

LIVING IN EXCESS: NARRATING VIOLENCE AND PRESENCE IN NATIVE AMERICAN
AND CHICANA LITERATURE

A Dissertation

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School
of Cornell University

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

by

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May 2021

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Cornell University 2021

My dissertation outlines the ways in which a comparative study of Native American, First Nations, and Chicana narratives of erasure and presence reveals remarkable and significant shared characteristics. This extensive comparison demonstrates these narratives' similar modes of theorizing representations of the body and its violent absenting, their similar if distinct concerns about the nature of colonial violence and its legacies, and their similar understandings of and strategies for cultural continuity that bypass settler colonial definition. I examine their approaches to representing and navigating the violence of enforced absence and the technologies that create absence, and to exploring how it conditions the strategies for survival that exceed it, arguing that they thus articulate subjectivities that insist on an enduring presence outside the conceptual and linguistic jurisdiction of the state and its technologies. For example, they query nationalist melancholic politics and discourses on ghostliness even as they rethink ghostliness in their own discursive traditions in order to mark both absence and presence. But these similarities, as well as the entangled histories that complicate those similarities, have gone unnoticed by Chicana and Native scholarship, and so I aim to address that paucity. The purpose of this dissertation is thus to investigate and compare narrative and artistic strategies for processing and representing ghostliness and presence in Chicana and Native American literature and cultural production.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Mariana Alarcón was born in Laredo, Texas, and lived in Nuevo Laredo, Tamaulipas, for most of her early life. She received a Bachelor of Arts degree from Southern Methodist University in English, and her Master of Arts Degree from the University of Colorado at Boulder's Department of English. In 2014, She joined Cornell's Department of Literatures in English to pursue her PhD. She resides in Houston, Texas, with her husband and their son.

For Andrew, who was with me at the beginning, and for Guillermo, who joined us at the end.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This dissertation could not have been possible without the aid of my special committee, Mary Pat Brady, Eric Cheyfitz, Ella Maria Diaz, and Penelope Kelsey. I owe each of them a debt of gratitude for their wisdom, guidance, and patience, and most especially for the faith they placed in me and my project. My husband Andrew made immense sacrifices to help me pursue what once seemed like an impossible dream. I would also like to thank my parents, Guillermo and Barbara, who have been a seemingly inexhaustible source of love and support throughout this long journey. Last but not least, I would like to thank my son, Guillermo the Younger (or Youngest), for giving me that final push.

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INTRODUCTION

This project undertakes a comparative study of Chicana and Native American women's scholarship and literature, with a more specific focus on narratives of violently enforced absence and excessive presence that trace overlapping colonial histories and their present-day legacies. Narratives of excessive presence refer to those practices and modes of expression that affirm ongoing life and cultural endurance in the face of the political violence that insists on (while attempting to effect) the erasure and disappearance of peoples and communities created as marginal within settler colonial structures of power. Threatened by their presence, the settler state renders ghostly, spectral, and therefore all-but-absent the peoples and histories that undermine its monopoly on the narratives by which it creates national subjects. My project seeks to understand the colonial histories that contextualize Native and Chicana discursive practices which treat with notions of ghostliness and continuity. It examines the not-quite-absences, or the lively traces, that suggest the excessive presence of the things made spectral within master narratives; as well as the practices (in this case narrative and discursive) that make manifest the endurance which cannot be acknowledged by the institutions that insist on its impossibility. For this reason, my dissertation dissects colonial histories that diverge, converge and run parallel with each other. Moreover, it involves the examination of colonial relationships that are made visible in narratives of dispossession, absence, and survival.

In the chapters that follow, I examine Chicana and Native American authors' approaches to representing and navigating the violence of enforced absence and the technologies that create absence—including master narratives, juridical structures, paradigms of belonging, and the conceptual modalities that serve them—and to exploring how political violence conditions the strategies for survival that exceed it. I argue that these authors' works articulate identities that

insist on the possibility of cultural survival outside the conceptual and linguistic jurisdiction of the state and its identitarian logics. In short, the purpose of this dissertation is to investigate and compare narrative and artistic strategies for processing and representing ghostliness and presence in Chicana and Native American literature and cultural production.

The project also examines modes of relationality as they come to bear on these representations of excessive life. I am interested in understanding how notions of relation and relationality are integral to the ways in which Chicana and Native American authors approach and implement presence in excess of Western technologies of disappearance—technologies that exert control over the creation of historical subjects, rendering other subjectivities anachronistic or perverse or irreparably traumatized and marked by violence, and rendering certain forms of affiliation and belonging as unintelligible and illegitimate. By insisting on the unintelligibility of the traumatized and the illegitimacy of communities and relationships it intended to shatter through trauma, and by implicating the traumatized in the violent relationships by which it effected their alienation, the settler state has made impossible the modes of affiliation that it understands as necessary for establishing relationships and networks of communication that mutually affirm a contingent identity. In other words, the settler state creates its marginal subjects as such through a violence that unevenly racializes them, through the imposition of racial and sexual hierarchies that maintain their differentiation, and through the destruction of other paradigms of identification and affiliation. It has subjected them to the violence of systems of federal recognition and to illegality's erasure, it erases the histories on which their identities are contingent, it denies their knowledge and the relationships by which it might be transmitted, and it does all this in part by insisting on the universality of epistemes in which the settler colonial project finds justification. Within settler epistemological frameworks, people who might

have found other modes of affiliation become mutually unintelligible. And yet the authors I engage in this project uncover pathways of communication and relation that defy any settler insistence of their impossibility. I am interested in how these authors' fugitive practices—their escape from the institutions that circumscribe life—allude to epistemological frames that stem from the complicated and entangled histories that mark Native American and Chicana bodies, and in what these allusions make possible.

A kernel of the ideas central to this investigation began to form as I worked on a Master's degree at the University of Colorado, where I developed an unfocused interest in the ways Native and Chicana literature represents the embodiment of history and in how violence marks bodies. My work at CU Boulder focused largely on memory and trauma and how they inform the way history is embodied, carried forward, and used in the articulation of contingent identities and relations. As I carried this work over to my studies at Cornell, I developed a sense of the connection between Trauma Studies and the very modes of erasure it attempts to combat. Later, in an example of intellectual cross-pollination, these ideas were impacted by my interest in how Chicana literature and scholarship imagine and deal with indigeneity and *mestizaje* in their responses to the trauma of Chicana political and historical displacement. More specifically, I became interested in how many U.S.-based Chicana feminist writers resist nationalistic efforts to establish a fixed and emplaced subjectivity within the uncertainty and unevenness of Chicana racialization, historicization, and geographic emplacement. I was intrigued by how they instead choose to inhabit ambiguity and uncertainty as a space of constitutive possibility; that is, as a formative space and matrix of embodied experience from which dynamic identities might be born, rather than as a space of denial that might only threaten the integrity of an uncomplicated Chicana identity if it is acknowledged. They demonstrate a refusal to fetishize integrity or aspire

to stability, and I was interested as well as by the strategies they use for imagining communities and kinship structures outside of nationalist forms and ossifying categories, choosing to imagine them as structures of feeling.

It occurred to me that the most interesting similarity I could detect between the Native American and Chicana feminist work I studied lay in their representations of how bodies that are historically marked (i.e., changing racial categories of empire and nation) endure in ways that are often illegible within Western conceptual modalities (i.e., humanity as tied to political agency), as well as in their representations of the communities that take shape within that illegibility. Their work proposes modes of flight from the liberal spheres of citizenship and Western humanity, and instead of pleas for recognition within those spheres they propose different modes of affiliation and community that can still be felt in spaces beyond recognition. In these spaces, family histories are transmitted and embodied regardless of documentation; communities persist despite a lack of federal recognition; objects of study speak directly to each other from the margins of racist ethnographies; and relationships and contingent relational identities transcend colonial notions of modernity and time. These similarities suggest that Chicana and Native writers invoke epistemologies that are shaped by Western colonial violence, but also utilize traces of knowledge from before and that endure beyond Western coloniality's mechanisms of control. Chicana and Native writers suggest different ways of articulating enduring but dynamic identities that do not depend on settler conceptual language and insistence on categorical fixity, and different ways of imagining our relationship to the signs of our subjectivity.

Most remarkably, they make visible narrative absences *as evidence* of presence that endures beyond violent erasure and majoritarian cultural denial. For example, the Native American and Chicana authors I work with see in the gap or the hole, in the missing chapter of

the history book or the missing episode of a family saga, the outline of the person or thing being denied and thus a doorway by which they might reenter the story that denies them. For these authors, the gap is proof of the continuing influence of what is missing, as it shapes the story even in its ghostliness. In short, they show how the ghost makes its presence felt through the very apparatus of its disappearance, and how its authorial role in present affairs is made palpable. In this way, both Chicana and Native American authors refuse to see absences as evidence of diminishment or melancholic and traumatized identities, and instead see proof of a stubborn continuity in the ghostly hand that reaches through hole left by its intended expulsion.

My efforts to take up this comparative study have been met with significant obstacles, both disciplinary and historical. Despite the seemingly inexhaustible invocation of indigeneity in the articulation of politicized Chicana identities, there is very little direct outreach or engagement of Native American literature and scholarship in Chicana scholarship or political thought. Recent popular discourse within Latina activist circles has, in fact, observed a tendency within Latina movements and scholarship alike to totemize Indigeneity while foregoing the kind of engagement that might force a potentially-disqualifying historical reckoning. According to this critique, would-be Indigenous interlocutors become silent ghosts while an Indigenous heritage located in the past is engaged precisely because it cannot respond. Meanwhile, Latina Blackness is overlooked entirely, and as a result, Indigenous and Black Latina peoples find themselves falling out of these networks of solidarity, while Native Americans become passive props to be referenced only so long as they do interrupt Aztlán's resurgence. The importance of contending with Latina histories of anti-Blackness and anti-Indigeneity and of permitting for actual engagement has been declared paramount in these discursive circles, and scholars and academics are taken to task for their failure to adequately do either. And in fact, there is a remarkable

paucity of comparative literary studies despite the historical relationships and discursive commonalities that warrant it.

I have, however, noted a tendency both in scholarship and popular discourse to either dismiss the histories of anti-Indigenous violence that condition those relationships, or to understand those histories as a reason to foreclose the possibilities implied in that relationship. To put it bluntly, much of Chicana literature and discourse often demonstrates an inability to grapple with complicity, or else to understand it as anything but an insurmountable obstacle. Instead of actual work or even the outreach that Chicana scholars are chastised for neglecting, we too frequently see a form of self-flagellation as self-congratulatory as it is fruitless. This, I feel, is a significant barrier to necessary conversations and pathways to solidarity, and so my work means to at least query the commonalities, shared fugitive strategies for survival, and shared experiences of falling off “the majoritarian maps of the public sphere,” all in light of the context that gives commonalities meaning.¹ In this I follow José Esteban Muñoz, whose work endeavors to imagine networks of differently-marginalized subjects who fall away from the dominant culture and its paradigms of belonging, but to do so in ways that do not erase nuance and even complicity.² This approach, I hope, might reveal pathways to affiliation and solidarity while allowing the recognition of the complexities of our relationships and the unevenness of our experiences of differentiation.

As discussed earlier, my dissection of culturally contingent and specific experiences and expressions of excess requires an investigation of genealogies of loss and violence and the relationships they map, and also the racializing assemblage that mark the flesh and thus inform

¹ José Muñoz, “Feeling Brown: Ethnicity and Affect in Ricardo Bracho’s ‘The Sweetest Hangover (and Other STDs),’” in *Theatre Journal* 52, no.1 (March 2000), 68.

² *Ibid*, 67.

the creation of those relationships. In this endeavor I follow Rafael Pérez-Torres, who argues that identities are constructed through relationships to and within structures of domination, further noting how the body is inscribed by the histories it indexes. For Pérez-Torres, the mixed-race body in particular indexes “a physical connection to a repressive colonial history of enslavement, genocide, and exploitation.”³ These histories are narrativized via a set of tropes that make sense of relationships as they are inscribed on the body. In Chicana literary formations, for instance, the racialized body evokes historical consciousness; they know and represent the body as “the physical manifestation of a long, difficult, and constantly evolving colonial history. It suggests as well that there exists a relationship between ethics and aesthetics.”⁴ This is not to say that such practices are unique to Chicana literary culture, or that Chicana literary culture is not informed by practices of identification anterior to the creation of the Chicana subject, but simply that this process is frequently narrated via various discursive formations and that the narration is itself constitutive.

In discussing mixed-race identities, Pérez-Torres argues that the mestizo body is “always a compromised site of multiple identities.”⁵ He writes that *mestizaje* is a metaphor for the embodiment of multiple subjectivities; and a critical approach to *mestizaje*, for him, assumes a relational understanding of identity, and comprehends a sort of “doubleness” by which the mestizo body can be subject to various identities at once.⁶ As a discursive site for the articulation of identity, it simultaneously occupies different positions in different relationships. A critical *mestizaje* can comprehend this multiplicity, permitting while circumscribing various

³ Rafael Pérez-Torres, *Mestizaje: Critical Uses of Race in Chicano Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), 7.

⁴ *Ibid*, 197.

⁵ *Ibid*, 196

⁶ *Ibid*, 12.

positionalities—that is, our relationship to our historical positioning. Part and parcel with this, however, is the fraught political history of strategically deployed notions of racial mixture and hybridity; as Pérez-Torres observes, discourses on racial mixture have been and remain vexed and contentious.⁷ In the U.S., for instance, it encompasses miscegenation’s legal history and the material and discursive disappearance of Native Americans. In Mexico, discourses on hybridity betray a capitalist investment in narratives of a teleological progress and have served the state’s interests in its efforts to confine Indigenous peoples to the past while simultaneously using them as raw material for a modern and tractable Mexican subject.⁸ The “de-Indianized” mestizo body serves notions of hegemonic progress while still inventorying the history of colonial violence that produced it: “The mestizo body inherits an untenable dichotomy involving numerous forms of erasure and presence.”⁹

The constraints remain and articulations of Chicane subjectivity still must contend with the legacy of colonial relations that confines them, but, as I have mentioned, excavations of violent histories also require focus. Cross-disciplinary push-back against nationalism, whether political or literary, points to problematic investments in concepts of the nation, of territory, and of whole and uncompromised historical subjects. One common and reasonable concern in fact pertains to the way in which mestizo and Chicane expressions of survival are sustained at the expense of Indigenous and Black visibility. Scholars like Nicole Guidotti-Hernández and Lourdes Alberto have intervened in the construction of monuments by questioning the role

⁷ Pérez-Torres, *Mestizaje*, 6-7.

⁸ The erasure of Afro-descendent Mexicans and Chicane people from these nationalist formations is a matter of particular urgency. While a comprehensive investigation falls somewhat outside the scope of this chapter, the place (or calculated absence) of blackness in these and in subsequent Chicane nationalist articulations of subjectivity require further scrutiny. Scholarly debates on *mestizaje* have thus far been largely concerned with Chicane *mestizaje*’s relationship to indigeneity, but we must also consider its relationship to blackness.

⁹ Pérez-Torres, *Ibid.*, 7.

violence played in their erection, and as Alexander Weheliye points out, there is usefulness in thinking through how and why some suffering is memorialized while other suffering is made illegible or marginal.¹⁰ Certainly, the erection of monuments that celebrate many forms of survival *within* larger systems of oppression obfuscate the quiet redirection of unnamed political violence that make that survival possible. However, Guidotti-Hernández pays remarkably little attention to what excavations of the unspoken can do beyond establishing complicity. On the contrary, this critical archeology tends to frame such revelations as foreclosures. Moreover, such scholarship tends to resort to a form comparison that itself relies on the organizing schematic that hierarchies provide without looking past it to the more complex relationships that the hierarchy disguises (while still informing). It assumes hierarchies wherein each rung exists discretely, detached, and in which any relation to the rungs below is conditioned exclusively by the violence through which the subject's place in that hierarchy is affirmed—and yet this form of comparison takes for granted a deep entanglement and complicity in the hierarchizing violence passed down from rungs above.

The grammar of comparison “will merely reaffirm Man’s existent hierarchies rather than design novel assemblages of relation,” Weheliye observes, adding that “while thinking through the political and institutional dimensions of how certain forms of violence and suffering are monumentalized and others are relegated to the margins of history remains significant, their direct comparison tends to lead to hierarchization and foreclose further discussion.”¹¹ Rather

¹⁰ See Nicole M. Guidotti-Hernández, *Unspeakable Violence: Remapping U.S. and Mexican National Imaginaries* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011); and Lourdes Alberto, "Topographies of Indigenism: Mexico, Decolonial Indigenism, and the Chicana Transnational Subject in Ana Castillo's *Mixquiahuala Letters*," in *Comparative Indigenities of the Americas: Toward a Hemispheric Approach*, ed. M. Bianet Castellanos, Lourdes Gutiérrez Nájera, and Arturo J. Aldama (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2012), 38-52.

¹¹ Alexander G. Weheliye, *Habeas Viscus: Racializing Assemblages, Biopolitics, and Black Feminist Theories of the Human* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014), 13.

than arguing for commensurability, Weheliye argues that in resorting to comparison, excavations of violent relationships often reinforce the formations they intend to trouble because they fail to properly identify or theorize the structures of dominance within which zones of complicity manifest. For this reason, the comparative work that I undertake in this project is not truly comparative in the strictest sense but is instead relational. By this I mean that it looks to those relationships both actual and potential that are still evident in the zone of complicity observed by other scholars. The modes of comparison I employ do not assume relationships that are necessarily cauterized by universalized notions of political personhood in which a single understanding of humanity is allocated in degrees, and in which the differently (de)humanized have little to say to one another. This assumption of a mutual unintelligibility takes for granted that Western political hierarchies have the power to disqualify other avenues for communication, and it is precisely what my project hopes to resist. To the contrary, I wish to show how zones of complicity already function as spaces from which to build, not as wastelands of impossibility and disqualification.

Indeed, the impulse toward comparison dovetails with a commitment to what Weheliye feels is an unproductive critical approach to states of exception. It constitutes an uncritical concession to the overwhelming dead-ness of the socially dead. By accepting bare life as the neutral anterior to a full humanity from which the oppressed are excluded, this scholarship overlooks the ways in which oppressed peoples respond to political violence or live in excess of it.¹² In other words, this concession to the conceptual apparatus of liberal humanism, which comprehends legal personhood as self-possession, takes for granted humanity as synonymous

¹² Weheliye, *Habeas Viscus*, 13.

with Western Man, or specifically Western notions of humanity. Failing to adequately trouble the conceptual apparatus that *creates* the flesh as the “temporal and conceptual antecedent to the body,” scholars take for granted that there can be no life outside the modalities of living permitted in the closed system that is the sovereign “world of Man” and its configurations of a politically viable human subject, or “corpus,” alive before the law.¹³ Because they permit Euro-American epistemologies a monopoly on notions of the human, these critical approaches to political violence fail to register the “traditions of the oppressed.”¹⁴ They do not detect those alternative assemblages of subjectivity that are able to threaten Man’s monopoly precisely because the flesh is constructed as ancillary to the body of liberal humanism. In response to this lapse, my own project borrows from Weheliye’s thesis in looking particularly at the expressions of humanity and the fugitive traditions of the oppressed detectable in the spectral landscapes beyond the border of liberal humanism. Though my dissertation provides more questions than answers, I hope to contribute to a more expansive discourse that might comprehend these traditions and expressions, and thus expose the relationships they make possible amid a sea of foreclosures.

In my efforts to identify important questions for consideration, I have drawn from the scholarship of Pérez-Torres, Weheliye, Raymond Williams, Mark Rifkin, Julia Emberley, and others. Their work has aided me in rethinking paradigms of Chicanx identity and relationality; rethinking the margins as spaces of constitutive possibility; rethinking the place of language and affect in networks of relation and solidarity; and rethinking temporality and space as the landscape that grounds these processes and relations. They have aided me in considering, finally,

¹³ Weheliye, *Habeas Viscus*, 20.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

what endurance means; how language shapes or forecloses the forms it takes, its discursive articulation and its lived manifestations. And in considering how marked bodies persist even in places designated as linguistic deserts.

By engaging present scholarly discourses on race and political violence, this dissertation participates in what is an ongoing conversation in various scholarly fields that, for reasons both disciplinary and specific to the multiple contexts from and within which the participants approach this project's central preoccupations, often appear to work at cross-purposes. Our many investments, however, can present a diverse set of tools and perspectives that may best address a challenge otherwise left unmet by disciplinary gatekeeping, however well-intentioned that gatekeeping may be. Given the parameters and demands of my project, I will draw from the works, whether literary or academic, of scholars and writers participating in various fields and genres. Of course, I will endeavor to do so responsibly, taking care not to elide the specificity of each writer's work and context.

Nevertheless, I feel it necessary to draw from the work of Black and Indigenous scholars and writers and bring it into conversation with Chicana scholars' work because the present focus on decolonization in the discipline would be better served by a consideration of the stakes as they are perceived by participants too frequently relegated to ancillary positions within various disciplines. Moreover, their introduction may help us detect the gaps or contradictions in our own work. I do this in part also because I feel that earnest efforts at decolonization must center Black and Indigenous peoples, as must any effort to apprehend structures of power and find effective decolonial strategies in solidarity with variously racialized and marginalized people who have understood and experienced their marginality in different ways. It requires an

examination of the zones of complicity I discuss in the first chapter, a rethinking our own political investments, and a redoubled focus on present but historically contingent relationships.

The literary texts that I have selected for analysis are largely non-canonical, and some belong to literary traditions far removed from the institutions that create canons and which permit symbolic inclusions only so long as they stem from traditions with established canons of their own. Just as they dictate and rank the cultural weight of their inclusions, canons likewise police, weigh, and rank the genres which they subject to a strict system of taxonomy. The texts I study here, mostly novels, trace parallel discursive genealogies that span genre, and that may indeed permit us to reconsider how genre functions and how its demarcations are malleable, suggesting capaciousness and fluidity. As I demonstrate, the genres I examine in my selection of texts have overlapping boundaries, moving from the novel of manners, the western romance, the testimonio, and the creative non-fiction memoir, to Gothic family dramas that recall the romances with which we began. There are through-lines and central threads that tie their narrative centers to each other, and each analysis, each chapter, sheds light on the next. Each depicts shifting and enduring networks of relation and plays with different possibilities for endurance amid political shifts and violent repression.

In “Zones of Complicity and Fugitive Life in Early Chicana Literature,” the first chapter of the dissertation, I revisit María Amparo Ruiz de Burton’s *The Squatter and the Don* (1885), as well as Jovita González’s *Dew on the Thorn* (1997) and her short stories collected in *The Woman Who Lost Her Soul and Other Stories* (2000). Both authors have had their work recently fished out of literary obscurity in the 1990s and early 2000s, thanks in part to the efforts of Latinx literary recovery projects, and, in fact, much of González’s work was pieced together from incomplete manuscripts. Because of the nature of their concerns and the politics they encode and

enact, both authors' works fit uneasily in Chicana literature's incipient canon. The texts I look at are concerned largely with the social repositioning of their subjects, and they indeed embody zones of complicity while simultaneously looking for alternatives to the liberal humanity from which they have been displaced.

Of interest to me is how the texts and their authors take up the search without being able to name the search, all the while reenacting the colonial violence of the social formations to which they cling, and where they locate these alternatives and how they try to access them. In investigating these texts, the chapter examines the ways in which the narratives and characters confront and avoid their own violent mechanisms of political marginalization precisely at the moment they become subject to those mechanisms via their political and racial realignment in a new world to which they have become anterior. I argue that the search leads the narratives to a traumatic understanding, though one that is continually deferred, of their subjects' vulnerability and their own hand in creating the systems to which they have become vulnerable. When their violent strategies for self-preservation become as unintelligible as the objects of that violence, they are forced to find avenues for humanity in the margins that they helped to construct. It is then that the texts begin to work at cross-purposes with themselves, revealing fugitive strategies that they only imperfectly understand and represent. Furthermore, they provide genealogies for later discursive practices; and these genealogies contextualize, limit, complicate, but also adds understanding to later imaginings of alternatives to those spheres from which they have been displaced, opening them up to new relations while also presenting obstacles to those relations. In short, my analysis of these texts show how they give context to Chicana participation in discursive acts of freedom while complicating that participation, and it further permits me to set the historical groundwork for the ensuing chapter.

Chapter two explores Deborah Miranda's *Bad Indians* (2012), which combines the memoir form with creative historiography. The chapter focuses on Miranda's fugitive strategies for survival and identification as they are outlined and narrativized in the text, in which she explores the legacy of violence and loss with which the Native peoples of California contend. It expands and departs from the focus of the first chapter by shifting to Native literature and critique, centering narrative practices that demonstrate other possible discursive approaches to the same concerns that undergird Chicana literary production. These discursive approaches also provide solutions to the obstacles that circumscribe Chicana articulations of fugitive subjectivities and practices of freedom from Western modes of sociality. My analysis of Miranda's memoir shows how she narrates the violence that marks bodies and conditions their survival of that violence, insisting on its constitution of subjects and modes of relationality that nevertheless exceed it. I argue that it thereby demonstrates that being implicated and compromised in that violence need not indicate the foreclosure of fruitful excess. Miranda imagines excessive networks of relation and, thus, other processes of identification that refuse the juridical logic and the conceptual modalities of the liberal state; moreover, the excessive networks of relation can encompass those who fall away from its parameters.

But these fugitive forms require a shared archive of knowledge that shapes sociality on the margins, including a shared knowledge of the violent histories that are foundational to the fugitive forms. Significantly, Miranda invokes the critical *mestizaje* that Rafael Pérez-Torres theorizes as a matrix for the imagining of marked but excessive subjectivities, further demonstrating how *mestizaje* as a structure of feeling can outpace fixed colonial language and definition. In this manifestation, she uses it to opt out of settler formations that police relational and emplaced identities. Finally, by placing her memoir in conversation with Cherrie Moraga's

Native Country of the Heart (2019), I show how Miranda's imagining of networks of relations that span time and leave behind Western temporality draw from Indigenous temporality and its application in fugitive practices of community- and self-making; and how it might speak to Chicana efforts to imagine practices that can similarly articulate an excessive presence in the face of their own historical displacement and spectral erasure.

The third and final chapter compares LeAnne Howe's *Shell Shaker* (2001) and Lorraine M. López's *The Gifted Gabaldón Sisters* (2008), analyzing Chicana and Native resistance to the discursive apparatuses of state power through narratives of ghostly returns and reintegration that challenge the Western Gothic tradition. In so doing, the novels detach the significance of the ghosts from those discourses on mourning which are overly invested in melancholy and the construction of a traumatized subject, instead emphasizing how the ghost embodies an irrepressible familiarity and the empowering process of becoming familiar. Both authors present stories of ghostly encounters about temporality, historicity, and Gothic relationality, and the ecstasy that is possible in falling away from Western paradigms of temporal and political definition and containment. They suggest how in rendering other forms perverse, Western paradigms make survival on the margins of political intelligibility perverse. The novels invite us to fall way with them, ecstatically, into the uncanny relations that the Gothic—as a technology of subjectivity—explores while policing. By abandoning the discipline that accompanies pleasure and the horror that accompanies familiarity in the Gothic, they imagine different contingent subjectivities beyond those permitted by settler formations.

The novels invoke the Gothic with a remarkable lack of fidelity to genre conventions, taking advantage of the genre's fundamental contradictions while calling on non-Western epistemologies and discursive histories by which they might explode the genre's possibilities.

They do so in a similar effort to imagine modes of continuity that exceed Western efforts to reduce competing histories to spectrality and competing processes of being in time to anachronism. López and Howe invoke the ghostly in their exploration of modes of sociality that are made uncanny because they disrupt what Mark Rifkin refers to as settler time. If the uncanny by its nature disrupts the boundaries that the Gothic at once troubles and affirms, then the novels dwell in the uncanny disruptions without resolving them. The texts inhabit the uncanny in their representation of aberrant times and unruly ghosts that take charge of family archives and present affairs by authoring them, refusing the disciplinary measures built into the Gothic. They construct trans-temporal relations by drawing the living into uncanny and thus deviant modes of relation, compelling them to leave behind the modernity which they reveal as an isolating settler fiction that intends precisely to annihilate the forms of sociality its does not encompass. Finally, by placing their ghosts at the helm of their narratives, the authors force a rethinking of historical authorship and agency, challenging the Gothic's final insistence on narrative and historical control by revealing the ways in which we are possessed by history even as we participate in its (and our) telling.

For Chicanx scholars, there is a great deal to be learned from reaching out and across the vast landscapes of embodied knowledge in which Chicanx and Native American peoples are together emplaced despite our uneven political and historical displacement, provided, of course, that we do so in ways that permit reciprocity. That is, in ways that accept accountability to the relationships that we wish to form in our search for contingent identities and enduring communities. Examining Native American and Chicanx literary discourse jointly and considering the points of connection and conflict will reveal our unsteady positioning in and outside the constructed and limiting "real" of the settler state, our paradoxical spectrality and

fleshiness, and our inconsistent desires for legibility within the settler state alongside a yearning to know ourselves in ways that the language we have struggles to reach. We may learn to see ourselves as more than melancholic, and instead as excessive and thus vibrant and living in ways not comprehensible by the languages of belonging we have learned. In reading Native American and Chicana literature together, we discover similar desires for departure, a shared reaching toward expressions of survival and articulations of the dynamic and vibrant people we might be and perhaps already are. We discover new and more empowering strategies for grappling with the histories and stores of knowledge that give context to our lives, and for reaching for relations that might make it all possible. Most importantly, we begin to find openings for shared movements toward decolonization and our own mutually-affirming survival of the political violence that shapes us.

CHAPTER 1

Zones of Complicity and Fugitive Life in Early Chicana Literature

The Bexar Archives at the Briscoe Center for American History at the University of Texas comprise a large collection of official Spanish documents detailing life in Spanish Texas, later Mexican Coahuila y Tejas. The collection includes census records for San Fernando de Bexar, or present-day San Antonio, from 1790. In the context of Chicana history-making and present literary and historical recovery efforts, these archival records stand as testament to the embeddedness of historical subjectivities within the colonial histories that inform present day articulations of identity both within and outside legal formations. For example, among the households recorded in the document is the family of Don Macario Sambrano: “E; Don Macario Sambrano, his wife Juana de Contrilla, the 1st aged 58 and the 2nd 50, their children Juan and María Josépha, the 1st aged 9 and the 2nd 10; attached, one little Indian child Thomás, aged, 9; slaves: Lucas Oxierro, married to María Berraza, the 1st aged 21 and the 2nd 40.”¹⁵ Another entry reads: “Jossé Anttonio Brito, his wife María Dolores del Río, the 1st aged 50 the 2nd aged 38; attached, Miguel Sánchez and his wife Rosalía López, the 1st ages 36 and the 2nd 31, *coyotes*.”¹⁶ The placement and emphasis on various fields within the census entries is telling: furthest to the left, as though qualifying the import of the subsequent field, is the letter “E,” for Español, a sort of racial branding indicating value. Then the head of household, ordinarily though not always male, followed by his children, and finally by those “others” whose various possible relationships to the foregoing are disguised by the term “attached.” The term could imply some attenuated family connection, but the present examples indicate without stating the violence by

¹⁵ Translation of census report by families. 1790. Box 2C152, Vol. 172. Bexar Archives. Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, University of Texas, Austin, TX.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

which people frequently became bonded to families to which they would never belong otherwise—bonded to subjectivities to which they would remain *extra-* and ancillary.

However, “attached” frequently encompassed more labyrinthine networks of power and complicity: “C; Diego Menchaca, his wife Rosalía Rodríguez, the 1st aged 40 and the 2nd 38, their son José, aged 11; female slave María Luisa Rodríguez, married to José María Reyes, a coyote, the 1st aged 21 and the 2nd 30; slave: José Manuel Rodríguez, aged 12.”¹⁷ The “C” here indicates that Diego Menchaca is a “coyote,” a term applied to various racial admixtures within New Spain’s caste system but which often referred to the offspring of one Indian and one mestizo parent. That a person so positioned within the racial hierarchies of New Spain should be thus implicated in the violence that sustained them is in itself remarkable, but just as remarkable are the knotty interpersonal relationships toward which his wife’s and slaves’ shared names gesture.

The census records demonstrate, then, the convoluted maneuverings that attended the creation of racialized national subjects, and the contingent and conditional placement of variously and unevenly racialized subjects within those hierarchies; they demonstrate the apportioning of Western humanity in degrees. This documentation policed the engagements made possible by the vertical arrangements that the documentation codified into law and by the legal and extra-legal institutions that enforced them. It reveals while veiling the political violence by which such arrangements were (and in many ways *are*) institutionalized and preserved; certainly, the census records disclose much about the multiple forms of bondage that functioned as racializing sociopolitical processes, and which were practiced widely throughout the

¹⁷ Translation of census report by families. 1790.

Southwest, ranging from debt-peonage to chattel slavery. They gesture to the trade in captives, the “ransoming” of women and children or the “adoption” of Indian and mestizo children, and the system of “compadrazgo.” The various categories—“attached,” “orphan,” “servant,” “slave,” and so on—uncover the legal and extra-legal maneuverings that permitted the system to continue as well as the unstable political dynamics that emerged from it. As a document intended to catalogue, the census also suggests the instability of a system that might at any time be undermined by its inability to perfectly reproduce the taxonomic formations that enabled it.

This ordering of bodies was betrayed by their constant movement, by what was figured in eighteenth century *casta* paintings and other discursive representations as a kind of grotesque malleability which threatened a dangerous social porosity, though these representations gloss the implicit sexual violence they reference. In any case, such legal and cultural documentation marks an urgent desire to control movement and reaffirm hierarchical networks of subjectivity and subjection. They also mark an awareness that this particular formulation of sovereignty depended on a system that could at any moment collapse under its own weight, with relationships becoming too complicated to reduce to “attachment” and patronage, don and coyote. Consolidation of power was effected through evolving relationships that continually threatened their own undoing; but however much they have changed in response to external and internal pressures, influences, and confluences, they nevertheless were born in blood in and sustained by it.

Whether the construction of colonial subjectivities, or racial, gendered, or sexual others is a matter of capitalist expediency is subject to some debate in academic circles, but my own work assumes that the construction of colonial subjectivities required the violent imposition of processes of identification on a designated other in imagined competition. However, the present

focus of my chapter is not the object but the process itself, and the narrative or discursive tools by which people make sense of, actively engage in, or find alternatives to such processes of identification. As demonstrated by the texts on which I focus, identity in colonial regimes is experienced as violence or as constructed and maintained through violence, but often exceeds it, also, suggesting lines of flight and alternative modalities of subject-creation emerging out of but also irreducible to that violence. The literary works I analyze figure themselves by turns as interventions within or rejections of the social assemblages with which they grapple, and which they identify, whether consciously or inadvertently, as assemblages. The chapter interrogates the strategies of identification they suggest and the alternative assemblages they propose, either within in or in response to colonial histories and legacies of loss and displacement that inform the authors' figuring of subjection and subjectivity.

I first look at María Amparo Ruiz de Burton's controversial novel *The Squatter and the Don*, though I recognize that in so doing I am exploring territory already trampled and perhaps exhausted by many feet. Even so, I proceed in order to trace the inception of a set of practices evident in Chicana literary formations, a genre that, because of its ambiguous place in various literary traditions, is compelled to navigate questions pertaining to the figuring of the self and the human within and without competing structures of domination. From there I move on to a discussion of Jovita González's *Dew on the Thorn* and her short stories collected in *The Woman Who Lost Her Souls*, reading them as companion works. In looking at González's work, which is intended as historical emplotment and an intervention in Anglo-Texan mythmaking, I intend to

examine the life revealed through those relationships implied in the zones of complicity her work represents and within which it participates.¹⁸

This chapter is, in short, about the complex negotiations that condition life in those zones of complicity, and in how those zones fit within the political margins that I see not as dead ends but as spaces of possibility, spaces in which new and contingent selves can be articulated. Following my discussion in the introduction about Rafael Pérez-Torres and Alexander Weheliye's understandings of the processes that guide the creation of excessive subjectivities, my hope is that this analysis may point to ways that we can conceive of critical *mestizaje* as a strategy for occupying zones of complicity in such a way that it allows Chicanxs to recognize their positioning in relation to indigeneity and blackness, meanwhile freeing them to articulate a positionality that permits them to explore those variably attenuated relationships and create new subjectivities.

Making Flesh

A comprehensive consideration of the literary works I analyze requires an assessment of the colonial histories they trace and the contingent subjectivities that emerged from those histories, a process emplotted and negotiated by the novels discussed in this chapter. Recognizing these works as historically embedded and aware in varying degrees of their embeddedness facilitates my discussion on the ways in which these texts express and negotiate positionality, which, following Rosaura Sánchez, I take to mean an articulated relationship to one's historical positioning and contingent processes of identification.

¹⁸ In my analysis, I extend Rosaura Sánchez's work on testimonios as historical emplotments to works of fiction. As she explains, historical emplotments are narratives that strive to make sense of history by giving it a plot, combining ideological explanation and narrative to achieve historical explanation. See Sánchez, *Telling Identities: The Californio Testimonios* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995).

Speaking to the construction of national and racial subjectivities and the function they served within sovereign nations, Brian DeLay observes that European powers in the Americas relied on the personal interests and private ambitions of their subjects to expand the empire, outlining the nature of the relationship between regional spaces of production and notions of citizenship.¹⁹ The nation is reproduced through even as it binds to itself subjects that police themselves, but the model was reproduced differently on the many frontiers of the Spanish empire (later the Mexican state). The strategies adopted for propagation of necessity changed in response to regional challenges—different cultural and geographic terrains, differently constructed and sustained interracial relations, and different groups or classes of settlers in different numbers with frequently conflicting interests all made for imperfect applications of the logics that dictated policy. Nevertheless, certain trends emerged in the strategies adopted to ensure continued control, containment, and production.

The importance of Native, black, and mestizo captivity to these layered colonial endeavors cannot be understated. Preservation of the labor force relied upon by ranches and homes depended on the pervasiveness and adaptability of a trade in captives that spanned much of the continent and that required and compelled the participation of those people made vulnerable by the practice.²⁰ As previously indicated, this adaptability is evident in the multiple

¹⁹ Brian DeLay, *War of a Thousand Deserts: Indian Raids and the U.S. Mexican War* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009), 9.

²⁰ James Brooks, Pekka Hämäläinen, and Ned Blackhawk have written extensively on the subject of Native participation in the trade in captives, though they have come to wildly diverging conclusions about the larger sociopolitical implications of that participation. For example, Brooks misunderstands the pre-colonial kinship structures of the peoples of the Southwest, and as a result he interprets evidence of complicity as indicative of commensurability. I am inclined to agree with Ned Blackhawk's assessment of Native participation as an effect of the violence that precipitated demographic and environmental changes in the region following contact. Native populations were compelled to adopt new practices in response to growing external pressures. See Blackhawk, *Violence over the Land: Indians and Empires in the Early American West* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008); Brooks, *Captives and Cousins: Slavery, and Community in the Southwest Borderlands* (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 2004); and Hämäläinen, *The Comanche Empire* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009).

forms that racialized bondage assumed in response to shifting cultural and legal restraints, but it remained a vital element part regional and national production on the Southwestern Spanish and Mexican frontier.²¹ As Ned Blackhawk observes, slaves in New Mexico provided an avenue to fortune and lordship for commerce-averse Spaniards whose wealth could only be amassed through Indian labor.²² Most Spanish households in colonial New Mexico had at least one slave, though a few larger landowners claimed the bulk of enslaved laborers. While clerics and laymen alike disguised commercial interests behind a charitable veneer, their cultural paternalism was a vehicle for those interests.²³

Rosaura Sánchez's archival work scrutinizes the layered interests served by missionization and the labor relations that emerged from the haciendas and the missions. She looks at the California missions as a technology of power, a mechanism for controlling local populations. The mechanism was secularized with the move to economic liberalism that attended the Bourbon reforms of the late eighteenth century, after which missions were displaced as the central space of production by the haciendas and ranchos. Sánchez apprehends haciendas, ranchos, and missions as sites of production in a double sense, but firstly as sites of material production that depended on forced labor and thus the strict hierarchization of the occupants of these spaces. That the ranches and haciendas were spaces of production should appear obvious, but missionaries also did competitive trade in products from the missions, products such as grain

²¹ While the purchase and sale of slaves on the frontier became outlawed in the sixteenth century, citizens were permitted to take captives in "just war," and it was left to the discretion of Spanish field commanders to determine what constituted a just war. Moreover, children "saved" from Indian captors were converted and tied to their rescuer by a form of debt bondage that the language of kinship obscured. The "rescue" of captives continued in different forms after the seventeenth century, though captivity would manifest in other ways. Though slaves were in theory provided with avenues towards manumission and protections against ill treatment, in practice these rarely manifested. "Ransomed" Indians, for example, generally remained servants for life. See Brooks, *Captives and Cousins*, 125.

