Articulations of Responsible Freedom:
Black, Latinx and Chicanx Life and Interiority Beyond Statist Redemption

A Dissertation

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF THE

UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA

BY

Mario Alberto Obando Ureña

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS

FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

ADVISER: BIANET CASTELLANOS

June 2018

Mario Alberto Obando Ureña

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am full of so much gratitude for the time, energy and support I have received from my committee members through my graduate studies. Each of you have taught me in your own unique way how to be critical, generous and appreciative of the experiences one goes through in academia and in life. Truly, I am blessed to have met each of you and I am so honored for the wonderful feedback and countless generous conversations that have shaped my thinking, writing and activism. To my adviser Dr. Bianet Castellanos, thank you for your support in all the projects throughout graduate school. Your brilliance and generosity always made me feel that I could complete my studies and without question, extremely welcome in the Twin Cities. Your relentless support of my work I hope to duplicate in my own work with students.

To Dr. Edén Torres, Dr. Jimmy Patiño, and Dr. Elliott Powell, thank you for teaching me rigor and generosity. Your guidance, reassuring words and thoughtful critiques throughout the process of my preliminary exams and final defense showed me that rigor and generosity can go hand in hand! Thank you for listening to my projects and helping me feel confident in my writing, thinking and teaching.

I am so blessed to have had the support of Dr. Noro Andriamanalina. Your office was always a safe haven for me and your relentless support of students of color especially in making us feel welcome at the UMN allowed me in so many ways to finish this project! Thank you to you, the Diversity of Views and Experiences Fellowship and of course the Community of Scholars Program cohort. Tia, Chris, Beatriz, David and the rest of the cohort thank you for your support and friendship! A huge thank you to the Interdisciplinary Center for the Study of Global Change; the fellowship, both financially and in terms of community, was vital in my pursuit of this degree.

I would also like to thank the Department of American Studies, African-American Studies and Chicana/o Studies in their support of my studies and teaching. Dr. Roderick Ferguson, Dr. Kevin Murphy, and Dr. Yuichiro Onishi thank you for inspiring me in your coursework and mentorship! I am also honored to have worked at the Center for Writing and having met Dr. Katie Levin. Your generous conversations and thoughtful solidarity and support I will always carry with me! Thank you to Dr. Kirsten Jamsen, Zack, Andi, Rose, Jennifer and all the wonderful folks who shared the writing center space with me. You made working and studying enjoyable and collegial.

So much of this dissertation is informed by the beautiful experience of teaching Chicana/o Studies my third year at the University of Minnesota. I dedicated that year to doing justice to the scholarship, activism, and teaching of Jesus Estrada-Pérez. With his spirit present, I had the wonderful opportunity and privilege of working with his students. Thank you Brenda, Briana, Jocelyn, Taylor, Brenda C., Brenda L, Melissa, Marco, José, Jessica, Wendy, Genaan, Alfred, Katherine, Mohammed, Teresa, JaLisa, Kaitlin, Steven, Grace, Abigale, Qing, Kashesha, and Elizabeth. Your willingness to build community as students and imagine better worlds fueled my passion for teaching!

I am so grateful to have had a supportive community of friends in the Twin Cities who opened their hearts and homes to me: Joanna, Irina, Naimah, Ana, Rahsaan, David, Chaun, Aaron, Daniel, Darlene, Karla, Kent, Moriko, Sasha, Marco, Vanessa, and Miguel. In California, thank you to Andrés and Frank for your wonderful friendship.

To my dearest friend Terrell Webb, thank you for always coming over, and blessing me with your laugh and your brilliance! Thank you for embracing me as a friend and brother and making the Twin Cities my home away from home. Anu and Moriko, thank you for always brightening up my day! Our time watching basketball, talking about everything, especially Prince, will always be the fondest memories of my time in the Twin Cities.

I could not have conceived of this project's ethics, politics and scope without Soham Patel and Danny Topete. Soham, our friendship means so much to me! Your brilliance, kindness and passion for imagining better worlds and doing our best to survive graduate school always kept me grounded after long days. This project is the product of so much of our conversations over shisha. I also thank your beautiful family that has been so kind to me when we returned home. Amy, Smit, Binisha, Parth, Tulsi, Pops and Ma, thank you for being so kind to me in this journey! I hope that one-day Noopur reads this dissertation and can feel the love shared throughout these years.

To Danny, thank you so much for opening your warm apartment and heart to me! You are one of the main forces that made this dissertation possible. Your kindness and gentle spirit regardless of the volatility and toxicity around us inspired me to keep going and know that what I was feeling was valid and indeed, important to voice. To Reina, thank you so much for always making me feel worthy of my time in academia. ("You're good!") Your relentless support and kindness throughout these years energized me to keep being true to myself! Thank you for letting me share in the joy of your family and see Diego grow.

To Letty, thank you for spending weekend nights studying and working with me. Our study nights took us all over the San Gabriel Valley. I could not have written this without you, whether it was at La Monarca, Lift, Mantra or our favorite, Café X2O. Thank you for listening to my ideas in progress and reassuring me that this would be finished. I hope I can reciprocate your kindness and generosity in the years to come. Our conversations always strengthened my commitment to social justice, womxn of color feminism and mental health! Thank you. X2O!!

My community of friends and colleagues once back in Southern California were instrumental in keeping me grounded in the work. I would very much like to thank the Department of Chicana/o Studies at California State University, Fullerton for the wonderful support and mentorship throughout my first years of employment there. To Dr. Patricia Pérez, Dr. Erualdo González, Dr. Alejandro Gradilla, Dr. Gabriela Cázares and Dr. Ana Nez thank you for your supportive and kind words in the rigorous task of writing and teaching at the same time. To Dr. Dom Magwili and Dr. Edward Robinson, thank you blessing me with your humor, wisdom and brilliance as educators in the Ethnic Studies Complex and ensuring me that I could do it!

I would like to thank the Mellon Mays Undergraduate Fellowship community which has supported me since 2011. Thank you Dr. José Ortega for asking me the pivotal life changing question—"have you ever thought of becoming a professor?"—and following up with so much time and support throughout these years. A special thank you is due to Dr. Sylvia Vetrone-Lopez, Dr. Shannon Stanton and Dr. José Orozco! Your kind words of assurance were vital in difficult moments throughout my studies. Thank you to my MMUF cohort—Nick Dante, Marina Najera, Amber Orozco, Juan Pablo Bustos, Natalie Smythe—for helping me with feedback, laughter and motivation all these years. To the entire History Department at Whittier College—Dr. Robert Marks, Dr. Elizabeth Sage, and Dr. Natale Zappia—thank you for allowing me to grow as an intellectual. Thank you Dr. Laura McEnaney for pushing me to always take my writing seriously through countless office hours spent understanding the significance of finding my voice. To my fellow Costa Rican, Dr. Ivannia Soto, thank you for supporting me in my research and in my community work with Whittier and El Rancho High School students. Your work inspires me to always think critically of my pedagogy.

To Dr. Ana Rosas and Dr. Abigail Rosas, thank you so much for your friendship and collegiality! Your commitment to me as a scholar and a person has taught me to never question my place in this field and your motivating words have allowed me to finish this dissertation.

A mi familia en Costa Rica, muchas gracias por todos sus mensajes durante mis estudios! Yo los llevo conmigo en todas estas aventuras. Estoy muy orgulloso de ser parte de una familia que siempre me tiene un chiste y un abrazo listo cuando regreso a mi querida Costa Rica. ¡Pura vida! ¡Los quero mucho! Un abrazote a Tio Alvaro, Tia Marilyn, Yoselyn, Tio Carlo, Tia Olga, Carlo Andre, Monserrath, Santiago, Sofia, Valeria, Tio Domingo, Tia Maruja, Marcia, Luciano, Diana, Nandy Carolina, Olman, Álvaro José, Nicolás, Yohel, Tessy, Tia Sandra, Fio, Franco, y Melany. Un abrazote a mi primo Orlando, gracias por siempre mandarme saludos y energia positiva. Un abrazote a toda mi familia Ureña en Palmichal y mi querida familia Vargas en Tabarcia. Aunque este lejos, nunca me olvido de donde vengo. Su humildad y cariño siempre lo tengo presente.

Yo debo mi vida a mi madre Milena Ureña. Su amor incondicional es lo que me motiva todo los dias. Su esfuerzo laboral y de madre es un ejemplo de como vivir una vida con fortaleza y ganas. Tengo toda la confianza en Dios que sus oraciones mi ayudaron estudiar con claridad y intencion positiva. ¡Usted es mi mundo! Gracias por dar me vida y ensenarme como vivir! La amo!

Tambien debo muchas gracias a mi padre, Mario. Gracias por el tiempo que dedicaste a trabajar y apoyarme. Que este logro sea una forma de ofrecerle gracias por sus luchas en los EEUU. Lo quero mucho. Un fuerte abrazo a toda la familia Obando.

To my brother Manuel, thank you for helping me become the person I am today. Your guidance, care and love is unquestionably the driving force in my success! Thank you for teaching me how to be disciplined and thoughtful in my work and reminding me to enjoy

the world around me. To my beautiful “little big sister” Monica, thank you for always gracing me with your wonderful laugh and positive energy when I would return from Minnesota. Also, thank you for bringing my wonderful niece Jazmiine Aaliyah into this world. Jazii, I hope the words in this dissertation reflect the care that your parents have had for me. To George and Rose, thank you for your kind texts and positive words throughout the years!

