

Violent Fronteras:
The Neoliberal State of Latina/o Bodies in Contemporary Narratives

BY

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THESIS

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SUMMARY

My dissertation explores the relationship between the nation and a “free market” economy in 20th- and 21st-century Latina/o literature and film. Although new political theories pronounce the “withering away of the state”—once a Marxist dream and now a neoliberal one—I challenge these theories by arguing that contemporary Latina/o literature and film reveals and exemplifies the remaining centrality of the nation even with neoliberal efforts to transcend it. For instance, in the cyberpunk tradition of Samuel Delaney and William Gibson, Alex Rivera’s film *Sleep Dealer* imagines a future where the capitalist needs of cheap labor in the U.S. are fulfilled without physical migrations or citizen outcries of an “alien invasion”: the border (and thus the nation) remains intact, while Mexican laborers stay in Mexico operating U.S. machines through a *Matrix*-like virtual reality. The film’s speculative premise demonstrates a compatibility with the maintenance of national difference and the creation of international/global markets. My dissertation explores how Latina/o literature and film exposes and embodies an interdependent, albeit contradictory, relationship between the nation and a “free,” privatized economy, where a sci-fi film like *Sleep Dealer* or a canonical novel like Helena María Viramontes’ *Their Dogs Came with Them* demonstrate a market logic that relies on nationalisms to operate.

Violent Fronteras approaches the relationship between the nation and the neoliberal economy through two overarching parts—the first concentrating on representations of nationalisms (chapters 2-4) and the second on the nation-state (chapters 5-6). I begin by analyzing figures like one of Alisa Valdes-Rodriguez’s Latina heroines who performs the stereotypical role of a “spicy Chicana” for her job in *The Dirty Girl Social Club*, which, I argue, emblemizes an interlocking relationship between economic institutions and cultural nationalisms in the equal-opportunity workplace. Where cultural nationalism gains a certain economic leverage in this novel, Cristina Garcia’s *Dreaming in Cuban* is another novel that

SUMMARY (continued)

builds upon the way the economy normalizes nationalisms and sexualities. The third-generation Cuban-American teen who buys punk albums to pay homage to her idealist vision of socialist Cuba, in the novel, portrays how nationalisms are understood as a mechanism of economic consumption and also as a perpetuation of uneven development. Thus, the market depends on and regulates, rather than undermines, the nation. My dissertation ends on the way the nation-state continues to maintain the border while simultaneously promoting policies such as NAFTA, where capital is mobile but people are not. Looking, for instance, at Francisco Goldman's *The Ordinary Seaman*, where workers are smuggled into the U.S. and then virtually forgotten, I consider how the economic needs of the U.S. are contradictorily reliant on the nation-state border walls and immigration laws. These questions of immigration and labor are central in American literature, from Anzia Yezierska's *Bread Givers* to Maxine Hong Kingston's *China Men*, but I show that Latina/o cultural production uncovers and exemplifies mystifications, contradictions, and the violence at the heart of the neoliberal state's unprecedented rule.

1. INTRODUCTION

When Irene Vilar wrote of her own 1988 death-wish “(*When you decide you are going to die, something in you splits. You live two lives, half of you cries in a chapel, the other half writes an index card*) (35),” she revises the same statement her abuelita makes in 1954 to the *New York Times*, after entering the U.S. House of Representatives and opening fire: “I did not come here to kill. I came here to die” (3). Vilar has put parentheses around her statement, as though it were a private reflection or side-note within her memoir. When her abuelita, Lolita Lebrón, made her statement, she was giving the Puerto Rican nationalist battle-cry. The difference between these two statements is historically situated: Vilar is writing out of a Latina subjectivity complicated by both her *personal* lack of national stability in the U.S. and 1980s Reaganite libertarianism, whereas Lebrón is speaking out of Puerto Rican anticolonial nationalism of the 1940s to 60s.¹ Vilar has privatized her death-wish, whereas Lebrón has nationalized hers. This distinction parallels the historical split between contemporary Latina/o cultural production and civil-rights cultural nationalism. The latter is engaged in political mobilizations that hoped to evoke *through culture* legal/state betterment, and the former develops theories of subjectivity that interrogates any political *telos* through its self-reflexivity.

This historical difference has been understood as the split between cultural nationalism and transnationalism. Scholars, such as Emma Perez (1999) and Chela Sandoval (2000), have attempted to deconstruct and reconstruct the way national identity and cultural nationalism differ from Chicana/o subjectivities within a more and more global economy. For instance, Sandoval conceives of cultural nationalism as being a “survival politics” that has developed into a method of “consciousness in opposition” (71); she sees this historical difference as one that moves from an era of survival to a time of making oppression visible. My dissertation questions and

challenges this historical and political difference since both movements are intrinsically tied to the relationship between the nation and the global economy. Latina/o cultural productions, in particular, struggle openly with this contradictory relationship. My dissertation, thus, begins with the following questions: How and why does nationalism continue to play a role in contemporary Latina/o cultural production? What is the relationship between nationalism and neoliberalism in contemporary Latina/o cultural production? And how does corporeal violence shape this relationship?

My dissertation explores how Latina/o literature and film—from Helena María Viramontes’ canonical *Their Dogs Came With Us* to Alisa Valdes-Rodriguez’s mainstream *The Dirty Girls Social Club* to Alex Rivera’s speculative film *Sleep Dealer*—exposes an interdependent, albeit contradictory, relationship between the (U.S) nation and a free-market, privatized economy. Against a body of critical work on neoliberalism that argues for a fundamental opposition between nationalisms and free, global markets—from the leftism of Masao Miyoshi to the rightism of Milton Friedman and Friedrich Hayek—I argue that Latina/o cultural production demonstrates the way in which nationalisms, on one hand, and the nation-state, on another, continues to be a function of the market. For instance, Oscar Zeta Acosta’s belief that literature could directly affect political representation for Chicanos is re-signified as Cristina Garcia’s third-generation Cuban-American heroine in *Dreaming in Cuban* who buys punk albums to pay homage to and identify with socialist Cuba; the market here regulates national subjectivities, while the maintenance of borders and national difference do not actually hinder but encourage economic flows. Extending Saskia Sassen’s theories on the legalizations of uneven development, I analyze these representations as a function of global capitalism, adding to and expanding the field of Latina/o studies by bringing it in conversation with transnational processes of culture, politics, and economics.

The first part of my dissertation concentrates on literary representations of Latino cultural nationalisms, arguing that neoliberalism makes nationalisms mandatory for privatizing “Latino” as a kind of brand name. Subjectivities are based on an understanding of the world through borders and can only function through exploitative labor forces, which maintain and produce uneven development. Thus, what appears as the vitality of the nation has an economic logic. The Latina who stylishly performs “spicy Chicana” in Southern California in the equal-opportunity workplace to get ahead, as in Valdes-Rodriguez’s *The Dirty Girls Social Club*, emblemizes the economic structure foundational to the creation, maintenance, and governance of neoliberal nationalisms. This question of national identity gives way to narratives on the role of the nation-state and national security within this economy in the second half of the dissertation. I explore how neoliberal demands for the mobility of capital, as in NAFTA, come up against national fears about the mobility of labor, as in immigration. For instance, Luis Alberto Urrea’s *The Devil’s Highway*, David Riker’s collection of shorts *La Ciudad (The City)*, and Francisco Goldman’s *The Ordinary Seaman* all grapple with the corporeal violence produced by trying to keep immigrants out of the nation *and* the violence inflicted on them once they become cheap labor. This culminates into the hyperbolic future in Alex Rivera’s film *Sleep Dealer* where labor is no longer physically mobile but virtually mobile, fulfilling the apparently contradictory desires of cheap privatized labor and a homogenous national population.

In order to make this argument, my dissertation rethinks two major movements influencing Latina/o literature and performance: cultural nationalism and celebratory transnationalism. On the one hand, cultural nationalism speaks to an identity politics that wished to enact civil rights. For instance, the imaginary homeland of Aztlán, imagined in 1969 by *El Movimiento* activists (arguably influenced by writer Oscar Zeta Acosta and poet Alurista), was an imaginary homeland located in the south-west U.S., specifically the lands annexed from

Mexico with the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo (1848) and the surrounding borderlands. As a homeland, Aztlán symbolized Chicano cultural nationalism, where nationalism as an imagined community became the central site of organization.² On another level, Aztlán became a symbol for where Chicano activists would have legal and primordial rights to the land. In this sense, Aztlán symbolized the potential for material empowerment. This imaginary alternative space was a place in which Chicanos would *regain* sovereign power, through culture, that they felt was owed to them after years of legal-economic oppression (i.e., the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo stole their land) and labor exploitation (i.e., the Bracero Program (1942-1964)). Aztlán, thus, was a symbol of political and on-the-ground teleology for the 1960s and 1970s civil rights movement. *El Movimiento* fought to reform and regain Chicanos' legal and economic rights *through the nation-state*.³ This symbolic nationalism, then, was formed with the strategy to enact material, civil change.

The texts within my dissertation realize the futility of cultural nationalism. The Chicano cultural nationalism of the 1960s and 1970s proved to be male-oriented, heterosexual, homogenizing, and often politically inadequate. Its exclusionary foundation has been the site of much critique, especially concerning its identity politics, both in Latina/o criticism and cultural production. Of course, the issues of exploitation and devaluation that concerned the cultural nationalists have not disappeared or been amended. The very real injustice of (farm-) labor exploitation, for instance, brought to light under César Chávez's activism and now influencing a massive genre of literary and critical texts, continues to be a problem.⁴ Also, the production of literary and visual art as a validation of *chicanismo*, also approached through the term *latinidad*, is still a central issue within Latina/o studies and criticism, where the literature and manifestos are only now receiving a canonical anthology from Norton (2010) almost half a century after *El Movimiento*.⁵ The texts that I read here still wrestle with these issues of exploitation and

devaluation because these issues still exist, specifically in terms of corporeal labor and commodification. Even after the civil rights movements, even after the 1980s and 90s challenges to identity politics, even after legal programs such as equal opportunity and affirmative action, and even after Latinos are fully represented at every level of the U.S. government, the issue of exploitation and devaluation is alive and well in cultural representation. And although these contemporary texts still *desire* for culture to affect material and civil change, the cultural nationalist mechanism for which these effects can work—the nation-state—is under question in these texts.

The rise in celebratory transnationalism and (trans)border studies in the 1980s and 90s looked to offer an alternative model to cultural nationalism since it took into account the declining agency of the nation-state. Transnationalism studies, however, was unable to discard the problems of unequal distribution that the term “transnationalism” often supported. Roberto Schwarz illustrates this problem through the role of cinema, where film brings the world into our “neighborhood,” offering proximity to the world without risk for the privileged spectator (160). He describes how this allows us to “witness oppression and its moral cost” (165) without seeing the gap between rich and poor or privileged and oppressed because the “political structure has been translated into an artistic structure” (162). Unlike Schwarz’s reading of cinema as a production of globalization, studies of transnationalism are often celebratory because they see the world pluralistically and/or through a politics-of-difference.⁶ This heterogeneity is somehow better than the homogenizing force of “globalization,” and through particularity, transnational studies claim to expose a “true” story of the world under global capitalism. This becomes celebratory because new networks and mobilizations can be made across borders.⁷ Exploited women laborers in Mexico and Vietnam, for instance, can join forces to fight labor abuses and low pay.⁸ In terms of literature, we see this type of reading arise most notably in José David

Saldívar's *Border Matters*, where he reads Helena María Viramontes' work as demonstrating how "U.S.-Mexico border culture is always already localized and global, and this is why our monocultural national categories are not the most sensible structures for understanding these emergent expressive cultural practices" (129). The problem with this theoretical perspective is that pluralism and heterogeneity are the tools for global capitalism. Capitalism is homogenizing by the very fact that it uses "difference" to promote consumer culture and explain away unequal distribution. My dissertation responds to "transnationalism as potentiality" by demonstrating how Latina/o cultural production reconstitutes nationalism as a central site of organization. Latina/o cultural production, thus, does not necessarily move away from this homogenizing-through-difference problem but instead illuminates the way the nation continues to structure this problem.

This persistence of nationalism within these texts contradicts the rhetorics of privatization, which suggest dissolution and/or weakening of the nation. Masao Miyoshi in his groundbreaking article "A Borderless World?" argues that transnationalism (specifically transnational corporatism) is simply another form of colonialism, where multinational corporations (MNCs) and transnational corporations (TNCs) are *denationalizing* and making countries of origin meaningless (728, 737, 740). This exact sentiment is echoed by many scholars and critics on neoliberalism, including Aihwa Ong, Robert P. Weller, Noam Chomsky, and many others. The contentions that the nation-state is declining, however, seem premature, especially considering nations are still very much an organizing principle of the world. I wish to propose, then, that the nation is rearticulated into the neoliberal state. I do not mean "neoliberal state" in David Harvey's sense where the nation-state is simply synonymous with private corporations (*Brief History* 85). Instead, I wish to point to the structures of contradiction brought about through the relationship between the nation and neoliberalism. Rather than offering a false

solution to this problem, these texts bring to light, through corporeal parody and violence, the way the nation-state and nationalism become a tool of the free market. My dissertation and the texts within grapple with and demonstrate this contradiction: neoliberalism needs the nation.

1.1 **From Neoliberalism to Latina/o Cultural Production**

This requires us to delve into what neoliberalism means. Neoliberalism has come to describe many economic and social developments arising, arguably, in the 1970s. Jason Hackworth recently accused many theorists and critics of making “neoliberalism” just another meaningless and all-encompassing term for capitalism, much like “globalization” (xi-xii). He beseeches critics to historicize the term and, thus, nuance its characteristic features: privatization, the widening gap between rich and poor, and immigration. Neoliberalism, largely, is understood as a socio-economic development coming from two historical economic movements. On one level, it develops out of eighteenth-, nineteenth-, and twentieth-century classical liberalism and/or laissez-faire economics, with its desires for less government in the economy and for individual freedoms in the market. On another level, it is a reaction to Keynesianism and/or embedded liberalism, characterized by New Deal policies and state influence in the market as a way to secure the welfare of its citizens and its own economic growth. These two historical movements shape the free market desires that this term encompasses.

Theorizing these economic movements and events, Michel Foucault saw this “new” economic paradigm in the 1970s under two perspectives: the German definition and the American definition. On one hand, he examines how German neoliberalism indicates a change from a state that regulated the market to “a state under the supervision of the market” (*Birth of Biopolitics* 116). On the other hand, he argues how this shift is an epistemological transformation of labor into capital, from the American perspective (223-33). But, it is important to remember

that both of these perspectives point to how neoliberalism evolved from the Bretton Wood Agreements (1944). These international agreements established a global monetary management system (i.e., the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF)) to establish fiscal relations between industrialized states and to offer Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs) to nations struggling to participate in this global economy. By doing this, they began a transformation toward a world where the market begins to dictate social relations

David Harvey upholds that the transformation in social relations is primarily a consolidation of class power to a select few, and he believes this is achieved by the tension between neoliberal doctrine and the pragmatics of neoliberalization. He examines how neoliberalism tries to make the practices of market monopoly or market failure unrecognizable from its theories (21). By this, Harvey illustrates the pervasive and deceptive common sense that “seeks to bring all human action into the domain of the market” (3). By reducing these ideas to the level of common sense, these economic moves become perceived as normal and out-of-the-question. This is perhaps why Robert W. McChesney believes that “Neoliberalism’s loudest message is that there is no alternative to the status quo, and that humanity has reached its highest level” and/or reached the end of history with “widespread satisfaction with the status quo” (15). The anxiety about neoliberalism’s normalizing effect shows up in as diverse of texts as Jean Comaroff and John L. Comaroff’s collection *Millennial Capitalism and the Culture of Neoliberalism* (2001) to Philip Cerny’s idea of neopluralism in his book *Rethinking World Politics* (2010).

But the doctrines of neoliberalism that reduce market objectives to a common-sense status quo of social relations are not always congruent with its practices. Harvey sees the true objective of neoliberalism’s common-sense doctrine as an elaborate process to widen the gap between rich and poor and restore upper-class power: “[I]n the struggle to restore or establish a

distinctive upper-class power all manner of twists and turns occur as political powers change hands and as the instruments of influence are weakened here or strengthened there” (87). For instance, Harvey considers the quintessential neoliberal moment to be the 1973 New York City stock market crash, where he describes how the banks forced the state into bankruptcy all to influence the government to create new financial institutions. These institutions (from which the banks would profit) would manage the city budget by cutting social programs, such as education, healthcare, public transportation, as well as disempowering unions (45). By doing this, select institutions and CEOs were able to reroute capital in their own direction and for their own purposes. It is this distinguishing characteristic of neoliberalism that many believe makes it particularly different from classical liberalism and Keynesianism: it is the restoration of power to an economic elite or upper-class. Harvey believes this restoration of power was propagated “through international flows and structural adjustment practices” (29-30) that rerouted money to a select few.

The consolidation of class disparity, however, is not necessarily “neoliberal.” What makes it neoliberal, according to Aihwa Ong, are how these class lines are governed. She defines “neoliberalism as a technology of governing” (9-10) and argues that it “recasts politics as mainly a problematizing activity, one that shifts the focus away from social conflicts and toward the management of social life” (178). So, for instance, when Ong looks at the relationship between Malaysian security techniques and Indonesian female domestic workers, she speaks to how these workers are sold as “problems” and as a “threat” to social life. This is quite similar to the way Latin American immigrants are being cast in U.S. media and politics: problems and threats. However, Ong shows that these rhetorics help the state or host country maintain its perceived power because the nation can “fix” the problem of foreign migrant workers by keeping the borders open or closed, depending on the amount of public moral outrage or the economic well-

being of the country, while also enslaving migrant workers to their economic terms of cheap labor (204-5). So, where McChesney defines neoliberalism as the way “a relative handful of private interests are permitted to control as much as possible of social life in order to maximize their professional profit” (7), Ong demonstrates one of the ways in which this control is acted out within the social order. This makes neoliberalism the major framework in which social relations are shaped, disciplined, and governed. Social relations now refer to securing the poor in a position of labor capital and the rich in the position of the few and powerful.

Saskia Sassen also sees this widening gap between rich and poor as a part of a new economic turn in the last 15 years. Although she does not always use the language of neoliberalism, she often describes the process of it. She illustrates how there is greater duality and polarization in the industries and labor markets, so that we see a “shrinking demand for intermediate levels of skill and training” (read: the middle class) since labor markets now demand “highly specialized and educated workers alongside a demand for basically unskilled workers whether for clerical, service, industrial service, or production jobs” (*Globalization* 146). Sassen elucidates here the way the market attempts to separate financial and social class more and more.

One of the major ways this widening gap between rich and poor occurs is through immigration. When we have international agreements, such as NAFTA, that allow for products and money to cross the border quite easily, these attempts to keep people out, especially cheap labor, seem to be in direct contradiction with these free-market principles. Sassen tells us that immigrations follow a certain pattern, and the increase of immigration occurs when “internationalizations of production” expands (58). This expansion opens up “transnational spaces for economic activity,” according to Sassen. But, there is a contradiction that happens here, too. We are also seeing a hyper-securitization of borders. Wendy Brown tells us the U.S.-

Mexico border wall project “was born out of a tension between the needs of North American capital and popular antagonisms toward the migration incited by those needs, especially their effect on wages, employment, and the demographics and cultures composing and in some eyes decomposing the nation” (*Walled States* 36). These “tensions,” as Brown calls them, point to the way that the border becomes a major site for the contradictions embodied within neoliberalism. Of course, the U.S.-Mexico border is perhaps the most obvious example of this contradictory site and is a major border for those hailing from Mexico and parts of Central America and South America, but the border manifests in many different ways across different groups represented under the header “Latino.” And since Latino subjectivities and representations are deeply tied to the border on many fronts—historically, culturally, and/or economically—this speaks to the way in which Latinas/os and the free-market economy are in direct conversation.

Yet, if we understand this privatized, free-market economy to be about consolidating class divisions and reducing subjectivities to a market logic, then the connection to literature seems purely metaphorical or allegorical. Arlene Dávila claims otherwise, “Neoliberalism is often connected with homelessness, poverty, residential segregation, and other indexes of inequality, yet ‘culture,’ a well-known instrument of entrepreneurship used by government and business, a medium to sell, frame, structure, claim, and reclaim space, is closely implicated in such processes and always in demand of closer scrutiny” (*Barrio Dreams* 9). Dávila’s argument for culture as equally important as issues of inequality in discussing the socio-economic climate is perhaps where we might begin to see how literature and specifically Latina/o literature and film matters in discussions and conceptions of neoliberalism. Latina/o literature is a category of literature that is both contestatory and in contestation, where it resists the appropriations and homogeneity of the market but finds itself emblematic of the market’s desires for difference and niches. This literature, thus, not only shows us its own perspective on the current economic

climate but also functions as an integral part of neoliberalism. By representing Latinas/os as both commodities and actors in the dissemination and consolidation of neoliberal doctrines and practices, this literature interrogates the way racialized and ethnic subjectivities play a very important role in the market logic.

We see this question of commodification and the primacy of consumer culture from Michele Serros' mixed-genre *Chicana Falsa* (1993) to Achy Obejas' novel *Memory Mambo* (1996) to Rubén Martínez's sentimental ethnography *Crossing Over* (2001). All of these books grapple with and exemplify the way Latino literature fits into a niche market, even when they are widely different in form and content. Thus, what is described and understood as national identity and the nuances of culture become a part of the market logic. Ellen McCracken, although attributing this relative phenomenon to postmodernism, argues that "ethnic groups can be understood as an integral part of capitalist structures while at the same time they are producing cultural truths not consumed by these structures" (13). By thinking of Latina/o literature within this contradiction, McCracken is able to interrogate how minority and ethnic literature, specifically Latina literature for her study, is commodified through its difference, where mainstream appropriation of minority texts works to "contain difference within its system" (14). One of the ways in which this commodification is enacted is through canonization. The *Norton Anthology of Latino/a Literature* (2010), in particular, exemplifies this by definitively labeling texts after the neoliberal turn of the mid-1970s as "Into the Mainstream." Raphael Dalleo and Elena Machado Sáez challenge this label of mainstreaming, since it suggests a docility with capitalism and a homogeneity of the category of Latino/a Literature. They read the way particular texts critique American capitalism, while they also maintain a "double vision" of this canon, acknowledging it is popular and very much a part of the cultural industry; this view requires them to think "*through* the market" (10-1). The upholding of difference and

contradiction, in both McCracken and Dalleo and Sáez, is precisely thinking through the market, but we might extend our understanding of the market to more than simply literature as a cultural artifact.

This literature and film does not exist in a capitalist vacuum of profitable ethnic content. As a product, Latina/o literature and film has proven to be also lucrative for publishing companies, production companies, and literary agencies. Michelle Habel-Pallán has looked at the way the Latina/o cultural industry oscillates between self-production, where artists and authors rely on D.I.Y. (Do It Yourself) aesthetics and *rasquache* (making art and products with what is literally “at hand”) sensibilities, and popularizing these “alternative” productions, as we see with The Hernandez Brothers’ comic book series *Love and Rockets* or Robert Lopez’s alter-ego El Vez from the punk band The Zeros. She illustrates how El Vez has been popularized internationally since his music speaks to a globalized subjectivity, allowing for cross-ethnic identification (and, thus, music sales, I would argue): “Although the specifics of Chicana and Chicano cultural symbols and experiences may be lost in translation, what is gained is the possibility of recognizing that young Turkish Germans are positioned similarly to Chicanas and Chicanos by capitalism and nationalism” (202). She shows how ethnicity operates as a global niche. Her argument, however, is founded within the theories and discussions of Arlene Dávila, whose work on the Hispanic market in *Latinos, Inc.* has demonstrated how the agencies and agents—from The Bravo Group (New York City) to Lapíz (Chicago) to La Agencia de Orca (Los Angeles)—that work on Hispanic marketing (or marketing “in Spanish” according to some) have created largely ideal, homogenous, and normative images of Latinas/os and *latinidad* (17-20). For instance, Dávila discusses how telenovelas and talk shows are emblematic of the growing transnationalism of Hispanic Programming, where companies such as Televisa and Univision are diversifying and universalizing their soap operas to appeal to U.S. audiences and Latin American

audiences. This is epitomized in *Dos Mujeres, Un Destino*, where Erik Estrada's character (with his weak Spanish-language skills) regularly crosses the border as he moves between his two love interests, or in *Cristina* and *Sábado Gigante*, talk shows that bring together Puerto Ricans, Mexicans, Dominicans, Guatemalans, Cubans, Venezuelans, Chileans, and U.S. Latinos into a transnational world on the set, often punctuated with crude and sexual content (163-165). In other words, Dávila points out how these agencies and industries that have made Latina/o cultural production popular and profitable in the global market are also shaping the perception of Latinas/os in very specific ways.

Ultimately, these critiques and understandings of Latina/o cultural productions expose a particularly neoliberal approach to literary and ethnic commodification: literature and film is distributed and disciplined via these ethnic categories, and a field that is as diverse as Latina/o literature and film allows for an ever marketable pluralism with this distribution. This approach to cultural production and "difference" often reduces these national and ethnic identities that make up the category "Latino" in the U.S. to the level of commodity and accessory. To this end, Latina/o literature and film embodies the way in which the market governs and situates these ethnic and national identities on a transnational level.

1.2 Structure of Dissertation

This dissertation approaches these issues and this argument through two overarching paradigms—nationalism (Chapter Two-Four) and the nation-state (Chapters Five-Six)—as they inform processes and representations of neoliberalism. In Chapter Two, "Premodern Style: How Neoliberalism Rewrites Cultural Nationalism on Latina/o Bodies," I analyze how Sesshu Foster's *Atomik Aztex* is a neoliberal revision of Chicano cultural nationalism. The novel, a postmodern parody of an alternative future and nostalgia of the native, is the story of Zenzo(ntl)

who lives in two different worlds. In one world, the Aztecs beat the conquistadors and now rule as a world power (rather similarly to the contemporary U.S., except with head-dresses and sacrifices). Here, Zenzontli is a wealthy general who mostly spends his time in leisure, dreaming fantastically of his greatness and buying junk to make his kids like him. In the other world, Zenzontli is simply Enzo, a poor meatpacking worker in present-day Los Angeles who is trying to unionize his legal and illegal “brothers.” Traveling between these two worlds is a physically painful experience, often analogized to crossing a border. By reading these two worlds, accompanied by Coco Fusco and Guillermo Gómez-Peña’s performance art piece “Couple in a Cage” and Julio Cortázar’s short story “The Night Face Up,” I argue that “Aztec” and the indigenous figure becomes nothing except a style from which to profit. Reading this through the criticism and theories of Gloria Anzaldúa, Nicolas De Genova, Fredric Jameson, and Franz Fanon, I argue that this rewrites cultural nationalism in the sense that claims to being native are no longer about gaining civil rights but are about gaining economic leverage.

Chapter Three, “The Gap Between Rich and Poor: Static Characters and Myths of Social Mobility in Valdes-Rodriguez and Viramontes,” turns from the issues of spatial-temporal mobility in Chapter Two to issues of social mobility. This chapter, also, takes up more formal and gendered issues within Latina literature, specifically contemporary character-driven novel where each chapter is built around the narration and story of a specific character. Looking at Alisa Valdes-Rodriguez’s *The Dirty Girl Social Club*, as a representation of the Latina “rich,” and Helena María Viramontes’ *Their Dogs Came with Them*, as a representation of the poor, I argue that both these books elucidate the myths of social mobility under neoliberalism, by appealing to Latina feminist ideals of empowerment while reducing them to mechanisms of consumption and questions of economic success. Politics-of-difference, that was once believed to be a way to gain cultural legitimacy and resist an oppressive state in 1980s US ethnic theory

from Yvonne Yarbro-Bejarano to Norma Alarcón, has turned into simply a profitable pluralism in which to obscure neoliberal agendas, specifically that of consolidating the gap between rich and poor and restore class power to the elite few. Aligning myself with the social theories of Arlene Dávila, Arturo Escobar, and Inderpal Grewal, I consider how neoliberal agendas are obscured within and through the character-driven structure of the novels.

Chapter Four, “‘Theory of the Flesh’: ‘Queer’ Sexualities and *Latinidad* from Voguing to Exile,” considers how sexuality becomes foundational within these corporeal commodifications of the first two chapters. In this sense, the market relies on Latina/o sexuality—whether it’s JLo’s butt, ethnic Barbie, Madonna’s appropriation of voguing—as a way to sell products and pander to a niche. This capitalist appropriation of Latina/o sexuality clashes with Latina/o representations of sexuality that are meant to resist or “queer” the status quo, but I argue that it demonstrates how “queer” is solely an *appearance* of resistance since it has been wholly appropriated into the market. Engaging with the theories of José Muñoz, Michael Warner, and Karen Christian, I consider the effects this contradiction has on Latina/o bodies, especially when these stories and narratives understand it through corporeal violence. The desires for hetero- or homo-normativity (both sexually and nationally), then, are played out on individualized (and thus privatized) bodies, creating what Cherrie Moraga calls “a theory of the flesh.” In the end, we see the way the market must use the hyper-sexualization and eroticism of “Latina” as something of a branding device and/or logo. This, ultimately, consolidates the many nationalities and nationalisms that make up Latinos into the market logic and normalizes that logic into everyday life.

Chapter Five, “The (Bio)State of Immigration: Security Theater and the Life of Capital,” explores theories and representations of security on the border. With discourses that tell us we have an “immigrant problem” and militia groups cropping up along the border, we are inundated

with rhetoric about securing our nation and securing our lives as citizens. This is a biopolitical discourse, then, and the nation-state has promoted and responded to these discourses with the building of the border wall and the increase in Homeland Security. Reading against Giorgio Agamben with Saskia Sassen, Peter Andreas, and Wendy Brown, I argue that Luis Urrea's novel *The Devil's Highway* and Alex Rivera's film *Sleep Dealer* demonstrate that these biopolitics are nothing but a performance of security. As a performance, we see an elaborate and violent theatricality that often results in the dehumanization and the death of immigrants. This demonstrates how biopolitics are not about human life, then, but about the life of capital.

Chapter Six, "The (Necro)State of Immigration: Death and a Politics of Labor in *La Ciudad* and *The Ordinary Seaman*," concludes this dissertation. This final chapter responds to chapter five's predicament of U.S. performances of security by questioning what is behind the theatrical curtains. By looking at the close connection between labor and immigration, I read David Riker's film *La Ciudad (The City)* and Francisco Goldman's *The Ordinary Seaman* as representations of how immigrant labor—both illegal and legal—are regulated by a process of invisibility and captivity. The nation-state remains an invisible actor by actively turning a blind eye to the exploitative and violent labor practices (as technically legalized in the Immigrant Act of 1987) that Latin American immigrants face when working in the U.S., that often result in death within cultural production. I explore the concepts of death from the socio-political formations of Achille Mbembe and Jasbir Puar to the more cultural considerations of Claudio Lomintz and Kirsten Silva Gruesz to unravel the troubling contradictions found in theories of necropolitics. I argue that what is actually happening is not "securing life" but instead a politics of death, where human capital is social death.

This dissertation, ultimately, wishes to demonstrate what exactly is at stake for Latinas/os in a world organized by these interactions between the nation and a neoliberal economy. The

contradictions present in the structural tension between nations and free markets are also present within these stories, these novels, these films, and these productions. And I end on the notion of social death because these contradictions are what create the means for and representations of labor exploitation, sexualizations of the Latina/o body, and, in the end, violence.

Notes

¹ El Partido Independentista Puertorriqueño (PIP) is still fighting for independence and autonomy, but Lebrón was part of the movement's beginning years.

² By thinking about Aztlán as a spatial symbol of imagined community, I am drawing on Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities* (1983) (p. 6-8, 37, 83-111, 150). This also illustrates the way symbolic nationalism as an ideology becomes a material force.

³ Perhaps most notable is Oscar Zeta Acosta's legal representation of Corky Gonzales and Saint Basil 21. Acosta's court cases often were civil disobedience cases, where he fought for the rights of Chicanos to participate in the U.S. legal system through protest and fighting police injustices. We might describe Acosta's legal rhetoric now as a call for participatory democracy. But, *Revolt of the Cockroach People* (1973) was supposed to have the same *effect*, by creating nationalist mobilizations, that his legal cases did, which demonstrates the way culture and legality were synonymous.

⁴ See Rachael Ida Buff's "The Deportation Terror" (*American Quarterly*, 60.3, Sept. 2008) and Guillermo Gómez-Peña's *New World Border* (1996). Nicholas De Genova's *Working the Boundaries* (2005) speaks to labor exploitation "off the farm," as well.

⁵ See Raphael Dalleo and Elena Machado Sáez's "Introduction" in *The Latino/a Canon and the Emergence of Post-sixties Literature* (2007) for further discussion on this new canon.

⁶ I am perhaps reducing the ideas behind transnationalism to a sort of "multiculturalism." Helen Heran Jun argues that multiculturalism (as a neoliberal phenomenon) "displaces white supremacy and racial liberalism in the late twentieth-century as a dominant ideology" if we understand that it is "inclusive category of cultural difference...governed by a normative logic that is racialized, classed, and gendered" (127). In other words, "multiculturalism" allows for categories of "bad" racial otherness to remain in tact. What I hope to add to this problem is how these happy transnationalisms that celebrate multiculturalism and diversity under a particular notion of globalism and neoliberalism still require categories of nationalism and nation.

⁷ See Lisa Lowe and David Lloyd's "Introduction" in *The Politics of Culture in the Shadow of Capital* (1997). They define transnationalism as "the universal extension of a differentiated mode of production that relies on flexible accumulation and mixed production to incorporate all sectors of the global economy into its logic of commodifications" (1). In other words, they argue that transnationalism is the reduction of all production into commodity. This would include cultural productions. However, they also want "culture" to be a positive political force when it comes into contradiction with this economic logic. By doing this, they redefine "transnationalism," making it a possible site for alternative modes of history and mobilization.

⁸ See Chela Sandoval's *Methodology of the Oppressed* (2000), Chandra Mohanty's *Feminism Without Borders* (2003) and Aihwa Ong's "The Gender and Labor Politics of Postmodernity" in Lowe and Lloyd's *The Politics of Culture in the Shadow of Capital* (1997) for this type of sociopolitical crossing.

2. PREMODERN STYLE: HOW NEOLIBERALISM REWRITES CULTURAL NATIONALISM THROUGH LATINA/O BODIES

When Fredric Jameson says that “a single system or mode of production has now supplanted all the others,” this single mode—capitalism—produces “the waning of the Utopian impulse,” where our desire is “enfeebled” and where our political options are “sapped” (55).¹ For Jameson, the material and historical structure of capitalism has overwhelmed any imagining outside of it, to the point where “alternative” structures are virtually impossible to desire, imagine, or produce. Where Jameson is talking about all cultural production in the age of late capitalism, this chapter considers what this might mean for Latina/o cultural production.

As a field that carries the historical suitcases of Chicano cultural nationalism² and with that the Chicano Movement (or *EL Movimiento*), Latina/o cultural production is no stranger to the desire for “alternatives.” *El Movimiento* is largely looked upon for its labor movements—headlined by César Chávez and Dolores Huerta—and its arts movement—embraced by Oscar Zeta Acosta, Corky Gonzales, and Alurista—two spaces that often overlapped. The literary aspects of the movement were believed to have just as much civil impact as the protests.³ Thus, *El Movimiento* created a space for alternatives, in this case civil rights and empowerment, to be imagined in both realistic and fantastic ways. The most striking of these Chicano “alternatives” is the imaginary and mythic homeland of Aztlán. Based on Alurista’s poem *El Plan Espiritual de Aztlán* given at the 1969 First National Chicano Liberation Youth Conference, Aztlán inspired a desire that would shape and embody the nationalist liberation movement.⁴ Aztlán was to be a reclaimed space (most commonly thought of as the borderlands that were ceded to the U.S. by the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo in 1848) that offered Chicanos a way to claim native (and thus equal) rights within the U.S.—although many more militant Chicanos saw it as a space to annex from the U.S. and Mexico and declare complete autonomy and sovereignty over.⁵ But it also

became a way to imagine the historical and ancestral ties—some violent and some romantic—to the region, fostering a sense of community and what we might call nativism.⁶ Aztlán, as an imagined space and community, was a symbol of how Chicanos thought of themselves within the nation of the U.S., as both inside and outside the law, the larger social structure, and the land.

Aztlán is a name with clear, direct reference to the Aztecs. The figure of the Aztecs, along with the Tainos and other native tribes of the Americas, within Latina/o cultural production has been tumultuous, celebrated for its empowering origin claim but also emblematic of colonial violences, both of which come to represent a tension surrounding Latina/o subjectivities and bodies. When we see novels and art utilize the premodern 40 to 50 years after *El Movimiento*, these imaginaries and tensions come with it. The historical difference in the usage of the premodern, however, occurs at the level of what the Latina/o body means. By looking at Sesshu Foster's novel *Atomik Aztex*, complemented with Coco Fusco and Guillermo Gómez-Peña's performance art piece *Couple in the Cage* and Julio Cortázar's short story "The Night Face Up," I will explore how the indigenous past relies on the ideals of cultural nationalism but finds itself materializing in rather cynical, violent, and oppressive practices and discourses on global capitalism in a world structured by nations. In other words, these fantastic imaginaries here are never removed or alternative to the regimes of commodification and exploitive labor. All of these texts, then, use the premodern as a fantastic "alternative" world not to dream of a world without these violence but as a way to understand the pervasive structure of capitalism through the Nation.

In effect, the nation-state and nationalism become quite central to looking at the economic violences that pervades Latina/o cultural production in the late 20th century and early 21st century. But these economic violences, which I have vulgarly summed up under the homogenizing and vacant term "capitalism," are very specific to a turn in the history of

capitalism. Global capitalism—defined through post-World War II agreements (especially Bretton Woods) and the Cold War era of communists versus capitalists—no longer can be understood entirely through the binary of capitalism and communism. One reason for this is that communism fell short of bringing communal forms of ownership into being, especially through the problem of dictatorship, although Castro’s Cuba and many decolonization movements continue to see it through. But also, this binary glossed over subtle changes in discourses and practices that increasingly permeate our daily lives.

This change becomes more obvious in the 80s in Latina/o literature, where the Aztlán manifesto falls away to Gloria Anzaldúa’s *Borderlands/La Frontera*. The purpose of Aztlán was largely a political one, hoping to enact actual legal changes in the U.S. through cultural production. Anzaldúa’s work is also “political” in the sense that it attempts to break open the literary world for personal voice and a consciousness of our many fractured identities. Both speak to the same border space but for very different means. Anzaldúa’s work is about identity politics, not legal politics. Her work, unlike the cultural nationalists, did not mean to literally enact legal changes (or claim state sovereignty), like Acosta believed culture could achieve.⁷ It is this turn to the self-referential, to identity as being central, that marks what I see as a logic of privatization. Following on the heels of Reaganite libertarianism, where state government is under attack for being too involved in the free market, the 1980s cultural productions attempt to move away from the legal and governmental, to privatize these cultural productions. Many saw this as transformative, allowing “Latino” to become a term of interaction unhindered by the structure of the Nation and the violence of a “patriarchal state,” and others saw it as empowering, allowing for a spot in the culture industry. This turn to privatization, to writing out nation in favor of a *free* marketplace of ideas and commodities, is generated by the neoliberal turn. What is perhaps interesting about Latina/o cultural production is that the figure of the Nation never

really went away, although it was contested and questioned consistently. The move to privatization seemed to highlight the Nation more and has become rather pronounced in this literature since the turn of the century.

When we end up with a novel such as Sesshu Foster's *Atomik Aztex* (2005) or the performance art of *Couple in a Cage* (1993), the Nation becomes a way to understand these economic changes and violences. The Nation in this sense is not an alternative to capitalism, nor is it necessarily the thing that will solve present-day economic problems (i.e., poverty, the widening gap between rich and poor, uneven development, neocolonial labor practices, and debt slavery, to name a few). Instead, the Nation symbolizes a dual structure: on the one hand, it is the pragmatic application of legal and juridical governing of peoples within demarcated spatial borders (i.e., the nation-state); on the other hand, it is a more figurative and representative organization of peoples through imagined community, national identity, shared cultural ways, and the like (i.e., nationalisms). This dual structure demonstrates the way the "people" and government purportedly co-operate a set of practices and discourses under the heading "Nation." This structure, at first glance, leaves out the economic processes of global capitalism. But the Nation is not an anomaly here. Its legal and juridical governing often has an economic logic. The persistence of nationalisms has fostered a whole racial, ethnic, and sexual market through commodifying these subjectivities, for example.⁸ What this produces is an interesting reinstatement of the Nation into a world joined under market forces, importing and exporting of goods, Third World-First World interactions, and financially-motivated immigrations.

This macro understanding of Nation is often pointed toward the character of the U.S. For instance, "The United States" is read as a contradictory and unstable construction, as the name itself invokes both a nation-state built on the civil idea of "freedom" and "representation" (read: liberalism and/or democracy) and a capitalistic world power built on similar strategies as

colonialism. The name itself is inextricably tied to these two understandings, both the global and the national, both the economic and the juridical. So, the global economic understanding of “the U.S.” is spurred on by militant actions abroad, the claims to “spreading democracy,” the often questionable foreign policy, and many other nation-based legislations. On that same note, the understanding of the bordered nation relies on corporate interventions (the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, the World Trade Organization), is organized through corporate lobbying and the commercializing of nationalism, as well as sustained through the on-going economic split between the First World and the Third World. Many scholars in Latina/o studies have built on this First World-Third World split, attempting to harness this into the dual nature of the U.S. with the concept of the “U.S. Third World” (See Chela Sandoval (2000) and Emma Pérez (1999)). However, I prefer to step away from this conception of the U.S. because, following on the heels of Roberto Schwarz and Fredric Jameson, the question of national liberation ingrained in the term “Third World” falls into national designations of developed and underdeveloped.⁹ In other words, the idea of an underdeveloped state that comes with the term “Third World” does not apply to the U.S. (or Latina/o subjects), which is a very developed, functional state (and/or people). Thus, the U.S. continues to represent not only a “successful” nation but also a capitalist world power. This duality of the U.S., then, occurs both outside and inside the space of the nation. In other words, it cannot be understood solely within the walls of the Nation, but it also gestures toward how the Nation continues to be significant to these socio-economic issues. This is perhaps where Walter Mignolo’s term “border thinking” is useful. Border thinking is the term that describes how we might think about this very interaction between Nation and the global economy.

When confronted with the role of Latina/o Literature, as a critique of these economic, political, and social contradictions, the Nation becomes entrenched in the way alternatives are

desired, histories are imagined, and socio-economic states of being are narrated. Finding undeniable ties in *El Movimiento*, Latina/o cultural production carries with it the history of cultural nationalism for brown, working bodies. But it also upholds the free marketplace of ideas, identities, and practices emblazoned in the 80s and 90s. Foster's *Atomik Aztex* utilizes what I have adopted to call "border thinking" through the body, where the character Zenzontli becomes split not only spatially and temporally but also economically and politically between the two worlds he violently travels between. I will explore this corporeal duality by first looking at a Zenzontli as a caricature of consumer and then by turning to his alter ego as a model of laborer and exploited producer of goods. By reading his character through this duality, I will demonstrate how these worlds become two sides of the same coin, a coin shaped by the exchanges between the Nation and the economy of global capitalism and which is mostly readily described through the term neoliberalism.

Atomik Aztex is not an ordinary Latino novel and would most likely never turn up in the Latino canon. Sesshu Foster, an Anglo/Japanese poet who grew up in East L.A., does not easily fit into the more traditional understanding of Latina/o literature, a category often defined by the authors' ethnicity.¹⁰ However, growing up in East L.A., Foster is no stranger to the Chicano cultural nationalist movement, both in terms of art and in terms of civil rights activism, or their continued effects on the Mexican-American community there. He is also no stranger to the working-class plights of East L.A., which often occur at the expense of racialized, sexualized, and commodified bodies. His book, thus, captures these conditions that permeate life and bodies in *el barrio* through fantastic and speculative means.

The novel is about a character who violently travels between two worlds, where what appears as an "alternative" isn't very "alternative." In one world, the Aztecs conquer the conquistadors and reign as a world power in the 1940s, comically parodying U.S. global politics.

This world is told by the Aztec general Zenzontli, who lives a life of leisure and consumption, with only the fear of sacrifice. In the other world, Zenzontli finds himself as a lowly worker called Zenzo at a meatpacking plant in Southern California petitioning for worker unionization during some undesignated time after 1961, with only vague memories of the alternative Aztec world. I will illustrate how these worlds simply become two sides of the same coin—neoliberalism—that does not critique globalization and capitalist deregulation but instead reconstitutes the Nation.

2.1 The Consumer

Half of *Atomik Aztex* is presented as a consumer's dream-world, where the Aztecs have defeated the conquistadors and are now a world power in which material goods and money abound for the rich, comfortable, and heavily-adorned Aztecs. At the beginning of Foster's book, we are introduced to Zenzontli, a general for the Aztec Socialist Imperium, a regime that sounds like socialism but works like capitalist imperialism, is run by neoliberals, and is often called a nation in the text (122). Although this Aztec world is surely an alternative history, this world looks like simply a parody of the U.S. political and economic narrative. Zenzontli's story is a simple one, coming out in postmodern flashes and discombobulated events and musings. He is the father of children who hate him unless they need money, he must guard the European slaves and prepare them for sacrifice, and he often sits in his hammock reflecting on whether or not his career as a military man—with the majority of his story concentrating on his battles during a parodic World War II—is in danger or whether *he* will be sacrificed. Consumerism constantly frames his story through his excessive consumption of material goods so his kids will like him, the amount of objects that fill up the pages describing his home and clothes, and the all-around leisure that Zenzontli enjoys among his material possessions.