²² Blackhawk, *Violence over the Land*, 24.

²³ Brooks, *Ibid*, 49-50.

and manufactured goods. Competition for land and resources eventually resulted in hostile relationships between missionaries and settlers, with coerced Indian labor counted among those contested resources.

Many missions, including those in Texas and California, were “reductions,” or pueblos on mission land within which the Indigenous people of a given area were compelled to live entirely under the supervision of missionaries. In a letter to the Mexican viceroy, Father Benito Fernández de Santa Ana, who worked for the Texas mission system from 1731 to 1749, indicates the strategies employed by missionaries and Spanish settlers alike to retain a monopoly on local markets and the labor on which those markets relied. In the letter, Fernández complains of an ordinance decreeing that soldiers and government employees could buy grain only from settlers; he goes on to address the settlers’ request that they be allowed access to Indian labor from the missions, insisting that his Indians could not afford the distraction from their work for the missions.²⁴ Subsequent letters detail the laziness of the mission Indians, by turns insisting on their importance to the missions’ economy and lamenting the lack of industriousness that rendered them unequal to other work.²⁵ In requesting that the governor place more soldiers at the missions for the purpose of disciplining and containing the Indians, Fernández also gestures to a greater collaborative efforts within which roles were simply being negotiated. He further gestures to the rhetoric employed in those negotiations when he argues that only through the crucible of mission life could Indians be successfully civilized; that a system of tutelage among Spanish settlers might be successful only if a military presence could keep the Indians

²⁴ Benito Fernández de Santa Ana, *Letters and Memorials of the Father Presidente Fray Benito Fernández De Santa Ana, 1736-1754: Documents on the Missions of Texas from the Archives of the College of Querétaro*, trans. Benedict Leutenegger, O.F.M., ed. Marion A. Habig, O.F.M (San Antonio, TX: Old Spanish Missions Historical Research Library at Our Lady of the Lake University, 1981), 31.

²⁵ *Ibid*, 39.

sufficiently intimidated, if they could be “taught especially that each Indian family should belong to each Spanish family.”²⁶ Fernández in this way strategically articulates the terms of Indian civilization in a way that suits his interests while composing them as Indians through the deferral of civilization. Before the carrot of humanity can be dangled before them they must be transformed into non-humans. That he places his own hand on the stick is an act of racial self-constitution effected through the location of agentive power.

And so, as Sánchez argues, the missions, haciendas, and ranchos were also sites of cultural production wherein relationships to property and the articulation of identities were interanimating. What becomes clear in these exchanges is the relevance of space to theories of social organization; according to Mary Pat Brady, capitalist spatial formations have massive consequences for the production of sociality.²⁷ Brady argues that “making identities is integral to making places; places get made in part through identity-making activities.”²⁸ To put it a bit simplistically, places are made through the articulation of their subjects, and territory depend largely on narratives of belonging that take relationship to land as foundational to subjectivity. The ways in which Western societies conceptualize the occupation of land bespeaks the processes by which people are made alien or native, human or not-human, master or slave. Those racializing processes that determine the nature of occupation—who properly *lives* in that space and who invades, who controls movement and draws borders, who works the land and who owns it—encompass captivity as a racializing assemblage that attempts to condition relationships to space through coerced labor and confinement. They entail the creation through discipline and containment of Indian, mestizo, and black bodies, enforcing their racialization at the end of the

²⁶ Fernández de Santa Ana, *Letters and Memorials*, 82.

²⁷ Mary Pat Brady, *Extinct Lands, Temporal Geographies: Chicana Literature and the Urgency of Space* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), 36.

²⁸ *Ibid*, 52-53.

whip.²⁹ Strategic racialization justified labor relations and the control of that labor force, and therefore of spatial, racial, and capitalist production. The labor force was in turn racialized through the apparatuses, both discursive and material, that enforced that control.

Brady writes that the alien and the wetback (the “mojado”) are “fundamental to the creation of insider/outsider, citizen/interloper, nation/not-nation.”³⁰ For Brady, the U.S. Mexico border is a system which functions as an “abjection machine” that “disarticulates people from the signs of their subjectivity.”³¹ Through a repetition of estrangement, the border creates people as illegal and undocumented, “thereby rendering them unintelligible (and unintelligent), ontologically impossible, outside the real and the human.”³² As a critical experiment, I would like to extend this framing of the relationship of space to processes of socialization to a theorization of captivity, particularly as it pertains to Native bondage on Native land. National borders serve to enforce geographic and temporal distance and, failing that, to put people who violate those borders in a position conditioned by an existence-in-violation, what Alicia Schmidt Camacho refers to as “minimal subjectivity,” ancillary to but never part of the society for which they labor, disciplined by the threat of potential violent extraction.³³ Alienation through bondage requires a drawing close: As an abjection machine, Native and Afro-Indigenous captivity and the various forms of bondage encompassed therein effect their own forms of estrangement precisely in the act of bonding. If we take *estranged* to mean both “to distance” and “to make strange or foreign,” we might imagine a captive as counterintuitively estranged from the land they work or

²⁹ See Archivo General de Mexico, 1538-1849, Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, The University of Texas at Austin; Gregorio Mora-Torres, *Californio Voices: The Oral Memoirs of José María Amador and Lorenzo Asisara* (Denton, TX: Univ. of North Texas Press, 2011).

³⁰ Brady, *Extinct Lands*, 53.

³¹ *Ibid*, 52-53.

³² *Ibid*, 50.

³³ Alicia Schmidt Camacho, “Hailing the 12 Million: U.S. Immigration Policy, Deportation, and the Imaginary of Lawful Violence,” in *Social Text* 28, no. 105 (December 2010), 8.

the master they serve by being bound to that land or master in a capacity that, being conditioned by bondage, can only be subordinate.

In the particular case of Native bondage, we might further interpret this estrangement as an attempted disarticulation of Native peoples from their indigeneity, the sign of Native subjectivity as the captor imagines it. We will see the narrative tropes that reinforce this logic in the analyses that follow: they constitute an attempt to deterritorialize and detribalize, and in this way claim settler “native-ness” to that land over which geographic and discursive control is being contested. As per colonial logic, when Indigenous peoples no longer have control of land that Western sovereignty understands as fundamentally fungible, when they no longer have the agentive power to inhabit and move across space as they wish, they are no longer “native” but alien. By remaking Indigenous peoples as “Indian” and therefore “not-human,” Spanish racializing assemblages attempted to disqualify those claims to land that, in accordance with colonial thinking, are fundamental to indigeneity. In this way, Spanish and later Mexican settlers could claim “native-ness” without ceding an oppositionally-constructed whiteness.

As Sánchez observes, Spanish and Mexican colonialism’s semi-feudalism depended upon a caste system that spatialized society hierarchically. The cooperation between crown and church in the recapture of escaped Mission Indians indicates a shared understanding of the necessity of Indian captivity for the various colonial enterprises underway, and the necessity of putting all bodies into particular relationships with productive spaces. This points to the complex and always violent strategies of identification that emerged from these spaces, including the narrative violence evident in historical emplotments. Although taxonomic efforts did not prevent miscegenation, or the increasingly web-like networks of complicity made possible through the colonial histories implied in that miscegenation, they mark an attempt to differentiate between

“unacculturated” Indians and *gente de razón*, a differentiating trope we can see in both Ruiz de Burton’s and González’s written work. That similar, though significantly distinct, strategies of differentiation would one day be used against Mexican nationals in the Southwest is a historical irony with which contemporary writers would struggle to come to terms.

Probing strategies of differentiation and the structures of dominance by which Spanish and Mexican colonialism buttressed its sovereignty contextualizes its failures, though we must identify the conceptual framework by which failures were perceived as such and how these perceived failures conditioned encounters with competing colonial projects. First, however, it is necessary to note that Spanish and Mexican dominion was contested from first contact, and where it was not contested it created the conditions of its own instability. Oppressed peoples adapt and respond to circumstances in ways that can sometimes force colonial powers to improvise and consequently leave themselves vulnerable. The absorption of the colonized, in whatever capacity, constitutively changed the Mexican body politic. Meanwhile, competing colonial projects threatened at every turn to take advantage of an exposed flank.

Because Texas became the staging ground for Anglo-Mexican efforts to assert regional and hemispheric dominance, the circumstances in which Texas found itself in the early nineteenth century may be glossed as representative of the circumstances of Mexico’s northern territories as a whole, though it is by no means a faithful a panoramic representation. Spanish and Mexican missionization and settlement efforts in Texas did remarkably poorly, especially when compared with similar efforts elsewhere in the northern territories. For instance, while the settler population of New Mexico in 1790 numbered upwards of 30,000, the settler population of Texas in 1820 was only 2,000. The Texas missions were particularly hard-hit by the Bourbon reforms and by a fast-disappearing labor force (due to death, disease, escape, and assimilation), going

under long before their California counterparts, while missions and settlements alike were compelled to contend with an Indigenous population that they could not subdue. The Comanche played a large role in curtailing Spanish-Mexican expansion in Texas, and the Apache likewise pushed back with more measured success; the Comanche in particular wreaked havoc on the ranching industry in 1770s and 1780s.³⁴ Uneven allocation of state resources became a problem: Because Texas did not have New Mexico's population, it did not receive comparable financial assistance. Independence also presented difficulties, outbreak of the war disrupted the flow of money and resources north. Texas was consequently less able to engage in diplomatic relations with Indians to whom they could offer few material incentives.

In the midst of the wars with the Apache and Comanche, the landed and political classes of Northern Mexico began questioning the value of a Mexican citizenship that could not guarantee the deliverance of God's plantation, of those spaces of production necessary for the creation of subjectivities dependent on discourses of production.³⁵ Who were they if they could be so easily defeated by "savages," if their access to fertile but uncultivated lands—lands that might yield great wealth if only they could be domesticated—could be interrupted?³⁶ These writings recall the language used in seventeenth-century Puritan narratives of conquest and domestication, of a promised but untamed land that could be cleared and delivered by being made productive, wherein conquest is the implied condition of cultivation. Indeed, DeLay observes that the perceived failures of Mexico's Indian policy in Texas did much to shape the way Americans thought about Mexicans, indicating the ways in which settler-colonial nations figured themselves as sovereign nations with the rights of conquest realized through conquest

³⁴ DeLay, *War of a Thousand Deserts*, 141-142.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 149.

and buttressed by narratives of national development.³⁷ Nations constructed themselves, and by extension their subjects, through relations with categorical others estranged while violently incorporated in a subordinate capacity or else destroyed. And so nation states proved their worth through Indian subjugation and death, or else through coercive diplomatic relations that spelled effective subjugation.³⁸ In Texas, these efforts manifested in the enslavement of Coahuiltecan, policies of extermination directed at the Apache, and attempts to manipulate the Comanche into tractability by fomenting intertribal animosities and encouraging dependence on European resources.³⁹

Mexico was encircled by sovereign powers on which it had to keep a wary eye as the external consequences of internal conflicts became increasingly apparent. The ability to conquer might establish a right to possession, but perceived ineptitude provoked the contempt and acquisitiveness of other nation states, laying the territory open for plunder by a nation more capable of realizing a manifest destiny.⁴⁰ Implicit in the Texas “Creation Myth,” as DeLay terms it, was the argument that “Mexico had broken a contract with Texas itself—with the very land of Texas. [...] Texas had been a land of forests and deserts not because Indians were strong, but because Mexicans were weak.”⁴¹ The battle over Texas became a contest to see who could fulfill the destiny of conquerors, and Mexicans’ inability to subdue the Indians of Texas was perceived in the political discourse of the U.S. as a moral failing. Mexican failure to subdue the wilderness

³⁷ Though I disagree with DeLay’s claim that the Comanche and other Indigenous peoples were ultimately responsible for Mexican subjugation at the hands of Anglo-American invaders, his over-arching argument—that Mexico’s inability to subdue Indians was perceived by competitors as an invitation—is compelling. His argument suggests that the validity of imperial claims depended on recognition by a network of sovereign states whose power to invalidate claims had to be recognized as absolute, but that consequently had to be kept at bay. See DeLay, *War of a Thousand Deserts*, 225.

³⁸ *Ibid*, 13.

³⁹ Hämäläinen, *The Comanche Empire*, no pages given.

⁴⁰ DeLay, *Ibid*, 65, 225-227.

⁴¹ *Ibid*, 230-231.

and make it productive was apprehended as a sign of their ineptitude, cowardice, laziness, and general unworthiness, defects often attributed to their racial composition.⁴²

The biologizing of race in early nineteenth century Western discourse coincided with the increased political use of the term Anglo-Saxon, the scientific racism born of the former serving as ideological reinforcement to the hegemonic ascendancy of the latter formation.⁴³ The coincidence evidences the always in-progress creation of a system within which claims can be made but not by everyone. Mexican claims to Texas were rhetorically invalidated with their discursive racial and spatial realignment, a disqualification that coincided with their indigenization, mirroring the way Native claims were disqualified via the creation of the Indian. Mexico could not save the forest and transform it into fields of grain because the Mexican people were constitutionally unequal to endeavors that, by this logic, fell exclusively within the purview of a now biologized whiteness. Like other inferior races, Mexicans, now a racialized group, were expected to simply, naturally, fall away before God's chosen inheritors.⁴⁴

As John González observes, nineteenth century literary production in the U.S. was instrumental to the cultivation and maintenance of an imperialist disposition among its citizenry. Print culture mediating the formation of imperialist subjectivities, and following the Civil War and Reconstruction, the literature of imperialism “restabilized national identity through a retrieved sense of imperial destiny.”⁴⁵ González emphasizes the racialist discourse of empire that “nurtured imperialist subjectivities,” an undertaking which required a concurrent invention of Indian savagery and Mexican barbarism realized through adventure narratives, romances,

⁴² DeLay, *War of a Thousand Deserts*, 229, 246.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 246.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ John Morán González, *The Troubled Union: Expansionist Imperatives in Post-Reconstruction American Novels* (Columbus: Ohio State Univ. Press, 2010), 3-4.

ethnographies, and testimonies.⁴⁶ This and other processes of estrangement spanned the greater part of a century: according to González, the Texas Centennial discourse created Texas history by creating Mexicans as apart but ancillary, celebrating “the historical emergence of Anglo-Texas modernity through the colonial difference of Mexicans.”⁴⁷ Producing Mexicans as always anterior to modernity in this way makes legible Anglo-Texas progress and the Texas Centennial as the master narrative of modernity.⁴⁸ Anglo-Texan texts attribute the development of the Texas character to the theft of land from Mexicans, Native Americans, and African Americans, thereby yoking Texan subjectivity to colonial relations; more specifically, they yoke Texan subjectivity to issues of land, property, and teleological narratives of development and temporality. Anglo-Texans razed and remade Texas by discursively razing and remaking Mexican subjectivity as it was comprehended by the structural parameters provided by Western sovereignty.

The manufacturing of new aliens likewise enabled the process of white self-formation in California. The violent manufacturing was not simply the result of generalized racism, Poblete argues, but “a structural form of racism tied to a highly productive political economy. [...] In it, some people are always below the radar of deserving citizenship.”⁴⁹ However, the treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo presented Anglo-American settlers a significant though not insurmountable obstacle to the dispossession and disenfranchisement of landed U.S. Mexicans. In California, attendees at the Constitutional Convention grappled with this precise twinning of race and

⁴⁶ González, *The Troubled Union*, 3-4

⁴⁷ John Morán González, *Border Renaissance: The Texas Centennial and the Emergence of Mexican American Literature* (Univ. of Texas Press, 2011), 6.

⁴⁸ Texas history was made a mandatory subject in Texas schools in 1890; textbooks figured Texas triumph as “a central expression of Texas power” and subjectivity. See González, *Border Renaissance*, 8. Similar curriculums were enforced across the Southwest U.S., including, as we shall see, in California. In this we can see state apparatuses, namely public education, creating historical subjects and privileging certain categories of knowledge.

⁴⁹ Juan Poblete, “Citizenship and Illegality in the Global California Gold Rush,” in *The Latino Nineteenth Century*, ed. Rodrigo Lazo and Jesse Alemán (New York: New York University Press, 2016), 286-287.

citizenship status: Conventioneers wanted to exclude Indians and Blacks from citizenship, but the treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo stipulated the extension of U.S. citizenship to Mexican nationals. As Rosaura Sánchez explains, extending a nominal whiteness to U.S. Mexicans for legal purposes meant that Anglos could still link citizenship to whiteness.⁵⁰ For wealthier, landed Californios, this juridical concession did at first result in material benefits, not least among those the now-shared control of Indian labor.⁵¹

Notwithstanding these begrudged compromises, the construction of the “latin race” remained a matter of great concern to these wealthy and, importantly, prolific U.S. Mexicans who could already sense their hierarchical repositioning even as they refused to name the nature of their political displacement. And, according to Poblete, American “Latinizing” of Latinos involved clearing away differences that might otherwise interfere with new categorical constructions, though this clearing away by no means removed the stakes that these new “greasers” had in the differences to which they often clung (and cling) defensively.⁵² Certainly, the landed and political classes developed strategies for hanging on to power, as we shall see, but internal relations developed as those strategies gradually failed and as their repositioning within the world of Man continued largely unabated. The differences—formerly policed by internal racial hierarchies and other strategies of disaggregation on which identity and self-recognition hinged—were steadily and sometimes abruptly erased and made illegible to (white) Americans, becoming largely irrelevant to American racial hierarchies. The lives of U.S. Mexicans came to

⁵⁰ Rosaura Sánchez, *Conflicts of Interest: The Letters of María Amparo Ruiz de Burton* (Houston, TX: Arte Público Press, 2001), 65-66.

⁵¹ González, *The Troubled Union*, 90-91.

⁵² Poblete, “Citizenship and Illegality,” 286.

be ordered in accordance with new differences—not American, not citizen, not white, not-quite-human.

Contested Intelligibility

The responses of U.S. Mexican writers to their racializing as the means of their repositioning within new hierarchical structures varied in accordance with the extremity of the shift, though it should be noted that scholarly considerations of nineteenth century Latinx literary output appear to look almost exclusively at the writings of the displaced ruling classes. The lacuna shapes the field, of course, as I will discuss at length further on, but for the present it should be noted that the concerns expressed in much of the literature still available relate to the quickly-dissipating elite status of the class therein represented. The work demonstrates how this shift in circumstances prompted a motivated nostalgia as praxis, a reification of a “Spanish” past with which they could guard against what they could see only as disappearance and abjection. Genaro Padilla refers to this narrativized nostalgia for a past now reimagined in prelapsarian terms as “*hacienda mentality*.”⁵³ Understood as a literary paradigm that gained traction precisely at the moment that Latinx cultural production began its descent into social unintelligibility, it reveals unravelling colonial relationships by romanticizing them in a desperate act of colonial self-preservation. It also constitutes an anxious deferment of the reevaluation of past colonial relationships now mirrored unfavorably by Anglo-Mexican relations.

Deferment depended on an entrenched belief in Western sovereignty, which now worked against those it formerly empowered. However, as José Aranda observes, the power of the state and the mechanisms by which that power is enforced become transparent when a person is made

⁵³ Genaro M. Padilla, *My History, Not Yours: The Formation of Mexican American Autobiography* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1993), 20.

“the subject of its colonialism as its perpetual other.”⁵⁴ And so nineteenth century Latinx discourse, as it is represented by the material that has been made available for study, produced a melancholic literature that demonstrates its own suspicions about the futility of its efforts. Indeed, Raúl Coronado argues that rather than “enshrine” Latinx literary resistance to Anglo colonization, scholars of nineteenth century Latinx literature should instead pay closer attention to the “accidents” and “reverse formations” that led complex Latinx communities to see themselves devolve from “elite” Spanish American communities to increasingly racialized others.⁵⁵ While a comprehensive examination of the social decline of racially reconstituted Mexicans would require a chapter of its own, it may be useful to briefly consider the narrative strategies they used to resist the decline and how they failed. Because, as Coronado notes, Latinxs did not simply cast off old subjectivities and assume new ones at the moment of the nation’s birth.

Their writings narrate what for Coronado can be summed up as a crisis of modernity in a specifically Latin American context. He argues that before the eighteenth century people in the West wrote and spoke from an immutable sense of self; after, from a sense that there was no real self to present. Literary production from the eighteenth century forward expresses both a desire to arrive at some foundational truth and awareness that “truth is but a product of language.”⁵⁶ Latinx literary culture, Coronado writes, was stuck somewhere between the two. It sought to establish a sense of being through what was not just a wholesale contestation of U.S. imperialisms but an expressed yearning for “a new modern world,” for the realization of a dream

⁵⁴ José Aranda, “When Archives Collide: Recovering Modernity in Early Mexican American Literature,” in *The Latino Nineteenth Century*, ed. Rodrigo Lazo and Jesse Alemán (New York: New York University Press, 2016), 153.

⁵⁵ Raúl Coronado, “Historicizing Nineteenth-Century Latino Textuality,” in *The Latino Nineteenth Century*, ed. Rodrigo Lazo and Jesse Alemán (New York: New York University Press, 2016), 50-51.

⁵⁶ *Ibid*, 53.

of modernity interrupted by racial violence.⁵⁷ Aranda likewise argues that the transnational character of Mexican American literature is due to its relationship to Anglo modernity, to how it registers the promises of modernity that accompanied the Anglo-American conquest and the positioning of Mexicans in relation to that modernity. But it also registers a sense of betrayal that the Spanish-Mexican order, also a product of modernity, could be so flimsy and so easily unmade, revealed to be neither immutable nor immanent.⁵⁸

Following Coronado, I understand Latinx literary melancholy as a trope that emerged from the epistemic shifts witnessed at the end of the eighteenth century within Western discursive matrices, shifts which saw new discursive traditions destabilizing of old subjectivities and the discourses that produced them. The consequent expression of melancholy in Latinx nineteenth and twentieth century literary might further be interpreted as an expression of pessimism, attended by a sense of mourning for a lost immanence. A loss compounded, I would argue, by a reckoning of one's role in the construction that the deconstruction revealed, thereby revealing the bitter irony of a modernity that created Latinxs as anterior to itself.

Reading the works of María Amparo Ruiz de Burton and Jovita González within this tradition may help to outline the stakes implicit in their attempted interruptions of Anglo narratives of modernity. I therefore also read them as, if not precisely within, then in many ways adjacent to the *testimonio*, a genre shaped by the melancholic politics it encodes. Though their novels and stories cannot strictly be called *testimonios*, which are invariably autobiographical first person accounts (though frequently mediated by outside parties) of events, González and even Ruiz de Burton draw heavily from the form. At the very least, they make use of not-

⁵⁷ Coronado, "Historicizing Nineteenth-Century Latino Textuality," 54.

⁵⁸ Aranda, "When Archives Collide," 153.

unrelated narrative conventions, and like testimonios, their fiction is concerned with the documentation of catastrophic change, likewise striving to make sense of events retroactively through narrative. According to Rosaura Sánchez, testimonios are a macro-text, “a collective effort to reconstruct the past from a variety of perspectives” in such a way that it proffers some kind of explanation, and perhaps even reification.⁵⁹ Like testimonios, Ruiz de Burton’s and Gonzalez’s works can be read as historical emplotments wherein scripted colonial relationships are performed and colonial difference is negotiated.

Reading them at the juncture of these traditions may further explain the function of the anti-Indigenous violence they represent and enact within the space of the texts. Ruiz de Burton’s work has been particularly popular among scholars largely because of the ways in which the representation and simultaneous absence of racialized others serves (or doesn’t) her novels’ social and political maneuverings. As a general rule, scholars approach Ruiz de Burton’s novels—and, to a lesser degree, González’s work—as an articulation and defense of U.S. Mexican whiteness in the face of the Anglo racializing assemblages they critique. Others, like John González, examine how Ruiz de Burton’s novels grasp more broadly the place of racial difference in the nation. But critiques of both authors center their representation of Indian labor and their concomitant elision of inconvenient historical truths, providing interpretive glosses which, though defensible, leave room for productive elaboration.

Moreover, because of the overt racism expressed in both authors’ bodies of work and the troubling politics they present and defend, their place within the any sort of Chicana canon cannot be uncontroversial. While arguing for or against their place in a canon of Chicana

⁵⁹ Sánchez, *Telling Identities*, 143.

literature is not the aim of this chapter, my own approach to both authors assumes their relevance to present concerns. Their inclusion, like the inclusion of testimonios, is useful because they transform the canon of Latinx literature and call into question present-day political formations, and at the same time they provide a genealogy for the conceptual modalities that did in fact inform the politics and poetics of the Chicana rights movement.

My own interests lie in the ways in which Ruiz de Burton's and González's literary corpora propose or query ways of producing racialized national subjects, and in the relationships that these critical strategies both reveal and propose. For this reason, I will discuss Ruiz de Burton and González's work chronologically, dwelling first on Ruiz de Burton, as this will facilitate a more complete analysis of the literary practices in which González is participating. Given Ruiz de Burton's publication history, it is unlikely that González ever read her work; nevertheless, Ruiz de Burton's *The Squatter and the Don* is peculiarly representative of the literary, political, and epistemological traditions that González engages in her own work. Ruiz de Burton demonstrates, as many writers have pointed out, a particular set of discursive practices that developed in response to Anglo conquest, but the critique of American colonization that underpins her work might be understood not simply as filtered through her own historical positioning, but also through a wishful positionality. In other words, it is shaped by an imaginative relationship to her positioning that permitted her to inhabit a particular aggrieved subjectivity precisely through a performative protest of its destabilization. To this end, she deploys performative nostalgia and politicized pastoralism reflected, if deployed and defended a bit differently, in González's writing.

Ruiz de Burton was born in La Paz, Baja California, to a family wealthy only in political clout; they traded on her maternal grandfather's name, which came with some political

recognition but very little land.⁶⁰ Ruiz de Burton would construct an identity for herself from that name when she relocated to Alta California with her mother and sisters after 1848, putting on aristocratic airs that belied a more tenuous connection with the *hacendado* classes represented in her work.⁶¹ Once in California, she married an American soldier, Captain Henry S. Burton, and together they purchased Jamul Ranch, which would later become the object of legal disputes reconstructed in *The Squatter and the Don*. Though never wealthy, Ruiz de Burton traded on class status and on advantageous connections she cultivated, befriending landowners like Mariano Vallejo, on whom she would model the titular character of her second novel.⁶² Her marriage to Burton moreover gave her access to spaces that might have otherwise remained closed to her. As Aranda and Alemán have observed, Ruiz de Burton's attempted intervention in the major discourses of United States speaks to a degree of access to discursive platforms and sources of cultural authority.⁶³ Her evident awareness of her discursive racializing is only as remarkable as her ability to contest that racializing on a platform closed to most other U.S. Mexicans; her attempts to position herself within American myth-making formations underscore that access as much as they do their own futility. Nevertheless, the fact that Ruiz de Burton's work is available now only thanks to the efforts of the Recovering the U.S. Hispanic Literary Heritage Project may be an indicator of how qualified that access was.

Ruiz de Burton's protest suggests from the first the impossibility of a satisfying response, but through the family at the center of narrative, she inhabits by reinscribing a position already

⁶⁰ Sánchez, *Conflicts of Interest*, 6

⁶¹ *Ibid*, 64.

⁶² *Ibid*, 74.

⁶³ See José Aranda, "Contradictory Impulses: María Amparo Ruiz de Burton, Resistance Theory, and the Politics of Chicano/a Studies," in *American Literature* 70, no. 3 (September 1998); and Jesse Alemán, "Historical Amnesia and the Vanishing Mestiza: The Problem of Race in *The Squatter and the Don* and *Ramona*," in *Aztlán* 27, no. 1 (Spring 2002).

beset by the series of obstacles she catalogues but cannot properly name. The “don” of the novel, Don Mariano Alamar, is a wealthy rancher in Southern California and the contested owner of a 47,000-acre Spanish land grant rancho outside of San Diego. The narrative tracks the change in fortunes of his wealthy Californio family as they contend with the arrival of Anglo squatters making claims to the family’s land, enabled by the Land Act of 1851 and the subsequent Homestead Act of 1862.⁶⁴ As the Alamar family’s case moves through the courts and the squatters continue to deplete the ranch’s herds, Don Mariano makes ultimately ruinous investments in city land believing that that the Texas Pacific would be brought to San Diego. His plans to participate in and profit from the nation’s capitalist expansion are undermined by the interests of the railroad monopolists forming the competing Central Pacific Railroad Company.

That the text is framed as a romance is significant insofar as it demonstrates, as John González argues, the ultimate failure of the genre to resolve the crisis of colonial identity it attempts to remedy through the marriage of two colonial endeavors and the construction of a white, national family.⁶⁵ Though the Alamares’ youngest daughter and the independently wealthy son of the novel’s titular squatter, Mr. Darrell, fall in love, the salvation that the younger Darrell can offer the family can only come in the form of a condescension that cements power relations. After the death of Don Mariano, Clarence Darrell is able to save the family from poverty by buying their ranch and finding suitable, white-collar work for the Alamar sons, but this salvation feels like a defeat reinforcing their otherwise reduced circumstances.

⁶⁴ Though the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo included an article guaranteeing the protection of land titles, this article was later removed. Subsequently, the Land Act of 1851 established a commission to review pre-war land grants, putting the burden on Mexican land-owners like Don Mariano to prove ownership, but any proof provided could be rejected if deemed insufficient. This resulted in a drastic reduction of land holdings and costly, protracted legal battles which left landowners financially crippled. The subsequent Homesteading Act opened for settlement all “unappropriated” lands, including these disputed holdings and Native American lands.

⁶⁵ González, *The Troubled Union*, 88.

We might understand the novel as a melancholic reproach that registers its own futility but cannot come to grips with the reasons for that futility, though to do so we must consider first what it means for a work of literature to be resistant. Aranda argues in that Ruiz de Burton's overt racism and her expressed desire to merge two imperialist projects undermine any effort to call her work resistant or to place it within a Chicana tradition of resistant literature. But this semantic policing suggests an unproductive monumentalizing of the resistant that fails to grasp how resistant literature or art might reproduce the circumstances of its creation. According to John González, resistance can be produced within relations of power, and while it might not transcend them, neither does it necessarily merely recreate them. The text's narrative manipulations of race can therefore be resistant without being purely oppositional.⁶⁶ If we can accept Ruiz de Burton's work as resistant, then we can better recognize the ways in which narrative resistance can and often does entail a protest not of the structures of dominance per se, but of their restructuring. As a case in point, Ruiz de Burton's narrative protest deploys representational violence, a reproduction of the political violence and colonial difference that provide context for the novel's creation but also ambivalent justification for the claims it makes. It is ambivalent because it also provides justification for Anglo conquest and Californio subjection, which may explain the simultaneous visibility and invisibility of that violence.

At work in the novel is the contradictory logic that undergirds this representational violence and the resistive gestures the text makes. In his reading of Rudolfo Anaya's work, Genaro Padilla proposes an analytical approach that does not "uncritically follow the logical permutations of the text," but facilitates a reading that employs "the terms implicit but unrealized in the surface of the story," terms that have "failed to become manifest in the logic of the

⁶⁶ González, *The Troubled Union*, 88.

narrative.”⁶⁷ In this way, Padilla’s proposed methodology facilitates access to the text, revealing what the text has wishfully projected and what it has repressed. We thus find the terms that the novel has avoided dwelling on or expressing, and see the social contradictions that the novel cannot confront. When applied to Ruiz de Burton’s work, Padilla’s approach produces fruitful analysis. In the *The Squatter and the Don*, the text’s contradictory logic becomes apparent in its simultaneously direct and indirect exploration of colonial legal institutions as racializing assemblages, because while its critique is imperative to the novel’s negotiation of Anglo terms of participation and exclusion, it also proves detrimental to the stability of its argument.

The contradictions become explicitly clear when the text considers legality as it pertains to naming and what naming permits. Don Mariano refers to himself and the landowning classes represented by the novel in turns as Spanish or Spaniards or Spano-Americans, often with reference to a collective identity made visible by legal and property relations.⁶⁸ That “Mexican” as a categorical term is rarely invoked may suggest merely patterns of regional identification. But that Don Mariano should default, then, to not to “Californio” but to “Spano-American,” and that the novel should insist on the “Spano-” as a racial qualifier implies a desire to be a determining agent in new but already present processes of hierarchization and categorization. This insistence implies a recognition of the discursive shifts that complicated identification in California in the second half of the nineteenth century, and might be interpreted as constituting a bid to intervene in those shifts by resuming some control over colonial taxonomies.

Remarkably, Mr. Darrell’s insistence to his wife that “we aren’t squatters, we are settlers” mirrors Don Mariano’s semantic preoccupations; his efforts to name the distinction between

⁶⁷ Padilla, *My History, Not Yours*, 123.

⁶⁸ María Amparo Ruiz de Burton, *The Squatter and the Don* (New York: Modern Library, 2004), 16.

“settler” and “squatter” reference the vocabulary of settler colonialism. Mrs. Darrell, his immediate narrative foil and in many ways the Alamares’ proxy and metatextual Anglo advocate, responds with the threat of categorical disqualification: “Whenever you take up government land, yes, you are ‘settlers,’ but not when you locate claims on land belonging to anyone else. In that case, you must accept the epithet of ‘*Squatter*.’”⁶⁹ As framed by the text, the Darrells’ respective arguments assume a shared recognition of the stakes implied in the naming: “settler” suggests legitimate or “proper” possession, but “squatter” suggest that legitimate possession lies elsewhere. Likewise, “Spanish” suggests legitimate possession, while “Mexican,” in accordance with logical permutations of the text, has been irretrievably racialized and might therefore imply categorical disqualification.

This semantic bargaining outlines the text’s encoded anxieties about the juncture of legality, citizenship, property, and categorical exclusion, as revealed by Mrs. Darrell’s and Don Mariano’s commentary on the designation of “government land” and what as such can legally be termed “free.” Don Mariano remarks that there remains in California “plenty of good government land, which anyone can take,” understanding good government land as unpopulated and uncultivated.⁷⁰ It is a defense that undercuts itself, however, as it compels him to theorize the mechanisms by which land becomes designated as such and the interests that motivate the designation: “Then the cry was raised that our land grants were too large; that a few lazy, thriftless, ignorant natives, holding such large tracts of land, would be a hindrance to the prosperity of the State, because such lazy people would never cultivate their lands, and were even too sluggish to sell them.”⁷¹ Don Mariano is bothered not by the language of cultivation as

⁶⁹ Ruiz se Burton, *The Squatter and the Don*, 5.

⁷⁰ *Ibid*, 17.

⁷¹ *Ibid*, 143.

(white) progress that is used to provide structural support for Manifest Destiny, but rather with what he perceives as his misidentification. His critique of the processes by which his land is transformed into “uncultivated land” and thus “good government land” invokes the authority of a sphere of Man within which “Spanish” is a marker of agency that forecloses the legal razing of his personal property and the alteration of his relationship to property as property. Mrs. Darrell and Don Mariano efface Indian claims, voicing displeasure only when Mr. Darrell extends that erasure to Mexicans claims. An insistence on Spanish-ness is the protest, the deferment of racialization justified by the same logic that those self-designated Spano-Americans use to claim precedence while disqualifying Indigenous claims.

By engaging in rhetorical maneuverings that recall the poetics of conquest underwriting Manifest Destiny, the text reveals its vested interests in the structures of dominance engineering the Alamares’ enfleshment, thus undercutting the critique necessary to its argument. When Don Mariano jests that he is “sure to be legislated into a *ranchería*,” he wards against the possibility of being made to occupy Indian space by laughing at its absurdity.⁷² It is significant that the text should critique Californios’ social and political repositioning in these terms, because it is through the discursive treatment of Indians that the text defers the collapse of distinction implied in Don Mariano’s lament. The language of the deferral betrays anxieties about the loss mastery over spaces of production that produced the hacendados as masters and that may now produce them as exception. Don Mariano fears being forced into a space that he can only read as exclusion because he creates it as such. In his figuring of his own shifting relationships to the *ranchería* he

⁷² Ruiz de Burton, *The Squatter and the Don*, 130.

references the hierarchical relations implied in his contested mastery, meanwhile eliding the ways in which he has already created and invaded Indian spaces.

It has been argued that *The Squatter and the Don* avoids any discussion of the bloody history of conquest and subjugation that is foundational to those subjectivities that the text defends, and that, accordingly, the narrative obscures the Indian labor on which hacendado life depends. My own observations, however, suggest that the text's attempted intervention depends on both the exclusion and tightly policed presence of its socially (un)dead. The text insists on Californios' right to political inclusion as realized through successful conquest, couching the argument in the language of cultivation and progress. It labors to make that cultivation legible by making colonial endeavors comprehensible as such, a strategy evident in Don Mariano claim that landed Californios were given "tracts of land as an inducement to those citizens who would utilize the wilderness of the government domain. [...] The fact that these landowners who established large ranchos were very efficient and faithful collaborators in the foundation on the missions, was also taken into consideration by the Spanish Government or the viceroys of Mexico. The landowners were useful in many ways, though to a limited extent they attracted population by employing white labor. They also employed Indians, who thus began to be less wild."⁷³ The text thus purposely references without fully acknowledging Indian bondage in the missions and the collaboration between settlers and missionaries that ensured its continuation. It likewise purposely references without fully acknowledging the way Californio rancheros abducted Indians and subsequently forced them into servitude.⁷⁴ The novel's characters perform the colonial difference increasingly unintelligible to Anglo hierarchies that subsumed Indians

⁷³ Ruiz de Burton, *The Squatter and the Don*, 144.

⁷⁴ Even after annexation, wealthier Californios benefitted from Anglo practices of legalized bondage, such as the Greaser Act of 1855, which allowed people to "lease" criminal offenders, and the Indenture Act of 1850, which allowed for the bonding of Indians to a U.S. citizen for a period of ten years.

and Mexicans alike, as if insisting on political embodiment by the indirect invocation of the racialized violence required for its achievement.

The novel labors to make visible (and so to realize) colonial difference through its depiction of labor relations. These efforts are evident in text's framing of exchanges between the Alamares and the squatters wherein Indians are pointedly excluded while being used as a rhetorical device. In Don Mariano's first conference with the squatters, his attempt to convince the squatters to abandon farming and take up ranching is rebuffed, and he responds with a rhetorical invocation of Indians laborers (over which he assumes mastery). When the squatters insinuate that ranching is uncivilized and menial work, stating that they would prefer not go "busquering" or "lassooing" like a common "vaquero," Don Mariano seems to object to the insult not precisely on principle, but to the application of that principle.⁷⁵ It is not uncivilized, he suggests, because it can be delegated to a racialized party better suited to menial labor: "I don't go 'busquering' around *lassooing*, unless I wish to do so. [...] You can hire an Indian boy to do that part. They know how to handle *la reata* and *echar el lazo* to perfection."⁷⁶ Insofar as the Don Mariano's plea can be read as an argument for one model of production as well as a symbolic overture, an invitation to merge colonial projects, the language invoked in the squatters' refusal indicates the text's grasp of the grounds on which Californio's are disqualified from participation. Don Mariano's defense is to point to the racial violence that proves his qualification; he defends a feudal model of production by which his qualification for mastery is realized through, and thus contingent upon, Indian subjugation.

⁷⁵ Ruiz de Burton, *The Squatter and the Don*, 48.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

Those passages in which Indian servants are depicted or mentioned are few, but when they are present, labor relations are referenced to contextualize that presence. They are only ever servants, possessing no life otherwise because those are the bounds of their lives as the novel figures them, a position that speaks to the function of Indian-ness as it pertains to the processes of Californio identification. As per Rosaura Sánchez's observations, oppositional identities in Spanish and Mexican California were predicated on colonial difference and relationship to spaces of material production. The policing of subaltern bodies and their relationship to the land to which they were bound constituted the constructive violence of identification, enabling the maintenance of Spanish and Mexican political economies. For this reason, the civilizing project that was the ostensible object of that policing is always left for tomorrow; the Indian only ever *begins* to be less wild in these historical emplotments.

