Chicana/x Carework: Invisible Feminized Labor, Chicana/x Carceral Community, and the Variegated Nature of Feminist Agency in Carceral Contexts

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Marlene Mercado

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"...prisons wear out places by wearing out people, irrespective of whether they have done time."

- R.W. Gilmore

This dissertation is dedicated to my father and brother. My father taught me how to be a fighter and a warrior. He taught me what it mean to be Chicana from the moment I entered the world—to fight for myself, my people and community. He told me as a young woman to never forget where I came from—to this day I have not and I never will. The foundation that he built in me as a young Chicanita is precisely why this dissertation is a production of community knowledge and it does not shy away from the deep pain many of our community members experience. We must confront that pain if we are to transform ourselves and therefore our world. My brother taught me how to take our trials and tribulations and turn those experiences into something powerful and beautiful. I became engaged in this work because of the subjection he experienced to policing and prisons—I will always acknowledge his experiences as an entry point for me into the scholarship in which I engage. He remains incarcerated as I write this and I remain by his side until he is free.

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ABSTRACT

Chicana/x Carework: Invisible Feminized Labor, Chicana/x Carceral Community, and the Variegated Nature of Feminist Agency in Carceral Contexts

Marlene Mercado

Research on the consequences of targeted incarceration primarily caters to the male Black and white racial binary that has been the cornerstone of American racial politics. While there has been an increase of research generated on the consequences of hypersurveillance, policing, and incarceration for those outside of carceral institutions, much of this research invisiblizes the experiences of system-impacted Chicanxs/ and Mexicanas. These unimprisoned women also live carceral lives, as they experience the slow violence endemic to both incarceration and neoliberal austerity (Story 111). Utilizing a critical carceral studies and Xicanx feminist lens, I explore the scope of their experiences as racialized and colonized people that have bear the brunt of the carceral system as they support currently and formerly incarcerated family members that have been targeted for premature death. This case study uses a combination or oral histories from four Chicana and Mexicana women residing in El Paso, Cuidad Juarez, and Las Cruces as well as my own autoethnographic experience via photo elicitation, to illuminate the ways that the profound material and ideological consequences of carcerality are experienced by those beyond prison walls. Furthermore, the carceral carework that Chicana/x and Mexicana family members of incarcerated and formerly incarcerated boys and men do as carceral brokers through racial and gendered social reproductive labor connects the projects of colonization to current iterations of criminalization that impacts indigenous/Chicanx/and Mexican communities broadly. By centering Chicana/Mexicana voices through oral histories, I formed a third space where the unheard, the unthought and the unspoken can be taken up and used in a decolonial analysis and

alternative future-making. This project better understands settler-colonial origins of racial criminalization and ultimately provides a framework to undo these legacies and build towards decriminalization and decolonization of the history and presence of Mexican origin peoples in what is currently known as the United States.

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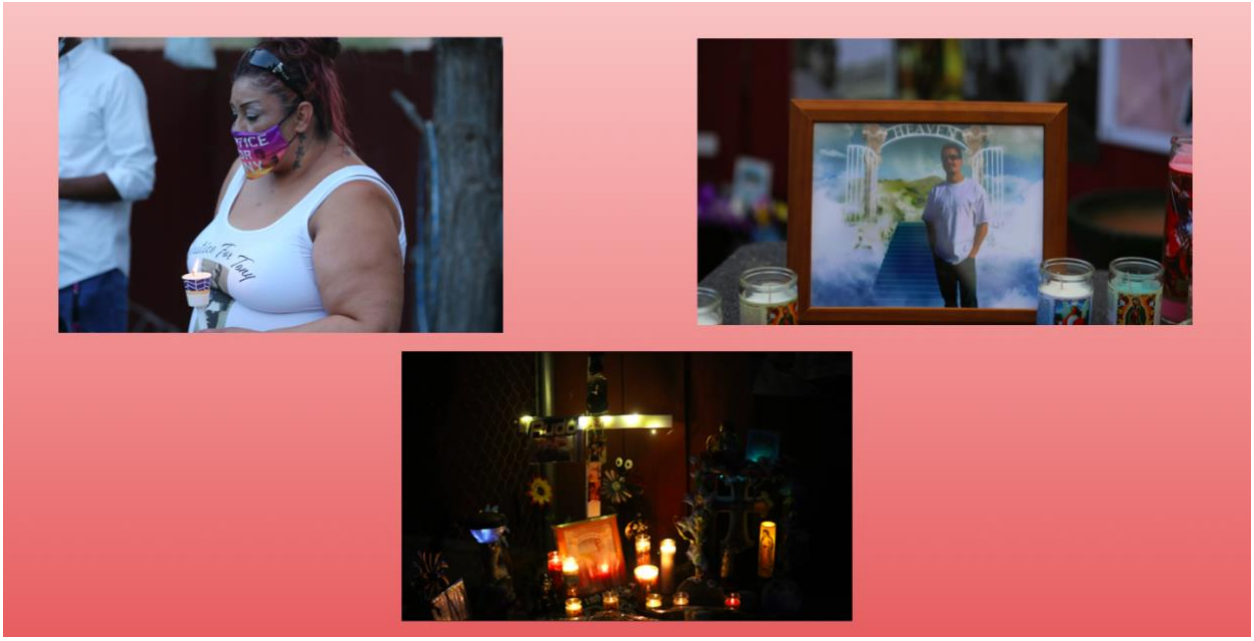

FIG 1.1 In September 2020 the *Las Cruces Sun-News* published a series of photographs from a candlelight vigil commemorating the six-month anniversary of Antonio Valenzuela's murder. Pictured in the left-hand corner is Antonio's sister, Valerie Chavez. In the right-hand corner is a photo of Antonio.[1]

I started to think seriously about the gendered, raced, classed, and invisible labor that Chicana/xs perform for their currently and formerly incarcerated loved ones and those subjected to premature death in the summer of 2020. My brother was forced to turn himself in and was re-incarcerated while the pandemic was in full swing, as racial unrest protests were erupting and as the world collectively watched. Antonio Valenzuela's murder changed the trajectory of my work. Prior to that moment, I was focused on the state and the colonial logics behind the building of the New Mexico Territorial Penitentiary and its relationship to Mexican racial criminalization in the late nineteenth century. When Antonio was murdered in Las Cruces, New Mexico, in the early

[1] Freudenthal, B. (2020, September 1). *Family remembers Antonio Valenzuela at vigil held six months after his death*. News. Retrieved May 5, 2022, from http://www.lcsun-news.com/story/news/2020/09/01/antonio-valenzuela-family-vigil-six-months-after-death-las-cruces-police/3449534001/

morning hours of February 29, 2020, my focus shifted. Officer Smesler of the Las Cruces Police Department violently pinned Antonio down and used a "technique" called the Vascular Neck Restraint (VNR) on Antonio, which is essentially a chokehold. It was not until more than eight minutes after Antonio fell unconscious from the chokehold that he received medical attention, which obviously at that point was too late. His murder was caught on tape from police body camera footage and officer Chistopher Smelser was charged with second-degree murder. His trial was rescheduled for March 2022 and the verdict is still pending.

Beyond the fact that I watched a Mexican origin person get murdered by police on camera, Antonio's murder shook me because I watched his sister, Valerie Chavez, lead the campaign for justice for her brother. It resonated with me on a deeply personal level–an embodied level. I saw myself in Valerie and knew that if that was my brother, I would be doing the same thing because in many ways I already was. I thought about the labor that Chicana/xs do for our loved ones, specifically those subjected to police brutality and incarceration. I thought about my homegirls back home, away from the university, and realized that Chicana/xs are the glue that holds our communities together. It was at that moment that I took a journey home, to the borderlands. It drove me to look at the raced, classed, gendered, and invisible labor that Chicana/xs perform for their currently/formerly incarcerated loved ones and those subjected to premature death, like Antonio.

FIG 1.2 Antonio Valenzuela's Tia, Sylvia, Montoya on the right and his grandmother Aurora Montoya on the left pictured above.[2]

BACKGROUND

The United States, as a settler nation state, has rendered Mexican origin peoples as carceral collateral.[3] Marisa Salinas describes how the process of designating Latinas as carceral collateral means that society treats a few as exceptional in order to justify the treatment of many

[2] Press, The Associated. "Activists: Police Killings of Latinos Lack Attention." *Latino Rebels*, Latino Rebels, 18 Aug. 2020, http://www.latinorebels.com/2020/08/18/activistspolicekillingsoflatinoslackattention/.

[3] Salinas, M. D. (2021). In Lak'ech from the Ivory Tower to the Prison Tower: Connecting Latina 'Disposables' to Latina 'Exceptionals' across Neoliberal Institutions. *UC Santa Barbara*. ProQuest ID: Salinas_ucsb_0035D_15227. Merritt ID: ark:/13030/m5bg9dz7. Retrieved from https://escholarship.org/uc/item/8kg0k15p; Lopez-Aguado, P. (2016.) The Collateral Consequences of Prisonization: Racial Sorting, Carceral Identity, and Community Criminalization. Sociology Compass 12–23.

as disposable. Salinas's study focuses on "how the passive violence of oppressive material conditions precipitates the active violence women endure in their homes lives" from carceral communities (61). Although her research focuses on Latinas from carceral communities who end up in either prison or academia, I extend her notion of "passive violence of oppressive material conditions," specifically in the lives of Chicana/xs in the Southwest US. The designation of Mexican origin people as carceral collateral has been achieved through organized abandonment, targeted incarceration, and premature death.[4] As a result, Mexican origin peoples have experienced legal and extralegal violence in what is currently known as the United States for more than two-hundred years, which continues to this day.[5] With many male-identifying community members incarcerated and targeted for policing / premature death, the fate of the Mexican origin / Chicana/o/x community has historically and contemporaneously been in the hands of primarily women via social, cultural and biological reproduction. Chicana/xs / Mexicanas are the foundation upon which these families and communities rest.[6] With this great responsibility comes a heavy burden, one that many of these women bear from a young age.

To understand the specific raced, gendered, and classed aspects of the labor that Chicana/xs perform I offer my notion of the term *carework*, which recognizes the historical materialist conditions of the Chicana/o/x community in the Southwest.[7] Scholarship on carework has typically examined wage workers performing services such as childcare, teaching, nursing

[4] Seigel, Micol. *Violence Work : State Power and the Limits of Police*. Duke University Press, 2018.; Gilmore, R. W. (2007). Golden gulag: prisons, surplus, crisis, and opposition in globalizing California. University of California Press

[5] Legal violence is sanctioned by the state and by way of direct force (cops, military, etc.) whereas extralegal violence is when civilians, take use their own discretions to enact violence and subsequently utilize laws to justify their actions (lynch mobs and white supremacists).

[6] Ruiz, Vicki L. *Las Obreras, Chicana Politics of Work and Family*. Los Angeles: UCLA, Chicano Studies Research Center, 2000. Print.

[7] Barrera, Mario. *Race and Class in the Southwest: A Theory of Racial Inequality*. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2002. Print.; Cuevas, Ofelia. Lecture. Introduction to Chicana/o/x Studies, 4 Nov. 2018, UC Davis, Davis, CA.

and counseling.[8] Studies of carework among Latinx populations have predominantly focused on the family, the caregiver burden, and the domestic worker.[9] Sociologist Arlie Hochschild introduced the notion of emotional labor as work; she explains, "beneath the difference between physical and emotional labor there lies a similarity in the possible cost of doing the work: the worker can become estranged or alienated from an aspect of self–either the body or the margins of the soul–that is used to do the work" (7). She describes emotional labor as a form of managing feelings in order to "create publicly observable facial and bodily display" and states that emotional labor is sold for a wage and therefore has exchange value. Sociologist Rhacel Salazar Parreñas put forth the notion of Filipina domestic workers as caretakers of the global economy, as they migrate to various locations such as the United States, Italy, and the United Arab Emirates to perform domestic labor where their economic positions typically improve but their social status declines.[10] She argues that Filipinas are relegated to the status of partial citizens in order to authorize their limited freedom and agency. Parreñas also documents the international division of reproductive labor stating that her participants often cited domestic violence, labor-market segmentation, and the unequal division of labor in the family as reasons for their initial migration (28).

Drawing from this scholarship, I contribute my formulation of Chicana/x carework, which considers the embodied aspects of carework that apply specifically to Mexican origin women as it relates to their colonization, racialization, criminalization, and socialization in a

[8] England, Paula; Budig, Michelle; Folbre, Nancy. 2002. "Wages of Virtue: The Relative Pay of Care Work." Social Problems 49(4): 455-473.
[9] Romero, Mary. 2018. "Reflections on Globalized Care Chains and Migrant Women Workers." Critical Sociology 44(7-8): 1179-1189.
[10] Hochschild, Arlie R. *The Managed Heart: Commercialization of Human Feeling*. , 2020. Print.; Parreñas, Rhacel. *Servants of Globalization: Migration and Domestic Work, Second Edition*. , 2020. Print.

nation state such as the US. The oral history participants in this dissertation describe their experiences of estrangement and alienation from parts of themselves in the body and flesh as well as in the soul (spiritually) as a result of their emotional (and other forms) of labor for their incarcerated loved ones. Although the participants do not describe concern over other people's perceptions of them (i.e. creating publicly observable facial and bodily displays), they do describe concern over creating an invisible, observable face/body for their incarcerated loved ones. For example, incarcerated loved ones cannot see their family members via phone calls but their interpersonal relationships have created strong bonds amongst them, which means that those who are incarcerated are hyper aware of emotions even over the phone. Chicana/xs in this dissertation describe the experience of having to "make face" over the phone so that their incarcerated loved ones do not sense something is off. This is also part of their emotional labor. Further, Borderland Chicana/xs are no strangers to domestic work and the status of partial citizen, non-citizen, or "illegal." Their economic and social position has been one of precarity for more than a century. As transnational peoples, the Borderland Chicana/xs in this dissertation discuss the influence of domestic violence, labor-market segmentation, and the unequal division of labor in the family as reasons for their initial migration or condition as US citizens.

Chicana/x Carework also considers how laws, ideologies, and forms of capital in the Southwest contribute to the political and social condition of Mexican origin people.[11] Through a historical materialist framework, I geopolitically contextualize the racialization and criminalization of Mexican origin people in the Southwest. Ideological constructions of Mexican origin peoples depicted them as mongrel, inherently criminal, and revolutionary, and

[11] Pesquera, Beatríz M. "Eleven. In the Beginning He Wouldn't Lift Even a Spoon: The Division of Household Labor." *Building with Our Hands: New Directions in Chicana Studies*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993. 181-195.

simultaneously a docile workforce. This ideological foundation emerged as responses to the needs of primarily labor markets and capital in general in the United States. That is, when the US lacked cheap labor, Mexicans were constructed as a docile workforce and when the country experienced an economic crisis, Mexicans became scapegoats via massive deportation operations. Similarly, when Mexicans threatened underground labor markets through illegal drug and alcohol activity, they were depicted as dangerous, uncontrollable criminals.[12]

The capitalistic desires of the United States have been the driving force behind racially criminalized ideological constructions of Mexican origin people, but those greedy desires could only be obtained through force since Mexican origin peoples have often resisted their dehumanization and marginalization. Legal violence from law enforcement to legislation makes these ideological constructions "real" in their creation of Mexicans as criminals. Legislation such as the 1917 Immigration Act and subsequent Head Tax, which was enforced at the US-Mexico border in the early twentieth century, required Mexicans crossing into the US to pay a fee, pass a literacy test, and complete a medical screening. The Act and tax aided in the construction of Mexicans as criminals by depicting them as "degenerates" or "disease carrying" peoples suffering from poverty. These characteristics were categorized as undesirable for a newly forming white nation state. Further, undesirability was conflated with criminality in this case. Ideological constructions of Mexican origin people as docile laborers and criminals worked in conjunction with US imperialist desires for capital, as law enforcement violently administered ideological and material boundaries against Mexicans, which led to the current material conditions of Mexican origin peoples in the Southwest.

[12] Campos, Isaac. "Mexicans and the Origins of Marijuana Prohibition in the United States: A Reassessment." *The Social History of Alcohol and Drugs*, vol. 32, no. 1, University of Chicago Press, 2018, pp. 6–37, https://doi.org/10.1086/SHAD3201006.

In the context of this history, Mexican origin people carry socially and morally conservative values that enact a culture of silence around incarceration. The carceral colonial history of the border influenced and in many ways has encouraged silence as a response to the various forms of violence people have been subjected to–particularly women. Further, Spanish Catholicism was a key factor in the colonization of Mexican origin people and has also historically played a role in creating a culture of silence.[13] Thus, those that are incarcerated or have familial ties to the incarcerated are admonished; discussion of the detrimental impact of carceral strain on those affected is largely avoided. Recently, however, there has been a shift from this silence to privately held conversations within the community. Those impacted have been engaging in conversations in intimate circles of community with trusted kin and are slowly becoming more comfortable sharing their often daunting and multifaceted experiences with the carceral system. This dissertation is one of many existing discussions taking place in community, between community members, and in emerging academic discourses on carcerality.

RACIAL CRIMINALIZATION: A HISTORY OF MEXICANS IN THE REGION

Mexican origin people's criminalization, as it relates to the state-building project of the United States, took form in the mid nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The El Paso-Ciudad Juárez border has historically and contemporaneously been understood as a frontier–the frontline to the United States–and therefore this rhetoric of security or "securing the border" has been in place since the late nineteenth century. Spanish occupation and settlement in Texas, which took shape between 1716 and 1731, planted the seeds of Mexican racial criminalization through laws

[13] Trujillo, Carla. *Living Chicana Theory*. Berkeley, Calif: Third Woman Press, 1998. Print.

that characterized Mexicans as idle, immoral, dishonest, and degenerate.[14] The Mexican period, from 1821 to 1846, witnessed Anglo-Saxon infiltration and the hardening of Mexican stereotypes that were (extra)legally constructed and carried out through lynching, mob violence, and the Texas Rangers.[15] With large populations of Mexicans / Chicana/o/xs scattered throughout the Southwest, and concentrated in what is currently the state of New Mexico and parts of southern Texas, an intense clash of primarily two distinctly different ethnic populations occurred. Anglo settlers desired the Santa Fe Trail, the Old Spanish Trail, and El Paso del Norte for economic gains and therefore needed to eliminate the large Mexican origin and Indigenous populations to take control over the trade routes. This project of elimination would be made possible through an ideological construction of Mexicans as racialized criminals, which simultaneously provided a justification for permanent settlement of Mexican and Indigenous land.[16] Once justified through the racial criminalization of Mexicans, Anglo settlers had free range to occupy / settle the land and eliminate Mexicans and other Indigenous peoples by any means necessary.

The project of eliminating Mexican origin people in what is currently known as the Southwest United States took many forms. One key form of elimination was the annexation of Mexican land to the United States in 1848 and the subsequent signing of the Treaty de Guadalupe Hidalgo. Not only did the US seize the land of Mexican and Indigenous peoples through this treaty, but the modern-day creation of the "Mexican American" and "Chicana/o/x" subject occurred as a result. The process of subject making / racialization of Mexican origin

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[14] Jones, Oakah L. *Los Paisanos: Spanish Settlers on the Northern Frontier of New Spain*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1996. Print.

[15] Weber, David J. *Foreigners in Their Native Land: Historical Roots of the Mexican Americans*. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2003. Print.

[16] HERNANDEZ, KELLY L. Y. T. L. E. *City of Inmates: Conquest, Rebellion, and the Rise of Human Caging in Los Angeles, 17711965*. S.l.: UNIV OF NORTH CAROLINA PR, 2020. Print.

people was important to an emerging nation-state and carceral state and set the foundation for the eventual political disenfranchisement of Mexicans.[17] The construction of the New Mexico State Penitentiary (NMSP)–a project of elimination and racial criminalization–played a crucial role in the removal and subsequent incarceration of Mexican origin people.[18] The NMSP was built to further facilitate the dispossession of land from Mexicans in the region.[19] Although many of the Chicana/o/xs in the area were pushed out because their work had been moved to surrounding villages, there remained a significant population of Mexicans in the area, and the prison therefore served as a site of containment for Mexican origin people.[20] Additionally, emerging carceral institutions such as Leavenworth Penitentiary, the Kansas State Penitentiary, and Arizona State Penitentiary served to displace Mexican and Indigenous peoples from Southwest territory.[21] Jail and prison construction along the nineteenth century west coast served to remove Native and Mexican people from the land.[22] The rhetoric used to justify their incarceration revolved around "civilizing" the "savage" and eliminating the "mongrel race."[23] Land, geography, law,

[17] Haney-Lopez, Ian. *White by Law 10th Anniversary Edition: The Legal Construction of Race*. New York: NYU Press, 2006. Print.

[18] Wilson, James A. "Frontier in the Shadows: Prisons in the Far Southwest 1850-1917." *Arizona and the West*, vol. 22, no. 4, University of Arizona Press, 1980, pp. 323–42.

[19] Torrez, Robert J. *Myth of the Hanging Tree: Stories of Crime and Punishment in Territorial New Mexico*. Albuquerque, NM: Univ. of New Mexico Press, 2008. Print.

[20] Jones, Oakah L. *Los Paisanos: Spanish Settlers on the Northern Frontier of New Spain*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1996. Print.

[21] Benson, Sara M. *The Prison of Democracy: Race, Leavenworth, and the Culture of Law*. , 2019. Print.; Wilson, James A. "Frontier in the Shadows: Prisons in the Far Southwest 1850-1917." *Arizona and the West*, vol. 22, no. 4, University of Arizona Press, 1980, pp. 323–42.; Crail-Rugotzke, Donna, "The treatment of minorities and women by southwestern courts and prisons" (2008). UNLV Retrospective Theses & Dissertations. 2798.

[22] HERNANDEZ, KELLY L. Y. T. L. E. *City of Inmates: Conquest, Rebellion, and the Rise of Human Caging in Los Angeles, 17711965*. S.l.: UNIV OF NORTH CAROLINA PR, 2020. Print.

[23] Ross, Luana. *Inventing the Savage: The Social Construction of Native American Criminality*. , 2021. Print.; Weber, David J. *Foreigners in Their Native Land: Historical Roots of the Mexican Americans*. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2003. Print.

racialization, and criminalization worked together to contain and eliminate Mexicans in the Southwest during the mid-nineteenth century.[24]

In addition to annexation and the building of the New Mexico State Penitentiary, the removal and elimination of Mexican origin people in the Southwest was carried out through cultural and spiritual warfare.[25] The explicit criminalization of Mexican / Chicana/o/x culture and spiritual practices occurred through the banning / stigmatization of particular styles of dress as well as tattoos and mannerisms such as language / linguistics, much of which is rooted in Indigenous practices because they are intertwined.[26] Cultural anthropologist Laura L. Cummings found that the institutional culture of law enforcement in border regions has used popular dress styles amongst Chicano/a/xs "as a gauge of a priori guilt or suspicion" (167). She analyzes the manual titled *Chicano Street Gangs*, which was used in the mid-1980s by the Arizona Department of Corrections to demonstrate how tattoos such as a cross, peacocks, the Virgin Mary, butterflies, spiders, a cholo, or a girl's face and head with long hair were listed in the manual as signs of gang membership. Further, she outlines how certain vehicles such as lowered Chevrolets or Buicks were used to identify potential gang members. Clothing such as plaid Pendelton-type shirts, hairnets, and white T-shirts also placed Mexican origin people in the category of suspected gang members. Even music such as "Oldies but Goodies" was listed in the guide. Given that many of these cultural practices and styles were and remain largely popular in working-class Chicana/o/x youth culture, Cummings argues that "such guides to gang-member identification are absurd and tremendously discriminatory" (167). Cummings also connects

[24] Cuevas, Ofelia. Lecture. Introduction to Chicana/o/x Studies, 4 Nov. 2018, UC Davis, Davis, CA.

[25] Gutierrez, Ramón A. *When Jesus Came, the Corn Mothers Went Away: Marriage, Sexuality, and Power in New Mexico, 1500-1846*. Stanford (California: Stanford University Press, 2006. Print.

[26] Cummings, Laura L. *Pachucas and Pachucos in Tucson: Situated Border Lives*. , 2015. Print.

Mexican Pachucos to the Yaqui Indians of Old Pascua–a connection previously absent within this field of study. The Yavapai Apache Indians were also early Pachucos in this region. Linking Yaqui and Yavapai Apache Indians to Mexican origin people and Pachucos sheds light on how these various Indigenous communities interacted, worked together, and worked against one another.

Tattoos, linguistics, estilo (style), sustained socialization, and an anti-servile demeanor are a few of the cultural aspects of Pachucos that Cummings focuses on in order to elaborate on the ways in which they became stigmatized and racially criminalized within Anglo society but also within the Mexican-American community. The tattoos and linguistics of Pachucos in this region and time period, according to Cummings, are rooted in Yaqui and Yavapai Apache Indian cultural practices, which were already criminalized by Anglos. The cross and its position as tattoos for early Pachucos is precisely on the ceremonial masks of Yaqui Pascola dancers and inside of Yaqui ceremonial *chapayeka* masks–where it touches the forehead. Crosses are said to offer protection for the dancers and Cummings states "it is probable that their placement and function in the same cases, were related to syncretic Indigenous beliefs and practices" (18). The facial tattoos are thought to be rooted in / connected to the Hermanos Penitentes and are believed to have been an earlier custom that was discontinued after New Mexico became a US territory in 1848. There was intense public opposition to the Brotherhoods as a result of the newly arrived Protestant sects (19).

Cummings argues that early Pachuco identity mainly manifested through language rather than physical aesthetics and Barker argues that linguistically, the language predates the Pachucos themselves. For example, Cummings offers the word "Tacuche," which was an early term for the zoot suit, to demonstrate how the word is actually a Tarascan / Pure'pecha term with various

meanings: a bundle, a wrapping of rags, trouble, slang for suit, despicable, worthless, a person of low class/status, a kind of prisoner's uniform, a man's suit, a lawsuit (24). The term itself already carried an identity rooted in resistance and an "underdog" culture. Although the zoot suiter of the early twentieth century is not necessarily hyper criminalized in the present day, the racial criminalization of the "cholo," the "gang banger," or the "gangster" persists and this "rage" can be traced precisely back to the early Pachuchos and their criminalization.

Interestingly, Cummings roots the language of the Pachucos, Caló, as emerging in the Southwest United States and in Northwest Mexico in the early part of the twentieth century. She states that a number of languages were brought together to make this new language possible and it was influenced by early Spanish colonialism and Anglo-American expansion. All of these forces converged for Caló to emerge from El Paso, Texas. In fact, "Pachuco" is a colloquial way of saying El Paso (100). To this day, people from El Paso call the city "Chuco Town." Cummings' attention to Indigenous roots illuminates "...the common semantic thread … Kiowa pä'sûñko, Kiliwa pachugó, and Tarascan / Pure'pecha tacuche; all refer to cloth-wrapped town dwellers, pernicious relations of power, and trouble" (101-102). She highlights that "... in the research on Pachuco, there is a general lack of attention in the literature to the region's Indian-language varieties and cultures, and to intertribal and Indian-Mexican relations" (104). These connections and relations between tribes and the Mexican community are key in terms of unraveling racial criminalization. If we turn back to the work of Luana Ross here to consider how Native peoples of Montana were criminalized for their very way of life, it becomes clear that quite a similar process was unfolding in the Southwest for Mexican origin people and continuously for Native peoples.

Further, the establishment of Americanization programs aimed at Mexicans during the early twentieth century further facilitated cultural and spiritual warfare against the community.[27] Mexican (im)migrant women were initially the primary targets of Americanization programs but after they proved difficult to influence, adolescent "American" born Chicanas became the target. Through the Mexican (im)migrant mother, the Americanization programs sought to mold the second generation of Mexican (im)migrants into a more dependable, less revolutionary, more loyal, but also disciplined workforce.[28] The programs also sought to establish English as the primary language in private and public spaces as it was considered a vital component of the Americanization process.[29] Schooling, church, and labor became spaces of Americanization for first- and second-generation Mexicans. Education, diet, health, and private/public habits were some of the main focuses of the Americanization project.[30]

ORGANIZED ABANDONMENT

The racial criminalization of Mexican origin people by the carceral state was also rooted in organized abandonment. Welfare and social services in the Southwest region for Mexican origin peoples were not simply disappearing but rather being intentionally removed / defunded on behalf of the state. For instance, in 2022, the minimum wage is $7.25 in Texas despite growing inflation nationally. Whereas other states have at least modestly increased wages to

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[27] Sánchez, George. "'Go After the Woman": Americanization and the Mexican Immigrant Woman 1915-1929." https://www.law.berkeley.edu/php-programs/centers/crrj/zotero/loadfile.php?entity_key=A4D6DFZI

[28] García, Mario T. *Desert Immigrants: The Mexicans of El Paso, 1880-1920*. London: Yale University Press, 1982. Print.

[29] Ibid.

[30] Ruiz, V. L. "South by Southwest: Mexican Americans and Segregated Schooling, 1900–1950." *Magazine of History*, vol. 15, no. 2, Organization of American Historians, 2001, pp. 23–27, https://doi.org/10.1093/maghis/15.2.23.
Hurstfield, Jennifer. "The Educational Experiences of Mexican Americans: 'Cultural Pluralism' or 'Internal Colonialism'?" *Oxford Review of Education*, vol. 1, no. 2, 1975, pp. 137–49, http://www.jstor.org/stable/1050220.

meet the growing needs of their respective populations, Texas has remained at $7.25 since 2009. Referred to as organized abandonment, this selective divestment process is a "purposeful 'shredding of social welfare' that places the burdens of the 'costs of downturns and surges in economic activity' onto the backs of working class and poor people of color."[31] Taking place in both urban and rural areas of the United States, Gilmore contends that "people have lost the ability to keep their individual selves, their households, and their communities together with adequate income, clean water, reasonable air, reliable shelter, and transportation and communication infrastructure."[32]

Surely, Mexican origin peoples of El Paso fit this model of state sanctioned abandonment. Although El Paso is considered an urban city, it is unique in its profile as a border town. Economically, El Paso has been slow since the early twentieth century.[33] Divestment in El Paso has manifested in decreasing tax revenues, progressively lowering federal funding for municipal projects, and expanding the carceral apparatus with austerity measures in the face of much needed social service projects. Capitalist and neoliberal state reorganization is a racialization process, a social practice of racializing and criminalizing Mexican origin people.

In conjunction with the shrinking of welfare and social services, state and federal funding in Texas is allocated in ways that are unclear or difficult to follow and that occur behind closed doors and without community input/approval. Looking at the El Paso County FY2021 Adopted

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[31] Benson, Sara M. *The Prison of Democracy: Race, Leavenworth, and the Culture of Law*. , 2019. Print.; Gilmore, Ruth W. *Golden Gulag: Prisons, Surplus, Crisis, and Opposition in Globalizing California*. , 2007. Print.

[32]Intercepted. "Intercepted Podcast: Ruth Wilson Gilmore on Abolition." *The Intercept*, The Intercept, 10 June 2020, https://theintercept.com/2020/06/10/ruth-wilson-gilmore-makes-the-case-for-abolition/.

[33] In the mid nineteenth century El Paso's economy relied heavily on agriculture such as wheat, corn, barley and livestock like sheep, cows, and cattle. By the late nineteenth century, El Paso was recognized as an important international transportation hub and four railroads were built through the county.
Montejano, David. *Anglos and Mexicans in the Making of Texas, 1836-1986*. 1st ed., University of Texas Press, 1987.; Foley, Neil. *The White Scourge : Mexicans, Blacks, and Poor Whites in Texas Cotton Culture*. University of California Press, 1997.

Budget book, there are five different areas where funding is allocated: General Fund ($391,607,020), Special Revenue ($51,394,122), Debt Services ($19,807,243), Capital Projects ($8,336, 849) and Enterprise Funds ($4,039,744). The way the budgets are broken down in the report can make it difficult at times to differentiate which area is strictly funding for policing versus other state-sanctioned projects. For example, special revenue ranges from county attorney commissions to the child abuse prevention fund and "commissary inmate profit."[34] The general fund category includes items such as "ambulance service, animal control, constable precincts, district attorney, and juvenile probation detainee gf."[35] Debt Services includes "solid waste enterprise fund, refund bonds, and solid waste funds."[36] Capital Projects includes "army reserve remodels, capital projects and courthouse improvements."[37] Enterprise Funds include "water projects, solid waste funds, and other water systems."[38] From what can be deciphered from the report, it looks like "debt services" and "enterprise funds" are the two categories out of the five that do not in some way contribute to policing and incarceration "services." As unclear as this is, what is clear is that funding for policing, incarceration, and penal approaches are heavily prioritized.

[34] *El Paso County, Texas 2022 - Epcounty.com*. (n.d.). Retrieved May 5, 2022, from https://www.epcounty.com/budget/documents/FY2022-Adopted-Budget-Book%201%20&%202.pdf .(page 24)
[35] Ibid.
[36] Ibid.
[37] Ibid.
[38] Ibid.