To my sister Mili, you have always been so supportive of my endeavors! Thank you for always facilitating our travels, and listening to my concerns. Also, thank you for bringing such a beautiful life into this world, my nephew Román. My mán, words cannot describe how much happiness and purpose you have brought into my life! I wrote this dissertation in your first years of life and your laughter, first steps, first words and curiosity about the world has only motivated me more and more every day to write a dissertation that you can connect with one day! I love you both so much!

To my sister Janelle, thank you for always having my back throughout the years. Your phone calls and text messages have always been so nurturing of my potential. Thank you for believing in me.

Mi pasión por ser maestro nacio con mi gran abuelo Alvaro Ureña. Yo se que estas sonriendo desde el cielo mi querido abuelo. Su curiosidad por la politica, educación y el mundo entero es su legado. Gracias por apoyarme en mis estudios con sus llamadas y bendiciones. Descanse en paz mi querido viejo. A mi gran abuela Elena gracias por ensenarme tanto cariño durante tan poco tiempo juntos. Cada palabra que escribe aqui te la dedico a su vida y memoria. Los quero muchisimo y espero verlos cuando este forma de vivir se acabe y les pueda dar un abrazote! Gracias por todo su amor.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this writing to my family, especially my nephew Román and niece Jazmiine as well as the next sobrino/a who will join us in July. My love for you knows no bounds. I also dedicate this to the memory of mi abuelo, Alvaro Ureña, gracias por siempre ser un gran ejemplo en mis estudios y mi abuela Maria Elena Vargas Guerrero, gracias por darme un amor eterno. Tambien a mi gran madre, sin vos, no hay luz y esperanza. Gracias por su ejemplo de guerrera.

ABSTRACT

Articulations of Responsible Freedom writes into existence the very alternative stories and their articulations that challenge the seemingly never-ending perpetuation that racialized injury and suffering can only be addressed by the state, or as a perpetual conflict and possible reconciliation with abuse. Of course, this perpetuation is part of the way the state reproduces itself as the ethical mechanism for the regulation of life in the late capitalist era. While systemic, the turn to the state for the very abuse it causes positions us in an infinite return to abuse itself. This dissertation is thus concerned with this very conundrum: why do we turn to the system of abuse for addressing the abuse it causes? Is this not an irresponsible way for thinking about ending abuse? What articulations of responsible freedom emerge when we read cultural texts beyond statist modes of recognition?

My aim is to further Hortense Spiller's articulation of responsible freedom as it pertains to the inner life of racialized peoples. Specifically, the project hinges on exploring the wild and reckless thoughts too as the goal is not necessarily a kind of utopian thought but is instead venturing into even the "occupation" of our inner thoughts; this is significant as the project explores the very ways power manifests itself as internal to racialized life which in being vital to identify ways to further decolonize the occupation of our minds, it is also instrumental in identifying the way we regulate ourselves in the instrumentation of power. Having said that, in endeavoring to articulate responsible freedom, the dissertation looks for inwardness in its sovereign wildness which also means not necessarily trying to build a proper, and authentic reiteration of black, Chicanx and Latinx identity but instead, consider the many nuanced and complex

terrains of the interior world of racialized life within discourses of redemption and resistance. At times, we may find resistance and solidarity and in other times this dissertation also finds, as Spillers cautions, avenues towards places that are not necessarily idyllic. What we do with such revelations of the interior is of concern here and will be discussed but I am more concerned with the journey of traveling inward and away from the expectation of resistance for racialized life than a journey inward solely to find an authentic confrontational spirit. That work is important, vital and done much better by scholars such as Facio, Lara and Anzaldúa for instance. This project's goal is to take an experimental leap beyond the expectation of resistance within the inward and interior of racialized folks through critical readings of the work of artists, the narrative of film characters and literary protagonists, the archival projects of students, and the oral history of loved ones.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES

Introduction

Big Little Lies

In the 2017 HBO drama limited series *Big Little Lies,* Nicole Kidman's character Celeste Wright confronts her husband's verbally, mentally and physically abusive behavior by seeking out and participating in couples' therapy. After having attended multiple sessions with her husband, she attends a session alone with Dr. Amanda Reisman, brilliantly played by Robin Weigert. While Celeste maintains that she would like her marriage to work and that perhaps her husband may change, Dr. Reisman already understands the patterns of behavior of someone who is suffering from ongoing physical, mental and verbal abuse. She informs Celeste that it is time to start developing an escape plan, and that she needs to look for an apartment where inevitably she can run to the next time her husband harms her. As a viewer, your heart sinks towards the bottom of your feet every time you realize that Celeste, regardless of the things she keeps telling herself about her husband, knows quite well that indeed there *will be a next time.* Even worst, she fears that the next time her husband snaps her children will be at risk of being hurt and that the very next time may indeed be the last time, as her own death seems imminent.

In watching this show, specifically Celeste's story arc, I found myself constantly practicing José Esteban Muñoz's theory of disidentifications and replacing the character's whiteness and class privilege with the haunted memories of the many trappings of my adolescence; full of feeling, hurting and crying to the screams and the silences of spousal abuse in a working-class immigrant Latinx home. Even though the show's characters live in an affluent beachside and predominantly white California paradise, Kidman's

performance triggered something else for me. Her sense of entrapment and enclosure in this violent and quotidian confrontation with death itself was all too familiar. In that scene in the therapy session when Dr. Reisman tells her to rent an apartment, fill it with food and have toys ready for her children to play with, something that all too often happens in abusive relationships is represented quite painfully yet accurately by the show…she comes back to her husband. The reason she attended the aforementioned session alone was because her husband was away on business. Thus, after hearing Dr. Reisman's advice, an air of tension remains as to what Celeste will do—will she leave him before he returns? At the end of the episode, we get an answer as Celeste takes her and her two boys to the airport. It is a scene of possibility as it is clear there are signs that read "departure" and "arrival". In the framing of the visual, you see that Celeste and her children may be heading towards the "departure" sign. You ask yourself "is it possible that she is taking Dr. Reisman's advice? Is she really escaping?" Then, the camera pans slightly to the left, away from the departure sign and puts into focus the sign that reads arrival. It is then that you realize the family is not departing but is actually waiting for the husband's arrival. The desire towards departure, towards escape is shattered by the reality that he emerges from beneath the sign that reads "arrival."

Cult of Resilience

Growing up, I felt something that I had not been able to articulate in words until therapy sessions like the one between Celeste and Dr. Reisman. In my adolescence, there was this insatiable feeling of wanting to runaway from those screams and the often unbearable silence that accompanies the aftermath of abuse. Then there was the guilt, the victim blaming, the apology, the reconciliation, the temporary stays at friends' houses,

and what seemed to be a never-ending cycle of pain, hurt and injury, of return and the confused bittersweet turmoil of this sustained tension. There were the tios and tias who would encourage you to be tough as well as the concerned ones who listened but were nervous about intervening in family business. There were the departures too. I recall crying when my sister left the house after my grandmother had had enough of the tension she was growing up in and then, I remember the sadness that would become part of the interior shared between my brother and I, the ones left behind.

The worst of it all was the cult of resilience. In my lifetime, the cult of resilience was institutionalized in the Seventh Day Adventist Church. These were the spaces that institutionalized patriarchy and justified the maintenance of abusive relationships through their reading of the sanctity of marriage. The head of the household, so divinely ordained by God himself, was the husband. They would send the wives to spiritual retreats while the men stayed at home, roughing up the kids and fucking their mistresses. These retreats served as places where women were told to stick it out, resist, confront their husbands, pray, pray, pray, go to church and keep the Lord first. Pray and be preyed on. Never were escape plans at the forefront of the discourse. The cult of resilience professed and encouraged resistance and confrontation as methods of having the husband recognize the pain of their abuse in order to reform and reconcile the pain and injury they caused; thereby, keeping the mandate of God alive, the nuclear family intact, and presumably the resolution of abuse through reform.

Considering *Big Little Lies*, I wonder what my childhood would have looked like if my mother had had the economic resources of Celeste to generate an escape plan such as the one suggested by her therapist instead of being surrounded by and influenced by

the cult of resilience? What would life have been like if instead of being told to be resilient and resistant and to reform so as to be recognized as valuable by her abuser, she were surrounded by discourses of refusal and fugitivity? What if she were surrounded by discourses that said "listen to your interior that tells you something is deeply wrong and runaway!" What if she were told to not succumb to the external discourses and practices that aim to keep vulnerable people in direct conflict and confrontation with their abusers? What would the pain and injury of racialized and sexualized violence look like if we confronted it with articulations of responsible freedom and not oppositional politics that relay on the possibility of the redemption of abuse and reconciliation with abusers and the persistent blind spot of its lens—the quotidian possibility of death.

Intimate Roots of Study

My disidentificatory reading of *Big Little Lies* marks the intimate roots of my main concerns in this dissertation. The questions that I ask throughout this dissertation are meant to elucidate larger questions about the nature of inwardness and freedom in regard to the larger and oftentimes more influential form of power—the state. In its contemporary formation, the state is always already redeemable and its ongoing existence as an ethical project is maintained by the project of resistance. In a move away from resistance taking the lead in a study of racialized life in the U.S., this dissertation offers intimacy and vulnerability to demarcate how we need to scale the truths of our inwardness to the realm of geopolitical power. More specifically, what would happen if we scaled these intimacies to understand questions of power and race in the U.S.?

