RICE UNIVERSITY

Chicana/o Literature and the Folkloric Difference

by

Elena V. Valdez

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE

Doctor of Philosophy

APPROVED, THESIS COMMITTEE

Jose F. Aranda, Chair
Associate Professor of English and Spanish & Portuguese and Latin American Studies, Rice University

Nicole Waligora-Davis
Associate Professor of English, Rice University

Jeffrey J. Kripal
J. Newton Rayzor Professor of Religion, Rice University

Melina V. Vizcaíno-Alemán
Associate Professor of English, University of New Mexico

HOUSTON, TEXAS
May 2019
Copyright © 2019 by Elena V. Valdez

All rights reserved
ABSTRACT

Chicana/o Literature and the Folkloric Difference

by

Elena V. Valdez

This dissertation examines the folkloric underpinnings of the Mexican American literary archive by reading Mexican American literature and cultural expression through the analytic I call the folkloric difference. Through folkloric difference, this project theorizes how to interpret Mexican American engagement with folklore. This study contends that the folkloric difference allows scholars to chart a Mexican American literary history that is attentive to the ways Mexican Americans have fashioned regional identities in response to coloniality. My study treats Mexican Americans’ communal identity formation as a dynamic process that is influenced by their relationships to particular regions in the US Southwest and West. The folkloric difference, I argue, acts as a framework that intervenes in the fields of American literary studies, folklore studies, and Chicana/o studies, highlighting how settler colonialism and processes of migration and exchange unfold in regional contexts to shape local forms of meaning-making and unofficial archives. The goal of this study is to acknowledge the capacity of folklore to act as a decolonial method.

This study traces folkloric difference since the early twentieth century. Chapter one examines discourses of folklore and the formation of alternate “folk” community in Cleofas Jaramillo’s Romance of a Little Village Girl (1955). Jaramillo’s politics demonstrate how folklore became a means dealing with the consequences of Manifest Destiny. In its reading of Jorge Ainslie's serialized novel Los Pochos (1934), chapter two
revisits the US Spanish-language press to examine how folklore becomes a source through which immigrant communities negotiate their identities outside of Mexico and in the wake of the Mexican Revolution. Chapter three explores how borderlore, a type of folklore tied to the US-Mexico border, disrupts two dominant literary genres—magical realism and the gothic—in Luis Alberto Urrea’s novel The Hummingbird’s Daughter (2005). Chapter four analyzes ire’ne lara silva’s application of borderlore in her short story collection flesh to bone (2013). Here borderlore is deployed as a feminist spiritual response to border violence. Chapter five contemplates the limits of the folkloric difference by considering how the contemporary celebration of the Spanish reconquest of Santa Fe, New Mexico, plays out in the public schools.
PUBLICATION NOTICE

Parts of this dissertation (chapters 3 & 5) were published in *Super Religion*, a collection edited by Jeffrey J. Kripal, and *Chiricú Journal: Latina/o Literatures, Arts, and Cultures*. 
To my grandmothers--
the ones who
kept their eggs in the windowsill,
wrapped their tired, injured wrists in green chile,
butchered sheep and built hornos,
and came to believe that, because of their resilience,
they were made of cement.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I completed this project because of the persistent guidance and encouragement of many people—teachers, mentors, friends, and family.

First, I’d like to acknowledge my committee members. Dr. José F. Aranda has had unwavering faith in my ability to become an academic since I started the PhD program. There is not enough space here to thank him for all he has taught me, for his patience and genuine kindness. He is a Chicano wizard, and I will always be grateful that he allowed me to be his apprentice. Dr. Nicole Waligora-Davis has also consistently offered her intellectual and professional support, and her “Black Left” course changed how I read the intersections of cultural and political work. Dr. Jeffrey J. Kripal inspired my intellectual curiosity to grow in the direction of religion and spirituality through his “Mutants and Mystics” course, which also helped me produce an early version of my third chapter. Dr. Melina Vizcaíno-Alemán has been a tough reader and steadfast supporter since I started working with Mexican American literature at UNM. I’m grateful she has continued to be part of my journey.

Many other scholars have contributed to this project through their mentorship and encouragement. I’ve learned a great deal from my conversations with Dr. Krista Comer and Dr. Helena Michie. Working with Dr. Gabriela Baeza Ventura and Dr. Carolina Villarroel was a highlight of my graduate school career. I owe special thanks to Dr. María E. Cotera for allowing me to contribute to Chicana por mi Raza (CPMR), and for inspiring so much of my work on folklore. And I wish to acknowledge the scholars who have participated in El Taller Chicana/o since 2013. Their feedback always helped drive my preliminary thoughts to the next stage. Dr. Amanda Ellis and Dr. Priscilla Ybarra, you have motivated me to keep going and have guided my thinking in powerful ways. To my
wonderful friends, Lorena Gauthereau, Brittany Henry, and Scott Pett, thank you for not only reading and writing, but also laughing and crying with me. I’ve cherished all of our get-togethers, especially when they’ve involved your delightful children. Thank you for being my Houston family.

Special thanks to Rob Martinez, the Deputy State Historian of New Mexico, and the New Mexico History Scholars Program. Thank you to the Humanities Research Center for providing me with a sixth-year public humanities fellowship and several years’ worth of conference funding. I also wish to acknowledge the Center for Engaged Research and Collaborative Learning, the Center for the Study of Women, Gender, and Sexuality, and Center for Academic and Professional Communication, and the Americas Research Center, for supporting my research and professional development throughout my years at Rice.

Finally, this project was ultimately born out of my love for a number of people and places in New Mexico. I have many aunties, uncles, and cousins, and some of them are very gifted storytellers. They have always helped me approach life with a sense of humor and joy, no matter how difficult it may be. My mom and dad have been teaching me their unique versions of Chicano studies for most of my life, always inspiring me to read the world differently. Thank you, Mom and Dad, for working so hard to be the best parents possible to your hijita. Thank you for gifting me with your appreciation for the power of place, your tireless creativity, and limitless love. To my Matthew: Thank you for being part of this dream. You’ve made it all worthwhile. You help me admire the beauty that surrounds us—the birds, the flowers, and the sun. I am lucky to share this life with you.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</td>
<td>vii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER ONE</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Remaking ‘Folk’ Communities in Cleofas Jaramillo’s <em>Romance of a Little Village Girl</em> (1955)</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER TWO</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Folkloric Difference in the US Spanish-language Press:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Case of Jorge Ainslie’s <em>Los Pochos</em> (1934)</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER THREE</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Between Modernity and Coloniality:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Borderlore in Luis Alberto Urrea’s <em>The Hummingbird’s Daughter</em> (2005)</td>
<td>104</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER FOUR</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spiritual Community and the Grief of Borderlore</td>
<td>141</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER FIVE</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Santa Fe Fiesta and the Limits of the Folkloric Difference</td>
<td>174</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BIBLIOGRAPHY</td>
<td>201</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
INTRODUCTION

Chicana/o Literature and the Folkloric Difference

I don’t believe that we are done with the old myths yet—or that they are done with us.

--ire’ne lara silva, flesh to bone

Literary criticism, like other areas of critical inquiry, often follows the colonizing impulse to “discover” unknown epistemological territory. But rather than replicating the colonialist drive to push toward the “new,” this dissertation returns to a subject that many critics of Mexican American literature know well: folklore. More specifically, Chicana/o Literature and the Folkloric Difference returns to ideations of folklore—those cultural formations and storytelling methods typically considered unofficial forms of knowledge and practice. Attentive to the ways in which Mexican American writers call attention to folklore, as the contemporary Chicana writer ire’ne lara silva does in the epigraph above, this dissertation recognizes that the “old myths”—those legends, beliefs, oral histories, and other items that qualify as folklore—continue to provide Mexican American writers with some of the most constant yet flexible material to question, conserve, reformulate, or otherwise make sense of the world in which we live.¹

For Mexican American writers, the appeal of folklore no doubt lies in its ability to adjust to local contexts. Though Western epistemology has long excluded folklore as a viable source of knowledge, considering it as emerging from a place “where thinking was impossible” according to the logic of modernity and coloniality, this dissertation contends that folklore has functioned as a persistent site of decolonial thinking for people of

¹ ire’ne lara silva, flesh to bone (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 2013), np.
Mexican descent in the United States. Reading folklore as a critical method, this dissertation asserts that Mexican American political engagement with folklore unites the seemingly disparate forms of literary and print culture that were generated before and after the Chicana/o movement.

*Chicana/o Literature and the Folkloric Difference* revisits the intersections of Mexican American literature and folklore studies to shed light on the relationship between coloniality and the politics of knowledge. In doing so, this dissertation lays a foundation for charting a genealogy of Mexican Americans’ engagement with folklore in the fashioning of regional communal identities. Though the slippery term “folklore” is invariably attached to coloniality, this project insists on reading Mexican Americans’ engagement with the informal meaning-making practices and unofficial histories often described as folklore through a decolonial analytic I call the “folkloric difference.” Such an analytic, I argue, allows us to read how Mexican Americans have used folklore as a method for addressing power inequities that continue to impact our capacity to write ourselves into the national literary and cultural consciousness. The analytic of the folkloric difference departs from other methods of reading the Mexican American literary archive because it traces a genealogy of Mexican Americans’ engagement with folklore as a mode of critique, a method that always exists in tension

---

4 I say “revisit” because I am not the first to examine the political potency of Mexican American folklore. However, previous analyses have predominantly focused on the isolated use of folklore by individual Mexican American authors.
with modernity and coloniality, one that sheds light on regional Mexican American community identity formation.⁵

Since sociologist Anibal Quijano first coined the term “coloniality of power,” coloniality has been used to denote interrelated structures of control that were generated as a result of the sixteenth century conquest of the Americas.⁶ These structures, according to world-systems theorist Walter D. Mignolo, have constituted the “darker side of modernity” and have aided in the expansion and maintenance of a global project that has organized space, time, and knowledge from an epistemological perspective anchored in Western Europe.⁷ Historically, and far from unique to Mexican Americans, the conditions initiated by settler colonialism and aided by modernity have rendered local, collective acts of meaning-making that occur outside of institutional spaces unreliable and inconsequential—folklore, in other words.⁸ Among its other material and cultural effects, the organization of knowledge from a Western perspective has resulted in the false yet persistent notion that we Mexican Americans are a unified and homogenous group.

Assumptions about Mexican American homogeneity, however seemingly benign, are both an outcome and source of historical amnesia in the United States, often even within the fields of Chicana/o studies and Latinx studies. Rodrigo Lazo points out that

---

⁵ I use the term “community” broadly. Throughout the dissertation, community refers to a social group that shares a common sense of identity, which is often constructed by shared cultural memories, attachments to place, or shared histories and experiences that are informed by structures of race, class, gender, and religion.
⁸ Linda Tuhiwai Smith writes that “[t]he negation of history was a critical part of asserting colonial ideology, partly because such views were regarded as clearly ‘primitive’ and ‘incorrect’ and mostly because they challenged and resisted the mission of colonization.” See Linda Tuhiwai Smith, Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples (1999; repr., London and New York: Zed Books Ltd, 2008), 29.
although recent demographic changes in the United States have helped foster Latinx studies, much of the current scholarship in the field has focused on the contemporary period.\(^9\) Though I do not seek to discount the important work that focuses on contemporary Latina/o/x issues of migration, identity, and culture, the ways in which these issues are approached sometimes participate in the marginalization and erasure of US Latina/o/x history, as scholars knowingly or unknowingly forward the notion that all Latina/o/x peoples are immigrants, or assume there are but few examples of literary and print culture written by Latinas/os/x before the civil rights period. Because of folklore’s attachment to cultural and geographic particularities, the folkloric difference is a timely analytic, as it considers how local, place-based histories interact with global processes and shape Mexican American identities not only in the contemporary period, but also in the early twentieth century.

Fundamentally, *Chicana/o Literature and the Folklore Difference* forwards the analytic of the folkloric difference so as to offer a decolonial perspective on Mexican American uses of folklore, particularly in regard to the role folklore has played in the formation of the Mexican American literary archive. The lens of the folkloric difference acknowledges that modernity and coloniality have affected Mexican Americans’ access to power and the institutional spaces where knowledge is produced. Though work has been done in the last half century to recover and think critically about Mexican American knowledges and practices that have been deemed folklore, much more still needs to be done in this area. In folklore studies, for instance, there is yet to be a study devoted to examining multiple Mexican Americans writers’ professional and creative uses of

---

folklore. In literary studies, the term folklore continues to mark Mexican American literary and cultural production as unworthy of the critical attention that other genres, methods, and literary movements receive. Folklore continues to be coded as that which is unsophisticated. My analytic of the folkloric difference returns to the Mexican American literary archive in order to tease out how folklore has functioned as a critical site of decolonial thinking for Mexican Americans.

Key to my intervention are the ways in which the folkloric difference draws attention to the regional manifestations of what Mignolo calls the colonial difference. The folkloric difference is an analytic that dovetails with critical regionalism but remains attentive to how coloniality has impacted Mexican American engagement with folklore. Mignolo’s concept of colonial difference is the “physical as well as imaginary location” where other local histories, disguised as universalisms, converge with more local histories and are consequently “adapted, adopted, rejected, integrated, or ignored” by local subjects. The colonial difference is also the site from where “border thinking,” or decolonial thinking is possible, because it is where the geopolitics of knowledge become visible. The folkloric difference, I argue, reveals how Mexican Americans have relied

---


on and adapted knowledges that emerged from the imposition of overlapping settler colonialisms in the United States, specifically in the US West and Southwest.

In “Decolonizing Western Epistemology/Building Decolonial Epistemologies” (2012), Mignolo discusses the colonial difference and its propensity to provoke decolonial thinking. He explains that while the words “decolonial” and “decolonization” have most often been used in discourse pertaining to liberation projects of the mid-twentieth century, the terms are now used in more frequency to describe the project of liberating our thinking from the confines of Western epistemology, which orders the world from the location of Western Europe. Decolonial thinking requires shifting the epistemological location from which we approach modernity. Mignolo points out that since modernity obscures the pernicious actions and outcomes that facilitated its extension, even the act of naming what it seeks to hide is a form of decolonial thinking.

Useful for my formulation of the folkloric difference is the distinction Mignolo draws between the “modern subject” and the “colonial subject.” Whereas the modern subject is the “knowing subject” that does not question the “epistemic presupposition in which he or she is grounded,” the colonial subject has typically been an object, one excluded from the epistemic ground upon which the modern subject stands and makes sense of the world. Decolonial thinking, Mignolo asserts, is “what colonial subjects do when they do not want to assimilate and are not happy remaining colonial subjects.” In other words, the practice of decolonial thinking (as well as doing) is never necessarily

---

14 Ibid., 26.
15 Ibid., 41.
16 Ibid., 42.
about undoing the effects of modernity/coloniality. Rather, it is about “learning to unlearn in order to relearn and to rebuild.”¹⁷ This is a task of the folkloric difference—to unlearn what we thought we have understood about folklore within the Mexican American literary archive in order to not only chart Mexican American uses of folklore and the relationship between and the formation and fluctuation of regional Mexican American identities.

**Critical Genealogies of the Folkloric Difference**

We change our minds
But it’s too late, the curator
Informs us. They’re already building the models,
Sure they will catch us in the right moment. This time
We cannot nod back. Now we know the difference
Between suggestions and decisions.

On the following Sunday,
We open up the family trunk
And go through our museum.

--Teresa Palomo Acosta, “Museum Piece (ca. Now)”

My intellectual moves come as other scholars invested in reading and recovering literatures produced by racialized populations have already begun the crucial work of questioning the relationship between literary studies and folklore. In entering the conversation, I am attending to a particular family “trunk,” metaphorically speaking, that repository we consider the Mexican American literary archive.¹⁸ Currently, the Mexican

¹⁷ Ibid., 26.
¹⁸ The theoretical and practical potency of this trope became most visible to me through my brief partnership with María E. Cotera and Linda Garcia Merchant’s Chicana por mi Raza Digital Memory Collective (CPMR) during the spring of 2018, particularly after María Cotera generously shared what was then an unpublished version of the essay, “Unpacking Our Mothers’ Libraries: Practices of Chicana Memory before and after the Digital Turn.” See Dionne Espinoza, María Eugenia Cotera, and Maylei Blackwell, eds.
American literary archive is a collection of writings vexed by structures of power that have simultaneously aided in the extension of modernity, and its shadow, coloniality, while they have also revealed and critiqued their premises. The practice of going to one’s family “trunk” for materials that instantiate Mexican American histories and experiences, represented in Teresa Palomo Acosta’s poem above, is a recurring literary and theoretical trope that appears most prominently in my first chapter but also speaks to ways in which Mexican Americans have created and consulted their own archives when institutions have excluded us from meaningful participation in the production of knowledge and sustained presence in the spaces devoted to it.\textsuperscript{19}

María Eugenia Cotera’s \textit{Native Speakers: Ella Deloria, Zora Neale Hurston, Jovita González, and the Poetics of Culture} (2008) exemplifies the kind of scholarship that has been foundational for the elaboration of the folkloric difference.\textsuperscript{20} In her monograph, Cotera uses a comparative approach to examine how three women of color writers and scholars, Ella Deloria, Zora Neale Hurston, and Jovita González, became involved in projects to change public attitudes in the United States about their respective communities. Significantly, each of these women, as Cotera writes, “broke from the discursive boundaries of their chosen disciplines to explore the political and poetic possibilities of fiction.”\textsuperscript{21} In her monograph, Cotera proposes and models a comparative feminist approach that is attentive to distinct historical experiences, revealing some of the

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item[(20)] María Eugenia Cotera, \textit{Native Speakers: Ella Deloria, Zora Neale Hurston, Jovita González, and the Poetics of Culture} (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2008).
\item[(21)] Cotera, \textit{Native Speakers}, 5-6.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
antecedents to contemporary women of color writings and activism. It is within her mapping of a frequently overlooked intellectual history that Cotera traces types of “regional scholarly practice” that Tejana folklorist and writer Jovita González engaged in during the early twentieth century, for example.  

Attentive to each writer’s ethnographic meaning-making interventions as well as their “resistant rhetorical strategies,” Cotera maintains that the rise of folklore studies during the early twentieth century allowed the subjects of her study to enter a “newly created institutional contact zone” that overwhelmingly understood ethnography as a “encounter with radical cultural difference.” In many ways, Cotera’s consideration of folklore studies as a site in which women of color have made meaningful interventions in the production of knowledge has paved the way for my development of the folkloric difference.

More recently, Karen R. Roybal has argued for a feminist reading of Mexican American women’s writing and a reconceptualization of archives that sheds light on the ways pre-movement Mexican American women writers have written against and grappled with their material and cultural dispossession following the end of the US-Mexico War in 1848. In her monograph, *Archives of Dispossession: Recovering the Testimonios of Mexican American Herederas, 1848-1960* (2017), Roybal brings together a collection of literary and print materials, including “land title records, testimonios recorded in court cases, correspondence, memoirs,” that constitute what she terms “an

---

22 Ibid., 23.
23 Ibid., 37.
archive of dispossession.”

Central to Roybal’s analysis of this archive is how the concept of “herencia” [her italics] evolves for early Mexican American women writers, particularly in the twentieth century. Instead of using their writings to merely protest the appropriation of their settler claims to land in the US Southwest, the twentieth-century writers, according to Roybal, “attempt to (re)claim their cultural property.” Roybal theorizes her archive as a “repository of recuerdos,” [her italics] which she says contains “equally valuable alternative narratives to what is considered an official archive by the dominant public.” The approach to the archive that Roybal theorizes supports my elaboration of the folkloric difference, as Roybal lays the groundwork for thinking about the spaces folklore occupies in Mexican American literary history.

Literary critic Shirley Moody-Turner has also proposed using folklore to trace “an alternate genealogy” for analyzing folklore studies and African American writers’ involvement in the production of black folklore in Black Folklore and the Politics of Racial Representation (2013). Moody-Turner’s work, too, has provided an integral blueprint for this dissertation to explore how Mexican American writers have deployed folklore as a mode of critique. In Moody-Turner’s words, her monograph “recognizes African American as active participants, rather than merely repositories, in the study and representation of black folklore.” Important to Moody-Turner is establishing the fact that African Americans theorized folklore in the post-Reconstruction period. To comprehend how black people have artistically and theoretically deployed concepts of

26 Ibid., 3.
27 Ibid., 16-17. Roybal defines herencia as “inheritance, legacy and heritage.” Ibid., 3.
28 Ibid., 11.
29 Ibid., 12. Recuerdos refer to memories.
31 Ibid., 4.
folklore, Moody-Turner argues for the need to “expand our definition of what ‘counts’ as folklore studies.”32 Who we understand as folklorists, or subjects working within the discipline, has the capacity to change how we understand folklore, as well. The black folklorists from the Hampton Folklore Society whose work she considers, for example, might not fall under the category of “folklorist” as it is typically understood in the academy, but their work nevertheless demonstrates how their adoption of folklore studies methods allowed them to use folklore for political purposes. Moody-Turner describes the work of the Hampton folklorists in the following way:

Their projects were admittedly both deeply personal and political. They tied folklore to cultural history and individual and collective identity, and they variously used folklore and folklore studies as a means to engage in contemporary debates and to document a viable African American tradition and culture. Their counterparts working in the literary realm similarly refused to allow the dominant conventions informing the collection and representation of black folklore to determine their ethnographic and artistic engagements with black folklore. The folklorists’ literary peers called attention to the racialized politics dictating the representation of black folklore, remaining painfully aware of the social and political stakes inherent in depictions of black folklore, and using folklore as a vehicle for civic reform and to protest continued racial and gendered inequities.33

In its entirety, Moody-Turner’s Black Folklore and the Politics of Racial Representation provides an indispensable model for discussing the intersections of folklore and literature and how communities of color have navigated those intersections. However, because it is concerned with a specific population and does not consider regional identity formation or settler colonialism as part of the theorization of black folklore, I develop my own analytic of the folkloric difference to similarly trace folklore within the Mexican American literary archive. My concept of folkloric difference allows me to attend to often

32 Ibid., 6.
33 Ibid., 7.
overlapping but still distinct questions about modernity, race, and gender that are related to Mexican Americans’ status as both colonizers and the colonized.34

My analysis of folklore in the Mexican American literary archive comes as folklorists, like literary critics, call for members of their field to adopt more critical perspective in regard to the history of their discipline and the ways its methods are practiced. In “A Latinx Folklorist’s Love Letter to American Folkloristics: Academic Disenchantment and Ambivalent Disciplinary Futures” (2017), folklorist Rachel V. González-Martin discusses how queer scholars of color like her “unsettle” the discipline of folklore studies in productive ways, as the future of the field remains unclear in the twenty-first century, particularly as more and more scholarship exposes how the field has aided in the construction and maintenance of oppressive structures.35 González-Martin critiques the field of folklore studies for its prioritization of white heteropatriarchal perspectives and methods. She suggests the mere presence of women of color in academic spaces such as the American Folklore Society conferences continue to be “a form of transgressive scholarly practice,” since folklore studies remains dominated by Western theories.36 She points out, however, that despite the fact that this has now been a multi-generational transgressive practice, the work of early twentieth-century and mid-twentieth-century scholars writing from minoritized positions continues to be difficult to

34 Resistance paradigms have often overshadowed Mexican Americans’ collusion in settler colonialism. More recently, however, there is a growing body of scholarship that is more conscious of the complicated positions Mexican Americans occupy as people who have both suffered and benefitted from modernity/coloniality. See for example José F. Aranda, Jr., “Making the Case for New Chicana/o Studies: Recovering Our Alienated Selves,” Arizona Quarterly: A Journal of American Literature, Culture, and Theory 58, no.1 (2002): 125-158.
36 Ibid., 22.
encounter, locate, or discuss.\textsuperscript{37} She identifies the need for “Latinx Folklore Studies,” which, she writes, would serve not as a “salvage expedition” but a means of making visible “our communities’ narratives of the present, supplementing a vacant past, in order to expose vibrant and structurally unanticipated Latinx futures.”\textsuperscript{38}

Genealogies of folklore scholarship continue to replicate power inequities and the devaluation of knowledges produced by people of color, as González-Martin and others point out. “The Challenge of American Folklore to the Humanities” (2018), written by the well-known folklorist Simon J. Bronner, exemplifies how scholarship about the discipline continues to make light of its modern/colonial origins and ignore Mexican Americans’ participation in the field.\textsuperscript{39} In his article, Bronner argues that “American humanistic thought,” particularly as it developed out of mid-twentieth century folklore studies, challenged European approaches to the humanities because of its “democratic” and “incipient” orientation.\textsuperscript{40} Tellingly, Bronner forwards an assessment of folklore studies that reads like an ode to American exceptionalism, asserting that “a folklore-centered humanities breaks down divisions between high and low, local and global, and individual and society.”\textsuperscript{41} Bronner positions the discipline of folklore studies as it has

\textsuperscript{37} González-Martin, 22.
\textsuperscript{38} Ibid., 25.
\textsuperscript{40} Bronner, “Challenge of American Folklore,” 2-3.
\textsuperscript{41} Ibid., 21.
taken shape in the United States as the answer to questions about how scholars should engage in ethical scholarly praxis.\textsuperscript{42}

Unlike Bronner, González-Martin proposes a Critical Latinx Folkloristics to begin the process of making folklore a more equitable discipline. Critical Latinx Folkloristics, González-Martin asserts, would not only recognize the racialized, classed, and gendered identities in which scholars approach the field of folklore, but also attempt to “account for the silenced intersections of Blackness and erasure, legacies of genocide, violence, and subjugation.”\textsuperscript{43} Fundamentally, this critical lens would center “folklore and cultural practices as inextricably tied to transnational movement, and settler colonialism in the United States.”\textsuperscript{44}

Stephen Olbrys Gencarella has similarly called for the development of a critical folklore studies that is conscious of the ways it perpetuates hegemonic structures and encourages “alternative ways of becoming” within and outside folk groups. But he assumes that the folklorist, given their cultural sensitivity and the knowledge they accumulate from living among the people they study, are able to make value judgments based on understandings of human universalisms.\textsuperscript{45} Olbrys Gencarella does not have the same critical investment in people of color’s self-determination, nor in theorizing folklore as a decolonial analytic. For González-Martin, the need to reconceptualize the purposes and practices of folklore studies ultimately goes beyond the academy. Included in her recommendations to reconceive of folklore studies is the need to “teach the centrality of

\textsuperscript{42} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{43} González-Martin, 28.
\textsuperscript{44} Ibid., 28.
translocal relationships and deterritorial citizenship as part of hemispheric-American identity formations.”  

González-Martin defines translocality as a “framework relating to a conceptualized hemispheric study of folklore in and of the Americas, foregrounding the relationship between cultural production, movement, and meaningful interactions.”

While I agree that a translocal approach would yield productive readings of Latinidad, I am wary of adopting a framework that is indifferent to local formations of Mexican American identity and concepts of belonging, at least for this project. Though it is probably my own racialized, classed, and gendered perspective informing my interpretation of translocality, I find that the transitory processes it prioritizes, though important, sometimes give the impression that all Chicanx/Latinx peoples are contemporary transplants within the United States. For this reason, I position myself as taking part in the Critical Latinx Folklorisitics that González-Martin conceptualizes but with my own critical bent. I adopt a regional, localized perspective. It is in the spirit of González-Martin’s invocation to recognize how the labor of people of color has contributed to the formation of folklore studies. However, I enter the conversation about folklore and the politics that have underwritten the Mexican American literary archive from the perspective of the folkloric difference.

Other scholars have also proposed charting other genealogies of folklore studies in effort to attend to the discipline’s modern/colonial underpinnings. In “The Coloniality of Folklore: Towards a Multi-Genealogical Practice of Folkloristics” (2012), Charles L. Briggs and Sadhana Naithani trace what they term the “coloniality of folkloristics” to account for the ways in which folklore studies has remained affixed to colonialism. They

---

46 González-Martin, 33.
47 Ibid., 35.
propose the adoption of “an emergent multi-genealogical” approach for folklorists to challenge the disciplinary boundaries that limit their ability to draw productively on other frameworks and genealogies.\textsuperscript{48} By tracing multiple genealogies of folkloristics, Briggs and Naithani argue, folklorists are better equipped to alter assumptions about “key concepts and practices.”\textsuperscript{49} In drawing on other disciplinary frameworks, they hope to show scholars, policy-makers and other constituencies that the implications of folklore studies extends beyond the boundaries of the discipline.”\textsuperscript{50}

Briggs and Naithani assert that the production of multiple genealogies will alter the dominant narrative folklore studies, allowing us to “displace” the coloniality of folkloristics “in favour of a collaborative and critical folkloristics.”\textsuperscript{51} Linking their scholarship to postcolonial thinkers such as Dipesh Chakrabarty, decolonial thinkers such as Enrique Dussel and Walter Mignolo, as well as the Mexican American folklorist Américo Paredes, they discuss how the diffusion of folklore as a methodology and concept has not only worked to delegitimize ways of thinking, but also offer the colonized a grammar to contest the ways in which notions of folklore have been deployed against them.\textsuperscript{52} My work follows the call of Briggs and Naithani to chart alternate genealogies of folkloristics, but I prioritize a feminist critical regionalist genealogy in charting the folkloric difference. In prioritizing feminist critical regionalism, I hope to somewhat problematize the notion that Américo Paredes the first and only of Mexican

\textsuperscript{49} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{50} Ibid. For discussion on the colonial roots of folklore, see pages 243-248.
\textsuperscript{51} Ibid., 268.
\textsuperscript{52} Briggs and Naithani, 248-262.
American folklorist to recognize the critical use-value of folklore for contesting coloniality.

My theorization of folkloric difference, which aligns with critical regionalism, seeks to understand the nuances that are reflected in local engagements with global issues. The folkloric difference allows scholars to better account for the ways regionally situated Mexican Americans have, in the language of Mignolo, adapted, rejected, and integrated coloniality through folklore. Following Krista Comer, I believe critical regionalism might yield more nuanced critical analyses than transnationalism, because, as Comer argues, critical regionalism enables us to identify how global structures have impacted local sites without compromising differences in experience and boundaries that serve protective functions. Despite the ability of transnational methods to reveal “new global networks of texts, writers, literary trends, marketplaces, communities, in and beyond the English-speaking world,” as Comer argues, they tend to preserve a dominant Euro-centric epistemological location. My project understands that, in many instances, transnational thought enacts its own imperial dispossession by crossing thresholds and laying claim to bodies and geographies without taking their place-based knowledges and particularities of experience into consideration. Comer argues that critical regionalism, in contrast, enables “a way of diagnosing the new configurations of meaning, time, and space, occasioned by global restructuring and new technologies” and privileges “issues of

53 Mignolo, Local Histories/Global Designs, xi.
55 Comer, 207.

More directly in conversation with Chicana/o studies, this project elaborates the critical concept of the folkloric difference in order to heed Melina V. Vizcaíno-Alemán’s lessons in *Gender and Place in Chicana/o Literature: Critical Regionalism and the Mexican American Southwest* (2017) about mapping Mexican American literary history.\footnote{Melina V. Vizcaíno-Alemán, *Gender and Place in Chicana/o Literature: Critical Regionalism and the Mexican American Southwest* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017).} Vizcaíno-Alemán explains that the publication of writer and folklorist Américo Paredes’ foundational “*With His Pistol in His Hand*: A Border Ballad and its Hero” (1958) shifted interpretations of early twentieth-century Mexican American literature and culture “toward a masculine and transnational sense of place.”\footnote{Ibid., 3.} Vizcaíno-Alemán’s argument for moving beyond Paredes’ “border aesthetics” lays a foundation for tracing a feminist genealogy of Mexican American writers’ critical application of folklore, and her concept of Chicana/o critical regionalism allows for a more nuanced understanding of the ways in which Mexican American writers have “rejected and revised” dominant regionalisms at a tighter scale.\footnote{Vizcaíno-Alemán, 3.} Following the critical example set by Vizcaíno-Alemán to recognize the “Chicana/o aesthetics of place,” but focusing on the politics of folklore specifically, my analytic avoids subsuming regional differences that are apparent in the Mexican American literary archive and contemplates what we stand to learn from them.
My intervention highlights the historical and political factors that have influenced our understanding of folklore in the Mexican American literary archive by bringing decolonial theory and critical regionalism to bear on folklore studies and literary studies. This dissertation by no means seeks to offer a totalizing definition of folklore. Rather, *Chicana/o Literature and the Folkloric Difference* means to destabilize traditional understandings of folklore. This disrupts the tendency to read folklore as a stable form that exists only in early Mexican American writing by highlighting how folklore has functioned as a method that Mexican American writers have engaged from the pre-movement period to the present. Given the modern/colonial origins of the term, however, Mexican American applications of folklore have had complex and sometimes contradictory results.

**Folklore and the Mexican American Literary Archive**

> With the superstitions dwells the simple folk-lore. That of the Mexicans is scant; but that of the Indians infinite and remarkably poetic. And both races have great store of folk-songs—composed by Those of Old, or by lonely shepherds.

--Charles F. Lummis, *The Land of Poco Tiempo*

> Perhaps it is true that in every new country folklore and history develop side by side, and that local pride, prejudice, and passions play their part in the “folklorization” of history. This certainly has been true in the American Southwest. The folklorists must also be regional historians; and the historians, it would seem, too often have been folklorists too.

--Américo Paredes, “Folklore and History”
In general, scholars trace the origins of folklore studies to eighteenth-century Europe, though William Thoms did not officially introduce the term until 1846. By the time folklore studies became institutionalized in the United States during the late 1880s, it was already entangled with popular assumptions and discourses about civilization and race. For many writers and scholars of the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century, including the popular writer and folklorist Charles F. Lummis, the folklore of racialized communities afforded a looking glass into the primitive stages of civilization. Folklore was understood as a soon to be extinct form of culture because it stood no chance of weathering the civilizing forces of modernity. Like Lummis, most folklorists believed Mexican Americans would either fully assimilate into modern (i.e. Anglo) society or perish in the increasingly industry-driven, technological world. The ways in which discourses of folklore were deployed to devalue Mexican American culture often went hand-in-hand with efforts to dispossess them materially as well as politically.

Folklorist and writer Américo Paredes, as Briggs and Naithani note, remains among the most well-known Mexican Americans to theorize Mexican American folklore. In *A Texas-Mexican Cancionero: Folksongs of the Lower Border* (1976), for

---

63 See Roybal, *Archives of Dispossession*.
example, Paredes discusses how Mexican Americans in the border region have used folklore as counter-histories that critique hegemonic US narratives. Importantly, rather than treating canciones, or songs, as bygone items detached from their living, regional contexts, Parades framed his edited collection *A Texas-Mexican Cancionero* as a type of living history. He insisted that the history and culture of the region he mapped indeed formed, responded, and existed in tension with the globalizing processes that have disparaged Mexican American knowledge and experience. In his own way, Paredes identified a version of the folkloric difference within his cancionero. Demonstrating sensitivity to region, Paredes addressed the Chicanos of the day, whom he chided for being too narrow-minded and presentist in their formulation of Chicano. Paredes criticizes Chicano nationalists for assuming the Movement of the 1960s and 1970s was an isolated and “sudden awakening of the Mexican minority in the United States,” asserting that Mexican Americans “have been awake to their problems since the time of Cortina.” 65 He specifies the political consciousness raised by the Chicano movement was only “culmination of a long and continuous struggle” that has been ongoing since the US-Mexico War ended in 1848. 66 Instead of entirely dismissing Chicanos’ efforts to reimagine their own identity through their cooptation of Aztec mythology, which he does describe them as “extreme,” Paredes recognizes their frustrations and posits that the border corrido and other Mexican American songs should not only “strike a responsive chord” with them, but offer a more complete picture of the nuances that encompass Mexican American identity in the United States. 67

67 Paredes, *Texas-Mexican Cancionero*, xvii. Paredes is well-known for constructing a paradigm of border conflict that he links to the corrido. For a critique of this paradigm,
For many of the Chicana/o writers and scholars of the Chicano movement period (1960s-1970s), a significant part of their project of self-determination was to retake control of their culture. This involved representing their experiences as people of Mexican descent in the United States in a way that would unify the heterogeneous group in their struggle for recognition and liberation. During this historical moment, Chicanas/os looked to the larger Mexican American community, but also in other times and places for symbols and expressions that would exemplify what it meant to be Chicana/o. Though not without their own socially and politically exploitative blunders, these writers, critics, artists, and activists who became involved in narrating their own stories were invested in challenging US hegemony and bringing recognition to Mexican Americans’ humanity. Chicanas/os advocated for better working conditions, greater access to education, medical services, housing, etc. While an examination of Chicana/o literary and print culture of the movement period from the critical perspective of the folkloric difference would no doubt yield an exciting contribution to the field, it is beyond the scope of this project. Following the critical threads developed by Cotera, Roybal, Moody-Turner, Comer, Vizcaíno-Alemán, and others, this dissertation charts a

---

genealogy of Mexican American critique through folklore that begins in the pre-
movement period (before 1960) and moves to the post-movement period (after 1990).69

Chapter Summaries

My examination of the relationship between folklore and the Mexican American
literary archive comes as the Recovering the US Hispanic Literary Heritage (Recovery)
project continues to accumulate a robust collection of US Latino literature and print
culture that predates the civil rights movements of the 1960s and 1970s. In the last two
and a half decades, Recovery has prompted scholars of American literature to reconsider
the ways Latinas/os have contributed to American literary history. The growing archive
has sparked questions about the role Latina/o/x populations have played in settler colonial
projects and the lingering effects of these projects in the United States today. Most
notably, Recovery has shed light on the complex positions US Latinas/os have occupied
in proximity to modernity and coloniality, allowing scholars of Latinx literature and
culture to reevaluate how race, gender, nationalism, etc. have impacted the formation of
contemporary expressions of Latinidad. Situating “recovered” texts within the Mexican
American literary archive alongside contemporary Mexican American literature and
cultural practice, my project offers the folkloric difference as a lens through which to
read Mexican American writers’ engagement with folklore to respond to coloniality. The
implications of these responses, I contend, complicate formulaic notions of the American
literary canon, Mexican American identity and folklore, and the local conditions created
by overlapping colonial hierarchies in the US West and Southwest.