This materialism in the book is deeply dependent on image and style, specifically fashion. The power of the Aztecs, for Zenzontli, is contingent to Aztec style, making style an amicable partner to the Aztec state's world domination and, with that, his own comfort. A major pattern throughout the novel is Zenzontli having tirades about how great the Aztecs are and then relating this greatness to appearance. For instance, he rants, "it's not that we're 'the chosen race' or any bullshit like that, it's just that fundamentally—where it counts—we're *better*" (65). By writing out "race" and replacing it with "fundamental," he opens the door to a whole gamut of questions on social evolution, naturalization, and essentializing aspects of power. His rant continues only to immediately point this greatness toward a function of Aztec appearance at the end of the tirade: "We, privileged citizens of Anahuak, the Aztex Socialist Imperium, are simply more advanced and more fully developed in all fundamental aspekts of the basic human personality as developed historikally over the course of Civilization(s). Plus we look too kool" (65). Although "coolness" appears to be tagged on, accessorizing the Aztec's historical and "fundamental" advancement, his ending on "looking too cool" signals a reliance on the commodities of appearance. By rhetorically ending on the coolness of Aztec image, he shifts the essentialist jargon of Aztec domination into a function of style. Following "too kool," Zenzontli proceeds to only list fashions and corporeal adornment: "in our tattoos, feathers, lip and ear plugs and sunscreen war paint, so we leave the competition far behind" (65). Although this list concentrates entirely on the clothes and accessories of the Aztec world, these fashions could easily be seen on any L.A. beach, in any biker bar, or at any Midwestern mall in our present-day U.S. world. In other words, the parodic humor of this idea of "coolness" is how Aztec style is not necessarily "Aztec." This is perhaps why Zenzontli so forcefully states that this isn't about "race" in the beginning of his rant. Of course, this list of "cool" fashion could easily be racialized

and in many aspects it is. The force of “coolness” here is inextricably tied to these “native,” brown bodies within this novel and deeply informs Aztec world power.

This idea of “coolness” becomes a reoccurring reference within Zenzontli’s world and sets the stage for what quickly becomes a structure of the market and commodification. Although Zenzontli emphasizes that the Aztecs are the “coolest” since their style is the best and their power proves it, he also muses over how the concept of “cool” should be the foundation to any world power, even Nazi Germans. When Zenzontli is fighting with his troops in a parodic World War II scenario (where the Aztecs take the place of the U.S.), he speculates how the Germans got as far as they did in taking over Europe:

The Germans, it must be said, did have a highly developed aesthetik sensibility about how to conduct war—which accounted for their early successes—becuz they chose the coolest immaculate uniforms of gray wool, Sam Brown belts with snap-on attachments or accoutrements and flared helmets like industrial samurais and stylistik master strokes like zippy emblems such as swastikas (we assume they took them from the Navajos, cuz Navajos swear they invented the swastika first by staring at the sun for a long time without sunglasses), which did a lot for their cause, having all those authentik items and perks of office, and they had kool designs like the iron cross, Death’s Head insignia, double lightning bolts for the SS, etc., all that good stuff, *plus the proper attitude (a certain pride in business undertakings, giving it 100%)*, which lead to enormous success in penetrating new markets all across the world.... (125)

Again, “coolness” and fashion choices (coupled, of course, with the ethos of good work ethic toward the end) are evoked as the very thing that lead to the Germans “penetrating new markets” world-wide. Zenzontli unabashedly uses the term “aesthetik” as the very thing here that leads to German success, but this is not a sensibility about the state of “art.” It is purely decorative. According to this logic, one’s success and power is dependent on one’s fashion and decoration. So we must ask ourselves, what “commodity” is being sold here?

If we rely on our own “real” historical knowledge of World War II, the Nazi “market” was anti-free market, wishing instead to cleanse and contain the world through xenophobia,

eugenics, and totalitarianism. But Zenzontli translates this “market” into the marketplace of ideas. So when we read how in a battle Zenzontli can only think about how he looks when he finally infiltrates a group of Nazis for sacrificial product (95-110), we laugh at the utter absurdity of the importance of image and style. But this absurdity has a late-capitalist logic. This logic leads to Zenzontli arguing here that German style can *sell the Nazi cause* simply because of the “authenticity” and “kool designs” of their clothing and accessories. Even the reference to the Navajos becomes a way to legitimize their fashion sensibilities through the origin claim; *indigenous* style and “authenticity” trump the actual “cause” of genocide and totalitarianism. Style, then, produces and markets ideology. This commodity—ideology—requires one’s good “aesthetik” sensibility—good fashion choices. What we see here is the way both the nonmaterial goods (like notions of “cool,” and “causes”) and the material goods (like fashion) are reduced to the perspective of the consumer.

This conflation of ideology—coolness, in this case—and the material good—fashion—invokes Inderpal Grewal’s analysis of Barbie going to India in her book *Transnational America*, where consumptive ideology can be easily manipulated by material clothing. She demonstrates, “As a white female tourist in an India opening itself to investment from abroad, Barbie, an icon of white, heterosexual American femininity, was able to put on a sari, a signifier of Indianness, and be ‘at home’” (82). The power of something so simple as clothing (a sari in this case) suddenly speaks volumes to national ideology. For Grewal, nationalism becomes inextricable from the clothes Barbie—a sign of the transnational and global economy—is wearing. The way that the Barbie doll symbolizes consumer capitalism on a transnational scale, then, is completely synonymous with the *national* clothes she wears. It is perhaps simply a coincidence that the Barbie doll, imitated from a German doll in the 1950s, shares the same name of Klaus Altmann-Barbie, a staunch Nazi whom the U.S. protected for his anti-Communist sentiment, moving him

into Latin America.¹¹ Barbie, as both a global commodity and a loaded sign, has also become an interesting figure in the niche market of “Hispanic” advertising. Frances Negrón-Muntaner speaks to this “Barbie doll phenomenon” through the arrival of “Puerto Rican Barbie” in 1997, arguing that it exhibited the way Puerto Rican race became a commodity form. When discussing the pro- and anti-Barbie camps, Negrón-Muntaner states, “Those who identified as Island Puerto Ricans saw the doll as a *wavy-haired mulatta*. The majority of U.S. Puerto Ricans disagreed: the doll was *straight-haired* and *white*” (209). The racialized visualizations and observations over PR Barbie lead her to conclude that there is a “tendency to construct identity as an accessory” (226). Barbie, then, is solely a body, loaded up with the signs of global capitalism and white misogynistic normalization that “dresses up” and magically becomes a direct representation of minoritarian national identities. The body becomes nothing more than a way to “model” rather superficial styles that say “Indian” or “Puerto Rican.”

When we see the body being represented in this exact same way, but through the eyes of a “premodern” subject like Zenzontli, we must ask what the premodern offers to this reading of the body. How can *premodern* style reconstitute state power and single-handedly sell causes? Grewal claims that the premodern has become an international appeal in postcolonial literature, rendering it a trope of the “postcolonial cosmopolitan imaginary” or a way to capture a “past purified from colonialism’s taint” (51). *Atomik Aztex* disrupts this anti-colonial appeal of the premodern. In quite the reverse, the novel uses the premodern body to parody the rise of U.S. world power arguably located in World War II successes, where Foster similarly positions the Aztex Social Imperium as fulfilling this same role in an “alternative” World War II scenario. By adhering to rather “realist” lines of history among fantastic vernacular and worlds, Foster complicates the significance of the premodern in contemporary times. The “realist” and the fantastic elements of the story allow for the very parody that exaggerates how the economy is

indebted to a sort of nationalism. In his translation of the material economy into national ideology, state power can be gained by “cool” clothing alone; national community is simply superficial bodies who “model” it.

As previously stated, the Aztec image is a common figure of *chicanismo*, harking back to the days of cultural nationalism. The “premodern” was a way to imagine a world where Chicanos were not oppressed and to claim direct lineage to living on this continent. The rose-colored glasses worn by the cultural nationalists uplifted the premodern figure into a sign of their own power. In a post-1960s and -70s logic, these rose-colored glasses have been shed. *Atomik Aztex* demonstrates how the premodern trope is deeply flawed since it can only be understood through “false” history and stylized commodities. Thus, when we get José E. Limón’s 1994 creative ethnography *Dancing with the Devil*, we are told to consider how borderlands folklore in Texas does not think of these practices through the history of the premodern Americas but “as traces of an older, higher, even more exotic, though still barbaric, civilization—not Aztec, but Arabic via Spain” (37). Limón demonstrates the uneasy relationship with the Aztecs, especially when this Aztec history must be understood through the story of the conquistadors and colonialism. But Limón here shows how Tejano folklore simply replaces the Aztec figure with a more “better” one, coming from Europe. Gloria Anzaldúa also finds herself falling victim to the commodifications of the premodern trope, specifically through her alter-ego Coatlique. Her alter-ego can only exist within her present-day torn subjectivity, thus creating what she calls the “New Mestiza.” The premodern figure here is solely to make meaning of Anzaldúa’s present, making premodern history appear to be a hat she wears, an ontology for the now that is fashionably and persuasively “historical.” The premodern trope then creates a crisis between the idealism of a powerful history and the logic of consumer culture.

It should be no surprise then that the consumer world of *Atomik Aztex* is exaggerated because of the perspective it is being told in: by a wealthy Aztec general who is very high-up in the imperial hierarchy. And although this is a *socialist* imperium, there is still very much a neo-colonial regulation of wealth, resources, and values in which Zenzontli is reaping the benefits. But this is completely instituted around the acts and ideas of consumer culture that are imbibed corporeally. Néstor García Canclini relates this in another way, stating, “Buying objects, wearing them on the body, or distributing them throughout the home, assigning them a place within an order, endowing them with functions in one’s communication with others, are resources for thinking one’s own body, the unstable social order, and uncertain interaction with others. To consume is to make more sense of a world where all that is solid melts into air” (42). Canclini believes that this pervasive consumption is about identity where identities are now becoming simply that of “consumer.” If we take what Canclini is saying as a truth, Zenzontli begins to look like simply a little voice in the back of our heads while we idle away an afternoon at H&M. We read Zenzontli ranting about the Socialist Imperium for their need of quantity over quality, especially when it comes to sacrifices, but these rants and musing are nothing more than that. He muses to his underlings or while he thoughtlessly feeds his sacrificial human “products” from Italy. This is the perspective of a person who has the leisure to muse, the pleasure to complain not about state material violences but about the “aesthetik” of the state. This is the perspective of a person who has reduced everything to the perspective of the consumer.

This idea of “aesthetik” comes up again and again in the flashes of story from Zenzontli’s Aztec world. But, when he uses it to complain about the Aztex Socialist Imperium at the end, he does it to fully reduce this violence to consumer culture. In a sudden and jarring flash, Zenzontli appears to suddenly be accused of treason (for, we might assume, complaining about the state’s lack of “aesthetik” or perhaps because he blacks out often when traveling to the other world) and

will be sacrificed next to the “lowlier” Europeans. We find out later that he is simply imagining his own sacrifice, presumably while lazing about his house. But this moment of imagining his sacrifice demonstrates the way this consumer perspective operates. Again, Zenzontli agitates over lack of “aesthetik” in nation-state rituals and practices, even attributing this lack to the government’s, aka the “Central Kommittee’s,” elite and aesthetically-destructive “Neoliberal Ekonimists” (146).¹² Once getting to the top of the sacrificial pyramid, Zenzontli explains his disgust at being sacrificed with a bunch of Europeans, stating:

I don’t think it’s prejudice, that it’s racist in any way, if I say that the Northern Europeans just don’t make for *good* human sakrifices, *aesthetiks* are of prime importance. If the aesthetiks are off, and here’s where I think our so-called leaders are making a big, BIG mistake, then the whole ritual simply won’t work. It won’t *funktion*. [...] the whole bloody affair won’t *accrue* the same ekonomik benefit as you would get from a *fine, graceful, beautiful* sakrifice” (141).

Zenzontli’s ability to complain while facing death humorously makes “sacrifice” seem to be nothing more than a performance of spectacle. Zenzontli’s entire commentary here is about how the ritual could “accrue [more] economic benefits” if the aesthetics of sacrifice were considered. “Aesthetiks” are purely a sort of superficiality of taste and style, but Zenzontli is playing into the hand of neoliberal economists, whom he seems to despise, here because this ritual is precisely to make money. Like a good consumer, Zenzontli is not concerned with the fact that he is going to die or the religious ethos of this ceremony, but instead, he thinks of how the sacrificial ceremony could make money and actually be entertaining. Thus, he immediately imagines how he would fight his executioners Lucha Libre style when it is his turn, complete with bad WWF-like insulting and postulating (146-152). The imaginary “fight” that ensues, however, is not because Zenzontli does not want to die. Quite the reverse, he fights in this manner to demonstrate that the ritual of sacrifice could be so exciting and entertaining—more consumer-centered—that the Great Crowd in the Central Plaza “*would be Revolutionized in that very instant, they’d titter with*

half-assed satori & enlightenment, they'd be struck breathless, they'd go, "that vato is one kool dude!" (146). This is simply a spectacle.

Thus, when we are confronted with a filmic representation of the indigenous spectacle, we get *Couple in the Cage: A Guatinaui Odyssey*. The spectacle that Fusco and Gómez-Peña produce in this performance art piece critiques how the premodern imaginary within Latina/o cultural production as a way to make sense of the continued commodifications of the indigenous body. Based on the World Fairs' exhibitionism of indigenous people, It was supposed to critique how modern subjects buy up the "Latino" indigenous subject as a way to elucidate how the premodern imaginary continues to inundate our consumer culture, excite our colonialisms, and trigger our continued commodification of the racialized and sexualized "primitive" and "premodern" body. Unfortunately, it failed as a critique since most of the spectators thought the indigenous couple in a cage were actually people who had never known modernity; it remained solely a spectacle.

Couple in the Cage was a performance art piece that toured on a global scale, stopping at the Chicago Field Museum, a upper-class gallery opening in New York City, a county fair in Minneapolis, Columbus Square in Madrid, Spain, London's Covent Garden, and the Museum of Natural History in Sydney, Australia, to name a few. Coco Fusco and Guillermo Gómez-Peña dressed up as "Amerindians" and put themselves in a locked cage on public display, charging spectators to view, touch, and take pictures with them. They had white, female announcers explain to the audience that they were "specimen" from a newly discovered tribe from an island in the Gulf of Mexico, called Guatinaui. The audience was told these two indigenous "specimen"—Guatinaui—had never seen civilization or been exposed to anyone outside their remote island. Within the cage, while these two specimens were on tour, they were given gifts of civilization: a TV set, a boom box, a computer keyboard, sunglasses, a tablecloth, pepto bismol,

and binoculars. Gómez-Peña has dressed himself up in a leopard-print Luca Libre mask, S&M leather and spikes, hot-pink feathers, and boxers or chaps, while Fusco wears a leopard-print bra, green and yellow or red face-paint, a straw skirt, and converse sneakers. They are fed bananas by their white captors, and audience members can see Gómez-Peña's penis for five dollars.

The documentary primarily concentrates on audience reactions of this indigenous couple in a cage. The reactions range from bleeding-heart white guilt—"it's kinda offensive I guess in that...um...it kinda feels like a slap in the face" and "where do they sleep at night? what do they do on their day off?" and "you know, they are human beings and they have a name"—to quite serious reflections on these primitive specimens—"they're too white" and "he's so interested in things he doesn't appear to understand"—to taking pleasure in this spectacle—"as long as it's a joke, it's ok" and "if I was in there, I'd wanna dance with you"—to looking at it as a critique—"because we all posed against that cage, we all looked like tourists" and "It's a critique of the colonization of America." These comments are interlaced with the visuals of tons of people paying a dollar to get their pictures taken with the specimens, kids openly laughing at Gómez-Peña staring at them, navy men ogling Fusco's scantily clad body, and close-ups of faces staring in wonder and amazement. All the while, references and background information to "primitive" exhibitionism and colonial spectacles accessorize the documentary. These historical forays mirror the audience reactions, or perhaps the audience unintentionally mimics these past spectacles.

As a key scholar of spectacle studies, Guy Debord offers us an umbrella understanding of the spectacle to further think about *Couple in the Cage*. When Debord talks about the spectacle in his 1967 pamphlet *The Society of the Spectacle* (to become a book in 1995), he argues that the root of the spectacle is found in the "oldest of all social divisions of labor," what he calls "the specialization of *power*" (18). For Debord, this specialization simply means that the spectacle

comes to represent, diplomatically and archaically, “hierarchical society at its own court” (19). Although in his French Situationist style Debord only gives us axioms on the spectacle, his argument is that the spectacle embodies the very mechanism of social organization, because it represents the structure of commodity and rules “over all lived experience” (26). Hyperbolically, he posits that the commodity—and thus the spectacle itself—is “now *all* that we see; the world we see is the world of the commodity” (29). By doing this, he shows us the way the spectacle illuminates—and consolidates—a logic of consumerism and class organization. Although Debord often uses terms such as “primitive” and “archaic” to describe this logic and even momentarily looks at the Algerian independence, his work does not deal explicitly with the racialization found in spectacles, opting instead to look at spectacle as the foundation to capitalism.

By thinking of the spectacle in this large and totalizing way, as the pervasive embodiment of capitalistic power dynamics, we must ask how race and ethnicity come into this class picture. *Couple in the Cage* demonstrates the way the premodern imaginary is something that is still racialized, sexualized, and “spectacular” enough that we will *pay* to *see* it and be a part of its colonial history today, no matter how violent or exploitative it is. If we think of Latino indigenous history as a specialized site of power, carrying with it the violent histories of Latin American colonialization, *Couple in the Cage* utilizes these historical and primitive images as a way to elucidate the continued colonial and “archaic” hierarchies still in place. Coco Fusco, in *English Is Broken Here*, explores how the spectacle’s “colonial fantasy”—that commercialized forms of voyeurism enact, from exhibitionism to cinema—sets up the duality between the Other and Western culture. She tells us that this duality motivated her and Gómez-Peña’s performance and how they hoped to bring into awareness these continued, albeit less violent, spectacles (49-50). *Couple in a Cage* enacts these specializations of power to tease out the racial and sexual

exploitation grounded in the power dynamic between Other and “Western” spectator. Furthermore, its “archaic” hierarchy—colonizer and colonized—depends on the way it is represented through these racialized and sexualized images and styles: the cage is simply an effective façade of enslavement, the fashion choices of the “captives” are crude indigenous representations made with contemporary items, and the acting of both the captives and the announcers hyperbolically mimic past acts in these exhibits. These images and styles motivate the audience to respond in numerous ways—from exoticism to tears of shame—yet they all remain in the arena of the spectacle. The power dynamics remain in place as long as the spectacle is in session.

The documentary ends with Fusco and Gómez-Peña leaving the cage quite freely, putting dog collars on the announcers, and leading them out of the staging area. Most of the audience simply looks on, confused or trying to move on to the next museum item. This ending perhaps means to symbolically reverse the power dynamic that the spectacle set up. Perhaps it humorously disrupts the pre-conceived notions of the social hierarchies that the spectacle organizes and establishes. But, this ending and the way it is captured cinematically—in slow-motion with little reaction from the crowd—instead demonstrates the way the critical force of the spectacle is not within the spectacle itself. The premodern subject meeting the modernized world then is simply a parody, and the images and ideas of an indigenous subject who contradicts modernity are still reliant on a market logic. The spectacle itself embodies the very social organization it means to critique. The ending then is post-spectacle; it is the critics’ (Fusco’s and Gómez-Peña’s) hope of reversal but not an actual reversal.

This is perhaps why when Gómez-Peña writes about the performance art piece, he ends with saying, “Sadly, over 40 percent of our audience, no matter where we were, believed that the exhibit was real (at least during their first visit), and did not feel compelled to do anything about

it” (*New World Border* 94). Or perhaps why Fusco describes, “We did not anticipate that our self-conscious commentary on this practice could be believable. We underestimated public faith in museums as bastions of truth, and institutional investment in that role. Furthermore, we did not anticipate that literalism would dominate the interpretation of our work” (*English Is Broken Here* 50). Fusco’s and Gómez-Peña’s spectacle, then, did not invoke critical “reaction” but consumerism. The crowd bought it up.

The purpose of this performance art piece was to bring into consciousness the continuances of these exploitative spectacles. Fusco notes, “While the human exhibition exists in more benign forms today—that is, the people in them are not displayed against their will—the desire to look upon predictable forms of Otherness from a safe distance persists” (50). This idea of the “safe distance” should make us think of commodity fetishism, where people are estranged from one another and alienated from what they produce, where the perceptible world is replaced with a set of images.¹³ This alienation demonstrates the way these images and styles come to mediate social relation. Social relation becomes only understood through our consumerism. When this social relation is primitivized through contemporary images of the premodern, we find ourselves in deeply racialized and sexualized states of consumption. *Couple in a Cage* attempts to capture this in its spectacle, although it ends up failing critically. *Atomik Aztex*, as shown, embraces this logic with the figure of Zenzontli. Of course, *Atomik Aztex* is not only narrating an “alternative” history of the Aztecs. The book is split between two worlds, one speculative and one ever so contemporary. It is in this “contemporary world” where the logic of the commodity becomes more multifaceted. In the contemporary world of the novel, we are presented with a laboring body of Zenzo, where the violence of consumption is paralleled to the violence of labor.

2.2 The Worker

It is precisely this lens of the consumer in the book that modifies our traditional understanding of the worker. The consumer exposes the way in which the laborer must also participate in making origin claims, in consuming race and ethnicity, and in creating spectacles in order to gain worker rights. The worker, embodied by Zenzontli in a parallel or alternative world, now can only be understood in relation to the consumer because the laborer must participate in these free-market desires to achieve nation-based legal victories. Thus, Foster's novel can only demonstrate, however, that these free-market desires and behaviors still require the Nation through the figure of labor.

Frantz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth*, although produced 50 years before *Atomik Aztex*, offers us a backdrop to thinking about the character Zenzo, the meatpacker, and his "contemporary" world of labor, by holding in balance violence, nationalism, and globalization. Fanon's book begins with his definition of the colonial system where the two forces of settler and native (or colonizer and colonized) are organized within a top-down system where colonizer brings the native into existence and, thus, owns the colonial system and is, consequently, at the "top" of the colonial hierarchy. Fanon argues that a process of decolonization must occur for "reintroducing man into the world, man in his totality" (62) and this process will result in the "dialectical truth of the *nation*" (141) (my emphasis). His mainly humanist argument is that decolonization must occur in order for African colonies to become sovereign, autonomous, self-sufficient nations and peoplehoods, and this is achieved through 1) violent revolution, 2) national consciousness, and 3) choosing, democratically, a power structure by the people/masses. Although Fanon is extremely involved with this process of decolonization as a purely historical process—"Decolonization, we know, is an historical process: In other words, it can only be understood, it can only find significance and become self coherent insofar as we can discern the history-making movement which gives it form and substance" (2)—this section wishes to use

Fanon's other methodology that offers us a model for thinking about the role of the Nation within global capitalism. His book becomes a sort of guidebook or plan of action for going through the process of decolonization in such a way that the forthcoming Nation will not become further exploited by the imperialism of capitalism and will not end up under a fascist regime (like many Latin American countries). Generally, however, Fanon's work is about the *dialectical* process of decolonization where the native turns the hierarchical system upside down, largely through violence and revolution, on the one hand, and consciousness, on the other.

Fanon complicates this dialectical process of power because he does not believe that consciousness alone is enough; in other words, decolonization can only come about through *practice* or "after a murderous and decisive confrontation" (3). This dialectic, thus, can only be achieved through violence. This violence is the catalyst for revolution. Like Marx's worker revolution where the worker somehow realizes his true power in the production system and revolts in the name of capital and economic power, Fanon's revolution is a moment where those at the "bottom" of the hierarchy (the colonized) must go through a freeing process from thing to man (2) and revolt against those at the "top" of the hierarchy (the imperialist colonizers) who keep them in the "thing" position. Fanon, however, wants his model of decolonization to move beyond Marxian class logic because in many ways, he continues to see potential in nation-building. This forces him to consider the potential hazards of national consciousness: "The urban proletariat, the unemployed masses, the small artisans, those commonly called small traders, side with this nationalist attitude; but, in all justice, they are merely modeling their attitude on that of their bourgeoisie. Whereas the national bourgeoisie competes with the Europeans, the artisans and small traders pick fights with Africans of other nationalities" (103). In this moment, Fanon is concerned with the possibility of decolonization moving toward the imperialist model. The

Nation must be very carefully constructed by “the people” so that it does not fall into the dominant socioeconomic structure.

Thus, in many ways, Fanon is largely indebted to the significance of the Cuban Revolution, especially considering Castro’s triumph over a fascist and corrupt regime and Castro’s anti-capitalist consistency in his construct of the new Cuban Nation.¹⁴ Fanon, at times, seems to favor a socialist agenda for the future of African countries since capitalism is solely another form of colonial imperialism to him: “The revolts, the acts of desperation, the factions armed with machetes or axes find their national identity in the unrelenting struggle that pits capitalism against socialism” (38). Fanon here believes that “national identity” will be violently founded in the socioeconomic wars, suggesting that we must construct “national identity” through our violence against the imperial economic structures. However, Fanon is also very careful to sidestep this “future” nation-building and chosen political structure because the masses, the people, the workers, and/or the decolonized must democratically choose the future. The significance of Fanon’s work, then, is *to understand the Nation as being structured by the economic*. Fanon sees the expanding threat of imperial capitalism on the world, and his insistence on stabilizing decolonized nationalism by politicizing it (137-138) is significant so that this capitalism cannot overtake the decolonization process and destabilize, manipulate, and *monopolize* the national consciousness and the nation building—the creation of a peoplehood.

Fanon’s work is significant in terms of its historical moment, and his call on the structure of social democracy to create a peoplehood free of imperialism and capitalist exploitation is surely influenced by these moments of revolution. This becomes a complicated position to carry into the contemporary political climate of neoliberalism and globalization, where consumer culture and the free market dominate over all global, regional, national, and social interaction. Neoliberal discourse has accused the regulatory purpose of the nation to be arbitrary and

antithetical to free market movement. If the free market is breaking down the sustainability and self-sufficiency of nations and nationalisms, Fanon's ideas of decolonization and his calls to create a "Nation" through the economic wars look to still be a legitimate response *against* economic hegemonies of global capitalism. But, *Atomik Aztex* shows us how the Nation is not antithetical to globalization but continues to structure and define these discourses and practices. Through the laboring Latino body, the novel demonstrates the way nationalism influences and consolidates a class gap, although violence abounds.

In the "contemporary" world of *Atomik Aztex*, we see Zenzontli become Enzo, a poor, overworked meatpacking worker. From deep descriptions of consumerism in the "alternative" world, we now get deep descriptions of the place of work and labor. Enzo relates, "This shit-stink was the stench of work, my job [...] I noticed it when I returned, and it was like coming into work after first being hired, feeling that fear lock onto my soul anew, hardening inside me until I forgot about that, too" (44). The sensual perception of work, here, demonstrates this grittiness of labor, for Enzo. Enzo can feel this sensual perception, and the fact that work produces an emotional, guttural reaction in him only to "harden" him to any emotions implies two things: that Enzo has internalized his labor and that Enzo must *forget* in order to survive. This push and pull in the character is what emphasizes the power labor has over subjects.

This is where the place of work becomes a monolithic sign for Enzo. The place of labor is symbolized as a pervasive machine that is prison-like for the laborers. As Enzo attempts to forget his conditions, the monolithic architecture of the meatpacking plant solely perpetuates its pervasiveness in his life. He states, "But, every Monday there it was, the blue mass of Farmer John rising above L.A. River like a fortress anchoring a Chinese wall of fortified industry, it's sheet metal and concrete arteries pumping pig blood into the vast urban sprawl" (44). The plant is described as "fortified," suggesting that it is prison-like, contained, and surveillanced. The

description of architectural materials reinstates this fortress visual. But this visual is then disrupted by the uncontainable force of the plant; the plant filters into the entire city. This appears to be a visual contradiction of where containment and the uncontainable manifest with the presence of the building itself. However, it is simply the utter pervasiveness of the place of production for Enzo because he has internalized his labor. His labor is no longer at a place but is now the entire city, and he feels imprisoned within it. The force of labor and production then becomes a violent commonplace over the subjectivity of the laborer.

This violence of internalizing labor has recently been considered by Nicholas De Genova in his book *Working the Boundaries*. A scholar on the hard labor that *mexicano* immigrants are doing in Chicago, De Genova explores the way the body and labor become interconnected. He demonstrates the materiality of labor within the context of global capital, stating, “As capital has burrowed into every nook of the world and burst every apparent barrier in the making of an ever more unhindered global arena for profit making and the continuous reconsolidation of an imperial division of labor, one of the commodities that is exchanged, necessarily and inevitably, is labor-power...homogenized, abstract, highly mobile labor” (123). De Genova sees “the migratory movement of homogenized, abstract labor” (123) as an embodiment of labor within “Mexican working men and women” (124). De Genova means to tease out the tepid and tense relationship between abstraction and materiality for the worker. His argument wishes to expose rhetorical force of capitalism where abstract labor structures become naturalized onto the literal body. For Enzo, this is a violent activity. Yet unlike Fanon’s idea of decolonization needing to be violent in turn, Enzo’s response to this internalization is not to disembody himself from labor but to change the *conditions* of that embodiment by unionizing the plant.

As Enzo attempts to fight the conditions of his labor, he comes to realize the function of (racialized) bodies and production. The plan for unionization is momentarily hindered when

Zenzo realizes the plant is hiring Mexicans without work visas: “How were we to know they hired illegal Mexicans by the truckload to run the meat processing & packing industry for the entire city, the entire southland region? The whole economy was built upon the back of our people, so-called illegals. Lucky for us” (75). The fact that Zenzo, in the end, does not see any difference between citizenship (“our people”) and labor illustrates a certain neoliberal belief in work, as a privatized space without the regulations or definitions of the nation-state. However, the process of unionization directly contradicts this belief since unionization requires the political support of the nation-state. Zenzo finds himself in a paradoxical position, especially when he achieves unionization at the end. And this paradox demonstrates how Zenzo’s world is simply the same world as Aztec general Zenzontli’s world, the only difference being their class position. The “alternative” falls apart at this moment when we realize that the contradictions simply make up the same world of neoliberalism. What is interesting about this world, however, is that this is not a global imperialism at work, but instead the imperial aspects of neoliberalism are anchored back within the construct of the Nation.

The fact that Zenzo, in the end, does not see any difference between citizenship and labor makes this labor a racialized labor. This is perhaps where we should pause on what makes this about “illegal Mexicans” and what racializes labor. Linda Martín Alcoff interrogates the sign of “race” that comes in and out of Latina/o studies of subjectivity, speaking to the split between race and ethnicity as descriptive terms for Latina/o (national) identity. She teases out the uneasy relationship that the paradigms of race and ethnicity offer to Latina/o studies, arguing that race and ethnicity are often equitable terms, where racial categories are “subsumed within an overall account of ‘ethnic makeup’” (33). Her desire to keep “race,” what she comes to call “ethnorace,” in Latina/o studies is because Latinos have come to be seen and understood as a racial category in the U.S. The racial paradigm, Alcoff illustrates, shows its face through the U.S. census, niche

marketing, the category “mestizo,” and the historical narratives of colonization and genocide built around black-white-indigenous relations, not through archaic notions of biology, skin color, and essentialisms. If we think of race in this manner, we see a large weight placed on the effects and legacy of colonial history. Within the same collection, Walter Mignolo, also adopting the term “ethnoracial,” tells us that “the conception and perception of Hispanics/Latinos has its principal articulation in 1898, during the war between an emergent imperialist power (the United States) and an empire in decline (Spain), intermingled with national struggles for independence (in Cuba and Puerto Rico)” (100). For Mignolo, the colonial legacy, marked by the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo (1898), is tantamount to understanding the way these colonially racialized subjectivities not only come into being but also are continually shaped by the nation, whether through the history of “colonial difference” or through the issue of “critical assimilation” (102). The force behind Mignolo’s critique is, however, found in the way the nation can no longer be understood as a singular social structure (without other nation’s bordering it and influencing its policies and discourses); thus, he calls for a “border thinking” from “the perspective of subalternity” (102).¹⁵ Although both Mignolo and Alcoff are indebted to the 1990s turn in Latina/o studies that problematically upholds diversity and desires “differences” (issues to be discussed more thoroughly in Chapter Two), they offer an established interaction between race, nation, and class, where one’s national identity is always racialized through colonial residues, and where these racializations place subjectivity in a “subaltern” position. Although I do not adhere to the concept of the subaltern since it often obscures very literal class disparity—as we already see, for example, between Zenzontli and Zenzo—Mignolo’s call for us to think from the “bottom up” (115) gestures to the historical and dialectical process in which Zenzo finds himself.

So, although Zenzo’s labor issues seem to represent class more than colonialism, Zenzo’s internalization of labor, which make him a tool of labor, must also be understood

through this colonial residue that informs Latina/o national identities. This dissertation is interested in these residues of colonialism because they speak to the question of racialized and sexualized bodies that permeates Latina/o stories and studies, but they also explain why the nation continues to be an influential structure, whether as the violent historical backdrop or as the in-your-face content of citizenship, assimilation, and civil rights. This is quite literally embodied through the push-and-pull of Zenzo, the “*Mexican worker*.”

For Zenzo, this racialization of labor demonstrates that his labor has produced the *whole* economy. On one level, this is a naturalization of labor. On another level, this is a dialectical moment where the worker realizes his “true” position of power. “Consciousness” is the moment of truth here. Zenzo, at this moment, claims the creation and maintenance of the economic system as his own, thus realizing his powerful position in the global market. Mignolo offers us a way of approaching a dialectical moment within Foster’s novel where Zenzo realizes his “true” position of power and utilizes “bottom up” thinking. This realization of dialectical power makes Zenzo see himself and his crew as an army of the night whose forces operate constantly while others have no idea what is going on. He muses over this after being evoked by a safety sign on the door:

I know there’s dangerous machinery in operation at all times caution is advised, it’s a big plant with several tall buildings sporting steaming towers in the industrial nite, the warm blurry steamy industrial nite as we pull the graveyard shift like the rest of the secret armies of the night who make your city run when you wake up in the morning with a headache on the couch & your TV talking the same old shit, the trucks hauling hogs in & boxes of packed meat out the front gates at all hours. (196-7)

The picture here is clear-cut: laboring bodies *run* the city. And this commentary on the utter ignorance about how the running of the city is contingent on the worker demonstrates how the worker produces not only the city but also the power of knowledge, or perhaps a better term would be “consciousness.” The worker, through his/her labor, organizes the city, while everyone

else is deemed unaware, hungover, and zombie-like. By thinking of himself and the city this way, Zenzo is “border thinking” because he’s thinking from the “bottom up.” This is not necessarily a celebratory dialectical moment, where Zenzo’s consciousness of his own power will somehow incite revolution. This moment of consciousness gives him the power, however, to produce more violence.

When Zenzo realizes that unionization can only do so much for the exploitation that he and his fellow workers go through, his narration changes to less legal and more dubious actions in Farmer Johns. Zenzo, once his plan for unionization begins, begins to be inundated with the worst jobs of the plant, from cleaning up the blood floor to working for hours in the freezers to being set to menial tasks. After being told to clean the smoke stacks and filters in the plant, describe as “*filthy with black grease*” and “*reeking with the stench of the blackest burnt bacon*” (198), Zenzo performs his job without question. Eventually, he becomes suspicious of his manager Max, who seems to be following him and watching him as he performs these menial and grotesque tasks. Zenzo realizes upon investigation that his manager Max is setting him up to be fired—Max re-smears the stacks with black grease—precisely because of the attempts to get unionization. When Zenzo realizes this, the narrative begins to break up and lose temporal coherence, but it results in successful unionization. Max, after re-smearing the smoke stacks, tells Zenzo to meet him in the office at the end of the shift, and the next moment, the LAPD are reporting Zenzo was “*in the vicinity of the sausage grinders*” that night (198). Then, Zenzo conjectures (presumably to the police or to the reader, although this is not clear):

after a popping sound the Phillip’s head protruding from his skull was lifted, so a fountain of blood splashed on the wall as he dropped spinning down into a corner, pure speculation all of it & certainly the fact that 3 troops of Boy Scouts at the Dodger game Thursday nite suffered sever gastric distress, colicky burps & poisonous farts doesn’t mean there wuz anything wrong those footlong Dodger dogs.” (199)

The suggested cannibalism accompanied by the violent killing of his boss is at once both grotesque in its violence but also darkly humorous. It is important to note that before this we have been told that Max skipped town after embezzling some money from the plant, and Zenzo killing Max is just a rumor that makes all of the workers vote for unionization out of fear (194-195). The difference between these two versions of what really happened to Max really doesn't matter, though because, both end with the same result: unionization. If Zenzo really did kill Max, he enacts a sort of violent revolution against "the man" and does away with his only obstacle. However, if he did not kill Max and Max actually skipped town, the rumors behind this disappearance allow for Zenzo to achieve unionization of the workers, with the hope that it lessens some of the exploitation and long hours.

This killing of the boss, literally or symbolically, leads Zenzo into strange and rambling musings over whether he is a man or a monkey, hinting to the humanist purpose of the killing but also to the ancient Chinese mythology of the Monkey King, the theory of the signifying-monkey, and his being descended from the "bones" of primates (188, 201-203). After these ruminations, Zenzo concludes that this man-monkey subject position leaves him in an undesirable position: exile. He reflects, "I might even think this was the mechanism of my doom & permanent exile from Aztlán except that I've existed in this condition so long it has become second nature" (203). Zenzo, at this moment, is caught in a strange push and pull where he feels condemned to the world of labor but simultaneously realizes that the conditions of his labor is a part of his nature now: labor has made him this man-monkey. The invocation of Aztlán here signifies that the imaginary homeland, once so influential in the making of a people and a politics, is now just that: imaginary. His exile from this imagination, from the glimpses into his "alternative history" as Zenzontli, suggests that the premodern can no longer be accessed as a space and ideal for the laboring body. And the book ends with Zenzo conceding to this loss with simply saying, "I don't

know what you can do with that” (203), signally back to Jameson’s argument that our desires and imaginations are exhausted.

2.3 Making Heads and Tails of It All: Or, A Coin

Of course, there is something to we can do with these two worlds, but this requires a closer look at the passages where Zenzontli physically and mentally moves into Zenzo (and vice versa). These two worlds are not simply divided by consumerism, on one plane, and labor, on the other plane. Both work to illustrate a certain commitment to the Nation, whether through stylizing claims to the “native” or through adhering to the nation-state policies and violences on labor exploitation and citizenship. These two worlds, thus, do not operate as disparate structures but parallel ones. The novel gives us moments where these worlds meet, where Zenzontli blacks out with seizures as he psychically and physically travels into Zenzo or where Zenzo hallucinates forests, sacrifices, and his alter-ego’s home through windows or dark nooks in the meatpacking plant. These moments are often physically painful for both characters.

When these moments happen, we are unsure if the character’s narration is from rich Aztec Zenzontli or poor worker Zenzo, who I will designate them coming from “Zenzo(ntl).” The character becomes a sort of hybrid of both worlds, although I would prefer to see this more as a “border crossing.” It is in these moments of narrative confusion and crossing that we begin see the way the nation continues to structure these free-market subjectivities of consumer and worker. In both these worlds, we see a certain leaning toward an anti-national position (through consumers, on one hand, and labor, on the other) that still needs the nation-state for the regulation of wealth (so Zenzontli can continue being rich through having solely a state title) or for justification and support of unions (so Zenzo can gain workers rights). But there is a third

part of the book, the (often violent) crossing between worlds, where a reconstitution of Nation occurs the most clearly, through the paradoxical hope in the border itself.

Zenzo(ntl) during one of his “crossings” utilizes the metaphorical figure of the border. The figure of the border becomes a way for him to describe his own painful crossings between worlds, but it also works as a way to make sense of the dominant structures of capitalism found in both worlds. He relates, “I crossed deserts to get here. I traversed the mountains of the Rumorosa & the Coast Range, skirting secret borders of forgotten history & identity. I sacrificed the Past, relationships & dreams of community. I tore open blisters & stubbed my toe on rocks. Empires lay in ruins along the way” (40). This moment in the novel celebrates the crossing of borders in some ways and bemoans it in other ways. The body is violently cut and torn, but the crossing of literal borders can leave Empires in ruins. This contradictory figure of the border, then, frames the very difference between the consumer and the worker, but it also collapses them into the same space.

I wish, however, to zero in on the use of “Empires” that comes out of this crossing. “Empires” here has a two-pronged meaning: global capitalism and colonialism. On one level, it triggers the now-famous work of Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri: *Empire*. They propose that “Empire” is a new global form of sovereignty, where “regulatory mechanisms” and the “logic of rule” over economic and social production must now be understood as the “united organism” of the national and supranational (xii). Hardt and Negri argue there is a decline in nation-state sovereignty and wish to differentiate Empire from old-world imperialisms, making “Empire,” look to be the very basis for what is now termed neoliberalism, with its slippery rhetorics and policies on a free market and the move to privatization, with Zenzontli describing it as “Private Enterprise! Doctrinaire idiots! Privatizing their own goofy asses!” (202). Of course, this anti-national notion of neoliberalism does not fully work within Latina/o representation, as I have

argued that the nation and its colonial residues remain integral in Latina/o representations both historically materially.

Thus, on another level, the term “Empire” speaks to the fallen premodern empires—imagined primarily through the Aztec, Mayan, and Incan empires in Latina/o cultural productions—that are now only ruined buildings in exotic locations as tourist attractions. These ruined Empires become spectacles. Humorously, Sesshu Foster directly speaks to this tourism but through the alternative history of Aztecs coming to power: “The modern day tourist who walks among the ruins of the ancient civilization of the Aryans finds himself filled with questions: ‘Who were these people? How did they live? What were their weird beliefs? What **strange** religions or goofy nonsense caused them to build all this stuff?’” (108-109). The irony here is that “Empire” is not a celebratory term of an empowered past, but instead, it is a term imbued with negative connotations of inequality, exoticism, and economic violence.

These two levels of meaning in the term “Empires” become allegorical to the larger tension between the nation and neoliberalism. Zeno(ntlí)’s need to keep the figure of the border to describe this seeming incompatibility reinstates how the national question is irremovable from the concept of neoliberalism. The premodern imaginary begins to take on and be dressed in this tension between these dominating and exploitive social structures.

Atomik Aztex, with its movement between the premodern past and the contemporary now as a commentary on “borders,” is a part of a larger tradition, hailing from Latin American, especially considering that it looks an awful lot like Julio Cortázar’s short story “The Night Face Up” in his 1963 collection *El Final del Juego/End of the Game*. The story is about a young man who travels between a contemporary world, where he owns a motorcycle and has all the modern technologies, and a premodern world, where he is a Moteca being hunted by the Aztecs for sacrifice to the gods. The story begins with a motorcycle, a crash, and the subsequent

hospitalization of the protagonist. As the protagonist goes through bouts of fever, he is transported back into the premodern past, where he is running for his life from a warring tribe. Both Cortázar's story and *Atomik Aztex* utilize the trope of physical malady in their representations of crossing: these narratives require fevers, fits, or some type of medical/biological problem in order to move between times (parallel or alternative). The fits and fevers make the material body enact the very violence between modernity (with its neoliberal desires) and the embracing of indigeneity.

What is perhaps interesting about Cortázar's story and influential in our reading of nativism in this chapter is that Cortázar pairs this corporeal violence with a collapse of time into space.¹⁶ In many ways, time-space compression becomes representative of the social structures which frame these characters and their different social statuses in the two times/worlds. In "The Night Face Up," the protagonist describes these time-space movements as "not even time, more as if, in this void, he had passed across something, or had run back immense distances" (73). These fits and fevers produce a bi-directional and un-timed experience. "Time" becomes inferred as solely endlessness, nothingness, "lasting an eternity" (73). *Atomik Aztex* utilizes a similar vocabulary, often referring to time as "infinite" (76-77). This inability to fix time and space becomes a descriptive device for understanding the way these two social structures are simply two sides of the same coin, bleeding into one another and sometimes becoming indistinct in the larger picture.

The premodern world in "Night Face Up," where the story spends most of its time, is interestingly a bit different from the more conventional Chicano narratives, where the premodern identification is with the Aztecs themselves. Instead, Cortázar's protagonist finds himself as a part of the tribe of the Moteca, a weaker tribe than the Aztecs, and locates himself on the run from the all-powerful Aztecs, who are hunting Motechas for sacrifices. The fact that Cortázar

chooses a “weaker” tribe for the protagonist to “feverishly dream” dismantles the Aztecs as a celebratory symbol of empowerment in the sense that, through the eyes of the Moteca, the Aztecs are an imperial power to fear only. Like *Atomik Aztex*’s reproduction of U.S. imperial hegemony through the representation of an “alternative” Aztec-dominant world, “The Night Face Up” paints the Aztecs as a hegemonic force while the Motecas run desperately from them: “It was unusual as a dream because it was full of smells, and he never dreamt smells. [...] But the reek lifted, and instead there came a dark, fresh composite fragrance, like the night which he moved, in flight from the Aztecs. And it was all so natural, he had to run from the Aztecs who had set out on their manhunt [...]” (69). The Aztecs, once again, simply look like a dominant institution, who feed off the weak and inferior. The fact that the protagonist sees this as “natural” implies that this form of dominance is naturalized within the construct of “Aztec,” even from a dream perspective. And where this dominance is obviously a parody (or pastiche reproduction) of U.S. hegemony in *Atomik Aztex*, the figure of Aztec remains much more abstract in “The Night Face Up,” never actually commenting on the U.S. or a more contemporary materializations of dominance. In this sense, “The Night Face Up” simply uses the Aztecs as a symbolic representation of dominance and “power” of which the protagonist must deal with or out-run.