Here is what I mean: first, let's disidentify or replace the figure of Celeste with a broad conceptualization of minoritized and devalued social life historically in the U.S.

The rape, pillaging and theft of indigenous peoples and land, the theft, enslavement and commodification of people of African descent, and the colonization, exclusion, and exploitation of Mexican, Latinx and Asian immigrant communities are understood as the historical abused. Second, let's replace the figure of the husband with power. Here, I define power as the collusion between knowledge, capital and state formations with the intent to maintain systems of domination and manage difference in the neoliberal era. Finally, let's replace the figure of the therapist with ourselves—tasked with speaking to the figure of minoritized and devalued social life about what to do with power's hold on them. For me, as with many of my intended readers, this is a task of speaking to ourselves and the minoritized communities, the historically abused, we hold dear.

This scenario plays itself out in nearly every text and space that dares to ask questions regarding power and race in the U.S. I raise this scenario because the dominant practice in ethnic studies circles often offers resistance and confrontation with power as a vital and reinvigorating force in the struggle over the valuing of indigenous and minority social life in the U.S. For me, this scenario carries us into the main concern of this study and can reorient what I consider a major problem in the discourse of ethnic studies—the dominant discourse of resistance. According to theories of resistance, confrontation and resistance with the abuser are viable models of reforming the life of the abused; in other words, through confrontation and resistance on behalf of the abused and their allies, the abuser will somehow become more aware of the abuse they cause and then, will script efforts to value, reconcile and reform themselves so that the coexistence with the abused can be reoriented via mutual recognition. By endeavoring to make personal and intimate

intellectual inquiry from the onset, the problem of resistance as a dominant paradigm for articulating political, social and cultural identity in ethnic studies becomes clear.

In other words, my problem with resistance as a dominant paradigm is its implications for the scenario above. Take for instance the following questions. What are the life and death implications for counseling Celeste to continue resisting and confronting the power dynamic she is suffering through? What are the ethical and life and death implications if she were told by Dr. Reisman, repeatedly for that matter, that her confrontation with her abuser would somehow lead to her abuser valuing her and that she should continue sticking it out and fighting for the mythical horizon of reconciliation and the fulfillment of the social contract of marriage? What are the ethical implications of studying how Celeste and her children navigate and resist the abuser? While on the one hand, the lens of resistance offers us solidarity between the historically abused, it lacks a direct and explicit prioritization and examination of the project of refusal and escape? In many ways, the lens of resistance relies on prompting of the identities of the abused and the abuser as stable forces, playing out a Foucauldian tragedy.

Thankfully, we have Dr. Reisman's escape plan to offer us a new conceptual way of responding to abuse. Instead of encouraging continued social death and/or the very possible literal death of Celeste to stay and fight, Dr. Reisman uses escape and flight as a conceptual lens to offer Celeste a way to find life. Like Dr. Reisman, it is of upmost significance to consider the possibility of death when attempting to theorize the dynamics of as well as direct responses to intimate *and* historical abuse. While *it is absolutely vital* to study the way we survive and navigate power, *it is also vital to* acknowledge that the implications of resistance as a dominant and even resolute paradigm in studying historical

abuse is not only an articulation of a problematic dogma inherent in cults of resilience but that also may indeed lead to death itself. A paradigm that increasingly sustains monstrous intimacies and may lead to the eventual, nearly inevitable, demise of vulnerable social life, specifically that of women and people of color can no longer be as dominant and resolute as it has become, for *death looms at its very limits*.

These questions and their implications manifest themselves in the intimate political and social terrain of power and race. The cult of resilience is institutionalized in ethnic studies and theories of resistance also fight for a mythical horizon of reconciliation and for the social contract of not marriage being fulfilled, but of a similar correction and realization of the constitutional project of equality within the ironic founding of a pro-slavery, settler colonial state. Little to any escape plans are articulated to the ongoing system of abuse that indigenous and minoritized subjects experience. Instead, the cult of resilience finds its intellectual capital in an odd yet common engagement with the resolution of suffering through a performance of resistance with the abuser. This problem seeps into even discussions of responding to state-sanctioned violence.

Life and Reform

For instance, on March 6th 2017, I attended a Black Lives Matter event on the campus of California State University, Los Angeles entitled "#BlackLivesMatter: Mothers of the Movement." There, Sybrina Fulton, Trayvon Martin's mother, and Lesley McSpadden, Michael Brown's mother, spoke on the experiences of confronting the deaths of their sons and the role of black women in efforts to confront state-sanctioned violence. In conversation with Dr. Melina Abdullah, the chair of the Pan-African Studies department at CSULA and a lead organizer in the Los Angeles chapter of Black Lives

Matter, the night reflected the ongoing efforts of Fulton and McSpadden in remembering, testifying, writing, and advocating on behalf of their sons and many other victims of police brutality. In this delicate interstitial space of mourning, reflection, meditation, testimony and collectivity, the discourse of representation, rights, and recognition provided an underlying subtext for the conversation. On the one hand, the women offered an honest and damning testimony on the necessity for black life to be valued and the need for recognition on behalf of dominant white culture and its institutions; Dr. Abdullah joined in and offered a history and sustained critique of white supremacy and state sanctioned violence. On the other hand, one of the mothers made it clear that there were good cops and bad cops, and that reform and reconciliation was an entry point to fixing a "broken" system.

The event revealed that Dr. Abdullah's radical critiques of state sanctioned violence while at times conflicted with the mother's mourning for reform nonetheless could share the same space because the project of resistance is intrinsically tied with the project of representation, rights and recognition. Moreover, the pairing of a radical critique of state sanctioned violence with a liberal reformist vision for institutions that carry out said violence also found its adhesion that night in, as Christina Sharpe describes, monstrous intimacies that "...that involve shame and trauma and their transgenerational transmission."[1] The state-sanctioned murders of Trayvon Martin and Michael Brown forged an intimacy rooted in trauma; this created a space for radical critique as well as liberal reformism to share space and to, even if mentioned a few times, possibly work together to confront and resist the abuser, raise awareness, and potentially

[1] Sharpe, Christina Elizabeth. *Monstrous Intimacies: Making Post-Slavery Subjects*. (Duke University Press, 2010) 4.

have the said abuser rescript their systems of value and potentially coexist in mutual recognition of abuser and abused. This adhesion, in addition to being rooted in monstrous intimacies of pain and terror, also finds its sticky origins in precisely what Roderick Ferguson calls the golden weakness of minority difference.

Indeed, the articulation of black suffering at the event I attended became the monstrous intimacies that would lay the blueprint for visions of reforming institutional violence. It became evident to me that racialized suffering, especially when radical critiques of resistance collude with liberal reformist institutional solicitation, incite a site of bargaining with power. Suffering, which in this case could be read as an interior force for stripping itself of its parasite—the abuser, instead, was converted into a policy paradigm—a way to bargain with the abuser. Resistance, in its collusion with institutional solicitation, sought representation where unarmed youth do not deserve to die because they are "good kids," part of "good families" and full of the potential of "good citizenship." Representation as a tactic of the theory of resistance destabilizes the self/other paradigm between a dominant culture and its other, minority social life, by valuing the image of the abused so as to manifest sympathy from the abuser as opposed to treating truth as sacred even if it leads us down dangerous roads and paths, hopefully not paved by the abuser.

If we return to *Big Little Lies,* Dr. Reisman's refusal to fall into the golden weakness and seek reforming an abusive relationship is instructive in developing a conceptual lens that aims to learn from the failures of resistance theory. Dr. Reisman wants Celeste to live, not die. She knows, without debate and discussion, that resistance is no answer for personal and intimate abuse. Perhaps, it is time for us to reckon with the

wisdom that resistance is also no answer for historical abuse as well. Perhaps it is time, our priority in reading cultural texts be not resistance to social death and death itself but instead, escape plans and their own complex, dynamic and ethical implications. This dissertation is my heart poured out in this endeavor.

Problem of Resistance

The problem of resistance can be situated in the presumptions we make in organizing methods for study in comparative ethnic studies. In *Black, Brown, Yellow and Left: Radical Activism in Los Angeles*, Laura Pulido defines her multiethnic comparative study as an examination of the "Third World Left" which were "organizations identified as revolutionary nationalist, Marxist, Leninist or Maoist and had a membership of at least half people of color."[2] She writes that few have "examined how differential racialization may contributed to distinct forms of revolutionary activism."[3] Additionally, she argues that differential racialization "influences a racial/ethnic group's class position and that both of these factors then shape the local racial hierarchy."[4] Pulido's exhaustive comparative study elucidates brilliant comparative analysis across racialized groups as it pertains to class standing and how this shapes local racial hierarchies. This without question is an important and significant contribution to comparative ethnic studies.

My critique of Pulido's work is the presumption of study in categories of subject formations, in this case activist organizations, that are always already in confrontation and resistance to dominant formations of power. While it is critical work to study the role of activism and revolutionary nationalist formations, it is also evident that this

[2] Pulido, Laura. *Black, Brown, Yellow, and Left Radical Activism in Southern California*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006) 6.
[3] Ibid., 4.
[4] Ibid., 4.

comparative framework organized around race and class presumes resistant subject formations and therefore, is initiated in a project of subjects in conflict with each other. The plot of the story is already written as the conceptual lens of resistance will lead us to understanding already stable identity formations and perhaps the condition of said stability. At the beginning of the text, we come to study activists and by the end, we have a theory of comparative racial and class activism, always already in perpetual confrontation with a dominant culture. Indeed, resistance theories, as with Pulido's work, entail the significance of struggle and confrontation as leading coalitions of solidarity and brewing a concoction of new identities; however, these new identities are plotted along the lines of their resistant relationship to power, always already and what seems to be in perpetuity.

