

AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

Alex Aleman Villalba for the degree of Master of Arts in Women, Gender and Sexuality Studies presented on June 13, 2016

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Indigenous and Latinx communities have always used storytelling to pass along ancestral histories and memories, whether it be through the act of speaking, performing or other types of artwork. This thesis examines the ways that queer Latinx artists are retelling the stories that have been mistold to erase, repress and ignore queer indigenous and Latinx individuals. Chapter One focuses on the movement towards a gender non-specific language through the usage of ‘x’ while also introducing Gloria Anzaldúa’s theory of nepantlas as a space navigated by Latinxs to queer and rewrite dominant understandings of being. Chapter Two looks at the poster art of Julio Salgado and Melanie Cervantes to do an aesthetic analysis of the ways that placing art in the public sphere tells stories that remember indigenous and queer histories. Additionally, by looking at the burlesque performance of Xandra Ibarra and the music videos of Persia and Daddie\$ Pla\$tik this project provides insight to the ways which resistance against repressive policies (such as the issues of gentrification and border violence) are shifting the political landscape in a way that responsibly acknowledges and centers queer indigenous and Latinx bodies. To conclude this thesis, I integrate my own personal storytelling as a way to exercise the types of activism the mentioned artists demonstrate. By engaging with current art activism,

policies and historical moments this thesis imagines a future that centers queer and indigenous Latinxs.

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Putting Coyolxauhqui Back Together: Queer Nepantleras Rewriting Latinx Memory

by
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I understand that my thesis will become part of the permanent collection of Oregon State University libraries. My signature below authorizes release of my thesis to any reader upon request.

Alex Aleman Villalba, Author

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I dedicate this thesis to all the whores, queers, cunts and trash the world forgets. Stay brash chingonas, everyone else will catch up one day.

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Chapter 1

Queer Nepantleras: Re-writing Fragmented Reality

I enter la tierra sagrada, orphaned of home and history.

-Cherríe Moraga

Art has been used throughout history to transform and convey messages to the public sphere. The type of meaning that art conveys directly relates to the position of the artist as it interlaces with complex cultural, sexual and spatial histories and memories. The spatial location of the border as many queer feminist of color scholars, artists and activists have long theorized is one of the many physical, emotional, spiritual, cultural and racial borders felt by queer Latinx individuals living in the United States. Throughout this thesis, I will elaborate on the ways that queer Latinx artists living in the United States express, perform and create to piece back together the missing, ruptured or untold stories of their lives, experiences and heritage.

I specifically focus on queer Latinx artists for a multitude of reasons with the most apparent reason being that I identify as a queer Latinx artist. More than that, it was the artists who I discuss throughout this paper that have kept me inspired throughout my difficult transition to the Pacific Northwest in which I had to leave behind my homeland, my brown queers, my sex work and my Spanish. Feeling estranged and homesick, I turned to online social media sites like Tumblr and Instagram to find who would become my virtual homegirls. Over the course of what has now been a year and half, I've found an online community of queer Latinx dykes, artists and sex workers whose presence alone has comforted me through my own process of fragmentation, self-reformation and remaking of home. The queer and Latinx friends I've come to know were the ones to introduce me to activists, books, resources, websites, organizations and those who I

write about in the next few chapters. My hope is that I can participate in the conversations with and about queer Latinx artists while also possibly expanding upon the current dialogues about the ways that art is used as a transformative process to reclaim, retell and remember crucial queer Latinx histories and memory.

As Anzaldúa writes in *Light in the Darkness/Luz en lo Oscuro*, these artists “constantly reinvent her/himself. Through art s/he is able to reread, reinterpret, re-envision, and reconstruct her/his culture’s present, as well as its past” (60). This constant fragmentation and reconstruction is especially crucial for “nepantleras” who live in the in-between, embody various identity borders and are constantly being pulled from a multitude of paradoxical directions. The space of nepantla (Nahuatl for in-between/space in the middle) as a transitional lugar, a precarious place of constant reformation, refuses stagnancy, values indigeneity and works as a queering of categorical identity. Furthermore, these unstable spaces of rupture, as Anzaldúa suggests, are captured and re-created by Latinx artists in ways that allows and portrays imaginary futures. By using the Nahuatl moon goddess Coyolxauhqui as theory to understand ways of re-writing and re-telling historical meaning and memory, Anzaldúa appropriates indigenous stories, symbolism, language and understandings to further nuance how nepantleras grapple with and transform blurred cultural, sexual, racial and spatial borders.

In the final chapter of her book titled “Putting Coyolxauhqui Together: A Creative Process”, Anzaldúa describes this rebuilding as “organizing the parts into a unified whole and drafting a full version of el cuento” only to be horrified at its repulsiveness leading you to rebuild her again in better form (107). Anzaldúa calls this process the “Coyolxauhqui imperative” which she defines as:

A struggle to reconstruct oneself and heal the sustos resulting from woundings, traumas, racism, and other acts of violation que hechan pedazos nuestras almas, split us, scatter

our energies, and haunt us...the act of calling back those pieces of the self/soul that have been dispersed or lost, the act of mourning the losses that haunt us. (1-2)

This definition suggests that while the work performed or created by queer Latinx artists may be campy, playful or erotic the messages are still deeply embedded in powerful and traumatic memories that will continue to haunt the living. In utilizing Anzaldúa's "Coyolxauhqui imperative" to focus on the gestures seen in queer Latinx's artwork, I demonstrate the ways that these artists are re-writing and putting fragmented or missing pieces back together in a way that tells their own truths and stories within the broader historical paradigms of colonization.

Throughout this thesis my usage of 'queer' is mostly referring to those who identify as queer in terms of their sexuality and/or gender expression, with the exception of artist Melanie Cervantes who I discuss in Chapter 2 and does not publically disclose her sexual identity (and I've been unable to contact). While my goal for this project is to amplify the work and voices of queer Latinx artists, it is also important to note Latinx artists who are radically queering politics of belonging, sexuality, citizenship, nation and all other rigid categories that are created and maintained via the hetero-patriarchal society in the United States. As a xicanx nepantlera, Cervantes' work queers the way that indigeneity, sexuality and Latinidad are conceptualized and has closely worked with some of the artists I discuss throughout this paper. Her art activism along with other queer Latinx artists is doing the important work of queering hegemonic ideologies of storytelling, histories and identity.

In addition, instead of using the umbrella terms Latin@ or Latino/a to refer to those who have ties to Latin America, I use Latinx (La-teen-ex) throughout this paper as a gender non-specific category to step away from the man-woman gender binary that excludes numerous of other gender expressions and identities. In the recent NPR podcast titled "Latinx: The Ungendering of the Spanish Language" Sarah Barrett says that "some studies, actually link

gendered language to gendered thoughts” which further “reinforces gender stereotypes in play and in life” (npr.org). Barrett and the other speakers Juana María Rodríguez and María Hinojosa discuss the different ways that people are attempting to ungender the Spanish language and the types of push back that some Spanish speakers have to these changes. Rodríguez points out that completely ungendering Spanish may not be what everyone wants or is comfortable with and gives the example of trans individuals who have fought to be recognized by the pronouns that affirms and respects their transition.

Among those who have spoke against the usage of ‘x’ in place of ‘o’ or ‘@’ are Gilbert Guerra and Gilbert Orbea in their collaborative piece “The argument against the use of “Latinx.” They first preface their article by stating they are “Latinos, proud of our heritage, that were raised speaking Spanish” who “have no prejudice against non-binary people” and continue to make the claim that changing Spanish to be a gender non-specific language would be “a detriment to all” (swathmorephoenix.com). From the first few sentences, Guerra and Orbea make clear who they consider to be ‘Latino’ and attempt to ensure the reader that they are not against using the ‘x’ because of prejudice against non-cis individuals, but because they are concerned of the damage it would have on all Spanish speakers. Throughout their argument, they use phrases such as “linguistic imperialism,” “reverse appropriation” “erasure of Spanish” “attempted degradation” and others to describe the transition of those advocating for the use of the ‘x’ (swathmorephoenix.com). While the rhetoric throughout the piece greatly mirrors nationalist and xenophobic narratives, the authors’ attempt to justify their refusal to use gender non-specific language is because they believe (from their personal experience) that it would be more exclusive.

This exclusivity that Guerra and Orbea are referring to applies to older individuals who have been speaking Spanish their entire lives and are perceived as incapable of adapting to such a change. While this claim is blatantly ageist and insulting, the authors continue on to accuse American (United States) culture and English-speakers for imposing their gender neutrality onto Spanish speaking Latinos and parallel this transition to that of Western imperialism. The authors neglect to mention Spanish as being a European language or how forcing the Spanish language upon Native groups was one of the many colonizing tactics and instead make a misinformed attempt to brashly criticize who they imply to be inauthentic Latinos and English speakers. These types of claims of associating the push for gender neutrality as a form of U.S. imperialism are by no means uncommon in communities of color and is still a narrative that is used when sexual minorities or other marginalized identities engage in activist work to address inequalities they are facing.

Hector Luis Alamo, the deputy editor of Latino Rebels (not to be confused with Latina Rebels) who was quoted in the podcast mentioned earlier, also wrote an article opposing the usage of the gender non-specific ‘x’ titled, “The X-ing of Language: A Case AGAINST ‘Latinx’.” Alamo wrote this article in response to an article written by María R. Scharrón- del Río and Alan A. Aja titled: “The Case FOR ‘Latinx’: Why Intersectionality is Not a Choice” written one week prior to Alamo’s piece and also published via the Latino Rebels media site. Alamo agrees with some points made by Guerra and Orbea, the main being that ‘Latino’ is both masculine and gender neutral and then goes on to say that those who know Spanish know better than to assume that the ‘o’ is only referring to men. Contradictory to Guerra and Orbea, Alamo points out the absurdity of suggesting that Latinx is linguistic imperialism or that it won’t catch

on to the mainstream. As he begins to develop his argument against replacing the ‘o’ with ‘x’,

Alamo states that:

If we dump Latino for Latinx because it offends some people, then we should go on dumping words forever since there will always be some people who find some words offensive. No word ever oppressed anybody (except maybe the word God). Banishing the word Latino won’t eliminate homophobia; on the other hand, the elimination of homophobia will change the meaning of Latino. (In fact I’m sure that’s what happened with colored: once the color of one’s skin no longer held any stigma, being “colored” wasn’t a bad thing anymore, but people were uncomfortable with readopting the term. Thus, “of color.” (Latinorebels.com))

As demonstrated, Alamo like Guerra and Orbea, has a very conflicting understanding of what constitutes oppression, racism, sexuality, gender while also refusing to listen to those who are advocating for a language that does not center masculinity. Claiming words have never oppressed anyone is an inaccurate universal and is a deliberate disregard to real life experiences of all, especially marginalized, individuals.

