AT THE BORDER OF SUBJECTIVITY:

ON LITERATURE, SPACE, AND SUBALTERNITY

by

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DISSERTATION ABSTRACT

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At the Border of Subjectivity: On Literature, Space, and Subalternity critically reexamines the making of the border subject within Mexican and Mexican American literature. I comparatively read texts alongside cultural studies to materially ground my analysis of border environmentalisms, border feminisms, and border citizenships. I argue that while Mexican Americans have utilized space-based identity claims to signal belonging, legitimacy, and resistance, such claims foreclose on our ability to build community with other border subjects.

In my first chapter, "Uprooting and Disentangling: Endangered Border Subjects in Elena Zamora O'Shea's *El Mesquite* and South Texas," I consider how border women's writing fragments a Mexican Indigenous presence and sustains settler colonial history. I pair the 1935 text with the 900-year-old Montezuma Bald Cypress in South Texas and environmental activism efforts at the Texas/Mexico border to contend with questions of lineage, genealogy, and belonging.

My second chapter, "An Unsettled Border Geopoetics: Locating Community Cartographies in Sandra Cisneros' *cuentos* and the Rio Grande Valley" is an expansion of my article, "Invented Geographies." I define "border geopoetics" as a lens to read literary spatial relations within Latinx imaginaries. I use theory of "decolonization" and a South Texas GIS community mapping project to materially grapple with questions of subjectivity to further

consider the fragility of citizenship.

My third chapter, “The Death of Border Subjectivity: On Violence, Body, and Nation in Sara Uribe’s *Antígona González* and the U.S.-Mexico Border” examines Mexican author Sara Uribe’s 2012 re-envisioning of the 400 BCE Sophocles tragedy, Antigone. I read Uribe’s use of *el otro* to access the un/knowable and in/visible violence on border bodies through the unlocatable. I center the murdered and disappeared by utilizing data, reports, and obituaries to make tangible those outside a humanistic grasp of “subject” and further address violence in the Américas.

My postscript leaves readers with a “politic of tension,” which does not suggest a resolution to these contested and ongoing claims to space. *At the Border of Subjectivity* reframes questions of subalternity through a spatial and material framework that deconstructs the myth of nationalism and sovereignty to redefine “border futurity” beyond Chicanidad.

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In eternal love and memory of
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INTRODUCTION

Borders have long been understood within Chicanx and Latinx Studies as Gloria E. Anzaldúa notes in her landmark text, *Borderlands/La Frontera: A New Mestiza Consciousness* (1987), as "*una herida abierta*," an open wound. While Anzaldúa articulates a singular borderland as a site of perpetual violence and struggle, border studies scholars understand its multiplicity and profundity.[i] As scholarship such as the foundational transnational work by Chandra Talpade Mohanty and Mishuana Goeman illustrates, borders, too, have always exceeded the U.S.-Mexico geographic and are not reducible to a single geopoint. As such, my understanding of borders is one not limited to a single geography, nation-state delineation, or identity formation, but expanded by considering borders as a potent signifier across multiple ethnic communities. Because borders can make legible the lived conditions of a multiplicity of border subjects, they can also make illegible the condition of others. *At the Border of Subjectivity: On Literature, Space, and Subalternity* seeks to dislocate our understanding of borders away from the symbolic systems of ethnonationalism and nation-state formations and consider the possibilities of a new, deterritorialized, decolonized spatial imaginary.

Due to the geographic proximity between Mexico and Texas, my understanding of borders, citizenship, and the nation-state has been largely informed by the ease with which I was once able to cross into Mexico. My childhood was filled with frequent trips to the State of Tamaulipas until the U.S. set up several restrictions for re-entry into the United States. I had, in short, responded to the questioning of my citizenship status since I was old enough to speak: Are you a U.S. citizen? It is a question I have heard my entire life growing up in South Texas, and it is one I have answered reflexively in the affirmative for the majority of my life.

There had been no feeling behind the 8-year-old me that said "yes"—the word was empty, monotone, and dead. I say this now with the acknowledgment of the privilege that my United States citizenship has afforded me and which has also allowed me to keep my body largely unharmed. I can say neither safe nor free, however, because I have felt neither as a woman of color on the border, in Mexico or in the United States. But I do have my body and its preservation is in part due to my Tejano father's objection to my Mexican mother's wish to give birth to me in Mexico. He was afraid we would not be allowed back into the U.S. and, as a result, I carry the privilege of having been born *here*, in *el otro lado*. These are the conditions under which I move about the world, and the intersection of my multiple subjectivities—as Mexican, American, Tejana, documented, and a woman from the border—that collide in tangible and intangible ways across and through my body. It was such a reflection on this condition that urged me not only to think about the U.S.-Mexico border, but also to consider those *at* the border of a legible subjectivity—the Indigenous, the undocumented, the immigrants, and those caught between these categories— because of the U.S.-Mexico border's imposing presence in border discourse. I knew even before arriving at the University of Oregon that this project would necessitate calling upon those un/nameable and un/locatable identities across these contested geographies in order to responsibly seed the type of border politic I thought possible.

I begin the introduction to this dissertation project with the claim that Chicanx communities have collectively exhausted Aztlán as a signification of possibility, futurity, and unity among border subjectivities. Furthermore, I suggest that any rewriting of Aztlán as a "decolonial imaginary" forecloses transtribal and transnational solidarity and futurity. In this way, my project represents a theoretical move to separate from Chicano nationalist efforts of

the 1960s, which were detrimental to the advancement of Chicana feminist and Chicanx LGBTQ+ rights. Even as Aztlán has been considered capacious enough to rewrite itself as what Chicana feminist Cherríe Moraga calls a "Queer Aztlán," the collective voices of queer people of color remind us that one can only be "queer in Aztlán." [ii] Even as I celebrate the contributions of Chicana feminist and Queer Latinx scholars, *At the Border of Subjectivity* is not a project invested in reinscribing a more liberating ethnonationalist stance for the sake of making the work intelligible within feminist border discourse. I'm looking to do something more. ''In considering the always-constellated relationships between individual and geographical space within literature, I bring emphasis to the symbiotic, fragile, and intimate entanglement and interdependence between "subject formation" and the space where such formations take place, illustrated in this project through literary geography. I consider the material and immaterial overlapping of territories, sovereignties, languages, and cultures within literature, cultural studies, and cultural geographies across the Américas. While not limited by the U.S.-Mexico border, I use this geopoint to orient my overall project. By beginning at the history, violence, tension, and geopoint of the U.S.-Mexico borderlands—specifically in South Texas—I wish to situate my methodology within the broad field of border feminisms that looks not only to the U.S.-Mexico border but understands the capaciousness and expansiveness of "border subjectivity." I assert the utility of shifting to a practice of what I term "community cartography" as a way to unwrite Chicanx nationalism and as the first step toward a deterritorialized futurity we might call the decolonial.

Ultimately, this project does not wish to intervene with a solution to these contesting claims, but rather utilizes these tensions as a useful methodology and hermeneutic with which to read the methodologies of "decoloniality" and "transnationalism." As I suggest below, I ultimately posit a politic of dislocation and not incommensurability as Settler Colonial Studies

already offers. I consider tension here as a productive frustration where border peoples of all kinds consider themselves as ultimately *commensurable* with other border peoples. Specifically, I consider how texts, both literary and non-literary, materialize loss and grief and reject territorial or nationalist rewritings or remappings of nation or community. My readings of social movement, art, and contemporary 21st century politics is a way to ground border theory in the world *outside* of the academy. I utilize my own border experiences as a Texas-Mexico border woman that both inhabits and reads these physical border sites through auto-historia/auto-teoría, a self-authorized history and theory. Such readings, I argue, bring us to a dislocation where the decolonial unravels in both the symbolic/imaginary and the material world.

While this unraveling may seem antithetical to our commitment to the futurity of Indigenous peoples, I suggest that we consider how decoloniality has never articulated itself outside the terms of state citizenship or through a non-nation-state imaginary. Because decoloniality does not responsibly consider Black, Latinx, or non-American Indian Indigenous subjectivities in the making of the "decolonial," we must consider the limitations of its imaginary. As such, I posit in this dissertation that decoloniality, as previously theorized, does not facilitate futurity for all border subjects and that it has been widely coopted by institutions, the nation-state, and neo-liberalism. I see these interventions as a part of the tension at work through my dissertation, which is organized into three layered chapters.

This Work is Intimate

It has taken me much longer in the writing process to recognize that the questions that initiated this dissertation, those around the possibilities and limitations of Border Studies and of Chicanx and Latinx Studies, culminated long before my arrival in Oregon. Because I recognize that articulating a single border identity threatens and, in many cases, devastates the agency of

other border subjects—especially that of the undocumented and those Indigenous within Mexico and Latino America—I did not want to write about the agency or power of declaring a border identity. In moving past border feminisms, Chicanx nationalism, and Latinx transnationalism, I want to re-engage with texts that have been widely read as advancing these same ideologies. I draw from the radical voices of women and queer people of color that encourage me to engage with my own subject positioning as a woman of color and border scholar. In this project, I merge literature and theory with a cultural analysis situated in the space, geography, and communities that variously emerge and disappear in literary and theoretical discourses. I engage texts and geographies as responsive and dynamic to each other in ways that I have not yet engaged in formal literary studies. In positioning myself as witness, I think not only about my own embodied experiences, but also about those I cannot cohere or spatialize across literary texts or geopolitical spaces. I begin with what is most intimate, local, and embodied, which calls on me to think about my genealogy and my history in South Texas to consider the distant, transnational, and disembodied experiences that inform my own necessary dislocation from these genealogies and histories.

And so, I want to begin this project with those whom I *can* name and locate: My great-grandparents are Natalio Hernandez and Jovita Rivera from San Luis Potosí, Mexico. They immigrated to South Texas in the 1910s where they both become day laborers on local farms and ranches in what is now Pharr, Texas. Eventually, they purchased their own property—four lots named after the Sugar Hackberry tree, Hackberry 1, 2, 3, and 4 in Hidalgo County. My great-grandparents had eight children—Abelino, Isaac, Prisca, Teresa, Maria, Josefa, Jesusa, and Ascension, my grandmother. My father, Oscar Hernández was born out of wedlock and became

the first man in our family to carry his mother's maiden name, which is how I come to be a Hernández, too. About my mother, Alejandrina Jimenez, I only know that she was born in Poza Rica, Veracruz and immigrated to the Rio Grande Valley around 1980. This is what is made known, made legible, to me, while the condition of being born Mexican, an immigrant, and/or in the discursive state of Indigeneity (as I understand my mother's and great-grandfather's identities articulated by family oral history) remains largely illegible. This is the limited genealogical history of im/migration that I know—it is neither a rich nor an expansive history, but it is one that I can begin to spatialize in important ways.

Because this dissertation thinks about the geospatial alongside border identity formation—their possibilities and limitations—I consider ecological futurity and the decolonial imaginary within both literary and cultural studies occurring within, and in proximity, to the geographies of South Texas and Northern Mexico. This focus and approach arises out of my own embodied intergenerational experiences as well as the bordered sites I inhabited and engaged with as a person living in the borderlands for over twenty-five years. As I argue in this project, that proximity to the border afforded me an important experience and subject position through which to speak, but it does not signify the totality of my politics or imagined futurities that are explored herein. I begin with what I can name and locate to arrive at what—and whom—I cannot name and locate. In this deconstructive process, I argue for dislocation on and off the page as both a political possibility and an ethical responsibility.

Reading the Borderlands

In 2017, after the death of my father, I brought with me to Eugene, Oregon the last person that had raised me, my tía Maria. Maria and I drove together over seven days crossing through the states of Texas, Colorado, Utah, Idaho, and Oregon. I spent nearly forty hours with

my tía collecting an oral history of these geographies through her own lived experience as a first-generation migrant farmworker. I had driven before with my partner through Idaho and seeing the Snake River Canyon where he grew up in Twin Falls, and I remember thinking, "Maria will be excited to see the falls again." It wasn't until we arrived and I helped my tía, then 80-years-old, onto the observation deck where the falls were especially full in late June and roaring beneath the wooden slats that she said, "I have never seen this before. *Es Twin Falls*/Is this Twin Falls?" I felt something akin to foolishness in thinking that my tía, though she had spent over a decade laboring in the Idaho Valley, had seen either these falls or the Snake River Canyon. To spatialize Idaho via the canyon or falls was a luxury not afforded to her or her siblings whose only spatial orientation of the state was through its roadways, camps, and fields.

When I first began to map out what this dissertation project would be, I knew I had to think about space intimately just as my tía had done over that 2,500-mile journey. The Rio Grande Valley—or RGV—is what I have known most intimately, and yet, as with the experiences of so many other writers of color, it took being *away* from the Valley for the writing to come *home*. My first time reading about the Rio Grande Valley in a literary text was my freshman year in college. In *Junky* (1953), William S. Burroughs describes the RGV like this:

> The Valley runs from Brownsville to Mission strip of ground 60 miles long and 20 miles wide. The area is irrigated from the Rio Grande River. Before irrigation, nothing grew here but mesquite and cactus. Now it is one of the richest farm areas in the US.
>
> A three-lane highway runs from Brownsville to Mission, and the towns of the Valley string out along this highway. There are no cities in the valley, and no country. The area is a vast suburb of flimsy houses. The valley is flat as a table. Nothing grows there but crops, citrus and palms brought from California...Pink and red grapefruit grow there that will not grow anywhere else...
>
> A premonition of doom hangs over the Valley. You have to make it now before something happens, before the blackfly ruins the citrus, before support

> prices are taken off the cotton, before the flood, the hurricane, the freeze, the long dry spell when there is no water to irrigate, before the Border Patrol shuts off your wetbacks. The threat of disaster is always there, persistent and disquieting as the afternoon wind. The Valley was desert, and it will be desert again. Meanwhile you try to make yours while there is still time. (87-88)

I read Burroughs' imaging of the Rio Grande Valley and its geography long before I read Gloria E. Anzaldúa's *Borderlands/La Frontera* (1987) at her own alma mater, the University of Texas Pan American (now University of Texas Rio Grande Valley), where she similarly described the RGV as a "tragic valley" (112).[iii] I begin with these seemingly opposing 20th century readings to frame my analysis of South Texas and its environmentalisms in Chapters 1 and 2 because they best illustrate how land and geography are intimately tethered to our understanding of border peoples, communities, cultures, and subjectivities. For Burroughs, the Rio Grande Valley is an environment always already dead and inanimate whose only purpose is to yield an economically valuable agricultural resource.[iv] For Anzaldúa, the Valley was something to be critiqued, as only one born and raised there could do, for its high unemployment rates and dependence on agriculture and international trade. While both Burroughs and Anzaldúa wrote of the Valley as exiles and outcasts from seemingly different worlds within the United States, Anzaldúa ultimately sees the Valley as her "*tierra natal*," her motherland (111).

When I first read how Anzaldúa had to go to California to write about the Valley, I remember feeling confused and betrayed—how could leaving make you feel like you know yourself best? And if Chicanas really were like mirrors, then how could she understand us best and still leave us behind or think of us as fated in such tragic conditions? It took me years to understand that I, too, could better recognize the condition of the border and the condition the border had placed upon me when I was not trying simply to survive there on a day-to-day basis. In other words, distance is its own privilege that gives space and sanctuary to think, reflect, and

process what we've experiences within this condition of survival. I think about my relatives, ancestors, and genealogies, their survival on the border, and I am amazed by their resilience to have survived that space at all. It was not that I wanted out; on the contrary, I have been longing to return ever since I left. It is that in leaving, I dislocated myself from a deeply nationalist attachment to that border that Anzaldúa articulated primarily as a frontier between the Anglo and the Mexican. It is perhaps surprising that I call so much upon Anzaldúa when I seek to move Border Studies beyond what she left us with in her work, but I suppose this is the way I have chosen to move on from her work in *Borderlands/La Frontera* without leaving her behind entirely in the process of *desconocimiento*, or unknowing, as I posit in the postscript. This project is, ultimately, for other border scholars seeking a border politic away from Anzaldúa's binaries and dichotomies, her split vision across the borderlands, even as doing so might seem impossible, unnecessary, or unjustifiable to some.

At moments *At the Border of Subjectivity* speaks broadly within border studies, but there is also a specificity in my engagement with the Rio Grande Valley. I write myself into being and make tangible my experiences to give direction to the ways I want others to read and theorize about the Texas-Mexico border, a methodology which might resonate with others from South Texas or other border regions. Above all, I write a project that feels responsible and accountable to a number of communities that give me the language and the theory as well as the community and archives from which to approach *At the Border of Subjectivity*. In this way, the project is not another one that talks about Tejanx, Mexican, or Chicanx identity formations, but considers what is left at the margins and thresholds in the making of those identities. I think spatially across literature as a way to reach the border of legibility for the subaltern—Indigenous Mexicans, immigrants, the undocumented, and *los muertos y los desaparecidos*/the murdered and the

disappeared—within the geopolitical spaces of Hidalgo County (Texas) and Tamaulipas, Mexico.

The experience that the border has had on me, my family, and my community is still posited in the writing of this project, because I could never, and would never, want to be split from those experiences. It is not that living on the Rio Grande Valley, or at the Texas-Mexico border, replicates or authorizes such experiences as "representative," but rather that it produces, in me, its own theory. My work here traces the arch of Mexican/Mexican American literature and border literature across the geographic spaces of the United States and Mexico as rendered and experienced in South Texas. I consider how these literary texts begin to form and map the contours of a border geographic imaginary beyond a nationalist politic and divisive citizenship. I utilize deconstructionist theory, women of color feminist theory, and subaltern studies to engage border literature in a way that dissolves the specificity of U.S. and Mexican nation-states in order to recover the multiplicity of border subjectivities. This is not a project of universality, of pluralism, or of broadening community. I believe that such projects will come later. Here, I look at that which we *cannot* negotiate: the desire to belong and the ways in which Chicanidad and Latinidad have rendered many others—especially Indigenous im/migrants, the undocumented, and the murdered and disappeared—as illegible and violable in the pursuit of the desire to articulate a nationalist politics of belonging in the Américas.

On Methodology

As a scholar of literary archives, I attend to questions of literary history by mapping out the dialogic narratives and spaces within texts beginning with 1935 and ending in 2012. I do so to think chronologically about the shifts in border discourse between the 20th and 21st century and the impacts of those shifts (ideologically and politically) on multiple border communities

and subjects—real and imagined. I think about the political, historical, spatial, and social politics that inform each respective literary text as well as briefly situate the academic work of the scholars before me. For example, in Chapter 1, I engage María Elena Zamora O'Shea's *El Mesquite* (1935) and consider the move to territorialization via a Tejano settlement in Coastal Texas as well as offer a reading of the multiple literary genres, forms, and periods it engages such as Border Modernisms, Tejanx studies, *testimonio* studies, and Mexican American literary and cultural studies. I draw on distinct voices in the field such as Kirby Brown, John Moran González, and Priscilla Ybarra. In Chapter 2, I take three of Sandra Cisneros' *cuentos*, or stories, and consider the positioned histories within Mexico City, Tepeyac (MX), and Seguín, Texas they each represent. In addition to considering space and form, I think about Cisneros' contributions to our understanding of Chicanx and Latinx studies and engage in a new approach to my previously published work on Cisneros. In Chapter 3, I read Sara Uribe's *Antígona González* and situate it within Mexican and transnational border politics attending to *los muertos y los desaparecidos/*the murdered and disappeared as articulated by local journalists and scholars like Cristina Rivera Garza, Orlando Maldonado, and Carlos Manuel Juárez. In addition, I consider the text as a poetic narrative, a *testimonio,* and a drama to further consider the limits of a disembodied transnational border politic.

As I emphasize throughout this introduction and the rest of the dissertation, I engage the discursive relationships that literary texts have with cultural studies. In thinking about how these texts are shaped by, and shape, their cultural, political, spatial, and historical environments, I made the individual chapters conversant with physical sites and geographies both in South Texas and in Northern Mexico. In spatializing literature not just within the text but layering it within the mappable geographies outside of it, my project illustrates the stakes of a border politic within our contemporary history. In Chapter 1, I layer Zamora O'Shea's novel with the 900-year-old

Montezuma Bald Cypress and project of border environmental activism in South Texas. In Chapter 2, I pair Cisneros' *cuentos* with a GIS (Geographic Information System) cemetery mapping project in Hidalgo County and the limits and possibilities of what I term "community cartography." Chapter 3 takes the archives and headlines that structure Uribe's text and cross-read them alongside immigration reports, data sets, and legal cases across Tamaulipas as a way to think about the fragmentation of subalternity across the Texas-Mexico border. As I frame throughout the project, I cannot do the symbolic work of theorizing about the border without situating it within the material realities and lived experiences that define it. In this way, the project remains urgent, personal, and political, and remains most representative of the type of work I intend to continue to do in my scholarly career.

In thinking about literature, physical sites and geography, I lean on the traditions of Chicanx and Latinx studies, cultural studies, cultural geography, subaltern studies, *testimonios*, ethnography, and environmentalist studies. To say that "I lean on" these fields is to note that I do not precisely follow their methodologies to the letter. Rather, I utilize what most sufficiently gives me the language and approaches to write about my embodied experiences as a gendered, Tejana border subject well as those that remain disembodied for so many. Subalternity, as a reading practice and theoretical tool, allows me to think about how partiality and fragmentation reframe the condition of the border outside of Tejanidad, Latinidad, and Chicanidad. As I note in individual chapters, to think about the relationships between literature, space, and the subaltern allows us to engage with the condition of our humanity that asks us to articulate a futurity beyond nation-state borders and ourselves. I make distinct the communities outlined by labels such as Tejanx, Latinx, and Chicanx, and I speak with as much precision about the stakes of renaming each of these identity formations within respective chapters. I, too, understand the

frustration that might come from scholars reading this work—especially those with strong commitments to each of these fields and disciplines. To those scholars, I say, I am neither the first nor the last to attempt to write across multiple fields, disciplines, and methodologies. I address what I can address where I can address it, and I position questions where answers are not possible. As I argue at the close of this project, I aim to dislocate my readership into thinking expansively about border futurity as a way to spatialize the Américas through an ethical politic.

Mapping the Project

The first chapter, "Endangered Subjectivities," begins with María Elena Zamora O'Shea's 1935 novella *El Mesquite* for the ways it historicizes Tejanidad. As Border Modernisms gains some traction in Modernist Studies and in Mexican American Studies, I believe this text, along with those by Zamora O'Shea's contemporaries like Jovita González and Américo Paredes, will effectively change the ways we read both U.S. and Tejanx Modernisms. John Moran González writes about Zamora O'Shea's contributions on Tejano history and how they narrate how Tejanxs mark for themselves a historical place in Texas literary history. Zamora O'Shea utilizes elements of *testimonio,* memoir, and fiction to illustrate the contentious territorial history of South Texas. By uniquely positioning a *mesquite* as her central narrator and protagonist, the text ruptures narrative conventions and asks us to read *el mesquite* as a living history. Furthermore, we are asked to read *el mesquite* as a border subject both acting upon and being acted upon by geopolitics. While scholars have considered the novel's location as largely biographical (Zamora O'Shea taught the now-contentious Texas folklorist J. Frank Dobie in Alice, Texas), they have largely elided the namesake of *El Mesquite*'s protagonist—"Palo Alto." By focusing on these dynamics and centering Zamora O'Shea's unique narrator, I argue that the novel encourages us consider futurity by grounding us in an unknowable, unplaceable

history. Perhaps most strikingly, the text demands that we consider such possibilities through an absence—in this case the absence (and absencing) of *el mesquite* and the specific Coastal Texas geography it articulates in the novel.

Complementing this literary analysis, this opening chapter also looks at the entanglement between Tejas history and the colonial desire that informs how Latinx, Tejanx, and Chicanx scholars have utilized geography, land, and the environment to advance our own settler desire at the Tejas-Mexico border. I consider the formation of border subjectivity within the novel, not only as it relates to Tejanidad, but also to Mexican Indigeneity through the lens of subalternity. In addition, I position the text as it connects to border environmentalist efforts around the 900-year-old Montezuma Bald Cypress along the Rio Grande River to push further on the spatial politics of border citizenships. In positioning the narrative of *el mesquite* alongside the untold narrative of the Montezuma Bald Cypress, I consider what is encoded in thinking about border space through modernity, genealogy, indigeneity, citizenship, and subjectivity. The relationship between community, individual, and land has always been precarious. As environmental scholarship teaches us, we are in a globally damning crisis that will continue to change the world as we know it today. My scholarship on border literature throughout this dissertation is certainly not disjointed from this reality. The impacts of our environmental crisis have impacted BIPOC bodies long before environmental humanities offered the critical language to remind us that our bodies have engaged with environmental warfare through colonization, enslavement, and agricultural systems that use, abuse, and discard BIPOC, their bodies, and their communities. The work I begin here on border environmentalisms extends the conversations already begun by others like Priscilla Ybarra, Helena María Viramontes, and Berta Caceres, and gestures to a second book project I've already begun to conceive around border environmentalisms across Texas, Mexico, and Guatemala.

The second chapter, “An Unsettled Border Geopoetics,” revisits and extends my 2020 publication on Sandra Cisneros’ epilogue to *Caramelo*, “Invented Geographies,” where I considered the im/material of a border geopoetics that still relied on an ethno-nationalist imagining of community formation. This chapter responds to and corrects a previous reading by re-visiting Cisneros’ short story, “Pilón,” and pairs it alongside parts of a new essay forthcoming from *University of Texas Press*, which begins to articulate what I call Cisneros’ “community cartography” as a reading practice that situates community formation beyond the nation or the state. In reading “Tepeyac” and “Woman Hollering Creek,” I orient readers toward Cisneros’ de-spatialized Mexico and Texas literary geographic imaginaries where narrators map from memory and disinvention through an intimate community project. I trace these works across the conceptual and material by spatializing the stakes of the transnational and the decolonial within border studies and Tejana literary studies. Along with this re-reading, I take up a GIS (Geographic Information System) community mapping project of a South Texas cemetery in Pharr, Texas and an unmapped historically Black cemetery in Edinburg, Texas to further elaborate on a deterritorialized spatial analytic. In thinking about what remains il/legible in community projects, I attempt to locate the competing sovereignties and subjectivities of both Tejanx, Mexican, Mexican American, and Black Tejanxs in a South Texas geopolitical space. In thinking about partiality and fragmentation, via subaltern studies, I suggest that what Cisneros’ literature makes possible is a communal project of *dislocation* in which we see the possibilities of community mapping and cartography while also remaining attentive to the subjectivities that cannot be mapped or spatialized along the borderlands.

While the first two chapters speak to my work on Tejanx, Mexican American, and Latinx letters, Chapter 3, “The Death of Border Subjectivity: On Violence, the Body, and the Nation in Sara

Uribe's *Antígona González* and the U.S.-Mexico Border" focuses on Mexican author Sara Uribe's 2012 play and its intersections with the making of another border subjectivity, that of *los muertos y los desaparecidos*/the murdered and disappeared, within Mexico. Written as a re-envisioning of the 400 BCE Sophocles tragedy, *Antigone*, I read Uribe's use of *el otro*/the Other to access the un/knowable and in/visible violence on border bodies through a narrative of the unlocatable. I center the murdered and disappeared from Mexico, Latin America, and Canada by utilizing data, journalistic reports, obituaries, and headlines to make tangible the body politics of those outside a humanistic grasp of nation-state "citizen-subject." In dislocating border studies from an exclusive association with the U.S.-Mexico border—moving across multiple national borders from Guatemala to Canada—this chapter brings into focus the disorientating nature of ethno- and settler-state nationalisms. Here, I address the limitations of our current working definitions of "border," "transnationalism," and "global" to recenter the experiences and precarities of the subaltern. I work with the critical thought of both Mexican and Mexican American theorists and political analysts to further address violence in the Américas. In naming the dead and disappeared as subalterns I do not seek to speak for, nor do I suggest that Uribe or her play speaks for, either the dead or the disappeared. Rather, I consider how death and absence articulate crucial questions that should be at the center of humanistic studies: Whom have we articulated as human and, therefore, as subject? Who remains outside of these categories and what are the implications of these elisions and erasures? And, ultimately, how does border studies account for its dead and disappeared?

While the bulk of my research begins at the U.S.-Mexico border for specificity, I ultimately make attempts to move across the Américas more broadly. In place of a formal conclusion, I leave readers of this project with a postscript that I call a "Politic of Dislocation," which does not so much suggest a resolution to these contested and ongoing claims to space than

it recenters the community and coalitional possibilities of a new, deterritorialized, spatial politic of dislocation. If *At the Border of Subjectivity* aims to frame questions of space, subalternity, the body, and the citizen through a literary and theoretical framework that deconstructs the myth of ethno- and state nationalisms and sovereignties to redefine "border futurity" beyond Chicanidad, then a deterritorialized Politic of Dislocation is one that moves beyond the need for either Chicanidad or border subjectivities. It is a dream, an opening, and a beginning to think further about the tensions entangled within any decolonial imagining. Such a politic does not want us to grow at ease in this dislocation, but to constantly feel its tension and discomfort. It is a politic unlike the Chicana feminist politics of writers like Cherríe Moraga, Emma Pérez, or Ana Castillo as it does not desire to name itself as a Chicana/Xicana feminist politic still tethered to a revised Chicano nationalism. It looks beyond the ethnic designation toward a spatialization that is dislocated from such a naming and placing. In thinking about dislocation as neither inside nor outside; neither First World nor Third World, dislocation invites us to sit in discomfort in all spaces as we think about the move toward collective futurities. At the end of the project, I think forward by thinking about the present. I cannot will myself to think, dream, or imagine the futurity of the fields we call Chicanx and Latinx literary and cultural studies without such a positioning and accountability.

Above all, this project marks and maps, in its own way, the questions and interventions I hope my scholarship can continue to consider over the course of my career. The responsibility to my communities, to my intended and unintended audiences, and to readers like myself is as personal as my responsibility to those that I cannot call upon or be called upon by. With this understanding, I recognize the totality of the project as an undertaking that will continually bring me to these borders and will demand a dislocation that gives way to a new orientation beyond

the language I have at-present. However, for now, this is what I have to offer you as my community, audience, and readership.

Notes

[i] For example, scholars that have engaged with Anzaldúa's borderlands in expansive ways include Lee Maracle, Theresa Delgadillo, and Cherríe Moraga.

[ii] See the edited collection, *Queer in Aztlán: Chicano Male Recollections of Consciousness and Coming Out* (2015), by Adelaida R. Del Castillo and Gibran Guido.

[iii] Anzaldúa cites Ricardo Sánchez's (Chicano poet from El Paso, TX) line "texas tragic valley dispossession" in his poem, "Indict Amerika."

[iv] I do not say "natural," because as Burroughs notes, the crops that abundantly grow in this geography have been brought in for the exploitation of both the fertile soil and the physical labor of farmworkers.

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CHAPTER ONE: "ENDANGERED SUBJECTS: BORDER ENVIRONMENTALISMS ACROSS MARÍA ELENA ZAMORA O'SHEA'S *EL MESQUITE* (1935) AND SOUTH TEXAS"

The border wall, which presently runs parallel to the Rio Grande River across Texas, cuts the contested geography of North America into two distinct countries. I have only ever known this space as the Rio Grande Valley and as home. For almost a century, an immense amount of literature and theory have explored the singular terrain that makes up the Texas-Mexico border and, most specifically, the Rio Grande Valley. Border people have, themselves, been continuously examined, considered, and theorized, which is to say that our relationship to geography has made and unmade us from the very beginning. Chicanx and Latinx scholars know, too, the historical significance of 1848 in the making of Mexican American subject formation. The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo remains a spectre in our histories and genealogies that ground present-day articulations of U.S. Southwest and U.S.-Mexico border subjects.

We remain haunted by the dispossession of land that really was a dispossession of culture, sovereignty, language, and community. This splintering of two nations has been equally literal as it has been symbolic—there are genealogical, linguistic, cultural, and religious practices that will never be recovered, which is also to say that there are parts of ourselves that will never be recovered. Unsurprisingly, much of the work in both Chicanx and Mexican American literature has had material roots in loss and recovery efforts, which sustains our dispossession and makes clear that this nearly 200-year-old incident is as urgent as ever. As Mary Pat Brady notes in *Extinct Lands/Temporal Geographies* (2002), "Chicanas write with a sense of urgency about the power of space, about its (in)clement capacity to direct and contort opportunities, hopes, lives. They write also with a sense of urgency about the need to contest such power, to counter it with alternative spatial configurations, ontologies, and genealogies" (9). That is,

literature of and from the geography of the U.S.-Mexico border speaks with urgency about identity and subjectivity as much as it speaks urgently about land, environment, and space from which those identities and subjectivities emerge.

The very parceling of land we call Texas, too, suggests a series of overwritings between not just six independent nations, but by many more gendered, classed, and racialized communities across its unique geography. While our focus has been on how Mexico "lost" part of its nation and geographies in the ceding of California, Nevada, Arizona, Utah, Colorado, New Mexico, and Texas, we have spent less time considering how Indigenous Mexicans had already lost their lands, languages, and sovereignties to the Spanish, Mexican, and United States governments. The designation of the Rio Grande River as a nation-state delineation is a process from which we have not recovered. Furthermore, communities of color remain in tension and out of sync within these disputed geographies across the Americas. This dissertation is as much about land and identity as it is about loss and grief, and I do not see a disconnect between these issues or our present-day disputes about sovereignty, land repatriation, and decolonization.

Growing up in Pharr, Texas, I felt more closed off from the rest of the United States than I did Mexico. The Falfurrias Border Patrol checkpoint was about 60 miles north of me while the Hidalgo International Bridge into Reynosa was under 12 miles. Mexico was always right there, and that proximity shaped my relationship to land and the Rio Grande Valley more than an entire education on Chicanx and Latinx literature and cultural studies ever could. Perhaps surprisingly for a student from the University of Oregon, I have been hesitant to consider Mexican American and Chicanx literature under the lens of Environmental Studies despite my primary focus on land, geography, and space. Even prominent Chicana writers like Helena María Viramontes and Cherríe Moraga note in their interviews in *Latinx Environmentalisms* (2019) that there is

hesitancy to identify with a predominantly white academic field as most fields ultimately are in the academy. Viramontes states that "even though [her] family was aware of [their] environment, and [they] carried it with [them] in [their] bodies always, [they] also lacked a certain kind of knowledge about it" (168). In my own family, the women that raised me had all been migrant farmworkers since childhood as had their parents before them. And yet, their relationship to land was never marred by their own exploitation as agricultural laborers across the states of Oregon, Idaho, Michigan, and Texas for over 30 years beginning in the 1930s. I saw this in the way that my community tended to their gardens—the saplings of chile piquíns, serranos, limes, valley lemons, naranjas—that grew across my own neighborhood in Pharr, Texas. The exchange of fruits and vegetables across families that always kept our community fed and whole. I can remember my own excitement in the hailing of a neighbor on my way home from school when they held out a grocery bag heavy with *limones* and *toronjas*. There was something intimate there that I do not wish to theorize.