69 In organizing my dissertation this way, follow the periodization that José F. Aranda, Jr.
proposes in "Grappling with the Archive of Mexican America." English Language Notes
Chapter one, “Remaking ‘Folk’ Communities in Cleofas M. Jaramillo’s Romance of a Little Village Girl (1955),” argues that the folkloric difference allows us to understand Mexican American writers’ critical uses of folklore as a collaborative political endeavor, rather than an isolated one. My chapter delineates how Mexican American epistemologies and claims of belonging were rendered folklore by Anglo Americans through the late nineteenth and first half of the twentieth century. Following the critical threads of María E. Cotera, Melina V. Vizcaíno-Alemán, Karen R. Roybal and others, I analyze how Jaramillo’s autoethnography Romance of a Little Village Girl refocuses critical folkloric engagement as a gendered project—one that afforded Nuevomexicanas (Mexican Americans of New Mexico) alternate spaces to imagine regional Mexican American community and belonging. The aim of this chapter is to establish how Mexican American women became involved in folklore studies and challenged structures of coloniality that devalued their histories by drawing attention to their gendered bodies, exposing their exclusion from institutional forms of meaning making by Anglo Americans as well as Mexican American men. By beginning with Romance of a Little Village Girl, this chapter also begins to trace a genealogy of the folkloric difference that asserts the long-standing presence of diverse Mexican American communities in the United States.

Chapter two, “The Folkloric Difference in the US Spanish-language Press: The Case of Jorge Ainslie’s Los Pochos (1934),” examines how Mexican American folklore was deployed to reconceptualize Mexican immigrant belonging in the United States. In doing so, the chapter identifies the US Spanish-language press as an archive in which Mexican American folklore is indexed during early twentieth century. More specifically, this chapter reads Jorge Ainslie’s serialized novel Los Pochos (1934) to analyze how
collective memories of local colonial histories became integrated into the literature of the US Spanish-language press and complicated the “México de afuera” ideology, which scholars have typically associated with Spanish-language immigrant newspapers such as San Antonio’s *La Prensa*. *Los Pochos* is about a middle-class Mexican couple’s journey to the United States during the Mexican Revolution, where, much to their dismay, they are forced to raise their US-born children. Focusing on a moment in which the novel’s main characters are introduced to vernacular storytelling traditions that preserve histories of San Fernando, California, chapter two argues that folklore became a method for immigrant communities to remake conceptions of Mexican identity in the United States.

Moving to literature published during the post-movement period, chapter three, “Between Modernity and Coloniality: Borderlore in Luis Alberto Urrea’s *The Hummingbird’s Daughter* (2005),” analyzes how borderlore mediates two literary genres in Luis Alberto Urrea’s novel *The Hummingbird’s Daughter* (2005), the gothic and the magical real. Borderlore, I propose, is folklore that emerges from within the geography of the US-Mexico borderlands. The novel is based on the extraordinary life of Teresa Urrea, a historical figure whose healing work and criticisms of the late-nineteenth-century Mexican government led people in Mexico and the United States to dub her a saint with “supernatural” abilities. In this chapter, I read the gothic and the magical real, two genres representative of two modern/colonial projects that converge at the US-Mexico border, as symptomatic of the inability of modernity/coloniality to make sense of a figure like Teresa Urrea. I contend that the borderlore exposes modern/colonial logics of violence and politics of the supernatural at the center of *The Hummingbird’s Daughter*. By attending to the logics that undergird the gothic and the magical real, this chapter also
reveals how Luis Alberto Urrea’s novel encourages readers to be receptive to the
decolonizing potential of borderlore.

Chapter four, “Spiritual Community and the Grief of Borderlore,” extends the
previous chapter’s focus on borderlore by exploring how ire’ne lara silva’s frames
spiritual community and belonging in her short story collection *flesh to bone* (2013).
Several of lara silva’s short stories consciously invoke the capacity of borderlore to
function as a mode of critique, revising stories familiar to many people of Mexican
descent, including the legend of La Llorona. The two short stories I examine, “cortando
las nubes, or, death came on horses” and “la huesera, or, flesh to bone” grapple with the
grief generated by neoliberal globalization that often becomes concentrated in the US-
Mexico borderlands. Both stories underscore how neoliberalism not only relies on the
dehumanization of particular bodies to sustain late capitalism, but also how women of
Mexican descent, especially those women who are indigenous or perceived as
indigenous, experience some of the most injurious effects of modernity/coloniality within
the US-Mexico borderlands. I argue that by centering women of Mexican descent’s grief
through borderlore, lara silva restores meaning to experiences rendered meaningless by
modernity/coloniality. This chapter also posits that at stake in restoring meaning to these
experiences is the humanity of readers. Ultimately, lara silva’s application of borderlore
within her stories highlights how shared grief becomes a means of creating spiritual
community.

Chapter five, “The Santa Fe Fiesta and the Limits of the Folkloric Difference,”
returns to New Mexico, though the contemporary period, to consider how Mexican
American uses of folklore replicate the modern/colonial structures that have rendered
local epistemologies unofficial and insignificant. This chapter argues that the
contemporary practice of the Santa Fe Fiesta, a localized celebration that commemorates the Spanish reconquest of New Mexico’s capital city Santa Fe in 1692, exemplifies how the capacity of the folkloric difference to critique modernity/coloniality is lost when the violence underpinning settler projects is negated. If the grief of borderlore facilitated the recognition of the humanity of others in chapter four, “The Santa Fe Fiesta and the Limits of the Folkloric Difference” contends that foregrounding of a religious narrative of peaceful reconquest precludes the ability of Hispanas/os, or Nuevomexicanas/os, to reconceptualize their relationships to peoples and place in decolonial ways.
CHAPTER ONE

Remaking ‘Folk’ Communities in Cleofas M. Jaramillo’s
Romance of a Little Village Girl (1955)

“Taft Signs Proclamation; New Mexico Now Finally inside the United States”—so read the front page of the Albuquerque Morning Journal on January 7, 1912. The newspaper reported that President William Howard Taft had granted New Mexico statehood, and thus, with a mere stroke of a pen, formally ended its more than sixty-year status as a US territory. Upon signing the proclamation in New Mexico’s capital city of Santa Fe, Taft purportedly told his audience, “I am glad to give you life and trust that you will be healthy.”¹ Taft’s rhetoric of salvation conveyed a prevailing attitude that New Mexico had not yet crossed the threshold of modernity, an attitude supported by popular theories of racial and cultural difference, as well as discourses of civilization and savagery. Since the region was home to numerous Native tribes and people of Mexican descent who seemed impervious to Western progress, Anglo Americans were generally skeptical about the state’s capacity to fit within the United States. Taft’s signing of the proclamation signaled the beginning of new era, as New Mexico became the forty-seventh state in the union.

In spite of Taft’s state-sanctioned, life-giving power, New Mexico’s diverse communities and local histories would continue to vex the linear, settler colonial logic that has given rise to the United States. Even today, the very name of the state—New Mexico—confuses the popular imagination, because the signifier recalls another settler colonial history. The mere association of the state with the nation of Mexico continues to

¹ “Taft Signs Proclamation; New Mexico Now Finally Inside the United States,” Albuquerque Morning Journal, January 7, 1912, Readex: America’s Historical Newspapers.
suggest that, while the place referred to as New Mexico is located within the United States, it is not of the same ilk.  

Dominant perceptions people of Mexican descent and Native Americans had a variety of consequences on the material, social, and political landscape of New Mexico throughout the territorial period (1850-1912) that affected its transition to statehood. Though the United States was effectively built by relying on racial and class differences to justify systematic exploitation and displacement, the acquisition of territories following the US-Mexico War in 1848 generated new worries for the nation. Largely considered an uncivil region with racially inferior and uneducated inhabitants, late-nineteenth-century policymakers believed that New Mexico could not become a state until its waywardness was rectified. Historian John Nieto-Phillips writes that when an 1876 statehood bill was sent to Congress, for example, opponents of the bill insisted that New Mexico continued to be “a forsaken territory, savage and undemocratic.” The sentiments of the opponents of the bill reflects particular concerns of the US government regarding the racial composition of people of Mexican descent. In comparison to New Mexico’s Native Pueblo peoples, who, during the late nineteenth century, were considered to have “purer blood,” the local Mexican Americans, or Nuevomexicanas/os, were considered mixed and therefore corrupted, making them incapable of self- 

---


governance. Following statehood, such perceptions continued to influence how Nuevomexicanas/os lived their lives, affecting landownership, education, and migration.

Nuevomexicanas/os would reflect on these anxieties and their lingering effects in a variety of venues and genres during the late nineteenth century and through the early twentieth. From the pages of the Spanish-language press, where debates erupted about the costs and benefits of statehood, to the collection of oral histories and songs compiled by the Federal Writers’ Project roughly two decades following Taft’s signing of the proclamation, there exists a robust collection of literary and print culture that sheds light on the ways in which US attitudes about New Mexico’s racial composition impacted the Spanish-speaking people who called it home. Though their narratives demonstrate that Nuevomexicanas/os were never fully unified in their perspectives regarding the United States on account of the social logics that ordered their world prior to their incorporation into the nation, their narratives generally show how global modernity converged with local histories, forcing Nuevomexicana/o to reformulate concepts of community and belonging. In many cases, folklore became the primary method through which they would interpret their own historical experiences and notions of communal selfhood that challenged dominant perceptions of “Mexicans.” The critical application of folklore also revealed some of the more complicated social relationships that have existed and continue to exist within the region.

Writer Cleofas Martínez Jaramillo was among a group of Nuevomexicanas/os who challenged how their community was represented in the broader American literary and cultural imaginary by writing about her personal life and culture, capitalizing on the flexibility of the meaning and methods of folklore. Jaramillo was a descendant of a

---

4 Nieto-Phillips, 71.
wealthy, landowning family that traced its lineage to some of New Mexico’s Spanish colonizers. Her life spanned a period that saw substantial social and political changes in New Mexico, coinciding with the expansion of the railroad into the New Mexico territory in the 1870s and 1880s, the transition from territory to statehood in 1912, and the detonation of the Atomic bomb at the Trinity site in 1945. Though Jaramillo did not receive formal training in folklore studies, she took part in efforts to collect and document Nuevomexicana/o customs and cuentos that she perceived were at risk of disappearing in wake of twentieth-century modernization. Jaramillo’s desire to preserve the stories and cultural traditions she had grown up hearing and observing motivated her to pen several texts: *Cuentos del hogar / Spanish Fairy Stories* (1939), an English-language collection of tales she learned from her mother; *The Genuine Tasty New Mexican Recipes: Potajes sabrosos* (1939), a cookbook; and two autoethnographies,*Shadows of the Past/ Sombras del pasado* (1941) and *Romance of a Little Village Girl* (1955). From the frame of the folkloric difference, Jaramillo’s writings evince years-worth of individual and collective efforts to reconstruct a vision of Nuevomexicana/o belonging by way of folklore during the first half of the twentieth century.

Perhaps most demonstrative of Jaramillo’s investments in folklore was her creation of La Sociedad Folklórica. Membership in the organization was reserved for Nuevomexicanas who claimed Spanish heritage, not Mexican heritage, and Jaramillo reflects on her role in establishing the society in both of her autoethnographies,*Shadows of the Past/ Sombras del pasado* and *Romance of a Little Village Girl*. However, she delves more deeply into the intimate connections she formed with the other members and the sense of social responsibility they shared in preserving and showcasing their history and culture in *Romance of a Little Village Girl*. Toward the end of her autoethnography,
she recalls deciding that her Sociedad Folklórica would be “composed of only thirty members, all of whom must be of Spanish descent.” To preserve the Spanish language and local knowledge about Nuevomexicana/o culture, she required that the society’s meetings be held in the Spanish language. Though Marci R. McMahon claims Jaramillo established La Sociedad Folklórica “intent on educating Anglo American newcomers who did not understand and appreciate Spanish cultural traditions,” details in Romance of a Little Village Girl reveal that the reasons inspiring the creation of the organization were more complex. Anglo American discourses of race no doubt inspired Nuevomexicanas/os to reconstruct narratives of the past to remedy Anglo American perspectives, but to assume that cultural responses like Jaramillo’s emerged solely for consumption of Anglo American audiences risks eliding the labor Mexican American women expended on behalf of the people with whom they identified.

Like Jaramillo, several of the Nuevomexicanas involved in La Sociedad Folklórica were writers. Some collected, transcribed, and edited their own collections of folklore, while others wrote autoethnographies. Members also staged pastorelas and participated in parades that imparted cultural perspectives and historical narratives that were attached to the region’s Spanish colonial and Mexican past. Several of the Nuevomexicanas who participated in La Sociedad Folklórica and who later penned their own texts were also from elite landed families. Examples of twentieth-century texts produced by members of the Sociedad Folklórica include: Fabiola Cabeza de Baca’s The

---

Good Life: *New Mexico Traditions and Food* (1949) and *We Fed Them Cactus* (1954); Aurora Lucero-White’s *Los Hispanos: Five Essay on the Folkways of Hispanos as Seen through the Eyes of One of Them* (1947) and *Literary Folklore of the Hispanic Southwest* (1953); as well as Carmen Espinosa’s *Shawls, Crinolines, Filigree: The Dress and Adornment of Women of New Mexico, 1739 to 1900* (1970). The writings produced by these more well-known members of *La Sociedad Folkloríca* demonstrate Nuevomexicana investments in retaining some level of control over the ways in which their history, identity, and culture were perceived. While Raymund A. Paredes famously characterized Nuevomexicana/o writing produced by the generation writing in the first few decades of the early twentieth century as exhibiting “hacienda syndrome,” and as an assemblage of literature that he says appears to have been “created out of fear and intimidation,” literary critics have since acknowledged that such texts exhibit nuances about the multifaceted raced, classed, and gendered dimensions of Mexican American literary history.7 Together, the women who became involved in the Sociedad Folkloríca were among an early generation of Mexican Americans writers who, from the frame of the folkloric difference, found in folklore means of critiquing modernity/coloniality.

*Chicana/o Literature and the Folkloric Difference* begins with Jaramillo’s *Romance of a Little Village Girl* because the text sheds light on the networks and writerly communities that emerged as a result of Mexican American writers’ critical applications of folklore. In this chapter, I read *Romance of a Little Village Girl* through the lens of the folkloric difference to expose how Mexican Americans’ political engagement with folklore became a method of reconceptualizing local community identity and belonging

---

during the 1930s and 1940s. I argue *Romance of a Little Village Girl* reveals a process Nuevomexicanas collectively undertook to redefine their relationship to New Mexico history and reimagine their place in New Mexico’s future. The attention that the folkloric difference places on collective action and community in *Romance of a Little Village Girl* makes more apparent the writerly networks that folklore engendered during the early twentieth century. More specifically, my reading of *Romance of a Little Village Girl* imparts how Nuevomexicanas used folklore to create alternate spaces of collective belonging for themselves, a project that in some ways unveils how folklore enabled Mexican American women to critique modern/colonial patriarchy, the gender system which sociologist María Lugones that “permeates racialized patriarchal control over production, including knowledge production, and over collective authority.”

More than merely a critique of Anglo American modernity, in other words, the folkloric difference reveals one way in which Mexican American women writers conceptualized ways of belonging as gendered writers and cultural workers. Just as Karen R. Roybal elaborates a more expansive definition of the testimonio genre to challenge patriarchal formulations of Mexican American land struggles and bring attention to an “alternate archive of dispossession, gender, and culture,” I use the folkloric difference to highlight how Jaramillo’s *Romance of a Little Village Girl* foregrounds Mexican American women’s cooperative and strategic engagement of folklore as a discourse, method, and concept. Such ways of reconceiving the archive are necessary, as Roybal and other scholars have argued, because Mexican American women’s perspectives and

---


voices have long been relegated to the margins of national literary histories. Since folklore has long been associated with orality and other forms of cultural expression that have been considered unworthy of archival preservation, the folkloric difference provides a means of examining how women have contributed to the formation of the Mexican American literary archive through folklore.

This chapter largely takes shape from the crucial work of scholars who have developed women of color feminist strategies to analyze archives that are often forgotten, if not purposefully ignored. Tey Diana Rebolledo was likely among the first critics to work toward the “recovery” of literature written by Nuevomexicanas that preceded the corpus of literature generated during and after the Chicana/o movement. And although her focus has been on the recovery of Chicana feminist thought from the 1960s and 1970s, Maylei Blackwell’s concept of “retrofitted memory” has been pivotal for the ways scholars of Mexican American literary and print culture have approached the creation of unofficial archives since her publication of ¡Chicana Power! Contested Histories of Feminism in the Chicano (2011). María Eugenia Cotera’s work on women of color who immersed themselves in anthropology to tell stories about their communities during the early twentieth century exposes the contradictions inherent to being both the agent and object of ethnographic analysis. More recently, Cotera has written about Chicana archives as a “composite text,” “a yet unwritten history of intellectual labor that offers

---

10 Roybal, 12.
scholars a glimpse into the conditions of articulation that brought us to the place we are now—a place in which we can write and speak about Chicana feminism in our classrooms, conferences, and books."¹⁴ Feminist scholar Brittany C. Cooper has similarly drawn attention to a “black textual activism” she terms “embodied discourse” and importantly reminds us that “intellectual work is not a disembodied project.”¹⁵

Following the methodological examples these scholars have set by bringing attention to racialized women’s bodies and their roles in the production of cultural knowledge, the application of the folkloric difference in this chapter demonstrates how Mexican American acts of collecting were very much collective acts, in some ways akin to the later meaning-making practices of Chicanas that Cotera says have not only fostered the “creation of permanent collections but also potential collectivities.”¹⁶ This chapter maintains that by focusing on the folkloric underpinnings of Jaramillo’s *Romance of a Little Village Girl*, we are better able to read the development of Mexican American women’s meaning-making projects that, though not necessarily radical compared to the civil rights and feminist movements that would come later in the twentieth century, formed as a result of folklore’s capacity to firmly link their sense of community with place. In doing so, this chapter also follows Melina V. Vizcaíno-Alemán’s assertion that *Romance of a Little Village Girl* highlights a distinctly “gendered sense of place.”¹⁷ But I

---

offer another way of reading how Jaramillo uses folklore to negotiate her status as a “modern woman,” how she effectively revises what she perceives as tradition in ways that reveal the conflicted relationship Nuevomexicanas had with the heteropatriarchal past.\textsuperscript{18}

**Folk Histories of New Mexico**

The counterhistory articulated in *Romance of a Little Village Girl* grounds itself within the landscape of New Mexico within the first two chapters, where, according to Jaramillo, the Spanish conquistadors first took possession of the lands “inhabited only by Indians” and their descendants existed, “surrounded by struggle of life and death,” as government control shifted from Spain to Mexico, and finally, to the United States.\textsuperscript{19}

Jaramillo’s framing of her autoethnography illustrates her preoccupation with establishing herself as an elite “Spanish” American woman, a preoccupation that largely stems from the outcome of the US-Mexico War (1846-1848).

The geopolitical shift that occurred following the US-Mexico War (1846-1848) resulted in the Mexican Cession, creating a new border between Mexico and the United States. With the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo, the United States acquired much of the territory we currently consider the US Southwest and West. In spite of the picture of unpeopled territory that continues to pervade the US popular imaginary, the lands obtained were not empty. And while the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo granted citizenship to Mexicans who remained within the newly constructed borders, making

\textsuperscript{18} Vizcaíno-Alemán writes that “Jaramillo tells about reviving New Mexico’s Old Spanish customs and laments to passing of the old ways, even though she herself was writing as a modern woman.” Ibid., 2.

\textsuperscript{19} Jaramillo, 2, 6.
them the first generation of Mexican Americans, concerns regarding the possible effects Mexican Americans might have on the body politic made them the regular targets of racism and xenophobia. As Alberto Varon remarks, it is roughly from this period forward that Mexican Americans “found themselves in the paradoxical position of U.S. citizen and perceived foreigner.” These conditions positioned Mexican Americans as racially and morally inferior and therefore unworthy of the privileges of national belonging. From California to New Mexico to the disputed geography of Texas, subsequent generations of Mexican Americans constantly negotiated the consequences the US national project mapped onto the territories that were previously under Spanish and Mexican colonial and imperial rule.

The literary and print culture generated by Mexican American women in the US West and Southwest from this moment onward, much of it sharing similarities with *Romance of a Little Village Girl*, often comments on the effects this geopolitical shift had on their lives. However, since much of this literary and print culture was produced by the Mexican American upper-class, these writings tend to underscore issues of property ownership and grievances having to do with the upper-class’ inability to maintain their elite status. María Amparo Ruiz de Burton’s novel *The Squatter and the Don* (1885), for instance, draws attention the to the dispossession that upper-class Californianas/os experienced almost immediately after 1848. Jovita González and Eve Raleigh’s novel *Caballero* (written in the 1930s but unpublished until 1996) similarly describes the economic impact the shifting border had on landed Tejanas/os, drawing a parallel between the mid-nineteenth century social conditions that facilitated Mexican American

---

displacement and the forms of anti-Mexican racism that affected Mexican Americans in Texas in the 1920s and 1930s. “Kearny Takes Las Vegas” (1938), a play written by a founding member of La Sociedad Folklórica, Aurora Lucero-White, also identifies 1848 as a defining moment in the Mexican American social and cultural history by centering her drama on the moments leading up to and immediately following the US-Mexico War.

The literary and print culture from the pre-movement period often reveals how these territorial changes altered even the most seemingly mundane activities that had previously informed Mexican Americans’ day-to-day lives in the US Southwest and West. For example, before writing “Kearny Takes Las Vegas,” Aurora Lucero delivered the oration “Should the Spanish Language Be Taught in the Public Schools of New Mexico?” (1911), which exposes how some Nuevomexicanas/os dealt with the politics of language more than fifty years after the US-Mexico War ended. Lucero’s oration draws attention to the ways speaking Spanish became a point of contention because the Spanish language was considered foreign. The only language deemed acceptable to speak in public spaces, even in New Mexico, was thought to be English.21 Summarizing the sentiments no doubt shared by other Nuevomexicanas/os during the early twentieth century, Lucero declares in the essay: “We want to learn the language of our country, and we are doing so; but we do not need, on that account, to deny our origin or our race or our language or our traditions or our history or our ancestry, because we are not ashamed of them; and we will not do it, because we are proud of them.”22 Lucero’s statement

22 Aurora Lucero, “Should the Spanish Language be Taught in the Public Schools of New Mexico?” in El Crepusculo, 1911, New Mexico Highlands University, Las Vegas, NM.
captures the affective register of literary and print culture from the pre-movement period that asserts Mexican American claims of belonging in the United States. The tone alone demonstrates the sense of urgency with which Nuevomexicanas/os approached their minoritized status during the early twentieth century.

Though still understudied figures in the Mexican American literary archive and lesser known still in the larger Latina/o/x literary archive, Mexican American women produced a prolific amount of literary and print culture prior to the Chicana/o movement, documenting local histories and traditions which appeared to be losing ground to Anglo American culture during the early twentieth century. Scholarly recovery efforts in the last two and a half decades, as I mention in the introduction, have led to the accumulation of a vast corpus of materials that evince the primacy of folklore in the Mexican American literary archive. Examples of “folkloric” texts written by Mexican American women outside of New Mexico include Adina de Zavala’s *History and Legends of the Alamo and Other Missions in and around San Antonio* (1917), Ana Bégué de Packman’s *Leather Dollars: Short Stories of Pueblo Los Angeles* (1932) and *Early California Hospitality: The Cookery Customs of Spanish California, with Authentic Recipes and Menus from the Period* (1938), Jovita González’s collection of short stories, which have been republished in *The Woman Who Lost Her Soul and Other Stories* (2000), Luisa Espinel’s *Canciones de mi Padre* (1946), and Soledad Pérez’s master’s thesis “Mexican Folklore from Austin, Texas” (1949). Scholars Tey Diana Rebolledo and Theresa Marquez have also written about the contributions Nuevomexicanas made to the archive through the oral histories collected as part of the Works Progress Administration program in the 1930s in *Women’s Tales from the New Mexico WPA: La Diabla a Pie* (2002). These

---

23 This list in not meant to be exhaustive.
texts are but a few samples from the pre-movement archive that speak to the ways
Mexican American women engaged folklore to confirm their belonging within the places
in which they dwelled. Many more literary texts that made use of folklore prior to the
Chicana/o movement were generated by Mexican American men, some who, unlike the
women discussed, held advanced degrees and academic positions.  

While dominant ethnographic discourses and concepts of folklore had attempted
to denigrate Mexican American local ways of being and knowing following the US-
Mexico War, such texts by Mexican American women attempted to represent their own
culture in more positive, though often complicated ways. Ethnographic discourses
distinguishing the primitive from the civilized were part and parcel to the disciplinary
study of folklore in the United States between the late nineteenth and early twentieth
century. The institutionalization of American folklore studies itself coincided with
government-supported efforts to examine supposedly primitive cultures that seemed at
odds with the nation’s project of Manifest Destiny. Late-nineteenth-century folklore
studies, like the discipline of anthropology from which it descended, supposedly allowed
professional and novice folklorists to locate “authentic” culture among diverse groups of
people. Shirley Moody-Turner reminds us that, since its emergence, American folklore
studies was shaped by the assumption that the white middle-class—its values,

24 There are several Mexican American academics who became well-known for their
work that focused on New Mexican language and folklore. Examples of their studies
include Juan B. Rael, “New Mexican Spanish Feasts,” *California Folklore Quarterly* 1,
*Spanish Folk-Poetry in New Mexico* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press,
1946); Aurelio Espinosa, “The Spanish Language in New Mexico and Southern
Colorado,” *Historical Society of New Mexico*, no. 16 (Santa Fe: New Mexican Printing
Company, 1911);
perspectives, and experiences—was the definition of “civilized” culture.25 For this reason, folklore studies often reinforced discourses of white superiority, and, by extension, ideas that seemed to confirm the inferiority of people of color.26 Folklore studies effectively enabled trained and untrained folklorist to extract information and organize people, places, and practices according to a logic of modernity/coloniality that cohered to middle-class Anglo American sensibilities.

The rhetoric of folklore that positioned New Mexico’s Mexican and Native American populations as primitive barriers to progress impacted New Mexico’s prolonged status as a territory. In contrast to the other territories the United States acquired following the US-Mexico War, New Mexico and Arizona would not achieve statehood for more than sixty years.27 Scholars have argued this was due in part to the large number of Native Americans and people of Mexican descent residing in the region.28

In her 1929 essay “Where Americans Are ‘Anglos’,” published in the North American Review, for instance, author Ruth Laughlin Barker contemplated the status of New Mexico’s Spanish-speaking population in the modern era. With the narrative style of an ethnologist, she described the self-identifying Spanish Americans who rebuked the term “Mexican,” surmising they were “really neither Spanish, nor Mexican, nor American, but New Mexican through three hundred years of living on the same soil, in the same adobe houses and with the same folk customs.”29 Barker suggests there is an

26 Ibid., 18.
27 Both Arizona and New Mexico achieved statehood in 1912.
28 See Nieto-Phillips.
interrelationship between place and culture that distinguishes the Spanish-speaking New Mexicans, or Nuevomexicanas/os, from other groups, and equated the unchanging, undeveloped qualities of the region (“same soil”) with the people who called that region home. Barker’s New Mexico appears as a socially and culturally rugged frontier that had yet to be fully tamed and integrated into the modern United States. Nuevomexicanas/os, Barker implies, existed only as quaint survivals of the region’s Spanish colonial past that had no place in the present.

Barker’s essay, which eventually became a chapter in her book *Caballeros: The Romance of Santa Fe and the Southwest* (1931), frames Nuevomexicanas/os as politically corrupt and culturally primitive, though in veiled terms, in order to justify their material and cultural dispossession. While Barker provides an impression of Nuevomexicanas/os in “Where Americans Are ‘Anglos’” that appears to avoid the more blatant racism that appears in pieces like “The Perils of the Mexican Invasion” (1929), wherein the author, eugenicist S.J. Holmes, describes Mexicans as menaces to the “racial composition” of the United States, Barker’s essay similarly frames Nuevomexicanas/os as incapable of participating in modern democracy and therefore unworthy of belonging in the United States.30 The essay upholds the logic that, if the United States stood as a testament to modernity’s achievements, then the inability of certain populations to fully participate in its democratic project was no indication of modernity’s failings, but rather a symptom of those populations’ racial and cultural flaws.

The notion that Nuevomexicanas/os were as wayward and uncouth as the land they inhabited had been circulated in English-language literary and print culture decades

---

prior to the publication of Barker’s essay. Only two decades prior, writer Charles F. Lummis had cemented an image of New Mexico in the broader US cultural imaginary as “the United States which is not the United States” [his emphasis] in his ethnographic travelogue *The Land of Poco Tiempo* (1893). Lummis famously dubbed New Mexico the land of “sun, silence, and adobe,” a place where three groups dwelled: the “Pueblo Indians,” the “Navajo Indians,” and the Mexicans. In *The Land of Poco Tiempo*, Lummis praised the Pueblo peoples for their “peaceful, fixed, house-dwelling ways,” chastised the Navajos, whom he considered “horse-living vagrants of the saddle,” and figured the Mexicans as “in-bred and isolation-shrunken descendants of the Castilian world finders; living almost as much against the house as in it.”

Literary culture generated between the late nineteenth and early twentieth century largely depicted these regions as, on one hand, having escaped the trauma of civilization and yet, on the other hand, in dire need of civilization at the same time. Late-nineteenth-century New Mexico, according to Lummis, was “a land of quaint, swart faces, of Oriental dress and unspelled speech.” Referencing the religious practices of the Nuevomexicana/o religious brotherhood known as the Penitentes, Lummis architected an image of New Mexico as a place “where Christians mangle and crucify themselves—the heart of Africa beating against the Rockies.” Lummis’ mapping of Africa onto the Rockies exemplifies what María Eugenia Cotera describes as a “distinct brand of

---

31 For more on how this notion affected women in New Mexico during the nineteenth century, see Deena J. González, *Refusing the Favor: The Spanish-Mexican Women of Santa Fe, 1820-1880* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999).
33 Ibid., 5.
34 Ibid.
35 Ibid.
colonialist narrative linked to the ideological imperatives of Westward expansion into the southwestern borderlands.”

Ramón A. Gutiérrez associates Lummis’ “orientalization” of New Mexico with the chronicling tactics of earlier European travel writing, noting how notions of civilization helped “elaborate mythologies of racial supremacy.”

According to Gutiérrez, “[i]f New Mexico could be conceived as an oriental place, as an Egypt locked in a time warp in the past, New Mexicans could be romantically depicted as specimens of degenerate races destined to collection in museums and extinction on the earth.”

Describing how writers like Lummis appropriated cultural legacies of Nuevomexicanas/os and the Native populations, Gutiérrez points out that the “antiquity of the cultures studied and collected in the Southwest were the source of sensual delight in the American imagination, but belonged not to the very people who had produced them.” Such accounts became part of a discursive tradition that figured Mexican Americans as uncivilized remnants of a pre-modern order.

While Lummis may have been considered only a popular writer, the images of the US Southwest he forwarded became part of the “official” archive that would define New Mexico in the dominant literary and cultural imaginary for decades. Despite his role in forwarding logics of Anglo American superiority, literary critic and folklorist María Herrera-Sobek counts Lummis among the “first generation” of folklorists engaged in the


38 Gutiérrez, 25.

39 Ibid.
study of Mexican American cultural traditions between 1893 and 1930. Following the publication of *The Land of Poco Tiempo*, writers and artists like Mary Austin, Ruth Laughlin Barker, Will Shuster, Erna Fergusson, and Mabel Dodge Luhan would use similar tropes and language to relate visions of New Mexico to readers in the eastern United States. Even literature as seemingly banal as Erna Fergusson’s *Mexican Cookbook* (1934) helped construct images of Nuevomexicanas/os as barbaric. Summarizing how Nuevomexicanas/os prepared their meals prior to the introduction of modern progress, for example, Fergusson states: “Apparently everything was done in the hardest possible way… the methods were the result of conditions so primitive that we can scarcely believe them now. Corn and wheat were ground on metates because there were no mills. Chile likewise. Fruits were dried because there was no sugar for preserving.” The cookbook confirmed through an ethnographic gaze that Nuevomexicanas/os were neither industrious nor inventive, discounting epistemologies that had defined Nuevomexicanas/os’ sense of identity for generations.

Though Barker is more subdued than Lummis in the way she distances and excludes Nuevomexicanas/os from American progress, she utilizes the same ethnographic discourse to locate them in a past that is diametrically opposed to the modern present. Whereas Lummis remarked that New Mexico was still “little bitten with the unrest of civilization” by the 1890s, Barker predicted that an increased Anglo American presence in the early twentieth century would soon produce a monolingual and “standardized” New Mexico. Through Anglo American education, intermarriage, and

---

42 Lummis, 16.
the general pressure to assimilate, Barker contended the “Vanishing Spanish-Americans” would be relegated to the domain of the “radio-talkie” and memory.⁴³ For some writers and their audiences, the possibility that Nuevomexicanas/os might continue to imagine themselves and their place in the present and future differently seemed inconceivable.

Jaramillo’s Centering of the “Folk”

*Romance Village Girl* is an elaboration of Jaramillo’s earlier autoethnography, *Shadows of the Past*, and was published in 1955, a year before the author died.

Throughout *Romance of a Little Village Girl*, Jaramillo details many of the events that transpired over the course of her life, including her personal memories of growing up in the northern New Mexican village of Arroyo Hondo and details regarding the separate deaths of her husband Venceslao Jaramillo, a prominent Nuevomexicano politician, and their daughter Angelina. Located north of Taos, New Mexico, Jaramillo describes Arroyo Hondo as a place that “imparted to its inhabitants satisfaction and contentment.”⁴⁴ She states that the New Mexico of her childhood had “adjusted itself” to the increase in Anglo American migration to the region during the late nineteenth century, even as the newcomers had begun to extract property and wealth from the Nuevomexicana/o upper-class.⁴⁵ It is when Jaramillo turns to events from her adulthood in *Romance of a Little Village Girl* that she seems to lament the “ills and troubles,” which, in one way or another, she attributes to modernization.⁴⁶ Perhaps one of the most apparent ways in which Jaramillo become aware of the social changes in New Mexico occurs when she

---

⁴³ Barker, 573.
⁴⁴ Jaramillo, 14
⁴⁵ Ibid., 9-10.
⁴⁶ Jaramillo, 199.
started a school in Taos. Jaramillo recalls that the students were not allowed to speak Spanish, and “the first English words were, ‘Put some wood in the stove.’” Though brief, Jaramillo’s memory of this moment displays her emerging awareness of the ways in which Nuevomexicana/o identity is marked as a form of second-class citizenship.

As Tey Diana Rebolledo states, Romance of a Little Village Girl is “a where the landscape underlies the narrative content.” While Jaramillo at times presents her childhood village as a somewhat isolated, pastoral place, where travelers would journey by horse and buggy “past remote villages” and “wide plains,” practically reconstructing the narrative vision of New Mexico with which Anglo American audiences were familiar, she also provides readers with descriptions of cultural events that would bring together groups people from various backgrounds, showing how local culture was never quite as static Lummis and others believed. On September 30th, during the feast day of San Geronimo, for instance, Jaramillo recalls how people would travel from near and far to celebrate the occasion in Taos. Evincing her own sense of racial superiority, she describes how the “filthy Utes,” the “tamed Apaches,” the aristocratic Navajos,” and the “friendly Picuris, Santa Claras, San Juans, Tesuques, and other tribes arrived at Taos from the south.” She recalls, too, during other fall occasions, traveling Mexican acrobats would stop by the villages and entertain locals, while “Arab gypsies in their picturesque garb passed through to sell their trinkets” on other occasions. The picture of life in northern New Mexico Jaramillo describes is not as simple and isolated as some

---

47 Jaramillo, 29
49 Jaramillo, 10.
50 Ibid., 17-18.
51 Ibid., 22-23.
critics have often assumed.\textsuperscript{52} These descriptions mark a very distinct space in which her perception of Nuevomexicana/o community and belonging is rooted, though one built on another form of coloniality. Even in her nostalgic gaze to the past, Jaramillo’s memories reflect a how northern New Mexico became a site in which forces of global modernity drove different groups of people into seemingly isolated territories.