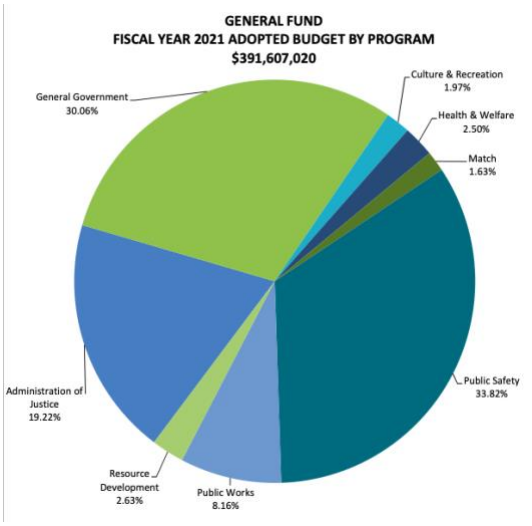

FIG 1.3 General Fund for Fiscal Year 2021

The budget for Administration of Justice was $73,784,166 in 2020 and was raised to $75,274,399 for the 2021 year. The budget for Public Safety was $131,275,874 for 2020 and raised to $132,443,549 for 2021. By taking a quick look at the pie chart for the 2021 budget, it is clear that there is a disproportionate amount of funding going toward policing. Whether disguised as public safety, general government, or administration of justice, the three categories require 83.08 percent of the county's budget. Health and welfare are a meager 2.5 percent of their budget.

In the context of organized abandonment, the murder of Chrstine Venegas is a case in point that underscores how the racial criminalization of Mexican origin people combined with the shrinking welfare state and ballooning warfare state leads to death.[39] As average food subsidies ("food stamps") in El Paso are about $200 for a single person and roughly $600 for a family with children, Venegas, a Mexican origin woman, was rightfully frustrated with the

[39] Gilmore, Ruth Wilson. "Globalisation and US Prison Growth: From Military Keynesianism to Post-Keynesian Militarism." Race & Class, vol. 40, no. 2–3, Mar. 1999, pp. 171–188, doi:10.1177/030639689904000212.

shrinking welfare state and the rising cost of living.[40] On July 3rd, 2019, Venegas went to the Texas Health and Human Services office and allegedly sparked an argument with social workers over food stamps. El Paso SWAT responded to the call and eventually shot her down after she was said to have pulled out a pellet gun and pointed it at a caseworker, security guard, and police. The El Paso Police Department ran an investigation and determined that the weapon in question was a "CO2 cartridge pellet bearing a virtually indistinguishable resemblance to a semi-automatic handgun."[41] Unsurprisingly, the identity of the officer who shot and killed Venegas has not been released. They were placed on administrative leave and there was never any officer nor departmental accountability. This instance of premature death highlights the material consequences that prevail in the face of organized abandonment as a dehumanization process and cornerstone of racialization. A perfect storm of conditions–a shrinking welfare state, a ballooning police state, and El Paso as a carceral community–laid the foundation for Venegas's targeted premature death. Christine Venegas should still be alive.

TARGETED INCARCERATION

The intentional erasure of Mexican origin people as Indigenous/Mexican and the relentless reassertion that Mexican origin people are white are both rooted in white supremacy and settler colonialism as state-building projects.[42] Mexican origin people's racial/ethnic identity

[40] *Snap food benefits*. Texas Health and Human Services. (n.d.). Retrieved May 6, 2022, from https://www.hhs.texas.gov/services/food/snap-food-benefits

[41] Martinez, A. (2019, July 4). *Woman fatally shot in Swat standoff at Health Office had pellet gun, El Paso police say*. El Paso Times. Retrieved May 5, 2022, from http://www.elpasotimes.com/story/news/crime/2019/07/04/woman-who-pointed-pellet-gun-el-paso-police-officers-fatally-shot-argued-over-food-stamps-benefit/1651429001/

[42] The discussion/debate regarding the Indigeneity of Mexican origin people is complex and controversial. This dissertation does not get into the specifics regarding this delicate debate, rather I am focused on highlighting how the "racial and ethnic" makeup of Mexican origin people presents challenges in documenting our incarceration statistics especially under a white supremacist regime like the United States.

has shifted many times and typically from outside ideological forces. First, Spanish conquistadores sought to Hispanicize various Native populations across North America in order to take control of capital and land–this included Mexican origin peoples and as a result racial/ethnic hierarchies were born. These racial/ethnic hierarchies were broken down to phenotypic markers. Many Mexican origin peoples were classified as "mestizos" as a result of Spanish colonization and while they were afforded many privileges because of this classification, their marking as "mixed" would present many challenges as the United States became a nation-state. Mexican origin peoples becoming mestizos was a literal and ideological Europeanization of the population. Later, during Anglo-American colonization Mexican origin peoples were first racialized/criminalized as a "mongrel" race but once the Mexican-American war ended, there was a sudden shift to whiten the Mexican population that would remain in the U.S. Mexicans were first classified as "white" by law and then the target for a series of Americanization campaigns.[43] Presently, Mexican origin people are categorized as "Latinos" and "Hispanics." These classifications are both moves to white wash Mexican origin people and erase individual/collective knowledge of Mexican Indigenous history. This dissertation does not categorize Mexican origin people as Hispanic or Latino. The concept of targeted incarceration implies what mainstream prison/police reformers call mass incarceration. Targeted incarceration is more specific in that it considers that certain communities are *the* target of policing and incarceration. According to the Prison Policy Initiative (PPI) in 2010, El Paso County's population was estimated to be 800,647 and its "Latino" population was 658,134, and 4,045 of

[43] Haney-López, Ian. *White by Law the Legal Construction of Race*. Rev. and updated, 10th anniversary ed. New York: New York University Press, 2006. Print.

them were incarcerated.[44] This means Latinos were overrepresented by only 0.76 percent. However, PPI's data does not specify which detention facilities are included in this data. For example, it is not clear that US Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) facilities and youth camp facilities are included in these numbers.

While generally El Paso is framed as one of the safest cities to live in the United States with lower rates of incarceration compared to other cities in Texas, there remains a wider impact of neglect influenced by the militarization of the border, by deportation, and by drug and alcohol abuse.[45] Further, many of the Mexican / Chicano men who become incarcerated in the county do not remain there, as El Paso does not have a long-term prison and many of these men are shipped to other cities or states and several are deported. There is a gap in scholarship on incarceration rates and the geography of El Paso. The way in which incarceration data is currently presented frames El Paso as incarcerating relatively low numbers of Mexican origin people compared to other cities in Texas. While this may in part be true since people do not technically remain incarcerated in El Paso jails/detention centers, the data fails to address a larger geopolitical carceral issue that follows historical patterns of physically removing Mexican origin people from the Rio Grande Valley and shipping them off elsewhere.[46]

All the oral history participants in this dissertation confirm this process as each family member who experienced incarceration was either deported and/or served time in a penitentiary outside of the El Paso County system. This is certainly an area in need of further critical

[44] For the most up to date data for census and incarceration rates by race breakdown from 2010 see Initiative, P. P. (n.d.). *County racial/ethnic overrepresenation*. County racial/ethnic overrepresenation | Prison Policy Initiative. Retrieved May 5, 2022, from http://www.prisonpolicy.org/racialgeography/counties.html
[45] Durán, Robert. "Dissertation Rough Draft." Received by Marlene Mercado, 10 March 2022.
[46] Tórrez, Robert J. *Myth of the Hanging Tree : Stories of Crime and Punishment in Territorial New Mexico*. University of New Mexico Press, 2008

examination.[47] Further, in the late 1980s and early 1990s, several "criminals" were deported to Ciudad Juarez on such a massive scale that many of them were recruited into cartels. This historical process contributed to increases in violent crime in Ciudad Juarez, especially after NAFTA, as underground and informal economies dominated the region and continue to do so today.[48] Additionally, the racial and ethnic complexities of how Mexican origin people are documented in the system also presents many difficulties when creating and reviewing incarceration statistics. There are many Mexican origin people who are categorized as white in the official documents and this has undeniably led to skewed statistics.[49]

El Paso County strategically invests in policing, securitization, and border-making processes by reporting a low monetary investment and budget for county policing to secure additional funding via federal agencies such as the US Border Patrol, US Bureau of Alcohol Tobacco Firearms and Explosives, the FBI, the constable, SWAT, the GANG unit, the NARC unit, ICE, etc. El Paso County, which has a lower policing budget, manages to detain/incarcerate more people than Austin and Dallas, two of the largest, most populated cities in Texas. This is made possible because of federal funding that is allocated in addition to local policing budgets.[50] For example, Austin has a jail detention rate of 195 per 100,000 county residents and a pretrial detention rate of 143 per 100,000. Dallas has a jail detention rate of 198 per 100,000 and a pretrial detention rate of 152 per 100,000. Austin's policing budget is $491,265,529 and Dallas's

[47] Geographer Ruth Wlson Gilmore brilliantly documented the political economy of California and the forced migration of criminalized people from urban to rural locations. I suspect a similar process takes place in Texas and this is an area for future research. Gilmore, Ruth Wilson. *Golden Gulag : Prisons, Surplus, Crisis, and Opposition in Globalizing California*. University of California Press, 2007.

[48] Slack, Jeremy. *Deported to Death : How Drug Violence Is Changing Migration on the US-Mexico Border*. University of California Press, 2019, https://doi.org/10.1525/9780520969711.

[49] Rodriguez, Clara E. *Changing Race : Latinos, the Census, and the History of Ethnicity in the United States*. New York University Press, 2000.

[50] Initiative, Prison Policy. "Jail Incarceration Rates Vary Widely, but Inexplicably, across U.S. Cities." *Prison Policy Initiative*, https://www.prisonpolicy.org/blog/2021/05/04/city-jail-rates/.

policing budget is $545,974,490. El Paso's policing budget sits at $157,607,718 and their pretrial detention rate is 177 per 100,000. By reporting a low monetary investment locally, El Paso County can continue garnering moral and financial support to fund its growing carceral apparatus with less pushback.

FRAMING

While discourse, scholarship, and indeed lived racial criminalization has impacted Mexican and other racialized Brown men in the geopolitical space of the Southwest US, I argue that this type of racial criminalization would not have been possible without the production of women of color as particular "criminals" in a process that fuels the transnational prison-industrial complex. Drawing from Julia Sudbury's edited collection *Global Lockdown: Race, Gender, and the Prison Industrial Complex,* I employ a transnational feminist prison studies framework to unpack the carceral regime of the Southwest and how its penal responses are shaped by "global capitalism, dominant and subordinate patriarchies, and neocolonial racialized ideologies."[51] This lens of analysis allows women of color, and in this case Chicana/xs, to be centered in discussions of the Southwest carceral regime. By centering Chicana/xs in this discussion, we can see how they are not only crucial to the functioning of a national and global carceral regime but also how non-imprisoned Chicana/xs enter the discussion as crucial labor and careworkers.

Shifting from a national to a global feminist lens allows new ways of analyzing gender and carcerality–it breaks open the borders that have been placed, perhaps unintentionally, around discussions of prisons, racialized communities, and gender. Rather than limiting gender to

[51] Sudbury, Julia. *Global Lockdown: Gender, Race and the Rise of the Prison Industrial Complex Around the World.* , 2014. Print.

discussions in terms of women, non-binary, and trans peoples' incarceration, a transnational feminist prison studies framework considers more complex forms of capitalism, patriarchy, and racialization–all crucial to unpacking the nuances of the global prison industrial complex. By looking at Chicana/xs through the global prison industrial complex framework, I take into account the serious role they play in the fueling, maintaining, and functioning of the carceral regime in the Southwest. Without their bodies–inside of a cell, deported, strangled in the borderlands desert, working in a factory, or running the household–and without their labor, the Southwest and perhaps much of the US prison system would not be able to operate to the extent it currently does.

Similar to how Andrea Smith in *Conquest: Sexual Violence and American Indian Genocide* argues that sexual violence perpetrated by the state, society, and individual against Indigenous women in the Americas was central to the theft of Native land, the prison-industrial complex is fueled by criminalizing the survival strategies of women of color and third world women. For example, Chicana/xs and Mexicanas in the borderlands region of the Southwest often engage in underground economic activities such as sex work, acting as drug mules, boosting, or selling food stamps for cash, and are involved in and criminalized for drug use, for being part of "gangs," and for their roles as mothers.[52] Their engagement in underground economies is in part because of the failure of advanced racial capitalism, especially in the borderland region, and in part because some of these customs are passed down from one generation to the next. This is not to suggest that Mexican origin people are inherently

[52] Drug mules are people who cross illicit drugs across borders. Boosting is when someone steals a large amount of merchandise from a store and sets up a small shop in their home or out of their car. Chicana/xs and Mexicanas experience policing of their motherhood by the state, see Katherine Maldonado "Gang-Affiliated Chicana Teen Momma Against Systemic Violence: A Testimonio Challenging Dominant Discourse Through Academic Bravery." See also Juanita Díaz-Cotto "Latinas and the War on Drugs in the United States, Latin America, and Europe."

"criminal." Rather, it is to highlight how survival strategies, in the spirit of Rasquache culture, for Mexican origin peoples, are passed down to the next generation.[53] Rasquache is "the politics of making do, of cobbling together makeshift solutions using whatever's at hand, more often than not the cast-off junk of the conspicuously consuming upper classes." This politics emerged because the Mexican community has continuously experienced organized state abandonment and targeted incarceration; therefore, if we are to find shelter and feed ourselves, we must get creative. Ybarra-Frausto describes Rasquachismo as an attitude, a taste, a consciousness seeking to subvert, a visceral response to lived reality, a view from *los de abajo* and an underclass perspective (85). While the "politics of making do" and the "cobbling of things" together is not at face value criminalized, the people who are or act rasquache are racialized/criminalized. For example, underclass communities are those which are highly policed and under intense surveillance. These same communities are those which are typically forced into resourcefulness in order to *hacer rendir las cosas.*

Chicana/xs and Mexicanas were criminalized as a result of their refusal to submit to patriarchal state powers, whether from the newly formed US nation-state or the crumbling early twentieth century Mexican government.[54] Border scholars have delineated the criminalization of Mexican male revolutionaries and its connection to "Mexican bandits" and eventually pachucos and cholos.[55] Historians and border scholars have highlighted the image of women who fought in

[53] Dery, Mark (2015) Rasquache Futurismos, Review: Literature and Arts of the Americas, 48:1, 3-5, DOI: 10.1080/08905762.2015.1020694; Ybarra-Frausto, Tomás "Rasquachismo: A Chicano Sensibility." Griswold del Castillo 155-62.

[54] Ramirez, Catherine S. "Saying "Nothin"': Pachucas and the Languages of Resistance." *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies*, vol. 27 no. 3, 2006, p. 1-33. *Project MUSE* muse.jhu.edu/article/209989.; Glenn, E. N. (2015). Glenn, Evelyn Nakano. "Settler Colonialism as Structure: A Framework for Comparative Studies of U.S. Race and Gender Formation." *Sociology of race and ethnicity (Thousand Oaks, Calif.)* 1.1 (2015): 52–72. Web.

[55] Mirandé, Alfredo. *Gringo Injustice: Insider Perspectives on Police, Gangs, and Law*. New York: Routledge, Taylor et Francis Group, 2020. Print.; Vigil, James Diego. "Contents". *Barrio Gangs: Street Life and Identity in Southern California*, New York, USA: University of Texas Press, 2021, pp. vii-viii. https://doi.org/10.7560/776135-toc.; Cummings, Laura L. "Cloth-Wrapped People, Trouble, and Power: Pachuco Culture in the Greater Southwest."

the Mexican revolution as shifting over time from that of the submissive follower into a promiscuous fighter.[56] Something else to consider is the way Mexicanas and Chicana/xs were simultaneously hypersexualized, criminalized, and erased at the same time. Las Adelitas, formerly referred to as Las Soldaderas, were young teen girls and women of various ethnicities who fought on both sides of the Mexican Revolution. They often joined the military, acted as nurses on the front lines, cared for those wounded in action, and engaged in combat when needed. The story of the women involved in the Mexican Revolution is often forgotten and when remembered, it is typically through a hypersexual lens. Perhaps women of this historical moment are depicted through these lenses to erase the fact that they were, and still are, willing and capable of bearing arms and engaging in combat. However, the potential fear of Mexicanas and Chicana/xs resistance did inform US criminalization processes. This can be seen through examples such as the story of Modesta Avila.[57]

Journal of the Southwest, vol. 45, no. 3, 2003, pp. 329–48, http://www.jstor.org/stable/40170329. Accessed 7 Apr. 2022.

[56] Fernández, Delia (2009) "From Soldadera to Adelita: The Depiction of Women in the Mexican Revolution," McNair Scholars Journal: Vol. 13: Iss. 1, Article 6.

[57] Modesta Avila was "a twenty-two-year-old Mexican "American" woman who was tried, convicted, and imprisoned for stringing her clotheslines and laying other obstructions across the California Central Railroad tracks that crosse the three-acre San Juan Capistrano property she claimed as her own" (37). Ben Olguín explains in his book *La Pinta: Chicana/o Prisoner Literature, Culture, and Politics* how Modesta was a threat because she was a "bilingual, bicultural, mixed-race, lower-class single woman who became famous for daring to challenge" the status quo, fight for herself and she embodied a recent past that threatened to reassert itself in the present – a colonialist fear (43).

FIG 1.4 (Adela Velarde Pérez)[58]

This dissertation is not centered on Chicana/xs who are currently or formerly incarcerated but rather highlights the way that primarily non-imprisoned Chicana/xs experience the slow violence endemic to incarceration through their social reproductive labor. Despite this focus, it is still important to make visible the various subject positions that Chicana/xs occupy in relation to the carceral regime in the Southwest. One oral history participant, Marisol, for example, shared more than once the theme of people dying in pieces. As I continued researching, writing, living, experiencing, and thinking, I realized that to be a systems-impacted Chicana from a carceral community like the Southwest is to also die in pieces. The slow violence of police raids, drug addiction, houselessness, hunger, domestic violence, surveillance, hyper-vigilance–these encounters in our everyday lives–chips away at our spirits, hearts, and souls.

There are many ways that Chicana/xs and Mexicanas perform social reproductive labor under racial and carceral capitalism in the Southwest.[59] For example, the daily invisible labor without pay required of Mexican origin women within the household such as preparing breakfast, laundry, cleaning, education, and everything outside of the household and in the "public" that aids in the creation of her as a "laboring" subject. Additionally, non-imprisoned Chicana/xs and Mexicanas experience an additional set of social reproductive labors required to support currently and formerly incarcerated family members.

[58] *Temas más buscados*. Mediateca INAH | El repositorio digital de acceso abierto del Instituto Nacional de Antropologia e Historia de México. (n.d.). Retrieved May 5, 2022, from https://mediateca.inah.gob.mx/islandora_74/

[59] Robinson, Cedric J. *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition*. , 2021. Print.; Barrera, Mario. *Race and Class in the Southwest: A Theory of Racial Inequality*. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2002. Print.; Wang, Jackie. *Carceral Capitalism*. Cambridge: Semiotexte/Smart Art, 2018. Print.

To help map out the spaces that Chicana/xs occupy in relation to men and the prison-industrial complex, I have outlined an exercise in the following sentences: if you're able to, cup your hands together at the palms and face them up toward the sky–the way you do when you're cupping water from a faucet–and you'll notice that the backside of both of your palms naturally lean downward. Now, picture Chicana/xs on the left and right side of the back of both palms where weight is pushing down on them. On the left, Chicana/xs experience the racial criminalization needed to fuel the prison-industrial complex and this is exacerbated in the borderland region.[60] On the right side, Chicana/xs occupy the position of perpetual gendered/social reproduction and labor required to keep Mexican origin and Chicana/o/x communities intact. Now, in the middle between your cupped palms are cis-gendered Mexican origin / Chicano men who experience the primarily destructive fire of the prison industrial complex by being targeted for incarceration and premature death, yet nevertheless, are coddled, cared for, and supported by the women and non-binary people in their community time and time again.

One of the keys to understanding all aspects of Mexican/Chicanx culture and history is to not get trapped in dichotomous thinking. As demonstrated by the above example, the subject position that all Mexican origin people occupy is a both/and position By this I mean that Mexican/Chicano men are both being targeted for incarceration and premature death *and* being coddled and cared for by the women in their communities at the same time. Mexicana / Chicana /xs are both racially criminalized to fuel the prison-industrial complex *and* relegated to the role of caretakers. Further, Mexicana / Chicana/xs both critique patriarchy / machismo in their communities *and* often manage to perpetuate these ideologies themselves. This nuance and

[60] Escobar, Martha D. *Captivity Beyond Prisons: Criminalization Experiences of Latina (im)migrants*. , 2016. Print.

complexity arise from our double colonization, from the carceral regime, from patriarchy /machismo, from global / racial capitalism, and from racial criminalization.[61] Robert Durán details the double colonial history that the Southwest region of what is now the United States entailed specifically as it relates to a Mexican racialized group experience. He explains how Spanish colonizers spread Catholicism, focused on attaining precious resources and encountered a variety of pueblo and nomadic Native Americans as they moved throughout the region. However, Hispano society remained weak during the Spanish colonial era as Native resistance was strong and control of the land was largely still in the hands of Native populations, including Mexicans. Mexico was under Spanish rule from 1521 until 1821. Mexico's independence was short lived because by 1846, they would be at war with the United States and consequently lose roughly fifty-five percent of its land to the US. The Mexican-American war and consequent land grab was a defining moment in white, Anglo-Saxon supremacy–the second stage of colonization that Mexicans experienced. Both Spanish and Anglo colonization has had lasting effects on Mexican origin people in Mexico and the United States alike. These complexities, nuances, and intersections are precisely why Sudbury's transnational feminist prison studies framework is so critical to my scholarship. Through a transnational feminist studies framework, I draw out the many factors that contribute to the material conditions of the Mexican origin / Chicana/o/x community and the way these factors intersect.

PREMATURE DEATH

[61] Gómez, Laura E. *Manifest Destinies : The Making of the Mexican American Race*. NYU Press, 2007. Print.; Durán, Robert J. "ONE. The Context for the Origination of Gangs: Double Colonization." *The Gang Paradox*. Columbia University Press, 2018. 23-39.

As part of a landscape of premature death, social and welfare services, as mentioned above, have been shrinking over the last forty to fifty years and the state does not tangibly support communities in the ways that they need (with shelter, health care, livable wages, etc.).[62] As social and welfare services shrink, "what's risen up in the crevices of this cracked foundation of security has been policing and prison."[63] Law enforcement's purpose has thus become focused on carrying out *violence work.*[64] Law enforcement carries out the violence that is required to maintain the status quo: criminally racialized hierarchies, borders of gender and sexuality, boundaries in cities, communities, borders, nations. Those who dare to threaten these various physical and imagined boundaries are penalized with brutalization and premature death. Because of the violence work that has been and continues to be carried out by various law enforcement entities across the United States, particularly in the Southwest, there has been intensification of targeted incarceration and premature death for Mexican origin people.[65]

As a result, Mexican origin women and Chicana/xs have had to shoulder the burden of responsibility in caring for loved ones and have become the informal reentry system for their loved ones–whether supporting them through their incarceration, in the transition back into society, in the aftermath of police harassment/brutality as a source of emotional support, or in the

[62] Ruth Wilson Gilmore defines racism as "the state-sanctioned or extralegal production and exploitation of group-differentiated vulnerability to premature death."

[63] Intercepted. "Intercepted Podcast: Ruth Wilson Gilmore on Abolition." *The Intercept*, The Intercept, 10 June 2020, https://theintercept.com/2020/06/10/ruth-wilson-gilmore-makes-the-case-for-abolition/.

[64] Seigel, Micol. *Violence Work : State Power and the Limits of Police*. Duke University Press, 2018.

[65] According to Mapping Police Violence, an online public archival database, in 2013 one-hundred and sixty-nine "Hispanics" were murdered by police whereas in 2020 two-hundred and one "Hispanics" were killed. A separate online public archive, Fatal Encounters, reported two-hundred and twelve deaths of "Hispanics/Latinos" in 2020 however their website specifies that it "documents non-police deaths that occur when police are present or precipitated by police action or presence." Fatal Encounters reported fifty-seven deaths of "Hispanics/Latinos" in 2000 and three-hundred and thirteen in 2013. The racial/ethnic documentation of Mexican origin people presents many challenges in reporting their death/murder as discussed earlier. It is clear that the number of "Hispanics/Latinos" overall has increased in the last twenty years.

painful experiences of having to bury our loved ones prematurely.[66] Some of these geopolitical and cultural aspects are distinct to Mexican origin women and Chicana/xs, even as other aspects are also experienced by other women of color in the United States, especially Native and Black women.[67]

CAREWORK

Carework is the term I use to describe the labor that Mexican origin women and Chicana/xs perform for their currently/previously incarcerated loved ones and those who have been subjected to premature death. My conception of carework includes the financial, emotional, psychological, spiritual, and physical forms of labor that Mexican origin women carry out to support their currently/formerly incarcerated loved ones. My dissertation highlights Mexican origin women and Chicana/xs who are from or currently reside in the Rio Grande borderland region–this includes southwest Texas and Northern Mexico. Because Mexican origin people / Chicana/o/xs are not homogenous and are the largest de-tribalized, de-territorialized Indigenous peoples in North America, it is impossible and ill-advised to generalize the community. Each of the oral history participants in this dissertation has their own unique ancestral lineage and relationship to their identity as Mexican origin. They identify themselves differently as well. Some identify as Mexican American, while others identify as Chicana or Mexicana. Further, one oral history participant mentioned that she identifies differently depending on who asks and her

[66] The Essie Justice Group formed in Oakland, CA names women as the informal re-entry system in the United States, as they provide many forms of support to their loved ones after they have been released from prison. I build off the work and report of the Essie Justice Group. Gina Clayton, Endria Richardson, Lily Mandlin, and Brittany Farr, PhD. Because She's Powerful: The Political Isolation and Resistance of Women with Incarcerated Loved Ones. Los Angeles and Oakland, CA: Essie Justice Group, 2018; Glenn, Evelyn Nakano. *Forced to Care : Coercion and Caregiving in America*. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2010. Print.

[67] Mendieta, Eduardo. "Plantations, Ghettos, Prisons: US Racial Geographies: Special Section." *Philosophy and Geography*, vol. 7, no. 1, Taylor and Francis Ltd, 2004, pp. 43–59, https://doi.org/10.1080/1090377042000196010.

assumption of their knowledge base of Mexican history, thus highlighting the contextual, specific nature of identity. Nonetheless, they are of Mexican origin, come from the Rio Grande region, and have experienced life as carceral collateral.[68]

To experience life as carceral collateral means that we as Chicana/xs and Mexicanas are dealing with multiple aspects of the carceral system/the prison industrial complex. Much of the scholarship on pre, current, and post-incarceration rightfully centers the people navigating the carceral system directly. What is not often discussed are the family members and community members behind the scenes who are also dealing with these systems. As mothers, sisters, tias, abuelas, primas, and partners, Chicana/xs / Mexicanas are there during the pre-incarceration experiences. It is in our homes that police raids and arrests take place. It is the mothers and (other)mothers who must deal with and carry the familia after these traumatic raids.[69] It is the sisters and tias who come together to raise thousands of dollars for bail money. It is the abuelas who hold down the household while their daughters and granddaughters drive to the annex, jail, or prison to put money on their loved ones' books because, for many reasons, many of them cannot add money from their phone or computers. In the same way that we hear it takes a village to raise children, it often takes a village of Chicanas/Mexicanas to carry their incarcerated loved ones. Occasionally, there is a lonesome mujer who is carrying one or several family members through the incarceration system. One of the oral history participants of this study, Marisol, gives her own understanding and formulation of carework:

> Oh, um, I guess just like having like a family member incarcerated who you're having to like make decisions around based on your own or make decisions about your life based on that situation. Like having to make sacrifices or whatever to like help a loved one navigate being incarcerated or and all the consequences of that.

[68] While there are many "re-entry" programs focused on the Rio Grande Valley, El Paso is often not included in this programming.

[69] Gamez, Grace. "Fierce Mamas Rising: Navigating the Terrain of Motherhood as Formerly Incarcerated or Convicted Women." (2019): 77-93. Print.

Through organized abandonment and targeted incarceration, Mexican origin peoples of the Rio Grande region are set up for failure. There are some who make it out of El Paso and can relocate and lead "successful" lives but there are just as many people who stay in El Paso, never able to escape the many traps set up. There are also those who are able to leave the region and become "successful," but they are still connected to their families back home and by extension forced to deal with the system–in some ways still entrapped by it.

CHAPTER OUTLINES

Chapter One, "Chicana/x Carework: The Social and Cultural Reproduction of Chicana/o/x Communities in the Carceral Southwest," looks at pre and carceral experiences of Chicana/o/x families–not just the individuals who become incarcerated but also those impacted by their incarceration. I take a close look at the labor involved in caring for formerly / currently incarcerated loved ones within the Chicana/o/x community. Further, I examine the labor involved in reproducing community and the ways that this labor is raced, gendered, and classed in ways that are specific to the Chicana/o/x community and the geopolitical space of the southwest. The last component of chapter one seeks to complicate the invisible labor and carework of Chicana/xs even as it is fundamental to the functioning of the family and carceral apparatus alike.

Chapter Two, "Invisibilized, Raced, Classed and Gendered Labor: Carework and Chicana/xs as the Informal Reentry System," looks at post-incarceration and the premature death of members in Southwest Chicana/o/x communities. Carework in this chapter is broken into three sections. The first section looks at the labor expected/required in supporting loved ones upon release from incarceration. The second section examines what happens when non-

imprisoned Chicana/xs "fail" to successfully support their formerly incarcerated loved ones in the re-entry process–losing them to premature death or re-incarceration. The last section outlines how non-imprisoned Chicana/xs attempt healing in the face of "failure," trauma, and deep pain.

Chapter Three, "Fighting for Abolition: Contradictions of Carceral Politics," examines Chicana/xs as conceptual borderlands in relation to the contradictory ways they exist within the carceral continuum. I first discuss the polarized debates between pro law enforcement and abolitionists and how this in turn has created limited opportunities for nuanced discussions on the contradictions that exist between the two polarized worlds–a place in which Chicana/xs exist. Then I examine how Chicana/xs navigate the delicate position between the prison and their communities, as carceral brokers, and how this liminal positionality sets the stage for self-sacrificial tendencies and the potential internalization of material and ideological carceral logics.

Chapter Four, "How Do You Envision Abolition When You're Dying in Pieces?" is an auto-ethnographic, testimonio and photo elicitation of my own embodied and lived experiences as a Chicana from the borderlands region of El Paso, Texas, who has lived and continues to live life as carceral collateral. I discuss my positionality as moving beyond insider / outsider debates and describe my proximity to my research "subjects" as we are one and the same. The chapter discusses pre-incarceration, incarceration, and post-incarceration experiences and ends with a discussion of tattooing as Chicana/x archiving and ceremony.

The conclusion, "Coyolxauhqui: Chicana/xs are 'The Healing of the Wound," engages the theoretical contributions of the late Gloria Anzaldúa through her framing of the Coyolxauhqui imperative alongside the theoretical contributions of my participants and interlocutors to think through healing as an abolitionist necessity. I end with a call to action for

Chicana/xs and other women/non binary/trans people of color to take healing as an imperative to abolition.

METHODS

The research questions that drove my scholarship were organized around the social and cultural reproduction of the Chicana/o/x community in carceral contexts. How does the incarceration of a loved one impact Chicana/xs? What does the work of keeping an incarcerated loved one alive look like? Ultimately, I decided to work with Chicana/xs and Mexicanas in the borderland region to collect oral histories and testimonios that center their voices and embodied experiences.

I conducted a regional study because of the carceral context of the Southwest border region of the El Paso / Ciudad Juárez border area. I worked with self-identifying Chicana/xs and Mexicanas who range in age from 30 to 64 years. Participants self-identified as women and/or non-binary, working-class, and largely employed with only a few unemployed. One participant identified as disabled and only one of them completed an undergraduate degree.

Originally, I aimed to conduct oral histories with ten self-identifying Chicana/xs and Mexicanas in the borderland region including El Paso / Ciudad Juárez as well as parts of New Mexico. After working with four oral history participants, I realized that I would not be able to do these women's stories justice if I continued conducting interviews. Their testimonios are so rich, complex, and deep. I decided it would be best to build from the testimonios of these four women to center their voices, and their lived and embodied experiences.

By employing the method of oral history, I engaged in documenting and creating an unconventional *herstory* of Mexican origin women, a counter-archive inspired by work like

Emma Pérez's *The Decolonial Imaginary: Writing Chicanas into History*. In addition to the oral histories, I compiled cultural artifacts from participants, which became another archive. In the absence of traditional archives, I asked myself how the racially criminalized segment of Mexican origin peoples in the Southwest transmitted knowledge. Cultural artifacts such as photographs, rosarios, letters from incarcerated familia, and prison paños form the material portion of the archive, from which I write and analyze. These material objects (cultural artifacts) and social practices (oral histories) form the hybrid archive that I work with. Not only is this hybrid archive missing from traditional archives, but it also resists documentation–that is, these materials and practices can primarily only be found within the community itself.[70] Further, the forms of carework that the Chicana/xs in this dissertation engage in are not "proper" archival documents. That is, traditional archives do not document the labor that is expected/required from non-imprisoned systems impacted Chicana/xs. This is another reason I was moved to cultivate an archive of cultural artifacts that came directly from the participants and myself. These cultural artifacts illuminate the emotional, psychological, physical, and other forms of carework and trauma that Chicana/xs navigate in carceral contexts.