Not coincidentally, in the most detailed of the passages the disciplining occurs at the margins of the scene, at a calculated distance from the central action that the disciplining contextualizes. Upon learning that his son Clarence paid Don Mariano for the land to which Mr. Darrell wished to lay claim, Mr. Darrell confronts Don Mariano, and the encounter soon turns violent. Mr. Darrell attempts to strike Don Mariano with his whip, but Don Mariano's son Gabriel lassoes Mr. Darrell, effectively immobilizing him, thus negating Mr. Darrell's greater negotiating power. Two unnamed Indian vaqueros arrive on the scene "looking for further orders," and having taken in the scene and misjudged the occasion, "they thought they could join in, too. So putting spurs to their horses, they began to run and shout in high glee."⁷⁷ Victoriano Alamar rebukes them: "A que vienen aca? Quien los convida? Callense la boca, no sean

⁷⁷ Ruiz de Burton, *The Squatter and the Don*, 229

malcreados, Vallense!”⁷⁸ The Indian vaqueros accept their disciplining without question: “This rebuke and imperative order silenced them immediately, and not understanding why these gentlemen were having all that fun, and did not laugh, nor wished anyone else to laugh, quietly turned and went home.”⁷⁹ In rebuking them, Victoriano excludes them from the political negotiations within which Don Mariano remains a participant. The rebuking, a performance of distance, must occur publicly: the scene establishes for the intended audience the distance of Indians from the spaces where political power is negotiated while making their simultaneous presence and distance conditional to the existence of those spaces.

The encounter dramatizes the Californio-Anglo relationships it seeks to establish as negotiable by juxtaposing relationships that are not negotiable, further implying without explicitly stating how those nonnegotiable relationships determine the material and non-material preconditions for such engagement. The social death of Indians must be performed in order to affirm the full, politically viable life that exists elsewhere. As presented in the text, the Indian vaqueros are “unintelligible (and unintelligent),” demonstrably incapable of participating; they do not have the language necessary to properly follow the negotiations occurring (at their expense) and are unable to learn it.⁸⁰ Chastised, they recoil back into their place, silenced but useful and never too far away.

Pre-Anglo colonization and racialized Indian labor form the preconditions of the racial hierarchies that *The Squatter and the Don* seeks to reinforce in opposition to Anglo racializing assemblages, so it cannot entirely erase those preconditions. Instead, it must recreate those racialized labor relations, even though doing so destabilizes the text’s efforts by suggesting the

⁷⁸ Ruiz de Burton, *The Squatter and the Don*, 230.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

⁸⁰ Brady, *Extinct Lands*, 50.

terms of the Alamares' racializing. It is here that we are able to see past the text's logical permutations to the fatal flaw, to the social arrangements the text reveals but cannot name. This aporia shapes the narrative's central conflict, implied but never directly engaged because the text cannot acknowledge that Manifest Destiny and the apocalyptic (for the Alamares) social reordering that extended therefrom are continuous with the colonial logic employed in the articulation of a white Californio subjectivity. The novel cannot directly name the terms of the Alamares' racializing, as this would undermine the naturalization of the measures taken against it, identifying them as measures and thus contradicting the text's projection of racial immutability. In refusing to name the form of their exclusion on its own terms—that is, refusing to properly name Anglo racial logics and the legal formations by which they were enforced—they insist on whiteness as unassailable while nevertheless continuing to *insist*.

The text's commitment to a defense before the systems of power that arbitrate (or claim exclusive authority to arbitrate) social life and death is a singular example of the ways in which the oft-uncontested concept of social death is negotiated within networks of complicity. The attempted deferment and then the reversal of social death within the novel and within many present-day nationalist movements reveal an abiding belief in the authority of the system that prescribes it, a matrix of power within which they are implicated but from which they can reap only marginal benefits.

It is therefore worth restating that Ruiz de Burton participates in some measure in debates which are central to Chicana concerns, namely questions of racial instability, compromised subjectivities, layered histories, and structures of power. Propelling the novel forward is a profound sense of displacement that the text seeks to resolve in its reenactment of political violence, and while its motivations are not defensible, neither are they entirely unrecognizable.

Pérez-Torres writes that the ongoing process of identification as narrativized by Chicana literary formations “is offset by a profound sense of dislocation and absence that forms a dark shadow cast by the hybridity of identity. This shadow implies an absence, a loss in the process of developing one position of identification from another.”⁸¹ While it would be unquestionably anachronistic, and even irresponsible, to refer to Ruiz de Burton as a Chicana or to attribute a Chicana politics to her work, the literary formations to which Pérez-Torres refers comprehend her preoccupation with identification and dislocation. Pérez-Torres’s critical framework permits a productive discussion of the networks of subjection and complicity evident in Ruiz de Burton’s work, networks that in turn comprehend present literary and cultural practices.

Applied to this critical undertaking, Weheliye’s thesis on the life of the flesh discussed in the introduction may likewise suggest a methodology for querying what happens to subjects constructed within (in opposition to non-subjects constructed as excluded and anterior to the human) when they are reconstructed as the excluded. The bargaining, the denials, and the arguments all evidence the nature of the processes because the newly-enfleshed cannot but accept the authority that enforces their transformation. After all, it is through its attendant conceptual modalities that they were permitted to articulate their humanity to begin with. They must attempt to deny their social death while conceding its reality, ultimately acknowledging (because they accept Man’s logic) that they have no power to deny, suffering a kind of Cotard delusion as a result. Of course, not all of the collectivized undead were among the formerly enfranchised, so examining the evolution of relationships marked by differences that carry consequences to the present may help us to appreciate how the now-dead interact with those constructed as always-dead.

⁸¹ Pérez-Torres, *Mestizaje*, 196.

Jovita González's *Dew on the Thorn* and her short stories form a pastoral reconstruction of ranch life in South Texas at the turn of the twentieth century, when Anglo settlers began arriving in greater numbers and the subsequent Borderlands War and Bandit Wars of the 1910s loomed on the horizon. Though there is no consensus as to when *Dew on the Thorn* was written, many of the short stories it later incorporated were published independently in various magazines in the 1930s, more or less concurrently with the Texas Centennial and the nationalist discourse it produced. The deliberate near- but not-quite complete absence of Anglos characters in González's novel and her short stories forces the relationships between the stratified undead to the hub of the combined narratives, rendering them hypervisible. It is through these relationships that González labors to mount a defense against the ascendant Anglo hegemonic order relegated to the narrative borders of the novel, circumscribing the characters' movements while remaining as-yet largely unseen.

Because of González's historical positioning, further along in the century-long process of Latinx enfleshment (to borrow Weheliye's phrase), her more pronounced political precarity compels a different approach to the hierarchical associations articulated by the narrative. This approach results in a pronounced slippage between the labor the novel intends and the labor it performs. Treated interchangeably, the detribalized Indians and mestizo peasants who overwhelm the narrative for which they are meant to labor constitute its hungry, vociferous undead, stepping beyond the narrative in ways unintended and inevitable. Though González intends them to intervene in Anglo-Texan mythmaking on the behalf of landed Tejanos but never their own, they perform a labor of their own that the text very unintentionally makes detectible precisely by binding them to that work. Thus, González's strategic rhetorical invocation of Indians and peasants as dead subjects fails more conspicuously than does Ruiz de Burton's

precisely because of the sort of cultural work that González's narratives require of them. Besides revealing the unintelligible practices of the oppressed on which the project depends, but by which it is also undermined, Jovita González reveals as much about her own positioning as she does about the hungry flesh she attempts the inhabit.

González's *Dew on the Thorn* and her short stories contest that geographic dislocation without acknowledging the ways in which landed Tejanos helped to create a historical precedent for their own displacement by laying the ideological groundwork for its enactment. Now they are not "native" but "alien," and further alienated from the flesh that they made other in the articulation of their since-abrogated Western humanity—a humanity contingent on a relationship to space now interrupted. The novel and the short stories work to access land and its history through a people dispossessed of that land, and in whose dispossession its intended beneficiaries are complicit. In their reconstruction of regional racial hierarchies, both Ruiz de Burton and González reveal a desire to create and inhabit space with an intimacy that that cannot be interrupted. But whereas Ruiz de Burton seeks this intimacy through the space-bound labor of Indians she excludes from that intimacy, González seeks to inhabit space by reimagining and inhabiting the intimate relationship between land and peasant, thereby inadvertently revealing her projections of dead subjects as living and desiring.

I will be reading González's *Dew on the Thorn* and her short stories together, as a single work rather than as distinct productions. I do this because the novel draws from the stories, sometimes incorporating them in their entirety while changing only the characters' names, and the stories in turn supplement the former, often introducing interesting variations on the stories included in a more pared-down form in the novel. Indeed, the novel's editors were compelled to piece the thing together from various manuscripts and fragments, frequently referencing the short

stories it incorporated as they did so. Given the novel's complicated publication history, a more orthodox approach may not be equal to a sufficiently comprehensive of analysis of the material. The novel itself, though anchored by the hidalgo romance at its center, wanders way from that center to the pastoral episodes that bolster and permit that romance. The Olivares, whose affairs occupy the central narrative, are rural nobility descended from the men who conquered the land on which their ranch was established; but the supplementary material, the folkloric pastoral episodes, the anecdotes about and by the peasants rendered simultaneously dead and alive, pulls away from the central narrative and a take on a not-quite-separate life. The bulk of the text thus dwells in its own margins and quickly loses control of them, and so it is on these passages and the short stories from which they draw that I will focus my analysis.

Considering an author's biography as it comes to bear on the text presents significant challenges, as José Aranda points out, and attempting to locate an author in the text is an awkward business not least because it infers a particular relationship between author and text for which there can be little evidence.⁸² But González's personal papers make clear the degree to which her fiction draws from her family history, and indeed, several episodes and characters from her childhood are given a fictional second life in her literary projects. José Limón, who reassembled and edited the rediscovered manuscript of *Dew on the Thorn*, remarks that on various occasions he was compelled to remove those phrases marking her autobiographical interventions, occasionally changing "Grandfather" to "Don Francisco," for instance, or "we" to "the children."⁸³ The autobiographical slips and their subsequent removal by the editor further complicate her relationship to a corpus that suggests its political stakes at every turn. If her

⁸² Aranda, "Contradictory Impulses," 552.

⁸³ José Limón, *Dew on the Thorn*, ed. José Limón (Houston, TX: Arte Publico Press, 1997), 76n1.

literary projects represent an intervention in regional myth-making, then her relationship to those mythmaking endeavors and to the alternatives she suggest through material drawn from her own life is worth assessing.

Like the Olivares of *Dew on the Thorn* and their counterpart in the short stories, González's maternal ancestors had been ranchers in South Texas. Having once owned a large amount of land, her mother's family, like many dispossessed upper-class Tejano landowners, lost many of the trappings of their class but not its attachments. In spite of her family's severely diminished circumstances, however, she was able to pursue a Master's degree in folklore at the University of Texas, though González later abandoned her academic career to teach high school. While much of her short work was printed in various in academic publications, her novels were never published and the manuscripts were found in shambles.

González's literary work extended from her scholarly interests, as did her approach to the material from which she drew. Following folklorist J. Frank Dobie, her mentor at the University of Texas, she elaborated significantly on the folklore she collected. Dobie demonstrated a literary elitism in his work with folklore, believing that folklore should serve as material for more "refined" literary production.⁸⁴ As Nicole Guidotti-Hernández notes, González's particular flavor of Texas-Mexican racism was based in class but also characteristic of twentieth century anthropology. Indeed, according to Guidotti-Hernández, common ethnographic practices guide González's written work, practices evidenced in her attempts to establish knowledge through folklore, novels, short stories, and ethnographic studies.⁸⁵ González endeavors to create an

⁸⁴ Sergio Reyna, "Introduction." Introduction to *The Woman Who Lost Her Soul*, by Jovita González (Houston, TX: Arte Público Press, 2000), xvii.

⁸⁵ Guidotti-Hernández, *Unspeakable Violence*, 138.

alternative knowledge structure to myths of Texas history that erase Texas-Mexicans, but her intervention reflects the paternalism and colonial attitudes of Anglo historians.

Fearing that that Tejano customs and traditions would perish before Anglo cultural hegemony and place-making practices, González performed valuable archival work in recording the stories that indexed the traditions of the poorest Tejanos, but implicit in this undertaking are the ambivalent identifications and contradictory motivations that inform her writing. Certainly, as Guidotti-Hernández observes, González reproduces in her writing the liberal paternalism of the upper classes, working to reinforce those hierarchies within which the Tejano subject of liberal modernity can still be the arbiters of inclusion and exclusion. However, in borrowing so heavily from the discursive traditions of the classes subject to this arbitration, rather than trying to locate and reproduce the stories and customs of her own class, she locates in the practices of the oppressed the means by which she affirms her presence in the face of Anglo absenting discourse. In trying to inhabit these subjects as though they were dead, she evinces a desire for the life she denies. The self-preserving measures undertaken in this work only complicate her relationship to an oral form she disdains, evidencing the distance that the narratives cement and bridge at once. Thus, González's narration of the relationship between master and subject reflects the nature of her attachment to those traditions of the oppressed that her work refuses.

The novel and stories also betray predictable anxieties about sovereignty and citizenship, about the location of power over political economies and the bodies they govern, all the while gesturing towards a resentfully relinquished right over those bodies that is reclaimed *through* those bodies. In "The Philosopher of the Brush Country," the text illustrates the uses to which abject non-subjects of Anglo Texas are put, drawing attention to the contests between imperial powers in which those deemed disposable have historically been used as buffers and cannon

fodder. The implied critique outlines the processes and terms of citizenship as they apply to those for whom it will always be postponed indefinitely, but in doing so it unintentionally utters—to borrow a phrase from Guidotti-Hernández—the genealogy of such practices.

The story, the more detailed of two available versions, follows the misadventures of Tío Pancho, a peasant philosopher and distant relation of the unidentified narrator’s grandfather. This family connection to the better positioned Don Francisco establishes an intimacy for the narrator through the story’s word-of-mouth structure, even as the narrative labors to otherwise reestablish distance. Tío Pancho is a very poor relation, the narrator insists, a peon who once possessed a few acres of bad land in northern Mexico but who relocated to Texas after the death of his wife to work as a shepherd. He is presented as a comical, illiterate eccentric with a penchant for strange philosophies. The text emphasizes Pancho’s unrelenting rurality and his intimacy with the space he occupies, conceiving him as an extension of the landscape: his children wear no clothes except hats made of pumpkin shells, he refuses to bury his wife in a coffin, explaining that he hopes that she “mingles with Mother Nature,” and his closest companion is his donkey Lycurgus, invoking a pastoral trope that establishes association through affiliation.⁸⁶

Tío Pancho’s familiarity with the rural spaces of South Texas enables the narrator to negotiate narrative control of that space, and the character’s relationship to Anglo matrices of power enables her to embed a critique that is also a claim and a rejection. Wishing to protect his sons from the Selective Service Act of 1917, Tío Pancho attempts to smuggle the boys across the border into Mexico, explaining that he does not understand why they should fight “for a country that is not ours.”⁸⁷ Before they can cross the river, Tío Pancho’s sons are apprehended by Texas

⁸⁶ Jovita González, “The Philosopher of the Brush Country,” in *The Woman Who Lost Her Soul and Other Stories: Collected Tales and Short Stories*, ed. Sergio Reyna (Houston, TX: Arte Público Press, 2000), 57.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 58.

Rangers, a law enforcement agency that by the turn of the twentieth century had become the face of violent Anglo domination in the borderlands imaginary. In border folklore and song, the Rangers are symbolic of the new order's violent policing and disciplining of unruly and excessive bodies. In the present story they embody a not-quite-concluded contest over regional power, evidenced by what the story presents as a brutally aborted access to land and the interrupted navigation of it: "The peaceful muddy Bravo, like a thread of quicksilver, was already visible, and the party was within an hour from safety when the Rangers caught up with them."⁸⁸ The Rangers figure as the disruption of relationships long established and until now unquestioned, referenced by Pancho's intimacy with bucolic Tejas and by his suggested and naturalized constitutive association with colonial Tejano social hierarchies. The organizing structures that give shape to those naturalized relationships find a vehicle in Tío Pancho's rough country wisdom, expressed through now audible language when he says, "My sons are not cowards; they can, and will fight, but only when they have received an offense."⁸⁹ His assertion raises question about what constitutes an offense and what constitutes a correct response to that offense, questions left unspoken but implied when he asks why they should fight "some poor Christians who have done us no harm."⁹⁰

Tío Pancho obliquely references, or utters, a history that goes otherwise undisturbed but that informs every aspect of the social and political life of the Olivares' ranch. The uttered history involves the captivity and coercive conscription of genízaros, Indians, and mestizos in similar projects by the Spanish and Mexican states.⁹¹ It implies the enfleshment of human made

⁸⁸ González, "The Philosopher of the Brush Country," 59.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Ibid, 58.

⁹¹ Genízaros were slave-soldiers, captive Indians frequently formed into armed militias by their captors. The term would later come to be applied to other categories of bound labor, but evolution and regional uses of the term are difficult to track. However, it invariably refers to Indigenous bonded servants and their descendants.

categorically other, and the limited and frequently provisory citizenship subsequently imposed on unwilling bodies made to function as a living barricade for settlers and as cannon fodder in the taming of the frontier—a frontier as integral to Spanish and Mexican national self-making as it was elsewhere to Anglo-Americans and their predecessors.⁹² Though Tío Pancho declares a personal stake in the text’s invocation of a “just war” against which he weighs Anglo-American martial endeavors (and thus Anglo-American rule), he does this through ties of affinity that have for him always been attenuated. Pancho’s flesh as the text *intends* to represent it can only be the vehicle through which a Spanish and Mexican citizenry might articulate the terms of its collective subjectivity.

González’s stories and their tellers are put to work in a not-unrelated endeavor. The entangled novel and stories form a collective narrative effort to make territory and by extension to make the bodies that inhabit it, establishing territorial belonging through the hierarchies implied in that making. For Guidotti-Hernández, González’s attempt to interrupt the notion that Texas colonialism is complete entails the simultaneous presence and absence of Indian and black bodies against which Tejano identity is oppositionally constructed. In *Dew on the Thorn*, for instance, González disappears the Indians of Texas by replacing them with generic representations of detribalized Aztecs, meanwhile erasing Mexicans of African descent from the Tejano cultural landscape. She demonstrates a longing for racial structures within which these constructed generic Aztecs knew their place and reaffirmed her own, and so, according to Guidotti-Hernández, the novel’s pastoral episodes are primarily intended to discipline those

⁹² In accordance with the Constitution of 1824, Mexico extended citizenship to all people living on Mexican territory, though there was some ambiguity pertaining to citizenship for Indians. However, this nominal citizenship did not in fact guarantee the rights of citizenship. Various forms of captivity and debt bondage continued. See Brooks, *Captives and Cousins*; DeLay, *War of a Thousand Deserts*.

marginal characters that Guidotti-Hernández refers to as “dead subjects.”⁹³ For Guidotti-Hernández, the *peones* are abject figures existing strictly within the semiotic perimeter established by González’s narrative control, which is why the pastoral episodes stories dwell to the degree that they do on madness and alienation.

While I agree with Guidotti-Hernández’s interpretive gloss in part, there are aspects of her analysis about which I have reservations. In contrast to her analysis, my own suggests a textual uncertainty of purpose enabling the layering of compatible but distinct interpretations. In my reading, González’s contempt is matched by her desire for her subjects, a conflict undergirded by her own uncertain relationships to both modern sovereignty, with its accompanying racial(izing) hierarchies, and to the discursive traditions from which she draws. The disorientation that results from the precariousness of her own positioning and the unreliability of the only discursive tools available to her leave González vulnerable to the relationships she attempts to manipulate defensively. For this reason, I do not feel that the labor the texts’ *peones* perform is strictly oppositional, though there is evidence to indicate that the author expects to reap from that labor two very different and mutually exclusive outcomes.

As a further example of the text’s violent articulation of oppositional subjectivities, Guidotti-Hernández points the geographic alienation of the text’s *peons* effected through denial of regional ties. She argues that González produces these as alien to Texas in opposition to her own white indigeneity, achievable only in the absence of local tribes and peoples, by locating their origins in the Mexican pantheon and not in Texas. I likewise feel that this is a distancing maneuver that doubly disqualifies the *peones* and the classes they represent from any claim that

⁹³ Guidotti-Hernández, *Unspeakable Violence*, 138.

might destabilize the Olivares', but these efforts exist alongside the text's concurrent attempts to establish the *peones'* stories an intimate connection to a land that it can hold through them. Tío Pancho relocated from Mexico, but Tío Pancho also legitimizes Tejano claims in the narrative, because his ties to the land survive the processes that make them unintelligible to Anglo modernity. This is a "Tejano pastoral" that depends on cultural peonage; the *peones* create a cultural landscape for González, who will claim it by holding it in trust.

Serving a similar function, the character of Ambrosio the Indian is present in the stories and in *Dew on the Thorn*, a marginal figure and in the novel not much loved even among the servants, but fully-fleshed and arguably composed with more care than the central characters. In the novel, he is superstitious and irrational, prone to moodiness, and, in a characteristically Tejano iteration of a common trope, a source of stories about the land and its "former" Native inhabitants. That his function as a storyteller is tied to his function as the "barometer of the ranch," predicting narrating the turn of the seasons, indicates the desire that transforms him into its vehicle.⁹⁴ In "Ambrosio the Indian," the narrator recounts how "in the spring when the cactus bloomed and the air was fragrant with prairie flowers, he hummed tunes delightfully soft. It was then that we gathered around him and begged him for a story."⁹⁵ So prompted, he recounts a story about an Indian princess "with hair like the Sun god's" who is transformed into a prickly pear blossom.⁹⁶ The story delivers the land through a regional mythology that does not disturb carefully-wrought political relationships because it places generic Indians in a timeless not-now while allowing the narrator access through them. It exemplifies the discursive practices by which

⁹⁴ Jovita González, *Dew on the Thorn*, ed. José Limón (Houston, TX: Arte Publico Press, 1997), 124.

⁹⁵ Jovita González, "Ambrosio the Indian," in *The Woman Who Lost Her Soul and Other Stories: Collected Tales and Short Stories*, ed. Sergio Reyna (Houston, TX: Arte Público Press, 2000), 104.

⁹⁶ Jovita González, "The First Cactus Blossom," in *The Woman Who Lost Her Soul and Other Stories: Collected Tales and Short Stories*, ed. Sergio Reyna (Houston, TX: Arte Público Press, 2000), 105.

identities are articulated in relation to space, as well as the failures and contradictions to which the process is vulnerable.

The policing the narrative enacts is undeniable, and Ambrosio himself embodies the social organization that permit the narration of those relationships with space, illustrating the rhetorical acrobatics by which Indians are conditionally incorporated into spaces created by nationalist narratives: “When he was in good humor he was an Aztec; when angry, he claimed to be a wild Apache and then he yelled and whooped in a way that delighted us.”⁹⁷ That the stories and novel both only ever refer to the detribalized and thus neutralized mestizo and Indigenous laborers as Aztec is integral to that policing. The narrative creates a distinction between the detribalized and reconstituted “Aztecs” made ancillary to Tejano subjectivity and the barbarous “savage Indians” that threaten it. But as (presumed) dead subjects with not control over their racialization, both are put to use. Alienated from the signs of their subjectivity, the tamed “Aztecs” are intended to supplant Coahuiltecan and those regional histories less easily tempered by nostalgia, while the wild Apache are symbolically subdued, made to serve Tejano subjectivity by being located outside of time. Having undermined Tejano expansion, they are put to use by being recreated as myth.

Nevertheless, only through Ambrosio can the narrative attempt the social and geographic re-location that the narrator is unable to accomplish alone. As “the barometer of the ranch,” Ambrosio is a tool of measurement, a fleshy weather-vane that turns in whatever direction the wind or the narrative push, but he remains a tool of (never-quite-realized) access. His intimacy with land and its climate becomes the ranch’s intimacy with the land, and he is the measure by

⁹⁷ González, “Ambrosio the Indian,” 104.

which the ranch can determine the extent of that familiarity. In attempting to locate Indians outside of time in order to more easily construct regional subjectivities not vulnerable to contradictions, the narrative cannot avoid locating Ambrosio in the present. So, even as he delivers those subjectivities, he undermines them, revealing the life he possesses through its denial. His uttered existence in the present transforms the text into a different kind of weathervane, one that signals to those with the language to decipher the message.

Critical frameworks that take as a given the texts' invulnerability to falling out of step with its own objectives risk overstating the "deadness" of the *peones* and the marginalized communities they represent. Such efforts to interrogate the political violence presented in and represented by the González's corpus risk further obscuring the life the narrative reveals in its efforts to deny it, when in fact González's project depends on the not-so-obscured life of the unruly dead that also limits its success. As Weheliye argues, "The potential of bare life as a concept falls victim to a legal dogmatism that equates humanity and personhood with a status bequeathed or revoked by juridical sovereignty."⁹⁸ The juridical logic implied in notions of bare life can blind us "to the sorrow songs, smooth glitches, miniscule movements, shards of hope, scraps of food, and interrupted dreams of freedom that already swarm the ether of man's legal apparatus."⁹⁹ Tío Pancho and Ambrosio live in ways obscured by González's misdirection, and they dream and hunger and signal in a language of their own, clear signs of life that are paradoxically detectable through the measures the narrative takes to obscure it. Not only do analyses so concerned with exception accept without protest the logic of the narrative, but they also fail to see the ways in which the logic fails the narrative in its execution.

⁹⁸ Weheliye, *Habeas Viscus*, 131.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

The juridical logic at work in *Dew on the Thorn* is invoked as its principal if still ultimately ineffective strategy for managing hierarchies in ways that accord with the modern Tejano subjectivity that the novel proposes, and it manifests in the narrative's own critique of Tejano feudalism. In my reading, González's critique comprises a negotiation of modern Tejano subjectivity that can keep up with Anglo modernity, a subjectivity removed from the colonial violence relocated in the past but not from the hierarchies still preserved by the conceptual apparatus of liberal humanism. However, the negotiations are compromised by the narrative's necessary duality of purpose, as the secondary objectives and the methods by which it pursues them undermine (and overwhelm) its primary objectives.

The competing models of Tejano subjectivity the narrative projects through the Olivares' patriarch and matriarch are articulated in their controlled encounters with those excluded from the contest. The text anticipates its own conclusion when it introduces Don Francisco Olivares as "a tyrant by inheritance and breeding," a man who believes himself "master of everything, not only of the land he possessed but of the *peones* who worked the soil."¹⁰⁰ In Doña Margarita, his wife, the text presents an alternate model, contrasting Don Francisco's patriarchal tyranny with his wife's liberal (and feminized) paternalism, expressed as "a maternal feeling for the poor whom she considered sent to her by providence."¹⁰¹ She assumes the role of educator and caretaker, but also disciplinarian: "She gathered the women and children around her, instructed them in religion, told them stories, or played the harp. She always ended the gathering with prayers, punctuated nearly always by commands or reproofs."¹⁰² Implicit in this projection of Tejano modernity are the still-present racializing assemblages comprised in this scene by the

¹⁰⁰ González, *Dew on the Thorn*, 12.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 13.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*

twin liberal apparatuses of education and religion, each heralding the discipline that always follows. Doña Margarita's constitutive paternalism in this way recreates, because it requires, the hierarchical ordering of humans and not-yet-humans in order to remain a viable framework for the production of relationally contingent subjectivities.

It is in relation to the non-human still located outside this sphere that González's attempts a comparison of old and new articulations of Tejano humanity. Whereas "it had never occurred to these hidalgos that the *peones* were human beings with a mental capacity to learn and spiritual possibilities to appreciate the beautiful things," Doña Margarita, Don Alberto the teacher, and the priest Father José María consolidate their monopoly on humanity by figuring it as a "capacity" and a "possibility" not yet realized in the peons.¹⁰³ The schooling scenes that usher in the close of the narrative outline the necessary conditions of inclusion as it is available to the students of Don Alberto's informal country school, composed mostly of the sons of peons. Don Alberto positions the *peones* as the before of modernity through their racial differentiation, declaring, "The first task before me is to eradicate their belief in witchcraft and evil spirits that is so deeply rooted in their souls. [...] They need something to believe in, and finding nothing better, they revert to the primitive beliefs of their race."¹⁰⁴ The *peones*' reversion, their before-ness, gives shape to the "now" from which they are excluded, ensuring Don Alberto's continued positioning as modernity's gatekeeper. The humanity he dangles before them, always just out of reach, is the model of modern Mexican subjectivity outlined by Mexican discourse on mestizaje; he thus relates to the boys stories of "the past greatness of indigenous races," of men like "the pure-blooded Indian" Benito Juárez and the mestizo Porfirio Díaz."¹⁰⁵ Their absorption into this

¹⁰³ González, *Dew on the Thorn*, 145.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid*, 146.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid*, 145-146.

modern Mexican subjectivity, however, entails the defacement of their already abstracted indigeneity, but is in any case retarded by their attachments to “primitive,” pre-modern customs, customs marking them as racially differentiated ghosts from another time.

By narrating Tejano discursive control of the nation’s racial hierarchies, González reinscribes their discursive control of the nation’s borders, implicitly, and perhaps wishfully, locating the Tejano within those borders. In extending to the *peones* the humanity they have yet to realize, the modern Tejano subject as represented by Don Alberto asserts the uninterrupted (because unintermittible) authority to do just that. The text cannot, in these scenes, name the humanity that exists beyond Don Alberto’s purported authority to make valid its existence, but the collected narratives utter it. The palimpsestic layering of contradictory motivations is revealed in those spaces where González’s attempt to construct a liberal Tejano subject conflicts with her attempt to establish native Tejano subjectivity outside the purview of Anglo hegemony.

What the narrative identifies as the markers of pre-modernity, pre-humanity, and pre-subjectivity manifest as superstition and stories of witchcraft and ghosts, but the performances and expressions of this anteriority are elsewhere obliquely identified as the signs of that Tejano subjectivity. And it is in the exploration of anteriority that the narrative locates those ways of being and belonging not comprehended by Anglo modernity but existing beyond it. While the Texas Rangers may have been able to interrupt and invade Tío Pancho’s relationship to his sons, his constitutive relationship to the land he inhabits cannot be so easily interrupted or invaded, no matter how little agency he is granted in his own movements, because his relationship to land as a sign of his subjectivity has little to do with ownership or agency. Whatever the space in which he is alternatively bound or set adrift, he interacts with that space in ways foreclosed by Western epistemologies. Understanding only “owner” and “property,” they likewise fail to comprehend

Tío Pancho's relationship to his donkey, the property from which their adherents presume to part him. After three "American" ladies fail to apprehend the nature of his relationship to Lycurgus, his donkey, the starving vagrant is arrested and charged with cruelty to an animal, while Lycurgus is left to starve by the women who registered the complaint. In his defense before the judge, he points to his starving body and the starving body of his donkey as a sign of their affinity, gesturing to their shared want of food and their cooperation in attaining it as indicative of a shared bond in poverty and privation that they value: "The donkey and I live for each other. Without me he would starve; without him I would die of hunger. We work together for each other."¹⁰⁶ That he uses a pack animal to find work is not unusual; what is striking is that rather than address the women's concerns about his misuse of the *property* they dislike him possessing (but in which they otherwise display little interest), he describes a relationship shaped by a mutual desire that neither is meant to possess. After his release, he resumes his transient life, wandering the brush country with Lycurgus in search of food, and upon his death, he leaves his scant savings "for the care of donkeys which, like his, had been the friends of man."¹⁰⁷ That he can articulate his humanity outside the bounds of Anglo law while the *peones* cannot do the same outside the bounds of the novel's proposed Tejano modernity is a telling contradiction, an indication that the narratives are working at cross-purposes with themselves.

Weheliye observes how the liberal discourse on agency fails to grasp the traditions of the oppressed because, concerned as this discourse is with personhood as ownership, it cannot comprehend desire as it exists in the absence of agency.¹⁰⁸ It perceives in that absence only a barren landscape, only the radical negation of subjectivity, rather than a space of constitutive

¹⁰⁶ González, "The Philosopher of the Brush Country," 63.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Weheliye, *Habeas Viscus*, 121-122

potentiality. And so liberal humanism denies the possibility of life in extreme circumstances. So does González in her compromised critique of the political violence she otherwise reinscribes, figuring the mistreatment of the *peones* as a negatively constitutive because it strips them of the volitional agency that the politically viable body possesses. At the same time, she dwells in those barren spaces, presenting a double vision of life and death in the texts' narrative lapses.

The narrative at once places the *peones* outside the sphere of a humanity to which they are (by its logic) incapable of finding alternatives because it comprehends none, but is unable to realize the “hopelessness and despair” by which it defines their abject, non-agentive state.¹⁰⁹ In describing the processes by which the constituents of this space of production are produced by that space, the text of the novel describes racializing assemblages as they intersect with assemblages of humanity: “The customs [were] merely part of a system that had been inherited by both classes. Neither one or the other knew of a better plan; the unfairness and injustice of it was never realized by the master and the *peones* looked upon it as a thing that had to be.”¹¹⁰ Binding them to *the thing that has to be* by negating their ability to dream of being otherwise, the narrative appears to reduce the *peones* to their suffering, foreclosing the possibility of an existence in excess of the political violence that produced them as flesh. Conversely, it is in the flesh, in the barren spaces, that the narrative locates the customs by which it establishes an existence outside the purview (and inaccessible to) Anglo hegemony: “But in all homes, however humble they might be, a statue or image of Our Lady of Guadalupe, enshrined in paper or natural flowers, occupied the place of honor.”¹¹¹ A figure constructed to straddle the limen between Old World traditions and Amerindian spiritual practices, between humanity and its anterior non-

¹⁰⁹ González, *Dew on the Thorn*, 14.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 15.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*

humanity, Guadalupe is a symbol of the dreams of the oppressed and also of the political violence that created the racialized flesh as anterior. She represents, then, both the *criollo* nationalism that banished the Indian but also the strategies of survival developed in response to political violence.¹¹² In the novel, she illustrates local customs, popular adherence to those customs, anterior to Anglo humanity because from the first (and by design) in the vestibule of humanity, creating space by creating culture made possible by its diametrical opposition to the world of Man. It is far from a given that González's invocation of Guadalupe intended to invoke this latter function of Guadalupe, but she cannot invoke the figure as a symbol of Tejano nationalism without revealing its function as symbol of life where no life is permitted, and it is only in this capacity that Guadalupe can establish the continuity of Tejano life after colonization.

The *peones* and their songs and stories shape the experiential matrix within which González articulates an identity outside sovereignty while fighting to obtain a place within it. She permits the undead of the novel to do the articulating for her, but in expropriating their flesh, she channels the life that stands as proof of her own. If this is indeed an attempted interruption of Anglo narratives about Mexican death, then the *peones* can be of little use to the narrative unless they can demonstrate their imaginations, appetites, and fears as manifestations of a vitality not extinguished by the absence of agency. Their hungering, signaling flesh, becomes González's proffered alternative archive, but it becomes their own as well. As both archive and archivists, the text requires that the *peones* be capable of conceiving themselves in a time of their own making, even if it exists outside of Western (now Anglo) time. They must do this if they are to create the folkloric history the text requires of them. Having drawn her material from her ethnographic work as well as her own experiences and encounters, González thus locates this

¹¹² Brady, *Extinct Lands*, 119.

archive beyond herself while clamoring to be an active participant as its curator. Though distorted in the appropriation, it still suggests alternative assemblages of humanity in the editorial lapses, and moreover speak to the contradictory desires of a curator registering her shifting relationship to her material as she is relocated outside time, citizenship, and Western humanity. What González's work accomplishes, finally, is the partly-accidental identification of fugitive strategies to which she remains partially blind.

There is a lesson to be learned here. At the very least, what I endeavor to uncover is a genealogy of narrative practices by which Chicana scholars might identify the relationships that condition their imagining of a contingent subjectivity and the possibilities for alternative socialites and networks of relations it makes possible. For a Tejana from the southern border, the genealogy I identify and the zones of complicity I map reveal the contradictions that shape my own investments in the comparative work on which I embarked. In the following chapters, I will expand on matters I have begun to touch on here by examining modes of sociality and strategies for endurance made possible when we begin to see our histories not as a foreclosure but instead as the foundations from which we build contingent identities and futures.

CHAPTER 2

“Stories worth following home”: Marginality and Survival in Deborah Miranda’s *Bad Indians*

Where the previous chapter looks at the zones of complicity for which much Chicana (and early U.S. Mexican) scholarship and literature struggle to account in their articulation of contingent and inconstant subjectivities, as well as the fugitive strategies for realization and endurance revealed in narrative failures, this chapter at once departs from and expands upon this mapping of Chicana-America’s cognitive interior. In my analysis of Deborah Miranda’s memoir *Bad Indians*, I shift the focus of my larger project to Native American literature for a double purpose: Firstly, because I wish to privilege Native American narrative practices that interrupt Chicana narrative place- and self-making and force their narrative failures (as described by Raúl Coronado) by testifying to their survival of the violence that enables and circumscribes those Chicana processes of becoming. These practices, I argue, create space for a consideration of contingency, thus revealing that survival is only made unspeakable if violence is made unspeakable. They reveal that the utterance of both is interdependent. In order to ensure survival of the erasure and absencing against which Chicana discursive formations also struggle—against being made ghostly through multiple kinds of interrelated dispossessions—the violence must be spoken. Thus, I also wish to demonstrate that through her invocation of such practices, Miranda likewise creates space for a reconsideration of Chicana-America’s relationship to that violence and present articulations of contingent subjectivities. But even as she does this, she points to opportunities for solidarity and kinship—and thus identity—by providing alternative frameworks for communal becoming that do not preclude ambiguity and complicity.

By way of introduction, however, I begin with a brief analysis of Cherríe Moraga’s memoir, *Native Country of the Heart*, rather than Miranda’s. I do so because in its efforts to

articulate an enduring presence through kinship and spatialized relationships, Moraga's memoir suggests interesting problems for which Miranda's work offers potential answers. The memoir encompasses, and is indeed given structure by, an account of the author's "MexicanAmerican" mother's Alzheimer's and eventual death and the stock-taking they occasion for Moraga. Her grief, her sense of impending and then realized bereavement, prompt a meditation on all that the loss of her mother, her mother's body, and her mother's memory entail. The loss brings to the fore concerns about memory and storytelling, national mythmaking and historical amnesia, historical orphanhood and identity; further, the author's rediscovery of her childhood home in the shadow of San Gabriel Mission further spur a consideration of the place of story in the creation and conceptualization of space and people. The observations gleaned from the deep-dive into her family history are mobilized in support of a claim to Indigenous identity embodied by Moraga's mother, evidence that "we were here first and forever [and that] our Native origins matter at a profoundly unspoken site of knowing."¹¹³ The author attempts to articulate an emplaced mestiza subjectivity dependent upon an affective claim to the site of its articulation, a claim that remains unspoken because it is unintelligible within the political language that defines her as alien. Moraga expresses a rejection of the languages that dispossess by defining her as alien to the home of which she is dispossessed. But in this rejection she invokes the twinned formations of mestizo myth- and place-making, demonstrating how this approach to mestizo articulation intersects with (and potentially interrupts) Chicana efforts to build affective and political networks and communities across cultural borders.