Melina Vizcaíno-Alemán explains that unlike the Chicana/o movement period texts that map the origins of Chicano history onto what has become a masculine-coded space of the US-Mexico borderlands, Romance of a Little Village Girl, in her words, “tips the scale back toward a female-centered and more local sense of place.”\textsuperscript{53} The history Romance of a Little Village Girl relates is one that not only becomes the subject Anglo American literary and cultural histories throughout the latter part of the nineteenth century and into the twentieth, but also one that Jaramillo taps to refigure her own relationship to region. In the first two chapters, “The New Spanish Province” and “Government Changes Take Place,” that Jaramillo discusses, for instance, the Spanish reconquest of Santa Fe and the United States’ “conquest of New Mexico” in 1846, only briefly mentioning the years following Mexican independence.\textsuperscript{54} For Vizcaíno-Alemán, Jaramillo’s autoethnography reveals a “critical conception of landscape and place that forms not on the ‘outsides’ of the nation-state but within and in tension with the dominant discourses and histories of the Southwest.”\textsuperscript{55} Vizcaíno-Alemán links the emergence of

\textsuperscript{52} Summarizing the writings of Nuevomexicanas/os, Raymund A. Paredes states: “The writers described a culture seemingly locked in time and barricaded against outside forces. Here the New Mexican Hispano passed their lives in dignity and civility, confronting the harsh environment with a religiosity and resolve reminiscent of the conquistador themselves.” See Paredes, “Evolution of Chicano Literature,” 87.

\textsuperscript{53} Vizcaíno-Alemán, 3.

\textsuperscript{54} Jaramillo, 6.

\textsuperscript{55} Vizcaíno-Alemán, 6-7.
this critical conception of landscape to the period following World War II.\textsuperscript{56} My reading of *Romance of a Little Village Girl* departs from Vizcaíno-Alemán’s analysis because the folkloric difference allows us to focus on the ways Mexican American writers have deployed folklore as a critical method to reimagine local collective identities and forms of belonging. Still, I rely on Vizcaíno-Alemán’s assessment of Jaramillo’s autoethnography as a text that centers a gendered sense of place.

*Romance of a Little Village Girl* highlights the gendered sense of place that informs the autoethnography within the first few pages through the paratext. In the first edition of *Romance of a Little Village Girl*, there is a large, oval black-and-white photograph of Jaramillo, with a “New York hat.” She sits holding her younger sister. The photograph is centered on the page that follows the table of contents. In subsequent pages are photos of family members and homes. There is one photo of Jaramillo’s husband, Ven, one photo of her mother, and one photo of her daughter, Angelina. Other photos feature, according to the captions, the “Author’s childhood Village in New Mexico, Arroyo Hondo,” and the two homes Jaramillo lived in later in life. The captions for these photos read: “The New Home, after the Author’s Marriage” and “Rhythm in Adobe, the Author’s Later Home.”\textsuperscript{57} Vanessa Fonseca-Chávez writes that Jaramillo’s inclusion of photographs in *Romance of a Little Village Girl* contributes to Jaramillo’s construction of her own “reality,” becoming “a means not only to communicate nostalgia for a disappearing past but to reassert a Spanish presence in Anglo American society.”\textsuperscript{58}

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{56} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{57} Cleofas M. Jaramillo, *Romance of a Little Village Girl* (San Antonio: The Naylor Company, 1955), Recovering the U.S. Hispanic Literary Heritage Collection, University of Houston, np.  
\textsuperscript{58} Vanessa Fonseca-Chávez, “Images, Identities, and Realities in *Romance of a Little Village Girl* (1955) and *Canícula: Snapshots of a Girlhood en la Frontera* (1995)” in
\end{flushright}
For Mexican Americans like Jaramillo, notions of belonging and identity were also linked to the politics of visuality, but with very different effects. Yet the emphasis *Romance of a Little Village Girl* places on visuality and the careful plotting of space in relationship to gendered bodies contrasts with the dominant representations that circulated about Nuevomexicanos between the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. The autoethnography’s picturing of Nuevomexicano space and bodies, most of which are presented as feminine, is a demonstration of agency akin to what visual studies scholar Jasmine Nichole Cobb describes as the visual practices and “embodied processes” that were applied by both black and white people to create visualities of blackness in the nineteenth century. Cobb explains that for nineteenth-century black women in particular, practices of “picturing freedom” that centered black women’s bodies intervened in the visual culture of slavery and created a counter archive wherein “slavery was a part, but not the sum, of Black women’s experiences.” In citing Cobb, I certainly do not seek to equate the experience of an upper-class Mexican American women with enslaved black women. However, I do find Cobb’s methodology extremely useful for incorporating a critical grammar of visual studies to my analysis of Jaramillo’s autoethnography.

**Jaramillo’s Folk Community**

The emphasis *Romance of a Little Village Girl* places on gendered bodies and spaces through the paratext before the start of Jaramillo’s narrative resurfaces when

---


60 Ibid., 6.
Jaramillo discusses the events leading up to the formation of La Sociedad Folklórica in the 1930s. According to her autoethnography, Jaramillo was motivated to mobilize a group of Nuevomexicanas in order to involve themselves in the preservation of their traditions after reading Holland’s Magazine. Inspired by an article she had read about a Natchez pilgrimage wherein “antebellum mansions” and “rich heirlooms” of the South were displayed for the public to commemorate phases of the region’s history, the text states that Jaramillo devised her own plan to curate her Nuevomexicana/o community’s Spanish colonial heritage and transform a popular festival dominated by Anglo Americans into what she thought it “ought to be.” Vizcaíno-Alemán characterizes this moment in the text as one in which Jaramillo “appropriates the Old South in the New South to revive old Spain in New Mexico.”61 In this sense, the origins of her Sociedad Folklórica are to some extent entangled with the regional history and politics of the South, though it is a set of politics that still do not position Nuevomexicanos within the racial and gendered coordinates that organize the US South.

The festival of concern for Jaramillo was the Santa Fe Fiesta, also known as the De Vargas pageant. It was an annual event largely constructed by Anglo American anthropologists to commemorate the Spanish reconquest of Santa Fe and the ways in which New Mexico had been saved by Anglo American modernity. Public performances that took place during the Fiesta reified tropes of Mexican and Native American primitivism that existed in dominant literary and cultural histories. At the time, the Fiesta primarily served as a way of attracting tourists to the region and contributed to the

---

61 Vizcaíno-Alemán, 12.
creation of New Mexico’s supposedly harmonious “tri-ethnic” culture. Although Nuevomexicanos took part in religious events to commemorate the founding of the city of Santa Fe, they were hardly active in other Fiesta activities in the early 1900s. Up to that point in regard to the Fiesta, the text suggests, Nuevomexicanos had “been seeing mostly what [Anglo] Americans have arranged.”

The description of the Natchez pilgrimage gave Jaramillo the idea of encouraging other Nuevomexicanas to “ransack” their “mother’s trunks” for clothing that would communicate a sense of Nuevomexicana belonging. She states that after reading the magazine, she started scheming about how to alter the Fiesta. The plan Jaramillo says she developed would require the help of other Nuevomexicanas. To get a sense of just how elaborate her plans were, it is worth quoting the passage at length:

During the hours I lay awake that night I planned a program, for the coming fiesta just two months ahead. The following morning, full of enthusiasm, I called five ladies who I thought would be interested in helping carry out my plans. Inviting them to tea, I told them I had something interesting to propose. This must have aroused their curiosity as the five ladies came. I told them my plan, which was to try to arouse more interest amongst our Spanish speaking population in taking part in the fiesta in greater numbers and that each of us would invite ten more to join us in the procession to the church, wearing old-fashioned gowns, in the procession to the cross, wearing shawls, that we should enter the parade on horseback as “Las Galleras de Santa Ana,” and to serve a Spanish barbecued supper. While it sounded like a large undertaking, nevertheless the ladies liked it.

Jaramillo goes on to say that she was successful and even succeeded in meeting her “quota” of recruits. Similar to the visuality upon which Jaramillo relies in the first few

---

63 Jaramillo, 174.
64 Ibid.
65 Ibid.
pages of *Romance of a Little Village Girl* to frame her narrative and position herself in relationship to place, the plan she articulates in this passage illustrates modes of engagement with folklore that challenge Jaramillo’s own sense of a stable, traditional Nuevomexicano culture. The passage emphasizes the stakes involved in representing communal identity in the public eye.

With the support of the five women she invited to her home, Jaramillo takes steps to bring her “program” into fruition, with mixed results. Jaramillo’s idea of entering the Fiesta parade on horseback alongside the other women she recruits for the religious procession somewhat falls through, she remarks, as she was first unable to find horses for every person and then only able convince four of them to ride into the parade with her:

Some of the ladies feared that the horses might get frightened by all the noise and only five of us entered the parade. I had the words, “*Galleras de Santa Ana*,” written in large black letters on the white sheets covering the horses. This and the old-fashioned costumes worn by the riders brought forth so much applause that we won one of the prizes.66

Jaramillo and her co-conspirators’ first intervention in the Fiesta leads to the formation of her folklore society and a fashion show, which thereafter became an annual Fiesta event.

In the same chapter, Jaramillo discloses how she prepared for the show by collecting dresses for the women to parade in through the streets of Santa Fe. In an effort to increase the number of gowns that could be worn, Jaramillo reportedly “searched the city” and “wrote to relatives and friend in other towns” to recover gowns that, for Jaramillo, communicated the grandeur of New Mexico’s past and the place of Nuevomexicanas/os’ in it. To her satisfaction, she was able to locate gowns for the show,
many of “which were free from damage by moths and splits,” “all ready to leap out of old trunks from the past to the present and have their wrinkles shaken out into the air.”

Jaramillo’s description of the origins of her fashion show resulted in the construction of an alternate archive that became instrumental in articulating sense of collective belonging among Nuevomexicanas in the public sphere. While Jaramillo seems to deemphasize the active role Nuevomexicanas took in collaborating and bringing these materials to light by attributing the action to the gowns themselves, as they were “ready to leap out of old trunks” for the fashion show, the text reveals how the production of an imagines Spanish past required a joint, active compilation of objects that highlighted the presence of Nuevomexicanas and their capacity to adjust their sense of belonging to the context of the twentieth century.

Critics have interpreted Jaramillo’s intervention in the Fiesta and her other preservationist activities as resistant but controversial attempts to salvage Nuevomexicano history. Genaro M. Padilla argues that such “disruptions” were “strategically intended to counter” Anglo American control of the Fiesta, and he considers her actions a “sociopsychological compensation for her actual social and economic status through the 1930s and 1940s as a financially troubled widow living in a small apartment off the main plaza in Santa Fe.” Padilla explains that Jaramillo’s *Romance of a Little Village Girl* exemplifies the extent to which Nuevomexicana/o writers of her generation were influenced by a “nonnative discursive network” that evolved over the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and asserts that the saliency

---

67 Jaramillo, 176.
of narratives that romanticized the US Southwest deeply affected the ways Nuevomexicanas thought about themselves, preventing them from diagnosing the conditions that were contributing to their dispossession and displacement.\textsuperscript{69} For Padilla, Jaramillo’s “folkloristic activities and her two cultural autobiographies” were part of a “discursive activity that was scripted for her by what she more than once references as the ‘newcomers,’ yet reappropriated by her when it became evident that her cultural knowledge was being plundered.”\textsuperscript{70} Considering Jaramillo’s romanticism more of a “salve” meant to numb “psychological wounds” than a resistive strategy, Padilla argued Romance of a Little Village Girl shows how Nuevomexicanas were coerced “into whispers of discomfort, confused historiography, muted social criticism, or silence.”\textsuperscript{71} Tey Diana Rebolledo’s reading of Jaramillo’s autoethnography, in contrast to Padilla’s downplaying of Jaramillo’s agency, argues the text is full of what she calls “narrative strategies of resistance.”\textsuperscript{72} For Rebolledo, the form and content of texts written by Nuevomexicanas prior to the Chicana/o movement, like Jaramillo’s Romance of a Little Village Girl, exhibit signs the authors were well aware of the ways they subverted dominant hegemonic discourses.

Read through the lens of the folkloric difference, the fashion show and the entry of the “Galleras de Santa Ana” into the parade on horseback underscores the collaborative processes upper-class Nuevomexicanas undertook to reframe Nuevomexicana collective identity and belonging. In the passages above, the capacity of an individual to change what the “Americans have arranged” is limited. Pushing the

\textsuperscript{69} Padilla, 202.
\textsuperscript{70} Ibid., 197.
\textsuperscript{71} Ibid., 203.
overbearing sentiment that Nuevomexicana/o forms of storytelling and performance were vanishing, the text emphasizes the continuing relevance of shared “traditional” meaning-making practices that take on an exceedingly gendered bent in the public sphere. The moment demonstrates how Jaramillo and a cohort of Nuevomexicanas utilized folklore as a method of critique. From the vantage point of the folkloric difference, we can read their shared efforts to transform the Fiesta not only as an attempt to reclaim control of a narrative about Nuevomexicano belonging from Anglo Americans, but also as an exercise that reveals the politics that contributed to their exclusion from institutional spaces of meaning making accessed by Mexican American men during the early twentieth century. The folkloric difference collapses the artificial separation of Jaramillo’s “folkloric activities” from her acts of writing to consider how they overlap and have contributed to the formation of the Mexican American literary archive.

The program Jaramillo creates to revise the Fiesta contradicts her own perception of tradition and the ideal Nuevomexicana ways of belonging which she describes earlier in *Romance of a Little Village Girl*. In “Government Changes Take Place,” Jaramillo speculates that Nuevomexicanas/os continued to practice their cultural traditions after New Mexico became a US territory precisely because of the social and political transformations that took place. “Crushed at first with these hard changes, but with their spirits still strong, with inherent courage and religious resolve” Jaramillo states, “they [Nuevomexicanas/os] bore their trials. In an effort to keep satisfied and cheerful, feast days, weddings, and other celebrations were kept up, with feasting, music, and dancing.”  

In other words, Jaramillo contends that previous generations made more concerted efforts to practice their traditions because these customs allowed them to cope

---

73 Jaramillo, 9.
with their displacement. To Jaramillo, folklore provided a sense of stability in the face of chaos. She explains that these events were usually based on the liturgical calendar and the planting/harvesting seasons. “People’s lives radiated between church and home,” she recalls,

> Mothers stayed home taking care of their children, satisfied to live off of their husbands’ earnings. They were not buying new clothes all of the time nor visiting beauty shops. No one was ever late for church, although some of them lived two and three miles distant and rode in slow wagons or even walked. How nice it would be if people would live thus!74

In this passage, Jaramillo nostalgically longs for the New Mexico of the past that was disrupted when New Mexico became a US territory. Jaramillo implies that Nuevomexicanas/os not only displaced from their former social positions in the twentieth century, but also from institutions that structured their lives (church and home). Here, Jaramillo suggests that the displacement of Nuevomexicanas from the home in particular was a negative consequence of modernization. Jaramillo’s nostalgic longing for a past wherein mothers lived between church and home clashes with the satisfaction she appears to get from staking claims to other spaces that, though gendered, facilitate alternative possibilities for Nuevomexicana belonging that are not limited to “traditional” mothering roles.

In *Romance of a Little Village Girl*, Jaramillo suggests the network of Nuevomexicanas she references in her discussion of the Fiesta come together to form the Sociedad Folklórica in 1935 because of the success they experience following their preliminary intervention. But she also attributes her inspiration for creating a folklore society to the lack of one in New Mexico. Recalling that the famous Texas folklorist J.

74 Jaramillo, 14.
Frank Dobie had invited her to become part of the Texas Folklore Society, it occurred to her that as there was no equivalent in New Mexico, “it would be an excellent plan to start one.” Under Dobie’s leadership, the Texas Folklore society produced a formidable collection of literary and print culture on the US Southwest, and members of the Texas Folklore Society often crossed paths with New Mexicans. During the joint session held by the New Mexico Institute and the Texas Folklore society in El Paso in 1936, for example, Nuevomexicana writer Nina Otero-Warren was listed to present alongside folklorists Arthur L. Campa, J. Frank Dobie, and Tejana writer Jovita González.

Moving between the first-person and the first-person plural, Jaramillo express the origins of the group’s name:

We named it “La Sociedad Folklorica,” although I was not sure that I had the correct word. “La Folklorica” is still the name of it today; and the first rules which I drafted still govern the organization. These rules were that the society should be composed of only thirty members, all of whom must be of Spanish descent, and that the meetings must be conducted in the Spanish language, with the aim of preserving our language, customs and traditions.

La Sociedad Folklorica is presented in Romance of a Little Village Girl as a social group with a clear objective: to maintain a “Spanish” identity. By 1935, Jaramillo’s Sociedad Folklorica was not the only Mexican American women’s organization devoted to the preservation of Mexican American traditions that were considered “Spanish.” Eileen V. Wallis has written that the descendants of California’s Spanish/Mexican ranch-owning

---

75 Jaramillo, 176.
76 See “Program of the Twenty-Fourth Annual Fiestacita: Texas Folk-Lore Society in Joint Session with the Hispanic Institute of New Mexico,” 15-16 April 1938, MSS 540 BC, Box 1, New Mexico Folklore Society Records, University of New Mexico Center for Southwest Research, Albuquerque, NM. Other New Mexico Folklore Society records suggest that folklorists such as América Paredes, Arthur L. Campa, and Jovita González went to some of the same regional folklore conferences to present their work.
77 Jaramillo, 176.
class created organizations comparable to the Sociedad Folklórica by the 1920s, pointing out that women’s clubs had been part of the social scene in Los Angeles since the 1860s. When questions about Californianas’ race became a contentious subject and barred them from participating in national women’s clubs during the first decades of the twentieth century, they upheld racial distinctions that resemble the one drawn by Jaramillo, separating “Spanish ladies” from “Mexican women.”

Crafting Alternative Spaces of Belonging

The creation of La Sociedad Folklórica occurred just as the Works Progress Administration (WPA) and its division of the Federal Writer’s Project began a national project to document American folklore. In 1935, President Theodore Roosevelt created the Federal Writer’s Project, which employed people to collect folklore and produce a series of State Guides. Sonnet Retman argues the creation of the Federal Writer’s Project was a way in which the government participated in a “revived debate over the definition and identity of the nation and its citizenry” during the Depression era. In this way, the project to document folklore was as much an attempt to revitalize the image of

---

79 Ibid., 140.
80 Rebolledo writes that the Federal Writer’s Program of producing State Guides “involved interviewing older residents to document culture and history; identifying cultural events that might attract visitors; and cataloguing the origins of name-giving to places, roads, and streets.” See Tey Diana Rebolledo and María Teresa Márquez, *Women’s Tales from the New Mexico WPA : La Diabla a Pie* (Houston: Arte Público Press, 2000), xxi.
the United States as an exceptional nation as an attempt by the government to provide economic support to citizens.82

The Federal Writer’s Project in New Mexico produced a vast archive of materials collected from Nuevomexicanas/os. Some of the items collected were published in the state’s guidebook, *New Mexico: A Guide to the Colorful State*. Far fewer Nuevomexicanos were employed by the Federal Writer’s Project to collect folklore than Anglo Americans, and there were even fewer Nuevomexicanas. Jaramillo’s brother, Reyes Martínez, was among the Nuevomexicanos to collect folklore, with his contributions ranging from copies of poems that appeared in the late-nineteenth-century Spanish-language press to descriptions of old religious practices to a history of his family titled “Spanish Pioneers: The Martínez Family of Arroyo Hondo” (1936). Curiously, in the family history, Martínez describes his sister Cleofas’ wedding as an event of “conspicuous prominence in the life history of Don Julián”—the family patriarch and their father.83 The occasion was momentous, according to Martínez, because the wedding was attended by Governor Miguel Otero. The author of *Romance of a Little Village Girl*, Martínez’s sister, appears in the history as if by accident, as the document focuses on the family’s patrilineal genealogy and the villages in which lived. In contrast to Jaramillo’s “female-centered” sense of place, to quote Vizcaíno-Alemán, her brother’s “Spanish Pioneers: The Martínez Family of Arroyo Hondo” maps an exceedingly masculine one.84

In comparison to Martínez’s controlled, masculine narrative, chaotic is the word that seems to best characterize Jaramillo’s wedding, given her description of the event in

---

82 Retman, 13.
84 Vizcaíno-Alemán, 3.
Romance of a Little Village Girl. Jaramillo relates the smallest of details, including how food was wasted and the wines purchased for the event were not served. Jaramillo describes how the “traditional” parts of the wedding that were meant to entertain guests and acknowledge the new places the bride and groom would occupy as members of the Nuevomexicano elite were not implemented. When the wedding ended, Jaramillo told Ven the wedding was a “mess,” but she quickly regretted making the comment after recalling how hard he had worked to put the wedding in order.\(^8^5\) In comparison to the ritualized structure of the upper-class weddings Jaramillo describes in Shadows of the Past/ Sombras de pasado, her wedding, for whatever reason, seemed to be completely unorganized.

The disorder of Jaramillo’s wedding, which she describes in the chapter “Wedding at Taos,” extends into the next chapter, “At the Home I Found Difficult to Call Home,” where Jaramillo recounts spending the days following the honeymoon. The honeymoon takes her and Ven from the little village of her childhood, Arroyo Hondo, to California for a month, but it is when Ven leaves her in parents’ house in the northern New Mexican village of El Rito that Jaramillo feels dislocated. The title of the chapter itself implies this was one place wherein Jaramillo felt she did not belong, though the reasons for her dislocation here are due to her marriage and not the forms of economic and social dispossession that she attributes to Anglo American dominance. “This quiet, dim house was now to be my home,” Jaramillo states,

\[
\text{I was trying to keep back the tears when a dismal cry made me spring up in terror and lock the door. Another unearthly cry echoed through the hills. A woman in distress, perhaps beaten and thrown out of her home by a drunken husband, has come to take refuge down here in the wooded river, I thought. Ven, returning with the mail and fining the door locked, asked,}
\]

\(^{8^5}\) Jaramillo, 81.
‘Afraid, mi vida?’ ‘Oh, the most awful wailing I have ever heard came from the river,’ I said.  

Ven proceeds to assure Jaramillo the sound came from “a coyote announcing a change in the weather” yet from the text it is unclear whether Jaramillo is satisfied with her husband’s explanation.  

“The lonely cry haunted me after I went to bed,” she states, “and I lay awake listening to the cheery crickets in the garden and the gurgling croak of the frogs in the pond by the river.”

The sense of uneasiness Jaramillo experiences after hearing the cry that then prompts her to consider the sound may have come from a woman who suffered domestic violence troubles her juxtaposition of the past and present in Romance of a Little Village Girl. Throughout the autoethnography, Jaramillo presents the past as an ideal place for Nuevomexicanas/os that has been disrupted by Anglo American modernization. “The Home I Felt Difficult to Call Home” suggests, however, that despite the loneliness and displacement the text attributes to modernization, women’s bodies are susceptible to domestic violence, even from within the seemingly safe and desirable spaces of the traditional Nuevomexicana/o home. That Jaramillo discloses this moment in which she suspects the “unearthly cry” emanated from a woman beaten by her husband in the chapter immediately following her wedding raises a specter of gendered violence and displacement.

These moments Jaramillo recalls early in Romance of a Little Village Girl contrast with one of her happier memories, which appears in the autoethnography’s closing chapter. Though writing as an older woman whose nostalgia figures the past as an ideal

---

86 Ibid., 84.
87 Jaramillo, 84.
88 Ibid.
space for Nuevomexicanas/os, she characterizes the fifteenth anniversary of the Sociedad Folklórica and other experiences with the society as the “happiest and most cherished” incidents that occurred within the latter part of her life. According the Jaramillo, the members of her society surprised on the fifteenth anniversary by meeting in front of her house in Santa Fe with musicians to give her “a gay serenade”:

When I opened the door each one greeted me with a warm embrace as they came in and then addressed with me an affectionate verse that each one had composed to me. One of them presented me with a bouquet of roses. They all looked charming with their pretty costumes and red roses in their hair. The rest sang and danced in the best spirits while two of the members quietly slipped out and brought in the refreshments. When we were invited to come into the dining room, they had the table decorated with roses, and there was a beautiful frosted cake with my name and a good wish written on it. I was asked to cut the first slice. I felt as if I were again at my wedding, and I was overcome by my Folklorica’s friendship and great esteem that although feeling very happy, I could not keep back my tears.

The memory of her Sociedad Folklórica’s visit presents a vision of a feminine community that complicates Jaramillo’s longing for the past. Friendship in this scene becomes another form of romance in which the autoethnography presents an alternate form of gendered belonging, not in Jaramillo’s traditional and therefore ideal Nuevomexicano past but in the temporal space she characterizes as the more immediate modern past and present.

Read through the lens of the folkloric difference, this final chapter in Romance of a Little Village Girl imparts a vision how Nuevomexicanas’ collective efforts to reclaim control of their collective identity through folklore—wittingly or unwittingly—enabled them to create different social relationships that have facilitated ongoing critiques of modernity while revealing their own complicated positions within it. When considered

89 Jaramillo, 194.
90 Ibid.
alongside the very masculine and patriarchal orientation from which Mexican American folklore has been theorized—from the edited collections and studies of folklore produced by figures such as Aurelio Espinosa, Juan B. Rael, Arthur L. Campa, and Américo Paredes—the emphasis Jaramillo’s *Romance of a Little Village Girl* places on women’s bodies provides a means of tracing how gender has affected the construction, dissolution, and evolution of the Mexican American literary archive’s folkloric foundation and the networks that emerged as Mexican Americans grappled with their positions as colonizers and the colonized between the late nineteenth century and the early twentieth.

The folkloric difference allows us to understand one way in which Mexican American engagement with folklore in New Mexico relied on collective acts and shared gendered labor to preserve local histories. Jaramillo’s autobiography, as read through the folkloric difference, also shows how collective acts of cultural preservation produced alternative modes of regional Mexican American belonging. Though embedded in *Romance of a Little Village Girl* are structures of modernity and coloniality that have continued to reproduce violence on Nuevomexicanos and other communities of color, there is, I contend, a model of politically engaging place-based histories documented in the text that should be considered connected and not separate from the Chicana feminist practices that would emerge later in the twentieth century, practices that continue to inform contemporary efforts to not only remember the past, but imagine alternative futures.91

---

CHAPTER TWO


In 1949, an article titled “Viaje por Nuevo México” conveyed for readers of San Antonio’s Spanish-language newspaper *La Prensa* how people of Mexican descent in New Mexico described themselves.¹ The article was written by Amalia Millán, a Mexican folklorist with formal academic training in the field.² Staying true to the genre of travel writing that her title invokes, Millán describes the landscape and the people she and her traveling companion, the Anglo American folklorist Eleanor Hague, encounter on their way to Gallup, New Mexico, for an annual gathering of Native American tribes.³ The opening paragraphs give the impression that Millán is about delve into an ethnographic study of the “[g]rupos numerosos de indios (numerous groups of indians)” meeting in Gallup. However, Millán instead turns to the other “gentes nativas (native people)” whom she encounters.⁴ Despite her obvious interest in the local Native American tribes, it is around the other “native” population that “Viaje por Nuevo México” pivots.

⁴ Millán, 33. All translations of “Viaje por Nuevo México” are my own.
The population at the center of the article puzzle Millán because their identity seems mired in contradiction. The self-proclaimed “españoles” spoke a crude form of Spanish that practically embarrassed Millán. Her introduction to their regional dialect came when the chauffer driving the two folklorists told them his plans to park the vehicle. Millán recalls the driver saying, “Voy a parquear mi carro mientras ustedes van a watchear por ay (I’m going to park my car while you all watch over there).”5 His substandard speech took her by surprise. Providing her readers with more context about the chauffer, Millán continued:

Aquel neomexicano estaba firmemente convencido de que hablaba un correcto español y yo lo dejaba en su ingenua convicción y recordaba el orgullo con que antes me había dado su nombre español: Bernardino Rodríguez (That neomexicano was firmly convinced he was speaking Spanish correctly, and I left him with his naïve conviction, recalling the pride with which he had previously given his Spanish name: Bernardino Rodríguez).6

It is from this description of her encounter with Bernardino Rodríguez that Millán segues into a deeper discussion about the reasons why the Mexican Americans in that region refused to identify as Mexicans. The “gentes nativas” insisted they were of pure Spanish descent. Yet they appeared to Millán to have physical characteristics—“piel tostada (toasted skin)” and “cabellos lacios muy negros (straight, very black hair)”—that clearly pointed to their mestizaje.7

Given the incongruence between their appearance and sense of identity, Millán implies that the logic of the local Mexican Americans is skewed. The neomexicanas/os’ misperception of their identity seemed connected to their flawed Spanish. As a whole their refusal to self-identify as Mexican puzzled her, motivating Millán to reflect on her

5 Millán, 33.
6 Ibid. Neomexicano is another term that Nuevomexicanas/os used to identify themselves.
7 Ibid. In general, mestizaje refers to mixed heritage.
own Mexican pride toward the end of the article. Despite the perceptible sense of shame with which the locals associate Mexicanness, Millán said she was glad to proclaim that she was indeed Mexican, “con un orgullo al parecer incomprensible para aquellos que me escuchaban (with a pride that was incomprehensible to those who would hear me).”

“Viaje por Nuevo México” was written for a largely immigrant audience and no doubt reminded readers of their separation from places that had long determined their sense of belonging. The article was also published in a newspaper that was invested in maintaining a Mexican middle-class readership. And while words like “watchear” and “parquear” were not necessarily unique to New Mexico during the first half of the twentieth century, for the readers of La Prensa they likely symbolized an undesirable form of acculturation, a waning of linguistic and cultural knowledge that made one Mexican. Such words would come to characterize the language of a generation of Mexican Americans who came of age in the late 1930s and through the 1940s. George Carpenter Barker, an anthropologist and contemporary of Millán, would describe this language as “pachuco argot” in 1950, a dialect which he hypothesized had been diffused from New Mexico and adopted by Spanish-speaking criminals and Mexican gangs throughout the US Southwest.

If the Spanish-language was indeed a signifier of one’s capacity to be Mexican, then the adoption of what we might consider “Spanglish” terms indicated a dissolution of Mexican authenticity. Though formally educated contributors to the Spanish-language press of the United States such as Amalia Millán may have seemed to only gently deride the use of words like “watchear” and “parquear,” their criticisms helped uphold notions

8 Millán, 33.
of a Mexican identity that was firmly rooted within the boundaries of post-1848 Mexico. The impulse to control language emanated from a desire to define and control what it meant to be Mexican, and in Millán’s case, particularly in terms of race and class.

Fundamentally, Millán’s article reveals that regional identities cultivated by Mexican Americans who did not cross the border did not go unnoticed by those who did. Though a fairly straightforward point, Millán’s encounter and her ethnographic reflection reestablish that Mexican Americans have never been a homogenous group. Millán’s “Viaje por Nuevo Mexico” demonstrates one way in which people of Mexican descent were introduced to localized ways of being Mexican in the United States that did not necessarily cohere to nationalist ideologies but were engendered by histories embedded in distinct landscapes throughout the US West and Southwest. Because the US Spanish-language press was one of the few venues in which Mexican Americans published prior to the Movement period, newspapers like La Prensa became vital for spaces in which they recorded, circulated, debated, and produced knowledge. Unsurprisingly, then, the Spanish-language press is where scholars may find written material that captures how local ways of knowing and being, often understood and interpreted as folklore, have inspired alternate collective identities and relationships to place. The mediation of these identities in the Spanish-language press occurs in genres ranging from ethnographic reports to serialized novels.

This chapter considers how the twentieth century Spanish-language press of the United States indexes Mexican American folklore. More specifically, I read how folklore in the Spanish-language press destabilizes Mexican American attachments to nation and the official methods of knowing upon which it relies to maintain its power. Scholarship on Mexican American folklore and the production of “folkloric” texts during the early
twentieth century typically situates folklore as a residual oral form and emerging from isolated regional contexts. In contrast, I read folklore in the press as part of a genealogy of Mexican American literary and cultural production that relies on the flexibility of vernacular forms and content to negotiate and establish localized ways of belonging. Using the lens of the folkloric difference to parse through the local histories and global designs which converge at the interface of Mexican American folklore and print culture, I argue the Spanish-language press of the twentieth century functioned not only as generative site of meaning making, but also a site in which seemingly residual and unsophisticated storytelling practices were validated as methods that allowed Mexican American immigrant and non-immigrant communities to remake collective identities.

In this chapter, I turn to a serialized novel published in San Antonio’s La Prensa to show how folklore became embedded in the press and redefined terms of Mexican belonging. Before Amalia Millán took readers to the pueblitos of New Mexico, writer Jorge Ainslie invited them to accompany Federico Godínez on a journey from Mexico to the United States in Los Pochos (1934). Ainslie’s novel details how Godínez and his wife María left their middle-class lifestyle during the early years of the Mexican Revolution (1910-1920) and became working-class immigrants who raise their US-born children—the “pochos” to whom the title refers—in Los Angeles. Throughout the novel, returning to Mexico remains a priority for the couple. But a combination of poor luck and unjust social conditions prevent the Godínez family from returning until the children are grown.

Overall, the novel discourages immigration to the United States. José Aranda asserts that while “Los Pochos is in actuality about many things affecting the lives of Mexican nationals living in the U.S. in the 1930s” it is precisely “the birth of the children in the United States, Virginia, and later her brother, José, that anchors this novel as an
anti-U.S. immigration text.”¹⁰ In this way, the novel’s preoccupation with the pochos mirrors the anxieties of readers who would experience the effects of being ni de aquí, ni de allá. Even so, it is through the novel’s presentation of folklore, I argue, that the possibility of establishing new relationships to place is forwarded.

Folklore figures into Los Pochos as collective memory, which, I argue, reterritorializes place to assert Mexican belonging in the United States. The novel’s representation of folklore dismantles the assumption that Mexicans are foreign to the United States by exposing the settler colonial origins of the Mexican American population in San Fernando, California. Consequently, it also troubles the novel’s preoccupation with the notion that the Mexican nation is the only true Mexican homeland. At the same time, the novel underscores how local vernacular storytelling practices endured despite the proliferation of written forms during the early twentieth century. Reading a particular storytelling scene within Los Pochos through the folkloric difference conveys how the redistribution and reformulation of regional collective memories became a method for immigrant communities to cope with the condition of being neither here nor there, while simultaneously recalling Mexican Americans’ positions as the colonizers and the colonized.

The Mexican Revolution and the US Spanish-Language Press

Shifting borders and immigration have affected how the Spanish-language press has evolved within the United States since the mid-nineteenth century. Historically, the Spanish-language press has been an important platform for communicating the local and

global news as well as distributing literature for the education and entertainment of Spanish-speaking audiences in the United States. For Mexican Americans, the Spanish-language press of the United States has also operated as a repository of knowledge. While not unique in this regard given that populations forced to exist at the margins of US society have often relied on newspapers and other forms of print culture to simply communicate the news or, in some instances, stage acts of resistance, the US Spanish-language press remained among the most important tools through which Mexican Americans could promote literacy and education in immigrant as well as non-immigrant communities. Access to such platforms has proven to be imperative when the United States has felt little if any responsibility to afford most racialized populations equitable learning opportunities.

The Mexican Revolution had a particularly powerful effect on the Spanish-language press in the United States. The Mexican Revolution and the events that would inspire it would prompt more than a million Mexicans to leave their homeland and settle in the United States by 1930. Historians Gilbert González and Vicki Ruiz locate the beginning of major Mexican immigration in the late nineteenth century, citing Porfirio Diaz regime’s efforts to modernize Mexico by opening the nation up to foreign interests in mining and agriculture, specifically the interests of the United States. Many of the immigrants who left Mexico would settle in the urban areas, some of which had historically been home to Mexican Americans. According to Nicolás Kanellos, the rise in Mexican immigrants to the United States during the early twentieth century also

---

supported the growth of the Spanish-language press. Kanellos explains that San
Antonio alone was the site of approximately a “dozen Spanish-language publishing
houses, more than any other city in the United States” because of the Mexican
Revolution. While previous newspapers had been established in the nineteenth century,
the new wave of immigration revitalized its reach and the communities it served. “In
New York, Los Angeles, San Antonio, and many other cities,” Kanellos states,
an entrepreneurial class of refugees and immigrants came with sufficient
cultural and financial capital to establish businesses of all types to serve
the rapidly growing Hispanic enclaves. They constructed everything from
tortilla factories to Hispanic theaters and movie houses, and through their
cultural leadership in mutual aid societies, the churches, theaters,
newspapers, and publishing houses, they were able to disseminate a
nationalistic ideology that ensured the solidarity and isolation of their
communities, or market, if you will.

It is in this manner that the Spanish-language press become a key source of Mexican
American education and artistic expression. The cities that would become the most
productive for the Spanish-language press were those that not only had a historic
population of Mexican Americans, but those that would receive the greatest influx of
immigrants of Mexican descent, including Los Angeles and San Antonio.