Still, the ecological, environmental, biological, and economical warfare waged by farmers on Mexican, Filipino, and other Asian immigrants and migrants has become its own focal study. I am hesitant, but I also understand that we have to make amends and understand that our community members have always wanted us to attend to these issues that continue to shape our intimate relationships with the environment well into the 21st century. In the field defining text, *Writing the Good Life,* Priscilla Ybarra considers Mexican American literature and environmental studies as a single field. She notes that communities have long engaged questions of racial capitalism, agricultural exploitation, and biopolitical violence. Indeed, we need not only to look at the social and political contributions of migrant farmworkers in the 1950s through the 1970s through key figures like Dolores Huerta and César Chávez. Rather, we can think more

expansively to the literary and artistic production beginning in the 19th century with writings like María Ampáro Ruiz de Burton's *The Squatter and the Don* (1885) to understand how land and environment have always been more than merely setting for a Mexican American identity. Space emerges as an entangled, animate, and vibrant site on which our disputes over territory have always occurred. Space remains even after we collectively cease to exist, and yet, we proceed in the worthy effort to not privilege land over people or people over land. Ultimately, it is not sufficient for us to privilege the environment without consideration to how these actions ultimately further erase immigrant bodies that remain at the border of intelligibility to our environmental, political, and social consciousness.

As such, this first chapter begins at an intersection of multiple inquiries about not just land and the environment, but of Tejas, Texas literature, and border subjectivity. I begin with what is most intimate to myself in order to understand not just my own futurity, but that of the multiple communities I stand with and for. I cannot divide myself from this work, and so this project most naturally begins with the Rio Grande Valley. In the Rio Grande Valley, cities and towns easily bleed into each other. The sprawling Expressway 83, which runs over 200 miles East and West between Laredo and Brownsville, connects the Rio Grande Valley across South Texas.[i] Once best known as the Magic Valley for its citrus crops, the RGV is a growing metropole with memories of small towns, ranch and farm lands, and open spaces that have long been replaced with H-E-Bs and strip malls. For writers like Gloria Anzaldúa, the exploitation of land and farmers animates the space, but renders its people as seemingly passive and dying when she says, "I see the Valley still struggling to survive. Whether it does or not, it will never be as a I remember it" (112). Literary geography, thus, is ultimately its own politic that is not only urgent, but detrimental to the environmental, socio-political, and feminist futurity of multiple border subjectivities that are not always rendered or rendered whole for its readers. Like I argue

of María Elena Zamora O'Shea's *El Mesquite* (1937), literary geography shows us the dialogic ways in which space, subjectivity, time, community, memory, and grief are conversantly acting upon each other to make and unmake border identity itself.

Rooting Border Environmentalisms

Like other Chicanas, I still find myself at odds with Environmental Studies. And yet, when I first read Zamora O'Shea's *El Mesquite*, my first thoughts were of South Texas even though the novel itself was set in Southeast Texas near the coast of Corpus Christi. I remembered the 900-year-old *Ahuehuete*, or Montezuma Bald Cypress, that grows in Abram, Texas just North of the Rio Grande River, which has remained elided in academic studies and theories. Most often frequented by runners and cyclists that do not mind the harassment by the U.S. Border Patrol stationed nearby, the tree remains accessible by vehicle on the unpaved road that runs through the border wall. And I do mean *through* the border wall. Unlike how government administrations or the media may make us imagine this space, the wall is not one continuous material structure along the Texas-Mexico border, but instead has several "breaks" in the oxidized steel bollards that span across north of the Rio Grande. Once *through* this wall, you remain on the "U.S.-side" of the border even though you physically stand South of the wall itself. Thus, this physical space between the wall and the river materializes the incongruous and absurd of logic that has always constituted the mythos of the border. As a person of color you are not decidedly American or im/migrant in this geographic space, but remain within the fraught citizenship of none. Located amidst that expansive and uncertain terrain of shrubs, mesquites, and other cypresses, stands, like *El Mesquite*'s narrator Palo Alto, the *ahuehuete* that displaces our understanding of modernity, border subjectivity, and survival—a 900-year-old witness with untold stories.

The Montezuma Bald Cypress, also called "Mexico's National Tree," can be described as both a historical landmark and an environmental marvel. My initial hesitancy to write about the tree stemmed from my unwillingness to both exploit this region and align my work within Environmental Studies, and yet, I wanted to bring into focus the im/material urgency that this ecological subject brings to bare for scholars doing work in any of the fields of environmental, postcolonial, decolonial, and border studies. Local environmental activists have, as early as 2012, taken up efforts to protest how the border wall unjustly cuts through the *ahuehuete*'s root systems, which likely connect across both Mexico and the United States. I say likely because the long term ecological damage of the border wall is largely speculative. This is not to undermine its urgency, but rather to emphasize how we cannot begin to know how this will ultimately and permanently affect the surrounding ecosystems of indigenous vegetation and animal life that has been cleared for the wall to begin to be erected for nearly a decade. Nor will we know the long terms effects on people living, im/migrating, and laboring along the South Texas-Mexico border—in particular how water, soil, and air quality may be affected by any toxins seeping into the earth from the wall. Like most environmental concerns, only time will determine how this will ultimately impact the entire of South Texas and its communities. If environmental racism has taught us anything, we do know that poor, rural, and/or undocumented communities of color will face disproportionate harm. While we know that these dangers have faced South Texas communities long before the construction of the wall in 2012, a comparative reading of both *El Mesquite*'s narrator and the *ahuehuete* in Abram, Texas shows us how the process of these entangled environmentalisms and ecologies ultimately reveal less an urgency to protect land than a neocolonial claim to both this South Texas geography and indigeneity.

In both 2017 and 2018, when the initial announcements were made that the border wall

would be expanded to cut through the Santa Ana Wildlife Refuge (Alamo, Texas) under the Trump Administration, local environmental activists gathered to protest the inhumanity and injustice of the border wall. There was brief national outrage regarding the ecological destruction that would affect upwards of 1,000 vertebrates and bird species and over 1,200 plant varieties along the lower Rio Grande Valley, which brought in other climate and environmental activists from around the United States. Much of these environmental efforts seemed out of sync as there was an unequal urgency to protect nature that had not been readily afforded to protecting undocumented lives.[ii] One local community organization in particular, "RGV No Border Wall Movement," protested the wall's construction in February 2019 and posted a photo of protesters holding a banner that read: "Our Roots Break Your Walls," which followed with a caption that read: "Here in the #RGV, we call the tree—believed to be the oldest in South Texas—Monty. Due to man made changes in the environment, Monty is dying of thirst and may also be cut off from the community that cares for it by new border wall construction. Today we took collective action to honor and water our ancestors' tree" (2019). When the *ahuehuete* was utilized by border activists to oppose the construction and expansion of the border wall, it shifted from solely being at the center of an environmental justice effort and simultaneously became a racialized subject in immigration and border discourse.

South Texas activists utilized a collective "we" and "ours" to organize and rally against both the nation-state and the environmental dangers posed by its border policies. The tree emerged as a decidedly "indigenous" and "Mexican" subject—its Nahuatl name āhuēhuētl (while more commonly written as "*ahuehuete*"), its indigenous presence within the geography of Mexico, and its age all propose that it preceded 16th-century Spanish colonial rule. Even the University of Texas at Austin's Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center confirms that the *ahuehuete*'s transnational native distribution is "from southernmost Texas (Cameron and

Hidalgo counties) south through much of Mexico to Costa Rica" (2015). Compounded with the rhetoric by activists that they were watering "[their] ancestors' tree," the Montezuma Bald Cypress, like Palo Alto in Zamora O'Shea's *El Mesquite* (1935), territorializes geography through an a priori and indigenous claim to the space. "Our roots" break the border walls of the nation-state because "our roots" predate the nation-state itself. In *Home Rule* (2020), Nandita Sharma offers the term "Postcolonial New World Order" to consider the ways in which territorial sovereignty can be made to appear not only natural, but as an "inheritance" to members of any nation (3). That is, the only way to overwrite the current nation-state is for members of a new nation-state to suggest that they have always been there, were there first, or are the original caretakers of any given territory. I lean on this concept of territory because it is in direct opposition to land or the environment: under the lens of colonialism, geography and terrain cease to be merely land or natural; they become a space to be owned, parceled, and regulated. Furthermore, as Sharma adds, "*anyone* placed outside the limits of the nation can be made a Migrant," an outsider, or a threat to the desired social order (12). Like local activists showed in their protesting of "Monty's" life, they first had to establish a clear connection to the tree by a making the relationship (naming the tree, for example), but they also had to establish a genealogy and lineage to the tree to show that they were/are more closely "related" to the tree than the nation-state. In this way, those unrelated or lacking these genealogical relationships are deemed as foreigners, outsiders, invaders, and colonizers, which reinforces the very ideologies that they oppose when used toward the undocumented.

My objective here is not to say that the United States government has more "rights" over the *ahuehuete* because the tree grows on the "U.S.-side" of the Rio Grande nor to suggest that local South Texas environmentalists are the designated ancestors who are then owed natural

rights/access to the tree. Rather, I wish to show how the *ahuehuete* simultaneously loses its rights, sovereignty, and identity within this dispute and transaction between both the nation-state and those who claim to protect it. Like Indigenous peoples all across Mexico, Central America, and South America, their sovereignty becomes not only fungible, but something that can be coopted and manipulated. Only in the tree's *becoming* into a U.S.-Mexico environmental and political subject does it gain legibility and is, consequently, afforded some "rights." Its only value is rooted to the tree's ability to affirm specific political agendas that utilize the U.S.-Mexico border geographic as a discursive space for multiple nationalist politics. This is not unlike the rhetoric that has long been used by both Mexican American and Chicanx activists following the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo of 1848. In this way, the *ahuehuete* ceases to have its own indigenous sovereignty and becomes a manipulatable object in border discourse much like Palo Alto does in *El Mesquite*.

By looking at the *ahuehuete* in South Texas and the *mesquite* in Southeast Texas, I aim to diverge from arguments that privilege the human or the body as the only sites where disputes over belonging, sovereignty, and decolonization occur. Like Sharma articulates:

> Indeed, national citizenship controls are, together, the key technologies for the material and cultural realization of postcolonial biopower. Disputes over their scope and application are central to the continuous (re)making of the national body politic. As new nations and new nation-states form and older ones dissolve; the unity needed to keep a nation intact is continually challenged. New national liberation movements arise to remake the borders of nationalized territory and set different limited to national belonging. (7)

Border studies scholars understand the ways in which citizenships regulate belonging and identity. Sharma's work shows, furthermore, the ways in which bodies and people—through the designations of "natives" and "migrants"—come to reify particular nationalist projects that ultimately uphold colonialism. Thus, even as the protection of the Montezuma Bald Cypress

generates productive environmental discourse, it also advances a dangerously problematic nationalist agenda that attempts to reterritorialize this South Texas space into Mexican and Indigenous. Communities can now rally behind the protection of the *ahuehuete* because, "like us," the tree has always been here. If the tree dies, so does our history and genealogy—even when those histories and genealogies are not only diverse but at odds.

Thus, my analysis of Zamora O'Shea's *El Mesquite* is rooted in the following questions about border futurity and liberation: Who and what is worth protecting and liberating? Who is left out of our articulations of community, futurity, and liberation? And how are we defining this "who?" In other words, what objects, subjects, and/or bodies have we agreed that matter? What are all objects, subjects, and bodies, but matter? I return to the Montezuma Bald Cypress at the end of the chapter as a way to treat both the tree and the text as their own theoretical interventions. I believe both to be making social, political, and historical interventions that demand an urgency to think of nature as "alive," not inanimate, or to borrow from Jane Bennet, vibrant things.[iii] As such readings of texts like María Elena Zamora O'Shea's *El Mesquite* calls us to consider texts from a number of humanist lenses including literary Modernisms, border feminisms, environmentalist, Indigenous, and Texas literary studies. This text marks deep genealogical roots that historicizes Texas through a nationalist spatial imaginary that has been highly contentious in border studies. Even as this may be the condition of "recovering" texts from a particular historical moment that often marginalized authors like María Elena Zamora O'Shea, I respond to these spatial imaginings in critical ways in order to build toward the futurity of liberation for communities outside of my own.

Becoming Modern: On Period, Genre, and Narrator

While the question of literary periodization was not one that initially guided my analysis

of *El Mesquite*, I remained attentive to the recent interventions by scholars like Kirby Brown who have responded to the persistent elision of Indigenous, Black, and border subjectivities within Modernist literary discourse. As Brown makes clear in "American Indian Modernities" (2017), Modernist studies still largely continues to reify ratios of "modern" to whiteness and "traditional" to non-white subjects by not attending responsibly to the ways in which industrial capitalism and white supremacy work to "produce" ethnic subjects across multiple geopoints in the present-day U.S. That is, to be a Modernist, or to be categorized as such, reflects also the condition that the writer is taking up conventions that abandon the "premodern" or "traditional past" in order to ultimately fulfill a colonial futurity. Certainly texts like Zamora O'Shea's *El Mesquite*, can be read in similar ways for the way it materializes the overlapping and contentious relationships between multiple "modern" subject formations across and alongside Texas as a geographic space. As John Morán González notes in *Border Renaissance*, the railroad construction at the close of the text rings in the "death knell" that marks "the final integration of the Nueces strip into capitalist world-system during the late nineteenth century" (91). That is, the novel describes multiple processes by which subjects concede over to the making of a new modernity (industrial capitalism) that ultimately "uproots" Indigenous and working-class Mexican communities and places them in a "fate of displacement" (González 91). New Modern subjects, Tejanxs, not only survive, but thrive even as other subjects remain on the margins of extinction. Even as González's reading ultimately suggests a historical survival for Tejanx subjectivities, as does the work by other scholars on Zamora O'Shea's work like Andrés Tijerina and Leticia M. Garza-Falcon, I suggest a more egregious project of "survival" has been enmeshed within our inquiries about modernity in the text thus far.

Prominent Texas writers like Américo Paredes and Jovita González, for example, have

been significant exemplars of the way in which Tejanx letters continually reshape our understanding of periodization, historicity, and modernity within a 1930s U.S.-Mexico border space. The significant work of South Texas and Texas literary history has also been addressed by scholars like María Eugenia Cotera, John Morán González, and José E. Limón, and I am unambiguously reliant on the root systems laid down by these scholars. In particular, I draw on the scholarship on María Elena Zamora O'Shea that has largely figured her as a Tejana author writing about and within Texas. I do this to show that even as Zamora O'Shea has been figured as a Modernist author for fitting numerous conventions that define literary modernisms like form, she also blurs many of these preconceived categories for identifying and examining her text. More specifically, I am drawn to the ongoing conversation surrounding the text as "Border Modernist," which places modernity and border subjectivity simultaneously at odds and in sync with one another. González argues that even as Palo Alto "disappears," Anita García, the descendant of Palo Alto's "masters" and "mistresses" remains "as the repository of communal oral history handed down from mother to daughter, a history that the ravages of border modernity cannot erase" (91-92). At once, this places women, Tejanas in particular, as weight bearers of communal knowledge, archives, and epistemologies that must be preserved for generations to come, which seemingly secures Zamora O'Shea's positioning as a proto-feminist and Tejana author. However, what becomes concealed in the move to recover Anita the Tejana, is Palo Alto's own subjectivity, which becomes the collateral damage in the process of survival and emergence of a new subject formation—the Tejana. Thus, I am hesitant to consider this type of preservation of futurity as either commendable or worthy of pride, as it is ultimately an imperialist vision that casts Indigenous communities, the working class, and nature as expendable subjectivities in order to ensure the survival of a new ethno-nationalist and nation-

state identity.

The very narrative positioning of el mesquite, who we call "Palo Alto," also blurs the role of the narrator by both narrating and being the subject in the plot; that is, the stories are acting upon the narrator as "character" while also positioning the tree as part of the plot/scenery/setting through its role as a natural landmark within the text. While I address these questions more fully in my section on subjectivity, I mark them early here as they help us to address these questions of narrative voice and genre as well. Because Palo Alto is recalling both personal and historical events, the text becomes much more akin to *testimonio* than it does to historical fiction. For example, Palo Alto makes several broadstrokes in historical references:

> The settlements have grown. Farther into the interior of Texas are great missions. The Fathers who come and go from Queretaro to San Antonio De Bejar as the settlement is called, tell of the great numbers of Indians who have been set to work digging ditches, building houses, and making the settlement the best in Texas. (44)

However, positions of counterhistory or counternarrative are insufficient, and we are called to consider what imaginaries their works lay before us. Brown poses, in "American Indian Modernities," that when Indigenous authors published "'authentic' legends, folklore, chants, oral histories, nature writings, and life stories [they] fulfilled settler colonial expectations and desires" whereas "contemporary Native peoples writing about explicitly modern Native lives, often in conventional 'western' forms, were not as legible within dominant discourses of white supremacy or romantic-modernist primitivism" (297).That is, what does the spatial imaginary look like in border modernisms and what does it complicate or reveal about the futurity of border subjects? Furthermore, if we utilize the critical lens of decolonial mappings, as articulated by scholars like Mishuana Goemann and Alex Hidalgo, what does Zamora O'Shea's novel contribute to our understanding of both the decolonial and literary geography?

Palo Alto's role is unarguably highly mediated. By reading *El Mesquite* through the genre of *testimonio*, Zamora O'Shea's Tejanx nationalist and modernist project can be turned on itself. Brown suggests in "Historical Recovery, Colonial Mimicry" (2010), that we should read "the narrator as a colonized subject—unquestionably indigenous yet alienated by that reality by the colonial ideology within which it is interpellated" (28). While I do not disagree that Palo Alto is established as an indigenous presence in the novel, I also do not think Palo Alto comes to represent "the persistence of indigenous peoples" across South Tejas (Brown 28). Rather, I believe Palo Alto to be its own subject and precariously placed in relationship to the human, and which it is always at the risk of extinction in the making of "modernity." Read in this way, Zamora O'Shea's text brings to the surface a tension that reveals how nature and human life consequently emerge as opposing and yet congruous dialogic systems. That is, nature, land, ecology, and space are characterized as the premodern state which must be destroyed in order to preserve new identity formations. Brown notes that the text "makes visible the historical, material, and narrative processes by which indigenous peoples are transformed into racialized national subjects as Mexicans, Mexican Americans, *mestizos*, and peones" (31). However, the process of racialization and transformations from "indigenous" to "peon" are deeply entangled and encrypted through the text's politics of space, which I explore more fully below. The process is, thus, not as visible as we may initially consider, but becomes accessible through the partiality and dialogism of the *testimonios* rendered throughout the text.

I utilize the term "dialogic" as Shannon Speed (Chickasaw), drawing on Mikhail Bakhtin, articulates in *Rights in Rebellion* (2008), where "'local' people participate actively, bringing in their local histories, understandings, and goals (which are already the products of [global discourse])" (33). In part, her redefinition of the term dialogic allows me to consider not

just dialogue and human rights as multiplicitous and overlapping, but temporality itself as neither synchronous or asynchronous. Time is conversant, intersecting, but not different for BIPOC communities. In many ways, this puts me in opposition to Scott Richard Lyons suggestion, in *X-Marks* (2010), that there have "always been a great number of different, interlocking 'epochs' or durées at any given moment: multiple modes of production, diversities of belief, contending memories, and competing future visions—in other words, different times unfolding in common space" (13). Rather than thinking of "different times," which only further coheres BIPOC subjectivities as outside of Western time, I believe dialogism reveals how disorientating temporality and space already are.

I do not wish to re-center and reify Western thought, time, and geography as the origin from which communities of color must always defer to when making meaning of our lives, communities, and histories. Rather, I pull from a community of writers of color that refuse linearity and the U.S. as their only orientations.[iv] When we consider history as neither synchronous or asynchronous, Western or Third World, the layered stories within *El Mesquite* also begin to reveal other modalities of being, expression, and meaning that cannot be articulated through a settler colonial logic or imagining. That is, time and space facilitate a type of responsibility on all of its subjects—no one stands "outside" of this responsibility due to historicity, gender, etc. Thus, it is not that Border Modernisms, as a category, ceases to have value in our understanding of either novel or novelist, but that its precision places ethnic subjects as either inside or outside of a dominant archive. As I argue of border feminisms, designating the border as a geopoint ceases to have value when it does not responsibly attend to the fragmented and illegible silences, voices, and subject positions of those outside of a conventional "border" subjectivity or community.

To understand those fragmented and illegible stories, I believe that a deeper consideration

of genre and identification may be helpful in our reading of *El Mesquite*. While scholars have broadly identified the text as novella or novel even given the narrative positioning of the mesquite, Palo Alto, I suggest that perhaps the text can be more formally identified as *testimonio*. As *testimonio*, the text's work on archiving, narrativizing, and "remembering" centuries of Texas history and knowledge as early as the 16th century shifts from prioritizing Tejanidad into recognizing several dialogical identities within a singular geography. As the subtitle proposes, "A Story of the Early Spanish Settlements Between the Nueces and the Rio Grande," "story" suggests that multiple literary elements of storytelling are entangled within the retelling of a Southeast Texas history. Furthermore, "story" suggests that the account will draw from both fictional and non-fictional events and will trouble distinctions between what is objective and subjective. Like all *cuentos*, or stories, it is something also largely conceptual—suggesting qualities of invention, nostalgia, and folklore that could substantiate elements of the story and, momentarily, place it as "outside" of the grasp of history. Even before the author's name on the title page, we are cognizant of the multidimensional aspects of storytelling that Zamora O'Shea wants to center. The page reads: "As Told By: 'La Posta del Palo Alto,'" which is placed after both title and subtitle, but *before* Zamora O'Shea's own name as the "official" author of the text. Therefore, the authority and legitimacy of the text and formal narrative are anchored to two authorial figures before the story even begins, which further emphasizes the significance of attending to what Zamora O'Shea's text, through the genre of *testimonio*, may be yielding.

Testimonio, or testimony, has been more centrally identified within the Latin American literary tradition through field-shaping texts such as Elena Poniatowska's *Lilus Kikus* (1954), Rigoberta Menchú's *I, Rigoberta Menchú* (1983), and Ruth Behar's *Translated Woman* (1985). As a genre, *testimonio*, often results in questions of "legitimacy" regarding the authorial voice. Who is speaking to us in a *testimonio*—the subject, author, or translator? This question is not

easily decidable given the multidimensional politics of translation, oral storytelling, and interview work. As such, the complexity of language, positionality, and bias can often undermine the "authenticity" of who is speaking at any given time. And yet, these fragmented narratives are often all that remain. In "Anatomía del testimonio" (1987), John Beverley identifies *testimonio* in this way:

> Podemos, sin embargo, distinguir en nuestra selección una forma general: un testimonio es una narración—usualmente pero no obligatoriamente del tamaño de una novela o novela corta—contada en primera persona gramatical por un narrador que es a la vez el protagonista (o el testigo) de su propio relato. Su unidad narrativa suele ser una 'vida' o una vivencia particularmente significativa (situación laboral, militancia política, encarcelamiento, etc.) La situación del narrador en el testimonio siempre involucre cierta urgencia o necesidad de comunicación que surge de una experiencia vivencial de represión, pobreza, explotación, marginalización, crimen, lucha. (9)
>
> *We can, nevertheless, distinguish in our selection a general form: a testimonio is a narrative—usually, but not necessarily, dependent on the length of the novel or short story/novella—told in first person grammar by a narrator that is perhaps the protagonist (or the witness) of their own story/account. It's narrative unit usually a "life" or an experience that is particularly significant (relating to labor, political militancy, incarceration, etc.). The situation of the narrator in the narrative of the testimonio always involves a certain urgency or necessity to communicate what arises from such a lived experience of repression, poverty, exploitation, marginalization, crime, or struggle.*[v]

Beverley's definition suggests that *testimonio* remains a capacious and political genre that allows us to engage subalternity—even as all testimony remains fragmented by the discourses of authorship, language, and power. Furthermore, he suggests that the general form of *testimonio* is fluid—length remains irrelevant in the making of the genre, which suits *El Mesquite*'s stylistic characteristics. However, *El Mesquite* also departs and expands our understanding of this narrative genre, per Beverley's definition, as it skew our perception of narrative positioning and personhood. Beverley determines that these stories are told in first person grammar by either a protagonist or "witness" (9), which presupposes our privileging of the human narrator. Certainly,

the text's most singular feature remains its displacement of a human narrative voice within the historicizing of this Southeast Texas region.[vi] Beverley's framing of the witness allows us to also think of nature as always bearing witness to the human and human action. For even as Palo Alto is a fully realized subject in the text, it cannot act upon human life in a conventional sense.

Even as I utilize the genre of *testimonio* to read *El Mesquite,* I do not aim to recenter Zamora O'Shea's or Anita Garcia's stories in this reading; rather, the genre of *testimonio* brings intelligibility and legibility to the fragmented archives of multiple subjectivities, like the environment, across this Tejanx landscape. As Beverley describes, the role of testimony can also be one of witnessing, which Palo Alto does despite its fixed location. Palo Alto comes to hear of major historical events by way of listening to settlers that journey by the tree, and, thus, bears witness in its own way to the changing landscape of Tejas through settler colonialism. These stories, however, are often also disjointed given that Palo Alto is not able to see for themselves what is occurring or transpiring in these far-off locations. El mesquite notes how "[the] settlements have grown. Farther into the interior of Texas are great missions. The Fathers who come and go from Queretaro to San Antonio De Bejar as the settlement is called, tell of the great numbers of Indians who have been set to work digging ditches, building houses, and making the settlement the best in Texas" (44). While the text does not indicate a year, only noting that "several years have passed" (44), the construction of the missions and the foundation of San Antonio allow us to utilize this colonial "development" and geography to pinpoint a general period between the 1720s and 1780s. The San Antonio Missions become illuminated through a type of literary geography in the text even as a part of their history also become encoded through Palo Alto's influence under colonialism. Palo Alto can only imagine these "great missions" as they are described by the Fathers—unable or unwilling to engage with the exploitation of life

and labor of Indigenous peoples that facilitate the very "making" of Texas.

Testimonio, in this case, both fails and succeeds in allowing us to think about Indigenous subjectivities. That is, even as Palo Alto is limited by its positioning, what emerges is that by "[h]olding the narrator's indigeneity at the center of the analysis and interrogating the narrative of Spanish-Mexican imperial nostalgia it advances raises important questions concerning the narrative function of 'the Indian' with respect to competing and contested claim to place in the multiply-occupied space of the trans-Nueces" (Brown 14-15). Palo Alto engages more intimately than witness by way of deciding which narratives are to remain immemorialized by the text, and which are dispensable within Tejanx history. In Chapter VI, the mesquite says:

> Today my mistress came to sit with me...She told of how Columbus had died in poverty, when he should have been honored for the great discoveries he had made...That her home was at Alicante on the Mediterranean Sea...How she longed to go back some day, and see her native land.
>
> The servant told a few stories of how her people had submitted to the teachings of the priests. How they were taught to spin, weave, and do all kinds of housework. That when Don Rafael had come to the priests and asked for some peones, she had hoped she would be assigned to them. How happy she had been with her mistress, and how her children knew no other lords than the Garcia family.
>
> The [Irish] lady told stories of...How the Fathers had befriended them, and found homes for them. How God had been good to them and their children, and she hoped that the friendliness between the Indian and the white settlers would continue, so that there should be no strife. (41-43)

Palo Alto not only privileges her own mistress's *testimonio*, but that of the Irish visitor's, above that of the servant's history. *Testimonio* allows us to think about what is unspoken in the woman's story—how she must convey not only "happiness" but gratefulness and loyalty for the Garcia family's benevolence. Her own genealogy—where she comes from, what her native tongue was, where her family remains or remained—is erased and overwritten by both religion and colonialism. She, along with her people, must "submit" to the teachings even as those

teachings aim to destroy and reform her community's spiritual identity. Later in the novel, Anita herself aligns herself with a similar mission of teaching, which not only reflects Zamora O'Shea's own autobiographical history as teacher in an early 20th century rural Texas-Mexico border space, but with the mission of teaching "these simple-minded sons of toil what it is all about" (76). As such, the stories that survive in Palo Alto's account are not only mediated and fragmented, but reflect more Zamora O'Shea's own commitments to preserving a particular history of Texas where Indians, peones, and, later, Mexicans, can only survive by disentangling the *testimonios* that do survive in *El Mesquite*.

As this work on the text has attempted to distill, Tejas has always been its own contested geography where multiple border identities struggle for survival. Similarly, Palo Alto's oscillation between the indigenous subjects and colonial subjects in the text allow us to remain attentive to the partialities of both history and storytelling. The testimonies that are rendered by Palo Alto's witnessing ultimately form a more detailed account of the competing nationalisms and sovereignties within this 16th to 19th century narrative that do not merely project and protect Tejanx nationalism and legacy, but highlight its shortcomings and violent negligence of other border identities.

María Elena Zamora O'Shea's text ultimately calls into question historicity, and as Kirby Brown argues, it is not sufficient to consider this novel as a "counter-narrative" or counter-history (13). Rather, my reading of the text is to position it in ways that asks us to consider space and place as unlocatable and unmmapable. That is, the narrator as a mesquite tree gives us two spatial possibilities: its initial deprivileging of human life allows us: 1) to untangle overlapping sovereignties and subjectivities, and 2) puts into question the value of space-based identity or claims to belonging in spaces like the Texas-Mexico border. In narrating centuries of border history, Palo Alto gives us access to imagining both a pre-and post-Spanish settlement that

ultimately allows us to consider the limits of thinking of space as merely territory to be possessed. What emerges is a deterritorialized spatial imaginary that uproots 21st century Chicanidad in productive ways and that call us to surrender ideas of "motherlands" driven by a nationalisms and citizenships.

On the Border of Subjectivity

The shift from reading Palo Alto from object to subject is not without a political agenda. Subjectivity, after all, is at the root of how power, citizenships, nationalisms, the human, and identity have been articulated. Therefore, when we identify particular experiences or identities as border subjects and/or border feminist subjects, what we are actually attempting to do is to cohere and make legible a community and identity formation. Perhaps what we seek is knowing that we are not alone in this experience, this language, this identity; to know that others have experienced something like *this* before. That like us, they have survived the process, and remained even when colonial violence has attempted to render our bodies, languages, traditions, and stories obsolete and extinct. Subjectivity, in this way, becomes an access point into the fragmented history and genealogy of ourselves. If we can identify a group of texts, writers, and experiences as adjacent to the "border," "feminism," and "Chicanx," then we have named a part of ourselves that otherwise would feel illegible or subject to erasure. As border subjects or border feminist subjects, we become legible and whole, and no longer at the margins of exclusion by two nations that have long contested our very legitimacy. As such, we have rarely questioned the making of this subjectivity—what it is, what it does, for whom, and who, ultimately, it renders whole and who is fragmented in the process.

Even when we become more specific within a border feminist politic, when we come

together as women, we are often also guilty of forgetting bodies that do not conform or fit into our conceptions of binaries or abilities. I put subjectivity through a sieve in this section because to be a "subject" suggests that we are also citizens with certain unalienable rights and privileges. Like the Montezuma Bald Cypress who becomes a racialized border subject in the process of ascertaining a certain legibility for South Texas and border environmentalisms, Mexicans Americans and Tejanxs are also caught within the fraught and imprecise language of nations and citizenships. The process is double-binding as Mexican Americans are simultaneously made into "citizens" of particular nation-states, which further reifies and advances the violent notions of nationalisms, citizenships, and patriotism, while also remaining largely illegible and homogenous as an ethnic group. We remain bound and tethered to invented countries, as all nations are, and we are made into subjects that uphold borders and citizenships even when we are the margins of legitimacy to those very countries and nations the define our rights.

John Morán González provides a thorough analysis of the collisions between the Texas Centennial and the emergence of Texas Mexican literature in the 1930s. In his analysis, González also attends to how Texas Mexican identity is ultimately reshaped and rearticulated by authors like Américo Parédes, Jovita González, and María Elena Zamora O'Shea. Like I address in my section of the identification of *El Mesquite* as a Border Modernist text, Zamora O'Shea's text remains an essential lens in understanding the archive of Texas literature, history, and folklore. Similarly, González's text historicizes this Southeast Texas author and literary contributions to Tejana letters in ways that remain largely understudied outside of Texas scholarship. As such, I extend the work of *Border Renaissance* by also considering how both Zamora O'Shea's text and its scholarship ultimately reflect a deeply nostalgic Texan nationalism. Furthermore, I wish to examine what this nationalist project ultimately coheres

about our understanding of border feminist subjectivity and citizenship.

Of *El Mesquite*, González argues that "Zamora O'Shea's exhortation reflected the approach of a new social movement that imagined a different relationship between U.S. citizens of Mexican descent and Anglo-Americans and that made the shaping of a new Mexica American subjectivity its goal" (94). Clearly, Mexican American subjectivity is meant to invoke a particular Tejanx nationalism that acknowledges Tejanx contribution to the making of the Texas as well as elevated Mexican Americans, and Tejanos, into a point of legibility within Texas discourse. González adds that Zamora O'Shea's association with the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC) in 1937 further illustrates a shared vision that would "restore the good name wrongly taken and the dignity that had been denied for a century [from Tejanxs]. In this way, Mexican Americans could return to living the honor of their ancestors" (94). I am drawn by the rhetoric of "return," "honor," and "ancestors" in this analysis, which I believe augments the abstract fashioning of a Mexican American or Chicanx racialized identity, in the text, at the expense of Indigenous Mexicans. As we may recall in the work of South Texas environmentalists, the honorable work of ancestry and genealogy must be upheld in order to lay claim to a particular inheritance. Unlike the descendants of the Spanish, the Garcia family who not only thrives but is written into perpetual history, the racialized lower classes of "peones" and "Indians" never "rise" to become landowners, and, are therefore, tethered to the "premodern" in ways that persist in contemporary politics through the imaging of Mexicans and "federally unrecognized" or non-enrolled indigenous peoples as "workers of the land" through roles like farmworkers, laborers, landscapers, etc. As Brown has already argued, Indigenous people remain everywhere and their relationships to geography should not be relegated to roles as land protectors or caretakers.

Zamora O'Shea's vision of Tejanx futurity is, at least biographically, rooted in the survival of Texas history as told by her own Spanish and middle-class family. Zamora O'Shea's own positioning as a "first-generation" Tejana and educated woman from a "formerly elite Texas-Mexican ranchero [family]" should make clear to us that the archival project of *El Mesquite* is already deeply troubled and entrenched within a dominant, ahistorical, and colonial discourse by its very authorial voice (González 72). For even as Zamora O'Shea has been traditionally read as border feminist figure, she is not a fair representative of the working-class and racialized subjects that are articulated and shaped in her own literary works. Other novels like María Ampáro Ruíz de Burton's *The Squatter and the Don* (1885) and Jovita González's *Dew on the Thorn* (1997) can also be rigorously examined for their individual nationalist projects that come at the expense of Indigenous and working-class subjectivities in both California and Texas. For example, even as Ruiz de Burton's *The Squatter and the Don* narrativizes the making of *Californios* by considering how California Mexicans become "subaltern" via legislation like the 1851 California Land Act and the Greaser Act of 1855, the novel also elides considering how over twenty Spanish Catholic missions from San Diego to Sonoma also came to violently remove and suppress Indigenous people and sovereignty throughout an 18th and 19th century California history. Subjectivities, like those illustrated by authors like Ruiz de Burton, González, and Zamora O'Shea show how deeply enmeshed our understanding of subject formation is to land. The making of *Californios* was dependent on genocide and religious indoctrination in order to create a space-based nationalist futurity for California Mexicans. Similarly, *El Mesquite* illustrates these very same projects sustain the cultural and nationalist identity we call Tejanidad. Furthermore, it shows us how such

subjectivities are also always overwriting and obscuring other subject formations and their relationships to land. That is, the novels grapple with the politics of legitimizing one's own community even if that legitimization comes at the expense of another community's sovereignty, tradition, culture, and language.