Pulido ends her work by stating that "this latest round of capitalist development is creating greater economic polarization in its wake, making the contradictions between the haves and the have-nots all the more visible" and as "long as these conditions remain, there will be a deep desire for alternative social arrangements that will reduce human suffering and enable people to live with a modicum of dignity."[5] She writes "…the need for a leftist politics is as great as ever" and that "without a vision of what the world might be like and how to get there, the left has little to offer people and no chance of building a broad-based movement for social change." She references Robin Kelley's *Freedom Dreams* and writes "the left is in dire need of dreaming."[6]

Again, suffering ushers in an urgency to act. This temporal urgency then ushers us to the timeline of progressive activism. On this timeline, the predominant agent is the

[5] Ibid., 236.
[6] Ibid., 238.

figure of the activist, housed in their political organization. Moreover, the progressive timeline finds itself on the same timeline of Western Enlightenment reasoning. Where injustice exists, one must reason, identify logic and make changes. It is no coincidence that the progressive timeline, especially of revolutionary nationalism, finds its must revolutionary act as the takeover of the state, in becoming endowed with the power of the oppressor. Using the grammatical framework I am trying to establish here, the takeover of the state is not just becoming endowed with the power of the oppressor, it is also the becoming endowed with the power of the abuser. Access and a seat at the table, especially in the American empire, also means exactly that—access to become an ambassador of the Empire. The left, and what's left of it, is an instrumental parallel running timeline of the right. Pulido's study of activists, housed in organizations that challenge the structure of abuse means that we are choosing an image of the complexity of minoritized social life. Pulido, as a painter of said image, paints subjects who slant left, resist power, and with who the hope of one day possessing the "power of the state behind it" rests.[7] This painting of a progressive teleology means that we are actively choosing to confront the scenario of the abused and the abuser with a canvass of resistance. We are telling the story of the abused, navigating the house of the abuser, creating small broom closets of material resistance, hoping that the abuser finds us legible for less abuse, while knowing full well that the abuser may tear down that very door at any moment.

Pulido chooses the left and holds on to the ideology of the "power of the state." While she asserts that there is a need to be wary of "dogmatism, coerciveness and sectarianism" she states that "there should be no orthodoxy."[8] Yet, the dominant tethering

[7] Ibid., 238.
[8] Ibid., 238.

of social change with the "U.S. left" leaves us not just with orthodoxy but perhaps worst, an endorsement of a empire and all the monstrous intimacies its persistence leaves us with. It is vital to note that Pulido's intention is to script more "compassionate and humane" visions of the world so as to "reach people's hearts and souls as well as their minds."[9] It is also vital to note that the intended reaching of people's hearts and souls as well as their minds is tethered to a state that we should read as an abuser of the historically abused. Again, radical leftist critique colludes with reformist thinking to solicit institutions of abuse for their transformation. The method of resistance in identifying resistant subject formations means that we do not start with escape plans, we start with listening to and overvaluing confrontation, moving us into articulating elements from the doctrine of the many varied cults of resilience. Those who can resist are valuable, those who do not, are disregarded and an afterthought. In an almost religious zeal, resistance paradigms seek to reach the hearts and souls and minds of the non-resistant, for their conversion.

Returning to the original scenario, Pulido would not be like Dr. Reisman, looking for escape plans and routes from the on-set; her work would traffic injury, harm and suffering and knock on the abuser's door, demanding change, and if not, would desire the same mechanisms of power—institutionalized in the state—for the resistance to takeover. Yet, she identifies the main problem of this kind of work—statist revolutionary nationalism lacks imagination, vision and dreams. Again, image is valued more than truth, authenticity and rawness. The activist as a figure of resistance holds a formation to be proud of, bold, and embodying a sense of definitive resistance. Complexity and

[9] Ibid., 238.

vulnerability can be compromising forces in efforts to make suffering legible to the abuser. What would it look like if we started studies with a different proposition in mind? Instead of definitive resistance marked by specific institutional and organizational formations via solicitation with power, we searched for life, and listened to all its fragility, vulnerability, frailty and continuous failures.

This critique takes us to the gate of departure at the airport and at the significance of prioritizing escape plans in comparative ethnic studies. First and foremost, prioritizing those in need of escape plans and how to develop escape plans means for once, valuing these plans from the on-set, regardless of where they may take us. This means that radical activists are not necessarily the main agents and subjects of studies of escape. People who are not necessarily automatically and categorically resistant subjects become the agents and subjects of studies of escape. As opposed to searching for folks with clear and discernible identity formations (communist activists of color) who have a common goal (the takeover of the state), prioritizing escape plans means listening to the people for who they are now, not who they might one can day become. This means prioritizing the everyday. This means looking beyond the categorical—it means studying the stories of everyday people struggling through conflicts that are both internal and external. The significance of studying people beyond categories of the resistant left means that complexities emerge in the cracks of formations of the resistant/dominant dichotomy; in doing so, we may see the lines, hues, contrasts, shades and shadows that haunt and contradict as well as accompany and supplement the often painted image of everyday progressive teleology and instead, seek raw, naked truth, regardless of how destabilizing,

contradictory and deeply imperfect the narrative that emerges when we use escape as a lens.

Racialized Suffering and Responsible Freedom

> …That's what I want to see possible for people, that's what I want to see possible for Black people who, God knows, really need freedom in that way, in every way: they need freedom from their oppressors, and they need freedom from their sisters and brothers; the freedom to love freely in the world is the greatest imperative, to my mind, for black people. And that even includes the freedom to turn one's back on the experience if one wants to. Even if one ends up passing into another culture, that has to be, in my logic, in the end, acceptable. I've got to be able to live with that. It's comparable to my wanting the church to turn over some of its prime time to ideas about the world, and if some of its constituents end up atheists, then we will have to live with that. Obviously, such an outcome is not ideal, nor is it what I would wish, but the goal is to try to open the way to *responsible* freedom.[10]

Hortense Spiller's envisioning of responsible freedom is at once a call for the possibility of futures that allow for the freedom to "love freely in the world" as well as an opening to outcomes of such a freedom that while not ideal, one has to "live with..." In Spiller's rendering, so much is at stake for racialized life, specifically black life—the freedom to move, to love, to fail, to leave home, to return, to "turn one's back on the old," or to "embrace the world without rejecting one's mother…"[11] Responsible freedom incapsulates also freedom from oppressors as well as freedom from our brothers and sisters, in essence the members of our communities. Spillers lays the blueprint for a responsible freedom that is not necessarily exclusively individualistic. In the same interview from which the excerpt above is also from, Spillers states that "leaving the community is not always you're wanting to flee or get away in some kind of pathological

[10] Tim Haslett, "Hortense Spillers Interviewed by Tim Haslett for the Black Cultural Studies Web Site Collective in Ithaca, NY" February 4, 1998, accessed November 27, 2017. http://www.blackculturalstudies.net/spillers/spillers_intvw.html
[11] Ibid.

sense" it also could simply be "growing up and experiencing the world and leaving home."[12] Thus, instead of pathologizing racialized life's desire to expand one's geographical horizons as a problematic, responsible freedom means that "you can have the world, you can really have the world on your postage stamp of soil." Responsible freedom also means:

> …way of breaking the bonds or the bars of love when love is choking and when membership is now defined as that which keeps me hemmed up in some little corner somewhere because it is proper to 'Black tradition' or to "Black experience" or in order to be an authentic and proper Black person, I have to live in this way, dress in this way, think in this certain kind of way. Now that's not what it's all about, to me. It is not a matter of my going back anywhere, even though I go home as often as I can. It is now a question of my being at home wherever I happen to be, or being at home *even more so* because I don't live there anymore…[13]

Here, the strands of thinking within representational identity politics, the "Black tradition" or the "Black experience", are not necessarily the only sites of freedom for black folks. Instead, Spillers articulates that home is carried everywhere one goes and therefore, responsible freedom ruptures notions of authenticity and assuredness located within the nexus of cultural nationalist politics. Spiller's conceptualization of responsible freedom offers an entrance into the possibilities of considering the discourse of freedom as emanating not from some essentialist mantra of the authentic tradition, experience and proper way of ordering racialized life. In sharp contrast, this dissertation takes up Spiller's conceptualization of responsible freedom as an active refusal of authenticity and its confrontation with abuse as well as the redemptive valorization such a resistance politics holds. While this endeavor is tricky as the pull towards authenticity vis-a-vie resistance politics in an era shaped by the dominant allure to be recognized via

[12] Ibid.
[13] Ibid.

institutional solicitation makes even the announcement of a project inspired by Spillers' articulation here steadfastly read as irrational, or outright impractical, this dissertation nonetheless embraces Spiller's conceptualization of responsible freedom especially in the age of redemptive representational politics.

To disrupt the representational terrain of redemption found in multicultural freedom, this dissertation focuses on cultural texts that illustrate responsible freedom. This comes at the urgent time of our ontological now where redress and resolution are defined in shallow and weary repetitions of redemptive representational politics. The goal of the project is to write into existence or at the very least hear the echo and reverberations of, as many critical ethnic studies projects do, the very alternative stories and their articulations that challenge the seemingly never-ending perpetuation that racialized injury and suffering can only be addressed by the state, or as a perpetual conflict and possible reconciliation with abuse. Of course, this perpetuation is part of the way the state reproduces itself as the ethical mechanism for the regulation of life in the late capitalist era. While systemic, the turn to the state for the very abuse it causes positions us in an infinite return to abuse itself. This dissertation is thus concerned with this very conundrum: why do we turn to the system of abuse for addressing the abuse it causes? Is this not an irresponsible way for thinking about ending abuse? What articulations of responsible freedom emerge when we read cultural texts beyond statist modes of recognition?