The story wraps with a surprise ending. Where the story began with a contemporary man, whose motorcycle accident seems to cause this movement into the premodern past, we do not expect to be told that the premodern past is not a feverish dream. All the references within the story about beginnings and ends (67, 71, 74) become twisted at the end when we are told that the world where he crashes the motorcycle and is in the hospital is actually the dream. Once the protagonist realizes that he is really a Moteca running for his life from the imperial Aztecs, he

comes to realize the “infinite lie of the dream” (76). Like Enzo who questions his exile from Aztlán, the Moteca protagonist realizes his exile from the “dream” of modernity.¹⁷

These “border” crossings coupled with being exiled from more powerful statuses return us to Mignolo’s “border thinking,” but perhaps more broadly construed under border theory. The borders of time and space are a figurative understanding of the nation-state borders that represent not only colonial differences of which Mignolo speaks to, but also the structure of dominance that the border, especially the U.S.-Mexico border, encompasses. Border crossing, then, can be read in two ways: 1) that the border crossing reinstates the presence of nations and creates a sort of hyper-nationalism, and 2) that the border crossing is the revolutionary space that can overthrow these neocolonial and neoliberal processes. María de los Angeles Torres offers the first reading, and she describes the crossing of borders (in terms of exile) a colonial feature. She states, “[E/Im]migration changes the landscape. It produces loss. In a strange sort of way a...community may in fact reinforce the borders of a nation-state. [It] entails the leaving of a country. [The] community abroad is a constant reminder that the borders still exist” (38). Torres believes this “reinforcement” and reminder of the nation is problematic because this is a politics heavily steeped in the Spanish colonialism of the Americas. In other words, borders are constructs of the nation-state; a literal line that demarcates “different” peoples, practices, and governments, and always has the residues of imperialism. Guillermo Gómez-Peña, in *The New World Border*, offers the second perspective. He considers the border, and the constant crossing of it, to be an alternative to neocolonialism because the border is his “home,” his “base of operations,” and his “laboratory for social and artistic experimentation” (63). And this is because “[n]o matter where I was, I was always on ‘the other side’” (63). For Gómez-Peña, the border represents a sort of celebratory transnationalism, and eventually, it is the border where he believes full resistance can happen. In other words, it is on the border where violent revolution

can happen. Ultimately, *Atomik Aztex* illustrates that alternative universes are not so alternative. To return us to Jameson, in a neoliberal and capitalist world, there are no “alternatives.” This is not for lack of potential. Gómez-Peña, harking to Franz Fanon’s decolonization guidebook *Wretched of the Earth*, offers revolution, which can only be imagined in the imaginary homeland of Aztlán, the borderlands. Of course, the exile from Aztlán at ending of *Atomik Aztex* does not negate revolution: the meatpacking plant supposedly is unionized and his boss is violently “killed.” But Zenzo(ntlí) suggests that there is no return to this ideal found in Aztlán. And, not once do “Empires lay in ruins” because of border crossing.

The novel, instead, illustrates that this violence is founded in the very push-and-pull between the economic social structure and the national social structure. And the fact that this tension still requires borders reinforces the figure of the Nation within this economic structure. Contemporary immigration criticism seems to see the crossing of borders as a way to breakdown nations, forming debates for either a celebratory transnationalism, as we might see with Coco Fusco and Guillermo Gómez-Peña, among others, or, as De Genova argues, a “counternationalist paradigm” (7) or, even in the rhetoric of the U.S. government, as a negative political “problem.” These anti-national stances within Latina/o studies, however, often feed into the hands of the neoliberal program, obliquely supporting the exploitation and injustices grounded in free market policy. But, the neoliberal program is not truly “without nation.” The border itself is precisely the site where the terms “immigration,” “free market,” and “the nation” become intertwined. Without borders there would be no rhetoric of a free market or issues of immigration or structure of the nation. The Nation, in this sense, remains integral to these conceptions. And *Atomik Aztex* brings this out in the border the makes its two worlds a part of the same coin: where the logics of nation and neoliberalism cross.

Notes

¹ At this moment in *Archaeologies of the Future*, Jameson is talking about Sir Thomas More and how these Utopian texts make something singular and all-pervasive so that they can just supplant that single thing (his example is money)—his argument is that this simplifies Imagination, because it doesn't take much to do that, but makes Fancy complex. The second half of what I've quoted is about how "Imagination atrophies" in this process. Although this is a historically-situated argument, Jameson demonstrates that late capitalism produces the same effect of "atrophy" through the means of nostalgia and parody.

² I am defining Chicanos as a politically-conscious group that finds shared identification through Mexican and Mexican-American culture and history. L.A. is the one place where Chicano is used for anyone and everyone of Mexican-American decent, but this homogenizes and flattens the term. Those that invoke Aztlán, the political agendas mapped out by *El Movimiento* in the 60s and 70s, or other political technologies and methodologies of activism are more readily in line with my definition.

³ Corky Gonzales, Oscar Zeta Acosta, Alurista, Luis Valdez were the main proponents of thinking of literature this way in the 60s and 70s, but we see a similar sentiment arise with the Nuyorican Poets Café in the 1970s and 1980s, as well.

⁴ The Plan de Aztlán begins with Alurista's famous poem and then becomes a manifesto that calls for La Raza to use their nationalism as the "common denominator" for mobilization and organization and the goal to achieve "total liberation" from oppression. For the full text, see http://aztlan.net/aztlan_historical_documents.htm.

⁵ Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo ended the Mexican American War when Mexico agreed to cede land to the United States for \$15,000,000. This land is now southern California, Arizona, New Mexico, and parts of Colorado, Utah, and Nevada. The U.S. agreed to protect the property and civil rights of the Mexican nationals living in the new U.S. territory, but as Fabiola Cabeza de Baca's memoir/novel *We Fed Them Cactus* (1954) shows us, this agreement was not upheld by the U.S. Furthermore, the water rights over the Rio Grande, which became the boundary between the two countries, are still under dispute to this day. For full text and pictures of the treaty, see <http://www.archives.gov/education/lessons/guadalupe-hidalgo/#documents>.

⁶ By "nativism," I am entering into conversation with Leo Chavez's work. Chavez sees nativism as deeply informing the stance of anti-immigrant proponents who fear that immigrants will destroy the singular vision of the U.S. nation—as Euro-American, English-speaking culture—by bringing transnationalism and multiculturalism instead of assimilation and acculturation (8). This fear is often awash with with rhetorics about national loyalty (50). But, Chavez sees the economic concerns with the financial unease at the turn of this century as overthrowing these nativisms, specifically when magazines—such as *U.S. News and World Reports* and the *Atlantic Monthly*—are targeting businesses and the economic system for luring immigrants into cheap labor or asking whether immigration is affordable any longer (198-199). By turning away from rhetorics of nativism and embracing discourses on economics, the media reframes our understanding of the nation.

Chavez's stance, however, fails to see how nativism is not simply a technology of the past that forgets the history of the U.S. and the necessity of "foreign" interaction. I wish to extend this traditional understanding of nativism into a less xenophobic trajectory by demonstrating how nativism works on the other side as well. With the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo offering many people with subjectivities that are the antithesis of "foreign," nativism has become a way to make origin claims and increase one's value culturally. In an age where economic inequality is rampant, these seemingly insignificant claims become important attempts at entering the market and successfully capitalizing on one's national significance.

⁷ This is most eloquently illustrated in *Revolt of the Cockroach People*, where Acosta remembers lifting "Zeta" from a movie with a "Chicano Humphrey Bogart" at one moment (123) and another he's representing the Tooner Flats Seven (201-202) and in another he's checking out the ass of a Chicana as she runs up the church aisle shouting revolution (17-19). All come together under the header La Raza, or cockroach, for Acosta; there is no difference between the Chicana film, the law, and the protests.

⁸ Although I faultily talk about the nation as a person or thing, it is solely for the ease of describing how this institution operates from a macro perspective. Not to mention how the U.S. 14th Amendment has single handedly purported corporations as a singular person, which often makes us see all institutions having a singular agency. The nation, of course, is not a singular person or thing; instead it is a confederacy between government and the people, specifically in the U.S. For a rigorous study of the relationship between democracy and neoliberalism, see Julia Paley's *Marketing Democracy* (2001).

⁹ See Roberto Schwarz, *Misplaced Ideas*, "Is There a Third World Aesthetic?" (173-174) and Fredric Jameson "Third World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism" *Social Text* 15 (Fall 1986): 65-88

¹⁰ We might attribute this biological exceptionalism to a sort of liberal racism. The way canons are created along biological ethnic lines, however, is synonymous with the way markets target ethnic consumers. These essentialisms may be problematic but they are vital to forming niche markets and getting consumers to identify with these markets.

¹¹ See Lynn A. Higgins' "If Looks Could Kill: Louis Malle's Portraits of Collaboration" in *Fascism, Aesthetics, and Culture* (1992), ed. Richard J. Golson.

¹² I should note that the references to neoliberalism are inconsistent within the novel. At one point, he also complains about the Aztec Socialist Imperium's Minister of Labor having a neoliberal agenda later in the novel (185). But, this inconsistency is emblematic of the ambiguous workings of this form of capitalism.

¹³ I am borrowing Guy Debord's definition of commodity fetishism here (See *Society of the Spectacle*, 26). For a more rigorous discussion on commodity fetishism and Latina/o cultural production, see Raphael Dalleo and Elena Machado Sáez's *The Latino/a Canon* (2007).

¹⁴ It should also be noted that Fanon's "guidebook" follows closely on the heels of the Cuban Revolution, almost perpetuating the fervor that the Revolution had on the world. Furthermore, Castro sent numerous amounts of troops during this time to aid many African national liberation movements in their revolutions, and Ché was sent to guide these movements in particular when he outwardly spoke against Castro's alliance with the Communist Bloc.

¹⁵ Also see his chapter "Border Thinking" in *Local Histories/Global Designs* (2000).

¹⁶ David Harvey considers time-space compression to be a major device in the dissemination of global capitalism. See *The Conditions of Postmodernity* (1990).

¹⁷ Ilan Stavans argues that "The Night Face Up" is a Borgesian plot, where Cortázar is trying to establish a "bridge and a sense of continuity to the past and present" which allows the story to be a thesis about every life being an "endless chain of repetitions" (39). Yet, simultaneously, Stavans also relegates this short story to simply Cortázar's "interest in the fantastic" (37) that was "in vogue in Buenos Aires in 1941" (36), reducing the story to simply a commodity in the Latin-American market of *lo fantástico*. Perhaps, Cortázar's fantastic stories from 1951-1958 were trying to establish him as an author of magical realism, especially since magical realism was quickly becoming an "in vogue" genre world-wide. But, Stavans fails to attribute the trope of "bridging" time and space as precisely working into this market logic around selling books and the fantastic.

This idea of Cortázar's "bridges," nevertheless, is also central to Jaime Alazraki's reading of the double as a common motif in Cortázar's fiction. He argues that the crossing of bridges in the story "Lejana" is a transformative moment for the character that ultimately allows the character to embrace her true self and exorcize her false self (80). In other words, the bridge is a literary necessity for characters to discover some authentic identity (82). The bridge, then, is quite similar to how Latinas/os think of the border as symbolic of the self, although the question of "authenticity" is another issue. The problem here, however, is that when we think of "identity" as simply an accessory or style as this chapter has argued, then the bridge and the border become emblematic of this "transformation" into commodity.

3. THE GAP BETWEEN RICH AND POOR: STATIC CHARACTERS AND THE MYTH OF SOCIAL MOBILITY IN VALDES-RODRIGUEZ AND VIRAMONTES

The Dirty Girls Social Club and *Their Dogs Came with Them* might appear to be an odd pairing. They show up in this chapter side-by-side not because they are intrinsically tied, not because they are in conversation, and not because they are all that similar. They show up side-by-side here because they are two sides of the same neoliberal coin that I examined in Chapter Two. In this sense, they both speak to how narrations on class cannot be understood outside the racial and sexual subjectivities of Latina characters, although one is from the perspective of the rich and well-off and the other from the poor and destitute.

Both novels deeply rely on character-centric structures, with Valdes-Rodriguez's *Dirty Girls* having each chapter titled after a specific character and Viramontes' *Their Dogs* centering in on a character in each chapter. These characters are complex in many ways, but I argue that they remain static characters, without any dynamic transformation. *Dirty Girls* is a novel about rich Latinas, who *may* have come from working-class backgrounds (or at least say they do) but seem to remain in the realm of rich-girl stereotypes. *Their Dogs* is a novel about poor Chicanas in the changing landscape of East L.A., and these characters embody working-poor archetypes without much character transformation.

By reading the novels under this basic class rubric, I will tie together the lack of class mobility (a very neoliberal representation) with the lack of character transformation in the narratives. I contend, extending Deidre Shauna Lynch's work on 18th-century liberalism into 21st century neoliberalism, that this "economy of character" engages with and exemplifies the social realities of a neoliberal agenda that consolidates the gap between rich and poor, dramatizing how socio-economic mobility, development, and/or "progress" is more and more of a myth. But

more, these novels show us that, in order for this myth to work, it requires a celebration of national identities and differences.

As one of the main discourses about neoliberalism, the “widening” gap between rich and poor has often identified a major turn in late capitalism. The push for a free market, devoid of nation-state laws, regulations, and taxes, has proven to off-balance income differences. David Harvey in *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* describes this through the increasing income inequality and the force of SAPs (Structural Adjustment Programs by the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF) in the form of loans) in the Third World, arguing that neoliberalization is precisely “to restore the power of economic elites” (19) as opposed to “dismantling working-class power” (62). For Harvey, this is a very important difference: restoration, instead of dismantling, was more marketable to the middle-class masses, who supported during Reagan and Thatcher (and continue to support) their own demise. Harvey, in many ways, thinks that the “dismantling” of the working class has already occurred historically, thus allowing for the perspective to change. But, Harvey’s emphasis on “restoration” also points to the cyclical discourses of and for neoliberalism, as though it is *returning* and *reconsolidating* what already was *for the rich*. Class inequality in the neoliberal age, then, is precisely in the name of the rich. This makes the poor and working-class look to be only for the maintenance the dominance of the rich.

I will show that both the rich and poor operate through an economic dominance over “character,” and by doing that, these two classes are working into a process of neoliberalization that is largely based on class division. The centrality of the character within *Dirty Girls* and *Their Dogs* demonstrates the way these two income brackets—not really “brackets” since moneyed numbers are often ambiguous or unseen—utilize the same question of subjectivity and identity but with very different economic objectives. The literal moneyed numbers that work to

designate “rich” or “poor” are no longer important within these novels; rather, the social *characterization* of “rich” or “poor” performs a consolidation of the gap between rich and poor. The importance laid upon “character,” then, demonstrates the way “character” (and often archetypal characters) plays a major role in neoliberal dissemination.

My claim, though, is also dependent on a historically-situated understanding of “Latino” identity and literature. The participants and scholars of cultural nationalism, especially in the 1970s, see their cultural work as effecting, influencing, and rearranging the political climate of Latinos in the U.S. Notably, Alurista’s work, markedly *Floriscanto en Aztlán* (1971) and *Nationchild Plumaraja, 1969-1972* (1972), utilizes interlingual poetry as a way to commentate about the exploitation and alienation on Chicanos in the U.S., calling for Chicanos to embrace their cultural identity in order to enact civil change and oppose “the man.” Alurista did not agree with the whole of *El Movimiento*; he called for an embracing of pre-Columbia history that was not reliant on imaginary paradises, such as Aztlán, because the goal was not exclusion from the U.S. but inclusion into the U.S.¹ Critically, we see a similar sentiment arise in José E Limón and the Saldívar brothers, where a Chicano cultural identity is central to enacting civil rights and political inclusion. This push for political inclusion, for a cultural movement in the name of civil rights, demonstrates the significance of “identity” to the movement. Identity politics were precisely the articulation of one’s history, perspectives, and personal and political investments that were representative of a larger whole, a whole that could have political force. The stakes in promoting and centralizing “identity” in cultural production were, then, political inclusion.

The main criticism against this notion of “identity,” of course, was the way it stabilized Chicanos into a masculine, homogenous order with little room for difference. At its most harsh, this criticism calls Chicano cultural nationalism sexist and elitist. Thus in the 1980s and into the 1990s, with the rise of Chicana feminism, U.S. women-of-color feminism, and U.S.-Third-World

feminisms, the agenda becomes about nuancing the identity politics of the cultural nationalists and other “dominant” orders. They wanted to open the door to oppositional and shared “differences,” supporting racial, ethnic, and sexual specificity. The most famous metaphor of this politics-of-difference is Gloria Anzaldúa’s allegory of having a leg on each side of the U.S.-Mexico border while being corporeally “torn” in *Borderland/La Frontera* (1987) (100-102). Norma Alarcón sees Anzaldúa’s work as enacting an important turn in Chicano constructs of “identity,” arguing, “The quest for a true self and identity, which was the initial desire of many writers involved in the Chicano movement of the late 1960s and early 1970s, has given way to the realization that there is no fixed identity. ‘I’ and ‘She,’ as observed by Anzaldúa, is composed of multiple layers without necessarily yielding an uncontested ‘origin’” (373). Alarcón calls for Anzaldúa’s metaphor of “torn” and of conflict to shape a collective based on “living struggle” (379) while “breaking out of ideological boundaries” that are imposed by paternalistic power (380). Alarcón embodies the underpinnings of a politics-of-difference. Politics-of-difference was a way to centralize identity as oppositional, reactive, and counter to dominance, while putting different cultures, races, and perspectives of the subaltern into dialogue. But the actual stakes of this project were often symbolic, where the desire was for respect and legitimacy. This materialized into fruitful movements for inclusion in the literary canon and more brown women shown on television. But at its heart, politics-of-difference was about negotiating cultural capital with the goal of cultural respect.

Politics-of-difference in the late 90s and early 2000s changed in many ways and remained the same in many ways. Many critics still saw the importance in maintaining oppositional identities for political and cultural means and gains. But, they also saw the way “difference” had been appropriated by (niche) markets, corporations, and many cultural industries (fashion, music, etc.). Jose Muñoz’s theorization of disidentification relies on a

politics-of-difference for queer Latinos, where there is an “interfacing” network between the “minoritarian” queers-of-color to “activate their own senses of self,” while also countering majoritarian “cultural logics of heteronormativity, white supremacy, and misogyny” (5). By doing this, Muñoz believes the arguments about essentialist versus social constructivist models—that defined the debate between cultural nationalism (accused of essentialism) and politics-of-difference (celebrated as social constructivist) in the 80s and early 90s—to be exhausted since “neither story is complete” (5). But, Muñoz’s work runs into problems by relying on a politics-of-difference, specifically when the “majoritarian” is not *against* the minoritarian. Often what we find is how the majoritarian *appropriates* the minoritarian, most notably when Muñoz talks about the “mass commercialization of drag evident in suburban multiplexes that program such films as *To Wong Foo, Thanks for Everything!*” (99). There is an inconsistency arising in these recent formations of a politics-of-difference, which also troubles Elena Machado Sáez’s, Frances Negrón-Muntaner’s, and Arlene Dávila’s work. All of these critics attempt to navigate, some cynically and some idealistically, what they see as a crisis for (different) Latino subjectivity. But it is important to demarcate what this “crisis” is exactly. The crisis for Latina/o identities based on a politics-of-difference is that the more it was appropriated for economic sales, the less it was about (political) representation in the social world. Davila negotiates these fine, contradictory lines between economics and identity. In one instance, Davila upholds the discourses on Latina/o identities and differences as producing and negotiating political mobilization and space(s) among different “subgroups” (*Barrio Dreams* 170-173). In another instance, she looks at “development” in East Harlem, where “Cultural activists, for their part, were told that learning the ‘right ways’ of carrying on cultural work through development of marketable and self-sustaining cultural institutions would assure the development of tourism in El Barrio” (209).² To Davila, these were consumption-based developments promoted as “a means of progress and upward mobility” (208)

that only emphasized ethnicity and identity for “its utility for business and industry” (209).³

These two instances in her work tell us something about how identity works now. This crisis between celebrating (different) Latina/o identities and seeing the way these identities are appropriated by corporate industries is a particularly neoliberal logic. This demonstrates the way neoliberalism becomes consolidated in the cultural realm at this time because the economic overshadows the political. Latina/o identity and “difference” becomes solely a commodity. Neoliberalism liquidated Latina/o identity down to money.

Dirty Girls and *Their Dogs* are written during this neoliberal consolidation. And what we get from them is a set of characters—of identities—that are deeply static due to their economic statuses. In no way would these novels be thought of as enacting civil rights, as the cultural nationalists hoped of culture, although they definitely continue a nation-based perspective. These novels do not necessarily desire to validate and legitimize these identities, as the 80s and early 90s critics did, but they surely wish to “bridge” Latina identities in the name of “difference.” But, now politics-of-difference are simply a means for a static demarcation of class. Each section of this chapter begins with reading these novels through this neoliberal consolidation. These novels demonstrate how the stakes of class-specific Latina identities—social mobility and “bridging” class divisions—becomes nothing more than a myth under neoliberalism. I will conclude each section with how this works in my dissertation’s overarching argument; specifically, the racial and sexual thematics that characterize these commodified identities in these novels reveal how neoliberalism is deeply structured by Nation.

3.1 The Rich

Alisa Valdes-Rodriguez’s *The Dirty Girls Social Club* came on the heels of the *Sex in the City* fad. As a story about a group of female girlfriends, who all share similarities in wealth and

latinidad, the novel is easily categorized as Chica Lit. This literary genre in many ways has re-situated the *Sex in the City* fad into a distinctly pan-Latina niche market. But, its niche does not take away from its rather similar content to the female-centric everyday-life novels and medias that took off with the rise of *Sex in the City*. The novel is about a group of six girlfriends from different ethnic, racial, and sexual identities (a Cuban-white trash mestiza, a puertorriqueña, a New Mexico “Spaniard,” a Cuban American, a Mexicana, and a Black Colombian “Latina” lesbian) who jokingly call themselves the *sucias*, a normally derogatory term equivalent to ‘hos or “dirty girls.” We are taken into each woman’s life, with each chapter specifically looking through a single character’s perspective. Although their lives are full of everyday drama—ranging from love lives to grand careers—the story is not exactly a story. Instead, the novel gives us snap-shots of the characters, hoping perhaps to gain reader identification more than a plotted narrative that takes us somewhere. I wish to call this a character-centric novel, then. Sure, there are weddings and divorces, but these events never represent a climax per se; there is little to no character transformation from these events, as well. Perhaps the closest we get to an overarching narrative is that all of these characters share two things in common: all are on a journey to understand their pan-Latina identity, and all are quite well-off.

By putting together identity and affluence, the novel points toward the fundamental bond between discovering one’s subjectivity and one’s privileged position to do so. I wish to show in this section the way this plays out in the novel as a cosmopolitan, rich-of-color discourse that ultimately nationalizes its neoliberal celebrations. Arguably, the novel’s character-centric structure is simply a performance of a politics-of-difference. Yvonne Yarbro-Bejarano is one of the more celebratory critic of a politics-of-difference—defining “the individual subjectivity of the Chicana writer through the articulation of collective experience and identity” (*Chicana Creativity and Criticism*, 218)—since she see this only occurring through “love” of self and one

another. Yarbrow-Bejarano's believes Chicana "love" is the key to a politics-of-difference, but this is not about "love" per se. "Love" is simply a symbol to make "difference" about unity.⁴ The problem here is that Yarbrow-Bejarano essentializes "Chicana" in this instance by unifying all Chicanas under the rubric of an identity that is "different" (from the hegemony of white literary authors, for her). Often, what we see with politics-of-difference is that it relies on a level of essentialism by universalizing individual "difference" as an inherent quality of society(ies). There is a tension between universal "difference" and individual differences within the concept of a politics-of-difference here that *Dirty Girls* finds itself performing. This novel, on one level, universalizes ethnic and racial difference by appealing to a pan-Latina collectivity. The universal "pan" does not do away with particular, individual differences, especially national affiliations and each character's personal perspective. Instead, the universal and particular difference(s) inform and contradict one another. However, this pan-Latina subjectivity in the novel is also deeply structured and informed by class. Often the "pan-Latina" is equivalent to what I would term a "rich-of-color" social position. This rationale in the novel has numerous problems, but the one I think is most interesting is the way this makes the desires of class mobility and the capitalist rhetoric of "development" mythical, by making the rich seem *always* rich.

When beginning *The Dirty Girls Social Club*, we are immediately in the mind and language of "Lauren," a sucia who embraces the pan-Latina by being a "New Jersey Cuban" and "half white trash, born and raised in New Orleans" but never really identifying with that fully. Her introduction to the story takes us into lengthy descriptions of who she is and who her "sucias" are. All of her chapters, though, are about her "identity." Unsurprisingly then, the term being over-used often in her chapters is the BE verb. In a particularly detailed rant, Lauren laments how her bosses and the journalist world expect her to be a stereotypical "Latina" who speaks Spanish (even though she really doesn't), wears sexy clothes, and is "spicy." She has a

momentary identity crisis in the middle of this rant, where her internal identity and her economic world commingle. I quote at length since all identity crises are long-winded:

And me? I don't know where the *hell* I came from. *I'll* take a good Caesar salad any day. I eat bagels for breakfast, with a schmear of salmon cream cheese. Oh, and I am what you'd call a Starbucks *addict*. I think they put cocaine *and* ecstasy in their drinks...If I don't get my venti caramel macchiato every morning—yeah, I said *venti*, so what?—I'm useless. But *don't* tell my editors. They expect me to be like those frisky Latina lawyers having orgasms while they shampoo their hair in court on the network TV ads. They expect me to reach up and pick mangoes out of the fruit basket I must wear on my head whenever I'm not in the newsroom talking about, you know, Mexican *jumping* beans. A Latina breakfast of mango and papaya—heyyyyy macarena, a'ight! (11)

Her crisis here illustrates a tension between her own internal labels and outside expectations, where she prefers to see herself as a Starbucks consumer but her bosses expect her to dance the Macarena constantly. This identity crisis, ironically, positions Lauren's internal labels as solely a consumer without an ancestral history, while the external expectations depend on an entertainingly cliché concept of "Latina." What is perhaps interesting about this tension is that both the internal and the external are versions of corporeal commodification. Whether drinking Starbucks, eating bagels, or having shampoo orgasms, Lauren is deeply caught up in seeing her identity through bodily acts.

Frances Negrón-Muntaner's *Boriqua Pop* speaks to this corporeal concept of "Latina." She unravels how "Latina" becomes a commodification of the flesh. JLo's butt, as perhaps the most promoted in the "Latin fever" market, demonstrates more about "politically and commercially expedient definitions of Latinoness" because her body, her curves, her bottom, speak loudly about how Latinos are constituted as racial, pleasurable subjects (232). For Negrón-Muntaner and the character Lauren, this suggests a "low cultural capital" of Latina subjects because it commodifies the body (232). It is "low" because it devalues Latinaness. However, this corporeal attention is also precisely what gains the literal form of capital: money. Lauren

recognizes this, stating: “Money talks, see. Hispanics are no longer seen as a foreign menace taking over public schools with that dirty little language of theirs; we are a domestic *market*. To be *marketed to*. Thus, me. My column. And my billboards” (9). Lauren is more than happy to use her Latinaness for the once “fabled six-figures” she now makes (8). Although her idealism about Latinos “no longer seen as a foreign menace” is false, as I will show Chapter Five and Six, Lauren understands that her “brown of face and hair” (7) is marketable, thus a commodity to sell.

Lauren, however, constantly draws upon her white co-workers’ generalizations about “Hispanics.” At moments, it’s hard to tell if these generalizations are not her own, since she is the character of the novel who wishes to avoid labeling herself under any Latina subheading, especially her intermixed racial and ethnic origins. Simultaneously, her willingness to market herself as Latina feeds right into the pan-Latina trope. Negrón-Muntaner argues that the pan-Latina is precisely what makes this not about “cultural identity” but about a specific “American national currency for economic and political deal making” (231). The pan-Latina subjectivity embraced by JLo, for example, during the making of the film *Selena*, and blared out through magazine interviews and movie reviews, is no coincidence to the commercial success of her “Latina” body, according to Negrón-Muntaner’s logic. This pan-Latina subjectivity works on both sides of the equation: it is productive for the economic market in selling to a niche of similarly racialized groups, but it is also politically productive for these groups to pool their resources in establishing political, and in this instance financial, clout. If we take what Negrón-Muntaner is saying as truth, then Lauren’s identity crisis between exchanging an essentialized identity for money and maintaining an ethnically-unmarked class position points in the same direction. In fact, Lauren’s internal “consumer” and external “spicy Latina” are both commodifications of her own body. Whether she is consuming Starbucks into her body or flaunting around the newsroom as though she is a “Mexican *jumping* bean,” Lauren’s “crisis” is

performing the logic of Latina as commodity. In this sense, she is simply a good capitalist. She consumes, she performs, and she sells herself under the header “Latina.” She both uses Latina as a tool to gain leverage in her work and indulges her own capitalist desires as a consumer “addict.”

Lauren, nevertheless, along with all her girlfriends, is constantly on a search for her own subjectivity. But, this search often lacks any transformation for Lauren (and all the characters). She is simply in crisis and reduced to consumer and commodity. This lack of character transformation clashes with the fact that this is a character-driven novel. In the late 18th century to early 19th century novel, when classical liberalism was arguably being consolidated into culture, the character-driven novel was about “progress” for the character. Deidre Shauna Lynch’s discussion on Ian Watt and the Romantic turn argues, “Characterization progresses, that is, as soon as the novels come to be full participants in the history of freedom and democratic revolutions” (124). For Lynch, these are “stories of progress that have been assembled since the nineteenth century” to present what she calls the “inward turn,” a new literary style marked as “a reconstitution of characterization that liberated the real meanings of the individual” (158). Lynch accuses Watt of believing that the “full and authentic report of human experience” and the inner truths of the individual character only happen when the novel interacts with a uniform liberal history. For Watt, the “full and authentic report of human experience” is “implicit in the novel form in general” (*Rise of the Novel*, 32) and is what “most closely satisfies [readers’] wishes for a close correspondence between life and art” (33). Watt sees the (modern) novel to be “closely allied” to the individualism of the modern period’s social structure (62). Individualism, here, is an “inclusive reordering of the components of human society” (64), weakening social structures (family, sense of nationality, the village) and democratizing social structures through individualism—“all souls had equal chances” (77). While Watt sees the economic contradictions

with these processes and ideologies, he also upholds the “absolute economic, social and intellectual freedom for the individual” that the modern novel embodies (86). Lynch wishes to break from this “triumphal story of ‘development’” (123) with its “uniform, continuous history” (127). She does this by arguing that the “full of human experience” and character progress realized in these turn-of-the-century novels was *inseparable* from (not contingent to) the “other principal activity” of narrative: distinguishing style and class (127). Lynch’s argument here is reliant on reader reception, where the readers themselves see characters as affirming “their *individual* distinction” and denying “their participation in what was...rapidly becoming a *mass* market” (132). This inseparability between the character and the economic processes of the time, for Lynch, is still dependent on the classical-liberalist ideologies of “development,” “progress,” and the “individual.” What is perhaps interesting here is that both Watt and Lynch see how, even though the “individual” is being set up to trump the “social” ideologically, the relationship between the individual and the social is always in conversation, informing one another and contradicting one another. Politics-of-difference utilizes this same tenuous structure—it sets up interacting individual “groups” against social hegemony—but the logic now ends up not being transformative.⁵

Classical liberalism, with its contradictions and congruencies, sets the stage for what *Dirty Girls* is doing in the early 2000s. I wish to suggest that *Dirty Girls* relies on a similar *ethos* surrounding the novel that we find in the romantic turn—that the character is “in development” and a unique, democratic individual—but instead follows a *logic* of neoliberalism. The character continues to be central but not because they develop into better or “classier” people. Rather, the character is static, unmoving from her class position. Within this particular novel, the economics of “rich” are inseparable from the racial and ethnic categorization of “Latina.” This inseparability

between class and race informs the static quality of character: Lauren's class is dependent on her being "Latina."

This is where the characters rely on not only the phenotypic images of "Latina" but also the symbolic genotypic—claims to and performances of ancestry—to gain their cultural and financial capital. At its most crude level, the character produces a narrative about "being" and staying rich through identity performance. There is no "becoming" here; there is no history of freedom and progress that Lynch and Watt believe central to character formation under classical liberalism. History is not transformative under neoliberalism and often only works as another tool for capital gain. To be and sell "Latina" is to *use* (racial and ethnic) history as a way to enter the free market and produce more money.

"History," of course, becomes a superficial literary device if we read it in this way. Yet, *Dirty Girls* uses it at every turn. With Lauren, we get a character who does not "know where the hell [she] come[s] from," but still uses a symbolic ancestral race and ethnicity for capital gain. Lauren, as a "historical" subject, then, embodies stereotypical performances of identity. The novel, however, contrasts this use of "history" to something more internalized. We are presented with a character whose history and ancestral origin are the only definitions of her subjectivity. The story of Amber/Cuicatl is one of (American) Indianness. In the novel, her claims to nativeness, including her insistence to talk in Nahuatl and to change her name to an Azteca one, are a part of her "act" as a rising pop musician. But, she internalizes this marketing technique as a political claim about her "people." During one of her manifesto moments, she proclaims,

So many of us, gone. Zapotecas, Mixtecs, Otomies, Tarascans, Olmecs. A whole continent disappeared, except for those few of us who remain, and now all the world is trying to call us Latinos so this hemisphere's bloody history will disappear for good, so we'll seem like foreigners even though we're only the ones who can truly stake a claim to these lands. What's up with that? (90)

Amber/Cuicatl's claims, here, demonstrate a version of politics-of-difference. Her list of pre-Aztec tribes of the Mexico-US region, for example, demonstrates the need to maintain a more historically-nuanced tribal identity for *mexicanos*, elucidating tribal difference that "Aztec" covered up during *El Movimiento* identity politics. She further exacerbates this need for difference in this passage by condemning the term "Latinos" as the homogenizing erasure of difference.⁶ Although she often opposes *El Movimiento* politics, Amber/Cuicatl also invokes the principles of *El Movimiento* Civil Rights here by claiming the centrality and legitimacy of "us" to the US land, as though the claim itself has a political agenda. For Amber/Cuicatl, this politics is about citizenship and original history, as seen through her employment of the term "foreign." Yet, she still wants the tribal disappearances to speak for "a whole continent" and hemisphere. She does not see this call to difference as contradicted by her use of a homogenizing royal "we." She cannot account for how her condemnation of "Latino" clashes with her preservation of a whole "hemisphere's bloody history." But these slippages do not matter to Amber/Cuicatl, and why should they when "history" for her is not about fact or even actual events necessarily. "History" here is simply a cultural claim of origin that she believes directly affects the present-day progressive politics for her people.

For Walter Benjamin, the "angel of history" becomes a figure for the propelling force of time and space. He describes "progress" through this figure. "Progress" is seeing the past as a single catastrophic storm piling past events into a singular debris and propelling the "angel of history" into the future while "his back is turned" (illuminations, 257-8). Amber/Cuicatl's reminiscence of a "bloody history" compliments this destructive and violent view of "progress." But, where Benjamin and Amber/Cuicatl depart on history is in what "history" means. For Amber/Cuicatl, the bloody history of her ancestors is a context for political leverage. In other words, this violent past incites present-day social progress for her people. At one moment, for

example, she calls to action her “sisters” “to build support for the legislation one of our Mexica sisters has proposed in northern California to have Mexican-Americans recognized by the national government as an indigenous people” (128). This progressive politics is steeped in cultural nationalism, especially since it is solely about recognition of subjectivity, but she sees “history” as a way to gain something. Benjamin, however, believes “progress” to be an uncontrollable apparatus of illusion that made the working class forget its hatred and reconstituted the controls of the ruling class. For Benjamin, the only possible way out of this illusion is the Messianic moment, an unexpected event, likened to class revolution, that can “blast a specific era out of the homogeneous course of history” (263). Although Amber/Cuicatl perhaps is not calling for a material and violent revolution here, she is surely calling on a “revolution” of consciousness, grounded in past atrocities and past origins. Where Amber/Cuicatl homogenizes this hemisphere’s history and wants it to “do” something now, Benjamin wants to particle-ize history by blasting the homogenization into a million pieces. Where Amber/Cuicatl avoids events, Benjamin upholds a singular Event.

Fredric Jameson reads Benjamin’s Messianic Event as the “sudden apparition of this utterly new reality,” or an Event in collective history called revolution that “can never be predicted in advance” (*Archaeologies*, 335). For Jameson, this concept of progress is too absolute. Thus, Jameson looks at particular present-day “development.” For instance, the planning and preparations of “land speculators and builder-investors” in the name of future investments (a la “progress”), for Jameson, demonstrates that these acts often close off the future since these spaces of development will be abandoned when profits dry up from “heavy exploitation” (228). Jameson sees the use of “history” (both Benjamin’s notion of “past” and his own notion of “future”) in this moment as a way to obscure and “disrupt” present-day atrocities of capitalism, especially the spatial organizations of class division (228). Jameson undoes the

bad historicism of Benjamin and Amber/Cuicatl by emphasizing the way it obscures and mystifies the present. Thus, Amber/Cuicatl's need to preserve her Indianness and her "bloody history" looks to be about a progressive politics rooted in cultural nationalism, but what it is actually doing is displacing her desire for heterogeneous subjectivity into the same violent homogenization she seemingly deplores, in the present moment.

And Amber/Cuicatl is very good at homogenizing, regardless of her politics of difference. Once again, she speaks to us in the "all" form only to turn again to a politics of difference that is now based on status: "All of us have photos in our family albums of a great-grandfather who wore braids. Most of us know we are Indians. It's just those uppity Xicanos who work at the *Los Angeles Times* who don't want to acknowledge us" (127). This universal Indianness, denoted entirely through hairstyle, is taken as a cultural given. The "all" form here materializes through the photograph. This is a very specific type of photograph that speaks not through its medium but through its content: a great-grandfather with braids. This grandfather, a figure of both the phenotypic (braids) and genotypic (familial), is upheld as "different" from one group: uppity Xicanos. What is both hilarious about this moment and also head-shaking is that "Chicano" is also a term about nativeness (for Mexican Americans only, of course). It is a celebrated term from a not-so-distant history of *El Movimiento* cultural nationalism that emphasized the Aztec ancestry in many aesthetic and political ways. With this knowledge of the term, we are left with only one problem that Amber/Cuicatl is actually having: "uppity."

Amber/Cuicatl's politics of Indianness are threatened by a form of elitism that is entirely dependent on the press. This is perhaps the moment where Amber/Cuicatl's actual exploitation of "history" becomes most apparent. She has used history to constantly gain something, whether national recognition or consciousness. But, her story is actually about her career as a rising pop star. This moment about the press, then, is in direct relation to her desire for fame. The press

becomes the vehicle for her own fame. Her problem with the press as a symbol of “uppity-ness” then is at once related to the lack of marketing that she and her politics, which begin to be solely a performance, are getting. This anger toward the press of course changes by the end of the novel when she achieves fame and the much desired press-time. Her boyfriend Gato even calls her out on it, shouting, “You *have* gone commercial. You’ve forgotten your roots!” (215). Although she denies this loss of her roots, she ultimately embraces her success and continues to “preach” about history as her marketing device. Amber/Cuicatl’s story oscillates between nativeness, history, and the market, as a way to draw out the way “subjectivity” becomes a tool to sell her body, her name, her *musica*. Her didactic claims, then, are precisely what make her money, rendering her a very rich dirty girl by the end of the novel. Her politics-of-difference within the novel, then, are only for the end product of money.

So, with Lauren’s identity crisis or Amber/Cuicatl’s origin story, we have a set of different identitarian images that are being marketed to gain capital. These two characters are quite directly connecting explorations of their particular identity with capital profit. This connection is made more complex, however, when we get the character Usnavy. As perhaps the “richest dirty girl” of the novel, Usnavy’s story begins with her peculiar name. Lauren tells us the story of how Usnavy’s mother wanted to “make a better life” for herself and her baby in “America” by leaving “the island [Puerto Rico] once and for all” (13). This desire to live in the U.S. inspired Usnavy’s mother “to name her baby something patriotic.” Lauren recalls:

On slow afternoons (there’s no other type in Puerto Rico, okay?) Usnavy’s mother used to go to the docks and watch American ships come and go on their way to bombing the hell out of the island of Vieques, amazed that the gringo sailor boys used brooms and mops on deck without shame. That, she thought, was freedom. Men with mops. So that’s where she got the idea for the great name for her daughter—from the side of the ships. U.S. Navy, girl. (13)

The sheer absurdity of Usnavy's name coming from the side of a military ship becomes much more complex by the mother's desire for "Americanization." This desire comes from, for the mother, the effeminatization of navy men, reconstituting the stereotype of sweeping and mopping as women's work. But, the mother's stereotyping is also what makes her see "America" as abstractly better than where she stands. The men performing gendered tasks, thus, represent the abstract notion of "freedom" for the mother. This movement in the mother's logic, as told by Lauren, is disrupted by the fact that these ships are basically using the islands as a testing ground for military action. The mother represents Puerto Rico, which Lauren incorrectly points out is legally an "American" territory since 1918 (13),⁷ as inextricably different from the U.S., but Lauren's recounting also demonstrates how Puerto Rico is nothing more than a part of a military testing ground. We can see here, then, a process of globalization, where the ideals of "America" clash with the actions of the U.S.

America, of course, is solely an idea here. Inderpal Grewal sees "the relevance of America" as a part of a much larger network than the space of the U.S. proper (3). She argues that "America, at the end of the twentieth century and beginning of the twenty-first, came to connote both whiteness and multiculturalism within the framework of an American exceptionalism in which neoliberal discourses provide the possibility of multiple and changing national affiliations" (7). She sees the neoliberal discourses of a "consumer citizenship" and a "liberal democratic state" that promote subject diversity—"unbound from territories and races and classes" (7)—as a way to regulate and standardize a white, middle-class "dream" of "America" in the rest of the world. Although Grewal highlights the many slippages in the definitions of "white," "middle-class," and "multiculturalism," she ultimately demonstrates the way "diversity" discourse and ideals produce the reverse: they reconstitute the hard line between racial and class differences. Diversity discourse coincided with the critical theories on politics-

of-difference, and some even see them as being the same thing, conflating them under the header “pluralism.”⁸ Both of the concepts were surely celebratory in the early 1990s, with many believing that they made positive strides in social justice, were more productive tools in conceptualizing collectivity, and accounted for a social constructionist perspective. But, as in all concepts, there was a backlash. The more these concepts were invoked, the more obvious it became that they were veiling what amounted to the consolidating of racial and sexual difference. But even more, they were being used as simply a marketing technique. The once celebratory views of these concepts became simply fodder for the market to make more money off people’s “particular” identities. Whether the market appealed to one’s feelings of difference or by appealing to a happy racially/sexually diverse (and liberal) image, social justice and “politics” began to look only like “Feel Good Inc.”

It is no surprise then that what came to replace (at least in popularity) the diminished quality of these concepts in the late 1990s and early 2000s was the theories of “cosmopolitanism.” Although cosmopolitanism is not necessarily growing out of the ideas of diversity and a politics-of-difference, it is partaking in a similar critical movement in salvaging productive discourse on collective “identity” under global capitalism. Kwame Anthony Appiah, in *The Ethics of Identity*, unravels the many conflicting definitions and perspectives toward the term. He, however, begins with the personal, by rewriting (and reliving) his father’s advice to see himself as a “citizen of the world” and to take “responsibility with that community for its destiny” (213).⁹ Realizing that many see cosmopolitanism as “liberalism on safari” and “universalist pretensions” (214), what Hardt and Negri term “liberal cosmopolitanism” in *Multitude* (234), he believes that there are forms of cosmopolitanisms worth defending. The form he wants to defend is one that “need not reflexively celebrate human difference” but also “cannot be indifferent to the challenge of engaging with” human difference (222). He wants to engage

with complexity of difference, not simply celebrate difference. By this, he denounces “diversitarianism” and “simple universalism,” defining cosmopolitanism as a humanitarianism that seeks to change the world by taking seriously “the value of particular human lives, the lives people have made for themselves, within the communities that help lend significance to those lives” (222-3). Cosmopolitanism, then, looks to be an ideal to of understanding the “Other” and being a happy global village through this empathy. Usnavy’s emblemizes this cosmopolitanism because she constantly makes “Puerto Rico” as the Other within herself—she claims to understand Puerto Ricanness and embrace it, but she seems to be so absolutely acclimated into a wealthy U.S.-mainland perspective about Puerto Rico: a pseudo U.S space that is great for vacations. Usnavy’s emblemizes the cosmopolitan “world citizen.”