Thus, when subjectivities emerge, develop, and survive, they remain tethered to a precise past, genealogy, ancestry, and tradition that also shapes a specific futurity for new generations within the myth of modernity. Zamora O'Shea's own imagining of what Tejanx identity *could* look like in the beginning of the 20th century is made material in *El Mesquite*, and as 21st century scholars we are called to rigorously attend to the fraught, entangled, and privileged legibility that is advanced in the making of such Tejanx historical discourse. Thus, my critiques of the novel are not so much critiques on Zamora O'Shea, although that work is perhaps unavoidably produced by the examination of both text and author; rather, what I hope is centered in this work is the critical examination of how border feminist subjectivity, as articulated as early as Zamora O'Shea's *El Mesquite*, has also largely been utilized as a placeholder for an envisioned community that has, paradoxically, put us at odds with other communities of color both nationally and transnationally. That is, while U.S.-Mexico border feminism asks for recognition and legitimacy within U.S. / Mexico historicities, it is also asking to be recognized and made legitimate by the very nation-state apparatuses that continually rejects and delegitimizes multiple border identities existing outside of the U.S.-Mexico border. Furthermore, we must ask, what is the cost of this recognition and legitimation when we think about the multiple sovereignties of other border subjects across Mexico, Central America, and Latin America? Whose futurities are secured and ensured survival? Who becomes a disposable subject in the making of those futurities?

Many scholars have examined Palo Alto's own reckoning with the making of Tejanidad in the novel, which has long been considered the central subjectivity erupting in *El Mesquite*. Palo Alto's testimonio brings us closer to examining the erupting racialized identity of Mexican Americans and Latinx peoples well past its 1930s literary history context as the mesquite considers the new racialized subjectivity and identity imposed on her "masters:"

> Now that a new country has been established south of the Rio Grande they call our people *Mexicans*. They are the same people who were called Spaniards only a short time ago. Some say the word in such a bitter way that it sounds as if it were a crime to be a *Mexican*. My master says he is one, and is proud to be one. That he is a member of the white race, whether he be called Mexican or not. (59)

Even as scholars have largely examined this moment in the text as one that coheres the emergent nationalist identity of Texas Mexican Americans and/or Tejanxs as well as signaling back to the ways that the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in 1848 symbolically and literally fragments Texas Mexican identity, this moment also adds to our understanding of the making of race. Brown notes how "indigenous peoples and Texas-Mexicans are pitted against one another by Anglo opportunists hoping to rid both from the trans-Nueces region of the newly annexed State of Texas" from Mexico (26). However, what is perhaps most egregious in Palo Alto's observation is the ways in which Spanish settlers are easily absorbed into the identity of *Mexicanos* while Indigenous Mexicans remain on the border of their own subjectivity.

Thus, as our focus has been on the way in which *Mexicanos* are denied full legibility as "American citizens," which I address further in the final section of this chapter, what *El Mesquite* makes fully legible here is the ease with which Mexican American identity gains proximity to whiteness even as that proximity is complicatedly fraught and fragile. Even as Don Garcia experiences racism, as a Spanish settler turned Mexican settler, within the geographical boundaries of the United States, he still clings to a membership to whiteness. Garcia's choice to "remain" Mexican is simultaneous to his reflex to remain designated by whiteness, which he

fully acknowledges, via Palo Alto's account, as a race. Latinx and Chicanx studies scholars understand that this was not an uncommon ideology held not only by many Tejanxs, Mexican Americans, and Mexicans, in the early part of the 20th century through concepts of *mestizaje* and *limpieza de sangre*.[vii]

Both *mestizaje* and *limpieza de sangre* are recognized as racial processes that are steeped in eugenicist logic, and yet both remain a basis for our contemporary articulations of both Chicanidad and Latinidad. Concepts of mestizaje have been rearticulated and reclaimed for over 30 years of Chicanx and Latinx history, politics, and intellectual thought by scholars like Gloria E. Anzaldúa, Rafael Pérez-Torres, Theresa Delgadillo, and Alicia Arrizón. However, even in trying to reaffirm how mestizaje speaks to a capacious hybridity, we cannot deny that the history of mestizaje is ultimately rooted and dependent on the erasure of Black and Indigenous genealogies in order to ensure the "survival" of both Chicanidad and Latinidad. That is, both Chicanidad and Latinidad are tangential to whiteness and do derive some privileges from their racial categorization as "white." In Zamora O'Shea's text, we must recognize that Don Garcia was never an Indigenous subject, he was a Spanish settler and colonizer whose survival was dependent on his adaptation into a new racialized order within the making of a Mexican identity.

Such politics are not limited to a 1930s racial discourse, but persist in our present-day articulations of Latinidad and Chicanidad. "Mexicans" became "Hispanics," then "Latinos," and remain somewhere at the margins of intelligibility between these ethnic identities. Even as Mexican Americans have been categorized as "white" under the U.S. Census, Mexican Americans understand the fragility of that racialization. In part, it reflects the project of assimilation and ways in which whiteness attempts to subsume racial difference across a heterogenous identity. On the other hand, the designation of white has historically also afforded

Mexican Americans, and other Latinx communities, access to white privilege via education, voting, and other rights. Whiteness, as presented in *El Mesquite*, becomes a fraught subjectivity that Don Garcia, and other Spanish settlers like him, both reject and adopt in the making of their own Tejanx identities and futurities. What is perhaps most significant, is that Don Garcia and his family are willing to adopt a new designation so long as their generational wealth is preserved through land and cattle ownership. When these capitalist assemblies and accumulations are threatened, Don Garcia utilizes his own new Mexican identity to reject new settlers that seek to take away those markers of wealth, power, and privilege.

Thus, when Texas Mexicans moved from being "Mexican" to "Mexican Americans" through the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in 1848, the urgency to "choose" between both nations (the U.S. and Mexico) became central to the formation of Tejanx identity even as each those nations was already wholly fragmented and contested. Mexico, for example, a contested geography across numerous Indigenous communities and the Spanish. What is also notable about this scene is Palo Alto's description of the process of racialization as simultaneous to the emergence of their own subject formation, the nation-state, and its borders. That is, *Tejanos* themselves can only emerge because of these conditions of erasure:

> Settlers continue to come and take up homes. They were paid with land for the services they rendered Texas in her war for Independence. As they like a section, they settle there. Many of them drive the old settlers away, calling them Mexicans. If they were Spaniards when governed by Spain, and Mexicans when governed by Mexico, why can they not be Americans now that they are under the American Government? Perhaps I am getting old and my philosophy is not so good, but that is my belief, unless they choose to be citizens of their old country. Or perhaps they are like me, I was a mesquite to the Indians, a Mesquite to the Spaniards and to the Mexicans, but I am Mesquit to the Americans. (61)

Palo Alto's narration remains heavily influenced by the colonial gaze of The Garcia family, which is clear by the mesquite's "siding" with them. Most interestingly, Palo Alto utilizes their

own subjectivity to explain the parallels and flaws of logic presented by the U.S. government in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. We may recall how earlier in the novel, peones are not allowed a full articulation of their sovereign identities. These identities become flattened in the literal making of Tejas. Here, Palo Alto fails to see the contradictions. The mesquite believes settlers like Don Garcia and his family should be able to *choose* their citizenships even as Indigenous and working class Mexicans could not *choose* to keep their autonomy and sovereignty. Rather, they, too, became subsumed by the racialized caste of "peones" that has no capacity to acknowledge cultural, linguistic, or religious difference across the trans-Nueces area.

Furthermore, Palo Alto utilizes language to further compress identity and subjectivity, noting that the Indians, Spaniards, and Mexicans alike call them "mesquite," but only the Americans inflect the name to fit their tongues and English language. And yet, the Nahuatl word for mesquite is actually mizquitl; Mexicans pronounce and spell the word as mezquite, and the Spanish and English written translation that is still used today is mesquite. Language makes subjects as much as subjects make language. What Palo Alto's reasoning here does is illustrate the ways in which language can transform subjectivity as much as individual subject formations can transform language. I am reminded of Demetria Martínez's anecdote in *Mother Tongue* (1994):

> A Spanish expedition comes upon some Mayan Indians. The Spaniards, what is this place called? The Maya answer, uic athan, we do not understand your words. The Spaniards believe they have been told the place is Yucatán so they impose that name on the place, inflict it. Like Adam, they think God has given them the right to name a world. And the world never recovers. (15)

The world never recovers from the infliction of the Spanish or English language. The text does not historize the Texas-Indian Wars, with documentation as early as 1820, that shows how this Texas region became a contentious terrain for "resolving" disputes around land, culture,

tradition, and language, but utilizes language as a way to compress Indigenous identity within its historical project. In trying to bridge the genealogy between Indians, Mexicans, and the Spanish, *El Mesquite* attempts to overwrite settler violence through its own subjectivity and identity as a native tree to the area. Because the tree stands in relation to power and space, it also produces and further entangles our understandings of power and space like the Montezuma Bald Cypress in Abram, Texas.

The making of subjectivity is central to my reading of Palo Alto's transition from "object" to "subject" as I am invested in the ways in which el mesquite is both self-positioning and positioned within the historical discourses of a Texas and Tejana geographic imaginary. I draw from Michel Foucault's rejection of the Cartesian *cogito, ergo sum* (I think, therefore, I am) even when I ultimately move away from Foucault's privileging and centering of the human, the body, and the male subject. Foucault's work on genealogy and subjectivity becomes an entry point to more rigorously attend to the limits and possibilities of border feminisms. As my analysis of *El Mesquite* will argue, the shift from object to subject is a seed for the expansive ways in which women of color feminisms, specifically border feminisms, can begin to reconsider border subjectivity and feminist agency.

When Foucault defines human subjectivity as an effect, a consequence, and, perhaps even, the ultimate condition of power, he is arguing that subjectivity is ultimately relational to power (particularly via institutions). However, because subjectivity itself is intricately enmeshed within the notions of the human and the body, it is also adjacent to the making and understanding of whiteness, gender binaries, and elitism. Because subjectivity exists as yet another category of difference, it has been crucial to the advancement of the hierarchies of the categories we formally recognize as race, gender, citizenships, and class. Subjectivity is not only

a condition of power; subjectivity sustains, creates, and, ultimately, is power itself. When subjectivity is reduced and aligned to the human, the body, and/or the male, it also reifies the very process by which the subject is socially and politically measured. Like the New Materialists who draw from the Greeks, Lucretius, and René Descartes, I wish to attend to the animate, organic atoms and particles that we could also call "matter." By reading matter as neither passive or inactive, but reacting, growing, expanding, producing, and colliding with other bodies, ecosystems, and galaxies also made of matter, we arrive at a nexus of materiality and immateriality that defies an anthropocentric, corporal, and patriarchal organization of subjectivity. I believe this is a worthwhile theoretical pursuit as it deprivileges the centrist notion that has often positioned BIPOC communities against one another throughout our political history while also revealing the limits of articulating subjectivity via the human. Similarly, my reading of el mesquite as subject, as opposed to object, is to simultaneously and rigorously consider the ways in which multiple other subjects emerge as racialized, gendered, and classed in *El Mesquite*.

Both the limits of Foucault and Western feminism have been long documented—such conceptions have been limited by their exclusion of the ways in which race, gender, and class undermine how the "subject" has been defined since colonial contact. The mere notion of subjectivity itself forces us to consider who has been/is "worthy" of being a subject (i.e. human, alive/animate, and of value) and who, historically, has been/is treated as an object (i.e. nonhuman, dead/inanimate, and of little or no value). As Black scholars like Zakiyyah Iman Jackson argue, the move to "becoming human" is highly racialized and political for Black subjectivities.[viii] Jackson argues:

> ...African diasporic cultural production does not coalesce into a unified tradition that merely seeks inclusion into liberal humanist conceptions of 'the human' but, rather, frequently alters the meaning and significance of being (human) and

> engages in imaginative practices of worlding... (1)

Because the making of Latinx, Chicanx, Mexican American, Tejanx, and Indigenous identities have been historically grounded in antiblackness and often in gaining proximity to whiteness, the politics of Black life is the politic of all people of color. Like Jackson notes of the Black diaspora, we must recognize the ways in which "the human" is already overdetermined and, therefore, already exclusive of the lives of people of color. To recognize non-white life as "human" is not only insufficient, but a surrender to the very category by which racialization is made possible. Consequently, my reading of *El Mesquite*, suggests that numerous categories and binaries—such as material and immaterial; animate and inanimate; human and nonhuman—are rendered indistinct when we examine the tree's as its own subject.

This move from object to subject is ultimately self-fashioned by Palo Alto. It is not my reflex to humanize or make animate a subject that does not wish to become a subject. If we read Don Rafael Garcia's sketch inscription of "1575" as an accurate timestamp, then we can also read el mesquite's self-introduction from a postcolonial lens. Palo Alto speaks of themselves from a moment where el mesquite has already been made into a subject. We cannot adequately cohere the precolonial subjectivity of el mesquite, because when the tree speaks—they are already speaking as a fully articulated "I." El mesquite states, "I am of the highest quality of Mesquites. There are three members of our family in the Southwest. The Arrastrado...; the Mesquite...; and my kind, which the Spaniards, the first white men to recognize my quality, gave the name of 'Mesquite Rosillo'" (1). Palo Alto names themselves a subject with the making of an "I" that is conscious of its own existence within a dialogical and ecological South Texas.

Here, el mesquite has already undergone the process of self-recognition. There is a

likeness in el mesquite's proclamation of "I am" that conjures up René Descartes *cogito*, but is not altogether similar. El mesquite both acknowledges their own subjectivity by asserting themselves as a subject ("I") that exists ("am") while also acknowledging their relationality ("of the highest quality of") to materiality ("mesquites"). The difference between el mesquite's testimony and the definitions of subjectivity by both Descartes and Foucault is this consciousness and materiality afforded by el mesquite's testimonio. El mesquite proceeds to list other members of the mesquite family, which further coheres the tree's self-understanding as a relational subject, but, most importantly, as a *species* and a type of tree. That is, el mesquite does not only recognize that it has commonality with other trees, but that in such a commonality, there can be a grouping of organisms that can be articulated as a species. And while mesquites do constitute a species of trees, I am interested in the parallels that have been drawn between el mesquite and Tejanx subject formation. For example, it would not be enough to argue that because mesquites are indigenous to the Southwest then so are Mexican Americans or Tejanxs. Rather, to interrogate how these geographic parallels are ultimately being drawn in order to advance a specific politic of belonging may allow us to more fully understand the racial and colonialist dynamics of the nationalist project at work in Zamora O'Shea's novel.

In *Becoming Human*, Jackson illustrates that the "categories of 'race' and 'species' have coevolved and are actually mutually reinforcing terms" (12). Similarly, el mesquite relies on the making of a type of race and species in order to feel tethered to the family unit and community of other mesquites. Like Brown notes in "Historical Recovery, Colonial Mimicry," the "botanical hierarchy" speaks to the ideas of evolution, biology, and race common within an early 20th century discourse across both the United States and Mexico (15). The tree partly relies on

the language of eugenics to make itself distinct from the other mesquites—a distinction that the tree notes was made by the Spaniards who "first" recognized its "quality." In this opening paragraph, the tree establishes a type of agricultural genealogy that, as Brown notes, is already "refracted" by colonial contact (15). Palo Alto notes:

> I do not know how I came to be so far out of every one's reach. I have stood here by myself for many centuries...
>
> I stand on a knoll, looking down on the rolling prairies of the vast Southwest. As I grew I began to see the extent of the lines of my horizon. In my youth I could only see rolling hills, but as I grew I could see lines of heavy green in the distance which I recognized as other trees. (1-2)

The tree experiences something akin to Jacques Lacan's mirror stage—a self-recognition that aligns *el mesquite* with those "other trees," but also signaling that it is altogether different, distanced, and displaced from that grouping of far-off trees. There is a physical and geographical isolation that is only understood once the mesquite's height reaches such a point where other trees become recognizable and legible to the narrator. The mesquite notes that as more visitors begin to take refuge beneath the shade it gives off, it also begins to long for the company of others. That is, the tree becomes self-aware of its existence as both object and subject and lastly as a subject within/out community. The tree expresses a melancholic loneliness that did not exist before Spanish contact, and which, arguably, el mesquite never recognizes as its own reliance on colonial presence.

El Mesquite is as much about the contested "makings" of Tejanx subjectivity as it is about recovering a historical archive of Modernist Texas letters. Even as this section has been a closer examination of el mesquite's subject position, it is ultimately an examination of the constellation of subjectivities produced across this Texas geographic imaginary. Who are the "human" subjects at the margins of intelligibility in this novel? As Brown's analysis makes

clear, *El Mesquite* performs numerous literary labors to arrive at a mass Indigenous erasure by the end of the text. The move from "Indians" to "peones" is also clearly classed and racialized, and we should not consider this just a minor casualty as el mesquite also becomes a colonized subject. For even as the tree may not understand how indigenous groups like the Coahuiltecans and the Karankawas from the Southeast Texas geographic are around Corpus Christi came to be labeled more generally as "Indians," the tree does not dispute this conflation and flattening of difference among these Indigenous groups. In contrast, the tree's subjectivity is also enmeshed within "nationalist" discourse when it declares itself as a "mesquite rosillo," which marks the tree as proto-racially distinct against other mesquite varieties. The making of Palo Alto's subjectivity in the text, thus, is not elsewhere in relation to the making of nations, nationalisms, and citizenships in *El Mesquite*. The tree calls into focus the significance of a particular space, "the Southwest," in the making of its own identity among numerous other subjectivities like that of the "Indians," "peones," "Fathers," and numerous species of trees and animals that it comes to identify—and to identify with/against—over hundreds of years of *testimonio*.

When el mesquite tdoes not "recognize" or make "intelligible" the differences between the other racialized subjects that are present not only in the novel, but in the very making of Texas, it suggests that Tejanx subjectivity is already at odds with other communities, sovereignties, languages, and cultural systems. "Tejanx" identity fails to be sufficiently capacious enough to recognize not just difference in terms of community designation, but in its articulation of itself that refuses to contend with the violent history of Texas Mexicans and Mexican Americans on Indigenous subjects across centuries and territories. Like Gayatri Spivak argues in "Can the Subaltern Speak?," a major problem within Western and U.S. Third World Feminism is the reflex to speak for the subaltern. Spivak suggests that, alternatively, "[p]art of

our 'unlearning' project is to articulate that ideological formation—by measuring silences, if necessary—into the *object* of investigation" (92). *El Mesquite* attempts to overwrite and clear out subjects in an effort of preservation of Tejanidad, but it cannot overwrite and clear out its silencing and attempted erasure of multiple sovereignties throughout the text. These voices, narratives, and *testimonios* themselves also survive and become their own objects and subjects of the text that make clear how the geographies mapped in the novel do not preserve any single nation or national identity.

While el mesquite both speaks as a vital materiality (a tree that is both inanimate and animate) and conscious of their positioning within a category and community (via the classification and reference to the plant species of mesquite trees), that subjectivity is also speaking from a Spanish colonial imaginary. Palo Alto has become a complacent participant and subject in the project of settler-colonialism, and affirms such notions when el mesquite states, "Since I was given a name by the kind Fathers I take more pride in myself" (8). As Brown argues, this self-worth is extracted through the very process of being "named" and "valued" by the Spanish and this, ultimately, establishes the tree as a "colonized subject" (16). However, the consequences of establishing el mesquite as a colonized subject are many. For one, the naming of subject does not just give the ability to center Palo Alto as narrator or integral character within the narrative, but it also suggests that its very identity can be named, understood, and assessed based on the positionality as both the "subject" of a text and a formed "subject" in the human world.

The tree moves through multiple identity categories in its subject formation. It is not human, which would reinforce an anthropocentric reading of the novel. Nor is the tree an animal, which has long been considered within both animal and environmental studies. Rather,

the tree is positioned both *in* nature and *as* nature—both aiding in the formation of setting, landscape, and environment while also a subject representative and constitutive of each of these categories of space. In *Power/knowledge,* Foucault states that:

> One has to dispense with the constituent subject, to get rid of the subject itself, that's to say, to arrive at an analysis which can account for the constitution of the subject within a historical framework. And this is what I would call genealogy, that is a form of history which can account for the constitution of knowledges, discourses, domains of objects etc., without having to make reference to a subject which is either transcendental in relation to the field of events or runs its empty sameness throughout the course of history" (117).

Foucault's primary concern seems to be that we must understand both subject and subjectivity as speaking within and through power—not outside of it. Similarly, I do not suggest that we label this shift from object to subject that we label el mesquite's testimony as a third space feminism and be done with it. This does not advance our critical examination of the making of Tejanx subjectivity. Rather, I suggest that because el mesquite disrupts the very shift from object to subject that we may perhaps glean the project of genealogy that *El Mesquite*, as a text, offers to our understanding of Tejanx subjectivity. That is, what does *El Mesquite* want us to accept as history, authentic, and knowledge and what does it want us to reject? Furthermore, how does the novel utilize subjectivity, gender, space, and geography to generate and reinforce its project?

El Mesquite certainly does not do away with either subject or gender, but what a gendered subjectivity renders is dependent on our reading of who controls the narrative in *El Mesquite*. In *Gender and Place in Chicana/o Literature*, Melina V. Vizcaíno-Alemán asks us to initiate a re-reading practice that considers "the place of gender and the gender of place" in the text (45). While we should acknowledge how Elena Zamora O'Shea expands our understanding of the fragmented archive that makes up border feminist literature and pre-1950s literature from the U.S.-Mexico border, her inclusion into these archives also emphasizes the urgency to attend

the gendered, racialized, and spatialized experiences that *El Mesquite* makes legible beyond its literary contribution. While Vizcaíno-Alemán's analysis likens the narrative voice of *El Palo Alto* to an "inanimate object" that corrects a South Texas history, I wish to break from her reading of el mesquite as simply object or of the novel as a correction (46). First, el mesquite is a fully realized, animate, and self-fashioned subject rendered as such by their own accord. The move in naming Palo Alto as "subject" is a process of recognition and acknowledgement of what el mesquite has already asked of us as readers—in this sense, my contribution here is not so novel. Recognizing the narrative voice produced by and through the text as its own "subject" allows us to hold the narrative accountable to the same criticisms that we might make of a "human" subject. This includes a critical re-reading of el mesquite's complacency with the colonial gaze and their surrender to the social power systems that further subjugate the tree's positioning against the Spanish settlers of South Texas.

How I am defining "inanimate" versus "animate" as theoretical terms bears further exploration. First, I wish to make clear what I believe the shift from "object" to "subject" yields in my reading of this environmental subject position taken up by el mesquite and what such reading can proffer border feminisms. In *Vibrant Matter*, Jane Bennett argues that "the philosophical project of naming where subjectivity begins and ends is too often bound up with fantasies of a human uniqueness in the eyes of God, of escape from materiality, or of mastery of nature; and even where it is not, it remains an aporetic and quixotic endeavor" (ix). Arguably, our understanding of subjectivity is always enmeshed in notions of the body and the human, which are conventionally considered as distinct from nature or the nonhuman. *El Mesquite*'s narrator, Palo Alto, indeed disrupts these groupings by both taking on a narrative voice and position in the text while also remaining self-aware of a relative positioning as a tree

or natural "object" within human relationships and historical developments. This is not to suggest that the tree is merely imbued with qualities or characteristics like voice, affect, emotional registers, or desire that we should strictly associate with "human." Bennett, herself, suggests that "in revealing similarities across categorical divides and lighting up structural parallels between material forms in 'nature' and those in 'culture,' anthropomorphism can reveal isomorphisms" (99). That is, categories like "human" and "nonhuman" can ultimately reveal what, between both systems, may be similar or equal. Palo Alto is not merely a metaphor for Mexican American subject formation, but rather a root in literary history that shows us the material stakes of environmental studies and border studies.

El Mesquite cannot correct history nor should we be tempted to identify the novel as a historical text. History is ultimately a culmination, a collective, and an archive of events as told and understood by a single subject or various subjects; history is flawed by its very perception. As such, the tree itself is flawed by its own power-dependent relationship to the Garcias, the Catholic Fathers, and the peones. John Morán González argues that writers like María Elena Zamora O'Shea in the 1930s were responding to and through the urgency of the Texas Centennial and the politics it brought to the forefront surrounding the place of Mexican Americans in Texas historical and racial discourse. He suggests that *El Mesquite* "offered the hope that Texas Mexicans would learn those lessons, reclaim Texas history, and, through that history, the rights of U.S. citizenship" (González 93). Even as we may wish to argue that el mesquite is a repository of South Texas history, el mesquite is codependent and coexisting among other narrative subjects that inform, coerce, interpolate, and affect Palo Alto's understanding of the world. Palo Alto is a relational subject—existing both despite settler contact but also because of it. We may identify this as simply codependency, but New Materialisms

shows us that this is the very fabric of materiality and immateriality. That codependency is indicative of the relational, interactive, interdependent, dialogical, and animate relationships that define biomes, communities, and history itself.

By extension, the reading also attends to anthropocentrism in the novel, which results in misreading the text as further advancing notions of Tejanxs and Mexican American subjects as "human" and therefore "of value." Scholars like Brown have been attentive to Indigenous subjectivity and erasure in the novel; I draw from his work by also considering the ways in which the "making" and "mapping" of subjectivity is made legible via the making of space-based identity. Furthermore, Jackson's work offers a critical lens with which to gauge the making of racialized literary space, which is intimately linked to white supremacy, anthropocentrism, and nationalisms. Jackson notes that in a critique of anthropocentrism, that critics usually:

> proceed by humanizing animal in the form of rights, welfare, and protections without questioning how advocates are constructing themselves in the process. In other words, they do not subject the very humanity they want to decenter and/or expand to sufficient interrogation. As a result, they authorize the violence of the state... (15)

Like the environmentalists that flocked to the Rio Grande Valley to protest the construction of the border wall through reserves like the Santa Ana Wildlife Refuge and Bentsen-Rio Grande Valley State Park who prioritized the "inhumanity" of the wall because of the disruption it would make on wildlife migration patterns, there is an obstruction of logic. What is produced is a tension and collision between the material and immaterial; between the human and nonhuman where immigrant life and the environment remain at the fringe of our perceptibility. Like Jackson notes, we must acknowledge how the nation-state has never regarded non-white bodies or subjects as human. That is, non-white Mexican and Mexican American subjects have also

been at the margins of what constitutes the human. Programs like the Bracero program and "Operation Wetback" make clear how the U.S. nation-state has always sanctioned violence—by not only mass deportation, but through subjecting both immigrants and non-immigrants of the U.S. to lethal pesticides and other environmental hazards. History shows us that there is little distinction made between "citizens" and "non-citizens" by the state. The fear of deportation and/or questioned immigration status remains an ever-present threat on the racialized body.

The objective in treating Palo as a subject in *El Mesquite* is a means to deprivilege human life. As those belonging to the minoritized communities across the U.S.-Mexico border know, we have always been at the margins of identification as "human." As Jackson notes, "a critique of anthropocentrism is not necessarily a critique of liberal humanism" (15). That is, it is not enough to critique the centering of the human within our socio-political discourse in the humanities. As I note in my introduction to this chapter, I am hesitant to completely align my analysis within any formal theoretical study like Environmental Studies, New Materialisms, Biopolitics, etc. that does not yet adequately attend to race, ethnicity, citizenship, and class in sufficiently urgent ways. This section is perhaps such an attempt, and I build from a number of scholars that have initiated this work across multiple theoretical fields including philosophy and feminist studies. My objective is to consider the ways in which border communities and peoples have both utilized and been utilized by the environment to produce a distinct and discursive geography-dependent relationship to nationalisms and citizenships. Such an objective is not novel to Border studies and Latinx/Chicanx scholars, however, I divert from a traditional practice in the sense that I do not wish to reify an idealization that Chicanxs have always been "here" (the U.S.) or that we are like the land. In fact, I reject this a priori claim to the Americas because it is not a responsible articulation of our identity. Such a claim only moves to reify

citizenships and space-based identities that have historically, politically, and socially undermined our alliances with other border communities. Rather, in reading the tree as subject, I wish to consider both the possibilities and limitations that el mesquite's spatial imaginary produces and reveals through an early-20th century invention. That is, I believe in locating subjectivity in *El* Mesquite, we can also identify what other types of subjectivity are lost, fragmented, or idealized in ways that oppose a vision of collectivity for border peoples.

Here, one might argue that imparting Palo Alto with a narrative voice will make the tree more akin to a human subject, and, therefore, may allow us to consider el mesquite's self-positioning as an "othered" subject in Texas history. This is the risk of this work—I do not wish to render an anthropocentric reading of *El Mesquite* as anthropomorphism does little to release the narrative voice of *el mesquite* from the constraints of a postcolonial or decolonial reading of subjectivity. Furthermore, what such a reading might render would be to further establish *el mesquite* as an Indigenous, Mexican, or Mexican American subject given its classification as a native tree to the Southwest. And if Palo Alto is like the Mexican American, then we can continue to claim a genealogical claim to the geography of spaces like Texas, which is not the aim of this project. Rather, my acknowledgment of Palo Alto's narrative voice is also, at least momentarily, a decentering of the human body within border feminisms. By neutralizing Palo Alto's gender, we can avoid the reflex to make maternal the subjectivity of Palo Alto.

Moreover, it suggests that we should only read the tree's testimony because the tree is *like* a human subject, which further privileges human life over that of organic life or nature. The mesquite troubles all of these categories by making legible the "difference" expressed in

and between the subject (el mesquite) and its environment/space (South Texas). My focus on Bennett's work on materiality stems from my interest to think about how numerous parts and particles can constitute a whole or partiality in the narrative set forth by Zamora O'Shea. The tree's testimony on one hand gives us limited access to a narrative of displacement of the indigenous groups along Texas within a 14th to 19th century period. On the other hand, we also recognize the partial nature of testimony and understand that we must look to other parts of Palo Alto's *testimonio* in order to cohere such narratives. I believe that a material reading of these South Texas environmentalisms may get us closer to the subjects displaced both by history and the narrative itself. Furthermore, I suggest that an attentiveness to materiality in Zamora O'Shea's text may also make clear the ways in which such narratives continue to shape our understanding of Mexican American and border studies into present day.

Other Border Bodies

In *Bodily Natures*, Stacy Alaimo defines "trans-corporeality" as a "theoretical site...where corporeal theories, environmental theories, and science studies meet and mingle in productive ways" (3). That is, the environment ceases to be distinctly "outside" or merely terrain, but locatable within "the very substance of ourselves" (4). Palo Alto both has a body and does not have a body. Even as gender and feminist studies have been attentive to the ways in which the body, in particular the feminine body, becomes a discursive site for biological, political, and economical disputes, to be a subject without a body is perhaps most legible to our understanding of Disability Studies. And yet, as I have already noted, my goal is not to make Palo Alto a human subject or recenter the human via the language I use to consider Palo Alto's subjectivity. There is

less a corporeal consciousness on behalf of Palo Alto than there is that relational consciousness of the tree's body, the trunk, as a material and responsive layer of matter. Palo Alto narrates:

> When I was a young shrub a buffalo bull, during the spring when he was showing off to the young cows about him, gave me a twist with his powerful neck, making me a little bent about the trunk, and throwing my stem out of perpendicular as it is the pride of all Roan Mesquites. (1)

Here, the mesquite understands itself somewhere in infancy—not a seed or even a sapling, but a young shrub, which suggests it is conscious of its height and span across where it grows. And yet, Palo Alto is also conscious of other animals—particularly birds and grazing animals that come near before human contact. The tree's physical matter is articulated as already at-risk within nature and in relationship to other matter within this Southeast Texas ecosystem. When Palo Alto notes that its trunk is now bent, changed, and different from other Roan Mesquites, it suggests that tree is also self-conscious of itself and feels othered even within its own species. Again, I do not utilize "body" as it would only recenter the human; however, I do want to draw us to how the tree sees itself as apart/a part of nature. Even as Palo Alto recognizes itself as distinct from the human settlers that come by the geographical area where it grows, it also feels *different* and outside of its own species due to the bend the buffalo's impact marked on its trunk. Its physical makeup as a mesquite is not reliant on human language, but is influenced by human language.

Up until this point in my analysis of both Palo Alto and *El Mesquite* more generally, I have avoided assigning a particular gender to the narrative voice of Palo Alto. My move to neutralize the tree's gender in the narrative has both advantages and disadvantages that I wish to attend to carefully. This move is not without attention to the ways in which *El Mesquite* expands our understanding of women writing on and from the border, but rather an attempt to respond responsibly to questions of gender, power, and feminism that urge me to consider the function of

"naming" and "assigning" that occurs when we label both this novel and its narrator a border feminist text. What is lost or gained when we identify the narrative of voice of *el mesquite* as a genderless subject? Does the move to de-gender or de-sex the tree further participate in a colonial and patriarchal erasure of Modernist Mexican American women writers? My short answer to both of these questions is no, I do not think moving to neutralize the tree's gender invalidates the work of Zamora O'Shea as a Tejana writer. On the contrary, I think it opens up the mesquite's *testimonio* to free itself of the responsibility to speak maternally or sentimentally about the subjects it is in conversation with. When we read Palo Alto's *testimonio* as outside of anatomical discourse, we are urged to define the politics of our futurity and liberation outside of constituencies, citizenships, and body politics.

A central aim of this writing project was to consider both the limitations and possibilities of border feminisms. I understand the desire to consider border women's writing as its own epistemology that legitimizes local knowledge and asks us to consider the fragmentation of literary periodization. As I noted in my introduction to this chapter, I see Elena Zamora O'Shea as a Modernist writer, but also understand that such a designation or categorization alone does not reveal the theoretical production of her text. When Vizcaíno-Alemán argues that *El Mesquite* situates an "object" that sits at "the crossroad of tradition and modernity," she is also suggesting that we read el mesquite as a material and tangible thing (51). I argue that Zamora O'Shea's text situates a subject—an animate, alive, and thriving subject—that bears witness to colonialism, becomes objectified in the colonial process, and is ultimately made extinct at the expense of the colonial imaginary. That is, the tree stands not as privileged above human subjects but in relation to them. This constellation expands our spatial and ecological definitions of space, place, and environment by forcing us to prioritize the relationships in-between subjects that ultimately

cohere and make legible the very process of subject formation.

Nature and borders from this lens may feel naturally opposing, but *El Mesquite*'s ending certainly highlight the interdependent relationship between border subjects and the natural world. When the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo of 1848 designated the Rio Grande river as a natural border, it made nature political. The river was no longer a natural feature carving out land, but came to designate a "here" and a "there." Two countries. Too many sovereignties. Too many languages, traditions, cultures, religions, and communities to name. The river did not cut two worlds in half—it cut fractions into fractions. We have long politicized water whether in the ways in which Border Patrol agents disposed potable water for immigrants crossing across the dessert to reach the United States or when Black life is denied clean drinking water as we saw in Flint, Michigan. As Shaylih Muehlmann writes in *Where the River Ends* of the Mexican Colorado Delta, like the U.S. government moved to tame the Colorado River in an effort to conquer it and "[transform it] from a morally corrupt savage outlaw with no decency into a hard-working citizen" (39), the geography that makes up the Texas-Mexico border, the Rio Grande River, and the Montezuma Bald Cypress have all been equally transformed into racialized subjects who must compete for survival with other racialized subjects.