Secondly, the awkward introduction of homophobia in his piece seems that Alamo uses gender and sexuality interchangeably and fails to understand how sexuality, although related, differentiates from trans identities. Perhaps Alamo meant to say: Banishing the word Latino (or gendered language) won’t eliminate gender, but the elimination of gender will change the meaning of Latino. Although ‘banishing’ is a bit of a strong word to use to describe the transition to gender non-specific language, it seems that comparing the elimination of homophobia (or the construction of gender if that is what was meant) as changing the meaning of Latino to that of the racial slur “colored” is a dangerous stretch to be making. Alamo insinuates that we are living in a post-racial society where skin color is no longer a marking of oppression or privilege, but an uncomfortable memory of the past which some of us have yet to move on from. This was also demonstrated earlier in the piece where Alamo spells out the racial slur ‘n****r’ and then

juxtaposes it with that of ‘Latino’ arguing that having narrow definitions of these (somehow) related terms predicates exclusionary language, therefore we need to be more open-minded.

Not unexpectedly, Alamo concludes his piece by stating “I am an adult, and won’t let anyone slap me on the wrist for using a ‘bad word’. Some may call that ‘privilege’. I call it a right” (Latinorebels.com). While Alamo justifies his refusal to be gender inclusive because as an adult he is allowed to do whatever he wants, he interestingly resorts back to the freedom of speech route to suggest that there are individuals (notably those who use Latinx) who are comparing the masculine ‘Latino’ with that of a swear word or an insult. To be clear, this is not mentioned in the article supporting the ‘x’ in which he is responding to, but it is how he has chosen to interpret their advocacy for more inclusive language. Nevertheless, Alamo foresees the critics who will label him as a reactionary, whether this is because he wrote his article almost immediately after Scharrón- del Río and Aja’s, the way in which he condescendingly mocks those who are attempting to minimize the violence embedded in categorizing people or the fact his piece exemplifies the tantrum-like response that fragile masculinity, sexism and homophobia can produce. So instead of attempting to nuance his perspective, he brashly admits the fact he is reactionary and that he will continue to be if that means refusing to be surveilled and regulated by the “paternalistic” notion of being gender non-specific (latinorebels.com).

Of the few written cases against the usage of the gender non-specific ‘x’ in Latinx, Guerra and Orbea’s piece is the earliest account written in November 2015 followed by Alamo a month later in December. This being said, it is also important to keep in mind that these three individuals who oppose gender non-specific Spanish are all three cis-men who have entirely dismissed the concept that having masculine-centered language is exclusive to and erases all others who do not identify as men. Likewise, all three authors insist that the ‘o’ is gender neutral

as well as masculine. As the usage of the 'x' rises in popularity, it still may be an awkward transition for those of us who have been exposed to only one way of hearing, speaking and learning Spanish as well as those of us who are new to the idea of using gender neutral language. In using Latinx throughout this thesis, I acknowledge that it does not necessarily roll off the tongue and that not all artists mentioned in this paper choose to identify this way, but it is still a way of dismantling and de-colonizing the gender binary that becomes reinforced through language. As Scharrón- del Río and Aja say, "Part of our process of colonization implies that we have internalized the power dichotomies of the oppressor, the tendency to make invisible the margins instead of centering them" (latinorebels.com). In using Latinx, I am refusing to invisibilize and attempting to center those who have always been marginalized.

Using Latinx as a gender non-specific identity is ungendering Spanish while creating visibility for disenfranchised groups, congruently to the ways that the artists I discuss are actively creating visibility for silenced and erased histories. This intentionality of dismantling gendered binaries in language understands the violence of repressing non-Western ways of being, decolonizes the body, sexuality and gender and is seen through the work of Latinx artists. Furthermore, centering marginalized artists while also considering their individual location within the larger scope of power and subordination actively disrupts the hegemonic modes of being and thinking about the world. Looking at how artists, who identify within the umbrella categories of queer and Latinx, are using their bodies to imagine and perform their own perspectives of how current or past events play out can be seen as a mode of survival, self-expression and empowerment while also providing accessible venues of discussing and critiquing societal inequities. One artist who becomes and presents their lived reality in a way

that is accessible to the public is queer xicanx drag queen Persia who collaborated with Daddie\$ Pla\$tik to make the music video *Stop Being Poor*.

This music video was created in response to the remark that former New York Stock Exchange director, Todd Wilemon, made on *The Daily Show* telling poor people “to stop being poor” if they want their lives and health to improve. The interview was conducted by Aasif Mandiv and was intended to challenge the notion that America (the United States) has the best health care system in the world. The episode aired in March of 2014 where Mandiv brought in Wilemon to further look into the views that conservative politicians had in regard to the Affordable Care Act (ACA). While the clips demonstrates how white conservatives’ opinions all mostly echoed the same fear that ACA is going to ruin America’s (the United States) health care system, their opinions all implied that Obama is using the ACA as a ploy to ruin the country. It was after Mandiv pointed out that the people who are in the worst state of health live in Tennessee and were in terrible health before Obamacare was enacted (and that the ACA actually helps them) when Wilemon made the comment that if you are poor than you should stop being poor.

The music video starts by presenting the quote “From rags to riches...Now we’re bitches!” and is followed by another minute and forty seconds repeating Wilemon’s voiceover “If you are poor, stop being poor” as Persia and the members of Daddie\$ Pla\$tik are seen sitting in a mansion drinking champagne in full drag. Singing the lines “My wealth is stupendous. You starve what a bore. Stop being poor. Stop being born” while in grossly exaggerated drag makeup demonstrates the intent that the performers are trying to make about the ugliness of the comments made regarding those who are in marginalized communities. Instead of merely stating that white people do not care about queer brown or black people, Persia and Daddie\$ Pla\$tik are

performing how privileged folk feel towards low-income communities while integrating what people have actually said regarding racialized poverty.

The over exaggeration of drag beyond the intent of trying to appear attractive is another layer of performance within the video that addresses the expectation that drag queens are supposed to look like pretty cis-women. By not conforming to the normative queen appearance or behavior, Persia and Daddie\$ Pla\$tik are queering the already queer drag queen culture and expectations while simultaneously stepping away from the assumption that queens perform with the sole goal of trying to look attractive and/or cis-gender. Critiquing beauty politics in the drag queen community implies that just because a community is queer does not mean that it is exempt from the damaging effects of colonization. More so, it exemplifies the unyielding impact that heteronormative ideologies hold and the need for decolonizing queer spaces.

Using a music video to discuss and critique the ways that racism, gentrification and drag culture are received is also seen in a previous music video in 2013 that Persia and Daddie\$ Pla\$tik released called *Google Google Apps Apps* which was in response to the mission district (the only Latinx district) in San Francisco being gentrified. The entire video is shot using only a green screen and begins with Persia doing a dramatized march in full drag with a backdrop of dropped pins in an open Google Maps app. About half way through the video, one of the members tells “daddy” that they want to be white in which Persia responds “For Christmas, gurl. For Christmas”. Afterwards everyone in the video starts applying what appears to be white lipstick all over their face and neck while moaning erotically. Silicone boobs are taped to their bodies and they put on masks that resemble the plastic surgery trend that is so popular in Silicon Valley, California. The theme of whiteness is present in both of the music videos and at one point in *Stop Being Poor* Persia mocks the ways that non-Spanish speakers speak Spanish by

using an accent to say “No, no, no, no, no. No tango de-nair-o (No tengo dinero). I’m so tired of people asking me for money”. In paralleling the struggle of poverty with the petty annoyance of the wealthy constantly being asked for their money, the music video holds a variety of themes that challenges dominant modes of being in the world. While the singing in the music video does not by any means attempt to appeal to the ears, Persia is very deliberately using a seductive, raspy voice when talking about issues that carry a great deal of violence. This coupled with the loud electronic beats creates a bizarre, creepy tone that makes the reader unable to pull away from what they are seeing and hearing.

The campiness of the video is seen throughout the lyrics, costumes, make-up, dancing, tone of voice, editing, and even the setting of the film to playfully portray the ridiculousness of normative ideologies regarding gender, sexuality, class, race and ethnicity. A theatrical performance by queer people of color that presents non-normative gender and sexuality offers not only a critique of the racism, classism, homophobia, sexism and transphobia engrained in global systemic structures, but also demonstrates a way of theorizing that Anzaldúa emphasizes is necessary. Using their bodies to creatively critique and raise awareness to the injustices faced by those who encompass a multitude of oppressions allows Persia and Daddie\$ Pla\$tik to broaden the range of mediums used to start discussions about social justice without the jargon used in the academic institutions.

These artists are one of the many examples of queer Latinx individuals who are using their bodies as artwork and activism to address the many issues and oppressions that they endure. While there has been much work that has been done regarding queer artists of color, I specifically focus on artists who identify under the Latinx umbrella category that are queer identified and/or queering Latinx histories and politics of belonging. In addition to this criteria, I

focus on those who are currently alive and engaged in activism within the United States. My intent is not to exclude those, whose work has been foundational or majorly influential to those currently creating, but to create a relevant project for blooming queerlings as well as for creative queers who are looking to find artists that speak to their lived experiences or for those artists which project collaboration is possible.

Through the next few chapters I will focus on art by queer nepantleras who are fulfilling the Coyolxauhqui imperative by transforming and centering queer, indigenous histories in the public sphere. More specifically, I explain the way that these artists are rewriting their realities to ensure a queer and indigenous future. In chapter two, *Defying Exile: Coyolxauhqui's Torn Limbs* I will be looking at poster art by Julio Salgado and Melanie Cervantes to examine the ways that they are using art activism to point out the precariousness of the United States as a nation while advocating for indigenization and centering of queer sexuality. I use Dean Spade, Karma Chávez and Eithne Luibhéid to demonstrate the ways that queer Latinx sexuality and indigeneity are not accounted for, protected or perceived as individuals who belong within the current system. This chapter details how poster art, such as that by Salgado and Cervantes, are visible responses against repressive U.S. immigration law that dually functions as a visual critique of policy while conjuring the historical past that is contemporaneously shaping the futurity of queer Latinx people.