One of the most influential and widely distributed Spanish-language daily
newspapers published in the US Southwest during the twentieth century was San
Antonio’s La Prensa, founded by Mexican immigrant and businessman Ignacio P.
Lozano in 1913. Lozano was also owner and editor of the publishing house Casa de
Lozano. In addition to founding La Prensa, Lozano also founded Los Angeles’ Spanish-
language newspaper La Opinión in 1926. Lozano was among an educated and upper-

---

13 Ibid., 25.
14 Ibid., 24.
class group of immigrants from Mexico who applied their wealth and journalistic talents to cultivating a particular kind of Mexican community in the United States. *La Prensa* served Spanish-speaking immigrants and non-immigrants across the United States, but the newspaper concentrated on building and maintaining a sense of community among Mexican immigrants in San Antonio by publishing articles, serial novels, and other literature that connected readers to their homeland. Skimming through the pages of *La Prensa*, one cannot help but notice the complex network of intellectuals, poets, novelists, and other cultural workers whose work became archived alongside a variety of business advertisements and news columns that reflect various ways in which Mexican Americans experienced day-to-day life and navigated the social, political, and economic landscape of the United States.

The people of Mexican descent who made their home in San Antonio during the first decades of the twentieth century differed in social class status. While the seizure of Mexican lands prior to the Mexican Revolution uprooted people of Mexican descent who belonged to the lower classes, or working poor, including many Native peoples, some of the immigrants seeking refuge in the United States from the violence of the revolution were middle- and upper-class members of the Mexican intelligentsia who were very much interested in maintaining the social structures that had previously existed in Mexico. Of the most popular genres to be produced into the 1930s, according to Kanellos, was the novel of the Mexican Revolution, which “represented the full gamut of revolutionary factions in their loyalties and ideologies” but generally was more conservative in comparison to the political motives guiding the Revolution.\(^{15}\) Juan D. Bruce-Novoa characterized the political leanings of San Antonio’s *La Prensa* in

\(^{15}\) Kanellos, 38-39.
particular as “closer to the views of the pre-revolutionary elite.” 16 Kanellos explains that the Mexican exiles who later established publishing houses in the United States were wealthy individuals who became invested in serving and profiting from the business they set up among the immigrant communities of Mexican descent.17

Despite the differing backgrounds that existed between the publishers and the constituencies they served, or perhaps because of them, the Spanish-language press mapped a social and ideological space in the United States known as “el México de afuera.” The concept of a México de afuera was complicated by the loyalties of the exile press and the political status of its readership in the United States. Juan Bruce-Novoa argued that publishers’ disdain for the Mexican Revolution was communicated in the way they depicted Mexico. In some cases, the authentic Mexican nation was considered completely dismantled by revolution, while the enclaves in the United States were all that remained of the country.18 More than a mere way of conceptualizing one’s relationship to space and nation, Kanellos explains that the concept of el México de afuera was ideological as well. For those trying to uphold the concept, they promoted the notions that “it was the duty of the individual to maintain the Spanish language, keep the Catholic faith, and insulate their children from what community leaders perceived as the low moral standards practiced by Anglo Americans.”19 Failing to do these things would result in a disintegration of Mexican identity and the dissolution of what the Mexican middle-class considered were the proper ways of being Mexican. The maintenance of institutional structures that had allowed them to be part of the middle-class was after all

16 Kanellos, 152.
17 Ibid., 40.
18 Juan Bruce-Novoa, “La Prensa and the Chicano Community,” The Americas Review 17, no. 3-4 (September 1989), 152. Arte Público Hispanic Historical Collection: Series 1.
19 Kanellos, 229.
essential. In many ways, it is with this sense of preserving el México de afuera that Jorge Ainslie constructed the story of the Godínez family in *Los Pochos*.

**The Mexican Places of Folklore**

Ainslie’s novel *Los Pochos* introduces readers to the main character Federico Godínez as he is seeking employment just prior to the Mexican Revolution. Having spent much of his childhood in poverty, Godínez is anxious for a job that will shield him from the insecurities and shame that came with being poor. With the right connections, Godínez secures a position with a government agency located in Santa Rosalía, Chihuahua. Through his new position, Godínez accumulates enough economic and social capital to marry María, the sister-in-law of the wealthiest man in town. The threat of violence caused by the revolution looms while Godínez is Santa Rosalía. While the novel states that Godínez sympathizes with the working class as revolution erupts around him, his investment in maintaining the social and economic privileges of the Mexican middle-class prevent him from taking a definitive side and ultimately motivates him to leave Santa Rosalía for the United States, with a pregnant María and money he steals from the agency where he was employed.

A central concern of the novel is the Godínez family’s struggle to maintain their Mexican identity in the United States, as the couple’s children repeatedly confirm the social ills that come from being away from Mexico. It is after crossing the US-Mexico border and arriving in El Paso that María gives birth to their first-born child, a daughter whom they name Virginia. She is the first of the couples’ two children born in the United States who represent what was then a generation of Mexican Americans who would become known as “pochos,” Mexicans usually raised outside of Mexico and whose
inability to speak standard Spanish and inculcation of mainstream US culture makes them inauthentic or insufficiently Mexican. Shortly after their brief stop in El Paso, they continue to California and eventually settle in Los Angeles, where they have their second child, José.

These pochos (Virginia and her younger brother José) are the primary figures driving the anti-immigration current of the novel, as José Aranda explains. The novel characterizes the Godínez children as having adopted qualities that detract from the more culturally and morally sound traits that make people Mexican. These qualities include Virginia’s taste for American jazz, her brother’s occasional drinking habits, and both children’s general disregard for their parents’ authority. The novel presents the children’s lack of respect as a symptom that could be remedied with the family’s return to Mexico.

The novel further underscores the necessity of the Godínez family’s repatriation by presenting the United States as a nation where there are few opportunities for people of Mexican descent to achieve middle-class status. Every time Godínez uses the money with which he absconded from Mexico—whether it is to fund a new restaurant or buy a fifty percent share in a pickling factory, for example—he loses his investments. Their economic reality becomes so dire that María is eventually forced to take up work as a seamstress at a garment manufacturing company. The passage of time brought despair for Godínez and María in the United States, as “la tenebrosa garra de la miseria apretaba cada día más entre sus dedos a la pobre familia (the dark claw of misery squeezed the poor

---

family more tightly between its fingers every day).”

The novel frames their inability to capitalize on the promise of US class mobility as stemming in part from the corrupt business practices of Anglo Americans and the equally corrupt practices of other Mexicans with whom Godínez attempts to partner. Only by returning to Mexico, the novel suggests, will the Godínez family ever achieve the middle-class life they desire.

The anti-immigration stance of Los Pochos resembles other Mexican American literature published during the 1920s and 1930s. José Aranda compares Ainslie’s novel to Daniel Venegas’ Las aventuras de don Chipote, o, quando los pericos mamen (The Adventures of Don Chipote, or, When Parrots Breastfeed), arguing, however, that Los Pochos offers readers a “more complex and ultimately uneven reckoning of ethical and moral accountability” because of Godínez’s class aspirations.

Written by the founder and editor of the weekly satirical Spanish-language newspaper El Malcriado and published as a serial novel in Los Angeles’ El heraldo de México in 1928, the novel Las aventuras de don Chipote traces the misguided journey of the gullible character Don Chipote from his one-oxen farm in Mexico to the United States. Practically no amount of dehumanizing treatment by police officers or the foremen managing migrant fieldworkers persuades Don Chipote to abandon his quest for riches the United States and return to Mexico. It is only after his wife Doña Chipota ventures across the border to retrieve her husband that he returns to his patria.

---

21 Ainslie, Los Pochos, La Prensa (San Antonio, TX), April 15, 1934-3 June 1934. Readex: America’s Historical Newspapers. All translations of Los Pochos in this dissertation are from Los Pochos, Americano de Traducción, Rice University (Forthcoming), unless otherwise noted.

Conrado Espinosa’s *El sol de Texas (Under the Texas Sun)*, another anti-immigration novel published in San Antonio in 1926, similarly conveys repatriation as the only option for Mexican families who do not wish to become exploited for their labor and influenced into espousing shameful habits within the context of the Mexican Revolution. Like *Los Pochos*, though published nearly a decade earlier, Espinosa’s novel criticizes the new generation of Mexicans being raised outside of the Mexican nation for what John Pluecker considers are the forms of “assimilation and hybridization” they embody.23 Pluecker writes that the author of *El sol de Texas* “positions himself as a defender if all Mexicans, of the underdog” and yet disparages those who, as Espinoza writes, “have lost their Mexican identity and are in terms of language (horrible Spanish, horrible English), in terms of their customs (rude and licentious), in terms of their desires (futile and fatuous ambitions) a hybrid group which adapts itself neither to this country now to our own.” 24 Espinoza’s statement encapsulates the reasons the trope of the pocho would trouble the social consciousness of writers following the Mexican Revolution and even those who would write during the movement period.

Each of these texts, including *Los Pochos*, largely reinforces the idea that authentic Mexican identity can only be properly cultivated within the borders of the post-1848 Mexican nation and represents repatriation as the only method for achieving a true sense of belonging. Nicolás Kanellos has argued that the constant comparison of the past with the present, where the present is attached to experience within the United States and the past is firmly situated in the homeland is a prominent feature of Hispanic immigrant writing.25 “In general,” Kanellos explains, “the literature of Hispanic immigration

23 Pluecker, 120.
24 Ibid., 124-125.
25 Kanellos, 25.
displays a double-gaze perspective: forever comparing the past and the present, the homeland and the new country, and seeing the resolution of these conflicting points of reference only when the author, characters, or the audience (or all three) can return to the patria.”

For the most part, Kanellos’ assessment describes author Jorge Ainslie, his characters Federico and María Godínez, as well as the novel’s middle-class Mexican audience.

Yet the temporal disjuncture between past and present is never merely a comparison between two entirely distinct nations when it comes to the gaze of writers, characters, and readers who imagine their sense of belonging in relationship to Mexico and the United States. The “new” country, particularly as it appears in the US West and Southwest, is not so much new as it is different. Ainslie’s incorporation of folklore reveals local histories embedded within the geographies characters encounter usually exist in tension with notions of Mexican nationalism that pre-movement novels locate in the “old” country of Mexico following the Mexican Revolution.

In Ainslie’s Los Pochos, the middle-class investments in maintaining a proper Mexican identity are evident in the exchanges Godínez has with his brother. Early in the novel, readers are made aware that Federico Godínez has an older brother named Raymundo who left Mexico when Godínez was just a child to make a new life in the United States. Following the birth of their daughter Virginia in El Paso, which occurs almost immediately after they first cross the border, Godínez and María make their way to San Fernando, California, to reunite with Raymundo. Having established his own successful business called “Recuerdos de México” in San Fernando, Raymundo has offered to help his brother and María establish themselves.

---

26 Kanellos, 8.
letters with Raymundo and then meeting him within the barrio of San Fernando, Godínez is reluctant to receive his brother’s support. In “Critical Translation: The Politics and Writings of Jorge Ainslie,” José Aranda interprets the encounter in the following way:

Although he [Godínez] could understand how Raymundo might live in poverty, after all they grew up miserably poor with their own parents, what he could not countenance was his adoption of his humble neighbors’ speech and ill manners. Raymundo should know better given his education. By speech, Ainslie means not just the lower class inflected language that Godínez is accustomed to hear in Mexico, but also linguistic elements and social cues that reflect a reshuffling of values that made sense of race, class, gender, and nationalism in one national context but not another. Even when Raymundo reveals his actual wealth—he runs a successful general store in the barrio—Féderico cannot overcome his own class prejudices, nor his fascination with the appearance of class markers of wealth, power, and security.27

Following Aranda’s analysis, the very title of Raymundo’s business, “Recuerdos de México,” seems completely at odds with the México Godínez associates with the social markers he desires. In this context, it is as if Raymundo’s efforts to facilitate the community’s attachment to México through the items in his store are undercut by the speech and manners he has adopted from living in the United States. Godínez’s resentment of his brother’s speech in many ways resembles the attitude the folklorist Amalia Millán takes toward her New Mexican driver Bernardo Rodriguez. Both Millán and Godínez’s impressions following these types of encounters thus illustrate how immigrant communities upheld particular ways of being Mexican in the United States through writing, in non-fiction and fiction.

The middle-class readership of La Prensa likely had similar encounters that generated some of the same anxieties and resentments. Aranda asserts that the Spanish-language press became “the only institutional center that recognized the value of

individuals and communities of Mexican descent.”

Serving an institution-like function, the press legitimized knowledge that emerged from within the communities it served. In this sense, the press translated a range of experiences people of Mexican descent might have within the context of national projects supported by competing colonialisms.

According to Aranda, Jorge Ainslie “theorizes immigrant life in the U.S. as a mode of critical translation”:

The lives and experiences of Mexican immigrants become an analytic lens by which to make sense of their historic moment and the ideologies that shape their communities. In taking up that analysis and communicating it, Ainslie’s writing behaves more like a translation than a straightforward literary text. Ainslie’s concern with translation represents an important aspect of the cultural work of literature in the Spanish language press. In my view, translation of a fraught social reality becomes, for Ainslie, a transactional, writerly method. This method invites “lectores,” readers, into a mode of critical reading that is sensitive to the dynamic exchanges of local and regional historical contexts, whose origins are traceable to the intersection of modernity with coloniality. Ainslie is not writing social realism for simple consumption; his readers are his characters, and vice versa.

Aranda’s theorization of critical translation as it occurs in Los Pochos is useful for understanding how folklore operates within the novel. Never merely a residual form that has been locked into the pages of the repository that is the US Spanish-language press, the form and content of folklore is also exchanged through such a “transactional, writerly method,” to use Aranda’s words. The way in which folklore is exchanged within and through the text, I contend, also exposes the settler colonial histories that have contributed to the formation of Mexican and the United States. From the critical perspective of the folkloric difference, the folklore recirculated in the press also

29 Ibid., 8.
30 Ibid.
illustrates how local histories encourage new Mexican American communal identities to form and reform in relationship to place.

**Vernacular Storytelling and the Press**

Critics of Mexican American literature have often charted the evolution of Chicana/o literature in completely linear terms. In these cases, the oral tradition constitutes the foundations of the Mexican American literary archive. Oral storytelling is considered a residual form that has given way to more modern forms of written cultural expression. In many ways, this manner of charting the Mexican American literary archive has followed the kind of trajectory the German philosopher Walter Benjamin discussed in his essay “The Storyteller: Reflections on the works of Nikolai Leskov” (1936), which, coincidentally, was published within a few years of the publication of *Los Pochos*. For Benjamin, the “artisan form of communication,” the practice of storytelling, was fading due to the popularity of the novel and other written forms during the nineteenth century.\(^1\)

The once universal mode of exchanging knowledge, according to Benjamin, had become a victim of modernity, and he described the difference between the novel and storytelling as one that was tied to the modern emphasis on the individual:

> What differentiates the novel from all other forms of prose literature—the fairy tale, the legend, even the novella—is that it neither comes from oral tradition nor goes into it. This distinguishes it from storytelling in particular. The storyteller takes what he tells from experience—his own or that reported by others. And he in turn makes it the experience of those who are listening to his tale. The novelist has isolated himself. The birthplace of the novel is the solitary individual, who is no longer able to express himself by giving examples of his most important concerns, is himself uncounseled, and cannot counsel others.\(^2\)

---


\(^2\) Ibid., 87.
Benjamin did not anticipate that the serialized novel of the Spanish-language press might be retooled as a mode of critical translation, as Aranda suggests, nor as of engagement with folklore that legitimizes storytelling as an enduring epistemological process. Benjamin’s conceptualization of storytelling also resembles dominant perceptions of folklore during the twentieth century—the idea that local, unofficial modes of meaning-making were unable to compete with modern forms of communication.

One of the most influential critical works on Mexican American literature published in the twentieth century charted the evolution of the corpus from folklore to supposedly more sophisticated forms. In his foundational monograph Chicano Narrative (1990), Ramón Saldívar argued that critics could no longer afford to consider Chicana/o literature as only subaltern, anticipating, perhaps, a moment in the near future when writings by people of Mexican descent would become institutionalized. Speaking not just to Chicana/o critics, but scholars of American literature in general, he insisted that “[w]e can no longer continue to ignore this body of work, or read it, when it has been read, as a ‘regional’ or a ‘marginal’ literature. It is time to see Chicano narrative as something more than a simple mirror of the life and folklore of a heretofore invisible segment of American society.”

While he acknowledges there is a “folk base” that informs Chicano narrative, he writes that this base has given way to new forms of meaning-making, declaring that the corrido, for instance, was a residual folk form that was being left behind in favor of more emergent narrative discourses. Chicano Narrative maintains a linear, Eurocentric narrative of Mexican American literary history, situating folklore within a traditional past that is better left there.

Retrospectively, now, we can see how Saldivar’s theory of Chicano narrative was complicated by the Recovering the US Hispanic Literary Heritage project. In an essay that discusses how recovery efforts complicated Saldivar’s theorization, Jesse Alemán points out that the Saldivar’s *Chicano Narrative* was published the same year the University of Houston’s Recovery project was initiated, in 1990. According to Alemán, Saldivar’s monograph “launches a theory of contemporary Chicano narrative already vexed by the presence of previous narrative forms that troubled the dialectical, counterhegemonic relation between Mexican and American conflict.” Saldivar’s theory, in other words, was attempting to make sense of an archive of Mexican American literature that was thought to have largely emerged from the Chicana/o movement period and the movement’s working class politics. Alemán makes clear that *Chicano Narrative* was not accounting for the range of diverse, often contradictory perspectives that no comprise what we think of as the Mexican American literary archive. Put another way, Alemán points out how Saldivar’s did not account for the ways in which the recovery of Mexican American literature, and Latina/o literature in general, would refuse to cohere to a literary history that had been theorized in binary terms of ethnic and class conflict.

While some literature in the pre-movement archive was generated because regional oral traditions were disrupted by the material and cultural dispossession of Mexican Americans during the late nineteenth century, as I have discussed in the previous chapter, orality was never fully divorced from Mexican American meaning-making practices that would continue throughout the twentieth century and into the

---

twenty-first. Some scholars have maintained that the oral tradition and literary tradition are completely separate entities, however, even if they remain connected by the content of the narratives each circulate. Scholar of Chicano folklore Rafaela Castro, for instance, argues that “written literature” derives from a “creative process that incorporates personal experience, intellectual exploration, and imagination,” while folklore is the compilation of “many elements of culture that are transmitted orally.” Yet as A. Gabriel Meléndez has stated in his work about the New Mexico Spanish-language press, “Spanish-language newspaper publication in the Southwest represents a gradual, though never absolute, transition from oral to print culture.” Scholar of orality and literacy Walter J. Ong, too, has suggested that despite our tendencies to relegate orality to the pre-modern past, “[w]riting can never dispense with orality.” The idea that oral meaning-making methods are never entirely separate from but interlaced in the Mexican American literary archive is key for understanding the ways in which folklore becomes indexed in the Spanish-language press, and it is from the lens of the folkloric difference that we should recognize the convergence of such meaning-making processes are effects of modernity/coloniality, not apolitical manifestations of literary development that somehow have naturally progressed from one tradition of cultural expression to another.

Folklorist Linda Dégh has rejected the notion that folklore exists separately from mainstream literary and cultural production. In her study *American Folklore and the*

---

37 Walter Ong, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word* (Methuen & Co. Ltd, 1982; repr. London and New York: Routledge, 2002), 8. It is worth noting that Ong maintains a colonialist perspective that people who maintain predominantly oral cultures “possess and practice great wisdom, but they do not ‘study.’”
Mass Media (1994), Dégh evaluates the interrelationship between folklore and the mass media in particular. Critical of the ways in which folklorists have guarded concepts of folklore and the methodologies they deployed throughout most of the twentieth century, Dégh’s scholarship pushes against assumptions that folklore is generated by isolated and illiterate groups of poor people, observing that the “course of the folklore process that folklorists studies before occurred on a smaller and less observable scale.”

Typical approaches of the early twentieth century often forwarded the notion that folklore could only be transferred orally, from one generation to the next. To Dégh, these assumptions were largely a result of the context in which early twentieth century folklorists were approaching folklore, a period when communities remained relatively disconnected from one another and the intergenerational transfer of knowledge was relatively uniform process.

The “mass media” and the eruption of technologies that were utilized by people by the time Dégh published her monograph (in the early 1990s), however, challenged preexisting interpretations of how folklore has been circulated and revised. Dégh insists that, despite the fact that many folklorists considered modernization an interruption of traditional folklore transmission, the “‘interference’ of mass media vehicles not only accelerates the folklore process but also contributes to a numerical growth, indeed, a never-before-experienced inflation of folklore.” Dégh has laid a valuable foundation for analyzing how the emergence of new technologies have affected the transfer and creation of folklore, but the perspective from which Degh approaches folklore assumes that all people, no matter their social position, are affected by capitalist structures and mass

39 Ibid., 12.
media forms they promote uniformly. In this sense, Degh’s analysis is not interested in considering how race, class, and gender, for instance, affect some “folk” group’s access to certain forms, just as they affect how, where, and the extent of their folklore’s circulation.

One of the most important chapters in Ainslie’s *Los Pochos* centers a character whose practice of delivering knowledge is fundamental to the narrative as a whole. Though only appearing chapter four, it is Doña Librada García who imparts the meaning of “pocho” to the couple, after meeting them and their daughter Virginia. It is in this chapter that the Godínez family arrives in San Fernando to meet Federico’s brother Raymundo, and they witness a whole community of Mexican Americans living in poverty. This is a particularly instructive point in the novel, as Aranda explains, because her explanation of the term “pocho” will determine how Federico and María come to understand their children and their own place in the United States.⁴⁰ From this moment forward Librada’s naming power, so to speak, will shape how the Godínez family with envision their sense of belonging, while mirroring for readers the instability of their own concept of Mexican identity in the United States. While the attention placed on the meaning and consequences of pochismo somewhat solidifies *Los Pochos* as an anti-immigration novel, it is in this manner that the novel briefly disrupts the notion that the Mexican nation is the only Mexican homeland and simultaneously validates the continuing relevance of the oral transference of knowledge.

Librada, also known by the endearing term of “Abuelita” among the residents of San Fernando, is a shrewd and independent widow who runs the only fonda, or inn, in the area. She is described in the text as an eighty-year-old woman who could neither

---

remember the date nor the place of her birth, but she was proud about having arrived in
San Fernando “en una carreta tirada por bueyes, cuando todavía aquello no era más que
un llano (in a cart pulled by oxen when it was nothing more than a plain).”41 Librada, “la
fondera (the innkeeper),” as she is also called, claims she reached San Fernando when the
local Misión de San Fernando Rey was still occupied by friars, and she recalls living
“bajo los portales del arcaico edificio (under the portales of the archaic building)” with
her husband. Her husband was a water carrier at the Mission who was paid with food and
shelter. It is only after Librada begins making and selling tortillas, enchiladas, and fried
beans, according to the text, that she and her husband eventually save money and
eventually open up a fonda. Apparently, this occurs when the friars abandon the Mission
and the town of San Fernando was created. “Y desde entonces vivía en el pueblo (And
from then on, she lived in the town),” the text reads, “Su marido murió poco después,
víctima de un reumatismo articular que había contraído baldeando agua y fregando los
pisos de la Misión (Her husband died a little after, falling victim to rheumatoid arthritis
that he had contracted wading through water and scrubbing the Mission’s floors).” 42
From then on, Librada operates the fonda on her own, speaking little except when
“soltaba la lengua algunas noches ([when she would] let her tongue loose on particular
nights,” sharing her “aventuras sentada en su sillón debajo el portal que cubría la
banqueta del frente de su fonda (her adventures sitting on her chair under the portico that
covered the sidewalk in front of her restaurant).”43 These details suggest that Librada was
living with her husband under the protection of the San Fernando Mission before 1847,
perhaps when the mission was still controlled by Franciscans.

41 Ainslie, 2.
42 Ibid.
43 Ibid.
The few details the novel provides about Librada’s background reference a formative period in California history that influenced creation of laboring Mexican classes of predominantly indigenous peoples and people of indigenous descent before 1848. By the time Mexico achieved its independence from Spain in 1821, there were a total of twenty-one missions that had been established by the Spanish colonial empire. The missions were an eighteenth-century extension of Spanish modernity and coloniality. Under the leadership of the Franciscan order, the missions were able to exert more concentrated control over California’s indigenous peoples following preliminary encounters the Spanish had with the region between the sixteenth century and into the early eighteenth. Historian Lisbeth Haas describes the process through which the Franciscans transformed California as a geopolitical shift that “introduced disease, livestock, and coercive practices that eventually produced a weakening or collapse of Indigenous polities nearer to the mission and then at greater and greater distances away.”

Forced to convert and labor on behalf of the Spanish colonial empire, which was essentially a system of slavery, many of the indigenous people would be baptized as Catholics and disciplined into adopting Spanish ways and accepting Spanish authority in order to survive. The eventual abandonment of the mission was an outcome of Mexico’s independence from Spain and elite Californios’ growing appetites for land and power. While the Emancipation and Secularization Decree of 1834 was supposed to return much of the land that had been under the authority of Catholic church back to California’s indigenous peoples, but instead much of the land fell into the possession of wealthy Californios. Historians Robert H. Jackson and Edward Castillo write that while the

---

emancipation decree prompted many of the indigenous “converts” to leave the missions in the later 1830s, many of these people became laborers on expanding Californio ranchos and continued living lives familiar to the ones in they had lived within the mission system.45

The novel casts the setting of San Fernando as a place with Spanish colonial origins, providing an ethno-historical description that outlines how the area was enfolded into Spanish dominion before introducing readers to Librada. Readers enter into the history of California and the mission system of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century with to the following information:

A fines de Agosto del año de 1797, Fray Fermín Francisco de Lesuén salió de Santa Bárbara, en compañía del Sargento Ignacio Olivera y cinco soldados, con destino al Rancho de Reyes, situado en el Valle del Encino, con el propósito de fundar la Misión de San Fernando Rey; nombre que había sido escogido por el Virrey de México Branciforte en honor del Rey de España. El día 8 de Septiembre del mismo año tuvo efecto la ceremonia de fundación, según el parte que envió el Fraile Lasuén a Bórica, Gobernador de California. A orillas de la Misión, su fundó más tarde el pueblo de San Fernando, que en la fecha en que corre nuestra historia era ya de alguna importancia y que más tarde creció hasta convertirse en uno de los más importantes de la región.46

(In late August of 1797, Fray Fermín Francisco de Lesuén left Santa Barbara, in the company of Sargento Ignacio Olivera and five soldiers, with the destination of el Rancho de Reyes, situated in the Oak Valley with the purpose of founding la Misión de San Fernando Rey; the name that had been selected by el Virrey de México Branciforte in honor of the King of Spain. On September eighth of the same year, the founding ceremony took effect, following the party that sent the Friar Lasuén a Bórica, the governor of California. On the banks of the Mission, the town of San Fernando was founded much later, that, on the date which runs our history, was already of some importance and much later grew until it became one of the most important in the region.)

46 Ainslie, 2. I altered the original Taller Americano de Traducción translation.
The purpose of founding San Fernando, as the text states, was to erect a mission similar to others the Spanish empire had already erected in California and other parts of the US West and Southwest by the late eighteenth century. However brief, the moment contextualizes a story that Librada tells a group of local children further into the chapter. The chapter grounds the conditions that motivate Godínez and María to leave San Fernando into a modern/colonial geography that simultaneously recalls overlapping settler colonial projects and maps an alternate site of Mexican American belonging in California, the contours of a place that are delineated by collective memories of California’s colonial past.

The way the novel maps this colonial history that bridges California with Mexico is complicated, however, by the poverty that Godínez and María witness upon arriving in San Fernando. In some ways, Los Pochos frames the town of San Fernando as a trap, a place where Mexicans have lost all hope of returning to their “true” homeland of Mexico. The novel suggests that San Fernando’s inhabitants are mostly immigrants, who, unlike Librada, crossed the same US-Mexico border that Godínez and María crossed:

Un número muy considerable de sus habitantes era de origen mexicano, que vivían dedicados exclusivamente a la horticultura. Conociéndose despreciados por los hijos del país, que se han creído siempre superiores, se aislaron voluntariamente formando para vivir, un barrio aparte, donde por su afinidad de deas y costumbres, hacían la misma vida que llevaran en su tierra natal.47

(A very considerable number of the people were of Mexican origin that were dedicated to living exclusively off the land. Feeling unappreciated by the children of the country, who had always believed themselves to be superior, they voluntarily isolated themselves, forming a separate neighborhood in which to live where they, by their affinity of ideas and customs, made the same life that they carried in their homeland.)

47 Ainslie, 2.
Many people living in San Fernando, the novel declares, made their way to the United States with every intention of returning to Mexico: “Habían emigrado en busca de trabajo para mejorar su situación, siempre con la idea de regresar más tarde a la patria, cargados de oro (They had migrated in search of work to improve their situation, always with the idea of returning later to the motherland, laden with gold).”\(^{48}\) However, little by little, the people “olvidaron sus propósitos y se establecieron para siempre en un país donde encontraban más fácil y cómoda la vida (they forgot their purpose and settled forever in a country where they found life to be easier and more comfortable).”\(^{49}\) The novel suggests that along with forgetting their purpose, the Mexican immigrant population of San Fernando forgot themselves, becoming so focused on accumulating wealth that they no longer cared to return to their country of origin. San Fernando continued to draw contingents of “brazos fuertes y hombres útiles (strong arms and useful men)” from Mexico, where, given novel’s anti-immigration stance, it implies they would stay.\(^{50}\) The novel’s portrayal of the poor conditions that constitute immigrant life in California is meant to convince others not to make the same mistake of leaving their homeland.

Despite the novel’s apparent anti-immigration tone, the instability of the novel’s reimagining of the Mexican homeland is underscored by the setting and Librada’s storytelling. *Los Pochos* implies that Librada is among the only characters who did not leave post-1848 Mexico to settle in the United States. *Los Pochos* suggests that Librada did not cross the border. It appears as though the border crossed Librada. Librada’s age is never confirmed, but the fact that her husband worked as a water carrier at the San Fernando Mission before the friars abandoned it suggest that she is at least eighty,

\(^{48}\) Ainslie, 2.  
\(^{49}\) Ibid.  
\(^{50}\) Ibid.
perhaps more. Librada’s inability to recall how or when she arrived in San Fernando nevertheless stresses her longevity and anchors her firmly to the setting. The character bridges two historical periods for people of Mexican descent in the novel as well as for the novel’s readers and seems to embody the contradiction of Mexican belonging in the United States that is presented by the anti-immigration novel. Interestingly, Librada cannot remember her age but she is represented as a key emissary of knowledge, and it is because of her, as Aranda writes, that María and Godínez begin to “make sense” of their experience in the United States.  

But Librada’s talents extend beyond her ability to translate. Perhaps because of her age and the function her fonda serves in San Fernando as a hub wherein locals and travels might encounter each other, she is a popular storyteller. According to the text, she is in greatest demand during cool, summer nights:

En las noches de verano, cuando el sofocante calor obligaba a los habitantes del pueblo a salir de sus casas y respirar un poco de aire fresco, que llegaba de repente, por rachas, del lejano océano; sentados a orillas de la banqueta, le suplicaban les contara alguna de sus aventuras.  

(On summer nights, when the cloying heat forced the town’s inhabitants to leave their houses to breathe a little fresh air, which would blow in fits every now and then from the distant ocean, they would sit at the edge of their seats and beg the elderly woman to tell them about her adventures).

The novel states Librada would regularly tease the children by calling them “pochos”:

—A todos ustedes los he visto nacer, “Pochos” arrastrados,—les decía bromeando—. Y a tu padre y a tu madre también,—les decía a dos o tres señalándolos con el dedo.  

(—I’ve seen all of you come into this world, you good for nothing “Pochos,”— she would tease. —And I saw your father and mother come

---

52 Ainslie, 2. I altered the original Taller Americano de Traducción translation.
53 Ibid.
into this world too, —she would tell two or three of them, singling them out with her finger.)

Though entertaining, Librada’s stories serve the practical purpose of gathering children of San Fernando for a shared experience that to some extent transcends the otherwise grim conditions in which they live. In suggesting Librada has seen the birth of multiple generation in the region, the text also contradicts its own assertion that the majority of the population in San Fernando are immigrants. If the children’s parents were born in California as well, then they are also pochos, and their multigenerational presence in San Fernando with Librada suggests that they might have also listened to Librada’s stories.

In chapter four, prior to the arrival of the Godínez family in San Fernando, Librada tells a group of children a local legend about the San Fernando friars and a woman who emerges from a well. The story reads eerily similar to the well-known Mexican American legend of La Llorona, or the Weeping Woman, and it recalls the ways in which gender and the regulation of sexuality in the mission system impacted indigenous peoples and generations of people of Mexican descent. Librada exercises her own creativity when she relays the story about the San Fernando Mission to a group of children, but she does not shy away from describing the violent details that characterized the Franciscan’s exertion of colonial power. She begins her tale by stating that the events she will recount occurred one night around midnight years ago, when she was tending to her sick husband:

Una noche; a eso de las 12, que es cuando se aparecen los muertos y andan las brujas buscando a ver a quen se llevan, estava yo dispierta, con los ojos muy abiertos, cuidando a mi pobre hombre que estaba muy acalenturao, pues ese día los frailes lo habían hecho hornear el pan después de baldear los pisos; cuando vide que de la puerta de la Misión salió un fraile, vestido de blanco, y aluego vide que salió otro; y aluego otro y muchos otros que se fueron caminando enfilados y sin hacer ruido al pozo del agua. Al principio creiba que era una procesión y no me espanté; pero cuando llegaron al pozo, vide que el primero se levantó por el aigre como si
tuviera alas y desapareció por el agujero. Yo creíba que iba a oír el chapoteo del agua, pero nada… ni un ruido ni una nada. Después se levantó el otro y lo mismo; aluego el otro y todos los demás.\(^{54}\)

(--One night, ‘round 12, which is the hour when the dead appear and them witches start looking ‘round to see who they can take, there I was with my eyes wide open, takin’ care of my poor ol’ husband who was all sick with fever. That was the day the friars had baked the bread after scrubbin’ all them floors, when I saw a friar dressed in white leavin’ through the mission door, and later I saw ‘nother, and later ‘nother, and then many others that left walkin’ in a line towards the water-well without makin’ a single sound. At first I figured it was just a procession and it didn’t stir me much; but when they arrived at the well, I saw that the first one rose in the air as if he had sprung wings! And then he done disappeared through the hole. I thought I was going to hear a splash o’ water, but nothin’…not even a drop! Afterward another one rose, and ‘nother just the same. Later another, and then all the rest.)

At this point, Librada interrupts her story to express how the mere memory of the friars’ procession made skin prickle.\(^{55}\) The youngest listeners shivers but remain interested in Librada’s story:

--Al poco rato vide que salía volando del pozo uno de los padres y después otro más. Agarraron la riata del balde y empezaron a jalonear. Entonces sí que oía los pujidos que daban al hacer juerzas. Al poco rato salía amarrada en al riata una mujer vestida de blanco y con los pelos todos sueltos; muy largos; y también traiba un niño en los brazos. La agarraron los dos padres y la acostaron en el suelo. Aluego salieron los demás… Uno por uno.

(--After a while, one of the priests came running from the well and then came another. They grabbed the bucket and began to pull. That was when I heard their groans from all the effort. A little while later, a woman dressed in white came out all tied up with the rope, with her hair streaming and a baby in her arms. The two priests took hold of her and laid her down on the ground. Later came the rest…one after the other).

While the friars circle around the woman, they chant that the sinner must suffer.\(^{56}\)

Frightened and sobbing with the child in her arms, the woman begs the friars for

\(^{54}\) Ainslie, 2. I altered the original Taller Americano de Traducción translation.

\(^{55}\) Ibid.

\(^{56}\) Ibid.
forgiveness. A friar removes the child from the woman’s arms and proclaims that he will put an end to all sinners. “Con la sangre del fruto de tu pecado,” the friar states, “voy a regar la tierra. Así se acabarían las pecadoras” (I will water the earth with the blood of the fruit of your sin. This is how we will put an end to all sinners). 57 Likely among the most violent moments in the novel, what occurs in the story catches Librada’s listeners off guard. The friar swings the child against the well. Librada tell her audience this occurred while she looked on in horror. “Mira (look),” she tells her husband. But when they both look out to the well, they see nothing. 58

The children who make up Librada’s audience mark the end of the storytelling session by calling attention to the inconsistency of the narrative content. At least one reaction to the story indicates that the children have heard it before. “¡Ujule!,” of the children remarks, “Ese cuento ya nos lo había usté contado y no acababa ansina (You’ve told us that story before and that’s not how it ended).” 59 Librada asks the child how the story is supposed to end:

—¿Pos cómo acababa, malcriado?
—Pos que uno de los curas se le había echado encima a la mujer pa abrazarla y que ella había gritado.
—¡Eso jué otra noche!—contestaba la anciana enojada de que la agarraran en mentiras. Y se metía a la fonda rezongando.