There is a norm of chisme (gossip) amongst Mexican origin peoples but in our exchanges of chisme, it goes beyond gossiping about other people and is often a space of deep knowing, acknowledging, and sharing. Often these exchanges happen in person en la mesa over some morning cafecito after a night of drinking tequila to corridos but during COVID times some of these exchanges had to change their shape into digital forms. Facetime, Zoom calls, and text

[70] DERRIDA, JACQUES. *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*. Place of publication not identified: UNIV OF CHICAGO Press, 2017. Print.; Stoler, Ann Laura. "Colonial Archives and the Arts of Governance." *Archival Science*, vol. 2, no. 1, Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2002, pp. 87–109, https://doi.org/10.1007/BF02435632.; Mbembe, Achille. "The Power of the Archive and Its Limits." (2002): 19-27. Print.; Cvetkovich, Ann. *An Archive of Feelings: Trauma, Sexuality, and Lesbian Public Cultures*. Durham, N.C: Duke University Press, 2019. Print.

messages also facilitated chisme for this dissertation. I engage chisme as a form of *Sacred Plática* which Irene Lara theorized as the "spaces between our bodies, minds, and spirits [that] "shrink with intimacy" and create a "bodymindspirit" borderlands that strengthens our mothering-daughtering relationships with ourselves and one another, birthing *cuarandera-guerrera* decolonial feminist conocimientos along the way."[71] Through *chisme* and *Sacred Plática*, the oral history participants collectively shaped this dissertation. Their *bodymindspirit* borderlands embodied and lived experiences birthed their own decolonial feminist conocimientos that they carry with themselves and share with their families and those they encounter daily.[72]

THEORY

As an interdisciplinary historical materialist feminist Cultural Studies scholar, I engage the fields of Chicana/o/x Studies, Critical Carceral Studies, and Cultural Studies to engage understudied and undertheorized Chicana/x underclass agency, with the goal of centering the lived and embodied experiences of Chicana/xs and taking healing as imperative to abolitionist struggle. My dissertation, *Chicana/x Carework: Invisible Feminized Labor, Chicana/x Carceral Community, and the Variegated Nature of Feminist Agency in Carceral Contexts*, contributes to the myriad performances of decolonial feminist praxis within Chicana/o/x Studies by confronting and seeking to invert and ultimately dismantle traditional heteropatriarchal and capitalist systems of thought, and by writing about subaltern populations. By examining the myriad and indeed ideologically vexing negotiations of patriarchy and power by Chicana/x heads of households in

[71] Anzaldúa, Gloria. *Borderlands = La Frontera: The New Mestiza*. San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 2007. Print.; Lara, Irene. "Abrazos De Conocimiento Across the Generations: Chicana Mothering and Daughtering in the Borderlands." (2019): 223-242. Print.

[72] *Spilling the tea on chisme storytelling as resistance ... - isu writing*. (n.d.). Retrieved May 6, 2022, from http://isuwriting.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Trujillo-10.2.pdf.; Ruiz, A. Dissonant divas in Chicana music: The limits of la onda *by* Deborah R. Vargas. *Lat Stud* 12, 154–156 (2014). https://doi.org/10.1057/lst.2014.14

families where male figures are incarcerated, I participate in the larger effort to rewrite Chicana/xs into history in a way that acknowledges their position as subjects with agency who both transform societal and political structures, while sometimes inadvertently reproducing oppressive strategies and power relations. My dissertation involves case studies in the Southwest border region, and draws upon feminist Marxist theorists such as Silvia Federici, the Chicana M(other)work Collective, and sociologist Arlie Russell Hochschild.[73]

There is a growing body of scholarship on the impacts of incarceration on communities and families, particularly those who are poor and of color. Recently, sociologist Megan Comfort documented the "secondary prisonization" of primarily Black women in relationships with incarcerated men and criminologist Todd Clear's theory of social embeddedness details how the burden of incarceration and reentry falls on women in disadvantaged neighborhoods.[74] By drawing on the aforementioned research and weaving in Chicana/Latina scholarship such as that of Katherine Maldonado, Irene Lara, and Grace Gámez from the Chicana M(other)work Collective, which describes how Chicanas are central to community and familial support, my project develops three heretofore ignored or under examined areas: Chicana/x Carework, Chicana/xs as facilitators of an informal reentry system, and the contradictory nature of engaging in abolitionist work within carceral contexts.[75] Chicana/x Carework aims to address the multifaceted aspects of the labor involved in keeping an incarcerated loved one alive and relatively healthy, and how this labor is raced, gendered, classed and largely rendered invisible,

[73] Federici, Silvia. *Revolution at Point Zero: Housework, Reproduction, and Feminist Struggle*. , 2020. Print.
[74] Comfort, Megan. *Doing Time Together : Love and Family in the Shadow of the Prison*. University of Chicago Press, 2008.; Clear, Todd R. *Imprisoning Communities: How Mass Incarceration Makes Disadvantaged Neighborhoods Worse*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010. Print.; For more on the need to recenter women as they are the center of communities and hold them down see *Say Her Name: Resisting Police Brutality against Black Women*. African American Policy Forum, 2015. Internet resource.
[75] Caballero, Cecilia, Yvette Martínez-Vu, Judith Pérez-Torres, Michelle Téllez, Christine Vega, and Ana Castillo. *The Chicana Motherwork Anthology*. TUCSON: University of Arizona Press, 2019. Print.

even as it is fundamental to the functioning of the family and the carceral apparatus alike. Chicana/xs as an informal reentry system unpacks the labor expected and required in supporting loved ones upon release from incarceration and aims to address the complexities of this work on the ground.

I also examine the ways that Chicana/xs are a conceptual borderlands in relation to the contradictory ways they exist within the carceral continuum. That is, while many Chicana/xs are involved in everyday acts of abolitionist resistance and struggle by supporting and performing labor for currently/formerly incarcerated loved ones, at times they too may reproduce ideological or material aspects of the carceral regime. For example, when Chicana/xs are tasked with assisting their loved ones with "reintegration," they are both acting as an informal reentry system as an abolitionist gesture and simultaneously potentially reproducing carceral ideologies by encouraging their loved ones to behave in ways that align with the status quo. This complex and contradictory dynamic poses important challenges to theorists, activists, and policy makers, and my case studies map out these challenges.

Chicana/xs and Mexicanas are frequently relegated to feminized labor that is often expected and undervalued, if valued at all. Within the nuclear family and extended family alike, as well as among Mexican origin peoples, Chicana/xs are critical in their roles as madres, abuelas, tias, primas and hermanas.[76] I bring social reproduction theory, which explores labor power relations under racial capitalism, together with Chicana Studies, specifically the *Chicana M(other)work Collective*, to holistically address mothering and othermothering.[77] The *Chicana M(other)work Collective* states that "Chicana M(other)work is a strategy for collective resistance

[76] Ruíz, Vicki. *From Out of the Shadows Mexican Women in Twentieth Century America*. 10th anniversary ed., Oxford University Press, 2008.
[77] Bhattacharya, Tithi, and Lise Vogel. *Social Reproduction Theory: Remapping Class, Recentering Oppression*. , 2017. Print.

within institutions that continue to marginalize us," it is "everyday acts and tactics of resistance against institutional violence" that "over time … can help produce institutional and interpersonal cultural change."[78] The anthology sees "mothering as an act of transformative labor within academic and community spaces."[79] Further, they propose an understanding of mothering to include unconventional forms. For example, Grace Gámez discusses the related concept of "othermothering" as "the practice of nurturing children in the place of or alongside biological mothers." Othermothers can be grandmothers, aunts, cousins, older siblings, uncles, and caretakers who are not blood related.[80]

This concept of othermothering plays a role in the lives of the Chicana/xs discussed throughout the dissertation. Othermothering creates space for the labor of tias, abuelas, primas, hermanas and more to be acknowledged even when they may have never given birth themselves. In this dissertation, I extend the concept of Chicana M(other)work to the carework that Mexican origin women perform on behalf of the incarcerated and formerly incarcerated people in their lives. I argue that without the carework, and therefore labor, that Chicana/xs perform for loved ones, families, and communities, Chicana/o/x communities would be subject to more intensified forms of carceral collateral.

A NOTE ON TERMINOLOGY

Throughout this dissertation I use the phrase Mexican origin person to signify Chicana/o/x, Mexican-American, Mexican, and Mexicana/o. I follow Ofelia Cuevas and Mario Barrera in their use of the term Mexican origin in a demographic sense rather in regard to a conscious political

[78] Caballero, Cecilia. *The Chicana M(other)work Anthology: Porque Sin Madres No Hay Revolución.* , 2019. Print.
[79] Ibid.*;* Hill, Collins P. *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment.* , 2021. Print.
[80] Ibid.

identification.[81] As Barrera states, "given legal and social complexities, there is no clear dividing line between Chicana/o/xs and Mexicana/os. They live in the same communities and generally do the same kind of work" (4). Although Barrera's scholarship was published in 1979, the same is true regarding Mexican origin peoples in the twenty-first century southwest.

While there are many academic debates currently taking place regarding the complexities of the racial and ethnic makeup of Mexican origin peoples in North America, this dissertation does not participate in these discussions. I acknowledge this is a limitation of the dissertation and am interested in further exploring these complexities within Southwest carceral communities in the future. A second limitation of this dissertation is my approach and analysis to gender/sexuality. I use the term Chicana/x Carework, as one of the oral history participants identifies as she/they. While I address intersectional factors present among Mexican origin women relating to carework for incarcerated loved ones, I recognize that the analysis is quite binary. That is, in analyzing the gendered labor of Chicana/xs, I primarily focus on the ways in which the gendering that takes place is through a "female" lens. Another area for further research and development is how this gendered labor falls on queer, non-binary, and trans Mexican origin peoples in the Southwest.

When I began developing my research questions, I envisioned oral history participants as distant strangers with whom I was not acquainted. I planned on gathering at least ten oral history participants as I anticipated this would be required if my work was to be legitimate and legible within academia. Much of the scholarship on Mexican origin women/Chicanas and incarceration take a sociological approach–gathering hundreds of interviews and data with systematized questions. Of course there is much value in the research that sociologists such as Juanita Dîaz-

[81] Cuevas, Ofelia. Lecture. Introduction to Chicana/o/x Studies, 4 Nov. 2018, UC Davis, Davis, CA.; Barrera, Mario. *Race and Class in the Southwest: A Theory of Racial Inequality*. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2002. Print.

Cotto have conducted specifically on Chicanas; however, my personal experiences and academic training led me down a different path to explore the lived and embodied experiences of non-imprisoned Chicana/xs.[82] I decided it was best to work with four participants as their testimonios are rich and powerful. I also sought to do their narratives justice, though I am still working through what justice is and what it means.

Appendix

METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Reflexivity

From the beginning I was hesitant to share my close proximity to the oral history participants in this dissertation. I worried that my research would not be recognized if I revealed that I personally know each of the oral history participants. Not only do I personally know them but I actually grew up with some of them and we experienced/shared many of the traumas that are described throughout this dissertation. My close proximity to them is both what makes this dissertation powerful and what raises questions about the limitations to the research. Does my close proximity to the oral history participants and the fact that we have experienced many of the same traumas prevent me from seeing conditions/relations that an outsider might identify or does it make me all the more susceptible to conditions/relations an outsider might miss? I know the stories of the oral history participants outside of the official recorded testimonios and worried this could present as unconscious bias as I engaged their excerpts and told their stories. I like to think that my knowing their stories outside of the official recordings provided a more in depth look at their experiences.

[82] Díaz-Cotto, Juanita. *Chicana Lives and Criminal Justice : Voices from El Barrio*. First edition., University of Texas Press, 2006.

Rather than approaching my proximity to my oral history participants as a shortcoming, I view it as a strength as it ultimately allowed participants to create a sacred safe space to share and unpack the violence we were all subjected to in the context of the carceral Southwest. I was able to validate their experiences and they in turn validated mine. This dissertation was produced in the context of shared community knowledge. The Chicana/xs I conducted oral histories with are my interlocutors–we have shared our understanding and perceptions of the Southwest carceral regime with one another for over two decades. I would not have the vision, understanding, and analysis that I do of the Southwest carceral system were it not for the Chicana/xs in this dissertation. For me, this is what shared community knowledge looks like and although some may not recognize it as valid, I seek ultimately to shift academic understandings of who produces knowledge and how that knowledge is disseminated.

CHAPTER ONE

CHICANA/X CAREWORK:

THE SOCIAL AND CULTURAL REPRODUCTION OF CHICANA/O/X COMMUNITIES IN THE CARCERAL SOUTHWEST

"...their mental health deteriorates even quicker if you're not like, supportive in the, in the right way."

–Marisol, non-imprisoned systems impacted Chicana/x from El Paso[83]

This chapter of *Chicana/x Carework* examines the forced labor of systems impacted but non-imprisoned Chicana/x to underscore the social and political implications of gendered, raced, and classed labor that is largely rendered invisible. I locate Mexican origin peoples' notion of carework in colonialism and violence targeted at Native and Mexican origin women through deeply entangled bodies, sexualities, and spiritualities. Additionally, I map out the impact of carework on the everyday lives of Chicana/xs by detailing its burdens financially, emotionally, physically, psychically, and spiritually.

PRE-INCARCERATION

Twentieth and twenty-first century Mexican incarceration in the Southwest is rooted in a carceral colonial apparatus. Beyond the state crafting of Mexican origin people as racialized criminal subjects, geopolitical locations like El Paso and other border towns in the area have been subjected to a distinct form of policing and control via the physical and ideological

[83] All participants have been given pseudonyms to protect their anonymity.

significance of the border. Historically, Southwest Mexican origin peoples have dealt with two major forces converging at the same time–being constructed as a laboring subject and simultaneously as a criminal subject.[84] Men or women (the primary subjects of construction in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries) were constructed as laboring subjects as they were largely framed as docile, obedient, and indigent.[85] Ironically enough, these same populations were constructed as criminal subjects that were inherently savage, delinquent, and rebellious given Mexican involvement in insurgencies and revolutions.[86] Mexican origin people largely fell into one of these two categories. Mexican women were gendered and racialized as laboring subjects and yet at the same time their labor–carework–has historically been erased and rendered invisible.[87] The historical construction of Mexican origin people as criminals laid the foundation for twenty-first century targeted incarceration. This construction can be traced through the figures of the bandido, the pachuco, and later the cholo / gangster.[88] Many of the community members who become incarcerated are viewed as the "worst of the worst" and this construction is possible in part by their criminalization as cholos / gangsters and the devaluation of their lives.[89]

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[84] Delgado, Richard., and Jean. Stefancic. *The Latino/a Condition : a Critical Reader*. 2nd ed., New York University Press, 2011.; Foley, Neil. *The White Scourge : Mexicans, Blacks, and Poor Whites in Texas Cotton Culture*. University of California Press, 1997.

[85] Ruiz, Vicki L. *From Out of the Shadows : Mexican Women in Twentieth-Century America*. Oxford University Press, 2008.

[86] That such contradictions of Mexican ways of being could coexist speaks to the narratives in the American public imaginary that were being spun to justify American exploitation and violence against Mexican origin people both as labor as well as legitimating violence against them in westward and southern expansion.
Acuña, Rodolfo. *Occupied America: A History of Chicanos*. , 2020. Print.

[87]Glenn, Evelyn Nakano. *Unequal Freedom : How Race and Gender Shaped American Citizenship and Labor*. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2002. Print.

[88]Durán, Robert J. *The Gang Paradox: Inequalities and Miracles on the U.s.-Mexico Border*. , 2018. Print.

[89] Cacho, Lisa Marie. "'You Just Don't Know How Much He Meant': Deviancy, Death, and Devaluation." *Latino studies* 5.2 (2007): 182–208. Print.

El Paso poses a unique case study since it became, as its name suggests, "the pass" from southern Mexico to the north. Many Mexicans from southern Mexico relocated temporarily to Ciudad Juarez in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and eventually made their way into El Paso and oftentimes to Los Angeles. As a result, a settled and transplant/migratory Mexican community emerged. One of the main impacts of this migration was the traveling of Mexican origin culture and subsequently a fear of Mexican origin people. Fears in El Paso are rooted in nativism and manifest destiny ideologies–that Mexicans were "invading" the United States and that Spanish and primarily Anglo settlers had the god given right to settle and lead westward expansion.[90] Mexican migratory tendencies, rooted in a 6,000-year history, frightened Anglo settlers because cohabitation with Mexicans was never part of their imperialistic vision.

Economically, El Paso did not provide job opportunities for its Mexican origin population in general and certainly not to the poor, working-class sector. Specifically, there was a shortage of employment and livable wages in conjunction with an expansion of the police state. Monies and investments were hyper focused on the policing of the community and the border. With a lack of employment opportunities, livable wages, and poor education, Mexican origin peoples in El Paso were and continue to be set up for failure. Left to our own devices, many community members join underground economies to survive. To be sure, these underground economies do not exist in a vacuum; the US and Mexican government are both involved in the production and distribution of drugs and other criminalized activity. However, the people who typically get prosecuted for drugs and other "illegal" activities are community members rather than politicians and other elite members of society.

[90] Acuña, Rodolfo. *Occupied America: A History of Chicanos*. , 2020. Print.

The Southwest has had the largest sustained amount of Mexican people for the longest period since the "founding" of the United States. Texas has also faced intense assimilation campaigns that have failed.[91] Therefore this region presents a frustrating challenge to a US vision of white supremacy: here is this large, persistent community of Mexicans who will not leave, who continue migrating, reproducing, fighting against the government and Anglo settlers, and who will not stop speaking Spanish or practicing spiritual/religious beliefs among other things.[92] Although many Mexican origin people have become "Americanized" and "assimilated" there are just as many, if not more, who have either intentionally or unintentionally resisted/refused Americanization and assimilation.[93] Sociologist Tomás R. Jiménez argued that Mexican (im)migrant replenishment is a significant factor shaping later-generation Mexican origin people's ethnic identity. His study identified two major contributing factors. First, intergroup boundaries are exacerbated between Mexicans and non-Mexicans as later-generation Mexicans experience nativist sentiments aimed at recent Mexican arrivals. Second, recent Mexican arrivals "refresh the salience of race" in the lives of later-generation Mexicans, as they are typically marked as foreigners–even lighter skin Mexicans. Furthermore, Jiménez points out that (im)migrant replenishment "sharpens intragroup boundaries by informing the criteria for 'authentic' expressions of ethnic identity" (1558). Mexican (im)migrants and second/third generation Mexicans have come to place boundaries on what it means to be Mexican by utilizing criteria such as speaking Spanish and having non-Anglo tastes. Therefore, (im)migrant replenishment serves as an additional driving force behind the refusal to assimilate fully to Anglo

[91] Sánchez,George. '"Go After the Woman": Americanization and the Mexican Immigrant Woman 1915-1929." https://www.law.berkeley.edu/php-programs/centers/crrj/zotero/loadfile.php?entity_key=A4D6DFZI
[92] Barrera, Mario. *Race and Class in the Southwest: A Theory of Racial Inequality*. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2002. Print.
[93] Jiménez, T. R. (2008). Mexican immigrant replenishment and the continuing significance of ethnicity and race. *American journal of sociology*, 113(6), 1527-1567.

culture. Given that the United States continues to rely on the physical labor supply of Mexican nationals, Mexican (im)migrant replenishment will persist and Mexican origin people will remain tied to a particular ehtnic and racial identity. This "issue" is clear further clarified by the way that many white supremacist groups justify their presence because of not only the numbers of Mexicans and "Hispanics" present in many communities but the prevalence of the Spanish language. Part of the reason that it has been so difficult to eradicate Mexican language and cultural and social customs is because of its historical presence in North America for thousands of years; a common misunderstanding among Anglos and "Americans" is that Mexicans are constructed as immigrants and recent arrivals, when in reality Mexicans have been in North America for at least 6,000 years.[94]

THE LABOR OF CAREWORK: PRE-INCARCERATION

Lulu was born in Ciudad Juarez, Chihuahua, Mexico in 1965. A mujer and a mother, Lulu grew up in poverty on a ranch in Juarez and often crossed into the US with her grandmother who worked in the fields. She was able to fabricate her citizenship and attend school in the United States where she was eventually pushed out because she did not speak English. At the age of eighteen, Lulu became a young single mother. Eventually she married and had two more children. However, her first born child would eventually get involved in underground economic activities and become gang affiliated. As a result, Lulu became the mother of an incarcerated man, a situation that she would deal with for more than a decade. Her son continues to be incarcerated to this day:

[94] Forbes, Jack D. *Aztecas Del Norte: the Chicanos of Aztlan*. Education Department, 1973. Print.

> Ahora mi hijo era que tenía problemas con sus drogas. De allí pues otro susto que me lleve. Sons sustos que te llevas, corajes que te llevas, tristezas que te llevas. Este… a veces no sabes cómo manejar la situación y tú crees que si lo sabes y no lo sabes. So mi hija, la que se iba quedando conmigo, ella fue que un poquito manejó la situación. Porque yo tenía mis nietos en mi casa conmigo también y la pareja de mi hijo también estaba mal en las drogas
>
> **(**translation**)** Then my son was the one with problems with drugs. From there, well, I had another scare. You experience fright, rage, and sadness. At times you don't know how to navigate the situation and then you think you know how to deal with, but, no, you don't know. So, one of my daughters, the one who was staying with me, was the one who started dealing with the situation because I had my grandchildren there in the house with me and also my son's girlfriend who was also on drugs.

In the above except, Lulu recounts her experience being married to a man with drug problems and proceeds to explain how this became an intergenerational issue that she witnessed her son confront. Lulu expresses the sustos, corajes, and tristezas she was exposed to because of her son's drug problems.

Susto is a concept that has been rigorously studied across North and Latin America and a condition that "occurs when a person experiences a fright, causing their soul to start out of the body." This can lead to a range of symptoms "which may appear immediately or gradually over time" and "include tiredness, disturbed sleep, loss of appetite, diarrhea, bodily aches, sadness and weakness."[95] Critical medical anthropologists highlight the way that "females" experience a higher frequency of susto and how it was an "illness of the poor" (72). One anthropologist, after his study on political violence in Guatemala asked "might we take them at their word … that this is an accurate, literal description of what has happened to them?"[96] Lulu's positionality as a poor working-class Mexican woman geographically positioned in a border zone where she has

[95] Herrera, Frida Jacobo, and David Orr. "Susto, the Anthropology of Fear and Critical Medical Anthropology in Mexico and Peru." *Critical Medical Anthropology: Perspectives in and from Latin America*, edited by Jennie Gamlin et al., UCL Press, 2020, pp. 69–89, https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv13xprxf.10. Accessed 6 Apr. 2022.
[96] Ibid.

witnessed killings, disappearances, violence and constant threats lends itself to Green's suggestion that she may be expressing her susto as "el espíritu se fue" (the spirit/soul has left the body).[97] Although Lulu does not proceed to describe how the susto has impacted her explicitly, she does make mention of tristeza/sadness and goes on to explain that she was left not knowing how to navigate the situation.

In this passage, Lulu expresses the toll of Chicana/Mexicana motherhood as the mother of a gang affiliated young man living in the geopolitical space of the borderlands prior to incarceration. Part of the toll is in her expression: "Este … a veces no sabes como manejar la situación y tu crees que si lo sabes y no lo sabes / At times you don't know how to navigate the situation and then you think you know how to deal with but, no, you don't know." The situation she implicitly references is connected to her positionality in the world and the lack of access to resources she and her family experience. As a Mexican (im)migrant woman living in the United States whose primary language is Spanish and who is not formally educated, it was quite difficult for her to know where to seek support for herself and loved ones. Eventually, Lulu relies on the support of her daughter to help navigate "the situation," as she explains her own preoccupation with her grandchildren and son's girlfriend at the time. Prior to the incarceration of her son, Lulu was already exercising aspects of carework that were yet to come with the physical detainment her son would experience–everything from the sustos, corajes, tristezas to the worrying about her grandchildren and others who were in relation to her son.

Marisol is another oral history participant in this study. She is a Chicana born and raised in El Paso, Texas. Her mother, Blanca, is originally from Durango, Mexico where her older

[97] Ibid.

brother Gabriel and sister Irene were born and partly raised. Marisol's mother, sister, and brother fled Mexico because of a violent, life-threatening relationship and relocated to El Paso in the late 1980s. Blanca eventually remarried and eventually Marisol and her second oldest brother were born. Marisol's parents divorced when she was four years old, leaving her mother to raise her children alone. Her mother Blanca worked long hours most days in a factory, which left her siblings and herself to raise one another. At a young age, her oldest brother, Gabriel, was identified as a "problem child" on account of his behaviors in school and this led to his clash with the criminal legal system at the early age of fourteen. Over the course of the next two or so decades, Gabriel would experience incarceration, deportation, and gang affiliation, all of which contributed to his eventual murder in 2018.

In the following passage, Marisol shares an early childhood memory of associating police presence with her brother's racialization and criminalization:

> ...after my parents got divorced, I would say every time I saw the cops after that, it was like something having to do with Gabriel, maybe like a neighbor saw him fighting with my sister outside, or like he was being either like "threatening to somebody."

Marisol explained that because of domestic violence, the police made frequent appearances to their household but after her parent's divorce, the police presence continued, and she understood at a young age that it was connected to her brother. Marisol's early encounters with police via her proximity to her racially criminalized brother subjected her to surveillance and a level of hyper awareness at a young age. Although Marisol herself may not have done anything wrong or been viewed as a threat, she was often near her brother and therefore subjected to similar surveillance as her brother. Marisol says, "every time I saw the cops," implying their presence was repetitive and more than simply a few times. Further, young Chicanas, like Marisol, are forced to develop a level of hyper awareness/vigilance of their immediate surroundings to ensure

their safety/survival from law enforcement and other threats. The early recognition of her brother being constructed as a threat speaks to the ways that Mexican origin / Chicano youth are crafted as criminal subjects. While adolescent teen boys from all backgrounds get into mischief and fight, Black and Brown youth are racialized and adultified as threats.[98]

Marisol continues explaining how her mother, a Mexican (im)migrant, trusted the United States system and her ex-military husband's opinion about how her son's "behavioral problems" should be dealt with:

> And my dad's remedy was like, "he needs boot camp" and my mom was like, "okay," like she didn't know how to help her son and thought, like, you know, like "I'm in the US and like these people know a lot about things like this. So, I'm, you know, going to just go along with it and hope it helps." And of course not. It didn't, it just made things worse for Gabriel and for the family.

Like Lulu, the difficulty of being a Mexican (im)migrant woman who primarily speaks Spanish presented challenges for Blanca in her decision-making process about how to best support her son. The portrayal of the United States as a first world country and Mexico as a third world country as well as the "American Dream" narratives that circulate in Mexico most likely influenced Blanca's decision to trust the US government with her son. Blanca also trusted her then husband and assumed that as an ex-military member he "knew better." However, as Marisol states at the end of the excerpt, "it didn't, it just made things worse for Gabriel and for the family." These early experiences with the criminal legal system often set the stage for what is to come in these young men's lives. To some extent, these mothers (and family members) begin to question and blame themselves for the outcome: death, deportation, and/or incarceration. In this

[98] Catherine d. P. Duarte, Leslie Salas-Hernández, and Joseph S. Griffin,2020: Policy Determinants of Inequitable Exposure to the Criminal Legal System and Their Health Consequences Among Young People American Journal of Public Health **110**, S43_S49,https://doi.org/10.2105/AJPH.2019.305440

way, Chicanas/Mexicanas are already engaging in carework prior to incarceration. Rather than the responsibility being accurately placed on the criminal legal system and the United States carceral regime, in these instances, Chicanas/Mexicanas shoulder the blame.

CAREWORK'S ROOTS AMONGST MEXICAN ORIGIN PEOPLES

In this section I expand on what I mean by carework in the context of Mexican origin peoples. I discuss what kind of carework is involved in tending to the needs of currently/formerly incarcerated loved ones. I also consider what kind of carework is involved in managing/navigating the premature death of loved ones for Chicana/xs and Mexicanas in particular. I delve into how non-imprisoned Chicana/xs can live lives marred by the carceral system despite not serving time. I unpack what the work of keeping a loved one alive entails and what happens when we, as Mexican origin women, "fail" to do so. I analyze how this carework is rooted in racial capitalism and the gendered social reproductive labor that is so often delegated, required, and expected of Chicana/xs and Mexicanas but that Mexican origin women themselves have often internalized to the point that we internalize it as our responsibility. This critical framing of carework reveals what else exists in the relationship between prisons/policing and Mexican origin women.

Care among Mexican origin peoples is imbued with meaning. It is not possible to unpack care without looking to the historical roots of colonialism, patriarchy/machismo, religion, and racial capitalism. The colonization of Mexican origin peoples by the Spanish and later Anglo-Saxons ingrained various toxic ideologies and ways of life that continue to negatively impact all Mexican origin peoples to this day. Spanish colonization of the Americas began in 1519 with the

arrival of conquistador Hernán Cortés. Spanish soldiers engaged in a project of genocide, rape, enslavement, and settlement over their two-year march to the city of Tenochtitlan. Mexican origin peoples, like other Native American groups, are not an entirely unified or homogenous group and this fact further complicates the already complex history and community of Mexican origin peoples. According to Jack D. Forbes, Powhatan-Renapé and Lenape scholar, the legacy of Mexican origin peoples can be traced to the Toltec, who were modified by the Aztec-Chimechec-Mexicayotl and this is what eventually led to what we know today as Mexicans.[99] Even prior to the Olmecs, Aztecs, Mayans, and Toltecs, Mexico and Central America were home to massive, interconnected empires.

Reflecting back to look forward, Mexican origin people continue to make up a very complex community. Because Mexicans have such mixed ancestry, our communities represent complex embodiments. Some Mexicans present European, others Indigenous and still others from the African Diaspora. Some of us present with two or three of these ancestries. The way that Mexican origin people present today is a direct result of the project of Spanish and Anglo-Saxon colonialism. That is not to say that all Mexican origin people embody a Spanish / Indigenous mixing but rather to state that Spanish and Anglo-Saxon colonialism impacted how Mexican origin peoples would both phenotypically present and be racialized/criminalized.

Our physical presentation in a carceral colonial world directly impacts our access to resources, our experiences, and our life as a potential target for premature death. It is common knowledge that colorism exists in all communities and the Mexican origin is by no means an exception to this matter. Darker-skin Mexican origin women are surely bearing burdens on their backs that lighter-skin women do not encounter daily.

[99] Forbes, Jack D. *Aztecas Del Norte: the Chicanos of Aztlan*. Education Department, 1973. Print.

Another matter of contention in analyzing *carework* for Mexican origin peoples is the virgen/pagan puta dichotomy.[100] Chicana feminist scholar Irene Lara argues that "the virgin/whore dichotomy, largely represented in the *Américas* by *La Virgen de Guadalupe* as spiritually pure mother and La Malinche as physically defiled concubine, is a foundational theme in Chicana feminist thought, along with this dichotomy's negative effects in the development of female subjectivity."[101] While at the surface level the virtuous virgen/pagan puta dichotomy may seem unrelated to *carework*, Mexican origin women's sexuality shapes and influences every facet of their lives and subjectivities, whether in being hailed by the ideologies of the virtuous virgen/pagan puta dichotomy, or outrightly rejecting the dichotomy, or more often straddling the border between both.[102] Through the virtuous virgen/pagan puta dichotomy, Mexican origin women are often categorized as either virgin, pure, clean, submissive, and obedient to men in their lives, particularly their husbands, or as a whore who is dirty, tainted, rebellious and does not listen to or take orders from anyone. Often Mexican origin women find themselves leaning toward the virgen side out of a sense of need for safety from interpersonal and state violence.

Often when women are in the process of working through this dichotomy and building their critical consciousness, carework bleeds over into their perceived role as la puta. The disappearances and murders of women in Ciudad Juarez since the early 1990s are one example of how the virtuous virgen/pagan puta dichotomy was politicized and mobilized by the Mexican community and government to justify the systematic targeting of primarily poor, dark skinned,

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[100] Lara, Irene. *Goddess of the América's in the Decolonial Imaginary: Beyond the Virtuous Virgen/pagan Puta Dichotomy*. Ann Arbor, MI: Michigan Publishing, University of Michigan Library, n.d. Print.

[101] Ibid.; Karttunen, Frances. "Rethinking Malinche." En *Indian Women of Early Mexico*, ed. Susan Schroeder, Stephanie Wood, and Robert Haskett, 291-313. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1997. Print.

[102] Althusser, Louis, Étienne Balibar, Jacques Bidet, and G M. Goshgarian. *On the Reproduction of Capitalism: Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses*. , 2014. Print. ;Anzaldúa, Gloria, Perez R. F. Vivancos, Norma E. Cantu, and AnaLouise Keating. *Borderlands =: La Frontera : the New Mestiza*. , 2021. Print.

Indigenous women in the city. There has always been and will continue to be women who straddle the border between the two stereotypes in search of liberation, agency, and empowerment, but are entrapped in a legacy of machismo and violence. Part of this straddling is the way that the virgen stereotype reproduces the private/public dichotomy. That is, women who are seen as virgen, pure, clean, and submissive also stay in and maintain the home and children.

Many women find that in their process of decolonizing the puta/virgen dichotomy, they have internalized their role as caretaker to the point that they pressure themselves to take responsibility for and care of everyone. Further, the construction of the virgen rests upon the notion of female self-sacrifice, which lays a foundation for deference to man, family, and god. Spiritually and religion (i.e., colonization) directly impacted gendered racialization projects that required Chicana/x deference. When Chicana/xs erect boundaries to not allow themselves to be rendered collateral they defy ordained roles and reject family, culture, religion, etc.[103] Therefore, part of the decolonial process for Mexican origin women in this dichotomy is to recognize boundaries, limits, and self-care–that they do not need to take care of everyone and save the entire world.