In the following chapter, *Fuck Me Brown: A Public Demonstration* I look at the gestures that Xandra Ibarra, who goes by stage name La Chica Boom, uses within her performances and visual art as well as the ways which she uses camp, ethnic drag and her own queer sexuality to reappropriate and reclaim particular symbols, icons and histories of Mexicanidad. I draw parallels between Ibarra's work with other queer Latinx feminist writings by Gloria Anzaldúa,

Cherrie Moraga, Juana María Rodríguez, Alicia Gaspar de Alba and José Esteban Muñoz to demonstrate how art and performances by queer Latinx artists are ensuring their future by retelling their own histories and lived realities.

In the concluding chapter of this thesis, *After Dismemberment: Speaking Wounds*, I discuss the transformative potential that art can have when it centers queer and indigenous stories as well as the ways these pieces of art have been used to open up dialogues about social justice issues. My hope is that this thesis can create new modes of imagining that emphasizes decolonization and indigenization in a creative, responsible and compassionate manner. To practice storytelling as a means of healing and transforming ourselves and our communities, in this final chapter I integrate some of my own personal stories and dreams that have stayed with me and serve as a reminder for the type of future I imagine to be possible. With this, full credit, acknowledgement and adoration is due to the queers of color who came before me whose stories and dreams have paved the way and continue to inspire those of us who come after. If it were not for all of your work and wisdom our world would not be as magical.

Chapter 2

Defying Exile: Coyolxauhqui's Torn Limbs

*I am so bloody in my own bath
of wild hairs
that I couldn't possibly
join you tonight
for that colonial thing
-Melanie McClure*

Queer Latinx visibility as a means of resisting against repressive anti-immigrant policy actively conjures the historical past of xenophobia against Latinx, queers and all other individuals who do not fit or conform to the able-bodied, white, gendered role within the capitalist system. One way that queer Latinx artists are creating visibility for themselves and their communities is by making their work accessible and displaying it in the public sphere. Poster art is an example of this. In this chapter, I will be looking at the poster art by Julio Salgado and Melanie Cervantes to demonstrate the ways in which they use their art as a means of remembering historical and cultural trauma while also crusading for a present and future that ensures the viability of queer Latinx individuals. I use the work from scholars Karma Chávez, Dean Spade and Eithne Luibhéid to demonstrate the ways that administrative violence towards queer (especially gender non-conforming and trans) Latinx individuals is still very much happening in the legal system despite hate crime and gender discrimination legislation that supposedly exists to provide protection. Furthermore, I use the framework these scholars provide to look at politics of belonging of indigenous and Latinx queer folk that is seen and centered within the poster art by Julio Salgado and Melanie Cervantes. By looking at symbolic and iconic

representations of indigeneity such as the recurring images of maíz as well as linguistic substitutions such as the ‘x’ instead of ‘ch’ to allude to indigenous roots used in the Nahuatl language, I will be doing a comparative analysis of the intersecting identities of Latinidad, queer sexuality and indigeneity seen in their public art. The visibility of these three separate yet deeply intertwined aspects of identity ensures an imagined future that coincides with Gloria Anzaldúa’s “Coyolxauhqui imperative” that I elaborated on in the previous chapter.

With the presidential primary campaign in full force, creating art that is accessible to and seen in the public sphere, such as posters plays a crucial role in reshaping the current anti-immigrant narratives that have again taken the center stage in the media. Art posters, which are cheap, quick, and accessible to the general public is one way which queer Latinx activists are engaging in activism against repressive queerphobic, transphobic, anti-indigenous and anti-immigrant discussions that are deemed as acceptable by the majority (if not all) of presidential candidates. As the Republican party blatantly expresses racist and violent views against immigrants and the Democratic party is advocating to indigenous and Latinx communities to win their vote, art activists are increasingly responding against mainstream anti-immigrant rhetoric in the media by queering and resurfacing the anti-Latinx, anti-queer and anti-indigenous history enforced by both parties.

Queering reality by creating a visible presence of and remembering that *nepantlas*, which Anzaldúa defines in *Light in the Dark/Luz en lo Oscuro* as the “places of constant tension where the missing or absent pieces can be summoned back, where transformation and healing may be possible, where wholeness is just out of reach, but seems attainable” encompass and center indigenous (her)stories is crucial for the past, present and future viability of Latinx queers (2). In order to understand the specific and material ways that individuals are currently grappling with

the complex, often painful, *nepantlas* that Anzaldúa refers to, it is crucial to look further into the current legal landscape that the Latinx community is enduring. One piece of legislation that best demonstrates the blatant xenophobic attitude towards queer Latinx and indigenous communities that the United States violently upholds is the Senate Bill 1070 that Arizona legislature passed in 2010. To further detail the disposable nature of Latinx bodies, I use Lilian Jimenez's law review, *America's Legacy of Xenophobia: The Curious Origins of Arizona State Bill 1070* to detail the disturbing methods that the United States government uses to exile, repress and murder those who are deemed expendable, dangerous and excessive.

In 2010, Arizona passed the *Support Our Law Enforcement and Safe Neighborhoods Act* also known as SB 1070, which gives power to local law enforcement to uphold and enforce federal anti-immigration policies throughout the state. Furthermore, the law's first enforcement provision requires that a:

...reasonable attempt to be made to determine the immigration status of a person during any legitimate contact made by an official or agency of the state or a county, city, town or political subdivision if reasonable suspicion exists that the person is an alien who is unlawfully present in the U.S.. (legalscan.com)

The purposefully vague language of "reasonable suspicion" gives free range of authority for any individual in local law enforcement to interrogate the documented status of any person that could be perceived as being in the United States illegally. While this law could technically be applicable to any person walking down the street, the historical context, geographical location and, as Lilian Jimenez details, the process in which the bill was passed all point to the blatant intention of criminalizing the existence of Latinxs and those who appear to be Latinx (indigenous) documented or not. In her article, Jimenez lays out the historical context of SB 1070 back to the two mass deportations of Mexicans during the Great Depression of the 1930s

and Operation Wetback in 1954 and continues to elaborate upon the coded dog-whistle racism deeply rooted within anti-immigrant legislation.

Jimenez then describes the organization which takes credit for drafting SB 1070 as a small anti-Latinx organization called the Federation for American Immigration Reform (FAIR) and lists their three main objectives as:

1. Establishing shell organizations that create the illusion of a large and multi-faceted restrictionist movement;
2. Targeting the media and public opinion by generating race-neutral editorials and media campaigns opposing immigration; and
3. Initiating legislation that targets Latinos through seemingly race-neutral immigration policies. (295)

The strategy of having shell organizations to create the illusion of power and authority further signifies the extreme racism and fear of a growing excessive and overly visible Latinx population. The facade of having a race-neutral campaign that is widely bought within mainstream society is also addressed, critiqued and expanded upon in Dean Spade's book *Normal Life: Administrative Violence, Critical Trans Politics and the Limits of the Law*. Spade, who is a lawyer, writer, law professor and trans activist writes:

Courts, the media, and policy makers, operating on definitions of racism and sexism that require individual intent and a one-to-one nexus of intent and impact, can deny that these programs are racist and sexist and declare them neutral and fair, all the while producing and relying on the racialized-gendered images that promote these programs. (114)

The connection between Spade's analysis of coded racism used by a multitude of public and private institutions cannot be better exemplified than in the organization FAIR that Jimenez pinpoints as the main author of the anti-Latinx and anti-indigenous SB 1070. Ultimately, the anti-immigrant narrative of SB 1070 demonstrates the way that even though United States depends on the exploitation of Latinx migrants and rapidly consume and appropriate Latinx culture, they want to do so without having to actually see or address brown bodies within their

borders. While the stifling of brown bodies can be seen through the mass deportations, disproportionately high numbers of incarcerated Latinxs, environmental racism, food deserts and the lack of access to reproductive (and general) health care, queer and trans bodies are even further invisibilized within this broader discussion of Latinx immigration. To address this further, I focus on the poster art of Julio Salgado and Melanie Cervantes to look at the ways they use their art as a means of creating new material and imagined realities that refuse to be repressed by systemic powers.

UNDOCUQUEER VISIBILITY

The gesture of exile that SB 1070 conveys is a dominant theme in Salgado's art posters. Salgado, who coined the identity "undocuqueer", co-founded the Dreamers Adrift creative project, leads art workshops, gives lectures and participates in numerous art collectives is seen as a key figure of the undocumented activist movement targeted toward queer youth. Although he cannot vote in elections due to his undocumented status, Salgado expresses his voice and imaginings through the medium of his body and artwork to participate in the broader discussion of exile, belonging and transformation that is interlaced with queer Latinx migration politics. In one of his most recent art pieces, *Queer Butterfly* (2013) shows a pink cartoon version of himself with butterfly wings. The words "I exist" and "Yo existo" are written across his chest and belly with a solid yellow background behind him. On his left red forewing are the words "joteria" above the word "migrante" in a black font with "migrant" above the word "queerness" on the right orange forewing. The green hind wing has the words "amor" "familia" "unidad" "paz" with the words "love" "family" "unity" and "peace" on his opposite blue hind wing.



Figure 1.1

This poster demonstrates one response that queer Latinx individuals are having against the United States anti-immigration legislation that predominately centers straight folk and the nuclear family. While Salgado's work is mostly known in relation to the Development, Relief and Education for Alien Minors (DREAM) Act, which failed to pass at the federal level in 2010, the prevalent theme of advocating for visibility and de-centering of heteronormative principles is seen throughout his posters. Karma Chávez elaborates on this strategic response of gaining visibility in her book, *Queer Migration Politics*, by examining the coming out rhetoric Salgado uses, particularly in the slogan "I'm here and I'm undocuqueer". In the context of the DREAM Act, demanding that the public sphere see and acknowledge the existence of undocumented queers, which again is seen with the "Yo existo" across his belly in *Queer Butterfly* (2013), complicates the layered event of coming out both in the sense of being queer and being undocumented. Furthermore, portraying himself as the main subject in his artwork and as a butterfly symbolizes the ways he conceptualizes himself and his own transformation while also affirming the existence of other queer documented and undocumented migrants.