Grewal, on the other hand, ties this ideal of the world citizen to cosmopolitanism’s second meaning: the subject of international trade (42).¹⁰ She sees all the forms of cosmopolitanism as participating in a narrative about “mobile capitalism” (44) where “[t]he ‘world citizen’ emerged as the consumer of multicultural, immigrant, and postcolonial novels through a neoliberalized difference in many regions” (79). In parallel to Lynch’s argument on liberalism and the character, Grewal demonstrates the way the citizenship is inseparable from the economics of neoliberalism. The world citizen, here, is no more than a consumer of “difference.” This disrupts Appiah’s idealism because Grewal contends that cosmopolitanism uses difference and “diversity” to influence consumerism. For instance, Grewal speaks to the way “cosmopolitan” literatures constantly represent “magical movements of peoples and goods” where labor and poverty are erased for the “flexible citizenship” of the upper-class (78). In this sense, she more readily identifies “cosmopolitanism” as reinstating and securing the gap between rich and poor by displacing these class issues into celebratory stances on subjectivity.

The tension in Usnavy's "origin" story, then, sets up and indeed produces the character's cosmopolitanism. Usnavy embodies the most "cosmopolitan" subjectivity of *The Dirty Girls Social Club*, flaunting her wealth and mobility in such a way that she symbolizes the global (capitalist) citizen, primarily because she can afford to be one. The world is truly her village. Her wedding, an elaborate affair that Usnavy brags about over and over again in her last chapter, ends the novel. She is able to reinstate the lines between rich and poor with her cosmopolitan attitude, specifically by evoking the cliché of Paris: "I got my dress in Paris, *mi'ja*. I'm not one of those women who's going to wait overnight outside Filene's for that one big sale day on wedding dresses. *Ay, no, mi'ja*. Paris for me" (299-300). Her attitude is interesting because she does not see this line as moneyed necessarily. Instead, she places herself as simply "better than" the other, *ordinary* women by getting her wedding dress in Paris. But, the hint of moneyed difference is still in the air here.

Getting a dress on sale at a common chain store versus spending money for traveling to Paris and buying the dress induces a gap between rich and poor even while it masquerades as a gap between extraordinary and ordinary. Her need to make this about a difference between her own extraordinariness and its opposite "ordinary" falls to the wayside when she falsely analogizes Filene's Basement to Paris. The cosmopolitan city of Paris being compared to a department store speaks volumes about the way the city is simply reduced to a(n expensive) department store. The ironic move here is that this juxtaposition and reduction actually does more harm to her sense of cultural entitlement. If we think of Paris as simply another department store, then the idea of Paris being a hub of culture is greatly diminished. The only extraordinary thing about Paris, then, is that it costs more to go there because it's further away. It is better than Filene's because it is more expensive. Usnavy, nevertheless, still inserts "Paris" in here with the expectation that the name-dropping somehow elevates her own importance through the *idea* of

Paris, even though the reality is that it is simply another shopping mall for her, albeit an expensive one.

This tension between rich and poor becomes more obvious when Usnavys explains her wedding location: “Twenty thousand dollars they gave me, combined! It would have cost twice as much back in the states. No, I know. Puerto Rico is a part of the states, I’m not retarded. But if you’re Puerto Rican, I mean deep down inside a true Puerto Rican, you call it a nation because that’s how it *feels*” (301). This comment is troubling for two reasons: Usnavys openly admits that she’s having her wedding in Puerto Rico because Puerto Rico is cheaper, and then she immediately displaces the exploitation of her actions by using nationalism as a red herring dripping with pathos. But this becomes much more troubling by the claims to essentialism. She makes the nationalist claims about Puerto Rico sound as though she chose the location of Puerto Rico because she is a “true” Puerto Rican. When these essentialist claims to nation are in the same instance claims to capital exploitation, what we get is a rather odd economic essentialism. I say “odd” because Usnavys is not saying she is poor and cheap like Puerto Rico, but instead her national essentialism explains away her exploitation of this location. There is a very cosmopolitan *thing* happening here. She has internalized the location but simultaneously distanced herself from the location. This is what Grewal categorizes as a deterritorialization accompanied by reterritorialization, where the decentralizing of state regulatory power and national affiliation (offered by cosmopolitanism) has created “new” centers, specifically the symbolic “America” (often, the U.S.) “in collaboration with other powerful nation-states” over other nations and imaginaries (21-2).

Cosmopolitanism claims a certain mobility here: the mobility of money and the entitlement of the rich to nation-hop. But there is something deeply immobile about this cosmopolitan state of being. All three of the characters I have explored here are representing

something with their subjectivities: all of their racial, sexual, and national “identities” are bound irrevocably to capital. But further, they continue to uphold a shallow affiliation with nations, whether it is the U.S., Puerto Rico, Mexico, or a symbolic “Latin America.” The last in this list may appear to be misplaced, but Lauren’s claim to disidentify with a specific nation does not hinder her reliance on the *appearance* of it for money. If we take Hardt and Negri’s critique that liberal cosmopolitans must rely on the declining of the nation-state for its possibility (234), then *Dirty Girls* turns this on its head by showing us that pan-Latina identity actually requires the nation. The cosmopolitanism inherent in the term “pan-Latina” actually relies on the continued significance of the nation-state.

3.2 The Poor

To turn to the poor at this moment, I mean to draw out the lines of demarcation between the rich and poor. This division appears to be more and more definite, not only in a neoliberal climate, but by reading Helena Maria Viramontes *Their Dogs Came With Them* in conjunction with *The Dirty Girls Social Club*. These stories could not be more different in terms of content, especially when read through the lens of class. However, these narratives share something very important with one another. They are both structured rigidly by character-centric chapters; they both uphold the subject as the driving force of the story; and they rely on a politics-of-difference to make meaning. There is surely a problem with this need to structure according to character and identity. But again, this structure tells us something about Latina literature in a more overtly neoliberalist climate. For *Dirty Girls*, it tells us about the way politics of difference and essentialism co-operate to foster a certain moneyed and cosmopolitan sense of entitlement and commodification grounded in the structure of nation. For *Their Dogs*, it tells us about the

immobilizing state of poverty that puts character identities in crisis and that stagnates the text in the space of the U.S. slum.

This idea of poverty immobilizing the text returns us to a rather metaphoric and vague notion of “progress.” The identities that we get in the novel are often moving between other major and minor characters and narrative details. They do not perform the same flat and straightforward character production that we see in *Dirty Girls*. I am, however, hesitant to call them round characters, even though they are surely more complex, precisely because they are characters reliant on a particular space. Viramontes’ more fluid and complex approach to character production is restricted to the slums of East L.A. Ironically, this fluid character production does a certain work in creating a text that constantly moves to the same place. The “movement” in the narrative is solely from one character to another, but each character is in the same place: the slums of East L.A, financially suppressed. David Harvey in *Spaces of Capital* describes the strange issue of mobility—that I believe this novel negotiates—through Marx’s arguments on capitalism’s desire for a “complete mobility” of capital and labor. Harvey suggests that capitalism’s push for “complete mobility” is inherently contradictory: capitalism escapes the contradictions of exploitation and unequal exchange through expansion—“fresh room for accumulation”—yet expansion and mobility to “every sphere and in all parts of the world” would render “little or no room left for further accumulation” (257). Through “mobility” then, accumulation would actually stagnate, turning mobile capitalism into an immobile structure. *Their Dogs* plays with this contradictory question of mobility-immobility by showing a textual space that is overly mobile in character formation and production, where the narrative moves from character to character with fluid ease, but is stagnant in poverty, where the characters are constantly in the “same place.”

This “being in the same place” is embodied most readily in the character Ermila, a young vata who finds herself torn between gangsta life and a poetic existentialism. Through her young teen-angst eyes, we get snippets of observations about the slum of East L.A. She observes from her bedroom window the morning grind of her barrio:

The five-thirty bus took the first set of female passengers to the Westside where, *if* they spoke English, they worked as nannies for hire (and did the ironing) or, if they didn’t speak the language, they worked as housekeepers (ditto with the ironing). The second set of women took the six o’clocker and traveled downtown, where they operated speedy sewing machines in the garment district...But all of them journeyed out of the neighborhood and outward into the massive unknown to become a part of the city’s working migration. (176)

The bus schedules for transportation out of the barrio organize this portrayal of work for the women. The bus is both a symbol of movement *away* from the neighborhood but is also conducive to a greater observation about work being one of migration. For Ermila, she sees this scheduled movement as representative of differences in labor, language, and time. But this difference between the English speakers and the Spanish speakers, the five-thirty travelers and the six o’clockers, the garment district workers and the nannies is immediately turned on its head. Ermila clumps these women together in the next observation through the similarity of space and legality: “They sat on the bus bench, canvas bags beside them, filled with the day’s essentials: fearlessness scrambled with huevos con chorizo and wrapped in a tortilla as thin as the documents they carried to prove legality” (176). The bus bench becomes a space tying these women together; they even seem to all be carrying the same canvas bags filled with food, courage, and visas. The uniformity of this moment contrasts against the differences in labor, language, and time. But these similarities and differences are not a process of compare-contrast. Inversely, these similarities and differences run parallel, weaving against one another to demonstrate the very real process by which this works. For instance, their differences in labor still require that they all are legal. Their difference in language skills crisscrosses how they share

cultural food ways. They are mobile in the sense that we are told they are leaving el barrio for work, but we never see them actually move. We still see them at the same bus stop regardless of the difference in which job they are going to or which bus they take.

“Fortified, fantasy-themed enclaves and edge cities, disembedded from their own social landscapes but integrated into globalization’s cyber-California floating in the digital ether,” Mike Davis describes the rich urban spaces of today in *Planet of Slums*, analogizing them to the science fiction of Philip K. Dick or a “gilded captivity” (120). The poor urban spaces, in contrast, occupy the “slum”: “a precarious ledge of land between a toxic factory and a poisoned lake” (121). Davis believes such sites are “poverty’s niche in the ecology of the city,” with the slum being simply “bad geology” (122). Although the science of soil toxins and sites of increased air pollution are never directly addressed in Viramontes’ novel, we can see how this “bad geology” works in the novel through migratory labor. The working women must leave el barrio for work. David Harvey in *Spaces of Capital* attributes this mobile labor as a form of dependency brought on by capitalist penetration (252-255). For instance, when Harvey explores the hidden “rot beneath the glitter” of Baltimore, he attributes the increased impoverishment of the inner-city neighborhoods on the “close public-private partnership between City Hall and dominant corporate power” (143). For Harvey, this partnership posed a “serious social danger” by creating an “island of affluence and power in the midst of a sea of impoverishment, disempowerment, and decay” because it “functions as a sophisticated mask” (143). This is a mask where we can’t see the total unemployment along Chesapeake Bay or the 75.8 percent increase in residents living below poverty line (140-144). The bus stop scene in *Their Dogs* demonstrates the way the slum neighborhood is unable to sustain itself in the space itself. Viramontes attributes this unsustainability on the construction of the East L.A. Freeway Interchange—an intersection of 4 highways, fueled by these public-private partnerships—throughout the novel, since it broke up

the barrio, displacing people and rendering East L.A. fragmented and uneven (8, 12, 75, 168-169, 225-6, etc).¹¹ The bus stop scene does not show us the East L.A. cut in half by a freeway or the pollution and toxic wind that blew over the barrio during its construction, although implied in many places. Instead, the bus stop scene shows us something much more disconcerting and indirect because although we can see the critical force of this moment, we are still seeing it through the eyes of a single character stuck in her bedroom, unable to envision the full significance of what she sees every morning. The character Ermila watches this play out everyday from her bedroom window, but the utter stationary situation of the bus stop places a sort of “mask” over it. Ermila brings out the endless repetition of the bus stop. There is no labor flow from slum to gated community or increase and decrease in poverty rates or any movement at all; it is simply the same place at the same time.

Viramontes’ Ermila flies in the face of capitalist claims that mobility and development are a good thing. Viramontes ultimately anchors the large structural order of mobility represented by the bus stop and East L.A.’s “development” into the singularity of a character. By doing this, she demonstrates a certain mystification in these capitalist stances. We should think of Horkheimer and Adorno’s critique of the Enlightenment here, where “[e]ach human being has been endowed with a self of his or her own, different from all others, so that it could all the more surely be the same. But because that self never quite fitted the mold, enlightenment throughout the liberalistic period has always sympathized with social coercion” (9). The mystification of the individual, to fit and mold to the production of goods being bought on the market, is exemplary of an overall myth. Horkheimer and Adorno see the Enlightenment movement as defining myths against itself (magic, prehistory, God) but ultimately mythologized itself, where the claims to order and science became nothing more than magic and illusion. The endorsement of the individual, then, was really a way to coerce the masses into a mass or a uniform horde through

mystification. Watt and Lynch have already pointed to a similar problem with individualism as a coercive ideological mystification, where the success of classical liberalism occurs by duping consumers, readers in their case, into identifying with and accepting class affluence in literature. Viramontes, however, extends this myth into a more neoliberalist climate, by constructing each of her different, individual characters under the same spatial institution where class divisions are consolidated: poverty.

This spatial designation of poverty, according to Davis, is a part of a larger structure, specifically that between the urban and the rural. He believes that the only way to conceptualize urbanization is through the transformations and interactions along an “urban-rural continuum” (8). This plays out through the character Tranquilina. When given the story of Tranquilina, the angelic 20-something missionary who makes it her purpose to help and enlighten the poor of East L.A, we are told a story of indentured servitude in rural Texas at an undisclosed time, but perhaps paralleled to the Bracero Program and migration labor camps of the 30s and 40s. We hear about this vicious circle of servitude that debt slavery creates for Tranquilina’s parents:

They were told they were free to go where they wished. But their families had signed promissory notes to Horseback, to Horseback’s father, and before to his grandfather. Thus the kneeling shoemaker, the peasant girl holding up a heavy basket of mangoes and the other hundred and five men, women, and children living and dying penniless at Rancho Paradiso were indentured servants, obliged to pay historic debts, because one had always to be accountable for history. (41)

What is perhaps interesting about this moment is the way history defines debt slavery. Octavia Butler’s *Parable* trilogy warns us of what will come in a future where privatization and work can only ever occur through this structure of debt slavery.¹² The recent turn-of-the-century alarm in credit-card economics, where the combined individual debt in the U.S. is as large as the overall national debt, also fuels fears about a future of debt slavery.¹³ But what Viramontes does here is ties the neoliberal question of debt into a question about history. By doing this, she demonstrates

a continuance of economic violence that follows Tranquilina from her rural roots to her urban present. The fact that Tranquilina is constantly describing this in memory form while she performs charity and missionary work illustrates a cyclical relationship between the roots of debt slavery and her desire to correct the state of poverty in East L.A. I say “cyclical” because this movement from the rural to the urban, from debt slavery to philanthropy, is not one of “progress” but precisely the anti-progress of these economics. Tranquilina’s attempt to instill God, prayer, and food into the homeless and poor who wander off the streets at night is surely with the hope of bettering the state of poverty, giving the poor a chance to change their lot. But her “looking backward” stunts the philanthropic desire of “looking forward.” Within the story, her charity seems to highlight the fact that the poor are no better off than her parents on Rancho Paradiso. Under neoliberal discourses about the equal freedoms to class mobility, the poor are told they are “free to go” forward in production and labor because “progress” is equivalent to gaining money, but Tranquilina’s work only seems to reemphasize how the poor continue to be poor. This occurs by how Tranquilina’s philanthropy is constantly juxtaposed to the stories her parent’s told her about their “escape” from debt slavery. The problem, though, is that the idea of “escape” is only a gesture. At its most cynical reading, Tranquilina’s parents’ “escape” never actually changed that history: Tranquilina’s family name is still down in Horsetooth’s debt ledger. And running parallel to this historical truth, we see more and more of the hungry come to Tranquilina’s mission, listening to the preaching of her father, not out of hope for or belief in class mobility but solely for free food: “Tranquilina knew right then that their ministry was no better than another bottle of Thunderbird wine, a quick fix of heroin, another prescription drug for temporal relief” (97).¹⁴

As we have seen with the characters in *Dirty Girls*, history plays a very important role in character “formation.” For the rich of Valdes-Rodriguez’s world, history is a productive and

successful marketing tool that demonstrates the way character and capital co-operate. I argue, of course, that this co-operation is actually illustrating the guise of “progress.” For the poor of Viramontes’ world, however, history much more clearly demonstrates the myth of “progress.” Viramontes, I believe, actually performs class essentialism here, where the particular economic history that haunts Tranquilina and informs her charity is expanded into the cause and root of poverty in general. This performance of synecdoche is reminiscent of Houston Baker’s idea that ritual masks and conjuring demonstrate the transformation of slavery into a more dialectical reconfiguration of the hierarchies of slavery, specifically that of lordship and bondage.¹⁵ For Baker, of course, the part offers a most optimistic account of the whole, where through consciousness the slave to history is able to reposition her/his status as the producer of history. Viramontes, however, offers a more cynical account, where philanthropy and “escape” are not positive transformations in the cycle of poverty, but instead they highlight the vicious circle itself. In other words, there is no moving out of poverty; poverty is all that exists.

Thus, at the end of the novel, Tranquilina is a crucial character to revealing the stagnant developments within the novel. In the end, her role emphasizes the lack of forward motion. This occurs most poignantly through her interaction with the queer, androgynous character Turtle. Turtle is perhaps the most complexly static character in *Their Dogs* since she comes in and out of the story under numerous guises without any “individual” transformation. She is a girl; she is a boy; she is a gangster; she is a drug addict; she is a homeless person; she is androgynous; she is a dog. Her changing subjectivity within the novel is pleasantly disorienting because she fills a structural other to the rather stable and stereotypical *mexicano* subjectivities represented in the slums of East L.A. By being a drag king in the beginning to fit into the *vato* culture of her brother, Turtle must erase her outer corporeal femininity. This erasure, of course, is not easy, and we only hear about it when Turtle is being subjected to violence from her mother: “Like the time

Amá had yanked and yanked Turtle's hair in an argument over her choice of boxers under her cutoffs, of her erasure of breasts and dresses and all that was outwardly female, over her behaving like some unholy malflora" (25). This violent incident gives rise to her brother shaving her head so she will no longer have to worry about people pulling her hair. What is interesting about this incident is it has nothing to do with sexuality, but instead, it has everything to do with fashion and image. Turtle is being abused by her mother because she is wearing boxers, because she doesn't wear dresses or anything to show off her breasts. The violence here is about issues with non-normative fashion.

José Esteban Muñoz sees the non-normative as a utopian "kernel of potentiality" in his recent book *Cruising Utopia*. The queer performer, according to Muñoz, allows for "a spoiled subjectivity, who is considered a loser, or rubbish, who refuses to live by an outside rule, a system of categorization that celebrates the normal, and instead insists on her own value as a countercultural heroine" (174). Muñoz wants to step away from Michael Warner's particularizing of normativity through the "heteronormative" for a more "expansive understanding" that can speak to the utopian-antiutopian dynamics of "normal" (173). The non-normative is utopian in so much that it allows for refusal. Turtle's drag-king persona is not hyperbolically performing her homosexuality per se, but it does "refuse" the normal. The violence accrued from this "refusal" demonstrates how her body is a site where these normative-nonnormative regulations occur. On one side, her mother is violently disciplining her image. On the other side, her brother retaliates against this violence by shaving her head, and thus furthering her drag-king image. With the actual homo/hetero-sexual acts removed from the story, we get solely a gesture of sexualized fashion. All we get is a young girl who simply *looks like* a boy.

But, the subject produced by these fashion choices is not "utopian" like Muñoz so badly wants queer performance to illustrate. When Turtle's brother gets drafted, she is left without his

gang backing her fashion choices, with a drug addiction to PCP and meth, and with a lack of housing. Fading into the world of the homeless, Turtle is almost forgotten by her neighborhood and her gang. This movement into obscurity does two things for her. First, she is no longer remembered as that girl who dresses and looks like a boy. Second, she becomes unrepresentable. In her state of poverty, she begins to take on an unidentifiable sexuality, so much so that when she tries to get a job, the convenience store boss does not remember her as “Turtle, the gang-banging girl-boy” that once robbed his store. Now, he can only decide what sexuality he thinks she is: “The young man Ray encountered the evening before the incident was a boy and not a girl. There. That was all he wanted to say” (*Dogs* 259). Ray’s “decision” is interesting because the sexuality of Turtle is dependent on others’ perception. She is only a “drag-king” when others know she is a girl. She is only a boy when her poverty makes her near unrecognizable to Ray. Subjectivity here, real or theatrical, is contingent solely on those perceiving it. This is a key element in *Dirty Girls*, where Lauren is able to use this fact to forward her own career and capital gain. Thus, this demonstrates a certain reliance on social experience that the concept of politics-of-difference upholds. But, the androgyny that Turtle begins to take on in poverty also obscures the notion of “difference” all together. Judith Halberstam argues that androgyny within cultural texts “always returns us to this humanist vision of the balanced binary in which maleness and femaleness are in complete accord” (215). She believes that the “blatant butch” in visual images upsets this utopian balance of sex. Turtle, who never blatantly identified as a lesbian, transsexual, or otherwise, loses her image as a drag king by becoming poorer than she already was. But this androgyny does not offer “balance” within the novel. Instead, this exaggerates the way poverty is even more off-balance. On one hand, poverty “decides” one’s sexual character, as we see with Ray. On the other hand, poverty reduces Turtle’s butch image and character into something forgettable and meaningless, since no one in the neighborhood can identify her

anymore; she holds no representation. Instead of getting Lauren's politics-of-difference for capital gain, Turtle is reduced to an androgynous presence with nothing but some drug-induced memories. What began as a fashion statement, then, becomes nothing more than a hyperbole of the definitive gap between rich and poor.

This neoliberal representation, however, is not some unbridled global force with the novels. It is very much a part of a Nation-based perspective. For *Dirty Girls*, we see this occur through cosmopolitanism, but in *Their Dogs*, this manifests through a sinister police force. At the end of *Their Dogs*, we finally see the pervasive presence of the Quarantine A Air Squad, who patrol East L.A. after curfew with the purpose of killing "rabid dogs." The Air Squad and the constant references to the neighborhood being quarantined every night only ever hovers as a backdrop throughout the novel until the end. We know there is a policing presence that shoots anything that moves, making the residents lock themselves up at night. We know the "official" purpose is because of rabid, stray dogs that supposedly have taken over the neighborhood. During Turtle's final PCP trip, she waxes and wanes between memories of her childhood and the reality of cruising with some old gang members. The gang heckles her into wanting to fight the opposing gang across the street. But the PCP makes her see things that are not really there. The opposing gang is not across the street; only a young boy trying to get home before curfew. In a drug-induced rage, Turtle brutally stabs the child in the ear. And it is not until Turtle kills the child that we see the full force of this policing operation. While Turtle stands over the child, in and out of a present state-of-mind, Tranquilina runs over to the scene. Everyone else on the streets mysteriously vanishes, while Tranquilina repeats over and over "why?" to Turtle. Then the helicopters, coming from nowhere and everywhere, open fire, killing Turtle, while Tranquilina shouts, "*We'rrre not doggggs!*" (324). The scene moves quickly, almost making the presence of the Air Squads too abrupt to register. But the abruptness of the scene works as a way

to demonstrate the fleeting quality of action: these actions are not necessarily means to an end, but a part of a cycle in which East L.A. residents reside. Thus, the Air Squad's shooting first, looking later, paints Turtle into her last character: a dog.

Turtle's poverty ultimately dehumanizes her to the point where she cannot even be recognized as human. Tranquilina ultimately sacrifices herself as well in the end by walking toward the helicopters, when the sharpshooters tell her to not move. Tranquilina's sacrifice plays with the missionary character she embodies, but her sacrifice is not in the name of religion, rather it is in the name of protesting state violence. This mirrors Turtle's last memory of her brother: "Luis Lil Lizard once told her that them two lived in a stay of execution" (324). The dehumanization and the sacrifice both point to the way poverty and states interact. By the end, we are able to deduce that these state regulations and disciplines of the barrio are structuring and enabling the poverty itself.

Notes

¹ This is most clear in Alurista's poems that mix Spanish with English. His use of both languages is not about getting rid of one in favor of the other; his dual lingual form is about undermining the hegemony of one over the other. This is about including and equalizing that which is deemed secondary and/or lesser, not completely excluding it.

² The idea of "development" is also central to Arturo Escobar's work *Encountering Development* (1995). Escobar argues that the idea of development (and with that "modernity") was a way of stabilizing class difference: "Development fostered a way of conceiving of social life as a technical problem, as a matter of rational decision and management to be entrusted to that group of people—the development professionals—whose specialized knowledge allegedly qualified them for the task" (52). But this works because "underdevelopment" is targeted as something that must be erased, according to Escobar, which has allowed for ever "more encompassing forms of power and systems of control" (52).

³ Another view on the gentrification and rhetorical constructions of Puerto Rican barrios can be found in Luis Aponte-Parés' "Appropriating Place in Puerto Rican Barrios: Preserving Contemporary Urban Landscapes" in the collection *Preserving Cultural Landscapes in America* (2000). Aponte-Parés argues that El Barrio in New York City represents a deterritorialized community of Puerto Ricans who have reterritorialized the space by building casitas, small houses belonging to "a family of balloon-frame wood structures (shacks, bungalows, or cottages) generally associated with Third World vernacular architecture" (95). These casitas are built by poor, working-class, disenfranchised who cannot afford the manufactured landscapes, which make these casitas and the continued building of them, according to Aponte-Parés, an act of resistance to the persistent dislocations and deterritorializations that Puerto Ricans have undergone historically in New York City (99). This reading adds to Arlene Davíla's work on the ways space and place become deeply significant in constructions of social mobility.

⁴ We see a similar move by Walter D. Mignolo with his idea of bilanguaging love in *Local Histories/Global Designs*. Utilizing the concept of bilanguaging, he argues that border thinking is less about spatial knowledge and more about the politics of language. He speaks to the histories of imperialism and nationalism that inform and construct these politics of language, which makes him call for a bilanguaging epistemology that may run the risk of becoming complicit with nation-states, colonial legacies, and consumerism but also "leads the way toward a radical epistemological transformation" (267). He believes this can only be achieved through love: "love for being between languages, love for the disarticulation of the colonial language and for the subaltern ones, love for the impurity of national languages, and love as the necessary corrective to the 'generosity' of hegemonic power that institutionalizes violence" (274). Love, in this sense, is the antithesis to the violence of inequality, and as such, it corrects (or at least balances out) this violence. This idea is quite cheesy and passé in a post-Beatles "All You Need Is Love" way, but it follows the logic that social relations require duality, a recurrent stance in Latina/o studies.

⁵ Michael McKeon, in *The Origins of the English Novel*, speaks to the way capitalist ideology was largely understood through Puritan notions of mobility, where those "confident of their

election” had internalized Christ and, thus, could do what they needed to do in order to help the “upward mobility of the spirit” (194). Later in the work, McKeon demonstrates how this religious dogma about notions of mobility are allegorized in literature by looking at how Bunyan’s *The Pilgrim’s Progress* objectifies the spirit and then beseeches the reader to forget this objectification, enacting a sort of commodity fetishism (312). This upward mobility of the spirit, then, becomes nothing more than a commodity, sold to the masses as a tool of mystification.

We get a similar dialectical commodification with characters and class, however. In McKeon’s discussion about the “persistence of the aristocracy,” he talks about how scholars like to think of the eighteenth century as a time of social, political, and economic stability, where the center of rule is the aristocracy. He sees this as ignoring the destabilizing effects that capitalism and the middle-class gentry have on these social relations, categories, and oligarchies. Ultimately, McKeon sees the history of the middle class and middle-class consciousness has coming from the contradiction between 1) imitating and becoming absorbed within the aristocracy and 2) criticizing and supplanting the status of the aristocracy (174). The middle class, then, symbolizes the “hopeful space between reformation and deformation that capitalist ideology was conceived” (175). What McKeon suggests here is that the historical development of capitalism was not founded on a rich-vs-poor class dynamic but in the contradictions epitomized in the creation of a middle class. I, however, see this as a process of mystification since all of McKeon’s examples of the middle-class gentry are still imbued with the desire to be rich, to be aristocratic, to have social mobility and accept the distributions of social, economic, and political power. Since the neoliberal turn, the disappearances of the middle class, as the gap between rich and poor becomes ever wider, have been full of rhetoric about the ineffectiveness of middle management, third-parties, and bureaucratic stagnation, but this rhetoric allegorizes the restoration of class power to the elite.

⁶ Of course, Lauren is adhering to a definition of “Latino” that is out-of-synch with its origins. Her claim is similar to the claims about the term “Hispanic.” But “Latino” was originally supposed to work against the term “Hispanic.” Arlene Dávila opts to conflate the two terms in her book *Latinos, Inc.* because the corporate world often uses the two interchangeably (15-17), much like Lauren. However, Dávila, like many scholars of Latina/o studies, sees the term “Latino” as a self-designated term. Chon A. Noriega and Ana M. Lopez in *The Ethnic Eye* are the primary go-to for teasing out the debate between “Hispanic” and “Latino.” They describe that “Hispanic” is a professional self-designation for the middle class, reflecting the attempt to gain institutional, economic, and professional power through homogenization. On the other hand, they state, “‘Latino’ emerges out of the efforts of civil rights struggles and grassroots social movements to achieve ‘radical’ change at the national level through the articulation of collective identity by the Latino intelligentsia” (xii). Although they shy away from calling “Latino” a homogenizing term, preferring the more positive label “collective identity,” both terms still are trying to bring together many subnational groups under the same umbrella because they share similar colonial and immigrant histories and because they experience similar discriminations in the U.S., one is just more positive than the other.

On another level, however, the definition of “Latino” has come into conversation with performance studies, offering scholars such as Karen Christian to redefine the term and step away from the often essentializing pull in these definitions. Christian does not see the term as participating in a discourse about homogenization and pan-ethnicity founded in common

ancestry, blood, and history. Instead, she reconceives of it as an identity only definable by process and spectacle, or as drag, where performances, behaviors, cross-dressing, and parody make one “Latino” (15-20).

⁷ I’m not sure if this is an intentional gaffe or not. But, the character Lauren is one year off on her date, assuming she is referring to the Jones Act of 1917, which made Puerto Rican’s official (albeit non-voting) citizens of the United States.

⁸ Pluralism is a slippery term, but I use it to denote the troubling beliefs behind multiculturalism that uphold the existence and interaction of a bunch of unique and “different” groups, making up a larger social milieu, and that argue we are all connected through our differences and individual uniqueness. The problem with this stance was that it glossed over the issues of dominance and power that permeate social relations. Walter Benn Michael’s *The Trouble with Diversity* (2006) is one of the most recent discussions on the problems with pluralism and diversity. Although he does not use the theoretical term “politics-of-difference,” he begins the book with questioning the idea that the rich and poor are different. Using an exchange between Hemingway and Fitzgerald, he illustrates how the rich and poor are not different people but the same people with different amounts of money, and he argues that the difference “between what people owned and what they were” should be obvious (1). Diversity, however, muddies this difference up by celebrating the differences of subjects instead of dealing with the ever growing problem with difference (or more aptly named “inequality”) of ownership, money, and power. This is a particularly neoliberal phenomenon, according to Michaels, who argues that the desire to not think about class difference is at the heart of the liberal imagination, whereas “at the heart of the neoliberal imagination is the desire not to get rid of class difference” (109). And, a major way to not get rid of class difference is to mystify the problems and violence of inequality with the red herring “diversity” and pluralism.

⁹ He is taking the term from its roots in nineteenth-century conceptions of subject rights.

¹⁰ She is not interested in an abstract understanding or consciousness of “human” necessarily, but in the way subject mobility under global capitalism divides cosmopolitanism into four categories: 1) cosmopolitan internationalism, defined as privileged mobile subjects who connect through power and participate in colonial-like acts on culture; denoted as “Western”; criticized as being elitist (44-48); 2) postcolonial cosmopolitanism, defined as mobile subject connections based on host-home binarism, the processes of diaspora, and recovering pre-colonial histories of mobility and tribalism; denoted as “Eastern”; criticized as reinstating the East/third-world as savage (46-58); 3) postcolonial feminist cosmopolitanism, defined as transnational connectivities based on a movement from repressive traditionalism to “freeing” progressivism, on discourses of exclusion-inclusion; criticized as being easily appropriated by neoliberal consumer culture (58-65); 4) cosmopolitan multiculturalism, defined as the migrants conflict between tradition and modernity in the name of hybridity and multiculturalism, the transnational production of “difference,” and the push-and-pull between multiculturalism and nationalism; criticized as linking multiculturalism inextricably to consumer culture (74-78). Grewal, of course, sees flaws, some more obvious than others, in all of these categories.

¹¹ Raúl Homero Villa in his book *Barrio Logos* (2000) discusses the displacement of people in East L.A. with the building of the 710 freeway and the 5 and 10 Interchange. He argues that the popular lore of the residents was that this freeway building was a “strategic ploy” by leaders and police to break up gangs, demonstrating how the freeways are symbolic of “the community’s historical geography” within the Chicano imaginary of “dominant urbanism” (82-83).

¹² She most eloquently describes debt slavery in *Parable of the Sower* through the futuristic neo-corporation Kagimoto, Stamm, Frampton, and Company (KSF) who take over, buy out, and privatize struggling towns, to open up desalinization plants or mega-farms. This company offers room and board to the residents, as well as security from the diminishing civility of the outside world, in exchange for his/her labor, with very little salary. According to the novel, this quickly becomes a system of debt slavery when new hires who have children and family in tow cannot live on the meager salary and/or have to pay room and board for the family members (118-121). Of course, with the lack of work and safety in this fictive world, these company-towns begin to look like the only option for many.

¹³ Although the rhetoric and discourses about debt slavery with loans or credit has saturated the liberal media for years, the CNN Freedom Project has built its entire existence around modern-day slavery, focusing on the issues of “debt bondage,” labor bondage, and mostly human trafficking. See <http://thecnnfreedomproject.blogs.cnn.com/>. I should note that it is no coincidence that this project is rhetorically situated under the term “freedom,” which is problematic when we think about how freedom has been engulfed into notions of the “free market.”

¹⁴ The National Council of La Raza in 1993 released “The State of Hispanic America” (http://www.nclr.org/images/uploads/publications/1405_file_AntiPoverty.PDF), where they provide many statistics about how Hispanic families are more likely to be in poverty and have a lower median income than comparable White and Black households. Simultaneously, they, on the whole, have a higher level of labor force participation than White and Black counterparts. These stats, although surely dated now, demonstrate the way in which poverty is not about how much or how hard one works.

¹⁵ See Baker’s *Modernism and the Harlem Renaissance* (1987) (p. 44).

4. “THEORY IN THE FLESH”: “QUEER” SEXUALITIES AND *LATINIDAD* FROM VOGUING TO EXILE

Cherríe Moraga was one of the few theorists in the 1980s who unabashedly combined essentialist and social constructionist perspectives. At a time when critics were picking a side between the two perspectives, Moraga’s work saw the ways in which questions of naturalization and descent are constantly in critical conversation with social status and structures. Of course for Moraga and many Chicana feminists, the indistinctness between essentialism and social construction was a sexual problem, where the Chicana body represented the sexual violences of colonialism (making her a mestiza) and the disciplines of gender (making her a mother, a nun, or a prostitute, with little other option). Chicana feminism, thus, attempted to unfix these stringent identity politics by theorizing a cacophony of duality: Mother-lesbian, third-world-first-world, colonizer-colonized.¹ These dualities were loaded with symbols of violence to both the body and to social norms within Chicana/o communities, but they were also sites of celebration and new possibilities. This was all enacted on the level of the body. As work on the “othered” body has grown since the 1980s, this corporeal conflict in Latina/o studies has come to emblemize numerous levels of contradiction. For this study, I am interested in the way these contradictions come into conversation with a free market economy through sexuality.² For example, when we have José Esteban Muñoz’s idea of disidentification, we can see the way Carmelita Tropicana’s queer performances both resist and disidentify with the dominant cultural industry and yet reinstates its dominance by embracing “otherness.” The sexual body in this sense captures contradictions that have become increasingly involved economically, especially in light of market appropriations of *latinidad*.

In 1981, Moraga conceives of what she calls a “theory in the flesh” where she maps out a methodological approach to reading *chicanidad*. According to Moraga, a “theory in the flesh

means one where the physical realities of our lives—our skin color, the land or concrete we grew up on, our sexual longings—all fuse to create a politic born out of necessity” (23). In order to put this theory to work, Moraga tells us that to read this through both biological and social concepts, specifically family, emotional investment, social status, corporeal knowledge, and struggle.

These concepts are central to forming a political consciousness and are always theoretically mediated through the body, through the flesh, and through the blood. A woman of color can only interpret her social position and her lived experiences by these (often painful) material effects left on her body. This idea of a theory in the flesh, however, also comes to try to describe that which is “normal” to Chicana experience. By this, I mean to elucidate how Moraga’s idea was very much a part of a larger “border feminist” project that Sonia Saldívar-Hull aligns with obliterating “the dominant culture’s power over what is ‘normal’ and acceptable” (67). Yet, since the border is symbolic of the very contradictions that tear and define the mestiza, the Chicana, and the Latina, this resistance and challenge to dominant culture’s ideologies of normal—as heterosexual, patriarchal, and white—are in turn a form of normalizing the Chicana and Latina experience.³

This “theory in the flesh” is reshaped when coupled with the problems of a free-market economy. If we think about this as coming from theories of sexuality—from the discussions about gender versus sex to the debates over sex acts opposed to sexual ideologies and discourses—we are able to see the way the body, both as symbol and as material, becomes foundational.⁴ In the age of neoliberalism, the body becomes a rather superficial logo and brand-name. For instance, Bill Maurer, in the collection *Queer Globalizations*, positions the body into this sexual economy: “Post-Fordism does promise just such free play of bodies and pleasures, but only within the strictures of a neoliberal market logic that renders all bodies into vehicles of consumer choice and all pleasures into gut-level preferences” (101-2). Maurer understands the

way in which the body emblemizes and “wears” neoliberalism. But, this chapter wishes to extend this idea of the body as purely a source of consuming pleasure into a much more troubling problematic. I wish instead to elucidate how neoliberalism and these theories of the flesh normalize Latinas/os as hypersexual in that they are sold as oppositional, queer, and/or feminine.

I consider in this chapter how the sexualized body of Latinas/os, with its many levels of contradiction, has come to exemplify the workings of the free-market. As the market appropriates the Latina/o body, so the Latina/o body shows the way the market has increasingly become a norm in everyday life. By this, I simply mean that there is gradually little ability to thinking outside the market since the 1950s through 1970s (or since Castro’s socialism and decolonization movements), and Latinas/os (as a niche) represent this process of normalization. In this sense, the market relies on Latina/o sexuality—whether it’s JLo’s butt, ethnic Barbie, or Madonna’s appropriation of voguing. This capitalist appropriation of Latina/o sexuality, nevertheless, conflicts with Latina/o representations that are meant to resist or “queer” the status quo (and thus the mass market). I argue that these representations demonstrate how “queer” itself has been wholly appropriated into the market. By looking at three sites that exemplify this—the documentary *Paris is Burning*, the niche marketing of ethnic Barbies and dolls, and the politics of exile in *Dreaming in Cuban*—I will demonstrate the way Latina/o bodies are sold as hypersexual and erotic, which normalizes this “abnormal” (read sarcastically) subjectivity into a packagable commodity. But in the larger picture, this is emblematic of the way neoliberalism has permeated our everyday lives and become a “normal” organization of social experience.

Besides the fact that each of these sites have been critically done to death respectively, I have linked these three sites together because they demonstrate a wide breadth in sexual representations by and about Latinas/os, displaying us as somehow intrinsically opposed to a

dominant and homogenous culture. It is perhaps passé for me to be talking about these three particularly over-analyzed cultural objects at all. But, from the drag motif to *mestizaje* to exile, these three sites—a documentary film, a set of ethnic dolls, and a novel about exile—all demonstrate the way the Latina/o body is both reliant on and manipulated by the market. In many ways, these three cultural sites are microcosmic narratives in a macroeconomic story, where Latina/o bodies undergo sexually-charged representations. I join these disparate examples, then, to showcase a set of cultural objects, bought by a diverse range of consumers and sold by very different companies for mostly different reasons, as a way to demonstrate the homogenizing market logic about Latinas/os: as sex-pots.

These representations, ultimately, elucidate the way neoliberalism—with its desires of less government and more branding—has wormed into our everyday lives, making the hyper-sexualities of Latinas/os customary. The purpose of this analysis is to move beyond simply seeing “Latino” as a brand and seeing it as requiring a certain set of norms and behaviors. Under free-market discourses and practices, this normalization is a way to hide economic problems, such as major uneven distribution and serious poverty. Kathy Griffin argues, “Neoliberalism (as highly contingent and inherently reproductive) structures and communicates appropriate types of and limits to human behaviour and acceptable social aspirations, neutralizing social dislocations by veiling historical contingency in ‘truth’ and the ‘real’” (17). Griffin’s work on the relationship between gender and the World Bank uncovers the way heterosexuality and desire are normalized through “truth” claims that reduce social constructions to natural facts (17). This is part of a larger process, according to Joseba Gabrilondo, between nation-states and the desire to be economically competitive (if not to be dominant): “Nation-states in the situation of Mexico are striving to join global commercial ventures such as NAFTA by presenting themselves as desirable nations for foreign investment and consumption—ultimately regulated by the U.S.

economy. Conversely, the U.S. imagination wants to consume kitsch representations of national Others in the specific form of feminine, low-class, heterosexual, and desirable images and objects” (247). These “kitsch representations” are partaking in an age-old hegemony, where those deemed inferior and “other” are feminine and lower class. Perhaps an interesting addition to Gabilondo’s description is that the “other” is also “heterosexual.” Those who have broken up this field, such as Muñoz, Michael Warner, and Karen Christian, often analogize the “other” to the homosexual and/or “queer” subjectivity. Yet, Gabilondo is perhaps elucidating a rather interesting perspective in early Latina/o sexuality studies, where the homosexual desire is to be feminine and heterosexual or, more forwardly, is to be “normal.”

4.1 **Balls**

This desire is best represented in the Puerto Rican/nuyorican and black gay culture in Jennie Livingston’s acclaimed documentary *Paris Is Burning*. This desire to normalize homosexuality through femininity and performing heterosexuality should remind us most readily of the late Venus Extravaganza, a light-skinned Puerto Rican transsexual who desperately wishes to be “truly” feminine. Our first introduction to Venus in *Paris is Burning* is photographic shots of her at balls and in glamorous costumes splashed across the screen while Pepper LaBeija talks about the Feminine Realness category for the young drag queens. From these photographs, we enter Venus’ bedroom, where she is sitting on her bed talking about her dreams and desires. She tells the camera, “I would like to be a spoiled, rich, white girl (giggles). They get what they want, whenever they want it, and they don’t really have to struggle...” In this sense, she is buying into a certain economic belief that success is about having money, being white, and not having anything sexually “different” (such as having a main vein instead of a yoni). Her desire to be

upper-class, white, truly female, and without conflict is something that begins to define the desire for normativity found in ball culture in general.

We must consider the balls as a site of mimicry, where the participants attempt to simulate these moneyed, white, and “normal” subjects through costumes, behavior, drag, and “voguing.” The major debate surrounding this 1990 documentary and ball culture, most notably engaged by Judith Butler (*Bodies That Matter*, 1993) and bell hooks (*Reel to Real*, 1996), is whether it critiques the upper-class white straight world or whether it simply desires and consumes this world. A similar debate infuses Gabilondo’s theoretical work when read against Denis Flannery’s more textual readings of the documentary. According to Gabilondo, “Voguing is about being able to acquire the right brand-name dress, in contrast to the homemade dresses of the older generation of drag queens” (256). He suggests here a generational difference where class and consumer-centric desires begin to trump the more D.I.Y. (Do It Yourself) sensibility of the balls. Voguing in *Paris Is Burning* is no longer about simply wearing a dress, cat walking, and being in drag; instead, it is about having brand-names, stealing clothes from big-name stores, and wearing the “real” thing.

In contrast to this reading, Flannery sees ball culture and voguing as elucidating the imperfections with “normal.” He states, “But as ever when *Paris Is Burning* scrutinizes the white straight world (we might think of the moment when the camera pans the sunny streets of prosperous 1980s Manhattan or the sequence in which it follows Octavia to the department stores and the supermodel contest) it highlights the potential queerness and modes of passing involved in the occupation of normative” (68). Flannery argues that these performances at the balls signify either cathartic “releases” that celebrate these racial and sexual identities or “gestures of erasure” that “magically” transform the performers “into the forces that will their destruction” (71). By reading the balls this way, Flannery invests the queer subject with the potential to release or

transform herself through performing “normal.” Flannery’s argument follows a similar logic found in Karen Christian’s *Show and Tell*, where she conceives of the drag motif or a parodic imitation of a nonexistent original (150), and in Muñoz’s *Disidentification*, where he calls for embracing contradictory and harmful components of identity as a way to counteridentify with majoritarian subjects (5, 12). This approach to ball culture wants to find something positive in the mimicry of the normative, but when the normative is so steeped in class privilege and consumer desires, we must see these performances as more than about “identity” and/or “counteridentity”; they are about the collapse of normal into capital.

This is perhaps why Gabilondo notes that this representation is saturated with performances that fail: “*Paris Is Burning* also illustrates that the failure to successfully perform a consumerist, queer identity has tragic consequences: violence, drug addiction, prostitution, AIDS, and death. Hence in *Paris Is Burning*, the queer subjects develop a very sophisticated form of politics based on the simulation of consumption, which symbolically compensates for their lack of capital” (256). The symbolic compensation for one’s lack of capital, nevertheless, is also a compensation for one’s lack of “normal.” These failures that occur, especially the tragic demise of Venus Xtravaganza who was discovered in a seedy hotel room stuffed under a bed four days after she was killed, become failures to be “truly” female or to be “truly” straight.