The virtuous virgen/pagan puta dichotomy played an important role in the criminalization and colonization of Mexican origin women. The dichotomy is rooted in Spanish Christian Medieval and early modern discourses that situate Guadalupe as religious, mestiza, patron, saint, and a Marian figure, whereas Tonantzin-Malinche was/is associated with a demonized Indigenous woman, mistress, translator-traitor known as "la chingada," which translates to "the fucked one." Colonization in the Américas included the genocide of millions of Indigenous peoples and cultural genocide. One shape that cultural genocide took was through the disciplining of Indigenous and

[103] Salinas, M. D. (2021). In Lak'ech from the Ivory Tower to the Prison Tower: Connecting Latina 'Disposables' to Latina 'Exceptionals' across Neoliberal Institutions. *UC Santa Barbara*. ProQuest ID: Salinas_ucsb_0035D_15227. Merritt ID: ark:/13030/m5bg9dz7. Retrieved from https://escholarship.org/uc/item/8kg0k15p

Mexican women's sexuality and spirituality as they are interwoven and inseparable. Prior to Spanish colonization as the Mexica rose to power, Nahua ideals faded as Tonantzin was transformed from a powerful "Mother Goddess" into a more passive "mother of God" (Lara 105). Through patriarchal religious imperialism the Spanish transformed Tonantzin into Guadalupe's pagan Other whose ideologies emerged out of a "sinful" Eve. The project and commitment of a Mexican nationalist identity has only perpetuated Tonantzin as a "bad mother" and Guadalupe as a "good mother." Being in charge of your own spirituality/sexuality and possessing agency as a Mexican origin woman is now seemingly inseparable from being a "bad mother" or a puta. This inseparability has historically been rooted in anti-indigeneity and racial criminalization as the goal of associating Tonantzin with our Indigenous side has been about criminalization.

Spanish settlers criminalized Indigenous cosmologies, ways of life, spiritual practices, and sexualities to justify the violent and forceful taking of land, sexual violence, and removal of Indigenous peoples and knowledges. However, Chicana/x feminist artists, cultural workers, and scholars have reclaimed Tonantzin by addressing the relationship between spirit and flesh through the Indigenous inflected iconography of la Virgen de Guadalupe. Irene Lara introduced the concept of Tonanlupanisma "as a prism through which to understand cultural productions that engage the contested histories and iconographies of Tonantzin-Guaadlupe from a decolonial feminist perspective."[104] Lara and several Chicana/x feminist scholars challenge the spiritual and sexual dichotomies of Christain-influenced Western thought by critically privileging Mesoamerican Indigenous worldviews that address the nuance and complexities of Tonantzin.[105]

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[104] Lara, Irene. "Tonanlupanisma: Re-Membering Tonantzin-Guadalupe in Chicana Visual Art." *Aztlán*, vol. 33, no. 2, UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center Press, 2008, pp. 61–90.

[105] Vargas, Daisy, "Hijas Rebeldes: Chicana Spirituality and the Re(claiming) of the Indigenous" (2012). Electronic Theses and Dissertations. 670. ; Castillo, Ana. *La diosa de las Américas : escritos sobre la Virgen de Guadalupe*. Vintage Español, 2000. ; Moraga, Cherríe., et al. *The Hungry Woman*. 1st ed., West End Press, 2001. ; Anzaldúa, Gloria, Perez R. F. Vivancos, Norma E. Cantu, and AnaLouise Keating. *Borderlands =: La Frontera : the New Mestiza*. , 2021. Print.

Marisol, a 31-year-old Chicana, explains her own struggle of internalizing her role as a caretaker for her incarcerated brother. Perhaps more accurately, Marisol is speaking from the perspective of a sister who experienced the loss of a brother because of premature death:

> And I, I don't think I had realized how much it, like informed my own narrative about who I am as a person. In like a negative way. It's impossible to say, like it's not part of who you are but like the narrative. I was telling myself, like being negatively influenced by like, this responsibility that I thought I had. And did have, like, it's not make believe. It's not, it's not like a pretend responsibility. Right. And it's not like we can just flip the switch and be like, oh, I'm not responsible for this person.

In the above excerpt Marisol shares her perceived / real responsibility for her brother and the negative impact it had on her as she sought to make sense of herself. She describes a state of entrapment: "...it's not like we can just flip the switch and be like, oh, I'm not responsible for this person." In a way, even if and when Marisol grew tired of being her brother's main source of support (i.e. labor / care work), there was both an internal and external expectation that she would provide that labor. She continues:

> Therefore, I need to like own up for myself … I don't know if it's like a coping thing. Like wanting to or needing to be a certain person for me to like justify why I feel so responsible or connected to like helping my brother.

In this excerpt, Marisol holds herself accountable for continuing to support her brother, perhaps beyond her capacity.

As she attempts to make sense of her decision to "cope" and "justify" her sense of responsibility and connectedness to her brother, she reflected on the way Chicana/xs internalize their roles as caretakers and struggle to enforce boundaries with loved ones:

> Whatever, I don't know, I still haven't figured that one out. But I know that that feeling went away when Gabriel died. It left me kind of like empty for a little bit and like confused. But now I feel more like myself, or I think I have a better grip on like who I actually am without that, like looming over me. And with that, I feel like I'm more able

> to think about, like, where my place in this is. Which like now, I think it's like in the realm of like knowledge sharing.

Marisol's internalization of her role as Gabriel's caretaker was all consuming to the point that after Gabriel died, she felt a sense of emptiness. Perhaps Marisol felt she served a larger purpose when she had to take care of Gabriel and when that did not exist anymore, she was unsure of her larger purpose. Marisol shares that eventually she did begin to feel more like herself once she did not have the pressures of having an incarcerated loved one. Healing from the loss of her brother has played a role in Marisol's rediscovery of herself and what her life looks like after such a devastating loss.

DURING INCARCERATION: RACE, GENDER, AND CLASS IN THE SOUTHWEST

The carework involved in supporting a currently/formerly incarcerated loved one includes financial, emotional, physical, psychological, spiritual labor, and heartwork for Mexican origin women. Additionally, many Chicana/xs advocate for their incarcerated loved ones through legal channels, which requires a different kind of labor.

Financially supporting someone inside a prison/jail/detention facility is quite costly. On average, depending on where this individual is incarcerated, families spend anywhere from $100-$400 a month. In 2017, the Prison Policy Initiative (PPI) created a "first-of-its-kind report" that included the cost of "mass incarceration" on families of justice-involved people.[106] The PPI found that "Bail bond companies collect $1.4 billion nonrefundable fees from defendants and their families," that "specialized phone companies win monopoly contracts and charge families up to $24.95 for a 15-minute phone call" and that "commissary vendors that sell goods to incarcerated

[106] Initiative, P. P., & Rabuy, P. W. and B. (n.d.). *Following the money of mass incarceration*. Prison Policy Initiative. Retrieved May 5, 2022, from http://www.prisonpolicy.org/reports/money.html

people–who rely largely on money sent by loved ones–is an even larger industry that brings in $1.6 billion a year."[107] In Texas specifically, the *Texas Tribune* analyzed $95 million in purchases at prison commissaries in 2009.[108] Additionally, care packages are part of a lucrative industry that provides a range of so-called services to incarcerated peoples and their families. For example, companies like *iCare*, which according to their website "keeps loved ones close by providing a quick and easy way to order care packages for inmates in jail,"[109] reported net sales of over $375 million in the "care package industry" in 2012.[110]

In addition to the financial burden outlined above, some Chicana/xs deal with a financial burden that can be two-fold. That is, expenses seemingly unrelated directly to a loved one's incarceration but that are a direct result of it. Medical expenses are one form of a financial burden that one oral history participant experienced. In 2015 Ruby's mental health deteriorated to the point that she ended up in a psychiatric ward. The mental health aspects of this situation are expanded upon in a later section; however, it is important to note that she continues to deal with the financial stress associated with this visit as her bill has since been sent to collections.

[107] Initiative, P. P., & Rabuy, P. W. and B. (n.d.). *Following the money of mass incarceration*. Prison Policy Initiative. Retrieved May 5, 2022, from http://www.prisonpolicy.org/reports/money.html
[108] Stiles, M. (2010, April 8). *Buyers behind bars*. The Texas Tribune. Retrieved May 5, 2022, from https://www.texastribune.org/2010/04/08/texas-prisoners-spent-95-million-at-commissaries/
[109] *Keeping loved ones close: Inmate care packages*. iCare. (n.d.). Retrieved May 5, 2022, from http://shop.icaregifts.com/shop/
[110] Eldridge, T. E. (2017, December 21). *The Big Business of Prisoner Care Packages*. The Marshall Project. Retrieved May 5, 2022, from https://www.themarshallproject.org/2017/12/21/the-big-business-of-prisoner-care-packages

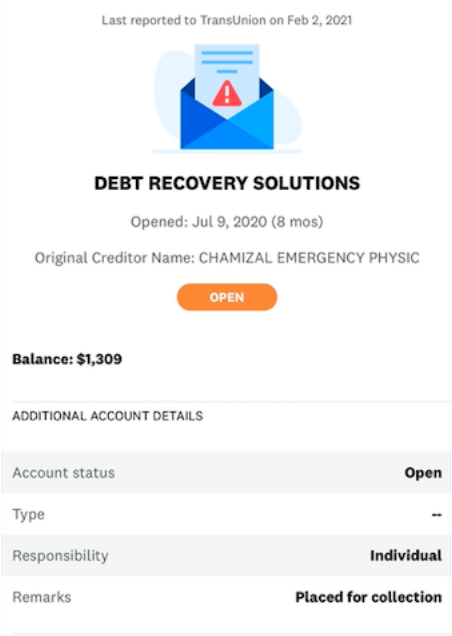

FIG 2.1 Screenshot provided by oral history participant, Ruby.

This financial responsibility can be a serious burden especially for Chicana/xs who are already marginalized in terms of the racial wealth gap.[111] Data available through the office of the Texas Comptroller on the Upper Rio Grande region, which "stretches from the most western part of the state, where the state line meets Mexico and New Mexico, along the Rio Grande past Big Bend and up to the New Mexico border," where El Paso is considered the region's economic center, makes clear the burden placed on the Mexican community at large and on women specifically.[112]

More than 81 percent of the Upper Rio Grande region's total population was reported as "Hispanic" in 2019 and the region's median household income in 2018 was $44,374, which is

[111] Accounts, T. C. of P. (n.d.). *The Upper Rio Grande REGION2020 Regional Report*. The Upper Rio Grande Region. Retrieved May 5, 2022, from https://comptroller.texas.gov/economy/economic-data/regions/2020/rio-grande.php
[112] Ibid.

significantly lower than the state average.[113] The report also identified the Upper Rio Grande region as "a leader in the leather and allied product manufacturing, apparel manufacturing and justice, public order and safety activities industries."[114] Exhibit 4 of the report demonstrates that the "Justice, Public Order and Safety Activities" occupational category employs more people than any other occupation in the Upper Rio Grande Region with 10,958 people in these occupations. This, however, does not include military jobs, which supported 130,943 workers in the Upper Rio Grande region and contributed $15.6 billion to the state in 2019. Further, Exhibit 7 named law enforcement work as a top occupation in the region with 4,225 employed.

Because the office of the Texas Comptroller's report on the Upper Rio Grande did not consider race as a factor in their report on "Women in the Workforce," I supplemented their report with one from *The Status of Women in the States* in 2018 focusing on Texas. According to their key findings in the report, "Hispanic women earn just 44 cents for every dollar earned by White men" and "Texas ranks 34th nationally for the share of women in poverty."[115] Table 2 of *The Status of Women in the States* (an "Overview of the Economic Status of Women of Color in Texas, 2016") highlights that "Hispanic" women are 56.7 percent of the labor force, have median annual earnings of $27,085 (lower than any other racial group in the report), and are 23.0 percent of women in poverty (higher than any other racial group in the report).

Considering the marginalized position of Mexican origin women in the Rio Grande Valley, Marisol points out additional burdens and barriers that these women face in the geopolitical space of the border:

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[113] Accounts, T. C. of P. (n.d.). *The Upper Rio Grande REGION2020 Regional Report*. The Upper Rio Grande Region. Retrieved May 5, 2022, from https://comptroller.texas.gov/economy/economic-data/regions/2020/rio-grande.php

[114] Ibid.

[115] *Www.statusofwomendata.org fact sheet, IWPR #R524, March 2018*. (n.d.). Retrieved May 5, 2022, from https://statusofwomendata.org/wp-content/themes/witsfull/factsheets/economics/factsheet-texas.pdf

> When we were growing up, we knew, like he [Gabriel] was a priority, like if he was in, especially when he was in Juarez because they don't really feed them there that much. So, my mom would have to take him his clothing, his food, his toilet paper, like everything. And she would go every Sunday, and it's super fucking far and he would ask her to like pick up some of the señoras who are also going to see their sons, because it's a … walk through the desert. Dude, I've never been out there but um, like wives, sisters, it's all women who like, go to this prison to take food or whatever. And my mom would do that, she would try every weekend, but it wouldn't always work out and sometimes she just didn't have the money, like we were fucking poor. I do not know how we like, had a roof over my head.

Marisol's brother, Gabriel, had at this point experienced deportation and become incarcerated in a Juarez prison. Although he was now in another country, the porousness of the El Paso / Ciudad Juarez border meant that her family would still be responsible for Gabriel. Responsibility in this context translates to carework that at this time was mainly performed by their mother. Marisol stated, "we knew, like he was a priority … especially when he was in Juarez because they don't really feed them there." While many incarcerated people in the United States express dissatisfaction with food quantity and quality, the conditions and situation in Mexico is dire. Marisol points out that her mother "had to take him his clothing, his food, his toilet paper, like everything." She proceeds to explain how her mother would pick up other "señoras, wives, and sisters" all making the trek through the desert to supply their incarcerated loved ones with basic supplies. In addition to the financial burden placed on these Mexican origin women, they also dealt with the physical toll that traveling, first across the border and then across the desert to the prison, takes on a person. Crossing the border involves long wait times, potential harassment by border patrol, and serious risks for women at the Ciudad Juarez border.[116]

[116] Falcon, Sylvanna. "Rape as a Weapon of War: Advancing Human Rights for Women at the U.S.-Mexico Border." *Social Justice* , vol. 28, no. 2 (84), Social Justice, 2001, pp. 31–50.; Gaspar de Alba, Alicia, and Georgina. Guzmán. *Making a Killing : Femicide, Free Trade, and La Frontera*. 1st ed., University of Texas Press, 2010.; Durazo, Ana Clarissa Rojas. "For Breath to Return to Love: B/ordering Violence and the War on Drugs." *The Routledge History of Latin American Culture*. Routledge, 2017. 323-337.

As the primary financial support system for incarcerated family members, how do women make ends meet? Overall, the Upper Rio Grande Region has a higher unemployment rate compared to the rest of the United States. It has a per capita income of $36,063 versus the US average of $54,446 and has less educated people ranging from high school graduates to a bachelor's degree.[117] When looking at women specifically in the Upper Rio Grande region and Texas at large, they are still primarily working in "care" industries, including healthcare support, personal care and service, office and administrative support, education, library, and healthcare practitioners, and technical occupations.[118] "Hispanic"[119] women are paid less and live in poverty more than any other racial ethnic group included in the report.[120] "Hispanic" women–or more accurately Chicana/xs–in the region are the most undereducated, underpaid, unemployed yet significantly impacted by their family members' incarceration.

It is also important to consider the significance of military and law enforcement employment in the Upper Rio Grande region as this demonstrates where state funding is primarily being allocated. This is where calls to defund the police and military become apparent. If the state of Texas defunded police and military, the funds could be allocated to community support for Chicana/xs in the Upper Rio Grande region to ensure completion of high school and undergraduate degrees, to support them out of poverty, and train them for better employment opportunities. The Prison Policy Initiative reported in 2010 that 972 "Hispanics" per 100,000 people in Texas were

[117] Accounts, T. C. of P. (n.d.). *The Upper Rio Grande REGION2020 Regional Report*. The Upper Rio Grande Region. Retrieved May 5, 2022, from https://comptroller.texas.gov/economy/economic-data/regions/2020/rio-grande.php

[118] Accounts, T. C. of P. (n.d.). *Business center*. Home Comptroller.Texas.Gov. Retrieved May 5, 2022, from https://comptroller.texas.gov/

[119] I use the term "Hispanic" as that is the label placed on Mexican origin peoples in the national data.

[120] *Www.statusofwomendata.org fact sheet, IWPR #R524, March 2018*. (n.d.). Retrieved May 5, 2022, from https://statusofwomendata.org/wp-content/themes/witsfull/factsheets/economics/factsheet-texas.pdf

incarcerated.[121] It is important to note that oftentimes Mexican origin people are documented as white during their incarceration, which complicates carceral demographic information. Nonetheless, there is a disproportionate economic burden being placed on Mexican origin women in the Upper Rio Grande region.

Supporting a loved one who is transitioning out of the system can be financially costly as well, especially since they typically have a difficult time finding employment, housing, and basic human services. Additionally, there can be extra barriers if both parties have a "criminal record" as many probation officers and conditions of parole require that two people who have been convicted of a felony not interact, let alone live together.

Supporting a loved one through incarceration and the post-incarceration phase can be daunting at many points in the process. Marisol describes the impossibility of supporting her brother in a successful re-entry:

> The impossible has to happen like they get everything they need they have like a home, they don't have to worry about bills they just like to have their basic needs met … like I thought to myself, what would need to happen like Gabriel would have to like move in with me and I would essentially have to put my life on hold to like guide him through like being in the real world for a couple years before I'd feel like, okay, he's good. Now, he'd have to go to therapy like all this shit that cost money that like we didn't have. So, the impossible would have had to happen for him to, like, ever feel normal. And then he was't even allowed back in the US. So, like we were never going to have our family whole regardless.

This passage underscores the financial toll for basic needs that is misplaced onto Chicana/xs. The carceral system is not a rehabilitatory space even though prisons are built on this premise.[122] Marisol states that her brother would have needed therapy that cost money she did not have. Another layer of Gabriel's situation was his legal status in the United States. Marisol points out

[121] Initiative, Prison Policy. "Texas Profile." *Texas Profile | Prison Policy Initiative*, https://www.prisonpolicy.org/profiles/TX.html.
[122] Bloom, T., & Bradshaw, G. A. (2022). Inside of a prison: How a culture of punishment prevents rehabilitation. *Peace and Conflict: Journal of Peace Psychology*, *28*(1), 140–143. https://doi.org/10.1037/pac0000572

that “he wasn’t even allowed back in the US … we were never going to have our family whole regardless.”

Another form of carework for systems involved Chicana/xs is their emotional/psychological labor. If these women have the privilege of being able to stay in communication with their incarcerated loved ones–through letter writing, phone calls, visitation, or virtual visits–oftentimes women feel pressure to hold emotional space for their loved ones. The patriarchal racialized space of the prison/jail/detention center, particularly for men, forces them to harden on the outside and shut or numb down internally. It is typically socially unacceptable for incarcerated men to show emotion. In turn, when these incarcerated men communicate with their loved ones on the outside, they find comfort by emotionally dumping onto the person on the other side of the phone–typically their mothers, sisters, daughters, or femme partners. Even though the women in these positions are feeling the emotional heaviness associated with the incarceration of their loved one(s), usually they suppress their own emotions/needs to make space for their loved one to be heard and held. Like their male relatives on the inside, Chicana/xs also learn to harden on the outside while experiencing deep pain and suffering on the inside. Marisol explains:

> I was expected to help him or like figure out, like how to help my mom help him. He’d be like, ‘this is what you got to tell mom to tell the lawyer or whatever.’ And I’m like, fucking in seventh grade, like, ‘okay.’

In addition to making space for her brother Gabriel to be heard and offering him vital support, Marisol shares that she was only in seventh grade at that time, meaning she must have been roughly 12 or 13 years old. While there is an abundance of research that examines how first-generation children of (im)migrant families play crucial roles in their families as cultural brokers,

there remains a gap in carceral studies around how youth, especially of color, play a role in families as carceral brokers.[123] Marisol's role as a cultural broker is also extended into the adultification of a young Chicana. Much of the scholarship on adultification examines how Black girls are perceived as more adultlike than childlike and oftentimes are labeled as "too grown" or "too sassy."[124] While some of these perceptions may be applied to Chicana/xs by dominant society, Marisol's excerpt points to a different form of adultification. She expresses the stress that was placed onto her at such a young age and the pressure of taking on adult-like tasks. Further, she points out that she was the buffer between her brother and mother; that meant supporting her incarcerated brother by translating for him to their mother. Translation here is not in terms of one language to another–they all spoke English and Spanish. Rather, there is a translation of legal terminology and processes that takes place. Chicana/xs in Marisol's position are forced to "figure it out" at young ages, which places a disproportionate amount of stress on them.

Chicana/xs in these positions hold a lot–their own emotional pain and trauma and that of their incarcerated loved one(s). Without healthy habits that assist in channeling this pain, trauma, terror, susto, and emotional heaviness, some Chicanas find themselves with exacerbated mental health issues, addictions of their own, and physical health issues. Emotionally supporting a loved one after their incarceration can be quite taxing, as oftentimes the caretaker can turn into an at-home therapist supporting their family member or loved one to grow accustomed to life "on the

[123] Weisskirch, Robert S., and Sylvia Alatorre Alva. "Language Brokering and the Acculturation of Latino Children." *Hispanic Journal of Behavioral Sciences*, vol. 24, no. 3, Aug. 2002, pp. 369–378, doi:10.1177/0739986302024003007.; Salinas, M. D. (2021). In Lak'ech from the Ivory Tower to the Prison Tower: Connecting Latina 'Disposables' to Latina 'Exceptionals' across Neoliberal Institutions. *UC Santa Barbara*. ProQuest ID: Salinas_ucsb_0035D_15227. Merritt ID: ark:/13030/m5bg9dz7. Retrieved from https://escholarship.org/uc/item/8kg0k15p

[124] Epstein, Rebecca, Jamilia J. Blake, and Thalia Gonzalez. *Girlhood Interrupted: The Erasure of Black Girls' Childhood.* , 2017. Internet resource.

outside" again. Errands that seem normal to most people can become strange and overwhelming for someone who is transitioning out of incarceration.

Ruby, a 31-year-old Chicana born and raised in El Paso, explained that carework involves loss and trauma. Her mother and father, both Mexican nationals, relocated to El Paso in 1991 where they raised Ruby and her two brothers. At an early age, Ruby's father, Fermin, became incarcerated and thus she was raised primarily by her mother, Dee, and brothers Felix and Valentine. At thirteen Ruby's father was released from prison and by the time she was fifteen her mother was imprisoned, her brothers and father would be disappeared, and she was alone in the US. Fast forward to the present day when she has buried both of her brothers, and she has yet to learn the whereabouts of her father, but welcomed her mother home after roughly 15 years of incarceration.

> It was just very, very harsh because I was only 15 years old when that happened, and I was left. You know, obviously, my, my father fled, and I had two older brothers and they fled with him. So, I stayed here in the United States. I was here by myself, navigating on my own and by the grace of God. I didn't get taken by, you know, into a foster, into the foster care system. And I was able to, you know, I got married at an early age. And that's what basically saved me from it, but you know, I was affected by the system because of the way that it went down with my mom and my parents.

Ruby shares that it was "by the grace of God" that she did not get taken into the foster care system or worse, as a teenage Chicana. She proceeds to share that her marriage enabled her to evade the foster care system.

FIG 2.2. Photo provided by oral history participant Ruby. (From left to right: Ruby, cousin, seated in blue, her brother (Felix), kneeling above is her brother (Valentine), and far right her cousin.

Because carework for Ruby is woven with loss and trauma, her cultural artifacts, such as this photo, are tied up with separation and loss, yet also transmit knowledge and memory.[125] This photo was captured inside one of the facilities where her father was incarcerated during her childhood. If you look behind the seated children, you can see incarcerated people in khaki seated at tables with family during visitations. Ruby, when discussing the picture started with "so my father, I don't have any pictures of him or any pictures of myself when I was young, so when I get these old school pictures, I'm like ahhhh because I haven't seen these pictures." Ruby's tia

[125] Cvetkovich, Ann. *An Archive of Feelings: Trauma, Sexuality, and Lesbian Public Cultures*. Durham, N.C: Duke University Press, 2019. Print.

happened to hold onto these photos and recently gave them to her. Although the photo triggers painful memories of her childhood without her father, Ruby articulates the excitement and joy she experiences through the sharing and viewing of the photo. In this way, it is difficult to disentangle loss/trauma from the carework that she would eventually perform for years to come for various family members.

FIG 2.3. Photo of paño provided by oral history participant Ruby.

Figure 2.3 depicts a prison paño constructed by Ruby's father while he was incarcerated. "Feliz Navidad, 1997" is written in the top left corner, marking the time that the paño was either crafted and/or sent. "El Paso, Texas" is written in thick red letters in the top right corner. The paño illustrates both a contemporary existence of Chicano culture in the United States, especially Texas, and a historical look to Mexican origin peoples of Indigenous roots. Two Aztec warriors are depicted in the piece, both taking combat style positions with their arms up and ready to engage in battle. One warrior holds a woman bleeding at the heart while the other stands in front of a woman kneeling in a sexualized position; her arms holding her hair up and a slight smirk displayed on her face. A serpent, eagle, and jaguar also make appearances in the paño, all animals with deep significance and symbolism within Mexican mythology. Pyramids and mountains in the background further represent Indigenous roots and connections. A modern-day representation of Mexican origin people is also present through the lowrider in the top right hand corner and the illustration of Chicano cholos with the thick mustache, a paño on the forehead and locs. Two more women appear in the paño, one depicting a connection to a warrior spirit with a braid and dagger. The other portraying a more somber, perhaps sad woman. In the corner with more modern-day representations of Mexicans, there is an image of what appears to be an older Native man–perhaps as a reminder to not forget our Indigenous roots. In the top center of the paño, an image of a large marijuana leaf occupies much of the space. Perhaps this is a gesture to the criminalization many Mexican origin people experience as a result of the drug. The left-hand corner has the Mexican flag–the colors, the eagle, and the serpent remind the viewer of the nationalist ties many Mexicans have to the country.

The images depicted in Figure 1.3 illustrate historical trends spanning as far back as Mesoamerica and engage in iconography deeply prevalent in Chicano tattoos, murals, and

airbrush paint on lowriders. This iconography was influenced by Jesús Helguera and the Mexican muralist movement. Prison paños are said to have been produced for nearly a century, narrowing its emergence to southwest penitentiaries and having roots in abolitionist movements in the United States and England.[126] Although a handful of prison paño art exhibitions have been held in the United States and abroad since 1996, paños have lacked scholarly attention. Art historian Álvaro Ibarra recently addressed this gap by examining four paños in the permanent collection of the Nora Eccles Harrison Museum of Art (NEHMA) at the University of Utah and three from the Leplat-Torti collection. One of his chief concerns was with the manner in which these paños ended up in an art museum. He also considers the status of the paños given their current home and the way in which viewers should engage the objects given their history. Especially relevant is his discussion of the "stereotypical macho Mexican culture … cisgendered, heteronormative fantasies" typically depicted in paños (8). Ibarra argues that we must resist the urge to reduce paños to the content as it "disregards their artistic merit and demotes them to the status of objects of fetishistic interest rather than objects of art" (8).

While the paño provided by Ruby depicts a macho Mexican culture, cisgendered, heternormative fantasy and a potential appropriation of Indigenous culture, as Ibarra argued we must not reduce the paños to the content. Literary scholar Cordelia Candelaria points out that "art offers almost the only human form of redemption that contrasts with the monotony and brutality of prison."[127] The paño is an invocation of redemption for incarcerated Mexican origin men– redemption from their families, a request of sorts for forgiveness and an urge to witness their

[126] Ibarra, Álvaro. "Sueño En Paño: Texas Chicano Prison Inmate Art in the Nora Eccles Harrison Museum of Art Collection, Utah State University, and the Leplat-Torti Collection." *Latino studies 19.1* (2021): 7–26. Web.; Sorell, V A. *Illuminated Handkerchiefs, Tattooed Bodies, and Prison Scribes: Meditations on the Aesthetic, Religious and Social Sensibilities of Chicano Pintos*. Notre Dame, Ind.: Snite Museum of Art, University of Notre Dame, 2005. Print.

[127] Lint, Robert G. "Candelaria, Cordelia. Chicano Poetry: A Critical Introduction." *Western American Literature*, vol. 21, no. 4, 1987, p. 380–.

humanness / humanity as racially criminalized subjects. Paños transmit knowledge, serving as objects of communication, tokens of love, and means of expressing cultural affirmation and faith.[128] Surely Ruby's paño served as a means of communication from her father to the outside world; however, it is difficult to decipher the message as it was created with a particular recipient/audience in mind and not necessarily for academic/artistic consumption or analysis.

In addition to the incarceration of her father, Ruby experienced the incarceration of her mother at the young age of fifteen. She discusses the emotional/psychological impact her mother's incarceration had on her in the past and how its reverberations continue to be felt now that her mother is home:

> It's interesting, we're starting to get to know each other because those 15-minute calls once a week don't really cut. It's very simple, like, hi, how are you doing, and most of the time she, you know, she would take out her frustrations on me, but I was only one, you know, she's like, hey, you need to do this, you need to do that. Like a lot of tasks and so like all that pressure had been on me after you know once my father was gone. It's like, boom. It's just you. You know what I mean, so I did it for an immense amount of time, it was just a lot of stress. A lot of worrying, a lot of I remember that I used to feel that I had to reach fame to be able to have the power, you know, I would tell myself. I mean, though I was young minded, I would think. No, I'm going to have to be, you know, a famous person to be able to have the power to be able to bring my mom home and I mean, life happens, you have kids, get married. It's like, obviously that's not one of your priorities, you know, I ended up being [a] wife and not, you know, a movie star or whatever it was that I wanted to pursue back in the days, but I was it just, it drove me to insanity all the worries, all the, you know, you just feel helpless because it's you against the system, you against, you know, the feds [are] against you anyways. It was just an ugly feeling.

[128] Ibarra, Álvaro. "Sueño En Paño: Texas Chicano Prison Inmate Art in the Nora Eccles Harrison Museum of Art Collection, Utah State University, and the Leplat-Torti Collection." *Latino studies 19.1* (2021): 7–26. Web.; Sorell, V A. *Illuminated Handkerchiefs, Tattooed Bodies, and Prison Scribes: Meditations on the Aesthetic, Religious and Social Sensibilities of Chicano Pintos*. Notre Dame, Ind.: Snite Museum of Art, University of Notre Dame, 2005. Print.

Ruby shares the pressures and to-do lists that were typically shared in her fifteen-minute phone calls with her mother while she was incarcerated for almost fifteen years. She also describes how her mother would "take out her frustrations" on Ruby and the stress that was introduced into her life as a result. She states, "it drove me to insanity … it's just you against the system."

Ruby, similar to Lulu, also expressed a feeling of entrapment within the carceral system even though she herself was not incarcerated. Again, this speaks to the ways in which non-imprisoned Chicana/xs are entangled in the prison system because of their proximity to racially criminalized family members–in this case, her mother. What's more is the psychological impact that the incarceration of a loved one can have on Chicana/xs:

> With me, it was more like why am I paying for the mistakes of others. Prior to me having a mental breakdown, I was very young and naive and once, like I had that mental breakdown like my mind changed completely, it was just anxiety out the roof like coming out from, you know, the mental health hospital. They want to put you on Xanax, they want to put you on this, on that, get into a program that you're forced to be in. And if you don't, you know, you have to comply with this program. But at the end of the day, you know, they just want to drug you up. They really don't care about your mental health, you're just another statistic. You're just another crazy person and you know they're just shoving medication down your throat.

Ruby's mental health deteriorated to the point that she landed in a state hospital, a medical expense that continues to haunt her as it was originally sent to collections.

These oral histories show not only that the carceral state creates public health problems for "inmates," but also for the communities to which they return. Psychologists Yvette G. Flores and Mónica Torreiro-Casal examine these injustices in the family, along with substance abuse, violence in the family, migration, deportation, separation, as well as queerness in Chican/Latinx families.[129] Public health scholar Miguel Muñoz-Laboy and colleagues detail the role of social

[129] Flores, Yvette Gisele, and Mónica Torreiro-Casal. *Psychological Perspectives on Chicanx and Latinx Families*. Second edition. San Diego: Cognella, 2020. Print.

support in the mental health of formerly incarcerated Latino men (FILM).[130] They found that "familialism mediated association between perceived emotional support and anxiety/depression … therefore, we must consider designing network enhancement interventions that focus on both FILM and their social support systems" (226). Furthermore, in the field of health, Arévalo, Bécares, and Amaro examined various aspects of health among incarcerated Latino men.[131] The article covers physical health care, mental health care, drug use, and the "criminal history" of incarcerated Latinos, including Mexican origin men as a subgroup. They name the economic hardships and structural barriers that formerly incarcerated Latino men face, which in turn becomes a hurdle for the "offender," the family, and the community, "exacerbating existent racial/ethnic health disparities" (154).

While there is abundance of scholarship on the psychology of Chicana/o/x peoples in various contexts, there remains a gap in research regarding the psychological effects of dealing with the incarceration of loved ones, especially as Mexican origin women. What is evident, though, is the role that family plays in the mental and physical well-being of Mexican origin men both prior to, during, and after incarceration. Further, it is clear that the incarceration of loved ones has serious implications for all family members involved–both physically and psychologically. Ruby's experience reflects those of many young systems impacted Chicana/xs who have navigated their own mental health struggles as a result of the incarceration of a loved one: "... at the end of the day. You know, they just want to drug you up. They really don't care about your mental health,

[130] Muñoz-Laboy, Miguel et al. "Differential Impact of Types of Social Support in the Mental Health of Formerly Incarcerated Latino Men." *American journal of men's health* 8.3 (2014): 226–239. Web.