Chávez makes the important nuanced distinction between documented and undocumented queer Latinxs by comparing radical and liberal approaches from within migration movements. For example, she states “‘radical indicates a departure from inclusionary politics’” and addresses the consequences of choosing such an approach by stating the “vibrant tension between being ‘radical’ and being ‘respectable’ within the movement emerges” (98). This tension alludes to a multitude of dimensions like colorism, passing (as white or documented) and the degree in which one expresses their gender or sexual desire. Because of historical anti-Latinx, anti-queer and anti-indigenous violences, this tension is more severely seen and felt amongst those whose indigeneity, gender expression and sexuality is seen as dangerous and corrupt by the white colonist nation. Remembering this tension in context of Anzaldúa’s *nepantlas* further requires that politics and activism of queer Latinx migration center and constantly acknowledge the histories that are typically ignored or manipulated to serve a white supremacist agenda.

By point of illustration, the DREAM Act that Salgado’s has advocated for for years, narrowly only applies to those who (upon many other requirements) entered the United States before the age of sixteen therefore excluding a great number of Latinx individuals who entered the U.S. after then. While the DREAM Act, seemingly appears to be a gesture of inclusion unlike the SB 1070, it still functions as a method of exiling those who are deemed unable to fit within the capitalist system. For example, the need to prove good moral character that demonstrates the ability to positively participate and contribute to U.S. society implies heteronormative and consumerist practices which inevitably labels queerness and indigeneity as deviant, unwanted outsiders. In his piece, *Toward a Tribal Critical Race Theory in Education*, Bryan McKinley Jones Brayboy lays out the way that adopting a tribal critical race framework is essential for

understanding the formation of current relationships between indigenous and hegemonic powers.

Moreover, Brayboy elaborates how the shaping of xenophobic policies is not separated but directly related to settler-colonialism and elaborates that this correspondence:

plays out in a distinction between the concepts of habitation and ownership, which is evident in the actions of White settlers. It appears that because a group of people were rooted to lands on which they lived, they did not necessarily properly “own those lands”, leading to a series of events that left many indigenous peoples dispossessed of lands that held not only life sustaining crops, but also spiritually sustaining properties. (431)

Brayboy’s excerpt exemplifies how the dispossession of indigenous communities is felt on the levels beyond what colonizers cared to understand and has persisted into contemporary times to be reflected in violent legislation targeted towards people of color including queer Latinx individuals. This seemingly distant past is still very much seen and heard in the storytelling and activism by queer Latinx individuals who consistently work towards de-colonizing their histories by indigenizing their politics.

The discourse of sexuality is one area where dispossession is felt and decolonization and indigenization is needed. In her chapter, “Decolonizing the Queer Native Body (and Recovering the Native Bull-dyke: Bringing ‘Sexy Back’ and Out of Native Studies’ Closet,” Native scholar Chris Finley expands upon the notion that heteronormative discourses, like sexuality, are colonial tactics of control that need to be analyzed as such first in order to imagine modes of decolonizing. Providing a historical background that reveals desexualization and repression of sexuality as colonizing and survival strategies, Finley advocates for a sex-positive approach that thoroughly and boldly examines the complex relationships between queer sexuality and settler-colonialism within Native communities. Finley, like Brayboy, points out the severe, violent ways that settler-colonialism impacts indigenous groups by naturalizing power structures that fuel domination over others by stating:

Colonization needs heteropatriarchy to naturalize hierarchies and unequal gender relations. Without heteronormative ideas about sexuality and gender relationships, heteropatriarchy, and therefore colonialism would fall apart. Yet heteropatriarchy has become so natural in many Native communities that it is internalized and institutionalized as if it were traditional. (34)

As this quote suggests, destabilizing these ideologies through the approach of indigenizing and decolonizing politics transgresses Western ways of understanding the world and progresses the reclamation of Native bodies, spirituality, land and way of living. Additionally, the act of historicizing and challenging the creation of the United States as a nation centers indigenous peoples while highlighting the heinous ways that hegemonic power structures have maintained their positions of domination. Using the medium of poster art to ensure visibility of indigenous queer centered histories is an invaluable gesture that is catalyzing the public sphere to engage with these purposefully erased violences. One artist whose art activism demonstrates this centering is Xicana artist Melanie Cervantes.

MAÍZ AS A GESTURE

Cervantes co-founded Dignidad Rebelde, a collaborative art-collective based out of Oakland, California in 2007 that focuses on empowering communities resisting against injustices through art activism. Of the art available for purchase on the website, Cervantes' posters *Somos de Maíz* (2013) and *The Corn People* (2014) are both part of the larger project titled *Un-Settling*

Alliances: Connecting our Liberation, which as per their project website:

...focus[es] on connections and alliances across struggles for self-determination, decolonization, and collective liberation. Drawing from the work of printmakers who engage in social, political and cultural themes, this project hopes to visualize and build cross-movement relationships. (cargocollective.com)

Cervantes is involved in activist work that personally affects the communities she identifies within while also working collaboratively with other artists who participate in anti-colonization

work. One type of response, as seen in Cervantes' art poster *Somos de Maíz* (2013), is to emphasize the complex relationship that indigeneity has with the United States federal government by reminding the public that the original occupants of what is now the U.S. are native peoples. The art poster, which depicts an indigenous woman holding a husk of corn close to her chest with a yellow corn patterned background and "Somos de Maíz" written above her, de-centers colonial interests by focusing on native women.

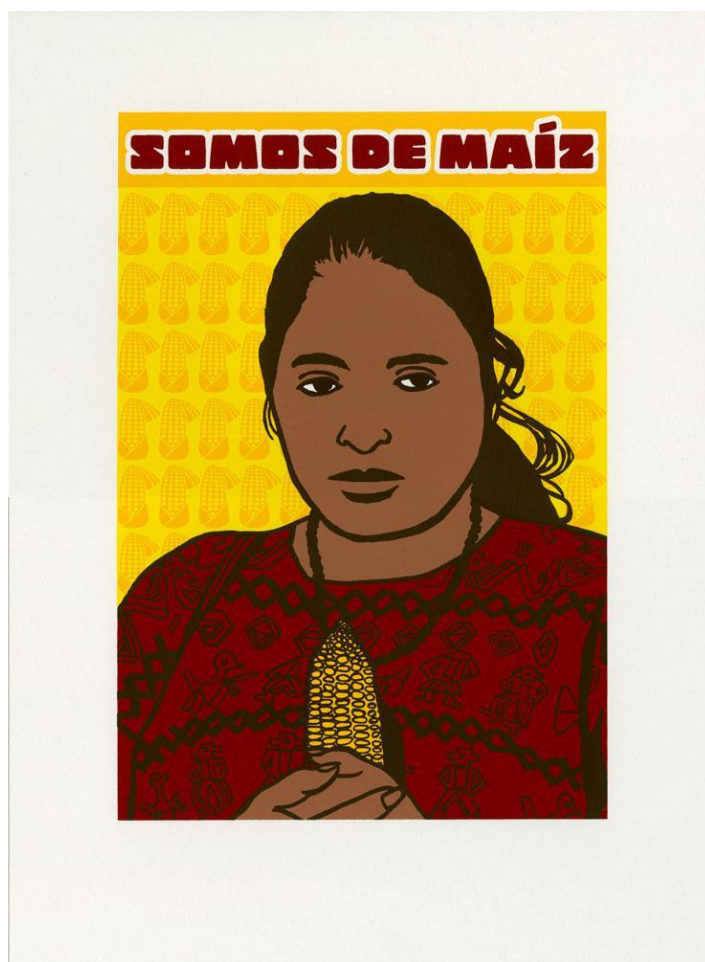


Figure 1.2

Taking a step back to first address the way that colonization and capitalism drastically affects and harms Native lives (both now and throughout history) allows for the ability to understand the complex ways that white supremacist and heteronormative ideologies affects queer Latinx

individuals. These identities which are not separate, but inseparably related and interlaced, are constantly regulated by the nation whether it be by creating legislation that exiles them or by strategically erasing and exploiting these individuals within public and private institutions.

In her book *Entry Denied: Controlling Sexuality at the Border*, Eithne Luibhéid discusses the way that anti-immigrant legislation functions to create “excludable women” on the basis of particular intersections of racialization and sexuality (137). Luibhéid, who is a prominent scholar in migration and sexuality studies teaching at the University of Arizona, addresses the way that gender and sexual desire are often overlooked or ignored altogether in the broader discussion of immigration. By focusing on queer sexuality throughout her scholarship, Luibhéid centers border crossings of queer identified women and further explores “the ways that anxieties about immigration strengthen the ability of state apparatuses to allocate rights and opportunities in a manner that reinforces hierarchies that are gendered, racialized and classed” (139). This reinforcement of hierarchies directly relates to the way that violence against those who migrate within or into the U.S. becomes legalized through the narrative of creating a legitimate and illegitimate citizen, which again ignores the fact that native peoples and those whose nations were divided as a result of colonization were here prior to imposed borders. Another poster by Cervantes, *The Corn People* (2014) implicitly refers to this theft of land and exile of its original inhabitants by reminding the viewer that the main crop of the U.S. is in actuality the roots of indigenous (to Central America) people.

The Corn People (2014) has a similar yellow corn patterned background to that of *Somos de Maíz*, and depicts a young boy with short black hair and a blue collared shirt. The boy has an expressionless face and is holding up an ear of corn with “El Maíz es Nuestra Raíz” in large purple letters with “Our seeds! Our Future! No GMOs!” in a smaller font underneath.



Figure 1.3

Using maíz in both pieces as a symbol portraying the theme of indigeneity moves beyond the stagnant Western conception of time and alludes to the Mayan creation story as well as the Native nations where corn was first domesticated in what is now Central America. Referring to maíz as ‘raíz’ ‘seeds’ and ‘future’ as an argument against the genetically modified foods (GMOs) equates the crop as being sustainable on a multitude of levels (spiritual, cultural, emotional) that go beyond the consumerist desire of profit. Continuing to center crucially significant pieces of identities, icons, symbols, and stories throughout the ongoing violent attempt to stifle these powerful narratives exhibits the immense power of these marginalized communities and their refusal to be erased.

The resilience portrayed in these three art posters speak to the broad array of issues that are being addressed by Latinx artists all the while still functioning to reappropriate particular histories such as colonization of sexuality, cultural memory and food production. The range of topics, content and symbols seen in these three posters, may seem scattered, but when understood collectively, illustrate the interconnectedness and immense effect that legislation can have on an entire community. To use the example that Cervantes indicates in *The Corn People* (2014), the production of corn which appears to be apolitical, is in fact is very deeply rooted in historical and spiritual meaning that has become contorted in mainstream understanding as solely being a topic of economic concern. Therefore, the role of recreating stories, perspectives and understandings of Latinx memory as seen by artists like Salgado and Cervantes, is actively queering the way that politics of being are perceived.