Returning to Abram, Texas

At the end of 2019, shortly before COVID-19 closed down the world as we knew it, I traveled with my husband, daughter, and friend to the Rio Grande Valley. At that point, I knew I would write on *El Mesquite* and on the Montezuma Bald Cypress. It had been many years since I had last driven out to see the 900-year-old tree, and I knew that part of the border wall had since been built. We drove up to the opening at the wall, which was guarded by a Border Patrol vehicle with two agents inside. Nervously I lowered my window and said, "We're just here to see the

tree. Do you know how far it is from this point?" One of the agents said, "Just a few minutes down on the left." And I went on driving well past the point I remembered it being. I could not remember where it was, the overgrown shrubs were disorienting and the dust the car's tires swept up added to my dizzying memory of this place. A few minutes in, and I knew I had gone too far. I made a turn to head back, and finally saw the tree just about 500 feet from where we had come through the wall. By then a U.S. Wildlife agent either had been called or maybe had been there all along and pulled up behind me as we all got out to see the tree. His first words were directed at me, "Did you see anything interesting down there?" And I said, "No, we were given wrong directions so we went too far South." We went too far South—too close to the river—too far from the wall—too far from the U.S.

He asked what we were doing even as he could see us looking at the tree, taking pictures on smartphones, and leaning on a rental car. One Mexican American woman, one White man, one Korean American woman, and one half White/half Mexican American preschooler. We did not feel free to go about our business even though each of us was protected by our citizenship and the passports in my purse I always carry with me when I travel back home with my fair-skinned daughter. What the tree designated was a marker for a geopolitical space where land is at tension with the nation. Citizenships do not mean anything here. You are suspect, an other, a contestable subject in the making when you cross that wall. The tree is a living testament of the politics of nature. Even as activists have attempted to argue for its protection—noting how the wall will threaten its livelihood, its growth, and its survival—those pleas have become enmeshed in border and im/migration discourse, which make the nation-state and its citizens hesitant to act. In this way, the Montezuma Bald Cypress may become collateral damage like Palo Alto does at the close of *El Mesquite*:

> Today another surveying part came through. They have changed the route of the road, and it passes in line with me. As they were marking the spot, the "Girl" rode up. She watched them as they surveyed the road bed. Then asked if I would be cut down.
>
> When she was informed that I was right on the path of the road, she asked if she could bring her camera and take a picture of me. Today they cleared all the brush about my roots. (79)

Even after Anita Garcia, Tejana descendant of Palo Alto's first "masters" and "mistresses," learns that the tree will be cleared for the establishment of the railroad, she expresses no grief for tree. Unlike the previous day when she had lamented at the sight of her ancestors' carved names upon its trunk, at that moment she simply decides to take a photograph. John Morán González argues that this immemorializes the tree into "modernist presentation" (92), but it also signals Anita Garcia's reflex to preserve her own family's history. The image can now accompany the sketch made by Don Rafael Garcia—generations before her—and cements Spanish settler history into perpetuity. The tree can now be fully rendered as part of her family's claim to this geography. Like the tree, her family has always been there—even when that belonging and claim to space overwrites centuries of settler colonial violence.

Like in *El Mesquite,* the Montezuma Bald Cypress is rendered unable to speak and unable to act for itself. Already in a precarious relationship to other environmental factors like droughts and hurricanes, it must now face human-made environmental changes. Bennett reasons that "materiality is a rubric that tends to horizontalize the relations between humans, biota, and abiota. It draws human attention sideways, away from an ontologically ranked Great Chain of Being and toward a greater appreciation of the complex entanglements of humans and non humans" (112). Even as previous readings of *El Mesquite* have suggested that border women's writing can often become a transmission of knowledge, both global and local, and a verifiable source of historicity that would otherwise remain inaccessible, *El Mesquite* illustrates that these

complex entanglements ultimately silence multiple subjects and sovereignties in the shift to make and sustain Tejanidad. These border environmentalisms show that no human subject is Indigenous to these contested geographies when such claims to Indigenous genealogy is situated in committing violence and erasure of other at-risk communities within those geographies. This simultaneously renders our understandings of citizenships and nationalisms as invalid—especially as we have conceived of them via documentation and il/legality. Nature leans on the terms we have accepted as truth like nation, states, and belonging. In this leaning, it asks us to reconsider our positioning to one another. Does the survival of my sovereignty eradicate that of another's—and if so, is that the futurity of our liberation?

Notes

[i] Some may argue that Laredo is not in the Rio Grande Valley, and I have often referred to it myself as not being in the RGV. However, for the sake of thinking more broadly about this geographic space, I wish to consider Laredo within its proximity to the Rio Grande River.

[ii] Perhaps unsurprisingly, many of the photographs and videos that were released by local and national news showed a predominantly white crowd, which further emphasized how local Mexican American and Latinx communities felt out of place within these environmental justice efforts.

[iii] See Bennet's *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (2009) as well as my subsection "On the Border of Subjectivity" in this chapter.

[iv] The creative works of authors like Ana Castillo, Natalie Diaz, Saidiya V. Hartman, Toni Morrison, and Leslie Marmon Silko show us that linearity and symmetry are Western inventions and conventions.

[v] My translation.

[vi] Albeit, we must recognize that text is in part historical fiction and in part drawing from María Elena Zamora
O'Shea's own autobiography, which should still inform our reading of the text.

[vii] See Maria Elena Martinez's *Genealogical Fictions: Limpieza de Sangre, Religion, and Gender in Colonial Mexico* (2008) for a more expansive consideration of "racial purity" from Spain to Mexico between the 16th and 17th centuries.

[viii] See Jackson's text *Becoming Human* (2020).

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CHAPTER TWO: AN UNSETTLED BORDER GEOPOETICS: LOCATING COMMUNITY CARTOGRAPHIES IN SANDRA CISNEROS' *CUENTOS* AND THE RIO GRANDE VALLEY

I wish I could remember the exact words my father said when he gifted me a copy of Sandra Cisneros' *A House of My Own: Stories from My Life* (2015). I know the occasion—my 26th birthday—but I cannot remember where we were in the Rio Grande Valley. I imagine us at Maria's Mexican Restaurant in Downtown McAllen on the corner of 16th and Chicago Avenue where the two of us often had breakfast. I imagine my father drinking coffee out of a brown mug and placing it on a translucent plastic tablecloth as bowls of menudo steam before us as we roll warm corn tortillas between our palms. But as much as I reach into memory, I cannot locate the where or the words that make my father or that moment real again—only the book remains. My father died on May 22, 2017, three weeks before my 27th birthday and this book is the last gift I ever received from him. I still keep the book close to my writing space and on moments like today, when I am feeling especially displaced and drifting, I open the book and lift the inside cover where it folds on the left. I trace my father's writing, his heavy but small strokes of dark blue ink that read:

To
Terry

There are few writers who stir in me what Cisneros has across two decades. I remember first reading her work in the 9th grade and writing my first creative piece as an homage to *The House on Mango Street*. I met her once as an undergraduate at South Texas Community College where she read part of what would later become *Have You Seen Marie?* In 2018, I read my tía sections of *Caramelo* out loud and later when my tía was put on hospice care, I began writing my first publication on "Pilón" while she drifted in and out of consciousness. I once even taught "Never Marry a Mexican" to the late Texas Conjunto Music Hall of Famer "Cha Cha" Jimenez.

It has been easy to write about and to teach Cisneros' *cuentos* because I find myself drawn time and again to the intimacy of her prose and the familiarity of the communities she writes into animacy. I do not think I could write this dissertation project without her. This chapter engages Cisneros' literary geography, spaces drawn from memory and invention, and the spatial poetics of her work.

As readers of Sandra Cisneros' collections know, there is a fluidity and dynamism in the literary geographies she crafts from memory and *puro cuento*. Cisneros transports readers within and across the Américas—while also often rupturing national boundaries, making her writing distinctly diasporic among American letters. Cisneros' work has become essential to our understanding of Latinx and Chicanx feminisms through her contributions to the re/imagining of space in relation to questions of gender, class, language, and community. Her work also complicates these categories with characters that defy and disorient, but that also guide and reorient our understanding of intimate community relationships. Cisneros' use of narrative space and place brings us to various forms of social mapping that give us new orientations by which we can begin to map the limits and the possibilities of the decolonial in our 21st century moment. The work calls us to build upon our understanding of literary geography, from the layering of streets to the geospatial poetics in her work, toward a new social orientation that asks us think critically about emergent relationships between community and geography.

Notably, the bulk of Cisneros' texts begin with mappable geographies in places like Mexico City and Chicago, which disrupts the labeling of her work as primarily Latinx or Chicanx literature. Even as border narratives, including those within the genres of fiction and memoir, pay homage to particular sites, cities, towns, neighborhoods, or regions, Cisneros utilizes such spaces only as beginnings. Thus, while Cisneros' literary mappings allow us to initially enter a familiar narrative space, these spatializations ultimately reveal mappings

beyond geographical setting. Texts such as Ron Arias's *The Road to Tamazunchale* (1975), Rudolfo Anaya's *Heart of Aztlán* (1976), or Alberto Rios's *Capirotada: A Nogales Memoir* (1999) are but some Chicanx literary works that utilize elements of fiction, memory, and a nationalist imaginary to re/create geographic space as a site of possibility for Chicano identity. That is, the literature itself must produce this nationalist possibility—it must give way to a reterritorialization in order to be reclaimed for/by the Chicanx subject. Cisneros' work has been treated similarly and has also been broadly explored for its focus on urban and rural communities inside the US and Mexico—primarily *The House on Mango Street* (1983).[i] However, as I note in this chapter, Cisneros' shift to the immaterial and onto what I term a "community cartography" (defined below) makes her *cuentos* spatially novel. They call for new orientations that are not just fixed or articulated by the nation, the state, or a language of territoriality, but rather illustrate the limits of discourses of state citizenship and of border subjectivities as they've been previously theorized. Thus, while scholars have previously categorized our examinations of her work under categories like Latinx literary studies, border feminisms, and border studies, we have also continually looked at her work through a U.S.-centric lens, which has effectively negated the diasporic elements of her writing that bring us to the limits of nationalist categories.

I consider here the possibilities of opening her body of work, more specifically her short stories and *cuentos* within *Woman Hollering Creek* (1991) and *Caramelo* (2002), through a new spatial imaginary that does not rearticulate a language of conquest, territorialization, citizenships or state/ethnic-centered belonging. I suggest that while Cisneros' texts place, locate, and position both characters and readers in a specific narrative geography, they also displace, dislocate, and unsettle such precise mappings. We may liken this to the decolonial imaginary

offered by Emma Pérez in her landmark text of the same name, a framework that begins to deconstruct racialized, patriarchal, and colonialist nationalist trappings (73-74). Pérez states that what emerges in third space feminism is a practice "written inside a decolonial time lag" (127). And yet, I am hesitant to identify Sandra Cisneros' geographies and social mappings as third space feminism because third space theory also reifies a dominant space, orientation, and temporality. That is, to speak from third space feminism is also to speak from a place "outside" or "away" from the first and second world, when what we really mean is that we are all in the same world subjected to and relegated to what we have collectively identified as second and third class positionings. Thus, what I argue Cisneros' community cartographies do in narratives like those found in *Woman Hollering Creek* and *Caramelo* is to bring us to the thresholds of recognizing these spatialized, classed, and gendered social mappings tethered to the Chicanx imaginary.

I draw from Pérez's work on the decolonial to further consider how Cisneros' social mappings deconstruct the limits of space, geography, memory, and time. I suggest that her work illuminates the communal possibilities that materialize from those very limits by offering readers what I call a *community cartography*. In this cultural-geographic reading practice, social orientations reveal the layered and dialogic communities and spaces within border feminist narratives. Furthermore, Cisneros' community cartography illustrates that the decolonial is neither inside nor outside of specific temporalities or geographies, but already at work within the diasporic narratives across both Mexico and the United States. In addition, as with my previous chapter, I tether my literary analysis of Cisneros and my analytic of "community cartography" onto the historical and cultural as a way to make resonant how community mappings, like the ones present in Cisneros' fiction, engage questions about the making and unmaking of border

spaces, border identities, and the subaltern.

To do this, I read Cisneros' work alongside a community mapping project in South Texas as a way to cohere Cisneros' exploration of space, memory, and a longing to return to a time and place that can no longer be located. I begin with a story about not being able to recall or remember where my father gifted me *A House of My Own* to echo Cisneros' *cuentos* that begin with a longing for return, remembrance, and recovery. In the place of a definitively spatialized memory, I conjured a memory of my father as a way to make him real. Cisneros' protagonists and *cuentos* do the same; they layer time and space into literary imaginaries that invite readers to conceive of space not only as dialogic, but also as overwriting, inventive, and displacing as a way to make memory real. It is a process that is spatial, physical, and psychological much like loss, grief, and dispossession that I can only locate within the Texas-Mexico borderlands. It has taken me nearly two years of writing this project to recognize that this dissertation is a way for me to make real the Rio Grande Valley for readers and to map my way back home and to my community. In thinking about space as always relational and tethered to memory and longing, I suggest that while Latinx and Chicanx literary imaginaries seek to re-spatialize through the decolonial, they remain bound to ethno-nationalist sentiments and divisive community practices with roots in settler colonial logics of territorialization.

A Community History Displaced

In 2018, when I returned to South Texas to bury my tía, I had no choice but to drive into my hometown. I had not been back since my move to Eugene, and I remember holding my breath as I made the exit into Pharr on Cage Rd. off the 69C. I noticed that several of the shops that lined North Cage had gone out of business or remodeled their storefronts, but still I remembered my way. I saw M. Rivas, one of the last family-owned grocery stores in the Pharr-

San Juan-Alamo area, in its assaulting yellow painted brick, and I knew that soon I would make a right down Dogwood Street, go down a stretch, and across from the small field, I would make a left and reach Chapa. My house would be the third house on the right and soon I would be home. I could draw a map of Pharr, as it was and as I remember it, from memory.

As I sat in my parked rental car under a towering mesquite, I took my tía's ashes in her urn and exited the vehicle. I opened the latch on the gate, where my father's old tattered sign that read BEWARE OF DOG was still zip tied to the chain link fencing. I pushed it open with my tía's urn in my arm and walked through the yard where the weeds were so overgrown they scratched at my knees. I made my way to the back of the house where my beloved lime tree was withering. I sat on a broken stool and began to weep as I often did near this tree when I would read a novel or poem that stirred in me a deep grief. I recalled my tías washing our bedding against an aluminum *lavadero* and hanging the laundry on a rope tied between two oaks as I watered that lime tree. Except no one was there but me. I realized I was no longer home. I went back to the car and saw my neighbor, Frank, sitting outside drinking a beer. He waved, and I drove off toward our old church, St. Anne's, where after the service we drove to Guadalupe Cemetery to bury the last of my genealogy.

Guadalupe Cemetery was designated as a Historic Texas Cemetery in 2007 and the plaque placed on the grounds reads:

> This cemetery, named for Mexico's Patron Saint, Our Lady of Guadalupe, was established in 1913 as a public burial ground for residents of the Pharr community. The Pharr townsite was laid out in 1909, and though ranch graveyards existed South of here, they were unavailable to newcomers. The earliest interment here, of Roberto De Leal, an infant, dates to 1913. Other burials include civic leaders, area pioneers and military veterans. The burial ground features religious statuary, curbing and interior fencing. The City of Pharr is the caretaker of the cemetery, and in 2003 joined volunteers of the Texas Main Street Program for a project to improve the burial ground.

Oral history adds that between 1910 and 1920 a man sold burial plots to Mexican families living in Pharr and then disappeared, leaving behind no official documentation on either the purchase or ownership of such sites which span across one full city block in West Pharr. The cemetery is divided by a cross street, so there is a South and North side to the grounds and is located North of the railroad tracks, which have historically segregated the City of Pharr between White and Mexican and Mexican American neighborhoods. As the plaque notes, "newcomers" were not given burial rights on border ranchlands South of the railroad tracks, which meant that recently arriving immigrants from Mexico were marked as distinct from the Tejanx settlers that had resided in that border area before the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo of 1848. As such, this distinction articulates that as early as the 1900s, state citizenship and a combination of race and class hierarchies had largely shaped border community formations along the Rio Grande River, informing how border bodies, living and deceased, would be organized and divided across this geographic space. Unlike many of the cemeteries that were later established in more affluent areas like McAllen and Mission, Guadalupe Cemetery remains decidedly marked as a Mexican cemetery to this day. My own family has three burial plots here which were purchased by my great-grandparents after their arrival in South Texas soon after the start of the Mexican Revolution in 1910.

For over sixty years, my family's only grave marker on the South side was for my great uncle Abelino Hernández. The marker is still there and made of scrap aluminum fencing, which his childhood friend shaped into his name by hand. The friend attached the nameplate with bolts onto a cross made of aluminum pipes that are just now beginning to rust. Only ten years ago, a friend of my father's, a plumber, added two white pipe crosses to the previous marker. To own a proper gravestone in a place like Hidalgo County is still a marker of socioeconomic success, and it was not until 2015 that my family purchased a single headstone for one of the three plots.

Ultimately, they record only the names of the women of our family; my grandmother, Ascencion, an estranged grandniece of my great-grandparents, Rosa Maria, and our tía Jesusa. At the top of the stone is the image of *El ángel de la guardia* and our family name: Hernandez. To find the family plot on the North side of Guadalupe Cemetery, I first have to find the young Montezuma Cypress tree that has been growing nearby for the past twenty years. I find the tree and then the cement cross with the engraved initials N.H. and J.R. The cross's initials belong to my paternal grandparents: Natalio Hernandez (b. 1896) and Jovita Rivera (b. 1901) both born in San Luis Potosí, Mexico and both of whom died without ever leaving the Rio Grande Valley because they were undocumented. Also buried there is my third tía, Josefa, the ashes of a second cousin, Ramiro Salas, and an unnamed stillborn baby girl of a close family friend (dates of birth and death unknown).

To write about the geography of South Texas is, in many ways, to write about loss and displacement. These are not the only things representative of the Rio Grande Valley, but it is an inheritance we have long attempted to overwrite. It is always surprising to me that the RGV is best-known as the "Magic Valley" for its fertile soil and agricultural potency. And yet, the communities are not all thriving and abundant; many, in fact, are suffering from centuries of illegibility that has led to the socioeconomic disparities the Valley continues to face today. To write about the geography of South Texas is also to call upon the ways we have attempted to make ourselves and our history legible and thereby legitimate. In 2015, the Pharr Memorial Library took on a community mapping project of identifying and documenting the gravesites at Guadalupe Cemetery. The project results estimate that the cemetery has 1,500 plots and 2,230 deceased individuals buried across both sides of the cemetery (Rosales 2015). I cannot imagine that this number reflects the totality of the deceased across this burial ground. I think about the

baby buried with my great-grandparents whose mother could not afford a funeral or a casket. My cousin, I was told, built a small wooden box for her family, and they buried her in plain daylight with just her mother, the baby's grandmother, my father, and my cousin as witnesses. As late as 2012, Hidalgo County provided a $500 voucher to help aid in funeral costs for those who could not afford it. Five hundred dollars, even in the Rio Grande Valley, can barely cover a proper casket. This family friend, the mother of the baby buried in our family plot, is undocumented and never asked for help from the county. I know only her first name, Rosa, and I don't know where she is now.

The community mapping project is particularly fascinating in relationship to the work that Sandra Cisneros attends to in her short fiction because it fails to bridge together "official" archives such as obituary notices and funeral home records and the oral history records that could have been accessed in this border space in the 2010s. While the project depended upon community members to survey the land, read plot markers and gravestones, and collate official documents, the limits of the project are that they only considered these tangible and material archives as potential resources to count the dead. Because the plots don't have documented "ownership" beyond a burial marker, for those families that could afford one, the city holds no official record of how many people are actually buried at this community cemetery. In response to the project, San Antonio, Texas librarian Romeo Rosales, Jr. wrote an opinion piece for the *Public Library Association*, "The Departed" (2015), which specifies how the information collected was merged with GIS (Geographic Information System) technology in order to create an accessible archive. Rosales notes that "several graves were in bad condition so names and dates were not legible" and that "those [were] simply read as 'unknown' on the online database" ("The Departed," 2015). When I

went to access the program for this project, I found that only one name "Abelinon" [sic] is listed for my family on the South side and one other on the North side. There is no way, from my end, to add or edit the data, history, or count. In part, this is what initiated my thinking about the "death of subjectivity" which I deal with in the final chapter of the dissertation, but it also felt intimately connected to Cisneros's work, which often maps, from memory rather than from official documentation or geographical data, the intimate community relationships at work within the setting of her prose.

Unsettled Border Geopoetics in "Pilón"

In a previous article entitled, "Invented Geographies," I used the term "border geopoetics" to reconsider the function of "setting," "environment," and "space" within border literature, and I still consider border geopoetics as a lens with which we can consider literary spatiality and geography.[ii] However, my definition of border geopoetics has become both more precise and more capacious since my initial consideration of the term. As I have previously suggested, if we understand that border literature calls on us to consider the border as neither a variable nor a passive setting to the narrative, then we must consider a text's geography as its own productive agent and subject, one that is continuously acting upon and begin acted upon other border subjects. The border is neither rigidly fixed nor altogether fluid, and yet often we describe it in within these terms.

Geopoetics as a methodology, then, lends itself to both a material and an immaterial imagining of the physical transnational borders present within Cisneros' nostalgic imagining of Mexico City within "Pilón." Despite beginning in a mappable geography, Cisneros quickly moves away from any fixed geopoint by positioning and recalibrating the site and space of the nation-state into one that is centered around a community geography. Instead, she calls it an

invention—*puro cuento*—suggesting that the geopolitical work of "Pilón" is itself a deconstruction of the geography that defines Chicanx and Latinx literature. In doing so, the *ofrenda* locates the unnaturalness of invented borders that span beyond the United States and Mexico.

As Debra A. Castillo and María Socorro Tabuenca Córdoba state, it has become "too easy for us" to theorize about the U.S-Mexico border (3).[iii] They both argue that when we center the U.S. we continue to ignore the condition of Mexican border women, which further displaces their narratives within border scholarship. The border is no longer as we once imagined it—it does not even exist as Gloria Anzaldúa imagined it in 1987—yet, the war and violence on emigrants from Mexico and on Mexican bodies in the United States continues onward through our current administration. The "immaterial" nature of anti-immigrant rhetoric urges our attention to shift to the material devastations that continue to fall on immigrant/emigrant bodies.[iv] As the U.S. government continues to contest the entrance of brown bodies into the United States, the borderlands themselves remain a contested site of im/possibility.

In revisiting Cisneros' *cuento* "Pilón," which is presented to readers at the end of her acclaimed novel *Caramelo* (2002), we know that the narrative begins in a tangible space in Mexico City, but soon becomes dislocated and immaterial by the end of the selection. When the narrator places herself on Cinco de Mayo Street in front of Café la Blanca, she situates two mappable locations in Mexico City's Centro Histórico (*Caramelo* 433). The text takes us to a moment of geopoetical precision by placing us in a historically rich center and by naming a recognizable eatery within the city dating back to 1915.[v] By referencing this street and that café, Cisneros' places her readers in the distinct space of Ciudad México, which immediately establishes an intimate relationship between text, space, and Mexican culture. Much like the Guadalupe Cemetery, Cinco de Mayo Street and Café la Blanca take on multiple labors of

spatialization by situating a constellated series of material relationships between the narrator and space, history, culture, the nation, and a nostalgic imaginary. Not only does the busy street connect us to the *Plaza de la constitución* (or el Zócalo), but it also serves as a historical allusion to the 1862 *Batalla de Puebla* (Battle of Puebla). The restaurant connects back to the Mexican Revolution even though, perhaps surprisingly, it was established by a Spaniard.[vi]

These material spaces—a street and eatery—relate back to other tangible historical discourses and formations of Mexican nationhood that ask us to similarly contend with the overlapping and overwriting nationalisms employed through "Pilón." In such ways, the geopoetics of "Pilón" make partially legible the competing and dialogical histories and narratives within Mexico and within Chicanx/Mexican American studies. Such moves, I argue, productively and necessarily unsettle thinking about space only through lenses of nationalism and coloniality. The site, then, is not merely a setting for the narrator's discourse on gender violence, border feminisms, and border futurity, but also produces its own discourse of how geography and mapping produce their structures of meaning around these questions. Furthermore, it produces its own discourse between Cisneros' literary presentations of these geographical sites and their relationships to multiple community formations. As with the community mapping project, we begin with the nameable and locatable as one way to ground what we know and cannot know.

As I later suggest of Cisneros' work in *Woman Hollering Creek*, what the narrator of "Pilón" marks for readers is an oscillated positioning between "local" and "outsider." For even as the narrator begins in Mexico City, she does not reveal if she "belongs" to this place and its history, nor does she name herself as being "from" Mexico. She is perhaps unaware of herself as either outsider or as belonging to this space, and yet, her very presence on *this* street and in front of *this* café allows us to begin the work of understanding why place, land, and geography are

intricately tethered to identity. These become entangled subject positions that ask us to unpack further what *belonging* means and what being *from* a location then contributes to place- and space-based identities specifically within Latinidad. To some extent, the readers must assume the role of witness—we are unsure if we "belong" there or how long we have been on Cinco de Mayo Street. If, as Eric Magrane suggest, the text's geopoetics are asking us to understand this site as both created by the language of the text while also understanding that the site is creating its own language, then what does Cisneros' use of these two locales in "Pilón" do for our understanding of a Latinx spatial imaginary? What is the narrator making tangible, legible, or material in her literary mappings within "Pilón?" What happens to these subjects through, and as a result of, this production?

In the first chapter on María Elena Zamora O'Shea's *El Mesquite*, I defined "materiality" as one way to consider the ways in which space is made tangible and physical through the environment (land, trees, the Rio Grande River), but here I extend it to also consider material structures like buildings or streets—and of course, communities. My effort in this dissertation is to capture the expansive nature of a deterritorialized geopoetics. Such a concept asks us to consider the ways in which land acts upon the individual and the ways in which we act upon the land. I suggest that we approach these relationships not merely through an environmental studies lens, which asks us to consider the ecologically dependent relationship between ourselves and the spaces we inhabit, but also to consider the ways in which we designate, parcel, and use land to further define citizenships and belonging. I use the term "land" with hesitation given its entangled relationship to settler discourses of sovereignty, territory, and private property, but I also think it useful for those of us in Chicanx and Latinx studies to continue holding that tension in the language we currently have accessible to us

within literary criticism. Like we can see in "Pilón," the naming of Cinco de Mayo Street and Café La Blanca gestures back to a nationalist sentiment that is possible through a literary geopoetics. Cisneros' narrator need only reference these geopoints to situate herself within a dialogical and historically contentious Mexico.

Mary Pat Brady considers the spatialization of Chicanx border-crossing narratives in *Extinct Lands, Temporal Geographies* (2002) and notes that such narratives "understand that the border is a system, not merely a site, a place, an image, or a fantasy" (52). And yet, "Pilón" is not initially recognizable as a border-crossing narrative. Because "Pilón" begins within Mexico City and within a historically rich geographic site of *El Centro Histórico,* we do not initially recognize ourselves or the narrator as outsider or border crosser. We are simply asked to observe this space, to receive this *cuento,* and to be orientated by the text. A popular site of theorization by numerous literary scholars such as Octavio Paz and Luis Alberto Urrea, we understand that the Zócalo, and broader Centro Histórico, collectively sustains Indigenous (Aztec), Spanish (Catholicism), and Mexican nationalisms. The center becomes a physical site of collision where contesting narratives, histories, and subjectivities fluidly write and rewrite each other.

When I previously named "Pilón" as a Latinx or Chicanx narrative in my article, I, too, was reading the text through a lens of territorialization. I was acting upon the text and reading Cisneros' own identity into what "Pilón" itself was aiming to disinvent for its readers. José Manuel Cortez defines such "disinventions" as a rhetorical possibility to unravel *mestizaje* within Latinx, Chicanx, and Latin American studies (93-94). I expand on his language to consider the boundaries of these contested motherlands along the U.S.-Mexico literary border. I argue that this disinvention, when considered within literary geography and border studies, can also disarticulate a nationalist episteme including the notion of the "citizen." As such, I reconsider

"Pilón" as a literary disinvention of any nationalist geography or territorialized state and note this "disinvention" as a moment where the text produces a deterritorialized feminist epistemology. Rather than rearticulating this text as part of the transnational or as a work of decolonial possibility, I posit that such unsettling and disarticulating enacts a process of "forgetting" the citizen, citizenship, nation, and nationalism altogether. As such, it offers Latinx, Chicanx, and transborder literatures an impossible citizenship and geography that makes intelligible, if only through its invisibility and impossibility, how nationalist spatialized imaginings have always been a fragmented invention.

In placing the reader in Ciudad México, the text disorients readers of *Caramelo*, which Latinx scholars have already identified as a cyclical migration novel.[vii] "Pilón" is not a part of the narrative structure of *Caramelo* even as it remains physically bound to the novel proper. Instead, it opens elsewhere, outside of the United States, and this is an important distinction to be made within Mexican American literature. I say "elsewhere" to undermine the specificity of Mexico City and to emphasize how the text itself rejects a Americentric and nationalist impulse. While the text signals Mexico City through a process of association and landmark mapping, Cisneros' narrator also refuses to simply name Ciudad México explicitly as its setting. Instead, she gestures to the café, the street, and the organ grinder as mechanisms to socially and spatially map Mexico City while also making legible how these markers invoke their own nationalist imagining.

"Pilón" calls on readers to begin to map for themselves a dense, culturally rich spatialization through references to La Caleta beach in Acapulco, the Mexican *caramelo* candy called "Glorias," and the reference to the mother's feet "like the red clay of Mexican pottery" (434). In examining the text's geopoetics we can additionally consider the constellated, dialogic, and contested relationships between space and the selection's emerging subject. A deterritorialized geopoetics would mark these spatialized relationships as tangential, dynamic,

and re/active. By considering the text in this way, we can similarly consider the dis/inventions being produced by that tension and relationship. In other words, a text's geopoetics can produce a methodology and reading practice that productively unsettles and dis/orients border literature itself. We can, as readers, then consider the limitations and possibilities of any given text's nationalist politics and imagined literary geographies. Texts like "Pilón" map what deterritorialized possibilities in Latinx and Chicanx literatures might look like.

In considering Cisneros's text as an engagement with geopolitical/geopoetical, textual, and corporal borders, it is first crucial to explain why I choose to read "Pilón" as a standalone textual offering, or as I suggest, an *ofrenda*. The word simply translates into "offering"—something presented or given for one to take as a gift. Cisneros begins with a definition of *pilón* for her readers: "Like the Mexican grocer who gives you a pilón, something extra tossed into your bag as a thank-you for your patronage just as you are leaving, I give you here another story in thanks for having listened to my cuento" (433). With this understanding, the very title of "Pilón" situates a social and cultural exchange actively happening between narrator, text, and reader that exists in many ways outside of the novel proper. Likewise, as I argue in this reading, the social orientations show us a new way to engage memory and spatializations beyond a re-writing of the nation-state.

Certainly, "Pilón" calls upon an imagined homeland, which the narrator longs to regain access to at the close of the *cuento*:

> And I don't know how it is with anyone else, but for me these things, that song, that time, that place, are all bound together in a country I am homesick for, that doesn't exist anymore. That never existed. A country I invented. Like all emigrants caught between here and there. (434)

As evidenced in this passage, the narrator longs to place herself back in relationship to a nameable geography even as it has ceased to exist, and indeed, "never existed" (434). The

narrator expresses a feeling and compulsion to return to the familiarity of memory, which echoes the sentiments expressed by Zamora O'Shea's character Anita at the close of *El Mesquite*. Anita takes a photograph that captures her stake in the formation of Tejanidad as a territorial border subject (one that has always belonged), while Cisneros' narrator exposes that her desire to return is bound within her stake in the disinvention of nations. In rejecting the nation, its borders, and its discourses of citizenship, she maps the possibility of geopoetic disinvention that releases memory from rearticulating any imagined geography as merely always-already part of the nation-state. Rather, memory, nostalgia, and longing in Cisneros' work are bound not to the nation-state but to the social and communal relationships she orients within the text.

When I published my article on "Pilón" in 2020, the scholarship on this *cuento* had been marginal, most of it focusing primarily on *Caramelo* and how it functioned as a transnational coming-of-age novel within Mexican American and Latinx literature. I was particularly interested in the materiality of the text, which had been primarily illuminated through the function of weaving and textiles in relation to the *rebozo* and Celaya's relationship to her grandmother.[viii] Others had explored the novel's spatial qualities—focusing on the transmigration the Reyes Family experiences through their trip from Chicago to Mexico as well as the urban dislocation suggested between the journey between the United States and Mexico.[ix] However, "Pilón" had remained largely elided within these critical interventions and my article addressed this gap in scholarship by focusing on the multiple textual borders at work within Sandra Cisneros's own textual offering of two "extra" forgotten pages located at the end of her celebrated novel. In part, this chapter is an effort to reconsider my initial claims that "Pilón" imagined geographies were mappable within and through a Chicanx imaginary.

As such, my aim now is to address the ways in which "Pilón" constructs and dissolves geopoetical and geopolitical borders to contest the motherland as a nationalist site for the

Chicanx imaginary. This effort is motivated by a goal to consider "Pilón" as a significantly disruptive and contentious text within Chicanx and Latinx literature and their imaginaries. I now argue that the text engages in critiques of both nationalism and the decolonial, but I do not limit these boundaries to the U.S.-Mexico border. Rather, I begin there and move beyond it as a method to consider the deterritorial politics in border *cuentos*. Even while Cisneros brings us to mappable points across the U.S.-Mexico border, the narrative also exceeds those geographical locations. As such, "Pilón" presents the dialogic position of space and border memory concerned as much with gendered violence and negotiating corporeal realities as it is about imagining a deterritorialized futurity. The intersections of space, border memory, recall, gender, and state-nationalisms are constellations to each other within the deterritorial geopoetics of "Pilón," and which I believe now are necessary ruptures to the Chicanx imaginary.

By engaging in a series of language redefinitions and abstractions that disorient the reader, "Pilón" posits a deterritorialized border feminism at work between Cisneros's *Caramelo* and Cisneros' *ofrenda*. "Pilón" renders geography as both necessary and unnecessary to community building and utilizes the gendered immigrant body to theorize its own de-territorialized border feminist politic. Furthermore, in distinguishing between *Caramelo* and "Pilón," the *cuento* functions as both a part of/apart from the novel proper, which continues to dissolve the formal conventions of both texts. Doing so makes visible the deterritorialized border feminism proposed by "Pilón" as it moves away from limitations of subject formation at the U.S.-Mexico border and toward an expansive border experience that includes denaturalizing material and metaphorical borders and acknowledging and revealing the violence of such borders on multiple bodies. Here, I connect us back to the community project of the Guadalupe Cemetery as the desire there, by the City of Pharr and its residents, begins with a longing to

locate the deceased as a way to bring these border bodies into legibility. In naming the dead, inputting their names as data and using their bodies as geopoints via GIS technology, the mapping project itself reveals the limitations of such a desire to locate and document. They cannot map the totality of the deceased within this geographic space, and, therefore, they cannot speak for border subalternity or force it into hegemonic order. Instead, in understanding that we cannot account for all our dead, we can begin to take on the work of interrogating who has been rendered legible and illegible within Chicanx, Latinx, and border narratives and geographies.