Yet, this problem of “true” and natural in these debates skirts the issue of parody. If we consider what Christian says about the drag motif negating any question of authenticity and originality, we must decide if these exaggerations and imitations are being critical of norms or simply making them more consumable. This has historically been discussed through the notion of camp. Gabilondo sees camp as the quintessential form of consumerisms: “‘Hispanic camp’ is not about high-culture resistance to consumerism. Rather the opposite; ‘Hispanic camp’ is about exceeding consumerism, is about consuming consumerism, without denying it. ‘Hispanic camp’

is the excess of consumerism” (257). Gabilondo sees consumerism as a norm in itself, which means that “Hispanic camp” is already about being normal (read: a normal consumer). What is interesting about his idea is that camp is equivalent to heterosexual and familial constructs within Latina/o culture: “‘Hispanic camp’ is about the queer body that exceeds the heterosexual familial body and, by consuming it, places itself in interior excess” (257). Although I am ignoring his questions of interior and exterior that have been most notably discussed through the figure of the closet, camp becomes synonymous with the market here, or we might even say a “hyper-market.”

Yet, Gabilondo’s ideas fly in the face of Muñoz’s notion that camp is a space only for white gay male culture. Muñoz believes that queer-of-color subjects must disidentify with this majoritarian gay male culture and instead embrace the Latina/o (and African) performance styles of *choteo* and *burla*, disidentificatory campy practices that use joking or exaggerated comedic performances. For Muñoz, *choteo* deires to “de-essentialize” the equation of gay men with camp and, thus, to counteract the normality of this link (121). Using the performance work of Alina Troyano and her famous Carmelita Tropicana, he argues that *choteo* “accomplishes important cultural critique” while also “providing cover from...scenarios of direct confrontation with phobic and reactionary ideologies” (119). By thinking of “Hispanic camp” as a safe critique, Muñoz conceives of this as a hybrid performance space where *choteo* is about identifying with *and* critically disavowing dominant culture (135-6). In this sense, this form of camp appears to be a positive aesthetic in representing queer Latina/o subjects. Yet, this becomes a problem when this reactionary form becomes foundational to queer Latina/o subjects as a form of hybridity and contradiction.

This is precisely what Michael Warner claims is the universal trouble with normal, both from the heteronormative and homonormative side of things. Warner states, “We all have

contradictory desires: to be safe and to be at risk; to be responsible and to fuck the law; to know what we're doing and to forget ourselves. These desires aren't equally voiced. Many are shoved from consciousness. And no amount of moralizing will solve that problem" (215-6). Warner claims this in the face of gay marriage debates where wanting to be normally familial contradicts resisting dominant norms; he claims this in the face of legislation that ethically wants to shut down the gay porn industry while praising (and moving into) economically successful gay neighborhoods, such as West Village and Christopher Street.⁵ These contradictions, then, are nothing new on both sides of the spectrum. But, he shows how the two sides need to define themselves against one another in order for the market to work. So the dominant heteronormative culture may yell blasphemy at gay sex shops while also applauding the capital successes of gayness (along with celebrating the stereotype that gay men have good taste in food and culture) within these neighborhoods. Meanwhile, the homonormative culture may perform camp to resist and parody dominant heterosexual culture, but this also normalizes queerness as resistant and campy.

What we get at the end of this debate, ultimately, is the way camp, drag, balls, and voguing become caught up in market norms. Carmelita Tropicana might perform resistance, safely removed from the streets through the art of mimicry and *choteo*, but she has also created a cultural industry out of this performance. This cultural industry is not the mass market in a modernist sense; it is now the symbolic selling of *latinidad* as "resistant" and "queer." The industry here is not about profit, per se, but about normalizing *latinidad* as queer. *Paris Is Burning* epitomizes this in a certain way, especially when we see this largely lower-class nuyorican and black performative appropriated and capitalized on through voguing in Madonna's *Truth or Dare* tour and song "Vogue" to RuPaul's reality-television show *Drag Race* that utilizes the ultra-glamorous and dramatic catwalking and dance, attributed as coming from these

underground balls.. This phenomenon leads Judith Halberstam to state, “And so while the queens in *Paris is Burning* expressed a desire for precisely the kind of fame and fortune that did eventually accrue to voguing, the fame went to Livingston and the fortune went to Madonna” (*In a Queer Time...* 158).⁶ So we must remember that this symbolic “success” in these appropriations is exactly what those like Venus Xtravaganza desired in many ways. The market, then, normalizes this hybridity, this drag motif, this contradictory politics, and this queerness.

4.2 Dolls

This queer body is partaking in a larger narrative about the Latina/o body, especially as marketed through popular culture. From Carmen Miranda to Edward James Olmos to Jennifer Lopez, we can see the way *latinidad* must include a certain image, whether that is an exotic fruit hat, *pachuco* facial scars, or a curvaceous bottom.⁷ The most ridiculous of these images of late has been the ethnic Barbie. Inderpal Grewal’s analysis of Indian Barbie, as discussed in Chapter One, takes this notion of normal into the way the market sells us ethnicity and sexuality. She argues that the market works because it creates so-called commonplaces, stereotypes, and standards of ethnicities and sexualities, and then it easily sells these “norms” through the rather superficial instrument of clothing and accessories. She demonstrates, “As a white female tourist in an India opening itself to investment from abroad, Barbie, an icon of white, heterosexual American femininity, was able to put on a sari, a signifier of Indianness, and be ‘at home’” (82). The power of something so simple as clothing (a sari in this case) becomes a sign of the transnational and global economy. The way that the Barbie doll symbolizes consumer capitalism on a transnational scale, then, is completely synonymous with the *national* clothes she wears. Grewal is demonstrating the slippery relationship between the nationalism that Barbie is representing and the transnational commodity that is a Barbie doll. The paradox here, then, is

that Barbie as a global commodity (and a white feminine one at that) can become a national icon by simply accessorizing differently. She only needs to change her clothes and her hair color to sell nationalism transnationally.

Barbie has also become an interesting figure in the niche market of “Hispanic” advertising, too. Frances Negrón-Muntaner speaks to this “Barbie doll phenomenon” through the arrival of “Puerto Rican Barbie” in 1997, arguing that it exhibited the way Puerto Rican race became a commodity form. When discussing the pro- and anti-Barbie factions, Negrón-Muntaner states, “Those who identified as Island Puerto Ricans saw the doll as a *wavy-haired mulatta*. The majority of U.S. Puerto Ricans disagreed: the doll was *straight-haired* and *white*” (209). What is perhaps significant about this debate, although Negrón-Muntaner does not engage with this line of thought, is that this debate is about what is “normal.” One side believes “normal” Puerto Rican hair is wavy and the other straight, and these two sides are split spatially by the ocean and by nationalism (although Puerto Rico is a U.S. commonwealth, many still desire independence and maintain a national difference on the island). Thus, the different perspectives on what is normal are synonymous with a difference in nationalized perspectives.

These symbolic representations of ethnicity and nationalism, nevertheless, are clearly making money on a global scale, as well. But if these symbols are inciting these types of critiques, who could be buying them and why? Grewal relates how Mattel underwent numerous campaign revisions to get any sort of profit off Barbie. Finally, they appealed to middle-class women, the primary consumers for their children, who were identifying more and more as global consumers (103-111). Negrón-Muntaner talks about ethnic Barbie’s wild success with Puerto Rican Islanders, who enjoyed playing with “themselves” (216). According to her, Mattel uses the myth of *jíbara*—“sexually desirable and eager to do the work of the nation”—as a way to appeal to the roots of Puerto Rico, but they fused it with the sexy hot mulatta as an appeal

interracial desires (222). This appealed to many classes of women and their children on the island.

These appeals to interracial desires, however, are more important in this Barbie phenomenon than Grewal and Negrón-Muntaner emphasize. The interracial returns us more directly to Moraga's idea of a theory of flesh because the history of race relations in Latin America has been about biology and miscegenation but also about the cultural hybridities produced through colonialism. The history of *mestizaje*, in particular, has become a site to interrogate Latina/o subjectivity, from Gloria Anzaldúa (1987) to Raphael Pérez-Torres (2006). As a term that speaks to both biological racial miscegenation and cultural hybridity, *mestizaje* has come to be the main framework for thinking about the contradictions that have come to be so marketable. For instance, the mestiza, a child of Spanish conquistadors and natives of the Americas, comprises the colonial violences that have created her, but she also is a space of celebration according to many critics because her history allows for transcending these past hierarchies (through consciousness, for Anzaldúa). The celebrated mestiza of Anzaldúa, nevertheless, is also a symbol for the whitening of Latinas/os, a colonial desire to erase the indigenous blood and culture through sex and reproduction. The mestiza, then, becomes a representative of the many contradictions surrounding Latinas/os and is the "norm" as a Latina subject; violent histories make her.

Unsurprisingly, the mestiza image is one of the major selling points of ethnic Barbie. Alicia Arrizón reads this through Filipina Barbie and the appropriations of the sexy mulata: "Since the nineteenth century, the mulata's body and her presence have been demarcated in exploitative terms: she has been defined merely as an erotic symbol embodying African dance or the musical instrument that conducts the movement of her body" (101). Arrizón reads the way the mulata and mestiza, women of violent Spanish colonial miscegenation and representations of

transcendence, are appropriated just as readily by Mattel and then “Barbie-ized” for consumers. So, when Filipina Barbie hit the market, she wore the *traje de mestiza*, which is the national costume of Filipinas, and became a “glamorous interpretation of the mestiza body” (150). Arrizón considers these Barbies to be nothing more than an unattainable ideal of the ethnic self packaged by Mattel where the “reinvention of mestizaje is captured in processes defined by the commodity of ethnicity and the fixation of an identified Filipina body personifying false markings of cultural difference” (150). The history of mestizaje, in other words, becomes a material commodity, and the fashion of the mestiza and the mulata dress up the body of Barbie. The cultural clothing of India, Puerto Rico, and/or the Philippines steps in as identity. The body becomes nothing more than a way to “model” rather superficial styles that say “Indian,” “Filipino,” or “Puerto Rican. This reduction of ethnicity into commodity is what allows Negrón-Muntaner to conclude that this is a “tendency to construct identity as an accessory” (226).

Ethnic Barbie emblemizes how national identities are reduced into material commodities. Arrizón sees this as a false representation of ethnicity, and the falseness of a doll is perhaps what makes ethnic Barbie an ideal example. But, Arrizón is clearly upset by this reduction, and she argues that this fixes and traps the ethnic body “within the symbols of corporate whiteness” (150). This question of “corporate whiteness” and the marketability of ethnicity can be seen easily with dolls or playthings that are globally marketed and expensive enough that they are only available to the middle-to-upper class. In other words, these aren’t the deformed, damaged, broken, and second-hand Barbies collected by the lower-class protagonist in Sandra Cisneros’ “Barbie-Q,” although they both symbolize a similar desire to own a global commodity of femininity. Furthermore, calling these “playthings” also parodies how ethnic others are precisely envisioned as for play, a colonial residue that exoticizes and eroticizes the brown body.

One of the most exemplary figures in this market normalization of “Latina/o ethnicity as a sexual plaything” is the market success of the Carlos doll. José Quiroga complicates this selling of ethnicity with more explicit questions of sexuality in his analysis of Carlos, the Latino boy toy of the gay Ken-like doll “Billy.” For Quiroga, the history of these ethnic others is completely removed from the racial history of the U.S., which allows these ethnicities to be reduced to objects of desire: “It is also clear that the inclusion of Carlos as a boy toy entails at least a tacit recognition of the importance of the Latino presence in the United States, if not as a market (the steep doll price falls outside the spending allowance of many Latinos), then as objects of desire not fraught with the complicated histories that black and white relations have had in the United States” (177). Although U.S. colonial history and its “black and white relations” are quite different from Latin American colonial history, Quiroga overlooks the way history itself becomes a commodity here. Carlos is awash with the age-old sexualization of Latin American within the U.S. He wears his hair cropped with “door knocker” facial hair; his anatomy includes defined pecks and six-pack along with an anatomically-exaggerated cock; and he comes with delivery-boy and/or leather-boy outfits (or should I say costumes).

To conceive of Carlos as “normal,” however, is to understand how his Latin lover status is being used within gay culture. Although I have been avoiding any heavy analysis of Michael Warner’s theories on hetero-normative and homo-normative in this chapter, there are clearly rules about what is normal for both heterosexual and homosexual culture. The key word here is “culture.” This, in other words, has little to do with the sexual acts that divide these two sexualities and more to do with behaviors, everyday life, objects of consumption, and desires. In this sense, I am disrupting Warner’s wish to distinguish between statistical norms and evaluative norms, where statistical norms are understood to measure healthy sex and evaluative norms are more about setting normative standards and values (56). For Warner, the statistical claims are

what demoralize homosexuality as a minoritarian and improper act, whereas evaluative claims are about blending as a response to sexual shame (57, 60). But, this distinction means little when we see the homogenization of heterogeneity within the market because Carlos becomes the homonormative object of desire while the heteronormative response to gayness in general simply reinforces its marketability of difference. So in some ways, I have been saying that “norm” and constructions of normal are a problem in general (regardless if they are hetero or homo) because they have all been reduced to a market logic.

Thus, the toy store as a site of gay consumption, according to Quiroga, is emblematic of the norms and the regulations of these norms for the “new millennium gay and lesbian”:

The toy stores are the perfect breeding and mating grounds for the new millennium gay and lesbian. They are all about families and sappy songs. They are wonderfully communitarian in their sponsorship of the Gay Games and the AIDS ride. They relish in the gay version of the universe, which always means proving that you are gay enough to wear that T-shirt, and they provide the comfortable, homogenous environment where you can buy those edible undies without lapsing back into the bad old times of furtive Times Square shopping, when homosexuals still had not turned into Gays, and then into Proud Gays who agreed with the ransacking of Times Square. (173)

I quote Quiroga at length here because his description implicitly illustrates how gay culture in a post-Stonewall era is quite normal. The desire for “comfortable, homogeneous environment” and a space of family should remind us of the balls in *Paris Is Burning*, where biological families are replaced with houses and the balls offers a comfortable space. This is all accompanied by shopping, or an unbridled “ransacking of Times Square.” Consumption, here, is a part of these norms and the making of community.

Of course, Quiroga is pointing to a norm that is often attributed to gay white men in urban spaces, and although this New York urban space is also embraced by Muñoz in many of his examples of queer-of-color aesthetics, we need to be careful in assuming that these norms are spatially queer-for-everyone. Luis Aponté-Pares, in his work on Latino gay men in New York,

reminds us how “[e]xcluded from many bars, watched as criminals by store owners, or harassed by policeman, Latino queers know that every visit to Chelsea or the Village is an act of courage” (368). Aponté-Pares relates how these traditionally white and upper-class queerscapes have proven unwelcoming and have forced Latino GLBTTQ to produce their own spaces in their own locales, such as Washington Heights and the South Bronx. What is perhaps interesting, however, is that although these Latino locales are loaded with a sense of cultural displacement, they still produce an economically-charged space. Aponté-Pares even describes the queerscapes of Jackson Heights through store fronts on Roosevelt Avenue: “almost indistinguishable from other storefronts, are a number of gay bars ...which intermix with storefront churches; Columbian, Peruvian, and Korean restaurants; and other immigrant sites” (368). Gayness is understood not through homosexual acts here but through storefront bars. And although Aponté-Pares labels this an “informal economy,” this is still collapsing the queer into the economy.

Thus, I must return to the significance that this is a *neoliberal* market logic. These dolls and the consumption of them are about the liberation of the market from old hierarchies of regulation where there are clear actors of lordship and bondage. Instead, this market is self-regulated by ideas and practices of normal. This self-regulation is due to the fundamental self-interest of this market, where these dolls represent our identity and the successes or failures of our identities. There is a sort of “liberation in the act of having this doll,” according to Quiroga, because it is no longer a prohibited and invisible niche in the world (179). Yet, these dolls tell us a story about the way difference and niches are homogenized and normalized as necessary to the market. When these are overtly sexualized, as we see with these Latina/o and ethnic dolls, this reduces these bodies to purely erotic objects. Of course, as dolls, subjectivity is quite literally missing from the picture, except as a symbolic inference. When subjectivity becomes the central question within a narrative, however, this becomes much more messy and less easy, particularly

because sexuality and corporeal representation becomes more violent, specifically in Cristina Garcia's *Dreaming in Cuban*.

4.3 Recalls

When we understand this corporeal phenomenon as specific to neoliberalism, we begin to see the way sexuality and gender become fundamental to the dissemination of free-market discourses and practices. Kathy Griffin has been working on the relationship between gender and the neoliberal institution the World Bank. According to Griffin, the World Bank—mostly known for its rerouting of money to the select few and its questionable Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs) that put many “poor” countries in immense debt—retained “woman” as a rhetorical tool in promoting a politics of development (125). This is most obvious in its Operational Policy (what Griffin calls its “gender policy”) of 1994 (revised and reissued in 2003), where production and development are constantly framed through the metaphor of “reproduction.” For instance, Griffin relates how the World Bank stated in 2006 that women and girls work harder than men and are more likely to invest their earnings in their children, which consolidates the opposition between man and woman, while also standardizing heterosexuality into the world market (154-155). This discourse on heterosexuality, and what Griffin considers the World Bank’s support of heteronormativity, reduces neoliberal policy into normalized and sexualized notions of reproduction.

According to Griffin, the only way to make this gender policy work was to sell it as a policy of inclusion. She states:

The Bank’s adoption of a gender mainstreaming strategy occurred at a time, under Wolfensohn’s leadership, of so-called ‘inclusion’ at the Bank, part of an effort to integrate the ‘social’ and ‘economic’ dimensions of development... [by] ...replacing the ruthless dimension of the state and uncritical adoration of the market advocated in the Washington Consensus of the 1980s with a rhetoric of

‘development community’, ‘forging partnerships’, and of giving people back their ‘self-esteem’ and ‘pride’ through policies of ‘inclusion’. (126)

Griffin wants to demonstrate how gender (especially femininity) becomes used to soften the image and successes of the World Bank. Her notion of “inclusion,” however, perhaps takes the World Bank’s agenda a bit too literally and negates her earlier claim that neoliberalism has an “inherently binary discursive structure” (17). In other words, she overlooks how these policies of inclusion require an understanding of who or what is excluded. So, when we turn to another neoliberal institution, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), we can clearly see these policies of exclusion. For instance, Argentina, the IMF’s model country, underwent a major economic crisis in 2001, where Argentinians blamed the IMF’s pressure to privatize national infrastructures (health, education, and security) and neoliberals blamed Argentina’s poor fiscal structure.⁸ This rift resulted in growing inequality within Argentina, and we were able to clearly see who had benefited (and who had not) from the IMF’s programs, policies, and loan restrictions. The *cacerolazo* riots that took place in Argentina between 2001 and 2002 escalated to property destruction of banks and foreign privatized companies, where the masses attacked those who had benefited from IMF intervention while the country fell into economic crisis. Similar situations and events occurred world-wide when corrupt banking and questionable investing bottomed-out the global stock market: the banks made off with inflated interest, tax money, and slaps on the hand while the masses lost their homes, their jobs, and their money. The rich were included in the money making, and the poor were excluded. These rhetorics of universal inclusion, in other words, were red herrings for the practices of exclusion.

Within these spaces of national exclusion is where Latina/o bodies have been theorized the most. Whether through theories of the subaltern or theories of diaspora, the excluded Latina/o is a figure that permeates both literature and criticism. Ellen McCracken argues that “one of the

most striking ironies of multiculturalism is the notion of inclusion through difference” (13).

McCracken is describing what also is called “politics-of-difference” and pluralism, as discussed

in Chapter Three. But, with the normal celebration of difference, she sees this as a market logic:

“Primarily because difference is more marketable than sameness, contemporary mainstream

publishers in the United States—although with critics, academics, and the press—valorize

writers such as Cisneros and Garcia for their presentations of what is perceived to be the exotic

Other” (13). It is this logic of difference, contrast, and contradiction that has come to define not

only Latina/o literature but also the market. Thus, when we talk about inclusion within Latina/o

literature and markets, we are also talking about exclusion. Literarily and historically, this idea of

exclusion has been wrapped up in questions of exile.

María de los Angeles Torres describes exile as a colonial feature. She states, “Massive emigration changes the landscape. It produces loss. In a strange sort of way an exile community may in fact reinforce the borders of a nation-state. Exile entails the leaving of a country. An exile community abroad is a constant reminder that the borders still exist” (38). This “politics of exile” is what Torres begins to call the mythology of the exile and nation, and she believes this to be heavily steeped in the history of Spanish colonialism which originally constructed Cuba as a land of Spanish exiles (39). These colonial residues have come to explain why many Cubans who left during the revolution often identify as a diasporic community who’ve gone through many exiles. In many ways, “exile” as a colonial feature reminds us that borders have been crossed and that borders are still very much in place. But, also, if we think about exile as a colonial feature, we have to keep in mind how colonialism in Latin America worked: through rape and the violently sexual attempt to whiten the natives. This understanding of exile is still pertinent to the later Cuban exile when Castro rose to power, and we can still read these exile politics as steeped in violent sexuality.⁹

This has been exemplified most notably in Cristina Garcia's *Dreaming in Cuban*. Ample critical work has been done on Garcia's canonical novel, from Elena Machado Sáez to Ellen McCracken, where it is often read through the issue of generational difference and the woman question. Both Sáez and McCracken in particular read the way these women undergo corporeal violence, and they link it to the consequences of late capitalism. Although I am wary to call this corporeal violence a *consequence* (since cause-effect logic doesn't seem quite descriptive enough), this novel does capture the ways in which sexuality, gender, and the free-market become entangled in the representation of Latinas. And it does this through the trope of exile, loss, and nostalgia.

A story about three generations of the del Pino family and its four Cuban (-American) women, *Dreaming in Cuban* is one of the more famous Latina/o novels to bring together gender and exile. Following the political and sexual struggles of these women, as Batista's Cuba becomes Castro's Cuba, the novel brings together gender and exile through the trope of corporeal violence. This record of violence within the family and between the women is constantly moving between Cuba and the United States, as it tries to capture the way families were ripped apart during the revolution. In many ways, the relationship between Cuban and the U.S. has always been understood through the politics of exile since the 1960s, and much Cuban-American literature and cultural criticism has normalized exile as a feature of these identities and cultural productions. *Dreaming in Cuban* is no different.

The novel, most recently argued, demonstrates a commodification of *cubanidad* through these politics of exile, according to Sáez. Exile, as Torres shows, is a loaded concept that includes not only spatial banishment but also constructions of nostalgia, memory, and loss. Sáez believes that these politics of exile in *Dreaming in Cuban* are caused by the economic split between Cuba and the United States: socialism (and then communism) versus capitalism. She reads this in the

novel mostly through the characterization of Pilar, the third generation character who is the granddaughter of Celia and daughter of Lourdes. According to Sáez, Pilar “stands somewhere in between these two extremes of Lourdes’s celebration of capitalism and Celia’s rejection of commodification” (136). She analyzes Pilar as contradictory figure who resides in an economic and political third space. Sáez, however, solely uses this “third space” concept to construct more dualities throughout the essay. For instance, this hybridized third space that Sáez formulates for Pilar also constructs a duality between assimilation (into U.S. cultural production) and resistance (nostalgia for *post*-revolution Cuba). The role of Pilar, then, becomes central to envisioning these contradictions.

Pilar is the so-called nostalgic character because she looks at post-revolution Cuba and her Abuela Celia with a romantic eye. This is the stereotypical position for the 1.5 generation, according to Gustavo Perez Firmat as he archived in his three stages. Firmat’s three stages are substitutive, destitution, and institution. The substitutive stage is “we are (still) there” (8). The destitution stage is “‘we are nowhere.’ [...] Mercifully, time passes and ‘nowhere’ begins to feel like home” (10). The stage of institution occurs over time: “Destitution gives way to institution, to the establishment of a new relation between person and place. To institute is to stand one’s ground, to dig in and endure. Thus, the theme of the third stage is not ‘we are there’ or ‘we are nowhere,’ but rather, ‘here we are’ (10-11). Firmat’s now-canonical theories on *cubanidad* in the U.S. have normalized generational difference into the Cuban American experience, since exile exaggerates the difference between those who stayed in Cuba and those who left after the revolution. Pilar in many ways goes through these stages throughout the novel, although her abuela still being in Cuba doesn’t allow the maturation to be clean and easy; in other words, she is always marked with some form of nostalgia. But, Firmat’s theories celebrate these experiences

and processes, taking a pro-capitalist stance when he argues “here we are.” This celebration becomes deeply problematic when we can see the violence it wreaks in *Dreaming in Cuban*.

Torres, breaking from Firmat’s celebratory stance, describes this as a process of loss that forces exilic subjects to recreate memories from scratch. Post-exile, the exilic subject goes through two statuses: *destierro* (separation from homeland) and *destiempo* (sense of dislocation). *Destierro* and *destiempo*, according to Torres, must “include the loss of memory of a place,” and the inability to remember or “to reproduce the past or to return to a prior status compels the re-creation of memory of what was left behind” (37). For Torres, nostalgia is not romantic memory but is a form of fiction. The nostalgia prevalent in the exile community reflects the impossibility of return. As opposed to yearning, or the desire for something that may be attainable, “nostalgia is a desire that can never be realized” (38). To think of memory as a form of fiction, however, seems to make the violence associated with exile less significant in some ways, especially since fiction suggests this all exists only in imagination. And, this becomes quite problematic when we think of these narratives and memories as deeply informed by very real and troubling economic realities, such as the Cuban embargo and the subsequent migrations. When we have a story such as *Dreaming in Cuban*, these politics of exile result in a corporeal violence that is profoundly tied to the economy.

The novel is full of violence on female bodies: “Abuse, disfigurement, and violation of women’s bodies appear throughout the novel—from eating disorders and the transmission of syphilis from husband to wife, to the scars inflicted by knives during sexual assaults, rapes, and masectomies” (McCracken 25). This trope of corporeal violence in the novel brings McCracken to argue that “Garcia critiques the excessive appropriation of U.S. economic and cultural models by the fanatical Cuban exiles in a series of parodical images” where these images “overcode the political debate about whether capitalism or socialism is the better social system” (25-6).

According to McCracken, the violence is an exaggerated form in which critiques of capitalism versus socialism play out. This makes violence sound quite similar to Karen Christian's drag motif. But, I am wary about equating the novel's violence to parody. The violences within this novel are demonstrative of the way sexuality and the neoliberal market co-operate.

The most exemplary moment in the novel of this is when Pilar is sexually assaulted by a group of young New York boys while she is going to college. As Pilar describes, "The boys push me under the elm, where it's somehow still dry. They pull off my sweater and carefully unbutton my blouse. With the knife still at my throat, they take turns suckling my breasts" (202). This sexual assault is a violence intoned with threats and fear, but we get little description of Pilar's emotions here. Instead, Pilar tries to rationalize the violence: "They're children, I tell myself, trying to contain my fear. Incredibly, I hear the five-note pounding of Lou Reed's 'Street Hassle,' that crazy cello with its low, dying voice" (202). This violence to the body makes her remember a song that *pounds*, is *crazy*, and contains a *dying* voice. She is replacing her experience with a Lou Reed LP she recently bought. The violence within the novel is replaced or collapsed into the act of consumption.

Sáez reads the record/LP as comforting to Pilar. Sáez notes: "The presence of the market through the record hints at the shift in context that has complicated the terms of exploitation, strangely providing Pilar with a sense of comfort in the face of victimization" (145n.6). Although Sáez believes this is the comforting nature of "the market," Pilar's memory of the song is described with negative forces. We, thus, can read this in two ways: that the novel is performing nostalgia for communist Cuba by equating violence with capitalism or the novel can only make sense of these sexual violences through the market. I would tend toward the later since these forms of violence reach across generations, economies, and nations, especially with Pilar's abuela, Celia.

On the other side of this consumption, we have Celia's volunteer labor for communist Cuba. But Celia is described from the beginning as having a long history of corporeal violence. The novel begins with Celia on the beach in a rather dream-like state and floating in the water. Her dream-like state is full of memories: "She remembers the painful transitions to spring, the sea grapes and the rains, her skin a cicatrix" (8). Her skin being a cicatrix is both sudden and grotesque in this memory, although coupled with a "painful transition." The idea of her body either being one large scar or being marked with numerous scars makes her seem monstrous, as though she has been pieced back together, a sort of Frankenstein. Her memory of herself and her scars, nevertheless, are representative of Celia's history of violence, with the scar being a trope of history never forgotten. In many ways, the scar and this corporeal violence materialize from memory and nostalgia.

Nevertheless, Celia's scarred body is one marked by labor. For instance, when Celia goes to one of Castro's speeches, she decides to help the Revolution by working in the sugarcane fields. Since the U.S. was the main buyer of Cuban sugarcane before the Revolution and the embargo, this work depends on the Soviet Union's need for sugar. But Celia convinces herself that her individual labor is securing the exportation of sugarcane. This individualism ironically contradicts the doctrines of communism and the point of voluntary labor, but it is this individualism or ego-centric approach that makes violence and memory market-friendly. For instance, Celia sees a worker killed by another worker without even really acknowledging this violence: "One day, a worker slashes a volunteer with a machete. Celia stares as the blood mingles with the sweat of his victim's chest" (44). The killing of the worker does not faze Celia because she is solely a working body in this moment; she is a machine that works. But, the corporeal violence of labor matters when it is her *own* body: "She examines her hands daily with pride" (45). She looks at this laborious violence to her body with pride (for the Cause); the cuts

and tears on her hands imbibe her with the power to affect markets, even if it really won't bring more money and resources to Cuba.

Of course, communist Cuba was never anti-market per se. It was simply anti-*free*-market, hence why Castro nationalized all business and attempted to eradicate the foreign, privatized industry. But, it would be too simple to say that a nation-centric market is truly different and opposed to a global market. The novel demonstrates the connection quite poetically by the magical connection between Pilar and Celia, who can hear one another across the ocean (and possibly across time). This lends Torres to analyze, "Celia writes of Pilar, her granddaughter who eventually goes into exile, 'She will remember everything.' Exiles, then, are commonly assigned the role of remembering for the nation. This defies the passive role commonly ascribed to those who leave the homeland. It further challenges the standard prediction that, upon arriving in the United States, the exile's homeland would be forgotten" (164). The destructive force of memory, for Torres, is that it consistently reinstates the nation for the exile. The exile can do nothing but remember the nation. The nation, then, is emblemized through the capitalist/exile in the story.

In many ways, Torres' argument underscores the nation as the major structure for understanding exile. Of course, this idea of "nation" is tied directly to the economical concerns surrounding the nation of Cuba. Kate McCullough offers another way of reading the nation, however. Instead of thinking of Cuban exile through the economy, she returns to the structure of colonialism, arguing that the exile's loss "emerges out of and simultaneously carries the traces of (in other words, it transculturates) earlier national colonial structures of racial and sexual hierarchy and violence" (580). The figure of "nation," here, is simply synonymous with colonialism, whereas transculturation speaks to the residues of old structures of hierarchy found in colonial and/or national structures. These colonial and national residues, according to

McCullough, are always marked “with an eruption of physical violence that both serves as a metaphor of the repressed violence of the colonial legacy” (598). McCullough’s argument is not radically different from Torres’, but it definitely wishes the nation into the past. And with that, she seems to align more with Firmat, where there seems to be a pro-capitalist streak of logic here. The nationalization and colonialism that marks Cuba’s history both with Batista and Castro is violent, but McCullough perhaps forgets that this violence is not simply on the about Cuban nationalism but also about the way capitalism integrates these pasts, these nationalisms, and these histories into the market. This returns us to Sáez’s argument that the novel’s violence comes from the contradiction between socialism and capitalism; the violence is being torn between a celebration of capitalism and a rejection of commodification (136).

Whether in Cuba or in the U.S., whether first generation or 1.5 generation, whether naturalized or socially constructed, or whether included or excluded, the del Pino women experience their sexuality and ethnicity through many levels of contradiction. What is central to these contradictions in the novel is how it can only be understood through the economical split between socialism and capitalism. And this split, historically and literarily, has been marked with violence, a violence that now shows itself on the body. *Dreaming in Cuban* ultimately emblemizes the ways in which violence becomes a normal thing for Cuban-American women. This normalization and its economical foundation are Lou Reed and Benny Moré LPs lying on the ground while a chica gets assaulted.

4.4 Conclusion

In 2004, Jennifer Lopez married Marc Anthony and had 2.5 kids. The quintessential pan-Latina dancer/actress/singer married the archetypal salsa star, and they fulfilled the most normal domestic expectations imaginable. J. Lo even disappeared from the public eye for a while,

performing the eye-rolling role of the good wife and mother. When she finally came back into the public eye with the “new” *American Idol* show in 2009, she disrupted the good wife and mother image. Unsurprisingly, in 2010, she and Marc Anthony divorced.

In 1999, Ricky Martin made history with “Livin’ La Vida Loca” and his Elvis-esque meets salsa hip movements. He was exalted as the Latin-fever paragon: women swooned and gay men became his loyal fans. But he was a one-record phenomenon. In 2010, after ten years of staunch denial, Martin admitted publicly that he was gay. No one was surprised or cared all that much by then.

These three popular figures of *latinidad* show us the way the market pairs Latinas/os with sexuality to the point that eroticism, queerness, and exoticism are constantly normalized.¹⁰ They also, furthermore, exemplify the contradictions which are now “normal” to Latinos: they are domestic-but-not, or they are queer in the most unsurprising and un-odd way possible. It is perhaps with irony, then, that Negrón-Muntaner remembers from her childhood, “So appalled by normality was young Ricky [Martin] that he saw television as the best line of escape. He was willing to give up his family and community for the seductive powers of illusion and the opportunities that objectification could afford him” (249). But she also points to how he used the (American) ideology that Latinos are “inherently musical” as a way to “escape” into commodity (255). This contradiction is both about being “appalled” with normality and embracing the norm that is shaped through consumer culture, though. And, these popular figures become emblematic of the ways in which Latinas/os are both made by the market and complicit with the market while the market simultaneously appropriates their (ab)normal and resistant subjectivities.

This chapter, then, has meant to break open two sides that we are supposed to believe are intrinsically opposed. On one side, the Latina/o sexual subjectivity is one of violence, market appropriation, and colonial history. On the other side, Latina/o sexual subjectivity is celebratory,

resistant to majoritarian dominance(s), and “queer.” These two sides show up in the theory and criticism, as well as the cultural texts themselves. But, this opposition is a false one under neoliberalism because both sides are necessary for the market to work. This opposition and the many other contradictions that I have attempted to put together in this chapter are all a part of a normalizing process that allows the market to make Latinas/os into sexual subject-objects and bring this “norm” into everyday life.

Of course, this has larger implications. Everyday life is not simply about what type of Latin American coffee we drink every morning (Columbian? Costa Rican?). It’s about the ways in which nationalisms and national identities are translated and sold through transnational commodities. What I hope this chapter has shown, in the larger picture, is that this is an increasingly complex and messy process, but ultimately, the global, unbridled economy needs these national differences in order to work. The dissemination of national difference and contradiction is why the neoliberal market is so successful at worming its way into everyday life and being put completely out of question. And this normalization requires a more economically nuanced “theory of the flesh” because it plays out on the corporeal representations that Latinas/os perform, fictionalize, remember, sell, and buy.

Notes

¹ Chicana feminism has often been understood through Norma Alarcón's famous article "In the Tracks of a 'Native' Woman" (1991), where she establishes Xicanisma as no longer about authenticity but about identity as fluid and multiple (373), as I discussed in chapter three. As a movement, Chicana feminism (or Xicanisma) spoke against the machismo and patriarchy within the Chicano movement, the traditionalism within Mexican-American communities, the homogenizing structure of the Women's Movement, and the nation-state. In this sense, it was conceived as intrinsically resistant. Of course, it was a progressive movement too. It wished to open up possibilities for Chicanas to be more than mothers, nuns, and/or prostitutes, influencing Anzaldúa to say that Chicanas now had the opportunity to enter the world through education and scholarship (at least a few) (39). This progressive stance opened up the second goal behind the movement which was to recover and legitimize the lost or ignored histories, folklores, and stories of Mexican and Mexican-American women, as we see with Rosaura Sánchez's *Telling Identities* (1995) and also with Latina and specifically lesbian histories in the collections *Telling to Live: Latina Feminist Testimonios* (2001) and *Companeras: Latina Lesbians* (1994). But, in many ways, Chicana feminism found itself reinforcing the structures it wished to resist and transcend, by diffusing internal differences and producing dominant ideology as privileged intellectuals, a point Sánchez analyzes in her article "Ethnicity, Ideology, and Academia." It is this contradiction between resisting hegemony and producing it that brings Sonia Saldivar-Hull to remind us that we must constantly "probe the significance of our self-interpellation as 'Chicanas'" (54).

² In many ways, I am drawing on Juana Rodríguez's definition of "queer *latinidad*": "The spastic contradictions and wild paradoxes of bodies and sites, identities and spaces intersecting are exemplified by the juxtaposition of these two terms, both provisional and immediate" (9). And although Rodríguez is not straying radically from most definitions of queer subjectivity—as a "subject-in-process" (31)—her methodology on queer *latinidad* as impossible to fully describe—"a complete picture is wholly illusory" (31)—is perhaps one of the few honest approaches to the way contradictions and processes of contradiction are mystifying.

³ This aspect of Chicana feminism has been interrogated by Karen Christian and Ellie D. Hernández, among others. Christian's refiguration of this movement will become increasingly clear in this chapter, especially as she puts it in conversation with performance studies. Hernández, however, sees her project as extending the Chicana feminist project of Moraga, Sánchez, and Alarcón, allowing her to truly "transcend the nation," through her notion of postnationalism or a "transitory phase" between cultural nationalism and transnationalism (viii, 4). Focusing on the Chicana/Native academic organization Mujeres Activas de Letras y Cambios Sociales (Active Women of Letters and Social Change) at one point, she argues that they mark a movement "from grassroots outside of the university to a research analysis supported by funding inside the agency that 'produced' knowledge," which allowed for Xicanisma to grow and be validated (65). The problem and contradiction here, which Hernández glosses over, is that these organizations also produced their own power dynamics in social and intellectual formations.

⁴ I'm making some major assumptions in my definition of "sexuality" here. I am, however, thinking of this theory as being founded in the work of Marquis de Sade. The narrative structure of *Philosophy in the Bedroom*, for instance, demonstrates a tension and movement between the performing of the sex act and the discourses (or philosophies) about sex. The seduction of the

young naïve virgin Eugénie is represented through a dialogue between the characters where Eugénie is being “educated” in the ways of libertinism. Her education is approached through practice and discourse, the practices making many see this work as lurid pornography and the discourses being read as immoral dogmas about pleasure. I use this example as a way to point to the dual understanding of sexuality, as both practice (or act) and discourse (or ideology).

Nevertheless, Sade’s work has in no way come to be the principal theory on sexuality. In post-1970s criticism, this title is often given to Judith Butler. Butler’s theories on gender and the body were foundational in forming the social constructivist camp, where “woman” was understood as socially, politically, and historically constructed through performances of gender roles and expectations. Butler’s ideas of gender, where the subject is not *determined* by gender norms but *regulated* through a process of repetition (*Gender Trouble* 185), have hurled the theories of sexuality into a deeply ideological issue (as seen in works by Leo Bersani, Dwight McBride, and Lauren Berlant, for instance), but many have attempted to reinsert the practices and acts of sexuality within these theories (as seen in the works of Lee Edleman, Gayle Rubin, and Carole Pateman, for instance).

⁵ Warner showcases the way in which sexuality is organizing social relations in New York City, and I utilize his ideas in a largely Latina/o project because they establish a macroeconomic process at work here. I see Warner’s work as demonstrating sexuality as a commodity fetishism, in many ways. However, I should note that Warner does not wish for this commodification to be the end-all and be-all of gay culture and subjects; he calls on making sex publics more public, and to organize “a city’s users on any footing other than identitarianism” in our “culture of privatization” (192). How this comes about exactly is still to be seen.

⁶ Of course, Halberstam sees the contradiction around these desires for mainstreaming and the mainstream absorption of queer culture, yet she ultimately thinks the more visibility on queer culture and the intellectual recodification and interpretation on these processes and subjectivity will ultimately have a positive effect, because they will circulate “a sense of its multiplicity” and show it to be a “radical cultural work” (159). I’m not sure I find this a necessary project when thinking through the problems of neoliberalism. I’m much more concerned with locating, describing, and analyzing these contradictions as a way to demystify an economic logic that has been put out of the question (and/or normalized) in everyday life.

⁷ Frances R. Aparicio in her co-edited anthology *Tropicalizations* (1997) describes this problem through the idea of tropicalization. In her article, she sees the eroticizing of Latinas/os as coming from the U.S. media’s Latino-mania, which persistently described and represented Latinas/os as hot and sizzling, most notably exemplified by Carmen Miranda and her “tropical hat.” But, Aparicio wishes to complicate this one-sided view of tropicalizations; she argues that there is also a process of self-tropicalization occurring. She exemplifies this through actress Maria Conchita Alonso—who “defines her own body as a space of sensual pleasure for consumers and fans” (199)—and composer Willie Colón—whose song “Color americano” “engages in a process of racializing himself” (200). In many ways, I am trying to keep these two sides of tropicalization in conversation and in contradiction within this chapter to demonstrate the multidirectional modes of representation that are appropriated into and exercised by the market.

⁸ See Stephen Webb, “Argentina: Hardening the Provincial Budget Constraint” in *Fiscal Decentralization and the Challenge of Hard Budget Constraints* (2003).

⁹ See *By Heart/De Memoria: Cuban Women’s Journeys In and Out of Exile*, Ed. Maria de los Angeles Torres, Philadelphia: Temple UP, 2003, for a collection of essays, poems, memoirs, and contestations that demonstrate the connection between exile, gender, and sexuality. In particular, Achy Obeja’s “The Boat” (15-16), a poem in both Spanish and English, imagines the lost country as a former lover with old bed sheets becoming a double entendre of both exilic loss and post-coital materials.

¹⁰ For more comprehensive discussions on popular figures of *latinidad*, see Clara E. Rodríguez’s edited collection *Latin Looks: Images of Latinas and Latinos in the U.S. Media* (1998).

5. THE (BIO)STATE OF IMMIGRATION: SECURITY THEATER AND THE LIFE OF CAPITAL

The U.S.-Mexico border has become a site where the nation continues to hyperbolically perform regulatory acts on Latina/o bodies. Interweaved with these nation-state performances, we also find the revival of vigilantism and discourses about the livelihood of the U.S. These often violent regulatory acts find validity through state institutionalization, utilizing both military actions and police actions. The U.S.-Mexico border, in other words, is no longer a place of celebratory nationalism for many Latinos but both a war zone and a site of police brutality. The two institutions—police and military—have long been understood as two very different and often opposing jurisdictions. The police state has long been understood to be a disciplinary institution *within the walls of the nation*.¹ Thus, it is a disciplinary institution for a group of people joined together through citizenship. The military state has often been understood as regulations dealing with that which is *abroad*, at least in the U.S.² Thus, it is an institution that partakes in the global world of many nations. But this institutional difference is no longer easily categorized traditionally. Here in the U.S., the differentiation between military states and police states has given way to the ambiguous term “security.” The U.S. is perhaps better understood as a “security state.”³ This descriptor—“security state”—does not have an institutional context, such as “police” and “military.” Instead, it remains an ambiguous rhetoric, suggesting that *something* or *someone* needs to be protected and made safe. This “something,” however, is never transparent since “security state” is used to describe a dual project. On one hand, it speaks to the nationally-based securing of citizens, which we see with the civil police and now, perhaps falsely, the Department of Homeland Security.⁴ On the other hand, this project simultaneously speaks to the international securing of our export-import resources, our affiliate-enemy ties, the “need” for military bases in certain resource-heavy spaces, and our “economic interests.” This

dual project has collapsed the difference between police and military in significant ways, especially on the U.S.-Mexico border. In the age of neoliberalism, “security” replaces and lords over the complex and nuanced processes by which the nation and the economy interact.

As we see a borderless economy arise for the U.S., we are also seeing an increase in policing, militarizing, and fortification on the U.S.-Mexico border. The border itself has become a strange site for security, because it is on and around the border where we see the differentiations between the police and the military collapse. With the short-lived “reality show” *Homeland Security* in 2008, we got to take the Border Patrol, and other like institutions, into our home for an hour and cheer as they took down “terrorists,” baby and drug smugglers, and all-around transnational “illegality.” For an hour, we got millisecond cuts of people splashed across our television sets without knowing their stories, without understanding all of their languages and dialects, and without necessarily seeing them as people. Meanwhile, the U.S. government touts free market policies, continues to support NAFTA in the senate, and has placed much of the regulation of illegal immigration on the corporations and businesses who hire them with the 1986 Immigration Act.⁵ To say that this Border policing and militarizing is solely *a show*, then, would not be too far off, as these neoliberal economic policies contradict the very fortification of nation-state boundaries. This symbolic “show,” nevertheless, performs an institutional amalgam of police, military, and “private” militia. This blurring symbolizes a hyper-regulation for “worried and fearful” citizens. By making a hyper institutional force, we can *act* like the (U.S.) nation is still in control, like the free market economy is not some unregulated monster, and like “we the people” are in no way connected to these “illegal” border crossings through our own consumerism.