This dissertation builds off of the work of Alexander Weheliye's *Habeas Viscus.* In it, Weheliye writes that rather than assuming that suffering "must always follow the path of wounded attachments in search of recognition from the liberal state" and there by

dismissing any "form of politics that might arise from the undergoing of political violence as inherently essentialist," his work takes suffering seriously beyond modern western redemption.[14] For Weheliye, this is precisely why a materialist reconfiguration of suffering as articulated by Asma Abba underscores his project.

> Asma Abbas does not conscript minoritarian suffering to the realm of individual resentment used in the service of gaining liberal personhood but, instead argues for "an understanding of suffering that allow us to honour the suffering and hope of others not because we are humbled by their impenetrability and unknowability, but because of how we see our sufferings and our labours as co-constitutive of the world we inhabit, however homelessly."[15]

Weheliye thus calls for the severing of suffering from its ties to liberal individualism; for Weheliye liberal individualism is futile in treating suffering within its full reckoning potential as it often positions pain and "anguish in the realm of the dehumanizing exception"[16] The severing of suffering from the liberal individualist realm thus does the work of reading and thinking with suffering and injury "as integral to humanity."[17] Weheliye's citation of Abbas is vital in theorizing pain and injury in this way. As Abbas writes "for suffering to be allowed to live and desire differently, we must turn to those moments where its life and its becomings threaten imperial liberal politics which swiftly moves to contain them—not only to show what liberalism does to its unwilling subjects, but also what we do to it."[18] Abbas thus outlines a reconfiguration of suffering that first and foremost is generated by a "…suspicion of the modes of speech and presence sanctified within these debates [as] requisite". For Abbas, liberalism assigns

[14] Weheliye, 14.
[15] Ibid., 14.
[16] Ibid., 14.
[17] Ibid., 14.
[18] Asma Abbas, *Liberalism and Human Suffering: Materialist Reflections on Politics, Ethics and Aesthetics*, (New York, Palgrave Macmillan: 2010), 229-230.

"undisputed value to a form of expressed suffering as fitting with recognition, inclusion and empowerment"[19]. The fitting of suffering into the modes of recognition, inclusion and empowerment creates a "representation imperative" that directs suffering only as "ascetic ideal" that instead of honoring suffering and its ruptures of progressive timelines instead, violates the suffering's and sufferer's truth. In doing so, it allows liberalism to remap its progress. Abbas writes:

> …Voice and harm in liberal society are coeval and reciprocal—as the haunted negotiations between liberalism and democracy continue, liberal democratic politics is always found in debt to suffering. I look at how this voice carries and ends up shaping the experience and the dominant aesthetic and political imaginations of people outside liberal democracies—to the extent that such voice becomes an index of their democratic desire, a desire familiar and recognisable to those who have "the goods" already. These forced familiarities severely compromise the fundamental experience that is channelled in this performance and that could, once freed from these consumptions, lead to different intimacies and alternative liberatory counter-discourses in the face of such scripted and mimicked desire to begin with.

This dissertation critiques the use of suffering to index the way the US states subsumes minoritized difference to continue its imperialist endeavors. Inspired by Weheliye's citational practice and engagement with Abbas and Spillers, this dissertation arises to critique <u>any use of</u> suffering for the indexing of desire for democratic domination within the imperial-liberal regime of recognition. In this vein, it is important to state that Weheliye's inquiry into racialized suffering and its materialist reconfiguration allow for other projects to endeavor untethering identity's main bargaining exchange commodity—suffering— for its value when it sits at power's table. Weheliye writes,

> Given the prominence of political violence within the histories of colonialism, indigenous genocide, racial slavery, internment, de jure segregation, and so on, black studies and other incarnations of racialized minority discourse offer pathways to distinctive understandings of

[19] Ibid., 229.

> suffering that serve as the speculative blueprint for new forms of humanity, which are defined above all by overdetermined conjurings of freedom.[20]

Weheliye's project then is to inquire as to whether "there exists freedom (not necessarily as a commonsensically positive category, but as a way to think what it makes possible) in this pain that most definitely cannot be reduced to mere recognition based on the alleviation of injury or redressed by the laws of the liberal state…?"[21] Moreover, he asks if that said freedom "might lead to other forms of emancipation, which can be imagined but not (yet) described"?[22]

Articulations of Responsible Freedom endeavors to blossom articulations of responsible freedom out of a critique of representation and resistance. The goal is to see how black and Latinx cultural texts can move us beyond the expectation of conventional modes of recognition within the context of the last decade's project of redeeming multicultural liberalism.

Methods

Kevin Quashie's *The Sovereignty of Quiet: Beyond Resistance in Black Culture* waters the sprouts of thought that allow for the burgeoning of *Articulations of Responsible Freedom.* In *The Sovereignty of Quiet*, Quashie critiques the politics of representation and the project of resistance. He writes,

> This is the politics of representation, where black subjectivity exists for its social and political meaningfulness rather than as a marker of the human individuality of the person who is black. As an identity, blackness is always supposed to tell us something about race or racism, or about America, or violence and struggle and triumph or poverty and hopefulness. The determination to see blackness through a social public

[20] Ibid., 14.
[21] Ibid., 15.
[22] Ibid., 15.

> lens, as if there were no inner life, is racist—it comes from the language of racial superiority and is a practice intended to dehumanize black people.[23]

Quashie asserts that the politics of representation enlists blackness to narrate stories about the social and political meaningfulness of black subjectivity. His formulation argues that representation is determined to see blackness through a social public lens and thereby ignores seeing the inner lives of black folks. Quashie succinctly and precisely asserts that this is racist and thereby links the determined politics of representation as committed to a practice "intended to dehumanize black people."[24] His critique does not stop there.

> But it has also been adopted by black culture, especially in terms of nationalism, but also more generally it creeps into the consciousness of the black subject, especially the artist, as the imperative to represent. Such expectation is part of the inclination to understand black culture through a lens of resistance, and it practically thwarts other ways of reading. All of this suggests that the common frameworks for thinking about blackness are limited.[25]

Quashie argues that the politics of representation has been adopted by black cultural nationalism and black artistic expression. *The Sovereignty of Quiet* understands this adoption as limiting insofar as it "practically thwarts other ways of reading."[26] Quashie positions representation and resistance as reading practices that lean too heavily on the social and political and function as dominant conceptual frameworks that too often dictate black subjectivity in limiting ways. Critiquing and arguing against resistance, as Quashie writes, is no easy task.

> Resistance is hard to argue against, since it has been so essential to every black freedom movement. And yet resistance is too broad a term—it is too clunky and vague and imprecise to be a catch all for a whole range of behaviors and ambitions. It is not nuanced enough to characterize the

[23] Kevin Quashie, *The Sovereignty of Quiet: Beyond Resistance in Black Culture* (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2012) 4.
[24] Ibid. 4.
[25] Ibid. 4.
[26] Ibid.

> totality of black culture or expression. Resistance exists, for sure, and deserves to be named and studied. And still, sometimes, when the term "resistance" is used, what is being described is something finer.[27]

Quashie proceeds to providing an example of his critique of resistance by exploring Stephanie Camp's *Closer to Freedom: Enslaved Women and Everyday Resistance in the Plantation South*. While the frame of the book is resistance, Quashie notes that Camp realizes that there is more to the motivation of "resistant" activities on behalf of enslaved black women and men on plantations.

> …Camp realizes that the meaning of black women's everyday lives was not shaped entirely by their engagement with and resistance to the institutions of slavery—that black women and men who were enslaved grew gardens and decorated their living spaces and organized parties in the woods.[28]

For Quashie, the lens of resistance is a limiting reading practice as it can become a totalizing gaze when studying racialized life under extreme oppression. Quashie positions us to consider how resistance as a reading practice might actually produce identities that are totalized by their configuration vis-a-vie the institution of slavery. Resistance then provides us with agency and survival, opposition and confrontation but not much else. As Quashie writes, the point here "is not to dismiss the intensity and vulgarity of slavery's violence on black people, but instead to restore a broader picture of the humanity of the people who were enslaved."[29] By reading beyond resistance, Quashie asserts that we can read how Camp brings the everyday lives of slaves into "fuller relief" and thereby, "their aliveness jumps out beyond that equation to offer something more."[30] Quashie disrupts the dominant imperative in black studies to produce oppositional and

---

[27] Ibid., 4-5.
[28] Ibid., 5.
[29] Ibid., 5.
[30] Ibid., 5.

confrontational subjectivity within the purview of the social public lens. In critiquing resistance, Quashie calls for us to look for other ways of reading racialized life. Fortunately, there is a precedence for this in black artistry.