Witnessing an Interred Subalternity

In putting into conversation both Cisneros' *cuentos* and the Guadalupe Cemetery mapping project, I want to add another geopoint as I continue to work through the question of who has been rendered illegible in border spaces and narratives. Certainly, as I noted with the remains of the unnamed child in one of our family plots, we understand that to die without documentation and without a name is to die in subalternity. Such subjectivities, while outside of our grasp, rupture border consciousness by urging us to contend with the overlapping and overwriting conditions within the borderlands. However, it is not just the undocumented that are positioned at the border of subjectivity or as "newcomers" (or never-comers) to the United States, but also those that have been deemed as outsiders and pushed out of border consciousness completely.

The Restlawn Cemetery is located less than nine miles north of Pharr in Edinburg, Texas. While Edinburg has experienced considerable commercial and urban development in the past 20 years, the Restlawn Cemetery was once located within a largely rural and underdeveloped area in the city. In 2004, the Restlawn was also recognized by the State of Texas as a historic cemetery, and the plaque put up in its commemoration reads:

> This property is believed to be the only graveyard in Hidalgo County dedicated for African American burials. Prior to its founding in 1928, Blacks were allowed burial space only in private ranch cemeteries. In the 1920s, Edinburg had a growing Black community of domestic and agricultural worker and entrepreneurs. A.Y. Baker, County Sheriff and the Director of the Hillcrest Cemetery Association, designated a half-acre in the undeveloped northwest corner of Hillcrest for a "Black Cemetery," which was renamed Restlawn in 1993. The oldest grave, unmarked, is for Leonard Bass (d. 1928). World War II Veteran Jacob White (d. 1945), for whom local American Legion Post 884 was named, is also among those interred here.

In the 2021 Census, over 92% of the population in Hidalgo County was of Latinx or "Hispanic" origin. In contrast, less than 6% were White (non-Latinx), 1% identified as Asian, and 0.9%, identified as Black or African-American. Black history in South Texas remains largely under-researched and what little information is available is currently held in Special Collections and Archives at the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley. The Rio Grande Valley, perhaps surprisingly, played a significant role in Black migration and the African diaspora due to the connection of Texas and Mexico via the railroad system. As UTRGV's Research Guide notes, the first Black families that established roots in South Texas were The Webbers, The Biddys, and The Jacksons (2022). And yet, as the population numbers show, very few Black community members call the Rio Grande Valley home today.

In part, as the plaque notes, Texas upheld Jim Crow, which effectively created a caustic racist environment in the Valley. In addition, Latinidad, and Mexican culture more precisely, is historically rooted in anti-Blackness. When you come upon the Restlawn Cemetery, which is located between Richardson Road just steps South of the railroad tracks, you can see how distant these gravesites are from the County of Hidalgo Public Cemetery. As at the Guadalupe Cemetery, some burial plots have markers while others are marked only by wooden crosses or nameplates. In the cemetery, someone has put up a wooden board where several names, dates of birth, and dates of death, have been recorded by hand. The board suggests that as early as the

1900s, Blacks and African Americans died in the Rio Grande Valley and were denied burial in both White and Mexican/Mexican American cemeteries. Community members have placed laminated obituary clippings and newspaper clippings at the cemetery in an effort to preserve what Black history remains accessible in the Rio Grande Valley. Unlike the community mapping project taken up by Pharr residents, the Restlawn Cemetery remains at the border of perceptibility in border consciousness even as we are urged to consider how such projects attempt to overwrite the subaltern condition.

While Cisneros' "Pilón" begins with the geographic location of Mexico City, it ultimately disrupts the categories of Latinidad and Chicanidad by anchoring itself in an unmappable space by the end of the *cuento*. This geographic instability forces us to both release the text from a nationalist expectation while also contesting the presumed territories and citizenships that have been previously labeled as distinctly "Latinx" or "Chicanx." Even as the narrative pushes us to the limits of such categories like place, space, region, and nation, it does not propose either a remedy or a re/solution to these interconnected geographies. Rather, "Pilón's" project of a deterritorialized geopoetics holds both the reader and text in tension and in possibility by naming the narrator's nostalgic rendering of a homeland as an invented country. Similarly, what community mapping projects like those of the Guadalupe Cemetery offer us in our study of border archives and studies, is the limits of making legible the realities of the border condition. These border narratives do not contain totalities because they cannot capture the totality of the border experience solely from authoritative archives or what history remains accessible. Rather, as the Restlawn Cemetery and Guadalupe Cemetery show us, border history has been both created and sustained through the exclusion and erasure of countless undocumented and Black bodies on the fringes of more legible border subjectivities tied to ethnicity, culture, and the Mexican or U.S. nation-state.

As such, I suggest that Cisneros' *cuentos* best situate readers as witnesses. I define witnessing as an active call to responsibility on behalf of the reader as well as an active call to engage the tensions produced within the overlapping geographies and identity formations within a text. Instead of thinking about spatiality as merely immaterial or invented, the act of witnessing in border literature asks us to consider the material conditions of border bodies and the disinventions those texts are offering. In other words, both the act of witnessing and the production of tension suggest that texts like "Pilón" are engaging readers in ways that are meant to go out of the bounds of "reading" a text. Border and Chicanx studies have so extensively theorized about the border that it has minimized the material, embodied stakes of those border experiences, which journalists and community mapping projects like these in South Texas make explicit and intelligible. We have forgotten that there are bodies, communities, and cultures at risk of extinction at any given moment in the borderlands even between communities of color and minoritized communities.

Early on in the *cuento* the narrator translates to us, as witnesses, the inaccuracy of naming such temporal and spatialized imaginings:

> And it was as if that music stirred up things in a piece of my heart from a time I couldn't remember. From before. Not exactly a time, a feeling. The way sometimes one remembers a memory with the images blurred and rounded, but has forgotten the one thing that would draw it all into focus. In this case, [she'd] forgotten a mood. Not a mood—a state of being, to be more precise. (*Caramelo* 433)

Here, the narrator attempts to outline her felt experience after hearing "Farolito" playing and "shaking awake the [memories]" inside of her and the other listeners on the street, while also grappling with the impossibility of defining that experience for her readers (433).[x] At first, the protagonist suggests it is a time "from before," but realizes the faultiness of suggesting a fixed temporality. If it was once a definitive time in the past, when and where it took place is no longer

within reach of her memory. She retracts by dismissing the static—it is "not exactly a time"—and likens it more to a feeling. She contextualizes this feeling as if one was trying to access a memory where the details and images are no longer clear enough to accurately assess the way things were. "The thing" itself is too much in the past, too estranged, and too distant. She then rephrases the "forgotten" thing as a mood, but quickly realizes the imprecision of "mood" as a fleeting emotion that language cannot capture. The narrator then modifies the description one last time: "Not a mood—a state of being, to be more precise." As the narrator recalibrates the language with which she is creating meaning for her reader, the reader is also forced to amend their imagining of what she is attempting to define, shifting alongside the protagonist in trying to locate precision within ambiguity, feelings and beingness within a language that ultimately proves itself deficient in providing a substantial bridge between the narrator and the reader.

Facing these tensions, the narrator decides to end this paragraph by stating that she can only "be *more* precise" within the borders of language and the text. Initially the protagonist insists on micro-adjustments to the language—each modification seemingly getting us closer to "the thing" she is imagining as she hears "Farolito." The song itself embodies that shift from precision, the nameable title of "Farolito," to the affective and linguistic imprecision it evokes. Such ambiguity suggests that it is *all* of these things. The conjunction, the additive transition from one term to the next, ultimately illustrates that this dislocated positioning *is* a time, feeling, memory, mood, and state-of-being—the way that narrator once was that is both ahistorical and atemporal and yet belonging to a precise moment in history and time within her body. The text demands what Gloria Anzaldúa terms "tolerance for contradictions, a tolerance for ambiguity" from its readers (*Borderlands/La Frontera* 101).

After stating the impossibility of defining time except with possibly "more" precision, the reader may expect the narrator to move towards cementing such space in the reader's mind.

However, the narrator moves to another space altogether—her own body as a site of the same collisions of time, feeling, memory, mood, and state-of-being. She writes: "How before my body wasn't my body. I didn't have a body. I was a being as close to a spirit as a spirit. I was a ball of light floating across the planet. I mean the me I was before puberty, that red Rio Bravo you have to carry yourself over" (433). As Cherríe Moraga notes, within "Blood Matters" in *Waiting in the Wings* (1997), the body itself possesses a "temporal geography" tethered to the cyclical give and take of life and death and the general ephemeral quality of the human body (120). I employ Moraga's words here to serve an additional function in the exploration of the human body. Moraga's corporal geography is appropriately illustrated by the *cuento'*s shift to an intimate space. The narrator recalls her childhood body as it once was before puberty—or to be more precise, as it once was *not*. The narrator surveys the landscape of her childhood self as a desexed and bodiless state. She remembers herself as detached from the world noting that she was "a ball of light floating across the planet" (433). There is a literal sense of timelessness in this passage—she is anchored neither by time nor space. Thus, the childhood body exists as a literal temporal geography as it is recalled as unaffected by the world below it.

Like the text's imagined borders, the corporeal borders present within "Pilón" demand a tolerance for ambiguity and reinforce that a transnational gender politic must be concerned with the violence against the gendered body. It also acknowledges that there is a quality of impossibility in defining and describing a border feminist experience. As Cisneros's narrator suggests, it becomes only marginally possible to distinguish its geography through "blurred and rounded" fragments (433). As with the Guadalupe Cemetery mapping project and the community board listing the deceased at Restlawn Cemetery, we understand the limitations inherent in making legible such border geographics subjectivities. There is imprecision with language, approach, and methodology, yet the community holds itself in tension as a way to

avoid complete erasure.

On Community Cartography

Unlike authors who utilize literary geography to merely station a story in a tangible place, Cisneros' *cuentos* use literary geography to make story out of place itself. Furthermore, while her stories begin in mappable locations, they ultimately move to reorient the reader's focus onto the social networks and relationships in/with/to place in that location. Spatial theorist Doreen Massey states that we must "recognize space as always under construction" (9). That is, we must first recognize how space is always active and reactive, not passive or dormant; how it is always in a constant negotiation with multiple emergent subject formations through a response, conversation, and negotiation with the space in which these narratives take place. Similarly, community mapping projects like the one of the Guadalupe Cemetery in South Texas illustrate that even as border communities respond to make legible the fraught relationship between space and the body, the bodies of the undocumented, those of lower socioeconomic classes, and those excluded from Tejanidad such as those interred in the historically Black Restlawn Cemetery, remain at the border of such legibility.[xi] In opposition, Cisneros' literary geographies materialize their own decolonial, transnational, and social politic of space that conceives of space as communal and interdependent. In particular, her short fiction utilizes narrative and literary space to reflect the constellated relationship between the borderlands and the border narratives emerging from and through their positioning in distinct geographics.

In this section, I focus on Sandra Cisneros's short story collection, *Woman Hollering Creek* to ground my understanding of community cartography. In particular, I examine the short stories "Tepeyac" and the title story "Woman Hollering Creek" to further consider how Cisneros' writing opposes conceptualizations of place, space, and geography as locations to

possess or rule. Similarly, I suggest that Cisneros' narrators and mappings show us the limits and thresholds of ethno- and state-nationalisms and how they urge us to redefine the decolonial. Furthermore, I consider how Cisneros' community cartography illustrates a shared responsibility between numerous colliding communities across Mexico and the United States. As Emma Pérez writes of the "diasporic configuration" in spaces like Texas where "populations dispersed through a land named, renamed, bordered, measured, mapped, and fenced" (77), Cisneros' *cuentos* show us that to practice the decolonial we must first re-negotiate what it means to enter border narratives from multiple overlapping and at times conflicting subject positions.[xii]

In this way, Cisneros' community cartographies *become* both a time lag as well as a decolonial and despatialized compass with which to navigate her *cuentos*. I use "despatialization" here as a theoretical and geopolitical reading practice both to articulate decoloniality within Cisneros' collection and to critique the im/material definitions of the decolonial. As Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang's foundational work has already noted, decolonization is not a metaphor.[xiii] Critical Indigenous Studies scholars call upon non-Indigenous scholars and readers to not forget that decoloniality is ultimately a demand for land repatriation and acknowledgement of Indigenous sovereignty. The purpose of this chapter is not to dispute such claims, but rather to consider how Cisneros' *cuentos* facilitate novel discourse between geography and community that becomes possible through metaphors, invention, and defamiliarization. As I have argued in "Invented Geographies," Cisneros utilizes language to disorient space and demark time within her texts. Such disorientation is not meant to simply posit Cisneros as being outside of Western time or space. As Mark Rifkin argues in *Beyond Settler Time* (2017), "To live 'in modern time' is to be on the other side of the break, in a time and 'world' shared with everyone else, and in this way *modern* functions less as simply descriptive

(later in chronological time) than as normative, a right to inclusion in a certain kind of shared time" (13). In reading border literature and experience as oppositional or parallel to the West only re-centers and reifies Western thought, time, and geography as the origin from which communities of color must always defer when making meaning of our lives, communities, and histories. When we consider Cisneros's *cuentos* as neither synchronous nor asynchronous, neither Western nor third world, neither U.S., Mexican, nor Mexican American, we can see how her work engages other modalities of being, expression, and meaning that cannot be articulated through nationalist languages of territorialization.

Mary Pat Brady's analysis of Cisneros' oeuvre has been especially useful in my consideration of imperialism and "rewritings," which has become an increasingly ubiquitous dialectic in Settler Colonial Studies and Native Studies. Brady notes of Cisneros' *Woman Hollering Creek* (1991) in *Extinct Lands, Temporal Geographies* that such texts:

> [Respond] to such colonization through remembering and rewriting…Tepeyac, for example, home to a millennium-old tradition, is also a tourist site and a contemporary religious shrine. These coexisting territories refer to one another, but their simultaneity is not universally acknowledged. Because places emerge out of complex systems of articulation, acknowledging that they exist as simultaneous, not successive, topographies requires fluency in several discursive systems. (127)

Brady notes that these texts are a response to colonization through a constellated and dialogic positioning of discursive systems we might identify in "Pilón" as history, nationhood, citizenship, and borders. Similarly, the work of Mishuana Goeman on Leslie Marmon Silko's *Almanac of the Dead* (1991) argues that how Indigenous authors remap and rewrite geographies can advance a restoration of sovereignty to Indigenous communities. And yet Black, Mexican Indigenous, Asian, Latinx, Chicanx, and undocumented identities remain at the margins of exclusion in these Indigenous remappings.

As such, I am hesitant to consider that simply remapping or rewriting physical sites liberates such locations from settler violence or white supremacy. If we, as Black, Indigenous, and People of Color, are still conceptualizing decolonization through systems of power like citizenship, borders, nations, and sovereignty when we remap our homelands, histories, and narratives, then what exactly have we liberated our communities from? Even as we reject a U.S.-based Chicanx nationalism, we move to reinscribe our communities within a new discursive system of exclusion. This makes clearer, as Brady notes, how these physical sites continuously emerge as "commodified symbols of nationalism" that are only possible through the "formation" we understand as race (118). And this project of exclusion has been largely enveloped in the discourse of decolonization and border studies, as the community mapping project in the Rio Grande Valley illustrates.

As texts like Audra Simpson's *Mohawk Interruptus: Political Life Across the Borders of Settler States* (2014) makes clear, Mexicans and Mexican Americans have been largely identified as settlers along the U.S. Southwest. There is a particular a priori claim at work within Critical Indigenous Studies that threatens the livelihood of Black life and obscures the Indigenous identities made illegible through government or settler-state recognition across the Américas. And yet, we understand that Chicanidad and Latinidad have practiced and continue to practice these politics of exclusion and appropriation by claiming fragmented relationships to Indigeneity and denying the charged nature of anti-blackness in our communities. Therefore, I argue that we must be hesitant to accept rewritings and reconfigurations of lands and geographies—literary or otherwise—as simply "decolonial," and must push such rewritings to the thresholds of incommunicability. I am not inclined to agree with either Latinx or Indigenous scholars that these contradicting utilizations of space are decolonial. In fact, while much of our

academic and institutional definitions of "decoloniality" have responded to and been derived from Tuck and Yang's essay (2012), I hold to my reading of such decolonial possibilities as one where such futurities will always be shaped by exclusive and violent structures of citizenships and borders.

Tuck and Yang situate a politic and ethic of incommensurability as one opposed to a politic of reconciliation that further enables "the settler" to deflect responsibility, make multiple "moves to innocence," and ignore land repatriation for tribal nations (31). While I agree that a politic of reconciliation is futile, I also think a politic of incommensurability further endangers communities of color. Under Tuck and Yang's futurity, Black and Brown bodies become dispensable subjectivities in the move toward "occupation" and repatriation of sovereign tribal nations. Not only does such an ethic ignore the numerous North American tribal nations that remain unarticulated as "sovereign" by settler-state recognition, but it also denies those whose Indigenous identities have been rendered illegible through border crossings—i.e. the ways Indigenous peoples with ties to specific languages and communities are transformed into minoritized national Others in the moment of crossing. While in 2019 there was a brief social response to the holding of children and families in the modern-day detainment centers across the Southwest, less attention was placed on the diverse nationalities and language needs of those being detained. In those cases, over half of detained immigrants were Honduran, Guatemalan, or Salvadorian, which should urge us to consider the erasure of Afro-Latinidad and Indigenous Latinx identities. As the outreach by immigration activist groups like *RAICES* and *Immigration Impact* made clear, there has been a high demand for Indigenous translators since 2017. The data does not even begin to account for those that do not make it across the Southwest/Mexico border, which I examine with greater detail in my third chapter.

Read in such contexts, Cisneros' narrators reorient the relationship between themselves and their communities, against and through the geographical spaces they occupy, in ways that reveals the im/possibility of border subjectivity and community. As Gayatri Spivak reminds us, reading is always an "active transaction between past and future" (272).[xiv] Cisneros' *cuentos* similarly engage readers to consider space through multiple lenses that ask us to grapple both with what we know or cannot know about a community. In this way, Cisneros's narrative geographies shows us that the decolonial must remain responsible and accountable to multiple subject formations that exist across any given geography, but especially in multiply-occupied and multiply-colonized sites such as South Texas. I transition here to "Tepeyac" as it most explicitly begins with what we may call, perhaps mistakenly, the laying down of a setting. I suggest "mistakenly" here to continue a reconsideration of how setting and geography remain fluidly ambiguous throughout Cisneros's body of work. Unlike the urban mapping Cisneros makes of inner-city Chicago in *The House on Mango Street* (1983) or of San Antonio in *Have You Seen Marie?* (2012), "Tepeyac" cannot easily be territorially located or spatialized. "Tepeyac" begins, like "Pilón," in a nameable geographic location in Northern Mexico City. As the narrator names the city of Tepeyac, she also brings into focus the dialogic, social, and cultural spatialization of the geographical site where Our Lady of Guadalupe first appeared to Juan Diego in 1531.

As Raúl Homero Villa argues in *Barrio-Logos*, *barrio* social space primarily takes shape through "the experience of being displaced in multiple ways from a perceived homeland…in this country" (1). As Villa adds, Chicanidad has always contended with questions of belonging as they relate to space in the United States. However, Cisneros' geographies and spatializations in *Women Hollering Creek and Other Stories* are not so easily confinable to or delineated by the

United States as a nation-state. Rather, her narrators always seem to be speaking at a distance from any single nation or nationalism. As we see in "Tepeyac," we might assume that the narrator grew up there through her intimate orientation to certain places on the plaza, but there is also a defamiliarization at work as she later feels almost like a foreigner herself—now only able to remember and conjure up Tepeyac through a distant, but vivid, memory. In moving away from spatializing Tepeyac into either category of nation or state, we move toward a new vantage point where Tepeyac can be read as a site of community, which as Villa argues of the city, can be a "meeting ground" and not simply a terrain (241). Furthermore, I propose that the geospatial work in *Woman Hollering Creek* allows us to further assess and contend with decolonial space and social mapping within Cisneros' border feminist narratives.

"Tepeyac," moreover, does not utilize one primary geopoint, a mappable geographic location, to spatialize the story. While we may be initially drawn to consider *La Basilica de Nuestra Señora* as the primary geopoint, the narrator does not begin with the church, but instead moves our gaze upward, looking first at the "ink of Japanese blue" amidst the opening of those "first thin stars" in Tepeyac's sky. For some readers of "Tepeyac," this initial illustration and rich description of the sky, its colors, and its stars may conjure a direct imaging of *La Virgen de Guadalupe*'s mantle.[xv] In fact, the narrator relies on what Mary Pat Brady identifies as the reader's "local knowledge" and a cultural familiarity with these signs to convey the signification of the space as a dialogic discursive system within Mexico ("Contrapuntal Geographies," 122). For readers familiar with Guadalupe's momentous role in Mexican and Mexican American cultural studies, that familiarity simultaneously transforms Tepeyac as a physical site within the text into one whose geography is inseparable from Our Lady of Guadalupe's presence, history, genealogy, and signification. The descriptive narration in this

opening sentence demands, as Brady states, a "fluency in several discursive systems" (134).

The narrator utilizes these initial links of title, geopoint of Tepeyac, and figurative description of the sky to situate La Virgen de Guadalupe as a cultural, national, religious, spiritual, and political symbol without even having to name her. These same signs can also be empty signifiers to an unfamiliar reader.[xvi] As Cisneros' readers know, her narratives always make legible specific geographies and "Tepeyac" in this sense appears not unlike her other *cuentos*. However, what meaning does the geography of Tepeyac hold for the narrative? To begin to make sense of the imaginary presented in that first line, we are first called to "know" the physical site of Tepeyac. The reader must be able to "read" the literary and social map that Cisneros's narrator has begun to draw for us and recognize that the church also appears as more of a social and conceptual referent than a static geopoint in the narrative. Cisneros's story moves us outside of the familiar urban spaces of Mexico City by naming Tepeyac as a geopoint that can initiate both a pre-Columbian and post-Columbian discourse. As Octavia Paz writes of México-Tenochtitlán, Tepeyac as an imagined cultural geography is also a space where multiple historical, genealogical, and political traditions collide.[xvii]

Cisneros's narrator, instead, asks us to shift our gaze beyond the colonial structures of the church with the repetitious phrasing of "above" in the opening lines of "Tepeyac," which further shifts readers away from a vertical, horizontal, linear, or even symmetrical view of the literary geography within the story and toward a community spatialization. Here, the signaling of "above" asks us to consider space as not limited to a single mode spatialization by illustrating Tepeyac's social and communal "mapping":

> …*above* the bell towers of La Basílica de Nuestra Señora, *above* the plaza photographers and their souvenir backdrops of La Virgen de Guadalupe, *above*

> the balloon vendors and their balloons wearing paper hats, *above* the red-canopied thrones of the shoeshine stands, *above* the wooden booths of the women frying lunch in vats of oil, *above* the *tlapalería* on the corner of Misterios and Cinco de Mayo…(*Woman Hollering Creek* 21)[xviii]

By asking us to gaze first not upon the church but toward that green-blue sky that drapes itself over Tepeyac and its community, the narrator establishes a spatial politic that does not reorient Tepeyac around the church but around a social and cultural geography. While Brady has already attended rigorously to the overlapping discursive systems of geography at work in "Tepeyac" through the signaling of Tepeyac, Tonantzín, Guadalupe, and the basilica, I wish to extend her reading of how a familiarity/unfamiliarity in this *cuento* points us to the limits of a literary geography oriented by the nation-state and further illustrates a new despatialized and social imaginary.

For unlike the decolonial imaginary of Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang still tethered to concepts of nationhood, sovereignty, and territoriality, Cisneros's narrator does not seek to reterritorialize or re-occupy Tepeyac as either a pre-conquest/Indigenous space or to affirm a Spanish or Catholic mapping as the only way to "read" it as a site. Instead, the story offers us a community cartography that does not rely on material structures or colonial forms of mapping to consider rich sites like Tepeyac. Unlike the ways Indigenous scholar Mishuana Goeman's work in *Mark My Words* (2013) articulates the act of literary "(re)mapping" as a way of "unsettling [an] imperial and colonial [geography]," Cisneros's text here does not wish to remap or respond to these geographies by simply reterritorializing space. Instead, the narrative and narrator further complicate the relationship between the numerous existing and in-tension discursive systems by asking the reader to look above to the unmappable sky while simultaneously calling us to look upon the plaza, the church, and the exchanges at work in a single site. Thus, even as the narrator demands that we look above the church and above the plaza, the text also recognizes that looking

above is already dependent on what is below, which further articulates Tepeyac as a dialogic space that is interdependent on and independent of multiple material and immaterial spatial and social relationships. Thus, even as *La Basilica* has been largely understood as a sign within a specific 16th century Catholic system that is then positioned within other discourses related to power, coloniality, and genocide, the text's shift away from merely remapping or reorienting Tepeyac shows the ontological distinction the text is also facilitating between *La Basilica* and *La Virgen de Guadalupe*. Cisneros' narrator demands that we negotiate the history of colonial violence that predates the text while also asking us to mark spiritualism and religion as wholly different signs and systems being accessed within the narrative.

This dialogic and layered view of Tepeyac further illustrates how Cisneros' *cuentos* always narrate through multiplicity—there is no single perspective, narrative, history, or vantage point that is privileged over another. This multiplicity is evidenced through the long, paratactic phrasing of the sentence that runs from the first page into the top of the next page. The commas fuse and constellate multiple vantage points that both give us access to new ways of seeing Tepeyac as well as show us the ways in which complete knowledge of and access to this geopoint is not possible. This parataxis allows us to consider how space beyond and between the merchants, the plaza, the church, and the sky are all interconnected in a single sentence and through a panoramic view of the city. The social exchange at work here is also multifaceted—we understand the competing ways in which Tepeyac becomes a single terrain on which culture, capital, religion, spirituality, and history must make space for each other.[xix]

By reading her *cuentos* as a community cartography, we can then not only read the tensions and dichotomies formed between often opposing systems such as religious institutions/communities, spirituality/religion, materiality/immateriality, but also the other fragmented and illegible social systems that can be easily elided in a topical, superficial, or

strictly geographic reading of the story. When Cisneros' narrator redirects our gaze and asks us to observe the multiple merchants on the plaza, the text's orientation rejects our impulse to hold it or its space to any fixed point. The narrative geography demands fluidity from the reader by shifting our focus away from a colonial reading of space as merely geopoints within a given territory defined through a nation-state delineation. That is, La Basilica remains a historically, culturally, and spiritually rich geopoint, but it does not take precedence over the social geography at work in Cisneros' *cuento*. Instead, the narrator illustrates Tepeyac's social geography by showing us the plaza in a state of fluidity and action:

> …*when* the photographers have toted up their tripods and big box cameras, have rolled away the wooden ponies *I don't know where*, *when* the balloon men have sold all but the ugliest balloons and herded these last few home, *when* the shoeshine men have grown tired of squatting on their little wooden boxes, and the women frying lunch have finished packing dishes, tablecloth, pots, in the big straw basket in which they came, *then*… (21, emphases mine)

Cisneros' narrator creates a tension between overlapping temporalities of "when" and "then" over the common space of the plaza. The social geography here presents a contradictory coupling of distance/intimacy and unfamiliarity/familiarity. Even as we may initially think that the narrator has an intimate and familiar connection to this community and space, there is also a clear admission of unfamiliarity and distance to the social networks that span across the plaza. She does not know where the wooden ponies and other props will be taken; she does not know where the merchants and vendors will ultimately go. There is admission: "I don't know where" (21). And yet the narrator has observed this geography and the movements and expert tasks of its social pillars—those that a tourist or visitor would consider as merely adjacent to this landmark and public sphere. The narrator orients space through a community cartography that reveals space as its own dynamic, fluid, and layered social discourse in this relational narrative space.

Brady identifies the literary mapping of "Tepeyac" as "loiterature," or "loiterly writing,"

which brings into focus how the plaza is illustrated through a communal, interactive, and intimate spatialization (113).[xx] As she notes, Cisneros's narrative geographies are not merely working as locations or settings, but rather are always transforming space through specific literary techniques like historical allusions and collaborative storytelling. Notably, for the first part of this *cuento*, the narrator does not privilege herself or her story. Instead, the narrator gives legibility and intelligibility to other subjects even though such designations are already fragmented. We, as readers, are then placed at these thresholds of reading a fragmented "Other"—we can both "see" the merchants, vendors, and women through the visual geography the narrator lays before us, but we are also unable to truly see, know, and define them in specific terms. "I don't know *where*," the narrator states, which further puts her in that borderland space of insider/outsider all too familiar to the Latinx and Chicanx reader. The narrator here seems to both belong and not belong, to be both familiar and foreign to the space—at the cusp of two intersecting "citizenships." Through the narrator, we become witnesses to the active community within Tepeyac. The narrator maps this social space, and it is in that place—between the communal and social—that the narrator can begin her story. At this brink of "then"—at this admission that she cannot access the totality of Tepeyac's social geography—is when the narrator feels she can begin to access and remember this geography as it once was for her. As the narrator navigates her spatialization of Tepeyac from territory onto the community geography, she similarly calls on us to sit in the dislocation of "I don't know where."

Time, too, is intimately linked to the ways in which space is ultimately rendered within "Tepeyac," which takes a type of geopoetical snapshot of the moment "when" and before everything changes through the narrator's social mapping. Following the shift from a community cartography of the plaza, the rest of the narrative is orientated by some initially

relational "I" statements: "*I* take Abuelito's hand…past the candy store where *I* buy milk-and-raisin gelatins, past La Providencia tortillería where every afternoon Luz María and *I* are sent…" (22, emphases mine). Again, Cisneros utilizes a community cartography to take us down the familiar space of Tepeyac as they relate to memory and community members. Alongside a mappable and geographical location are the unmappable relationships between family, kinships, and neighbors. In her work, *Mapping Memory*, Kaitlin M. Murphy, too, suggests that maps are often "defined by time, because they enable viewers to perceive how events happen in succession" (11). However, Cisneros' works respond by neither being beholden to mapping the nation-state nor a single temporality. Instead, "Tepeyac," develops and expands our understanding of time by weaving through two temporalities—past and present.

Memory also shapes the community cartography at work in "Tepeyac" when the narrator writes of her relationship to this space. However, the *cuento* should not be read merely as a nostalgic rendering of the narrator's past as the narrator does not long for a return to Tepeyac as it once was. Rather, the narrator's textual mapping turns inward toward the community and family relationships that have been most impacted by time, those that remain enmeshed between a material and immaterial rendering of Tepeyac:

> …to the house on La Fortuna, number 12, that *has always* been our house. Green iron gates that arabesque and scroll like the initials of my name, familiar whine and clang, familiar lacework of ivy growing over and between…years later *when* the house on La Fortuna, number 12, is sold, *when* the tlapalería, corner of Misterios and Cinco de Mayo, changes owners, *when* the courtyard gate of arabesques and scrolls is taken off its hinges and replaced…years afterward when I return to the shop on the corner of Misterios and Cinco de Mayo, repainted and redone as a pharmacy, to the basilica that is crumbling and closed, to the plaza photographers, the balloon vendors and shoeshine thrones, the women whose faces *I do not recognize*…to the house on La Fortuna, number 12, smaller and darker than *when* we lived there, with the rooms boarded shut and rented to strangers… (23, emphases mine)

Instead of remapping Tepeyac as she remembers it, the narrator sets forth a social geography that

attends to an intimate and relational representation of space that cannot be located on any map outside of this narrative. Even when the narrator states that the house on La Fortuna had "always" been their house, we understand that "always" is attached to a single temporality of her past. New residents have moved in, physical changes have taken place that have transformed the familiar space of "home" to something unfamiliar and distant. She can only now see it again from the outside as the house stands as a material representation of what remains central to Cisneros's spatial imaginary: community. The house, La Fortuna, and Tepeyac hold meaning only as they relate to the social geographies that she once knew: "the mad parrot voice of the Abuela…the Abuelito snoring" all leading up to "when Abuelito falls asleep one last time" (23). It is then that the counting trails off and when new faces are rendered unrecognizable and unfamiliar. And yet, the narrator becomes the only one that can remember "when everything else is forgotten" (23). Her memory and her recollection of Tepeyac emerge as sites through which she narrates her sacred, intimate, and layered relationship to space. It is not one that seeks to reaffirm that this house, this space is hers, but rather to note that Tepeyac once existed as a familiar space that helps make intimate familial networks that are no longer accessible physically through this literary and spatial imagining. In naming her displacement from Tepeyac in the present, the narrator is not seeking to reterritorialize or repossess the spaces she describes. Rather, she understands that in mapping her memory of Tepeyac as it once was, she can create a community cartography that centers those intimate relationships that give meaning to the spaces in the past, present, and future.

While my reading thus far has been limited to reading narrative spatialization within the *cuento*, here I shift to the title story of her collection, "Woman Hollering Creek." While "Woman Hollering Creek" has broadly been read through the lenses of border feminisms and

queer studies, in this section I consider how Cisneros utilizes a similar community cartography to dislocate both reader and narrator in the indeterminate "*el otro lado*," the other side. A precise geography within this border narrative is withheld from the reader until much later in the *cuento*, which, like in my reading of "Tepeyac," I suggest functions to further disrupt our narrative orientations away from land as terrain/territory or from nation-state notions of identity and belonging. All that is initially known to the reader is the "several miles of dirt road and several miles of paved, over one border and beyond to a town" that stand between Cleófilas in Texas and her father Don Serafín who remains in Mexico (43). The narrative quickly discloses that Cleófilas marries and crosses into the United States and this further strains her relationship to her father, who imagines his daughter looking "south" toward home with regret for leaving him behind (43).

The un/paved road here presents a tension between the "premodern" state of Mexico that stands opposed to the "modernity" of this unnamed U.S. town. As such, the naming of either town in Mexico or the United States is initially inconsequential to the development of Cleófilas's narrative. As we come to understand from the rest of the *cuento*, Cleófilas eventually loses the early optimism that she placed on her future new home and the region that once seemed so "far away and lovely" (45).[xxi] The precise naming of Seguín is initially withheld from readers, which emphasizes that what matters most to Cleófilas in those few moments is the reality that she will no longer be in Monclova, Coahuila. Rather, what lies across the border is a spatialized promise of modernity, urbanity, and social fluidity in which her new American life can unfold. Such ideas, of course, are subject to their own class critiques; however, this should not distract from the call to bear witness to a story of immigration that unfolds in and through a spatial displacement between Mexico and Texas.

