance to the reader, a defamiliarization with the continent.”¹⁷² This idea helps me think about how the grito in this performance as similarly accented. I suggest that what we hear in this particular event is a resistant auditory grammar against cultural erasure that has particular sense-making possibilities in the Chicana/o – Latina/o sonic imaginaries, including generating solidarity, as Lugones and Price further suggest. I suggest that thinking of “el grito” as part of a historical and ongoing repertoire itself would further sound and articulate important disruptions to dominant narratives of nation, race, and gender. In order to hear what Aztlán sounds like we will need to continue to parse out aural cues from visual symbols in the ways we listen to the many sounds of América.

¹⁷¹ Jenni Rivera Sings National Anthem alternate/unofficial video with “grito”
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3VUcFnqDW8E>

¹⁷² Joshua Price and Maria Lugones. *Indigenous and Popular Thinking in América*. (Duke University Press, 2010),lxix.



Sebastien de la Cruz: AT&T Center in San Antonio, TX, Game 3 NBA, Miami Heat vs San Antonio Spurs (2013)

The escalation of anti-immigrant, specifically anti-Latino and anti-Mexican sentiment and racist legislation that has historically targeted and affected Chicana/os is evident in the virulent audience online responses to the performance of “The Star Spangled Banner” by Sebastien de la Cruz at the 2013 NBA Playoffs Game 3. That game was held in de la Cruz’s hometown of San Antonio where Sebastien and millions of other fans root for their beloved San Antonio Spurs. Eleven years old at the time, Sebastien is a bonafide rising star and has become nationally known for his winning performances of Mexican mariachi love songs in the show *America’s Got Talent*.¹⁷³ A true golden boy, Sebastien is popularly and affectionately called “El Charro de Oro” which is also his Twitter handle.

While news of Marisoul’s performance was made available by a personal video shared on Facebook and Twitter, Sebastien’s was broadcast on local and national networks and the performance is archived online on CNN U.S. with links to the performance on YouTube.¹⁷⁴ The story posted by CNN staff writer Cindy Y. Rodriguez reports on the unrestrained racist comments sparked by Sebastien’s performance that circulated on Twitter immediately following the game. Rodriguez highlights how social media sites and users such as Tumblr and the blog called Public Shaming are becoming more savvy about these controversies since: “most of the Twitter handles have been deactivated or the tweet has been removed.” Public Shaming provides an archive of screen shots of the initial Twitter responses and displays 28 public microblogger rants. Many of the comments were in the generically hostile “go home, wetback” vein but some comments specifically objected to the discord in the experience of *hearing* the U.S. national anthem while *seeing* the Mexican mariachi costume Sebastien wore. The two just didn’t add up. Here are just a few of examples:

“Is this the American National Anthem or is this the Mexican Hat Dance?”

¹⁷³ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eNGStoeu4BI&noredirect=1> “Sebastien & Charros de Oro

¹⁷⁴ <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R0L7oIHuR34>

“This lil Mexican snuk into the country like 4 hours ago now he’s singing the anthem”

“Why is a foreigner singing the national anthem. I realize it’s in San Antonio, but that still ain’t Mexico.”

“Why was the kid singing the national anthem wearing a mariachi band outfit? We ain’t Mexican”¹⁷⁵

These comments show how tropes of the permanent deportability of Mexicans in the US, of infection, illegality, “anchor babies,” the vigilante protection of the U.S.-Mexico border, and the contest between citizenship and cultural belonging persist given a forum. The anonymous and pseudonymous aspects of online platforms have made them notorious for “internet trolling.” Yet the politically neutral notion of “trolling” needs to be troubled, as Susan Herring has stated: “The relative anonymity of the Internet releases some of the inhibitions of a civil society, resulting in flaming, harassment, and hate speech online (Ess, 1996)” which is better understood as racism.¹⁷⁶ These racist comments reveal the understanding of the U.S. as America and does not imagine or remember an America further north and further south of these double borders. But these comments also reveal a specific tension that I want to pursue: Were the objections to Sebastien de la Cruz’s performance of the national anthem provoked on visual terms or in aural terms? Or by the juxtaposition of the two? Sebastien obviously sang the, “Star Spangled Banner,” in English yet he performed it in the traditional fitted and adorned charro costume that represents the national music of Mexico. According to many of the tweets, this is the beginning of discordant receptions to his performance. Whether this signals a crisis of legibility, identity or just an opportunity to recycle a cheap joke about the “Mexican hat dance,” it doesn’t matter. Both are probably true. Like most comments sections, the questions raised after Sebastien’s performance are both interesting and disturbing. These tweeters asked, “Is he doing the American National Anthem or the Mexican Hat Dance?” which signals a response to the discord or discomfort that some non-Mexican viewers experienced at the sight of his mariachi outfit and the sound of the American national anthem. I ask, why does this performance of the National Anthem sound dissonant when, as one tweeter states, “I realize it’s in San Antonio”? This comment reluctantly acknowledges Mexicans as part of the fabric of the U.S and it accurately describes the local demographics in which it is performed. How, then, do we see race differently than we hear it?