> From Zadie Smith, Afaa M. Weaver and Rita Dove to Zora Neale Hurston, Langston Hughes and Ralph Ellison, the black artist lives within the crosshairs of publicness and, if she or he is to produce meaningful work, has to construct a consciousness that exists beyond the expectation of resistance. Inspired by these artists, this argument for quiet aims to give up resistance in search of what is lost in its all-encompassing reach.[31]

Quashie's project of quiet, which is also the theoretical framework for the first chapter "Surrender", asserts that the goal is to "let the unexpected be possible" by not endeavoring to represent people "as symbols of a discourse of racism" but instead, to produce meaningful work that "exists beyond the expectation of resistance" and articulate people who are in the "everyday, wary and resolute, alive."[32] Indeed, for Quashie and this dissertation, it is important to note that that what limits our capacity to see the "fuller humanity" of racialized life is the dominant paradigm of ethnic studies that privileges public expressiveness and resistance.

Quashie's quiet is rooted in his conceptualization of inwardness as already tied to the work of Hortense Spillers. Quashie cites Spillers' *Black, White and in Color: "*What is missing in African-American cultural analysis is a concept of 'one'."[33] Oneness is not an apolitical individuality. Quashie writes that Spillers is right and that the concept of oneness describes the "energy of the inner life that constitutes a person's being" and is "distinct from the notion of the individual, which is a modern classification based on the

[31] Ibid., 5.
[32] Ibid., 5.
[33] Ibid., 119.

ideals of liberal humanism…"[34] Oneness then is the quality of existence "not constrained by the limits of the social world" and is different from the idea of self "which often reflects subjectivity shaped by the awareness of another."[35] Quashie writes that oneness "signifies the human as a creature of appetites and intensity…it is the human soul, the abundance of will, hunger, fear that propels each person through the world."[36] Located in this abundance is what Quashie calls a radical freedom "as if one's existence is no longer defined by membership in a community or group."[37] In this context, though, something important arises in the construction of oneness—mystery.

> Oneness returns the mystery of being human to the black subject, who often seems to be known even before he or she arrives. And it allows a black person to claim frailty as a meaningful part of life. Whatever its fault lines, the idea of oneness is important for considering the inner life, to be able to say, as Michael Harper does, that one's life exists in a "fresh space with no reference other than to its internal oneness."[38]

Oneness offers a balancing of the social and political realities of racialized life where these identities, the intersections of race, gender, and sexuality for instance, "feed rather than hinders her humanity."[39] Oneness and inwardness, as a critical component of responsible freedom, is not part of a decontextualized and abstracted relationship with the world. Indeed, taking seriously the interior of racialized life is not a matter of "naive, New Age-y" and apolitical" spiritual worldviews.

In their work on body-mind-spirit *Fleshing the Spirit: Spirituality and Activism in Chicana, Latina and Indigenous Women's Lives,* Irene Lara and Elisa Facio read the

[34] Ibid., 119.
[35] Ibid., 119.
[36] Ibid., 119.
[37] Ibid., 119.
[38] Ibid., 123.
[39] Ibid.

work of Gloria Anzaldúa and her insistence to address the "spirit and spirituality as essential aspects of reality."[40] Quashie's desire to turn inward also marks my desire to take seriously the work of the spirit, oneness and inwardsness in racialized life. As Lara and Facio write this is also a shunning of "so-called New Age dehistoricized approaches focused on transcending flesh" and "resists dominant western thought that would have us split our bodies, our flesh and bones and cells, from our spirits—the invisible, yet felt aspect of our beings that [are a] part of our life force—as if they were separate or opposite."[41] Lara and Facio assert that "saying 'to flesh' and 'to spirit" acknowledges that spirituality is something we do; it is part of creating culture and the production of meaning."[42] Similar to Quashie's reading of black culture, it is vital to take serious the inner life of Latina, Chicana and Indigenous women especially in regards to the way colonialism places inwardness as absent within racialized and gendered life.

> …the silences, distortions and questions surrounding Chicana, Latina, and Indigenous women's spiritualities are deeply rooted in the legacies of colonial racism, (hetero)sexism, classism and modernity's emphasis on the mind, reason, and science set in dualistic opposition to spirit, passion and the sacred.[43]

However, this dissertation does not necessarily aim to arrive at a similar representational destination that Lara and Facio arrive at. Indeed, chapter 3, which explores the inner life of Isola—the protagonist of Melinda Palacio's novel *Ocotillo Dreams*—argues that one's spirit and one's inwardness is not necessarily an inherent place of oppositional and resistant virtue. Instead, borrowing from the critical work of

[40] Elisa Facio and Irene Lara, Fleshing the spirit spirituality and activism in Chicana, Latina, and indigenous womens lives (Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 2014) p.11.
[41] Ibid., 11.
[42] Ibid., 11.
[43] Ibid., 7.

Martha Vanessa Saldívar, the erasure of marginalized histories is part and parcel of the way settler colonial societies, like those in the U.S. and Israel, occupy the inner minds and lives of its subjects. I deeply value and respect the beautiful projects of Quashie, Lara and Facio in thinking through the inwardness of racialized and gendered life. For this project though, my aim is to further Spiller's articulation of responsible freedom as it pertains to the inner life of racialized peoples.

Specifically, the project hinges on exploring the *wild and reckless thoughts too* as the goal is not necessarily a kind of utopian thought but is instead venturing into even the "occupation" of our inner thoughts; this is significant as the project explores the very ways power manifests itself as internal to racialized life which in being vital to identify ways to further decolonize the occupation of our minds, it is also instrumental in identifying the way we regulate ourselves in the instrumentation of power. Having said that, in endeavoring to articulate responsible freedom, the dissertation looks for inwardness in its sovereign wildness which also means not necessarily trying to build a proper, and authentic reiteration of black, Chicanx and Latinx identity but instead, consider the many nuanced and complex terrains of the interior world of racialized life within discourses of redemption and resistance. At times, we may find resistance and solidarity and in other times this dissertation also finds, as Spillers cautions, avenues towards places that are not necessarily idyllic. Chapter 3 outlines how this operationalizes itself within the citizen-undocumented internal dialogue in *Ocotillo Dreams*. What we do with such revelations of the interior is of concern here and will be discussed but I am more concerned with the journey of traveling inward and away from the expectation of resistance for racialized life than a journey inward solely to find an authentic

confrontational spirit. That work is important, vital and done much better by scholars such as Facio, Lara and Anzaldúa for instance. This project's goal is to take an experimental leap beyond the expectation of resistance within the inward and interior of racialized folks through critical readings of the work of artists, the narrative of film characters and literary protagonists, the archival projects of students, and the oral history of loved ones.

Articulations of responsible freedom then endeavors to capture what Roderick Ferguson calls the radical potential of minority difference and not regulate and manage difference in both the disciplining power of universities as well as within the discipling power of the well-intentioned but often also disciplining nature of multicultural liberalism. As discussed through the work of Kendrick Lamar, responsible freedom emerges out of a similar bafflement that I share with Avery Gordon.

> It has always baffled me why those most interested in understanding and changing the barbaric domination that characterizes our modernity often—not always—withhold from the very people they are most concerned with the right to complex personhood…Complex personhood means that all people (albeit in specific forms whose specificity is sometimes everything) remember and forget, are beset by contradiction, and recognize and misrecognize themselves and others…means that people suffer graciously and selfishly too, get stuck in the symptoms of their troubles, and also transform themselves…means that even those called "Other" are never never that…means that the stories people tell about themselves, about their troubles, about their social worlds, and about their society's problems are entangled and weave between what is immediately available as a story and what their imaginations are reaching toward...means that people get tired and some are just plain lazy…means that groups of people will act together, that they will vehemently disagree with and sometimes harm each other, and that they will do both at the same time and expect the rest of us to figure it out for ourselves, intervening and withdrawing as the situation requires…means that even those who haunt out dominant institutions and their systems of value are haunted too by things they sometimes have names for and sometimes do not.[44]

[44] Avery Gordon, *Ghostly matters: haunting and the sociological imagination* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011) 3.

I too am baffled by the same concern; multicultural liberalism and its grasp on redeeming state formations as the throne of ethics to eternally return to misses the complexities of power. As Gordon writes, power relations that characterize "any historically embedded society are never as transparently clear as the names we give to them imply. Power can be invisible, it can be fantastic, it can be dull and routine. It can be obvious, it can harm you by the baton of the police, it can speak the language of your thoughts and desires."[45] This dissertation is most concerned with the last part of this line from Gordon. One question that dominates the discussion that follows this introduction is the way power speaks the language of our thoughts and desires. If one is to engender a project of the interior as a way of articulating responsible freedom, and the way it moves us away from an age dominated by redemptive politics that disciplines what we can think and desire when we discuss racialized injury and suffering, we must be willing to confront the way it is often articulated within the very lines of power we aim to stray away from. At the same time, the ongoing spiritual conquest waged by Spanish Catholicism and carried out in its secular manifestation within Western Enlightenment, scientific rationalism and Euro-centric Marxism as well as its itinerant solidification in dominant and even, cultural and minority nationalisms is not a totalizing venom that is altogether consuming. Indeed, it is a spiritual and interior war that is complex, nuanced, messy and wild—this is further explored in Chapter 2. The telling of the story within thus must include not just what is dominant and resistant but also, what is wild about it all. This may seem futile and perhaps a bit apolitical. But it is not. *Articulations of Responsible Freedom,* while not necessarily dedicated towards a redemptive/resistant

[45] Ibid., 3.

subject formation, nonetheless explores the interior for the purposes of committing oneself to the bounty located in journeying towards responsible freedom. Deciding to look towards the inwardness of racialized life is a decision to fully and seriously engage the cultural politics of our world. It is not disengaged from resistance as a politics towards universal truth but instead, in what it means to venture beyond the anticipation of resistance. Racialized interiority is more than resistance, it is powerful, forgiving, messy, hopeful, historical, spiritual, lively, deadly, abundant, contradictory and raw.