Numerous theorists—Masao Miyoshi and Noam Chomsky, for instance—speak to how neoliberal policies are intrinsically opposed to the nation. They, however, often pass over the

way immigration, a process that should encourage and uphold neoliberalism and its “borderlessness,” is actually forcing the nation-state to respond with great fervor, specifically in the U.S. I contend in these last two chapters that the practice of and discourses on immigration allows us to see the way neoliberalism and the nation interact. This chapter, in particular, locates this interaction on the literal border, where crossing borders both legally and illegally are regulated through a discourse of biopolitics and the symbolic performances of security.⁶ By thinking of immigration this way, this chapter hopes to tease out how and why the many discourses arise about citizenship, a country’s livelihood, and fortification of the border in the midst of neoliberal borderlessness. The problem here is clear: the U.S. stance on immigration has contradicted its policies on an unregulated global economy. In other words, money can cross borders quite easily, but people cannot.

I consider this phenomenon through the theoretical model of biopolitics, which has also become one of the major theoretical models for thinking about neoliberalism. By first looking at Luis Urrea’s novel *The Devil’s Highway* and its sentimentalism, I will speak to the way “human” and “life”—two major terms within biopolitics—are put into question through the figure of the immigrant. Then I will delve into a deeper exploration of the theories surrounding this apparatus of biopolitics, where I will demonstrate how this theory looks like nothing more than a symbolic performance of “security.” I, then, will exemplify these performances as they are textualized in both Urrea’s *The Devil’s Highway* and Alex Rivera’s futuristic sci-fi film *Sleep Dealer*. Ultimately, I argue that the immigrant figures in these texts represent how performances of national security often dehumanize and commodify the immigrant in favor of a good “life” for a select few citizens and the nation. I contend that Urrea and Rivera bring to light a process where neoliberalism and its biopolitics require the structure of the Nation in order to *perform* security and make immigrants into commodities.

5.1 **From Humanization to Securitization**

This argument puts into question what “human,” “person,” “life,” body, and subjectivity even mean. I do not claim to be aligning myself with any of the great philosophers and theorists of humanity—Kenneth Burke, Descartes, Hegel, etc.—precisely because I do not see this project as partaking in those particular broad discussions. Nevertheless, a definition of “human” is no easy feat without these philosophies. I will simply state that for the purposes of this chapter, then, “human” means that which differentiates wo/man from machine. This differentiation might be called spirit, essence, identity, consciousness, or subjectivity depending on what circle you roam; I am more inclined to call this subjectivity. By calling this “subjectivity,” I mean to point to the structures of ontology (i.e. Being) that collide with and inform the logic of power relations. We might associate this structure of “subjectivity” to the Althusserian apparatus of ideology, which Jose Muñoz summarizes as “the inescapable realm in which subjects are called into being” since it is the “imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence,” located within, for example, the state apparatus (11). When I invoke “person” or “personhood,” again I am speaking to that idea that all humans have subjectivity. “Life,” thus, when about humans and people, is not simply biological or genetic in this chapter. It speaks to social journeys, ideas, and dominant norms that enlighten wo/man with something more than just a “body,” an outer shell of machinery that is sometimes used to fashion and objectify one’s subjectivity. As the previous three chapters have shown, “subjectivity” is a deeply troubled and capitalized term in the neoliberal age. These definitions, albeit simple and overly abstract in their brevity, are necessary when discussing a theory such as biopolitics, which allows many to make universal claims about the state of humanity and elide the nation. However, by connecting these theories with immigrant

narratives, I hope to show how nation-state structures, such as border walls and security, inform the processes of regulation around the immigrant.

Luis Urrea's *The Devil's Highway* narrates the story of the Wellton 26, better known as the Yuma 14 since those were the one's who died, through the Border Patrol's opinions and records. Urrea positions this mass death of a group of "illegal" *mexicanos* as a "part of the job." We are taken on the journey of Devil's Highway, overtly looking through the eyes of the Border Patrol and records of the 26 men as they travel this deadly path from the south-eastern Mexican state of Veracruz up to the Desolation deserts of Arizona. The limitation of this "true" story is that the Border Patrol records and documents are incomplete, where even the names of the Wellton 26 are unlisted and unknown in most cases. The interviews Urrea conducted with particular agents are purely "personal perspective," changing from one agent to another, one story to another. This subjective approach immediately puts into question the way the government *records* and *regulates* illegal immigration. The lack of documenting in these documents that Urrea used to create this narrative signifies the undocumentability of immigration. This is perhaps why Urrea creates a narrative entirely dependent on *pathos*. By appealing solely to the reader's emotions and sentiments about brutal death and those who deal with it, Urrea inadvertently refigures this political immigrant narrative into a sentimental humanist narrative.

Most notably where we see this refiguration of politics into sentiment is when Urrea goes into a deep and grotesque description of the documents, specifically the photographs of the dead. The narrator describes looking through public records issued by both the INS and sheriff's reports. His gaze relates the various levels of decay in the bodies. Many body parts are unrecognizable, while other parts remain intact but are bloated with death. The narrator cannot even tell the sex of the victims; the difference in decay is moot. The photographs all show the same thing: all the dead are stretched out naked with their skin cracking open from being baked

for days by the Arizona sun. And after these intense descriptions, he tells us, “For many of them, these are the first portraits for which they posed” (35). By ending the description on this note, we are suddenly reminded that these are people, not simply dead objects in photographs. After a barrage of grotesque descriptions, this reflection works in two ways. On one hand, it is to reanimate the immigrant back to “life” by suggesting that they “posed” for these photographs and, in many ways, to reconstitute them as people through the act of getting a “portrait.” Simultaneously, this moment alludes to the lack of portraiture required for passports, visas, and other legal documentation required for crossing national borders, especially since the narrator makes a point to distinguish these photos as their *first* portraits. This moment creates conflicting paradigm within the story: on one side, the immigrant is a human being, and on the other side, the immigrant is the antagonist to state institutional “politics.” This story consistently attempts to bring personhood back to the Wellton 26 throughout the narrative, through a sort of reanimation of their lives that needs to appeal to reader sentiment. The “politics” (or lack thereof) in the story are, nevertheless, deeply triggering this sentiment.

This begs the question “why”? Elizabeth Barnes argues that sentimental literature, of the early U.S., evokes sympathy as a way to promote and discipline democracy. She sees the sentiment of sympathy as a rhetorical tool that not only imagines but constructs a certain *democratic* readership.⁷ Democracy, in this sense, is political union brought on through identification and tolerance. Barnes argues that sentimental literature makes democracy about family and imagined community—sentimentalism is “designed to make familial feelings the precondition for inclusion in the public community” (3). Thus, if the sympathetic characters are made to look, talk, and be *like us*, the reader is made to imagine a national community, along the lines of Benedict Anderson’s claim that national community is shared through similar behaviors, language, and understandings of power.⁸ This idea of “democracy” is flawed, however, precisely

because Barnes solely invokes it *as an idea*. She overlooks the *acts* of democracy, such as voting, legalities, and policy making; she takes the nation-state out of democracy, preferring to stay in the realm of nationalism. Of course, Barnes still sees the state at play here on some level. She, ultimately, argues that this democracy becomes as a sort of call for a Christian State that would supplant the union. By positing the idea of democracy as a moral state, we can see how sentiment and politics become confused.

Joseph B. Entin develops this idea of sentimental literature, looking at the era of Modernism, as a certain form of philanthropy. Philanthropy highlights the way politics, such as representative democracy, becomes refigured into sentiment. Entin argues that sentiment was a discourse that “sought to construct pathways of cultural connection through depictions of bodily suffering or sacrifice, in which the vulnerability of the less fortunate sparked feelings of pity and empathy in middle-class readers, whose moral virtue was reinforced by the extension of feelings across the chasms of class and race differences” (35). Entin shows how sentiment allowed for the literary field to extend its vision to overlooked and excluded populations. The problem with this philanthropic “discourse,” of course, is that these populations became literary tools to solely endorse the *ethical* status of the well-off. Urrea elucidates this philanthropic contradiction when he describes how the Mexican government used to give the walkers survival kits that had provisions and condoms. There was a serious uproar from the US who “saw these attempts at life-saving as a combination invitation to invade and complimentary picnic basket” (56). Ultimately, the Mexican government quit giving these kits to the crossers to maintain their relationship with the US. Their helpful hand was not as important as being “friends” with the dominant nation to the north. Historical sentimentalism, thus, begins to look more like a social imperialism that reconstitutes dominant-subordinate dualities. To make this power dynamic into

the *idea* of democracy, as Barnes argues, is to normalize democracy as the relationship between excluded and included, poor and well-off, black and white, subordinate and dominant.

These discussions on sentiment, of course, are deeply tied to their respective historical literatures: The Civil War (Barnes) and Modernism (Entin). Thus, it might be simple enough to clump Urrea into a category of pastiche nostalgia here, since he seems to be evoking a literary device that is fleshed out and dealt with mostly in narratives prior to the period of postmodernism.⁹ I, however, am wary to take that route. Urrea's use of sentiment is not easily identifiable with nostalgia, specifically with the desire to return to an era of democratic philanthropy since these sentiments never really went away. In other words, democracy still describes the rationality behind this literary sentiment. Democracy, as an artifact of classical liberalism, has two faces: on one face, it is about the representation of the people so that "all" have equal access to state power, and on the other face, it is about constituting the peoples' freedoms and liberties. These two faces share one facet: social contract, as a *legal* negotiation, thus sanctioned by the state, between different social classes and *peoples* at certain moments under the guise of equality. As Charles Mills and Carole Pateman both show, however, is that social contract constitutes deeply hierarchical differentiations that support and endorse the structures of class and hierarchy.¹⁰ This "democracy" works because it is forwarded under the logo/motto "by the people, for the people"—a system of governance that presumes equal representation and personhood and then *naturalizes* this universal humanism. But, what is really going on is the reconstitution of class disparity.

Thus, when we see the Wellton 26 displayed in various levels of decay, we *feel sentiment* instead of *think politics* because we are participating in a democratic rationality of liberal humanism. The reader who feels sympathy, thus, becomes "democratic" because s/he *feels* sympathy about the relationship between immigrant (illegal) and citizen (legal). The reader, in

this sense, can claim “tolerance” while remaining safely inside the walls of citizenship. This is not empathy, as Entin so readily uses next to sympathy; this is simply pity that leaves the reader intact and removed from the situation. And this power dynamic becomes normalized precisely because it is democratized.

Wendy Brown argues that neoliberalism, as a rationality more than an ideology, must normalize the political (the state) and the social (citizens) as “economic actors in every sphere of life” (“American Nightmare” 694). She propagates how this normalization works as a de-democratization because it becomes a sort of philanthropy for one’s own self: “Familiar here are the many privatization and outsourcing schemes for welfare, education, prisons, the police, and the military, but this aspect of neoliberalism also entails a host of policies that figure and produce citizens as individual entrepreneurs and consumers whose moral autonomy is measured by their capacity for ‘self-care’—their ability to provide for their own needs and service their own ambitions, whether as welfare recipients, medical patients, consumers of pharmaceuticals, university students, or workers in ephemeral occupations” (“American Nightmare” 694). The citizen’s “moral autonomy” works to endorse one’s own capacity to consume. We, thus, feel like good citizens when we are good consumers. As Entin demonstrates, this morality becomes a way to elevate our *own* status; this occurs individually in the sense that it is in our own “self-interest.” No longer does this figure of philanthropy speak to a national collective constructed on dualities of inclusion and exclusion that the classical liberalism Barnes is concerned with advocates. For Brown, this “self-care” works against democracy, not because it voids the collective and classical liberalism necessarily, but because “democracy” simply becomes a tool for the political to translate into the economic rationality of the market. Through privatizing, neoliberalism is “neo” because it turns the classical liberalism of nationalism into an individual consumerism.

Urrea's narrative troubles this individualizing of the market that Brown describes. By utilizing the form of sentiment around the figure of the immigrant, he restructures the story of national inclusion and exclusion back into the logic of neoliberalism and its borderless economy. For example, in the chapter "Their Names," a chapter that introduces us to each walker, attempts to make these immigrants into individuals who are all duped by the promises and possibilities sold under the header "the United States of America." But what we actually get from this chapter is the way the Mexico-US division is precisely why these "consumers of the US" are together. But, each individual story—from fifty-six year old Reymundo who had been laid off by Coca-Cola to Lorenzo who had no money at all—is also about the utter destitution and poverty that leads them to crossing, tugging at the heart strings of the reader. Urrea demonstrates precisely the way this "self-interest"—where our sympathy reinstates our own superiority—requires the story of immigration, and with that the *appearances* of the nation.

This is precisely why Urrea's attempts to humanize, and hence sentimentalize, the immigrants comes from the non-fictional categorization of his story, and perhaps explains the reason that this non-fictional story must constantly dabble in fiction when speaking to the immigrants' perspective and *lives*, especially in the chapter "Their Names." The non-fiction novel that must fictionalize adopts a sort of claim to realism, not meaning a Howellsian device that responded to romance through tedious descriptions of parlors, apartments, and the such,¹¹ but as a novel that claims to mediate between reality and expression.¹² Ramon Saldívar describes realism "as an antidote to the romantic style and sentimental impulses that Western fiction has generally cultivated in its invention of the American West as a province of an exclusively white, male, individualist imagination" (76). For R. Saldívar, realism was imagined as dismantling the bad sentimentalism that uplifted the dominant, but he dismantles this claim by arguing that "realism" was never an "undistorted reflection of the world" (76). This "realism" declares a sort

of documentation of reality and wishes to mediate between representation and reality by exposing class disparity, but it is unable to do this without sentiment. It is this relationship between sentiment and realism that allows this story to appeal to nationalisms whilst maintaining an overtly political neoliberalism. My assumptions that Urrea wrote a sentimental narrative and that readers must read this book sentimentally come from the interplay between a sentimentalism that must fictionalize and a “realism” that claims truthful representation of the political realities on the border. Urrea’s narrative precisely demonstrates this interplay.

These figures of sentiment—the dead immigrants—are in many ways a narrative response to the troubling realities on the border. Urrea’s refiguration of a political narrative into a sentimental one actually hyperbolizes the material violence that immigrants undergo, due to both the economic demands that incite the crossing and the national securities that fight the crossings. To think about these violences more succinctly, I first need to tease out this relationship between the economic and the national. This relationship comes through most readily in the theory of biopolitics.

5.2 The Neoliberal Rationality of Biopolitics

Biopolitics has become the leading theoretical model to describe the movement to a “life”-centered understanding of social organization and regulation. Popularized in the late 20th and early 21st century, biopolitics finds its roots in the Foucauldian notion of sexuality. Michel Foucault cites the change into a world disciplined through biopower as beginning in the mid 18th-century, due to the upheaval of the French Revolution, where he describes this as the historical movement from a politics of death to a politics of life: “One might say the ancient right to *take* life and *let* live was replaced by a power to *foster* life and *disallow* it to the point of death” (*History of Sexuality* 138). The body and “society” before the French Revolution, however, was

often controlled through the principle—“ancient right”—of a *central* sovereign who regulated the people through a constant threat of death. Foucault exemplifies this ancient right through the spectacles of hangings.¹³ For Foucault, this changes when the sovereign right is put into question with revolution. No longer does the sovereign have a god-given, blood right to power. New political strategies and technologies of power arose from this change. Primarily, this change to “biopower” is one from regulations given by the singular sovereign to regulations of and by *populations*.¹⁴

To understand how this affects and works within immigration policy, discourse, and representation, I must first flush out the history that this idea encapsulates and the critical discussions it has inspired. In *History of Sexuality*, Foucault cites this shift in regulation to populations and “taking charge of life” (143) through two poles: discipline (anatomo-politics of the human body) and regulatory controls (biopolitics of the population). Although this chapter is more interested in biopolitics, it is difficult to fully separate biopolitics from anatomo-politics. For instance, using the example of the hysterization of women, Foucault illustrates how the medicalization of their bodies and sex “was carried out in the name of the responsibility they owed to the health of their children, the solidity of the family institution, and the safeguarding of society” (147). This disciplining, then, was sold as bettering the population.

Three years after the publication of *History of Sexuality*, Foucault’s lectures, now collected in *The Birth of Biopolitics*, describe biopolitics as a movement into the plurality of the state, where the singular king/sovereign is supplanted by “the people” and the state exists only in the plural (5). I see this change in perspective and power as coming from rethinking a system of genetics and blood (i.e., blue bloods) into a system of “by the people, for the people” (i.e., liberal or representative democracy). In other words, we are talking about a change in mass perspective, from a belief in natural law to a belief in people’s law. In *History of Sexuality*, Foucault places

this moment in the French Revolution, but in *Birth of Biopolitics*, he is much more willing to generalize this moment with the solidification of classical liberalism, and with that, the complex, contradictory discourses of freedom, democracy, rights, and contract.

Wendy Brown and Janet Halley describe classical liberalism as “the political order that replaces Tudor monarchy rooted in explicit class privilege with modern democratic constitutionalism rooted in abstract individualism” (*LL/LC* 5). For Brown and Halley, liberalism legitimates the state because “we the people” are guaranteed equality and liberty *before the law*, under abstract notions of freedom and individual rights. Brown and Halley depart from Foucault in their book by challenging this moment as an actual “change” (13). They opt instead to see classical liberalism as an extension of the feudal law. They believe this precisely because class difference becomes the central way of organizing “the population,” which only illustrates the way sovereign privilege is replaced with class privilege. The hierarchies and inequalities, then, are still very much in place, although softened by abstract discourses about freedom, democracy, and “the people.” This social organization, then, might be called equality but is really still an order of inequality.

Biopolitics, from this perspective, begins to look like nothing more than a process of abstraction and mystification. Hardt and Negri take this suggestive notion of sexuality further into the New World Order, which they call Empire, by defining biopower as the stakes of power being the production and reproduction of life (*Empire* 24). They believe this production-reproduction idea to be an integral part of what they describe as “Empire” and its biopolitics, where the social *bios* “disrupts the linear and totalitarian figure of capitalist development” in order for the “*civil society* to be absorbed into the state” (25) (my emphasis).¹⁵ Hardt and Negri are clearly opposed in the effects and implications of a world regulated through biopower and biopolitics. Hardt and Negri see the state as this unidentifiable agent who spawns destruction on

society, where as Foucault steps away from the state-proper by suggesting that the state is no longer identifiable as a single sovereign or as an imperial mechanism because it has been made “plural” and about “population” (*BoBp* 5). In other words, the state and civil society are often interchangeable figures: the “state” under biopolitics is defined as representative of the people. This is better known in the world as “liberal democracy.”

It is this question of liberal democracy and population-centered organization that neoliberalism both troubles and enables. Neoliberalism, according to Foucault, has two definitions: the German and the American. On one hand, he examines how German neoliberalism indicates a change from a state that regulated the market to “a state under the supervision of the market” (*BoBp* 116). On the other hand, he argues how this shift is an epistemological transformation of labor into capital, from the American perspective (223-33). This epistemological transformation is very telling because, as I argued in Chapter Four, it reduces this economic logic into a norm. Biopolitics as a doctrine of neoliberalism, then, becomes a sort of social Truth. In other words, neoliberal doctrine is so intertwined with its policies of *securing* “life” that biopolitics are normalized and naturalized into the state apparatus.

Agamben wishes to respond to this on some level in *Homo Sacer*, accusing Foucault of abandoning the traditional juridico-institutional approach to the problem of power: the distinction between totality and individualization (5). Agamben attempts to clarify Foucault by characterizing biopolitics as the exception, also what he calls “the inclusive-exclusion” and “the zone of indistinction” where “every decisive political event were double-sided: the spaces, the liberties, and the rights won by individuals in their conflicts with central powers always simultaneously prepared a tacit but increasing inscription of individuals’ lives within the state order, thus offering a new and more dreadful foundation for the very sovereign power from which they wanted to liberate themselves” (121). Agamben’s main exercise in *Homo Sacer* is to

illustrate the way these “double-sided” events lay the foundation for indistinction, where all political distinctions collapse into a zone: the “traditional political distinctions (such as those between Right and Left, liberalism and totalitarianism, private and public) lose their clarity and intelligibility and enter a zone of indistinction” once “bare life” becomes the referent of state “politics” (122).¹⁶ This collapse of distinction, of difference, is biopolitics, for Agamben. As I have shown in previous chapters, these collapses and reinstatements of difference, especially between the subject and the object, come from an overtly neoliberal sensibility.

Aihwa Ong renounces this idea of “indistinction” in biopolitics, however. She very much sees biopolitics as restoring class disparity. She, thus, argues against Agamben’s “zone” in favor of the more ethical question surrounding this politics of life. She contends that “life” under biopolitics “becomes, through the interventions of local communities, NGOs, and even corporations, shifted and reorganized as various levels of categories of morally deserving humanity” (*NaE* 24). This idea of a “morally deserving” humanity reflects on the very divisions between worthy lives and unworthy lives, often producing deep class disparity. For Ong, this class disparity found in the analytics of biopolitics is tied directly to neoliberalism and its effects of uneven development. According to Ong, life—and the politicization of “bare” life—is entirely shaped through uneven development and the very *distinct* categorizations of class. Ong relates, for example, how poor citizens in certain African communities have become politically excluded because of starvation, disease, and war, while simultaneously health has become a prerequisite for human status (24). She does not see this contradiction as a zone of indistinction because it is quite *distinctly* the neoliberal widening gap between rich and poor, privileged and disadvantaged, and included and excluded. Her point of departure from Agamben, then, is precisely through refusing to see any site of indistinction when thinking of biopolitics through class. This debate between Ong and Agamben demonstrates a very slippery and tenuous contradiction around

biopolitics, where it collapses certain differences while simultaneously reinforcing others. This contradiction, I believe, is precisely what allows biopolitics to operate as neoliberal rationality. In considering unequal distribution, biopolitics, as a regulation of “life,” immediately put into question whose life matters or, more specifically, which populations matter.

But, we must understand these regulations of “life” as hyperbole. The hyperbole we find in and around theories of biopolitics is perhaps where we find performance and biopolitics meet. Hyperbole gives rise to a system where police and military are no longer easily distinguishable because it allows for a hybrid institution that *hyper*-regulates national “problems.” Simultaneously, the “immigrant” becomes marked as a “problem” by placing them as threats to the U.S. standards of a good “life”—specifically, a threat to job availability and putting money into national circulation instead of sending it “home” to other nations. This process of hyperbole is where we get the *hyper-appearance* of democratic state biopolitics as a way to “deal” with another hyperbole of fearing “the immigrant”.

We might think of the relationship between biopolitics and performance to be firmly fixed to the Butlerian logic that the subjected body—and its acts, gestures, desires—looks as if it is representing one’s internal substance or “identity.” But this illusion “of an interior,” according to Butler, renders these bodies purely performative with no ontological status. This performative—the appearances of the body—is the only thing that constitutes reality and, for Butler, points to the public regulations of “fantasy” through a surface politics of the body (*Gender Trouble* 173). This process has dire consequences for those who *embody* consciousness, for Butler, seven years later in *Psychic Life of Power*, where death becomes their “inevitable fate” (41). But, when we talk about immigrants and those in the status of “Other,” the subjected body is perhaps better understood under Alicia Schmidt Camacho’s notion of “minimal subjectivity”: “*Minimal* because the undocumented have been subjected to a criminalizing

discourse that renders their status abject in relation to that of the citizen; *minimal* because their *unrecognized* status renders the undocumented vulnerable to an almost total abridgement of their social relatedness as materialized in actual kinship ties and communal belonging” (8). Camacho sees “minimal subjectivity” as describing the slippery legislature that imposes a violent process of desubjectification and depersonalization. This biopolitics, of course, comes out in U.S. security theater, whether it is the militarized raids and home invasion described by Camacho or the symbolic building of the border wall.

Jasbir K. Puar teases out this relationship between biopolitics and performance, allying herself with Butler. Puar demonstrates the relationship between biopolitics and performance by looking closely at the photographs coming from the Abu Ghraib tortures. She describes that “the pictures look indeed as if the U.S. Guard felt like they were on a stage, hamming it up for the proud parents nervously biting their nails in the audience...they repulsively invite the viewer to come and jump on stage as well” (104). These images of “regulation,” for Puar, depict “how both process (the photographing) and product (the pictures) are shaming technologies and function as a vital part of the humiliating, dehumanizing violence itself” (106). I would like to take this one step further by suggesting that these images of “regulation” do much more than offer a sort of voyeurism that violently dehumanizes the tortured, while upholding the threatened “life” of those viewing. The dehumanized objects (or perhaps more aptly named “props”) in these photographs are not only the tortured victims but also the U.S. Guard. They are all reduced to technologies or objects of biopolitics, and only the viewer can feel “secure” or “guilty” or “alive” in response to them.

The theatricality that we see in the photos is quite different from the theatricality we see on the border. On the border the “viewer” is never fully present. On the border, this process and performance of biopolitics is much more sinister because it disallows viewership, opting to enact

the appearance as though it were “normal.” Rarely, do the media capture what is happening on the border and broadcast it to the many flat-screens across the U.S. And it is still illegal to take pictures at border security points or with *La Migra*. I do not mean to suggest that these are private performances, but more that these performances are supposed to be a part of everyday life. This relationship between biopolitics and performance on the border, in other words, is not sensational in the same way that Puar demonstrates; if they are ever “sensational,” this sensationalism is immediately normalized. This dehumanization of the immigrant, then, becomes simply a part of the job, another day on the llano, and just drinking beer on lawn chairs with 30-06s pointed at the border.

5.3 **Performances of Security and Biopolitics: The Game**

This process of theatricality and performance, I believe, begins with the blurring between policing and militarizing on the border. Precisely, this blurring of the police and military, found in the term “security,” takes shape through the way that performance hurls regulatory action into the symbolic. “The immigrant” is subsumed into this process as a symbolic target, allowing for those who *play* the anti-immigrant militia to *look* rational. But, “the immigrant” begins to appear less and less as the problem when this is the case. Saskia Sassen’s *Globalization and Its Discontents* attempts to locate the “real” problem. She argues that the U.S. corporation has deeply influenced America’s “immigration problem.” In particular, the U.S.’s foreign investment in export resources has moved corporate agricultural into the southern hemisphere, displacing subsistence farmers into commercial work (41). Where this displacement becomes most problematic is when the commercial factories and farms close down in favor of the cheaper labor they can find in other third world countries. The minute these corporations shut down, these farmers and maquiladoras—“wage laborers”—find themselves not only out of a job but find that

their traditional work structures have completely eroded (43). These workers, thus, cannot return to the pre-commercial labor, especially without any income. This is why immigration occurs. But, this is doubly situated because displaced Latin Americans are not immigrating to countries with high employment rates; instead, they are coming to the U.S. Although this might appear to be simply due to proximity, the reason is much more complicated when looking at the economic implications of immigration. Sassen explores why the U.S., whose corporate ventures have been the cause of this displacement, becomes the end-point in worker migration. She argues that the U.S., and specifically the large cities of the U.S., are ideal for immigrants, even though we are seeing a decline in many of the industries and manufacturing that traditionally employed immigrants, because there has been the “rapid expansion of the supply of low-wage jobs in the United States and the casualization of the labor market associated with new growth industries, particularly in the major cities” (45). On both sides of the border, thus, we see the cause-effect relationship of immigration. *On* the border, however, this relationship is moot. And at the end of the day, the Minutemen are still donning their uniforms to enact an old role-playing game, where “the immigrant” simply becomes another prop on the stage of regulation, while the real culprit hides in the shadows. And although the deaths happening on the border are very real, these deaths are coming out of a desire for the *appearance* of state regulation. As a symbolic regulation, we are able to see the way the police and the military have become interchangeable and their differences blurred. I see this institutional collapse as the appearance of “hyper-regulation” since it requires a hyperbole of performance to maintain its rhetoric of “security.”

This blurring of institutional departments occurs through a two-pronged execution. The first is through performance, specifically through creating an image of regulation. The second is through the redefinition of biopower, specifically through rethinking regulation as actually *about* people. Urrea, and Riker as we will see, utilize the trope of regulatory image and theatricality,

often hyperbolically. Both, however, do not construct theories of biopower intentionally. Instead, their stories elucidate certain processes that of biopower. To see the way these authors envision the border, we must first look at what is happening around the U.S.-Mexico border and how this regulation works “in the world,” both through social critique and by how Urrea treats these sociopolitical realities. This police-military state, although already implied through the word “security,” is not new. Peter Andreas’ *Border Games* maps out the way the military and police co-operate and coordinate within the U.S., citing INS Commissioner Doris Meissner for saying, “Think of this as one team, different roles, different uniforms, but with the same game plan—and that is to restore the rule of law to the border” (91). The difference in roles is that the army is not allowed to make “arrests.” Instead, they construct the wall; they shoot their guns in “threatening” situations; and they provide the technologies of enforcement. Military surplus is often given to domestic police forces, who are now equipped with bayonet guns and other technologies of war.¹⁷ We might ask ourselves what the police forces plan to do with these technologies when raiding homes or arresting civil criminals, whether or not they are “properly” trained to use these weapons. The idea that the domestic police are supposed to be protecting citizens is immediately contradicted by the military artifacts of violence they now carry. The rise in paramilitary units—SWAT, etc.—also suggests a sort of fine line between the international competitions that the military engage and the domestic protections that the police enforce. On the U.S.-Mexico border, we see these cross-institutional actions and projects most clearly. And although the government maintains they have “different roles,” we most likely can only tell the difference in uniform.

Urrea captures this lack of difference only for a moment, illustrating *la frontera* as a site where institutional difference collapses. “The border war is often seen as a highly competitive game” (16), Urrea writes, which Meissner forwards as the exact perspective of the INS. To think of “securing” the border as “a game” positions these “different” institutional agencies on the

same side, making these “differences” rather arbitrary if thinking about the larger picture of “the game.” So, when Urrea describes “the game,” he pays particular attention to this lack of institutional difference, stating: “Texas Rangers allegedly handcuff homeboys and toss them into irrigation canals to drown, though the walkers can’t tell the Border Patrol apart from the Rangers or any other mechanized hunt squad: they’re all cowboys. Truncheons. Beatings. Shootings. Broken legs. Torn Panties. Blood. Tear gas. Pepper spray. Kicked Ribs. Rape” (17). The supposed difference between Rangers and Border Patrol cannot matter on the border. But, the governmental agencies, furthermore, are not even distinct from any other “mechanized hunt squad,” as though those enacting “security”—whether private, national, or somewhere in-between—are all the same institution. This demonstrates the way that institutional difference becomes futile when all enact the same process. When these actions of violence, listed with the finality of periods, represent the “savage gospel of the crossing” (17), as Urrea concludes, the institutions only stand for this violence. “The game” is simply the enactment of this violence, trumping any state logic to separate security agencies, which is perhaps why all these agencies on the border are often solely referred to as “La Migra.” And in *The Devil’s Highway*, this game, this violence, and the inability to tell one agency from another are precisely exacerbated by thinking of the border as a site of war.

Mike Davis argues in *Magical Urbanism* that this collapsing line between policing and militarizing is simply growing out the “War on Drugs.” Reagan’s political baby has morphed in the past three decades into a strangely abstract and uncontainable process that seems to have more to do with the U.S.’s influence within Latin American economies than on actually stopping drug smuggling into the U.S.,¹⁸ and the U.S. consistently deploys hundreds of military and police into the borderlands in the name of this “war.” Davis sees the “War on Drugs” as becoming just as much a “War on Immigrants,” stating, “In practice, the distinctions between immigration

control and narcotics interdiction, or between policing and low-intensity warfare, have become so blurred that border-dwellers speak routinely of the ‘war against drugs *and* immigrants’” (35). This conflation between drugs and immigrants reduces the immigrant to just another black market commodity that requires *both* military and police action. This blurring between war-like action and police action, for Davis, comes from this U.S. program—“War on Drugs”—because it was a program designed without any real results. This is precisely why the true irony lies in how the U.S.’s program against “smuggling” (whether drugs or immigrants) “contrasts with its famous inability to arrest notorious border drug barons, supposedly the most wanted men in the hemisphere, as they brazenly lounge at Caliente racetrack and boogie the night away in trendy discos” (37). This contradiction, however, lies not in the deployment of troops and police into *la frontera*, as is Davis’ concern, but in the conception of the “War on Drugs.” This War, much like the “War on Terrorism,” is a War against something uncontainable, something often unidentifiable, something that appears to be target-less, largely because they are wars against humanless objects and ideologies. The “game,” as Meissner and Urrea call it, seems to be without a material, real target. Until we get “the immigrant.”

Urrea’s narrative exposes how “the game” flourishes into full-on theater once “the immigrant” enters the picture. Through explanations of “cutting the drag” and the way the Coyotes and La Migra become enlisted into “the game,” we can see the way the border tells us the story of this game and the way it is played. Urrea states, “The whole game for their team [the Coyotes and crossers/walkers] is to pass by invisibly, and the team on this side [La Migra] is paid to see the invisible. The Coyotes score when they make it, and the Migra scores when they don’t” (28). The drags, where car tires are dragged through the desert every few days to the east and the west, forcing the crossers to walk over them on their south-to-north trek, thus leaving “tracks,” are the challenge within the game. To not be tracked is the goal for the Coyotes. “The

game” is simply a bait-and-catch scenario. And the fact that Urrea makes sure to say “their team” for the Coyotes and “the team on this side” for the U.S. agencies works to reduce the numerous groups partaking in this “game”—the Coyotes, the crossers, the Border Patrol, the INS, the Department of Homeland Security, the U.S. military, the drug lords, the Minutemen, to name a few—by splitting it into two “teams.” What this demonstrates is how policing the border and militarizing the border are two sides of the same coin, because they are on the same “team.” But more, this places the Coyotes and crossers on the same team, too, although the Coyotes are not on the same side as the immigrants who are their business clients only. These false, homogenizing teams, thus, begin to look solely like a simplistic duality that has major effects on the border politics.

Justin Akers Chacon and Mike Davis’s co-authored treatise *No One Is Illegal* breaks down the way the national institutions of police and military get reshaped when dealing with “the immigrant.” By seeing *la frontera* as a space of illegality, the police-military have not been just about national protection, especially since we see the privatization of these institutions most noticeably on the border. Davis, in particular, suggests that this hybridity of regulation is not conceived or executed on the part of the State. Instead, he looks at the way this is constructed by private or peri-state violence. Thus, we see the policing and militarizing of the border, for Davis, through private corporate armies and securities. For Davis, however, this violence originates from the geography of the late 19th- and early 20th-Century: for the Heartland, we get the Pinkertons; for the South, we get the Klansmen; and for the West, we get white vigilantes. He posits that we see this private violence when the “biggest industrial, mining, and railroad corporations, loathe to put their entire trust in the local state, deployed literal armies of armed guards, plant detectives, and company police,” where “the Pinkertons alone reputedly outnumbered the regular U.S. Army in the early 1890s” (16). This schematic of institutional

privatization found in the late 19th and early 20th century was deeply influenced by the failures of post-civil-war Reconstruction, the rise in industrialism, and the increase in Southern European and “Asian” immigration. The economic, racial, and ethnic emphasis on the construction of private “security,” however, demonstrates solely the mobility of security between the state and the private. Security, as a construction of the co-operation between police and military, then, is not bound to State enforcements of law and order but often to economic interests. Thus, “security” becomes redefined: it no longer means securing people per se but instead means securing corporate resources and projects.

This late 19th and early 20th century blueprint, however, changes shape and context in the late 20th and early 21st century. Davis explores how these vigilantes and nativists in the West have morphed into The Minutemen Project. This Project, according to Davis, grew out of a long history of infighting between unions and teamsters. The NFWA and UFWOC (often on the side of the immigrant) have been fighting with the nativist Grower-Shipper Teamsters (often on the side of cheap labor) ever since the end of the Bracero Program about migrant and immigrant workers’ rights. The Minutemen, deeply influenced by the Grower-Shipper Teamsters, see themselves as a group of concerned *citizens* protecting their national rights (read: economic and geographic resources) from the threat of “the Mexican hordes” (84). What is perhaps most interesting about these later formations of privatized violence is how they market their agenda through a rhetoric of Nation, claiming to be super-patriots. Davis describes this Project—what I see more as “marketing”—as a “theater of the absurd as well as a canny attempt to move vigilantism back into the mainstream of conservative politics” through “jabbering to the press” (84). Davis’s most provocative critical move in arguing this is when he describes the Minutemen’s outfits as a hyperbolic performance of “army” while they sit in their lawn chairs drinking, cleaning their guns, and getting “sunburned and bored” (84-85). The outfits/uniforms

themselves begin to look nonsensical among the lawn chairs and beer coolers. The Minutemen have done little in terms of “securing” the nation against illegal immigration; instead, they simply look and talk big, suggesting they are simply a theatricality of privatized “patriotism.”¹⁹

These securities, private or otherwise, are a necessary show for citizens to keep us/them docile, and this gives motive to why Urrea needs to make the Wellton 26 “people”—if not to include them into the space of citizenship, then to call on an ideal notion of global citizenship that liberal humanism promotes. The novel realizes this problem. It comes though in the lack of names within the government documents, the lack of story within these documents, and the apathy of the recorders and other government officials toward this incident. His need to sentimentalize this explicitly political story, then, is to give personhood to those who are not people, but objectified *targets of performance*, in the eyes of the U.S. government.

The problem is that these immigrants are already dead; these immigrants are still solely named as “illegal immigrants” by nation-state institutions. At the end of the novel, the narrator describes an interaction between a possible relative to one of the Wellton 26 and an INS secretary. The relative is quite bluntly told that her family member is dead—“He’s dead. I’ve got him on the slab” (220). The secretary leaves the room after this abrupt announcement, then comes back to find the woman crying: “‘Oh!’ she says. ‘We’ve upset you.’ She sits and says, ‘Señora, you must forgive us. We deal with death so often here that we forget. We forget, you see. We’re indelicate. If you don’t work here, death still means something to you.’” (220). This moment is framed by descriptions of the files, all “exact replicas,” all about “immigrants” listed in death as WHITE MALES, without any particularity or personalization, all stacked onto shelves or falling over without attention. Race and sex do not even mean anything; they are simply markers that pose as “documentation” for the Border Patrol within the narrative. But,

importantly, death is figured as simply a part of the job. It holds little humanism when it is simply another 9-5 on the border.

5.4 Securing Populations, Securing “Resources”

Urrea’s attempt to humanize the dehumanized simply exaggerates this anti-human program. So, when “human” is not even an issue for the government, we are forced to question what exactly this hyper-regulation on the border is and what it is for. When personhood is taken out of the picture, we are left with only a regulation and security of borders, not people. The border begins to take on this symbolic and metaphorical signification of the nation-state itself. The border begins to be the only thing that matters. Once again, this hyper-regulation simply replaces the larger narratives of immigration with symbolic nationalizing.

The idea that money can cross borders freely—as the overarching neoliberal doctrine—but people cannot is complicated once we begin to see the way immigration institutions and documentation on the U.S.-Mexico border work. But, this becomes even more complicated when we begin to see how these securities are just as much about the security of resources. The futuristic sci-fi film *Sleep Dealer*, directed by Alex Rivera, takes this question of resource security and imagines how it will look if we keep on this path. A story about a young techno-enthusiast Memo, the film captures these issues surrounding immigration: the freedom of capital mobility, the restrictions on corporeal mobility, the legalities and fears over resource depletion, such as jobs and water. These three issues come together in the film.

Memo is a virtual worker in factories called sleep dealers, named for the possibility of collapse, comas, and/or blindness if one works too much. The future is full of virtual workers who travel to the Mexican side of the border wall to work in these sleep dealers. These workers are equipped with nodes, a Matrix-like implant that becomes a part of the workers DNA and

nervous system and allows them to hook into a virtual reality in order to operate machines in the US. These machines might be picking fruit in Florida, driving taxis in New York City, cleaning houses in upper-class neighborhoods of California, or building skyscrapers and apartment complexes in Chicago. Memo travels to the border city of Tijuana to become one of these node workers after poignant tragedy occurs at home.

Memo comes from what was once a prospering farming community, until a Coca-Cola-like corporation comes in and buys the water rights, dams the river, and causes the entire community to become a desert. Memo's father who had farm land decides to keep farming through the creation of a milpa (where the corn and bean are inter-planted to help each other grow) and buying water from the corporation's heavily-secured dam. Memo, who wants to be a hacker instead of a farmer, despises this life, spending all his extra time building and playing with a satellite receiver. When he hacks into a private US military line, he is marked as a terrorist. The US military proceeds to trace and bomb his house, using a remote-controlled drone (operated by one of their own military node-“worker” named Rudy Ramirez) and brutally killing his hard-working and innocent father. Without the patriarch to run the farm, Memo migrates to Tijuana to make money for his family.

His journey and his story are intertwined with memories and flashbacks of the milpa, his father, and the dam that took away their livelihood. Through a series of connections, both virtual and real, Memo and Rudy Ramirez meet, and Rudy helps Memo bomb the dam from a sleep dealer. Marked with emotion and sentimentalism much like *The Devil's Highway*, the film ends on a pseudo celebratory note, as water runs back into the parched and desolate community. However, Memo does not return to the farm and his family but continues to work as a node-worker and grow a milpa next to the virtually-operated-machine-gun-armed border wall.

The border in the movie is so heavily fortified with cameras, machine-guns, metal, and light scans that it is reminiscent of prison walls, at least on the Mexico side. There is a mixture of panoptical disciplining and aggressive militaristic regulation. When Rudy travels to Mexico, he even has a machine-gun pointed directly at his head while he answers questions about why he is traveling into Tijuana by an unseen, kindly-voiced woman. U.S. citizens, then, are treated like criminals when going to the other side of the border wall. What is important about this representation is that we never see the US side of the border wall. The US is almost non-existent in the film, except from what the node-workers see while working: through the eyes of a machine. But, more interestingly, the dam in Memo's hometown is secured in the same way. The film basically equates the border wall that keeps Mexico and the US separate to the corporate security of a resource. Both are manned with machine-guns, remotely controlled by node-workers or node-military wo/men. Both are covered in cameras and spotlights. And both are militarized, as we see when Rudy blows up the dam and is pursued to stop by his fellow army mates. Resources are what need to be protected here.

This rhetoric of resource depletion is commonly exaggerated on the border, where the semi-desert conditions are already seeing a lack of water and where the fights over the Rio Grande water between the U.S. and Mexico have become alarmingly heightened over the past decade. Urrea portrays vacationers going into the Arizona desert only to find "[t]hey didn't carry enough water" (119), an issue that immediately recalls his earlier description of the Yuma 14 being found with "cactus spines in their faces, their hands" and so dehydrated that "there wasn't enough fluid in them to bleed" (5). The water fear in the south-west U.S. feeds this rhetoric of resource depletion on the border. And although all sides are affected by resource depletion, compelling Urrea to write, "In the desert, we are all illegal aliens" (120), the Wellton 26's lack of water versus the U.S. citizen-vacationer's lack of water are not universalized as Urrea so readily

chronicles in his chapter “Killed by the Light.” Urrea’s universalization of the issue of resource depletion is a part of his project to include the immigrant into a “human problem” of water shortages (surely a more accurate view on the issue of water). But, this is a part of a much more sinister discourse on overpopulation. If biopolitics and its securing of populations is an illusion to reconstitute power to the elite few, then overpopulation rhetoric works to expel certain populations from this “security” and often points the finger at those who “threaten” nation-bound resources.

When we take this concept of overpopulation out of the context of solely environmentalism and look at it through the lens of anti-immigration programs, this concept morphs into racialized fears of the third world. The fear of the “Mexican hordes,” as Davis names it earlier, thus, is not primarily shaped by the adjective “Mexican” but produced by the noun “hordes,” at least when overpopulation becomes the leading rhetoric against immigration. The image of millions of bodies coming to take away “our” jobs, oil, property, and *national* money is one of the leading appeals to the fear of “immigration.” Of course, the term “Mexican” is not an empty signifier. “Mexican” works on two levels: racially and nationally. It explicitly racializes this overpopulation rhetoric, making the image specific to brown bodies. This racialization, perhaps, forces the claim of overpopulation into an archaic colonial program, where controlling “life” was tying the tubes of American Indian women without their knowledge or supporting genocide in the overtly “colored” regions of Africa. It also places the U.S. fear of immigration on the populations south of the border so that this fear can easily be translated into patriotism with the *appearance* of being non-bigoted. The racialization and nationalization of overpopulation claims, thus, always works as a way to focus biopolitics—the regulation of “life” in the name of populations—onto a very specific “subordinate” population, while also attributing these specific populations with a hyperbole: *over*population.

Biopolitics, on many levels, comes from a desire to deal with the ever growing populations of humanity. By being defined as a movement from sovereign right of death to an emphasis on a population's livelihood, biopolitics immediately begins to look like another fallacy of fear, this time a fear of overpopulation. Although all of the theorists above evade the issue of overpopulation, we might liken this political change—biopolitics—to the population booms that were accentuated and created in the 18th-century through the process of colonization, to the threats of immigration “hordes” emphasized in U.S. immigration discourse since the 1880s, to the need to *deal with* new and different peoples as the world began to see itself more globally. Although perhaps a now archaic notion, overpopulation works closely with the theories of biopolitics because it redefines the program of regulating in the name of “life” to regulating the growth of “life.” And it is precisely this question of “growth”—or I should say “over-growth”—that shapes the rhetoric of anti-immigration. Unlike what we see with (classical) liberalism's endorsement of progress and development discussed in Chapter Three, “growth” takes on a negative connotation, especially when paired with “immigration.” Resource depletion is one of these overpopulation rhetorics that incite a fear of over-growth.