In considering how Cleófilas orients our reading of space back toward the social

relationships in Seguín, the geographic emerges as another part of Cisneros' border feminist practice in *Woman Hollering Creek*. For Cleófilas, Seguín initially holds tremendous potential to access success through a figuring of America as a utopic geography. For her, this is materialized through the very naming of Seguín early in the narrative:

> *Seguín, Tejas*. A nice sterling ring to it. The tinkle of money. She would get to wear outfits like the women on the *tele*, like Lucía Mendez. And have a lovely house, and wouldn't Chela be jealous.
> And yes, they will drive all the way to Laredo to get her wedding dress. That's what they say. (45)

Even as Cleófilas longs for a social and class-based mobility and fluidity, she is faced with multiple exclusions that make this longing for the "American Dream" inaccessible—she is a woman, an immigrant, and a Mexican. Even the Tejanas in "Woman Hollering Creek" are unable to access the promises of class mobility because of their racialized positioning as *Mexican* American women, but this is not something that is explained to Cleófilas due to her limited visibility as "another one of those brides from across the border" (54). Thus, the idyllic rendering of Seguín and the U.S. is quickly ruptured as Cleófilas learns the ways in which women are sexualized and violently treated as disposable subjects north of the border. She recalls the newspaper stories that narrate the murders of women "found on the side of the interstate. This one pushed from a moving car. This one's cadaver, this one unconscious, this one beaten blue. Her ex-husband, her husband, her lover, her father, her brother, her uncle, her friend, her co-worker. Always" (52). Any intimacy or familiarity with men is weighted with a risk to her body, her mental health, and her livelihood. Even in Seguín, the men at the ice house and her own husband are direct threats to her safety, which further emphasizes an engendered border politic that Cisneros also illustrates in "Pilón." That is, the gendered, immigrant, border body, the engendered body, is always at risk of violence and erasure in the Américas.

Seguín, however, is not the primary geopoint of this *cuento*. Much like in "Tepeyac," we are called to rethink space and geography in Cisneros' text. Cleófilas is most drawn to Woman Hollering Creek, initially for its curious name of "La Gritona," which is spatialized geographically around its proximity to Seguín. However, much like her failed efforts to connect with the women in the town, Cleófilas arrives at no clearer understanding of the origin for the creek's namesake:

> Though no one could say whether the woman had hollered from anger or pain. The natives only knew the *arroyo* one crossed on the way back to San Antonio, and then once again on the way back, was called Woman Hollering, a name no one from these parts questioned, little less understood. *Pues, allá de los indios, quién sabe*—who knows, the townspeople shrugged, because it was of no concern to their lives how this trickle of water received its curious name. (46)

For the townspeople, Woman Hollering Creek holds no intrinsic or immediate value to their everyday lives. Instead, the creek functions primarily as setting and landscape to their social lives. This reveals the tensions at play within this Texas space by illustrating how violence and erasure are always inherently attached to spaces within a racial and colonial U.S. geographic context. For Cleófilas or the townspeople of Seguín to "know" where the name Woman Hollering Creek or *La Gritona* comes from, first there must be admission of settler violence and Indigenous erasure. There must be acknowledgement of the Texas-Indian Wars, with documentation as early as 1820, that shows how this region became a contentious terrain for "resolving" disputes around land, culture, tradition, and language. Seguín, too, must be recognized as a dynamic discursive space for the competing sovereignties of Indigenous, Mexican, and Spanish peoples during the Comanche Wars, which further illustrates how territorialization remains enmeshed in the townspeople's imagining of Tejas.[xxii]

The Texans and Tejanxs in "Woman Hollering Creek" distance themselves, at least momentarily, from the history of this geography and the unspoken history of colonial and settler

violence under six distinct flags and numerous other territorial delineations that remain contested and unknowable within Texas's long settlement history. They neither know this history nor do they seem to want to contend with it, but rather suggest that it is of "*allá de los indios*"—delineating Indigenous history as outside and beyond their own inherited histories in Texas. "Allá" connotes not just time but also space and a geographic framework, which further limits the women's ability to understand Cleófilas' interest in the creek, its name, and its origins. In this way, Cisneros' community cartography asks us to re-negotiate with a settler colonial history. As readers, we also become implicated in that history. We see the Tejanx characters, like Anita from *El Mesquite*, speaking from their inheritance as both colonized subject and settler subjects. In this way, "Woman Hollering Creek" critically spatializes Seguín by narrating its dialogic and layered history between Mexican, Mexican American, and Indigenous communities, which situates a decolonial border feminist practice.

Certainly, "Woman Hollering Creek" is as much a border feminist narrative as it is an immigrant narrative. While Cleófilas is not necessarily in exile from Mexico, we also cannot speak of her as solely a Mexican national. To identify her as Tejana would also be to further obfuscate her positioning as a recently immigrated Mexicana, which further problematizes categories of citizenship and nationalism. Thus, even as we may want to consider her relationship to Seguín through a U.S. spatial imaginary, we must also consider the ways in which Cleófilas remains outside of U.S. social orders in this Texas narrative geography. While Brady notes that there are multiple contrapuntal spatial points at play that map and orient the relationships between locations and individuals, we must also recognize that Cleófilas is always outside of these social and nationalistic orders and border geographies ("Contrapuntal Geographies" 140).

Notably, Cleófilas is made to feel like an outsider primarily by the Tejanas in the *cuento*. For example, it is Trini, the laundromat attendant, who first tells Cleófilas that her own customs and ways of being do not align to conventions of this region within this *otro lado*, other side:

> 'What do you want to know for?' Trini…asked in the same gruff Spanish she always used whenever she gave Cleófilas change or yelled at her for something. First for putting too much soap in the machines. Later, for sitting on the washer. And still later, after Juan Pedrito was born, for not understanding that in this country you cannot let your baby walk around with no diaper and his pee-pee hanging out, it wasn't nice, ¿*entiendes*? *Pues*. (46)

Cleófilas finds herself in a "new country" without alliances and community that are essential to her self-preservation and safety. In an abusive relationship to Juan Pedro, estranged and distanced from her father and brothers back home in Monclova, Cleófilas is also negotiating motherhood alone alongside navigating a new culture, community, and social system that does not legitimate her existence. Trini simply tells her this is not how it is done "in this country"—do you understand? "In this country" delineates the ways in which Cleófilas stands outside of the orientations and formations of both Seguín and Texas, which further complicates her subjectivity as a Mexican immigrant. This subjectivity is unlike what Mae M. Ngai articulates in *Impossible Subjects: Illegal Aliens and the Making of Modern America* (2004) as Cleófilas does not represent either a bracero or an immigrant coming in to take resources, wages, or even the "affections" of other Mexican American women (158-59). What Cleófilas' subjectivity reveals in Seguín is the deep sentiment of xenophobia rampant in Mexican American border communities that is situated in a territorial dispute over who does or doesn't, who can or can't, belong.

Later, when Cleófilas does ask for help, Felice and Graciela, the ultrasound technician and her friend who resolve to help Cleófilas after she discloses her domestic violence situation to them, struggle to understand her cultural identity or personal narrative. In their exchange, they

minimize Cleófilas' life story and render her only legible as "[another] one of those bride from across the border" who "doesn't even speak English" (54). Even as Felice and Graciela are responsible for getting Cleófilas, Juan Pedrito, and Cleófilas' unborn child to safety, they also initiate a type of mimicry of her situation. At the end of their phone call, Graciela likens the situation to "a regular soap opera" and says "[*qué vida*]/what a life" (55), which further emphasizes the incommensurability between their positioning as Tejanas versus Cleófilas' positioning as a Mexican immigrant. As such, Cisneros layers the physical geography of Tejas alongside the social geography of Seguín to show how Cleófilas faces rejection because she cannot be read as either American or Tejana.

As Debra A. Castillo and María Socorro Tabuenca Córdoba note, such readings of Cleófilas within Latinx feminisms have thus far been largely drawn from our perspectives as feminists within the United States (55). We can only begin to understand her positionality as an immigrant in Texas by reading how she remains only a partially intelligible citizen—and thus human—in Seguín and in the community cartography rendered through the Tejanxs in the *cuento*. Because the bulk of Latina and Chicana feminist analysis of border feminist literature has assessed and analyzed is subjects from a U.S. positioning, we have also become limited in our understanding of *cuentos* that cross and traverse these distinctions. Instead, as Castillo and Tabuenca Córdoba note, we must work from a "politics of location by which partiality and fragmentation rather than universality or coherence delimit the conditions of possibility for claims to knowledge, whether dominant culture-based or border-inflicted" (232). That is, literary critics and scholars must first understand how these *cuentos* narrate partiality and ask us to be critical of community cartographies that also reject women like Cleófilas.

Mapping the Decolonial

If, as Emma Pérez proposes, "the colonial imaginary hides something, then the decolonial imaginary in a third space recognizes what is left out" (55), then Cisneros' community cartographies in narratives like "Pilón," "Tepeyac," and "Woman Hollering Creek," bring us to the thresholds of recognizing these spatialized, classed, and gendered social mappings. As such, Cisneros' community cartographies trace how aspects of our collective histories, communities, and relationships can never be recovered or fully articulable through an imagining of space as something to own, conquer, or possess again. Moreover, such a reading practice make visible how single spaces, like Tepeyac or Seguín, hold multiple contested and competing genealogies and intimate social orientation. Like Cisneros' narrators show us, such relationships are often fragmented, partial, or no longer accessible due to time, erasure, forced displacement, or coerced assimilation. Unlike the social mappings narrated in Cisneros' other *cuentos* examined here, "Woman Hollering Creek" begins by narrating space through Cleófilas's alienation and isolation from Seguín's community.

"Woman Hollering Creek" thus shows us the tensions, violences, and erasures of and by Tejanx communities. Cleófilas makes her keen awareness of space in Texas legible through her isolation and exclusion. Cleófilas remains attuned to the ways in which she both does and does not belong in either geographic or social context and how such connections "map" her social world in the United States and Mexico quite differently. For even as she feels that there is little to do in Monclova, Coahuila, she is also not socially isolated there. Her initial mention of the mundane activities of accompanying aunts and godmothers on visits and socializing with her friend Chela stand in stark contrast to the social ostracism that she faces in Seguín (44). There is a communal rejection of Cleófilas by the women of Seguín, which the narrator herself liken as a trade of one "town of gossips" for another (50). She notes the distancing between houses which

offers “no more privacy because of it” (50), and this itself marks the greatest strain on Cleófilas:

> Because the towns here are built so that you have to depend on husbands. Or you stay home. Or you drive. If you’re rich enough to own, allowed to drive, your own car.
>
> There is no place to go. Unless one counts the neighbor ladies. Soledad on one side, Dolores on the other. Or the creek. (51).

Cleófilas offers a critique that not only makes legible the ways in which these spatial constraints reinforce a patriarchal and misogynistic order in Seguín, but the “here” also places the United States in tension with Mexico. As we can remember from her social mappings of Monclova, Seguín does not have the same fluidity, openness, and social emphasis that she once had. “Here,” Cleófilas feels retrained, confined, and ostracized from the general population and social space of this Texas and U.S. town, and from “here” there is nowhere else to go. In place of an elsewhere, Cleófilas’ attention comes back to the creek, which initially draws her in with its strange naming and fluid orientation, but later becomes an “alive thing, a thing with a voice all its own...calling in its high, silver voice” (51). The active, personified, agential description of the creek stands in contrast to the rigidity and seclusion she feels in Seguín surrounded by shops with “nothing, nothing, nothing of interest” (50).

When Tuck and Yang refuse to articulate what decolonization may look like for the “settler,” they position decolonization not so much as opposed to reconciliation but as unwilling to reckon with the language of conquest necessary to articulate such an imaginary. It would not only be a social and political imaginary of violence, but one that further renders the undocumented, Black, and/or Indigenous subjects as unseen, unheard, and inadmissible at all border points. They note that “decolonization is not accountable to settlers, or settler futurity. Decolonization is accountable to Indigenous sovereignty and futurity” (35). And yet a collective and mappable futurity must be encompassing of subaltern subjectivities muted—if not

eliminated entirely—by the language of coloniality, citizenship, sovereignty, and nationalism. This imaginary of Indigenous decolonization, too, seems to halt at the U.S.-Mexico border, but what about the rest of the Américas? It is not a settler move to innocence for BIPOC to want to live and to envision their own futurity. Even as decolonization diminishes Black life and the lives of those who have experienced forced immigrations and expulsions from every shore, communities of color continue to articulate their liberation via the "decolonial." Decolonization cannot speak for us—it is an ideological reimagining of mass deportation and genocide of the subaltern subjects we have already erased, killed, and neglected within these geographies we have bordered.

Even as decolonization as articulated by Tuck and Yang renders itself largely incommunicable, it does call on the limitations of a liberation expressed solely by literary and intellectual work. While Tuck and Yang do not deny that this type of intellectual work can "free the mind," they convincingly argue that the "decolonizing the mind" is insufficient as an end in itself (19). Moreover, their conclusion articulates decolonization not as an "and," or an additive to existing paradigms, but as an "elsewhere" for liberation and abolition (36). I extend that elsewhere here to consider how a deterritorialized geopoetics emphasizes the capacity of literary language to construct environments in texts without relying on languages of conquest and exclusion. It is not limited to the naming of places and spaces, such as rivers or towns, but expands to the ways in which these places and spaces *cannot* be named. We may think that the description of an *arroyo* or a *milpa* engages us to think spatially about a text—its location, its position, and its history. As I discussed in the previous chapter, Zamora O'Shea's *El Mesquite* utilizes "Palo Alto" to shift multiple narrative and geographic orientations in the text. Similarly, Cisneros' *cuentos* make us attend to social geographies without being limited to the language of

re-territorialization that organizes Zamora O'Shea's text. Instead of thinking within the parameters of colonial tools like mapping and Western geopolitical, geosocial orientations, or through state-centered discourses of sovereignty, nationhood, and territoriality, a de-territorialized geopoetics and community cartography can shift us to reconsider how land has always been expressed and considered as territory—even through decolonization. Furthermore, as I argue through my analysis of the Restlawn Cemetery and Guadalupe Cemetery, even our community failures show us whom we have failed and how. In this way, the possibility of mapping, conceiving, and living community within an ethical politic remains within reach.

What Cisneros' community cartography makes possible, then, is a decolonial futurity that responsibly engages with communities and individuals beyond national borders and state-centered discourses of citizenship and nation. As Cisneros' collection speaks to us from multiple geopoints along, within, and at times outside of both the United States and Mexico, she never asks us to remain static in these spaces. The narrative mappings rendered in these two stories do not articulate space and geography as simply terrain or territory; they do not call on us to consider border spaces as spaces to be repossessed or reconquered. Rather, they show how deterritorialized literary geographies can help reorient our focus onto the complicated social relationships that actually exist and coexist in these contested spaces. By making clear the limitations of racial, ethnic, and state nationalisms and citizenships that obscure immigrant positionalities and destroy possibilities for coalition between border subjects, Cisneros' critics and readers alike are called to spatialize in new ways that serve and show care for all communities.

Furthermore, Cisneros' *cuentos* mark the fractured chronologies and fragmented orientations across numerous geographic locations, revealing new spatial possibilities within

Latinx and Chicanx feminist literatures that gives wholeness to our communities. Her narratives do not invent a new border feminist geography, but rather utilize disinvention to rupture our understanding of and formation of geography as delineated by the nation-state. As such, the final lines in "Pilón" stand as testament to the necessity of imagining the nation as one that has always been invented. Such a reading of Cisneros' *cuentos* should not glorify the possibility of other world-building without holding itself responsible to the bodies, communities, and lands it is attempting to overwrite and erase. I still believe that what "Pilón" best illustrates, is that the geopolitics of borders, citizenships, and nations are *puro cuento*.[xxiii] Here, a return to the disclaimer that precedes *Caramelo* is apt: "If, in the course of my inventing, I have inadvertently stumbled on the truth, perdónenme." With this in mind, understanding the nation-state as an invention is not only necessary to constructing a deterritorialized reality, but essential to constructing a coalition between Black, Indigenous, and People of Color. Cisneros' writings emerge as a geocriticism that defines space, time, and memory as not tethered to a recapitulation of nationalism and state citizenship. Ultimately, Cisneros' *cuentos* can expand our understanding of narrative space as dialogical and conversant with multiple border subjectivities that show us how mapping the decolonial is beholden to multiple community cartographies at the borders of subjectivity.

Notes

Parts of Chapter 2 are taken from my published article "Invented Geographies" (2020) in *MELUS* as well as my forthcoming piece titled, "Mapping the Decolonial." I would like to thank Kirby Brown and Geneva Gano for their support and important feedback on this chapter.

[i] Notable scholarship that considers urbanity and rurality in Cisneros' work includes: Juanita Heredia's "Down These City Streets" (1993), Helene C. Weldt-Basson's "Women and the City," Elisabeth Mermann-Jozwiak's "In the Corazón of the Capital," and Mary Pat Brady's "The Contrapuntal Geographies."

[ii] Portions of this chapter, including selected close readings on the three *cuentos*, "Pilón," "Tepeyac," and "Woman Hollering Creek," are from my *MELUS* publication and forthcoming publication in *Ay Tú!*.
[iii] See *Border Women: Writing from La Frontera* (2002). For these scholars, such romanticizing of the border further erases the struggles of the lives on the Mexican side of *la frontera*.
[iv] The 2019 shooting in El Paso, Texas is one of the most recent reminders of the consequences of anti-immigrant rhetoric. I would like to extend my gratitude to one of my anonymous reviewers for suggesting bringing attention to this particular event as it highlights the material violence posed by the "immateriality" of language.
[v] This creates a literary mapping that is both common in and unique to Sandra Cisneros' body of work and can be readily seen in texts like *The House on Mango Street* and *Woman Hollering Creek*.
[vi] See history of Café La Blanca on their website.
[vii] See David J. Vázquez's *Triangulations: Narrative Strategies for Navigating Latino Identity* (2011) for his analysis of *Caramelo* as a circular migration novel (178).
[viii] Translation: A Mexican and indigenous textile that is often worn or used to carry/secure infants or goods. See work by María Herrera-Sobek, Julia Andres, and Mary Jo Lanham on *Caramelo* and the *rebozo*.
[ix] Here, I refer to the work by Olga Herrera, Elisabeth Mermann-Jozwiak, and Paul B. Wickelson on space within *Caramelo*.
[x] The song "Farolito" was written and performed by iconic Mexican singer-song writer Agustin Lara in the 1930s. The title's literal English translation is "luminaria" or "little light."
[xi] To emphasize, the Pharr community cemetery project was, and is, a worthwhile project, but not only because it attempts to name those that have died across this border region. Rather, it is its failure to spatialize and to name, which make clear how some border subjects remain at the border of subjectivity even in community-led projects.
[xii] As Pérez notes, diasporic narratives can lend us as readers the scope with which to encounter the making of space and the colonial process through which geography is often configured in both literary and non-literary mappings.
[xiii] See Tuck and Yang, 2012.
[xiv] See Spivak's essay, "Subaltern Studies: Deconstructing Historiography."
[xv] The Virgen's *tilma*, which carries numerous symbolic interpretations that defy any single meaning or tradition, is manifested through the reference of that green-blue sky stamped with thin stars from the heavens.
[xvi] La Basilica and the name of the city only hold meaning and value to readers that are familiar with the figuration of Our Lady of Guadalupe or a geographical rendering of Mexico City more broadly.
[xvii] See *The Labyrinth of Solitude*, "Critique of the Pyramid," for Paz's discussion on the constellated positioning and overwriting of histories (Aztec, Mexican, and Spanish) through a single material structure.
[xviii] Italics/emphasis are my own on "above," but are true to the printed text on "tlapalería."
[xix] Cisneros's narrator is both making a critique of capitalism when she asks us to look above the merchants, but she is also self-aware of the class and social structures in place that can undermine such a Marxist critique. A Marxist reading of "Tepeyac" here would fall short of understanding the nexuses of class, hierarchy, poverty, tourism, and consumerism alongside the reading of race, religion, ethnicity, language, and history.
[xx] See Brady's chapter, "Sandra Cisneros's Contrapuntal 'Geography of Scars'" in *Extinct Lands, Temporal Geographies*.
[xxi] And yet, the title of this story can reveal a specific location to those familiar with the geographies of Texas, like the title of "Tepeyac" does and it can also create distance and inaccessibility to those unfamiliar with this small town in Guadalupe County.

[xxii] Refer to University of Texas at Arlington's archives titled, "Border Land: The Struggle for Texas, 1820-1879.

xxiii Here, I use "geopolitics of borders" to not only refer to mapping space, but also to refer to the concepts of "citizenship" and "legality."

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CHAPTER THREE: "THE DEATH OF BORDER SUBJECTIVITY: ON VIOLENCE, EMBODIMENT, AND NATION IN SARA URIBE'S *ANTÍGONA GONZÁLEZ* AND THE U.S.-MEXICO BORDER"

"*Adultos mayores, obreros de la construcción y de la maquila, taxistas, un joven recolector de basura, familias, comerciantes y un enfermero son parte de las [catorce] víctimas de la masacre de Reynosa*/Seniors, construction and maquiladora workers, taxi drivers, a garbage collector, families, merchants, and one nurse are part of the [fourteen] victims of the massacre in Reynosa," reports Carlos Manuel Juárez for *Elefante Blanco*, a Mexican news outlet. Headlines in the United States covering the June 2021 mass shooting tell us: "At least 14 killed" (*The Washington Post*), "19 killed, including 15 innocent bystanders" (*KTLA*), "Some victims in deadly Reynosa shootings identified" (*KRGV*). The massacre is but the latest in the lengthy territorial disputes between cartels, what the Mexican news media broadly refers to as "crime organizations," and the Mexican government. Meanwhile across the Canadian border, 751 bodies of mostly Indigenous children are found at a former residential school in Saskatchewan in June following a previous discovery of over two hundred Indigenous bodies in the province of Kamloops in May.[i] In the United States, thirty-five bodies with confirmed African ancestry are found in Tulsa, Oklahoma that date back to the 1921 Tulsa Race Massacre.[ii] The dead are with us even when they are only legible through an approximation of bodies and gravesites. The dead, in their invisibility, erasure, and absence appear in contrast to the precision of the settler nations where they are found, which marks how their condition remains illegible within border discourse.

Journalist Carlos Manuel Juárez lists their occupations as one way to make legible and intelligible the lives of those murdered in Tamaulipas. They were working-class people, older people, community people—it has never been enough to just say "people." We have strayed far

from this sense of humanity. Gayatri Spivak warns us not make subalternity interchangeable with oppression—for the working-class are oppressed but not outside of capital logic (45-46).[iii] To be oppressed, then, is not the same as being unintelligible. Spivak adds, in her 1992 interview with Leon De Kock, that:

> When you say [the subaltern] cannot speak, it means that if speaking involves speaking and listening, this possibility of response, responsibility, does not exist in the subaltern's sphere...; the only way that that speech is produced is by inserting the subaltern into the circuit of hegemony, which is what should happen, as subaltern... No activist wants to keep the subaltern in the space of difference. To do *a thing*, to work for the subaltern, means to bring it into speech.
> The third thing, which is the worst, that is, you don't give the subaltern voice. You work *for* the bloody subaltern, you work against subalternity... (46)

Spivak's contributions to subaltern studies illuminates the tasks ahead of us in Chicanx studies and border studies. Spivak's words from 1992 ring loudly in 2022 when I see the profound attachment to Chicanidad and Latinidad across border studies even in an epoch of continual violence against the Other across the U.S.-Mexico border—the rootedness of anti-Blackness and simultaneous Indigenous erasure and cooption are but two examples of such violences. My attempt to frame it as an epoch—as something that can be measured temporally—is perhaps already a logical fallacy; this epoch will outlive us all. This is not to deny that some of us are, or have been, oppressed and marginalized, but to acknowledge that when we speak in academic forums—such as this dissertation—we are no longer in alterity. In Chicanx and border studies, we have forgotten those that are not only without voice, but without names and without bodies in these tragic borderlands. The dead across and within national borders remind us that subalternity leaves many to die in obscurity and anonymity, which is to say—to die without access to basic dignity, to humanity. While the death of some marginalized subjects gains visibility, sparks outrage, and propels momentum for change—and to be clear, I believe this is the least that the dead are owed—the death of others is already at the border of subjectivity and intelligibility. As

M. Jacqui Alexander reminds us in *Pedagogies of Crossing* (2005), "The dead do not like to be forgotten" (290); *los muertos y los desaparecidos* await such a wakening across border scholarship.

I begin my analysis of Sara Uribe's *Antígona González* with Spivak's work on subalternity even when, at first glance, it seems to threaten the core politics of the text. As I suggest later about the work, it *is* a call for action from the living and such action could be read as an attempt to take the subaltern/*el otro* out of obscurity and erasure into visibility and presence. I do not wholly believe that this move would be decidedly wrong, but it is not what Uribe's text does. Rather, it works *through* subalternity—not *for* subalternity and not *in its place*. In utilizing obscurity, absence, and death, the text reveals the ways in which a conceptualization of humanity, bound to the violence of the nation-state, continues to silence and make invisible alterity on both sides of the border. It shows us the exhaustibility of border subjectivity, renders it to mean nothing but a *desire* and *fixation* for location amidst dislocation, which is perhaps the greatest threat to Chicanx and border studies. It does this by making visible how subjects come to be disposable in the Américas—by way of gender, race, sexual identity, and class—and how such processes are not the same as being disposed of without a trace. The text does not preoccupy itself with oppression, geopolitics, or border politics; rather, I argue that it brings us back to the indistinction between subaltern life and death, which ultimately reveals the very limitations of a an imagined community whose politics, citizenships, and nationalisms impart violence beyond territorialization.

The dead remind us of the core principles we have come to collectively identify across humanistic studies: a shared commitment to the value of all life and the basic necessity of human rights, justice, and equality. I begin with the latest massacre in the state of Tamaulipas to

consider the ways in which death can mark, or make partially legible, *el otro*/the other. As these headlines state, the dead, regardless of racial or ethnic designation, cannot accurately be tallied in any nation or geography. Some are rendered visible, via occupation or age, but others fall into anonymity. *Antígona González* begins with a similar admission. To enter the realm of subaltern death is to enter uncertainty: *Me llamo Antígona González y busco entre los muertos el cadaver de mi hermano*. /My name is Antígona González and I am searching among the dead for the corpse of my brother" (6). She does not declare her brother's name, but instead puts him into an entirely subsumable, collective category of *entre los muertos*. Within this grouping, her brother is not singular, but rather placed into a type of necrocommunity, a community of the dead. Antígona proceeds to locate his remains *entre los muertos*/among the dead: "*Contarlos a todos. / Nombrarlos a todos para decir: este cuerpo podría ser el mío. / El cuerpo de unos de los míos. / Para no olvidar que todos los cuerpos sin nombre son nuestros cuerpos perdidos*/Count them all. /Name them all so as to say: this body could be mine. The body of one of my own. So as to not forget that all the bodies without names are our lost bodies" (6-7). In making Tadeo a part of a collective, Antígona seeks to restore agency to the dead even when the dead do not necessarily seek such agency or power themselves. It is Antígona's attempt to bring these bodies into what Spivak would call hegemonic discourse. However, subalternity does not allow for Antígona to speak in its place. It becomes legible in the way it shows us that we cannot make it legible—we cannot force *el otro* into speaking because *el otro* cannot be named or accounted for even when grouped into the framework of a collective necrocommunity.

Antígona's desire to count each body, to name each body, is one already positioned within impossibility. The dead cannot be accounted for in such totality, which simultaneously rejects the formation of a necrocommunity or populace of the dead. When Antígona seeks to

intercede between the living and the dead—by forming a global community of the dead—the impossibility of community formations opens itself to the reader. What Antígona's desire *does* articulate is the precariousness of subalternity. When she says, "*este cuerpo podría ser el mío*/this body could be mine," she reveals both the fraught nature of liberalism (we should care about these bodies because this could be me) and the urgency of the biopolitical (if any body can be rendered indistinct through subalternity, could ours be next?). Certainly, as the history of racial, colonial, gender, and class violence in the Américas shows, the bodies of Black, Indigenous, Asian, and people of color are not only made disposable; such disposability is often sanctioned by the nation-state. What Uribe makes possible through a literary rendering, is the ways in which many more bodies are disposed of without ever reaching intelligibility. To know that others die without a trace, face, or name is a threat on all bodies beyond and across the borderlands.

Citizenships and belonging mean nothing in an epoch of violence. The massacre in Tamaulipas—where both "citizens" and "noncitizens" of Mexico as well as those that fell between the fault lines of "innocent" and "guilty" were killed—shows the ease with which the legible becomes illegible. Uribe writes, "*Qué cosa es el cuerpo cuando alguien lo desprovee de nombre, de historia, de apellido? Que era una probabilidad. Cuando no hay faz, ni rastro, ni huellas, ni señales. Que los iban a traer aquí. ¿Qué cosa es el cuerpo cuando está perdido?*/What thing is the body when someone strips it of a name, a history, a family name? That there was a chance. When there is no face or trail or traces or signs. That they were going to bring them here. What thing is the body when it's lost" (110-11)? For even in death, not all can or will be named, claimed, or identified by the nations, states,

communities, or families from which they originate. And yet, the bulk of border studies has relied heavily on frameworks and ideologies of nationalism as the epicenter from where identity, like border subjectivity, culminates. All bodies can enter subalternity—and it is in this detranscendentalized spatiality, where subalternity exposes the unnecessity of origin as it relates to questions of "legality," "documentation," or "belonging," that I begin my analysis of Uribe's work.[iv]

Up until this point in my dissertation, I have examined how border environments and geographies both make and unmake the identities we have thus labeled and identified as "border subjectivities." As María Elena Zamora O'Shea's *El Mesquite* shows us, multiple border subjectivities—ethnic, racial, gendered, national, classed—collide across the geography of the Texas-Mexico border which urges us to reconsider how Tejanx literary studies and border feminisms articulates a detrimental "genealogical" relationship to land. Sandra Cisneros' "Pilón" shows us the power of disinvention across border subjectivity and unlocatable geographies as ways to further contest the mythos of homelands and nationalisms. Here, I remain attentive to questions of subjectivity across border politics but shift also to read how "necropolitics" and "biopower" can inform our reading of texts like Sara Uribe's *Antígona González* (2016) and the death of subaltern subjects. Because the text illustrates the violent collision between citizenship, death, and the body, it also produces novel ways to reckon with displacement, disembodiment, and the nation-state for readers across the Americás.

I utilize Nicole Guidotti-Hernández's analytic from her monograph *Unspeakable Violence* which utilizes violence itself as a frame to examine "racial, sexual, gender, and class inequalities, [because] it renders visible the unspeakable and demands more openness in a way that nationalisms, mestizaje, and resistance-assimilation do not" (295-96). She suggests that the

predicament in both Chicanx and border studies evolves from our inability to take responsibility for the historical violence acted upon women and Indigenous communities—a responsibility which "would allow survivors of violence and their kin to mourn and move forward with a mindfulness about history" (296). While I also see the stakes of the work before us in Chicanx studies and Latinx literary studies as one that begins with such an admission and responsibility, I build from Guidotti-Hernández's contributions by not seeing this as an allowance for resolution or as an authorization for grieving communities to "move forward." Certainly, our field's fixation since 1848 has been on the futurity of our Chicanx identities specifically and borderlands studies more broadly. I believe this to be itself a form of violence against *el otro*. We have become so overly preoccupied with our futurity and community-building that we have further neglected the undocumented, the im/migrant, and the Indigenous. In the deaths of *los otros*, those that cannot be named or located, we see not only the greatest limit of coalitional possibility, but also of the futurity of an ethnocentric field that does not account for the dead of *el otro* whose identity is not derived from the border.

I am reminded of the proverb written in the Museo de las Momias de Guanajuato, where tourists pay money to see mummified corpses dating back to 17th century Mexico, the inscription reads: "*Cómo te ves, me vi*/*y como me ves, te verás.*" The translation to English fails as most translations do, but it roughly says, "How you look, I once looked. And how you see me now, you will also appear." The proverb, a true irony, brings us back to the myth of an equitable death. In her lecture, "Necropolitics and Ways of Dying," feminist philosopher Rosi Braidotti questions the ways in which death has been broadly conceived as a universal phenomenon: "Universal? Human? Not mutual; loaded with power differential. They are, in fact, terms that almost police the access to what *counts* as humanity. Counting as human is an incredible entitlement. Not

everybody does or we do so differentially—in materially, embedded, and embodied perspective. We are not human to the same degree...The degree to which you access full humanity gives you different degrees of mortality" (13:47-14:25). Certainly, im/migrant death, Indigenous death, Black death, and Asian death are not equal. The death of the poor, not the working-class, is also elsewhere within that elusive imagining of humanity.

As bell hooks writes in *Homegrown: Engaged Cultural Criticism*, the dominant culture cannot remember their dead. "How can they, when the U.S. is involved in the wholesale slaughter of peoples of color all over the world, every day? How can we really talk about honoring death" (127)? *Honoring* the dead is not sufficient. In Chicanx studies, we have long studied the ways in which the death of Latinxs, like those from the 1970 Chicano Moratorium in Los Angeles, have gone unnoticed in a white supremacist U.S. national imaginary. Uribe's text makes us think about bodies on the border of such a subjectivity—that is, the unnamable and unknowable of border subject formation. When we name border subjectivity, whom or what do we really intend to articulate? Whom or what will be counted, seen, grieved, and buried also defines whom will be rendered intelligible within a particular articulation of border politics. The answer to this question imparts many responsibilities on Chicanx scholars—how can we be defined by a border subjectivity that has been theorized to the point that it is synonymous with culture, genealogy, and identity—and also understand border subjectivity as another violent face of nationalism and settler occupation? Of course, the risk of such a claim is manifold. On one end, many can interpret this as a denial of the tangible and palpable oppression of people along the U.S.-Mexico border. It may also seem like an outright rejection of that which has given us community. However, to those, I ask, what bodies, identities, subjectivities, and relationalities have we invited into that community? The bodies of *el otro*, I argue, have never been encompassed in such formations.

The Dislocation of Border Studies

Thus far in Chicanx, Latinx, and border literature and cultural studies, we have broadly applied Gloria E. Anzaldúa's term, the "borderlands," to refer to the collision and overlapping of numerous subject positions and dynamics of power across the U.S.-Mexico border. We understand, too, that borderlands serves as a capacious signifier that is expanded by Kimberlé Crenshaw's work on intersectionality. In this way, we are no longer limited to reading borders only in terms of space and geography but understand that they articulate the very crossroads of multiple subjectivities—both seen and unseen. In the span of over forty years, Women of Color feminist scholarship has attempted to make legible the ways class, gender, sexual identity, and race both brings us both closer and further away from knowing, naming, and understanding the differences and similarities between communities of color. Perhaps most importantly, this collective work shows us the sincere commitment to finding some semblance of community or solidarity even in and across difference. We have named these theoretical and discursive pursuits as cultural pluralism, multiculturalism, and, most recently, as transnationalism. I see these terms ultimately as linguistic placeholders for that which we cannot yet name as anything but the making of a community in and of difference.

As the words by Trinh T. Minh-ha, Audre Lorde, and Saba Mahmood make clear, our communities are not reducible to visible "differences," and, yet, difference is often the only way in which communities can begin to articulate collectivity despite the obstructions of gender, race, language, culture, identity, class, and national borders.[v] It is with this vision of community by Women of Color feminist scholarship that I begin to examine Uribe's work and which I return to again and again in my scholarship. As a woman of color, I take heed of the urgency of the biopolitical across the Américas but recognize the distance that the very border,

which continues to define my existence within the United States, also occludes my understanding of the illegible in other parts of the world. As such, I begin this chapter with a hesitation to speak on a text by a Mexican author because of the lengthy history of U.S. Latinx scholars speaking for Mexican subjects. Like Debra A. Castillo and María Socorro Tabuenca Córdoba note in *Border Women* (2002), too often as Chicanx scholars we have failed border subjects by flattening the differences between Mexican and Mexican American women. The split is not so easily rendered into these two groups, but asks us to think more broadly about women from multiple communities designated as Indigenous, Central American, and Latin American, that remain at the border of intelligibility, legibility, and visibility within border discourse.