The spirit of this kind of spirit study then engages in Lisa Cacho reading Derrick Bell's theorization of racial realism. While some of the stories here may leave us inspired and empowered, they do not necessarily have to. Venturing to the inwardness of ourselves and our own communities also means wrestling with wildness, and wildness is not a place of stability and certainty, although it may (but it does not have to) bring us some clarity and some transparency. In channeling Derrick Bell, Lisa Cacho conceives of empowerment very different than its conventional and traditional rendering as resistant consciousness in the pursuit of recognition and representation. She writes "Empowerment comes from deciding that the outcome of struggle doesn't matter as much as the decision to struggle. Deciding to struggle against all odds armed only with fingers crossed on both hands is both an unusual political strategy and a well-informed worldview."[46] *Articulations of Responsible Freedom* engages in racial realism insofar as it is a "form of unthinkable politics" because "it proposes that we begin battles we've already lost, that we acknowledge and accept that everything we do may not ever result in social

[46] Lisa Marie. Cacho, *Social death: racialized rightlessness and the criminalization of the unprotected* (New York: New York University Press, 2012) p. 32.

change."[47] Thus, in privileging the interior, we , as Quashie writes by dialoging with the work of Marita Bonner, luxuriate "in the wild possibilities that the interior offers. These possibilities are not all positive, nor are they without social relevance…and still, it is a remarkably different way to orient one's self—surrender as an alternative to the anxiety of double-consciousness."[48] Chapter 1 explores the way Kendrick Lamar pushes against DuBois' double-consciousness and enacts lyrical and visual performances of surrender.

This task becomes critical in that it mobilizes a critique of the discourse of the human and the way it orders our society. Cacho writes to take "unthinkable politics seriously" we need to "entertain counterintuitive thoughts and practice imagining otherwise."[49] Citing Fiona Ngô, Cacho writes that failure in formulating an alternative to the dominant ordering of the human is generative and should not be sought to be overcome, "rehabilitation need not be desired, subjectivity need not be recovered" as this conceives an "ethical stance that refuses to cover over the violence that brought us to the present."[50]

Indeed, as a refusal of the redemptive politics of multicultural liberalism this project ventures into cultural figures, texts, projects and histories and entertains the "counterintuitive thoughts" as a critical task precisely because this is a work that does not "resolve the contradictions of reintegrating the socially dead into a capitalist society that sees most of humanity as a necessary but negative resources"; For Cacho, it "makes sense to mobilize *against* preserving this way of life or the ways of knowing that this life

[47] Cacho., 32.
[48] Quashie., 41.
[49] Cacho., 32.
[50] Ibid., 33.

preserves."[51] As Cacho insists, rather than "breathe life" into "spaces of social death, we might conscientiously work against the logic of survivability."[52] Similar to Kevin Quashie, Cacho writes that "we cannot discount that fighting for basic survival needs in immediate, practical and strategic ways is urgent, important work but at the same time, a meaningful life is not a luxury but rather the purpose of the struggle itself, the difference between surviving and living."[53] The study of the intricacies of the interior within racialized life is thus also a study of meaningful interiors and studying them beyond the anticipation of resistance is thus also at the heart of the difference of survival and living. Racialized life is so much more than just resistance and oppositionality. Finding meaning in the interior thus is also a way to take seriously our desires and thoughts, in their inner most nakedness, so that we can sense and feel who we are now in order to imagine desiring and thinking differently. If we are only meant to engage the interior to survive in opposition to dominance then we submit the beauty of the complexity to the disciplining order of the exterior social world. This dissertation aims to do something different—it turns to the interior not just for methods of survival but for articulations of living, and living meaningfully for that matter.

What would it mean to assess interior lives similar to the way Gordon conceptualizes power and complex personhood? *Articulations of Responsible Freedom* examines flashes of the interior in music, film, teaching, and oral history to show that our interiors can "feel like remote control, exhilarate like liberation, travel through time, drown you in the present" and can be "dense and superficial, can cause you bodily injury,

[51] Ibid., 33.
[52] Ibid., 33.
[53] Ibid., 33.

can harm you without seeming to ever touch you" and can be part of the "systematic" and "particularistic" and "often both at the same time" and can cause "dreams to live" and "dreams to die" and we can "call it by recognizable names" but also, we need to remember that the interior houses a range of possibilities from the monumental to the microscopic *and* back again, and is so *much much much* more. What is beautifully tragic, terrifying yet also poetically material and unabashedly sovereign about the interior is that it can whisper "freedom" while screaming "silence", exclaim "hope" while bickering cynically in repetition "quit", loquaciously confess our sins while surreptitiously hiding our virtue, quietly mumble "faith" while vigorously gossiping in chatter "suspicion." This dissertation harnesses the complexity of the interior to critique systems of thought that aim to redeem the interior—most especially its articulation of pain and suffering in racialized life—towards the suction of power, which often creates the exterior and material conditions for pain and suffering in the first place.

Articulations of Responsible Freedom

Chapter 1 explores elements of Kendrick Lamar's most recent work. More specifically, the chapter offers a critical reading of his work through the lens of surrender and vulnerability. The chapter argues that the conceptual lens of surrender and vulnerability offer a way of outlining Kendrick Lamar's critiques of cultural nationalism and representational politics. Through an analysis of Lamar's various visualizations of his music as well as the lyrical content, I argue that Lamar positions vulnerability and surrender to honesty and raw interiority as alternative avenues of articulating a racialized collectivity in an era of presumed post-racialism, endeavored by the liberal project of redemption via statist modes of recognition. As such, Lamar engages frailty and fragility

as interior and spiritual forces that work against and beyond the assuredness of black cultural nationalism and its itinerant desire for cohesive publicness. The chapter extends the work of Kevin Quashie and his readings of the ways James Baldwin made use of vulnerability and intimacy to the reading of the cultural texts provided by Lamar. In doing so, the chapter demarcates an alternative visual and sonic terrain that by naming the limits of cultural nationalism also begins to lay a blueprint for moving beyond statist modes of recognition and representation. Within the broader purview of the dissertation, this chapter lays out multiple dimensions of how to articulate and imagine responsible freedom, insofar as it aims to reconfigure racialized suffering as a vital aspect of life rather than a currency to be exchanged with power for rights and mutual recognition.

Chapter 2 examines the film *Django Unchained* (2012) and *Moonlight* (2016) through the conceptual lens of erotic and decolonial fugitivity. The chapter explores ways to assess fugitivity in the film as a critical praxis in intervening against redemptive politics. The chapter reorients the focus of the film on Broomhilda as opposed to mainly Django and assesses the ways black female sexuality and eroticism activates fugitivity as a critical form of articulating responsible freedom beyond redeeming power and thereby, challenging the ways that abolition and emancipation have often times been scripted as reconciliatory measures for the benevolence of the state. Instead, black female sexuality, eroticism and desire activate the movement of the film and thereby, constitute a radical departure from any way of redeeming the collusion between state, capital and knowledge. This positions racialized desire as a fugitivity toward geographies of liberation; geographies that also aim to eradicate white supremacist claims on land, property and life.

Chapter 3 examines the novel *Ocotillo Dreams* (2011) by Melinda Palacios. Using the lens of haunting, the chapter explores the ghostly matters of the novel, specifically how they pertain to the complexities of intimate and social relationships in Latinx communities defined by citizenship. The chapter contributes to the theorization of responsible freedom in that it examines the fatal and biopolitical effects of resolving ghostly matters through the state. More specifically, the novel traces the character arc of Isola who goes from academic who studies white literature and resents her mother's political activism in her childhood to resourceful ally who takes up her mother's causes and helps her undocumented cousin cross the US-Mexico border as well as providing her with a future in sharing her home. Unfortunately, the path to this character arc is bloody and deadly. Before she helps her cousin and becomes the resistant Chicana social formation so often theorized in resistance theories, she commits a horrific act in the name of personal vengeance, an act that her citizenship status fails to comprehend its potency. After finding out her lover, who is undocumented, is expecting a child with his ex and took her late father's identification, Isola feels betrayed and in act of passion, has sex with him one last time. After they finish, she replaces her ex-lover's id card. Caught in the context of immigration sweeps, Isola's act leads to his arrest and as the novel implies, the fatal death of her lover at the hands of brutal immigration agents. Thus, this chapter argues that any theorization of responsible freedom must confront the hauntings that citizenship produces, and thereby, problematizes the novel's resolution, in that she will always be haunted by this decision, regardless of her transformation.

Chapter 4 "Study" explores the work of student projects as activations of projects that flee the conventional geographies of cultural nationalism and activism. Reflecting on

the work of students in ethnic studies classrooms, the chapter argues that study is not a passive activity, leisurely existing in sites of privilege but instead, for students of color offers them glimpses into seeing oneself and one's community beyond the scope of disciplinary power. Fred Moten and Stefano Harney conceptualize study beyond its recognizable forms with the academy towards the informal and into the space beyond the fear of amateurism. Extending this conceptualization of study to my reflections of student projects that I have been a part of the process of, this chapter argues that study, if nudged beyond terrains of representational politics, can arrive at an articulation of responsible freedom. Study, thus, carries the potential of the very proposition of the dissertation—to push us beyond the recognition possibly granted by a field of identity politics which often positions study as a "naturalized academic misery" that "loves company in its isolation" and which ties people together not by "blood or a common language but by the bad feeling they compete over" but instead, into a kind of archival projects that endeavors the value of the affectivity that is assumed by the very act of study itself. The chapter does not look for cohesion and synthesis of ideas to be cobbled for representational purposes but instead in the very process of enacting study for the purpose of disrupting conventional forms of recognizability.