David Harvey argues that “[w]henver a theory of overpopulation seizes hold in a society dominated by an elite, then the non-elite invariably experience some form of political, economic, and social repression” (*Spaces of Capital* 63). For Harvey, the ecological problems, DDT for instance, exist on a worldwide scale now, prompting many to identify the underlying reason for these problems on the “runaway rates of population growth” (65). Harvey notes that only some have recognized this “problem” as being brought about by the “penetration of the market and wage-labor relationships into traditional rural societies” (65), something Sassen also critiques above. On one level, this assertion seems obvious. But, the implications of a “politics of repression” (65) attached to these theories and rhetorics of overpopulation, for Harvey, render

this Malthusian reasoning deeply terrifying. Harvey's critique, nevertheless, is coming from the growing alarmism about global warming, resource depletion, and environmental catastrophe.

Sleep Dealer captures this alarmism and exaggerates it through futuristic and bio-technological representations. The concept of node-workers becomes the brutal consequence of these overpopulation rhetorics, where there are so many workers that they are disposable. The imperfect science of the nodes, often being implanted by coyotecs on the streets of Tijuana, and the dangerous electrical pulses that can occur at the sleep dealers (which result in death) demonstrate this disposability. The science within the story parallels the science behind the theory of biopolitics and the rhetorics of overpopulation. Both give the illusion that this is a progressive future and that we have solved or will solve the "problem" of immigration, but instead, all this shows us is that these illusions and performances are hiding the very real and troubling distinction between the haves and have-nots. In other words, the film elucidates how we love that we can have the cheap labor of immigrants while the immigrants still remain on the other side of the border in poorly-constructed sleep dealers.

5.5 **Conclusion**

What Urrea's narrative and Rivera's film ultimately illustrate is the lack of "human," the lack of personhood associated with bodies, the dehumanization of "the immigrant." The immigrant as a figure embodies the program that dehumanizes in the name of national security. This is perhaps why Urrea relates, "Of course, the illegals have always been called names other than human—wetback, taco-bender...In politically correct times, 'illegal alien' was deemed gauche, so 'undocumented worker' came into favor. Now, however, the term preferred by the Arizona press is 'undocumented entrant.' As if the United States were a militarized beauty pageant" (35). Urrea demonstrates here precisely the way that the immigrant begins to look

exactly like a body removed from ontological life; this body struts across the stage (better known as the border) solely for U.S. forces to regulate on them. This is not to say the immigrant isn't actually a person. Of course, these are people, which is what makes these performances even more sentimentally appalling. But, when thinking about the institutional picture of immigration, people are not a part of this picture. Moreover, if we think of this as a process of biopolitics, then biopolitics becomes deeply problematic. The "bio" in biopolitics and biopower is taken out if what we are regulating is not even considered to have *bios* or *zoe*. With the bio taken out, all we have left are the institutions and processes performing "regulation." Urrea's descriptions of the Border Patrol's daily grind, then, are precisely about the actions of policing and killing. The immigrant is simply a name (and image) to call another thing on which these actions are performed.

I do not mean to suggest that we are left with only "politics" when the "bio" is taken out, but to argue that what is happening on the border is deeply opposed to the "bio" in "biopolitics." On the U.S.-Mexico border, we see the "bio" taken out of "biopolitics," meaning that the framework of "life" and regulating populations gives way to capital and only capital. The subjectivities, thus, that represent the "bio" in "biopolitics" are desubjectified and refigured into materials/bodies of capital. When this happens, the questions of "life" that frame and construct the concept of "biopolitics" becomes the "life of capital," where the body is more useful as a commodity and machine than as an ontology or subjectivity. It is at this moment that the performance of security comes into contradiction with what and more importantly *who* is being regulated. What we see in immigrant narratives is a process that demonstrates the opposite of "life": When "human life" is replaced with "capital life," the "human" becomes a dead immigrant in a photograph on some INS agent's desk.

Urrea at one point imagines the Wellton 26 preparing to walk across Devil's Highway, with the Coyotes changing their prices and each step of the journey looking more and more like a scam. He relates, "Fifty pesos here. Fifty pesos there. They were just bleeding money" (97). What we are left with is blood and money. The blood of these immigrants, their life source, becomes solely equated with money. Michael Clune reads "blood money" as a way to make value "entirely subjective" (494). Clune reads "blood money" as following the treatises of Fredrick Hayek, a quintessential neoliberalist, but I would suggest that he reads it backwards by adhering to this neoliberal line of thought that promotes the "possibility of a radically free market" (494). Value is not always loaded with subjectivity, but subjectivity is always loaded with value. And it is in this reversal that we find commodified immigrant bodies. *The Devil's Highway* and *Sleep Dealer* rewrite "blood money" into a world where neoliberalism and the restoration of class power to the elite few require immigration and, thus, the structure of the nation. Capital is consolidated through the blood of these immigrants. This idea of blood and money, thus, translates "biopolitics" into the life of capital, because at the end of the day, money is all that matters.

Notes

¹ Brian Chapman's *Police State* (1971) tends to be the defining text for this idea. We also see representations of police states in Orwell's *1984* and the film *Metropolis*, where systems of surveillance imprison and discipline the population.

² This is more in line with Harold Lasswell's *The Garrison State* (1941). Of course, the internment camps of Hitler's Nazism (and U.S. Japanese internment, as well) and the labor camps of present-day China also can be seen as models of garrison and/or military states. I should note, however, that the difference between police and military states are not always maintained as diametrically opposed. Lasswell, even, sees the garrison state as still utilizing surveillance and other police-like organization of peoples.

³ We can see this term come up often after 9/11. For use in the popular media, see <http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2011/sep/8/perpetual-security-state/?page=all> (last accessed 4/4/2012). Also, see Martin Sicker's *The Geopolitics of Security in the Americas: Hemispheric Denial from Monroe to Clinton* (2002) for a historical discussion on the way the U.S. nation-state operates under the auspices of "security."

⁴ It is important to note that the Department of Homeland Security, which now houses the INS and the Border Patrol, is not the only government agency in the name of national security. The National Security Agency (NSA) has been an integral part to national intelligence surveillances since 1952 (Truman instituted), claiming to protect the nation through the cryptology of foreign signals. The Department of Homeland Security did not evolve from this agency, but we might say it devolved from this agency in terms of technologies of surveillance. Unlike the NSA, the Dept of Homeland Security looks more like a front for an image of security.

⁵ This is transparent in the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986 when it states, "Employers must verify the eligibility of each employee hired after November 1986 to work in the United States after completing INS Form I-9. An employer must examine documents that establish the employee's identity and eligibility to work in the United States before completing this form" (31). It goes on to tell how it will regulate employers (not immigrants): "Under the employer sanction of IRCA, employers who knowingly hire aliens not authorized to work in the United States are subject to fines ranging from \$250 to \$10,000 for each unauthorized alien" (32). This IRCA can be accessed via <http://www.ers.usda.gov/publications/ah719/ah719f.pdf> (last accessed 4/4/2012).

⁶ The Prio New Security Studies book series released the collection *The Geopolitics of American Insecurity: Terror, Power and Foreign Policy* (2009) where Julian Reid's article "The Biopolitics of American Security Policy in the Twenty-First Century" discusses the complicity between law and force, or more specifically the complicity between the sovereign and the biopolitical, through the U.S. war on terror. In this chapter, I am not approaching the theory of biopolitics through this same lens, although it comes in and out of focus through my discussions of others' work.

⁷ Janice Radway also suggests this in *Reading the Romance* (1991), although her focus is not democracy. Barnes speaks to this Radway connection (p. 63).

⁸ Anderson conceives of “imagined community” through the development of print-as-commodity—where capitalism and print technologies converge “on the fatal diversity of human language” (46)—and the creations of national consciousness—where populations share (and fix) a common national print language and accept the power dynamics between different uses of this language (44-45). His idea has become foundational in the way nationalisms are created in spite of regional, ethnic, and class difference

⁹ See Fredric Jameson’s *Postmodernism* (1990)

¹⁰ Although I will talk about their respective work more directly in Chapter Six, Pateman and Mills begin their jointly authored book *Contract and Domination* (2007) with this foundation, which I quote at length:

For three centuries there is no doubt that white women and nonwhites were deemed inferior to white men, were second-class citizens or outside citizenship altogether. The difficulty of writing about sexual and racial power today, especially in rich countries, is that it exists in a context of formal equality, codified civil freedoms, and antidiscrimination legislation. People are thus encouraged to see any problems as a matter of discrete remnants of older discrimination or the outcome of unfortunate, backward individual attitudes. We have tried to show how contract in the specific form of contracts about property in the person constitute relations of subordination, even when entry into the contracts is voluntary, and how the global racial contract underpins the stark disparities of the contemporary world. (2).

The goal of their project then is to demystify the inequalities present within structures and forms of supposed equality, especially in terms of contract law. I hope that my project is performing a similar demystification.

¹¹ For those who enjoy tedious descriptions of parlors and apartments, please see William Dean Howell’s *A Hazard of New Fortune* (1890).

¹² I am perhaps simplifying the Lukacsian concept of realism, as a response to naturalism’s inadequacies of joining the social and man (215). See *The Historical Novel* (1983).

¹³ See Foucault’s *Discipline and Punish* (1977).

¹⁴ Foucault makes this claim both in *History of Sexuality* (p. 137) and in *Birth of Biopolitics* (p. 21).

¹⁵ Of course, Hardt and Negri’s “Empire” should not be confused with Foucault’s “Empire.” For Foucault, Empire is the innate/divine nature of the singular sovereign that eventually gives away to the plurality of the state, but for Hardt and Negri, Empire is precisely the social imperialism wrought through this plurality of civil society. This is perhaps why in *Multitude*, Hardt and Negri call for a participatory democracy to subvert this process. For Hardt and Negri, Empire is precisely what keeps “democracy” an abstract and thus easily manipulative technology, whereas participatory democracy makes the potentials of “life” an *actuality*. I disagree with this call on a participatory democracy because “democracy” is still a problematic ideal, especially considering that free market discourse invokes its foundation of “freedom” quite often.

¹⁶ By doing this, Agamben ends up displaying biopolitics as a sinister refiguration of the “ancient right” through the figure of the Nazi internment camp, where mass death is industrialized to the point of a production line and where life is solely determined for those who “deserve” to live. Agamben’s *Homo Sacer*, then, is about those lives that do not deserve to live or, as he shows with madness discourse and the coma patient, those who do not seem to have a *will* to live (or to die) (138). The *Homo Sacer*, or living dead man, who occupies this zone of indistinction, is without consciousness of life, it would seem. Thus, Agamben’s need to “interlace” *zoe* and *bios*—bare life and way of life—at the end of *Homo Sacer* celebrates the potential of something more than mere life, which we might liken to ontology. Agamben chooses to describe this through a Heideggerian notion of “essence” and existence at the end of the book, which he believes is the exact method for which “*bios* lies in *zoe*” (188). Agamben believes that thinking of this relationship between *bios* and *zoe* will open “the emergence of a field of research beyond the terrain defined by the intersection of politics and philosophy, medico-biological sciences and jurisprudence” (188), opting to see this process as a positive or celebratory potentiality.

¹⁷ See Radley Balko’s pop-paranoia text “Overkill: The Rise of Paramilitary Raids in America” (2006) that he wrote for the neoliberal think-tank the Cato Institute, accessible from <http://www.cato.org/publications/white-paper/overkill-rise-paramilitary-police-raids-america> (last accessed 4/4/2012). Also see Peter B. Kraska and Victor E. Kappeler’s “Militarizing American Police: The Rise and Normalization of Paramilitary Units” in *Social Problems* 44.1 (1997): 1-18.

¹⁸ The U.S. relationship with Columbia has been emblematic of this slippery movement of influencing politics behind the rhetoric of “The War on Drugs.” Jorge G. Castañeda talks about this issue recently in his article “Morning in Latin America” (in *Foreign Affairs* 87.5 (2008): 126-139), especially with George W. Bush’s push for the United States-Columbia free-trade agreement.

¹⁹ Leo Chavez’s discussion on the Minutemen Project in *Latino Threat* (2008) follows similar claims as Justin Chacón Ackers and Mike Davis. He argues that the Minutemen are not only “delineating simple dichotomies” (such as us/them, illegal/legal, and invaders/invaded) but are enacting a historical desire: “there must have been the appeal to performing a contemporary version of an Old West narrative of cowboys versus the Mexicans, or Texas Rangers versus the Mexicans, or simply border vigilantes” that comes from the historical period after the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo when the U.S. wanted to “pacify the Mexican-origin population in the border states” (138). But this desire was particularly performative, according to Chavez, in which the Minutemen Project becomes another form of “border theater” or a “symbolic ritual of surveillance” (144). I wish to extend Chavez’s claim, however, to think of this more than simply a spectacle for fearful citizens to consume; I have argued that this appears to be necessary in the larger neoliberal picture. The need for cheap labor in the U.S. and the need for immigrants to do this cheap labor must be mystified in order to keep citizens docile in this neoliberal system, and these performances are precisely mystifications.

6. THE (NECRO)STATE OF IMMIGRATION: DEATH AND A POLITICS OF LABOR IN *LA CIUDAD* AND *THE ORDINARY SEAMAN*

When Luis Urrea writes in *The Devil's Highway*, "Like pro wrestling, there is a masked invader who regularly storms the field to disrupt the game. This, of course, is La Muerte" (28), he elucidates an ambiguity around the figure of death. On one hand, "the game" that we have seen unfold through the mystifications of biopolitics and the performances of security in the last chapter results in violent and deadly politics for immigrants. On the other hand, death here is also the only way to combat "the game" through its *disruption*. If we think of border security and the immigration "game" as only a performance in the name of securing citizen livelihood at the expense of immigrants, as I argued in the last chapter, then we must begin to question what process of regulation is happening behind these mystifying theater curtains. Where Urrea's *The Devil's Highway* draws out these theatrics of the Border Patrol for the fearful citizen, we are still left with 26 dead bodies. Where Rivera's *Sleep Dealer* offers a world completely understood through biopolitics, veiling the immigrant presence in the U.S. by a virtual *Matrix*-like machine that removes actual border crossing from the picture, we are still left with "node workers" who have been blinded or killed by electrical surges to the body. This chapter wishes to pull back the curtain of biopolitics and its symbolic "security" theater. I have ended the last chapter with how *Sleep Dealer* conflates immigration and laboring bodies so completely that it is virtually impossible to separate the two, forcing *mexicanos* into the role of cheap labor and commodities. It is this inseparable relationship between immigration and labor that this chapter explores through David Riker's *La Ciudad* (*The City*) and Francisco Goldman's *The Ordinary Seaman*.

Following the arguments of Saskia Sassen, we must understand the foundation of immigration today as a function of globalization. The forces of globalization divide the world into developed and underdeveloped, as explored in Chapter Three, but this division has serious

implications for the way money and wealth are distributed globally. With free-market policy under neoliberalism dictating the haves and have-nots, rampant uneven development and distribution have become something of a norm. Nestor Garcia Canclini's example of how factory work drew Mexican peoples away from the farms, making the people abandon subsistence for "real" money, has had dire consequences when those factories close down and move toward cheaper labor.¹ These Mexican factory workers cannot simply go back to the farms and start over without income, and many are forced to find income through other means—Sassen tells us this is the force behind immigration. Within Latina/o literature, representations of immigration are often combined with Latina/o labor narratives.² When immigration and labor become so intertwined in this way, we must begin to question what this relationship tells us and what implications this has in Latina/o cultural production. The most obvious inference to be made about this relationship is that immigrants fulfill the role of cheap labor, a commonplace story told through U.S. history in Operation Bootstrap (1948) and the Bracero Program (1942-1964). Once we acknowledge this fact, we can easily see that border biopolitics are not necessarily about securing and regulating social life for U.S. citizens by keeping immigrants out, or some ambiguous and ambivalent construct of inclusion-exclusion.³ Instead, these performances of biopolitics—specifically securing the border with hyperbolic practices and discourses—are symbolic; they mystify and veil the capitalistic desire for cheap labor that immigrants fill. In this sense, social life, especially in the U.S., depends on the cheap labor of immigrants.

This relationship has some harsh implications, not only for Latina/o bodies but also for the larger processes of regulation. Riker, during an interview with the *Revolutionary Worker*, describes this 5-year making of *La Ciudad* as attempting to capture the stories of "uprooted workers" from "the inside out," through the immigrant perspective. He believes that immigration is our time's central issue, due to these systems of enclosure and captivity. According to Riker,

this film was meant to encapsulate the way labor captivity characterizes the political economy, driven by global capitalism:

...as a navigating compass, I look at what's happened since 1973 as a process of enclosure very similar to the enclosures at the birth of capitalism 500 years ago in Europe. That is, that it's essential for capitalism to develop to actually produce this uprooted proletariat or working class. And that what we've seen since the mid '70s, on a global level, are new enclosures, which are as important in their consequences as the original ones.... (“David Riker and the People of ‘La Ciudad’”)

It is no coincidence that Riker marks these “new enclosures” as beginning in the mid-70s, the exact time period David Harvey considers to be the birth of U.S. neoliberalism (and what I might characterize as a launching in localized libertarian policies and discourses of privatization).⁴ Of course, these new enclosures are not particularly “new”: the Bracero Program, a temporary labor contract enlisting thousands of impoverished Mexicans to come into the U.S. to work, demonstrates a Keynesian system of enclosure that nods to future neoliberal manifestations. This program created a wide range of wages and working conditions, considering it was controlled by employers more than government entities and, thus, changed from farm to farm.⁵ The problem, then, was that no one was really regulating these working conditions and wages *for* the braceros; this was a self-interested regulation *for* the employers and corporate entities. This has given rise to the long-standing belief that the Bracero Program was nothing more than another version of legalized slavery.

Neoliberalism’s “new enclosures” do not require these same nation-state alliances that fueled the Bracero Program. Instead, I believe these enclosures elucidate how regulations over the modes of production, capital, and the labor function by rendering workers and bosses invisible. This invisibility points to nuanced regulations, most succinctly described through the framework of necropolitics (or a politics of death). By looking at two shorts from David Riker’s

collection of short films *La Ciudad*, I argue that these representations demonstrate how immigrant Latino bodies are organized by necropolitics in the United States.

Necropolitics addresses two contradictory processes that this chapter explores: the particularly violent and deadly effects of security states under neoliberalism on racialized and working-class bodies, and the celebratory potential of death as a figure of martyrdom and ultimate resistance. At the heart of necropolitics, we find a violent push-and-pull (both materially and figuratively) that comes to define the way class and race are represented under free-market policy and discourse, and its regulatory process is central to the way nations and neoliberalism work. Thus, necropolitics speaks to the need to re-theorize “politics” in a neoliberal age. As a regulatory system that must remain invisible and behind-the-scenes in order to secure capital for the rich and maintain free-market globalization, necropolitics creates these new enclosures, veiling cheap labor and exploitative practices. Extending Achilles Mbembe’s work of necropolitics, I wish to elucidate the way necropolitics are the organizing logic to cheap immigrant Latino labor.

I will begin by exploring this organizing logic of necropolitics through the short “Brick Cleaner.” Alongside this reading of *La Ciudad*, I also define what necropolitics is and how it works in contrast to biopolitics, which also requires a close look at the U.S.-Mexico agreements for the Bracero Program and the corporate turn in the 1986 Immigration Act—two key historical events in creating the conflation between immigration and labor for Latinos. I argue that *La Ciudad* shows how the U.S. government has precisely written itself out as a regulatory agent when dealing with immigrant laborers, both legal and illegal, in the U.S. and how this results in a system where Latina/o labor is synonymous with a politics-of-death. As a way to extend and refine Mbembe’s work on necropolitics, I look at how the nation and the neoliberal economy co-operate in this oppressive model of regulation through the figure of the *living dead* Latino

worker. By rendering (illegal and racialized) labor invisible, necropolitics are ultimately about social death.

As the ending to this chapter and dissertation, I will conclude on a more suggestive note, juxtaposing *La Ciudad* with a reading of Francisco Goldman's *The Ordinary Seaman*. I do this in order to elaborate on an interesting contradiction that arises from these structures of death, where death is a violent and exploitative neoliberal practice but also becomes the catalyst and organizing symbol for social mobilization. I tease out this contradiction, questioning how death, both literally and figuratively, becomes a significant figure in exposing the relationship between the nation and a neoliberal economy. Goldman's novel and *La Ciudad* show us these slippages and contradictions surrounding a politics-of-death. This conclusion, specifically, allows me to also speak to the larger discussions coming out of Mexico and Brazil about the symbolics and celebrations of death in Latina/o and Latin American imaginaries and cultural productions, where death frames the very understanding of the present political climate under neoliberalism. Overall, this chapter demonstrates how necropolitics, as a state system of regulation and a theoretical framework, exposes the contradictory and troubling interplay between the nation-state and the neoliberal economy in Latina/o film and literature.

6.1 *La Ciudad* and the Captivity Story of Work

I have chosen to look at David Riker's collection of short films *La Ciudad* since this collection utilizes cinematography in "documentary-style" (neo-realism), which nicely mirrors Urrea's "True Story" in the last chapter, because "documentary" immediately invoke claims to realism, as mediation between the real and the symbolic. Riker's collection, done entirely in black and white, attempts to capture a side of New York City that often is not exposed in film, specifically the backstreets and ungentrified areas of the Bronx. His film is entirely dedicated to

portraying the real “life” (or lack thereof) of immigrants hailing from Latin American in this setting.⁶ The black-and-white medium, nevertheless, works in two ways. On one level, it reduces a *mestizaje* discourse, where brown Latino bodies carry the history and blood of both European conquistadors and indigenous peoples, to a racial duality. Arguably, this racial duality is contingent on a *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896) understanding of U.S. race relations, where the social world can only be understood as black and white.⁷ But, by doing this, the film finds itself in a problematic position for “representing” Latin American descendants and *mestizo* history. Simultaneously, race becomes exaggerated in the black-and-white medium because it oversimplifies the Latino experience. This technique, then, puts *mestizaje* completely in question since brown actors, depending on light-skin or dark-skin, can look either “black” or “white” on camera.⁸ The film’s racial aspect, thus, brings with it the nationally-specific histories of race while also putting into question racial constructs all together. On another level, the black-and-white medium calls to mind the overly-done “art” film, where the lack of color somehow immediately captures a gritty (although often elite) representation of the world. As a “nostalgic” technique, black-and-white cinematography seems to work as a disruption to the garish in-your-face blockbuster, opting to elucidate a more noir element of calm urbanism amongst raw and shadowy content. “Urban” becomes the key significance of the medium. This “art” film technique becomes a method for representing these immigrant experiences as raw, gritty, and overly “urban.”

The film opens with an aerial shot of a very non-descript city, being overpowered by sky and the only movement coming from a freight train slowly cutting through the haze of gray buildings. A few tall buildings puncture the sky, but mostly, there is a homogenous spread without distinction. After this, it immediately cuts to a vacant single sidewalk, angled obliquely on a photo store, advertising 1-hour photos for visas and applications: “Fotos loteria de visa &

aplicaciones.” What is perhaps most eerie about this opening is the complete lack of people and life. As a collection entitled *La Ciudad*, we are not introduced to the overcrowded, loud visions of city life. Instead, the city stands only for buildings and businesses. The fact that the only movement is a train in the first cut immediately emphasizes solely a movement of products to the city-center. This filmic representation of the city, thus, points only to product, business, and the market.

We immediately enter the photo shop, where we see portraits being taken of individual people. The attention to the SLR camera adjustments in close-up and the slow production in changing the background is dotted with the Latina/o men and women posing for something that does not seem to be political documents. The portraiture backgrounds are cliché panoramas of pretty lake and forest scenes, appearing to be bad Monet copies through the black and white camera eye. A young Latino man combs his hair carefully, and for a moment, he appears excited. But, the portrait takes only an instant; he only gets to smile for a second. We find out later that this portrait is to send back home, as the young man reads over and over a letter from his wife and caresses her photo in his wallet. The use of portraits that we see in Riker, and in Urrea from the last chapter, is perhaps more telling about Latinos and immigration than the story allows time for. According to Suren Lalvani, portraiture has been a development coinciding by design with the middle-class’ “arrival into the domains of finance and culture,” making portraiture an affirmation of one’s ascending social class (44). The body, for Lalvani, is arranged in portraits as a way to highlight a perspectival image that uses the visual medium as a metaphor for “knowing” one’s superior existence (6-9). For Lalvani, the worker’s body is incorporated into this visual power dynamic. He argues that photography operates under a capitalistic logic that must “capture” and control the worker as a mechanism of objectification, through a (de)composition of the worker “in motion” (139-140). The portrait as a recurring theme in contemporary

immigrant narrative, however, does not seem to align with this historical claim. Oppositely, the portrait seems to work in these narratives, on one level, as signaling the lack of political portraiture (visas, passports, IDs, etc.). But simultaneously, the portrait seems to work as a documenting of one's story, one's well-being, and thus one's "life." Urrea's portraits, from the last chapter, are the only proof of the Yuma 14's story and what they had to *live* through; Riker's portraits, a bit differently, are taken so these characters may send them back home to loved ones. Urrea's portraits are public records of the dead, but Riker makes private the portrait as a communication device for the displaced to tell those back home of their "life" in the U.S., much like a letter. Both representations uphold the portrait, and with that the medium of photography, as a sentimental and humanistic expression, collapsing the distinction between public and private. The portrait becomes a macro symbol of one's "life." The way portraiture and one's "life" becomes intertwined, however, demonstrates how portraits begin to represent something antithetical to political portraiture, especially when state politics seem to be removed from the picture, a silent and unseen actor that always seems to be there and that always seems to be adjacent to these representations.

The quiet and stillness of these first three scenes—the city view, the sidewalk, and the photo shop—is then immediately broken by a cut to a sidewalk where about 20 men are jostling one another and the camera with shouts for work at the passing camera. The camera is so close to what appears to be a small mob—again, the reoccurring motif of racialized, immigrant "hordes" appears—that it is difficult to see anything but scans and glimpses of the men or to see exactly where the crowd begins and ends. This scene is perhaps the closest the entire film gets to capturing "documentary-style" in the sense that the camera is no longer a still, unmoving eye, but becomes a part of the jostling, a part of the calls for work, a part of the desperation to be picked, and thus paid, for a day of construction work. During this scene, though, the camera is

still strangely removed from the crowd because the camera is the “boss” that the men are begging for work.

The way the camera becomes an “actor” within the film, and specifically an “actor” that is so obviously in a position of dominance, reveals what José Esteban Muñoz describes through filmic ethnography, particularly autoethnography, where the camera can only be understood in “colonizer’s terms.” For Muñoz, this form within documentary-style film does not reproduce the binaries of colonizer and colonized, but instead “disrupts the hierarchical economy of colonial images and representations by making visible the presence of subaltern energies and urgencies *in* metropolitan culture” (82). Muñoz sees the camera as taking a hegemonic role that cannot operate without its opposite. Continuous shouts of “¡A MI!” puncture the violin soundtrack in this scene, perhaps validating Muñoz’s claim that this technique of “metropolitan form” requires the “power of subaltern speech” and “needs the colonial ‘other’ to function” (82). But, this scene does not necessarily demonstrate a “disruption,” or more pointedly a celebratory dialectic, of these power dynamics, as Muñoz claims. The way that the camera remains removed from the group through its dominance despite being a part of the scene invokes what Roberto Schwarz describes as a “cold” camera eye that produces an “ethnocentricity of reason” (61). This ethnocentricity, for Schwarz, exposes a “violent effectiveness of capitalist colonization, in which reason and superiority are combined,” which then solely is “transformed into an aesthetic model” (*MI*, 161). Schwarz sees this filmic technique as problematic in that it writes out the political dynamics of the content and replaces the political with the aesthetic. Although Schwarz and Muñoz are coming from very different positions and angles, I must complicate Schwarz and Muñoz a bit. This scene in *La Ciudad* neither replaces the political with the aesthetic nor does it raise up the “other.” Instead, this scene hyperbolizes the political implications by making the camera *el jefe*, which immediately subsumes the viewer into the position of both one who feels

sympathy as a removed spectator *and* one who is the authoritarian target of this begging. In other words, the film interpollates the viewer into a position of power. The camera and its relation to the eye of the viewer, in this sense, shapes the aesthetic and molds it to the political power dynamic, enclosing both the viewer, the camera, and the “hordes” into a rather violent and repulsive experience. The logic we find here is not necessarily ethnocentric because it homogenizes this experience: the actors, the camera, and “us” are all incorporated into this space. Simultaneously, the class disparity exposes an uneven distribution of power in this uniform and totalized space. This space is (illegal) labor.

It is important to note, then, that this is the first time that the city appears to be “overcrowded,” loud, and full of people. The fact that this is attached to the search for work for illegal immigrants and the unemployed is both disturbing and telling. Saskia Sassen describes the relationship between low-wage, immigrant labor and the city as a “mode of incorporation” that “renders these worker’s invisible, therewith breaking the nexus between being workers in leading industries and the opportunity to become—as had been historically the case in industrialized economies—a ‘labor aristocracy’ or its contemporary equivalent” (*The Global City*, 322).⁹ This process of invisibility is precisely where we find the immigrant laborer in *La Ciudad*.

When the scene of “hording” workers and the camera-boss cuts to a very pudgy New York white man with the “hordes” surrounding him for work, he gathers 10 Latinos with promises of \$50/day for unspecified work and drives them into the middle of a dilapidated nowhere land. When we get to the construction site, the site is no more than an old factory falling apart, with fallen walls of brick covering every square of visible land. The oddness of this destroyed Fordist image is that it literally looks to be one building in the middle of brick, without any sign of other buildings or “civilization.” It is literally the “fall of civilization.” By this, I

mean to point to the lack of “life” at the site. The workers are the only “life” that seem to populate this space, and the ruins of the factory only recall a past life, at once both nostalgic and apocalyptic. The process of invisibility in this scene, thus, is through the way that the space appears abandoned, destroyed, and outside the life of the city. Simultaneously, this Fordist image maintains the city as central to the space, the industrial being a commonplace sign of the city. If the immigrant is the only “life” within this, then the worker remains isolated from city “life,” placed into the waste of the city.¹⁰ This space, thus, encapsulates the immigrant workers into an invisible and veiled labor, hidden within the city that provides them work.

Once at the site, the boss changes the verbal contract. He tells the workers they will get 15 cents per brick that they clean and stack. Immediately, the men start shouting in Spanish, a language the contractor obviously does not understand, about how unfair this “change” is after being driven out into the middle of nowhere. The only black worker steps up and translates between the Latino workers and the boss, taking the mediator role even though he, too, is getting the “short-end of the stick” in this contractual change—his dual language skills seemingly remove him from the space of labor momentarily. This moment tells us something about contract.

This contract, and the change to it, speaks doubly to both a sexual (or of-the-body) contract and a racial contract. Carole Pateman defines contract through “property of person,” where people own “property” within their own person that they can contract out in exchange for money (5). For Pateman, this concept of having “property of person” creates relationships of subordination that we can mostly clearly see in the sexual-social contracts of marriage, prostitution, and surrogacy, which are always under the rubric of economics. This “property of person” was extended by Charles Mills into the realm of the racial, speaking to the relationship of subordination intoned through white supremacy, where the racial contract, developed through

colonialism and slavery, gives rise to the very definition of race: “‘White’ people do not preexist but are brought into existence *as* ‘whites’ by the Racial Contract” (63). Mills tells us that this racial contract might look like a moral and normalizing hierarchy but is “calculatedly aimed at economic exploitation” (32) where the black underclass undergoes continuous “labor market discrimination” as “payoff for its white beneficiaries” (39). Both Pateman and Mills redefine the ways that the body—genetically, biologically, socially, sexually, racially—becomes a tool in a capitalist process that mystifies the worker into a status of individual “free” labor, who under contract is not contracting out himself but instead a “part of a property he owns in his person” (Pateman 65). Contract, thus, mystifies the labor situation by allowing the worker to believe that he is a free and civil *equal* to the employer or boss because the worker’s body, not the worker himself, is solely the tool to contract out.

When we see this become racialized, as in this scene in *La Ciudad*, where the Latino workers and the white boss are “arguing” about the change in contract through the single black man, we can *visualize* the bureaucracy of business, as a sort of legitimization of the situation. But the starkness of racial difference, and the language barriers that arise in this scene, are deeply informing this moment as one of class structure. Bilingual skills may appear to remove the black worker from the situation, enabling him with the status of “communication mediator.” But this moment actually shows us an absence of a contract mediation (it is only lingual mediation) and demonstrates a part of the mystification of contract: he does not achieve a fair contract with his communication/mediation skills, ending up as one of the exploited. Thus, it is no surprise that the fight over the contractual change is short-lived. The workers, starved for pennies, agree to the dubious change in contract; the communication does not actually do anything. The contract is nothing but a formality to *appear* as legitimate and uphold the facade of employment “equality,” since the workers voluntarily “agree.” But when looking at the utter need for money when they

were begging for work on the street, the space they have been driven to, and the racial and lingual barriers, the workers obviously have no choice in the matter—choice is simply an appearance. Of course, this contractual change makes the situation even more abysmal since it immediately causes the workers to overexert in an attempt to get enough brick to make at least \$50 for the day. This leads to infighting, as some men desperately steal other workers' bricks and others rarely stop for water.

The “bossman” leaves them in the middle of this apocalyptic rubble once the contractual change is “agreed” upon, without water or amenities. In this situation, there appears to be no regulation. The old factory is unstable; the site is obviously not safe; and the men are placed within it as though they have no rights but to hard labor. And although the outcome of a situation like this is obvious when one of the factory walls collapses on one of the workers, the horror of the situation becomes deeply realized in this accident. The other workers attempt to save the man crushed by brick, madly digging out his arms. The camera only captures the hands and limbs of both the fallen and the men removing brick. Once dug out, the man is barely breathing, and one of the men calls out “Yo llevo un ambulancia,” but there is no phone nearby, no cars, and no ability to contact “civilization.” The fallen man is the same man we see getting his portrait taken in the beginning.

Even when one of the men finally gets to a phone, he has no idea where they are, so he cannot give 911 any information. When he returns with this fact, there are maybe 5 seconds of silence from the men, as they realize they can do nothing for this man. Many of the men simply go back to work. Only one stays with the fallen, and in a matter of seconds, the man who so carefully combed his hair for a portrait to send to his wife back “home” dies. They can only mourn through more labor. They scream, they cry, they knock old mortar off each brick. At the end of the day, 15 cents a brick trumps the sentiment of a death. This scene elucidates the way

that work and labor enclose the immigrant. The workers' contractual and geographical enclosure, which produces a system of invisibility, leads to this moment, and we are vaguely unsurprised by the death because it is the obvious conclusion to this situation. This scene, then, tells us how death becomes a part of the job. So, although these men mourn the death of their fellow worker, the death becomes deeply entrenched in the structure of work.

6.2 **Necropolitics at Work: The Matter of Absence**

This short in *La Ciudad* brings me the question of "death" and how it structures these economic issues within immigration. Achille Mbembe offers a framework for thinking about this relationship between death, the nation-state, and the economy through the theory of necropolitics. He begins with a two-fold definition of politics here: as a project "of autonomy" but also as "the achieving of agreement among a collectivity through communication and recognition" (13). Mbembe tells us that this definition of politics is "what differentiates it from war" (13) because it is communicative and congenial (13). His argument wants to challenge and redefine this understanding of politics because this definition omits the violent material actions going on in the world, especially a post-9/11 world. Mbembe, thus, argues that politics (as communication/recognition) and war are not opposed.

By conjoining war and violence with politics, he labels this relationship necropolitics, where politics are always "the work of death" and sovereignty constantly exhibits "the right to kill" (16). His argument may appear to be suggesting that we have returned to what Foucault calls the "ancient right," as described in the last chapter (136-147). But, this is not a monarch who regulates the people through the threat of death. Instead, Mbembe's project, although often dense, is quite straightforward: the inhumanity inherent in policing and discipline or what he terms "social death" (21, 25, 34). What Mbembe describes here is the way death becomes the

only way to allow for certain populations to live. So when we have a situation like the workers' in *La Ciudad*, the absent boss and the mystifying contract demonstrate this systemic inhumanity, where communication renders no contractual recognition and produces an enclosure of violence, resulting in the death of one of the immigrants. Mbembe wants to foreground "death" instead of solely invoking it as a background technology that upholds life, as biopolitical theory often does.¹¹ By foregrounding "death," we are able to see the way that these processes are "necessarily violent processes" (20). In other words, politics cannot be separated from war and violence.

The term "sovereignty" has been a major approach to speaking to these "politics" and is central to Mbembe's work, as well as many critics of both biopolitics and necropolitics.¹² Many believe that sovereignty is still a significant framework for thinking about the neoliberal world, although all believe it must undergo some serious redefinition. Often summed up as "supreme authority" over a geographical area, sovereignty is most obviously associated with the modern nation-state, where centralized-but-representative governments rule over a people and a spatial "property." But, of course, nation-states are recognized and legitimized by their interactions with one another, whether through foreign policy talks, treaties, and/or war.¹³ When these interactions are deadly, they work to create hierarchy and hegemony among the world of nations. In a neoliberal world, this operates a bit differently from the liberalism of "nations as democratic populations" because these interactions (such as war) operate not to legitimize the nation-state but to create economic hegemony. I wish to step away from the term "sovereignty" since its erratic usage unnecessarily obscures the processes that take place in global interactions between recognized nations. Instead, I wish to take this more into an economic language of distribution since necropolitics is about how state-bound (governed) populations organize themselves and one another through distributions of death, where some peoples are more disposable than

others.¹⁴ This is a part of uneven distribution, where populations are organized by the few haves and the many have-nots.

In this sense, necropolitics is not solely about literal biological death (although surely the literal is the most extreme of this process), *per se*, but about the utter disposability of the racialized labor force. Mbembe, of course, is not far away from my economic extension. He sees necropolitics as a violent process that commodifies the body. Primarily drawing on the figure of the slave, a representation of these lethal and violent processes, he describes that “the slave’s life is like a ‘thing,’ possessed by another person, the slave existence appears as a perfect figure of a shadow” (22). The slave is the quintessential historical figure for human commodity, but Mbembe draws out the rather neoliberal implications of necropolitics here. Mbembe’s figure of the slave steps in as demonstrative of the way people are reduced to dehumanized commodities. This makes necropolitics deeply economic because it sparks the capitalist need for commodity circulation and signals the ease in enacting violence on people who are “things.” Mbembe wants to see the slave as a “state of exception” that symbolically seals off the slave (22); I have described this exact process through the layers of invisibility that *La Ciudad* elucidates.¹⁵ The historical difference, of course, is that the slave in U.S. history was quite literally dehumanized into pure commodity—property—whereas the workers in *La Ciudad* are not slaves in this traditional sense. They are captives, sealed off from the city, and disposable in the same sense, but they are not “possessed” by an owner or boss. Quite the opposite, the boss is absent. Instead they are “possessed” by the mystifying equality of a contract. They have been made to believe that only a property within themselves is commodity, and they have legally agreed to this violence. This is where the economics of the situation truly meet the politics of the nation-state. Ultimately, these workers are *legally* disposable.

To elaborate, the workers are held captive in the space of Fordist ruin, which disallows them to get help for the dying man. This captivity, resulting in both violent labor conditions and literal death, “works” because these men are invisible to society and because contract stands in for the absent boss. This issue of invisibility is central to understanding how the relationship between Latinos, labor, and immigration encapsulates the violence wrought through the regulatory practices and discourses of a necropolitical structure. The fact that the boss is *absent* from the space of work demonstrates a much more troubling, and I would say “neoliberal,” commodification of the body. This absence suggests that the laborer is not managed in the Fordist and/or bureaucratic sense. This is a liberalism that may appear to be “self-regulating” (which is one of the defining features of libertarian thought), but the presence of a “contract” demonstrates the way this is managed: it is at once both an act of state legality and a commodification of the laborer (since as Pateman illustrates, contract implies having a “property he owns in his person” (65)). Although Mbembe does not want to locate necropolitics within the boundaries of the nation-state, seeing this process as a deeply inter-national (war) and global (capital) occurrence, I think the boss’ absence tells us quite a bit about the way the nation operates in this neoliberal economy as well. In other words, we are not witnessing a “withering away of the state” when we see these border politics and laboring immigrants. The state is not disappearing; it manifests itself constantly through social contract. But contract also works to veil these nation-state regulations, rendering them invisible and behind-the-scenes. The nation-state works hard at building the border wall, at performing security, and at maintaining a symbolic patriotism in the name of citizen “life”—the last chapter showed us how this symbolic still required immigrant deaths. *La Ciudad* complicates this symbolic regulation of immigration by demonstrating the way the *lack* of state regulation on illegal labor practices is still nation-bound and ultimately points in the same direction of violence.

The first and most clear example of the way the nation-state continues to have a strong role in the neoliberal economy (and vice versa) through a process of invisibility is the Bracero Program (1942-1964). We see this “shadow” of the state demonstrated in border discourse and practice most poignantly through the Bracero Program and its own program of captivity.

Although the Bracero Program may not be a part of the popular U.S. imagination, this labor contract between Mexico and the U.S. arguably changed the face of immigration in the U.S. As a way to fill the gap of workers fighting in WWII, the Bracero Program was simply a temporary labor contract enlisting thousands of impoverished Mexicans to come into the U.S. to work. The work was predominantly farm labor and railroad building. It was so successful that the conclusion of WWII did not bring its end, and it was repeatedly extended until 1964. A committee of numerous governmental departments was in charge of the program-contract, but they provided little regulations on the program they created, placing the power of “regulation” on the farmers and contractors who had called for more workers.¹⁶ So, although this was an inter-governmental contract, the individual worker contracts were largely controlled by independent farmers’ associations and farm bureaus. This program, contracted by governments but controlled by employers and corporate entities, created a wide range of wages and working conditions, considering it changed from farm to farm and depended on boss-worker contracts (Calavita 57). The problem, of course, was that no one was really regulating these working conditions and wages *for* the braceros; this was a self-interested regulation *for* the employers and corporate entities.

Simultaneously, this lack of U.S. state regulation was contradicted by Operation Wetback, initiated in 1954, which set out to stop the illegal immigration the Bracero Program had instigated. We see INS commissioner Gen. Joseph Swift calling for troops “to stop this horde of invaders” at this moment (quoted in Calavita 51). Once again, the echo of “hordes” is

invoked as a hyperbole that must be “eradicated.” But, what Operation Wetback instigated was to particularize the Bracero Program. Because of Operation Wetback, the Bracero Program became a program of captivity since new legislation to stop illegal immigration bounded *by law* braceros to a given crop and employer. This has given rise to the long-standing belief that the Bracero Program was nothing more than another version of legalized slavery.

This relationship between the nation and the economy finds its footing in the very construct of “labor,” then. Labor begins to be the foundation from which captivity, enclosures, deregulation, and politics comes. Kitty Calavita relates that the Bracero Program was not demonstrative of economic citizens’ puppeteering the state but instead shows a rocky alliance between state agendas to deal with the fine line between legal/illegal and economic interests to forward the *life of production* (74). What we see here is how “life” is not tied to “human,” but instead to production and specifically capital production: the free enterprise of labor, which has been put into question time and again in the age of neoliberalism, comes into direct *contract* with nation-state policy.

The second major, although often underplayed,¹⁷ example of this process of invisibility of the nation-state and the captivity of the immigrant worker is the libertarian-influenced Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986. As more explicit neoliberalism arises in the 1970s, it is now no surprise the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986, followed by the Immigration Act of 1990, as well as the reforms being discussed in Congress and the House as I write this, were and are drafted by the Department of Labor. When the U.S. government passed the Immigration Reform and Control Act in 1986, immigration politics underwent a more economical agenda. This Act was more about the economy than it was about actual immigrants in the sense that it was less concerned about creating border, visa, and citizenship regulations. The major reform in the act was that the U.S. government placed the agency of immigration

regulation on businesses, stipulating that it was illegal for businesses to knowingly hire illegal immigrants. In many ways, this Act allowed the government to police businesses more than “illegal immigrants.” By legally placing blame on businesses, the U.S. government assumed that work and immigration were inextricably tied together. But moreover, I touch on this Act because it highlights a very interesting move in the legal question of immigration: the immigrant “problem” is now privatized to the corporate world in many ways. The nation-state reformed immigration law to make sure businesses would hide their illegal exploitations all the more, and of course, working immigrants cannot easily decry their exploitation in fear of deportation (illegal) or visa retraction from employers (legal). This reform, however, also points to why the U.S. state is out of the picture when we see these representations of illegal labor practices. The government literally wrote themselves out of the immediate immigrant picture and into a more definitively “business” picture. More importantly, this was a *legalization* of their lack in regulation. The nation-state in this situation is now veiled behind a corporate logo, and immigrant labor is regulated through this veil.