Abraham Acosta notes in *Thresholds of Illiteracy* (2014) that when Castillo and Tabuenca Córdoba identify "the illegitimacy of [U.S. writers like Gloria] Anzaldúa, we arrive at an 'epistemological threshold' of how we have articulated border studies more broadly (214-15). Acosta adds:

> For if the purity or unmediated properness of the Mexican side of the border is the primary contention, and if the speech that emerges from within this field of intelligibility is therefore assumed to be a direct and entirely unmediated relation between things and words, then what is ultimately being asserted about the category of speech, of speaking beings (that which counts as speech and who counts as a speaking being) and of their allotment along that other, metaphorical or mythological side of the border that is ascribed to Anzaldúa's borderlands? (215)

Acosta argues that Anzaldúa's il/legitimacy to "speak" is ultimately less significant than Castillo and Tabuenca Córdoba's supposition that reading the writing of Mexican women will radically amend our understanding of border feminisms. Similarly, in reading a Mexican literary text, I move border studies away from our U.S.-centric modes of reading, thinking, and analyzing "the border." When we truly open border literary studies away from singular geographic and

monolingual traditions and reading practices, we decouple "Chicanidad" from border literature in expansive ways that welcomes the multiple communities we have neglected, silenced, forgotten, acted upon violently through a Chicanx nationalist imaginary. In reading these textual dislocations of border studies, we can see that border subjectivity constituted in such ways is neither unilateral nor viable.

I dislocate "border studies" from only signifying a chasm between the United States and Mexico, by assessing the core ideologies that comprise a border subjectivity. Uribe's text does not concern itself with the symbolic, which has been at the core of our work in Chicanx studies, but grapples directly with the biopolitical and geopolitical precarity of *el otro*. What location does Antígona speak from and to whom? Does space, as both a spatial and geographical concept, transmit meaning in Antígona's search for Tadeo's body? The text's initial publication in Spanish and in Mexico grounds many of its geopolitics around Mexican politics, but it also renders these national precisions as ultimately futile within its discourse of necropolitics and im/migrant subjectivity. What Uribe's text places and locates, then, is how geography has always been encoded to render specific im/migrant subjectivities as unreadable, illegible. And we need not only look at Uribe's text as evidence of this, but also take inventory of the totality of Mexican, Latin American, Latinx, and Chicanx archives to understand how space and subjects have always been enmeshed in inextricable ways that attempt to overwrite the other. In an early exchange between Antígona and her brother, Tadeo, whom we can only momentarily place "elsewhere"—that is, outside of a locatable geography—Tadeo tells his sister:

> *Son de los mismos. Nos van a matar a todos, Antígona. Son de los mismos. Aquí no hay ley. Son de los mismos. Aquí no hay país. Son de los mismos. No hagas nada. Son de los mismos. Piensa en tus sobrinos. Son de los mismos. Quédate quieta, Antígona. Son de los mismos. Quédate quieta. No grites. No pienses. No busques. Son de los mismos...*

> They’re one and the same. They’re going to kill all of us, Antígona. They’re one and the same. There’s no law here. They’re one and the same. There’s no country here. They’re one and the same. Don’t do anything. They’re one and the same. Think of your nephews. They’re one and the same. Keep quiet, Antígona. They’re one and the same. Keep quiet. Don’t shout. Don’t think. Don’t search. They’re one and the same... (26-27)

Tadeo’s words, here, disrupt the ability for readers to map Tadeo’s body onto a specific geographical site. His condemnation casts a wider net on class, elitism, nationalist politics, and questions of sovereignty that exceed a Mexican spatiality. It is not any single nation, country, or space that is to blame, but all of them. *They* are those to blame for the disappeared— his own disappearance and those of countless others. *They* are all the same—there is no law, no regulation, no order. Borders do not protect or preserve anything but the nations that rely on their existence. Like borders, people who continue to reify the border do not seek the liberation of all. To be killed and to be made to disappear is not preventable in any geographic sense; *they* can and will kill us all. The slip into subalternity is all too accessible. Who exactly Tadeo means in his articulation of “they” I can only speak to through my own subjectivity as a U.S. born woman of color from the Texas-Mexico border. I see it through the atrocities across two nations on the women of Juarez, Mexico and El Paso, Texas, the missing and murdered Indigenous women both in the U.S., those along the U.S.-Mexico border and U.S.-Canadian border, the black women that have been shot by police officers and are yet to be given justice as well as the recent surge of attacks on Asians, Asian Americans, and Pacific Islanders since the beginning of the COVID pandemic in 2019. “They” is an indictment of us all—*son y somos de los mismos*. A community formation by any name that does not hold itself accountable for *all* its dead and for *all* its missing, is still a community seeking the power to destroy everything but itself.

Tadeo’s spatialization in this moment—“*Aquí no hay ley...Aquí no hay país* / *Here* there is no law, no country” (26)—places Tadeo and *los otros* in a mappable geography, which is at

the core of the narrative. Where is he? Which is to ask, where are *los otros*/the others? Where is "here?" I read "aquí" not in opposition to a Mexican or U.S. nationalist imaginary, what we might also call a transborder or transnational imaginary, but as a naming of the condition of subalternity produced by and through any ideology that seeks power of both land and the people that come across those lands. Let me return to the text's tangible spatialization. *Antígona González* was initially commissioned by Mexican actress and director Sandra Muñoz in 2012 in an effort to bring visibility to the increasing number of murders across her home state of Tamaulipas. The state of Tamaulipas, which is located just across the river from where I was born and raised in South Texas, connects Mexico to the United States at the Pharr International Bridge. Tamaulipas has seen nearly two decades of disputes over land and territory by the cartel known as "Los Zetas," or what for a long time Rio Grande Valley and Mexican residents would only refer to as "La ultima letra" / the last letter, and most recently the "Gulf Cartel." The disputes between both organizations have been lengthy and bloody with numerous "casualties" from citizens from not only the U.S. and Mexico, but Central and South America as well. The narratives that Uribe's text brings together are personal.

In 2009, Oscar Varela, then 20, was kidnapped at gunpoint in a restaurant in Tamaulipas by the cartel and was never heard from again. Oscar, who would now be 32-years-old, was in my graduating class at PSJA North. In a testimony given to Texas legislators about border violence in 2010, his mother Patricia Martinez said, "You waste a lot of time with definitions...We need solutions...My son is not a number. He's a person, and he's still missing" (Roebuck "Mexico's Drug War"). Oscar, a U.S. citizen and college student at the time, entered the positionality of *el otro* within border discourse without community clamor. While his absence was real, it was only felt by those that knew him personally; to the two separate nations and states that Oscar Varela

migrated between, he was just another disposable border subject. When Tadeo speaks again in the text he says, "*Aquí todos somos invisibles. No tenemos rostro. No tenemos nombre. Aquí nuestro presente parece suspendido...lo que occure aquí es lo verdaderamente real.* / Here we are all invisible. We have no face. We have no name. Here our present seems suspended...what happens here is what is actually real" (100-101). The threat of "casual" violence has hung over the *colonias* of Tamaulipas and the lower Rio Grande Valley for decades, and yet, the highest number of the missing and murdered are illegible im/migrants—Indigenous, non-Spanish speaking people, queer and trans people of color, children, and the poor.

The Texas-Mexico border and the violence that occurs on the border is not just what remains as a residual territorial dispute that reaches back into 1848 between the United States and Mexico. It re-emerges as numerous organizations seek to control land, resources, municipalities, *colonias*, communities, and bodies within those respective political geographies. All while "citizens" from both countries become collateral damage as cartels continue to challenge the boundaries set both by Mexico and the United States. Of course, this is not to suggest that there is a significant difference between either Mexico, the U.S., or cartel organizations. As Uribe's text suggests, *son de los mismos* / they are the same. Journalist Oscar Misael Hernández-Hernández for *Elefante Blanco* notes that there is: "*un tipo de gobernanza criminal se ha hecho visible en* [*Tamaulipas*] / a type of criminal governance has been made visible in [Tamaulipas]" (2021). His use of "visible" makes tangible how decades of political corruption have been largely invisible and illegible, a situation which continues to put its most vulnerable communities at risk of extinction. This includes "most notably" the assassinations of PRI (Partido Revolucionario Institucional) candidates, mayors for the state of Tamaulipas, and numerous journalists in the past decade. I place notably in scare quotes because these murders

have been the most publicized in both Mexican and American media while the murders of im/migrants from Central America and South America are rendered indistinct when news sources state their deaths as a collective toll or in connection only tangentially to their homelands. They are the unnamable and unlocatable subjects within border subjectivity, those whose absence and anonymity render impossible efforts of naming, locating, and placing *el otro* within a tangible dialect where justice and closure may be possible. It is a linguistic and codified process that reveals the limits of border theory by urging us to reckon with the fragments and traces that remain of the dead within the field of border studies.

Antigone to Antígona

Like with the previous chapters, I situate a nuanced reading of the text's form and genre to consider how such readings can limit our perception of the text. Here, I consider the ways in which the text's form, genre, and narrative arc facilitate their own reading politics in our broader understanding of sovereignty, nationalism, and border subjectivity. In my first chapter, I argued that the genre of *testimonio* becomes a lens with which to begin reading María Elena Zamora O'Shea's *El Mesquite* and the text's preservation of Tejanx nationalism and border feminist *autohistoria* while also giving us access to a partiality that articulates Indigenous subjects within an otherwise fracturing Tejanx discourse. Here, I argue that Sara Uribe's *Antígona González* and its poetics of *el otro*/the other allows the narrative to open itself to the urgent biopolitics and geographies of subalternity within Latino America. The text, which can be identified within multiple literary genres including as a pastiche of the Sophocles tragedy, re-envisions the Greek drama to engage in a critique of 21st century biopolitics and border and immigrant subjectivity.

Much like the 441 BC play, Uribe's text examines the ethical and legal intersections of life and death while also grounding several questions around how the nation-state differentiates between "life," "death," and "citizens."[v] Uribe's text initiates a blurring between the significations of life and death in her text, which reveals that the difference between "citizens" and "noncitizens," as subject positions, has always been a dangerous and precarious signification for precarious bodies. Unlike the Greek heroine Antigone, Antígona's narrative begins with the absence of her brother's body. Of Antigone, as "hero," Jacques Lacan asks "what is the image [she represents]" (252)? Sophocles' Antigone has been read as the archetypical filial sister who seeks the ultimate closure via the proper and just burial for the body of her brother, Polynices. Antigone also embodies a corporeal agency when she moves to bury her brother, which decidedly defies the city-state, via her Uncle Creon, in order to preserve her brother's sovereignty. In Creon's discovery that Antigone has defied him by attempting to bury Polynices' body by covering him with dust, the reader comes to understand that what is most threatening to Creon is Antigone's loyalty to some greater power, some greater law:

> CREON: And yet you dared to overstep these laws?
>
> ANTIGONE: Because it wasn't Zeus who pronounced
> these things to me, nor did Justice, companion of the gods
> below, establish such laws
> for humanity. I would never think
> your pronouncements had such strength that, being
> mortal, they could override the unwritten, ever-
> lasting prescriptions of the gods,
> for those aren't something recently made, but
> live forever, and no one knows when they
> first appeared. (29)

For Antigone, Creon's laws seek to overwrite those of a *natural* or *original* law drawn by the gods themselves. As she sees it, she is still obeying the divine laws drawn upon her as a citizen of a world fashioned by gods, but making distinct that the laws she follows transcend those

drawn by Creon unto the human subjects and citizens of Thebes. While Lacan sees Antigone as the real and splendid hero, Uribe utilizes a new narrative arch to construct a chorus of archival traces that bring focus back onto the precarious state of all border subjectivities.

The aim of this chapter is not to make an intertextual argument between the works of Sophocles and Uribe, but to arrive at an understanding of what Uribe's text ultimately discloses about disembodiment, loss, citizenships, and nations within border studies and literature. It does not give us a hero or political figure; nor does it celebrate Antígona's splendor about her singularity or exceptionality in the face of political injustice. In fact, it is Antígona's positioning as an ordinary woman that situates the urgency of the narrative she is piecing together for the reader. The text poses the following:

> *:Quién es Antígona dentro de esta escena y qué vamos a hacer con sus palabras?*
> *:Quién es Antígona González y qué vamos a hacer con todas las demás Antígonas?*
> *:No quería ser una Antígona*
> *pero me tocó.*
>
> :Who then is Antigone within such a scene and what are we to make of her words?
> :Who is Antígona González and what are we going to do with all the other Antigones?
> :I didn't want to be an Antigone
> but it happened to me. (10-11)

Here, Antígona displaces her own subjectivity. She speaks of herself and her experience not from the singular, but from the plural, the collective. She acknowledges that the searching, seeking, and mourning she experiences is experienced by many others. She is one of thousands, which is to say that she is already in a legible and intelligible community of Antígonas. In the Spanish text, Uribe writes "*no quería ser una Antígona / pero me tocó,"* in which "tocó" might be translated not only as an occurrence and happening, but as an awareness of the condition that has been placed upon her personhood. *Me tocó*—as if to say, I did not ask for this, but it was my

turn. If it had not been her, it would have been another. The language here shifts the formal elements of the text into a narrative of chance—"me tocó." This time it was "me," whose turn, chance, or fate will select the *next* Antígona? It is also not just a coincidental happenstance, but a completely physical positioning. "Tocó" also means to touch, to perform, to play; it is sensory; it can be felt, heard, and sensed just as the weight of grief and loss over Tadeo's missing body hangs over Antígona. In this way, Antígona understands the multiplicity of her own positioning and experience in ways that do not diminish her or the grief she holds within herself. Rather, she uses grief, specifically that which she feels over her brother's absent body, to bring us back to the ease with which bodies enter alterity.

In his analysis of *Antigone*, Lacan notes that Antigone's acceptance of death for her "crime" reveals a "life that is about to turn into certain death, a death lived by anticipation, a death that crosses over into the sphere of life, a life that moves into the realm of death" (248). Certainly, Sophocles' *Antigone* makes material the politics of death beyond the body of Polynices—for Antigone's own life and body signifies its own gendered and agential politic. Antigone must lose the sovereignty over her own life and body because she could not obey Creon's sovereignty and extended rule into the metropolis of Thebes. Which is to say, if citizens do not obey the nation-state, they, too, can lose their sovereignty, their freedom, and their lives. Antígona states: "*Yo también estoy desapareciendo, Tadeo. / Y todos aquí, si tu cuerpo, so los cuerpos de los nuestros. / Todos aquí iremos desapareciendo si nadie nos busca, si nadie nos nombra. / Todos aquí iremos desapareciendo si nos quedamos inermes solo viéndonos entre nosotros, viendo cómo desaparecemos uno a uno*. / I'm also disappearing, Tadeo. / And all of us here, if your body, if the body of our people. / All of us here will gradually disappear if no one searches for us, if no one names us. / All of us here will gradually disappear if we just look

helplessly at each other, watching how we disappear one by one" (164-65). Even as Antígona still seeks a community identifier—she says that we must be responsive to the bodies of "*los nuestros*"/"our own"—the next line dissolves the necessity for calling upon a single community. We are *all* at risk of disappearing into anonymity in that unmappable "here." Such specificity and abstraction releases the text from speaking only to a particular audience, group of citizens, or national community, allowing the text to open itself to Spanish-speaking communities across the Américas that intimately understand what it means to live with the risk of *losing* their bodies. The text is not about Antígona's becoming a hero or coming into her own political subjectivity, but about the multiple narratives that have remained at the border of intelligibility. Thus, understanding the formal parallels between Sophocles' *Antigone* and Uribe's *Antígona González* is more a beginning in our understanding of the text than a conclusive determination of its political work.

The text, which oscillates between the formal categories of *testimonio*, dramaturgy, and poetic activism, shifts our reading of the text from merely tragedy and spectacle, as Sophocles' *Antigone* has been most often read, and into one that moves its reader to action *off* the page. *Antígona González*, which I also consider a poem or narrative poem, distinctly breaks from the traditional tragedy which releases *Antígona González* from the limits of the pastiche and brings into focus the fragmentation of human subjectivity. Scholars like Jason De León in *Land of Open Graves* (2015) consider how partiality, specifically through material fragments like trash and articles of clothing help us to reposition the disappeared within our analysis of border subjectivity. I lean on De León's work here to read through Uribe's use of archives, narratives, and disposed oral history to create a more tangible narrative and poetic of

loss through subalternity. Uribe, for example, archives several murders in the section "*¿Es esto lo que queda de los nuestros*? / Is This All That Remains of Our People?" and begins with the murder of three gagged men whose remains were found at the Zacatequitas municipal cemetery "*que pudieron haber sido enterrados hace más de dos años* / [that] may have been buried more than two years ago" (44-45). Among these archives are also the bodies of two women and one man found executed "*cerca del límite entre Guanajuato y Querétaro* / near the border between Guanajuato and Querétaro" (52-53). In each of these cases, the bodies of the missing and murdered are placed near nameable geographies even when the very victims cannot themselves be named. The text cannot make known their names, ages, stories, or genealogies. In fact, the precision of space marks a significant contrast to the imprecision with which the dead appear in Mexico and across greater Latino America. By utilizing such "fragments" and "pieces" to build her text, Uribe not only creates new epistemological strands, but as readers we also begin to distill our understanding of how border narratives do not contain totalities. These are some stories that were able to be preserved, but there are others that remain outside of those mechanisms of memorialization and preservation. In this way, the form, its characteristics, reflect its politics.

My analysis of the text traverses between the original Spanish text by Sara Uribe and John Pluecker's, (now JD Pluecker), translation into English. One can describe Antígona González as a deeply self-reflexive text—aware of its political trajectory and its audience. Notably, in the Sur+ 2012 Mexican publication, the text ends with this dedication: "*Este libro está dedicado a todas las Antígonas y Tadeos, a los miles de desaparecidos en una guerra injusta y, por supuesto, inútil. Sin justiciar no hay descanso posible. Ni remanso alguno* / This

book is dedicated to all the Antígonas and Tadeos, to the thousands of people disappeared in a war that is unjust and, of course, useless. Without justice there is no possibility of rest. Nor any refuge at all" (204). The paratextual here displaces Antigone's presumed singularity in the world of philosophy, literature, and art. Antigone as archetype and sign can be translated to mobilize a new body politic that is not delimited by a nationalist feminism. The text is active and responsive to what Luz Elena Zamudio Rodriguez identifies as "*la problemática situación que se vive actualmente en México* / the problematic situation currently being experienced in Mexico" (37).[vi] The situation meaning Mexico's growing number of murdered and missing people, which is not limited to Mexico's borders, but increasingly visible in the rest of Latin America, the United States, and Canada, and which I attend to more specifically below.

Upon translation then, Uribe's text not only opens itself to new readerships, but explicitly makes translation a political and humanist act. The English translator, JD Pluecker states under "Final Notes and References" that they see their own body intertwined politically within the translation of Uribe's text despite their own geopositioning in the U.S. and racialized identity as a white American. Pluecker writes:

> The translation of Antígona González begins with the specificity of [Tadeo's] absent body. In a world overwhelmed by bodies, brutalized bodies, mutilated bodies, neglected bodies, ignored bodies, exploding bodies, disappeared bodies, this translation is specific to this one body, this one person, this one search. Translation becomes a response, a lifting, a hand offered to help to bear the weight. Translation is never enough, though often too much or all that we have to offer. One becomes many. (193)

Translation is also a form of passage and crossing into other experiences and other borders. These passages and crossings are safe—as readers we are not at risk of losing our own bodies. Even when we lose ourselves in a narrative, or when narratives challenge and unsettle our most cherished values and beliefs, we ultimately remain tethered to a single space—ensured by our

ability to re/locate ourselves safely once we put down the book. However, perhaps what is most striking about Uribe's text is the ways in which it does not allow us to rest comfortably as spectators or readers. In the Sophocles play, Antigone asks her sister to help her bury the body of their brother, but in Uribe's text, *we* are the ones asked: "*Me ayudarás a levantar el cadáver?* / Will you join me in taking up the body?" (170-71). Even as Pluecker translated "ayudarás" into "join"—I read it as "help," "assist,"; in other words, we are asked to become involved in a tangible way in the act of *levantando,* lifting. More specifically, we are asked to lift up a cadaver and corpse, no longer a living body, but in/animate in ways outside of the realm of normative body (and embodied) politics. The text ends with an urgent inquiry: how will we attend to the bodies of the disappeared and the dead?

The narrative's decentering of Antígona as an individual heroine is further enmeshed within the politics of Uribe's vision for the narrative. In her interview with Simón Bolívar Andean University, the poet speaks openly about the form of her text, which Uribe describes as a type of *testimonio* that prioritizes "*la voz del otro*/the voice of the other" (3:44-3:45). She suggests that by thinking of the text as a collective piece of writing—neither fiction nor non-fiction—it emerges as its own category, or genre, of writing: "*...Este libro se ha hecho a petición de otros, con otros, y para los otros. Es por decir un libro que ha pasado por muchas manos* / ...This book has been made in petition of others, with others, and for the others. It's to say a book that has passed through many hands" (3:20-3:30). Uribe's use of *testimonio* and literary journalism as genres expand the possibilities with which to consider multiple subjects in the text.

Unlike the scholarship that has followed Sophocles' *Antigone,* which has largely theorized Antigone's singular subject position within the making of kinship, country, nation, and law—*Antígona González* draws from multiple traditions and archives to bring the precarity of *el*

otro to a broader readership. Antígona's is not the only body at risk. Rather, she reminds readers there are others, *los desaparecidos*, whose bodies have already crossed that risk, past danger, and into an unnamable classification that is not definitively "death," but "unknown." By inhabiting such a sphere—where the difference between life and death, between known and unknown, is not altogether distinct—questions of subjectivity and citizenship reemerge. As such, the conventions of literary journalism and *testimonio* allow us not only to decenter the hero/heroine, but also to break from our understanding of border literature as various articulations of the *bildungsroman* centered around individual subject formation. When Uribe produces a poem built from the *collective* archives of printed news stories, oral history, and individual testimonies of subaltern death, she disrupts our dependency on the individual protagonist as anchor to the narrative. The story she presents is no longer about the grief or loss over one person from a single perspective, but collective grief and loss over so many missing and murdered that we may never be able to properly name or know across these vast borderlands.

Rupturing any assumed relationship to the long-studied Sophocles play, I see Uribe's text's fluidity in form and genre as itself disruptive of any formal literary conventions in ways that do not so much "resist" classification as they shift our gaze away from the text and onto the bodies and subjectivities that cannot rendered through text. In this way, the text does not further glorify the heroic or the exceptional, but brings us back to the urgency of coalitional and community possibility. The text is a play, a poem, a book, a novella, *testimonio*, and artistic activism, but it is also not sufficient enough of a task to archive or categorize the text in these ways unless such categorization speaks directly to the implications these categories places upon

the bodies of *los otros*. To read the text as *testimonio* is illuminating so long as it produces a practice that seeks to be accountable to the ways in which specific stories of *los desaparecidos* will never be fully known to us as readers. Who and what remains outside of this type of border literary narrativization? Who, within the community of the murdered and disappeared, will never be nameable or locatable? How do we remain responsible within border studies and border literary studies to those who have been made to disappear by two nation-states and these border communities we have so long referred to as our own?

Reading *El otro*

While the text can be placed into several literary categories, questions of form do not necessarily reveal everything about either Antígona or those whose stories are gleaned within the narrative. Rather, what form reveals is the very un/making of border subjects and subjectivity. Unlike in the dramatic form, we do not always know who is speaking, from what location, or whom they are addressing. In this way, voices, names, and stories overlap and can be disorienting to the reader who wishes to locate answers within this specific archive. In the opening pages, the actress Sandra Muñoz presents themselves to the reader with the aim to find "*...descanso de los que buscan y el de los que no han sido encontrados. / Quiero nombrar las voces de las historias que ocurren aquí* /...rest for those who are searching and for those who have not been found. / I want to name the voices behind the stories that take place here" (8-9). The book does what Uribe suggests—it shifts from a stagnant and passive literary state: "*de la poesía al activismo contra la violencia* / from poetry to activism against violence" (). We are forced to return to Spivak's warning about speaking for the subaltern.

For those of us within literary studies, we understand that literature, as W.H. Auden once wrote about poetry, "makes nothing happen" except giving us a way to speak and so it is "a way

of happening, a mouth" (Auden, lines 36-41). *Antígona González* is an occurrence where the textual reveals how communities slip into subalternity. Uribe's work can be placed amidst the works of other Women of Color that bridge together the literary and the biopolitical such as Tejana poet Amalia Ortiz's "Women of Juarez" (2006) and Cherokee poet Kim Shuck's *Murdered Missing* (2019) whose texts act as poetic call to action from two distinct geopoints to recenter the feminine body within U.S. politics. These calls are not limited to poetry but include other works Alicia Gaspar de Alba's *Desert Blood* (2005) and the collection *Keetsahnak* (2018) that show us the ways in which fiction also makes legible the violences on Latinx and Indigenous women. Uribe, in this way, joins a coalition of writers and artists that understand that language and expression can facilitate action that goes beyond representation.[vii] When the text brings us back to those bodies at the border of subjectivity across the U.S.-Mexico landscape, the text calls into consciousness the state of border discourse. It has never been enough to theorize about the border just as it has never been enough to simply give hemispheric or nationalistic representation.

Uribe's work in this section of text facilitates a particular politic of responsibility by making legible the often undocumented and untold stories of the dead and missing, which draws from numerous blogs, news outlets, activists, and academic sources to provide an unapologetic and urgent collective exposé. Uribe bring us back to the bodies of the murdered and the disappeared at each turn of the page. The text's publication in 2012 follows the notorious massacres in 2010 and 2011 in San Fernando, Tamaulipas. Tamara R. Williams writes in "Wounded Nation, Voided State," that *Antígona González* documents that those killed in both massacres were "mostly undocumented migrants from Central and South America" including 72 migrants in 2010 and 193 in 2011 (6). As Maritza Cardenas argues in *Central*

American-Americans (2018), the subject positions of both Central Americans and Central American-Americans, or any non-Mexican identity, "interrupts and suspends Latinidad" (138). These massacres reveal how non-Mexican or non-Mexican American bodies are also made to disappear into anonymity and alterity at the U.S.-Mexico border. As reported by an unnamed Ecuadorian survivor of the 2010 massacre, the im/migrant group was predominantly composed of people from Honduras, El Salvador, Brazil, and Ecuador (The Guardian 2010). Cardenas' work makes clear how Central American subjectivity has always been at dangerous odds with Mexican identity. While Cardenas primarily looks at the United States as the geographical space wherein these two subjectivities dangerously collide, the egregious mass murders in the past decade show us that numerous border spaces continue to emerge as contested and disputed geographies. Uribe's text reminds us that *el otro* is simultaneously a "global" and "local" subjectivity that can easily be silenced, erased, or displaced.

Here, I wish to be cautious not to articulate "*los desaparecidos*" and "*el otro*" as the making of another "universal" or "global" identity. While communities everywhere have their own murdered and disappeared, Uribe's text, and my own dissertation, focuses attention on those outside of such intelligible classifications. Terms like transnationality, transborder, and global do not sufficiently root out the corruption, terror, misogyny, and violence between and among community formations, nations, states, and criminal organizations. The murdered and disappeared as *los otros* reveal that there is no single border identity or subjectivity, but multiple competing for survival and futurity. As Williams notes in "Wounded Nation, Voided State," Antígona González creates an "ontological circumstance" between absence and silence that ultimately makes visible "[Antígona's] need to re-member and re-constitute the body politic, understood here in the broadest sense as the people of a society considered collectively as an

organized group of citizens, in other words, community" (11). Antígona's desire to place Tadeo into a necrocommunity, then, emerges out of her desire to place him into a nameable and countable grouping. Of course, the murdered and disappeared across the Américas are beyond our ability to count, which prevents placing such bodies into a community category, or in relation, even through death.

In her analysis in *Antigone's Claim*, Judith Butler calls Antigone's castigated positioning (after she rejects Creon's orders) the "shadowy realm" where one is "not negated, not dead, perhaps slowly dying, yes, surely dying from a lack of recognition" (81). And yet such theory still takes up Antigone's animate and living subjectivity while inadequately spatializing the subjectivity of the disappeared and the murdered. It is not that, as Butler suggests, the body is merely lacking in recognition, but that the subjectivity of *el otro* is an already infinitely illegible and unlocatable positioning. Its materiality or vitality cannot be gleaned or acknowledged because to do so would render legible and locatable the violence and hatred within ourselves. *El otro* is both a specific subject position—that which is not part of national consciousness or legible to political orders—as well as an abstract positioning—we cannot wholly define what it means to be the other because part of those qualities are not knowable by us. It is not so much outside as it is within the totality of the world, but a marked positioning where one is pushed to the outer limits of fungibility, legality, and intelligibility. Part of the work of the nation and nationalism is to make the other not only invisible and illegible, but also to render such bodies and subjectivities as disposable, inhuman, and/or nonhuman, even in death. In this way, *el otro* is neither an in-between space nor realm between two countries or two citizenships; rather, it is a designation, a station, and process where multiple citizenships, nations, and nationalisms are revealed as mechanisms that advance violence and genocide in the name of an invented

homeland and imagined community.

Williams adds that "it is within this context of blurred lines between state authorities and cartels that Antígona González emerges not to oppose an edict or transgress a Law, but to reveal the devastation, the loss" (6). Antígona's previous spatialization of an ambiguous "*aquí*" and indictment of the culpable, those she calls "*los mismos*," also confirms that blurred borders mean more than just a distinction between the state (police, government) and the cartel (drug war, disputed territories), but also those who dismiss these massacres because those killed and murdered are themselves illegible in both Mexico and the U.S. They are dually othered—migrants from another border. Uribe's inclusion of journalistic archives shows us these perimeters of subalternity. In her description of the murder of a man whose body was found at a dam, "La Venta," near Guerrero, the only identifying markers were two tattoos on his arms with the names "Josefina" and "Julio" (68-69). The mountainous region of Guerrero has seen an influx in missing and murdered cases as the communities in this area continue to find themselves caught amid territorial disputes between the Mexican government and cartel organizations. Human rights organizations like *Mocipol* (Monitor Civil de la Policía), for instance, have focused much of their activism on addressing the violent crimes, extortions, and unlawful arrests committed by Mexican police forces on Guerrero communities. In the publication, "A Panorama of the Defense of Human Rights in Mexico" (2013), *Mocipol* coordinator Matilde Perez Ramos notes that "The federal strategy of fighting organized crime was presented as combat with an enemy, as a war between the good and the bad. The presence of the [Mexican] Army in this context generated many human rights violations" (19). Perez Ramos named how "fear" of reporting resulted in the silence of Guerrero communities, which has resulted in even more

unreported disappearances and murders across the region. As Uribe's work shows, the war between "good" and "evil" is rendered futile within a nationalist imaginary. Both the Mexican army and cartels have utilized Guerrero as a battleground on which thousands of bodies are but disposable casualties in the making of territorial boundaries.

In response to the violence on its own Mexican citizens, President Andrés Manuel López Obrador's (AMLO) stated the following in his address in September of 2020: "*Ahora hay justicia para el pobre y en materia de seguridad ya no manda la delincuencia organizada, ya no hay torturas, desapariciones ni masacres (en México), se respetan los derechos humanos y se castiga al culpable, sea quien sea" /* "Now, there is justice for the poor and in matters of security, organized crime no longer rules, there are no more tortures, disappearances nor massacres (in México), human rights are respected and the guilty are punished, no matter who they are" (Nogueda 2020).[viii] And yet, the death toll in Mexico continues to rise. Journalist José Luis Martínez S. notes, "*El espectáculo de la violencia y la muerte se ha vuelto cotidiano* / The spectacle of violence and death has become ordinary" (2021). While we can certainly infer that AMLO's words aim to protect Mexico as a nation (its positioning within the global stage), AMLO's negation of the ongoing violence in Mexico, especially against women and the poor, is even more fraught.

AMLO's claim that there is justice and that cartel organizations no longer hold Mexico by the throat opposes the staggering statistics collected by *Causa en Común*, a Mexican organization that archives human rights issues. Between January and June of 2021, the organization reported the discovery of 509 clandestine grave sites, 461 reported cases of torture, and the dismembering and/or destruction of 342 corpses primarily within the states of Guanajuato, Jalisco, Chihuahua, Veracruz, and Michoacán (1). Similarly, *Antígona González* damns the state of our humanity across national borders by bringing us to the threshold of

perception of the subaltern. The narrative provides textual snapshots of bodies that have been found, without name, face, or identification, but leaves us with the understanding that there are many thousands more whose bodies will never be found. I bring us back to my classmate Oscar whose mother elected to never run an obituary—he is similarly caught somewhere between il/legibility and somewhere between life and death at the Texas-Mexico border.

I see the work of border literature not needing to speak for, but to respond to Uribe's text, the voices and narratives it amplifies, and the bodies it prioritizes. While Uribe does not speak specifically to the violence against women of color, the death of *el otro* is the death of us all. The conditions are also no different than what we experience in the United States when the government not only ignores the deaths of im/migrants, transpeople, transpeople of color, BIPOC, women, the homeless, the working-class, and those existing in indistinction within all of these categories, but also enables and sanctions those deaths. Mexican Americans and Latinx Americans believe themselves to be legible as American citizens. What these violent reports indicate is that the greatest invention is our belief that we are somewhat more safe or secure in our U.S. citizenship than those across the Rio Grande.

The disposability of the subaltern precedes colonization. Colonial contact has only made us disposable to more people; we cannot idealize our genealogies only when it serves us. I am reminded of Gloria E. Anzaldúa's words on *machismo* where she defends her father's expression of masculinity as one to be idealized, reclaimed, and reconstituted. I cannot help but think that a part of Anzaldúa could not let go of her father out of fear and respect for Mexican patriarchy itself. They're one and the same, which is to say that violence is gendered, but marginalized women also commit violence on subaltern women. Tadeo thinks only to advise Antígona to keep silent, to think of her nephews/the boys, to practice self-restraint, to not speak. Tadeo speaks

from fear of retribution and recognition that they can and will also come for Antígona just as they came for him. The body cannot be guaranteed, it cannot be preserved. The body, like life, is an already borrowed possession. For women and queer people of color, the body can be a source of joy, liberation, pleasure, and reclamation, but it also endangers us. *Antígona González* disrupts the mythos of border identity by forcing readers to articulate a clear definition of border subjectivity. What makes a border subject? Does this constitute a type of border citizenship? How does border studies account for those outside of such a community formation? How do we properly attend to the dead in the borderlands?

The Death of Subjectivity

La muerte, ¿dónde está la muerte?
¿Dónde está mi muerte?
¿Dónde su victoria?
-Himno pascual

My own relationship to death hangs heavy in this chapter because over the span of a decade, which is to say the entirety of the time I have been in academia and higher education, I have lost both my paternal and maternal genealogies. I realize much of my grief has been processed through rituals—dressing the bodies, carrying the caskets, being prayed over by the women in my community, arranging *novenas*, and so on. All of my dead, the ones I can name, are at the Guadalupe Cemetery in my hometown of Pharr, Texas—I buried their bodies there. I do not know what it feels like to seek the body of a loved one that will never be located. I do not know if and when Oscar Varela's mother will ever stop searching for her son's body.