I want to think about how these online spaces which circulate damaging discourses about Chicanos, Latinos, and immigrants are also the very same grounds in which new meanings can be made. It is precisely because of the visual markers such as the Mexican charro costume that some listeners are able to hear how Sebastien’s vocal performance reveals the trained operatic qualities that distinguish the Mexican mariachi vocal genre. Any singer with that kind of training would be more than well suited to the one and a half octave range singing the national anthem demands. Hearing the intertextual presence of Mexican musicianship in an American

¹⁷⁵ The 28 tweets are archived at: <http://publicshaming.tumblr.com/post/52763976629/racist-basketball-fans-pissed-a-mexican-american-boy>

¹⁷⁶ Susan Herring, et al. “Searching for Safety Online: Managing Safety in a Feminist Forum.” *Information Society*. (2011).

song forms serve as reminders of colonial histories and can both suggest and produce affinities and linkages to other people, communities, and homelands beyond those imagined in the dominant sounds and English language lyrics of, “The Star Spangled Banner.” I argue that listening closely for these small aural distinctions through which multiple musical practices can be heard helps amplify the ambivalences of citizenship and belonging embodied in Chicana/o performances of nation. Restating Kun, if any history of music in the U.S. is a history of race, I would further add that American music is always and already the product of colonial and interracial encounters.

Conclusion

The degree to which any of these Chicana/o performances of the national are understood as ambivalent or contradictory depends on the contexts, the audience, the occasion and place. To many of their fans, including myself, these tensions may resonate in familiar ways not at all contradictory. This small repertoire of Chicana/o performances of the U.S. national anthem helps me think through the idea that just as the nation remains a contested term, so does music remain an important cultural sphere with both visual and sonic aspects in which Chicana/o histories and subjectivities can be affirmed, challenged, and remade. Towards this aim, I have aligned and explored these performances with Jimi Hendrix and Jose Feliciano’s important performances informing my listenings. Across time, this repertoire of Chicana/os performing the national anthem highlight meaningful disruptions, tensions, or, musically speaking, variations on the theme of América and Aztlán and offer a way to consider other modes of belonging in and out of nation. Here I am reminded of George Lipsitz’s notion of the “long fetch of history” and the seemingly hidden histories that songs have to further consider what these Chicana/o performances tells us about the U.S.¹⁷⁷

The performances I have discussed capture brief moments in time yet, as an ongoing repertoire, their meaning is continually made. Three years after Marisoul’s performance at Dodger Stadium, the singer posted this message on La Santa Cecilia’s Facebook page addressing their fans:

Went to see this EXTRAORDINARY play last night, Chavez Ravine, and I URGE you to go out and see it!!! Como un abrazo del abuelo tiempo...a cultural and historical embrace que entre risas y llanto I was taken into the humble homes of the residents of "La Loma" called Chavez Ravine. I was reminded of my own experience on the lawn of Dodger Stadium and the hesitance I had in singing our nations anthem knowing what had happened here. I felt that it was important to honor the people of Chavez Ravine by standing on this sacred land as a proud Angeleno singing my heart out for the people, the struggle and the bitter sweet history that created our beautiful city of Angels.
¡Viva Chavez Ravine! ¡Viva Culture Clash y que Vivan los Doyers chingao!!¹⁷⁸

The singer’s internal conflict over performing at Dodger Stadium and her reasons for pressing on with the performance reveal an ambivalent distance to the official songs and stories of nation. By choosing to “sing(ing) my heart out for the people” she mediates her experience in layered complex ways, neither contradictory nor forgetting. Her statement shows that there is a place for

¹⁷⁷ George Lipsitz. *Footsteps in the dark: The hidden histories of popular music*. U of Minnesota Press, 2007.