[131] Arévalo S, Becares L, Amaro H. Health of Incarcerated Latino Men. In: Aguirre-Molina M, Borrell L, Vega W, editors. Health Issues in Latino Males: A Social and Structural Approach [Internet] New Jersey: Rutgers University Press; 2010. Chapter 8; p.139-157. 978-0-8135-4604-9p. Available from: https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt5hj7x4.

you're just another statistic." Her narrative should urge us to take seriously the issue of mental health among systems impacted Chicana/xs.

There is also the physical labor, which can manifest as time, involved in caring for currently incarcerated people, especially for Mexicanas and Chicanas. Some women find themselves having to pick up another job to make ends meet at home and to continue funding supplies for their loved ones inside. In pre-COVID times, physical labor was especially present among poor women and women of color (Story 2019). The process of driving, using public transportation, or paying for private buses to visit family members inside is an arduous process that has been documented by scholars such as Ruth W. Gilmore and Brett Story.[132] Since COVID, the conditions of physical labor have shifted in this context. New research is needed to understand how these shifts have affected the most marginalized in these spaces.[133]

This focus on health is also important because sometimes people engaged in carework later become ensnared in the system themselves. Dee's testimonio differs from the other oral history participants since she became incarcerated herself. In her oral history, Dee revealed that she was born in Tamaulipas Reynosa, Mexico in 1956 and left home at the young age of fifteen to escape a violent household. Her mother, who experienced domestic violence from Dee's father, worked long hours and began physically punishing Dee. Within two years of leaving home, Dee met her first husband, got married, and began having children. Dee left her first husband after roughly three years because of his alcoholism and domestic abuse. Eventually she

[132] Gilmore, Ruth Wilson. *Golden Gulag : Prisons, Surplus, Crisis, and Opposition in Globalizing California*. University of California Press, 2007.; Story, Brett. *Prison Land: Mapping Carceral Power Across Neoliberal America*. , 2019. Print.

[133] For further information see LeMasters, Katherine et al. "Carceral Epidemiology: Mass Incarceration and Structural Racism During the COVID-19 Pandemic." *The Lancet. Public health* 7.3 (2022): e287–e290. Web.

would give birth to five children, two of whom have since passed away, and remarry her second husband.

Dee's late husband was involved in major underground economies primarily based in the El Paso-Ciudad Juárez border region. After his initial arrest in the early 1990s, Dee went on to take care of her children alone, obtained her GED and eventually became a compliance officer at the US-Mexico border. Her position as a compliance officer would backfire after her husband was released from prison when she was arrested, accused, and convicted of involvement in her husband's illicit business as a look out. Dee would go on to serve almost 15 years in prison and still to this day has not learned her husbands' whereabouts. Her testimonio therefore interweaves her own story with that of her husband. Reflecting on her husband's incarceration for 13 years, Dee shares:

> Really, I think now that I lost my time waiting for him, like almost 13 years. Now married with nobody, which I did have a proposal, to be honest. Yes, I did. I went out those 13 years. I met guys.

Dee proceeds to emphasize that she never brought any men home throughout the thirteen year period that her husband was incarcerated, but she also makes clear that men proposed marriage to her and she chose to remain married to her incarcerated husband, perhaps out of a sense of responsibility or loyalty.[134] Beyond a potential sense of responsibility or loyalty, Dee shares how she lost thirteen years waiting for a husband who would be released from prison and quickly start a family with another woman, abandoning Dee after she became incarcerated in connection with his illicit business. In addition to the physical labor that Dee performed for her husband during his incarceration–as evidenced by her traveling throughout the United States to

[134] Flores-Ortiz, Yvette G. "Levels of Acculturation, Marital Satisfaction, and Depression among Chicana Workers: A Psychological Perspective." *Aztlan: A Journal of Chicano Studies* 20 (1991): 151-75.

visit him in various federal detention facilities–she also gave her time to her husband by waiting for his release for more than a decade.

This chapter has attempted to unravel some of the complexities of carework for systems impacted Chicana/xs in the Southwest. By situating their communities and experiences in the geopolitical space of the Southwest and considering settler colonial influences, I have drawn out some of the contradictions that emerge in their material lives. Further, by utilizing an intersectional approach that considers race, class and gender within a doubly colonial space like the Southwest, we are able to better understand the transnational experience that Marisol explicates.

In the context of the El Paso-Ciudad Juárez border region, there are additional physical labor requirements. Physical labor includes what Marisol mentioned above when describing her mother's treks to Juarez to deliver her brother food, clothes, and toiletries. Physical labor can also be understood as her mother putting her physical body on the line. Marisol describes this:

> …and then she'd go and we would just like, would sit around at home. I hope she comes home … like sometimes she'd come home, super fucking late and I would just be so worried because I know like they were killing the señoras. Most of the women my mom would give rides to, they're all dead.

Marisol's excerpt suggests a need for further research on this area, as violence against women and the murders of women in Ciudad Juarez are widely known.[135] Marisol speaks to this narrative herself when she explains, "most of the women my mom would give rides to, they're all dead." In this way, Marisol and her mother not only experienced physical and emotional labor in the carework performed for their loved one, but they also experienced forms of psychological terror faced with the reality of potential death in caring for their brother and son.

[135] Fregoso, Rosa Linda., and Cynthia L. Bejarano. *Terrorizing Women : Feminicide in the Américas*. Durham [NC: Duke University Press, 2010. Print.

Spiritual labor and heartwork in caring for currently and formerly incarcerated loved ones are just as important and impactful as other aspects that have already been outlined. Some Chicana/xs perform Indigenous ceremonies to help center themselves and their incarcerated loved ones, or they seek curanderas, sobadas, limpias, etc. These ceremonies can take many different forms but will not be discussed or elaborated on here as it is beyond the scope of this dissertation. Others find solace in Catholic or Christian prayers requesting safety for their incarcerated loved ones. Supporting an incarcerated loved one requires that Chicana/xs and Mexicanas expend energy to remain human through the process and to work toward bringing humanity to their loved ones inside.

Managing and navigating the premature death of a loved one involves many of the same pursuits and more. Both involve developing a deep relationship with grief and mourning. Grieving the incarceration of a loved one involves managing the reality of their ongoing social death.[136] While they may be literally alive, the world does not have the ability nor the option to see this person and family members/loved ones have no access to their incarcerated loved ones. One oral history participant said, "it feels like they're dying over and over and over again." This type of grieving is contingent on a colonial carceral regimes' decision about how racially criminalized subjects might live and ultimately how they will die.

In instances where Chicana/xs and Mexicanas have had to manage and navigate the premature death of a loved one, much of the same care work is involved: monetary work, emotional labor, physical work, psychological work, spiritual labor and heartwork. Burying a loved one is expensive. In the borderland region, funerals cost roughly $10,000. For a poor working-class family who was already systematically disenfranchised by the racial wealth gap while supporting

[136] Cacho, Lisa M. *Social Death: Racialized Rightlessness and the Criminalization of the Unprotected*. New York: New York University Press, 2012. Print

a loved one inside, $10,000 is oftentimes inaccessible. Much of the labor therefore continues even after loved ones have been buried. Family members grieve their loss, but they do much more, and this is where access to information about the material conditions under which Chicana/o/x and Mexican origin communities live is crucial. Without access and the ability to process information related to our colonization, policing, and racialization, many Mexicans are left blaming themselves, their incarcerated loved ones, or their deceased loved ones. This is particularly poignant in the borderland region where access to education is scarce, and Mexicans have been funneled into physical labor for employment or into a jail/prison cell for punishment.

FIG 2.4 Photo of Dee provided by oral history participant. She is pictured in the middle along with her two sons, daughter, and husband on her right.

Scholarship on the US incarceration system tends to examine prisons exclusively within its nation-state borders.[137] While there is certainly value in understanding the inner workings of

[137] Alexander, Michelle. *The New Jim Crow : Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*. New York: New Press, 2010. Print.; Ravis, Jeremy, Bruce Western, and F. Stevens Redburn. *The Growth of Incarceration in the United States : Exploring Causes and Consequences*. Washington, D.C: National Academies Press, 2014. Print.;

the US incarceration system on its own, there is much to investigate in border regions such as El Paso, Calexico, and San Diego.[138] Borderland regions present an opportunity for scholars to examine how many families who reside on the border navigate the deportation and subsequent incarceration of their loved ones. Two of the four participants in this dissertation shared how their loved ones were either transferred from a US prison to a Mexican prison (i.e. deported) or first deported and later incarcerated in Juarez. There has been an emergence of work looking at how immigration and the US incarceration system intersect in what some scholars name as a crimmigration system–and still there remains space to examine the impacts of crimmigration on borderland families.[139]

The previous sections aimed to enumerate the various facets of Chicana/x carework in the Southwest. Because Dee is the only oral history participant who was both formerly incarcerated and systems impacted, I shift to a contextualization of her history through a transnational feminist prison studies framework. Global capitalism, patriarchy, and neocolonial racialized ideologies shaped Dee's life early on. She describes how the timeline of her mother's pregnancies matched the economic needs of the United States. While her family still lived in Mexico, her father, who was recruited to the Bracero program, would travel back and forth from the US every two years: "every two years, … my mom was pregnant because my father used to come to the United States … contractor work in the United States and go back to Mexico and

Enns, Peter. *Incarceration Nation : How the United States Became the Most Punitive Democracy in the World*. New York NY: Cambridge University Press, 2016. Print.

[138] Ordaz, Jessica. *The Shadow of El Centro : a History of Migrant Incarceration and Solidarity*. Chapel Hill, North Carolina: The University of North Carolina Press, 2021. Print.

[139] Macias-Rojas, Patrisia. *From Deportation to Prison : the Politics of Immigration Enforcement in Post-Civil Rights America*. New York: New York University Press, 2016. Print.; Jiang, Jize, and Edna Erez. "Immigrants as symbolic assailants: Crimmigration and its discontents." *International criminal justice review* 28.1 (2018): 5-24.

boom, she get pregnant again. So, every two years." The timing of her mother's pregnancies reveals the global capitalist forces thrust upon Mexican origin peoples.

The economic needs of the United States have thus shaped and continue to shape the everyday lives of Mexicanas and Chicana/xs in Mexico and the United States. From an early time in Dee's childhood, she took on the role of a careworker:

> I get married when I was seventeen years old, I run away from home when I was fifteen … I had child abuse from my mother but because she was abused from my father, so she punished me, beating me a lot. So, and that was because she used to work hard from 10 am in the morning to 10 pm in the afternoon. So, I was the head of household, I was the mother of my, my siblings–a lot of responsibility on my shoulders to take care of them. No childhood, no nothing. So, I was living in a poor family but, we are blessed.

Dee, through her own healing process, was able to contextualize the entirety of her own personhood rather than fragmenting her humanity. Dee does not reduce her mother's abuse to any one action or the action of child abuse. Instead, Dee contextualizes why her mother perpetuated abuse, understanding that her mother was a victim of violence at the hands of her partner and was experiencing the violence of racial capitalism through her arduous, long workdays and the conditions of poverty. Dee does not excuse her mother's abuse; she does explain it though. She expresses how she was not the biological mother of her siblings but acted as head of household since her mother was working all the time. As a child Dee was forced into the position of caretaker, was forced to experience child abuse, and pushed into survival mode, all of which would continue for most of her life. In being forced into the position of a caretaker, Dee experienced the requirements and expectations of a young Mexicana to perform feminized labor that is not valued in Mexican or "American" society.

Further, Dee's experience of childhood abuse is rooted in patriarchy. Her mother's abuse was arguably transferred to Dee because of the abuse she experienced at the hands of her husband. The abuse she experienced has had lasting effects on Dee's life:

> I don't like nobody like [to] touch me. I don't feel like it's a trauma, but I think it is because if someone touch me like this, I go back to when she used to punish me hard, belt, it was a hard punishment, that's why I run away … but then I got married, the same thing. Domestic abuse, my husband, he used to drink a lot and he beat me and I just last … I get married with him and last three maybe four years and that was it, I left him and moved to Nebraska with my mom and my siblings. Yeah, it was hard.

These multiple forms of abuse are all rooted within patriarchal and machista culture within Mexican origin communities. The trauma that she endured from years of abuse coming from various contexts emotionally and psychologically scarred Dee. The purpose of focusing on Dee's experiences with abuse is not to paint her as a helpless victim, but rather to contextualize her life and historicize the conditions from which she came, and to show how outside forces, rooted in white supremacy, patriarchy, neocolonial racialization, and global capitalism, all played a role in how her life would turn out.

CONCLUSION

Chicanas and Mexicanas take on the brunt of the carceral system in the Southwest, whether through physical incarceration, detention, deportation, murder, or the carework they perform for their currently/previously incarcerated loved ones and those who experience premature death. Chicanas and Mexicanas in the Southwest are at the forefront of the battle against the carceral system as their survival strategies are criminalized and directly fuel the prison-industrial complex. If they themselves are not the direct target of the legal system, they experience the ripple effects of the carceral regime through the carework they are expected and often forced to perform.

Although these forms of labor are separated throughout the dissertation as pre-incarceration, incarceration, post-incarceration, and premature death, these forms of labor overlap across different time periods in the carceral web.

CHAPTER TWO

INVISIBILIZED RACED, CLASSED, AND GENDERED LABOR: CAREWORK, CHICANA/XS, AND THE INFORMAL REENTRY SYSTEM[140]

"There's no, there's no way out. The only way out is like he's dead now."

–Marisol, non-imprisoned systems impacted Chicana/x from El Paso

Chapter One focused primarily on pre-incarceration and incarceration and their combined impact on Chicana/xs who remain in their communities. I looked at the labor involved in caring for formerly/currently incarcerated loved ones and the labor of reproducing the Chicana/o/x community. I argued that even though Chicana/xs labor within the context of the carceral regime is invisible, it is still fundamental to the functioning of the family and carceral apparatus. Chapter Two moves into the post-incarceration and premature death of loved ones. I look at the labor expected/required in supporting a loved one upon release from incarceration and, relatedly, the labor associated with their premature death. Further, I examine what happens to Chicana/xs when we "fail" to support our loved ones and they either return to prison or experience premature death. Lastly, I explore how Chicana/xs heal and find happiness after being subjected violence and trauma.

POST-INCARCERATION AND PREMATURE DEATH

[140] As mentioned elsewhere, I build from Essie Justice Group's notion of women of color as the informal reentry system and look specifically at Chicana/xs in the Southwest region

The organic emergence of post-incarceration and premature death in sacred platicas with Chicana/xs and Mexicanas signals the frequency at which these community members are confronted with these traumatic situations in the geopolitical space of the borderlands.[141] Extra-legal and state-sanctioned violence against Mexican origin peoples in Texas can be traced back to Native criminalization, the Texas Rangers (vigilante violence), and a general anti-Mexican material and ideological atmosphere that continues into the twenty-first century.[142] Oral history participants spent a significant amount of time describing/discussing their experience and labor upon the release of their loved one(s) from incarceration. There is a body of scholarship that highlights the impact of incarceration on the people who experience incarceration themselves and similarly, there is a growing body of literature on premature death in many aspects, not just as it relates to incarceration.[143]

This research has focused primarily on men of color although recently there has been more attention paid to the experiences of women of color.[144] Juanita Diaz-Cotto looked at experiences before, during, and after incarceration among Chicanas in Los Angeles.[145] Megan Comfort documented primarily Black women's experiences of being in relationships with

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[141] Martinez, Monica M. *The Injustice Never Leaves You: Anti-mexican Violence in Texas*. , 2020. Print.
[142] Ibid.; Carrigan, William D, and Clive Webb. *Forgotten Dead: Mob Violence against Mexicans in the United States, 1848-1928*. , 2017. Print.
[143] Amanda E. Temares, Brittany D. Parker, Lenore E. Walker & David Shapiro (2022) Parental Grief, Wrongful Incarceration, and the Continued Effects after Exoneration, Journal of Aggression, Maltreatment & Trauma, DOI: 10.1080/10926771.2022.2051656.; Tadros, E., Durante, K. A., McKay, T., Barbini, M., & Hollie, B. (2022). Mental health, perceived consensus of coparenting, and physical health among incarcerated fathers and their nonincarcerated, romantic partners. *Families, Systems, & Health.*Advance online publication. https://doi.org/10.1037/fsh0000671. ; Ricky Camplain, Travis A. Pinn, Lyle Becenti, Heather J. Williamson, George Pro, Crystal Luna, and James Bret.Journal of Correctional Health Care.Feb 2022.6-11.http://doi.org/10.1089/jchc.20.05.0041.; Aguirre-Molina, Marilyn, Luisa N. Borrell, and William Vega. *Health Issues in Latino Males: A Social and Structural Approach*. New Brunswick, N.J: Rutgers University Press, 2010. Print.
[144] Ritchie, Andrea J. *Invisible No More: Police Violence against Black Women and Women of Color*. , 2017. Print.; *Color of Violence: The Incite! Anthology*. , 2016. Print.; Law, Victoria. Resistance Behind Bars: The Struggles of Incarcerated Women. United States, PM Press, 2012.
[145] Díaz-Cotto, Juanita. *Chicana Lives and Criminal Justice : Voices from El Barrio*. First edition., University of Texas Press, 2006.

currently incarcerated men.[146] Todd Clear studied the unintended consequences of incarceration on intimate social relationships, including private (intimate) social control, social networks, and economic and political systems through an ethnographic study of two poor, almost entirely Black, communities in Florida. He concluded that sustained high levels of incarceration impair various aspects of community life and damage the community.[147] There remains an opportunity to look at the experiences of Chicana/xs who are in various relationships with previously/currently incarcerated loved ones and what happens when those incarcerated loved ones return home and/or experience premature death. What kind of carework is involved in supporting a loved one in the post-incarceration phase as a Chicana/x?

Although gang and border scholars of El Paso have identified the city as a community of low incarceration rates and relatively low levels of violence, supporting the theory of "El Paso being the safest city to live in," what perhaps has not been explored is the way that many of the Mexican men who get detained in El Paso never stay incarcerated there.[148] El Paso County does not have a prison. The closest prison is FCI La Tuna and La Tuna Federal Correctional Institution located in Anthony, Texas. While these detention facilities are only a thirty-minute drive away, they technically are not in El Paso County. El Paso County has a handful of jails and (im)migrant detention centers. This means that while Mexican / Chicano men in El Paso may be disproportionately sentenced to prison, it appears that incarceration rates are low in the county. This is a delicate discussion as I do not wish to argue that crime is high in El Paso or perpetuate the notion that Mexican / Chicano men in the border region are violent. Rather, from an

[146] Comfort, Megan. *Doing Time Together : Love and Family in the Shadow of the Prison*. University of Chicago Press, 2008.
[147] Clear, Todd R. *Imprisoning Communities: How Mass Incarceration Makes Disadvantaged Neighborhoods Worse*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010. Print.
[148] Duran, Robert J. *The Gang Paradox: Inequalities and Miracles on the U.s.-Mexico Border*. Columbia University Press, 2018. Print.; https://kisselpaso.com/el-paso-once-again-makes-the-top-of-the-safest-large-us-city-list/

abolitionist framework, if a disproportionate number of Mexican / Chicano men are getting detained it means that hyper policing is taking place. Therefore, while El Paso may read as a safe city with low crime and incarceration rates, there are a disproportionate number of Mexican / Chicano men getting detained and shipped off to prisons across Texas and the rest of the country, a historical process that has been occurring since the late nineteenth century.[149]

Marisol elaborated on the deep impact "the system" can have on those who become incarcerated and their families. In underscoring the insidiousness of the carceral regime via post-incarceration and premature death, she said, "The damage that that system caused on his life, like, keeps traveling through us, like even still now, like, he's dead and we're still dealing with it." This damage, which she says "keeps traveling through us," began with her brother Gabriel and continued to travel from him to his family members. While incarceration is typically seen as a solution to deal with so-called criminals by removing them from society and not necessarily as a form of punishment for the families of those individuals, the incarceration of these men often translates precisely into the punishment of those left behind. That is, although these family members may not experience physical punishment from the state, they are subjected to psychological, emotional, and spiritual punishment because of the anguish their loved ones experience as a result of their relation to their loved ones. This relation that Chicana/xs have to their loved ones, rooted in Indigenous practices and belief systems, means they also experience the cuts of incarceration. These cuts, or wounds, continue after their incarceration and most

[149] I mentioned in a previous footnote that this is an area for further analysis and research as my participants have confirmed this process but there is a gap in the literature. There are a few publications that hint at this process but nothing that explicitly takes this position. James Wilson's article "Frontier in the Shadows: Prisons in the Far Southwest 1850-1917" from 1980 began addressing some of the early purposes of prison building projects in the Southwest and he identified a serious gap in the literature then. Donna Crail-Rugotzke's dissertation "The treatment of minorities and women by southwestern courts and prisons" addresses the experiences of women in Southwest prisons and details some locations where they were shipped off and for what reasons.

certainly continue for Chicana/xs who lose their loved ones to premature death, which was the case for Marisol. She says, "he's dead and we're still dealing with it."

EXPECTED / REQUIRED LABOR

> Tú lo cargas, no veo una solución, no veo escape, es algo horrible, y eso que no estoy allí //
> You carry it, I don't see a solution or a way out. It's something horrible and that's that– I'm not even there.
>
> –Lulu, a non-imprisoned, systems impacted Mexicana and madre

Non imprisoned Mexican origin women are trapped by the criminal legal system via their proximity to it. That is, simply through their relationship and physical proximity to primarily Mexican origin / Chicano men, Chicana/xs are expected, forced, and required to perform labor for their loved ones prior to, during, and after incarceration. The expected/forced labor of Chicana/xs ultimately serves the criminal legal system by helping keep the system intact: intentionally or not, the criminal legal system relies on Chicana/x labor just as it relies on the physical bodies of Chicano / Mexican men to fill the beds.[150] While not all incarcerated Chicano / Mexican men receive carework and labor from their "female" loved ones, or even equally, the women who do perform carework / labor are pouring a great deal of financial and other support that the prison system requires for its functioning.

Lulu's excerpt, which opens this section, highlights her experience of entrapment by the criminal legal system: "tu lo cargas, no veo un solución, no veo escape/ you carry it, I don't see a solution or a way out." Lulu begins by sharing that she carries the pain of separation from her

[150] https://theappeal.org/if-you-build-it-they-will-come-how-jail-beds-drive-incarceration/; Cuevas, Ofelia O. "Welcome to My Cell: Housing and Race in the Mirror of American Democracy." *American Quarterly*, vol. 64, no. 3, 2012, pp. 605–24, http://www.jstor.org/stable/23273536. Accessed 16 Apr. 2022.

son and the labor associated with his incarceration such as visitations, court hearings, and lawyer meetings among many other things. She also signals how she feels trapped herself when she says, “I’m not even there [prison]” and still she does not see a solution or way out. There is no solution to her son’s incarceration and similarly there is no solution to her position as careworker/laborer to her son and therefore the criminal legal system. The prison system benefits from the labor/carework of Chicana/xs, especially as it relates to the financial resources poured into it year after year. For a deeper discussion of the financial impact on Chicana/xs and the way the prison system created lucrative industries from the families of those incarcerated, see Chapter One. The expected / required labor of Chicana/xs on behalf of their incarcerated loved ones comes from the criminal legal system and the incarcerated person.

As discussed in Chapter One, Mexican origin women’s relationship to carework and labor is rooted in the history of colonialism. To complicate the discussion on entrapment above, Lulu’s decision to carry “it” can be read as an act of passivity and agency. On the one hand, she gives into the pressure and expectation that she will continue to make sacrifices, including herself, for her children and especially one who is incarcerated, leaning into a passive role. On the other hand, choosing to be part of her son’s imprisonment in the face of the criminal legal system as a Spanish speaking Mexican origin woman requires strength, resilience, and agency. Dealing with law enforcement on any level as a Mexican origin woman can be intimidating as they have historically been targets of racialization, criminalization, and violence from law enforcement.

Distinctly, an example of expected/required labor to be performed on behalf of systems impacted Chicanas in the post-incarceration phase can be found in their hesitation to start families of their own so that they can remain available for the family. As Marisol explains,

> I'm about to be 31 and I've never like, I definitely have thought about how, like, how much I've like intentionally not gone down a certain path of like wanting a family or whatever because I'm like, damn, I want to be able to help my sister's kids and my brother's kids and how much of that can I do without and still have my own family. Like, I can't. The moment I have my own family, my whole world is going to change. And I will no longer be able to be that person for them

Here, we can think about the impact of the criminal legal system on the larger Chicana/o/x community and its ability to biologically reproduce itself. Although Marisol shares that it was a conscious decision she made not to start a family, she proceeds to explain that it was out of concern that she would "no longer be able to be that person for them." By "that person," she is referring to the support system she has been relegated to and chosen for herself. This is one impact the criminal legal system has on Chicana/o/x carceral communities–the hesitancy of impacted women to have children of their own. Another layer to consider is the fact that many Chicano / Mexican men who are in the age range to have children are incarcerated.[151] To what extent has this situation stunted the growth of the Chicana/o/x community, if at all?

A separate form of expected/required labor from Chicana/xs that is not necessarily supporting the criminal legal system is the load that is placed on them to heal themselves and the family–to break cycles / intergenerational trauma and curses, especially in the twenty-first century when discussions of being the cycle breakers are frequent in academia, among communities, and on social media. Marisol elaborates this notion of cycle breaking in the following passage:

> …and like now I have to decide is that healthy. I'm like, is that part of the pain you should feel when you're like disrupting the cycles or is that … part of … disrupting the

[151] While I disagree with the argument presented in this article, I cite it only because it provides a detailed graph of "Hispanic" male incarceration rates and age. Therefore offering a glimpse at the high number of incarcerated childbearing age "Hispanic" men. Vogel, Matt, and Lauren C Porter. "Toward a Demographic Understanding of Incarceration Disparities: Race, Ethnicity, and Age Structure." *Journal of quantitative criminology* vol. 32,4 (2016): 515-530. doi:10.1007/s10940-015-9265-6.

> cycle, like *the pain that it is* to give up my own, like, dream for a family and like help the people [that] already exist, like stay out of that cycle, you know.

In addition to the pain that Chicana/xs experience as a direct result of their loved one's incarceration, they also grapple with the pain of disrupting cycles of incarceration (i.e., colonialism). Part of breaking cycles of incarceration involves making conscious choices about whether or not to help the people who are already alive such as nieces and nephews and sacrifice one's own desire to have a family to attempt to save the bigger family unit. This theme of self-sacrifice will be further discussed in Chapter Three when I explore the contradictions of carceral politics.

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN WE "FAIL" TO SUPPORT FORMERLY INCARCERATED LOVED ONES?

As has already been stated, much of the scholarship on incarceration focuses on men of color and has increasingly explored the expansion of punishments targeted at women, gender non-conforming, and trans people, as well as the impacts on the communities ravaged by incarceration and policing.[152] There remains an opportunity to examine the post-incarceration lives of those who return home and those who receive these formerly incarcerated peoples back into their communities. Further, there is an opportunity to study what happens to Chicana/xs after they support a loved one through incarceration and homecoming, and yet somehow still lose that

[152] Patrick-Stamp, Leslie. "Numbers That Are Not New: African Americans in the Country's First Prison, 1790-1835." *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*, vol. 119, no. 1/2, 1995, pp. 95–128, http://www.jstor.org/stable/20092927. Accessed 5 May 2022.; Gross, Kali N. *Hannah Mary Tabbs and the Disembodied Torso: A Tale of Race, Sex, and Violence in America*. , 2018. Internet resource.; *Color of Violence: The Incite! Anthology*. , 2016. Print.; Sudbury, Julia. *Global Lockdown: Race, Gender, and the Prison-Industrial Complex*. Hoboken: Taylor and Francis, 2014. Print.; Emily, L T. *All Our Trials: Prisons, Policing, and the Feminist Fight to End Violence*. , 2019. Print.; Ritchie, Andrea J. *Invisible No More: Police Violence against Black Women and Women of Color*. , 2017. Print.

loved one, whether to gang violence, police brutality, or another means of premature death that is entangled with incarceration.

In analyzing how premature death after incarceration impacts Chicana/xs, I explore the mental, spiritual, and embodied aspects of this effect. Prison Policy Initiative researcher Emily Widra detailed how incarceration shortens life expectancy at an individual and national level by two years.[153] Widra also presented new data that delineates how people with incarcerated loved ones also have shorter life expectancies and poorer health.[154] The report reveals that "people who have an incarcerated or formerly incarcerated family member consistently rate their health and well-being lower than those without a family history of incarceration, and have an estimated 2.6 years shorter life expectancy."[155] Considering the mental and physical impact of incarceration on loved ones, one can only imagine what the women in this dissertation might experience when after surviving the trauma, separation, and violence of the prison, their loved one is still ultimately subjected to premature death.[156]

In analyzing how premature death after incarceration impacts Chicana/xs, research needs to explore the medical and psychological impacts of this situational type of premature death. Although I do not expand on these aspects as it is beyond the scope of my work, trauma/separation/violence emerged in my work in discussions of the impact of premature death

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[153] Initiative, P. P. (n.d.). *Incarceration shortens life expectancy*. Prison Policy Initiative. Retrieved May 5, 2022, from http://www.prisonpolicy.org/blog/2017/06/26/life_expectancy/

[154] Initiative, P. P. (n.d.). *New data: People with incarcerated loved ones have shorter life expectancies and Poorer Health*. Prison Policy Initiative. Retrieved May 5, 2022, from http://www.prisonpolicy.org/blog/2021/07/12/family-incarceration/

[155] Ibid.

[156] There are studies detailing the high risks associated with "prisoner" release as many people struggle to navigate the "free world."For more see : Binswanger, Ingrid A et al. "Release from prison--a high risk of death for former inmates." *The New England journal of medicine* vol. 356,2 (2007): 157-65. doi:10.1056/NEJMsa064115; Bird SM, Hutchinson SJ. Male drugs-related deaths in the fortnight after release from prison: Scotland, 1996–99. *Addiction.* 2003;98:185–190.; Verger P, Rotily M, Prudhomme J, Bird S. High mortality rates among inmates during the year following their discharge from a French prison. *J Forensic Sci.* 2003;48:614–616.; Stewart LM, Henderson CJ, Hobbs MS, Ridout SC, Knuiman MW. Risk of death in prisoners after release from jail. *Aust N Z J Public Health.* 2004;28:32–36.

and how these manifest on an embodied level. Chicana/o/x Studies has an extensive genealogy of embodied knowledges and experiences and a separate index of how colonialism impacts the body from generation to generation.[157] On the one hand, Chicana/xs possess a form of embodied knowledge through their lived experiences and this serves as a foundation for expertise.[158] On the other hand, Chicana/xs can internalize negative experiences on an embodied level–such as the experience of having a loved one incarcerated. Marisol elaborated on this embodied experience:

> Remember how I say how people die in pieces. When somebody dies, I think I started talking to you a little bit about this, like that experience of like realizing somebody's gone over and over and over, over an extended time, like years. And like, the different things that trigger that realization and sometimes it's like not even like directly tied to them. It's like some other way, like some other way that their energy or their grief lives on. And so, like, one of the biggest like pieces of Gabriel, that is still alive, it's like my mom's grief of having lost her son. And so, I think about like how Gabriel, for me, won't feel dead until my mom's dead.

Marisol begins by sharing her experience with the loss of a loved one and the way she went about processing their death over a long period of time. She says, "that experience of like realizing somebody's gone over and over and over, over an extended time, like years." Her repetition of the word over emphasizes her familiarity with the process she is describing. She continues how "grief lives on" as part of an identification that the continual re-realization of someone having crossed over can be triggered by an energy or grief connected to the embodied relationships of Chicana/xs. Marisol expresses a connection to her brother on a level beyond the physical realm–his energy and the grief associated with his death live on in her. Marisol

[157] Delgado, Bernal D. *Chicana/latina Education in Everyday Life: Feminista Perspectives on Pedagogy and Epistemology*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2006. Print.; COLLINS, PATRICIA. *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*. S.l.: ROUTLEDGE, 2021. Print.
[158] Moraga, Cherrie, and Gloria Anzaldua. *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color*. , 2021. Print; hooks, bell. *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center*. , 2015. Print.

references the negative energy that is transferred on an embodied level. Her brother's energy and grief were transferred to her mother and now Gabriel is kept alive through her mother's grief. She says poignantly, "...Gabriel, for me, won't feel dead until my mom's dead."

This is one example of what happens to Chicana/xs when they "fail" to support their loved ones. Of course, Marisol did not fail her brother. To the contrary, as has been demonstrated throughout this dissertation, she consistently showed up for Gabriel to the point that she put herself aside and her life on hold for the sake of his mental/physical well-being. And still, her worst nightmare came true the morning she received a phone call that he had been murdered:

> Like because she carries that grief and like that grief, like I carried that grief too, but … such a big part of the pain that I feel for Gabriel being dead is knowing the grief that brings my mom and so that feeling of, like him being fully laid to rest will not happen until my mom is no longer here. Because she, she keeps him alive. And so, it still feels like he's like, like that energy is still, like moving through us, like negatively, not in a good way.

Part of the reason that the energy is "not in a good way" is because of its rootedness in a colonial carceral regime that translates into fear or a hardening of the self.

> And I don't feel at peace about it. Until I know my mom no longer has to carry that and that that's part of like my fear growing up about him dying was, like I saw how much my mom cared about him and how much she put on herself, that a big part of my connections to Gabriel is through my mom because I didn't see him a lot. My connections that were big with Gabriel were phone calls and letters for so long and pretty inconsistent ones … anything I knew about Gabriel's experience about Gabriel was through my mom. So, that's part of like my own like I don't want to say projection, but like it's like my biggest fear around Gabriel dying was what it was going to do to my mom. Um, and it happened.