In *Grieving* (2020), Cristina Rivera Garza writes, "Mourning, the psychological and social process through which the loss of another is publicly and privately recognized, is perhaps the most obvious instance of our vulnerability, and, thus, our human condition. When we mourn

the death of another, we accept the outset, whether consciously or unconsciously, that the loss will change us, forever and in definitive ways" (137). The death of the subaltern, of the illegible and disposable subject, however, has always been outside of such a public recognition. Those deaths are often not even afforded ritual, tradition, and mourning. In *Precarious Life* (2004), Judith Butler proposes that we "[reimagine] a community on the basis of vulnerability and loss" (20). She adds:

> The question that preoccupies me in the light of recent global violence is, Who counts as human? Whose lives count as lives? And finally, What *makes for a grievable life*? Despite our differences in location and history, my guess is that it is possible to appeal to a "we," for all of us have some notion of what it is to have lost somebody. Loss has made a tenuous 'we' of us all. (20)

Both Butler and Rivera Garza conceive of mourning and grief as a unitary process whereas I conceive of death, the very cause of our mourning, as a pull away from such ways of collectivity. When we give pause to the human impulse to form community out of grief, what will we see? Perhaps the dead have more to teach us. Rivera Garza adds, "The virtue of mourning consists in positioning the *I* neither as an affirmation nor as a possibility but as a way of unknowing. A becoming" (137). I reach further into the inarticulable affect of grief that Uribe begins with within *Antígona González* by displacing the *I* and moving back to *el otro*.

The relationships between death, society, and the body have been explored, primarily, in African American and Black Studies by scholars like Orlando Patterson, Vincent Brown, and Christina Sharpe who have diversly considered what "death" means across the transatlantic. In his work, "Social Death and Political in the Study of Slavery (2009)," Brown suggests that funerary ceremonies held on slave ships could locate life where other scholars, like Patterson, have only found death and absence. Brown focuses primarily on the funeral ceremony to consider community and agency where "the death rite thus enabled [the enslaved] to express

and enact their social values, to articulate their visions of what it was that bound them together, made individuals among them unique, and separated this group of people from others (1232). In her monograph *In the Wake* (2016), Christina Sharpe also notes that death has always been a communal experience and, therefore, Black death crosses into life. By detailing her own experience through multiple personal losses, she notes that these moments helped her:

> [Re-experience] the power of the wake. The power of and in sitting with someone as they die, the important work of sitting (together) in the pain and sorrow of death as a way of marking, remembering, and celebrating a life. *Wake: grief, celebration, memory, and those among the living who, through ritual, mourn their passing and celebrate their life…* (10-11)

What these scholars bring together is an understanding that death does not suggest an end to Black life or even an end to Black subjectivity; rather, in death, they remain active, charged, and fluid. There is, in loss, continuum. Thus, despite the conditions of enslavement placed upon Black bodies, Black subjectivity remains whole and unfractured. Conversely, in Latinx and Chicanx studies we have focused on border subjectivity as articulated by border crossings and im/migration, but less so on those that either do not arrive or cannot escape borders within borders.

In his reading of Alberto Urrea's *The Devil's Highway*, Abraham Acosta positions *"los que nunca llegarán / those who will never arrive"* via Georgio Agamben's *Homo sacer* and his work on *bios* and *zoe.* Acosta argues that "the border is constituted by nothing less than that exteriority that has been excluded from both frontiers. Like a demilitarized zone, it is a space that is neither inside nor outside the juridical order, neither inside nor outside the sovereign claims of Mexico or the United States, but instead is a doubly constituted state of exception existing between both" (227). The border, however, has never been a single frontier separating two states or nations, but a splitting of multiple legible and illegible subjects and subjectivities

across a multiply occupied, multiply colonized terrain. In this sense, Acosta's estimation of the border as a demilitarized state fails to fully capture the hypermilitarization of the border, the desert, and the communities on both sides of the default line. Similarly, as Acosta notes, Deborah Castillo and Tabuenca Cordoba's *Border Women* also fails to consider how simply reading Mexican women's writing from the border is an insufficient step in further distilling border subjectivity. The subaltern, *el otro*, is still obscured by the work of nationalism. The *Indígena*, Guatemalan, or Honduran other cannot be found in this way because their stories have faced erasure and genocide. Their stories, to some extent, can never be recovered except in marking their absence.

Perhaps the greatest fault of Chicanx studies and border studies has been that the border is beyond just our conceptualization of a geography caught at the crosshairs between Mexico and the United States. The border is not easily locatable at any single geopoint, but exists as much as it does in Guerrero when the *ejercito* and numerous cartel organizations kill thousands of Indigenous people—some citizens, some non-citizens, all made killable. This violence relies heavily on such an indistinction—there cannot be a difference between citizens and non-citizens—both are expendable, disposable, and dispensable. Acosta suggests that those that have "failed to llegar, or who have died llegando" are "illegible, unintelligible, and incommensurate within [the borderlands]" (119). Furthermore, that they "remain, to the degree that they are excluded, neither inside nor outside; they are the trace that both binds and separates, the sign that threatens inside/outside with indistinction, the conceptual figure that ultimately ruptures the idea of a seamless and borderless borderlands" (Acosta 121). We may draw similar connections with Uribe's *Antígona González* in the ways her text renders indistinct and useless the necessity for citizenships. After all, Mexican nationals are dying at just as alarming rates as are nationals from

Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, and the rest of Central and South America.

When Uribe identifies *los desaparecidos*, we are also asked to re/consider what it means to be *disappeared*. The first truth is that the disappeared have always been unintelligible and invisible to the nation-state and to border communities. The second, less acceptable, truth is that the difference between the disappeared and those that remain is hardly as distinct as we have allowed ourselves to believe. That is, to be at the border of subjectivity is already a marked positioning—all bodies are already at risk and in danger of being lost, murdered, and missing. The death of subjectivity, or at least its threat, feels imminent. Like Saidiya V. Hartman who likens entering the archive of African American studies to entering a mortuary, Uribe understands that to speak about Mexican and border life is to enter a similar archive of death and the unknown.[ix] The fragments of people's lives and individual narratives can only be told through partiality by those that have remained. *Testimonio* and poetic form become for Uribe's text mouths from which to speak—even as they cannot, and do not propose to speak for *los desaparecidos*. Instead, it tells of *los desaparecidos* who remain unlocatable.

Antígona González, in this way, shows us the way to access new archives, stories, and subjects that begin with partiality. Sharpe posits of Black bodies in the transatlantic that "Africans who were in the holds, who left something of their prior selves in those rooms as a trace to be discovered, and who passed through the doors of no return did not survive the holding and the sea, they, like [her] are alive in hydrogen, in oxygen; in carbon, in phosphorous, and iron; in *sodium* and chlorine" (19).[x] There is material residue and atomic continuum in life that cannot be obliterated. Similarly, *los desaparecidos* leave traces not just in the physical world as Jason De León writes about the debris and tangible possessions left behind by im/migrants.[xi] There is something altogether immaterial left behind in loss and memory. That which is not tangible, but palpable, visceral, and embodied nonetheless by those whom *los*

desaparecidos leave behind. And then, there is that which cannot even be felt—those that have died and are dying under obscurement and indistinction. They are not Mexicans, but *otros*/others from unknown and unknowable Indigenous, Central American, and Latin American communities. These affective and invisible traces are what Uribe animates within the text and which give readers an opportunity to engage critically the basic meaning of subjectivity and citizenship.

In *Necropolitics* (2019), Achille Mbembe looks at the intersection of sovereignty, space, and death as one that reveals how "colonial occupation" also "means the capacity to define who matters and who does not, who is *disposable* and who is not" (80). That is, sovereignty is not just the power to kill, but to silence and render others invisible. While Mbembe's articulation of "necropower" focuses on Palestine, his broader argument articulates how colonial warfare means not only the literal killings of subjects, but the "infrastructural warfare" that results in the "invisible killing" of multiple sovereign subjects (82-83). Sovereignty is thus intricately enmeshed and encoded within a politic of death—liberation, power, and control can only be truly possible and accessible through the death of those who threaten such autonomy. Mbembe's presentation of "necropolitics" builds from Michel Foucault's biopolitics and biopower, which can be defined as technologies used to exert control over human bodies by the nation-state. Mbembe's work speaks to a lengthy exploration of the relationship between the life, death, and power by other philosophers like Hegel, Foucault, Agamben, Heidegger, and Derrida. My work in this section builds heavily from Mbembe's *Necropolitics*. I wish to expand Mbembe's theory in two central ways 1) by considering how the dead and the disappeared, *los muertos y los desaparecidos*, change our political definitions of "subject," "citizen," and "nation" within border studies and Chicanx and Latinx literary studies and 2) how death, grief, and the

impossibility of naming, locating, and burying the dead make tangible the aporetic state of our humanity.

In his analysis within *Being with the Dead* (2020), Hans Ruin suggests that "politics—as communal organization and action—*involves* the dead through the ways in which the living community situates, responds to, and cares for its dead" (7). Ruin argues against the politicization of the dead and cautions against communities appointing them with agency:

> ...[T]here is also a tendency in the contemporary understanding of necropolitics, especially where the examples are taken from indigenous and marginalized communities, to idealize these bonds by positioning them within a different, non-Western, and presumably more organic sense of community and society that combines the dead and the living in a larger whole...In many of these examples, the very interpretation of necropolitical phenomena inevitably becomes politicized, as the question of legitimacy, lineage, inheritance, and thus of power over the present comes to the fore. (95-96)

I echo Ruin's concern that necropolitics can become another way of establishing power via inheritance or a genealogical connection to space. For example, in reading *El Mesquite* (Chapter 1), one might be tempted to read Anita Garcia's search for grave markers to her relatives burial sites as a tangible indication to her ancestral belonging to Tejas. However, Sara Uribe's *Antígona González* does not aim to lay claim to any geographic belonging nor does it attempt to cohere a subjectivity based on ethnic origin. In fact, what the text does produce is an inability and impossibility in cohering subjectivity based on a geopolitics or nationalisms. The illegible border subject, *el otro,* cannot form community in death just as it could not become a legible border subject in life.

Ruin, however, glosses over the core of my intellectual pursuit where locating power is central. For it is not a question of who can kill; we know that nations and its citizens believe themselves to have the right to kill—either directly or indirectly. Rather, the question that Uribe's text ultimately poses is: Do any of us have the power to *not become el otro* ? What does

citizenship, or such momentary legibility, secure for any subject on any border? I believe that these questions ultimately ask us to reconsider our academic and theoretical definitions of border subjectivity. What does it really mean to be a border subject? What do we really mean when we ask for our sovereignty and identity to be acknowledged or recognized? Is sovereignty not just a resignification of colonial power? I do not pretend to have tenable answers but pose these series of questions in an effort to cohere the limits of subjectivity, identity, and space-based identities within the capacious field of border studies. I believe that when we speak of sovereignty, we are truly speaking of power—the power to re/name, re/position, re/define, re/territorialize, and re/write ourselves and those that we identify as being in-community with us. I believe that when we speak of sovereignty, we believe that we have reclaimed something intrinsic, natural, and god-given. Sovereignty, in this way, cannot easily be challenged. If what we are asking is, how do we assert the sovereignty of bodies, subjectivities, and positionings that only look, speak, and reflect "us," then we are not asking for or seeking a collective community. I understand that as people of color—especially women of color—we have been denied this innate sense and exercise of sovereignty. We have lost parts of ourselves, our identities, and our communities in ways that cannot be repatriated. Reparations cannot bring back our dead. This is not to say that we are not still sovereign through our own beliefs outside of institutions, governments, and laws through the sacred and the spiritual. However, I want to know if the designation of border subjectivity is really just another resignification of power, and, if so, who will that power ultimately serve? Will that power rearticulate and rewrite new borders, nations, and states? I do not wish to challenge sovereignty for any other means than to attend to the ways in which it has betrayed our move toward coalition and collectivity by rationalizing and protecting citizenships. Thus, what sovereignty has the power to do is to rename power altogether. It shapes power into

something owed, something inherited, something fundamentally human.

In her essay, "Doing Justice to Someone," Judith Butler argues that the 1966 John/Joan case situates that self-assertion and self-identification are essential in our understanding of the human. In this case, male twins, Bruce and Brian Reimer, are circumcised at eight-months-old. However, only one's procedure is completed successfully while the second child suffers extensive trauma to his penis. Under the advice from a leading Johns Hopkins Hospital psychologist, the parents made a decision to raise the second child as a girl despite the child growing up not to identify as such. Butler utilizes this case to assert the importance of choice regarding gender identity, which, in turn, makes legible the significance of transgender and non-binary identities. Butler notes:

> When we ask what the conditions of intelligibility are by which the human emerges, by which the human is recognized, by which some subject the subject of human love, we are asking about conditions of intelligibility composed of norms, of practices, that have become presuppositional, without which we cannot think the human at all. (621)

When John refuses to render his intelligibility and humanity down to an anatomical sign or marker, Butler argues, "he establishes the limits of what [others] know, disrupting the politics of truth, making of his desubjugation within that order of being to establish the possibility of love beyond the grasp of that norm...he emerges at the limits of intelligibility" (635). In this way, I argue, the dead also show us the limits of human intelligibility and the limits of love and care as either theory or praxis. In fact, the dead show us the impossibility of love and care in our present moment. We have not afforded the dead with love because we have not afforded them recognition of the inherent value of their lives, their living. In Chicanx studies and border studies especially, we have long ignored the ways in which Chicanidad has imparted violence on the undocumented, the Indigenous, and non-Mexican South of the U.S.-Mexico border. We have

fixated solely on our intelligibility within a nation in which our very humanity can slip into subalternity.

I press on questions of citizenship, nationalism, and subjectivity through the spectre of death in border literature because I believe Sara Uribe's text formally and rhetorically moves to make indistinct the subjectivities of the living and the dead. In doing so, the text illuminates how "citizen" and "non-citizen" are not only defunct terms, but terms that reify the need for exclusion, which in turn shows us the limits of a Chicanx nationalist imaginary. While the first two chapters of this dissertation put through a sieve what remains preserved within the making of a Mexican American and Chicanx imaginary, this chapter thinks about the critical turn to the Latinx diaspora. I see texts like *Antígona González* making legible the ways in which border subjectivity has been dangerously articulated as a transnational and, even, universal positioning, which suggests that border subjects have some basis of commonality, translatability, and relatability. Certainly, as I have noted earlier in this dissertation, the U.S.-Mexico border reminds us that it is not only acting upon us but also being acted upon by both human and non-human subjects. And yet, the geographic location of the border is but a set of coordinates, a topographical rendering, an ideological concept, and an environmental phenomenon on which we, as people, have waged a violent war against anyone or anything threating our sovereignty. *Antígona González* brings us back to our current condition, where imagined communities of coalition are not necessarily impossible, but a distraction from the crisis that the border has imposed on *el otro*. It is neither a call to move forward nor a project of futurity. It is a call for stasis, for exigency; the text is a condemnation of our failure to our own humanity.

On Futurity

At the close of the text, Antígona says, "[*Siempre querré enterrar a Tadeo. Aunque*

Nazca mil veces y él muera mil veces]...Me ayudarás a levantar el cadáver?/I will always want to bury Tadeo. Even if I am born a thousand times and he dies a thousand times]...Will you join me in taking up the body" (168-71)? In this concluding moment, the translator opts to put the subaltern back into animacy—they elect to use the word body as opposed to Antígona's use of the words corpse or cadaver. In Antígona's imagining, Tadeo is already dead, and like Sophocles' Antigone, we are asked to help and assist. However, we are not called to bury the dead, render it more illegible and outside of consciousness, but to lift and take up the dead. In this lifting, in action, we give of ourselves (perhaps in a minor way through intellectual labor and effort) for *el otro*. As I read it, the text demands much more—it asks for a surrender to a humanitarian effort against the biopolitical warfare that puts everybody—and every body—at the border of subalternity.

While I worry that such a reading of border subjectivity—what I call the death of border subjectivity—may read akin to Afro-Pessism as defined by scholars like Ta-Nehisi Coates, I do not mean to suggest that what is revealed in the process is a perpetual positioning of our otherness.[xii] In displacing and dislocating ourselves from the nation and the state, we locate an elsewhere that is already within us. As I argue that Uribe's text suggests, it begins with an attentiveness to the crisis of all subjectivity and moves toward an invitation to take up the task of that crisis.

Notes

[i]See "How Thousands of Indigenous Children in Vanished in Canada" (2021) by Ian Austen.

[ii] Read DeNeen L. Brown's "Scientists excavating Tulsa Race Massacre site" (2021) on the *Washington Post*.

[iii] From Gayatri Spivak's interview with Leon De Kock, "New Nation Writers Conference in South Africa" (1992)

[iv] I draw from Spivak's use of "detranscendentalized" in *Death of a Discipline* and which I explore and expand in the section on placing and locating subjectivity in Uribe's work.

[v] In particular, see Lorde's *Sister Outsider* (1984), Minh-ha's "Not You/Like You" (1990), and Mahmood's *Politics of Piety* (2004).
[vi] My own English translation.
[vii] For instance, the form of poetic activism generates action or at least initiates conversations that extend outside of the immaterial and conceptual world and has material and tangible consequences on the bodies of women of color across different delineations of the nation-state.
[viii] My translation.
[ix] See Hartman's *Lose Your Mother* (2006).
[x] My emphasis
[xi] See *The Land of Open Graves* (2015).
[xii]For example, accusations have been made of Coates' work in *Between the World and Me* (2015) by writers like Cornell West who argue that Coates does not position a possibility for Black life, in our present history, to prevail over the condition produced by enslavement.

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POSTSCRIPT: "A POLITIC OF DISLOCATION"

I have written many versions of this postscript because I've not been able to commit to a vision of what is to come with this project. This Spring, I joined a writing group led by Indigenous scholar Michelle Jacob (Yakama) and in the past few weeks, Professor Jacob's vision for writing has urged me to think deeply about the work before me in my academic career. She asked in an initial session to imagine a place we felt most safe and at home. I think about my house on Chapa Street that I wrote about briefly in Chapter II. I think about losing that home to the county—the land my great-grandparents bought in exchange for the dispossession of their language, community, and identity. I imagine myself in the backyard as the *chicharras* fill my ears with sonorous vibrations overlapping with the voices of my father and tías. That imagining led the work in this dissertation and it also spatialized the politic I want to end with in this postscript.

In a recent writing session, I posed this question to the group: *What does the conclusion in a dissertation call on us to do?* Now, I asked this question having written many conclusions before in my roles as student and researcher, but still I felt overwhelmed at the thought of bringing this project to a *close*. I have tossed and turned for months thinking about this task and the coalitional possibilities I might foreclose on by not articulating a politic that aligns me with the communities I feel most connected to as both a border scholar and a woman of color. The majority of the folks in the writing group have doctorates and are, most importantly, members of historically underrepresented communities in academic forums from across the Pacific Northwest. Some are also graduate students from other departments across the University of Oregon, and I can see the question resonates with many who are writing conclusions or have written them for their own dissertations. Shortly after posing the question, I see Angie Morrill (Klamath) smile as she types in the Zoom chat: "It is a place to dream." Other answers come in

that echo Dr. Morrill's sentiment that it is a place to posit ideas that will invite others into your scholarship and into the dream. That night, I cannot sleep. I think of my students in my Introduction to Chicanx and Latinx Studies course this term who resolve in Week 2 that we must decolonize the Américas. I said, "Wait, we have not defined what this means for us yet." I see the discomfort in some of their faces and added confusion in others.

It is neither that I do not want to dream nor that I do not want to decolonize. Over the course of a decade, I have committed myself not only to reading the scholarship that has defined, shaped, and marked what we call Chicanx, Latinx, and border literary and cultural studies, but to the community building that sustains such identifications. The conclusions to much of these narratives and theories have varied from calls to action, dreams of futurity, hopeful pathways, clings to nostalgia, and, even, resigned acceptances. I have already dreamed of decolonization with writers like Chela Sandoval, Ana Castillo, Emma Pérez, and Mary Pat Brady. Outside of Chicana circles, I have dreamed alongside Linda Martín Alcoff, Gayatri Spivak, Leslie Marmon Silko, Chandra Talpade Mohanty, Joanne Barker, Lisa Lowe, M. Jacqui Alexander, and Audre Lorde. Outside of scholarship, the conversations have happened with my family, friends, colleagues, and faculty such as Michael D. Reed, Liza Soria, Jiesha Stephens, Vivian Schmolke, Madhura Nadarajah, Jalen Thompson, Kirby Brown, José Cortez, and Tara Fickle. The dreams that women of color have dreamt for us have filled me with endless possibility. And yet, I plead with my students to wait. It was not to disarm them of a decolonial possibility, but to first make sense that this decolonial possibility might come at the expense of another, *of an other*.

In class today we read Gloria Anzaldúa's final chapter in *Borderlands/La frontera*, "*La consciencia de la mestiza*," and we begin to translate the short poem where she writes of "mestiza consciousness" as an/a "*alma entre dos mundos, tres, cuatro... /* soul between two

worlds, three, four...” (77). Teaching Anzaldúa in Eugene, Oregon has felt like speaking outside of my own embodied subjectivity. I have to teach her now in the ways she was not taught to me—recognizing the eugenicist project of *mestizaje* via José Vasconcelos and thinking about the Aztec mythology that becomes the wounded-healer, the Chiron, of Chicanidad. I, too, have dreamt with Anzaldúa and her new mestiza consciousness, but I’m no longer lulled by the call of her nationalism or new tribalism. In her posthumous work, *Light in the Dark/Luz en lo escuro* (2015), Anzaldúa proposed seven stages of *conocimiento*, which translates into knowledge or knowing between inner- and public-work. She ultimately articulates coming to terms with her own sickness and mortality as a *desconocimiento*, a process of unknowing or estrangement, of her own body. I feel most aligned with Anzaldúa in that state of *desconocimiento* as it suggests there is an opportunity to unlearn our current ways and become familiar with one another again on different terms.

Every term, students of color, Latinx students, Chicanx students, and queer students come into my office looking for themselves in the readings, in the dreams, that will help them map out the next step toward *conocimiento*. I know the feeling, I tell them. I have been there: dislocated and displaced. They ask for more readings, more conversations; we often cry or laugh in frustration. I have spent countless privileged hours listening to stories about family histories, fragmented genealogies, and im/migration. I listen and hold onto their narrative wishing they knew that my students as far as South Texas and as close as right next to them in class have shared experiences. They are not, of course, shared or the same, but they arrive at similar questions of *desconocimiento* that I have not resolved myself in over a decade of study. I get in my car in the parking lot listening to Ramón Ayala’s voice and accordion take me back.

I recall myself at nineteen taking courses in Mexican American Studies at the University

of Texas Pan American where Gloria Anzaldúa herself wrote and studied. I remember coming of age first as a Mexican American, then as a Tejana, and later as a Chicana. After moving to Oregon, I was called by others a "Latina," and I could not make any label stick. Like other Mexican Americans, I felt like naming my identity would give me access to my history, my genealogy. If I can name myself, I can call myself into being. The reality is that I have never felt more dislocated and displaced than I have in Oregon, and that dislocation and displacement has allowed me to grow more confidently in my politics and my identity. The closest an identity that has felt honest and real to me has been to call myself a border scholar and woman of color, as both align with my experiences in the Rio Grande Valley and with the politics of the women of color I named before. Theoretically, they are dated terms, or so I have been told, but I cannot find anything else that names the subjectivity I occupy regardless of proximity or distance to a geographic border. Even as I have written and rewritten this postscript multiple times, I have never produced a version with a different audience in mind other than women of color, queer people of color, and border peoples. I am calling on all of you as I attempt to envision a responsible futurity.

If futurity calls on us to think about what is come, I do not believe that we have responsibly articulated this futurity as Chicanxs and Latinxs. Even as Chicana feminism has informed the work I have done, it rearticulates the nation in ways that I can no longer come to terms with or accept at face value. I must dream without a nationalist identity, without a homeland. In spaces like the academy it can feel that to write, imagine, and dream without the nation can be dangerously close to the apolitical. At a campus interview, a white faculty member asks, what does this futurity look like within your proposed spatial imaginary? My heart beats upward into my throat. I tell him, I have not seen it before, but I know what it can look like.

Politic of Dislocation

In this postscript, I propose a politic of dislocation as it best defines what I seek to do with my imagined futurity. It is the only way to be, as Frances R. Aparicio writes in her essay "Americas," "anti-cartographic" (11). I think about the lengths we have gone to articulate community without denouncing the nation, a project I, myself, have taken on here, and I think about the ways in which we fail other communities in such projects. The violence of borders insists on reifying the nation, the state, and all their dividing lines and citizenships. Nationalism arises out of a need to name ourselves before we face extinction and erasure. We make place synonymous with identity and subjectivity. "I am a border scholar." My identity and experiences are consequential of the nation-state's impulse to delineate and demark space as land, as territory.

I began with María Elena Zamora O'Shea's *El Mesquite* as a way to respond to Tejanidad as a border identity that has long claimed the Texas-Mexico border as "home." Anita has been long read as a projection of the contemporary Tejana establishing herself in border history, reclaiming a lengthy genealogy and rightful claim to the space. Certainly, with the exception of Jovita González, modernist writings by any Tejana have been, thus far, difficult to locate in literary history. I wanted to begin to write about border environmentalisms because as my friend, Will Conable, once said: "I want to be an eco-contrarian." I think about the environmental humanities and fields like environmental studies, and I become filled with a visceral rage that I have only recently admitted to myself is not temporary. I cannot think about the environment without thinking about children in cages, missing women and migrants, and those subjected to the inhumanities of border policies. I think about *colonias* and communities built upon landfills in Mexico while my colleagues write abstractly about ecological precarity

and endangered bionetworks. I felt the same way on the border when activists clamored around the Montezuma Bald Cypress and later around the Santa Ana Wildlife Refuge. And it's not that these concerns are not *important*, but that those politics, too, displace im/migrant and Indigenous identities and bodies in an unmappable and unrecognizable elsewhere. There, they remain outside of our consciousness and our vision of futurity. What might happen if we could come together to collectively define precarity and endangerment? If the goal was not to name what or who came first, but who came last and who hasn't made it or never will? I see the first chapter as a beginning to another project to come—*Endangered Subjects*—which I want to see through as I continue my academic trajectory within the Pacific Northwest amidst a global climate crisis and amidst a humanitarian crisis around im/migration across the Américas.

When I first read the ending to *El Mesquite*, my tía had just died, and I found myself in tears when Anita is attempting to locate the graves of her ancestors. I remembered my embodied experience in seeking the gravesites of my family members at Guadalupe Cemetery in South Tejas. I believed that in naming where I came from I could name who I was. However, if I believed his to be true then what would such a politic make out of those rendered out of their identities? Where, in the making of the decolonial, do we situate those that we can longer name, mourn, or place? I argue that place and space cannot make us a people or a community just as the colonized Spanish language cannot make us a people or a community. Like José Esteban Muñoz notes in *Disidentifications*, the making of identity is all about negotiation (6). I lean on deconstructionist theory and utilize dis- as a prefix that undoes and negates the need to locate and to place. The politic of dislocation becomes less a negotiation and more a clear rejection or refusal of the coupling of space and identity.

Although I have written broadly about how such literary geographies across Mexican

and Mexican American texts can illustrate absence and the condition of subalternity, I also know that the totality of subalternity and absence cannot be illustrated or mapped in these ways. With this consideration, I sought out physical sites to tether those readings. I named it as a deterritorialized, despatialized, and disinvented geographic that lends itself to the possibility of a community geopolitic. Dislocation gives me an opportunity to think about border environmentalisms, community cartography, and subaltern border subjectivity more explicitly. Dislocation recognizes that there are nationalist overwritings, overlapping community formations, and contested sovereignties that not only grate against each other and bleed, to borrow from Anzaldúa, but act violently upon all that threaten the nation's or state's positioning across the Américas. Dislocation acknowledges that as communities of color we experience, or have experienced genealogically, a violent—and sometimes forced—im/migration often called diaspora. Dislocation is not the same politic as *ni de aquí ni de alla* (neither from here or there), because it understands that as U.S.-born people of color we have been afforded the privilege of a citizenship that disorients and displaces. Dislocation as a politic reminds me that I don't really belong anywhere and that nowhere really belongs to me. In this realization or *desconocimiento*, I see myself as what I really am: a settler and an exile. And still, I understand that such a realization does not release me from my responsibility to other dislocated and displaced communities. Such a politic emboldens me to think that I can make community with anyone that holds the radical vision that we do not need citizenships to legitimize our identities, to value our lives, or to build our futurity.

In 2021, when the State of Texas began vaccinating eligible groups against COVID-19, my alma mater in Hidalgo County, the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley, denied vaccination to countless eligible community members simply because they were

undocumented. After some social media pushback, university officials issued an apology that the staff had been misinformed and had incorrectly denied vaccinating those without proof of citizenship. I mention this example as the Rio Grande Valley has a predominantly Latinx population and sits just across the Mexican border on the north side of the Rio Grande. It is not a space where one could imagine that someone would deny access to something as essential as a vaccine because of their immigration/citizenship status. And yet, this is exactly what happened. And perhaps most surprisingly was the intense resentment toward the undocumented, as observed on social media platforms like Twitter. The same nationalist rhetoric that had been dispersed in the protection of land in the United States was reconfigured during the pandemic as a way to justify the guarding of resources, like the vaccine, as limitable for only its "citizens." The slippage of border citizenships makes such rhetoric possible even as it has afforded those currently recognized as "citizens" certain rights and privileges. A politic of dislocation urges us to recognize that these are the consequences of situating identity and community within the discourses and social formations of the settler colonial nation-state or within ethnonationalist understandings of identity, community, and belonging.

In Chapters 2 and 3, I wanted to think about the dialogic and displaced histories and subjectivities of the dead across the borderlands. We heard much about the inequity of death around the disappearance and murder of Gabby Petito in Wyoming in 2021. Thousands across the United States and abroad were deeply engaged with the details and investigation of the case. Ultimately, that engagement pressed on law enforcement to continue their search and led to the recovery of Petito's body. In response, scholars, activists, and communities clamored over how

hundreds of missing and murdered Indigenous women across the Américas had been given negligible attention by the media, law enforcement, communities, and other activists. Their outcry made evident how the number of resources that had been drawn upon to locate Petito were incomparable for women of color in the United States. Gabby Petito became a household name in a country forged on rendering the names and bodies of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color outside of legibility and value. As of 2020, 40% of missing women and girls are people of color even as they make up only 16% of the U.S. population (*Black and Missing Foundation*). In that statistic, Latinx women are grouped under "White," which cannot factually account for the condition of undocumented people or migrants. The totality of Black life, and the abhorrent acts of anti-Blackness occurring across the Americas, I can barely begin to engage here because that work draws me to a new project. As I bring into focus with the last chapter, I think about how the legibility of certain cases, people, and communities demarks the illegibility of the countless thousands that have died, and will continue to die, at what I call in this project *the border of subjectivity*. Dislocation acknowledges that the murdered, the missing, the undocumented, the Indigenous, the im/migrant, and the subaltern within all these categories are all casualties to nationalisms grounded in white supremacy, anti-blackness, racial capitalism, and settler colonialism.

As such when that faculty member asked what my futurity looked like, I replied that I knew what it could look like because I have already been given pieces of the vision. M. Jacqui Alexander writes in *Pedagogies of Crossing*:

> 'What if we declared ourselves perpetual refugees in solidarity with all refugees?' Not citizen. Not naturalized citizen. Not immigrant. Not undocumented. Not illegal alien. Not permanent resident. Not resident alien. But refugees fleeing some terrible atrocity far too threatening to engage, ejected out of the familiar into some unknown, still to be revealed place. (265)

For Alexander, who writes from an Afro-Latinx positioning, such futurity is held outside of the language of citizenships and belonging. Gayatri Spivak thinks about futurity through a de-globalized sense of community:

> The planetarity of which I have been speaking in these pages is perhaps best imagined from the precapitalist cultures of the planet. In this era of global capital triumphant, to keep responsibility alive in the reading and teaching of the textual is at first sight impractical. It is, however, the right of the textual to be so responsible, responsive, answerable. The "planet" is, here, as perhaps always, a catachresis for inscribing collective responsibility as right. Its alterity, determining experience, is mysterious and discontinuous—an experience of the impossible. It is such collectives that must be opened up with the question "How many are we?" when cultural origin is detranscendentalized into fiction—the toughest task in the diaspora. (100-01)

What these theorists have in common is that futurity exists beyond the nation, beyond the global and the transnational. They seek an elsewhere, a place yet unknown, an imagined pre-capitalist culture. Spivak asks, how many are we? I respond with uncertainty. There are too many bodies to include in the "we." But I am certain that any "we" cannot be whole without every body. The consequences of such a politic of dislocation in anglophone traditions is a rigorous dialogue with scholars in Ethnic Studies, Border Studies, Indigenous Studies, Chicanx and Latinx Studies, Latin American and Caribbean Studies, and even Spanish literatures. It is an emergent discourse already spoken and yet unspoken. I see it when my students raise a hand asking a question about Latinidad and Chicanidad that cannot be answered precisely. Dislocation is unmappable, but not without direction. I am just now beginning to ask better questions, and I keep redirecting myself toward new ways to dream.

While my own conception of futurity is certainly seeded from Alexander's language that abandons the nation and the need for citizenships, I do not believe futurity is elsewhere. It is here, in this temporal world. What it requires, however, is what has thus far pushed futurity outside of our grasp—it requires an abandoning of the nations and nationalisms that make up our

identities. I am only at the beginning of this dream, but the future looks much like what these texts and sites have suggested: a response to the crisis of all those at the border of subjectivity. In this way, it is neither a call to move forward nor a project of futurity as we have most often practiced in Chicanx literary and cultural studies.

It is beyond an open border. Dislocation does not argue for im/migrant hospitality because I cannot welcome you where I am not welcomed or never will be welcomed. I want us to create a world beyond hospitality or hostility where no one has to feel welcome, because I *don't* want to be welcomed here. If being welcomed "here" means conforming to a nationalism that will continue to militarize and uphold borders, then I don't want to belong. A politic of dislocation does not ask for refugee status or amnesty because we cannot, will not, and could not return. Dislocation is a politic that sits in tension with urgent questions of belonging and asks, who is not here? When we think about the proverbial table, or in my work now in the ivory tower, I want to think about the students that will never be my students. I want to guide my students to the border of subjectivity and linger there in that dislocation.

In her preface to *Home* (2012), Toni Morrison writes:

> Whose house is this?
> Whose night keeps out the light
> In here?
> Say, who owns this house?
> It's not mine.
> I dreamed another, sweeter, brighter
> With a view of lakes crossed in painted boats;
> Of fields wide as arms open for me.
> This house is strange.
> Its shadows life.
> Say, tell me, why does its lock fit my key?

Except in my dream I cannot open the door. Like with my old childhood home in South Texas, whose locks have been changed and whose door has been replaced, I stand outside without a

key.

I sit in this dislocation in the Pacific Northwest where I am both a Tejana settler on Indigenous lands and a descendant of relative who labored over harvests across the counties we call Marion and Linn. The work of dislocation feels isolating, but it also feels promising. As this project unfolded like a map, I understood that I have not been *here* before. The dissertation, to me, feels fragmented just as I feel fragmented, but it situates me, my scholarship, and my trajectory in a spatialized community politic that can guide me forward into the next dream.

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