¹⁷⁸ 2/19/2015 post by Marisoul in the La Santa Cecilia Facebook page.

many kinds of allegiances: to the people of her hometown, to buried memories, to the arts, and even to the Dodgers. Surely there is room for the Dodgers in Aztlán. The video is still in circulation on YouTube and the temporality of cyberspace lets these comments reverberate in ways that lead back to this performance for someone listening closely. Jenni Rivera, who was a frequent performer and presence at Dodger Stadium, speaks of both the prestige of performing there as well as her memories of collecting aluminum cans outside of Dodger Stadium along with her brothers and sister to exchange for coins and dollars. Growing up in poverty is the reality for many U.S. Mexicans and Latino immigrants and her performance of the national anthem remembers this history. In San Antonio, Sebastien de la Cruz's performance of the "Star Spangled Banner" would not be his last as he was invited to sing it again at Game 4 of the NBA finals while escorted onto the stage by Julian Castro who was the mayor of San Antonio at the time. In 2016 Sebastien performed the national anthem once again, this time at the DNC in Philadelphia, to an overwhelmingly supportive audience which keeps this debate on the national stage three years later.

The individual performances in this chapter have different local contexts and histories for listening and interpretation. The history of Dodger Stadium will always be linked to the razing of the predominantly Mexican American Chavez Ravine neighborhood in the 1950's, which is documented in multiple sites including popular music. New media is an important site that takes these performances to audiences beyond their local contexts. Yet the larger context for listening to these performances as a repertoire is the escalating debate over Mexican, Chicano, and Latino citizenship. The permanent deportability of Mexicans, the many echoes of "go home wetback," the scale of deportation is at its largest in the history of this country. Mexicans and Latinos are not the only undocumented groups in the U.S. yet there is much to learn about immigration in the U.S. from what we hear in these performances. If we can "hear" el grito and traces of Mexican musical performance styles and genres in American music it points to the potential unassimilability of Chicanos in the long term. I argue that there is something resistant in these musical performances where Mexican, Chicano, and Latino histories push through the like a resistant grammar that sounds the accent on the "a" of América. That resistance sonic force refuses assimilability into the nation and insists that there are more expansive ways of belonging. This is doubly strengthened in the understanding that the work of national anthems is to assimilate complex histories of race, migration, and citizenship into a single uncomplicated story of nation. In the presidential race of 2016, virulent anti-Mexican and anti-immigrant rhetoric has been used to divide this country while vilifying this significant population. Threats to build a border wall builds on the perpetual message for anyone perceived as Mexican to, "go back to Mexico." This discourse is not going to slow down in national or global debates on immigration. But as the national anthem has now become part of the Chicana/o repertoire where the sounds of "el grito" spar alongside the sounds of, "The Star Spangled Banner," tells us that Mexico is already here. In other words, we can hear Aztlán in "The Star Spangled Banner" and this too is part of what Aztlán sounds like.

"El Grito Can Still Be Heard In Space"

In a conversation I had with the poet Javier Huerta after our graduate seminar in Chicana/o literature, a rare offering in my years at Berkeley, we discussed with some concern the future of Chicano studies. The question of the death of the Chicano avant-garde and the question of whether Chicanos were going out of style came up in our last meeting. We wondered whether

our shared commitment to Chicana/o literature and politics was something that only lived at the university. Our resounding response was, no, that there is still much to learn and explore from a Chicana/o perspective. He playfully yet defiantly exclaimed that, “el grito can still be heard in space.” In theories of sound there is a notion that all of the sounds that have ever been heard still resonate. This theory makes the soundscape a capacious plural space where many sounds are heard at once. I began this chapter with an epigraph from the novel “The Gangster of Love” by Jessica Hagedorn: “Jimi Hendrix died the year the ship that brought us from Manila docked in San Francisco.” I am a fan of rock music but I am not the most avid listener of Hendrix’s music, specifically. Yet I was struck by how this single line linked a Filipino immigrant narrative to an important African American musical icon. I read in Hagedorn a complex manner of identification with the U.S. that negotiates the national, diasporic, immigrant themes of the novel through popular music. I find it fitting that my interest in exploring these performances of nation began in part by encountering Jimi Hendrix in a book.