In addition to the transfer of energy and grief on an embodied level, Marisol's testimonio underscores the power of kinship and familial connection in Chicana/o/x communities. Prior to Gabriel's death, during his incarceration, their mother Blanca was already doing the work of keeping him alive by updating his siblings regarding his whereabouts and wellbeing and that

connection was nurtured "through my mom." When Gabriel was murdered, that work of keeping him alive, that energy, did not simply disappear into thin air–it was and still is energy that continues to be transferred:

> And I saw, I see. I'm seeing currently, still seeing, what it is doing to my mom, and I hate it. I can't think about it too much, or like it really fucks me up if I really start to think about, like, like now before I used to think like if I'd be in bed and be like cold or whatever. And I'm thinking about my brother, like, damn, like, I wonder if he ate, or I wonder if he's warm or whatever. Now I think about my mom, like sometimes at night or like if I know, it's like, I don't know if she was like talking about him a lot. Or I can tell like she's feeling heavy about it. And then we get off the phone and I'll just lay there in bed for four hours just thinking like, damn, like is she crying right now? Like how she is, what isn't she telling me, 'cause I know she doesn't want me to worry … that same grief. Now it lives with my mom.

This carework and this energy, while both coming from a good place, from la corazon, are responses to violent systems. It is difficult to disentangle the heartwork and carework from the incarceration, since they seem to have become bound together over the last couple centuries of targeted incarceration against Mexican origin peoples:

> And I don't want to think about, like, my mom dying. But she's never, ever, ever, ever going to be happy again ever until she's gone. I'm like there's never a day where I'm going to ask my mom, "how are you," and she's going to be like "muy feliz" and really mean it. That's never ever going to happen again and that, that's part of like, part of Gabriel. And until that happens, I don't see or even until like that's like one major piece, right, of him dying. But it's not the final piece or the only piece, like he has two daughters here and until they're like adults and doing well, I'm, I'm not going to feel good about it. So, if they never are doing well or something happens to one of them, like he just stays alive forever in this like, limbo and I just want him to die because he's gone.

In describing this difference between dying and being gone, Marisol illuminates what it means to be ensnared in the long-standing history of careral violence.

Further, for community members such as Marisol, the worry of heartwork and carework, does not end with her generation and she makes that clear when she mentions his daughters and

her worries for them. The challenge of keeping the next generation out of the system is a big one when there is a long-standing history of carceral violence in the geographical region and within the family itself. There is a body of scholarship that highlights the challenges that communities of color face in escaping cycles of incarceration and the impacts of having parents and family members locked up.[159] At first glance, Marisol's testimonio may sound a bit morbid when she states, "I just want him to die because he's gone," but by taking into consideration the impact that keeping Gabriel alive has on herself, her mother and others, it becomes clear that Marisol's desire for him "to die because he's gone" has more to do with a longing for him to rest and her/family to heal.

HOW NON-IMPRISONED AND SYSTEMS IMPACTED CHICANA/XS HEAL

After all is said and done, when the brother, tio, father or partner comes home from prison only to begin another kind of unimaginable nightmare, what do Chicana/xs do? Why is healing important? What does healing look like for them? We must also consider the fact that some Chicana/xs do not attempt to heal themselves, for whatever reason. Some Chicana/xs "give up," and submit to addiction and unhealthy coping mechanisms. The Chicana/xs in this dissertation focused on healing and sought healthy coping mechanisms such as physical exercise, therapy, and community support among other things. Perhaps they also engage in forms of unhealthy coping mechanisms, but none of them discussed those aspects in their testimonios. They seem more focused on breaking generational cycles of incarceration, becoming successful women, and healing themselves and their communities:

[159] Clear, Todd R., and Chase L. Montagnet. "Impact of incarceration on community public safety and public health." *Public health behind bars*. Springer, New York, NY, 2022. 13-29.; Kirk, Eileen M. "Community consequences of mass incarceration: sparking neighborhood social problems and violent crime." *Journal of Crime and Justice* 45.1 (2022): 103-119.

> When Gabriel died, like initially it sucked because it was like everything I've been doing was to like hopefully, one day be able to help this person who I love, and so now it's like all for nothing. But on the other hand, it was like, liberating. Once I like process[ed] that grief to just like okay, now I can like think about, now I can like really hit pause and like think about how I want to affect people who are going through what I went through or what Gabriel went through or what our family went through and like, I don't know, it just changed how I think about it. It made me more patient with myself. It made me, it made me feel more like myself, honestly.

While Marisol shared in earlier excerpts how her brother's premature death deeply impacted her in negative ways, the above passage has a hopeful, optimistic tone to it. She starts by sharing that it felt like everything she had done was for nothing once her brother died and then transitions to share that it felt liberating. What a bittersweet moment for Marisol–her brother's transition to the spirit world meant she was liberated from carework/labor associated with incarceration but, as has already been explored, the carework did not disappear as her brother's grief lives on in Marisol and their mother–and it required a different kind of carework.

Marisol is conscious of the fact that she still has grief to process so that she can "hit pause" and contemplate how she wants to support people who are going through similar struggles. It is interesting to note the tendency for Chicana/xs to support people–whether families, communities, or people who are struggling. Perhaps, by sharing her experiences with community members Marisol can feel that everything she, her brother, and her family went through was not in vain. His death was not in vain. In a way, the wisdom that a Chicana/x like Marisol holds is institutional, genealogical knowledge–she knows how to navigate the system and the impacts that it can have on more than one generation. This is wisdom that should be widely shared to support other Chicana/xs in knowing that they are not alone and assist them in navigating such a deadly system. In the end, she shares that losing her brother ultimately made her feel like herself–it changed the way she thinks. It may be that in her feeling "liberated" from

a particular kind of carework, she was able to return to herself. She was able to be present for herself and able to process information in a new way. Through pain, loss, and trauma, Marisol was able to move beyond survival and strive toward a life where she can thrive. Marisol lost her brother, but she did not lose herself.

CONCLUSION: "WE USE THAT PAIN FOR FUEL"

In losing family members to premature death, Chicana/xs are forced to find themselves. The Chicana/xs in this dissertation underscore that through all the trials and tribulations they faced alongside their loved ones, they did not give up. They refused to give up. Instead, in true underclass Chicana/x style, they each used their pain as fuel to lead a different life, one that can positively impact those around them. These Chicana/xs consciously chose to heal: they chose themselves despite deep sorrow and pain.

CHAPTER THREE:

FIGHTING FOR ABOLITION: CONTRADICTIONS OF CARCERAL POLITICS

As someone who I have known for many years, Marisol never really spoke negatively about her brother Gabriel even though he was incarcerated and gang affiliated, qualities that in our community would most often lead to name calling and a form of victim blaming–not recognizing or understanding the larger systems at play in certain peoples' affiliation with gangs and their imprisonment. Even during one of our last brainstorming sessions on how to navigate a situation Gabriel was dealing with while incarcerated in a prison in Mexico, I do not recall Marisol expressing annoyance or frustration at her brother; rather, she was upset with the prison system and politics. I never stopped to think about why this might be the case. I never questioned it. However, after witnessing her testimonio I realized that feelings of annoyance or perhaps even a sense of resentment existed in her. We discussed how she navigated Gabriel's incarceration over a sustained period of time:

> For a long time, I was like, the patient one or the one that was willing to like, answer my phone when Gabriel called or, like, give a shit and then later on I got tired of it. Honestly, like sometimes I just could not fucking deal … Like the only relief you can have when somebody in your family is locked up, like that is like blocking it out, which is really fucked up. But that's like how you, how you survive, how you get through the day. Like if I spent all my time thinking about my brother like, incarcerated, I'm not going to get anything done.

Marisol speaks of the burnout associated with Chicana/x carework of incarcerated loved ones. She shares how eventually she "got tired" of being the main person in her family who was patient and willing to answer her brother's phone calls. Eventually, she grew tired of it and expressed a need for "relief" from the incarceration of her brother. She explains the complexities involved in that relief. For Marisol, to experience a sense of relief from the carework, she had to

"block out" her brother and she shares how this is "really fucked up." Sitting in the contradiction of loving, caring, and supporting her brother Gabriel, and simultaneously seeking a sense of sanity and stability, placed Marisol in an uncomfortable position. At some point this contradiction and uncomfortable position becomes a choice between yourself/herself or the incarcerated person. What is the cost of Marisol's love and support for her brother? Or rather, who is the cost? Marisol also explains how "blocking out" and seeking relief are tied up with survival–emotional, psychological, spiritual, but also capitalistic. She says "if I spent all my time thinking about my brother like, incarcerated, I'm not going to get anything done." The ideological and material conditions in which Chicana/xs and Mexicanas exist present barriers to their upward mobility and their ability to move out of this position of careworker for primarily the men in the family but also the community at large.

This chapter examines the ways that non-imprisoned Southwest Chicana/xs and Mexicanas are a conceptual carceral borderlands in relation to the contradictory ways they exist within the carceral continuum.[160] As they experience the tensions between bearing witness to the violence of the carceral state and knowing their formerly incarcerated loved ones must "play within the rules" of the free world, they internalize colonial carceral ontologies and epistemologies in an effort to maintain the dignity and well-being of their loved ones. The multifaceted roles these women take–roles that carry great responsibility and ultimately rest upon their self-sacrifice–often result in these women reproducing material and ideological aspects of the very colonial carceral world that many of them seek to dismantle. Before considering the

[160] Anzaldúa, Gloria, Perez R. F. Vivancos, Norma E. Cantu, and AnaLouise Keating. *Borderlands =: La Frontera : the New Mestiza*. , 2021. Print.; Salinas, M. D. (2021). In Lak'ech from the Ivory Tower to the Prison Tower: Connecting Latina 'Disposables' to Latina 'Exceptionals' across Neoliberal Institutions. *UC Santa Barbara*. ProQuest ID: Salinas_ucsb_0035D_15227. Merritt ID: ark:/13030/m5bg9dz7. Retrieved from https://escholarship.org/uc/item/8kg0k15p

contradictory ways that Chicana/xs exist in a carceral Southwest, I first discuss how the polarized debates between law enforcement and abolitionists have created limited opportunities for nuanced analyses of how certain racialized/criminalized populations can exist in the liminal spaces between the prison and the "free world." Borderland Chicana/xs are bombarded with competing messaging from dominant society, which is typically aligned with pro-law enforcement rhetoric and then abolitionist thinking from their communities. While there are many Mexican origin people who align themselves with law enforcement, many of whom have been incarcerated themselves, there remains a large portion of Mexicans who are explicitly anti-police given their political and economic position as historically racialized/criminalized people. Borderland Chicana/xs straddle the competing narratives and realities of existing in material and ideological pro-police environments like the border, all while possessing an understanding or potential desire to eradicate the carceral system, and coming face to face with the reality that they and their family members must exist within the system. Chicana/xs recognize the harms caused by the carceral system but know their families must still adhere to the rules or they risk death.

CARCERAL STATE VS. ABOLITIONISM

The Blue Lives Matter movement was founded in 2014 by active and retired law enforcement officers who claimed to be "motivated by the heroic actions of Officer Darren Wilson and many others" to create an organization "in the hopes that it could prevent more officers from being hurt."[161] According to the official Blue Lives Matter website, "Ferguson PD Officer Darren Wilson was doing his job as he stopped Michael Brown, who had just committed

[161]*About Us*. Blue Lives Matter. (2017, January 11). Retrieved May 5, 2022, from https://archive.bluelivesmatter.blue/organization/

a robbery of a local convenience store … Officer Wilson was forced to defend his life by shooting Brown."[162] Thereafter, on December 20, 2014, New York Police Department Officer Rafael Ramos and Officer Wenjian Liu were murdered by an anti-police civilian said to have been influenced by anti-police rhetoric in the media. These two events, both taking place in 2014, propelled the Blue Lives Matter movement into action. The organization clearly states their position in direct opposition to the Black Lives Matter movement in claiming that Black Lives Matter frequently spread lies and false narratives as a group "whose goal was the vilification of law enforcement."[163] In the summer of June 2020, the Blue Lives Matter movement expanded even further as the world witnessed local, state, and federal law enforcement entities take to the streets in military equipment alongside the violent and peaceful responses from protesters. The Blue Lives Matter movement is only one aspect of pro-police ideologies and organizations, but certainly one of the more prominent in our current political climate.

The contradictions of this pro-police movement became all the more visible on January 6, 2021, when the Capitol in Washington D.C. was stormed and attacked by a mob of roughly 2,000 Trump supporters. Psychologist Clark McCauley suggested that "the breach can only be understood in the context of a long and escalating conflict between Right and Left activists in the U.S."[164] He argued that "a milestone in this conflict was the interaction between police and protestors at the inauguration of Donald Trump in January 2017."[165] In the *Special Issue of Dynamics of Assymetric Conflict*, psychologists contextualized the Capitol breach in how Trump

[162] Ibid.
[163] Ibid.
[164] McCauley, Clark. "Introduction to the Special Issue: Putting the Capitol Breach in Context." *Dynamics of Asymmetric Conflict*, vol. 14, no. 2, Routledge, 2021, pp. 94–109, https://doi.org/10.1080/17467586.2021.1925136.
[165] Ibid.

and white supremacist groups are closely tied to one another by outlining the long-standing direct conflict with groups such as Antifa and other organizations.[166]

Over the course of roughly a decade, political polarization has reached new heights, especially after Trump's inauguration, the murders of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor, and the 2021 Capitol breach. While groups such as Antifa, an anarchist / communist leftist counter-hegemonic group, which, at times engages in violence and direct conflict with police and right-wing groups, should absolutely be examined in terms of their indoctrination process and how they contribute to political polarization in the US, I am instead interested in looking at abolitionist organizations and their interaction with and opposition to right-wing groups, white supremacists, and police. Examining abolitionist interactions with and opposition to law enforcement provides a more accurate view of political ideologies that Mexican origin people engage in on the ground.

Though there are different genealogical threads of abolition depending on time, geography, and racial/criminalized population, what most of these threads have in common is the goal of either reforming policing, prisons, penal ideologies, and practices, or completely doing away with them. From a historical perspective, Northern prison reform is a story that typically focuses on Pennsylvania and New York during the late 18th and early 19th centuries and highlights how reformers were interested in shifting the forms of punishment from mental to physical methods.[167] This story also typically follows how labor began to play a role in incarceration and underscores the changes that occurred prior to the emancipation era. Captivity

[166] Lokay, Andrew, et al. "The Oath Keepers." *Dynamics of Asymmetric Conflict*, vol. 14, no. 2, Routledge, 2021, pp. 160–78, https://doi.org/10.1080/17467586.2021.1912375.
[167] Manion, Jen. *Liberty's Prisoners : Carceral Culture in Early America*, 2015.; Jay Hirsch, Adam. *The Rise of the Penitentiary : Prisons and Punishment in Early America*. Yale University Press, 1992.

in this context unfolded through the form of jails, prisons, and Black enslavement.[168] The post emancipation carceral regime can be analyzed and understood by looking at histories of the enlightenment liberalism**,** the criminalization of Black people, the preservation of white men in power, the construction of white women as fragile and innocent, and the emergence of ideologies of law and methodologies of capture.**[169]** The form of confinement during the mid-19th century was thus primarily through jail and prison facilities as well as southern neo slavery practices.

Early histories of the captivity and incarceration of Indigenous peoples can be understood by looking at forced labor, the repartimiento systems, the encomienda systems, missionization, Indian boarding schools, and in some cases reservations.[170] The motive or desire for the confinement, control, and incarceration of Native/Indigenous peoples was primarily to remove them from their homelands and importantly, but to a lesser extent, enslave them. Spanish and Anglo-Saxon colonialism worked together alongside geography to violently remove Native peoples from their homelands. Since Native peoples actively resisted colonization, Spanish and Anglo-Saxon colonizers devised carceral structures, described above, to contain and control Indigenous peoples. Histories of captivity among Indigenous peoples were thus race-making/racialization projects through the criminalization of everyday behaviors that were vital to the preservation of Native life and culture.

In more contemporary times and especially since the further intensification of the police state after the summer of 2020, the term abolition has shifted in the popular imagination. Abolition is now often conflated with calls to defund the police and while these concepts are interrelated, and many abolitionists are interested in defunding the police, they are not reducible

[168] Patrick-Stamp, Leslie. "Numbers That Are Not New: African Americans in the Country's First Prison, 1790–1835," Pennsylvania Magazine of History & Biography CXIX, no. 1–2 (January–April 1995): 96, 98–100.
[169] Childs, Dennis. *Slaves of the State : Black Incarceration from the Chain Gang to the Penitentiary*. 2015.
[170] Reséndez, Andrés. *The Other Slavery : the Uncovered Story of Indian Enslavement in America*. 2016.

to each other. That is, abolition is more complex than simply the defunding of local police departments, although it is a first step. Abolitionist Ruth W. Gilmore says "Abolition is about presence, not absence. It's about building life-affirming institutions."[171] Many abolitionists from racialized/criminalized communities and those involved in grassroots organizing follow Gilmore's line of thinking in terms of not focusing on the absence of police or prisons. Their focus is on building connections with community members and remaining in contact with their loved ones behind bars or connecting with currently incarcerated folks that are not family. Further, contemporary abolitionists focus on building life-affirming institutions, which means an interest in housing, health, mental health care, education, access to food and employment to name a few. Investment for contemporary abolitionists goes beyond monetary forms; they understand there must be an investment in the people who have been and continue to be racially criminalized and/or dehumanized.

Abolition challenges us to move beyond surface level understandings of state violence. Leading abolitionist scholar-activists Angela Y. Davis, Gina Dent, Erica R. Meiners, and Beth E. Richie collaboratively outlined abolition's feminist lineages in their recently published book *Abolition. Feminism. Now.*[172] Their book challenges its readers to move beyond the surface level understanding of abolition–now trendy, accessible, and popular–and toward a meaningful conceptualization of abolition. It is also a critique of carceral feminism, which advocates for enhancing and increasing prison sentences.[173] These penal ideologies of carceral feminism, alongside polarized debates between pro-law enforcement and pro-reform positions, have created

[171] Gilmore, Ruth Wilson. *Golden Gulag : Prisons, Surplus, Crisis, and Opposition in Globalizing California*. University of California Press, 2007.
[172] Davis, Angela Y. (Angela Yvonne). *Abolition. Feminism. Now.* Haymarket Books, 2022.
[173] Bernstein, Elizabeth. "The Sexual Politics of the 'New Abolitionism.'" *Differences (Bloomington, Ind.)*, vol. 18, no. 3, Duke University Press, 2007, pp. 128–51, https://doi.org/10.1215/10407391-2007-013.

a landscape of limited opportunities for critically understanding/analyzing abolitionist women of color existing in carceral communities and unpacking the contradictions that exist between the two polarized worlds. That is, the policies that come from pro-police ideologies and law enforcement are in direct opposition to abolitionist thinking and approaches.

For example, a Chicana/xs loved one who was recently released from prison is very likely to be on parole or probation–each requiring its own form of checking in with a parole or probation officer. While Chicana/xs may fundamentally disagree with the requirements of a parole/probation officer, such as having to take drug tests or being forced to seek employment via "legitimate" forms, these Chicana/xs understand they must encourage/support their loved ones in complying with the state or they will be reincarcerated, at best. In this example, it can be argued that Chicana/xs are reproducing ideological and at times material aspects or logics of the carceral regime by complying with police/the state, but what other choice do they have if they seek to support their loved ones in remaining outside a jail/prison cell? Because of the reach of the police/carceral state, many Chicana/o/x community members who have been entrapped by the criminal legal system remain ensnared by the system somehow–via carceral technologies like an ankle monitor and increasingly through many other forms.[174] Resultantly, Mexican origin women in this study complicate this polarized debate as they represent a liminal space between the so-called free world, as guided by colonial racialized principles, and the violence of the carceral state.

EXPERIENCES: CHICANA/XS AS CONCEPTUAL BORDERLANDS

[174] Benjamin, Ruha. *Captivating Technology: Race, Carceral Technoscience, and Liberatory Imagination in Everyday Life*. Duke University Press, 2019.

Chicana/xs as a conceptual borderlands considers how the mind, body, and spirit for Mexican origin women are inseparable.[175] The bodymindspirit is a space and place that Chicana scholars have identified as a location of power where interpersonal relationships can be strengthened. I also see bodymindspirit as a location where Chicana/xs can gain access to wounds–their own and those they are in relation to–for better or worse. Being able to access the bodymindspirit as systems impacted Chicana/xs from the border means there is opportunity to engage una herida abierta. Gloria Anzaldúa wrote about una herida abierta as an analysis of the literal border: she said "the U.S.-Mexican border es una herida abierta where the Third World grates against the first and bleeds."[176] Anzaldúa saw the physical border as an open wound–a marker of a collective traumatic history that continues to impact the experiences of individuals and entire communities. She also explored the ways that una herida abierta can be analyzed figuratively in thinking about the ways people can heal from the effects of trauma.

This chapter explores how Chicana/xs and their bodies are una herida abierta and a borderlands between carceral institutions and their families. I consider how Chicana/xs are a sort of mesh fence, getting grated against from both ends: the prison and the street/family simultaneously at times absorbed into their bodymindspirit.[177] This positionality as a "mesh fence" provides an entry way to analyze how or why Chicana/xs might engage in self-sacrificial tendencies in the sense of placing family members before themselves to a point of deficit, how they navigate the contradictions of policies/principles of the state and abolitionism, and finally

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[175] Lara, Irene. "Abrazos De Conocimiento Across the Generations: Chicana Mothering and Daughtering in the Borderlands." (2019): 223-242. Print. In this entry, Lara builds on the work of Gloria Anzaldua by contributing to the notion of "shrinking with intimacy" and acknowledging that the spaces between minds, bodies and spirits become a "bodymindspirit" borderlands that can strengthen mothering-daughtering relationships.

[176] Anzaldúa, Gloria, Perez R. F. Vivancos, Norma E. Cantu, and AnaLouise Keating. *Borderlands =: La Frontera : the New Mestiza*. , 2021. Print.

[177] WACQUANT, LOÏC. "Deadly Symbiosis: When Ghetto and Prison Meet and Mesh." *Punishment & Society*, vol. 3, no. 1, Jan. 2001, pp. 95–133, doi:10.1177/14624740122228276.; Anzaldúa, Gloria, Perez R. F. Vivancos, Norma E. Cantu, and AnaLouise Keating. *Borderlands =: La Frontera : the New Mestiza*. , 2021. Print. 93

how this work, engagement, and navigation set the stage for the internalization of carcerality–at times ideologically and others materially.

SELF-SACRIFICE

Self-sacrificial tendencies of systems impacted Chicana/xs, as discussed in Chapter One, are rooted in a history of double colonization as well as carceral colonial logics. There is a long history of Chicana/xs socialization in many structures of society that nurtures them to engage in self-neglect to ensure that families and communities remain intact. In the following passage, Marisol briefly explains her thought process on negotiating self and family in supporting her currently incarcerated brother:

> So, it's like this constant balance between how much should I dedicate, how much should I allow myself to feel like, think about this versus like I don't want to feel. I don't want them to feel like I'm neglecting them or whatever. Like it's a constant like pick and choose between yourself and this person who literally cannot do anything for themselves right now.

Her bodymindspirit absorbs patriarchal and carceral ideologies about who should be prioritized. While she understands the importance of supporting her brother, she has also engaged in carework for more than a decade and contemplates whether there is a point at which she may need to choose herself.

Before she even mentions her brother potentially feeling neglected, Marisol explains the negotiation of feeling the heaviness of her brother's incarceration. Taking in the incarceration of her brother means she must feel it, it means the herida abierta stays open and potentially gets deeper. To be there for her brother, she must keep the herida abierta which in some ways may mean she is not able to embark on her healing journey. She puts herself on pause, emotionally

shutting down perhaps or learning to numb herself to provide space, love, and support for her brother, hence engaging in acts of self-sacrifice for the sake of her brother's mental/emotional/physical well-being.

At times, Marisol and other Chicana/xs in this study, support meant the literal survival of her brother. If she did not engage in the work of self-sacrifice, she knew that her brother's life would be at stake. In this way and in some instances, the act of self-sacrifice for Chicana/xs is not really a matter of choice. Marisol elaborated the depths of self-sacrifice, demonstrating how she is the liminal space between her family and the carceral institution where her brother is detained:

> Um, and then like, that's my brother, but I can't imagine what my mom feels like, that's the child, you know, And I know like every time. Anytime we would do something and like even now, it's even worse now that Gabriel is dead, but like anytime we were all together for something it was always like, oh, it would, it would be even better Gabriel was here.

As the sister and daughter in this situation, Marisol operated as the carceral broker of the family. Being that her mom primarily spoke Spanish and worked long and odd hours, at a young age Marisol became Gabriel's go-to person. Although in the above passage Marisol elaborates on how her mother might feel or the fact that she "can't imagine what" her mom feels, she demonstrates how she remains in that space of una herida abierta because she expresses concern over her mother's well-being–a theme that is woven throughout the dissertation and Marisol's testimonio.

CONTRADICTIONS BETWEEN THE POLICIES/PRINCIPLES OF THE STATE VS. ABOLITIONISM

Non-imprisoned systems impacted Chicana/xs are forced to navigate the contradictions between policies/principles of the state versus their potential abolitionist orientations. When formerly incarcerated loved ones return home it is often the family members who support them successfully in their reentry. For example, family members often provide shelter, food, transportation and more to ensure their formerly incarcerated family members meet the conditions of their probation or parole. Ruby underscores these contradictions when she discusses her mother's return home after nearly fifteen years of incarceration:

> I feel like the fight's not over, like I have a sense of relief because I physically see her and I have her and I, you know, but it feels fucked up the fact that without permissions that she can't go to the corner without vigilancia without being watched, at all times. You know what I mean. I see how uncomfortable it is for her having to just report so many times to somebody.

Ruby's mother was released as part of a large clemency campaign in 2020 and was required to remain in home confinement, report to her probation officer, and wear an ankle monitor. Ruby expresses that although her mother is home now and she feels a sense of relief, she also feels that the fight is not over given the home surveillance to which they are both subjected. Ruby continues:

> I want to stay positive and shit, but I know that anytime like the rug can be pulled out from under your fucking feet and shit. The lady from the organization. She posted an article saying that supposedly Congress after like coronavirus has like cleared or whatnot, it comes down that all the people on home confinement that they want to send them back. And that's, that's some fucked up shit you know, it's like, how are you going to do that? How are you going to play with people's emotions and freedoms and lives. So like in the in the back of my, not just my mind but like my mother's mind. It's like, fuck you know. Now it's like let it be corona forever.

Ruby demonstrates the delicate in-between position she and her mother inhabit. While they both understand they must follow the rules of her mother's release, they also know that "the rug can be pulled out from your feet" at any time. She proceeds to explain the potential

reincarceration her mother may be facing as a result of congressional proceedings. Ruby stands by and witnesses the dehumanization of her mother via surveillance, home confinement, and an ankle monitor but she is forced to navigate the situation as it is in her home that her mother resides–without Ruby's address her mother's release would have been nearly impossible.

Another context in which Chicana/xs are forced to navigate the contradictions between policies/principles of the state and potential abolitionist orientations is during their visits to the prison. Ruby describes her experience of growing up visiting prisons; first her father, then her mother and partner. She shares:

> …and you're waiting outside longer than when you actually have the visitation. Once you get into you know the processing they pat you down. Like they treat you like if you're, you know, like if you're a criminal yourself like, you know, and there was a lot of racial tension … When they would see me, they'd be like, oh, for any reason, they would want to send me back. It's like, man, like I drove nine hours to get here. "Oh, no, that shirt is not allowed here." Or, or, you know, whatever. Just any little reason to just fuck with your day when you been outside waiting and, you know, you're about to go through that metal detector, like, "oh no, I'm sorry, your bra has underwire," and if that machine beeps, you're not gonna be able to go in, you know, like you would be in the damn parking lot, trying to cut open your bra, it was just a bunch of bullshit.

Ruby explicitly names the illogical nature of the prison when she says "they treat you like if you're a criminal yourself." Even though visiting her loved one while they were incarcerated was clearly, at best, an unpleasant experience for her, Ruby continued to make the trips to distant prisons and at one point she actually relocated in order to be closer to her mother and partner while they were incarcerated. In this context, Ruby was forced to navigate the contradictions of the prison where punitive dehumanizing policies meet abolitionist orientations and gestures. She was willing to deal with the punitive criminalizing aspects of the prison, even as it invoked her own criminalization, in order to remain in physical contact with her incarcerated family members.

INTERNALIZED REPRODUCTION IN PRACTICE

While many Chicana/xs are involved in everyday acts of abolitionist resistance and struggle by supporting and performing labor for currently/formerly incarcerated loved ones, at times they too may reproduce ideological or material aspects of the carceral regime. For example, when Chicana/xs are tasked with assisting their loved ones with "reintegration" they are acting simultaneously as an informal reentry system and an abolitionist gesture, but they also potentially reproduce carceral ideologies by perhaps encouraging their loved ones to behave in ways that align with the status quo.

Ideological and material aspects of the carceral regime seep into the everyday lives of Chicana/xs through law enforcement interactions via the criminalization of their ways of life and through the disruption of their mental/psychological state of mind with concern over the safety of their incarcerated loved ones. Materially, some characteristics of the carceral regime can be understood as the physical policing, detention, and incarceration that Chicana/xs deal with themselves or witness on behalf of their loved ones. Ideological features of the carceral regime can be seen through continued depictions of Mexican origin people as inherently criminal and as foreign. Like other colonial projects, carcerality has been to some extent internalized by some Chicana/o/x community members. Wilson Kwamogi Okello says "carcerality is more than a physical occurrence, but a lasting psychological, spiritual, and emotional state of being that gets in the body and directs how one may move in and through the word."[178]

Internalized carcerality becomes an occupation of the flesh, an embodiment that Chicana/xs take on. Through this embodiment, Chicana/xs can at times unconsciously reproduce

[178] Wilson Kwamogi Okello (2022) "What are you pretending not to know?": Un/doing internalized carcerality through pedagogies of the flesh,Curriculum Inquiry, DOI: 10.1080/03626784.2022.2047579

harmful carceral logics themselves. The following excerpt from Marisol's testimonio highlights how internalized carcerality can direct how one moves in and through the world:

> Because he's just been locked up his whole adult life like my brother spent more time in prison than he did out and my mom was like saying how she, she didn't realize how fucked up he was from being incarcerated until one day when she realized he didn't know how to keep keys to a house. He would lose them every time when he was out and she would say, "here's your key." He would always, always lose a key like over and over and over and over and over, like a, like a small child. But even worse, like a kid knows, like this is the key to my house and he cannot keep a key because he didn't know like what it meant to like have a home and a place that you can go and leave from that you lock in like this, how you get back in your home, just something as simple as keeping a key safe. Or like remembering to look when you cross the street, like basic ass shit that we don't think about and that was how my brother had to like navigate the world just like not knowing how to do these basic things and then everyone being upset with him always for it. Including us, like his own family. You'd just be like, what the fuck like how do you not know that, that's normal. And then you tell them once and you expect them to learn and then they don't. And you're just like, it's fucking frustrating. On both ends. There was always like tension between all of us and him. There's always like a misunderstanding or miscommunication with us being like, why can't he be like this or why won't he just do this, and for him, he was always just like "you guys don't get it."

Marisol's excerpt underscores the complexity of carework in carceral contexts by demonstrating the tensions present within interpersonal relationships. For example, Marisol acknowledges that she, her brother, and the family were frustrated by their miscommunication and in being misunderstood. Her/the family's expectation of her brother to "be like this" or for him to "just do this" can be interpreted as reproducing carceral ideologies by pushing him to behave in ways that align with dominant society. This situation is not specific to family/sibling dynamics and can be present in platonic/romantic relationships as well.

Her brother's response, "you guys just don't get it," is an abolitionist gesture. That is, in a way, he is responding with a refusal to conform to the "free world," a colonial world–a refusal of forceful assimilation and dominant society. It is not necessarily that he may have sought to stay in a carceral, institutionalized mindset. Rather, Mexican origin/ Chicano men from the Southwest

are pushed to develop, from an early age, a refusal to conform to dominant society as they are not accepted in the first place. Gang scholars have written extensively about gang culture and the way that many young Brown and Black boys/men find solace and acceptance by belonging within and to gangs.[179] It seems that this mentality stays with Mexican origin / Chicano men even after they have left their gang affiliations and/or incarceration. There is an understanding that they are still unacceptable by dominant society and so they seek to build alternative futures in various ways. Marisol's brother sought a form of freedom that has not yet been made tangible. One where he can be free to be exactly who he is without explaining himself to anyone. One where his life is valuable just because he is alive, and people love him, rather than his "value" to society.[180]

Ruby's testimonio demonstrates how the ideological aspects of growing up in a colonial carceral context can be internalized from a young age. She explains:

> My upbringing was very, I was just trained to always watch. Watch mirrors, make sure you don't talk on the phone too long. You know, it's just like that training, that soldier mentality of like, checking your surroundings, like just having to always watch your back.

As her father was involved in underground economies and had already spent her entire childhood in prison, he brought home that training, as she calls it "that soldier mentality." This mentality relates to an earlier discussion on Marisol's hypervigilant focus on her surroundings–they are similar in training, but Ruby expresses how it was intentionally instilled in her. In part, Ruby explains that she was trained to watch because "it's like we have so many, you know, like we

[179] Durán, Robert J. *The Gang Paradox: Inequalities and Miracles on the U.s.-Mexico Border*. , 2018. Print. Brotherton, David. *Youth Street Gangs: A Critical Appraisal*. London: Routledge, 2015. Print. ; Vigil, James D. *Learning from Gangs: The Mexican American Experience*. , 1997. Print.