(—Oh yeah? And how’s it supposed to end, you rascal?
—Well, one of the priests had thrown himself over the woman to hug her and she screamed.
—That’s what happened the other night!— answered the old lady, angered that they had caught her spinning tales. She went into the inn grumbling.)

Librada does not like the child’s answer. In the storytelling scene, the San Fernando legend has multiple endings and, although one child calls out Librada’s “mentiras,” the

57 Ainslie, 2.
58 Ibid.
59 Ibid.
legend’s setting and characters still recall a history, albeit a violent one, that binds multiple generations of people of Mexican descent on both sides of the border together. The child’s ability to call out Librada’s inconsistencies demonstrates that the narrative functions as a flexible tool to orient listeners/readers to their surroundings, not a fixed form that is exclusive to one person or one group.

The content of the story is flexible, as the listener points out, yet it nevertheless captures the ways in which the indigenous peoples of San Fernando were at the mercy of the Franciscans and reveals the coloniality that underlies the setting. In doing so, the novel suggests that some the people of San Fernando are descendant of local indigenous peoples. Although Librada never states that the child was the outcome of sexual violence, the legend’s content portrays the uneven power relations that have disciplined women. The horrible scene emphasizes the ways indigenous women’s bodies have endured the worst consequences of coloniality, yet, at the same time, underscores how those consequences never remain fully locked in the past. Literary critic Nicole Guidotti-Hernandez writes about such instances as moments of unspeakable violence, moments where “specter bodies,” like the ones in Librada’s story, haunt histories where violence is normalized.\(^{60}\) Rather than omitting the violent details of her story, however, Librada seems intent on sharing them. Librada imparts a legend that not only speaks to the region’s local history, but also brings evokes a past in which California was part of Mexico. The shared history links the immigrant population of San Fernando with the people of Mexican descent who were born there.

In some ways, Librada’s story resembles what Alberto Varon describes as Mexican Americans’ engagement with the Spanish fantasy heritage. Put simply, the Spanish fantasy heritage is a term coined by Cary McWilliams to describe a constructed sense of Spanish colonial history.\textsuperscript{61} Reading the short stories of Adolfo Carrillo titled \textit{Cuentos Californianos} (1922), Varon argues that Carrillo drew upon California’s Spanish colonial history to “translate the state’s cultural narrative for Mexican Americans and rewrite Mexican Americans within it.”\textsuperscript{62} Varon explains that after Carrillo had spent a considerable amount of time in the United States (roughly thirty years) and among middle-class Californios during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, Carrillo became invested in addressing issues of inclusion that dogged people of Mexican descent in the early twentieth century.\textsuperscript{63} Drawing attention to Carrillo’s recasting of the Joaquín Murieta legend, for instance, he insists that Carrillo invokes a “shared masculine ideals” that works within the Spanish fantasy heritage to support a lasting presence of Mexican Americans in California, and he suspects some of the stories published in \textit{Cuentos Californianos} were also published in the Spanish-language press.\textsuperscript{64} Considering how well circulated the Spanish fantasy heritage myth was by the time Carrillo published his cuentos in 1922, Varon asserts that “Carrillo’s stories of old California would both translate that history for consumption and constitute their participation in it, working against the fantasy heritage’s erasure of the Mexican population.”\textsuperscript{65} For Varon, the timing of Carrillo’s \textit{Cuento Californianos} indicates a shift away from the dominant México de

\textsuperscript{63} Ibid., 90.
\textsuperscript{64} Ibid., 89-90.
\textsuperscript{65} Ibid., 90.
afuera ideology circulating at the time in favor of a “distinctly U.S.-oriented Mexican American culture.” 66 Similar to my argument about Ainslie’s representation of folklore in *Los Pochos*, Varon argues that Carrillo’s adaptation of the California stories, in other words, resituated Mexicans in a geography and history of the United States and thereby “demonstrated the necessity of local engagement with the community.” 67

Contra to Varon, I contend that the form of engagement with folklore that occurs in *Los Pochos*, as read through the folkloric difference, is not concerned with the fantasy heritage, nor does it forward universal claims of Mexican belonging that are detached from the setting in which Librada tells her story. If the folkloric difference recognizes how local histories inform the creation, preservation, and evolution of identities as they exist in tension with globalizing processes of modernity and coloniality, then the story of the woman in the well and the friars, as told by Librada, should be read as flexible yet always rooted in the geo-historical conditions that have shaped San Fernando. In other words, although Librada’s story is printed within the Spanish-language newspaper of San Antonio and potentially distributed elsewhere throughout the United States, the details of Librada’s story remain entangled with the formation of the San Fernando Mission.

At the same time, the moment of disagreement at the end of Librada’s storytelling session draws attention to the form in which she communicates and the mutability of place-based storytelling traditions that maintain regional collective identities and notions of belonging. Through the lens of folkloric difference, Librada’s act of improvisation is connected to a practice of transferring knowledge from one generation to the next that transcends geographic locale. Librada’s improvisation demonstrates that despite being

66 Varon, 90.
67 Ibid., 91.
old and perhaps set in her ways, she is able to adjust to context, to change the ending of the story as she sees fit. On one hand, her improvisation represents the unreliability of folklore to communicate history. Yet, on the other hand, Librada’s improvisation illustrates the capacity of folklore to act as a fluid process—a process in which localized versions of community and belonging are made and remade through the creation of shared public memory. Because Librada has entertained multiple generations in San Fernando with her storytelling, as the text implies, local knowledge has about the mission’s brutal treatment has remained in the town, exchanged among the population of the present. While *Los Pochos* presents the people living in San Fernando as poor and illiterate, that storytelling session draws attention to the processes Mexican Americans engaged in order to preserve shared histories that were often circulated and sometimes transformed to recreate alternate visions of community within distinct regions and through the invocation of local histories.

Following the storytelling session, the focus of *Los Pochos* shifts from Librada and her audience back to the Godínez family. When Godínez, María, their newborn daughter Virginia, and their loyal companion, Gutiérrez, arrive in San Fernando, a group of children swarm vehicle in which they were riding. Raymundo returns from picking up his brother and his family, and when the vehicle stopped, Godínez was the first to step out of the car. He let his wife and Gutiérrez out while the crowd of curios children as well as adults looked on:

Cuando los chiquillos vieron a Gutiérrez bajar del automóvil, vestido de charro y con un puro en la boca, perdieron todo el interés por el matrimonio. Se codeaban unos a los otros, señalando con la mano los pantalones ajustados y el sombrerete de charro que portaba. Era la primera vez que veían un hombre vestido de esta manera. Los habían visto en las estampas que vendía don Raymundo, pero vivo y al alcance de su mano, nunca. Abrieron la boca de admiración y se hacían conjeturas sobre el objeto de semejante arreo en un lugar donde no existían los caballos.
(When the kids saw Gutiérrez dressed like a charro with a cigar in his mouth, they lost all interest for the couple. They hobnobbed with one another, pointing out the tailored pants and the big charro hat that he was wearing. It was the first time they had seen a man dressed in such a fashion. They had seen similar outfits in the picture cards that Don Raymundo sold, but never in person and right before their eyes. Their jaws dropped in admiration, and they began speculating the meaning of a cowboy in a place without horses.)

The community of San Fernando, though familiar with Gutiérrez’s fashion from the items Raymundo sold in his shop, Recuerdos de México, find the man’s clothing curious. To them, he seems dressed for another context, conspicuous in San Fernando even though the labor of men accustomed to dealing with horses was probably desired in the region less than a century before.

The moment in the text symbolizes a confrontation between immigrant and non-immigrants that signals the regional and cultural differences that existed between Mexican American immigrant and non-immigrant communities during the early twentieth century. In fact, the encounter between the children and Gutiérrez almost resembles the kind of encounter Amalia Millán describes in “Viaje por Nuevo México,” where she is shocked by the speech of her Nuevomexicano chauffer and the identity he and other communities claim. In Los Pochos, two local manifestations of being Mexican are brought together because of global designs. Though the Godínez family and Gutiérrez do not stay in San Fernando, the encounter signals a destabilization of what constitutes Mexicananness. This occurs even while Ainslie’s novel overwhelmingly supports the repatriation of Mexicans following the Mexican Revolution. The ethno-historical moment earlier in the chapter leads up to an encounter wherein the novel presents very different ways of being Mexican that, through the lens of the folkloric difference, suggest that

---

68 Ainslie, 2.
local histories are constantly influenced by exchanges, often between immigrants and non-immigrants, leading to critical reflections about what constitutes communal identity and belonging.
On September 13, 1889, a column published in the Omaha World-Herald reported the latest news about a woman known as the “Mexican Joan D’Arc” for US readers:

The next time that Teresa Urrea sets foot on Mexican soil it will probably be a step directly in her grave. The Mexican government has grown tired of her at last, and now small mercy will be shown her. For seven years, ever since she was 16 years old, she has been a veritable firebrand, inciting her fanatic followers to crazy deeds of violence, causing the death of at least 1,500 persons and forcing both the Mexican and United States governments to spend large sums of money to restore the peace she has disturbed.1

The article proceeded to describe Teresa Urrea’s rebellious ways, as well as her “deluded followers.”2 These followers, both “ignorant and superstitious,” according to Omaha World-Herald, dubbed the woman a saint after she began to apply her seemingly miraculous talents to healing their ills and injuries.3 With a great deal of skepticism for Teresa’s miracles and an obvious sense of disdain for the Mexicans it describes, the article frames the “Mexican Joan” as a rabble rouser who not only threatened Mexico, but also the United States. Given the popular following she garnered and the violence that seemed to follow her, she proved to be a great source of worry for both governments, one they were each anxious to eliminate.

The Omaha World-Herald article positions Teresa Urrea (whom I will continue to refer to as Teresa) as a binational problem, with a “squatty figure and a round, fat face,

---

2 Ibid.
3 Ibid.
just as hundreds of ordinary Mexican women have.”

According to the column, Teresa had “forced herself into notice by fomenting the trouble at Nogales, Ariz., which culminated in the Yaqui raid on the place.” Predictably, the raid had inspired “[c]ompanies of Mexicans and United States regulars” to go “hunting the Yaquis” and there was speculation “there would be a good deal of killing on all sides, simply because Santa Teresa claimed she had communication from heaven ordering the raid against Nogales.”

While the invocation of the divine or sacred to criticize state power might yield similar responses in any context, the article’s description of Teresa’s body frames her as an expendable Mexican fraud with no legitimate reason for critiquing the Mexican government. The article alludes to violence that Nicole Guidotti-Hernandez labels “unspeakable,” that which is “normalized, enraging, and extraordinary all at the same time.”

From the perspective of the Omaha-Herald, there is no question that both nations were justified in using violence in order to subdue the Yaquis, especially because these indigenous people were bold enough to conduct a raid within what was still then a territory of the United States.

Though Omaha World-Herald report about Teresa is but one of many articles that appeared in the English-language and Spanish-language newspapers of the United States, it nevertheless speaks to the reasons why the popular curandera became somewhat of a legend in the US-Mexico borderlands, memorialized in oral and written forms since she died in Clifton, Arizona, in 1906. The daughter of a wealthy Mexican hacendado and woman of indigenous heritage who lived in peonage, Teresa became known as the “Santa

---

4 Ibid.
5 Ibid.
6 Ibid.
de Cabora,” “Santa Teresa,” and other names that denote the spiritual esteem in which people have held her. Somewhat of a shadowy figure who emerged in and out of the popular literary and cultural imaginary during the latter part of the twentieth century, writers and scholars have attempted to narrate her mysterious life through both fiction and non-fiction. The most well-known texts that narrate Teresa’s life include William C. Holden’s biography Teresita (1978) and Brianda Domecq’s novel La insólita historia de la Santa de Cabora [The Astonishing Story of the Saint of Cabora] (1990). Now, more recently, Teresa has re-emerged in Luis Alberto Urrea’s novel The Hummingbird’s Daughter (2005). Breaking from what has up to this moment in the dissertation been a focus on pre-movement texts in the Mexican America literary archive, I turn now to The Hummingbird’s Daughter, a post-movement novel that overtly engages Teresa’s story as folkloric, linking the figure to a particular place and time somewhere between fact and fiction.

The Hummingbird’s Daughter provides readers with a narrative about Porfirian-era Mexico in a register that speaks to issues of twentieth- and twenty-first-century globalization and migration, revealing through folklore the ongoing burdens of modernity and coloniality. Written by a distant relative, The Hummingbird’s Daughter openly calls attention to the historical Teresa’s interconnection with an archive comprised of various forms of expressive culture, including biographies, newspaper articles, non-Western healing traditions, and oral history. Luis Alberto Urrea asserts that while some might consider The Hummingbird’s Daughter “baroque,” he thinks of his novel as “really an attempt to reproduce those fine semi-addled Mexican voices as they spin out tales to their
children.” Reflecting more than twenty years of the author’s research and writing, including visits to libraries, museums, and conversations with family members, the novel draws attention to the folklore that remains attached to the landscape of the US-Mexico borderlands.

Significantly, *The Hummingbird’s Daughter* conveys multiple ways in which the supernatural figures into the narrative landscape of the US–Mexico borderlands, where numerous tales and legends reflect certain communal values, anxieties, sufferings, and achievements tied to the region’s modern and colonial past. By supernatural, I refer to those strange occurrences we tend to dismiss as unreal (miraculous healings, visits from the deceased, predictions of the future, etc.), those things we usually consider merely figments of the imagination. Presenting the supernatural as an expression of US-Mexico borderlands histories, the novel relies on dominant epistemological perspectives that descend from separate yet overlapping colonial projects, also showing how folklore emerges from within and between these genres to critique the violence they reproduce. There are moments in which *The Hummingbird’s Daughter* presents the supernatural as something illogical and to be feared. Yet the novel also presents the supernatural as an accepted part of everyday experience. These two ways in which *The Hummingbird’s Daughter* deals with the supernatural are mediated by what I call “borderlore,” a form of folklore concentrated at the US-Mexico border, which I interpret from my analytic of the folkloric difference.

This chapter posits that *The Hummingbird’s Daughter* generally coheres to the expectations of two dominant literary genres—the magical realism and the gothic. First, I

---

argue that *The Hummingbird’s Daughter* represents a case in which the two genres, the
gothic and the magical real, mirror the entanglement of two settler colonial projects that
converge at the US–Mexico border. Drawing from the literary traditions associated with
the United States (to the north) and the Mexico (to the south), Urrea’s novel weaves
together both genres in a way that reveals the epistemological locations to which they are bound. While the gothic stems from a Western tradition, or, in the language of Walter D.
Mignolo, the “imperial difference,” which refers to space from which critiques of
modernity that arise from the Western perspective, magical realism stems from the
“colonial difference,” the space in which the geopolitics of knowledge are negotiated.\(^9\)
Second, I argue that the relationship between the two genres, which are informed by
different geopolitical conditions and the power they assert, are complicated by the
enduring presence of folklore, or more precisely, the borderlore in the novel. The
folkloric difference, I maintain, allows us to read borderlore as a form of border thinking,
that which Mignolo essentially describes as an epistemology from ‘below.’\(^10\)

The term borderlore refers to folklore but draws attention to a distinct
geographical and cultural context. I borrow the term from social scientist Maribel
Alvarez and the University of Arizona’s Southwest Center’s Folklife Alliance.\(^11\) Borderlore is one of the Southwest Center’s organizing themes for understanding and
appreciating the “diverse ethnic groups and societies, past and present, [that] lend the
Southwest a distinct regional identity, shaped by the land itself.”\(^12\) Within this chapter, I

---

\(^9\) Walter D. Mignolo, “The Geopolitics of Knowledge and the Colonial Difference,”
\(^10\) Ibid., 71.
\(^11\) “About Southwest Center,” Southwest Folklife Alliance, accessed April 19, 2018,
https://www.southwestfolklife.org/borderlore/.
\(^12\) Ibid.
use borderlore to account for the folklore that circulates within and about the US-Mexico border specifically. In other words, this is not an extension of the folkloric difference that can be applied to other geographic and metaphorical borders. Borderlore dovetails with critical regionalism and is therefore is attached to the landscape it references. The term borderlore retains its meaning, here, by operating in proximity to the US-Mexico border while making clear the role violence has played in the formation of the particular archive it describes.

Borderlore expresses and negotiates the historical conflicts that have characterized relations between the United States and Mexico since the US-Mexico War ended in 1848. Writer and theorist Gloria Anzaldúa appropriately described the US-Mexico border in *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (1987) as a place where “the Third World grates against the first and bleeds,” and we know she is not the only person to characterize the site and the border dwellers’ experience in such corporeal terms. Other Mexican American intellectuals and writers have also described the border region as a place violently ruptured by US imperialism. Jovita González and Eve Raleigh’s historical novel *Caballero* (1930s/1997) describes the remapping of the Texas-Mexico border following the Mexican American War as incident in which “Texas wrote its history with a scratchy, blotty pen, and called its southern line the ‘bloody border.’”

Texas writer and folklorist Américo Paredes also identified the border as a site and source of “painful matters,” a space from which Mexican American folklore in particular

---

frequently emerged to “expose the conflict between Mexican and North American cultures.”

In the analysis that follows, Paredes’ notion of painful matters is useful to recall, for it reminds us how borderlore has continually figured into critiques of modernity and served as an archive for people of Mexican descent, enabling them to bridge the epistemological gap between unofficial and official knowledge. As Paredes and other Mexican American writers show, folklore has the capacity to reveal topics and conflicts that have been neglected if not intentionally erased from the US historical memory, including how the bodies of people of color in the space of the US-Mexico borderlands become subject to not one but two converging settler colonial projects. My theorization of borderlore, similar to Paredes’ painful matters thesis, puts pressure on the *The Hummingbird’s Daughter*’s configuration of borderlore to consider why the supernatural accompanies violence on the US-Mexico border, encouraging us to shift the lens through which we view the politics of the supernatural in the US-Mexico borderlands.

**The Borderlands of The Hummingbird’s Daughter**

*The Hummingbird’s Daughter* begins in late nineteenth-century Sinaloa, Mexico, where the main character, Teresita (the diminutive of Teresa), is born to a mother in peonage named Cayetana Chávez. The novel identifies Cayetana as an indigenous woman, citing the northern Mexican Cahita language as her mother tongue and her mother and father as descendants of the Yaqui, Mayo, and the Tehueco peoples. In the

---

16 Ibid.
novel, “the People” living in peonage alongside Cayetana call her Semalú, the Hummingbird. Like Cayetana, the people living in peonage are also coded as indigenous or of indigenous descent. Throughout novel, “the People” are depicted as having to constantly negotiate their place as indigenous peoples, or peoples of mixed heritage, in the debt-laboring system of peonage, which existed in both the United States and Mexico during the nineteenth century.\textsuperscript{18} Cayetana is only fourteen when she gives birth to her daughter, Teresita. The novel reveals early on that the patrón of the ranch in which she labors, Don Tomás Urrea, is Teresita’s father. Alluding to the forms of gendered and sexual violence to which she had been subjected, the novel declares that, at fourteen, Cayetana "had already learned that life was basically a long series of troubles."\textsuperscript{19}

Though Cayetana's suffering quickly propels her away from the ranch and her infant daughter, forcing her to grow up without her mother and without knowing the identity of her father, at least for a brief period, the young Teresita eventually finds a friend in the respected ranch curandera, Huila. Despite her own racialized and gendered position as one of “the People,” Huila exercises a tremendous amount of power on Don Tomás Urrea’s ranch, living in a room behind the kitchen of the ranch main house. From Huila, Teresita gradually learns about the healing tradition of curanderismo, both its material and spiritual dimensions. But Huila’s healing knowledge is not all-encompassing. \textit{The Hummingbird’s Daughter} implies that much of Huila’s knowledge centers around plants that grow near and around the Sinaloa ranch. When Tomás’ lands

\textsuperscript{18} As Andres Reséndez writes, the concept of dept-peonage was often merely a way of disguising the enslavement of Native peoples Andrés Reséndez, \textit{The Other Slavery: The Uncovered Story of Indian Enslavement in America} (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2016).

are threatened by Porfirio Diaz and he decides to move north to a ranch in Cabora, Mexico, with “the People,” Huila introduces Teresita to a curandero named Manuelito because Huila is unfamiliar with many of the plants that exist in the ranch’s new location. It is only after the main characters reach the ranch in Cabora that Teresita further develops her healing powers and uses them to serve the many pilgrims who catch word of her healing abilities.

Teresita is driven to heal because of the social, physical, and spiritual suffering she notices around her. In their trek north to Cabora, Don Tomás, along with Huila, Teresita, and “the People” they pass lands and people that make them fear for their lives, an assortment of “[u]nbelievable creatures and spirits,” including “red wolves and gray wolves,” “mountains that could have exploded Apaches at any instant, or soldiers, or bandits, or Americans.”20 Everywhere Teresita and company turn, death and disease and destruction are nearby. When the travelers arrive at their destination, Teresita begins to notice how “the People” struggle to toil with their bodies. She sees that many have “injured feet and ankles, the legs twisted by injury or disease.”21 Teresita realizes there are “[m]issing eyes and white eyes and wandering eyes and crossed eyes,” three-legged dogs, and rotting animal carcasses.22 In what is like a social awakening for Teresita, she recognizes the “world was wounded in ways she had never seen,” and she begins to question why such things transpired, growing “mad with frustration to hear that suffering and disease were ‘God’s will’.”23

20 Urrea, Hummingbird’s Daughter, 132
21 Ibid., 172.
22 Ibid.
23 Ibid.
The contemporary novel’s details attempt to reflect the historical setting upon which much of the novel’s content is based. The context in which the historical figure Teresa Urrea achieved unofficial sainthood was heavily affected by the Mexican government’s attempts to modernize Mexico. Historian Vicki Ruiz estimates that around five million people were displaced from their homeland as a result of modernization efforts.\(^{24}\) Characters feel the effects of Mexico’s modernization throughout *The Hummingbird’s Daughter*. The novel maps the effects of capitalist expansion in Mexico by providing context about the world in which these characters live, focusing on the grim details of suffering bodies, as previously described, and the ways in which technologies and markets were bringing together the local and the global with more frequency. Readers learn, for instance, that as the Urrea hacienda travels to Cabora “France took Tahiti. Singer sold 539,000 sewing machines to replace its older models,” and “Alexander Graham Bell placed the first telephone call.”\(^{25}\) Additionally, indigenous peoples are not only dealing with government encroachment and settlers in Mexico. The novel reports that the same phenomenon was happening in the United States: “Settlers in the state of Oklahoma, like Yoris in Mexico, had begun stealing Indian land. American companies not busy embezzling the Indian Territories were heading south and buying vast land holdings from the Diaz regime.”\(^{26}\) Industrialization intensified, too, with the introduction of the railroad, which transported goods between the United States and Mexico.


\(^{25}\) Urrea, *Hummingbird’s Daughter*, 139.

\(^{26}\) Ibid., 138.
These details illustrate the tensions existing between the local and the global in the novel. At stake for Mexico during the tenure of the President Porfirio Diaz, at least for the government, was the fulfillment of modernity, a project that justified the seizure of lands for railroad expansion and mining projects. Predictably, the dislocation of people from their homelands often sparked rebellions against the federal government.

**Teresa Urrea’s Historical Rebellions**

The Tomóchic rebellion of 1892 was one such historical uprising that resulted in tragedy when Mexican soldiers decimated the town of Tomóchic and is probably the most well-known insurrection with which the historical Teresa has been associated.27 Her alleged connection with this particular battle was even unofficially memorialized in the “Corrido de Tomóchic.” To put the timeline in which Teresa became affiliated with revolts against the Mexican government in perspective, it is helpful to recall that folklorist Enrique Lamadrid suggests the “Corrido de Tomóchic” was likely the first corrido, or Mexican folk song, of the Mexican Revolution, although the Tomóchic rebellion preceded the revolution by a few years.28 In his analysis of the corrido, Lamadrid recalls how, in 1996 and 1997, he and a group of students visited the village of Tomóchic, where a ninety-two-year-old survivor of the rebellion and several of the survivors’ descendants were still living. That members of the community of Tomóchic were still singing the corrido about the events that transpired in the late nineteenth

---

century demonstrates one of the ways Teresa’s story circulated as part of the village’s collective memory.

The historical Teresa remained somewhat popular in the collective memory because she tended to the poor and the sick who sought out her healing knowledge. She also repeatedly denied her involvement in revolts against the government. Desirée Martin writes that the “cult” of Teresa “emerged in the 1890s, in the midst of a larger conflict in Mexico between the regional margins and the national center.”

Martin explains that the conditions in Mexico during this period generated “a bevy of living saints,” as anti-Porfiriato sentiment coalesced. Scholars of new religious movements would likely consider the emergence of local religious groups and unofficial saints characteristic of social environments where segments of the population become dissatisfied with the their conditions to which they are subjected. Such movements, whether consciously or unconsciously on the part of the subjects involved, are apt to become targets of the dominant culture because they challenge the existing order. In the case of social and spiritual movement that would become known as “Teresismo,” Teresa Urrea’s elevation to a larger-than-life symbol of resistance against the Mexican state and the Catholic Church would attract the attention of both the United States and Mexico. Historically, the ways in which her supernatural healing powers were interpreted on either side of the border were relative to the geopolitics underpinning each nation.

30 Martin, Borderlands Saints, 38.
When Teresa and her father, Tomás, eventually made their home in Nogales, Arizona, and later, in El Paso, Texas, Teresa continued to serve the people who sought her cures even after she began living in the United States. She reportedly traveled as far as New York and St. Louis to demonstrate her abilities. Scholar of religion Brandon Bayne argues that Teresa Urrea actively looked for opportunities to showcase her skills to audiences around the country and garnered travel support from sponsors who wanted her to reject any identification with Catholic “superstition,” which was antiquated and crude to them in comparison with scientific rationalism.32 Such a rejection, however, would have entailed denying some of curanderismo’s basic precepts. Bayne writes that instead of renouncing what her sponsors believed was superstition, Teresa “continually weaved what Dipesh Chakrabarty has called a ‘timeknot,’ a braid of spiritual presences and natural explanations that resists unraveling into ‘premodern’ or ‘modern’ strands of historicist interpretation.”33 Chakrabarty uses the concept of the timeknot to underscore the role religion has played in non-European perspectives of time, but particularly in South Asia, where even working in a factory to produce goods, he argues, is not an entirely secular activity.34 For Chakrabarty, the timeknot collapses distinctions between what we tend to think of as premodern (i.e. religious, superstitious) and modern (i.e. secular) ways of being and represents their historical entanglement. In this way, Chakrabarty’s notion of the timeknot is similar to notion of modernity/coloniality, for it references how European historiography, taken as universal history, has occluded other epistemologies, particularly those involving the supernatural. Bayne’s reference to the

32 Brandon Bayne, “From Saint to Seeker: Teresa Urrea’s Search for a Place of Her Own,” *Church History* 75, no. 3 (2006), 626.
33 Ibid.
Chakrabarty’s timeknot is appropriate given the way science in the late-nineteenth-century United States seemed to answer questions that religion had never answered in the past. Teresa’s abilities would have been considered inconceivable, or a hoax, because they did not abide by the laws of science.\(^{35}\)

Though typically considered illogical and crude from a Western perspective, the curanderismo that the historical Teresa practiced belongs to a broad body of traditional knowledges and practices that descend from a history of unequal and often violent exchanges in the Americas.\(^{36}\) Eliseo “Cheo” Torres defines curanderismo as “an art, a calling, a ‘gift’ from some supernatural agent to some of those who practice it.”\(^{37}\) Torres asserts that “in the best of worlds it seems to be a profession that is pursued not for profit or gain but as a form of charitable care-giving.”\(^{38}\) Offering a more expansive definition, literary critic Amanda Ellis defines curanderismo as a method “rooted in a long-standing set of healing practices centered on preserving and safe-guarding the holistic balance and well-being of individuals and communities.”\(^{39}\)

A practice that is common among many communities, and not exclusive to Mexicans and Mexican Americans, curanderismo often depends on the practitioner’s relationship to place. Curanderismo might include anything from delivering babies and prescribing herbal remedies to performing spiritual cleansings called limpias, or treating susto, a traumatic shock to the soul. Many people of Mexican descent use traditional

\(^{35}\) The US English-language press also equated her work with magnetism and theosophy. See Bayne.

\(^{36}\) For a study that traces Chicana/o literary representations of curanderismo and their decolonial healing potential, see Amanda Ellis, *Detrás de Cada Letra: Trauma and Healing in Chicana/o Literature*, Rice University Dissertation (Houston, 2015).


\(^{38}\) Ibid.

\(^{39}\) Ellis, 16.
healing knowledge that might qualify as curanderismo in their homes without undergoing any kind of formal training. In most cases, curanderas/os’ abilities to navigate the material and spiritual dimensions of curanderismo contribute to their revered status within the communities they serve, and the capacity of curanderas/os to work with the supernatural, sometimes embody it, is one of the primary attributes that makes them a particularly powerful and enduring figure in Mexican American folklore and literature to this day.40

**Teresa Urrea in the Mexican American Literary Archive**

The once-living Teresa’s legacy as a curandera has faded in and out of US mainstream historical memory for decades. Gillian Newell writes that in the academy the story of Teresa is often limited to those who have an interest in Mexican American history.41 More recently, Desirée Martin has stated that Teresa practically forgotten following her death in 1906. Drawing on the scholarship of Robert McKee Irwin, James F. Griffith, Gillian E. Newell, and Paul Vanderwood, Martín asserts that Teresa was “even forgotten in the U.S.-Mexico borderlands where she resided for the majority of her life (in Sonora and Arizona), except for the odd local or historical publication, family and community stories and legends, and one lonely chapel dedicated to her at the Santa Teresita Ranch in Cascabel, Arizona.”42 Though scattered throughout the US-Mexico

---

42 Martin, 35. See also Robert McKee Irwin, *Bandits, Captives, Heroines, and Saints: Cultural Icons of Mexico’s Northwest Borderlands* (Minneapolis: University of
borderlands in both oral and written forms, Martin’s assessment of Teresa’s shadowy presence in the archives still suggests that the curandera’s supernatural legacy remained affixed to the US-Mexico border region.

The Mexican American literary archive demonstrates that the folk saint Teresa came of interest to Chicanas/os during the Chicano Movement. Teresa’s position as a woman of mixed indigenous and European descent who spoke openly against an unjust government would have appealed to Chicanas/os for obvious reasons, particularly because Chicanas/os were invested in recasting historical and mythical figures into the cultural imaginary that would best reflect the sense of cultural awareness and political consciousness the movement promoted. The sense of Chicano nationalism that pervaded the early years of the Chicano movement is perhaps best exemplified in Rodolfo “Corky” Gonzalez’s epic poem *I Am Joaquin/ Yo soy Joaquin* (1969), as it represented the Chicano everyman as not only both “Aztec prince and Christian Christ.”^43^ The three most common figures Chicanas turned to, on the other hand, were La Llorona, Malinche, and La Virgen de Guadalupe.^44^ Richard Rodríguez and Gloria L. Rodríguez were among the first Chicanas/os to retell Teresa’s history during the movement period, with their research “Teresa Urrea: Her Life, as it Affected the Mexican-U.S. Frontier” (1973).^45^ The

article, though informative, focuses on the political landscape as it was unfolding during Teresa’s lifetime, detailing the discontent that the laboring classes acquired in response to Mexican president Porfirio Díaz’s policies.

Five years after “Teresa Urrea: Her Life, as it Affected the Mexican-U.S. Frontier” was published, Carlos Larralde composed a short biography on the folk saint. Larralde’s *Teresa Urrea: Chicana Mystic* (1978) made use of various official and unofficial sources to create a narrative about the curandera’s life. Drawing from newspaper articles and oral histories, Larralde assembled a collection he hoped would shed light on the little-known figure. Still, Larralde expressed feelings of uncertainty about the archive he assembled, voicing his concerns about the biased accounts belonging to both the Mexican and US presses.46 Perhaps due to what he perceived were the presses’ biases, Larralde chose to look elsewhere for information on Teresa and obtained oral histories from three Mexican Americans: Ascension Prieto, Guadalupe Torres, and Carlota Perez. These individuals mostly recounted stories told to them by family members about the famed saint because they were only children when Teresa was alive, save for Torres, who remembered receiving treatment from Teresa. In the case of *Chicana Mystic*, putting together Teresa’s story required an act remembering on the part of Larralde’s informants, an exercise that took Larralde beyond the spaces of formal, institutional meaning making to construct an alternative history of the curandera.

From the analytical perspective of the folkloric difference, borderlore is embedded throughout Larralde’s *Chicana Mystic*, unlike Rodriguez and Rodriguez’s article, because it emphasizes the enduring presence of the supernatural in the US-

---

Mexico borderlands. For example, the second chapter of Larralde’s text, “Magic and Reality,” details a young Teresa’s discovery of power and the tutelage in curanderosimo that she received María Sonora, otherwise known as Huila. In contrast to other narratives about Teresa, however, Larralde’s *Chicana Mystic* emphasizes the role hallucinogenics played in Teresa’s encounters with the other-worldly. He insists the drugs did not make her see fictions but opened her eyes to an alternate reality.

Religious studies scholar Luís D. León writes that such hagiographies of Teresa Urrea “evince her power as a cultural symbol, trying to locate her in a life context that makes sense—even though during her life she was, in a sense, out of place and out of time and therefore not so simply categorized.”  

León’s summation raises several questions that help frame the next section of the chapter: In what context does it make “sense” for a racialized, gendered woman to exercise power in the ways that Teresa did? Is there a border logic that reconfigures how we should understand Teresa’s supernatural abilities from alternate epistemological standpoints? These questions I hope to answer by reading Luis Alberto Urrea’s *The Hummingbird’s Daughter* through the lens of the folkloric difference.

**Borderlore in The Hummingbird’s Daughter**

Despite the broad popularity of *The Hummingbird’s Daughter*, it has received little critical attention since its publication in 2005, as literary critic Christina Garcia Lopez states. In “This Land is Holy!” Intersections of Politics and Spirituality in Luis

---


Alberto Urrea’s *The Hummingbird’s Daughter,*” Lopez considers the novel characteristic of contemporary Latinx literatures, that is, transnational in scope, as it “encourages critical readers to recognize this ‘Mexican’ story as a hemispheric American one.”49 Making the case for understanding the narrative of *The Hummingbird’s Daughter* as transnational, Lopez writes that because it is at the end that Teresita, along with her father, face the United States as they approach the nation to the north on a train, the novel ends where most Chican@ narratives typically begin.50 In this way, Lopez states, “Urrea forces us to shift their frame of reference regarding historical and geographical parameters, encouraging us to resituate Chican@ literature in a hemispheric context.”51 The designation of the novel as a hemispheric text allows Lopez to read the “spiritual epistemologies and practices as part of the globalized ‘flows’ that created new citizen-subjects and politics during the Porfiriato.”52 For Lopez, at stake in such a reading of *The Hummingbird’s Daughter* is recognition of the ability of spirituality to function as a form of resistance.

Lopez discusses how folklore circulates among characters in the novel. More specifically, Lopez reads how expressions of local, public memory appear in *The Hummingbird’s Daughter* to recall violent and traumatic events and operate as a form of witnessing. Rather than merely indexing moments in which the Mexican government killed “the People” in the novel, Lopez argues the novel presents folklore as a “form of

49 Lopez, 2.
50 Ibid.
51 Ibid.
52 Ibid., 3.

historical remembrance” and a means of rejecting “their dehumanization.”\textsuperscript{53} Essentially, the novel presents the People’s public, oral commentary as a repudiation of the way in which the Mexican government classifies them as disposable. The “act of storytelling and the complimentary act of receiving story both function to remember and give witness to the systemic displacement and dehumanization experienced during the Porfiriato,” in Lopez’s words.\textsuperscript{54} Lopez’s analysis of \textit{The Hummingbird’s Daughter} is pertinent to this chapter because it not only suggests folklore acts as a powerful form of contestation, but also underscores how the novel’s representations of violence work to “make real and embodied the often intangible costs of state violence.”\textsuperscript{55} It is a form of embodiment that does not separate notions of spirit and the spiritual from the materiality of the body and land.\textsuperscript{56}

Though Lopez’s discussion of \textit{The Hummingbird’s Daughter} productively reads how the novel resituates spiritual epistemologies in relationship to state violence, my reading of the novel’s engagement with borderlore seeks to focalize on the regional histories that are particular to the US-Mexico borderlands. Doing so, I maintain, allows us to understand the way in which folklore emerges from within and between the genres of magical realism and the gothic. In \textit{The Hummingbird’s Daughter}, borderlore draws attention to the collision of settler projects that continue to make the US-Mexico border region, one that is perpetually haunted by modernity/coloniality. At the same time, the novel’s borderlore disrupts what otherwise might seem like futile attempts to cope with

\textsuperscript{53} Ibid., 9.
\textsuperscript{54} Lopez, 10.
\textsuperscript{55} Ibid., 14.
\textsuperscript{56} Ibid., 15.
this violence by offering a method of approaching Mexican American epistemologies from a decolonial perspective.