Conclusion

“Libertad”

The lithograph titled “Libertad” by Chicana artist and activist, Ester Hernandez was made on the occasion of the U.S. 1976 Bicentennial.¹⁷⁹ Hernandez who grew up in the San Joaquin Valley of California was an art student at the University of California, Berkeley at the time learning the process of printmaking. The image of a Chicana sculptor bringing into relief the subsumed symbols of pre-Columbian Mexican art and culture is stunning in how it visually represents a contest over belonging. The words “AZTLAN” carved at the base of Lady Liberty could be read as claiming a stake in the history, place, and story of Chicanas and Chicanos in the U.S. There is a faint cityscape below in the barest of outlines. This image captures more than one sense of time and place, 1976, 1776, and 1492. It is both New York and Aztlán. That is to say, Hernandez’s “Libertad” does not sound only New York City and Ellis Island, it sounds América. Called “Libertad” and not “Liberty” also contests the legacy of epistemic violence of audible in “English only” debates and officially and unofficially enforced on Spanish speakers. The code-switching in “Libertad” and “Aztlán” can be read as a simple linguistic resistance to conflating the U.S. with America, it can be read as a turf taking move – elaborate precolonial placas! I think of the many ways this image maps Aztlán against official narratives and representations and sounds of nation. Perhaps “Libertad” also represents the artist herself, a self-portrait of the Chicana artist within the larger visual and aural contours of Aztlán. Up close I see the chips of copper chiseled out by the Chicana figure on the ladder break off. These visual representations of the noise of the artist at work hover above the noisy cityscape below mid-fall and I imagine a sound like great metal claves, “*chin-chin-chin-chin!*” Surely they are also sparking and surely they are also sounding Aztlán.

A Decolonial Feminist Soundscape for Aztlán

While searching for concert footage of La Santa Cecilia I came across a 2010 performance at La Cita in downtown Los Angeles. It was the final song of the evening, the encore, and they played an electric cumbia-rock cover of The Beatles song, “I Want You (She’s So Heavy)” to an audibly enthralled audience of Chicanos and Latinos.¹⁸⁰ The camera filmed the band up close on a small crowded stage for the four and a half minute duration of the song. The audience is never seen on camera but I clearly heard someone exclaim, “¡Viva La Raza!” above the music and the crowd.

In gatherings of Chicanos and Latinos in the U.S. invariably there are exclamations like “Viva La Raza” and variations of “gritos” fitting for the occasion, many are happy ones like this concert. Yet as a first generation Chicana with a transnational upbringing, I am skeptical of strong expressions of cultural nationalism and patriotism. I feel I have claims to different kinds of belonging in Mexico and in the U.S. not quite captured in these acts. My family has struggled in this country and my sense of being “American” and what America means is shaped by this fact. Hearing expressions like Viva La Raza and seeing Chicanos perform the national anthem became important questions for me. I wanted to understand what I was hearing and what it meant. Expanding the definition of music and beyond the performance of a song and

¹⁷⁹ Photograph of “Libertad” taken by Cindy Cruz with permission by Estér Hernandez. Thank you both!

¹⁸⁰ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GkoqkRKFk-M>

considering audience, place, space and historical context situates listening in important ways. This performance was most likely recorded on one of the “Mucho Wednesday” nights that featured Latin Alternative music at the nightclub and gathered Chicano and Latino audiences. Hearing, “¡Viva La Raza!” in that context, I understood that it signaled a feeling of great pride for the musicians on stage. The good vibes are palpable. However it remains an expression of Chicano cultural nationalism with a history that is problematic for Chicanas and queers in Aztlán. For me to engage the concept of Aztlán, it had to be already feminist and queer.

I ask the question: “What does Aztlán sound like?” rather than “What is the sound of Aztlán” to avoid a problem in music research intent on defining a single sound either through region, nation, or culture. Listening across the Chicana/o borderlands, I knew that the music of Carlos Santana, La Santa Cecilia, and Girl in a Coma all *sound* Aztlán in different ways. Yet this is not the same as saying that they are *the sound of* Aztlán. I wanted an expansive sense of Aztlán to proliferate across the various musical and nonmusical texts in my research. I claim that through the soundscape, Aztlán becomes a plural concept.