[180] Cacho, Lisa M. *Social Death: Racialized Rightlessness and the Criminalization of the Unprotected.* New York: New York University Press, 2012. Print.

have the PD, we have the Border Patrol, there's just so many, you know, mother fuckers can stop you at any time for whatever reason." It was the experience of living in a hyper policed city and being raised in a family in which prison/street culture and mentality coalesced that shaped her understanding of self-defense.

CHICANA/X EVERYDAY ABOLITIONIST RESISTANCE & STRUGGLE

Chicana/x everyday abolitionism can be understood as fighting colonial carceral institutions–whether on behalf of a loved one or to confront injustice themselves. Chicana/x abolitionist actions can take shape by remaining in contact with incarcerated loved ones, raising bail money, or simple gestures such as intentionally building relationships and community with one another. Where there is oppression, there is resistance, and where there is resistance, there is a complex set of relationships as well as contradictions. Resistance scholarship has occasionally depicted movements, communities, and peoples as either helpless oppressed victims or militant revolutionaries, overlooking the complex and contradictory positions many oppressed peoples occupy. Radical women of color scholars and intersectionality theories have and continue to provide frameworks to understand how oppressed people can straddle borders in racialized, gendered, and classed forms and via other identity markers.[181] Critical social theories have provided helpful analyses of how colonized groups continue to internalize colonial practices such as internalized racism, homophobia, and in this context carceral logics.[182]

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[181] Moraga, Cherrie, and Gloria Anzaldua. *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color*. , 2021. Print.; *The Combahee River Collective Statement: Black Feminist Organizing in the Seventies and Eighties*. , 1986. Print.

[182] Quintana, Stephen. *Mexican American Children's Ethnic Pride and Internalized Racism*. Julian Samora Research Institute, Michigan State University, 1999.; Hipolito-Delgado, Carlos Porfirio. *Internalized Racism and Ethnic Identity in Chicana/o and Latina/o College Students*. University of Maryland, 2007.; Wilson Kwamogi Okello (2022) "What are you pretending not to know?": Un/doing internalized carcerality through pedagogies of the flesh, Curriculum Inquiry, DOI: 10.1080/03626784.2022.2047579

The following passage from Marisol's testimonio underscores how Chicana/xs engage in abolitionist resistance and struggle in their everyday lives and how it is not a straightforward process. Chicana/xs with close proximity to their hyper racially criminalized loved ones also have a difficult time understanding the position(s) they occupy:

> Like I feel like now I get what Gabriel was saying to me about, like not hearing him, not getting it. Not understanding it, even though I'm like I'm reading this book, I talked to this person, I learned this thing. And you still don't get it because it's like not something you read in a book or not something someone can teach you. It's just, that's not the way we're wired to learn and it's like, it's sad that it took him dying for me to learn that you know, and I thought, I had thought some, something like that before. But I had never felt it in that way where I'm just like, damn.

Marisol's desire to understand her brother Gabriel comes through genuinely in the above passage. She actively seeks to humanize her brother by engaging in various educational practices, but she shares that "it's not something you read in a book or not something someone can teach you." Marisol shares "it's sad that it took him dying for me to learn that, you know." It is through the loss of a loved one who is also a racially criminalized subject that Chicana/xs gain access to knowledge on an embodied level. Marisol emphasizes that when she says, "I had never felt it in that way where I'm just like, damn."

To be sure, carceral contexts, such as that of Mexican origin peoples in the Southwest, are contradictory and complex. While Chicana/xs are involved in radical abolitionist acts in their everyday lives, they too at times unintentionally reproduce ideological and material aspects of the carceral regime. Notwithstanding, the original oral histories that drive this chapter offer unique perspectives on potential routes for institutional and structural change.

POSTSCRIPT

Marisol's poetry represents the dimension of carework present in her spirit and psyche and also how Mexican origin peoples who are hyper racially criminalized segment and transmit knowledge and pain through various archival documents. While this poetry was not initially part of the plan for the oral histories or cultural artifacts gathered for this dissertation, it came naturally out of one of the sacred platicas that Marisol and I had. Marisol talked a lot about how she writes about death and in particular the theme of "people dying in pieces." Although her poem is not about people dying in pieces, it is about the anticipated and eventually material labors that Chicanas perform in their lives. Beyond the poem's focus on the labor that is anticipated and later expected/required of Chicanas, Marisol also unpacks the complexities of colonialism that spill over into every facet of our lives–that is, psychologically and mentally.

Ojo De Buey

Tengo mucho amor que dar, primero me la doy a mi misma
Porque para ayudar a la gente tienes que ser egoísta
Eso yo no me lo invento me lo enseñó mi madre
De mi nadie abusa aunque sean de mi sangre

Bueno esa verdad a veces es pura mentira
A veces siento por dentro que el cerebro me gira
Me abandono yo misma para consolar a mi gente
Pa' no sentirme culpable y mejor sentir me decente

De repente me encuentro con bajas defensas
Hundiéndome bajo olas saladas y inmensas
En un mar de lágrimas de mis seres queridos
Revuelta con sangre espesa de corazones heridos

Pero a mi desde chiquita me gustaba natación
A pesar que a los 3 años antes de educacion
Me caí en una piscina y en un instante me di cuenta
Si te calmas un poco te undes mas lenta

Al siguiente momento aprendí otra cosa
Si el agua sabe fea, pues cierra la boca!
Después de unos segundos mi papa me salvo
Pero por ser tan alto hasta el pie se quebró

Cuando eres adulto solo tu te puedes salvar
Por eso es muy importante saber cómo nadar
También se recomienda saber cómo flotar
Para no cansarte debes saberte relajar

No hay garantía que llegues a donde quieras
Porque el corriente te lleva a lugares extranjeras
Puede ser que te encuentres a un compañero
Buscando la ayuda de un amigo sincero
Luego uno decide algo muy interesante,
Le puedo ayudar y también yo seguir adelante?

Después de tanto tiempo flotando en este mar
Nos hacemos profesionales en cómo navegar
Lo que aprende uno
Lo convierte en herramientas
Así creamos aparatos
para superar a las tormentas

Estos barcos se construyen como un picasso
Raros pero bonitos, hechos de muchos pedazos
Con piezas boyantes
para ser optimista
Y otras más fuertes
para ser realista

También vienen ya hechos para cierta gente
Que se criaron en un ambiente bastante diferente
Pero en este viaje no siempre es tan importante
Si construiste tu barquito, O naciste en un yate

Mi barco no es perfecto, es más-tiene agujeros
Y no creas que fue por falta de ingenieros
Es pa’ no olvidarme que en cualquier momento
La seguridad se desvanece rapidito con el viento

Todos necesitan un poco de suerte
(O a dios si prefieres) para evitar a la muerte
Cuando me encuentro estampada en un roca
Me relajo, nado, y cierro la boca

Sin embargo a veces se te llena de agua
Y si te la tragas, por dentro te amarga
si se me mete poquita ya no me preocupo
Incluso la saboreo y después la escupo
Porque yo e aprendido que la felicidad se sazona
Con la sal de las lágrimas

Bull's-Eye

I have a lot of love to give, first I give it to myself
Because to help people you have to be selfish
I didn't make that up, my mother taught it to me
No one takes advantage of me even if they are my blood

It turns out that truth sometimes is a lie
Sometimes I feel inside that my brain is spinning
I abandon myself to comfort my people
To not feel guilty and to instead feel decent

Suddenly I find myself defenseless
Sinking under huge salty waves
In a sea of tears from my loved ones
Mixed with the thick blood of their wounded hearts

But since I was little I liked swimming
Although at 3 years before I started school
I fell into a pool and in an instant I realized
If you relax a little, you sink slower

The next moment I learned something else
If the water tastes bad, then shut your mouth!
After a few seconds my dad saved me
But because he was so tall, he broke his foot

When you are an adult only you can save yourself
That is why it is very important to know how to swim
I also recommended knowing how to float
To not get tired you must know how to relax

There is no guarantee that you will get where you want
Because the current carries you to foreign places
You might meet a fellow traveler
Looking for help from a sincere friend
Then one decides something very interesting,
Can I help you and still get ahead?

After so much time floating in this sea
We become professionals in how to navigate
what one learns
Is turned into tools
That is how we create gadgets
to weather the storms

These boats are built like a picasso
Rare but beautiful, made of many pieces
with buoyant pieces
to be optimistic
and other stronger ones
to be realistic

They also come already made for certain people
Who grew up in an extremely different environment
But on this journey it’s not always so important
If you built your little boat, or were born on a yacht

My boat is not perfect, in fact it has holes
And don't think it was due to lack of engineering
It's to not to forget that at any time
Security fades quickly with the wind

Everybody needs a little luck
(Or god if you prefer) to avoid death
When I find myself pinned against a rock
I relax, I swim, and I close my mouth

Sometimes it fills you with water
And if you swallow it, it makes you bitter inside
If it gets in my mouth a little bit I don't worry anymore
I even savor it and then spit it out
Because I have learned that our happiness is seasoned
With the salt of the tears

The poem begins with love: she has so much to give but first she must love herself. She moves on to discuss how in order to help "the people," one must be a bit selfish. This thinking is rooted in women of color feminist politics of self-care as a radical act: in order to take care of others, which we are so often required to do, oneself must be well. Marisol credits her mother for this epistemological knowledge and makes the strong statement that not even her own blood will get away with abusing her–acknowledging the sacredness of self. Marisol shifts to naming the complexity of carceral ideology seeping into her own psyche–she says "it turns out that truth sometimes is a lie." She continues by stating that sometimes she feels that her brain plays tricks on her and she in turn abandons herself to console her people, to not feel at fault for her people's rough condition and to feel decent. This gets at the heart of one aspect of carceral ideologies that place a disproportionate amount of responsibility on women of color most of the time.

Abolitionist/decolonial logics and ideologies ask for community responsibility and accountability–that means that community members who are in a "rough condition" acknowledge their own culpability in their situation. If we do not ask folks to hold themselves accountable, we are aiding in the stripping of their agency. Approaching each person from an abolitionist/decolonial framework creates space for the folks in "rough condition" to realize they have agency, that they can heal, grow, and evolve–in short, it empowers them. Placing all the responsibility on the few community members who are advancing in a racial capitalist world and

becoming "successful" only works for so long.[183] Those one or two people who "make it out the hood" can only carry their family members and communities for so long. Beyond the financial burden, the emotional and psychological / spiritual cost is too high. It is exactly what Marisol is expressing: "me abandono yo mismo para consolar a mi gente." What happens when some of our most powerful women abandon themselves to save their family and community members? We all lose.

Abolition and decolonization mean no one abandons themselves–and certainly not to take care of anyone else. Carceral logics are rooted in an abandonment of self and when these logics seep into the psyche of a racialized criminalized subject they manifest 1) by people being able to cause harm to themselves and others and 2) by select community members attempting to eradicate the harm and bring family members home, which requires them to abandon themselves to fully show up for others. Again, it is a lose-lose situation for racialized / criminalized communities but a win-win for the police state–it means that racialized / criminalized communities are more vulnerable to control, violence, and other forms of state sanctioned violence.

While Marisol's poem can be further analyzed, I end my analysis here as I encourage the reader to sit with this community member's knowledge as it exists as part of the production of my dissertation. The knowledge that this dissertation has sought to put forth did not take place in a vacuum and is not "my knowledge." It was cultivated in community with the participants in this dissertation and therefore I urge you to sit with Marisol's words.

[183] I use "successful" carefully here so as not to perpetuate the idea that people are only successful when they advance in a racial capitalist world. However, from the community perspective, this is the person that most folks usually look to as they have more access to resources everyone needs.

FIG 3.1 Photo of Gabriel provided by oral history participant Marisol.

This photo of Gabriel was taken while he was incarcerated in Ciudad Juarez, Chihuahua, Mexico in the fall of 2016. Gabriel's partner, Marisela, went to visit him ,and while he was being brought in for court she managed to capture this photo of him. A photo taken by a family member inside of a carceral institution is rare. Technology is not allowed and typically corrections officers and staff are very strict with these policies. Including this photo as an archival document is in part to record in a material way Gabriel's incarceration. Although the viewer/reader is unable to see Gabriel's facial expression, he was smiling. This photo captures the humanity of Gabriel from the point of view of a family member, a loved one. Rarely do we see photos of incarcerated people that are taken by family members. Photos taken inside carceral institutions of "inmates" are more often than not taken by law enforcement officers, which inevitably shifts the attitude of

the incarcerated person. The photo does not necessarily make apparent the carework that is performed on behalf of his sister Marisol, but we know that his partner Marisela's carework is implicated in the photo. There is pain and joy transmitted through the photo, in capturing his smile inside of a Mexican prison.

FIG 3.2 Gabriel's life was taken on July 28, 2018. Author photo, August 2018.

CHAPTER FOUR:

HOW DO YOU ENVISION ABOLITION WHEN YOU ARE DYING IN PIECES?

Figure 4.1 Photo of my brother on the left and father on the right. Author photo, May 1993.

I often say the work I do chose me. The work has always been personal. My interest in working with currently or formerly incarcerated and system-impacted Chicana/xs stems from

growing up with family members incarcerated. This continues presently.[184] For a long time I thought it was normal to have family locked up.[185] I experienced the incarceration of my father and am experiencing the ongoing incarceration of my brother. My proximity to my brother and father, two men who were racially criminalized, subjected me to various forms of violence and hardships ranging from hunger, houselessness, police harassment, "gang" affairs, drugs, and other underground economic activities.

My lived and embodied experiences as a young Chicana who experienced these struggles provide a unique entry point into my scholarship. The Mexicanas and Chicana/xs I worked with are more than just research "subjects." They are me; I am them; we are one and the same. There is an unspoken shared understanding between myself and the oral history participants that goes beyond insider/outsider dynamics.[186] I share a type of trauma, pain, and loss with them that not just any Chicana from the Rio Grande Valley knows–we are the Chicana/xs from the hyper racially criminalized segments of the region. Carework is associated with the trauma, pain, and loss that we have all experienced and is one reason I decided to engage that form of labor in my dissertation.

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[184] Throughout my work I use Chicana/o/x in the demographic sense, that is, to identify people who are of Mexican descent and born/raised in the United States. I use Mexican origin people to indicate people who have connection to Mexico beyond it as a site of nationalism and instead have Indigenous, Afro and/or European ancestry tied to the geographic space.

[185] Ross, Luana. *Inventing the Savage: The Social Construction of Native American Criminality*. , 2021. Print.

[186] Collins, Patricia H. "Learning from the Outsider Within: The Sociological Significance of Black Feminist Thought." *Social Problems*. (1986): 14-32. Print.; Mies, Maria. "The Need for a New Vision: The Subsistence Perspective." *Just Methods: An Interdisciplinary Feminist Reader : Supplemented with a New Introduction and Chapter on Learning from Practice*. , 2016. Print; Harding, Sandra. "Borderlands Epistemologies." *Just Methods: An Interdisciplinary Feminist Reader : Supplemented with a New Introduction and Chapter on Learning from Practice*. , 2016. Print.

Because of my opportunity to attend college, I learned my experience was grounded in a nearly two-hundred-year racial capitalist history, perhaps even longer.[187] This history was hardly accessible and most certainly not intentionally taught to me as an undergraduate student at a predominantly white private school. I sought this history out myself as I completed my undergraduate thesis in an English department on Chicana prison literature entitled, "'It's Just Me Against the World': Minority Identity and Resistance in Chicana Prison Narratives." My title, "It's Just Me Against the World," referenced lyrics from 2Pac's famous song "Me Against the World." I was exposed to 2Pac's music as a young girl because of my brother. My brother and father's influence and presence have been apparent in my work for many years. The vignettes that opened my graduate school applications discussed the labor and carework I was performing for both my father and brother before I even had the language to name it.

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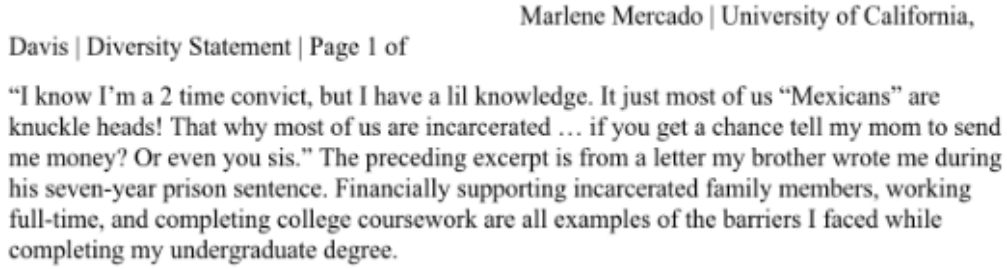
The metal detector beeps as a woman behind the counter asks if I have anything in my pocket; I have the letter my father asked me to write. Unexpectedly a prison guard signals me to follow her to the courtroom. A judge, public defender, and several guards occupy the room. I see my father as he's escorted in. The disproportionate rate at which men in my family have been incarcerated drove me to question the phenomenon; more importantly, it led me to consider what is happening to the women in Chicana/o communities. I explored such experiences in my senior thesis titled "'It's Just Me Against the World": Minority Identity and Resistance in Chicana Prison Narratives." My thesis provided me the opportunity to consider the intersection of criminal justice, race, ethnicity, gender, literature, and culture. As the title suggests, this project explores riveting but largely ignored accounts of modern day minority identity and resistance within the criminal justice system. In brief, my research engages the systemic oppression that criminalizes Chicanas as violent and therefore violable; it explores this logic of criminalization that is used to justify the funneling and exploitation of Chicana bodies into American detention centers.

[187] Goeman, Mishuana. *Mark My Words: Native Women Mapping Our Nations.* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013. Print.; HERNANDEZ, KELLY L. Y. T. L. E. *City of Inmates: Conquest, Rebellion, and the Rise of Human Caging in Los Angeles, 17711965*. S.l.: UNIV OF NORTH CAROLINA PR, 2020. Print.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"I know I'm a 2 time convict, but I have a lil knowledge. It just most of us "Mexicans" are knuckle heads! That why most of us are incarcerated … if you get a chance tell my mom to send me money? Or even you sis." The preceding excerpt is from a letter my brother wrote me during his seven-year prison sentence. Financially supporting incarcerated family members, working full-time, and completing college coursework are all examples of the barriers I faced while completing my undergraduate degree.

FIG 4.2 Screenshots from my graduate school applications highlighting my continual engagement with carework in my personal life over the years and an early grappling of what that meant for me academically.

These embodied and lived experiences have always driven my work. Invisible labor, carework, and my subjection to carcerality have shaped my entire life. My scholarship is much deeper than a research question, a method, or a theory. My work seeks to provide tangible solutions via potential policy recommendations,but it is also a repository, an archive where these women could unload, dump, and leave pieces of these traumatic stories and experiences. Yet my work also goes beyond praxis. I genuinely and selfishly sought to make sense of my own experiences and I thought I could perhaps do that in community with other Chicana/xs who might be some of the only people who truly have an idea what it is like to live life as carceral collateral.[188]

ME / US / LA FAMILIA

I was the last child born into the Mercado family in El Paso, Texas, in 1990. My parents quickly opted to move myself, my brother Juan, and sister Maxine out of El Paso and we relocated to Santa Maria, California, where my father pursued physical labor employment in the

[188] Salinas, M. D. (2021). In Lak'ech from the Ivory Tower to the Prison Tower: Connecting Latina 'Disposables' to Latina 'Exceptionals' across Neoliberal Institutions. *UC Santa Barbara*. ProQuest ID: Salinas_ucsb_0035D_15227. Merritt ID: ark:/13030/m5bg9dz7. Retrieved from https://escholarship.org/uc/item/8kg0k15p

field of construction. Both my parents, Maria del Carmen and Miguel Angel, were born in Ciudad Juarez, Chihuahua, Mexico, and grew up in poverty. They knew first-hand the struggles of being Mexican origin in the twentieth century, especially in a border region that brings its own unique set of struggles. Over the course of my childhood, my father moved our family across different cities and states in his pursuit of the so-called American dream.

We landed in Las Vegas, Nevada, where my siblings and I began to develop ourselves as young humans and teenagers. We did typical teenager things like drinking, smoking, skipping school, getting into fights, kissing crushes, and the like. Because our parents spent most of their time working and/or commuting, my siblings and I led quite independent lives as young children and teenagers. My brother, Juan, was exposed to the gang lifestyle as a young teenager. I am five years younger than him and I remember as a young girl how he would bring over his "cholo" and "gangster" homies. My father consistently directed physical and verbal abuse at my brother. After my brother and his girlfriend at the time learned that they were pregnant with their first child at age sixteen, my mother and father agreed to send my brother back to El Paso, Texas, to live with our madrina (godmother). My parents and our madrina agreed this move would be best to remove him from his current situation, not knowing that the environment he was going to live in was worse.

FIG 4.3. Photo of my brother and his then girlfriend. Author photo, July 2004

Within months of Juan's move back to El Paso he became affiliated with a local "gang."[189] Fast forward five years and my brother would catch his first felony case, a case that would almost get him killed by the El Paso Police Department (EPPD) and for which he would serve his first prison sentence. EPPD responded to a 911 call and arrived at the apartment complex where my mother, sister, and brother lived. My brother was experiencing sleep deprivation and a mental health crisis that was exacerbated by substance abuse. My brother, Juan, ended up outside in his boxers and amongst the chaos, he managed to toss a rock through a

[189] I follow critical gang scholars in my use of quotations around the term "gang" to signify a complex history which recognizes the carceral colonial history of gang formations. In the Southwest in particular, gangs initially formed as a response to white supremacist, extra-legal and state sanctioned violence, including the KKK. Tapia, Mike. *Gangs of the El Paso–Juárez Borderland: A History*. United States, University of New Mexico Press, 2019.

neighbor's window. Juan was also approached by an elderly man that attempted to restrain him and as a result he pushed the male stranger away. When EPPD arrived, my brother's mental state had deteriorated further, and it was at this time that a taser was drawn and pointed at him. Luckily, the taser was not a gun. However, because of my brother's state, the taser caused him to experience a seizure, foaming at the mouth, and eventually irregular heartbeats. By the time the ambulance arrived his heart had stopped. The ambulance took my brother away and were luckily able to revive him—but he woke up handcuffed to the hospital bed in a state of confusion.

Over the course of the next fifteen years my brother would go through a revolving prison door. My father and cuñado (brother-in-law) would also simultaneously serve prison sentences. The incarceration of these three men, especially my brother and father, impacted my life in every way imaginable. At the time, the magnitude of trauma–the rate and frequency at which it was pouring into my life–left me numb. I also did not have the tools to understand what was happening to me or my family. For many years I was very angry with and blamed my family members for their incarceration, addiction, and affiliation with "gangs" and underground economies. Through my educational, professional, and activist experiences I gained tools, frameworks, and languages to explain my lived experiences, and still all this knowledge does not and cannot fully explain the heartbreak and ache associated with incarceration and premature death.

ARTIFACTS / TRANSMITTING KNOWLEDGE

Mexican origin peoples' inclusion in traditional archives has historically served to criminalize, racialize, dehumanize, and erase state-sanctioned violence against them.[190] Historian Monica Muñoz Martinez documented the various ways that archives in Texas have served to erase murders, as well as the pain suffered by surviving family members, and the efforts of family members who seek justice in the aftermath of murder. She notes that "death certificates for victims of anti-Mexican violence at the hands of police are hard to find" and how oftentimes police lied under oath and relentlessly sought to preserve the reputation of the state police (5). The intentional erasure and denial of state-sanctioned violence against Mexican origin people in Texas perpetuates their racialization and criminalization by legally allowing and justifying their murder again and again. Many historical documents depicted Mexican origin peoples as idle, immoral, dishonest, and degenerate.[191] Primary sources assembled by historian David J. Weber outlined the various archival documents used initially to ideologically criminalize/racialize Mexicans and later materially. Congressional documents, popular literature, and travel narratives stated that "Mexicans would make inferior United States citizens" since they were said to be incapable of a democratic government (135). More explicitly, Mexicans are named the "degenerate inhabitants of New Mexico" by writer and journalist Rufus B. Sage. He states "there are no people on the continent of America, whether civilized or uncivilized, with one or two exceptions, more miserable in condition or dispicalt in morals than the mongrel race inhabiting New Mexico" (72). These are a few examples of the ways in which Mexican origin people were depicted as criminal subjects before the United States took control over Native and Mexican

[190] Martinez, Monica M. *The Injustice Never Leaves You: Anti-mexican Violence in Texas*. , 2020. Print.; Carrigan, William D. *The Making of a Lynching Culture: Violence and Vigilantism in Central Texas, 1836-1916*. Urbana, Ill: University of Illinois Press, 2007. Print.

[191] Perea, Juan F. "A Brief History of Race and the U. S.-Mexican Border: Tracing the Trajectories of Conquest." *U.c.l.a. Law Review*. 51.1 (2003): 283-312. Print.; Weber, David J. *Foreigners in Their Native Land: Historical Roots of the Mexican Americans*. Albuquerque, NM: Univ. of New Mexico Press, 2003. Print.

land. These portrayals of Mexicans and "New Mexicans" in the Southwest persisted into the twentieth century and continue to emerge into the present day.

Inclusion in traditional archives has also served to justify Mexican origin people's physical removal from territories across the Southwest, which aided in the nation-building project of the United States in the late nineteenth century via the Treaty de Guadalupe Hidalgo in 1848.[192] Nontraditional archives, which I define as repositories not recognized by white supremacist instituions, are rich and abundant amongst Mexican origin peoples. Nontraditional archives amongst hyper racially criminalized Mexican origin peoples have not necessarily been intentionally created, but rather have emerged as a result of their exclusion from traditional archival repositories. Further, being that currently/formerly incarcerated peoples and their family members experience an additional layer of stigma, the preservation of their communication, knowledge, and search for justice exist almost exclusively between community members. That is, many of the archival documents in hyper racially criminalized communities exist only within the community itself and many of these archival items will not be found outside of the community–sometimes out of safety concerns. This chapter engages the method of auto-historia by articulating my own oral history testimonio and utilizing a visual sociological technique *photo elicitation* to guide my own testimonio and analysis.[193]

These nontraditional archives manifest as Nike boxes under beds full of letters from our incarcerated loved ones, personal photo albums depicting ourselves with incarcerated loved ones, prison birthday cards, and makeshift gifts from loved ones, among other things. I include

[192] Gómez, Laura E. *Race, Colonialism, and Criminal Law : Mexicans and the American Criminal Justice System in Territorial New Mexico*. Law and Society Association, 2000.; Menchaca, Martha. *Recovering History, Constructing Race : The Indian, Black, and White Roots of Mexican Americans.* University of Texas Press, 2002

[193] Maldonado-Fabela, K.L. "In and Out of Crisis": Life Course Criminalization for Jefas in the Barrio. *Crit Crim* 30, 133–157 (2022). https://doi.org/10.1007/s10612-022-09615-2

artifacts from my personal archive to offer the reader a glimpse into how Mexican origin racialized and criminalized people remain in contact with their loved ones, how they share/transmit their knowledge in the absence of inclusion into traditional archives, how they reflect on their own mistakes, and how they recognize their own humanity and urge others to do the same.

The following archival document is from my father while he was incarcerated in a state prison in Utah. He opens the letter by addressing me, "Dear Marlene," while typically he referred to me as "hija" or "mama chiquita." He continues to say "here's a little something that I have put together throughout my stay k. I'm gonna send each one of you a copy … read and see the other side." The other side opens with the title "my purpose" and the proceeding seven pages outline life lessons. In this letter my father is quoting Milton from *Paradise Lost* and masterfully appropriates and redeploys the significance of the lines to fit his own experience.[194]

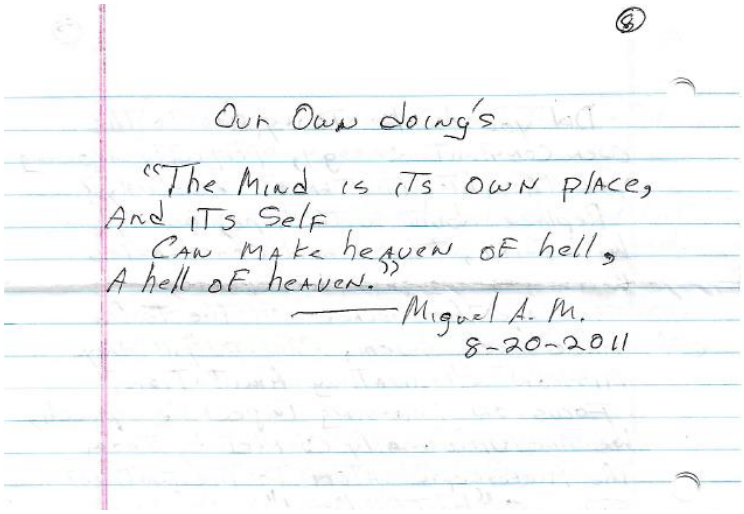


FIG 4.4 Digitized version of letter from my father. Author photo, May 2020.

[194] Milton, John. *Paradise Lost: Books I and Ii*. , 2018. Internet resource.

"Our Own Doing's" is the final life lesson and where my father decides to close out the letter.

For me, I see that my father understands accountability and Chicano agency. "Our Own Doing's" signifies he understands his own role in how his life unfolded up until that point. Perhaps the time he had spent in that cell facilitated a space of reflection to realize how in some ways he had landed himself there–this does not strip the state of its role in Mexican racial criminalization and rather creates space to examine the contradictions. From an abolitionist's perspective, a person can reach a level of reflection without being incarcerated, but in this scenario, it seems that my father took a bad situation and attempted to make the best out of it by reflecting and communicating that reflection with his children. The excerpt is also powerful considering his current incarceration.

Oftentimes incarcerated people discuss how while their physical bodies may be detained, controlled, and surveilled, but the state does not have control over their hearts, spirits, and minds.[195] My father, Miguel Angel, echoes this sentiment when he says, "the mind is its own place, // and its self // Can make a heaven of hell, // A hell of heaven." In having control over his spirit, heart, and mind, my father exerts Chicano agency. He was not simply a victim of the system; rather, he was expressing accountability for his actions and demonstrating his agency with self. Change begins with self and it is not that he sought to be like the dominant society–he instead sought to change himself for self, for family, and for community.

While my father was incarcerated in Central Utah, my brother was serving time in a Central Texas prison. Juggling the incarceration of my father and brother while I was working a fulltime job, attending community college, and attempting to be a responsible young adult was

[195] Rand Hazou, and Reginold Daniels. "Unshackling the Body, Mind, and Spirit: Reflections on Liberation and Creative Exchange Between San Quentin and Auckland Prisons." *Humanities (Basel)*, vol. 11, no. 7, MDPI AG, 2022, p. 7–, https://doi.org/10.3390/h11010007.; Seale, Bobby. *Seize the Time : the Story of the Black Panther Party and Huey P. Newton.* 1st ed., Random House, 1970.

quite difficult and overwhelming. The following images contain a letter my brother wrote me during this time.

FIG 4.5 Digitized version of letter from my brother while he was incarcerated. Author photo, May 2020.

9-16

Whats up Sis?
Whats going down with you? How you been? I Hope everything going good for you lil SiS! How come you havent wrote to me? You forgot about your Bro? As I'm here doing time in this pen... Its been so hard for me lately, th is hard time here. Every its a str- uggle with these inmates. I Cant believe, I'm back here again. Oh well itsahard lesson to be learned. I should be getting out Jan 03, 201 Thats how it looking. Maxine have been writing to me lately, but I was just wondering whats up wi- th my lil SiS? Haws the freeword going for you? I figured you Have been to busy to even write a letter hea? Me at the moment I'm trying to get my life Straight, taking classes for Angermangemett, G.E.D what ever I can get my Hands on. Trying to change my life around. I'm trying to figure out how to chang my old habits, and turn in to Sam new productive habits.

Because I'm tired of being sick and tired. This lifestyle gets old. Sometimes I wounder How I got myself in the trap of Satan. I was working for the Devil, but now I working my way through the Holy spirit to worship God. If it wasnt for him blessing me for anther chance at Freeworld. Because on the hu! I could have been here way longer, do to the fact of all shit I've done Sis! I thank God! I lived a rough lifestyle in the streets, now I'm done. Wants I get out I'm probably going to Odessa, Tx to the Oil Fields. They'll start you off at 25$ an hair. That where most of these Vatas from the pen... go to ones there relecesed. I got to Stop being Selfish, cuz I got Babys out there waiting for there Daddy! It just as humans we commit mistakes. I had to learn the hard way Sis! Being behind bars is not hu! Anyways Sis, I hope to see one of these days? I miss u!

I really want to see my lil Sis! Its been a min... Are u far from where Maxine lives? You live alone? I hope your ok? Lets see if we keep in-touch a lil bit often. To continue a better relationship between me and you. I love You! And no its not just jail talk Its just out there I was lost. And in here you just realize all your down falls. So keep ur head up. Love You!

W/B

Your Bro

My brother Juan opens the letter almost immediately addressing the fact that I have not written him often enough. He says "How come you haven't wrote to me? You forgot about your bro? … Maxine have been writing to me lately, but I was just wondering whats up with my lil sis." Juan expresses a sense of loneliness and a need to hear from and remain in contact with me. It is common to receive this type of insistence/pressure from an incarcerated loved one. Abolitionists have written and spoken extensively about the importance of remaining in contact with incarcerated people.[196] Contact, connection, and community are direct responses to state isolation and penal tactics that seek to break down "inmates" by isolating them.[197] The theme of remaining in contact comes up several times throughout his letter: "I figured you have been to busy to even write a letter ha? … Anyway sis, I hope to see one of these days? I miss u! I really want to see my lil sis! Its been a min … Lets sis if we keep in touch a lil bit often. To continue a better relationship between me and you. I love you! And no its not just jail talk." As the family member of an incarcerated person, I learned how vital I was to his time inside. I became a lifeline for my brother. In that sense, there was and continues to be a responsibility to do the work of keeping my brother alive.