On that account, creating a visual presence through the medium of poster art, operates as a means of resisting against xenophobic legislation that legalizes racial profiling and exiles brown bodies. As Salgado uses his body to highlight the existence of queers in the Latinx community, Cervantes uses the imagery of maíz as an active reminder that even though the land and crop is violently occupied and has been colonized, the roots and origins remain the same. The usage of art posters to convey meaningful responses against repressive anti-immigration policy continues past the borders of the United States nation and evokes historical indigenous memories of settler-colonialism that is still seen and felt by queer indigenous and Latinx individuals today.

Translating these feelings, memories and hauntings into gestures that are later put into the public sphere, ensures a futurity of peoples that is indigenous, queer, self-written, multi-directional and resilient to divisions that colonial powers impose. Anzaldúa describes this

translation as a transformation that radically changes the way we exist in and perceive the world.

Anzaldúa elaborates on this redefining transformation that occurs in the nepantla as:

...undergo[ing] the anguish of changing our perspectives and crossing a series of cruz calles, junctures, and thresholds, some leading to a different way of relating to people and surroundings and others to the creation of the new world. Nepantleras such as artistas/activistas help us mediate these transitions, help us make the crossings, and guide us through the transformation process- a process I call *conocimiento*. (17)

Conceptualizing nepantleras as guides who are directing communities through the *conocimiento* of healing situates them as the living reminders and representations of Coyolxauhqui's torn limbs. The process of slowly reconnecting the limbs to the body is not intended to return to a romanticized past, but to remember that the body, although dismembered, contains stories, beings, power and healing that carries the potential to imagine futures that advocate for wholeness and responsibility. These imaginings can be seen in the gestures of maíz and butterflies that Salgado and Cervantes present.

The artists and activists I mention in this chapter are responding against violent modes of thinking that can be most blatantly seen in the anti-immigrant legislation of SB 1070 and more subtly seen in the inclusionary gestures such as the DREAM Act. These pieces of legislation are only two examples of the institutional ways that Latinx bodies are being stifled and are based in more thorough histories that can be traced back to the colonization of indigenous peoples on this same land. It is necessary to center indigenous peoples and histories in order to understand the ways that Latinx, indigenous and queer sexuality are being contained and erased by dominant structures. Only after this can Coyolxauhqui be put back together.

Chapter 3

Fuck Me Brown: A Public Demonstration

My pussy is yours when I say you can have some.

-Chrystos

Stereotypes that hypersexualize, fetishize and tokenize queer Latinx individuals are so prevalent throughout public discourses that adopting these same tropes has become an empowering mode of rewriting how they are being conceptualized. Combining gestures of disgust and excess with the sexual and erotic, allows for queer Latinx performers to reclaim their histories, bodies and culture. In this chapter, I focus on queer, Oakland-based, Latinx performance artist Xandra Ibarra, who goes by the stage name of La Chica Boom, to look at the way she provocatively summons historical violences, traumas and memories of colonization and white-supremacy by using erotic, comedic, light-hearted props and gestures. Specifically, I look at interviews, her performance piece *Tortilleria* and the piece *Triptych* from her photographic series *Ecdysis: The Molting of a Cucarachica* to examine how her performances provide examples of what transformation, healing and imagining can look like. I look at the way that *Tortilleria* captures the complex processes and meanings that result when sexual desires seemingly contradict sexual politics as well at how *Triptych* resists against the notion that healing and transformation is supposed to occur at a particular pace or have a particular end result.

MOLTING BROWNNNESS

In her performance piece *Triptych* from the series *Ecdysis: The Molting of a Cucarachica* (2015), Ibarra utilizes the narrative of excess and disgust that is often used to describe Latinxs and queer individuals within public sphere and flips it to become an image of transformation.

Comparing brown bodies residing in or entering the U.S to that of cucarachas has become the justification for the basis of exile and fuels the attempts to stifle and subdue these communities. By taking up an unlikely symbol of transformation, Ibarra is also queering understandings of empowerment, belonging and identification. In the brief article discussing this photographic series, Ibarra explains the transformation of the cucaracha by stating:

These photographic performance works embody the cockroach in its abjection, disgust, invisibility, hypervisibility, and infestation, along with its state of presumed metamorphosis. When a cockroach changes during adolescence, through ecdysis it removes its exterior casing to fashion a new self that only ends up resembling the old. (2)

In this description of her performance, Ibarra steps away from the idea that healing and transformation means becoming something new and instead describes the process with a melancholic perspective. This depressive affect of transformation parallels with Jose Esteban Muñoz's piece "Feeling Brown: Ethnicity and Affect in Ricardo Bracho's: The Sweetest Hangover (and Other STDs)" in the sense that brownness is seen and understood through affect of failed performance that is read against normalized whiteness. In this context, Muñoz discusses how artists like Ibarra, conduct brownness as the essence of "ethnic difference and resistance" within the complex framework of neoliberal politics and imperialism that continues to exploit bodies, land and culture (68). Furthermore, he elaborates how the situated understanding of brownness as Latinx in the United States, becomes normalized as a monolithic category, which then produces stereotypes that dually reify and silence important pieces of history.

The stereotypes within the category of those who identify as or are perceived to be brown become enforced, regulated and encouraged in order to serve a dichotomous, division between those who belong and those who do not. These dichotomies can be seen both literally and metaphorically as borders which is more thoroughly and eloquently explained within Gloria Anzaldúa's *Borderlands/La Frontera*, as she states:

Borders are set up to define the places that are safe and unsafe, to distinguish *us* from *them*. A border is a dividing line, a narrow strip along a steep edge. A borderland is a vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary. It is in constant state of transition. The prohibited are its inhabitants. (25)

In describing inhabitants as prohibited, Anzaldúa is referring to not only to those who have crossed the borders that define nations, but also the spiritual, emotional, psychological and sexual borders that divide and label queer Latinx individuals as unsafe, excessive and dangerous. Borders are also referenced in Ibarra's website bio where she states that her performances, art and writing "problematizes the borders between proper and improper ethnic, gender, and queer subject[s]," thus locating herself within the contemporary discussion of queer, border and feminist politics (lchicaboom.com). Furthermore, this problematizing of borders that Ibarra refers to embodies what Jose Esteban Muñoz coins as disidentification.

In his book *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics*, Muñoz discusses how "identity is enacted by minority subjects who must work with/resist the conditions of (im)possibility that dominant culture generates" (6). These conditions greatly resemble the blurred spaces of in-betweenness and constant tension of the *nepantlas* that has been discussed in the previous chapters while also fostering an environment which transformation can occur. Locating this space between the binary of essentialism and anti-essentialism leaves queer Latinx artists to constantly negotiate how and when to adopt particular pieces of themselves throughout their daily lives as well as within their performances. The contradictions and the awareness of the pressure to either assimilate or resist against the essentialist-anti-essentialist binary marks queer Latinxs as "los atravesados" (25). In referring to those who delegitimize colonial binaries as "atravesados," Anzaldúa recognizes the strong connotations for those who fail to abide by or place themselves within the firmly enforced categorizations that structure the U.S. as a nation. The impact of these binaries bleed into other paradigms of being, such as the act of healing and

transformation, which can result in the creation of binaries that mirror colonial ways of thinking. Ibarra resists against this binary way of understanding healing and transformation in her piece, *Triptych*.

In this photographic piece, a topless Ibarra is sitting beside a large, cucaracha carcass and a pair of black heels in an emptied pool. In the first photo, Ibarra is sitting up adjusting her hair beside the cucaracha. The second photo shows Ibarra laying down with her arms raised and both hands in her hair with the final photo showing her prone with her arms by her side still beside the unmoving carcass. Having three photos depict the phase of metamorphosis, tracks the slow process of change while also demonstrating that the end result does not necessarily become something radically different from what was begun with. The location of the heels that remain below the cucaracha makes the viewer question who was last wearing the heels and whether Ibarra is adjusting herself because the molting process was just completed or if she is preparing herself for another molting to occur. The temporal ambiguity challenges the Western notion that change and healing is linear and emphasizes the circular evolution of fragmentation and putting back together.