These moments of political flight are in this way often followed by the narrative's deferral of a fuller excavation of those unspoken sites of knowing; they are hobbled by the text's

¹¹³ Cherríe Moraga, *Native Country of the Heart* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2019), 20.

efforts to avoid the possibility of its disqualification from Native kinship and identity. In recalling her visit to the San Gabriel Mission gardens, Moraga notes the temptation of obfuscating place-making strategies by undermining the fantasy of a golden “Mestizo California” that she found herself entertaining throughout her visit: “I am as romantic as the tourist in this regard, longing to imagine a less brutal past. But spirit won’t have it.”¹¹⁴ Her observation of her own complicity in a mythmaking that first requires an absence implies an impulse to flight that she also carries, and it further hints at the multiplicity that permits her a double vision of history and an intimate understanding of the discursive machinery of colonialism. The text then abruptly stops short midway through her analysis of that multiplicity, swerving around the complicity that complicates affiliation, as she recalls her discovery of a Moraga among the soldiers that attended an expedition into California. It is significant that it is here that the text segues into a brief account of Moraga’s family history in which she notes the many soldiers recorded among her ancestors, because the inclusion stands as a testament to mestizo multiplicity by pointing her ancestors’ participation in the violence that created the spaces she inhabits. But even while claiming Native kin together with the architects of their subjection—the “distant relations who killed Apaches or the relations who were Apaches themselves”—she swerves:

What la familia Moraga shares historically with multiple generation of Mexicans and MexicanAmericans is the denial of our Native origins. As mestizos, we swallowed the bitter Kool-Aid of colonization—first through the Spanish and then the gringo—that distanced us from the recognition of a living Indigenous presence in our histories, our families, and ourselves.¹¹⁵

By framing that denial as a violence directed against the self, Moraga avoids the specter of outward violence by which the political distancing intended through that denial was in fact

¹¹⁴ Moraga, *Native Country of the Heart*, 175.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 179.

realized. In her efforts to bolster violently attenuated ties and thus re-establish kinship with Native communities, she muffles her *own* uttering of the entangled histories that condition those relationships. Her challenge to her family's denial thus functions as a different kind of veil. The text proposes a subjectivity compromised thought violence, but not a complicit one, and it uses affiliation as a defense against a complicity that is not so much denied as it is suspended.

Moraga's desire to claim kinship demonstrates an awareness of the relational nature of identity and the necessity of its communal articulation. To claim relation to a people and a place is to claim an unalienated self, and thus to affirm an enduring existence in the face of forces that insist on its negation. But this claim requires reciprocity. In her work on Mohawk communal endurance and political sovereignty, Audra Simpson observes how community members negotiate the terms of inclusion even outside the bounds of membership law—which prioritizes matrilineal genealogy and disregards patrilineal descent—though not necessarily outside its discursive or material reach. Their negotiation depends on dialogue, by which Mohawks attempt to locate their interlocutor in the network of relationships that make up the community. It requires knowledge of the interlocutor's "people," and thus a mutual familiarity with a shared "archive of social and genealogical knowledge" which "operates as an authorizing nexus of identification that also can and sometimes does refuse the logic of the state."¹¹⁶ Of course, in this, Simpson references very specifically Mohawk membership law and "membership talk" and Mohawk discourses on communal belonging, formations that arose from a specific and localized set of histories and encounters. While I have no intention of denying that specificity and locality, the informal discursive practices in particular address concerns that span the hemisphere,

¹¹⁶ Audra Simpson, *Mohawk Interruptus: Political Life Across the Borders of Settler States* (Duke University Press: Durham; London, 2014), 15.

concerns about what happens to those people who fall away from formal political recognition or definition. What Moraga desires, it seems, is precisely such a form of identification that can refuse the logic of the state, a kinship (and thus a relational identity) she can claim in that “unspoken site of knowing.”¹¹⁷

However, Moraga consigns to speechlessness the archive of knowledge that informs sociality in the margins of the settler state, and so she partially obscures histories that are foundational to the process of Chicana becoming. By making the violence that informs that process unspeakable, the text concedes that Chicana presence requires an absence, and so fails to comprehend the possibilities permitted by ambiguity and implication. When discussing stories related to her by Tonva acquaintances, Moraga focuses the frame so as to free the image from context. In their stories about their displacement following the secularization of San Gabriel Mission, her interlocutors recount that their ancestors were forced to flee into hiding and how the children were cared for “by Mexican families” in whose homes “they learned to hide their Indian identity in order to survive.”¹¹⁸ She speculates that these families “who offered them hogar” were themselves Native and mestizo, suggesting less complicated and therefore, by implication, less assailable connections between variously racialized groups. This is not a claim made in bad faith, nor is it inaccurate, but it tells an incomplete story that renders unspeakable the practices of “false kinship” discussed in my previous chapter. It leaves unspoken the conditions under which so many of those children entered mestizo homes, it glosses the labor relations into which these “criados” were often inserted, and fails to identify the parties from which the Tonva fled in the first place.

¹¹⁷ Moraga, *Native Country of the Heart*, 20.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 180.

To allow these things to be spoken is to risk disqualification from the networks of community and solidarity and the frames for identification they provide—a prospect understandably terrifying to a group marginalized by the settler colonial state and rendered ghostly on Native land. How then do we affirm a continued existence in the face of historical and anthropological erasures? What home can we claim? But to fail to speak these things is to refuse accountability to the relationships being claimed, and thus to fail to participate in earnest in those relationships and in the fugitive political and social formations they facilitate. Chicax scholars must ask ourselves what might be learned if we allow our interlocutors to speak back and what we lose when we fail to do so. Even in her hesitation, Moraga testifies to the kinship and solidarity that is possible in the sites of knowing she illustrates, and in the mutually recognized enduring presence on colonized land that they might affirm.

However unsure her footing, Moraga's work in many ways tackles the challenges presented by Chicax scholarly and literary efforts to fight political and social erasure in spaces where Chicax subjectivities and histories are subordinated to the Anglo formations that render them illegitimate and spectral. Chicax scholarship and cultural production at large aim to affirm an enduring life in the margins, but their consequent navigation of presence and absence is in many ways rooted in and frequently constrained by the discourses engaged in the material I cover in the previous chapter. The patterns of simultaneous absence and presence seen in that literature extend beyond individual works of literature to the field of Latinx literature at large, and even, in many ways, to the disciplines concerned with the consolidation and theorization of that literature—in particular that scholarship that is sustained by theories of blackness and indigeneity but that fails to engage Afro-diasporic and Indigenous critique. As I will demonstrate in subsequent chapters, many Chicax feminist authors and scholars already attend to an

exploration of those endlessly repeated patterns, unpacking the difficult histories that haunt (and thus shape and constrain) Chicana social and political life. Here I aim to continue their work by proposing a shift in Chicana studies' approach to the comparative—or, indeed, the relational—and to argue for the importance of paying closer attention to Native literary production in our theorization of race and existence in the so-designated margins.

To be clear, this work has already been taken up, and it should be noted that many Chicana authors and scholars have less attenuated connection to the Indigenous and the Afro-diasporic than current post-Chicana ground-clearing scholarship might suggest; they do not simply theorize indigeneity and mestizaje as useful abstractions, unburdened by intimately experienced histories. Nevertheless, if Raúl Coronado's writing on Latinx publication history or Guidotti-Hernández's work on Latinx national imaginaries are any indication, looking to Native literary production may still be necessary for a fruitful reconsideration of the literature of the marginal. The limited scope of the literary historiography in which they participate can result only in an equally limited comprehension of the practices they describe. In framing the relationship between such practices as either purely exploitative or entirely detached from Indigenous and Afro-diasporic discursive traditions, they foreclose many potentially fruitful avenues for cross-cultural engagement by neglecting to properly evaluate the genealogies of those practices.¹¹⁹ A refocused dedication to relational work may instead reveal and permit us to understand extant practices held in common, which in turn may help Chicana scholars develop a framework for rethinking or retooling Chicana practices of self-articulation. Such a retooling

¹¹⁹ Though it is outside the scope of this chapter, it is nevertheless necessary to consider the problems that attend the politics of solidarity within Chicana scholarship and literature. As Ana Patricia Rodríguez notes, solidarity can be exploitative and patronizing, and the challenge before Chicana scholars and authors is finding forms that are not. Rodríguez, "The Fiction of Solidarity: Transfronterista Feminisms and Anti-Imperialist Struggles in Central American Transnational Narratives," in *Feminist Studies* 34, no. 1/2 (Spring 2008), 199-226.

might permit the expression of a subject more at home in ambiguity as well as forms of relationality not predicated upon appropriation *or* negation; and it would necessarily involve a critical understanding of the ways in which we narrate history and construct contingent, relational subjectivities as well as formal and informal networks of kinship. Our disciplinary isolation makes it difficult to explain discursive failures, but by permitting (rather than fearfully avoiding) multi-directional dialogue, we may find new or already shared notions of fugitivity from settler colonial identitarian logics and definitions. We might moreover discover different strategies for effective and responsible decolonial scholarship, strategies that can allow us to bridge cultural and disciplinary divides while acknowledging and accounting for the complicated histories (upon which commonalities are contingent) discussed in the previous chapter.

One of the principal aims of Miranda's memoir and historiography is precisely to trace the genealogies of her own fugitive traditions, and in so doing she both implicates and issues an invitation to Chicana discourse. As a descendant of the Mexican missions and a member of a federally unrecognized tribe likewise struggling against various interanimating forms of erasure, Miranda (Ohlone/Costanoan-Esselen) outlines strategies for survival and communal endurance in response to settler colonial insistence on her absence. As demonstrated by the memoir, these strategies are born of the very legacies of violence within which Chicana processes of becoming are embedded, and in tracing the genealogy of these resistant traditions, she engages forms that are central to Chicana discourse and activism. In particular, Miranda invokes the testimonio in her literary references, and occasionally mirrors its form in such a way that she simultaneously adopts and challenges its narrative apparatuses.¹²⁰ By prying open the sometimes twinned genres

¹²⁰ As discussed in the previous chapter, testimonios are autobiographical accounts of U.S. Mexican life before and after the U.S.-Mexican war and annexation. These accounts were, in the main, collected and compiled by Anglo-American ethnographers and historians such as Hubert Howe Bancroft who treated the stories dictated to them as historical curiosities. Encoding a melancholic politics, the genre is largely concerned with narrating catastrophic

of testimonios and autobiography, she forces a reevaluation of our imagining of sociality in the margins in her narrative reconstruction an Esselen family's history. *Bad Indians* is a memoir that effects that prying as it explores the histories that a California Indian woman's life encompasses and inscribes. In no particular order, it tells the story of a childhood rife with abandonment and abuse and an adulthood spent trying to place that violence within a process of becoming, but this story necessarily intersects with others', and in those intersections Miranda gives meaning to her own experiences. Indeed, she seems less interested in giving a comprehensive account of her life than she is in giving an account of the relationships that place those experiences within a communal matrix. She therefore includes her parents' stories and her grandfather's stories, and the stories of others' relegated to a "before" that Miranda draws into her own articulation of the "present" she embodies. She finds extant and enduring relationships in the anthropological notes with which she opens the narrative, in the poetry reconstructed from Junipero Serra's writings, and in her reimagining of the Mission and its pedagogical legacies—in short, she finds meaning in the violent histories and never quite realized displacements (in land and time) without which her experiences lose context and thus meaning.

These episodes bracket and give shape to a memoir that refuses the temporal policing imposed on experience by autobiography, with its insistence on a structure that organizes events into a recognizable order. In Miranda's memoir, the episodes, poems, letters, and asides do not interrupt the story so much as they give it a shape and pattern more closely resembling a mosaic, creating a complete story that by genre specifications is lacking precisely because there is no

change and shifting political landscapes and identities. As Rosaura Sánchez notes, these texts undertake a negotiation of colonial difference and political marginality through a narrative reconstruction of pre-Anglo social hierarchies. The testimonios form is in many ways adapted by contemporary Chicana autobiography and memoir, which, like the testimonios, narrate communal life and history through the vehicle of personal experience. See Sánchez, *Telling Identities*.

direct line from “then” to “now.” In fact, the fugue-like, episodic structure of the narrative—divided not into chapters but into sections that bleed into and recall each other—indicate an alternative mode of telling time and thus accounting for a life. This mosaic of personal, communal, cross-temporal experiences that are present and relevant at once are reflective of the subjectivity it articulates. It is a subjectivity predicated on survival, storytelling, community, and survival through communal storytelling. And so Miranda both narrates and channels a story that is both deeply personal and fundamentally communal. Indeed, it is noteworthy that the first half of the memoir is largely composed of “episodes” which at first glance have little to do with her life in the dissociated “present,” but they bleed slowly, gradually, into the more personal stories she explores in the latter sections. Through this apparent initial decentering of herself as protagonist, she locates the origins of her own process of becoming in stories and experiences that predate her own by centuries.

Importantly, this story is embedded in the regional Native histories that Miranda employs while/by deconstructing colonial historical emplotments, which, as Rosaura Sánchez explains, are texts that attempt to make sense of history by using a combination of narrative and ideology to give it a plot. The text presents a critique of imperialist nostalgia and pedagogy embedded within an exploration of what it is to be a survivor, to have a sense of self that is born of violence and loss but that is irreducible to that violence and loss. By revisiting Alexander Weheliye’s thinking on the practices of marginalized peoples constructed as illegible to the conceptual apparatus of humanism, I read her memoir, which is also a testimonio, as a performative expression as well as a consideration of alternative expressions of humanity among non-federally

recognized people.¹²¹ It is a consideration and expression of a Native subjectivity born of Indigenous practices of freedom. A descendant of survivors of the California mission system, Miranda pieces together the histories that passed through the flesh of her paternal ancestors to hers, scrutinizing the physical, psychic and political scars that constitute the flesh as it journals embodied colonial histories. Her memoir is simultaneously autobiographical and speculative, a history that is also an envisioning of a future that may have already arrived.

In subverting Western genre conventions—biography and testimonios—Miranda attempts to recuperate an Indigenous epistemology. This undertaking intersects with her efforts to find and articulate an integrated sense of self in the face of violence intended to mark her as always anterior to articulation. Through her efforts, Miranda accomplishes two things: she demonstrates the survival made possible by the knowledge encoded in the Esselen storytelling practices she invokes; and in so doing she presents alternatives to Western subjectivity, privileging affective connections as spaces and events through/in which critical decolonial subjectivities in process are expressed and affirmed. This identification and affirmation of structures of being and belonging beyond political recognition speaks to Miranda's reimagining of specifically California Indian practices of freedom, and this specificity cannot be overlooked. It may, however, also suggest both an opportunity and challenge for other unevenly racialized peoples still struggling to make sense of their positioning within a shared history of violence and the shifting relationships by which it is mapped. A careful evaluation of Miranda's memoir may permit Chicax scholars and readers to rethink mestizaje as a critical apparatus and social formation. It may permit the expression of a fugitive mestiza subjectivity beyond nationalism

¹²¹ Though my project does not directly engage the discourses on Afro-pessimism within which Weheliye intervenes, I turn to Weheliye once more because I believe that his work on fugitive states and political flight is applicable to the narrated experience of non-federally recognized peoples, and because his own lateral gestures allow for such engagement. See Weheliye, *Habeas Viscus*.

and its monopoly on sociality, and in excess of the colonial taxonomies and racializing assemblages it indexes. Like the affective networks of solidarity that Miranda insists are made possible through Esselen knowledge and communal storytelling, mestizaje can articulate relationality in ways not accessible through the language of nationalism and citizenship. Framed this way, mestizaje may be reimagined as an identity-in-process contingent on relationality, outlining (and made possible by) relationships negotiated and sustained through affective connections. This leaves room for an acknowledgment of complicity within networks of solidarity, and it moreover may untether our thinking from conceptual modalities like colonial nationalisms that are frequently limiting, exclusionary, and obfuscating by design.¹²²

Inhabiting the Margins

Miranda prefaces her the text by asking, “But who are we, when we have survived?”¹²³ The survival points not to the after, not to any sort of teleological progress from abject to legally recognizable human, but to what exists because of and in excess of what has been survived. If representational violence in fiction and journalism echo historical violence, as Guidotti-Hernández claims, further effacing the object of that violence, it is worth asking what is accomplished when the effaced subject represents or recreates that violence. If we read representational violence not as an act of dehumanization but as a process of differentiation that *creates* disembodied, *pre*-human flesh by creating through violence the marked, differentiated object of that violence, what happens when the flesh narrates the process of its own abjection?

¹²² This is not intended as a critique of Native American nationalisms, which are a primary methodology in Native American scholarship and political life and are often conceptualized in accordance with Native epistemologies. Though some articulations of Native American nationalism are tethered to the apparatus of federal recognition, many more are fluid and capacious, and cannot be accommodated within the matrix of Western sovereignty. Instead, what I hope to trouble are those nationalist formations that adopt Western conceptual modalities even as they resist political marginalization within Western hegemonic spheres.

¹²³ Deborah A. Miranda, *Bad Indians: A Tribal Memoir* (Berkeley, CA.: Heyday, 2013), xiv.

When it points to the marks, the scars, by which its enfleshment was effected? To borrow Weheliye's language, writers like Miranda suggest alternative modalities of life by figuring themselves as constituted by violence but also constituting themselves in excess of that violence, figuring themselves as not-dead and as hungry and desiring.

For Miranda, that excess is best detected (and enacted) through storytelling and its various manifestations. In fact, the difficulties that attend any effort to locate the narrative within a genre denote the function of literature as Miranda apprehends it. That is, storytelling as a practice of freedom, one that creates a community contingent upon the common experiences that the community narrates together. As she envisions them, these practices establish an existence beyond exclusionary subject-constituting narratives by rejecting the conceptual frameworks that permit their creation and maintenance, instead foregrounding shared losses *and the strategies of survival* to which they gave rise. To this end, Miranda begins by gesturing to the political conditioning enforced through state apparatuses, including public education, and the memorializing it entails, observing the pedagogical strategies used in the institutionalizing of master narratives. As she writes, "Who tells a story is a mighty piece of information for the listeners; you must know what the storyteller has at stake."¹²⁴ By way of example, she points to the logic that animates the narrative structures of dominance in her discussion of the Mission Unit, a once standard part of California's history curriculum requiring that students participate in a "Mission Project" intended to monumentalize the California missions as an integral part of the state's history. The Mission Unit has since been abandoned by California schools, but the pedagogy of nostalgia of which it once formed a part endures along with the still-standing walls of missions that welcome thousands of tourists and students each year. If Miranda speaks to an

¹²⁴ Miranda, *Bad Indians*, xvi.

extinct pedagogical practice, she does so to remind us that the settler mythology for which the missions serve as monuments continues to fulfill its objectives and remains an integral part of California settler identity. This “powerful and authoritative indoctrination in Mission mythology” is a manifestation of the state apparatuses that sustain and reproduce master narratives, in so doing reproducing a system in which the Indigenous people of California can be legible only as spectral because it requires their social if not actual absence.¹²⁵ Miranda’s marginalization facilitates the creation of a (white, occidental) Californian subjectivity, because having been constitutively abjected, her abjection is in turn constitutive of the domain that is the modern West. It gestures to a controlled, motivated nostalgia. While nostalgia implies loss, it also implies an attenuated and mediated relationship to that loss, which is here being policed by state apparatuses that enforce the romanticism of distance. What is revealed is Western ambivalence about those notions of contingency foundational to Euro-American narratives of settlement and origin. Subjects and spaces are created by violent histories, but that violence must be disguised even as it is invoked.

The Franciscan order established 21 missions in California between 1769 and 1833, and as a collective they were considered a greater success than their Texas counterparts. Together they transformed the political, geographic, and cultural landscape more comprehensively than the latter could. As I briefly discussed in the first chapter, the missions were spaces of production in a double sense, generating material for the construction of an empire as well as the social relations that facilitated the construction. With its various functions existing together in some tension, the mission became “a heterotopia of crisis and deviation,” according to Rosaura Sánchez: “In its mirror image it was the ‘sacred’ place where starving Indians found warm

¹²⁵ Miranda, *Bad Indians*, xviii.

clothing and food, but it was as well a penal colony, the dystopia from which it was practically impossible for the Indians to escape.”¹²⁶ As “instruments of coercion,” the mission formed a vital part of the Spanish Crown’s effort to subdue the Native populations in the far reaches of the empire and commandeer their labor.¹²⁷ The missions’ purported and commercial goals depended on their ability to control Indian bodies, and although they were not chattel in any legal sense, they were nevertheless bound legally and extra-legally to the missions for which they labored.

The missions established across the empire’s northern territories accomplished the subjection of local Indigenous populations, or endeavored to accomplish it, through discipline and coerced acculturation, twinned modes of captivity evidencing a shared ideological parentage. In California and elsewhere, reports of sexual assault, starvation, hard labor, and cruel punishment were not uncommon, though heeded only when deemed politically expedient.¹²⁸ Official documents filed by Governor Franquis of Texas detail complaints by mission Indians of hard labor, starvation rations that consisted of little more than minuscule amounts of corn gruel, violent recapture after attempted escapes, and subsequent punishments that resulted in death.¹²⁹ Lorenzo Asisara, a survivor of the Santa Clara Mission in California and one of Miranda’s references, reports in still more detail incidents to which he or his parents were witnesses, occasionally suggesting what he leaves unsaid. For instance, he nods to the prevalence of syphilis in the missions—a result of the sexual assault of Indian women by priests and soldiers—and the consequent decline in birth rates. He gestures also to the missionaries’ attempts to increase the number of births (and thus of laboring bodies) by policing their charges’ sexual lives

¹²⁶ Sánchez, *Telling Identities*, 50-51.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*

¹²⁸ Complaints were many times filtered through the motivations and politics of mediating officials. It is therefore likely that the full extent of atrocities committed within these spaces of confinement remain underreported.

¹²⁹ Archivo General de Mexico, 1538-1849, Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, The University of Texas at Austin.

and punishing women who failed to produce children.¹³⁰ Furthermore, as Sánchez notes, cultural displacement was brought about through the interruptions of Indigenous social life, and in particular through the isolation of children brought into the mission or produced (like material) within it. As a strategy for acculturation, isolation facilitated the social re-education of a people compelled to participate in their own subordination. Indeed, many Indians raised in the missions eventually became *alcaldes*, overseers and enforcers of the missionaries' discipline.¹³¹ In this way, indoctrination was joined to violence in the dis- and re-articulation of the Spanish and Mexican empires' marginal subjects.

Miranda dwells *in* that violence; her positioning within this history frames her reconstruction of what the text presents as a brutal making and unmaking in which she is at all times present. Her curation of the colonial narratives she references is part of the narrative she weaves, and she inhabits these narrations of racializing political violence by positioning herself as an active participant within them. By beginning with a reconstructed history of the missions, she identifies missionization and the violence that sustained it as inextricably tied to colonial pedagogy and the production of sociality in the present, and as such, an indelible part of her own lived experience as an Ohlone/Costanoan-Esselen woman. Structured like the appendix or glossary of a school project, this history is framed by a title page introducing the historian and including a school picture of a young Miranda; it is strictly ordered by subject headings and

¹³⁰ Asisara's testimony is treated as an anecdote within this testimonio, collected and transcribed by Thomas Savage. The greater part of the narrative is given over to José María Amador, a former presidio soldier whose recollections of the mission differ from Asisara's in bias if not in fact. When invited to speak, Asisara details the mistreatment he and others' faced at the hands of the missionaries and their subordinates, recounting different priests' preferred mode of punishment or else their horrifying strategies for ensuring the continued growth of the mission's labor force. He recalls, for instance, an incident in which a priest attempted to compel an infertile couple to have sexual relations in his presence. When they refused, he demanded to examine the woman's genitals. Refused again, he had both the man and woman severely punished: the man shackled, the woman flogged and forced to carry a wooden doll shaped like an infant. See Mora-Torres, *Californio Voices*.

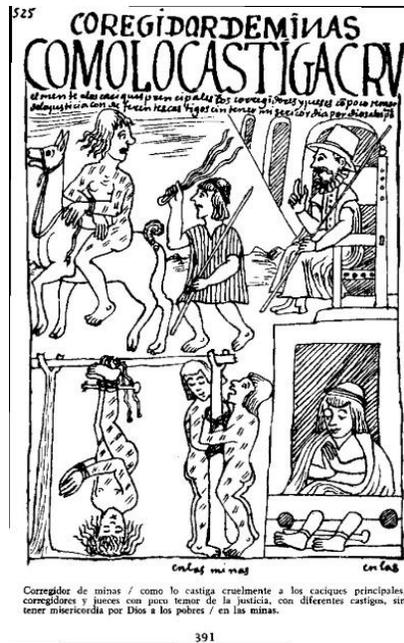
¹³¹ Sánchez, *Telling Identities*, 85.

numbered lists; and its proffered terminology effects the definition of people and places. Even the language adopted by Miranda speaks to the rote repetition of discursive violence. She narrates her “Mission Project” as a child or young student would, and rather than revise the paternalism that shapes settler histories, she instead intermittently imitates it as might a child instructed in that paternalism. For instance, she explains that “due to their animal-like natures, California Indians often made mistakes or misbehaved even when they had been told the rules,” subsequently including images and woodcuts of the devices used to discipline (and mark) the unruly flesh.¹³² She mirrors the paternalism that characterizes most accounts of the missions and amplifies it through satire, laying bare the racializing discourse that sustained the mission system by inhabiting the rhetoric as an Esselen woman. In other words, in returning in this capacity to the violent scenes of her putative abjection, she is able to produce a critique of the legacies of violence that survived the missions’ eventual closure while foregrounding her own survival.

Focusing on the materiality of mission life, Miranda emphasizes the materiality of slavery in order to make real the violence and compulsory labor made palatable through abstraction. The voice she assumes naturalizes the processes she records with a disconcerting innocence, but it is undercut by the scenes of violence she presents visually and textually. For example, one of the attached woodcuts, the work of sixteenth-century Quechuan artists and historian Felipe Guamán Poma de Ayala, depicts the punishment of five Indigenous men, their naked and fettered bodies exposing the wounds by which their flesh becomes racially marked.¹³³

¹³² Miranda, *Bad Indians*, 10. Guamán Poma was a Quechua writer and artist whose woodcuts and written work documented Spanish atrocities, Indigenous resistance, and Andean history. See Rolena Adorno, *Guaman Poma: Writing and Resistance in Colonial Peru*, 2Nd ed. (Austin: University of Texas Press, Austin/Institute of Latin American Studies, 2000).

¹³³ Miranda, *Ibid*, 11.



In “Adobe Bricks,” the first section of the project, this marked flesh is reimagined as the material for the construction of spaces of production: “All in all, adobe is cheap—the ingredients free for the taking—but you will certainly go through a lot of Indians.”¹³⁴ The text emphasizes the capitalist logic of colonialism and the violent transformation of bodies into expandable material for the construction of its institutions, ironically imploring colonial subjects-in-process to “always know the limitations imposed by fuel availability.”¹³⁵ While the text explicitly renders the rhetorical conversions of the homo sapiens body into fleshy material and its physical consequences for Mission Indians, this “fuel” also suggest the preconditions for the construction of Western humanity, an enterprise for which the sustained subjection of the non-human was necessary.

The strict ordering of the project fails to contain dissenting voices, however, and the tone and perspective used in the various subsections of the “project” shift sporadically. Miranda’s

¹³⁴ Miranda, *Bad Indians*, 8.

¹³⁵ *Ibid*, 17.

narrative voice loses its childish paternalism as she assumes the place of a Mission Indian experiencing the repetitive motions by which life is denied as monotony, as the mundane daily maintenance of the constraints placed on her existence. She focuses on the mission bells, representing them as symbols of the racializing assemblages that deny volition, thereby further identifying the mission's attempted monopoly on "voice" as the signaling of agentive humanity: "The voice of the bell is the voice of the padres. We try, but we cannot always obey. Bells at dawn, keening. Bells ordering us to prayer; the alcaldes stand over us with cudgels and long canes, invoke silence. Bells direct us to breakfast, gruel of atole quickly swallowed."¹³⁶ The invocation of silence at prayer suggests speech as the purview of the human, while the inhuman shuffle wordlessly from task to task, but Miranda signals to us from the chapel pews. And while the robotic movements, controlled remotely, may suggest the inertia attributed to social death, her revisiting of these scenes does not imply the anterior states of a present conscious subjectivity realized through the crucible of an anterior inhumanity. But by locating herself in this violence, figuring herself as present in the processes of her enfleshment, she reflects on the inherited hieroglyphics of the flesh in which she is present—that is, the inscription of history on her body and the positioning those marks reveal.

Miranda pays especial attention to this inscription or marking as it was experienced by women, emphasizing how her inscription is an inheritance accompanied by the inheritance of a story that she helps to build. Among the sources she speaks of, to, and within are the letters and as-told-to stories of Isabel Meadows, a California Indian and survivor of the missions who became a field subject and informant for J.P. Harrington, an ethnologist working with the Smithsonian. Miranda incorporates a field note in which Isabel recounts the rape of Vicenta

¹³⁶ Miranda, *Bad Indians*, 9.

Gutierrez, a Mission Indian and contemporary of Isabel's ancestors, by a priest. Through the Harrington's field note, transcribed in English and Spanish, Miranda responds to Vicenta directly, across the distance imposed by Western science and language, by addressing her in a letter. As a survivor of rape, Miranda establishes solidarity by describing a legacy of sexual assault and a community of Native women connected by that racializing violence, meanwhile reflecting on discursive framing of the mediated accounts of that violence: "I've read the testimonies, the as-told-to stories. Funny thing, that. No one believes what you say. [...] Isabel didn't forget you, though. One hundred years after the padre raped you in the church, Isabel told your story to Harrington. She told it like it happened yesterday. And she was mad."¹³⁷ She figures both the act of recalling and the being-recalled as mutually affirming for herself, for Isabel, and for Vicenta. The flesh marked by violence is not written out of existence because the historically marked flesh has a name that is remembered, gesturing to relationships that survive the racializing political violence designed to render its objects unintelligible and thus ghostly.

Shari Huhndorf argues that sexual violence in a colonial context is best understood as one of the material processes of conquest, stating that colonization involved the "[exertion of] social control through the management of women's bodies."¹³⁸ This social control was at once discursive and literal, involving rape, the invalidation of pre-colonial gender roles, and the removal of Native women from power. Miranda's scholarly and literary writing likewise presents rape as a tool of colonialism and a constitutive element of racialization, further demonstrating technologies of enfleshment as intimately tied to colonial pedagogy. For Miranda, sexual violence as colonial violence teaches Native women to know themselves differently, as

¹³⁷ Miranda, *Bad Indians*, 23-24.

¹³⁸ Shari Huhndorf, "Indigenous Feminism, Performance, and the Politics of Memory in the Plays of Monique Mojica," in *Indigenous Women and Feminism: Politics, Activism, Culture*, ed. Cheryl Suzack (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2010), 182.

marked by violence and always the recipient of violence within European structures of power. Within this sphere, they come to be identified by the marks of violence inscribed on their bodies: “We learned these lessons. [...] Indian bodies are inferior bodies. Indian women’s bodies are rape-able bodies. Indian bodies do not belong to Indians, but to those who can lay claim to them by violence.”¹³⁹ In this critical approach to the function of race and gender under colonial patriarchy, racialization works through sexual reeducation because it endeavors to overwrite what racialized women and others know about their own humanity. They are created as Indian by being created as always possessed, never as possessing, and as falling away from what José Muñoz terms “the culture of consent” and what I understand as the sphere in which social agency is tied to ownership of the self.¹⁴⁰

Miranda wants us to grasp the ways in which this brutal education alters Native identity and sociality. Indeed, as Huhndorf notes, Western patriarchy and the technologies of indoctrination that attend it have had lasting consequences for Native communities, affecting internal dynamics in ways that leave Native women especially vulnerable.¹⁴¹ The discourse surrounding the sexual violence experienced by Native women has not always been unproblematic, however, in particular when Native women’s bodies are treated as discursive battlegrounds and sites of colonial encounters. In this way, Native women are figuratively and materially absented, made tragic and abject and ghostly. Though she is conscious of this, and consequently wary of suggesting a melancholic Indian subjectivity, Miranda stresses the importance of discussing sexual violence to the “reinvention” of a California Indian identity. She suggests the place of that violence in the articulation of an Indigenous feminist subjectivity that

¹³⁹ Deborah A. Miranda, “Saying the Padre Grabbed Her: Rape is the Weapon, Story is the Cure,” in *Intertexts* 14, no.2 (Fall 2010), 96.

¹⁴⁰ Muñoz, “Feeling Brown,” 68.

¹⁴¹ Huhndorf, “Indigenous Feminism,” 187.

exceeds the violence that constitutes it, proposing a subjectivity predicated on survival. When survival is itself integral to subjectivity, the conditions of that survival are not immaterial, and the healing made possible through the embodiment of that subjectivity requires an acknowledgment of loss and its power to transform. The marginalized survive together because the violent processes of abjection themselves inadvertently make possible a different kind of bond, and this bond functions as a strategy of survival.

In her work with Native women playwrights, Huhndorf observes how their work challenges patriarchal colonialism by exploring Native women's shared experience of sexual violence across boundaries of nation, language, and culture.¹⁴² Miranda engages in a similar practice, locating the construction of a people, a group of women separated by space and time, in the very act of sharing stories and speaking to each other's common experiences. The medium is a vital part of these processes, however, and Harrington's self-positioning as mediator and curator prompts creative approaches to the expression of shared life that he only imperfectly polices. Miranda's critical approach foregrounds those issues inherent to signaling not simply from but within the margins precisely because the language is incomprehensible, is mere noise, to those insensible to the practices of the marginalized: "But the scribblings of an obsessed white man trying to record the memories of an aging Indian woman attempting to tell the story of an Indian girl's rape one hundred years before—can *this* change the world?"¹⁴³ Miranda at once underscores the problems with nominal inclusion as mediated by those who control the processes by which people assume legible subjecthood or are "heard," as well as the already-there presence of a living people that Harrington channels in ways incomprehensible to him. She argues that

¹⁴² Huhndorf, "Indigenous Feminism," 183-184.

¹⁴³ Miranda, *Bad Indians*, 25.

“through the vehicle of this field note we are engaged in a very indigenous practice: that of storytelling as education, as thought-experiment, as community action to right a wrong, as resistance to representation as victim.”¹⁴⁴ She represents herself as a participant in an alternative discursive set of narrative processes through which communities of the oppressed are created, practices embedded in a tradition existing beyond the margins of the page. The Native participants engage not with the mediator, but directly with the violent histories Harrington expropriates and the narratives by which they are made flesh. The margins thus become a space of constitutive possibility, and in the text they become the site of Miranda’s Esselen being and becoming.

Miranda in this way describes networks of kinship and solidarity, of mutual responsibility and understanding, imagining themselves into being and surviving through the traditions that emerge from the shared knowledge and references transferred through shared codes. And though these particular strategies are specific to her own positioning as the mixed-race descendent of missionized Ohlone/Costanoan peoples, they illustrate trans-Indigenous practices.¹⁴⁵ In his work with Pomo storyteller and healer Mabel McKay, Greg Sarris observes that McKay’s stories often implicate him as a listener. When McKay tells Sarris, “Life will teach you,” Sarris takes this to mean that her stories will make more or less sense to him depending on the experiences shaping

¹⁴⁴ Miranda, *Bad Indians*, 29.

¹⁴⁵ As explained by Chadwick Allen and Shari M. Huhndorf, Indigenous transnationalism is a critical and political framework that looks beyond the local and beyond the tribally specific to inter-tribal and inter-national relationships, and to whatever possibilities for solidarity and understanding those relationships might reveal. As Huhndorf uses the term, transnationalism “refers to alliances among tribes and social structures and practices that transcend their boundaries, as well as processes on a global scale such as colonialism and capitalism” (Huhndorf 3). A transnational critical framework permits indigenous peoples to see themselves in a global context, and by reading Miranda alongside Sarris, we can observe narrative practices that appear to bridge tribal distinctions. Huhndorf, *Mapping the Americas: The Transnational Politics of Contemporary Native Culture* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2009); Allen, *Trans-indigenous: Methodologies for Global Native Literary Studies* (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 2012).

his relationship to the story.¹⁴⁶ Put differently, stories will come to make sense as he becomes better able, because of experience, to listen properly. Sarris' positioning in the history that contextualizes McKay's story conditions his relationship to the story and thus his ability to make sense of it and participate in the telling, and the stories themselves compel him to consider the relationship. For example, in one instance, she remarks in an oblique way to the history of sexual assault and displacement that comes to bear on the circumstances of the people she discusses; this in turn causes Sarris to reflect on his own experiences and mixed heritage.¹⁴⁷ It is gossip, and as always with gossip, meaning requires context, which in turn requires immersion in shared experience and thus a shared language, or code. Knowledge is made and communicated through this gossip, and this shared knowledge becomes the foundation of communities that construct themselves together in the margins, outside the legitimizing apparatus of citizenship, nevertheless affirming life through collective affective expression.

It is perhaps in her approach to her intermediary and interlocutor that McKay differs most detectably from Miranda. Sarris notes that McKay's lectures to mixed Native and non-Native audiences tended to prompt uncomfortable reflection in the non-Native listener because Mabel's responses to questions posed by listeners pointed to the framework by which the response was understood (or not). But by prompting that self-awareness and inviting them to participate in a story that is also an event that facilitates communication, McKay attempted to reach an audience not immersed in a shared experience or knowledge.¹⁴⁸ For Sarris, what Mabel is doing with the questioner is important—they are her audience, in fact, and not simply her intermediary, however incapable they may be of finding meaning in the knowledge being offered. In

¹⁴⁶ Greg Sarris, *Keeping Slug Woman Alive: A Holistic Approach to American Indian Texts* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 5.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 29-30.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 19.

Miranda's framing, the salvage ethnologist who assumes himself the embodiment of Western academia is in fact only the intermediary, and can only be an intermediary because of his inability to detect those codes that fall away from what he recognizes as meaning. Isabel Meadows signals through and past him, and whether or not he comprehends is in some measure unimportant (though not immaterial to the strategies she takes up). In this framing, the event-story is meant for Miranda, inviting her to partake in the transmission of knowledge reinforced by shared experiences, shared dreams, and shared desires.

Even so, McKay and Sarris may provide us some insight into the project Miranda undertakes and her use of affect in identifying a community of survivors that feels together. Like McKay, Miranda sees both herself and Isabel as fully conscious of their various interlocutors and intermediaries, and both she and Isabel take this into consideration in their delivery. And like Sarris and McKay, Miranda sees the story as an *opportunity* for voice, not simply the representation of a voice recorded at an ethnographic distance. Miranda centers her relationship to Isabel's thrice mediated story as fundamental to how she reads it, detailing the circumstances of her approach and addressing her own response-story to the subject of the story with which she is engaging (through a lens conditioned by those circumstances).

Miranda observes that the stories Isabel tells Harrington often appear "irrelevant," not the linguistic data or folklore that Harrington might have required of her.¹⁴⁹ Instead she gives him gossip, anecdotes that reveal a social existence not confined to an abstracted and therefore untainted past. As a gendered discursive formation, gossip is rendered incoherent, even animal; it is mindless babble effectively placed outside of language because it cannot carry meaning. It

¹⁴⁹ Deborah A. Miranda, "'They were tough, those old women before us': The Power of Gossip in Isabel Meadows's Narratives," in *Biography* 39, no.3 (Summer 2016), 375.

becomes a code undetectable to self-assigned purveyors of meaning, and as such it is evidence of sociality that continues even in the extreme circumstances contextualizing the gossip. Indeed, Miranda observes that Isabel's gossip consists of stories of loss, "narratives of a traumatized community."¹⁵⁰ However, it bears repeating that for Miranda, neither she nor Isabel imagine the affective networks of kinship and solidarity as a community of diminished, melancholic specters. Their gossip instead registers their continued presence through feeling, their expressed grief and rage affirming the possibility of life even in the wake of the transformative, disarticulating losses intended to hold them captive beyond the realm of reason and thus political viability. As gossip, the violent stories shared by Vicenta, Isabel, and Miranda across the centuries that separate them constitute an exchange, one through which they participate in a discursive tradition which for Miranda functions as a practice of freedom shared by those barred from participating in other formations and thereby consigned to unintelligibility.

Webs of Scar Tissue

Miranda does not approach Isabel, and Vicenta, and the thousands of voices calling out from the missions without making an offering of her own, a record of hurt and survival marked on flesh and psyche alike. In dwelling on the webs of scar tissue that narrate her life, she considers the ways in which her body sustained and continues to bear the visible and invisible marks of her differentiation. From her investigation of the cultural and political genealogies she helps to assemble, Miranda transitions to a consideration of the disruption of Native kinship structures and its present consequences as they are embodied by her father. Al Miranda is a central presence in the text, a figure around which many of its constituent narratives pivot, and

¹⁵⁰ Miranda, "They were tough," 375.

he is also implicated in the violent legacies with which the text contends. Nevertheless, Miranda's relationship with this complicated, angry, and physically and emotionally abusive man conditions her understanding of her positioning within the colonial histories in which she and her father both are embedded. Through this frequently violent and always fraught relationship with Al, Sr., Miranda thinks through and reframes cycles of abuse and violence by placing that violence within her offered genealogy, and she further asks what it means to be produced by colonial violence.