In this dissertation I have sounded Aztlán in these ways:

At the intersections of woman of color thought. Chicanas have been part of coalitional histories, coalitional thought and praxis. By tuning into *This Bridge Called My Back*, coalition becomes audible. Listening becomes an important praxis for remembering coalitions Chicanas have been a part of. Listening coalitionally is implicated in both women of color feminism and decolonial feminism. The concept of coloniality expands discussions of gender in the U.S. from national to the modern/colonial. This shift in important yet as decoloniality at large does not consider gender integral but rather additive, hence, a U.S. third world feminist critique still holds. As a praxis, listening lets us recognize the coloniality of gender in terms other than visual. When women of color take up sonic space, we must learn to listen against the grain of power. If part of the goal for decolonial feminism is for us to recognize other co-resisters to coloniality, as Lugones states, I argue that *listening* is an important practice to allow that recognition. To listen decolonially, against the grain of power, and in solidarity and coalition with other co-resisters is inextricable to decolonial feminist praxis. A decolonial feminist deep listening or sounding of *Bridge* and the Napa Valley Wine Train Controversy lets me hear distortions when women of color take up sonic space and it also lets me hear those resistances. To activate a decolonial feminist politics of listening from the written text to the larger social become inextricably linked decolonial feminist practices.

The Decolonial Feminist Soundscapes in Post 80s Chicana Literature. Three things connect the three new contemporary works by Estella Gonzalez, “Chola Salvation,” Verónica Reyes, *Chopper! Chopper! Poetry from Bordered Lives*; Raquel Gutiérrez, “The Barber of East L.A.” 1) All demonstrate feminist solidarities and are gender transgressive. Located in the post 80s, they are also post *Bridge* and their feminist themes all are informed by the intersectional and coalitional thought of woman color feminism. 2) Music. The musical intertexts in these soundscapes are so many that they function more like soundtracks. Furthermore, three main kinds of music show up in these narratives: Oldies, boleros, and alternative 80s. These soundtracks tell us that there was a time before punk and after punk, and this shows up in Chicana literature. New Chicana characters emerge and representations that are minor or marginalized or non-existent in the dominant imaginary of Aztlán are rendered in these texts. More than representation, they become audible in the soundscape. In these narratives we hear pochas and cholas speaking caló which lets me theorize the concept of a decolonial feminist poetics in the augmentative characteristics of pachuca caló. Chicana lesbians, in particular

butch/femme characters and histories are recovered. In the soundscape, music becomes an important way to represent these subjectivities. 2) East L.A. These new works put East Los Angeles on the map and announce a new generation of writers shaped by the 1980s. My argument is: You cannot nostalgically remember the 80s in a flashback radio hour or 80s night at the club and forget East L.A. I begin a theorization of the “flashback” as a tool for remembering music, Chicanas, and East Los Angeles.

What does it mean to ask, “Where are you from?” and to write where you are from? When I read these new Chicana writings, it matters that the poets and writers name such places as East Los Angeles, such city streets as Brooklyn, not Cesar Chavez, neighborhoods like MacArthur Park, Maravilla, and such places like Florentine Gardens, The Vex, and Troy Café. Maria Lugones would ask, “Have you ever entered a book geographically?” I add that there is a soundscape to these geographies. Chicana poetics is expanded by thinking how both language and music present new Chicana lesbian aesthetics, poetics, erotics, and politics. What is the meaning of a nopal in poetry about a city known for its asphalt, freeways, and concrete rivers? This is part of what it means to ask, “where are you from?” and to speak, where you are from. The works of these writers map Chicana lesbian experiences that are specific to their time. As someone who grew up in the 80s, it means a lot to me to tune in to the sounds of a bolero sung by Eydie Gorme and a reference to Wham! in the same book. This has wonderful implications for what the imagined reading and listening audience looks like and who these writers are speaking to.

And last, if only to point to where conversations about Chicana lesbian literature is happening, on a recent Facebook post a friend opened a conversation with an article called “When did Butch become a dirty word in the queer scene?” I commented then as I do now, that “Butch” is part of my daily vocabulary. Yet it is not simply a word for queer, or vice versa. Some meanings are lost in translation. I am not sure that translation should always be the goal. Commensurability is not possible in queer theorizing when the dominant term for sexual alterities or ambiguity is “queer.” Although there are scholars working on queerness and decoloniality, I argue that they are fundamentally incompatible projects. That said, I may not be able to avoid slippages into queer terminologies but it would be good work to think and write more precisely about “queer latinidades” and how they are shaped by the geo-politics of language. If there is a sound to gender—to marimachas, malfloras, jotas, butches/femmes, what does using the word “queer” do to how we hear them? This debate will get hotter.