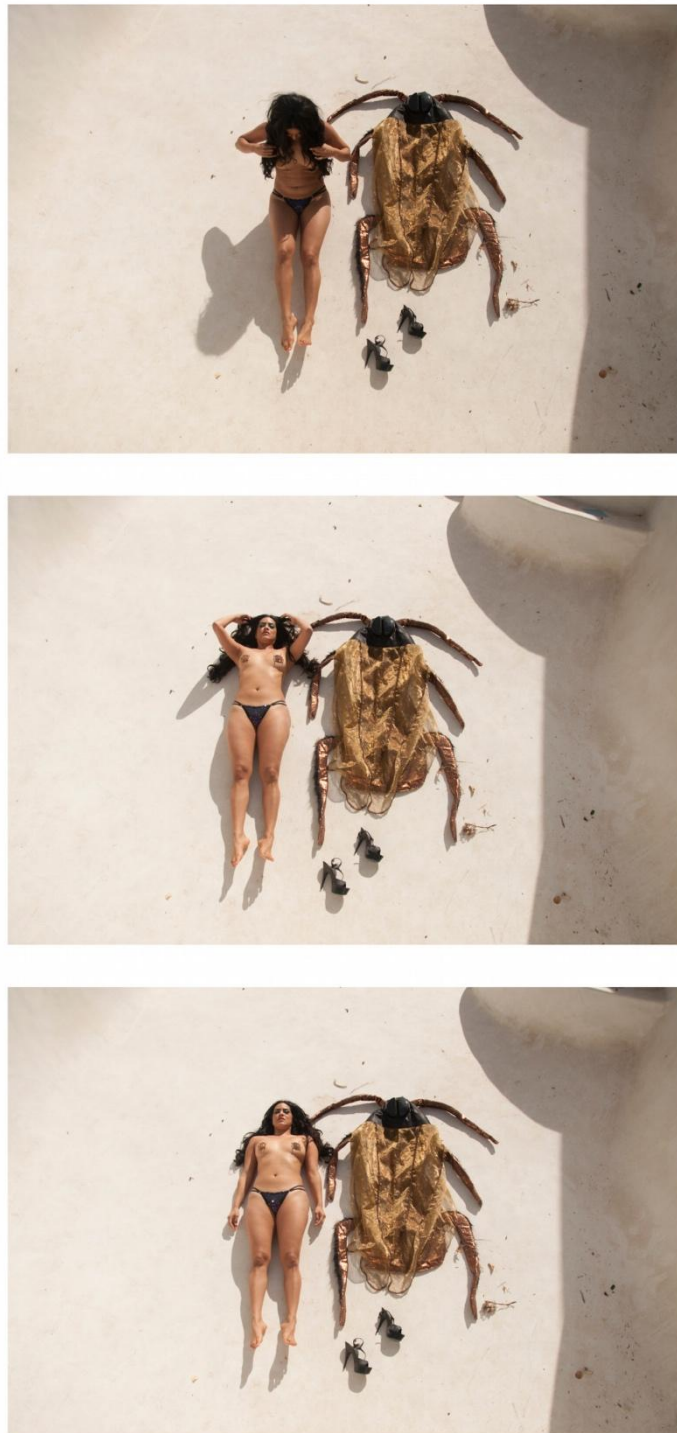


Figure 2.1

RESISTING COLONIALISM

By resisting against hegemonic understanding of healing and transformation that assumes the process leads to a new or better being, Ibarra demonstrates the various and complex ways that Coyolxauhqui's fragmentation and the putting back together occurs. Like Persia and Daddie\$ Pla\$tik's performances, Ibarra takes the popular negative discourses used against her communities and parodies them to create spectacles which mock these same violent discourses. Spicticles which Ibarra defines on her website as "camp spectacles of Mexican/Mexican-American myths that render the colonial gaze laughable; short bursts of mexi-sexy minstrelsy that interrogate modes of sub/objectification" are used throughout her performance pieces to resist against the monolithic ideas of what it means to belong to a particular group of individuals (lachicaboom.com).

More currently, the colonial gaze that Ibarra refers to can be seen amidst the GOP debates regarding the presence of brown bodies and explicitly within the leading candidate Donald Trump's speeches. Perhaps the most popular instance of Trump first addressing the Latinx community is in his speech announcing his candidacy for president in which he states:

When Mexico sends its people, they're not sending their best. They're not sending you. They're not sending you. They're sending people that have lots of problems, and they're bringing those problems with us. They're bringing drugs. They're bringing crime. They're rapists. And some, I assume, are good people. (newsday.com)

This speech garnered support from such a large number of individuals within the U.S and abroad and was used as justification for his plan to build a wall along the entire U.S.-Mexico border if he gets nominated as president. While this is only one example of violent anti-Latinx and anti-immigrant discourse, Trump's lead demonstrates the disturbing ways that racism and nationalism feeds violence that continues to be experienced and felt by queer Latinx individuals. This constant stereotyping of Latinx people within all levels of the public sphere functions to ensure

that white supremacy is upheld and that hegemonic power structures are maintained all the while deliberately ignoring the ways that these structures are built upon genocide.

Andrea Smith goes into greater detail of the ways that strategically forgetting the fact that the United States was created on the foundation of genocide is a tactic of white supremacy in her piece: “Heteropatriarchy and the Three Pillars of White Supremacy: Rethinking Women of Color Organizing.” Smith discusses how hegemonic groups constantly work to forget the genocide of Native Americans, the enslavement of Black Americans and the exploitation of those deemed to be inferior in order to intentionally erase crucial histories, memories and identities that would jeopardize their positions of power. Furthermore, Smith states that indigenous groups “must *always* be disappearing in order to allow non-indigenous peoples rightful claim over this land. Through this logic of genocide, non-native peoples then become the rightful inheritors of all that was indigenous- land, resources, indigenous spirituality or culture” (68). While the benefits of forgetting these histories cater to the wants of those in power as well as non-Natives, the impact of forgetting negatively impacts indigenous communities and all other marginalized communities who live under the violently enforced binaries imposed by colonization, such as queer Latinxs.

Refusing to forget and ignore the impacts that colonization has had on their communities, queer Latinx artists such as Ibarra are rewriting hegemonic narratives in a way that integrates colonial histories with their own present truths and imagined futures. This is also described by Juana María Rodríguez in her book *Sexual Futures, Queer Gestures and Other Latina Longings* where she discusses the various ways that sexual acts are used to create new imaginings and futures that bring healing to traumas. More so, Rodríguez makes the claim that “through eroticization and pleasure, we are thus presented with the possibility of reinterpreting the pain and refusal of social intelligibility that constitute our daily lives, rescripting the social and sexual

conventions that have defined us as racialized subjects” (136). These types of possibilities are seen within the sexual gestures of queer Latinx artists and are expressed through performances in which imposed racialization is rewritten into new empowering understandings. For example, Ibarra takes the gestures of excess and disgust used to negatively describe queer Latinx bodies and rewrites them in a way that simultaneously critiques colonialist tactics while also reaching for an erotic, queer future that would allow her to define and imagine her own transformation. While this is seen in her performance piece mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, it can also be seen in her perhaps most popular performance act, *Tortilleria*, where she adopts and rescripts what Alicia Gaspar de Alba coins as the Tres Marías to reclaim her sexuality and Latinidad.

RESCRIPTING TRES MARIAS

In her book *[Un]Framing the “Bad Woman”: Sor Juana, Malinche, Coyolxauhqui and Other Rebels with a Cause*, Alicia Gaspar de Alba describes the Tres Marías (referring to the three Marys in Jesus’ life) as being the “three attributes to the feminine gender: la madre, la virgen y la puta” that are used as a rubric to evaluate the worthiness of a woman (73). Transgressing these simple categorizations by combining the puta with pious virgen or la madre, as Ibarra does, collapses them upon themselves and indicates that the correlation between Catholicism, Latinidad and sexuality needs to be re-imagined. Gaspar de Alba further explores the ways indigenous and Latinx women today and throughout history have been seen as betraying la raza through their writings, artwork, independency and sexuality that go beyond their predetermined gendered roles.

In order to understand how these artists are attempting to queer their realities and broaden how people visualize the future, it is necessary to understand how the hierarchy of surveilling queer Latinx bodies originated and continues to function in society today. In her chapter

“Malinche’s Revenge,” Gaspar de Alba lays out a “conquest triangle” which she also calls the “Mexican caste system” to help better visualize the ways that colonization has formed how sexual politics get enforced (67). The conquest triangle puts “La Malinche (Indian Mother)” (also referenced as Doña Marina, Malintzin, La Chingada, The Mexican Eve, the Indian/Violated Mother and the fuckee) at the bottom left hand corner of the triangle, “Cortes (the white father)” is located on the top, the “Mestizo (bastard son)” is in the bottom right hand corner and “colonialism, racism + sexism, phallic power and Spanish lengua” in the inverted white triangle of the center (67).

This diagram provides an (over)simplified visual of the expected roles that one is expected to adhere to within the contextualized history of what is generalized to be Latinx culture. While Gaspar de Alba situates this chapter within the parameters of women’s expected roles during the Chicano Movement of the 60’s, Ibarra demonstrates how the surveillance of Latinx women’s behavior by all genders pervades beyond hetero-family centric ideals and is still being seen and felt amongst Latinx queers. The horizontal regulation between queer Latinxs includes reprimanding those who use the image of La Virgen out of the context of reverence and demonstrates the type of consequences that hybridizing queer sexuality with Latinx iconography (that is embedded in religious-based patriarchal norms) can have. Nevertheless, Gaspar de Alba describes this gesture of erotic blasphemy as one of the key ways that queer Latinxs re-possess the Tres Marías by stating that they “have begun to transform the story of Malinche into a mirror of Chicana resistance against female slavery to patriarchy- be it the brown patriarchy of La Raza or the overarching patriarchy of the white father” through the medium of art, performance and writing (78).

Gaspar de Alba, like other queer of color activists and like Ibarra, are reassigning the meanings of Latinx iconography, persons and happenings that often get morphed to fit a misogynistic, queerphobic, anti-indio agenda by using their own positionality, body and sexuality as the medium for interrupting hegemonic understandings. These types of retellings are not only a means of defining and expressing individual and hybridized realities, but are also uprooting falsified histories that are grounded in white supremacist ideological aims and perspectives. Instead of glorifying, simplifying and erasing hybridized and disenfranchised experiences, queer Latinx retellings focus on the complex and often painful modes of being that values the straddling of various literal and metaphorical borders. This embodiment of multiple, overlapping identities creates what Anzaldúa coined in *Borderlands/La Frontera* as “mestiza consciousness” which instead of functioning within the linear, stiff concept of time, memory and history she describes the mestiza as having “plural personality, she operates in pluralistic mode—nothing rejected, nothing abandoned. Not only does she sustain contradictions, she turns the ambivalence into something else” (101).

This tolerance of contradictions and ambiguity, along with the ability to transform what a Western (or what Anzaldúa references as “Aryan” and “white America”) perspective would consider to be a type of impurity or defect into a being that embraces complexity and prompts fertility (99). When queer Latinx activists, performers and writers put themselves, their writings, their art out for the world to see they are as Anzaldúa says:

...participating in the creation of yet another culture, a new story to explain to the world and our participation in it, a new value system with images and symbols that connect us to each other and to the planet. Soy un amasamiento, I am an act of kneading, of uniting and joining that not only has produced both a creature of darkness and a creature of light, but also a creature that questions the definitions of light and dark and gives them new meanings (103).

The creation of a new culture that Anzaldúa refers to functions as a means survival for those who are not represented under the rigid binaries that categorizes all people and stereotypes brownness, but also works as a type of healing and preservation of cultural, spiritual and material realities. Amidst the ongoing and historical violences experienced by queer Latinxs, the erotic continues to be a powerful mode of healing and reclaiming of the body. This is seen perhaps most explicitly in Ibarra's performance *Tortilleria: Interrupting the racial bondage between hot sauce, tacos and familial domesticity by making tacos with panties topped with Tapatío ejaculate*.

FUCKING SPICY GESTURES

In this performance, Ibarra wears adopts chingada aesthetics while wearing stereotypical Mexican housewife attire: a black and white checkered apron over her ruffle lined dress which is the colors of the Mexican flag (green, red and white). She has a big rose in her hair (Frida Kahlo style), black fishnet stockings, black high heels, long straight black hair with a few dark reddish-orange highlights throughout, unblended black lip liner that outlines her red lipstick and bright green eye shadow to match the colors of her dress. At one point during her act, Ibarra turns away from the audience and tears open the back of her dress to reveal that she is only wearing black titty tassels and a black leather strap-on harness. A bottle of Tapatío hot sauce is in the place of a dildo, which she jacks off later in her act. Utilizing imitation as a form mockery to reveal the disturbing reality behind such mentalities, Ibarra imitates the male phallus, the literal aesthetic of spiciness, the stereotype of Latinx women and the Tres Marías in a way that condones voyeurism into the mind of hegemonic power while telling them to get fucked. This go fuck yourself approach in her performances demonstrates what Iván Ramos calls “defiant dissatisfaction” (11-12). Ramos loosely defines “defiant dissatisfaction” in his piece “Spic(y) Appropriations: The

Gustatory Aesthetics of Xandra Ibarra (Aka La Chica Boom)” as the ways the brown queer community struggles against the steel control that those in positions of power implement to dominate and pacify every aspect of their lives.