In "Genealogy of Violence, Part II," she recalls her father playing forcefully with his four-year-old son while a younger Deborah does homework in the next room. This lesson in masculine intimacy results in Al Jr. losing a tooth and breaking into tears. Unable to console his son, Al Sr. becomes angry and proceeds to beat the child with his belt. The author frames the beating as a sacrament that neither her father or brother entirely understand but in which they participate because these are familiar patterns, the social and familial choreography they know. The choreography comes out of history, and the text intersperses excerpts from mission letters documenting the evolution of parent-child relationships among California Indians, presented as narrative interruptions that contextualize Al Jr.'s abuse at the hands of his father. These ethnological accounts trace shifting kinship structures and practices that begin by describing the "excessive" love of Indian parents for children, culminating with a report that "some parents who are a little better instructed punish their children as they deserve."¹⁵¹ Thus redirected, "the arc of my father's arm is following a trajectory I know too well, the arc of leather, sharp edges of cured hide, instrument of punishment coming from two hundred years out of the past in a movement so ancient, so much a part of our family history that it has touched very single one of us in an

¹⁵¹ Miranda, *Bad Indians*, 34-35.

unbroken chain from the first padre or the first soldado to the bared back of the first Indian neophyte.”¹⁵²

The colonial pedagogy I reference earlier comes to bear on this scene from Miranda’s home life, in which it invades the intimate relationships that sustain and mirror larger kinship structures. Rebecca Tsosie, in her work on Native leadership and cultural resurgence, argues that the residential school system as it manifested in both the U.S. and Canada functioned as a form of captivity purposely intended to interrupt the transmission of knowledge.¹⁵³ This physical and pedagogical captivity interrupted the transmission (and the articulations of identity that accompanied it) by invading those relationships on which the transmission depended. Through the captivity and discipline by which the invasion was effected, through the schools’ intake rituals and literal and figurative renaming, the invasion was intended to be racializing and disarticulating. Its function as a crucible of citizenship first required that disarticulation. According to Tsosie, the cultural suppression required for acculturation facilitated Native adoption of the norms of colonial society within which they would remain marginal, including systems of oppression. This adoption, she argues, further altered relationships and the values by which they were guided.¹⁵⁴

Miranda identifies the mission as an analogous mechanism of control with similar lasting consequences for the peoples subjected to that control, showing us the process Tsosie outlines in a distinct but markedly similar context. She shows us the reproduction of captivity in the disciplining of Native bodies as indicative of ongoing captivity, depicting it as legacy inherited at

¹⁵² Miranda, *Bad Indians*, 34.

¹⁵³ Rebecca Tsosie, “Native Women and Leadership: An Ethics of Culture and Relationship,” in *Indigenous Women and Feminism: Politics, Activism, Culture*, ed. Cheryl Suzack (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2010), 33.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid*, 33.

the end of a belt. The text limns the vocalizing of pain and betrayal as a recording, the lashes on the body as documentation, even birthmarks, establishing the embodiment of that inheritance. It is an initiation into a history made present on her brother's abused back. Racializing political violence becomes a sacrament of initiation and departure, given to the Mission Indians "along with the baptism, confession and last rites," comprising learned processes of subject making through violence.¹⁵⁵ While Miranda is able to tap alternative assemblages of subjectivity, rediscovering the practices of freedom by which a people survive, she encounters that constant reminder of the political violence that conditioned their development.

At an Esselen tribal gathering, another tribal member greets Miranda and her half-sister by commenting that "it is too bad that our father wasn't there with us."¹⁵⁶ There is nothing necessarily peculiar in this, except that it references patterns of inclusion within particular kinship structures. Al Miranda is an elder member through which other people, namely his children, can claim a connection to a group, and thus claim a contingent identity. The sisters are reminded at this Esselen reunion of their connection to it, and are in fact gathered to be reminded, but the reminder is a bittersweet one given the nature of a connection only ever as affirming as it is traumatic. Even in his absence, their father is the specter that haunts but also permits their inclusion: "We were all having flashes of recognition that weekend, bittersweet DNA circulating through the gathering like gossip."¹⁵⁷ Miranda's sister Louise cannot listen to the recordings of her ancestors' voices without remembering that her father is the trunk connecting branch to root, the medium by which relations are preserved in the absence of legally viable and defensible ties: "It is his blood that gives our bid for federal recognition real teeth,

¹⁵⁵ Miranda, *Bad Indians*, 34.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 170.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

authority that the government can't deny. It is our father who remembers family names, stories, clues we are desperate to record. It is our father whose body is the source of the most precious part of our identity, and the most damning legacies of our history."¹⁵⁸ It is significant that Miranda should here reference the Esselen tribe's ongoing battles for federal recognitions, as it suggests that it is only through her father's visible, audible suffering, and the visible and audible suffering that he inflicted on his children that they are intelligible to U.S. juridical matrices. It is also through her father that she identifies that modalities of humanity that exist independently of the sovereign state to which they remain imperceptible, unviable. Nevertheless, though existing in excess of suffering, they are not disconnected from it. The violence inscribed in sisters' shared archive of knowledge remains fundamental to the process of their becoming.

In her quest to comprehend the trauma of survival and how it informs the subjectivity of the survivor, Miranda identifies an irreparable fracture at the core of her Esselen identity, explaining how the disorienting encounter at the gathering "was the first time I really understood, *in my bones*, the unimaginable, savage splintering that my ancestors—and my father, my sisters, my brother, myself, had endured."¹⁵⁹ Miranda describes a compromised identity not dissimilar to Pérez-Torres's projection of a critical mestizo subjectivity, an identity destabilized by the conditions that made its existence possible and predicated on a fundamental loss. She can only be Esselen through the violence that created her father and created her as already dispossessed through continual alienation. In asking who she is now that she has survived, she appears to outline a melancholic subjectivity in many ways at odds with a great deal of present scholarly thinking on Native identity. But she in fact suggests something richer and more

¹⁵⁸ Miranda, *Bad Indians*, 172.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

dynamic than a subjectivity hemmed in by melancholy and therefore risking reinforcing narratives of diminishment. As a member of a tribe denied federal recognition because of a clerical error that wiped the Esselen out of legal existence, foregrounding a tribal identity built in exile from several national spheres entails identifying the circumstances of that banishment as the precondition of an existence that is *necessarily* beyond political recognition.

Falling Away

The loss sustained during and in the centuries following Spanish and Mexican colonization undergird the excessive life Miranda delineates, even though that excessive life is not reducible to loss. For Miranda, narratives of reclamation can offer very little to the Esselen, because, she explains, “sometimes something is so badly broken you cannot recreate its original shape at all. If you try, you create a deformed imperfect image of what you’ve lost; you will always compare what your creation looks like to what it used to look like.”¹⁶⁰ Instead she frames acts of continuous rebuilding as Indigenous practices of freedom, stressing how “more useful and beautiful results can come from using the pieces to reconstruct a mosaic.”¹⁶¹ She describes the disarticulation and re-articulation of bodies as the material grounding for the articulation of continuously assembled subjectivities. Accordingly, in her framing of this “imagining of our future” and “the long, long task of reinventing an identity every second of our lives,” Miranda gestures to the assemblages of humanity made possible in the vestibule of Western subjectivity, identifying those vestibular spaces as spaces of constitutive potentiality.¹⁶² Excluded from federal recognition, she can imagine alternative assemblages of indigeneity outside the policed boundaries of modernity’s liberal state. This is not to understate the violent technologies by

¹⁶⁰ Miranda, *Bad Indians*, 135.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁶² *Ibid.*, xiv.

which she was constructed as always already stripped of political personhood but to understand her as more than simply stripped. Miranda perceives and thus realizes herself as more than a gaping wound, a bleeding zero.

In “Mestiza Nation,” Miranda imagines a nation that cannot be comprehended by the modalities of sovereignty that undergird many manifestations of nationalism in the margins; it is more interested in fugitivity than in forging a place within political recognition. It is an instance of what Weheliye terms “the transformative assemblages of the flesh that acknowledge social life found in those bottomless circles and circles of sorrow around political violence.”¹⁶³ It projects a vision of Native futurity that imagines the “mestiza nation” as a dynamic web of kinship.

The original acts of colonization broke the world, broke our hearts, broke the connection between soul and flesh. For many of us, this trauma happens again in each generation, to children too young and too untrained to try to cope with dysfunction that ravages even adults. Gloria Anzaldúa knew this. Paula Gunn Allen knew this. Chicana, Indian, these women knew that the formation of Mestiza Nation was as much about healing from our childhoods as healing from larger histories. [...] I imagine this is the kind of story my descendants will tell, seven generation from now, in the future mythology of the Mestiza Nation.¹⁶⁴

On the surface, the narrative has very little to do with mestizaje as encompassed by Chicana/o scholarship, but in the context of the narrative, mestizaje becomes a “structure of feeling,” to borrow a phrase from Raymond Williams. For Williams, the social is fixed by being defined and institutionalized, always formed in theory as nation, education, or ideology. But the present, which is physical and moving, escapes, and Williams argues that “there are experiences to which the fixed forms do not speak at all, which indeed they do not recognize.”¹⁶⁵ These “structures of

¹⁶³ Weheliye, *Habeas Viscus*, 113.

¹⁶⁴ Miranda, *Bad Indians*, 123.

¹⁶⁵ Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 130.

feeling” are distinct from ideology, and are instead “meaning and values as they are actually lived and felt...affective elements of consciousness and relationships.”¹⁶⁶ Also, importantly, they are “always in process,” always unfixed. His assertion that “practical consciousness” is what is actually being lived, that structures of feeling reveal tension between the form and the experience, may allow us to imagine mestizaje and the Mestiza Nation as Miranda does. Indeed, for Muñoz, this turn to affect suggests a better framework for understanding and discussing identity and affiliation between differently and unevenly racialized groups than what is available in other articulations of identity politics, in which we might include various manifestations of Chicana nationalism.¹⁶⁷ As a structure of feeling, sustained by affective bonds, the Mestiza Nation of the narrative provides sanctuary to the orphaned inheritors of colonial violence who fall away from fixed forms.

The embedded semi-autobiographical narrative Miranda includes in the section spatializes the structures of feeling in which the fallen-away feel (and express collective humanity in the feeling) together. As a fictive, fabulous retelling of Miranda’s own felt experiences as a child in the care of her grandparents, estranged from Esselen kinship networks and the world of her white grandparents (the prospect of belonging dangled before her but never realized), the narrative emplots the process of the estrangement and the survival it makes possible. The orphan of the narrative is a child taken in by her white maternal grandparents after having been abandoned by her mother. Unable or unwilling to care for her, her grandparents likewise make plans to send her away, but before they can do so, the child is drawn away into the forest surrounding her grandparents’ home by “scraps of song” audible only to her.¹⁶⁸ In the

¹⁶⁶ Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, 132.

¹⁶⁷ Muñoz, “Feeling Brown,” 68.

¹⁶⁸ Miranda, *Bad Indians*, 125.

woods, the child meets a woman who draws her away to a world existing in modernity's shadow, a Neverland that is sunny and vibrant and inhabited by other orphans. She learns that in their forgotten state, the orphans have constructed their own relational networks: "Not many children here have mothers. But you'll be cared for. This is getting to be a big family."¹⁶⁹ Their forgotten state, here manifested in this vision of a maroon community, becomes a realm of possibility. Family structures are invaded and interrupted, but the orphans approach affinity differently; denied legal rights to land, they nevertheless dwell with it and in it, inhabiting the sunny vale that is and is not the no-place of statelessness because it exists beyond the state. But it is felt by its subjects, who, feeling together, imagine structures of community and belonging unimaginable within the spheres from which they are estranged. These are orphans produced by Euro-western humanism as such, lost in perpetuity but living in ways invisible to the eyes of the grandparents, who one day will cease searching and will forget.

That Miranda writes herself into these affective networks through a fanciful retelling of her own experiences suggests her understanding of storytelling as communal endeavor, as well as her understanding of the sociality such an endeavor makes possible. It also further demonstrates some significant patterns in Native storytelling; according to Annette Portillo, Native American women's autobiography "rarely conforms to those sorts of conventions suggestive of individualism and Western ideas of self."¹⁷⁰ She likens Native women's autobiography to the testimonios form, arguing that in both forms, the "I" is representative of the larger community within which that "I" is embedded.¹⁷¹ The "I" represents a given positioning within certain political and social relationships, and, for Portillo, it also suggests an event-based

¹⁶⁹ Miranda, *Bad Indians*, 126.

¹⁷⁰ Annette Angela Portillo, *Sovereign Stories and Blood Memories: Native American Women's Autobiography* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2017), 4.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 7.

approach to the retelling. According to Portillo, Native women's autobiography positions the "I" as a witness to events that inform shared knowledges, identities, and processes of identifications.¹⁷²

When we read Miranda within this tradition, the text's juggling of pronouns suggests another falling-away from a fixed form, and the embedded story comes to read as a further demonstration of Miranda's (mis)use of genre. In her earlier exercises in communal storytelling, she locates herself in the as-told-to stories mediated through constitutively estranging technologies like Harrington's anthropological lens, engaging directly with the object the lens creates as abject. She sees how they signal and she signals back; when she does this, she uses the personal "I," thus making both a personal and communal claim on the story being told. But here she uses "she," "her," and "they" in place of the "I," thus dilating and contracting in a series of semaphores that signal Esselen knowledge. She makes a myth of her own story, and the myth communicates truth independent of accuracy. Paula Gunn Allen notes that "myth is a kind of story that allows a holistic image to pervade and shape consciousness, thus providing a coherent and empowering matrix for action and relationship."¹⁷³ And importantly, "American Indian myths depend for their magic on relationship and participation."¹⁷⁴ As myth, Miranda's story can be claimed by her interlocutors, here imagined as living subjects of the Mestiza Nation and thus as kin. The combination of the mythic and the personal suggests the ways in which storytelling is communal in every sense; her story becomes another's story, a myth and therefore a peoples'

¹⁷² Portillo, *Sovereign States*, 7.

¹⁷³ Paula Gunn Allen, *The Sacred Hoop: Recovering the Feminine in American Indian Traditions* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1992), 104-105.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid*, 105.

story. Miranda's mythology permits them to articulate a collective identity, a sense of being and belonging in this formation, through the story.

Miranda replaces the nation with alternative and anterior structures of belonging and being still existing beyond the realm of the citizen. To follow Weheliye's logic, Miranda's Mestiza Nation represents an anterior future, anterior in the same way that the flesh is anterior to Man's body. Rather than suggesting a move to Western subjectivity, it is an enactment of long existing practices, an "already there" conceptually distanced from but existing side by side with the grandfather's house. To the grandfather, freedom of the flesh can only be no-place, but it is legible to those who can tune in to the traditions of the oppressed and imagine the future "as it is seen, felt, and heard from the enfleshed parenthetical present of the oppressed."¹⁷⁵ By constructing a future mythology that she locates in this parenthetical present, Miranda emphasizes the now-ness of future histories, rethinking Indigenous futurity by rethinking Indigenous time as well as Indigenous space. Her generations reach forward and back and exist here in the now. Even though the political violence that attends political invisibility remains, it is denaturalized by projections of already extant alternatives to those ideological formations—Western time, Western space, Western Man—that not only reinforce but require political violence.

As she thinks through what Native flesh means and can mean, Miranda troubles conceptual monopolies and their discursive apparatuses. By allowing the abject vehicles of Western humanity to signal, she reframes dominant narratives, revealing their purpose and also the logics by which they function. Her Mestiza Nation offers a framework for extending these

¹⁷⁵ Weheliye, *Habeas Viscus*, 138.

efforts to present Chicana nationalist formations rethought and retooled in Miranda's invocation. Aztecism, with its myriad problems, does not figure here; this Mestiza not-Nation is not the Aztlán of Chicana nationalism, though it does not foreclose more dynamic manifestations and enactments of Aztlán. Her Native reclamation and restructuring of the Mestiza Nation reveals structures of feeling made possible because they are realized extra-nationally, disrupting the monopoly of nationalism on present conversations about organization, belonging, and affinity, while pointing to what nationalism (within colonial paradigms) leaves out of those conversations. What Miranda's mythology does, finally, is provide a sort of methodology for mutual healing that comprehends, and in fact requires, accountability for the archives of knowledge on which that healing depends.

Upon encountering the residents of the sunny vale, the child of the narrative "notices right away that some of the people were darker than her, and some were lighter."¹⁷⁶ While it is not unreasonable to assume that this description implies either a community of mixed-race people or a community in which kinship comprehends uneven racialization, it necessary to consider that this is not a universalizing gesture. It does not elide the differentiation by which the body is marked, though Miranda does place the differentiated in communication with each other. It is no accident that she includes this narrative only after narrating the process of differentiation at the hands of Mexican padres and soldiers complicit in that differentiation, though they were themselves, by and large, of mixed ancestry. This mythology avoids the trap of the multiculturalism within which *mestizaje* is frequently articulated, particularly in Latin America. It steps away from the obfuscating function that multiculturalism serves for nationalist projects, projects which resort to a universality by nature obliterating in order to erase Indigenous and

¹⁷⁶ Miranda, *Bad Indians*, 126.

Afro-descendent peoples and obscure the projects' dependence on genocide and bondage as modes of differentiation.

For Indigenous scholars like Emil Keme, the language of *mestizaje* and *latinidad*, at least in its assimilative Latin American manifestation, necessarily undermines any attempt at epistemic disobedience and decolonization because it subordinates Indigenous forms to European language and definitions. It undermines the reclamation through language of the spaces and peoples erased, renamed, and reshaped by Eurocentric definitions as tools of colonial annihilation (via erasure), as such a reclamation requires the rejection of the conceptual modalities that enabled epistemic and territorial colonization. What's more, *latinidad* is sustained by the indigeneity it obliterates. Keme further argues that Indigenous peoples have a duty to “affirm our own points of millenarian reference in order to recognize ourselves in our own hemisphere,” and that Indigenous peoples must do this by renaming the hemisphere they wish to reclaim.¹⁷⁷ Renaming for Keme is an act of reclamation because it entails a refusal of imposed names (Latino/Latinx, *mestizo*, American, America) and thus geopolitical and cultural constraints. For Keme, the rejection of compromised languages that privilege Western forms is a necessary part of the legal and epistemic renaming of the Americas and of the spaces and communities it encompasses—and thus of the affirmation of indigeneity. He insists on an alternative “locus of enunciation” based in Indigenous languages and knowledges that can function as a structure of feeling and political formation, one that can accommodate *all* Indigenous nations and their specific, diverse struggles and archives of knowledge.¹⁷⁸

¹⁷⁷ Emil Keme, “For Abiyala to Live, the Americas Must Die,” in *Native American and Indigenous Studies* 5, no.1 (Spring 2018), 53.

¹⁷⁸ The locus of enunciation that Keme proposes is Abiyala, the name by which the Guna people of Panama refer to both South and North America. He imagines it as a transhemispheric political formation within which Indigenous peoples can unite in an effort to effect an epistemic and territorial reclamation of the hemisphere and the

As a descendant of mission survivors robbed of their various languages and specific archives of knowledge on which contingent identities rely, Miranda searches for just such a locus of enunciation in a language that is, as Keme argues, fundamentally compromised. She searches for a language with which to undertake her own renaming, and she chooses the “Mestiza Nation” as just a locus of enunciation perhaps because of the circumstances that condition the search. Philip Laverty points out that the forced consolidation of various tribes in the missions had “amalgamative effects” on the different groups, and this was by design.¹⁷⁹ As Keme observes, the theft of specificity realized through colonial definition and pedagogy facilitated the acquisition of land vacated of the knowledge that made it important to a given people. And indeed, these various tribes’ struggle for federal recognition may be explained in part because, within the assimilationist logics adopted by the United States, their indigeneity had already been abrogated through the process of missionization.¹⁸⁰

And so Miranda must adopt a language with which to affirm an Indigenous subjectivity already understood as compromised by the apparatus of federal recognition, and through which she can imagine a community of diverse peoples similarly forced into an assumed indistinction by the settler politics of recognition. Miranda’s choice to use *mestizaje* as a language by which she can advance her own renaming and speculative reimagining of the signs of an Indigenous subjectivity—the spaces and communities with which she intimate—suggests the slipperiness

geographically emplaced knowledges of its original peoples. According to Keme, Abiyala differs in its articulation of space from other comparable formation like Turtle Island or Anahuac, which have more specific and local applications to specific struggles, precisely because of its transnational claims. The object of the “civilizational project” of Abiyala is the development of a “historical bloc” that can accommodate diverse peoples without obliterating their specificity. See Keme, “For Abiyala to Live,” 58.

¹⁷⁹ Philip Laverty, “The Ohlone/Costanoan-Esselen Nation of Monterey: Dispossession, Federal Neglect, and the Bitter Irony of the Federal Acknowledgment Process,” in *Wicazo Sa Review* 18, no. 2 (Fall 2003), 44.

¹⁸⁰ Laverty writes that Costanoan peoples, as well as many other formerly missionized California Indians, were overlooked in treaty negotiations and, later, in federal recognition processes because they were perceived to be already Christianized and thus presumably fully assimilated into Mexican social and political life. As such, they were no longer a “problem” that the United States need resolve. See Laverty, *Ibid.*, 53.

and infidelity of language. Moreover, it suggests the important of contextualizing language-based identities in their own territory and history. Mestizaje as a system of signification proves useful to Miranda precisely because, in the specific geographic context in which it is invoked, it suggests compromise and ambiguity but not necessarily an enforced disappearance. Miranda may be invoking a critical mestizaje, which, as theorized by Pérez-Torres, figures the mestizo body as tied to and constrained by colonial hierarchies while simultaneously suggesting the possibility of new relational identities.¹⁸¹ As a new historical subjectivity, it poses a challenge to racial hierarchies but cannot escape the histories of violence from which it emerges. In the Chicana U.S. it is less categorically tethered to assimilative national projects than it is to claiming an understanding of difference and the shifting terrains of racial signification on which that difference is contingent. Within Chicana discourse, the trope of mestizaje can and often does acknowledge a compromised mixed-race and historically embedded subjectivity that is always in process, never “finished” and institutionalized, and that endures as such. These articulations of *critical* mestizaje more closely resemble the mestizaje-as-structure-of-feeling that Miranda outlines, as they are both reflexive and strategic, and depend upon an embodied archive of knowledge. They offer a framework for probing diverging but nonetheless common experiences of multiplicity as well as difference. Critical mestizaje furthermore comprehends contingent social and historical relationships because it must be reflexive if it is to remain dynamic and productive. It can and in many ways already does exist beyond the ossifying and categorical proscriptions of colonial definition, and as an experiential modality it is only imperfectly policed by settler formations. Because it falls away from settler definition, Miranda can imagine mestizaje as an affective state in order to rename a diverse community’s collective and still

¹⁸¹ Pérez-Torres, *Mestizaje*, 12.

specific relationship to land and history. She uses this language to opt out of the settler formations that police relational and emplaced identities through the politics of recognition, partaking in a form of epistemic disobedience by which she affirms an extant relationship to the signs of her subjectivity.

Her disobedience makes possible a subjectivity that comes into being in the act of refusal, and Miranda articulates that identity-in-process as emplaced through her refusal of the settler space-making that aims to subordinate her own. Her stories about land establish connections elsewhere negated by a state-sanctioned pedagogy that, as she observes, perpetuates as story of dispossession that at the same obscures the violence of that dispossession, rendering it unspeakable. But she explains that California Indians “have many other stories”: “They aren’t easy; they are fractured. To make them whole, what is needed is a multilayered web of community reaching backward in time and forward in dream, questing deeply into the country of unknown memory.”¹⁸² As Mark Rifkin suggests, Miranda’s speculative language registers a futurity continuous with an ongoing story, told communally, that is impossible to consolidate into discrete moments in time, and as such does not abide by settler temporality and the legitimizing structures by which it determines what is modern and what is extinct.¹⁸³ In my reading, this future, the dream that continues independently of any notion of legal agency and access, is placed within an archive of knowledge—a “country of unknown memory”—that Miranda maps onto California landscape, noting that “who we are is where we are from.”¹⁸⁴ She illustrates her vision of an enduring contingent identity based in an extra-legal relationship to emplaced knowledge by recalling her grandfather’s fascination with an airplane beacon erected

¹⁸² Miranda, *Bad Indians*, 193-194.

¹⁸³ Mark Rifkin, *Beyond Settler Time: Temporal Sovereignty and Indigenous Self-Determination* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017), 34, 40.

¹⁸⁴ Miranda, *Ibid.* 194.

at the summit of Mount Diablo in the San Joaquin Valley. For Miranda, the airplane beacon is an insult, “like a giant sacrilegious stamp [...]. Its presence on the mountain was a direct violation of all that was sacred and holy to Indigenous California knowledge.”¹⁸⁵ But if sacrilege is a form of theft, in this case a theft effected through settler colonial juridical formations, it does not here interrupt the call homewards that she believes her grandfather felt as he was “pulled back home to his beginning, to the source of his Indigenous identity.”¹⁸⁶ The sacrilege encoded in law and cartography fails to interrupt the call even as it denies her grandfather’s legal claim, and even the agency to claim.

The mountain was and remains a sacred place of emergence, and in the country of unknown memory, it is home and will remain a locus of enunciation to the California Indians of San Joaquin valley even if its legal theft was facilitated by the destruction, through political amalgamation, of specific claims. In referencing Indigenous California knowledge collectively, Miranda reminds the reader that even as different tribes of California were consolidated within the confines of the mission and the category of “Indian” and their specific knowledges and customs were shattered, a “shared knowledge” was reconstructed through adaptive strategies of a people surviving together.¹⁸⁷ Here Miranda insists that languages and knowledge born of communal strategies of survival can articulate enduring land-based subjectivities outside the realm of legal recognition and its motivated insistence on a calcified “authenticity” that it weaponizes against Native peoples. So, even though “the specificity of which mountain was sacred to which community might be lost [...] the knowledge that a sacred place of emergence, a mountain, did exist was retained.”¹⁸⁸ Together, the community of survivors articulates itself as an

¹⁸⁵ Miranda, *Bad Indians*, 195.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

enduring people in a space that is their own through the act of renaming, even if the languages and knowledges they invoke are recreated, and even if the renaming is conducted on an affective register undetectable to those not part of the affective community. Miranda has to use an affective language to first begin the process of that renaming, and this is in fact a practice of freedom, affirming survival through a body of “unknown” knowledge that persists in excess—though not independently—of its attenuation and fracturing.

Utilizing the language of affect to insist on the palimpsestic endurance of an emplaced knowledge that persists even in a compromised state, Miranda grounds her claim to an Indigenous subjectivity and geographically contingent articulations of relationality that exists in excess (though, again, never quite independently) of the institutions that grant and deny political legitimacy. In this she appears to speak again directly to Moraga’s sometimes frustrated efforts to combat the forces working toward her political and historic absence and affirm a whole, uncompromised, and geographically-contingent (because predicated on a tenuous relationship to Indigeneity as a site of origin) identity. In her own memoir, Moraga recalls those frustrations by detailing a trip to Mexico during which a physiological illness appears to make manifest a spiritual illness that is revealed on what was meant to be a pilgrimage to find a site of origins. Her inability to communicate effectively with the concerned staff at her hotel suggests to her that “what brought the fever to the surface of my skin” was “the trepidations that who I was would never find home again.”¹⁸⁹ But through a chance sexual encounter with a fellow California Chicana, she is led back to California, and indeed her desire for California, often expressed sexually, emerges frequently throughout the narrative. This desire is commensurate with Moraga’s desire for the people and communities she associates with the state, demonstrating a

¹⁸⁹ Moraga, *Native Country of the Heart*, 98.

relationship to space inseparable from the networks of belonging she locates there. Her desire for a Chicana identity can only be realized in California, a space to which she is not native but which comes to function in the narrative *as* Chicanidad.

Moraga curiously associates this California, this site of cultural if not ancestral origin, with a “country of ghosts,” the land of memory and feelings that her mother comes to inhabit as her own illness progresses. She says of her mother that she had a gift for carrying “all those ghost stories inside her,” and she asks, “How was I to honor them and their carrier in a twenty-first century AngloAmerica where to reside with the spirits is to reside in a foreign country? We were so far from home [...] in this nation of true amnesiacs.”¹⁹⁰ Moraga’s language does something peculiar with regards to place-making, storytelling, and memory; and the challenges that attend place-making and remembering in spaces built on an amnesia more wholly obliterating and destructive than even her mother’s Alzheimer’s. To “reside in a foreign country” implies that to live with these stories is to be elsewhere, fallen away beyond the imagined nation’s political *and temporal* borders and the knowledge they emplace and thus authorize. In his writing on Indigenous temporality, Rifkin argues that “temporal orientations that do not fit dominant European frames of reference can be interpolated as abnormal fixations on the past, translated as aberrant tendencies toward anachronism (as opposed to being seen as alternative ways of being-in-time).”¹⁹¹ These dominant frames of reference narrate time in ways that annihilate relationality and designate as anachronistic and ghostly those practices that narrate time and *a presence in time* differently. Following Rifkin, what is at stake is control over the process of becoming enabled by these temporal orientations, and European frames of reference

¹⁹⁰ Moraga, *Native Country of the Heart*, 163.

¹⁹¹ Rifkin, *Beyond Settler Time*, 39.

disqualify processes that rely on a different relationship to time and the connections that span time. Moraga's mother's foreign country is made foreign by being placed outside the present, the modern and "real," but as her mother's immediate "real" world becomes fuzzier and less important, the distant memories of "spirit relations" become more immediate.¹⁹² Relationships attenuated by settler time are solidified as the immediate world fades away.

The spatiality invoked by Moraga's language is telling. Following Keith Basso's work on place-making in Western Apache discursive practices, Rifkin writes that stories "give meaning to current and former occupancy in particular places while also conjuring the specificities of those places, producing kinds of experience and forms of relation that cross apparent temporal gulfs but do not arrive as an uncanny and spectral remainder."¹⁹³ Moraga similarly attempts to give meaning to her occupancy through narrative negotiations that invoke relationality that can span such temporal, and in her case also geographic, gulfs. When she details her stay at her childhood home following her mother's admission to the hospital, explaining her rediscovery of the "spirit relations that had come to reside" there," she illustrates how the foreign country of felt knowledge maps onto material spaces. When she asks, "Are these small plots of lot and land what is left of memory as Mexicans in the United States?" she has already answered her own question:¹⁹⁴

But that small white house, a house for which I believed I held no nostalgia [...] had been country to my mother. It had allowed her permission to know what she knew and to reign madre over all of it, even as it occulted itself within the parameters of that narrow lot of crabgrass and rose garden in the smoggy basin of Los Angeles County.¹⁹⁵

¹⁹² Moraga, *Native Country of the Heart*, 162.

¹⁹³ Rifkin, *Beyond Settler Time*, 45.

¹⁹⁴ Moraga, *Ibid*, 163.

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid*.

Her mother and her mother's ghosts have renamed and recreated this space—"that narrow lot of crabgrass"—through her relationship to them and it, however foreign this re-named place and the knowledge it replaces may be to the settler world contained within county lines. This is "how ancestral memory returns to us," along with the networks of relationality it narrates and creates.¹⁹⁶

In her renaming of space and the emplaced archives of shared, felt knowledge within which she affirms a likewise geographically contingent identity, Moraga mirrors Miranda. This mirroring highlights the shared fugitive practices that already exist even in the zones of complicity that span the political and discursive margins of settler states. Both Miranda and Moraga appeal to archives that retain a presence in land redefined as is it is claimed by the state, archives that are made ghostly because they index modes of relationality that the settler state deems anachronistic and unintelligible. As framed by Miranda, this is an Indigenous practice that persists in excess of the complicity and compromise that inform processes of becoming in settler states. And even though Moraga consigns to speechlessness much of the knowledge in which she grounds these practices, her vocabulary already suggests opportunities for kinship that she desires but cannot quite realize because she cannot imagine a mixed-race subjectivity that exists in excess of but never independently from the violent histories by which it was engendered. Even so, she gestures towards the networks of relationality that might shaped as much by a shared epistemic refusal and shared difference as by complicity.

In his own thinking on relationality and marginality, Muñoz proposes that we consider Latinidad as an identity-in-difference; following Norma Alarcón, he sees it as an identity "that

¹⁹⁶ Moraga, *Native Country of the Heart*, 163.

understands the structuring role of difference as the underlying concept in a group's mapping of collective identity."¹⁹⁷ Embodying this identity-in difference entails an awareness that one "falls off the majoritarian maps of the public sphere," exiled from reason, intelligibility, and agency—and, in the present case, from space and the histories it emplaces.¹⁹⁸ The exiled group forms a community of the "fallen out," whose affective connections are otherwise unreadable because they are beyond reason, "excessive."¹⁹⁹ In itself, this apparatus is unable to grasp the varying textures of difference, but because it comprehends multiplicity rather than disqualifying it, and because the critical mestiza subject is aware of inhabiting various positions at once within complex relational networks embedded in shared histories of violence, critical mestizaje leaves open pathways to those spaces and conversations where those unevenly marked by difference can feel and speak together. When read through such a lens, Miranda's *Mestiza Nation* prompts a reconsideration of the ways in which the life of the marginalized outpaces the violence with which it runs in tandem, suggesting the ways in which Miranda's own critical apparatus might guide our approach to complicity and multiplicity, acknowledging shared experience without overwriting the complicity that is also constitutive. It shows a way forward, outside fixed forms that ossify sociality, balancing responsibility with kinship.

As framed by the narrative, Miranda's fugitive strategies of identification and affiliation, for place-making and community-building, pose a challenge for Chicana feminists. Chicana participation must remain critical, and Chicana participants cannot consign to speechlessness the knowledge that contextualizes their relationship to those practices. Instead, participation requires an awareness of relational ties that can vary wildly and are difficult to map, but that suggest the

¹⁹⁷ Muñoz, "Feeling Brown," 61.

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 68.

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 69.

violent histories in which they are grounded; and it requires divestment from the conceptual modalities that foreclose the viability of knowledge and the possibility of life outside settler forms and epistemes. Such modalities police by modulating our understanding of the Chicana's unstable positioning—her existence on the border between humanity and inhumanity, presence and ghostliness—and obscure the violence by which they assume power. Finally, it requires that we confront the sheer terror of survival by acknowledging the conditions of its possibility—because who are we when we acknowledge our participation in the now-recognizable violence we survived? Miranda's framing of the question gestures to the ways in which the reckoning can be constitutive, suggesting that this reckoning is a vital part of the psychic and material restructuring we call decolonization.

CHAPTER 3

Haunted Archives, Uncanny Authorship, and Gothic Time in Lorraine López's *The Gifted Gabaldón Sisters* and LeAnne Howe's *Shell Shaker*

In the previous chapter, I demonstrate how Cherríe Moraga and Deborah Miranda articulate an aberrant relationship to space and time that they struggle to make legible and visible outside discursive frameworks that lack the necessary language for this endeavor. They feel half-blind at the past, digging through family archives, feeling themselves both haunting (as living anachronism) and haunted by things half-remembered and felt. While they reach back, they sense something attempting to reach forward. They thus narrate temporal and spatial relationships that might be described as uncanny or Gothic from certain frames of reference, an intimacy with ghosts that defies absence and spatial-temporal distance.

In LeAnne Howe's *Shell Shaker*, Susan Billy, the matriarch of an Oklahoma Choctaw family, brings a collection of family heirlooms into the family kitchen, heirlooms that carry a history she feels more than knows; a family archive that she hands over to her daughters and grandson. Around the kitchen table, the family examines the stone her daughter Auda received from her Uncle Isaac, as well as a porcupine sash and "two burden baskets filled with loose shells" handed down through innumerable generations.²⁰⁰ Susan gives the sash to Auda, the oldest of her children, the turtle shells to her younger daughters Adair and Tema, and the stone to her grandson Hoppy, Tema's son. Susan tells them that the stone "always belonged to a powerful leader" and that "the porcupine sash and the shells once belonged to a descendant of Grandmother of Birds. If we're lucky, maybe they'll survive another generation or two. Who

²⁰⁰ LeAnne Howe, *Shell Shaker* (San Francisco, CA: Aunt Lute Books, 2001), 220.

knows?”²⁰¹ Her commentary as she disposes of this family inheritance makes clear the stories associated with these objects, the lack of certainty that attends that archive, the family’s uncertain negotiating with time, and the tracing of a genealogy through objects that transgress it. They feel for connections through and in that archive, connections attenuated by the strictures of colonial time-keeping, and they wonder *how much longer* these objects can function as repositories of histories and relationships that are felt more than known. The nature of family archives drawn in this scene raises questions of historical authorship—who tells a family story and how—and it reveals the stakes in the managing and authoring of that archive: survival, presence, a communal future authored collectively. It also indicates a relationship to time and the metrics by which presence is understood and felt, as well as the language available for understanding it.

This chapter touches on topics covered in the second chapter, but here I use a different hermeneutic approach. I interrogate how Howe’s *Shell Shaker* and Lorraine M. López’s *The Gifted Gabaldón Sisters* provoke associations with the Gothic through their use of cross-temporal family hauntings, their invocation of the ghostly, and their insistence on filling absences with (un)homely presences that offer healing and opportunity. Both novels exhibit a relationship to the Gothic that is hard to pin down—neither an uncritical adoption nor a rejection, but rather a Chicana and Native American reimagining of the possibilities already suggested by the contradictions the genre encodes and the problems it presents as a framework (how it includes and excludes marginalized peoples).

²⁰¹ Howe, *Shell Shaker*, 220.

The texts offer diverging views on the gothic and the ghostly. In *The Gifted Gabaldón Sisters*, a central but absent character is treated by older members of the family as an uncanny presence in the official family archives, the terrible secret that haunts, that is not known but is felt; a source of affective terror. And yet for the younger members of the family who take charge of the family archive and the stories it comprises, the uncanny is not so much resolved as it is entered into and sustained. They turn it into its opposite—the homely, a source of pleasure. In *Shell Shaker*, the terror projects outward and the pleasure inwards. For settlers encountering the Billy family's ghosts, for example, the ghost is a symbol of savage terror, teeth and claws in the dark; but for the family at the center of the text, the ghostly presence is only ever experienced as the fulfillment of intergenerational desire. It is protection, a returned relative, and the dread that accompanies the uncanny is missing. Its presence is integral to the process of righting the wrongs of the past.

In both texts, familial relationship with the ghost permits the characters to wrestle with histories that have been made ghostly. Indeed, what is remarkable in both novels and where the Gothic is both invoked and turned against itself, is in the absence of horror, which indicates a resistance to the discursive violence of the Gothic while also foregrounding how marginalized peoples experience its concerns. We see, for instance, mundane interactions with what might elsewhere be referred to as the repressed unconscious, but which the authors frame as feeling—as things felt more than known, where the passage into knowledge is anything but traumatic. We see the blurring of boundaries, the transgression that forms such a part of the traumatic horror that the Gothic presents and defers, here actively sought out by communities that fail to be appropriate targets for the negative affect by which the Western Gothic disciplines the pleasure-seeker. Appropriated by its would-be targets, the Gothic's unique tools for managing the

temporal, historical, political, and domestic boundaries that restrain life within settler colonial modernity are applied differently.

The Western Gothic is largely concerned with time and its subjects. It encodes anxieties about the past invading the present, disrupting the narrative of modernity. Nor is this preoccupation confined to the Gothic, or its anxieties; trauma studies, a field that has assumed authority over critical excavations of the Gothic's dark recesses, appears to have taken it for granted that this fear is not in itself a product and technology of hegemonic control, but rather the only possible response to temporal dislocation. Within the field, there is an inclination to understand memory and the history it narrates and occludes as only ever traumatic, an uncanny imposition that compromises the integrity of the psyche in the present. But elsewhere, that temporal disruption is desired, yearned for, precisely because it makes ghostly histories and contingent "anachronistic" subjectivities possible for marginalized authors and audiences. For this reason, I do not read the novels' invocation of the Gothic within a trauma studies frame. Rather than looking at their iteration of the Gothic and ghostly as a repository of trauma of unspeakable pain and loss, I see it as marking a yearning, a desire. I read the haunting as an opportunity for healing, and the invasion of the past as a reunion. As imagined by López and Howe, the haunting disrupts those paradigms that render their alternatives (and the subjectivities and communities that depend on those alternatives) as uncanny, frightening, and unnatural. It does not merely reproduce their logic, but rather it indicates that by placing the traditional object of the horror in the place of the subject, the genre's tropes take on new meaning and significance.