It is not magical realism but the gothic that readers first encounter in *The Hummingbird’s Daughter*. In the novel, suffering and death are the only outcomes the indigenous and mestizo populations in peonage anticipate in their futures. The gothic figures into *The Hummingbird’s Daughter* most clearly when the novel expresses the violent history of conquest that is long past but ever present in Mexico but frames this history as a secret. In the first chapter, the novel intimates the details leading up to Teresita’s birth and lays the gothic foundation for the text by detailing the Spanish conquest’s impact on Mexican architecture and processes of racialization:

> So what were they? Every Mexican was a diluted Indian, invaded by milk like the coffee in Cayetana’s cup. Afraid, after the Conquest and the Inquisition, of their own brown wrappers, they colored their faces with powder, covered their skins I perfumes and European silks and American habits.⁵⁷

The description of Mexicans demonstrates how the novel at times “problematically appropriates *mestizaje,*” as Zachary Robert Hernández states, and also brings to the fore how whiteness and Euro-centric habits were internalized and utilized to signify one’s humanity. According to the novel, these Mexicans “attempted to choke the gods with New York pantaloons, Parisian petticoats,” yet the “banished spirits whispered from corners and basements.”⁵⁸

The gothic emerges most prominently in the description of Mexican architecture, for it contains traces of the “Old Ones,” the pre-Colombian gods, in other words. Significantly, *The Hummingbird’s Daughter* positions them as threatening figures who

---

⁵⁷ Urrea, 9.
⁵⁸ Ibid., 9.
lurk behind the artifices constructed by the Spanish colonial empire and upheld in modern Mexico. They also linger in spaces that appear at the margins of modernity, including landscapes seemingly unbothered by civilization:

All around them, in the small woods, in the caves, in the precipitous canyons of copper country, in the swamps and at the crossroads, the harsh Old Ones gathered. Tlaloc, the rain god, lips parched because the Mexicans no longer tortured children to feed him sweet drafts of their tears. The Flayed One, Xipe Totec, shivering cold because priests no longer skinned sacrifices alive and danced in their flesh to bring forth the harvest. Tonántzin, goddess of Tepeyac, chased from her summit by the very Mother of God, the Virgen of Guadalupe.  

In spite of Spanish efforts to destroy, or at the very least, keep the remnants of non-Western existence invisible, the novel implies, the “Old Ones” continue to whisper. They “hid behind statues in the cathedrals that the Spaniards had built with the stones of their shattered temples.” The opening is infused with references to dark sights and smells, a mixture of “sacrificial blood and copal seed” exuding from between stones, accompanied by the scent of “incense and candles.” These forgotten divine beings whisper the words, “Death is alive,” “[d]eath lives inside life, as bones dance within the body.” In this way, the novel stages the violence of Spanish colonialism that continues to haunt Mexico.

The imagery painted by details of broken temples and seeping blood that are bound together by the Catholic Church marks the beginning of The Hummingbird’s Daughter as gothic. Though situated in altogether different context than the settings in short stories like Edgar Allen Poe’s “The Fall of the House of Usher” (1839), Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s “The Yellow Wallpaper” (1892), and Shirley Jackson’s “The Lottery” (1949), nineteenth-century novels by Nathaniel Hawthorne, or the television series Sleepy

59 Urrea, 10.  
60 Ibid.  
61 Ibid.  
62 Ibid.
Hollow (2013-2017), the scene still evokes gothic themes. Justine D. Edwards describes the gothic as a “continuum,” as contemporary gothic text illustrates that the genre “never dies” but rather “morphs into different forms at different historical moments.”

In contrast to magical realism, the gothic has been a fundamental aspect of the dominant Western cultural imaginary that typically reveals, according to Lucie Armitt, a fear of the unknown and the foreign. Jerrold E. Hogle similarly writes that since its beginnings in late eighteenth century England, the genre has “come to connote a backward leaning counter-modernity lurking in both the emerging and recent stages of modern life.”

Hogle’s evaluation of the gothic underscores its linear substructure and its connection to Enlightenment rationalism, which, as a universally projected but still locally situated episteme, generally considers the supernatural, particularly that which descends from non-Western cultures, a worrisome, even threatening sign of irrationality.

The gothic currents informing the Hummingbird’s Daughter are also apparent in the novel’s references to sexual and gendered violence. There are two instances when the novel implies that Cayetana Chavez, Teresita’s mother, and later, Teresita, become the victims of rape. The doubling of the rape reveals how racialized, gendered bodies are the most susceptible to acts of violence. In the novel, bodies that appear indigenous in the US-Mexico borderlands are perceived as the most available for fulfilling patriarchal

---

desire. For Cayetana and Teresita, their humanity is invisible, or somehow lacking, to
their assailant because their bodies are coded as indigenous.

The centrality of death and suffering in The Hummingbird’s Daughter frame the
novel as a gothic text, because it expresses a violent history of conquest that is long past
but ever-present in Mexico. The modern/colonial logic that legitimizes acts of sexual
violence against Teresita and Cayetana on account of their indigeneity or apparent
indigeneity also legitimizes the murder of Cayetana’s family in the novel. The
Hummingbird’s Daughter reveals that members of Cayetana’s family were killed because
the Mexican government “mistook them for fleeing Yaquis.”66 It was not a mistake that
the Mexican government made, however, because any body that resembles an indigenous
body is always expendable within the logic of modernity and coloniality. This is the logic
that renders Cayetana unworthy of dignity and respect to the ranch owner Tomás, who
occupies the highest position of power on the ranch as the Yori master (Yori is the term
the mestizos, as well as the Mayo and Yaqui people, use for white, or light-skinned
people in the novel).

Intra-ethnic violence represented later in the novel, when a mestizo man, not a
Yori, forces himself on Teresita. At one point, Millán, the mestizo miner from Rosario,
remarks to himself, “Mexican women are dogs, but Indian women are cows” before
accosting and inflicting sexual violence on Teresita.67 While Millán’s own humanity
would be discounted within the logic of modernity/coloniality, his statement that
“Mexican women are dogs” and Indian “women are cows” demonstrates how racialized,
gendered bodies are implicated in modern/colonial hierarchies in the US-Mexico

66 Urrea, 11.
67 Ibid., 313.
borderlands, where bodies are treated differently in relationship to the contexts in which they move.

Significantly, it is after Teresita’s traumatic experience with Millán that magical realism surfaces most forcefully. Teresa falls into a coma after her encounter with Millán. After several days of not stirring and a visit from a “gringo doctor,” she is eventually pronounced dead. It is during Teresa’s funerary wake that her supernatural abilities most forcibly shock the people of Cabora, surprising her mourners by regaining consciousness. Her reaction to the wake surprises everyone, including her father Tomás:

“What is happening?” Teresita asked.
Tomás sputtered.
“Oh no. No,” he said. “No, you must be kidding.”
Teresita yawned.
“Why am I on this table?” she asked.
Buenaventura whistled, and Gabriela felt faint and leaned against the doorframe.
“This is your wake,” Tomás managed to say.
“My wake?”
“You’re dead!”
“I am?”

Here, humor eases the novel’s transition into the magical real. After Teresita’s wakes up, her healing powers grow yet they become an almost quotidian part of life on the ranch.

Crowds of people flock to see the "living dead girl" so that she may heal their ailments, which prompts the government to monitor her closely. Teresita performs miracles on some and merely blesses others--giving sight to the blind, for example, and consoling mothers who are grieving the death of their children. Teresita has visions, emits a rosy smell from her pores, heals with a strange energy, and even converses with Huila, her mentor, after she dies. The healing exhausts Teresita, though, for it often

---

68 Urrea, 332
69 Ibid.
70 Ibid., 339.
requires she take on a pilgrim's pain, an exercise she calls the "ultimate test of faith." It is at this point that the Mexican government declares Teresita an enemy of the state as she begins openly criticizing the government and the Catholic Church for its mistreatment of the poor.

In general, Urrea’s novel narrates the story of Teresa in a register that leaves open the possibility of the extraordinary, or supernatural, unfolding within the context of the ordinary. The setting of *The Hummingbird’s Daughter* is perhaps what secures its connection to the literary tradition of magical realism for many readers. The framing of the supernatural in this way has thus led many reviewers to describe *The Hummingbird’s Daughter* as a magical realist novel, a label the author has also repeatedly eschewed. During a 2006 interview, for instance, Lauro Flores asked Urrea what he made of critics’ assertions that text was “a continuation of Latin American magical realism.” Urrea responded, first, by noting some critics had gone as far to claim he “reinvented the genre” and had even compared him with Gabriel García Márquez. He then told Flores that, although he appreciates the association with the Nobel prize-winning author, he never intended for *The Hummingbird's Daughter* to fit within the category of magical realism. “You see,” Urrea told Flores,

[T]he “magic” in the book is all quite true. It’s historically true in that Teresita’s miracles are all documented. It is also historically true in that the teachings of Huila and Manuelito are based on the teachings of real medicine people. Finally, it is real in that some of the strange dream work in the book is actually work the shamans did with, to, or on me. The fiction is stuff like what they ate for breakfast.  

71 Urrea, 387.

In his answer to Flores, Urrea references the fissure that exists between the two concepts that describe the genre that has long been associated with Latin American literature—the "magical" and the "real."

Critics have argued that magical realism is a literary genre that pushes against the dualistic paradigms of rationality and irrationality that emerged in Europe with the Enlightenment. In Magical Realism: Theory, History, Community (1995), Lois Parkinson Zamora and Wendy B. Faris point out that the genre of magical realism "resists the basic assumptions of post-enlightenment rationalism and literary realism. Mind and body, spirit and matter, life and death, real and imaginary, self and other, male and female: these boundaries are to be erased, transgressed, blurred, brought together, or otherwise fundamentally refashioned."73 Zamora and Faris’s definition is useful for reading Hummingbird’s Daughter because it recognizes the ways in which the supernatural is represented as always present in everyday life and the natural world. However, while critics Lois Parkinson Zamora and Wendy B. Faris assert magical real literature often “draw[s] upon cultural systems that are no less ‘real’ than those upon which traditional literary realism draws” and thus operates according to logics not wholly rooted in Western epistemes, Urrea’s statement suggests that the genre still occludes the legitimacy, or historicity, of the events his novel attempts to represent.74

74 Like the meaning of most concepts, the meaning of magical realism has changed over time. The term, similar to folklore, is European in origin and was first used by Franz Roh in the essay “Magic Realism: Post-Expressionism” (1925) to “indicate that mystery does not descend to the represented world, but rather hides and palpitates behind it.” Roh was a German art critic and historian who used magical realism to describe Europe’s move from Expressionism aesthetics back to more realist representations. Though Roh was not attempting to make sense of Latin American literature, magical realism became associated with Latin America by the mid-twentieth century. See Franz Roh, “Magic Realism: Post Expressionism,” in Lois Parkinson Zamora and Wendy B. Faris, 15–31.
The association of *The Hummingbird’s Daughter* with magical realism, particularly as it has appeared in Latin American literary traditions, is perhaps another way of positioning the novel as hemispheric story. Though useful for tracing flows of people, goods, and ideas across borders, the inclination to examine literary and print culture from a hemispheric perspective can have the effect of obscuring the differences that are often overlooked when general terms like “Mexican” are used to account for communities that have shaped and been shaped by places throughout Mexico and the United States. So, while Christina Garcia Lopez asserts that the setting of *The Hummingbird’s Daughter* impresses upon “English-dominant readers the critical importance of moving south and beyond the US-Mexico border to amplify understanding of the historical relationship between both nations,” this kind of hemispheric approach almost completely elides the fact that Mexico once extended into the US West and Southwest.75

**Borderlore: A Decolonial Perspective**

Luis Alberto Urrea writes about one of the trips he took to conduct research for *The Hummingbird’s Daughter* in the essay, "For True Healing to Begin, Simply Turn Off Your Western Mind" (2005). The essay, which is included as part of the novel’s paratextual material, discusses one of his own encounters with the supernatural. In the essay, Urrea writes that he journeyed to Cuernavaca, Mexico to visit a pair of curanderas. He describes arriving at their house and the humble lifestyle the two women lived:

> I was there to research a book. The curanderas (healer women) of Cuernavaca had agreed to meet with me and discuss the secrets of their trade. They lived in a modest house, and later in the night they offered me

75 Lopez, 2.
a plastic bowl of green Jell-O. Nothing magical. No one was burning incense or candles, sprinkling holy water, or chanting mantras. A very noisy, very bad ranchero band was playing in the neighbor’s yard to celebrate a barrio wedding. The curandera’s TV had rabbit ears wrapped in aluminum foil.\textsuperscript{76}

The scene Urrea relays for readers is mundane, to say the least. Yet, he goes out of his way to say there was “nothing magical” about the setting. Urrea anticipates how audiences unfamiliar with curanderas and their healing techniques might perceive them as somehow extraordinary, in a fantastical, fairy tale type way. What this description of the curanderas’ home in Cuernavaca demonstrates how \textit{The Hummingbird’s Daughter} conceptualizes the supernatural as always present or typical of the everyday spaces people occupy, it is a perspective of the supernatural that is typical to borderlore.

In the same essay, Urrea confesses the more he found out about Teresa, the less he wanted to write her story.\textsuperscript{77} He recalls telling author Linda Hogan his “‘Western mind’ couldn’t wrap itself around all the mystical stuff.”\textsuperscript{78} The “‘Western mind” he describes is that which Gloria Anzaldúa also speaks about as the “rational” mind, which distinguishes between ideas of spirituality and being that are based on Enlightenment principles and those that are not. Hogan merely replied to Urrea that the Western mind “is a fever” that would pass.\textsuperscript{79} Upon entering the women’s home, Urrea says that one of the first things one of the curanderas told him (her name was Esperanza) was: "White people think what we do is magic. It's not magic. It's science."\textsuperscript{80} Urrea does not reflect on her statement in the essay but instead goes on to mention how he then fell into an intensely emotional state that Esperanza had predicted only moments before. Esperanza’s notion

\textsuperscript{76} Urrea, 7.
\textsuperscript{77} Urrea, 8.
\textsuperscript{78} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{79} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{80} Ibid., 9.
that curanderismo is science and not magic is more complicated than classifying it as merely one or the other. By stating that it is not magic, she seems to push against the idea that curanderismo is merely superstition or imaginary. Framing it as science makes it real, makes it *true*.

Reading the supernatural in *The Hummingbird’s Daughter* as borderlore rather than an element entirely attached to the genres of the gothic and the magical real attempts to expose the “fever” that elides the place-based relationships and forms of knowledge that speak to regional Mexican American communal identities and experiences. Nelson Maldonado-Torres calls this type of exposure the decolonial turn, which refers to a “shift in knowledge production” from Western-centric models to models that incorporate the diverse experiences of people of color.⁸¹ It is “about making visible the invisible and analyzing the mechanisms that produce such invisibility,” about turning off the Western mind for just enough time to remember other ways of perceiving the world.⁸²

*The Hummingbird’s Daughter* demonstrates how borderlore not only endures the violence of modernity/coloniality, but also provides opportunities to transcend some of its most debilitating effects. Teresita’s supernatural abilities, which have no rational explanation within the logic of modernity/coloniality, challenge both the secular and religious foundations of modernity/coloniality. Borderlore becomes the answer to the gothic’s fear of the foreign and the unknowable, while drawing attention to the specificity of the region in ways that the magical real cannot. The worldviews that magical realism, borderlore and the gothic support may exist in tension with each other, however, read

---

⁸² Ibid., 263.

In *The Hummingbird’s Daughter*, the “magical” and the “real” come together in borderlore. When Huila deems it acceptable for her to begin learning about curanderismo, she tells her a story about how the Virgin visited the Mayo indigenous people before the Europeans had ever introduced Catholicism to the region. According to Huila, the Virgin appeared on top of a cactus to a group of warriors, who decided to throw things at the woman because they had never seen anyone like her before. The warriors could not harm her, however, and the Virgin instructed them to—of all things—get her a ladder. Teresita and Huila laugh at this demand the Virgin made, because it seems preposterous. Why does she not land directly on the ground, instead of asking the warriors to retrieve a ladder? Huila goes on to explain to Teresita what the story about the Virgin appearing on the cactus illustrates. This “is how Heaven works,” she says,

> They’re practical. We are always looking for rays of light. For lightning bolts or burning bushes. But God is a worker, like us. He made the world—he didn’t hire poor Indios to build it for him! God has worker’s hands. Just remember—angels carry no harps. Angels carry hammers. 

In what is one of Teresita’s first lessons in *The Hummingbird’s Daughter*, Huila situates God’s power within a space that is inherent to the mundane, material world, not separate from it. In this tale, a supernatural being appears to humans atop a cactus and she does not explain, at least in the story, who she is or where she has come from. While Huila’s story never reveals whether the Native onlookers got her a ladder or whether she climbed down, the story is representative of a type of remembering that interprets the supernatural through an alternate logic.

83 Urrea, 94.
The story, a form of borderlore, along with Huila’s remarks, respond to modernity/coloniality by critiquing assumptions that spiritual knowledge and the supernatural are irrational or inaccessible to laboring, racialized bodies. Huila’s story rejects what Maldonado-Torres identifies as “the patterns of power that emerged as a result of colonialism, but that define culture, labor, intersubjective relations, and knowledge production.”84 First, it is important to note that the supernatural occupies the same physical and social space as the indigenous peoples, the group that European colonists initially displaced and relegated to the lowest rungs of society. When Huila says that in Heaven “they’re practical,” she is overturning the idea that the supernatural (in this instance, Heaven) is completely beyond comprehension, located above, and full of the unbelievable, unusable notions. Even God has to “work,” she says, and so the supernatural is in this way more congruent to the laborious existence that the material world so often requires of people like her and Teresita in this context. Huila’s story about the Virgin and the cactus also disrupts the hierarchy established by Catholicism by stating that “God is a worker, like us [my emphasis].”

The story about the Virgin and the cactus emerges at different points in The Hummingbird’s Daughter, but it is never re-told in full. It becomes more of a reminder for Teresita, who, even after Huila’s death, laughs at the Virgin’s request. The borderlore orients Teresita’s approach to curanderismo, which requires that she collapse multiple cultural, religious, and material/immaterial binaries in order to redress some of the hopelessness that pervades landscapes like the US-Mexico border. In Women and Knowledge in Mesoamerica: From East L.A. to Anahuac (2011), Paloma Martinez-Cruz

---

84 Maldonado-Torres, 243.
argues that *The Hummingbird’s Daughter* functions as an example of the ways in which the curandera figure “restores dignity to indigenous womanhood,” writing:

> [t]hrough Huila, Urrea dispels the notion that Teresa’s gifts came to her as an extracultural, purely supernatural transmission and instead emphasizes the rigors of her training and the earnest dialogue on matters spiritual and profane that she undertakes with Huila to demonstrate how healing was arbitrated by an ancient and autochthonous system of knowing.  

Her argument about indigenous womanhood aside, Martinez-Cruz’s summation of how Teresita acquires her abilities in *The Hummingbird’s Daughter* aligns with the ways in which the practical function of borderlore makes knowledge accessible to those who, according to a Western logic, might otherwise be considered incapable of understanding it.

Western philosophy has largely influenced how we think of the supernatural, that is as something separate from the world we live in, which is to say: primitive, unreal, irrational, and/or completely imaginary. This way of thinking descends from the Enlightenment era, the same period which greatly shaped modern science. It is the same general period that produced a highly rationalist worldview, which argues that we should consider the material and immaterial realms as completely different, and that only the material realm can be measured in an empirical manner. The problem with this, of course, is that it renders all immaterial phenomena, that which cannot be measured objectively, as unreal. This is why, if there is no visible, measurable and enduring material proof of supernatural phenomena, they must be considered irrational and unsupportable.

---

Anzaldúa was among the most prominent Chicana writers to take up this issue in *Borderlands/La Frontera*, where she explains her concept of the mestiza consciousness, its spiritual dimensions, and how it related to her personal experience growing up on the US-Mexico border. The mestiza consciousness, according to Anzaldúa, is a product of “racial, ideological, cultural and biological crosspollination.”86 It allows for one to see multiple points of view, by moving “away from set patterns and goals and toward a more whole perspective, one that includes rather than excludes.”87 This ability to see beyond “set patterns” allowed Anzaldúa to reflect on the supernatural and the Western and non-Western ways of knowing and being she was familiar with as a Mexican American.

Anzaldúa writes that, like many Mexicans, she did not think her brushes with the supernatural had any real-world significance. She allowed "white rationality," that which understands the supernatural as irrational because in many instances it cannot be empirically measured, to distinguish what was real and what was "mere pagan superstition":

I accepted their reality, the "official" reality of the rational, reasoning mode which is connected with external reality, the upper world, and is considered the most developed consciousness—the consciousness of duality. The other mode of consciousness facilitates images from the soul and the unconscious through dreams and the imagination. Its work is labeled "fiction," make-believe, wish-fulfillment. White anthropologists claim that Indians have "primitive" and therefore deficient minds, that we cannot think in the higher mode of consciousness—rationality.88

The “official” reality Anzaldúa points to is the reality of institutionalized Western thinking. It is this “rational, reasoning mode” that has led anthropologists (and not just

---

86 Anzaldúa, 99.
87 Ibid., 101.
88 Ibid., 59.
white ones) to align the supernatural and the people who view the supernatural as part of reality with the pre-modern and irrational.

This is a principle that haunts folklore studies, because within a dualist paradigm the “folk” are directly opposed to the high culture of the elites. Folklore, after all, write Robert A. Georges and Michael Owen Jones in *Folkloristics* (1995), “is an English word coined by an Englishman, it is to the intellectual life of Europe—and particularly that of Great Britain—that one must turn to understand what kind of model of reality was prerequisite to the evolution of folkloristics,” that is, the study of folklore. For people of color, as Anzaldúa intimates, Europe has constructed official history, institutionalized religion, and our ways of understanding the physical world as separate from the supernatural, which does not exist.

Returning to *The Hummingbird’s Daughter*, there is one more way of reading a short scene that speaks to the novel’s decolonizing efforts as expressed through borderlore. The scene involves Teresita and another lesson from Huila, following Huila’s death. Teresita has been captured by Mexican officials who are intent on deporting her and making her suffer close to the end of the novel. Huila, though she has been dead for some time, appears to Teresita. Teresita asks the apparition to help her out of the situation. Huila replies by saying, “Oh no child…I am on this side, and you are on that side. We cannot interfere with you.” Teresita, in desperation, begs Huila to help her, but Huila only says, “I am here, aren’t I?” Huila proceeds by producing multiple spheres of light that show “every possible” version of Teresa’s life that rests on the choices she

---

89 Robert A. Georges and Michael Owen Jones, *Folkloristics: An Introduction*.
(Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), 32.
90 Urrea, 485.
91 Ibid.
makes. Each sphere contains a glimpse of what Teresita might look like in the future. When Teresita express to Huila that she does not understand the visions in the globes, Huila replies that they are meant to illustrate Teresita’s choices. “Forever, you are surrounded by countless choices of which you are to be,” Huila states, “These are your destinies.”

Although Teresita is ostensibly a supernatural figure herself and Huila’s appearance does not surprise her, Huila claims that she is bound to one “side” and cannot cross over into the other. If the supernatural—in this case, apparitions of the dead—exist in the material world and are not removed or opposite to it, then why are there the “sides” Huila speaks of? If the supernatural was part of the material, why can’t she help Teresita? Huila essentially answers these questions when she responds that she is there beside Teresita, where she “has always been.” The spirit of Huila locates Teresita and herself in different “sides,” but sides with an impermeable boundary that divides the living and the dead. We can read this moment as one of the novel’s reminders to recall how borderlore preserves histories and alternate ways of knowing, even if our Western minds limit our ability to perceive them.

Urrea’s representation of borderlore in *The Hummingbird’s Daughter* becomes a means of decolonizing dominant paradigms that consider the supernatural irrational and primitive. These same paradigms tend to frame people who look at the supernatural differently as irrational, primitive or just plain superstitious. In response to these colonizing moves, this chapter has attempted to remember the supernatural within the decolonizing framework that *The Hummingbird’s Daughter* provides in order to rethink

---

92 Urrea, 487.
93 Ibid., 485.
how the supernatural appears within the US-Mexico borderlands. By remembering Teresa Urrea’s story, the novel forces us to come to terms with the reductive ways that European-Enlightenment logic has informed our own understandings of the supernatural and the real within the context of the US-Mexico border.
CHAPTER FOUR

Spiritual Community and the Grief of Borderlore

Luis Alberto Urrea’s *The Hummingbird’s Daughter* (2005) demonstrates one way in which contemporary Mexican American writing makes use of folklore, or borderlore, to make sense of the painful matters that haunt the US-Mexico border. Border-crossing figures into the conclusion as Teresita and her father Tomás are deported to the United States. Though the novel describes the United States as “great, dark North America,” it ends with a sense of hopefulness that is tied to Teresita’s recognition of the possible futures she might chart for herself. In focusing on Teresita, the novel maintains a temporal distance between contemporary readers and the socio-cultural and historical content of the novel. Just as the two characters leave Mexico, readers follow their trajectory and leave behind the visions of bodily suffering that permeate most of *The Hummingbird’s Daughter*.

By comparison, Mexican American post-movement writer ire’ne lara silva’s contemporary short story collection *flesh to bone* (2013) harnesses borderlore to bring readers closer to some of the more recent violence that has transpired within and around the border region. lara silva’s collection is composed of nine stories, several of which

---

take up “old stories/myths” that are generally familiar to Mexican Americans. Though the temporality of her stories shifts between past and present, the borderlore binds the narratives to the geography of US-Mexico borderlands. This chapter reads how borderlore becomes a means of both recognizing and processing shared grief in *flesh to bone*. The forms of grief on which I focus emanates from the devaluation of particular bodies within the framework of modernity and coloniality.  

Like other examples of contemporary borderlore, lara silva’s short stories represent death and grief as concurrent, imbricated aspects of daily experience and cultural memory in the US-Mexico borderlands. In this way, *flesh to bone* resembles other cultural expressions and productions that have emerged from the borderlands. The artistic renderings of the late Tejana singer Selena Quintanilla Perez in retablos, in murals, and other forms, particularly those concentrated in Texas, exemplify, too, how death and grief accompany borderlore. The growing veneration of La Santa Muerte is yet another manifestation of borderlore. Grief is often part and parcel to borderlore, for it imparts meaning to bodies and experiences that are otherwise considered meaningless in relationship to the nation.

The two stories in lara silva’s collection that interest me most given their deployment of borderlore are “la huesera, or, flesh to bone” and “cortando las nubes, or,

---

5 In recent years, the Santa Muerte has been closely associated with the drug cartels in Mexico and labeled a cult figure, but her popularity also increased as people have been including her in Day of the Dead events. The Pope has repeatedly spoken out against the veneration of La Santa Muerte.
death came on horses.” Both short stories are comprised of fragmentary narratives, with shifting perspectives. The story “cortando las nubes, or, death came on horses” is a revision of the legend of La Llorona, or the weeping woman. Its narrative is articulated from first-person and third-person perspectives, with the bulk of the story told from the point-of-view of La Llorona’s daughter. The temporality of “cortando las nubes, or, death came on horses” oscillates between the colonial period, when ‘death came on horses,’ to the post-World War II period and to the present moment, but remains grounded in the geography of the borderlands. It is a geography mapped by three poetic stanzas identifying rivers, arroyos, and creeks that interrupt the prose. Similarly, “la huesera, or, flesh to bone” charts a distinct area in the US-Mexico borderlands, focusing on the Mexican side. The short story draws attention to the Juárez femicides through a narrative that alternates between testimonio, represented in italics, and first-person narrative. Recasting the figure of the bone setter woman within the context of late-twentieth to twenty-first-century Juárez, lara silva’s “la huesera, or flesh to bone” attempts to reckon with egregious forms of violence enacted on women and girls in the borderlands.

Together, the two stories demonstrate how grief, expressed through borderlore, binds people of Mexican descent on both sides of the border within a spiritual network or community that gives meaning to experiences otherwise discounted or easily forgotten within systems of meaning proffered by modernity and coloniality. The grief of borderlore behaves like the “politics of grief,” which anthropologist Augustine S.J. Park argues works to make indigenous lives grievable. Park argues for a politics of grief to be

---

6 Details in the narrative suggest some of the story also takes place at some point during the Bracero Program (1942-1964).
adopted in decolonial projects because it refuses a “purely emotive of affective understanding of grief that lends itself to settlers simply ‘feeling bad’ for colonial violence.”

Instead, according to Park, the politics of grief should become a “resource that calls for an agenda of decolonizing structural justice.”

The form of spiritual community that lara silva’s stories encourage is a community bound through shared grief, which recognizes the damage modernity and coloniality continues to inflict on racialized and gendered bodies.

This chapter follows Amanda Ellis’ analysis of lara silva’s story “duermete,” in which she points out that “[t]he present global neoliberal economy breeds illness.”

lara silva’s collection demonstrates that grief, like illness, stems from the contradictions of late capitalism and globalization. While global capitalism has encouraged greater exchange and connection in the latter part of the twentieth century and the first decades of the twenty-first, it has also increased restrictions on how bodies move between nations and how bodies move in relationship to capital. The profitability of multinational corporations has relied on the exploitation of labor, exacerbating income inequality, particularly between peoples living in the Global North and those living in the Global South. Thus grief, like illness, has become a counterpart to the exploitative practices of the global neoliberal economy, which rely on the dehumanizing forces of modernity and coloniality for labor that will sustain the global market.

Women, and particularly women of color, are among those who continue to be among the most exploited for their labor, and therefore, as lara silva shows, among those

---

8 Park, 274.
9 Ibid.
who have been susceptible to the pernicious forms of violence that are sustained within a
globalized economy. For women of color in the US-Mexico borderlands, their humanity
has been ignored and discounted because of their exploitability, their lives only
considered meaningful in relation to their productivity. In flesh to bone lara silva insists
on the humanity of such women by insisting their stories should be told. However,
recognition of the women’s humanity is never wholly the responsibility of lara silva.
Recognition of humanity also becomes the responsibility of the reader, a form of
acknowledgement that forces readers to assess their own humanity as well.

In this chapter, I argue that the grief expressed through lara silva’s short stories
vis-à-vis borderlore acts much like a binding agent does in the practice of weaving,
promoting a spiritual sense of belonging that is shared by people of Mexican descent
within the US-Mexico borderlands. In attending to grief through borderlore, silva’s works
does not attempt to supplement a historically inaccurate or incomplete narrative of the
past but rather grapples with pain of the present in order for characters and readers to
summon strength that allows them to persist into the future. Put another way, within the
two stories, a reckoning with former absence and loss occurs, but lara silva’s engagement
with grief through borderlore promotes a sense of collective purpose that binds border
dwellers together without completely obscuring their distinct experiences, which are
linked to and affected by their relationships to region. Rather than following a model of
Chicana/o spirituality that is tethered to nationalism, or a sense of pan-indigeneity, or

---

11 For a summary of feminist perspectives on globalization, see Serena Parekh and
Shelley Wilcox, "Feminist Perspectives on Globalization,” The Stanford Encyclopedia of
12 Frantz Fanon, Black Skin, White Masks. Trans. Richard Philcox (New York: Grover
Press, 2008).
expansive in geographic and temporal scope, grief in “la huesera, or, flesh to bone” and “cortando las nubes, or, death came on horses” maps an intimate sense of spiritual belonging, particularly among women living within the borderlands.

Grief appears in each of lara silva’s stories and yet appears most prominently at the beginning of the collection in the form of an epigraph. The epigraph, from author and activist Paul Monette, frames grief not as a debilitating outcome of intense suffering and loss, but as mode of survival. The epigraph form Monette reads: “Tell yourself: None of this ever had to happen. And then go make it stop, with whatever breath you have left. Grief is a sword. Or it is nothing.”13 Grief is configured here as a tool to confront historical trauma. While the act of wielding grief like a sword might appear antithetical to the “aesthetics of healing” that Amanda Ellis reminds us are very much at the heart of contemporary Chicana feminist writing such as lara silva’s flesh to bone, the metaphor nevertheless communicates the permeating force grief might have when channeled to not only come to terms with past experiences, but also to change how we conceptualize how we envision solidarity.14 Grief, constellated throughout flesh to bone as a feeling that makes us, for instance, “strange creatures,” “[a]t once, hollow and brimming over,” pulses within each story, piecing together fragmented historical events as told by characters to mediate suffering that occurs within the geographic specificity of the US-Mexico borderlands.15

---

13 lara silva, flesh to bone, np.
14 Amanda Ellis, Detrás de Cada Letra: Trauma and Healing in Chicana/o Literature, Rice University Dissertation (Houston, 2015).
15 lara silva, 5.
Shifting Chicana/o Spiritualities and Paradigms

Post-movement representations of Chicana/o spiritual community have departed from the many movement period Chicana/o interpretations of spirituality and religion. During the Chicana/o movement many Chicana/o writers were eager to critique all religious ideologies. From Tomás Rivera’s ...y no se lo tragó la tierra / And the Earth Did Not Devour Him (1971) to the early Chicana feminist writings on the place of religion in the liberation movement, Chicanas/os frequently took the position that religion and spirituality have acted as a form of oppression, sometimes with that particularly cruel consequences for Mexican American women. Even decades after the Chicana feminist movement of the 1960s and 1970s, Anna NietoGomez wrote in “La Chicana—Legacy of Suffering and Self-Denial” (1995), for example, that the “colonial Catholic church superimposed its ideology during this [the colonial] period and justified the oppression of conquest as something good.”16 Since Chicanas/os of NietoGomez’s generation correlated oppression with the Catholic Church, many felt that religion and spirituality would not aid in the path toward liberation.

Yet in some regions across the United States in 1960s and 1970s, religion and notions of spirituality unified Mexican Americans and informed their sense of belonging. In the case of the United Farm Workers (UFW), which was one iteration of the Chicano movement that emerged in California during the 1960s, the very spaces built to support institutional religion became invaluable to the people. Churches became meeting sites for members of the UFW and the icon of Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe became an emblem of struggle. Luís D. León writes in The Political Spirituality of Cesar Chavez: Crossing

Religious Borders (2014) that the UFW co-organizer Cesar Chávez “de-territorialized the sacred, re-territorializing it in the dusty picking field and other colonized spaces occupied by nomadic labor.”\(^{17}\) In his discussion of Chavez’s political work, León argues that Chávez “scripted a spirituality and a spiritual mestizaje that transmuted La Causa unto a religious movement.”\(^{18}\) It is this religious movement, León writes, that attracted Mexican Americans to the UFW. In the history of the “political spirituality” that became part of the Chicana/o movement, Chávez, and later figures like Gloria Anzaldúa, became two very different spiritual leaders who sought to unite Mexican Americans through spiritual activism. Both figures drew on folklore to galvanize their audiences but also predominantly mapped the place of Chicana/o belonging within the United States.

More recent scholarship on Chicana spirituality has largely circled around Gloria Anzaldúa’s theorizations of spiritual activism, the mestiza consciousness, and spiritual mestizaje. For scholars of Chicana spirituality, Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza (1987) has become central to post-Movement theorizations of spiritual community, especially as it is the same foundational text in which Anzaldúa offers her now famous corporeal description of the border as “una herida abierta,” an open wound where the “Third World grates against the first and bleeds.”\(^{19}\) For Anzaldúa, Chicana spirituality is deeply connected to creative acts such as writing, and she conceptualizes it in opposition to institutionalized religions. She points to Catholicism and Protestantism, for instance, as institutionalized religions that “encourage fear and distrust of life and the body” and facilitate the “split between the body and the spirit and totally ignore the

---


\(^{18}\) Ibid., 12.

\(^{19}\) Anzaldúa, Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza (San Fransisco: Aunt Lute Books, 1987), 25.
In complicated ways, Anzaldúa’s notions of the mestiza consciousness and spiritual activism are grounded in the US-Mexico borderlands, and yet, like much of the Movement period imagery, draw on Aztec mythology to reclaim an often indigenous past.21

Literary critic Theresa Delgadillo defines spiritual mestizaje in Spiritual Mestizaje: Religion, Gender, Race, and Nation in Contemporary Chicana Narrative (2011) as a process in which “the transformative renewal of one’s relationship to the sacred through a radical and sustained multimodal and self-reflexive critique of oppression in all of its manifestations.”22 In Delgadillo’s words, spiritual mestizaje is also a “creative and engaged participation in shaping life that honors the sacred.”23 Delgadillo has argued that Anzaldúa constructs a framework of “spiritual mestizaje” from both personal memories and memories belonging to the larger population of US-Mexico borderlands inhabitants.24 These memories, according to Delgadillo, are what become fleshed, or “embodied,” through the process of writing, where they are “excavated and worked” and “become the substance out of which new communities and spiritualities emerge.”25

Delgadillo’s choice of the word “excavation” to describe the project of fashioning spirituality is intriguing given the connotations the word carries, particularly when it is

20 Anzaldúa, 59.
23 Ibid., 1.
24 Ibid., 22.
25 Ibid.
employed in discussions of ancient indigenous empires. In her discussion, Delgadillo recounts how Anzaldúa was cognizant of the influence that the archeological finding related to Mexico’s ancient indigenous civilizations in the 1970s had on the ways in which people of Mexican descent in Mexico and the United States saw their relationship to indigenous religion and spirituality. Delgadillo writes that Anzaldúa saw figures like Coyolxauhqui as potential symbols from which Chicanas could rewrite an indigenous past, and she asserts that since feminine deities were often ignored, the meaning of the ways in which they represented notions of gender and sexuality overlooked, the revision of their meanings for women of Mexican descent was a necessary task, one that Anzaldúa undertook in her writings. Anzaldúa’s formulation of spiritual mestizaje, then, according to Delgadillo, was an attempt to counter the heteropatriarchal ways in which Chicano nationalists had imagined their indigenous past during the Movement period to, among other aims, “(re)member the Chicana body.”