THE PANDEMIC AND THE POLICE STATE

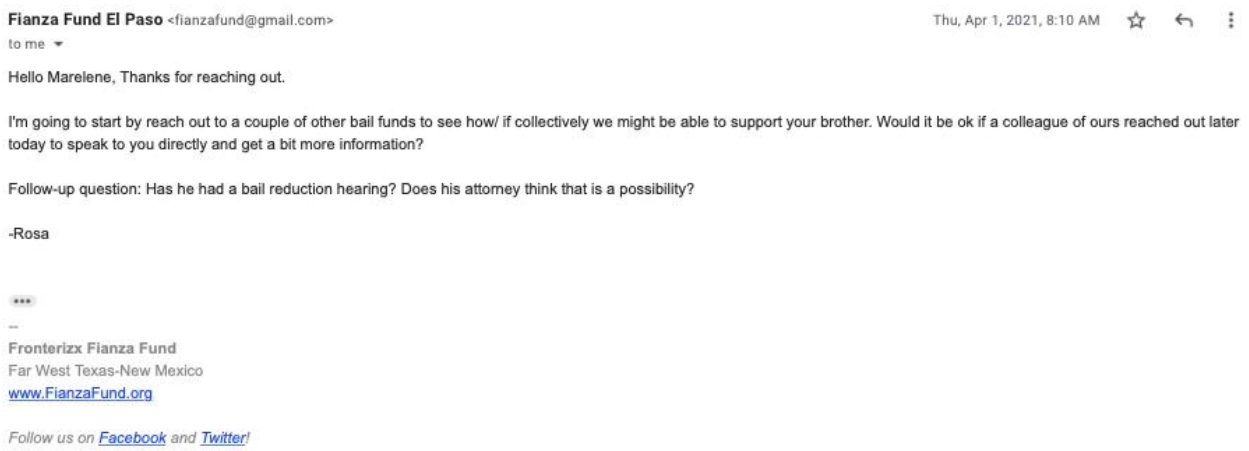
[196] Cr's Abolitionist Toolkit." *Critical Resistance*, https://criticalresistance.org/resources/crs-abolitionist-toolkit/.; Lydon, Jason, et al. *Coming Out of Concrete Closets: A Report on Black & Pink's National Lgbtq Prisoner Survey*. , 2015. Internet resource.
[197] Foucault, Michel. *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. New York: Vintage Books, 1979. Print.

The second week of March 2020, my brother was tracked down by El Paso law enforcement and detained at a nearby gas station. Additionally, El Paso law enforcement violently raided my madrina/s house, where my elderly Nina, Tio, and nieces lived at the time. This law enforcement encounter would set the stage for carework and labor that I would fulfill for the next two years while I completed my graduate studies–labor in which I continue to engage. The type of carework I engaged in ranged from emotional labor via phone calls to support my brother's mental health and sense of connection to advocacy labor in documenting the current conditions inside the El Paso County Annex Jail during COVID and getting him temporarily released from the Annex because of a medical condition. It also involved physical labor when I flew down to El Paso to support him in his preparation for reincarceration, financial labor to fund phone calls, flights, lawyer fees, commissary, etc., psychological labor to communicate between my brother and his lawyer (like the time his lawyer said the DA was trying to sentence Juan to a 40-life sentence and I was the one who had to tell him while he was in solitary confinement), and finally spiritual labor because I've had to continuously make sure my spirit is "right" in order to be there for my brother when he calls. While these overlapping forms of labor are daunting, he looks to me for words of encouragement, positivity, hope. As his emotional rock, allowing my incarcerated brother to see the hopelessness and despair I often feel would only contribute to his emotional demise within prison walls. Thus, maintaining a facade of positivity is a key form of emotional labor that I must uphold as I do not want him to lose hope and succumb to engaging in behaviors on the inside that could prolong his incarceration or worse, lead to his physical demise.

During the beginning stages of his incarceration, I focused on setting up a network of support since I did not know how long he would be detained, and I knew I would not be able to

support him on my own. I used my social media presence, network, and accounts to recruit volunteers to write to my brother and contribute donations to his bail fund. At first, there were many people who heeded the call to action, and both wrote as well as sent donations. As time went on, people stopped writing and donating and the responsibility fell largely, if not entirely, on me. His bail situation was one of the biggest barriers we faced. It was a $10,000 bail fee and contingent on our family gathering signatures of three consistently employed adults who would vouch for my brother and required our family to put up a house as collateral. The house also had to be owned by a family member and located in the El Paso region. Given that my family members are primarily located in the El Paso region and recalling the economic barriers I laid out in Chapter One, we do not have three consistently employed adults who would be willing to vouch for my brother and many of my family members see my brother as criminal themselves. Further, our family does not have intergenerational wealth on either my father or mother's side. The only home that was owned belonged to our grandmother on our father's side of the family and was under intense scrutiny as my grandmother was nearing the end of her life.

Considering all of this, I decided to reach out to abolitionist organizations in the region and beyond to see if there was any way around the situation. My brother's bail was outrageous considering the charges. It seemed that the state was interested in simply punishing us for being poor and knew that we would not be able to come up with $10,000. I thought to myself that perhaps if we raised the money, the bail bond companies would make an exception and we could get my brother released. I reached out to the Fronterizx Fianza Fund and was supported by the group. They were able to secure the $10,000 for my brother's bail but in the end, it did not matter because there was no exception to be made–we needed three signatures and the house. I failed him.



Fianza Fund El Paso <fianzafund@gmail.com> Thu, Apr 1, 2021, 8:10 AM

to me

Hello Marelene, Thanks for reaching out.

I'm going to start by reach out to a couple of other bail funds to see how/ if collectively we might be able to support your brother. Would it be ok if a colleague of ours reached out later today to speak to you directly and get a bit more information?

Follow-up question: Has he had a bail reduction hearing? Does his attorney think that is a possibility?

-Rosa

•••

--

Fronterizx Fianza Fund

Far West Texas-New Mexico

www.FianzaFund.org

Follow us on Facebook and Twitter!

FIG 4.6 Screenshot of my personal email detailing my communication with Fianza Fund. Author photo, March 2022.

During the same time that I was trying to figure out a way through the bail situation, my brother was experiencing backlash from administration inside the Annex, as he and I had previously organized phone zaps together to bring pressure to jail administration as COVID conditions were horrible.[198] The county jail was admitting people who tested positive for COVID into general population without following quarantine protocols. Incarcerated people were also not being provided proper cleaning supplies, masks, or soap and were not able to socially distance. Even worse, by November 2020, COVID conditions in El Paso and especially the Annex had escalated to the point where county "inmates" were recruited and paid $2/hour to move bodies into morgues. One can imagine the shock and horror my family and I experienced in learning that our hometown was almost ground zero for COVID cases and our incarcerated loved one was at the center of it all. Officials claimed that "inmates" would be quarantined for two weeks after the "program" was over, but my brother confirmed that was never the case.

[198] The jail administration placed my brother in a special unit which was essentially solitary confinement and left him there for over 30 days. I was standing by listening to my brother's mental state rapidly deteriorate. Administration then took things a step further and began withholding his commissary, icare and mail. They did not like the level of support my brother was receiving.

El Paso inmates help move bodies into morgues as Covid deaths soar

An inmate from El Paso county detention facility prepares to load bodies into a refrigerated temporary morgue in Texas on 16 November. Photograph: Mario Tama/Getty Images

Use of inmates 'temporary' until Texas national guard able to help, said sheriff's office, as facilities in area overwhelmed

Advertisement

[199]

Article clipping from *The Guardian* shows a photo which spread rapidly on social media, depicting an El Paso County Annex "inmate" and several bodies.

[199] Guardian News and Media. (2020, November 22). *El Paso inmates help move bodies into morgues as covid deaths soar*. The Guardian. Retrieved May 5, 2022, from Gutierrez, Ramón A. *When Jesus Came, the Corn Mothers Went Away: Marriage, Sexuality, and Power in New Mexico, 1500-1846*. Stanford (California: Stanford University Press, 2006. Print.

CALL TO ACTION SUPPORT MY INCARCERATED BOTHER

100 calls on Friday
April 2nd

Juan is still not receiving his commissary & icare.

Juan called me on March 30th to notify me that the Annex has once again withheld his commisary, icare and mail. This is beyond devastating for an incarcerated person especially when you are being held in solitary and in a cell 23 hours a day.

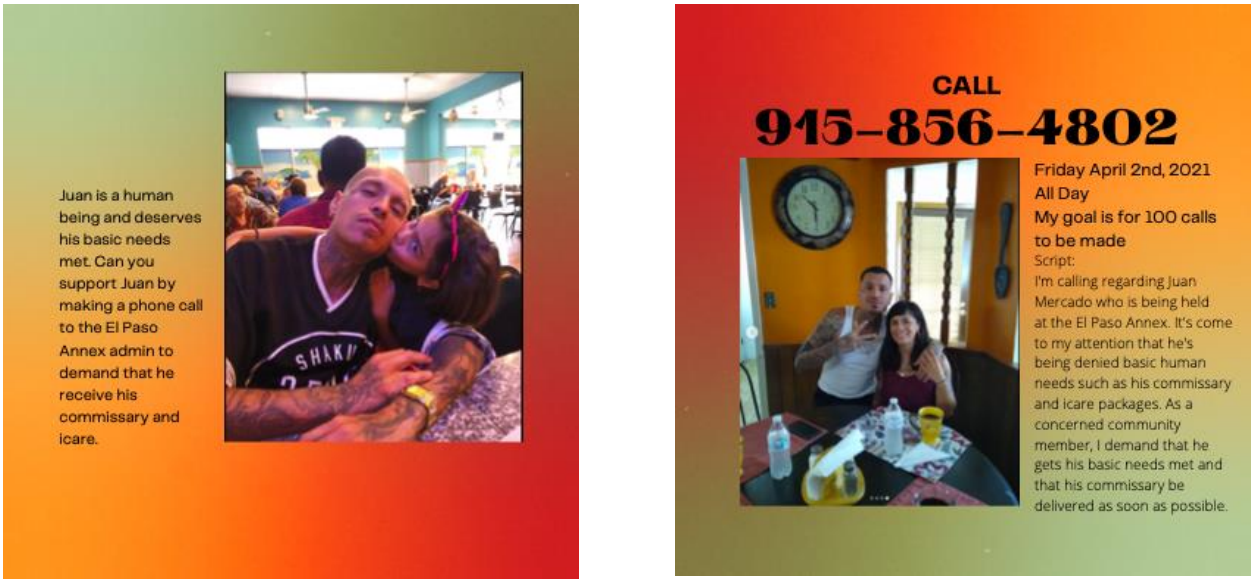


FIG 4.7 Screenshots of the call to action I organized for my brother. This campaign was circulated online on my own social media account and many local/national abolitionist organizations. Author photos, May 2020.

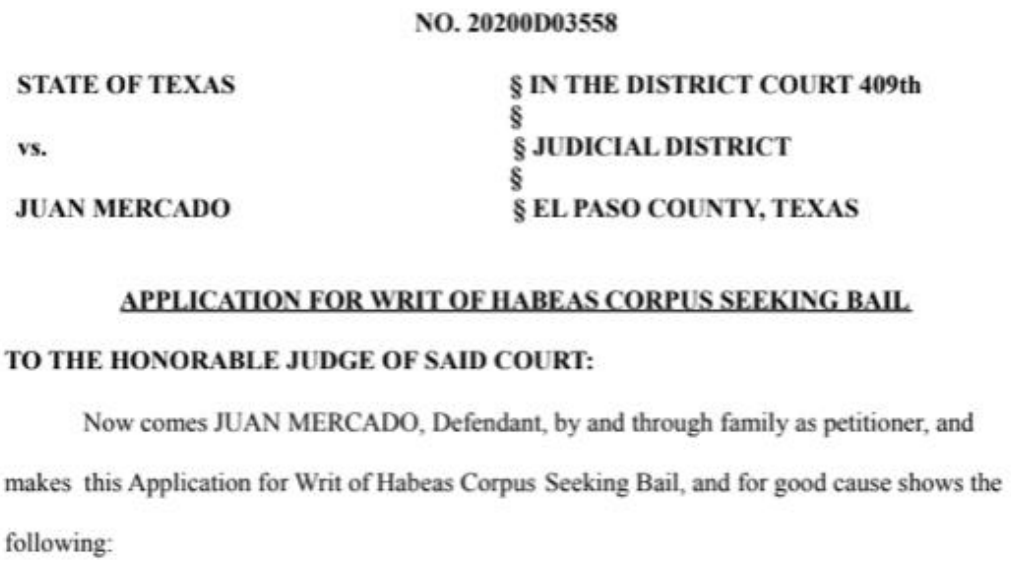
The bail situation, COVID conditions in the Annex, and the backlash from administration left my brother in a fragile state. The future looked grim, and the pandemic felt like a death sentence for him. Given the context of the bail situation and administrative backlash, I spoke with my brother's lawyer urging him to attempt to secure a Split PR Bond or PR bond for my brother.[200] After many passive aggressive emails, failed attempts, and immense pressure from my brother, I decided to take things into my own hands, and I began working on an application for a writ of *habeas corpus*, which outlined the following demands:[201]

> Thus, I am respectfully requesting the following: (1) Juan be released from pretrial detention (2) bail be reduced to $25,000 with no stipulations such as property or co-signers (3) access to law library (4) removed from the disciplinary section of the Annex (5) a physical copy of the prisoner's handbook be given to Juan (6) have consistent

[200] A PR Bond is a "Personal Recognizance Bond" where a judge determines that an individual does not pose a threat to society and does not pose a flight risk. Through a PR Bond, an individual is released from jail without having to pay but is required to be present for court appearances. A Split PR Bond is similar except that the defendant is required to pay part of the bond in order to be released.

[201] A writ of habeas corpus is a legal petition typically brought forth by an incarcerated person in a criminal case to challenge their conviction or sentencing conditions. Family members of incarcerated people have in many cases filed petitions on behalf of their incarcerated family members.

access to commissary, icare and mail (7) have consistent access to his weekend visitations.



NO. 20200D03558

STATE OF TEXAS	§ IN THE DISTRICT COURT 409th
	§
vs.	§ JUDICIAL DISTRICT
	§
JUAN MERCADO	§ EL PASO COUNTY, TEXAS

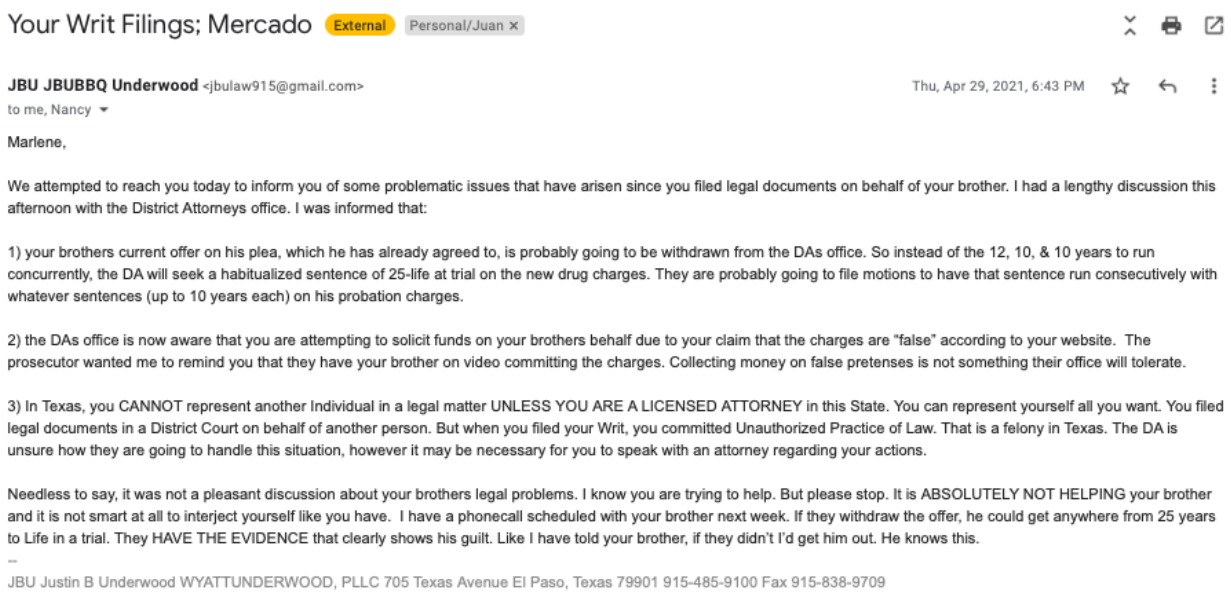
APPLICATION FOR WRIT OF HABEAS CORPUS SEEKING BAIL

TO THE HONORABLE JUDGE OF SAID COURT:

Now comes JUAN MERCADO, Defendant, by and through family as petitioner, and makes this Application for Writ of Habeas Corpus Seeking Bail, and for good cause shows the following:

FIG 4.8 Screenshot from the first page of the writ of *habeas corpus* that I filed on behalf of my incarcerated brother. Author photo, June 2021.

After submitting the petition to the court on April 29, 2021, I received an email from my brother's lawyer where he outlined that I should seek an attorney and explained that the District Attorney was going to take my brother's plea deal off the table as a direct result of me filing the petition. Attorney Underwood went so far as to tell me that I am "ABSOLUTELY NOT HELPING" my brother. Receiving this email was not only devastating but incredibly terrifying. Here I am, thinking that I am doing something good for my brother, that I am fighting for him, only to learn that I may have destroyed his chances of getting a plea deal for twelve years and that he may end up with a life sentence. Attorney Underwood also made it clear that I was under surveillance and the state of Texas was considering filing charges against me.



Your Writ Filings; Mercado External Personal/Juan ×

JBU JBUBBQ Underwood <jbulaw915@gmail.com> Thu, Apr 29, 2021, 6:43 PM

to me, Nancy

Marlene,

We attempted to reach you today to inform you of some problematic issues that have arisen since you filed legal documents on behalf of your brother. I had a lengthy discussion this afternoon with the District Attorneys office. I was informed that:

1) your brothers current offer on his plea, which he has already agreed to, is probably going to be withdrawn from the DAs office. So instead of the 12, 10, & 10 years to run concurrently, the DA will seek a habitualized sentence of 25-life at trial on the new drug charges. They are probably going to file motions to have that sentence run consecutively with whatever sentences (up to 10 years each) on his probation charges.

2) the DAs office is now aware that you are attempting to solicit funds on your brothers behalf due to your claim that the charges are "false" according to your website. The prosecutor wanted me to remind you that they have your brother on video committing the charges. Collecting money on false pretenses is not something their office will tolerate.

3) In Texas, you CANNOT represent another Individual in a legal matter UNLESS YOU ARE A LICENSED ATTORNEY in this State. You can represent yourself all you want. You filed legal documents in a District Court on behalf of another person. But when you filed your Writ, you committed Unauthorized Practice of Law. That is a felony in Texas. The DA is unsure how they are going to handle this situation, however it may be necessary for you to speak with an attorney regarding your actions.

Needless to say, it was not a pleasant discussion about your brothers legal problems. I know you are trying to help. But please stop. It is ABSOLUTELY NOT HELPING your brother and it is not smart at all to interject yourself like you have. I have a phonecall scheduled with your brother next week. If they withdraw the offer, he could get anywhere from 25 years to Life in a trial. They HAVE THE EVIDENCE that clearly shows his guilt. Like I have told your brother, if they didn't I'd get him out. He knows this.

--

JBU Justin B Underwood WYATTUNDERWOOD, PLLC 705 Texas Avenue El Paso, Texas 79901 915-485-9100 Fax 915-838-9709

FIG 4.9 Screenshot of email from Justin Underwood. Author photo, June 2021.

This is the level of advocacy and carework that many Chicana/xs perform for their incarcerated loved ones. The state shut down all the momentum we had for my brother's case. Juan ended up signing the plea deal and I was forced to remove myself from the advocacy aspect of carework. Within a few months my brother was transferred to a prison in central Texas, and we transitioned into facing our new reality–his twelve-year prison sentence.

It has been almost two years since my brother was reincarcerated and the carework continues to this day. The monthly expenses never ease up, the phone calls and emotional support continue, the daily worrying about well-being, especially when more than a week goes by without a phone call. I have included a receipt from JPay where I added $50 to my brother's commissary funds. I typically add money to this account three times a month. At this point in his incarceration it is difficult to know what to say. We are looking at twelve years together. That is, he is serving twelve years in a cage and I'm looking at twelve years of carework.

I continue to take his life into full consideration as I move forward with my own. Upon the completion of my PhD, I must find employment that not only covers my own expenses, but that will allow me to fund my brother's incarceration. Beyond that, I must find ways to stay well physically, mentally, emotionally, spiritually, to continue being a source of support and hope for my brother. While my brother has been sentenced to 12 years in a Texas state prison, the carework that I will be expected to produce expands beyond his time inside the facility. As my dissertation has attempted to demonstrate, I will enter the post-incarceration phase with my brother once again and pray that I will successfully support him. Given that two of the oral history participants in this dissertation have experienced the loss of their brothers due to their entanglement with the carceral system, my fears of losing my brother post-incarceration already haunt me.[202]

The last time I saw my dad alive, I was burying my grandmother Eulalia Mercado on my 31st birthday weekend. I was in Lake Tahoe celebrating with my partner at the time and friends when I received a phone call from my Tia Martha notifying me that I needed to fly home to El Paso as soon as possible–my abuelita was taking her last breaths. After a lengthy two-hour drive home and six-hour flight the next day, I did not make it in time to say goodbye to my abuela. Her life slipped away in the early morning hours of May 31, 2021. I firmly believe that she waited for me to arrive in our homelands as I was the last one to fly home before she crossed over. My father, as one might imagine, was a wreck. My sister and I had to track down my father, literally drag him out of a crack house, force him to shower, and convince him that he needed to be present at our grandmother's rosary even though most of our family despised my father. My

[202] Murphy, Kaitlin M.. "chapter 4. The Politics of Seeing: Affect, Forensics, and Visuality in the US- Mexico Borderlands". *Mapping Memory: Visuality, Affect, and Embodied Politics in the Americas*, New York, USA: Fordham University Press, 2018, pp. 120-152. https://doi.org/10.1515/9780823282562-005

sister and I held him by the hands on each side and physically/emotionally supported him as we stepped into the funeral home.

We buried my grandmother in the same cemetery where we laid Marisol's brother to rest in 2018. Ironically, my brother sat in a cell across the street from where the rest of our family said goodbye to our abuelita. This moment will forever stand out in my mind and heart. It was a moment of deep pain and realization of the ways in which the untold/unheard stories of Chicana/xs from the borderlands of El Paso are so deeply intertwined with one another that sometimes it becomes difficult to disentangle them. It was that moment of embodied realization that Marisol, like Dee, like Ruby, like Lulu, was just like me, and I just like them.

The passing of my grandmother was the nail in my father's coffin. Her death quite literally broke my father in every way possible. He did not even make it to the anniversary of her death and in the months leading to his passing he shed many tears in our conversations and exchanges–an aspect of himself that he rarely shared as a more traditional masculine Mexican man. Although my father's official cause of death was pneumonia, I have often thought about the ways that his passing was a premature death. He was 61 years old. Because he is my father, I have resisted intellectualizing his death and rather have attempted to focus on remaining connected to him as he crosses over into another place. Perhaps one day I will be interested and able to contemplate all the ways that the carceral colonial state logics contributed to his premature death.

FIG 4.10 Digitized version of rosario cards we made for my father's funeral. Author photo, March 2022.

In the months following my father's death, I decided to finally get my back tattooed. Getting my back tattooed is something I have been planning for years and I am not sure why I procrastinated because I have many tattoos. I thought I was looking for the right tattoo artist but looking back now I know my spirit was holding onto this idea because there was a bigger plan. Although I was never gang affiliated myself, I grew up around the gang culture and lifestyle. All of my siblings were gang affiliated at some point and many of my primas and primos as well– some still to this day. My parents were of course never pro-gang involvement on behalf of my siblings and I but I think there was some kind of understanding of the protection that gang affiliation afforded each of us at some point in our lives. For example, because of racial tensions between Brown and Black communities, I was subject to harassment by a large group of young Black girls when I was in middle school. However, once they found out who my sister and brother were, the situation shifted because they realized that this smaller conflict could erupt into

a much larger issue. I share this because growing up around the life meant that many of the politics, customs and styles became ingrained in me at a young age. Even as a young teenage girl, I knew I would grow up to get tattooed–it was a given.

FIG 4.11 Photo of author's back tattoo depicting la virgencita and bold letters of last name. Photo provided by the author.

Figure 4.11 depicts only part of the tattoo as it is not complete. Pictured is a large image of la virgen de guadalupe under big Old English letters spelling my last name. As I mentioned before, I have many tattoos and am familiar with the pain of sitting for several hours while the tattoo artist completes their work but I was not ready for the pain that would be inflicted from my

back session. Troy Trujillo, my tattoo artist and fellow Chicano abolitionist, began his work on my back and I immediately knew this was going to be a different experience. As I lay there for hours under his tattoo machine, I settled into my body. After first, I took deep breaths when he would lift the machine up in order to prepare myself for the next line. I then adapted a method where I would flex my back muscles to ease the tension and this worked for a couple of hours. Eventually, I grew tired of matching my breath with his lining and I could not bring myself to flex anymore–I was exhausted. My mind began to wonder. I thought about my father and brother. I thought about the significance of la virgencita on my back and my father's name above her. I sunk into my body and tapped into my own pain, traumas and frustrations. I connected deeply with my pain and in that moment I was able to feel the pain of my father, brother and ancestors. As painful as it was, I was able to connect with my brother and father. I thought about all the pain my brother has experienced and will continue to until his release. I told myself 'if he can get through even a day of incarceration, you can get through this.' My brother's trials and tribulations served as an impetus for me to withstand the pain–and really it is a metaphor as I think about this in many aspects of my life. I also knew that the pain I felt in the tattooing was only a sliver of the pain that my father felt throughout his life and leading up to his death.

This experience and my processing of it brought me to the realization that tattooing for Chicana/xs is a ceremony and also a practice of archiving.[203] In those seven or so hours I was forced to confront pain–my own and those of my loved ones. I was also able to begin processing my father's death–on an embodied level. Not only is my tattoo a way to connect with my loved ones but it is also a way to inscribe my/our history on my physical body. Stories like my family's

[203] *I Heard It before I Ever Saw It*, tamarasantibanez.sandbox.library.columbia.edu/.

are constantly erased and inscribing my/our history on my body/flesh is an act of resistance. It is also a form of archiving–people are forced to reckon with my/our history when they see my back tattoo. I carry my/history on my body.

Being "female" presenting brings a set of complexities to my tattoo as well. Tattoos such as the one that I have on my back are typically reserved for men in my community. Although I identify as she/they, I would likely be classified as "hyper-femme" therefore further disrupting gendered notions of who should and should not have certain tattoos.[204]

[204] Santos, Xuan. "The Chicana Canvas: Doing Class, Gender, Race, and Sexuality through Tattooing in East Los Angeles." *NWSA journal* 21.3 (2009): 91–120. Print.; SCHILDKROUT, Enid. "Inscribing the Body." *Annual review of anthropology* 33.1 (2004): 319–344. Web.;Olguín, B V. *La Pinta: Chicana/o Prisoner Literature, Culture, and Politics*. , 2022. Print. .;Olguin, B. V. "Tattoos, Abjection, and the Political Unconscious: Toward a Semiotics of the Pinto Visual Vernacular." *Cultural critique* 37 (1997): 159–213. Web.; Pérez, Laura E. "Writing on the Social Body: Dresses and Body Ornamentation in Contemporary Chicana Art." *Chicano and Chicana Art*. New York, USA: Duke University Press, 2020. 219–236. Web.; Clawson, A. "La virgencita y los vatos locos: tattoos and Chicano cultural identity." *The Journal of Latin American Affairs* (1995): 37-45.

CONCLUSION

COYOLXAUHQUI: CHICANA/XS ARE "THE HEALING OF THE WOUND"

> "Our task is to write against the edict that women should fear their own darkness, that we not broach it in our writings. Nuestra tarea is to envision Coyolxauhqui, not dead and decapitated, but with eyes wide open. Our task is to light up the darkness."
>
> –Gloria Anzaldúa, *Light in the Dark =: Luz En Lo Oscuro* (2015)

While I wrote this dissertation and worked to center the embodied experiences of Chicana/xs, I learned they articulate a need for healing and discussion of the many ways they engage in the work of healing. In the spirit of the Chicana/xs who so graciously shared the intimate details of their lives, the loved ones they lost, and their own trials and tribulations with me, I conclude this dissertation with an exploration of healing. In the spirit of the late Gloria Anzaldúa, whose theoretical contributions are interwoven throughout this dissertation and who gave us a profound framing of Coyolxauqui, I attempt to answer her call to action by writing against the edict that women should fear their own darkness. She said, "Nuestra tarea is to envision Coyolxauhqui, not dead and decapitated, but with eyes wide open. Our task is to light up the darkness."[205] The Chicana/xs in this dissertation light up the darkness, even when they themselves are that very darkness; they do more than envision Coyolxauqui "not dead and decapitated," they are Coyolxauqui and through their fighter spirit they piece themselves back together. These Chicana/xs move beyond piecing themselves back together, they move beyond survival and embark on a journey of living life in a space of thriving. Moving past survival mode

[205] Anzaldúa, Gloria, and AnaLouise Keating. *Light in the Dark =: Luz En Lo Oscuro : Rewriting Identity, Spirituality, Reality*. , 2015. Print.

and shifting into thriving places Chicana/xs in a position as healers, healers of themselves and their communities. By becoming Coyolxauhqui, the Chicana/xs in this dissertation, and beyond, are the healers of the wound, la herida abierta–the physical borderlands grating against two worlds and their own physical bodies placed between the prison and their families. Chicana/xs and their family members die in pieces and Chicana/xs are there to put the pieces back together again.

Healing in the Chicana/x community, much like abolition, is not an individual endeavor but instead a collective one.[206] Healing can begin at the individual level and must eventually branch out to a collective place. Although healing is not linear but messy, if family/community members are working toward a form of healing simultaneously, there are more opportunities for a new, shared understanding of one another and their individual/collective positions in the world. Like abolition, the more people involved in and striving toward a collective shared practice of healing, the more likely we are to achieve relief from internal/external pain and triggers. Though state and interpersonal forms of violence may continue, healing provides opportunities to learn healthy coping mechanisms for our current conditions.

Healing needs to be part of our collective abolitionist blueprint. Abolition is, for the most part, an action-oriented place and space–and it should be. Oftentimes for the people involved in the everyday work of abolition (whether officially or unofficially organized), the work is never ending. As cholar-activists Angela Y. Davis, Gina Dent, Erica R. Meiners, and Beth E. Richie point out in their new book *Abolition. Feminism. Now.*, "As this work can only happen in relation, in communities, it is always imperative that the burden of labor does not again fall on the same bodies–notably women, usually women of color" (14). This speaks to the invisibility of

[206] Davis, Angela Y, Gina Dent, Erica R. Meiners, and Beth Richie. *Abolition, Feminism, Now*. , 2022. Print.

Chicana/x labor as it relates to the carceral state and points out that in more conventional spaces of abolitionist organizing, labor often falls on women of color. Chicana/xs, in this case, may engage in abolitionist work on the ground and simultaneously have the pressures of expected/forced labor on behalf of their incarcerated loved one(s), creating a heightened sense of urgency to make change now. While the abolitionist labor, on both fronts, that Chicana/xs and other women of color engage in is vital to harm reduction now and ultimately prison/police abolition, what is the cost of this labor? Who is the cost of this labor? How can Chicana/xs engage in the difficult labor of carework and abolition for their families and their communities and still manage to take care of themselves in a real way–not just the bare minimum way.

The seriousness with which decarceration and abolitionist campaigns are taken is the seriousness with which healing needs to be understood. In this context, those directly impacted are those who have spent time in a cell and those who have had the work of keeping those loved ones inside a cell alive. As argued in Chapter One, Chicana/xs are a direct extension of their loved ones while they are incarcerated–they are connected. This dissertation has attempted to outline how the prison/carceral regime bleeds into the lives of Chicana/xs–how they take on cultural and political practices that come from inside the prison. If Chicana/xs are expected to continue the work of keeping incarcerated loved ones alive and well, to continue the work of abolitionist movement-building on the streets, to continue the biological/cultural reproduction of their communities, and much more–than their healing needs to be part of a new Xicanx abolitionist blueprint.

Anzaldúa invited us to heed her call for the Coyolxauhqui imperative when she said, "let us be the healing of the wound," a provocation "to move through and beyond trauma and rage, transforming it into social-justice work" (xxiii). Each of the Chicana/xs in this dissertation did

and continues to do just that–to move beyond the pain and transform these wounds into action. Through these actions, Chicana/xs insert healing into the discussion on abolition. Without healing, abolition is not possible: “Yet as abolition becomes more influential as a goal, its collective feminist lineages are increasingly less visible, even during moments made possible precisely *because* of feminist organizing, especially that of young queer peoples of color whose pivotal labor and analysis is so often erased” (xi).

FIG 5.1 Photo of artwork/screen print done by Marina Contreras. Included with artists permission.

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