Channeling

According to Jack Halberstam, the Gothic is best approached as a mode rather than a rigid genre, "loosely defines as a rhetorical style and narrative structure designed to produce fear

and desire within the reader.”²⁰² It originated as a European form that emerged in the eighteenth century, concurrent with the Enlightenment, as though it were meant to serve as the Enlightenment’s dark shadow. It encompassed a genre of popular, often low-brow art and literature that appealed to a wide audience and that spoke to societal fears and anxieties. As Sugars and Turcotte suggest, “The Gothic is often located in a realm of unknown dangers and negotiates both internal and external disquiet. It is a literature of excess and imagination, but one that is used as well to reassure and compartmentalize unreason. It is therefore a literature that both enacts and thematizes ambivalence.”²⁰³ The source of enjoyment is also the source of its horror, and its hallmarks and common tropes pertain in some way to the transgression of boundaries, or the dark recesses that exist side by side with the realm of reason, threatening its integrity. Gothic spaces, graveyards and burial grounds, dark wildernesses, shadowy attics, and recessed nooks threaten territorial integrity. The pull between reason and superstition threatens Enlightenment values. The mixing of life and death threatens the authority of the living, and the dead’s disruption of time—the disruption of a bright, sunlit modernity—threatens their narration of history. We thus see the thematization of archives and memory and the secrets they hide, and the imagining of monsters born in the dark recesses of these archives.

Uncanny relationships become apparent in these pairings when one transforms into the other, such as when family secrets become history, when the monster in the attic is revealed as kin, when the dark recesses become indistinguishable from the family home, and when the past becomes the living present. But the Gothic defers the intimacy of the uncanny by establishing

²⁰² Judith Halberstam, *Skin Shows: Gothic Horror and the Technology of Monsters* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995), 2.

²⁰³ Cynthia Sugars and Gerry Turcotte, “Introduction: Canadian Literature and the Postcolonial Gothic,” in *Unsettled Remains: Canadian Literature and the Postcolonial Gothic*, ed. Cynthia Sugars and Gerry Turcotte (Waterloo, Ont.: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2009), xv.

distance even as it titillates its audiences with the threat of its proximity. This is particularly apparent in its treatment of time, as it models time as a mode of containment in its attempts to lock away all that is other at a safe temporal distance. In the gothic, horror manifests when things that belong properly to a dark past—family secrets, histories of violence, remnants of Catholicism, superstition—enter the present. It erupts, and then is contained, disciplined, and “repressed.” The present moves on.

For this reason, the Gothic has lent itself to psychoanalytic and postcolonial criticism in literary scholarship. In psychoanalytic spheres, scholars of the Gothic frequently privilege the individual psyche over any serious consideration of the environment in which that psyche is produced and *by which it is understood*, taking Western psychology (with the histories of racism and misogyny and the politics that undergird it) as a universal paradigm for understanding (and sometimes pathologizing) patterns of individual thought and behavior. This universalizing psychoanalytic interpretive frame permits scholars to indulge their wildest Freudian fantasies about repressed ids and the unspeakable horrors tucked away in the subconscious, regardless of context. As Halberstam argues, this investment in the individual psyche, and the eager pathologizing of individual behaviors, fails to adequately explain either the function or appeal of the Gothic. Postcolonial scholars, meanwhile, find it a reductive approach to the complex social and political relationships represented within the Gothic, but neither is its incorporation into post-colonial critique uncomplicated. As I discuss below, where psychoanalytic critique demonstrates a tendency toward a universal psychology within which the subaltern is disproportionately rendered pathological, postcolonial critique too frequently privileges settler narratives and experiences.

Postcolonial critique can nevertheless provide a rudimentary model for understanding that Gothic in a North American context. A form both transplanted and yet shaped by its environment, the North American Gothic's genealogy draws as much from Puritan discursive practices, and the settler imagination mapped in Puritan narratives, as it does from eighteenth century European forms. This new Gothic form is particularly concerned with the past and its proximity to and presence in contemporary political life, as evidenced in the work of Nathaniel Hawthorne and Charles Brockden Brown, and even in less obviously Gothic works like J. Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur's *Letters from an American Farmer*. The unshakeable presence troubles the foundational national mythology in which the United States is imagined as existing outside of history, and so the North American Gothic is overwhelmingly preoccupied with managing anxieties about histories of violence; histories that are foundational to the American settler colonial project but antithetical to the narratives that make possible the continuation of that project.

In both its European and American forms, the politics of the Gothic might be reflected, if imperfectly, by its purported function. If the Gothic deployed to explore “unresolved quandaries” in the cultural belief systems or ideologies of the time, then one possible objective the context of North American history and its discursive practices might be to manage popular ambivalence about the settler presence made possible by settler ideologies and narratives.²⁰⁴ Their claim to an enlightened superiority that came to be coded as racial, in opposition to the atavistic barbarity of slaves and Indians, was a providential license to own and conquer all that lay beyond providence, and it was evidenced by the natural passing away of those same slaves and Indians. Narratives of

²⁰⁴ Jerrold E. Hogle, “Introduction,” in *The Cambridge Companion to the Modern Gothic*, ed. Jerrold E. Hogle (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 5.

disappearance and enslavement became justification for disappearance and enslavement. Settler presence was moreover made possible and given justification by their historical exceptionalism, their insistence on an existence out of and apart from the history that made the settler colonial project possible, and that history is a burial ground in which the sins of the past are rendered immaterial to the present. Narratives of disappearance aided in establishing the distance necessary for that exceptionalism. But at every turn, even following emancipation and the end of the so-called Indian wars, those narratives of progress, of always already having left history behind, were interrupted by the inconvenient remnants yet left as a reminder of the conditions that make American fictions possible. The American Gothic channels and negotiates anxieties that are hard to address directly because to do so might result in the toppling of an already unsteady edifice.

In its conventional form, the Gothic mode can enact violence. It identifies its antagonist, sometimes an antagonist within, and creates it as other—and moves to defeat it, exorcise it, or, failing that, to contain it. Halberstam observes that “Gothic fiction is a technology of subjectivity, one which produces the deviant subjectivities opposite which the normal, the healthy, the pure can be known.”²⁰⁵ This alienation is foundational to the Gothic, as such technologies produce a kind of gothic sociality that conditions the relationship between self and other. It moreover polices relationality by transforming desire into fear: “The Gothic is also a narrative technique, a generic spin that transforms the lovely and the beautiful into the abhorrent and then frames this transformation within a humanist moral fable.”²⁰⁶ Following Eve Sedgwick, Halberstam argues that “the Gothic [...] inspires fear and desire at the same time—

²⁰⁵ Halberstam, *Skin Shows*, 2.

²⁰⁶ *Ibid*, 22.

fear of and desire for the other, fear of and desire for the possibly latent perversity lurking within the reader herself.”²⁰⁷ But, he notes, the “fear and desire within the body produce a disciplinary effect.”²⁰⁸ For Halberstam, the monster of Gothic fiction “marks the distance” between what is aberrant and the reader.²⁰⁹ It creates monsters, it creates ghosts and others. What this chapter explores, however, is how Gothic works but marginalized authors use the machinery of the Gothic to reverse the transformation of desire into fear. If, as Halberstam suggests, the other, the ghost or monster, produces affective responses in the reader—namely horror, pain, paranoia—then it is worth investigating why these same others fail to produce anything but pleasure and familiarity in the novels I look at.

It is necessary to discuss, then, how the Gothic has historically invoked marginalized others, which comes to bear on my earlier discussion about what the Gothic means in an American context. The Gothic imagines and creates these others as symbols of the threat of cultural or racial or sexual disintegration; for instance, “going native” is an ubiquitous trope in a sub-genre that Patrick Brantlinger terms the “imperial gothic,” in which barbarism and savagery function as a contagion that threatens civilization.²¹⁰ Or else the presence of marginalized peoples is felt as the nation’s repressed, the malevolent, vengeful ghosts haunting a family home. The latter form presents their histories, and even their continued existence, as unspeakable, and further suggests a politics of melancholy. In their work on Canadian postcolonial Gothic fiction, Sugars and Turcotte observe that this genre, which assumes a settler subject, “is concerned less with overt scenes of romance and horror than with experiences of spectrality and the uncanny,”

²⁰⁷ Halberstam, *Skin Shows*, 13.

²⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

²¹⁰ Patrick Brantlinger, *Rule of Darkness: British Literature and Imperialism, 1830-1914* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 1988), 230.

experiences frequently accompanied by “fears of territorial illegitimacy, anxiety about forgotten or occluded histories, resentment toward flawed or complicit ancestors, assertions of Aboriginal priority, explorations of hybrid cultural forms, and interrogations of national belonging and citizenship.”²¹¹ Indeed, they observe that “in many of these works, there is an aura of unresolved and unbroachable ‘guilt,’ as though the historical foundations of the nation have not been thoroughly assimilated.”²¹² But these anxieties, rather than prompt a sustained inquiry into present accountability and restitution, are resolved by an exculpatory melancholy. As Michelle Burnham argues, “Traditional American Gothic serves a colonialist politics of mourning that pleurably reinforces the very self that its frightening narratives appear to put at risk.”²¹³ The mourning exculpates and thereby manages feelings of illegitimacy and complicity.

Meanwhile, the trauma suffered by the subjects of violence becomes evidence of diminishment, transforming the victim into a mere remnant. Indeed, Julia Emberley takes issue with the approach to trauma studies’ “psychoanalytically informed” scholarship on testimony because she feels that it “constructs the subject of violence within an ontology of victimization.”²¹⁴ In its approach to the Gothic, a trauma studies frame may only aid in the creation of a beleaguered, diminished people, unable to escape the memories of the violence they suffered and enter the present. It can transform survivors into ghosts that did not truly survive the violence they endured. This in turn affirms the right of the “living” to move unencumbered in a

²¹¹ Sugars and Turcotte, “Introduction,” ix.

²¹² Ibid.

²¹³ Michelle Burnham, “Sherman Alexie’s Indian Killer as Indigenous Gothic,” in *Phantom Past, Indigenous Presence: Native Ghosts in North American Culture and History*, ed. Colleen E. Boyd and Coll-Peter Thrush (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2011), 6.

²¹⁴ Julia V. Emberley, *The Testimonial Uncanny: Indigenous Storytelling, Knowledge, and Reparative Practices* (Albany, New York: SUNY Press, 2014), 2.

sunny present that exists outside, apart from histories of violence that make their presence felt only as uncanny invasions.

If, however, the Gothic threatens and affirms the Western processes and models of identification, what does it do in these texts? What happens when the objects of Gothic horror that threaten order become the subjects, or when the text has less invested in preserving an oppressive order than in aiding in dismantling it, in allowing the ghosts the space they need to do their work? Jodey Castriciano observes how though the Western Gothic does not counter Western thought or paradigms, it does reveal its aporias.²¹⁵ It shuts a door on unspeakable truths, but it must open the door first to take a look. I argue, then, that in spite of the Gothic's disciplinary bent, it suggests the possibility of a door that does not close, or a resolution that does not come, and this presents an opportunity for writers with other plans. As invoked by marginalized authors, we can identify in Gothic literature the key to undermining the institutions that the Gothic endeavors to protect. Sugars and Turcotte write that in the hands of marginalized writers, "the postcolonial Gothic has been used to challenge dominant, literary, and social narratives."²¹⁶ Marginalized writers can inhabit the anxieties, refusing the resolutions that might defeat their object, thus allowing Western normative order (along with its paradigms of identification) to remain troubled.

In doing this, these authors may even suggest that the Gothic already carries with it the potential for critique, at least when the relationalities the Gothic references are read askew. By allowing the intimate (because titillating) proximity of the source of horror, it provides a door for its entrance as pleasure. Halberstam insists that "it is not always so simple to tell whether the

²¹⁵ Jodey Castriciano, "Learning to Talk with Ghosts: Canadian Gothic and the Poetics of Haunting in Eden Robinson's *Monkey Beach*," in *University of Toronto Quarterly* 75, no. 2 (Spring 2006), 802.

²¹⁶ Sugars and Turcotte, "Introduction," xviii.

Gothic registers a conservative or progressive mood. Of course, Gothic is [...] mobile and therefore, we should not expect it to succumb so easily to attempts to make claims for its political investments. But it does seem as if there has been a transformation in the uses of Gothic from the early nineteenth century to the present. [...] It disrupts, furthermore, the logic of genre that essentializes generic categories and stabilizes production of meaning within them.”²¹⁷ Paul Wickelson further points out that it might even provide an approach to trauma that resists ontologies of victimization or narratives of diminishment, as a “mature gothic practice would recognize the necessity of working through the past and of keeping a suspicious eye on power but would never allow the trauma the last word.”²¹⁸

This chapter is less concerned with trauma, however, and more so with Gothic relationality and the intimacy promised by the other, the monster and the ghost. It is interested in what sort of relationality becomes possible when the spectral other is permitted to shatter the ostensible integrity of the present.

The prevalence of ghosts in Gothic narratives is notable, though this is not to imply that as a conceptual modality the ghost is inextricable from the genre. The mode nevertheless has left a clear impression on scholarly theories of ghostliness and the critical approaches it engenders. As a conceptual modality and interpretive tool, its critical applications frequently place an emphasis on hiddenness, on things best forgotten that are never entirely forgotten, or on the interruption of the present by a shadowy past and unspeakable truths. The fundamental irony of ghosts is that in being made spectral, immaterial and unreal, they are given the power to stick around—to pass through walls, through time, and through and into bodies. They may be denied,

²¹⁷ Halberstam, *Skin Shows*, 23.

²¹⁸ Paul Wickelson, “Shaking Awake the Memory: The Gothic Quest for Place in Sandra Cisneros’s *Caramelo*,” in *Western American Literature* 48, no. 1& 2 (Spring & Summer 2013), 102.

but they continue to pull at the bedsheets, nagging, possessing, and haunting. This in the Western Gothic is a source of abject terror, and the embodiment of all that interrupts the sanctity of “modern” temporalities and narratives. As Castriciano points out, the ghost is the uncanny, that which cannot be acknowledged but which invades the home, a part of the home and also Other.²¹⁹ But for marginalized writers, the ghost is an opportunity. Indeed, they speak to strategies for an enduring presence in the face of narratives of extinction and diminishment. For instance, as Sugars and Turcotte note in their work on Canadian Aboriginal fiction, Canadian Aboriginal writers “invite a reassessment of the association of gothic conventions with psychoanalytic motifs of repression and unsettlement since Aboriginal spirits do not carry the same threatening aspect as a conventional gothic monsters.”²²⁰ Without resorting to generalities that erase distinction across the narrative traditions of different marginalized, we should nevertheless ask what meaning then their ghosts and monsters carry. Can we read ghost stories as necessarily gothic, even if they suspend horror, or is horror necessarily interchangeable with the Gothic, with any analysis of knowledge found in recessed spaces? And does this depend on how we understand the function of both the Gothic and ghostliness in literature and social imaginaries?²²¹

²¹⁹ Castriciano, “Learning to Talk with Ghosts,” 802.

²²⁰ Sugars and Turcotte, “Introduction,” xx.

²²¹ Ghosts are also the dead and are not simply a metaphor. They compel us to consider the place that the dead are given in living communities, how this itself might be read as disturbance or as a perverse inability to let go, and also how they speak to way of understanding continuity through relation. According Greenberg: “The gothic thus has the potential to raise the dead but also risks running away from their literalness. In other words, gothic potential for raising the dead is in tension and contestation with its clichéd conventions for reading deceased bodies as unintelligible and possibly villainous. The contradictions of the Gothic thus both enable the transgressive speech of the dead and point towards static ways of reading dead bodies.” Castriciano adds that “in Western culture, there really is no room for contact with the dead (unless it’s confined to the Gothic).” See Linda Margarita Greenberg, “Learning from the Dead: Wounds, Women, and Activism in Cherrie Moraga’s Heroes and Saints,” in *MELUS* 34, no.1 (Spring 2009), 167—168; and Castriciano, “Learning to Talk with Ghosts,” 804.

The ghost has a brief but storied scholarly history and has seen a resurgence since the onset of trauma and memory studies, which should suggest the nature of its theoretical baggage. Avery Gordon's work looks mainly at how institutions haunt communities, though less so at how suppressed communities haunt the institutions (like time) by which they are marginalized. For her, haunting is "a way of knowing," of feeling for the forces authoring present life, and the "ghost's arrival notifies us of a haunting."²²² Her work is focused on the production of knowledge and how knowledge comes to be permitted or erased. That is, it is focused on how things are made knowable or unknowable, and how this leads to historical and present realities becoming unknowable even while they still have tangible effects. This is what she refers to as haunting, and haunting is also for her about perception—about how we detect things that we cannot know because they are unspeakable. For Boyd and Thrush, the ghost counters erasure and forgetting because of its agency and authority in the present, as well as its power to violate fixed temporal and spatial boundaries. What they find interesting is the ghost's ability to counter the institutions that haunt—history, time, national narratives, the technologies of displacement. They suggest that part of the problem with critical approaches to ghostliness is that critics focus on how the ghost serves cultural erasure, rather than on how it resists erasure.²²³ But it is Jack Halberstam's work on Gothic monsters, rather than ghosts, that most informs this chapter's approach to ghostliness. Halberstam looks not at the ghost but at the monster, since for him what is most interesting is not the disruption of time but the disruption posed by queer embodiment. However, though he focuses on the monster's fleshiness, not the ghost's

²²² Avery F. Gordon, *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), 24.

²²³ Colleen E. Boyd and Coll Thrush, "Introduction: Bringing Ghosts to Ground," in *Phantom Past, Indigenous Presence: Native Ghosts in North American Culture and History*, ed. Colleen E. Boyd and Coll-Peter Thrush (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2011), xi.

spectrality, and though the boundaries at stake appear different, he likewise understands the monster as the other of a disciplined modernity, a disruption of the boundaries that preserve its order. It is moreover an “other” onto which any meaning can be projected. He thus identifies the monster as integral to the Gothic and its “peculiarly modern preoccupation with boundaries and their collapse,” and reminds us that because the monster is expansive and capacious, no assumptions can be made about its political investment, which are mutable.²²⁴ Like the ghost, it invades, disrupts, and elicits desire as well as fear, suggesting alternatives to the ways of being in time and space made normative by the dominating order.

To comprehend notions of continuity as they are invoked by this iteration of the Gothic, we need to look at how ghosts challenge settler temporality, and precisely how this relates to authorship. I will therefore demonstrate how the ghosts in these novels disrupt time because they traverse it, and even narrate it, in seemingly illogical ways. They force us to reconsider the relationship between time and historical authorship, and also how ghosts disrupt history because they disrupt time. They show us how even as we reach back, the ghosts are the vehicle by which the past reaches forward to tell the present into being, and the present becomes a dialogic creation, created through reciprocal relations. The sudden loss of narrative control can, depending on the positionality of the observer, feel uncanny or comforting. For example, the typical Gothic novel uses a frame text to establish authorial control over the inner narrative, which is generally set before the frame text to provide an editorial gloss, to direct interpretation, to establish distance, and to emphasize the rational (and impregnable) world’s ultimate power over the unreason and disorder of the inner narrative. The present tells the past, but the past cannot invade the present or breach the divide between frame and story. It ensures the location of

²²⁴ Halberstam, *Skin Shows*, 23.

narrative power, a way of containing the ghosts that crept in for the moment. Nevertheless, as we shall see, these novels invert the way the frame text and inner story interact with each other.

I discussed briefly in the previous chapter how it is crucial that we understand modernity as a settler fiction that annihilates many forms of relationality dependent on other temporalities. In his work on Indigenous temporalities, Mark Rifkin examines the different ways in which societies create and narrate time. He looks at how Euramerican time is ordered, the frames of reference that inform it, and the way it becomes a tool of absorption and annihilation through its monopoly on time and its relationship to history-making. For Rifkin, time is conceptualized according to a selective set of references, looking, for instance, at the significance ascribed to one event but not the other, colonial teleology and narratives of development, and mechanisms for locating people and places in time. He examines how these stories, beliefs, and biases “orient” people in time and give them a sense of their own trajectory.²²⁵ He argues that settler time requires singularity for its construction of national history and historical subjects, and it cannot acknowledge the diverging histories and multiple processes of becoming in time: “Settler time reduces the unfolding and adaptive expressions of Indigenous peoplehood to a set of points—the supposedly shared now of the present, modernity, and national history.”²²⁶ This forces Indigenous people, survivors of chattel slavery, and other national Others to choose between being made anachronistic and “being enfolded into frames not of their making that can normalize non-native presence, privilege, and power.”²²⁷ In this way, settler time limits the ways in which continuity and survival can be imagined. Rifkin therefore argues for the importance of

²²⁵ Rifkin, *Beyond Settler Time*, 26.

²²⁶ *Ibid.*

²²⁷ *Ibid.*, 13.

rethinking the concept of continuity through a consideration of Native temporalities and modes of being in time.²²⁸

I use Rifkin's work in my analysis of both texts because of the applicability of his understanding of diverging temporalities to the novels' exploration of continuity, kinship, and of what it means to be embedded in obscured histories. It may help make sense of their invocation of the Gothic in order to build networks of relationality while challenging, perhaps incidentally, the temporal frames that consign those formations to perverse fixations and uncanny anachronism. A different approach to temporality may moreover speak to the ways in which the novels imagine the influential hand of the past in the present and future, to the ways in which the characters see themselves as carrying a legacy forward, and to how this carrying forward is made uncanny in a society built on the fiction of historical exception. Of course, because Rifkin's approach is shaped by its focus—Indigenous time and ways of being-in-time—applying it to Chicana literature is a challenge I wish to take up carefully. As discussed in previous chapters, Chicana and Indigenous histories diverge and converge in complex and often violent ways, and ascribing generalities to knowledges and practices drawn from those histories would be its own kind of violence. But because of the complicated relationship, and because of the way in which Chicana people and Chicana presence has been narrated and folded into (multiple) settler temporalities and paradigms of historicization, I nevertheless find Rifkin's framework useful for understanding how López navigates the ways in which Chicana histories are made ghostly and Gothic.

Interferences

²²⁸ Rifkin, *Beyond Settler Time*, 34.

Though Latinx Gothic cultural production has long been well-underway beyond the notice of the academy or mainstream literary visibility, the field of the Chicax Gothic remains largely unstudied.²²⁹ As Tanya González remarks, it is uncommon to find scholarship on Chicax writing that looks at it in the context of an American Gothic tradition; there is instead a tendency on the part of critics to default to magical realism as an interpretive framework for any Latinx writing that touches on Gothic themes or tropes.²³⁰ Authors associated with the twentieth century “Boom” in Latin American literature “made magical realism synonymous with Latin American fiction” because of their hybridization of realism and expressionism.²³¹ Authors like Gabriel García Márquez, Carlos Fuentes, and Isabel Allende frequently made use of the supernatural to illustrate all that was “essentially magical” about American cultures, so any departure by a Latin American or US Latinx writer from the bounds of realism (as demarcated by Western critics) would thereafter result in their work being labeled as “magical realism.”²³² Because this has effectively discouraged other critical approaches, literature that deals in the Gothic without the invocation of the supernatural becomes likewise illegible within this critical binary system.

Jesse Alemán notes how Anglo-authored Gothic cultural production concerned with Latinx subjects tends to confine its gaze to Latin America rather than directing it within its own borders, at least until very recently.²³³ More recently, the fascination in Anglo-American popular

²²⁹ For further examples of Latinx Gothic cultural production, see Sandra Cisneros’ *Caramelo, or, Puro Cuento: a Novel* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2002); Kathleen Alcalá’s novels and short stories; Denise Chávez’s *Face of an Angel* (New York: Warner Books, 1995); and Ana Castillo’s *So Far from God: A Novel* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1993). For examples of Mexican and Mexican diasporic Gothic cultural production, see Silvia Moreno-García’s novels and short stories and Juan Rulfo’s *Pedro Páramo* (Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1955).

²³⁰ Tanya González, “The (Gothic) Gift of Death in Cherrie Moraga’s ‘The Hungry Woman: A Mexican Medea (2001),’” in *Chicana/Latina Studies* 7, no. 1 (Fall 2007), 46.

²³¹ Tanya González, “The Gothic in Cristina García’s *The Agüero Sisters*,” in *MELUS* 37, no. 3 (Fall 2012), 117.

²³² González, “The Gothic in Cristina García’s *The Agüero Sisters*,” 118.

²³³ Jesse Alemán, “The Other Country: Mexico, the United States, and the Gothic History of Conquest,” in *American Literary History* 18, no. 3 (Autumn 2006), 407.

culture with santería, Day of the Dead, and la Santa Muerte seems to suggest the novelty and thrilling horror of cultures characterized by unreason and a spooky ability to cross political and figurative borders that are presumed inviolate and “real”: life and death; flesh and spirit; the ordered North and the heaving, grotesque (but colorful in its excess) chaos of the global South. Even so, most U.S. Latino Gothic literary production has been authored by U.S. Latinos as they try to grapple with their own histories and the specters contained and disciplined by those histories. What this suggests is that unlike Native American authors, Latinx authors are not faced with the challenge of writing against a long-established and frequently violent tradition, which I will touch in the latter half of the chapter. The Gothic is therefore represented and often earnestly engaged in Latinx literary representations of families struggling with uncertain family histories and mobile socio-political positionalities. The Gothic provides Chicanx writers a framework for exploring relationality made gothic by entangled histories of colonization and the layered racial logics that shape cultural identity in contemporary Chicanx life. That this literature is not always easily identifiable as Gothic by an audience expecting dancing calaveras may reflect its concerns; in other words, that it frequently forgoes the tropes of magical realism is perhaps a function of Latinx authors’ effort to locate the Gothic in the mundane and domestic.

López’s insistence on realism is integral to *The Gifted Gabaldón Sisters*’ handling of the Gothic; and as Halberstam indicates, realism can still be Gothic if we account for how it utilizes “the changing technologies of subjectivity.”²³⁴ His observation pertains specifically to nineteenth century literature, and certainly we can see the Gothic at work in the work of María Amparo Ruiz de Burton. But if it can be argued that we also see the Gothic in the work of Jovita González, then this may be evidence that this Gothic tendency, this inclination towards a certain

²³⁴ Halberstam, *Skin Shows*, 2.

narrative framing of relationality, is part of the discursive legacy from which contemporary Chicana literature draws. In López's novel, the Gothic is felt through family relations rather than through any supernatural presence. Indeed, in Latinx literature, the Gothic often manifests via family relationships, regardless of whether it is accompanied by explicitly supernatural trappings.

The Chicana Gothic is concerned largely, though certainly not exclusively, with explorations of family memory and family secrets, and with the tight policing that post-colonization kinship structures entail.²³⁵ Paul Wickelson writes that in an American context, the Gothic is associated with the northeast and southeast, but that it is worth paying attention to how it manifests in the Southwest with its historical legacies, and, I argue, how it is made tangible in the interpersonal.²³⁶ Its manifestation in Latinx literature usually represents a response to a sense of absence or half-felt presence, an odd gap in family history thus in an incomplete sense of self or location. Such works explore "history" as something that is not carried and dealt with by the individual, but rather collectively, by a family or community. In doing so, they propose a relationship to time that permits the imagining of family histories differently.

The Gifted Gabaldón Sisters is a story built on a story, and the foundations story pertains to the character of Fermina, who is "present" in the present action of the text for only a short amount of time. The narrative is more obviously the story of a Chicana family living in California, having relocated from New Mexico; it follows the four daughters of the family, who have grown up without a mother and found a surrogate mother in their ancient housekeeper, a Pueblo woman called Fermina whose time with the family has been longer than the family's

²³⁵ I refer to works such as Sandra Cisneros's novels and short stories and Kathleen Alcalá's *The Flower in the Skull* (San Diego: Harcourt Brace, 1999).

²³⁶ Wickelson, "Shaking Awake the Memory," 102.

willingness to recall. She has, in truth, been with them since she was thirteen, when she entered the family as a slave, and she is moreover great-grandmother to the current generation. The man who purchased her, Inocencio Gabaldón, routinely raped her, and when she gave birth to a son he and his wife adopted the child into the family. This connection is firmly denied by the girls' father and his sister Nilda, however, and after Fermina's death, the only legacy with which the girls are left is Fermina's promise of a "gift" that they interpret as superpowers. These powers, real or imagined, prove to be of little use to the girls as they grow and come to face the conditions of their political marginality, from poverty to domestic violence to sexual assault and terrible loss. But the promise of the gift, of the connection it implies, haunts them and fills the space left by Fermina and their absent mother. When as adults they discover Fermina's real gift, the record of her life and a letter in which she introduces herself to them as their grandmother, they find that the promise of connection implied by their imagined gifts is realized in the form of kinship—a connection that transcends time and distance.

The prologue introduces us to an as-yet unnamed Fermina by referring to her as merely "a Pueblo woman" attached to the Gabaldón household: "A widowed utility worker, with five children, and an elderly Pueblo woman."²³⁷ The nature of that attachment is then clarified through a description of the family's small home and her introduction: "The four girls in the family share the largest bedroom, while the one boy, the middle child, sleeps in a youth bed in his father's room. The smallest bedroom belongs to Fermina, the aged housekeeper."²³⁸ In many ways, the description of the household echoes the eighteenth century census records I include in the first chapter; the patriarch is listed first, then his children, then the servants and bonded

²³⁷ Lorraine López, *The Gifted Gabaldón Sisters* (New York: Grand Central Pub., 2008), 1

²³⁸ *Ibid.*

laborers (usually Black or Indigenous) attached to the household. Their complex and frequently mobile relationship to the household is suggested and disguised by the language of the census. The spatializing effected by the description of the family home certainly serves to mirror the spatialized hierarchies that the census encodes. But here the text places all the narrative emphasis on this last inclusion in the family record, on the “attached” body ordinarily included as an afterthought. It is Fermina’s small room that receives the most attention from the text, which describes its “crammed” interior, the mirrors and rugs and dresser, and quilts; in short, the objects that suggest a presence or inhabitant. And it pays particular attention to the trunk in which her life story is contained, the records of her connection the family that belie the official record of her “attachment.” Among the contents are photo albums, baptismal gowns, yearbooks, diplomas, and birth certificates, the sundry objects collected by family to mark the passing of time through family milestones. Chief among these is “a parcel of yellowed pages, printed in fading and bound together with twine.”²³⁹ This is Fermina’s story, which comes in the form of unpublished Works Progress Administration interviews transcribed by an interlocutor working for the WPA’s recovery project. These same interviews are then stored in a chest that moves with the family, but which the family neglects and then forgets. What follows then, before the beginning of the contemporary, point-of-view chapters that make up the bulk of the novel, is the first excerpt from Fermina’s WPA interviews.

This emphasis on the trunk and its contents suggests, first, Fermina’s association with this hidden family archive, a repository of suppressed family history; and the ways in which this suppressed family history frames and perhaps directs the novel. The forgotten and unacknowledged archive of family memory frames the central story and makes it possible,

²³⁹ López, *The Gifted Gabaldón Sisters*, 2.

sometimes appearing to address it directly. Meanwhile, the framed text moves between the third, second, and first person with no apparent order, so that the narrator is never stable, but gives the impression of a kind of dialogism. Even so, the dialogism marks a struggle to overcome the deliberate interruption of certain communication technologies and the exclusion of Fermina from others. As a result, the girls find themselves trying to sustain conversations with ghosts and being frustrated in their efforts both by the obdurately silent older generation and by their own learned alienation from the family they desire to claim.

Chicanx literature, and Latinx literature more broadly, exhibits a peculiar focus on the figure of the Indigenous grandmother, or sometimes nanny.²⁴⁰ For Rafael Pérez-Torres, the fixation speaks the ways in which Chicanx novels “attempt to name a feeling of absence underlying the Chicano self.”²⁴¹ In Chicanx literature, Chicanx identities are often characterized by a “lack” that is “often associated with an absent family member.”²⁴² Interpreted in bad faith, we can see this as treating the grandmother as a repository of desires, as a trunk full of memories offering validations, as a document of authentication, or, at worst, a family heirloom to be paraded before guests. The text appears conscious of the issue, and in the act of claiming Fermina, López presents the stakes as a choice between claiming and rejecting. It may be worthwhile to inquire whether the text disregards other claims or disqualifies them by making Fermina an orphan with only the one set of grandchildren by only one of her two children. In this way, the text circumvents the issue of present-day relations and the complications they might present. However, López’s central focus is, like many other Chicanx family dramas, insular, at least in the sense that social life is examined from within the confines of the family group; it is

²⁴⁰ Pérez-Torres, *Mestizaje*, 196.

²⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 207.

²⁴² *Ibid.*, 206.

concerned principally with history as it is felt and lived within the family space, from which the family comes to understand its place in a larger web of relations.²⁴³ For López, it is in this space that historical relationality is experienced and explored, and so it is within this space that Fermina marks her presence and exceeds her erasure.

Fermina is first heard, audibly, with her own voice and not through the as-yet obscured testimony of the interview, in the first of the sister-narrated chapters that her story frames. A young Loretta, the second of the four girls, offers to show her friend Randy “her Indian” if he brings his dog, and the language used to propose the exchange indicates Fermina’s treatment as the family’s pet curiosity: “You have an *Indian*? Can I see?”²⁴⁴ Loretta contemplates how Randy’s gaze makes Fermina appear grotesque, even monstrous: “To him, she must have made the gargoyles in fairy tales seem smooth as babies.”²⁴⁵ And yet in Randy’s absence the text describes an intimacy between Loretta and Fermina that is at once suspect and also suggestive of the relational possibilities as López sees them: “I was used to Fermina, how she looked and the creaky way she spoke. I enjoyed curling up with her in bed and reading *Stories for Young Catholics* to her.”²⁴⁶ Their relationship can only be recognizable as one thing before the prying eyes of neighbors, but becomes more flexible in the dark, private, closeted space of Fermina’s bedroom. Fermina’s literal compartmentalization, and the location of that intimacy in a small and stifling room, suggests that the contained intimacy can only be realized fully, accepted fully, if named properly by the light of day. Until then, Fermina and the girls can only have a wobbly, unstable master-subject relationship. The text represents that realization as something that Fermina wants and needs as much as the girls do, transforming the girls into repositories for

²⁴³ I refer once more works such Cisneros’s *Caramelo* and Castillo’s *So Far from God*.

²⁴⁴ López, *The Gifted Gabaldón Sisters*, 6.

²⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 7.

²⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

Fermina's desires—her desire for a future after displacement, and an enduring existence that exceeds the terms of her legal erasure.

In the WPA interviews, she expresses a desire to be recognized by her children “as she recognizes them.”²⁴⁷ The stress placed on *her* recognition indicates the anxieties that complicate Chicana desire to claim kin who might not recognize them as kin in turn, and, more importantly, it identifies the obstacles to that kinship as barriers erected through the sustained colonial violence obscured and suggested by the romantic trappings of *noblesse oblige*. This insistence on indulgence complicates and makes sinister any demonstration of intimacy and care because so long as Fermina remains “attached,” the only language for understanding that care is the language provided by colonial modes of relation. Fermina's interactions with her son's wife Eulalia and their daughters insinuate as much: “Eulalia's daughters handle the housework, leaving little for Fermina to do, though she still enjoys working in the garden. Eulalia's children continue to treat her with kindness. They bring her candy and small gifts from trips to Albuquerque and Santa Fe. Though it is impossible, Fermina wishes there was a way for these young men and women to recognize her, as she does them, and one day call her *nuestra abuela*.”²⁴⁸ Read one way, the interviewer's language transform the small gifts and the exemption from housework into a form of condescension. It is a demonstration of power that is made felt through the exemptions of a person who is implied to be unequal, and it taints the kindness Fermina is shown by revealing it as merely the kind of intimacy that hierarchies permit. But a more generous reading, and perhaps the intended one, illustrates the ways in which intimacy may permit the defiance of the structures that limit desire. It signals the feelings that

²⁴⁷ López, *The Gifted Gabaldón Sisters*, 286.

²⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

may exist even outside of language and naming, though in that space it becomes uncanny. Fermina's desires haunt family life and interactions and the institutions by which they are understood, and what she desires is to make and know kin and for this desire to be reciprocated. While we should consider whether it is ethically sound to assign this desire to Fermina, what the novel emphasizes is the necessity of reciprocal recognition over time in the making of kin. Under these circumstances, reciprocity would necessarily involve entering into the uncanny and wrestling with the ghosts and histories that direct even the intimate and personal.

The history that contextualizes Fermina's desire to make kin comes to bear specifically on kinship structures in the Southwest, prompting an interrogation of kinship in the wake of bondage and displacement. As discussed in my first chapter, slavery in the Southwest spanned centuries, though it adapted to and circumvented different rubrics of legality, and to be sure, the practice of taking bonded servants continued until well-after the practice was outlawed. The mobile institution spawned and was supported by its own racial logics and forms of social exchange. It found justification in the system of *criadismo*, which James Brooks identifies as a form of fictive kinship. The *criado* might be captured in war or traded for, and might then be "adopted" into a Christian settler family for whom they would labor. The intended purpose of the incomplete adoption was to disrupt extant Indigenous kinship structures and absorb the captive into a transplanted social order within which they would always remain ancillary.²⁴⁹

The first explicit mention of slavery in the novel appears in one of the WPA interludes, gesturing to the material conditions that fueled the trade in captives even in the late nineteenth

²⁴⁹ Native Americans in captivity in the Southwest were often, though not always, treated as *criados*, a word that then meant a subordinate dependent, not unlike a ward. Significantly, the word has since come to mean "servant." *Criados* were included and excluded in a hierarchical kinship structure in which they were as a rule half-subjects. See James F. Brooks, *Captives & Cousins*.

century. In the interview, Fermina describes a runaway slave like a revenant: “When the village was enjoying a feast, a man emerged from the shadows and limped toward the hearth. [...] The man was sooty with filth and emaciated. ‘Let me eat,’ he said.”²⁵⁰ He then describes for gathered onlookers the conditions of his enslavement and mentions that he was sold during a recent famine. Later, in her account of her own capture, Fermina describes the starving, emaciated bodies of her Navajo captors in comparison to her own: “All [the captives] were young, healthy, and strong, while hunger had whittled the Navajo so that the knobs of their joints and notches of their spines jutted through loose flesh, but they shared what dried meat and meal they had with the captives.”²⁵¹ But before they experience it and survive it, the violence and want which the fugitive slave describes can only seem dehumanizing, disarticulating, and truly unknowable and unspeakable. Horrified by the runaway’s story, Fermina’s mother’s warns her to stay away from him: “His flesh smells of Maski, she said, of bone ash and sulfur. She claimed he had been expelled from the underworld, not wanting to believe that a family would trade a member for cornmeal and meat.”²⁵² It is a knowledge she cannot accept, and the story she assigns him demonstrates one way in which bodies placed outside knowability become spectral, a translation by which the familiar becomes alien and monstrous. The story gestures to an inability to process violence and the survival of that violence, but it contradicts her own later journey to her daughter and great-granddaughters across time, from the underworld of Euro-American historical archives and in defiance of its technologies of alienation.

Following her captivity, Fermina is subjected to the same process of attempted unnamings and remaking within settler sociality through violence. In a later interlude, Fermina recounts

²⁵⁰ López, *The Gifted Gabaldón Sisters*, 85.

²⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 153.

²⁵² *Ibid.*, 86.

being sold to the Gabaldón family, the loss of her language, being given a new name, as well as the physical and sexual abuse by which she was taught her place in the Gabaldón family. In her account, she illustrates the fictive kinship by which she is absorbed into and then written out of family histories. Following the birth of her child by Inocencio, Fermina refuses to be sent away, hoping that she might preserve a relationship with her son, however attenuated. At the urging of their priest, who reminds them that their actions are illegal (however customary), the family offers her a cruel compromise that on its face appears favorable: “Then, he said, she must be baptized to become a member of the family. So it was that Fermina was taken to church for the first time to be baptized and have her name written in the record. Though it was the custom of the time, Yrma refused to give her their surname, and Inocencio indulged his wife in this matter. Instead they christened her Fermina Hidalgo. [...] Now Fermina could attend church with the family.”²⁵³ She cannot name her child nor take his name as her own; she cannot be his mother, but neither can she part with the family to whom she must remain attached. She demonstrates how her real kinship with her child is transformed into a fictive one precisely through her baptism and incorporation into the family. Their relationship becomes spectral, gothic, and ephemeral. The transformation is effected through her baptism, through being “brought in” to a new form of kinship because of the capacity in which she is brought it, and because of what must be jettisoned or “written over.” Anterior forms of relationality are papered over, and as in a palimpsest, the new forms are haunted by whatever has been scratched out beneath.