Since the 1970s and 1980s, Anzaldúa’s writings have inspired Mexican American writers and scholars to similarly task themselves with defining Chicana spirituality. In many cases, their attempts to do so have involved the reclamation and often over simplification of indigenous pasts. In Fleshing the Spirit: Spirituality and Activism in Chicana, Latina, and Indigenous Women’s Lives (2014), for example, editors Irene Lara and Elisa Facio propose the essays in the volume supplement growing scholarship on the role spirituality plays in decolonial feminist projects. For them, Anzaldúa’s work has

---

26 Delgadillo, 24.
27 Ibid., 25.
28 Ibid.
been foundational in theorizing spirituality as integral to lived experience.\textsuperscript{29} Relying on the genre of autoethnography to explore theory, many of the collection contributors draw on their personal experiences to critically reflect on the meanings of spirituality. Lara and Facio describe spirituality as emerging not from a personal sense of dissatisfaction with mainstream religions, but a form of consciousness about the ways in which settler colonialism has contributed to the formation of social and epistemological hierarchies.\textsuperscript{30}

What mestizaje is and how it has affected different bodies has been a contentious subject in Chicana studies recent years.\textsuperscript{31} Lourdes Alberto has made clear that while indigeneity played a key role in the formation of a “counter narrative to the oppressive experience of Mexican American in the United States,” the same counter narrative frequently obscured “uneven legacies of colonization, especially in relation to land and place.”\textsuperscript{32} Aimee Carrillo Rowe has similarly called on critics to “complicate Chicana treatments of indigeneity” to examine the settler colonial dynamics at work in Chicana feminism.\textsuperscript{33} More recently, María Josefina Saldaña-Portillo has proposed that scholars of Latinx studies adopt the promising paradigm “drift” (rather than shift) of Critical Latinx Indigeneities, which seeks to bridge paradigms in Native American studies, African American studies, and Chicanx/Latinx studies in order to resist the erasure of indigenous

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{30} Facio and Lara, 11.
\textsuperscript{32} Alberto, “Nations, Nationalisms, and Indígenas: The ‘Indian’ in the Chicano Revolutionary Imaginary.”
\end{flushleft}
peoples in the Americas. Saldaña-Portillo makes a case for thinking about indigeneity as more than an identity indicated by blood quantum and tribal affiliation, without looking to ancient indigenous cultural formations to define an imagined past. This scholarship is part of a growing wave of research that pushes scholars of Chicana/o/x literary and cultural studies, as well as US Latina/o/x studies, to consider the how intersections of race, class, gender, and sexuality have affected Latinas/os’ access to power in the context of overlapping settler colonial projects.

lara silva’s stories recall indigenous ways of knowing without necessarily laying claim to a mythic pan-indigenous past. Grief circulates within the US-Mexico borderlands and through her stories, restoring an understanding of place that reveal how modern/colonial concepts of property and ownership have disfigured both land and bodies. Grief is a reaction to loss that is configured as a public, communal and ongoing spiritual response. In this way, the grief represented in the text departs from Western forms of grieving, which, like Western forms of spirituality, especially the forms of spirituality that evolved in the twentieth century, emphasize the individual. As Jeremy Carrette and Richard King point out, “Western forms of the self constantly inscribe the language of the private self and private possessions and actively subvert awareness of relational and social identity.”

Both ire’ne lara silva’s short stories “cortando las nubes, or, death came on horses” and “la huesera, or, flesh to bone” use borderlore to highlight the grief that modernity/coloniality generates among people living in the US-Mexico borderlands. The

two stories participate in a tradition of the folkloric difference, where folklore, or more specifically borderlore, deployed as a method of critique, privileges local ways of knowing in order to map a place of belonging for people of Mexican descent. To some extent, the two stories answer Saldaña-Portillo’s call to consider the intersections of indigeneity and Latinidad through fiction without completely transplanting ancient Aztec mythology within the borderlands. Rather than only excavating memories of a geographically distant landscape and temporally distant past, the two stories, I contend, focalize on the consolidated location of the borderlands.

The stories’ expressions of grief behave similarly to the “spiritual ‘reinscription’” that Alberto López Pulido argues is often characteristic of Mexican and Chicana/o acts of pilgrimage. Such acts or pilgrimage (also peregrinación), or movement, according to Pulido, are both physical as well as metaphorical and often represented in Mexican American literature. Focusing on the border crossings represented in literary works like Daniel Venegas’ *Las Aventuras de Don Chipote, o, Cuando los Pericos Mamen* (1928), Ernesto Galarza’s *Barrio Boy* (1971), and María Amparo Escandón Esperanza’s *Box of Saints* (1999), he reads pilgrimage as both movement and narration. “Narratives,” Pulido asserts, “are a way for pilgrims to negotiate familiar as well as new ways of being religious in their community.” Ultimately, for Pulido, the pilgrimage journey is about change, as “[n]o one remains the same” afterwards. In some ways, the characters in *flesh to bones*, participate in acts of pilgrimage as well, only never to fully ‘return’ to any

---

37 Ibid., 77-78.
38 Ibid., 78.
particular destination alive and changed. Even so, expressions of grief facilitate processes of spiritual meaning making among communities on both sides of the border and invite readers to be transformed.

**Mapping Spiritual Community in “cortando las nubes, or, death came on horses”**

Expressions of grief in lara silica’s short story collection emanate from gendered bodies and intimate spaces like working class homes, even closets. In the short story, “hiding-place,” for instance, readers encounter the folkloric figure El Cucuy from the perspective of a child hiding inside of her mother’s closet. In the story, the Cucuy parallels many of the characteristics belonging to the abusive partner of the child narrator’s mother. The Cucuy, a type of boogeyman, has “two black horns shooting out of his head and the antennae as big as his body that whip back and forth,” in addition to “glowing red eyes” and a “shiny shell like a cockroach.” Though the Cucuy first scares the child narrator into almost fear-induced paralysis, by the end of the story, she is motivated to overcome her fear and protect her sister. This story is not connected to any distinct region but is only loosely associated with the Mexican American culture because of Spanish-language signifiers and Mexican American cultural types like the Cucuy character.

The grief that pulsates within “cortando las nubes, or, death came on horses,” on the other hand, extends over a specific regional landscape, marked by waterways. But while “cortando la nubes, or, death came on horses,” operates within a fixed space, the narrative oscillates according to an almost circular temporality. Through a combination of first-person and third-person accounts, the story offers a revised version of the Llorona

---

39 lara silica, 25.
legend, where she searches for her children as they also search for her. The Llorona in this story, or “Mami” as she is called by one of the narrators, “wander[s] all the rivers and all the creeks and all the places her people went, finding and losing her children in all their faces.”

“Her people” are the ones who resembled her son, the “men with hollow eyes who died running from guns, the ones who lost their footing in the river’s rushing.” They are also “women she found curled around their babies in the desert, the women attacked walking home at night from the maquiladoras,” who remind the Llorona character of her daughter. To her children, she sometimes appears like “Death. Grief. Fever. Ache and Struggle,” wielding a machete, other times a shield. Although she is never hailed specifically as La Llorona in the text, the details about her wanderings along various waterways for her children is enough information for Mexican Americans and others familiar with La Llorona lore to identify the character as the legendary weeping woman.

La Llorona has occupied a prominent place in Mexican American literature and culture, existing, in Domino Perez’s words, as “a person, legend, ghost, goddess metaphor, story, and symbol.” In There Was a Woman: La Llorona from Folklore to Popular Culture (2008), Perez offers reading strategies for interpreting expressions of La Llorona, considering, for instance, “the ways in which La Llorona folklore promotes an intercultural dialogue.”

---

40 lara silva, 53.
41 Ibid.
42 Ibid.
43 Ibid., 37
44 Domino Renee Perez, There Was a Woman: La Llorona from Folklore to Popular Culture (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2008), 2.
45 Ibid., 4. Perez catalogues the ways in which Chicanas/os have cultivated cultural items, or “artifacts” that “are illustrative of the wide range of La Llorona representations across genres.
in breadth, because she reads figurations of the legend and symbol across genres and offers an important theorization of reading strategies that can reveal the “intercultural dialogues” the legend facilitates between people of Mexican descent and people of other cultures. Interested in the revisions the folkloric figure has experiences in the past and the shapes she will take in the future, Perez suggests that La Llorona will continue to be deployed in “sites of struggle,” especially as the demographics of the United States continue to shift:

La Llorona’s future has always been in the hands of her cultural and metaphoric children. By continually retelling and reshaping her story to account for new or changing sites of struggle, Chican@s, thus far, have proven that La Llorona is an avatar of social and cultural conflict. Her continued presence in our oral history for almost five hundred years suggests that she and her legend can accommodate dramatic historical and cultural shifts, including the demographic one that is happening now.46

Perez’s summation of La Llorona’s adaptive potential exemplifies the ways in which legends, according to folklore studies, operate more generally. Perez recognizes the narrative of La Llorona as a process rather than a stationary item, a process that has traversed time and space. Following Perez, “cortando las nubes, or, death came on horses” maps an area of conflict through La Llorona’s story that straddles the US-Mexico border.

Though “cortando las nubes, or, death came on horses” might be read as having a more transnational orientation because the content transgresses national boundaries, reading the short story from the lens of the folkloric difference, as an example of a writer’s use of borderlore to critique modernity/coloniality, nevertheless locates the content more specifically within a tighter frame. Throughout the text are references to creeks and rivers located in the US Southwest and in Mexico, many of them running

46 Perez, 13.
through Texas. These references interrupt the narrative, charting the spaces in which La Llorona wanders:

from
the mouth of the river
to the creeks
Medio Creek
Blanco Creek
Coldwater Creek
Brady Creek
Arroyo Guadalupe

As a whole, “cortando las nubes, or, death came on horses” mentions waterflows that extend beyond the US-Mexico border but nevertheless provide a clear geographic setting. From the Colorado to the Nueces to the Pecos, “cortando las nubes, or, death came on horses” maps a space wherein people of Mexican descents’ relationships to land and history are complicated by coloniality. Despite that fact that the contents of the story are seemingly diffusive, as if they have no anchor, the narrators’ repeated references to “the land” tethers the narrative to a distinct region.

Whereas the temporality of the story rotates with almost no consistency, moving back and forth between past and present, the geographic remains constant, only ever changing on the surface as settler colonialisms give rise to global capitalism. The daughter of the La Llorona, who is named “Cempasuchil,” describes these changes, noting how the waterways that once structured ways of life for people in the borderlands were disrupted:

The land keeps changing. Before, we followed the puddles until they became creeks, the creeks until they became rivers. Always, the people lived along the waterways. But then the ground was parcelled out and fences came up. The rivers were contained and leashed, run through the centers of towns and into irrigation ditches leading only to fields and field of strange new crops. All our memories were lost in the changes and their

47 lara silva, 36.
newness. Circles and circles. For a while, at least, we found refuge with the people. But the people have changed. They don’t listen to our steps at the door anymore. They have forgotten how to feed us and speak to us, how to lead us to our sleeping places on the floor.48

This passage, appearing early in the story, retells a condensed history of the region. The “we” refers to the La Llorona and her children, the narrator and her two brothers, Tomás and Iccauhtli. The fragmentation of the landscape mirrors the fragmentation that many bodies described in the text experience, bodies that are not only dislocated from their homelands and their families but also dismembered from acts of violence, which are always tied to capitalism. This sense of brokenness is also reflected through the form of the narrative, which is why, in terms of temporality, the story seems to circle around the borderlands and the colonial encounters that have rendered particular bodies meaningless in modernity and coloniality.

The text equates the loss of “memories” with a loss of meaning that has contributed to the wandering state of La Llorona and her children. Since the waterways that once led them to places where they were fed and spoken to have been “contained and leashed,” the characters, and the memories they carry, are unable to return to the places in which they were acknowledged, perhaps even accepted. Forced to endure endless walking because they no longer are able to take “refuge with the people,” La Llorona and her children seem to exist within a permanent state of grief because there seems to be no place for them along the waterways and among “the people.” Their source of grief extends from the moment “death came on horses” to the contemporary period, as the fictional characters’ stories and movement reflect those belonging to those attempting to cross the US-Mexican border.49 It is a sense of grief that is tied to a perpetual

48 lara silva, 32.
49 Ibid.
experience of placelessness that affects the ability of racialized and gendered bodies to receive empathy and equitable treatment within the logic of modernity and coloniality.

The moment that “death came on horses” is configured through a retelling of an encounter with Spanish colonizers that occurs near the end of the short story but is named as “[t]he beginning.”\textsuperscript{50} The events that took place in “the beginning” are conveyed from a third-person point of view:

A hundred times, a hundred times they came to the door. They came with swords and spears and bayonets and guns and cannons. Death came on horses. Death and disease and poverty. Acts of violence soaked the ground with blood again and again, hunting the people with dark skin and darker eyes and sky wide faces.\textsuperscript{51}

Death is presented in the form of “[b]oneless flesh,” “unfurled, unraveled, unmade flesh,” once again pointing to the fragmentation and unrecognizability that pervades the short story.\textsuperscript{52} The repetition of violence signaled by the number of times “they came to the door,” underscores the how the violence occurring in the colonial period was never isolated and discontinued. Though the descriptions of the people with “dark skin” and “darker eyes” in addition to the temporal and geographic setting imply that the targets of violence are indigenous peoples, the indication that such events have occurred “a hundred times” emphasizes that bodies with similarly phenotype and cultural background have continued to suffer because of the system of meaning established during the colonial encounter. It is a system of meaning that Nelson Maldonado-Torres argues has normalized war-like conditions for people of color in the Americas, a system of meaning that also leads to the devaluation of women’s bodies in “la huesera, or, flesh to bone.”\textsuperscript{53}

\textsuperscript{50} lara silva, 50.
\textsuperscript{51} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{52} Ibid., 52.
\textsuperscript{53} Maldonado-Torres, 255.
In “The Coloniality of Being” (2007), Nelson Maldonado-Torres describes how coloniality has encouraged and allowed conditions of war to become a normal aspect of everyday life for people of color, but particularly black and indigenous peoples. Drawing from the work of the decolonial theorist Franz Fanon, Maldonado-Torres elaborates a concept of the coloniality of Being that recognizes how “being” for black and indigenous coded bodies has historically meant that these bodies are subjected to “[h]ellish existence” on earth. In the words of Maldonado-Torres, the “coloniality of Being primarily refers to the normalization of the extraordinary events that take place in war [his emphasis].” The coloniality of Being is maintained through the logic that was established when “murder and rape,” for instance, became “day to day occurrences and menaces.” Maldonado-Torres explains that the binaries of good/evil and religious/non-religious that structured how Christian colonizers of the sixteenth century thought of humanity gave way to secularized concepts of race that have in many ways continued to justify the treatment of Native and black peoples as “non-beings,” or soulless, making it acceptable for them to live in warlike conditions.

In the US-Mexico borderlands represented through “cortando las nubes, or, death came on horses,” as well as “la huesera, or, flesh to bone,” women coded as mestiza/o or indigenous are those who experience hell on a regular basis. For the weeping woman and her children in “cortando las nubes, or death came on horses,” the regular devaluation of migrant lives in the borderlands is a constant reminder of the colonial encounter during

---

54 Maldonado-Torres, 255.
55 Ibid.
56 Ibid.
57 Ibid.
which such acts of violence were normalized. Lara Silva’s revision of the Llorona legend suggests that grief is an outcome of the trauma which has been constitutive of colonality, one that the characters are doomed to suffer eternally, as their fate continues to be reflected to them in the fates of people attempting to cross the border. The Llorona and her children are never afforded respite from the trauma. Their bodies and memories continue to be rendered incoherent and disfigured, but yet they, like the land, endure.\textsuperscript{59} It is only when the Llorona figure appears to “the people” when they are near death that they “recognized the rage and tenderness in her eyes and called her Mother” that some of grief give way to new meaning.\textsuperscript{60} The new meaning established between the Llorona and “the people” comes from not only witnessing but attending to others’ suffering. This is a mode of spiritual recognition and exchange developed more thoroughly “la huesera, or, flesh to bone.”

\textbf{Grief in “la huesera, or, flesh to bone”}

Since the early nineties, Ciudad Juárez, Mexico, the city located just across the Rio Grande from El Paso, Texas, has become known as one of the most dangerous cities in the world, particularly for women of color. Lifeless, disfigured and often hardly recognizable bodies of women and girls have since been discovered in the deserts surrounding Juárez at alarming rates, the victims mostly being laborers in the border city’s maquiladoras, factories responsible for producing many of consumer goods for sale in the United States. The Juárez femicides have remained a grim trend now roughly three decades after the first bodies were found. Due to their status as poor, racialized, and

\textsuperscript{59} Lara Silva, 33.  
\textsuperscript{60} Ibid., 53.
gendered subjects, as well as their disfigurements, the experiences and identities of these women and girls have been overlooked, and sometimes simultaneously, as Bernadine Hernández explains, callously and horrendously commodified for frivolous consumption in the United States.61 Hernández writes that since the early 1990s, “upwards of one thousand female bodies have been found in various forms and places, such as the desert, alleyways, water sources, and garbage dumps,” while still more women have gone missing and their bodies are yet to be located.62

The concentration of gendered violence on the US-Mexico border in the post-movement era, particularly its manifestations in Juárez, has largely contributed to the incorporation of Mexican nation’s side of the borderlands into the Chicana/o literary imaginary. This occurred despite the fact that, following the publication of Gloria Anzaldúa’s foundational *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (1987), as María Socorro Tabuenca Córdoba asserts, concepts of the US-Mexico borderlands became mostly theoretical and metaphorical.63 While the dislocation of border theory from the actual geographical space of the borderlands occurs regularly, gendered violence on the Mexico side of the border has to some extent relocated Chicana/o literary perspectives to the material realities in that region.

Since the femicides in Juárez have been gaining attention since the 1990s, literary critics have correlated the production of contemporary writings about racialized and gendered bodies that are subject to violence on the border with the degree to which these


62 Ibid., 72.

bodies have remained unidentifiable. Because the identities of women and girls who have been killed are often difficult to determine due to the state in which officials often find their bodies, Chicana/o writers have attempted to (re)member them and bring attention to the structural mechanisms that have produced the nightmarish conditions many of the women in borderlands face through storytelling.

Scholars have argued that many of the victims of the violence in Juárez share similar characteristics. Chicana/o studies scholar Alicia Gaspar de Alba has written that many of the women and girls in the first decade and a half of the femicides were “short, dark-haired, and dark-skinned,” usually between the ages of fifteen and eighteen (2009, np). Literary critic Jeffrey Gray has stated that the women and girls are frequently referred to by Juárez locals as “las inditas del Sur (Indians from the South).” Beyond these vague characteristics that suggest many of the victims may be indigenous and from parts of southern Mexico and Central America, however, the identities of the women and girls often remain unknown. When their identities are recovered, they are sometimes overshadowed by the grim details written into government and media reports about the state in which their bodies were found.

lara silva takes on the topic of the Juárez murders by telling a story by melding the perspectives of a huesera, a woman who gathers bones in the desert and sings them into being, and a victim of the femicides in “la huesera, or, flesh to bone.” In “la huesera, or, flesh to bone,” borderlore functions as a framework through which readers are invited to become part of a spiritual community that that links the suffering of women in Juárez to

the structures with which Mexican American women have long contended. Similar to the ways grief is expressed in “cortando las nubes, or, death came on horses,” grief in “la huesera, or, flesh to bone” works to connect people on both sides of the border by advocating for spiritual community. Unlike the forms of religious and spiritual community conceptualized during the Chicana/o Movement, the one promoted “la huesera, or, flesh to bone” emerges from and operates within the US-Mexico borderlands.

lara sylvia’s story “la huesera, or, flesh to bone” takes place in Juárez following the implementation of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). In 1993, the bodies that brought the world’s attention to Juarez were found within months of George H.W. Bush’s signing of the NAFTA agreement, with Canada and Mexico. NAFTA encouraged flows of goods and capital between the three North American nations and increased the number of factories, or maquiladoras, in Mexican border cities where cheap, gendered labor guaranteed high profits. Jessica Livingston has argued that NAFTA initiated a “gendering of production,” where the “construction of women as ‘cheap labor’ and disposable within the system makes it possible, perhaps even acceptable, to kill them with impunity.”

The consequences of NAFTA have thus been particularly hard on women who must work in order to sustain themselves and their families. While supporters of NAFTA asserted that the agreement would create job opportunities for Mexicans and improve the economy, therefore discouraging immigration to the United States, the conditions created by NAFTA came to resemble a hellish landscape, especially for women and girls who became employed by the maquiladoras.

Within the first decade following the discovery of women’s bodies in the desert in 1993, scholars began examining the correlation between neoliberal globalization and the violence in Juárez. Neoliberal globalization refers to the unregulated capitalist structure that has transformed local economies around the world. Rosemary Hennessy traces the history of the maquiladora industry in Mexico to the 1960s, when US companies sought to increase profits by moving their production sites to Mexico in *Fires on the Border: The Passionate Politics of Labor Organizing on the Mexican Frontera* (2013). Hennessy writes that this economic strategy was part of a larger global phenomenon in which companies sought to avoid demands made by labor organizations and take advantage of economies that were not strictly regulated by the state.\(^{67}\) When NAFTA opened up opportunities for companies to expand their presence in Mexico, according to Hennessey, “capital investors from the United States, Canada, Europe, and Asia built factories that assembled everything from wheelchairs and underwear to automotive parts, TVs, small electronic, and gift bags.”\(^{68}\) The work conditions created by these investments made life worse for many of the people who became employed at the maquiladoras, especially for women and girls whose protections have been of little concern to investors.

**The Spiritual Function of Borderlore**

Silva’s story “la huesera, or, flesh to bone” recounts with graphic detail the kind of violence women and girls working in the maquiladoras have experienced at the hands of their killers. Like other stories in the collection flesh to bone, it maps a geography wherein characters are subjected to violence. Silva’s story demonstrates how the

---

\(^{67}\) Hennessy, 6.

\(^{68}\) Ibid., 13.
entanglement of flesh and bone, place and time, generate experiences that require
spiritual unification. lara silva’s story advocates a reckoning with the past that will allow
us to move beyond it.

The short story begins with a description of the huesera’s actions from the first-
person point of view. The first-person singular narration mentions a “her” who at first
remains nameless, like the narrator, and is the passive recipient of the narrator’s actions.
In the first five lines of the story, the narrator describes almost a horror scene, as the first
few sentences of the story reads:

My tongue runs along the stretch of her tendons. I hold her foot delicately
in my hand. Feel the spasming bunch of read muscle in my mouth. Her
bones clinking against my teeth. This is the way it must be.

The narrator then goes on to describe how she attempts to reconnect the splintered pieces
of a woman or girl’s body. “And with hands larger than my hands,” the narrator states, “I
twist her frame, thrusting the bone into the hollows, anxious to embrace them.”
The huesera’s actions evince that, despite the state of the body, there is a purpose to the work
in which she is engaged, a purpose underscored by the geographical context that
communicates why the body is in pieces.

The details in the first few paragraphs locate the story in the still and empty desert
of the US-Mexico borderlands, though it does not become clear that the story is set in
Juárez until later in the story. The narrator references the isolated space of the desert,
where there are “no stars” and “no sounds,” only the “coyotes howl and the whirlwinds
whisper despair.” But howling coyotes and whispering whirlwinds contradict what is
supposed to be the lonely setting of the desert. Even that cacti shudder, “extending their

69 lara silva, 127.
70 Ibid.
71 Ibid., 129.
spines,” as if they hear the “sound of flesh being torn. Bones breaking and speaking.” The environment in “la huesera, or, flesh to bone” appears to respond to the violence that transpired, portraying the desert as a place where even elements and the flora and fauna recognize the suffering that the body experienced.

While she attempts to gather the pieces of the body together, the huesera goes on to describe the voices she hears in the wind, remarking that she had been told she could not mend the “shattered bones” or remake the “crushed pelvises”:

They also said the screams were long gone. That spilled blood couldn’t speak. But I can hear them. I hear them all the time. So many names: Maria, Elena, Veronica, Rosa, Cecilia, Sarita, Isabel. So many women, each name has a hundred different faces. I hear all their voices. They keep me from sleeping. They paint my dreams in the wrong colors.

The huesera’s assertion that she can hear voices that keep her from sleeping suggests that the voices, the “hundred different faces” are what prompt her to reconstruct the bodies. But while the huesera hears these women’s voices, she does not relate what they say. Instead, the voice of a teenager named Maite Hernandez Ayala interrupts the first-person narrative of the huesera and begins to communicate her own story in the form of a testimonio.

The voice of Maite is signaled by italics in the short story. Unlike the short, fragmented sentences that the huesera utters, Maite delivers her story in a cohesive manner. From the beginning of her testimonio, she asserts her agency by identifying herself and her sister, who traveled to Juárez in order to find work:

My name is Maite Hernandez Ayala. I was sixteen years old when I came here to work. I brought my sister Raquel with me. She was fifteen. People said we looked like twins. Both of us with long, black hair, slightly tilted eyes, too light to be morenas, too dark to be blancas.

\[\text{\textit{72 Lara Silva, 129.}}\]
\[\text{\textit{73 Ibid.}}\]
The Ayala sisters’ “too light” but “too dark” complexions and “slightly tilted eyes” mark them as bodies implicated in the colonizing project that has shaped the Americas. The story suggests Maite and Raquel are mestizas, or exhibit signs of mestizaje, showing how, in the words of Rafael Perez-Torres, “the body is tied to a colonial history of racial hierarchy whose power relations already constrain and guide the body.”

Continuing with a description of Maite and Raquel’s bodies, the short story underscores the ways gender, like race, determines how bodies are constrained by hierarchies of power. “People said we were pretty, that we looked like dolls,” Maite states, “La suerte de la fea, la bonita lo desea, my mother would say, and tell is that looks weren’t as important as working hard, being honest, or having faith.” Even though the mother’s dicho, or proverb, “the pretty one desires the ugly one’s luck,” seems to imply that Maite and Raquel were destined to have bad luck because of their appearance, the mother’s emphasis on “working hard, being honest” and “having faith” which she imparts upon her daughters complicates the future that the dicho foreshadows. Further in short story, we find out that the mother lived these principles of working hard and having faith. She was a partera (midwife) and sobadora (healer) who delivered many of Maite and Raquel’s peers, and “massaged out all kinds of pain and aches, stretching and twisting limbs and torsos.” During the years she spent lending her healing services to the local community, she never required payment, only donations. Maite describes her mother as an extremely pious woman:

Amá prayed all the time. Before she got out of bed, as she was making the tortillas, before we ate, while she was washing dishes, while she fed the animals and weeded the garden. Each meal, each time she sat down, lay

---

75 laura silva, 128.
76 Ibid., 129.
down, got up. The constant low murmuring of her prayers eased me into sleep, made me feel safe, followed me everywhere I went.77

Yet despite Maite’s mother’s piety, she falls ill. Her illness is what prompts Maite and Raquel to move away from what the text implies is their rural home to an aunt’s house that is located an urbanized area. In some ways, the mother’s illness questions the values of “working hard, being honest,” as well as keeping faith, because, for a person who did her best to live out these ideals, she was rewarded poorly. The mother dies in poverty, separated from her daughters, who become one of the many victims of the Juárez femicides. In her testimonio, Maite suggests that the circumstances in which she and her sister find themselves in after working late and attempting to journey home separately one night questions the purpose of having faith when living is already a hellish experience.

When their mother first falls ill, Maite and her sister are forced to move in with relatives because they do not have enough finances to maintain their household and take care of their sick mother, which underscores the precariousness of their position. The text intimates that the Ayala family enjoyed a relatively stable lifestyle from the donations their mother collected and their ranch before their mother becomes ill. Their mother’s illness forces them to sell their animals and land because even the help they receive from the townspeople who benefitted from the mother’s skills is not enough to sustain them. First, they all move in with a cousin, where there is hardly enough room for Maite and Raquel to sleep on the floor.78 The two sisters then move “up North” with their aunt, Tía Dorinda, and away from their mother to another small house where the sisters still had to sleep on the floor.

77 lara silva, 128.
78 Ibid., 129.
Tía Dorinda’s location “up North” and the reference to the presence of “red-faced tourists” reinforces the significance of the setting by reminding readers that Maite and Raquel are working in the Juárez maquiladoras. Cuidad Juárez is located in Chihuahua, Mexico, just across the border from El Paso, Texas. They wake up every day at 5:00 a.m. to eat “cold tortillas and coffee without milk” before going to work two jobs. In the morning, the sisters work at a factory “twisting the colored wire inside televisions,” and in the evening they work at a restaurant. They send most of the little money they earn to their mother and give what’s left to their Tía Dorinda. Maite states in the testimonio that she and Raquel would sometimes keep just enough for themselves to venture to the Mercado on Sunday afternoons to “buy taquitos and coke, and watch red-faced tourists, look at all the things people were selling.”

In her testimonio, Maite recalls how she was killed the night she found out her mother passed away, and the horror of the ordeal once again calls into question the point of maintaining “faith” when it does not seem to offer any relief from violence. Maite recalls how she got in a fight with Raquel about not seeing their mother before she died one night after working at the restaurant:

“You don’t even care that she’s dead,” Raquel screamed at me. “She died all alone because you said we needed to come here to work.” “We would have starved, Raquel, and Amá would have died sooner without the money we sent her. Died and we would have had to sell ourselves to bury her.” “Liar,” she yelled, “You’re a liar, Maite.” I was so tired. And my eyes hurt from trying not to cry. I turned and walked away from her.

The scene that Maite recalls attempts to represent the difficult choices that women and girls who grow up in the rural areas of Mexico make when global capitalism forces them

---

79 Ibid., 130.
80 Ibid., 131.
81 lara silva, 133.
to sell their labor. The grief she and her sister share in regard to their mother’s death and their decision to leave her drives the girls away from each other. Following this exchange, Maite and Raquel part, and Maite finds herself alone in the dark. She says she was “so tired, [she] didn’t see them.” By them, she means the men who abduct her and beat her severely. It is following the moment in which she walks away from her sister that the men gag Maite and take her to a “dark place” before they murder her. “I died screaming,” she says in the testimonio. “They cut out my tongue and still I kept screaming. They cut my throat and then the screaming ended.” While it is never clear what happened to Raquel, the text hints that she suffered a similar fate.

Given the brutality and despair in “la huesera, or, flesh to bone,” spirituality almost seems insignificant. The lasting power of Maite’s screams is only made audible by the huesera’s actions, her attempts to summon Maite’s spirit. In between the italicized narration of Maite’s experience, the huesera continues to recollect the pieces of the dead and “pull out the rewoven skeins of their fragile spirits.” We read that she too was a victim of violence, for she recounts her own transformation from limbs “hanging loosely” and “long hair matted with blood” to a “four-legged” and “long-tailed” desert legend. The huesera turns out to be a wandering contradiction, a figure both real and imagined. She is Maite but she is not, because by the end of the story, the huesera says she continues to call out to the spirit:

Come back, come back. Maite, Maite, Maite, I whispered, calling the spirit back. I knelt, and turned her ragged face up to mine. Held my cheek

---

82 Ibid.
83 Ibid., 135.
84 Ibid.
85 Ibid., 130.
86 Ibid., 133.
close to her lips, her nose, and felt no breath. Breathe, please breath. Calling myself back. Flesh to bone to blood to spirit to power.\textsuperscript{87}

The huesera’s grief is what motivates her to bring together Maite’s flesh and bones, to locate them and Maite’s spirit in the desert.

Lara Silva’s story “la huesera, or, flesh to bone” presents readers with a version of the huesera legend that grapples with the grief produced by the Juárez murders. While the story itself does not offer an explicit critique of the mechanisms that have generated the ongoing gendered violence in the border city, it makes use of folklore and testimonio to illustrate the healing potential of grief. The grief in “la huesera, or, flesh to bone” not only develops from women’s suffering within the context of neoliberal globalization and the Juárez murders that have taken place since the 1990s, but also plays a key role in reassembling the many parts—material and spiritual—belonging to Maite Hernandez Ayala, the young woman to whom the “hidden” spirit in the story belongs. The act of calling the spirit back to the body that the huesera practices in the story is a restorative practice, one that not only aims to create meaning from suffering, but meaningful structural change.

Lara Silva appears conscious of the transformative potential of folklore, or borderlore, because of the explicit remarks she makes about the “old stories” in her collection in her acknowledgments. When Lara Silva acknowledges the individuals and institutions that helped make the publication of her book a reality, she chooses the acknowledge the “old stories/myths.” She states, “I don’t believe that we are done with the old myths yet—or that they are done with us.”\textsuperscript{88} In this statement, Silva suggests that folklore, or the “old stories/myths,” still have the capacity to alter human behavior, that

\textsuperscript{87} Lara Silva, 136.
\textsuperscript{88} Lara Silva, np.
is, who we think we are and how we interpret the world around us. Rather than declaring folklore has somehow faded from the Mexican American imaginary, she underscores its enduring significance as method that allows writers to explore how spirituality informs everyday life.

Silva’s acknowledgement reminds me of a conversation she and I had at one of her creative writing workshops in the fall of 2018, where I asked her about the role folklore plays in her work. Taking a few seconds to think about my question before she answered, silva remarked that folklore offers a kind of “flexibility that realism does not.” Instead of being bound to the supposedly universal logic of literary realism, in other words, borderlore relies on the logic of the local, those ways of knowing and being that are often tied to place. Lara silva restores meaning to bodies that are otherwise dehumanized by late capitalism by reemphasizing the transformative potential that shared grief can have for those who have experienced violence and those who may yet change the structures that prioritizes property over people.
CHAPTER FIVE

The Santa Fe Fiesta and the Limits of the Folkloric Difference

In chapter one, I argued that Nuevomexicana/o Cleofas Jaramillo’s application of folklore functioned as a critique of modernity/coloniality. Understood through the lens of the folkloric difference, Jaramillo’s autoethnography *Romance of a Little Village Girl* (1955) demonstrates the capacity of folklore to reveal its own modern/colonial origins, and, at the same time, facilitate alternative forms of meaning making that rely on and expose local histories. Though the Nuevomexicana/o sense of community and belonging that Jaramillo helped construct was not without contradictions, her use of folklore nevertheless provided Nuevomexicanas opportunities to redefine their sense of community in relationship to not only Anglo America, but also New Mexico’s heteropatriarchal past. By engaging folklore, Nuevomexicanas were able to reformulate a sense of local belonging.

Yet the effects of the folkloric difference, as it was applied in by Jaramillo and other Mexican Americans, has had lasting, pernicious effects on the social and political landscape of New Mexico, where, for all the power of critique that folklore holds, the modern/colonial structures that continue to frame Mexican Americans as foreigners, the continuing exclusion of ethnic studies from public school curriculum, and investments in preserving a perception of nation that prioritize whiteness and privatization and personal accumulation continue to dominate popular discourse and overshadow other ways of being. The mode of critique that could be understood as an expression of the folkloric difference has all but disappeared.

My final chapter offers a meditation on the limits of the folkloric difference through a discussion of the role that the Santa Fe Fiesta has played in the construction of
a distinct “Hispano” identity that celebrates coloniality. Through connected to the activities of a generation of Nuevomexicanas/os who experienced the “folklorization” of local Mexican American knowledge in the latter part of the nineteenth century and the early decades of the twentieth, the contemporary practice of the Santa Fe Fiesta Court visits to the Santa Fe public schools, I argue, has discontinued the capacity of folklore to act as a method of critique. The discontinuation is most evident in the ways today’s Nuevomexicanas/os, or Hispanas/os, have become resistant to recounting histories that expose grief and violence.

This chapter explores how contemporary Santa Fe Fiesta has elided the grief and violence that has structured New Mexico by focusing on the Fiesta Court’s representation of New Mexico’s Spanish colonial past in the public schools. I argue that the narrative of reconquest that the Santa Fe Fiesta seeks to preserve is made visible during the Fiesta Court visits in a way that promotes the logic of coloniality among students and encourages them, almost in a religious fashion, to adopt a Spanish identity. I contend the pageantry of the Santa Fe Fiesta reveals the limits of the folkloric difference. That is, the Santa Fe Fiesta demonstrates that Mexican Americans’ uses of folklore to respond to global coloniality can lose its critical capacity, replicating structures of domination that have rendered their own histories and communal sense of belonging inconsequential when there is outright refusal to acknowledge the “darker” side of modernity.