I could not exist without terms like butch or butcha or Butchlalis in queer Aztlán. When making my zine *JOTA*, a journal for new Chicana lesbian poetry, I wanted a word that gave a working class edge to the notion of “Chicana Lesbians.” I was of course deeply influenced by Carla Trujillo’s anthology by the same name but this was a DIY self-published zine, not an anthology, and I wanted to keep it somewhat under the radar. “JOTA” fit the bill and while it sounds like “dyke” there is no equivalence, it is not a translation. Chicana histories, experiences, sexualities and subjectivities, intimacies, language, style, cannot be understood without a deep recognition of what butch and femme have meant and continue to mean. There are very high stakes in these representations. This is part what it means to exist as new subjects of literature.

Hearing the Accent in América

National anthems are contested forms. National anthems, like national narratives, follow a singular logic in that they are meant to perform and articulate an assimilating function into the

nation, however real or imagined. Contradictions and tensions are built into nation making projects as they demand homogeneity even when such values captured in the distinctly American phrases “melting pot,” “nation of immigrants,” and “give us your poor,” are projected into the national narrative. Similarly, Chicano brown power expressions like, “¡Viva la Raza!” can inspire both solidarity and alienation among Mexicans on both sides of the border. By the very same logic, many stories and sounds located at different distances from nation are forgotten by the dominant narratives in both the U.S. and Chicano imaginaries of national belonging.¹⁸¹ As a historical narrative, the story of the U.S., whether written or in song form, is meant to be comforting.¹⁸² Indeed, the official “story” of the U.S. is one of providence, progress—from fledgling colony to superpower—and benevolence towards other, lesser nations and people. Alternate stories, told with more complexities, ambivalence, and contradiction exceed the formal limits of both story and song. In the context of the U.S., Chicano stories and sounds are disruptions to the dominant narrative; their perceived excess and dissonance produce a sense of discomfort against the assumed consonance of nation.¹⁸³ Listening practices are implicated in what kinds of meanings are produced in sonic space.

The Chicana/o performances of “The Star Spangled Banner” in this work present a map of América with an accent. Tracing the sound of Mexican musical practices in the grain of these Chicana/o voices and hearing Chicano sonics such as “el grito” in “The Star Spangled Banner” points to a fundamental unassimilability of Chicanos in the U.S. It’s not necessarily oppositional, it is potentially coalitional, and it will need to be both in the current war against Latinos. But it is also plural. Sounding Aztlán in all these ways, through the soundscape, becomes a plural concept. This plurality is informed by women of color coalitional politics and decolonial feminism and disrupts the singular logic of nation/alism.

In a graduate music seminar I took at Berkeley we discussed trends in popular music based on the history of publications in the journal *Popular Music* and the kinds of panels that featured at the American Musicological Society Annual Meeting that particular year. The question of whether the “national” continues to be important topic in music research came up. I appreciate the question but I sense it was disconnected to the issues and concerns that inform Chicana/o research. I need not state that I was the only Chicana and woman of color in that seminar. I answered then and now that it continues to matter because of the fact of migration. We cannot simply theorize about musical migrations and musical fusions without engaging the socio-cultural, political, and economic conditions that produce them. The movement of people puts pressure on static notions of the nation. To hear América with an accent acknowledges and defends that movement.

I could not have taken up this project if it weren’t for the work of Chicana feminists, artists, and writers whose intervention to Chicano cultural nationalism revealed its limitations and call for a widening of its borders and of the imagination. Moraga’s queer Aztlán and Pérez’s ambivalent nationalism have been especially important and generative concepts to think with. Restating the question I heard in my music seminar, I have also asked myself why it still matters to engage questions of Chicano nationalism. In part because I still hear terms like “vendida” used against Chicanas by Chicanos in influential positions and circulate in the public sphere.

¹⁸¹ Joseph Keith, *Unbecoming Americans: Writing Race and Nation from the Shadows of Citizenship, 1945-1960*, 2012.

¹⁸² Ned Blackhawk states: “American history is considered a place of comfort, not one of pain; a realm of achievement rather than one of indigenous trauma.” Ned Blackhawk. *Violence over the Land: Indians and Empires in the Early American West*. Harvard University Press, 2009.

¹⁸³ Vargas, *Dissonant Divas*, 2012

Aztlán is not going to die but histories matter. There can be no decoloniality without the decoloniality gender. In this we are all implicated. Sound has been my vehicle towards a critique of nation and nationalism and my goal has been is to open it up conceptually through the soundscape so that we may practice new ways of listening. There is still much to explore and in the vast imaginary of Aztlán there has not yet been a soundscape. This research presents a decolonial feminist soundscape for Aztlán towards future sonic imaginaries.

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