As a palimpsest, the Gabaldón family archives show how Spanish and Mexican forms of relationality in the Southwest became gothic. They involved the constant negotiation and modulation of different forms of intimacy, and the political hierarchies that gave shape to those

²⁵³ López, *The Gifted Gabaldón Sisters*, 194.

forms necessitated a constant writing in and scratching out. In a letter to her supervisor, Fermina's interlocutor Heidi points to how Fermina is written out of family history and national archives in conjunction with the history of slavery in the Southwest. Entreating the Director of the New Mexico Writers Project not to pull Fermina's data from the WPA recovery project, she writes, "The insights she provides illuminate an important, and often overlooked, perspective on those early years in the territory. I know you have complained that my writing style is not suited for this project, but I suspect the information my subject divulges with regard to a leading family in this community is more the problem."²⁵⁴ Besides revealing a few of the sundry problems with collecting testimonios—the mediation required, the framing and editing, inclusion and exclusion—Heidi's letter obliquely gestures to the vast silences, the unspeakable and the unknowable, that frame the community and family histories they document. Within these circumstances, Fermina's claims are represented as a response to the deliberate occlusion of all that is left out of the WPA's accounts of Southwestern sociality, and are more indirectly an invasion of one family's inconsistently-documented and jealously-guarded history.

In her creation and recreation of the Gabaldón family records, López illustrates how the Gothic provides a framework for understanding how the family as an articulation of kinship is imagined and created within a historical context. The Gothic fixation on family, and the mobile set of boundaries and inclusions by which its parameters are determined and defended, is evidenced by the tropes it commonly makes use of—old letters or journals, family ghosts, forbidden rooms, mad wives in attics, boxes of old photographs. These props function as reminders that boundaries of what we term the domestic and private are permeable, that the full contents of the home might be less than secure and perfectly knowable. In the silences and

²⁵⁴ López, *The Gifted Gabaldón Sisters*, 250.

omissions, other presences and voices can at times be felt and heard. The sisters detect gaps and absences and fixate on them, attempting to reach through them towards the presences on the other side, rather than cement over them.

In *The Gifted Gabaldón Sisters*, the sisters sense their family ghosts manifesting in ways too subtle to very obviously invoke the Gothic. Their mother's smell emanates from Bette's pillow, or she appears as a shadow across Rita's bedroom ceiling; more significantly, she and Fermina intrude on the family's life at unexpected times through the expressed, or else poorly suppressed, yearning of their daughters. She and Fermina are made remarkable through their loud absence, as the absence itself marks the space where a presence should be. Fermina is only in the story long enough to make her absence felt, and the mother is missing entirely except as a name on a tombstone in the first chapter. The text gestures to the incomplete stories with which the sisters must live, the uncertainty they provoke, as well as the want that that is disciplined and curtailed by the Gabaldón elders. The Gothic is in this way made palpable in family dynamics, in the stilted expression of desires that threaten an opening for invasion. The text makes clear that the haunting in the novel is affective, and it is also clear that it is a family affair. As I will show further on, the affect moves from fear to curiosity, and then finally to familiarity and pleasure, from otherness to relation. The text thus narrates the process by which the sisters learn to be a receptive audience to the stories made available through those uncanny relations, interlocutors in a family story.

Fermina's ghostliness is established through her first introduction as a "spooky" disembodied voice issuing a command to her great-granddaughter's friend: "Get the dog,

boy.”²⁵⁵ By setting the conditions for the stranger’s entrance into the family space, she establishes her place within it, even if her voice itself is perceived as a frightening and illogical intrusion. This first encounter functions to establish a presence, as well as to provide a framework for how the text will continue to conjure that presence after her death: as an authoritative voice in the construction of a family, as an illogical force that shapes family relations, and as a plea for kinship that is answered in gestures rather than audible acquiescence, at least at first. For instance, the illogic of her place in the family is cemented by the Gabaldón patriarch’s rejections of it when his eldest daughter thoughtlessly claims Fermina as a “grandmother” in a moment of crisis, just as Fermina departs (physically) from the story. When Bette is caught outside of class by the school priest, having just escaped an attempted assault, she tells the priest, “My grandmother died.”²⁵⁶ It is the panicked response of a frightened girl to an authoritative figure who can offer no understanding or aid, but she nevertheless invokes Fermina *as absent kin* in her defense. Her eerie foresight suggests an uncanny awareness and identification of the losses she has and will have endured by the end of the narrative; because when she is marched into the school office, she is told that Fermina has died. But Bette’s father’s subsequent interrogation suggests that for him, the uncanny is doubled by the language with which she expresses that awareness. He asks her several times, in Spanish so his younger son cannot overhear, “Why did you say that?” and “How come you told Monsignor your *grandmother* died?”²⁵⁷

His panic is magnified in his sister Nilda’s violent reactions when she is made to account for her relationship with Fermina. When Bette’s strange exchange with her father is followed by

²⁵⁵ López, *The Gifted Gabaldón Sisters*, 6.

²⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 33.

²⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

an immovable silence, she asks her Aunt Nilda whether Fermina was a relative, and Nilda responds with uncharacteristic hostility: “Fermina, rest her soul, was nothing to us. [...] She worked for the family. That’s all.”²⁵⁸ Bette’s protestations cause Nilda to order a blanket silence on the subject: “She was la criada, and that’s all there is to it. [...] Don’t you start spreading this around, you hear me?” For Nilda, these are dangerous “fairytales” that gain validity through repetition.²⁵⁹ In calling Fermina “la criada,” Nilda insists on the distance permitted by fictive kinship structures that she hopes can ward against cobweb-laden family secrets invading the carefully curated archive by which she constructs the family’s present.

Nilda’s invocation of colonial relationality in her attempts to ward off the knowledge of something worse leaves unclear what it is that she identifies as *something worse*. It is unclear, for example, whether that something worse is kinship with la criada or the sexual violence that conditioned that kinship. Either may suggest something about what López is proposing as the specter haunting the family. But whether it is the violent history, or the relations that stem from that violence, what Nilda resists is the terror of knowing what should remain unknowable. Avery Gordon asks,

How do we reckon with what modern history has rendered ghostly? [...] It is a matter of exploring here the particular mediation that is haunting. As a concept, mediation describes the process that link and institution and an individual, a social structure and a subject, and history and a biography. In haunting, organized forces and systemic structures that appear removed from us make their impact felt in everyday life.²⁶⁰

What the novel mediates is the legacy of bondage and bonded labor in the southwest, as well as how that legacy works its way into family history and family life. Through Fermina, the Gabaldón family is linked to an overwhelming history they thought had been already contained

²⁵⁸ López, *The Gifted Gabaldón Sisters*, 40.

²⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 40-41.

²⁶⁰ Gordon, *Ghostly Matters*, 19.

in a space beyond knowability. What they resist, then, are the ways of “knowing” that Gordon argues is represented by haunting: “The way of the ghost is haunting, and haunting is a very particular way of knowing what has happened or is happening.”²⁶¹ Nilda’s fear of knowing might be explained by the fundamental irony that Emberley identifies in Freud’s approach to the uncanny, in which the uncanny “produces fear of insight, insight being the domain of the unconscious, a feminine domain or one occupied by savages.”²⁶² For Nilda, insight (whatever its immediate object) is the threat that Fermina wields against a family with a complex relationship to its own history, one that Nilda feels is best left unexamined. In the novel, the uncanny speaks to a divergence of knowledge in the sense that we see different ways of understanding history (and documentation) and different ways of knowing family and recording family.

In the novel, the specter creates the conditions for its eventual invasion of the family space by creating an audience that needs its presence and which has adopted this uncanny way of knowing. As Halberstam notes, the parasitic monster of the nineteenth century Gothic invades the “intimacy” of the home and takes it over. He moreover identifies the danger as internal, a possession and re-making of what is possessed: “The monster, such a narrative suggests, will find you in the intimacy of your own home; indeed, it will make your home its home (or you its home).”²⁶³ It is a figure that is drawn, as Halberstam hypothesizes, from “colonialist fantasies” of the other making its way to our hearth and “altering forever the comfort of domestic privacy.”²⁶⁴ Halberstam explains that the parasite “becomes paramount within [the] Gothic precisely because

²⁶¹ Gordon, *Ghostly Matters*, 8.

²⁶² Emberley, *The Testimonial Uncanny*, 24. Emberley argues that the inclusion within Western knowledge of the uncanny as what is anterior ironically creates an opportunity for destabilizing: Indigenous epistemology makes it possible to view the uncanny as repository of knowledge that once competed with its European scientific counterparts. In the great historical drama of epistemological conquest, however, it lost out to that particular formation and yet still survived in a transformed context as a ‘ghostly other.’” See Julia Emberley, *Ibid*, 27-28.

²⁶³ Halberstam, *Skin Shows*, 15.

²⁶⁴ *Ibid*.

it is an internal not an external danger.”²⁶⁵ If it is the latent perversity, unmanaged by fear, that permits the parasite to enter, then Nilda sees her niece’s unrestrained appetite for something the frightens Nilda as an invitation and a perverse search for insight that must be cut short.

For the Gabaldón sisters, the invading specters are frightening at first, but the fright is soon resolved by a sense of recognition, the pleasant sensation of things falling into place. Their manifestation is shocking and then pleasurable, but the move from fright to pleasure is attached to the familiarity of the source of the affect. Sophie, the youngest, is “spooked” by a picture of Fermina, whom she does not remember and whose picture seems stern and forbidding, distanced from the gift of humor which Sophie has received: “Though you love monster movies, that picture spooks the hell out of you.”²⁶⁶ For her, Fermina is a stranger detached from the mysterious legacy she bestowed on the girls, frightening because unknowable. Yet Fermina’s insistent presence marks a slippage between knowability and unknowability. As a young Rita is trying to sleep next to her sister, she sees “a slow-moving cloud casts an umbra near the ceiling that sharpens into her mother’s silhouette, but her expression is hard. [...] Rita struggles, ready to give in and check the house, when she faces her mother’s profile again. The shadow has shifted, transforming the silhouette into an owl with horned feathers and crooked beak. [...] Now Fermina’s bumpy profile issues from the shadowy stucco.”²⁶⁷ The indefinite, shifting form creeping across the enclosed, safe space of the bedroom is alarming—first her mother transforming into something unfamiliar, alien, animal, and then creeping its way back into familiarity. It triggers Rita’s need to check the home’s physical boundaries before soothing them. While the images are Rita’s projection onto meaningless shapes, the meaning and affect she

²⁶⁵ Halberstam, *Skin Shows*, 15.

²⁶⁶ López, *The Gifted Gabaldón Sisters*, 84.

²⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 71-72.

assigns them suggests how relations made unknowable drift in and out of familiarity. With the familiarity comes not horror but its relief.

“Conjuring” is how the text describes the invocation of connections, as demonstrated by the sisters’ expressions of longing for their mother. The term moreover suggests a species of witchcraft, the disruption of an established order, and the purposeful and deviant bringing into presence of things formerly consigned to the spectral. When Bette uses Rita’s old nickname, “Rita is floored. This was her mother’s pet name for her. She’s forgotten almost all about it until now. Hearing it conjures her mother—big and beaming.”²⁶⁸ Similarly, whenever Loretta cooks, she performs a form of domestic witchcraft: “Her scent stays with me. [...] Food smells, warm smells. I loved to cook, to conjure my mother’s fragrance.”²⁶⁹ The desire for connection and understanding that is missing in the older generations and present in the sisters is made evident in their active, illogical conjuring of the uncannily twinned figures of their mother and Fermina.

More than once, the sisters invoke their mother and Fermina as uncanny doubles, the face of the missing mother fading into the features of the missing servant. Years after Fermina’s departure from the narrative, “Rita conjures an image of her mother wearing an emerald robe. Her large face softened with sympathy. [...] Her mother’s image dissolves and Fermina appears. ‘Who were you really?’ Rita asks, astonished by how desperate she is to know.”²⁷⁰ To the sisters, their mother and Fermina are similarly familiar and unfamiliar, leaving in their collective wake a sense of lack experienced as the interruption of singular familial connection. Their curiosity about and yearning for Fermina becomes indistinguishable from their curiosity about and yearning for their mother, for a relation that might provide a solid, reassuring foundation to their

²⁶⁸ López, *The Gifted Gabaldón Sisters*, 117.

²⁶⁹ *Ibid*, 103.

²⁷⁰ *Ibid*, 213.

seemingly disjointed lives and incomplete identities. Even the gifts that they cling to as placeholders for that steady, grounding presence remain unreal for as long as their benefactors do. For Bette, the “gift” is a legacy that remains immaterial, and thus unhelpful, without the context that might better reveal its nature and place in her life. She suspects that only the knowledge of Fermina’s life will yield any answers: “Maybe if I figure out who Fermina was, then I’ll find out about that gift.”²⁷¹ The sisters sense that that the twinned connection they want, and indeed need, requires a knowledge of, and thus a familiarity with, the person for whom they are reaching. The curbed and now energized curiosity becomes desperation as the sisters grow older, and rather than wait for that connection to manifest, they begin to conjure it, suggesting the possibility of reciprocity with the long dead.

In their rediscovery of Fermina’s archive, they find a repository of answers that was always within reach. They travel to New Mexico only to discover that it holds less answers than they might have found within their own home, living with them as intimately as any stash of forgotten family albums. The trunk has in fact been passed between their home and Nilda’s, serving at one point as the table at which Loretta once interviewed her aunt about the family’s history, itself containing a history more integral but as forgotten as the furniture in their home. Fermina’s trunk provides an alternative family archive, though most of it might be considered junk by anyone but the archivist. In it, the sisters find the WPA narratives that frame and give context to their narrated lives, as well the letter by which Fermina introduces herself as family, making herself finally *familiar*. The text does not present Fermina only as a repository, but rather as an archivist of stories that are her own while also giving shape to the sisters’ lives; her gift is not just context, or a gift of material to be appropriated in service to another’s process of

²⁷¹ López, *The Gifted Gabaldón Sisters*, 46.

becoming. The gift it is the knowledge of her life and the shared history by which they are bound and thus the possibility of relation, though whether it is an uncanny burden or a gift depends on the willingness of the recipient to acknowledge what is being offered. It requires the reciprocity that the previous Gabaldón generation was unable to give: acknowledgment in return for the legacy being acknowledged.

As Loretta reads the WPA narratives that have been shaping her story at the margins of her awareness, she observes how the history and the relations it makes possible already have a felt presence in her life. It is a presence that remained ghostly only because it is rendered unknowable, but that nevertheless makes itself known through feeling: “My inner ear buzzed with swelling silence that exploded into a cacophony of sounds: voices in an unrecognizable language, the snap of flames, hooves drumming the hard-packed earth, and weeping. [...] The script on the page wavered, blurring as hot tears stung my eyes, but it was sure and true in the inexorable, undeniable way that one is at last confirmed in what one knows without knowing.”²⁷² Fermina’s story is for Loretta a confirmation rather than an imposition. Though she experiences the recognition as shock—a thing long felt now spoken—it is not traumatic or dislocating. To the contrary, the “inexorable” pull of a history places her in a complex relation with the other subjects of that history. She is relocated as past events are brought violently, and intimately, into her present in an act of possession that is welcomed because it soothes the loneliness of an isolating modernity that places its subjects out of history and the relations it entails.

In her letter, Fermina introduces herself with a name that has not appeared in in the Gabaldón family records until now: “You call me Fermina, but my name is Nuvamsa.”²⁷³ The

²⁷² López, *The Gifted Gabaldón Sisters*, 316.

²⁷³ *Ibid.*, 314.

name that represents the conditions placed upon her ancillary inclusion in the family peels back over the name by which she knows herself: “This is my gift, so you will know me, and my mother.”²⁷⁴ Fermina then recounts the story of her own mother’s tireless search for her daughter, just as Fermina searched for the Gabaldón sisters and they her. She describes a legacy of yearning and reaching out: “How could I know what she had done without hearing this? It was her last gift to me. Now that I have lost so much, I still have this, and through this, I have my mother with me. I close my eyes and I see her [...] walking all those miles, all these years, just to find me. [...] I am your great-grandmother, and this is my story, so you will know how far I have come to be with you.”²⁷⁵ The language refers to time and presence and movement through time; the text frames time as a permeable boundary, and even as a road, rather than as an immovable division that prohibits the carrying forth or the reaching back that these relations entail. It also gestures once more to the importance of reciprocity. That is, of mutual recognition and accountability outside the bounds of those institutions that police its mechanisms, those social and judicial systems of recognition that cannot recognize the journeys toward one another undertaken by illegitimate (and therefore uncanny) families. Yet those journeys must be undertaken mutually and in full awareness of the histories (violent and intimate) through which the participants are journeying, and of their place in that history. That is how the Gabaldón sisters accept the gift of relation.

Acceptance first requires their rejection of the settler time described by Rifkin, which means to monopolize the process of being in time by establishing a universal temporality in which people and events remain safely locked in the past. Nilda insists on its enforced distance

²⁷⁴ López, *The Gifted Gabaldón Sisters*, 314.

²⁷⁵ *Ibid*, 315.

when she denies any knowledge of the WPA interviews, remarking to her nieces, “I don’t know why you girls want to get mixed up with that old nonsense.”²⁷⁶ For Nilda, the stakes are as high as they are unspoken. Poking too much into the past will cause it to poke back, interfering with the myths that make a particular kind of sociality possible, as well as a particular myth of self. In other words, it interferes with her desire to see herself as detached, set apart from conditions that give form to her life, and therefore as irreproachable. The specter of Fermina and the kinship she offers requires an accountability at odds with that myth of self; a recognition of her own and her niece’s implication in the histories from which they emerged.

The sisters cannot mourn Fermina as a grandmother without the knowledge of that history of violence, and can only feel at the edges of the hole she leaves in their own personal histories, so they spend the greater part of the narrative reaching for the frame narrative lying just beyond their awareness. They must know Fermina’s history and name it, and their place in it, before they can mourn. They are then better able to understand the loss they and Fermina have endured and are permitted to grieve those long-denied losses. This mourning also requires that they establish relationships with the dead by reaching across time, and the act cements those relationships as real in the present—and thus affirms a contingent, complicit, historical subjectivity, a critical mestiza identity that recognizes the complexity of the relations by which it is created and conditioned. Fermina’s story is not old marginalia; it is instead a part of their own story, a living legacy. However, this act of mourning resists melancholy, which would suggest that the mestiza subject is “the passive inheritor of a disempowered past.”²⁷⁷ Pérez-Torres argues that “the loss implicit in mestizaje is not the tragic loss of the Indian now remembered only as

²⁷⁶ López, *The Gifted Gabaldón Sisters*, 253.

²⁷⁷ Pérez-Torres, *Mestizaje*, 216.

part of a nebulous past forever severed from the complexities of contemporary history. Rather, the loss implicit in a critical mestizaje is one that actively propels mestizo bodies through the ruptured terrain of a historical present.”²⁷⁸

There is much to be gained through a willing engagement and acknowledgement, including the opportunity for participation in a shared story. Fermina’s letter draws parallels between Fermina’s journey to the girls, Fermina’s mother’s own journey, and their own journey across the ruptured terrain to which Pérez-Torres refers. Rifkin argues that “story offers a means of understanding how collective stories can be immanent within everyday interaction and perception, generating kinds of continuity and connections across time that do not necessarily require immediate contiguity of experience (either geographic and generational).”²⁷⁹ In the Gabaldón sisters we see descendants who have been displaced across space and also in time, and who have suffered the loss of the “bridge” with which to cross time and thereby find meaning in their experiences. Fermina builds just such a bridge and places it in a box, and then prepares the sisters to desire it and look for it when they are old enough to relate to the stories it contains.

In responding to the circumstances of their own marginalization, the sisters—first children and now women—participate in their own creation as an audience. They want to believe that they have received gifts precisely because they wish to find some order in lives in which they feel they have little agency. Throughout their narrated lives, the gifts have a constant presence, manifesting via coincidence or deliberate invocation at times and proving entirely useless at others. As children, the sisters try to identify the gifts as magical bequests that empower them in a world that has rendered them all but powerless—an ability to heal, to lie, to

²⁷⁸ Pérez-Torres, *Mestizaje*, 216.

²⁷⁹ Rifkin, *Beyond Settler Time*, 40.

speaking things into being, to induce laughter. Rita, for instance, attempts to use her gift for speaking things into being to dispatch a sexually abusive uncle, while Bette uses her ability to lie convincingly to navigate difficult domestic relationships. As imagined, their gifts are unreliable; they provide no answers or real power, and the sisters are left scrambling to find their footing: “Rita’s not sure what to believe, wishes she has had some way to know. She often rakes her memory for traces of Fermina, for answers, even clues about this.”²⁸⁰ The doubts emerge as they realize an inability to direct their circumstances, and as the gifts prove unable to deflect tragedy or even provide meaning. For the sisters, the gifts they imagine speak to a desire for tangible legacy amid so much absence, as well as to a concrete need for power over/within difficult material circumstances. The gifts then become placeholders for an unknowable legacy that conditions their very existence, shaping their lives from the molecular to the political, but that remains beyond their comprehension so long as their experiences are not embedded in a larger collective story.

The WPA segments often mirror the chapters that follow, as though the narrative is modelling the stories included like marginalia. What is more, like the WPA segments, the chapters themselves are snapshots in time that gesture to bigger stories. They jump forward in time as the WPA segments jump back. Fermina’s story about the sacred clowns of her village WPA precede Sophia’s account of her efforts to cope with her experiences through comedy; and Fermina’s account of her rape by Inocencio precede Rita witnessing her coworkers’ rape by a group of white men, as well as her recollection of her own assault. Like Fermina, the sisters experience sexual violence, abandonment, systemic injustice, and grief. The narrative pairings do not intend to establish commensurability, but they do imply that the sisters are better able to

²⁸⁰ López, *The Gifted Gabaldón Sisters*, 163.

name the darker facets of a complicated legacy as they experience it. They can understand Fermina's experiences and their own when they see the patterns of violence and endurance that have been carried forward into their own lives. This facilitates the naming of experience, including Fermina's heretofore unspoken experiences, which in turn permits them to participate in the networks of belonging that facilitate survival in the margins. Through the letter, the sisters realize that Fermina's gift is not magic and will not spare them suffering but may help them make sense of it and endure together.

Fermina's story and letter do not serve an uncritical fantasy of reunion, and they do not circumvent complicity by establishing kinship. If López's novel is a search for the validation of Chicana desire, it nevertheless insists on the importance of accountability, reciprocity, and participation—and it defies the impediments toward that reciprocity and participation that settler time and historicization present. That defiance grants the Gabaldón sisters access to a legacy that is no less welcome for being difficult, and they enthusiastically embrace history's specters as their reality.

Manifestations

The prevalence of Native ghosts in the settler Gothic evidences a specific kind of settler violence, another technology of disappearance. In the settler Gothic, Indians are the vengeful dead that disturb the home, the nuclear family, and the nation built on their burial grounds. In describing the prevalence of Indian revenge in settler narratives about Indian ghosts, Warren Cariou explains that "revenge is of course the return of something: An injury for an injury. It has an economy which is fundamentally uncanny: misdeeds of the past create a climate in which

dangerous symptoms must erupt in the present."²⁸¹ There is guilt implied in the fear of revenge, in the disturbance of settler legitimacy, but it is joined to an insistence on right: the right to defend settler identity against the violent disturbance of past sins, and the right to defend the settler home built on blood-soaked ground. It is telling that this right is not extended to the dead who have refused their place, because the claims of the dead are uncanny *interruptions* of the settler's right, and are made visible only as a violence that the settler will use as justification for a violent response. It justifies an ultimate exorcism. For even when the Indian ghosts do not actively interfere in settler articulations of right, they remain the malignant but immaterial remnants that "unsettle" the family home. They turn the ground sour and cause borders and boundaries built on that ground to deteriorate. There is no joy in this disturbance; they are merely a passive obstacle to settler claims, both ideological and also thereby territorial. Such narrative representations suggest that the land itself is possessed by unreason and refuses to succumb to settler reason, further indicating a belief that a whole and undisturbed settler subject requires Native disappearance, a disappearance only as tragic as it is essential.

It behooves us to dwell on what it means for Native American writers and scholars to "possess" a genre that on its face appears to be fundamentally antithetical to their survival. As Sugars and Turcotte observe, "the refusal of Indigenous people to disappear has been as long standing as invader narratives proclaiming this inevitability."²⁸² In their discussion of the Canadian Gothic as a transplanted form, Sugars and Turcotte ask whether the Gothic as a narrative mode can ever be "indigenous to Canadian experience," or if it can only ever chart the psychology of the settler invader.²⁸³ Renée Bergland, for instance, sees ghost stories only as a

²⁸¹ Warren Cariou, "Haunted Prairie: Aboriginal 'Ghosts' and the Spectres of Settlement," in *University of Toronto Quarterly* 75, no. 2 (2006), 729.

²⁸² Sugars and Turcotte, "Introduction," xix.

²⁸³ *Ibid.*, ix.

“technique of removal,” and further suggests that Native writers cannot engage the American Gothic critically without reinforcing its function.²⁸⁴ Boyd and Thrush move away from this reading by arguing that “in telling ghost stories to the colonizer, Indigenous writers claim one of the most powerful narrative tropes and use it for their own ends, replacing settler guilt with Indigenous mourning, and imagined spectral ancestries with actual genealogies embedded in the land. These ghosts are political, as ghosts almost always are.”²⁸⁵ Like Bergland, however, they assume a settler audience and assign to the genre an inherent melancholia. Not only is it unwise to assume a settler audience, but I moreover feel that in Native hands, the Gothic can go beyond representations of Indigenous mourning. The Indigenous Gothic can serve as a technique of endurance precisely because its functions are not limited to critique, and it is not locked in particular relations with transplanted settler forms or settler audiences. Besides directly responding to settler forms and settler violence, it also facilitates a flight from those forms.

In answer to their own query, Sugars and Turcotte determine that the Indigenous Gothic “attests to a tentative, yet also palpably immediate, perception of overlapping realities and temporalities in the wake of settler-invader diasporic history.”²⁸⁶ It is a perception that becomes perverse within the imagined space of settler modernity, as Rifkin asserts: “The supposed anteriority of Native lifeworlds provides a model of perverse fixity, and, thus, Indigenous experiences of time seem as if they are a deviant way of remaining caught in the past. From this perspective Indigenous duration can only be the carrying forward of what properly should be past, and inversion of ‘real’ time or ‘natural’ time which implicitly is that of Euramerican

²⁸⁴ Renée Bergland, *The National Uncanny: Indian Ghosts and American Subjects* (Hanover: Dartmouth College published by University Press of New England, 2000), 4.

²⁸⁵ Boyd and Thrush, “Introduction,” xx.

²⁸⁶ Sugars and Turcotte, “Introduction,” ix.

historicism.”²⁸⁷ For this reason, I argue that the Gothic can be useful mode for imagining Indigenous and Chicana presence and continuity in time. It provides a language of disturbance, one which describes the deliberate conjuring of people and history and forms made spectral from out of the national repressed, and the kind of fruitful disturbance and resurgence this might enable for Native people. It allows for the expression of an identity that is contingent upon these overlapping realities and temporalities, an identity that is dynamic and vital, regardless of how uncanny and anachronistic it is made elsewhere. Incidentally, the endurance of these uncanny identities may indeed pose a challenge and a threat to settler dominance. It may in fact permit a demand for restitution or an insistence on just revenge as necessary for balance. But this, it must be reiterated, is terrifying only for settler audiences, which we cannot assume, just as we cannot assume that the affective responses of other audiences would be the same.

Just such an understanding of the function of ghosts shapes their representation in Native ghost stories, and the manner of their incorporation informs their relationships with the living. Cariou writes that in Native stories “these spirits are not necessarily figures of uncanny terror. [...] And while many spirits do seem to address the transgressions of the past, they usually do so as part of a call for some kind of redress or change in the present.”²⁸⁸ Certainly, LeAnne Howe seems less concerned with the role of ghostliness in the formation of settler subjectivities and more concerned with its role in the formation of Native temporal and historical subjectivity; in fact, she has noted how *Shell Shaker* excludes all but a small handful of non-Native characters.²⁸⁹ Consequently, in her novel, the traditional “subject” of terror has been replaced with the traditional source of that terror, the Indian ghost. Through this inversion, she emphasizes the

²⁸⁷ Rifkin, *Beyond Settler Time*, 39-40.

²⁸⁸ Cariou, “Haunted Prairies,” 730.

²⁸⁹ Kirstin L. Squint, “Choctawan Aesthetics, Spirituality, and Gender Relations: An Interview with LeAnne Howe,” in *MELUS* 35, no. 3 (Fall 2010), 213.

importance of sustaining the relationships that enable the formations of Native temporal and historical subjectivity; as well as of the keys these living connections provide for endurance and the resolving of violent legacies.

Howe is interested in using ghosts to describe embodied archives of family and communal knowledge and history. Insofar as Howe makes use of the uncanny, she invokes Emberley's notion of the Indigenous uncanny, which, as Emberley explains, "involves reading the ways that Indigenous storytellers, in film, literature, performance art, and other artistic cultural practices, are turning the indigenous uncanny into its opposite, providing a new understanding of kinship and 'home.'"²⁹⁰ Howe turns the uncanny into its opposite by joining, often without alienating fanfare, concepts ordinarily treated not only as discrete but also antithetical—past and present, the living and the dead, ancestor and descendant, narrator and subject, frame story and inner narrative. These concepts are not merely joined, but instead *become* the other—the dead are living, ancestors become their descendants, and the past becomes the present as time folds in on itself. As a result, the reader receives the impression not of historical cycles but of a single continuing story. This narrative continuity, of course, carries implications for the genre. For example, the erasure of distinctions between ancestor and descendant forces a reconsideration of haunting as a conceptual modality, which in turn affects the "family Gothic" as a generic form. Who does the haunting and what the haunting is meant to accomplish is a central concern of Howe's fiction. What relations does it reveal and make possible? What perspectives does it force upon the subject of the haunting?

²⁹⁰ Emberley, "The Testimonial Uncanny," 295.

Relation is central to Howe's work. In any analysis of Howe's writing, it is useful to reference her own notion of tribalogy, an interpretive framework and methodology that informs her work. She explains that "Native stories, no matter what form they take (novel, poem, drama, memoir, film, history), seem to pull all the elements together of the storyteller's tribe, meaning the people, the land, and multiple characters and all their manifestations and revelations, and connect these in past, present, and future milieus."²⁹¹ For this reason, in her work, she has "tried to show that tribalogy comes from the Native propensity for bringing things together, for making consensus, and for symbiotically connecting one thing to another."²⁹² A tribalogy is a story that draws together by defying distinction, making possible a coming together and *made* possible by this connection. It requires reciprocity and uncanny intimacies. Moreover, as I will show, it requires a relinquishing of absolute narrative control and a receptivity to possession by other authorial voices. This is important because, Howe argues, "stories continually bring us into being," and these stories have always been the product of uncanny collaborations between past, present, and future.²⁹³

Shell Shaker is a hard novel to summarize because it folds together two places and times. It seems structured around two distinct narrative centers. However, it follows the affairs of a single family whose past and present stories become indistinguishable as they move forward in two time periods that feel more adjacent than sequential. We are introduced first to Shakbatina and her grandmother Onatima, long dead; her daughters Anoleta, Neshoba, and Haya; her husband Koi Chitto, a warrior from the war clan; and Yanabi Town, their Choctaw community in eighteenth century Mississippi. We meet Shakbatina's brother, Nitakechi, likewise from the

²⁹¹ LeAnne Howe, "The Story of America: A Tribalogy," in *Clearing a Path: Theorizing the Past in Native American Studies*, ed. Nancy Shoemaker (New York: Routledge, 2002), 42.

²⁹² Ibid.

²⁹³ Ibid.

peacemaker clan; and Jean-Baptiste Le Moyne de Bienville, their French ally whose interests they defend against the Inkilish okla, the English. Finally, we meet Red Shoes, Anoleta's Chickasaw warrior husband from the Red Fox clan, whose intimacy with the English troubles his wife's family, and whose murder of his Red Fox Chickasaw second wife aggravates Chickasaw-Choctaw relations when the Red Fox village blames Auda for the death and demands her death in return. Suspecting that Red Shoes and the Red Fox clan will use this as an excuse to attack the Choctaw on behalf of the English, Shakbatina chooses to sacrifice herself in her daughter's place, knowing well that the war that Red Shoes has begun is coming regardless.

In the present, Shakbatina's descendants, the Billy family, are spread across the country, but they come together on the Choctaw reservation in Oklahoma in the midst of a political crisis within the Choctaw government. The matriarch of the family, Susan Billy, gathers her daughters and her brother Isaac when Auda, Susan's eldest, is possessed by the spirit of Shakbatina and in this state shoots Redford McAlester, her former lover and the corrupt head of the tribal government—and the reincarnation of Red Shoes. Susan takes the fall for the murder, causing an uproar on the reservation, and relatives living and dead gather together to clear her name and put Red Shoes' spirit to rest so it never returns. Such strange returns abound in the text: Susan is the reincarnation of Shakbatina, who has “split her soul,” enabling her presence in Susan and elsewhere. The Billy sisters—Auda, Adair, and Tema—are the reincarnations of Shakbatina's daughters, all but one of whom died in the struggle against Red Shoes. And their Uncle Isaac is Nitakechi returned. All are trying to finish a conflict, or conclude a story, that began centuries before; and this notion of continuance, as opposed to repetition, manifests most clearly in the way the text narrates the central conflict of the story as one singular conflict operating on different fronts and different times.

The central conflict of the story is broken up into the first, second and third Choctaw wars even as the text undermines this compartmentalization through its insistence on causality. Conrad Scott observes that “Indigenous literature, following the culturally destructive process of colonial European advancement and absorption of what are now called the Americas, tends to narrate a sense of ongoing crisis rather than an upcoming one.”²⁹⁴ And indeed, the final stage of the war waged in this battle references its own genealogy. The political tensions that led to Shakbatina’s sacrifice date to first contact with European settlers, and these in turns precipitated the Choctaw Civil War, which, the novel argues, laid the groundwork for the casino wars in the early 1990s. If Redford McAlester’s greed and his willingness to launder money for the Italian mafia through the casinos while skimming off more than his share (all ostensibly for the benefit of the Choctaw people) suggests settler involvement and motivated provocation, then this relationship mirrors the history of settler influence on internal affairs as the novel represents it. In his previous incarnation as Red Shoes, McAlester began his life as the half-Choctaw, half-Chickasaw intermediary between two tribes, a position which required frequent interfacing with the tribes’ allies. According to Divine Sarah, a supernatural agent who will become integral to the story in part because she bears witness to events across Choctaw history, “the Choctaws tattooed Red Shoes’ face with the inter-tribal sign of friendship. He became a messenger for both tribes. What perfect job for a covetous man! [...] Red Shoes rose to power by trading information for muskets—to the English, or the French, or his own.”²⁹⁵ He demonstrated a willingness to trade information with the English and French for weapons and a willingness to turn on people for power, all the while believing that he could become a great hero by so

²⁹⁴ Conrad Scott, “(Indigenous) Place and Time as Formal Strategy: Healing Immanent Crisis in the Dystopias of Eden Robinson and Richard Van Camp,” in *Extrapolation* 57, no 1-2 (2016), 77.

²⁹⁵ Howe, *Shell Shaker*, 72.

doing—defending his people from the same settlers with whom he collaborated and who used him for their own ends.

While delivering a lecture to a largely settler audience, Auda, a historian by training, outlines how the Choctaw understood their relationships to foreigners, and how these settlers used those relationships to create internal strife: “Off and on during the early years of the eighteenth century, the French-supporting Choctaws fought the English-supporting Chickasaws. Each tribe adopted a foreign tribe. [...] During the eighteenth century, hundreds and hundreds of Indians died in the effort to acculturate their foreign adoptees.”²⁹⁶ She sketches a history of white settlers stirring enmity and gestures to the internal problems caused by external pressures, like the war between the Chickasaw and the Choctaw, all of which benefitted external parties. Through her, the text provides historical context for the present casino wars, wherein the Genovese mafia profits from tribal corruption, instigating internal strife and reaping the benefits. Adair later notes that the casinos “were set up to benefit the Mafia, not the Choctaw people.”²⁹⁷ Gore Battiste, the family’s Alabama Conchatys lawyer, likewise comments on the “new Indian wars,” remarking that casino revenues on tribal land would attract the attention of international gangs and the “corporate Mafia.”²⁹⁸ Like Adair, he suggests that it is Indians who lose out in the end, if not tribal governments. And for Susan Billy, the stakes are even greater; in arguing that they should not depend on the Mafia to return Choctaw land to Choctaws, she insists that McAlester’s actions, much like Red Shoes’ earlier actions, are tantamount to “mortgaging a thousand years of Choctaw sovereignty.”²⁹⁹

²⁹⁶ Howe, *Shell Shaker*, 44.

²⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 90.

²⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 114.

²⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 109.

The novel draws out a violent genealogy, as well as its forms and its creations, from the first appearance of European settlers. It moreover shows that the violence is cumulative and demands a response that in turn requires a reconsideration, or redefinition, of hereditary responsibilities. Near the beginning of the novel, Shakbatina remarks that “wars are more prevalent” than in her grandmother Onatima’s time, and there is a fading distinction between peacemaker and warrior, which is to say between diplomacy and violent resistance.³⁰⁰ When she exchanges her life for intercommunal peace, Shakbatina walks toward her death wearing the white of the peacemakers and the red of the warriors. She submits to her execution with the full understanding that this is no conclusion to a violent story that builds on itself, and that a true resolution, a final peace, will require an ongoing battle fought on different stages. To be a peacemaker in a time of war is to be a warrior. Shakbatina’s daughters and descendants, all born into her peacemaker clan, must then become warriors, their genealogy drawn through a relationship to one continuous battle.

To understand how this long war is a fought, we must consider how the novel understands temporality and historical agency, as well as the role of storytelling in both. I discussed earlier how the novels I analyze toy with the traditional structure of the Gothic tale by placing the frame story and the central narrative in new relations. In *Shell Shaker*, which begins and ends with Shakbatina, the frame and narrative are inverted in the sense that the past frames the present rather than the reverse; in other words, those passages narrating the past, always in present tense, frame future events. The past begins to invade the narrative it frames while authorial distance fades slowly and then entirely. As the boundary markers between past and present disappear, generations appear to interact on a multidirectional path that spans time, and

³⁰⁰ Howe, *Shell Shaker*, 8.

control over the story is difficult to ascertain because it becomes difficult to tell which story frames the other.

In some ways, the inverted but labile structure mirrors the notions of generation discussed on the very first page: “Ano ma Chahta sia hoke oke. Call me Shakbatina, a Shell Shaker. I am an Inholata woman, born into the tradition of our grandmother, the first Shell Shaker of our people. We are the peacemakers for the Choctaws.”³⁰¹ Shakbatina traces a tradition first laid out in her account of her own ancestors, the Grandmother of Birds and her husband, against De Soto and his Spanish invasion, and the ceremonial practices by which a genealogical procession, an inheritance, was ensured. In these first sentences, she establishes herself as storyteller, narrator, and participant; she is the presence that lends authority to the story that follows and the final authority over events narrated. Her voice frames the story and makes its possible, though she is nevertheless subject to the events, past and present, that she tells into being. The present tense in “I am” and “we are” is likewise important. According to Howe, “Choctaw language is almost always present tense and moving. [...] It's another reason why I consciously write in present tense even though I'm writing about the past. For almost all of us Native-centric-types (my tongue is in my cheek), the past is ever present whether it's through the ceremonies, ghosts, or land.”³⁰² This consideration of the ultimate power and authority of the storyteller, their determination of the shape of things past and present, and the interpretive frameworks with which we approach it, comes to bear on the process of historicization and the relationship to time (or more accurately, to temporality as a notion) that that process requires.

³⁰¹ Howe, *Shell Shaker*, 1.

³⁰² Squint, “Choctawan Aesthetics,” 219.