Jasbir Puar, one of the major scholars on Mbembe’s theory of necropolitics, explores this interplay between the nation and neoliberalism, arguing that what is central to necropolitics is that there is “a privatization of death” (*Terrorist Assemblages* 33). Privatization is one of the defining features of neoliberalism, identifying the movement away from government-controlled social programs to the private (corporate) sector (especially health care, welfare, and education). But Puar uses “privatization” much more metaphorically, believing death is now kept private and taboo (33). Her idea of the private is simply another form of invisibility, and she believes this “privatization” is essential to the “distribution and redistribution” of biopolitics or to “optimize life” (33).¹⁸ For Puar, death is taboo and private because it must be kept invisible so the national and quotidian norm (another form of regulation) may persevere, or metaphorically *live on*. But as

I hope the historical examples demonstrate, the nation-state operates much more formally within this privatization, rewriting laws and acts to redefine and ultimately mask itself in the economic climate of neoliberalism. What we find in these legal processes of invisibility, both in law and in “privatization,” is often inhumanity, where the worker is dehumanized and the body is commodity. This is a process of violence; this is necropolitics.

This contradiction of regulating one’s lack of regulation, according to Lisa Lowe, “continues to be the site for the resurgence of contradiction between capital and the state, between economic and political imperatives, between the ‘push-pull’ of markets and the maintenance of civil rights and is riddled with conflicts as the state attempts to control through law what is also an economically driven phenomenon” (20). For Lowe, the violence is found in the push and pull between governments and the economy. Although this “contradiction” is deeply apparent when looking at border politics and immigration, I am wary to keep calling this relationship between the nation-state and neoliberal economy a “contradiction” because these two processes often require one another in order to work. However, if we consider necropolitics to be the organizing framework of this interplay between these two processes, we must understand the framework as having its own paradoxes. To understand necropolitics, then, “death” must take on a more multifaceted meaning, pointing to more complex layers of invisibility. Mbembe describes invisibility in multiple ways: on the one hand, it’s the brutal invisible “killings” where populations are deprived of income or “cut off from the world” (30), and on the other hand, it is the suicide bomber who “transforms his or her body into a mask that hides the soon-to-be detonated weapon...the weapon carried in the shape of a body is invisible” (36). Mbembe draws out a very interesting contradiction here. This contradiction between the absolute brutality inherent to necropolitics and a system of martyrdom that mimics it in the name of resistance is what the second half of this chapter explores.

6.3 **Politics-of Death as Social Mobilization in *La Ciudad***

The contradiction surrounding the figure of death shows itself in the last short of *La Ciudad*, “Seamstress.” Mbembe offers us an interesting way of reading these politics of death as deeply tied into the economy of production, where “innovations in the technologies of murder aim not only at ‘civilizing’ the ways of killing. They also aim at disposing of a large number of victims in a relatively short span of time” (19). This immediately invokes the gas chambers of Nazi Germany, although this mass production in murders also brings to mind the systematic “disappearances” of women and men in Mexico, the genocide of the urban and capitalistic Cambodians by Pol Pot and his regime, and the authoritarian massacres and torture of uprising Iraqis by Saddam Hussein, to name a few. These scales of violence (in a matter of months or a few years, sometimes) are almost impossible to fully comprehend, resulting in millions of deaths. But, the disposing of masses of people through *innovative* technology alludes to the production line, where mass killing sounds an awful lot like Fordist production. The factory, as a constant symbol of the Industrial Revolution and the rise of mass production, appears in the beginning of *La Ciudad* as a fallen, post-apocalyptic ruin to be cleared away. But, the end of *La Ciudad* revives the factory, as an ongoing model of illegal labor practices. This nightmare of Fordist destruction, resulting only in death, is replaced at the end of the film by the Fordist corollary: the sweat shop.

The short about the sweat shop tells us the story of a young woman, Ana, who sews clothing for the ready-to-wear stores of New York City. The sweat shop, with at least thirty women sewing in rows and a handful of men ironing in the back with billows of steam obscuring the windows, looks cramped among the yards of fabric and steam in an approximately 300-square-foot brick-walled space.¹⁹ The story tells us how the Chinese couple who runs the shop

keep pushing back the workers' payment, fire the women randomly for a "bad" stitch, and hover over the scene in wolf-like fashion, a practice that Ana chooses to overlook at first when talking with the other ladies about not being paid: "*no me meta en esto.*" The stereotypical use of the Chinese bosses, nevertheless, speaks to the way that the sweatshop encapsulates these global exchanges and keeps them hierarchical. By casting Chinese bosses with solely Latino workers, Riker's sweatshop demonstrate a multilevel process to the sweatshop, where Latinos occupy the hard labor and the Chinese find themselves one notch above the hard labor as the managerial overseer. We even momentarily get an unidentifiable white woman who contracts the sweatshop's work; she enters for seconds as the commanding figure of the whole process. All the while, this is set somewhere in the Bronx. What is interesting about this top-down representation is that it racializes and ethnicizes these tiers while the principal "boss" remains absent: consumers and their "cheaper-apparel" desires. By doing this, the sweatshop becomes a space that reduces the complexity of consumption into a rather banal racial hierarchy entirely focused on production alone. We should see this as an oversimplification, considering these racial lines position this labor and the garment industry into a long-standing discourse about how the white hegemony pits immigrant groups against one another and newer immigrants are immediately cast as "less than" to more established immigrants.²⁰ But by taking out consumption and opting to only show the side of racialized production, the film interpollates these workers into a labor that is removed from its rationality of consumerism. This work is solely stratified through naturalized notions of race and ethnicity.

When Ana finds out her daughter is very sick back home, she begins a desperate search for \$400 that she needs to send back home quickly. After going to friends, her drunk cousin, and a couple close fellow workers, she finds herself with little money and not enough time. Deeply worried and encumbered by the nagging knowledge of her daughter's illness, Ana finally refuses

to work without being paid immediately. What results from this refusal is the Chinese man continuously prodding and shoving her shoulders while shouting “¡Trabajo!” Her tearful screams of “no” and begging for the money are answered with the demand for her to “get out” in which she hugs and holds onto the commercial sewing machine. This action of holding onto the machine does not make Ana any less “docile” than she has been with these working conditions. Aihwa Ong describes the way that transnational companies prefer “third world female workers” because of their perceived docility. For Ong, the third world female body becomes a selling point for buyers who want higher production on lower wages, so that her “nimble fingers,” her “eyes and fingers adapted for assembly work,” and her “natural attributes” are synonymous with wage work (73). This moment where Ana holds on to the sewing machine, crying, not saying anything but tearful requests to be paid, exposes her corporeal dependency on the labor of sewing, so much so that her only protest is to lock her body around the machine that she works on. The machine is not a source of income, since she has not been paid for her work in weeks. Instead, the machine is an extension of her own body; both her body and the machine solely symbolize labor.

To think of Ana and the sewing machine being an extension of one another is to put Ana’s body into a troubling position. In many ways, Ana’s body and the sewing machine become synonymous, where the body is a machine and the machine is a body. This relationship between the body and the machine, then, tells us something about this protest. By turning off the machine, Ana turns off her own body. In this sense, both are “dead.” By locking her body around the machine, Ana and the machine become one and the same. If the machine is not working, neither is Ana. If Ana refuses to work, so must the machine. Ana’s protest, however, goes beyond this metaphor in the film, demonstrating that she/machine cannot leave this space of work. If she leaves, she gives up the money that she so desperately needs. This makes her very

much a captive of capital. Her protest, then, is not taken to the streets but remains with her machine in the confines and captivity of the sweatshop.

The major surprise of this short is that her firing does not lead to the blind-eye acceptance we have expected, as the often true and pessimistic outcome when one is “illegal” and thus peripheral to state labor laws. Instead, everyone in the sweatshop stops working; all noise is stopped; all machines die. This silent protest might bring to mind Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri’s call for the multitude: a network of plural singularities, internally different, whose actions, constitutions, and participatory democracy are not based on identity but on what they have in common (100).²¹ For Hardt and Negri, the multitude is a “living alternative” within the violences of globalization (xiii). In other words, it is a social mobilization possible through globalization but not necessarily performing the hegemonic and economic exploitations of a capitalistic world.²²

But, unlike the multitude, this scene does not look to be the actions of a participatory democracy. Actually, regardless of the cooperative resistance, this moment is the antithesis of “action” or of “living”; it is precisely non-action. This scene demonstrates a troubling juxtaposition, where the non-active, “dead” body actually does more political work than an active, “living” body. Mbembe explores this potential in death under martyrdom, preferring the extreme example of suicide bombers, where self-sacrifice gives the body value and power because it is a “process of abstraction,” a “sign of the future,” and a “supremacy in which the subject overcomes his own mortality” (37). Puar describes the suicide bomber as indicative of these very paradoxes (the literal and the abstract) surrounding a politics of death: “In pondering the queer modalities of this kind of terrorist, one notes a pastiche of oddities: a body machined together through metal and flesh, an assemblage of the organic and the inorganic; a death not of the self or of the other, but both simultaneously; self-annihilation as the ultimate form of

resistance and self-preservation” (“Queer Times, Queer Assemblages,” 128). And likewise, Mbembe is not celebrating the suicide bomber, simply teasing out these violent processes that have created “new and unique forms of social existence in which vast populations are subjected to conditions of life conferring upon them the status of *living dead*” (40). Ana represents the way the living dead are not simply the result of exploitative economic and political practices and discourse but also a paradoxical mobilization against this exploitation. If we think of this as a version of necropolitics, albeit more figurative, then the dead begin to take on a dual meaning: they are the violent effect of the relationship between nation and neoliberalism, but they are also the disruption to this violence. This disruption is La Muerte—both a celebratory figure and a violent figure.

After a series of individual shots of the bosses who seem to be at a loss for what to do and the workers who seem to be simply focused on the act of non-action, the camera begins a three-cut pan out of the factory building. We begin to see how truly small the space is, as it becomes three tiny windows amongst a building that must house a hundred of these “shops.” The conclusion to this protest is never given. We are left without any clue to whether or not the refusal to work *actually works*. By doing this, the non-working body is synonymous with the inability to demonstrate the productivity of this protest. In this sense, the ending is simply to stop all productivity. The silent protest, nevertheless, seems to be the only answer for the film’s ending short, a sort of passé “light of hope” in a rather brutally ominous film.

But, this is not the ending to the entire film. After panning out on the factory, the film returns to the photo shop and begins to show another series of shots of individual and group faces getting their photos taken. The film actually ends with the young man we see die at the construction scene, closing the movie with where his character started: getting his photo taken.

6.4 The Nation and Neoliberalism: The Dead, the Resurrected, and the Ghost

Unlike Puar who wants to “keep taut the tension between biopolitics and necropolitics” (35), I instead want to elucidate that this distinction between biopolitics and necropolitics is inappropriate for the larger processes at work. The mystifying framework of biopolitics, that the last chapter revealed, are not opposed to necropolitics but a necessary appearance to veil the workings of necropolitics. I have attempted to argue that biopolitics is nothing but a show, an illusion, a great sham, that reconstitutes the centrality of the Nation at the heart of capitalist neoliberalism in the first chapter of this Immigration section. This biopolitical mystification itself is a function of neoliberalism’s success. What the border shows us, and more pointedly what Urrea’s *The Devil’s Highway* and Rivera’s *Sleep Dealer* show us from the last chapter, is that the optimizing of life, as Puar would call it, solely disguises the necropolitics that drives and disseminates these processes of capital. This chapter, on the other hand, has attempted to more explicitly demystify this biopolitical model of neoliberal regulation on Latina/o bodies, demonstrating that what we have is precisely a politics-of-death for Latinas/os within the U.S. nation-state. In other words, the tension is not between biopolitics and necropolitics but within politics itself.

Riker’s *La Ciudad* gives us an explicit representation of how the U.S. nation-state continues to operate by turning a blind eye—in writing—all in the name of corporate affiliations and free market policy-making. The fact that the Nation and its biopolitics remain “central” is not because they are actually operating then, but because they are the necessary mystification for our docility within this system. To think of this as necropolitics, then, is to understand that immigration is one of the major sites for elucidating the *violent* interplay between the nation and the neoliberal economy. This interplay is where we find Latinos in the larger social structure, and

through Latina/o cultural production on immigration, the poignant affects of this interplay creates a model for engaging with and understanding the larger implications of neoliberalism.

Nevertheless, it is this “docility” with which Francisco Goldman’s canonical novel *The Ordinary Seaman* engages. This novel, I wish to suggest, helps elucidate the very system in which *La Ciudad* finds itself. The contradictory relationship with “death”—both literal and figurative, both as the end of a life and as a social mobilization of corporeal immobility—in *La Ciudad* is precisely this necropolitics at work. *The Ordinary Seaman*, like *La Ciudad*, brings home how these politics-of-death are inextricable from labor itself. This is a story about Esteban, a young man who participated in the Nicaraguan civil war of the 1980s²³ and who had to leave for work due to the post-war instability. He leaves Nicaragua when a man solicits him and fourteen other men to work on a ship called the *Urus* docked out on the Brooklyn pier. They are illegally “shipped” to the pier, where they are left to do work on the *Urus*. What is perhaps haunting about this story is that these men are left to work with little to no direction from a “boss.” Like we see in *La Ciudad*, the absent boss is replaced with the managements of a mystifying contract, reducing these men into bodies that are legally regulated but also economic commodities. They are left without money and very little food; they are told not to leave the ship or they will be arrested and deported; and, they are left without any guidance on how to actually repair the *Urus*. The men are visited only fleetingly throughout the novel by El Capitán and his assistant Mark, who sometimes bring money and some food but eventually disappear entirely. These ordinary seamen become prisoners to the ship, some slowly starving to death and some going crazy with their memories, for six months before the Seafarer’s Institute discovers them. The novel is a surreal depiction of the same captivity story we get in *La Ciudad*.

Michael Templeton reads the novel as representing the tension between symbolic nationalism and “becoming transnational,” analyzing how the boat is a site of non-nation for the

men because it is registered in Panama but also the property of a private U.S. owner. The boat and the men's relationship to this space, for Templeton, show how "nationality is impossible to define" (279). Although the nation on this international merchant vessel comes into question, Templeton brings out the way this becomes a story of captivity. By looking at the men of the ship who resort to paint-sniffing, Templeton argues that the men become the "very machine that is their world": their bodies begin to match the same state of wreckage as the *Urus* itself (286). This tells us something about the larger system of transnational enterprise with which the novel engages where the man-becoming-machine is another form of slavery, for Templeton. He sees this man-becoming-machine as only happening to the paint-solvent sniffers or "those that collapse under this system" (287). This is perhaps where I wish to differentiate myself from Templeton, who seems to reinstate the very problem I see these stories elucidating. Templeton argues that only the men who become drug addicts become machines, which to him, shows a weakness and inability to "become transnational," but this has nothing to do with character weakness. On the contrary, the men aboard the *Urus*, drug addicts or not, are all reduced to captives of labor—as immigrant laborers, their bodies are worth little more than "wrenches as big as tennis rackets" or "a dead ship on its way to scrap" (Goldman 47).

The protagonist, Esteban, takes matters into his own hands eventually, going off the ship to steal, and then earn, supplies and necessities for the men. While "off boat," he meets many Latinos who teach him how to "survive" in the global hub of New York City as an illegal immigrant. Esteban represents the only movement from the boat to the city. Although Templeton wishes to see Esteban's movements as representative of the transnational, I see the boat itself taking a very important role here. The boat represents both the space of violent enslavement and captivity and the symbol of capitalist reproduction. The men are there to bring the ship back to life (i.e. working condition). In this sense, the ruined and dead boat mirrors the men's own

bodies, but the purpose of their labor—to resurrect and restore the life of the boat—problematizes this mirror of death; the boat is more worthy of life than these men.

With this problematic figure of the boat, the boat also steps in as a capitalist symbol of circulation, where reproduction is about capital accumulation. The boat reduces the sexual-social (babies, sex, procreation, and human “growth”) into this market logic, much like Pateman unravels through contract theory. This reduction of reproduction to a purely capital figure tells us the way in which “boat” is not a solution but a solidification of the neoliberal market logic. My argument, here, is also hinting toward the explicit sexual connotations of the boat in Goldman’s novel: reproduction. These sexual questions infer a corporeal quality to these economics. Mbembe considers necropolitics to be these “technologies of destruction” that are “more anatomical and sensorial,” a point that Puar believes to be the entire principle of necropolitics and what makes them inherently sexual (Mbembe 34; Puar *Terrorist Assemblages* 34, 112).²⁴ The boat performs the same function in *The Ordinary Seaman* because its need to be brought back to life for the private owner can only happen at the expense and captivity of these men’s bodies. The boat and the body become interactive and paradoxical but are ultimately structured by violence.

What Goldman’s novel brings to the table, however, is a docked boat almost in ruin. In this novel, the boat represents both the body of dying men and capitalistic reproduction within this enclosed male space. Goldman combines the boat and the body irrevocably, much like we see with Ana and the sewing machine in *La Ciudad*. But these figures are representative of a larger systemic representation. Saskia Sassen points to the very foundation of these systematic representations, stating, “The fact of the corruptions and abuses of power, they are all legal. Those are our contemporary brutalities. The problem is that some many of these brutalities of global capitalism are not immediately legible. You need to make the connections between that

which appears unconnected and to show the extent to which suffering *here* is a product of what we admire and consider prosperous *there*” (“Possibility of Hope”).²⁵ Sassen elucidates the way this uneven distribution does not only mean the distributions of wealth but distributions of violence *through these inequalities*. What is most troubling is the way this is “legalized” to Sassen but also in Goldman’s novel because the boat is supposedly a space that is not legally the U.S.’s but Panama’s. This why El Capitán warns the men not to leave the boat because leaving will make them “illegal” in the U.S., even though the boat is docked in Brooklyn (25-26). The boat demonstrates the complex legalizations of this worker exploitation that Sassen addresses. The boat and the workers epitomize these uneven spatial violences. Esteban’s movements off-boat and on-boat, then, isolates the boat as a central actor in the contradictory processes of necropolitics and these uneven distributions of death.

The role of Esteban and what he brings back to the boat is central to Kirsten Silva Gruesz’s analysis of *The Ordinary Seaman*. She considers Esteban and his movements as particularly contradictory. His “off boat” excursions, she argues, demonstrates an economic organization that is both celebratory and deeply cynical. She relates, “To underscore the ironic unevenness with which globalism has spread its wealth, on one of his container raids Esteban brings back a box of frozen shrimp exported from Honduras, and the Hondurans respond incredulously that they’d never been able to afford to eat such shrimp at home” (73). The stolen Honduran shrimp, then, is not simply a means for survival but the very thing in which the economic structure of neoliberalism plays out. The men are interpellated as subjects who must eat food that *represents* their national origin but has nothing to do with their economic positions in that nation (or any nation for that matter). For Gruesz, this illustrates the uneven distribution found on the dock, a profoundly neoliberal structure of the way nations and class play specific roles in the economic organization of peoples. These products are sold as representations of

nations, moving across the waters to other nations, on boats, that house a class of people who also represent nations, but are held captive to the neoliberal process of uneven distribution.

The novel, nevertheless, does not leave the men in their captivity, turning to a more hopeful ending than just leaving these men on the “death” ship. Esteban finally notifies the Seafarer’s Institute about the desolate Urus, housing a group of men from Guatemala, Panama, and Nicaragua who are not getting paid or fed for their work. It is this moment of “action” that Gruesz finds the contradiction that *The Ordinary Seaman* elucidates. She argues, “*The Ordinary Seaman* is at once a rejection of Americanism as the utopian terminal port of every immigrant's dream, and an embrace of it—but an embrace in the prophetic mode of Martí, as a presentiment of a truer liberty yet to be” (80). This contradiction shows its face, according to Gruesz, not only in the shrimp but also in the literary motifs that Goldman utilizes: the connections to *Moby Dick*, the disruptions of time and space, and issues of “visibility.” These motifs illustrate the very globalism in which Goldman is writing, and this globalism puts into question the presence of “America” among these worldly tropes.

Nevertheless, the hope of a “truer liberty” that rejects the American dream as the *telos* of immigration and/or mobile labor is a part of a new turn in celebratory transnationalism. This celebratory transnationalism drenches the special issue of *Modern Fiction Studies*, organized by Paula M. L. Moya and Ramón Saldívar, where Gruesz’s article appears. Moya and Saldívar conceive a theory they call the “trans-American imaginary” in the introduction of this special *MFS* issue, defining it as a “cultural geography, or as a chronotope, that is both historical and geographical, discursive and real, populated by transnational persons, whose lives intersect in complex ways with the heterogeneous meanings of the symbols of ‘Americanness’”(16). For Moya and Saldívar, this trans-American imaginary is all about *possibility* “where multiple national political cultures and plural national collectivities might suggestively interact as

communities of shared fates” (17). As I already touched on through Hardt and Negri, this possibility is most readily tied to the idea of the multitude. And Moya and Saldívar call on this participatory democracy that the idea of the multitude encapsulates: “Such a process might truly allow for meaningful democratic participation in the determination of the political and cultural life of the nation and mutual deliberation about how to respond collectively to the challenges facing the community of the Americas” (17). What is perhaps interesting about this trans-American imaginary, then, is that it defines transnationalism as a positive site for social mobilizations. But, more importantly, they conceive of this site as the “life of the nation.” This suggests that the trans-American—as a version of the transnational—is political only as long as it is for the nation. Yet, Moya and Saldívar gloss over the contradictory and often violent economic sites where these “interactions” occur, opting for a more nation-based understanding of deliberation and determination. In many ways, they replace the economic violences with a celebratory nation. But, these differences between the nation and the neoliberal economy are not this uncomplicated and oppositional.

So, what is perhaps not fully teased out in these readings on *The Ordinary Seaman* is the way the nation and the neoliberal economy operate quite closely. This operation is most legible in the way one of the ship's inhabitants, Bernardo, organizes these actions and non-actions of the story through his death. Bernardo, like Esteban, passes on, to an elderly couple walking by, the injustices happening on the ship. But more so, it is Bernardo who calls el Capitán out on what is happening at this site when el Capitán gives a long speech about how he cannot pay them until the boat is operating: “Let’s not hide the truth, Capitán, this ship is a swamp of safety and maritime labor violations, and now this, *un gran insulto!*...Instead, Capitán, you ask us to be slaves” (68). This accusation from Bernardo is immediately greeted with denials from the boss, who explains the capital “logic” of it through how the men are there to fix these violations and

how this is all “legal” (69). Bernardo’s allegation, however, sets him up as the speaker of truth in the novel. He is both a prophet, envisioning the ghost of his disappeared stray cat Desastres, and the symbol of aged wisdom, being the oldest and most experienced seaman of the crew. His visions within the story foretell us of his impending death: the ghost rubs against his leg (124) and his leg burned by cooking oil (237). Bernardo’s death is one that might have been avoided if they had been able to call for help, much like we see with the brick-cleaner in *La Ciudad*, again alluding to both the absent boss and the absence of state regulation of labor conditions. And even though some of the crew finally gets him to a hospital, it is too late. He, like Urrea’s Wellton 26 from the last chapter, will be buried without a name in an unmarked grave. Gruesz considers his pain in her reading, arguing that his pain “bring[s] the crew together through his suffering” (76) and analyzes how his death is solely for Esteban to have a revelation of the way past deaths are really about an “unfolding present” (78). I wish to step away from the question of temporality and belonging that both Templeton and Gruesz find central to the novel. Instead, this novel, and specifically Bernardo’s death, points to the very foundation of this larger structure of neoliberalism and the nation. Bernardo’s death functions as the catalyst for the rest of the actions in the story, especially Esteban’s continuing support of his shipmates when he could have simply walked away and disappeared into the abyss of New York City. But Bernardo’s death becomes enigmatic of the very processes in which these “transnational” men find themselves. His death is representative of this system of work, of this “transnationalism,” and of this uneven distribution.

This contradiction around the figure of death finds itself under two nodes, then: the celebratory and the violent. Like *La Ciudad*, where one short shows us the violent and poignant death of an immigrant worker and the other shows the unmoving, “dead” body as a source for social mobilization, *The Ordinary Seaman* also presents us with these two sides through Bernardo. This duality around death and these politics it enacts in these neoliberal

representations hails from ongoing discourses and practices from Latin America. Robert H. Moser's *The Carnivelesque Defunto* reads the way death in Brazilian literature and cultural practices becomes a way to reconcile the national past with the present and future through carnival and excessive reality (7-9). Claudio Lomnitz's *Death and the Idea of Mexico* historicizes and revises the ongoing significance of death as a Mexican national totem (the laughing skeleton) that embodied the *mestizaje*, cultural hybridity, of Aztec and Catholic, capitalist and socialist, and festive and violent (41-46). Both these works engage with the way death and the dead become central to the national structure, often producing the same imagined community of Benedict Anderson's construct of nationalism. And although neither uses the term "necropolitics," both are often talking about the same logic. On many levels, although both critics wish to keep taut the celebratory and the violent, they end up seeing death as either happy hybridity that has become the signal-word for transnationalism-as-potentiality (since the 1990s, at least) or as a symbolic imaginary that works much like the Aztlán for the Chicano cultural nationalists (as seen in Chapter Two) or like La Migra's "security" practices (as seen in Chapter Five). This celebratory mode, however, cannot be understood alone; the figure of death must maintain its contradiction, especially when it is representative of this relationship between the nation and neoliberalism.

Death and the dead, as a cultural device from which to read, is one of the places where the nation and neoliberalism begin to be in direct conversation. Moser's and Lomnitz's works demonstrate the particularly nationalized foundation of "death," through national wars (such as the Mexican Revolution) and nation-based practices (such as Carnivale or Dia de los Muertos). Moser, in particular, approaches this contradictory figure of death by glossing over the global allusions of this figure in favor of a more national literary perspective. In his reading of Roberto Schwarz, for instance, he neglects the global implications of Schwarz's argument in *Misplaced*

Ideas. Schwarz claims that the lack of historical continuity in Brazil comes from Brazil's adoption of the democratic ideas/ideals of the "modern" world, which has allowed for a "distortion" between ideologies of liberalism and ongoing social inequality (25). This distortion between the nation and the world produces "a sense of contradiction between the real Brazil and the ideological prestige of the countries used as models" (2). Moser, however, refuses to deal with this global structure, concentrating almost entirely on the national, where for example "hegemony" is found in the Brazilian elite not the prestige of other countries' ideas (104-5). Instead, Moser replaces the global with what he calls the "Otherworldly." Death, in this sense, becomes the microcosmic figure of how Latin American nations are made, for Moser. I wish, however, to extend Moser into a more Schwarzzian construct of how nations are dependent on market circulations, of both products and ideologies. Death is not the "fill-in" to the global. Death operates as the relationship between the nation and the global because it exposes the way capital and the "free" market trumps the human body in both realms. Nations and global capital operate under this rubric of death in order to participate in and disseminate a process of neoliberalism.

Death, thus, also speaks to these larger neoliberal interactions. Lomnitz ends his tome on the complicated circulations of death and death culture, where the poor and working classes become synonymous with the skull imagery, dehumanizing them from the rich (450-1). For Lomnitz, death and its popular, powerful images now became signals to the growing inequalities of Mexico (both within the nation and in the global sphere), which he argues ultimately dissociates death from the nation-state (453, 496).²⁶ Lomnitz, however, chooses not to fully dissociate death from the nation-state. Instead, he simply removes "sovereignty" from the nation-state and gives it to the figure of death (496). This misplacement of "sovereignty" returns us to Mbembe's framework of necropolitics, where sovereignty becomes not necessarily a way to

legitimize death but something to obscure the process of death wrought through neoliberal state violences of exploitation, inequality, and uneven distribution.

This process, then, is both unseeable, as the ghosts that haunt the works of Moser and Lomnitz and the character Bernardo or the invisible, shadowed workers of *La Ciudad* and *The Ordinary Seaman*, and yet all too seeable, as the deadly theatrics of the Border Patrol or the skeletal costumes of Dia de los Muertos processions. This process is where we find the dead bodies of immigrants and Latino laborers but also where we labor to find the source of disruption. This process is uneven development and distribution. This process is free-market capitalism. This process is the privatization of the social world. This process is neoliberalism.

I end this dissertation on the politics-of-death not to end on a note of cynicism. I wish, instead, solely to bring out the implications of neoliberalism on Latina/o bodies. But more so, I wish to demonstrate what exactly is at stake for Latinas/os in a world organized by these interactions between the nation and a neoliberal economy. Within the cultural productions in this chapter, we see a world arise that tells us a very sad story, but a necessary story. The many contradictions and mystifications that are created and demystified within Latina/o literature and film elucidate the very structures and processes that inform them. It is here, in the story, where death becomes the ultimate corporeal (non)act and the lasting impact of the neoliberal state.

Notes

¹ See *Transforming Modernity* (1993).

² See Helena Maria Viramontes' *Under the Feet of Jesus* (1996), Cristina Garcia's *Dreaming in Cuban* (1993), and Ana Menendez's *In Cuba I Was a German Shepherd* (2001), to name only a few, as a part of this labor-immigration genre. There are, of course, exceptions to this rule, where issues of political asylum, educational betterment, and/or environmental disasters are more central, which is most notable in Julia Alvarez's *How the Garcia Girls Lost Their Accents* (1992) and Irene Vilar's *The Ladies Gallery* (1996).

³ See Agamben's *Homo Sacer* (1998), also discussed in Chapter Five. His construct is also known as "the exception."

⁴ See David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (2005). Harvey looks at the 1974 New York stock market crash as a catalyst for revamping the social programs of welfare and education in favor of a more privatized organization of the economy and the people (23-27, 45). I, of course, would not consider this the moment that U.S. neoliberalism begins, necessarily, since I see that very much evolving from the Bretton Wood Agreements. However, this localized moment opened the door for more overt libertarian agendas and defines one of the major features of neoliberalism.

⁵ Kitty Calavita speaks to this in *Inside the State: The Bracero Program, Immigration, and the I.N.S.* (1992) (p. 57).

⁶ See David Riker's interview "David Riker and the People of 'La Ciudad'" with the online journal *Revolutionary Worker* (March, 26, 2000, last accessed 11/8/10).

⁷ This understanding of race relations, of course, ignored the Mexican American, Native American, and Asian American (as well as Italian/South European American and Irish American) experience of race in the late 19th and early 20th century. Of course, this legal moment does not fully encapsulate these non-black race relations at this time. *Plessy v Ferguson*, thus, is an interesting moment because it reduced everyone into this black-white paradigm, while obscuring the very complexity of how brown and regionally-racialized bodies were allowed and disallowed into the national make-up.

⁸ See Henry T. Sampson's *Blacks in Black and White* (1977) for a more full discussion of cinematic racializations.

⁹ Sassen is reading this out of what she calls the "serving class"—made up mostly of immigrants and women—that replaces the traditional "woman and child" category in household service work—such as nanny, landscapers, etc. (322). Both are "invisible, unrecognized workers" but in different ways (322 n.25). For Sassen, this difference is precisely a movement from the Fordist to Post-Fordist and is indicative of how the "increase in various types of inequality has brought about new social forms" (333).

¹⁰ Although this is not the common conception of the post-industrial (or Post-Fordist) worker, which is always synonymous with “service worker,” it is a type of servicing. Instead of serving consumption, this Latino immigrant worker is cleaning brick for something and someone *other than* the industrial, since the industrial appears to be in ruin. See Margaret A. Rose’s *The Post-Modern and the Post-Industrial* (1991) for a look at the fluid understanding of post-industrialization. Also, for a closer look at how the worker remains “invisible” in the post-industrial, see Gabriel Thompson’s pseudo-ethnographic project *Working in the Shadows* (2010).

¹¹ An example of this backgrounding of “death” is most apparent in Giorgio Agamben—a theorist who uses the term thanatopolitics instead of necropolitics. He argues in *Home Sacer* (1998) that today, “biopolitics can turn into thanatopolitics” since “this line no longer appears today as a stable border dividing two clearly distinct zones” (122). Yet in the same breath, Agamben maintains the existence of that “line” and simply says, “This line is now in motion” (122). Agamben’s discussion of the Nazi death camps, nevertheless, is that they are still the “pure, absolute, and impassable biopolitical space” (123). Agamben, in this sense, exemplifies the very way “death” becomes sublimated in favor of theories of life. This has major consequences when life is about “capital life” and not “human life.”

¹² See Gilberto Rosas’ “The Fragile Ends of War” in *Social Text* 25.2 (2007): 81-102; Lauren Berlant’s “Slow Death” in *Critical Inquiry* 33.4 (2007): 754-780; Giorgio Agamben’s *Homo Sacer* (1998); and Jasbir Puar’s *Terrorist Assemblages* (2007) and “Queer Times, Queer Assemblages” (*Social Text*, 2005), to name only a few.

¹³ See Immanuel Kant’s *Perpetual Peace* (1795/2005, p.19-20) for how this understanding of “Nation” becomes consolidated during the classical liberalism of the Enlightenment.

¹⁴ Mbembe at one point defines sovereignty under necropolitics as “the capacity to define who matters and who does not, who is *disposable* and who is not” (25). Unfortunately, the term sovereignty has become a catch-all for a number of different (although interrelated) processes, which often makes the term meaningless.

¹⁵ Mbembe’s ideas here are anticipated by Orlando Patterson’s *Slavery and Social Death* (1982). Patterson argues that the slave offers us two conceptions of social death (or not belonging to a community or having a social existence). On one hand, the slave was understood as a domestic enemy, meaning “[h]e did not and could not belong because he was the product of a hostile, alien culture” (39). On the other hand, the slave symbolized the defeated enemy, putting this social death into a discourse about military success and captivity (39-40). For Patterson, these two conceptions were representative of an intrusive-extrusive (or insider-outsider) dichotomy, and he believes the intrusive/insider conception is often neglected in histories and discussions of slavery. His work wishes to include the intrusive conception because “there s growing evidence that the legal redefinition of crime and the resulting increase in penal and public slavery was largely determined by the need to regulate labor” (45). In this sense, Patterson sees social death as a way of dealing with capital offenses and with refiguring our notion of labor. Although Patterson is working with a wide range of cultural spaces and historical time periods, he sees contradiction as being an important aspect of slavery and social death, especially in his idea of the ultimate slave and the dialectics of slavery. I would extend this by claiming that much of

what he identifies through this notion of intrusive versus extrusive slavery becomes refigured as intrusive AND extrusive under neoliberalism, specifically in the sense that immigrant laborers and day-workers are enslaved through the contradiction of being both insiders (for the economy) and outsiders (as non-citizens).

¹⁶ For a more comprehensive study of the Bracero Program, see Kitty Calavita's *Inside the State* (1992). Kitty Calavita, one of the leading contemporary scholars on this program-contract, uncovers the fluid relationship between the government and the economy that this inter-governmental contract created. She relates that the call from growers and farmers about labor shortages was immediately answered by the INS, the Department of Justice, Labor, State, and Agriculture, and the War Manpower Commission, who formed a committee "to study the possibility of launching a labor importation program" (19).

¹⁷ The Immigrant Act of 1965, more famously discussed in scholarship on race and ethnicity in the U.S., was an Act that changed the ethnic and racial content of U.S. citizenship, but the labor issues (that immigration is deeply tied to) did not become explicitly addressed until the Reagan-Thatcher libertarianism of the 1980s.

¹⁸ Puar's choice to call this "privatization" is both telling and disconcerting. Her need to make this synonymous with the "private-public" paradigm is not wrong, but it allows her to avoid explicitly dealing with the economic implications of this process we call "necropolitics." Specifically, when she does engage explicitly with commodification and consumption, she collapses it into the idea of homonationalism and the discourses of norm (38-39). According to my own argument, Puar elides half of the process here, concentrating on the nation instead of the relationship between the economy and nation. Thus, her distinction that death is privatized but biopolitics is nationally public is a false dichotomy, especially through the economic lens of neoliberalism. Quite the reverse, both private-public processes require an economic understanding of the way bodies are regulated.

¹⁹ As a side note, this sweatshop space looks very different from the more popular image given in the film *Real Woman Have Curves*. The image of the sweat shop in *La Ciudad* makes the "sweatshop" in *Real Women Have Curves* look like an absurd parody. Although both exemplify the conditions of the sweatshop, especially the heat, the prevention of running fans due to dust, and the "binge" work schedules, *Real Woman Have Curves*, its familial business model, and its incredibly large space with few workers stands in stark contrast to *La Ciudad*'s slave-like and cramped representation of the textile sweatshop. We might think of *La Ciudad* as demonstrating a more "real" version of this space; however, the difference between these two representations is not necessarily about which representation is more real but about which representation actually says something about these conditions. The fact that *Real Woman Have Curves* is reduced to an absurd parody in comparison to *La Ciudad* points to the way that *La Ciudad* brings out the political implications of the space without replacing it with the aesthetic, as *Real Women Have Curves* shows us and Schwarz argues is often the case in these types of films.

²⁰ This is most commonly discussed under the topic of "model minority," where "ethnic" immigrant are rated and stacked accordingly to how well they assimilated or how economically successful they are in the U.S. For a more nuanced reading of the model minority and its

ramifications in Latina/o performance, specifically for the Cuban American experience, see José Esteban Muñoz's "No es Fácil" (*TDR* 39.3, 1995, pp.76-82).

²¹ It should be noted that this is a fallacy: identity is not necessarily different from "what we have in common." Hardt and Negri, nonetheless, base almost the entire concept of the multitude on the "common," arguing that vertical power dynamics can be changed from the base of the common. Common here refers to commonwealth, common sense, common knowledge. Never does the notion of "common" disrupt or reject "identity," per se.

²² Similar arguments on the "potentiality" of globalization/transnationalism have been touched on throughout this dissertation, most notably Kwame Anthony Appiah's *Ethics of Identity*, the earlier works of Guillermo Gómez-Peña, Emma Perez's *The Decolonial Imaginary*, and José Esteban Muñoz's *Disidentifications* (1999), to name a few. But the potential for new networks and social mobilizations that globalization give us is most reminiscent of Lisa Lowe's claim in "Work, Immigration, Gender: New Subjects of Cultural Politics" in the collection *The Politics of Culture in the Shadow of Capital* (1997). She argues that the capital labor industry creates "necessary alliances between racialized and third world woman within, outside, and across the borders of the United States" giving rise to "the emergence of politicized critiques" (363). Aihwa Ong, more prominently discussed in the last chapter, also sees potential in these globalized and transnational mobilizations and networks because the world-view allows for alliances and allegiances that are deterritorialized and, thus, always against the logic of sovereignty (*Neoliberalism as Exception*, 122). But, again, this floating abstract called "sovereignty" disrupts the very material actions that social mobilization and politicizing bring out. Although this discussion on "potentiality" in late capitalism is constantly implicit to this dissertation, I continue to be wary of their hope to outmaneuver and exceed the violences of late capitalism. Instead, I see this "potentiality" and these violences as a fluid structural contradiction that allows for globalization to get away with the atrocities I am reading here.

²³ Although the Contreras vs. Sandinistas is a backdrop in the story, only coming out in fragments here and there, it deeply informs much of the plot and the way the nation-state and the economy operate together. As a war heavily funded by the U.S. by Reagan's administration, the war appeared to be another communist-vs.-capitalist conflict, but many think the war was more about creating instability so that corporations could more easily move in and access a cheap labor pool. See Ralph Armbruster-Sandoval's *Globalization and Cross-Border Labor Solidarity in the Americas* (2005).

²⁴ See also Lee Edelman's *No Future* (2004) for a queer-analytics reading of the relationship between death and sexuality.

²⁵ Transcribed from *Children of Men* DVD featured commentary "The Possibility of Hope."

²⁶ This is also much more clear in the Santa Muerte and San Malverde celebrations (unsanctioned by the Catholic Church), often associated with the narcopolíticos of the borderlands. See David Rochkind's project "Heavy Hand, Sunken Spirit" (1980) for his photography exhibit on the growing popularity of these celebrations.

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- “Premodern Style: How Neoliberalism Rewrites Cultural Nationalism on Latina/o Bodies,” MLA, January 5-8, 2012, Seattle, WA.
- “The Gap Between Rich and Poor: The Latina Character Novel and Myths of Mobility,” ACLA, March 31-April 3, 2011, Simon Fraser University, Vancouver, Canada.
- “The (Necro)State of Immigration: *La Ciudad* and a Politics of Labor,” Newberry Seminar in Borderlands and Latino Studies, January 28, 2011, The Newberry Library, Chicago, IL.
- “The (Bio)State of Immigration: Performances of National Security in Luis Urrea’s *The Devil’s Highway*,” 2010 MELUS Conference, April 8-11, 2010, University of Scranton, Scranton, PA.
- “The (Neo)colonialism of Labor and Consumption in Foster’s *Atomik Aztex*,” Nuestra America in the U.S.?: A U.S. Latina/o Studies Conference, Feb. 8-9, 2008, University of Kansas, Lawrence, KS.
- “The State of Power: The Splitting between State Biopower and Biopolitics in Philip K. Dick’s *Lie’s Inc.*,” Project Biocultures, Nov. 16-17, 2007, University of Illinois at Chicago, Chicago, IL.
- “Glam and Velvet: The Layering of Authenticity on an Artifice,” Mid-Atlantic Popular/American Culture Association (MAPACA) 17th Annual Conference, October 26-29, 2006, Baltimore, MD.
- “Navigating Academic Hybridity: The Fan-Scholar’s Place in Academia.” The 12th Annual Southwest Graduate English Symposium: “(Re)Markable Identities: Confronting, Corrupting, and Conflating Cultural Discourses,” Feb. 24-26, 2006, Arizona State University, Tempe, AZ.
- “The Byronic Hero Syndrome.” The 11th Annual Conference of the International Conference on Romanticism (ICR): “Romantic Border Crossings,” Oct. 14-17, 2004, Texas A&M International University, Laredo, TX.
- “From Colonialism to Postcolonialism: Gabriel’s National Identity in ‘The Dead.’” The 20th American Conference for Irish Studies/West: “Modern Ireland: Her Arts and Culture,” Oct. 1-3, 2004, University of Northern Colorado, Greeley, CO.
- “Signs, Signs, Signs: The Ultimate Connection Between Rhetorician and Audience from Then to Now.” The 58th Annual Rocky Mountain Modern Language Association Convention (RMMLA), Sept. 30-Oct. 2, 2004, University of Colorado, Boulder, CO.

VITA (continued)

“From Colonialism to Postcolonialism: Gabriel’s National Identity in ‘The Dead.’” Joyce’s Ireland: A Celebration of the Bloomsday Centenary, June 10-17, 2004, University of Kansas, Lawrence, KS.

“The Mestiza Consciousness: A Study of Chicana Literature and the Appropriation of Mestizaje.” The Ronald E. McNair Scholars Program at Penn State Summer Research Conference, August 2-4, 2002, Pennsylvania State University, State College, PA.

TEACHING EXPERIENCE:

Teaching Assistantship:

University of Illinois at Chicago (primary instructor):

ENGL 120—Film and Culture: “Nationalisms through Conspiracy, Paranoia, and Fear,” 1 section, Spring 2012.

ENGL 101—Understanding Literature: “Utopias and Dystopias,” 1 section, Fall 2011.

ENGL 161—Composition II: “Writing on the Body,” 1 section, Fall 2011.

ENGL 161—Composition II: “Writing on the Body,” 1 section, Summer 2011.

ENGL 113—Multiethnic Literatures of the U.S.: “The Nation, Transnational, and Global” 1 section, Fall 2010.

ENGL 160—Composition I: “Writing in a Visual Culture” 1 section, Fall 2010.

ENGL 101—Understanding Literature: “Allegory, Symbols, and Archetypes” 1 section, Spring 2009.

ENGL 109—American Literature and Culture: “Imagining Alternatives in the 20th- and 21st-Century” 1 section, Fall 2008.

ENGL 160—Composition I: “Writing in a Visual Culture” 1 section, Fall 2008.

ENGL 109—American Literature and Culture: “Postmodernism” 1 section, Spring 2008.

ENGL 113—Multiethnic Literatures of the U.S.: “Immigrant Literatures” 1 section, Fall 2007.

ENGL 161—Composition II: “Writing the Body,” 1 section, Fall 2007.

ENGL 113—Multiethnic Literatures of the U.S.: “Latina/o Literatures,” 1 section, Spring 2007.

ENGL 160—Composition I: “Writing in a Visual Culture,” 2 sections, Fall 2006.

ENGL 161—Composition II: “Rock ’n’ Roll and Resistance: Writing about Subcultures,” 2 sections, Spring 2006.

University of Northern Colorado (primary instructor):

ENG 123—College Research Paper. 2 sections. Spring 2005.

ENG 123—College Research Paper. 2 sections. Fall 2004.

ENG 122—College Composition. 2 sections. Spring 2004.

ENG 122—College Composition. 1 section. Fall 2003.

GRE Analytical Writing section workshop instructor and tutor. McNair Scholars Program (UNC). Summer 2004 and Summer 2005

Writing Tutor: University of Northern Colorado’s Writing Center. Fall 2002, Spring 2003, Fall 2003.

VITA (continued)**RELATED EXPERIENCE and SERVICE**

Scholarship Editor. Literary magazine *Packingtown Review*, 2007-2008

Art Editor. Literary magazine *Packingtown Review*, 2007-2008

Graduate Representative, Early American Literature Hiring Committee. University of Northern Colorado. Fall 2004-Spring 2005.

GA: Screening Films. University of Northern Colorado. Fall 2004.

Editor. *The Crucible* literary magazine. Fall 2001, Spring 2002, Fall 2002, Spring 2003.

Secretary. *The Crucible* literary magazine. Fall 2002 and Spring 2003.

Spanish grader for SPAN 301, University of Northern Colorado, Fall 2000.

ACADEMIC AFFILIATIONS:

Modern Language Association (MLA)

American Comparative Literature Association (ACLA)

Multiethnic Literatures of the United States (MELUS)

National Association for Chicana and Chicano Studies (NACCS)