Ramos also looks closely at Ibarra’s gestures in *Tortilleria* and discusses the symbolism and correlation between the stereotypes of Latinxs being spicy and the usage of Tapatío hot sauce. The usage of the Tapatío strap-on is also seen in Ibarra’s other pieces such as *Tapatío Cum Shot* (2010), her collaboration performance with Amber Hawk Swanson *Untitled Fucking* (2013) as well as in the bottle label display in her *Fuck My Life* exhibition and has been an important gesture that signifies the variety stereotypes imposed upon queer Latinxs. The intentional correlations between Tapatío hot sauce with the stereotypes that lead to fetishizations of queer Latinxs ties into the notions of consumption and prompts the question of who is consuming whom. In her chapter “Eating the Other” bell hooks details how this type of fetishizing becomes a commodity for the hegemonic group to consume. More specifically, she states “within commodity culture, ethnicity becomes spice, seasoning that can liven up the dull dish that is mainstream white culture” (22). Using a bottle of Tapatío as a dildo jeers at the way hegemonic white society depends upon the fetishization and exploitation of Latinx bodies to get themselves off while also demonstrating how queer Latinx sexuality is only deemed acceptable if it is under the colonial gaze. Sexuality that is expressed outside of this gaze is rendered excessive and labeled as inverted, yet is still always viable for consumption.

Spice as a gesture produces the affect of panic within the colonial gaze, thus enticing the need to reinforce containment of these bodies out of fear of excess. Combining the gesture of spice with Ibarra’s usage of tortilleria to title her act addresses the layering of the various identities and experiences she embodies. Tortilleria, meaning tortilla maker, is also slang for

lesbian and alludes to the assumed servitude of Latinx women as well as the ways that queer bodies are consumed by those who are in positions of power. Reproducing these assumptions through spicticles elicits a call for the audience to assess their own situated position in the space where “convergence of pleasure with Otherness” occurs (24). This convergence, as hooks calls it, becomes a space of *nepantla* that holds the potential to further understand the ways that social power manifests onto the bodies of queer Latinxs.



Figure 2.2

Ramos' focus on the convergence of maternal attributes of purity and piety for the purpose of expressing resistance against the slut-shaming narratives that racialized queer women often experience from a range of different individuals, naturally evokes a broad array of responses from Ibarra's audience. In an interview conducted by Marta Martinez in 2011, Martinez asks Ibarra about the types of responses and reactions she receives from the audience after her performances and Ibarra responds with:

For a queer white audience, I feel like they see the *fuck you* in the performance. And for people of color, a lot of times it's a mixed bag. Some Latinas will come up to me, and tell me that I'm perpetuating whore stereotypes about Latinas. And I always say the same shit, "Well, what's so bad about whores?" Because they don't know that I'm a sex worker and that they're insulting me. There will also be dudes that come up to me, Latino dudes who say similar things or just call me a ho behind my back. (artpractical.com)

While this excerpt mostly focuses on negative reactions she has received after performing, Ibarra later in the interview discusses the ways that Latinx queers were offended by her usage of Catholic iconography, such as the eroticization of the Virgen de Guadalupe, claiming that she took it too far. Performing for herself or for what she is feeling at the time, instead of tailoring her performances to target a particular audience becomes an act of telling her own truth, which consequentially often attempts to get censored by the same group of individuals who have similar colonized histories or ways of feeling and belonging. The method of using her body to tell her story functions to actively reappropriate cultural icons associated with Latinx (or more specifically Mexicanx) culture while unabashedly embracing her queer sexuality within them. In addition, the viscosity of her performances prompts the issues of fetichization and tokenization to be historicized before the audience whether or not they have the lens to see or articulate its complexity.

CONCLUSION

Through what Katrin Sieg coined as "ethnic drag" and neo-burlesque, Ibarra uses camp to perform a multi-layered cultural critique that centers and exaggerates the interlocking aspects of queerness, Latinidad and the subjugation of femininity. Ibarra grounds her persona in chingada aesthetics that, when used outside of the queer or feminist community, are most often alluded to with derogatory, slut-shaming, misogynistic intent. The usage of a Tapatío strap-on in multiple of her performances conjures memory of colonization and white supremacy via the gesture of penetration while also alluding to the spiciness and hypersexualization that is ascribed to queer

Latinxs. In adopting the same gestures that are violently ascribed to her, Ibarra seductively reassigns the meanings of these tropes to imagine a queer, erotic future that reappropriates and transforms how Latinidad is understood. In centering herself in her pieces, Ibarra utilizes the paradigms of disgust, excess and failed spicticles to focus on the ways her own self transformation seems to always reproduce or mimic her same self.

In another more recent interview, Ibarra discusses the ways that she trying to step away from the spictacle performances that La Chica Boom is known for and wants to focus more on her molting and cucaracha projects that explore the notions of healing and transformation. During the interview when she is talking about a piece inspired by her grandmother's healing rituals, she states: "I always talk about not wanting to heal myself because I think that healing is about trying to be whole, something I could never be. Let me just put it this way: I like myself fucked up. I would never try to heal those portions of me because they are a part of who I am" (48hills.org). With this, Ibarra emphasizes the importance of stepping away from the narrative of healing as wholeness and instead conceptualizes healing as a type of self love, acceptance and authenticity. Additionally, Ibarra's desire to move on from La Chica Boom centered projects towards new ways of performing, demonstrates how change is inevitable in order to accommodate the types of healing and transformation that are necessary. At the time, spictacles were what was needed to express and grapple with her truths, but her needs have since shifted and evolved with time and her experiences. This again speaks to the malleable nature of nepantleras, the fluidity of borders and the various ways that healing and transformation are understood. Nonetheless, navigating and situating oneself in the nepantlas leaves queer Latinx individuals left to grapple with the various contradictions that, once wrangled, arouse potentialities that strive for a decolonized future free from the violences of subjugation.

Chapter 4

After Dismemberment: Speaking Wounds

*We are daughters and sons
exchanging roles and intermixing
and being punished-
slashed with words and hands
raped by our own families
recycling the hurts.
-D.M. O'Brien*

Out of the necessity to survive, heal and imagine, queer Latinx artists are using their bodies and artwork to fulfill the types of memory that are missing within the provided, dominant (his)stories. By telling their own truths and rewriting mistold histories, queer Latinx artists such as those mentioned in this thesis are reaching towards and creating an indigenized, queer, erotic future. Through the interrogation of borders, sexuality, and policies of belonging, artists Xandra Ibarra, Julio Salgado, Persia, Daddie\$ Pla\$tik and Melanie Cervantes are confronting absent narratives to demonstrate how the haunting legacy of colonization continuously gets undermined, thus furthering the violences felt by disenfranchised groups. The body as a site of storytelling reveals and remembers how colonization continues to impact bodies, memories, lands and histories of those who are seen as disposable and replaceable while simultaneously healing and transforming these same communities. In this final chapter, I offer fragments of my own story to practice the types healing and transformation that queer indigenous, Latinxs and people of color have always been doing as well as to participate in the imagining of a future that indigenizes and queers current understandings of belonging.

When I was six years old, a cat came into our backyard. Abuelita, with her eyebrows already washed off, grabbed the nearest gun and shot at it. She told me she missed, but I wouldn't stop screaming. She put a weenie on toast in my mouth to shut me up and continued teaching me how to make rosary knots. The nuns were coming in the morning and we were only halfway done.

Performing queer Latinxs are ensuring futurity by rejecting the current fixed modes of theorizing and de-centering the hegemonic power that certain types of histories and memories hold. Creating and performing art within the public sphere maneuvers within and against dominant forms of telling and remembering histories and transforms the largely accepted, exclusionary and falsified narratives into stories that reaches towards a queer erotic future. Queer Latinx artists are continuing the work done by the queer women of color feminists by using their bodies, social-positions, knowledge and truths to build new meanings behind cultural practices, icons and ideologies to heal themselves and their communities in a way that simultaneously exercises their own multi-faceted agency and transgresses the stagnancy of time. Continuing the tradition of storytelling whether it be through poster art, sharing memories, making a music video or performing burlesque is an important tactic of survival ensuring that agency and livelihood of queer indigenous and Latinxs does not get stifled through the dominant systems of power.

In her piece “The Historian as Curandera,” Aurora Levins Morales provides a handbook of healing that emphasizes the tellings and re-telling of various, contradictory, untold and mistold histories. She emphasizes how through our “writing about the past, we are choosing to bear witness to the impact of the past on the people around us. We don’t stand apart from history. We are in the midst of it right this minute” (37). For example, these writings expressed through

storytelling are seen within Melanie Cervantes' poster art that points out the violence behind the strategic forgetting of indigenous histories when engaging with politics and activism regarding (im)migration, food politics and land. Cervantes' poster *Somos de Maíz* (2013) discussed in Chapter Two, writes about the past in a present tense that is both remembering erased indigenous stories while also actively reminding the public that the future is indigenous. Standing within the complexity of history to imagine the the way the future will be, transforms and heals those who are putting back together the fragments that are constantly being scattered by hegemonic powers.

When I was seven years old, I had reoccurring nightmares about hanging human skins and angry men with sharp nails. I saw a dead body on the side of the road and knew not to tell anyone. The psychiatrist said my visions were a symptom of PTSD from my father's attempt to kill us. I didn't go back and we kept moving every six months.