The relationship of an authorial present is assumed in Western histories, but in the novel the authorial voice comes into the present from the past. Time becomes a story shaped by the teller, the stories as history and history as stories people tell. As Howe tells it, “The story you get depends on the point of view of the writer. At some point histories are contextualized as fact, a theoretically loaded word.”³⁰³ As she reminds us, these stories are the processes by which a people articulate a sense of being in time, so the motivations that inform the processes are key to understanding their outcomes. Establishing control of those processes means control of the stories, hence the Western insistence on the unassailability of the conceptual modalities, like Western time and Western science, on which its own rely. As Shakbatina assumes narrative control of the past and present war, and of her sacrifice and its consequences, she draws a line between people and events. She creates a continuous history and continuous community through association, thereby facilitating the survival of an extant people in defiance of settler histories that narrate alternative temporal relationships into nothingness. As evidence of this survival, she creates an alternative archive in which the future that she narrates into being is kept alongside the past.

Comprehension of the models of survival and communal presence in time that Howe proposes in her writing first requires an understanding of the novel’s ghosts and the spaces, and, importantly, the conceptual modalities they haunt. It likewise requires an examination of the strategies by which they haunt and the history that makes them ghostly. In reaching toward such an understanding, the novel foregrounds the importance of a familiarity with archives, with how they are kept, and how they are embodied. These histories are in some measure represented in the novel by the written records of Father Renoir, a Jesuit living among the Choctaws in Yanabi

³⁰³ Howe, “The Story of America,” 33.

Town in the eighteenth century, who chooses to leave his order in order to marry into the community. Rapidly writing the journal entries he has neglected in the years he has spent in the town, he finishes them and hands them off to another priest just as he is about to flee the coming battle with Neshoba and the young and infirm. What he chooses to include and scratch out of the written records is notable for the way it appeals to their intended audience and their agendas. Renoir himself refers to them as his “lies to history” as he marks out those sections in which he expresses admiration for the Choctaw people and their cultural practices—“No use leaving behind evidence that will disgrace his father in Quebec”—and instead falsifies or editorializes reports of their drunkenness, belligerence, and primitiveness.³⁰⁴ His discomfort and his justifications are together suggestive: “He reasons that it is best for France and the Church not to know that the greed of their faith is causing the demise of Indian tribes. Even though he is leaving his religion he cannot bring himself to speak ill of it.”³⁰⁵ His capitulation and deferred reservations, however contradictory, lay bare the nature of the archive and reveal much about how and why people “make” history, as well as why it feels to them imperative to make it in a certain way. Renoir’s journals illustrate how knowledge is made within Western frameworks—the document, the factual record, the official archive compiled by “qualified” authors—as well as a deeply ingrained and unquestioned impulse to preserve this paradigm of knowledge-making. Renoir cannot shame his father, or the colonial project his father represents, by including a story that disrupts the story they depend on; his “lies to history” supply this colonial project with the narratives on which colonial notions of progress and authority (and historical authorship) rely, but he only hints at the unspoken of what is at stake in this kind of storytelling. Renoir’s story brings into being colonial powers as they wish to imagine themselves, and it brings into being

³⁰⁴ Howe, *Shell Shaker*, 178-179.

³⁰⁵ *Ibid*, 179.

the Choctaw as already-ghosts that must pass away before the living. His story will become for the archivist the history that justifies the erasure of all that it excludes.

Though she leaves academia to play a larger role in tribal politics, Auda is a historian by training. Familiar with archival erasure, she turns to alternate archives from which she draws evidence of a different story that brings into being a different present. She points to the land itself as providing a history belying settler narratives. In her confrontational lecture on the early eighteenth century inter-tribal animosities and battles that preceded the Choctaw Civil War, Auda notes the traces left behind and the settler inability to read this kind of archive: “The earth still gives up little mementos from this battle, a fragment of ax blade, pottery shards, splinters of flint from a war club. It was the women who chased down the traitors within our midst, but for what? To protect disagreeable foreigners [...] who would one day have the gall to explain our history to us.”³⁰⁶ Working outside Western archives and against Western history, she remarks on the relationship to the past and *the desire for narrative control* implied in Western history making. Her lecture reveals how Western historians choose materials for the archive and how their curation cements authorial control and distance because it refuses any evidence that cannot be comprehended by their own narrative machinery. They refuse any evidence that suggests too close a proximity to the affairs of daily life, and that moreover gives ownership of the history to people considered unfit for ownership. Any external insistence on ownership is instead pathologized as delusional and aberrant, but, as Auda demonstrates, that ownership is felt and demonstrated by the ability to read it and know it differently.

³⁰⁶ Howe, *Shell Shaker*, 44.

Auda's own relationship with history entails an intimacy that exceeds documented evidence and that defies her own training. When she considers her interest in Bienville and her certainty that she "knows" him, she demonstrates what under different circumstances would be considered a delusional fixation: "She dismissed this as a curse or her profession. Many historians talked about developing psychic communications with those they researched. [...] They often realized that their 'channeling' had been a result of having read too much into what little they'd found out. Nevertheless, as she poured over the French documents, certain episodes that dealt with her tribe and Bienville felt more like memories than mere historical events."³⁰⁷ Auda's musings reveal obliquely how we ordinarily understand historical events—as impersonal and unreal, or spectral—by showing us a departure from the established professional protocols that serve to place distance between the scholar and her subject. Western history sees the past as a different country, but Auda *feels* that different country in a way that might be called uncanny by a less receptive host. She exhibits a familiarity that troubles temporal distinctions, and troubles moreover that authority assumed by the living present over a dead past.

While considering her relationship to history, Auda is unceremoniously thrust into a vision in which she sees herself holding Shakbatina's hand; and in this vision she is not dropped into a different place but also into a different body immersed in a web of familial and political relationships that feel familiar. Shakbatina is not any woman or someone else's mother, but *her* mother. Her mother is talking to Bienville, a man they (Shakbatina and the child who is both Auda and not Auda) both know well enough to treat with both familiarity and caution: "Bienville is not telling the whole truth. She wonders if her mother also sees through him, as she does."³⁰⁸

³⁰⁷ Howe, *Shell Shaker*, 121.

³⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 122.

When the visions ends and she returns to the present, Auda decides that this woman—whom she’s seen mentioned only briefly in old journals—must be an ancestor: “Fine dust makes Auda sneeze. It breaks the shock. The woman she’d found in the diaries of the French priest in 1738, and again in 1747, was her ancestor. Until then, she’d only considered the woman’s name—the same as her ancestor’s—a coincidence, but at this moment, she believes the impossible. That she is the young girl in her vision, standing beside her mother, Shakbatina.”³⁰⁹ The shock is superficial and passing, as there is no moment of doubt, no fireworks—in a moment, she simply knows and accepts the knowledge with a narrative shrug, just as she accepts the abrupt fracturing of temporal boundaries that permitted this reunion. Nor does Auda exhibit any resistance to the sudden fracturing of self or to being transported into the life of another. There is no sense that she has invaded or been invaded by anything foreign, or any sense of psychic or social dislocation, because she does not already see herself as a free-standing individual outside of the historical relations that give meaning to her existence in the present. The web of familial and political relationships is her own, and it has survived the ossification of the university archive and made itself *felt* in a moment when distinction between other and self, history and now, wears thin.

In *Shell Shaker*, feeling history entails being differently literate, able to use and read a different language from the language provided to historians. Delores, a friend of the Billy family and a ceremonial undertaker, informs Adair that all Choctaw are “Code Talkers” because “you have to understand a lot of codes to be a Choctaw.”³¹⁰ She explains that for Indians, important things are not written down, and that an interlocutor must instead “live the life to know the

³⁰⁹ Howe, *Shell Shaker*, 122.

³¹⁰ *Ibid*, 145.

ways,” or to sense them, as “so much goes unspoken.”³¹¹ Delores proposes an affective understanding of the nature of history and inheritance, suggesting that the codes are already known and sensed by the bodies they possess. She further forces a consideration of what sensing means in the context of haunting, of carrying history in body and psyche, thus being at all times possessed by the past and becoming the ghostly agent that haunts the present.

As she cooks for the family in the old Billy house built by Nowatima, the only Billy to survive the Trail of Tears, Delores senses an apparition, and she begins to recall visiting Nowatima in this house in 1939 after her mother’s death. Her mother survived the Trail of Tears with Nowatima, and so Delores asks Nowatima what she should sing for her, asking particularly for the songs Nowatima sang at the funeral of Conehatta Annie, another Choctaw elder. Rather than responding directly, Nowatima responds first with her recollections of the Trail of Tears, making a point of showing Delores the scars on her arms left by burrowing screw-worms, demanding a witness: “See for yourself.”³¹² When asked for knowledge, she points to her body and to the scars that mark it and mark its presence in time. The scars carry a story and thus give the body meaning, and it will fall to Delores to continue that story even as she lays similarly marked bodies to rest. By way of explanation, Nowatima tells Delores that this body is the archive in which the words to the funeral songs are housed and preserved, and why Delores, who has seen it and heard of it and thus known it, will not forget: “I am the only one from my family who made it. Conehatta Annie was another who made it. She was my friend. That’s why you remember the words I spoke for her. They were sacred. You will never forget them.”³¹³ The words are a record of loss and endurance, *and* of love and kinship. Delores now has a better

³¹¹ Howe, *Shell Shaker*, 145.

³¹² *Ibid.*, 148.

³¹³ *Ibid.*

understanding of them, an affective knowledge of that love and kinship, because she herself carries that record forward in time. It has invaded her and possessed her via story and felt affinity. And she does not simply carry it, but also lives it. She continues a story of communal endurance that began long ago, and that continues to be authored collectively. It is told by her mother, by Nowatima, and now by Delores herself, and, importantly, by the living ghost of Shakbatina.

Shakbatina intervenes in a family archive by writing its history and future as she invades the present. At the beginning of a present-day section near the middle of the novel, Shakbatina interrupts the momentum of the story to address the reader directly: “For six generations I have waited, marking time, daughter by daughter.”³¹⁴ She is a ghost addressing the haunted directly, haunting a narrative that she tells just as an author haunts a story. She reminds the reader that this story is hers by insisting that it is she who is marking time by generation and keeping her own record. A woman known only to western history through a brief mention in an old journal found by Auda becomes the author of her daughters’ fates. Shakbatina’s interruption of “modernity” suggests her authorship of, and thus authority in, the present moment. Shakbatina tells a story that Howe calls Nukfokechi, a “story that brings forth knowledge and inspires us to make the eventful leap that one thing leads to another.”³¹⁵ Howe explains: “My tribe’s language has a mysterious prefix that when combined with other words represents a form of creation. It is *nuk* or *nok*, and it has to do with the power of speech, breath, and mind. Things with *nok* or *nuk* attached to them are so powerful they create.”³¹⁶ In the novel, Shakbatina’s invocation of this storytelling in combination with her insistence on her own ghostly authorship of events across time creates

³¹⁴ Howe, *Shell Shaker*, 137.

³¹⁵ Howe, “The Story of America, 32.

³¹⁶ *Ibid*, 30. Though I do not speak Choctaw and am therefore unable to offer better insight, Howe’s comments provide valuable context for my argument about Shakbatina’s authorial role.

the impression that existence itself is haunting, a projection forward of what belongs to past. But it is fruitful in that it creates new forms and makes life possible in inhospitable circumstances; her haunting suggests endurance precisely because it is an aberration that denies settler colonial forms a monopoly on storytelling and time-marking.

The novel invokes Gothic tropes—and other ghostly trappings—that seem familiar. Though they are transformed via a narrative funhouse that forces a shift in perception, this novel does at first glance appear to fit the genre more obviously than does *The Gifted Gabaldón Sisters*. It presents disembodied, accusing voices, apparitions, and possessions; and at the heart of the story is a community’s attempt to exorcise a malevolent spirit. Then it turns the otherwise recognizable tropes on their head as the entities doing the haunting reveal their agenda. This *is* a story of revenge, but the war waged by the dead is welcome and timely in a moment of political upheaval and threatened danger. The “ghostliness” of the people doing the haunting is challenged by their constant presence woven through the text, enabled by their connection to descendants who themselves often become indistinguishable from what haunts them. For example, when we meet Divine Sarah, a porcupine spirit, she is presented as a living force in the world. She is a psychopomp and a spirit, but she is also a strange old woman who claims to be the actress Sarah Bernhardt, lives in a retirement community on the reservation, and enjoys playing tricks on the neighbors. She wears a red evening gown and smokes cigarettes, and once quoted Shakespeare at Teddy Roosevelt, “or so the story goes.”³¹⁷ Her involvement in their lives has a purpose, and her presence and her tricks drive forward events and catalyze change. Isaac refers to her as a trickster, remarking that tricksters “can shake things up.”³¹⁸ Divine Sarah’s

³¹⁷ Howe, *Shell Shaker*, 68.

³¹⁸ *Ibid.*

presence implies that “things” need shaking up and, not coincidentally, that scores need settling, because revenge and the changes needed for endurance look uncannily similar when survival is coded as an intrusive violence against an oppressive status quo. Gore’s description directly invokes her function: “She’s not really a human being, but a porcupine spirit who claims she’s fighting an evil war chief named Red Shoes, come back in the form of Redford McAlester.”³¹⁹ Divine Sarah’s concurrent physical presence and spectrality make possible the real, material changes for which she serves as an agent; she facilitates the meeting of the fleshly and the ghostly because, as a cultural figure relegated to myth by Western anthropology, she embodies both. The fleshy and the ghostly, then, become in the novel a chimera that fails to be monstrous and instead make possible the changes that Shakbatina, with Divine Sarah’s aid, authors through the bodies that she haunts. Those bodies make real her presence and authorship.

The restitutive function of these paradoxically fleshy specters is most apparent when we look at what the haunting does for the haunted, paying close attention to how they interpret the haunting, and particularly at how they communicate a sense of homeliness, the feeling of being home with the uncanny. After she is assaulted by McAlester, a traumatized Auda has a vision of a shell shaker who appears before her in her room as the farmland outside burns with the anger of the spirits. Auda had been “waiting for something to happen. At last it does. Out of nothing a spirit emerges.”³²⁰ In the vision, “Auda sees herself,” implying that the welcome, the almost desperate relief she experiences is tied to her ability to identify with the haunting and mobilize it. Outside, meanwhile, the plains that surround the house burn, and the text (or perhaps Shakbatina’s narration) provides the interpretation: “It’s a sign. They’ve come back to pick a

³¹⁹ Howe, *Shell Shaker*, 116.

³²⁰ *Ibid*, 18.

fight.”³²¹ The spirits are answering her distress with their return, and their return entails the same promise of war treated as a threat in contemporary Gothic fiction. But as Auda prepares herself to confront McAlester and dresses in red, indicating her own intent to wage war and seek revenge, it once more becomes unclear if there is a distinction between “they” and her. In this sense, she herself seems to be the return that is promised, the spirit called out of history’s “nothing.”

We see in the text a haunting that becomes dialogic, and historical subjects articulated as chimeras of flesh and spirit and past and present. Through them the text implies not so much an ethics as a way of knowing that *can* facilitate an approach to haunting as fruitful presence as well as a way of understanding ongoing crises. But bad stories can also haunt and can be obstructive. In the readers’ first encounter with McAlester in the present day, McAlester and Red Shoes fade into each other momentarily in a confrontation with Auda: “Let me tell you what I did do for you. I used the *Inkilish okla* and the *Filanchi okla* against each other, which saved our people from being colonized. Because of what I did, the councils of Natchez, Alibamu, Chahtas, Talapoosas, and Abihkas would sing my praises as I entered their town.”³²² The brag is someone else’s; the war he references, and the warrior whose identity he assumes here, have all been long consigned to history, and thus, by Western temporal logic, to non-existence. It might have made more sense, from a particular reading, to discuss his manipulation of the D’Amato crime family and the U.S. government and to cast himself as an inheritor of Red Shoes’ legacy, a hero of for the present. But the boast suggests a different kind of identification, a more uncannily intimate claim to Red Shoes’ legacy. It suggests that the residents of that foreign country we call the past

³²¹ Howe, *Shell Shaker*, 17.

³²² *Ibid*, 23-24.

are us. The central cast of characters are specters in their own present, come back to pick a fight; they are not caught in some terrible repetitive cycle, but are the same cast of players in an ongoing production. Far from being decided, the final say in that story, or the control over its ultimate shape, remains contested.

Their encounter further demonstrates how past and present fade into each other throughout the story, but also how the boundaries between “they” and “there” and self and here are misty. They and there are the ghosts meant to be disciplined and contained by both biological and historical death, but who have failed to be contained and *should* (by the logic of the Gothic) have thus become monstrous. Instead, they become homely by bringing the characters into the unhomely, revealing the living characters to be stories that function as vehicles for the tellers rather than independent agents who are merely possessed by foreign entities. There are many examples of this throughout the novel, but in all these scenes what is missing is the jolt we might associate with change, the breaking of bones we associate with physical metamorphosis, or the trauma of dislocation and psychic disarticulation. There is no transformation because one thing is revealed to already be the other. The absence of the uncanny-as-trauma has to do with the logic at work in the text. The logic by which the story finds order and meaning is exemplified by the Divine Sarah episodes, which have the kind of logical seamlessness we experience in dreams. Things that might otherwise seem strange simply make sense and do not require explanation or introduction. Sudden changes in location feel more like the unveiling of one location beneath the other, and the process by which two people become the same person strikes us more as an unmasking than it does a metamorphosis. When Isaac and Hoppy visit the reservation home of Big Mother Porcupine who calls herself Divine Sarah, the story she recounts becomes their present as her home becomes elsewhere: “Someone is beating a drum far away, and Isaac

follows it until he finds himself in an open field. [...] Although Isaac is in the field, he can hear Divine Sarah's voice. It's as if he's in two places at once."³²³ He is also, importantly, two people at once. Divine Sarah refers to Isaac as Nitakechi on multiple occasions; and when she refers to Hoppy's mother as Haya and he corrects her, she responds merely, "Detail, details."³²⁴ The markers that create distinction are irrelevant to Divine Sarah, unreal and unimportant. What matters is the presence beneath the clutter of names.

What Sarah "shakes up" is time and the identifications and strategies of resistance made possible or foreclosed by different temporalities. Her immersive story enacts this shaking up as it explains Redford McAlester's background by giving a history of Red Shoes' failure—his greed, his desire to be loved, his belief that he was warrior destined to save his people from the same foreigners who interests he served, and the work that must be done now to rectify a bad story that has yet to end. She repeats an earlier line, declaring that "the spirits have come back to pick a fight" while at the same time suggesting that spirits were always already here.³²⁵ In coming out of Divine Sarah's vision-story, Isaac glimpses a birds-eye view of time, of his time, as though it were laid out before him: "Divine Sarah's story spanned eons. [...] A dark, pulsating energy flows between Isaac and his past."³²⁶ Isaac's claim matters because it constitutes an insistence not on cyclicity but on a continuity that sees extant families and communities as a continuation rather than remnants. The Billy family is the same family in the same circumstances, centuries later. Past events do not repeat and cannot even be termed events (which are finite), as they bleed

³²³ Howe, *Shell Shaker*, 71.

³²⁴ *Ibid*, 70.

³²⁵ *Ibid*, 72.

³²⁶ *Ibid*, 72-73.

into and transform into the present. The past did not need to invade because it *was* already the present that it authored.

Isaac's insistence on continuity depends on his understanding of causality and of time's logic, a different formula for the creation of history. His niece Tema's English husband fails to understand (and even dismisses) Tema's attempts to explain an approach to temporal authorship where events are determined by the story they follow: "No, I don't understand that kind of irrational thinking. In essence, you're saying that speech determined actions."³²⁷ He calls it irrational thinking, in so doing giving himself authority over reason and the movement of time, but also failing to see historical authorship as Tema does. The storyteller begins the story and then events follow, and this formula informs how the Billy family makes sense of the legacies they live with.

For the Billy family, the past authors the present, just as Red Shoes foretells the war he will author and his own centuries-long haunting. Nine years after Shakbatina's death and preceding the Choctaw Civil War, Red Shoes narrates his death as it will happen, asking, "What of the story of my death?"³²⁸ He begins to recount a story that has not yet begun, beginning with his destruction of an Alibamu village, his murder of its inhabitants, his own death at the hands of an assassin, and, finally, his return: "In my last solemn moments I pray for a reflection, a shape that will defy the astounded dead. I will not be stone without eyes. I will not live where no one sees me or knows my name. I will return, I sing. I will return, I sing. I will return."³²⁹ He sees the future stretching out before him like a road: "A road does come for me. There is a whistling

³²⁷ Howe, *Shell Shaker*, 36.

³²⁸ *Ibid*, 172.

³²⁹ *Ibid*, 174.

sound, searing. A meat-whistling that shrivels everything.”³³⁰ His prophecy-story recalls a form of predetermination, and he is both its author and its helpless subject. Red Shoes narrates himself into the future, and Redford McAlester is only his vehicle, a bad story he tells and one which needs to be concluded so that a different story can continue. Near the end of the novel, it falls to a comatose Auda—poisoned in a failed assassination attempt—to escort Red Shoes-McAlester to his final rest in Mississippi. As her spirit accompanies his eastward, the narrative to which they are subject is visualized as a road, a black ribbon stretched between Mississippi and Oklahoma. While Red Shoes drives, his body swells and shrinks as his two lifetimes join, and he recalls two lifetimes of memories with Auda as a single story that they began to tell centuries ago.³³¹ Red Shoes observes that “it’s just the trappings of time that have changed. Whether it was Bienville and the Filanchi, or the D’Amato brothers and the Italians.”³³² The trapping become details that do little more than obscure a sense of path dependency and models of continuity that exceed settler notions of time, making the nature of present-day experiences difficult to identify and comprehend. Their narrative, spatialized and mapped out onto a contextualizing geography, reveals the trappings to be mutable because ephemeral.

Through a story that treats these trappings as mere details, Divine Sarah gives the Billy family a sense of the work before them. It entails taking up their responsibilities as author-subjects and thus the fulfillment of their own destiny as foretold by the ghosts to which they give flesh in the present: “Red Shoes started a war that continues even now, two hundred and fifty years later. I’ve come to tell you—what’s in the past is not passed. The time has come, Nitakechi, for you to fulfill your destiny.”³³³ Of note is her claim of a deliberate intervention, a

³³⁰ Howe, *Shell Shaker*, 174.

³³¹ *Ibid*, 190.

³³² *Ibid*, 200.

³³³ *Ibid*, 72.

reaching out by spirits and people that have been made illegible in the present as anything but delusions and macabre fixations; her declaration of a purpose to join together and catalyze a movement forward; and an insistence that this indicates a responsibility to become vehicles for a story they must play out and in this sense co-author. Auda likewise expresses a determination “to finish McAlester’s story,” but her authorship is impossible without the presence of Shakbatina to give Auda’s objectives context and direction, and thus to determine the shape of the ending that she will realize through Auda.³³⁴ It is Shakbatina, after all, who witnesses the beginning of the story, who understands the larger stakes, and who knows what it means to create history. Shakbatina has the knowledge necessary to mark time differently, while Auda can access that knowledge by permitting the past to take possession of her. She must acknowledge herself as its vehicle, its creation, its agent, and its keeper. In *Shell Shaker*, ghostly possession is dramatized literally as Auda’s body becomes the incarnation of the intentions and desires of her ancestor while Auda only ever has an incomplete understanding of what happened the night that she killed McAlester. Shakbatina takes charge of the narration and provides her interpretive gloss at the end of the novel when she addresses the reader directly, telling us that it was she who moved her descendant’s limbs to action: “Auda did hold the gun in her hands, gently, as if it were inlaid with jewels. It was then that I slipped my hands in front of her hands, and together we struck a pose. The day was hers, all hers, but it was my day, too.”³³⁵ All hers, but also mine. In holding the gun like a pen and bringing the story to it close together with Auda, *as* Auda, she suggests that her intentions and desires are not just kept and channeled through her descendant but *live in* her.

³³⁴ Howe, *Shell Shaker*, 218.

³³⁵ *Ibid*, 222.

In her exploration of the trope of possession in what she terms “ethnic” literature, and in particular in Native American literature, Kathleen Brogan argues that possession is how “history lodges within” bodies, and how these “swollen bodies [...] give birth not to the future but to a nightmare repetition of the past.”³³⁶ Through this oddly, monstrously gendered formulation of historical subjectivity, Brogan claims that “stories of cultural haunting record the struggle to establish some form of historical continuity that allows for a necessary distance from the past. [...] They can be read as cautionary tales about the proper function of memory.”³³⁷ She sees authors of cultural haunting as “translating history” in an act of exorcism that “reframes cultural inheritance,” effectively evacuating the ghost from processes of modern ethnic identity.³³⁸ In translating history, the ghost is only a “master metaphor” that “makes present the past while conveying its indefiniteness (and thereby possible malleability) thus provides the vehicle for both a dangerous possession by and an imaginative liberation from the past.”³³⁹ For Brogan, the tropes of possession and ghostliness explore and realize a desire for liberation from the past that still acknowledges the monopoly of settler time and historical relationality. Her approach to possession, however, is and is not Howe’s, who does not appear to comprehend possession as the Gothic invasion and bodily dispossession of the living. While McAlester’s swollen body does perhaps carry a putrid history into the present (just as the trauma of cycles of violence remain), he is also an agent in that history, authored though it might be by the settler greed that possesses him. Moreover, Auda can only exorcise his spirit when she herself is possessed by history—the history of a clan, a history of endurance and survival through storytelling, and the spirit of her

³³⁶ Kathleen Brogan, *Cultural Haunting: Ghosts and Ethnicity in Recent American Literature* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1998), 9.

³³⁷ *Ibid.*

³³⁸ *Ibid.*, 11.

³³⁹ *Ibid.*

ancestors who collapse time in order to facilitate the communal continuation of that storytelling. The text insists that she does not because she *cannot* do it by herself. In *Shell Shaker*, bodies are always already possessed by history, and there is little appreciable distinction between the possessor and the possessed. Within the logic of the text, to exorcize a spirit from the body that houses it would be to vacate that body of meaning and transform it, well and truly, into the undead. Howe does not want liberation from the familiar country that is the past and its inhabitants, but she instead wants to make its presence felt because of its liberating possibilities from the bad settler stories that have overwhelmed any alternatives under settler colonialism.

For the same reason, I feel it unwise to assume that Howe sees her ghosts and their possession of fleshy bodies as a metaphor in the way Brogan comprehends metaphor. To reduce the ghost to metaphor as she does is to rob it of political and cultural power, and to consign it to the invisibility it challenges. Gordon, on the other hand, argues that “to write ghost stories implies that ghosts are real, that is to say, that they produce material effects.”³⁴⁰ For Gordon, ghosts are not metaphors, but instead represent those exclusions that nevertheless exert a palpable influence on the living. For C. Jill Grady, the ghost and its influence, beyond being simply palpable and material, are in fact constitutive of the relations in which the ghost is directly engaged. She explains that while settler discourse substantiation of Native endurance is usually obtained through documentation, Natives themselves “rely upon evidence of vital living people who are in contact with the vital living spirits of their ancestors. This living counter-evidence, though perceived as spectral and unempirical by the dominant culture, actually lives on.”³⁴¹ Though I hardly feel qualified to argue for or against the existence of ghosts, it is

³⁴⁰ Gordon, *Ghostly Matters*, 17.

³⁴¹ C. Jill Grady, “Ancestors, Ethnohistorical Practice, and the Authentication of Native Place and Past,” in *Unsettled Remains: Canadian Literature and the Postcolonial Gothic*, ed. Cynthia Sugars and Gerry Turcotte (Waterloo, Ont.: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2009), 282.

nevertheless vital that we understand the integral role of the dead and their knowledge in sustaining communal relations and in the constructions of trans-temporal communities and subjectivities that exceed their consignment to anachronism by settler modernity. They are an integral part of the communal imagining of kinship and strategies for cultural and political survival. To reduce the ghost, already shoved out of time and social legibility, to a metaphor is to deny the models of continuity they make possible precisely because it would imply that cultural authorship and the creation of contingent identities are exclusively retroactive rather than collaborative endeavors. In *Shell Shaker*, the living and the dead conclude McAlester's story and continue their own together as a *communal project*. Exclusive and thus necessarily retroactive authorship, on the other hand, suggests a sort of aloneness in time, revealing settler modernity as an isolating place. It is especially isolating for people who see communality as essential to life and the isolation of modernity's individualism as a foreclosure. Singularity makes for a useful and indeed necessary organizing model in the establishment of uncontested mastership in colonial world-making because it eliminates competition. But it is antithetical to the models of communal survival depicted in the novel, and the ghosts of the novel invalidate it through their presence and insistence on participation.

In a Choctaw space under settler dominance, ghostly interventions are at once Gothic and not Gothic because of the shift in perspective that the text forces. Delores feels the force of the ghosts' insistent interventions through a second vision that overtakes her as she kneads bread in the Billy family kitchen. She observes that "she can feel herself vanishing," describing a feeling of disarticulation at the hands of unseen forces that in the Gothic *should* be a source of abject horror.³⁴² Rather than finding herself coming undone and suspended in nothingness, she finds

³⁴² Howe, *Shell Shaker*, 158.

herself, a young child again, in her old family kitchen with her mother's dining table, a place for community and kin to convene and eat together and together create a household. The table is dusty, and as Delores goes to clean it the fine dust transforms into the dirt of Mississippi. Soon "relatives appear out of the shadows to help the young girl" fill baskets with the soil that keeps mounting higher: "Not to be outdone, the grandparents of tribes part the clouds with their blow guns and assist the digging crew. Finally, a grandmother, always the one with big ideas, calls her grandson. When the famous warrior arrives, he is driving a giant yellow Caterpillar with four wheels the size of houses."³⁴³ Relatives from across millennia, from both past and future, help Delores build the Nanih Waiya, the Mother Mound, on the family table, which once more serves to bring together.

She comes back to the present to find that the dough she is kneading for the family dinner has transformed into mud. Her vision seems nonsensical and the appearance of the mud impossible, but the transportation (and reunion) of souls and sacred earth across time and place is what permits her to find a concrete solution to a very real ongoing battle. She decides that this means they must bury McAlester in Mississippi near the Mother Mound, as this is the only way he will find peace—deep in the heart of the community from which he became estranged. This project, the project of writing an ending to a story, becomes a communal one; this family haunting is required to put Red Shoes' malevolent haunting to bed.

Adair offers her own interpretation of Delores's vision: "One Indian can't do anything alone, but needs the help of ancestors and young people to build the future."³⁴⁴ The vision alludes to the creation of a community that within another framework might be understood as

³⁴³ Howe, *Shell Shaker*, 159.

³⁴⁴ *Ibid*, 162.

anachronistic and deviant, formed through the disruption of the temporal boundaries put in place by a paradigm that requires those firm divisions to justify its present existence. Such a boundary keeps a neat, blameless modernity from the accusing fingers of a violent past, and in service to its function it isolates people from the signs of their subjectivity in order to police the processes of their becoming. It alienates by interrupting alternative forms of knowing and marking time, of understanding one's relationship to time and the processes of identification contingent on that relationship, and strategies for endurance that likewise depend on it. It reduces those embodied histories, contingent subjectivities, and strategies to eerie anachronism, and survivance to a malignant haunting. In its idiosyncratic invocation of the Gothic, the text demonstrates how in fact these haunted/haunting formations are necessary for addressing and surviving the traumas and difficult legacies that likewise stick around, unacknowledged and therefore spectral.

The novel insists on forms that permit affiliation over time. When she introduces Gore to Dovie and Delores, who proceed to draw out and mull over family connections, Auda contemplates how affiliation is negotiated through shared customs and the function these customs serve: "Everyone knows that relationships in the Indian world are based on kinship and ardent familiarity, which often results in more kin."³⁴⁵ The desire for "ardent familiarity" that charges social interaction, the desire to identify and be identified as kin and thus belong to another's story, indicates subjectivities that depend on our ability to create family over time, as we saw in Miranda's memoir. Ardent familiarity is what *The Gifted Gabaldón Sisters* seeks and what *Shell Shaker* manifests. Isolation in time obstructs the mechanisms of identification, which require a knowledge of relations that reach back and forward. Kinship means that no one exists in the present alone because they are a filament in web and require adhesion to relations past and

³⁴⁵ Howe, *Shell Shaker*, 119.

present for structural stability and meaning. At the end of the story, after Susan hands out the stone, shells, and sash, the house becomes suddenly, ardently warm, “alive with the ghosts of aunts and uncles, and future relatives.”³⁴⁶ Their presence is not a Gothic invasion of the family home, not a disruption of family life, but instead a constitutive, integral part of it because what it does invade is the bounds of modernity’s isolation—the impregnable body, the home as fortress, the individual outside history. The characters reach for that familiarity, for the feeling that they belong in someone else’s ongoing narrative, a story that spans time and that tells “the coming of the future.”³⁴⁷ When that narrative reaches out to the present from the past, the processes by which kinship is established may become indistinguishable from haunting, differentiated only by the ardent familiarity that conditions it.

Shakbatina’s authorship of that narrative is a haunting. If Red Shoes authored the war, Shakbatina authors its conclusion, telling a story through her descendants, possessing them literally and figuratively; but she is also telling what Emberley calls a shadow story “because of how such stories can lie in the shadows for a long time before they can be brought to light.”³⁴⁸ This shadow story “represents the key element of the indigenous uncanny, whereby things that are hidden from history, concealed as it were, are revealed.”³⁴⁹ She further explains that the shadow story is not part of “concrete reality” but still comes bear upon it, as it generally foregrounds “the spiritual and emotional aspects of life.”³⁵⁰ In *Shell Shaker*, we might consider Shakbatina’s narration of her continued presence as the shadow story; it is a shadow story having to do with temporal relation, with what it means to be subject to time rather than outside of it. At

³⁴⁶ Howe, *Shell Shaker*, 221.

³⁴⁷ Howe, “The Story of America,” 33.

³⁴⁸ Emberley, *The Testimonial Uncanny*, 214.

³⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 215.

the end of the narrative, and, indeed, on the last page, Shakbatina claims the last word when she reveals herself to be the narrator of the novel. She insists on her authorship of time, of history, and, importantly, of her own family's future: "My story is an enormous undertaking. Hundreds of years in the making until past and present collide into a single moment."³⁵¹ She insists further that the Choctaws are "life everlasting," and the last phrase indicates the incontestability of insuppressible, irrepressible life as well as her active role in ensuring Choctaw survivance: "Hekano, I am finished talking."³⁵² Silence follows her declaration. Nothing more can be said, and no interruption is possible because hers is the only voice that can begin and close a people's story. Hers is the ghostly hand that brings them into being.

Reaching Out and In

Shakbatina's authorship is uncanny for those resistant to its intimacy, but certainly not for those who already understand themselves as a part of a communal story being told by all its participants at once, whether alive or dead. For those who do not need or want the unilateral control of settler time and its related paradigms, it is an offer of familiarity and meaning. It is the assurance, rather than the disorienting suspicion, that lives are shaped and directed by forces rendered invisible; that our so-called modernity cannot keep at bay the ghosts that prove that modernity is a fiction; that we do not exist out of history, and that we are all instead haunted and possessed by it. It relocates narrative power and control; we are no longer entirely in charge of who we are because who we are is embedded in a story that does not belong only to us, but neither are we alone in a story without context or meaning. We are, finally, never alone in the making of our world, and this presence, this knowledge that we are never alone, that there is a

³⁵¹ Howe, *Shell Shaker*, 222.

³⁵² *Ibid.*

ghostly hand in the making of us, is the knowledge that is repressed even as it is revealed in the Gothic. Perhaps it is even the shadow story.

If this is the repressed knowledge at the heart of Western Gothic literature, what we see in these novels is not the return of the repressed but rather a promise of the return of the suppressed, which speaks a challenge to both settler psychology and its interpretive frameworks, as well as to those technologies, such as settler time and settler histories, that do the work of suppression. Both *The Gifted Gabaldón Sisters* and *Shell Shaker* imagine other forms of relationality and other way of knowing the world and themselves in it. Gordon asks, “What kind of case is the case of a ghost? It is a case of haunting, a story about what happens when we admit the ghost—that special instance of the merging of the visible and the invisible, the dead and the living, the past and the present—into the making of worldly relations and into our making of the accounts of the world.”³⁵³ The novels’ particular use of ghosts invite the disruption of the boundaries and temporalities—modes of containment and erasure—that Gothic literature affirms. They further invite the disruption of its shrill insistence on narrative control of time—history, present, future—and therefore also of the Gothic and the uncanny relations it creates in time. They undermine its disciplinary measures even as they use it to embrace the relations it has made gothic. Most importantly, Howe and López undermine the construction of modernity’s isolated, individual, self-directed subject by revealing the forces that author her existence.

Both authors approach the genre with a notable lack of fidelity. They display no investment in the genre itself, but rather in what the form can do for them in their own exploration of time, historicity, and contingent modes of relationality. Their use of the form

³⁵³ Gordon, *Ghostly Matters*, 24.

therefore feels incidental, if not accidental—just a consequence of the authors engaging the modes, tropes, and concepts that seem pertinent to their respective projects. Their lack of interest in committing to the genre, and their novels’ refusal to adhere to the traditional parameters of the form, is precisely why they explode its possibilities. For example, the resolution typical of the Gothic is deferred eternally in both texts. They are not concerned with resolving so much as aggravating, turning the function of any mode of storytelling on its head, bringing matters to a crisis and sustaining it without ever performing a final exorcism. In this transgressive mode of the Gothic, it is not the object of the text to treat disruption and transgression as the terror that titillates while it is kept at bay; in the Gothic as it is invoked here, disruption and transgression are the object. López and Howe reverse the machinery of the Gothic by transforming fear into pleasure, keeping the monster but suspending the horror. And in their final departure, they surrender temporal authority and exclusive historical authorship by placing their ghosts at the helm of the story. Their choice to not reduce their ghosts to secondary participants or shove them toward the dusty corners of the text is made all the more significant in light of the manner in which the novels foreground the importance of storytelling. They emphasize its ability to create its own participants, bringing subjects into being. In making their ghosts the principal storytellers of the stories they offer, the authors showcase how, as Emberley argues, storytelling is a “way of acknowledging how the past continues to intervene in present circumstances and everyday life.”³⁵⁴

The novels exhibit differences that demand explanation, however, and the scope of their concern and the scale of their hauntings may be indicative of larger disparities in the objectives that energize the Chicana and Native American incursions into the Gothic. *The Gifted Gabaldon*

³⁵⁴ Emberley, *The Testimonial Uncanny*, 290.

Sisters is certainly the more insular of the two novels, and, as is more typical of the Gothic, the family home focuses the narrative and limits how far afield the characters can go in their search for answers to the novel's concerns. Because they reach outwards for those answers from this demarcated domestic space, Fermina becomes the intermediary between the living and their history, alone bearing the weight of their coming into being. The haunting is particular to the Gabaldón family and through them it gestures by implication at larger networks of connection. By contrast, *Shell Shaker* takes a panoramic approach that more clearly places the Billy family in a comprehensively drawn web of relations without robbing them of their particularity. It is more ambitious in scale, and it looks inward to the family space rather than outwards from it. The family space is described, created, and made meaningful through the narrations of ghosts, whereas the Gabaldón sisters reach out for the larger narrative that might give the family space meaning. The insularity is more typical of Chicana fiction, and while there certainly are authors, like Helena María Viramontes, who embrace the panoramic, the inclination to find a firm narrative center in family spaces amid an unknowable world beyond is representative of Chicana attempts to make sense of *embeddedness* through personal circumstance and experience. This may be a consequence of a sense of cultural isolation that is itself a product of their positioning within national histories, narratives, and politics. While the approach facilitates an exploration of what has been occluded or denied through what little can be known and relied upon among the architecture of Chicana life, reading the incipient Chicana Gothic alongside the Native American Gothic may shed light on the as-yet unrealized possibility of more expansive forms of relationality.

Whatever its generic limitations, López's novel takes fruitful risks by following Howe in inviting the ghost to make a vehicle of the text and its inhabitants, rather than simply forcing the

ghost to function as a vehicle for the shell of an easier story that forecloses the possibility of the very encounters it yearns for. Like *Shell Shaker*, *The Gifted Gabaldón Sisters* invites the ghost, the monster, the parasite, to take possession. While the differences in form and function make a nuanced approach to their study essential, a comparative reading of Howe and López's work reveals parallel, and at times uncannily similar, imaginative alternatives to Western models for the creations of temporalized and spatialized subjectivities. Because they are legible only as extraneous within settler colonial accounts of national histories and contingent notions of citizenship and belonging, both Howe and López imagine and tell new forms of survival and resurgence made possible by forms of relation that are unimaginable within settler colonialism's temporal confines. Both ask what might happen if we allow our ghosts to direct the making of the world.

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