Every September, Hispano residents of Santa Fe, New Mexico partake in a week-long religious celebration that foregrounds the region’s Spanish colonial past. The

---

1 I use the regional term “Hispana/o” to describe a population of people who, if asked to describe their identity, might also use terms like “Spanish,” “Spanish American,” or “Hispanic.”

community festival, variously known as the Fiesta de Santa Fe and the Santa Fe Fiesta, showcases local Hispano heritage and history through pageantry and performance. The festival recognizes the Spanish reconquest of Santa Fe in 1692, which occurred twelve years after the Pueblo Revolt. The Pueblo Revolt was a rebellion of Pueblo peoples against Spanish/Mexicans who had colonized the land they considered the northern province of the Spanish empire, which the Spanish called Nuevo México. The Pueblo Revolt forced the Spanish to flee Santa Fe and take refuge in El Paso del Norte for twelve years, until the colonizers, led by general Don Diego de Vargas, reconquered the city of Santa Fe.

Underlying the Santa Fe Fiesta is a story about how the Marian icon La Conquistadora interceded in the Spanish reconquest of Santa Fe on behalf of the colonizers, enabling them to reclaim the city from its original Pueblo inhabitants peacefully. In recent years, the narrative of peaceful reconquest forwarded through public performances and religious processions has incited public outcry, especially in light of ongoing debates about the symbolic value of monuments and historical markers that commemorate (dare I say celebrate?) the subjugation and enslavement of human beings.\(^3\) One of the most contentious debates to erupt about the Santa Fe Fiesta has centered on the relationship the Santa Fe Fiesta has with the city’s public schools.

For decades, public schools have been sites where students are exposed to the Santa Fe Fiesta and encouraged to participate in its activities. During the week of the Fiesta, members of the Fiesta Court, a group of people dressed as seventeenth-century friars and conquistadors, as well as an annually elected Fiesta Queen and Don Diego de

---

\(^3\) Monuments honoring the Confederacy sparked numerous protests across the country in 2017. Most recently, for example, students at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill brought down a statue known as “Silent Sam.”
Vargas, visit students in grades K-12 to communicate the meaning behind the celebration. In the past, the visits have involved the naming of a “Little Don Diego” and “Little La Reina” from the student audience. Pressure to alter the Santa Fe Fiesta’s relationship with the public schools intensified in the wake of a decision made to end the public performance of the Entrada, a dramatic interpretation of Don Diego de Vargas’ re-entry into the city, with members of the community articulating concerns about the place of religion in public spaces and the way in which the Santa Fe Fiesta tends to obscure the consequences Pueblo people have endured as a result of the Spanish reconquest. While some critics of the Fiesta Court school visits have described the Santa Fe Fiesta as a celebration of genocide, supporters of the school visits maintain that the visits are merely expressions of cultural pride.

On August 7, 2018, the Santa Fe School Board held a meeting during which they voted on measures to change the way Fiesta Court visits are conducted. Following increasing criticism from indigenous activists, district parents, and students about the ways the Santa Fe Fiesta promotes and represents Hispano heritage to students in the public schools, a Council on Diversity & Equity made recommendations to alter the practice. The council was appointed by the current superintendent, Veronica C. García, to evaluate the Fiesta Court visits “in an effort to be respectful to all students as the Santa Fe community continues to move toward reconciliation and peace.” In addition to limiting

---

4 Native people from nearby Pueblos are often recruited to take part in the Fiesta Court. For a description of the roles reserved for Pueblo people, see Sara Horton, *The Santa Fe Fiesta, Reinvented: Staking Ethno-Nationalist Claims to a Disappearing Homeland* (Santa Fe: School for Advanced Research Press, 2010), specifically pages 163–64 and 171–73.

5 Veronica García, “Fiesta Council Recommendation Letter.” Santa Fe Public Schools, August 20, 2018. drive.google.com/file/d/1Pd20HOv-Da97To2tyxuWuG6uo_KBTk0-/view.
the public school visits to the grades four, seven, and nine (the grades in which students are required to take course on New Mexico history), the Council on Diversity & Equity recommended the discontinuation of selecting children from each school to portray the roles of a Little La Reina and Little Don Diego de Vargas and making certain teachers provide a “comprehensive and balanced view on the state’s history from multiple perspectives.” During the school board meeting, members of various organizations responsible for the production of the Santa Fe Fiesta, including former members of the Fiesta Court as well as other locals, voiced to the board their approval and concerns about the proposed changes. Responses were brief but generally reaffirmed that the meaning, purpose, and effects of the Santa Fe Fiesta are highly controversial subjects, especially as they coalesce around issues of ownership and identity, religion and belonging.

The folkloric difference allows us to read Nuevomexicana/o participation in the early-twentieth-century Santa Fe Fiesta as an effort to achieve some degree of self-determination, though often at the expense of those who do not meet the racialized, classed, and gendered standards that encompass ‘Spanishness’ in Santa Fe. My analysis, which focuses the historical development of the Santa Fe Fiesta and the statements made by community members during the school board meeting, examines how Hispano identity is not only represented by the Fiesta Court in the public schools, but also how these representations obscure the effects coloniality on the social and cultural landscape of Santa Fe.

Although the current activities of the Santa Fe Fiesta are largely organized and promoted by the city’s Hispano residents, the earliest versions of the Fiesta pageants and performances were considerably different. Scholars have traced the origins of the

---

6 Ibid.
contemporary Santa Fe Fiesta to the booster activities of Anglo Americans in early twentieth century New Mexico. Originally organized by the Museum of New Mexico’s staff of archaeologists and anthropologists, the early iterations of the Santa Fe Fiesta featured a pageant, for instance, that depicted a linear evolution of life in New Mexico by framing Native Americans and Hispanics as primitive populations who would ultimately benefit from the civilizing promise of Manifest Destiny. Such efforts to showcase cultural evolution and difference capitalized on what were still then emergent discourses of folklore, which were often used by Anglo American writers and ethnologists to represent the lifeways of people of Mexican descent and other racialized populations. The same discourses became a means by which Mexican Americans would also interpret and frame their own regional cultural practices, very often strategically, by the first few decades of the twentieth century.

When it comes to the contemporary Santa Fe Fiesta, however, the ‘difference’ that Hispanics had once been keen on defining so as to represent an alternate mode of belonging in New Mexico has dropped out—the religious festival no longer functions as a mode of critique. Even so, recognizing the folkloric difference that inspired the contemporary formation of the Santa Fe Fiesta helps us unpack what José Aranda calls the “history of excess,” which pervades spaces “territorialized, cultured, racialized, and gendered once by Spain and then by an independent Mexico” and has shaped the

---

8 Horton, 39-43.
existence of people of Mexican descent exist as agents and victims of coloniality. What we find in the Santa Fe Fiesta, particularly through its representation of Hispano history in the public schools, is an amplification of coloniality that allows us to explore how these “excesses,” to quote Aranda, “are recorded and preserved, but also very often in contest and conflict with its own formation.” Put another way, the Santa Fe Fiesta demonstrates that while Hispanos’ method of applying the folkloric difference was effective for spotlighting the long-standing presence of Hispanic people in the US Southwest, it has also allowed them to furnish an identity that has become similar to what Travis Franks terms “settler nativism,” but one closely connected to the religious dimensions of coloniality. The variant of Catholicism adopted by Hispanos and perpetuated through the Santa Fe Fiesta emerged as a result of their physical and social displacement at the turn of the nineteenth century has become a tool by which they assert not only their belonging, but also their ownership. By insisting their reclamation of Santa Fe was peaceful and refusing to acknowledge how their own physical and social displacements are entangled with the historical and ongoing dispossession and displacement of others, Hispanos have cultivated in their own place-based identity that is grounded in coloniality.

11 Travis Franks, “‘We Are Considered Undesirable Foreigners’ in ‘This Our Texas’: Mexican American Settler Nativism in *Caballero*.” *MELUS* 43, no. 3 (2018): 88-89.
12 For a recent study that focuses on the shift in Mexican American ideas of ownership from land ownership to cultural ownership, see Karen Roybal’s *Archives of Dispossession: Recovering the Testimonios of Mexican American Herederos, 1848–1960* (2017).
The Santa Fe Fiesta has been the focus of several book-length studies published since the 1970s, however, none have attempted to analyze the how the Fiesta Court’s visits to the public schools operate within the larger context of the festival despite the role of the visits in constructing and safeguarding the local Hispano community’s social memories and claims of belonging. *Symbol and Conquest: Public Ritual and Drama in Santa Fe* (1976) by religious and ritual studies scholar Ronald L. Grimes is likely the earliest critical examination published about the Santa Fe Fiesta. Grimes focuses on the symbolic meaning of the Catholic rituals that take place during the Santa Fe Fiesta and the public performance of the Entrada that formerly took place in the city’s downtown plaza. Grimes published his study during the Chicano movement, which, interestingly, figures into his analysis by way of a discussion about the symbolic similarities and differences between the figure of Don Diego de Vargas and Reies Lopez Tijerina, the leader of the northern New Mexico movement to reclaim Spanish land-grants for the Mexican American community.13 Cultural landscape scholar Chris Wilson offers an architectural analysis of the Santa Fe Fiesta in *The Myth of Santa Fe: Creating a Modern Regional Tradition* (1997), where he traces the origins of the contemporary Santa Fe Fiesta to early twentieth century Anglo boosterism and engages a critical regionalist approach to read how city structures reflect shifting power dynamics and the effects of these dynamic on the social demographics of Santa Fe in the 1990s. Wilson proposes that the people of the city create alternate modes of belonging in Santa Fe by redesigning Santa Fe’s built environment to produce “more socially constructive” myths.14 Sarah

14 Horton, 314-329.
Bronwen Horton’s *The Santa Fe Fiesta, Reinvented: Staking Ethno-nationalist Claims to a Disappearing Homeland* (2010) is a more recent ethnographic study of the Santa Fe Fiesta and Hispano identity. Horton’s analysis centers on efforts made by local Hispanos and various Santa Fe Fiesta organizations to transform the celebration to during the early twentieth to reclaim the city of Santa Fe from Anglo Americans.\(^{15}\) Horton uses the methods of Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (1983) to read the contemporary Santa Fe Fiesta as an “invented tradition,” noting that her examination of the festival is not an attempt to completely deconstruct it but rather to shed light on the reasons why Hispanos redesigned the celebration to counter their dispossession.\(^{16}\)

**The Santa Fe Fiesta Court’s School Visits**

During the Santa Fe Fiesta, the meaning of Spanish identity is performed by the Fiesta Court during various events, but no event is probably so foundational for the preservation of the tradition than the Fiesta Court’s visits to the public schools, with the most prominent figures being the Fiesta Court are Don Diego de Vargas and the Reina de la Fiesta, or the Fiesta Queen.

For public school visits, the individuals who portray the parts of Don Diego and the Fiesta Queen often recite local lore about the Spanish reconquest of Santa Fe for students, forwarding the narrative that the reconquest was peaceful and referencing, implicitly or explicitly, the role of La Conquistadora in the Spanish re-entry. The narrative the Fiesta Court forwards usually resembles the story published on the official Santa Fe Fiesta Council website. On their website, the Fiesta Council asserts that

\(^{15}\) Horton, 2-3.  
the “cry of ‘Viva la Fiesta’ has been reverberating throughout the streets of Old Santa Fe every autumn for 306 years. The sound generates a curious blend of thanksgiving, revelry and pride in the hearts of Santa Feans who celebrate the Fiesta annually to commemorate Don Diego De Vargas’ peaceful reoccupation of the City of Holy Faith in 1692.”

The website also goes on to explain how, upon returning to Santa Fe in the following year, the “anxious colonist placed La Conquistadora on a make-shift altar and implored her to intercede for the successful re-entry into the town.” Some members of the Fiesta Court relate the story orally as they introduce participants who take on the roles of Don Diego, the Fiesta Queen, and other key players, but often the visuality created by the Fiesta Court’s costumes is enough to communicate the modern/colonial foundations of the celebration.

The costumes worn by the Fiesta Court accentuate the Fiesta Court’s narrative by visually representing the colonizers as forceful and benevolent figures, imposing yet humble. Don Diego and his cuadrilla (sixteen fellow officers) wear colorful shirts and gold-embroidered capes. They hardly ever appearing without their instantly recognizable Spanish colonial helmets and belts, usually complimented by swords or axes. Less prominent but still an integral part of the Fiesta Court are the men who act as friars and don religious robes and rosaries. The Fiesta Queen and her group of princesas usually have an assortment of dresses for the various functions associated with the Santa Fe Fiesta. These are ankle-length and often white. For hair decorations, they wear Spanish-style combs with lace mantillas or polished silver crowns inlaid with turquoise. Pueblo

---

people who choose to participate in the Santa Fe Fiesta by becoming part of the Fiesta Court wear attire befitting of their Pueblo, visibly differentiating them from the other members of the Fiesta Court, who, in contrast, wear romanticized versions of Spanish colonial clothing. Though these accouterments may seem intensely superficial and therefore inconsequential, they operate within a system of complex symbols that not only map Santa Fe as a space with a Spanish colonial history, but also represent an order that is based on the logic of coloniality, where the meaning of one’s identity is profoundly impacted by hierarchies of race, gender, sexuality, class, as well as religion.

The relationship between the Spanish colonial reconquest narrative and the criteria by which individuals are selected to play the roles of the Fiesta Queen and Don Diego further demonstrate how such hierarchies figure into the pageantry of the Santa Fe Fiesta. The Fiesta Council selects who will take on the roles of Don Diego and the Fiesta Queen, for example, and they generally make their decisions based on how well the contestants meet the Fiesta Council’s requirements. The Fiesta Council stipulates, for example, that Don Diego must be “of Spanish descent and have a Spanish surname,” be between twenty-one and fifty years old, must have been born in New Mexico, and, among other criteria, “be willing to be judged on...Spanish and English speech and knowledge of the history of the Santa Fe Fiesta.”19 Similarly, the Fiesta Queen must also be of Spanish descent and born in New Mexico. A key difference between the requirements for the two roles involves age and marital status. While the individual chosen to be Don Diego de Vargas may be up to fifty years in age and married, the

19 Fiesta de Santa Fé, “Candidate Requirements: Don Diego de Vargas/La Reina de la Fiesta de Santa Fe,” accessed October 04, 2018. www.santafe fiesta.org/don-diego-de-vargas-la-reina-de-la-fi esta-de-santa-fe/.
woman chosen to portray the Fiesta Queen must be between twenty-one and thirty-five and “NEVER have been married” [the Fiesta Council’s emphasis]. In addition, the rules stipulate that candidate should not have any children, “nor shall she become pregnant throughout her entire reign as La Reina de la Fiesta de Santa Fe.” The Fiesta Council’s requirements reveal how the roles of the Fiesta Court reinforce a gendered “Spanish” identity that values women’s virginity and adheres to a culture of honor that is rooted in Spanish colonialism.

When the elected figures of Don Diego and the Fiesta Queen visit public school audiences along with their Fiesta Court, their oral and visual representation of the meaning behind the Santa Fe Fiesta is usually proceeded and followed by a musical performance of the official “Santa Fé Fiesta Song” by a mariachi group that accompanies the Fiesta Court from school to school. The song is one of the Santa Fe Fiesta’s most recognizable features. Originally written with verses in the English language, the song was translated into Spanish by Johnny Valdes in 1943. The lyrics deliver a happy description of the yearly festival without referencing the reconquest or La Conquistadora. Instead, the song lyrics and upbeat tune concentrate on the secular social festivities that constitute the Fiesta:

Santa Fe, tus fiestas de Septiembre Se celebran en la capital
Con Zozobra quemando las penas Ya las fiestas van a comenzar
Tus mujeres llenas de alegría Pregonando van su nuevo amor
A la luz de grandes luminarias
Van cantando con placer esta canción
Si Señor, cómo no, vamonos al vacilón
A bailar y gozar de esta linda población

20 “Candidate requirements.”
21 Ibid.
Before the recent school board vote to limit the Fiesta Court visits to the schools, the song is an audible component of the Santa Fe Fiesta that reverberates from the walls enclosing the school gymnasiums where the Fiesta Court typically delivered a sanitized account of Santa Fe’s colonial past. The “Santa Fé Fiesta Song” usually rouses students to their feet before the Fiesta Court leaves the school vicinity but obscures the annual event’s relationship to coloniality, specifically as it is informed by the figure of La Conquistadora, the Marian icon who, according to Santa Fe lore, inspired Don Diego de Vargas’ peaceful reconquest.

The Making of the Folkloric Difference

The centrality of La Conquistadora in the contemporary Santa Fe Fiesta is an outcome of Hispanos’ efforts to reclaim the Fiesta from Anglo Americans during the 1920s and 1930s. Originally, the Santa Fe Fiesta emerged as a result of Anglo American efforts to encourage tourism and more Anglo Americans to take up residence in New Mexico, because they promoted the region as a respite from the anxieties and disillusionment of industrial development.22 Public performances that took place during the Santa Fe Fiesta during this period reinforced the notion that New Mexico was a haven from if not antithetical to the idea of civilization.

The 1919 Santa Fe Fiesta, for example, featured a “De Vargas procession” sponsored by the Museum of New Mexico, as well as Native dances and a parade honoring Stephen Kearny, the general who invaded New Mexico during the US-Mexico War (1846-1848).23 A newspaper article from the Albuquerque Journal titled “Ancient

22 Horton, 39-43.
23 Ibid., 40-41.

Ibid.

Ibid.
Protestantism. In discussing the effect this project had on the language politics of New Mexico, Erlinda Gonzalez-Berry writes that the “public schools were seen as the ‘first Americanization agent’.”

The years following the “revival” of the Santa Fe Fiesta by the Museum of New Mexico saw changes in the production of the celebration, though not necessarily improvements in how Hispanos were represented.

Undergirding their approach was an assumption about authenticity—that there was an authentic Hispano culture and the artists were capable of locating it. Although the artists billed their revision as a way of returning “the Fiesta to the gente, ” they essentially shifted the celebration’s focus on what often amounted to stereotypical representations of Native Americans to a similarly idealized Hispano folk culture. To this end, Anglo Americans continued to promote Santa Fe as the “antithesis of the nation’s industrial core” by highlighting, according to Horton, the “quaint, Hispano villager.”

The year 1935 marked a turning point for Santa Fe Fiesta because it was the year that four Hispano initiated group responded to Anglo American social and economic domination of Santa Fe by redefining the Fiesta. These organizations were the Sociedad Folklórica, the Caballeros de Vargas, the Fiesta Council, and the Confraternity of La Conquistadora. While the Sociedad Folklórica’s activities have never focused exclusively on the Santa Fe Fiesta, the other three fraternal societies have taken and continue to make the organization of the Fiesta as their primary objective. Through these organizations Hispanos often collaborated with Anglo Americans while also articulating their own

---


28 Horton, 42.
sense of the folkloric difference by refiguring the rituals, religious symbolism, and
narrative of the Santa Fe Fiesta.

A key figure in producing the folkloric difference was the Hispano writer Fray
Angélico Chávez. Chávez restablished the Confraternity of La Conquistadora with Pedro
Ribera-Ortega, a Santa Fe historian. According to Horton, the Chávez’s motivation to
write Our Lady of Conquest (1948) and La Conquistadora: The Autobiography of an
Ancient Statue (1954) came from his desire to inspire local devotion to the Marian icon.
Chávez was dedicated to recruiting devotees to La Conquistadora even though she was
not officially recognized by the Catholic Church until 1954.29 Chávez even made it a
point to increase local recognition of La Conquistadora by organizing a De Vargas Mass
in her honor and transporting an “double” of the statue around the state to heighten her
visibility among Catholic Hispanos. Chavez reportedly “chaperoned her [La
Conquistadora’s double] as she traveled from Taos down to Júarez, Mexico, the site to
which colonists had retreated during the Pueblo Revolt.”30 In this way, the visits acted as
a method of conversion. Chávez introduced the statue and her story to communities that
may not have otherwise heard the story of Santa Fe’s peaceful reconquest. The travels of
the statue became so symbolic of La Conquistadora and Hispano identity that the original
statue made a trip to Spain in 1993. In this way, Chávez was central to Hispanos’ re-
appropriation of the Santa Fe Fiesta, mapping a “distinctly Hispano space” over which
Hispanos could assert their ownership.31

While Chávez’s Our Lady of Conquest shows the ‘difference’ that had motivated
the redefinition of the Santa Fe Fiesta in the form of folkloric difference, the text also

29 Grimes qtd. in Horton, 80.
30 Horton, 81.
31 Ibid.
shows how that difference began to fade over time. *Our Lady of Conquest*, after all, is a book complicated by what excess of modernity/coloniality, which Aranda describes. In his introduction, Chávez states the religious devotion to the statue deserved attention “not only because it parallels and perhaps exceeds three full Southwestern history, touching on important names and events at different periods, but also because, largely independent of official Church or state acts, it was a popular movement which brought the scattered Hispanic colonists of the Southwest together.”

Significantly, in the backdrop of the history of the Spanish reconquest of Santa Fe he hoped to recuperate, was yet another reconquest: the Spanish Reconquista of the Iberian Peninsula, a violent project that ultimately facilitated the economic and political conditions for the colonization of the land that is now known as the “Americas.” In the shadow of modernity/coloniality, or excess, in which Chávez wrote and promoted the notion that La Conquistadora enabled the peaceful reconquest of Santa Fe, there is a history of violence that is at once regionally situated and yet tied to a global enterprise that relied on the dislocation and ordering of peoples, places, and ideas. In each of these histories, ownership has often been the factor that determines who belongs and who does not belong in a given community.

---

Sustaining Coloniality

Given that the meaning of the Santa Fe Fiesta was re-appropriated during the early twentieth century in a way that shows how the folkloric difference became a tool by which Hispanics recognized how structures of power were malleable but often employed to keep people in their place, so to speak, it is not surprising that years of ritualizing it would make it lose some of its power of critique. Whereas the context and changes facilitated by Chavez and others show the Fiesta was a critical response to folk discourses, the visibility of the same discourses in our contemporary moment have faded from view. Proponents of the Fiesta Court’s public school visits argue that the meaning of the Santa Fe Fiesta is not meant to be divisive, and, like the 1919 celebration, suggest that the Fiesta is meant to signal an era of peace that was ushered in by the Spanish. While many Santa Fe Hispanics cite the opportunity to represent their culture and history in the schools as one of the Fiesta’s most important accomplishments aside from honoring la Conquistadora, these school visits, quite understandably, have been contested by many of the city’s residents. Santa Fe resident and activist Elena Ortiz of Okhay Owingeh Pueblo, one of the most vocal Pueblo people who has protested against the reenactment of the Entrada and the Fiesta Court’s public school visits, for example, has said she “resented” the Fiesta when she was a child and had to take her daughter out of school for the visits.33 Only last September did the current superintendent of the Santa Fe Public Schools, Veronica Garcia, issue a statement that makes clear students have a choice in attending these gatherings. Garcia, forced to respond to protests by parents about the fiesta court visits, underscored the need to follow through with a district

resolution originally passed in 2015, which makes clear that Native and non-Christian students are able to opt out of the event.

During the meeting school board meeting in which board members voted on recommendations made by the Superintendent Veronica García’s Council on Diversity & Equity about the future of the Fiesta Court’s visits to the district’s public schools, residents voiced their opposition to the proposal. The following day, the *Santa Fe New Mexican* reported that approximately seventy-five members of the community showed up to the meeting and more than thirty people had addressed the board directly about their concerns regarding the pending recommendations, with the vast majority opposing any changes. The ages, occupations, and backgrounds of speakers varied. However, the majority of the opponents to the recommendations were middle-aged Hispanos who were somehow connected to the Santa Fe Fiesta, serving in at least one of several key organizations responsible for the promotion of the festival, including the Fiesta Council, the Caballeros de Vargas, or the Fiesta Court.

I happened to be visiting my family in Santa Fe at the time, so I decided to attend. I thought I might have something to contribute to the meeting, but the atmosphere of the school board made it difficult to speak about the Fiesta Court visits in a nuanced way. My awareness of the public school visits has come from my own experience in the district, where I was somehow always aware that, although a New Mexican with family roots in the northern parts of the state, I was different from my Santa Fe counterparts.

I was born in Santa Fe, New Mexico, but the families of my mother and father have roots in the small towns and villages further north and east of the capital city. My

---

mother and father were living in Rio Arriba County when they met and moved to Santa Fe to find employment before I was born. Like many people of Mexican descent living in rural and semi-rural areas where their families have dwelled for generations, my parents decided to leave a place where they had felt at home in order to achieve greater economic security and obtain better access to education for their child. In Santa Fe, my parents attempted to raise a Catholic daughter who understood her relationship to New Mexico history and culture as a Chicana and though a northern New Mexican, still Mexican. It was in the space of the Santa Fe Public Schools and not from home that I became attuned to the different meanings of the words Chicana/o, Mexican, Hispana/o, and Spanish as well as their power to communicate to others in Santa Fe whether one belonged in Santa Fe or not. And I learned quite quickly from my earliest exposure to the Santa Fe Fiesta that to name myself as Mexican in Santa Fe was almost equivalent to admitting that I was somehow deficient or undesirable.

During the meeting, critics of the recommendations repeatedly called attention to the community-bonding qualities of the Santa Fe Fiesta. Orlando Baca, a former high school principal and life-long resident of Santa Fe, for example, said the Fiesta Court visits to the schools “are a lesson in community, something bigger than their families, something bigger than their schools.”35 Another resident and former Don Diego de Vargas, Ronald S. Trujillo, recalled, for example, that while he never gave a “history lesson to the children,” he did invite them to attend festivities taking place on the Santa Fe plaza and encouraged “them to participate and give back to their community.”36 “I recall, in 1994, going to all the schools in Santa Fe and seeing the kids’ and teachers’

35 Nott, “School Board Votes.”
faces light up when I, along with La Reina, cuadrilla and the royal court would show up. It meant Fiestas was upon us. It meant mariachi music, dancing, and caramel apples on the plaza.”37 For Trujillo, the school visits were primarily about expressing pride in the unique history and culture of Santa Fe.

Other former members of the Fiesta Court and long-time Santa Fe residents maintain, however, that the primary purpose of the school visits to keep the promise Don Diego de Vargas made to honor La Conquistadora every year for allowing the peaceful reconquest of Santa Fe. Jennifer Richardson Garcia de Romero, local resident and graduate of the school district, referenced how her grandmother’s saying, “Sin no pasado, no hay futuro; without our past, we have no future,” shaped her attitude toward the Santa Fe Fiesta early on. Citing her “traditions, Catholic upbringing,” Garcia de Romero says she was inspired to serve as the 2005 Fiesta Queen and “ambassador” of the city. She said she took on the role of Fiesta Queen “remembering the reason, the purpose, the mission of the Fiesta.”38 Garcia de Romero asked the board to reconsider voting for the changes and implored them to learn about the Santa Fe Fiesta, that is, “why we come together as a community.”39 “It is in peace,” she insisted,

I can’t answer for history. I can’t change history or our past, of the transgressions of our ancestors, but I do know there was a moment in peace, where reconciliation was had. We came together with our Native American brothers and sisters in that moment of peace to recognize and honor our lady, La Conquistadora.40

Other speakers made similar comments about the meaning of the Santa Fe Fiesta. Tomás Baca Gutierrez, the President of the Caballeros de Vargas, 2014 Don Diego de Vargas,

37 Ibid.
38 Ibid.
39 Ibid.
40 Ibid.
and Santa Fe Fiesta Council member, asserted that “most importantly, is that we respect each other and each other’s interpretation of history.” Linking himself to “ancestors” who were “both Spanish and Native American,” he too cited the popular story of La Conquistadora, stating he believes “sincerely that Don Diego de Vargas came to New Mexico peacefully on that day he re-entered Santa Fe in 1692.” And while he acknowledged that relationships between the Spanish and Pueblo people would “break down shortly after” in 1693, when De Vargas returned to Santa Fe with families from El Paso del Norte, as the Pueblo people had “changed their minds.” The battle that ensued, Gutierrez argued, catalyzed an era of peace and an “intermingling of races.” Speaking directly to the school board and the superintendent, he stated:

I would ask you all to reconsider what you are doing and allow the meaning of Fiesta to go forth as it has for over 305 years, 306 years. One thing you cannot erase is what is in our blood, what is in our hearts, and in our minds. We have come to coexist, worshipping the same God and cultivating this wonderful earth we call New Mexico.

Gutierrez attributes the meaning of the Santa Fe Fiesta to the peace and reconciliation between the Spanish and the Pueblo people to Don Diego de Vargas and his devotion to La Conquistadora. However, in comparison to Garcia de Romero, the celebration’s religious underpinnings are more implicit.

The statements made in support of the Fiesta Court visits exhibit how Hispanics cite the 1692 “peaceful” reconquest of Santa Fe as proof of their divinely sanctioned ownership of the land upon which the city is built. The rituals of the Fiesta Court visits re-signify through performance the power relationships that resulted from the region’s

---

41 “SFPS Board Meeting.”
42 Ibid.
43 Ibid.
44 Ibid.
local manifestation of coloniality and continue to inform notions of belonging among Hispanics. While the statue of La Conquistadora does not accompany the Fiesta Court when its members make their appearance at the public schools, the narrative of reconquest the Fiesta Court delivers to children and adolescents nevertheless evinces the Fiesta’s colonial foundations that have aided in the building and maintenance of structures which privilege Euro-centric ways of knowing and being over others. Although many Hispanics believe the Fiesta Court’s visits to the public schools bring overdue attention to the role their ancestors played in the development of the New Mexico, their emphasis on peace obscures the multiple displacements and ongoing forms of global violence that were not only initiated by the colonization of the land that became the Americas, but also continue to impact communities at the local level.

What the actors never communicate to students of the Santa Fe Public Schools, for example, is that during the long-term re-entry of the Spanish colonizers, some seventy families, the Pueblos continued to revolt. Joe Sando states that these revolts were not successful in driving the Spanish away because the Pueblos did not unite as they had in 1680.45 One especially devastating fight between the Spanish and Jemez Pueblo, Sando claims, took place in 1694, when the Spanish, in company with Keresan allies, attacked the Jemez people. Together, the Spanish and the Keresans captured three hundred and sixty-one women and children and killed eighty-four people of Jemez.46

What is exposed in the various public performances by the fiesta court, particularly in their visits to the public schools, are the very differences that constitute the Santa Fe public and the manner in which local Hispanics have used coloniality to reassert

46 Sando, 62.
their power in Santa Fe. However, the diversity of the schools, as well as the other key players who participate in the Fiesta, signal how colonality utilizes yet obscures the results of ongoing displacements to sustain itself. Despite the Fiesta Council’s insistence that participants in the Fiesta Court be of “Spanish” descent, which, in this context, means descendant of the original colonizers, musicians that accompany the Fiesta Court have been not necessarily been Hispanos but of some other Latin American origin. Even the most popular contemporary rendition of the official Fiesta song was recorded by Mariachi Tenampa, a group initiated by Miguel Ojeda. Ojeda moved to Santa Fe from Mexico, along with several family members who became part of the mariachi group. Even this small detail reveals that the aural and oral components of the Santa Fe Fiesta have been aided by the presence of other people of Mexican descent and the increasingly diverse Latin American population that continues to make their home in Santa Fe and other parts of New Mexico. Although younger and older generations of Hispanos seek to differentiate themselves from immigrant populations and Latinas/os who have only recently established themselves in New Mexico, they rely on their labor and the linguistic knowledge to continue many local “traditions.” Rather than only seeing their own displacement from Santa Fe as an outcome of Anglo American neocolonialism, Hispanos would do well to recognize how their displacement is but one of many that are distinct but linked in their relationship to the ongoing consequences of modernity/coloniality.

What became evident at the school board meeting is that the public school performances are the primary means by which the members of the Fiesta attract future

members. These performances are highly ritualized and take place every year. They encompass a multitude of symbols and codes by which many children then use to make sense of the world around them. And because these codes are primarily religious in nature, they situate the Hispanos as the “rightful” or divinely sanctioned owners of Santa Fe. Like the images of Santiago, or St. James, who Hispanos regularly portray on their retablos and in the other “traditional” artifacts that descend from a distinct colonial/religious relationship with the region, the Fiesta recalls and attempts to re-center a specific kind of ethno-religious way of interacting with the world and it only maintains its power through violence. At the same time, the Fiesta’s visits to the public schools create a contact zone where the coloniality’s continuing displacement of peoples from their homelands is apparent yet hidden. The Fiesta de Santa Fe’s presence in the public schools modifies the space in ways that reveal and obscure how coloniality sustains itself. Though the modern Fiesta was originally a response to Anglo American dominance, it has become so concentrated on resurrecting an alternative colonial past that it has almost replicated and maintained the very order its early twentieth century arbiters sought to resist. Rather than claiming ownership of Santa Fe through the public display and performance of the reconquest, residents of Santa Fe might benefit from rethinking their relationship to Santa Fe as a tradition of learning to belong.

48 I use “contact zone” here keeping in mind Mary Louise Pratt discussion of the contact zone as a space where multiple people might have different stakes in the meaning of the literatures, art forms, performances, etc., that are circulated within a community. See Mary Louise Pratt, “Arts of the Contact Zone,” Profession (1991): 33-40. http://www.jstor.org/stable/25595469
I would like to conclude by sharing scholar Alfonso Ortiz’s insight about the terms of belonging that the Pueblo peoples of New Mexico set for colonial Spanish invaders following the Pueblo Revolt of 1680:

The humbling lesson the Spaniards learned from the Pueblo Revolt, although they might not have realized it immediately, was that they could not remain absolutely “Spanish” if they were to learn to live in peace in the great valley of the Rio Grande and in the province of New Mexico. That is to say, they had to give up their arrogance toward nature and toward indigenous life forms and cultures, and they had to give up their absolute intolerance toward religious beliefs and practices other than their variant of Roman Catholicism.49

Ortiz frames the Pueblo Revolt as a rebellion motivated by religious conflict—a conflict that did not end but was mitigated because the Spaniards learned they could not exercise their power over the Pueblos to the extent they had before the Revolt. For Ortiz, Spanish “arrogance” was embedded in Spanish colonizers’ assumptions about religion and race. Learning to “belong” following the reconquest in of New Mexico in 1692 required Spaniards to “overcome their attitude of fear and contempt toward indigenous institutions and beliefs.”50 Ortiz seems to suggest that if being “Spanish” meant that Spaniards would not allow behaviors and beliefs they perceived as heretical to survive, the Revolt taught the colonizers that their ideas about themselves and the order they upheld would have to change, or they would face unrelenting Pueblo rebellion. By drawing attention to the manner in which the Pueblo Revolt rattled the colonial status quo for years to come, Ortiz underscores how Spaniards not only altered but were altered by Pueblo people and lifeways.

50 Ortiz, 113.
Ortiz’s words shed light on more than just the pueblo perspective of the Pueblo Revolt. Ortiz allows us to think about how “variants” of any religion adjust to their local contexts, sometimes by inflicting violence or absorbing the violence that is the outcome of other another group’s retaliation. Ortiz also suggests there is a need for those in power to “learn to belong,” where learning to belong means learning to belong to a place without seeking ownership of a place or the ideas that give meaning to a place.\(^5\) While the Santa Fe Fiesta shows that there are limits to the folkloric difference, Ortiz’s words should remind us that there are opportunities for approaching belonging as a decolonial process, one that could involve redefining the meaning of folklore in local contexts. Perhaps the grief attached to these moments of conflict and expressed through the school board meaning will create opportunities to reformulate local ways of belonging in the future.

\(^5\) This concept of learning to belong without seeking ownership is inspired by Priscilla Solis Ybarra’s work on decolonial environmentalisms. See Priscilla Solis Ybarra, *Writing the Goodlife: Mexican American Literature and the Environment* (Tucson: University of Arizona, 2016).
BIBLIOGRAPHY


Ainslie, *Los Pochos, La Prensa* [San Antonio, TX], April 15, 1934-June 3, 1934. Readex: America’s Historical Newspapers.

-----.*Los Pochos*. Translated by Taller Americano de Traducción. edited by José F. Aranda, Lorena Gauthereau, and Elena Valdez. Work-in-progress. Rice University, Houston.


Cooper, Brittany C. *Beyond Respectability: The Intellectual Thought of Race Women*. 


Franks, Travis. “‘We Are Considered Undesirable Foreigners’ in ‘This Our Texas’: Mexican American Settler Nativism in Caballero.” MELUS 43, no. 3 (2018): 86-102.


González-Martin, Rachel. “A Latinx Folklorist’s Love Letter to American Folkloristics:


Lazo, Rodrigo. The Latino Nineteenth Century


Lucero, Aurora. “Should the Spanish Language be Taught in the Public Schools of New Mexico?” In *El Crepusculo*, 1911, New Mexico Highlands University, Las Vegas, NM.


Newell, Gillian E. “Teresa Urrea, Santa de Cabora and Early Chicana? The Politics of


“Program of the Twenty-Fourth Annual Fiestacita: Texas Folk-Lore Society in Joint Session with the Hispanic Institute of New Mexico,” 15-16 April 1938, MSS 540 BC, Box 1, New Mexico Folklore Society Records, University of New Mexico Center for Southwest Research, Albuquerque, NM.


-----., And María Theresa Márquez, eds. Women’s Tales from the New Mexico WPA: L...


University of Arizona Southwest Center “About Southwest Center.” https://www.southwestfolklife.org/borderlore/.