PROCESS OF REMEMBERING

This putting back together of scattered pieces requires that they be found and understood within the context of which they were torn off. In her book *Light in the Dark/Luz en Lo Oscuro*, Gloria Anzaldúa coins this as the “Coyolxauhqui imperative” which she defines as the process of healing the violences that “split us, scatter our energies, and haunt us” (1). The death and dismemberment of Coyolxauhqui by Huitzilopochtli symbolizes the ongoing undertaking to reconnect, heal and transform ourselves, our communities and the world we live in from the violences we have all experienced. Coyolxauhqui imperative, which has been the foundation of this thesis, can be seen perhaps most vividly in the types of storytelling by queer nepantleras. Understanding queer Latinx artists as nepantleras who are persistently navigating and intervening to point how these violences and erasures are still felt hundreds of years later, adamantly insists that memory is not forgotten or stagnant, but alive and powerful. The rewriting

of stories in order to remember, transform and heal the various types of scarrings and hauntings that are felt in our daily lives is deeply intertwined with various paradigms and geographies of being.

When I was twelve years old, I started keeping a Bible next to my bed because the Jesus people at my school said the Bible keeps sin away. I was hoping it would keep my brother from coming into my room at night, but it didn't. I replaced it with the long fillet knife that my step-father got when his granddaddy died. He stopped coming in my room.

Dominant forces that deliberately separate paradigms and geographies of being as individual and unrelated, perpetuate the act of forgetting for the sake of maintaining control over marginalized groups. Continuing to instill this mode of seeing the world, is an attempt to pacify and discredit the ongoing work of those who are refusing to be forgotten. Anzaldúa states that this refusal that traces geographies of history and memory “interact with internal and external, real and virtual, past and present environments, people and objects around us, we weave (tejemos), and are woven into our identities” (69). Understanding ‘remembering’ as the sifting through Coyolxauhqui’s torn limbs, denies the passive sequential process of healing and instead embraces agency through the act of storytelling and recalling contradictory aspects of memory. This tearing and ripping away of limbs that Coyolxauhqui and others continue to endure, requires that we go back into our own histories and understand them as intricate spaces that have the potential of rewriting a future that is currently being told by hegemonic structures.

When I was thirteen years old, my friend Brittany taught me how to use my body to get drugs. She introduced me to Angel who gave the two of us a decent supply after we were done with him. I went home and took everything at once, but still woke up the next day. I heard Angel went to prison for stabbing someone to death. Brittany never left that shitty town.

Such can be seen in Aurora Levins Morales' book *Kindling* in which Morales tells stories of healing, illness, pain and resilience experienced in her own body and the ways these experiences have contextualized her understanding of various systems of power and oppression. Morales' explains the ways that we embody our history and memory by writing:

Our history is in our bodies- what we do to breathe, how we move, the sounds we make, our myriad shapes, our wild gestures, far outside the boundaries of what's expected, the knowledge bound into our bones, our trembling muscles, our laboring lungs- like secret seeds tied into the hair of our stolen ancestors, we carry it everywhere. Our stories erupt in the dances we invent, in the pleasure rubbed from our bodies like medicine from crushed leaves, spicy, astringent, sweet. (*Kindling* 165-66)

Like the queer Latinx artists I've discussed in this thesis, Morales brings histories and memories back to the movement, gesture, touch, taste, and sound of the body, reifying what Cherríe Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa coined as "theory in the flesh" that was first introduced in the anthology *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color*. Moraga describes theory in the flesh as being the "physical realities of our lives- our skin color, the land or concrete we grew up on, our sexual longings- [that] all fuse to create a politic born out of necessity," thus explaining how the body serves as a crucial way of storytelling and theorizing (23).

When I was sixteen, I was washing the vomit out of my mother's hair when she told me how her rape was my creation story. Her lips disappeared as she raised her hand trying to hit my face. She called me devil's cunt and I laughed. When I asked her what she was, she said she was tired. I wrapped her hair and put her in bed.

EROTIC TENSIONS

In her article, "Queer Xicana Indígena cultural production: Remembering through oral and visual storytelling" Susy Zepeda looks at multiple queer Xicana artists whose art is indigenizing and remembering histories and memories that intentionally get blotted out within

the stories told by hegemonic groups. Zepeda prefaces her piece by recognizing the all encompassing damage that still impacts queer Latinx communities by stating “colonization was a source of harmful fragmentation for most peoples in Mesoamerica and continues in the present day through colonial legacies of forgetting or misremembering” (120). This violently forced domination is felt within the artwork of queer nepantleras and actively attempts to prevent the remembering and understanding of their own realities. Despite these efforts, queer Latinx artists relentlessly seek to interrupt the ongoing process of colonization which results in what Zepeda calls a “productive tension between colonial and non-colonial frameworks that signify the entangled complexities of historical narratives and memories” (121). These tensions while uncomfortable, create spaces that nepantleras utilize to imagine a future that indigenizes the queer Latinx retellings.

When I was nineteen, I had a dream where I saw my ancestors. Four were standing before me, holding bundles close to their chests, still and unspeaking. When I reached out to touch them, their skin turned into a story showing me their lives. They took me to Tejas and Algeria before the Whites came. I woke up and ran to the mirror to look at my face. We all had the same eyes.

In her piece “Indígena as Scribe: The (W)rite to Remember,” Cherríe Moraga describes the act of writing as a bold gesture of survival that is used as a powerful medium of remembering, imagining and creating that which has been strategically forgotten over time. Moraga explains how “writing against amnesia” serves a crucial role in navigating the tense spaces of nepantla all the while retelling the truths of our ancestors (157). Writing on the body to confront missing histories and memories, reconnects queer Latinxs with their past while also healing themselves through their art. The work of Xandra Ibarra, discussed in Chapter Three,

demonstrates how burlesque and the erotic can transform how the complex relationship between the way our sex and healing are understood together. Imagining the potential healing that sexual acts can bring upon ourselves and our communities dismantles stiff notions of sexual politics surveilled by heteronormative institutions and instead writes sexual desire as a powerful mode of resistance and creativity. In her book *Sexual Futures, Queer Gestures, and Other Latina Longings*, Juana María Rodríguez states how “queer sociality through the erotic, forge[s] a bond between political projects of social transformation and the urgency of imagining other sexual futures” (183). This coming together of politics uses the site of the the body to remember erased desires with the hope of envisioning a queer future that understands the erotic as transformative.

When I was twenty, I organized a group that connected professors to student sex workers on campus. Using the space of the university to work ensured a type of security that created some of the safest working conditions that us sugar babies had ever had. Unfortunately, the men were vanilla as fuck. We got bored and changed our numbers.

Nepantleras who are forming connections between queer sexual politics, racism and xenophobia like the work seen by Ibarra, Julio Salgado, Persia and Daddie\$ Pla\$tik, are crucial for understanding the explicit erasure of bodies, desires and stories. In her concluding chapter, Rodríguez suggests that the messiness of our situated experiences and realities are “seemingly individual desires and gestures [that] carry the traces of history and social conventions (183). With this, Rodríguez makes the claim that the individual is not separate from but deeply embedded within and carrying the stories that have shaped our world. Sexual acts and the act of writing to remember reclaims co-opted stories of resilience and survival, thus becoming a radical gesture of transformation and agency. Latinx artists who are queering the ways we perceive and live the world function as guides, leading the world through the tensions and spaces of the

unnatural borders that seek to divide and disempower. Through these queer nepantleras, we are able to rebel against the forced politics imposed by a queerphobic, white supremacist nation that is the United States, all the while transgressing our understanding of who we are and where we come from.

When I was twenty-one, I sat on my homegirl Victoria's couch for three days. With no insurance she was my suicide watch. I chain smoked through a carton of cigarettes listening to her tell me stories until I had to catch my flight up north. Her cheekbones were showing and she was trying to get her little boy back. She's gotten clean a few times since then.

CONCLUSION

Queer Latinxs pushing against the continuation of violent policies and narratives that exclude them lays out the political landscape within the United States for other activists to engage with. Bringing work of these particular artists in conversation with each other, confronts hegemonic understandings of eroticism, (im)migration, gentrification and the way it relates to indigeneity and queerness as it is understood in the U.S.. Interrogating these relationships and histories that queer Latinx artists present, anticipates a future that decolonizes the way we conceptualize ourselves in the world we live in. While I have discussed only a few Latinx performers and visual artists who are queering understandings of being within the United States, there are thousands whose work has not been discussed. This thesis however, provides a jumping off point for which artists and activists can collaborate and engage with one another through their storytelling and healing.

Encapsulating these seemingly unrelated works together, allows us to see the various movements that are happening at this moment in history and to envision potential relationships and connections that could again rewrite how we understand ourselves and our histories.

Expanding notions of queerness and Latinidad through telling and listening to stories of healing are seen within all these pieces of work and directly imply the relatedness between these various discourses of being thus calling us to question how we can use our own bodies, stories and spaces to heal and transform. The pieces of memory that have survived and grown despite the repression by hegemonic groups imparts a hopeful glance into future meanings and unions that derail common misconceptions of what healing is supposed to look like. While this type of work is never complete, destabilizing the notion of healing as a linear process provides alternative, indigenous understandings that centers queerness as a possibility for remembering and transgressing systemic trauma. Thereby, this thesis project participates within the the already ongoing evocation of healing and transformative spaces while also ensuring that it continues thereafter.

When I was twenty-two, I had a dream about the revolution. I was barefoot in the street laughing and there was blood everywhere. I had my great granddaddy's fillet knife in my hand and just finished gutting and castrating someone. I started to run and I could feel my braid beating against my back. We were winning.

Throughout this project, I have discussed how queer Latinxs are understanding past, present and future histories and memories that shape the politicized spaces we live, feel, love and fuck in. Through the reclaiming of forgotten and erased stories, the artwork and performances I have mentioned provoke ancestral memories and traumas while simultaneously healing and fragmenting our individual selves and our communities. Instead of separating my individual self from the work that I reference and discuss throughout this thesis, I fully immerse the memories and histories I hold within it. This bridging of self with theory, while traditionally looked down upon, practices the very types of transformative work that imagines a future viable for queer

indigenous and Latinx survival. This tearing away and splintering of ourselves that occurs within every sphere of existence, is being challenged and rewritten through queer Latinx bodies, art and performance. Telling new stories for the sake of healing and transforming politics of living in the world is a refusal to be forgotten and threatens the authority of hegemonic groups who continue to disappear those who are seen as disposable. Modes of imagining that emphasize decolonization and indigenization in a creative, responsible and compassionate manner actively pieces the missing, ruptured and untold stories, experiences and heritages back together.

I am twenty-three and my illnesses keep me in bed for weeks at a time. Everything is loud and pale people are staring at me. My rage remembers my ancestors. It is hot, yellow, dangerous and beautiful. I'm going back home, where I can find them everyday under their sun. If I look into the dry desert cracks, I see their spikes, blood and bones looking back into me.

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