Chapter 5 "Refusal" explores the oral life history of my mother in dialogue with my personal testimony on graduate school. I examine the lessons to be learned from our shared acts of refusal; narrating her story and mine through the conceptual lens of refusal challenges traditional modes of representing minoritized life in the context of neoliberalism. In doing so, the chapter examines the generative potential of refusal as a

conceptual lens in the telling of stories of Latinx immigration beyond the parameters of state, activist and academic recognition and its itinerant subject formations.

Articulations of Responsible Freedom is thus an experiment of freedom as opposed to a prescription of respectability that is inherent in the word "responsible." It examines key cultural texts that oppose the irresponsible inclinations and leanings towards statist modes of recognition which cloak the imperialist-liberal regime in the fabric of diversity and inclusion. Articulating responsibility then is less about what we need to do, but what we are willing not to do. In other words, it is a willingness to leap elsewhere together, beyond identity and representation, resistance and redemption. Perhaps in this endeavor we can hold each other in surrender to our truths, in fugitivity from abuse, in haunting those who hunt us, in study together, and in refusal of the current order of things. Perhaps in articulating this, we can imagine, create and become freedom in motion towards the interior.

Chapter 1

The Drowned Hand, not the Clutched Fist in the Work of Kendrick Lamar

Preface

Kevin Quashie begins his brilliant study of quiet and silence *The Sovereignty of Quiet: Beyond Resistance in Black Culture* by analyzing the iconic image of the 1968 Olympics where in "a volatile Mexico City" Tommie Smith and John Carlos raise their black-gloved fists above their heads in a black power salute meant to protest "racism and poverty and counter the anthem and its embracing nationalism."[54] Quashie notes that the "story of this moment has been told many times" and its details are often celebrated, "the clenched fists, the black gloves, the shoeless feet", confirm the "resoluteness of the action."[55] The paired bodies of the image "have become a precise sign of a restless decade and especially of black resistance."[56] Quashie, though, notes that upon closer examination, something else is revealed about the image.

> …But look again, closely, at the pictures from that day and you can see something more than the certainty of public assertiveness. See, for example, how the severity of Smith's salute is balanced by the yielding of Carlos's raised arm. And then notice how the sharpness of their gesture is complemented by one telling detail: that their heads are bowed as if in prayer, that Smith, in fact has his eyes closed. The effect of their bowed heads is to suggest intimacy, and it is a reminder that his very public protest is also intimate. There is a sublime balance between their intentional political gesture and this sense of inwardness, a sublimity that is often barely acknowledged.

Quashie denotes the significance of the political protest beyond resistance and asserts that a more critical reading of the iconic image is that of reading the subliminal balance of

---

54 Quashie, p.1.
55 Ibid., 1.
56 Ibid., 1.

that intentional political gesture with the sense of inwardness situated in their bowed heads, emphasizing prayer. The political project of black representation through the narrative of resistance oftentimes misses and "barely acknowledges" the beauty of the inwardness of such political gestures and actions.

> In truth, the beauty of the protest is enhanced by noting the intimacy, in reading Smith and Carlos not only as soldiers in a larger war against oppression but also two people in a moment of deep spirituality, in prayer, as vulnerable as they are aggressive, as pensive as they are solidly righteous. In this reading, what is compelling is their humanity on display, the unexpected glimpse we get of the inner dimensions of their public bravery.[57]

For Quashie, the lens of intimacy and vulnerability enhances the beauty of the protest. In this vein, Quashie outlines a conceptual approach to reading beyond resistance and representational politics. How does intimacy and vulnerability allow us to see deep moments of introspection and inwardness? How do these reading practices provide "unexpected glimpses" of the "inner dimensions" of racialized life? These questions are vital for Quashie as he conceptualizes reading black life merely through publicness and social discourse as "if there were no inner life" as "racist" as this logic finds its origins in "the language of racial superiority".[58]

Resistance in our contemporary moment is vital but can be a limiting way of reading racialized life. While oftentimes resistance reminds the project of redemption of its shortcomings, it also provides redemption with a unique rhetorical move. Redeemers find the value of resistance in that redeemers will read resisters as creatures who envision the future, just not yet. Redeemers will articulate that the demands of resisters are valid and will remind them, as is infamously and repeatedly stated in resistance efforts that

[57] Ibid., 3.
[58] Ibid., 3.

solicit institutional recognition, that change does not happen overnight, it is slow, and that resisters need to keep fighting for the long haul. Redeemers, envisioned in the rhetoric of hope by Obama and often embodied in the diversity bureaucratic regime in academic and corporate realms, depend on the visionary work of resisters; redeemers do the work of parsing out the radical potential of the minoritized critique of resistance and incorporating the digestible elements for the multicultural liberal appetite. In this realm, the demands of resisters, which often relies on an economy where racialized suffering is the currency of exchange, are absorbed and coopted by power. Power's most insidious move then is that it *does* listen to resistance's demands via its arm of redemption; transformation and change then also are adjusted to the demands of the order of things, and the visionary demand of a revolutionary now that aims to alleviate suffering is left pondering the empty or at best minimal readjustments that power exchanged for listening to suffering in its own frequencies.

Resistance's radical potential is at the very least intimate with the project of redemption and at the very most hinges its future with the responsiveness of multicultural liberalism. Often, then, resistance finds its authenticity in honoring a nostalgic perpetual return to the "black tradition," or a romanticized "proper" blackness, and a striking concern for embodying a specific kind of black experience. This dissertation chapter thus asks perhaps an oxymoronic question: what reading practices reveal and thus can reconfigure blackness as non-resistance? Moreover, in doing so, how can we wrestle suffering away from representation that traffics pain and injury in exchange for institutional solicitation? How does reading intimacy, vulnerability and surrender untether suffering from the project of redemption? In answering these questions, the goal

of the chapter is to provide an articulation of responsible freedom that positions us beyond representation and resistance. More specifically, in being animated by the work of Quashie, I examine the work of Kendrick Lamar as a way of meditating on the brilliant and beautiful ways the "the black artist lives within the crosshairs of publicness and, if she or he is to produce meaningful work, has to construct a consciousness that exists beyond the expectation of resistance". This chapter thus examines how Kendrick Lamar constructs a consciousness that exists beyond the expectation of resistance. I argue that this occurs by reconfiguring racialized suffering and injury beyond trafficking it for institutional solicitation, authentic black male charisma, and a homogenizing "black experience."

I.

To further introduce how I build off of Quashie's work, I turn to an analysis of surrender. Quashie builds with the work of Marita Bonner in critiquing W.E.B. Du Bois' conceptualization of double-consciousness. Quashie analyzes Du Bois' double-consciousness as a "twoness" that is "kind of pathology."[59] What follows next is the passage where Du Bois uses the term "double consciousness," though he has already described the context for understanding the black person as one "born with a veil, and gifted with second-sight in the American world—a world which yields him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world."[60] One could read the possibility of agency in Du Bois's ironic phrase "gifted with second-sight," though it is clear that whatever additional insight the black subject has is linked to his being the other—this subject who is revealed via the consciousness and imagination

[59] Ibid., 14.
[60] Ibid., 10-11.

of the world around him, as well as via his response to and resistance of such imagining. In double consciousness, the twoness of black subjectivity does not represent another consciousness that is free and wild; instead, the two twoness is a kind of pathology, a fractured consciousness that is overdetermined by a public language of black inferiority. The black soul is measured "by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity."[61] In this characterization, agency is limited to resisting public discourses, and the black subject seems to possess no interior worth speaking of.[62]

While Du Bois intends to "give attention to the unique profundity of racism", Quashie write that "what is striking" is that "his notion of double consciousness does not characterize the inner life of the black subject, at least not an interior that has its own sovereignty…does not offer…access to selfhood beyond the public discourse of race, access that is unfettered and unrestricted, even if only in his own mind."[63] Quashie then turns to the wonderful work of Marita Bonner. For Quashie, Bonner offers us a discourse of the interior beyond the expectation of resitance. Instead, Bonner articulates "subjectivity as a surrender to the interior" and as such, constructs a "black subject as possessing a consciousness of imagination rather than a consciousness that is doubled."[64] Moreover, Bonner's work "does not plea for freedom but instead suggests that the freedom worth having is already always present: the freedom of being, innately and complicatedly, a human being."[65] Surrender to this interior is a gendered and racialized act. Waiting for instance is a critical site for Bonner. As Quashie writes, Bonner

[61] Ibid., 11.
[62] Ibid., 14.
[63] Ibid., 35.
[64] Ibid., 36.
[65] Ibid. 36.

articulates that "waiting is a location of intelligence and insight" and that waiting, as a gendered and racialized experience, refuses to waste "strength" learning "the boundaries of white supremacy, male patriarchy or black cultural nationalism."[66] For Bonner, one is not merely doubled—"she is not merely oppressed from the outside but is also humble and knowing from the vastness within."[67] Within this context, waiting is "not passivity but instead is patience, the thoughtful attentiveness of one who is wise."[68] Moreover, since waiting is the surrender to the interior" it is a surrender to a wildness and vastness from the onset exceeds the expectation of resistance.

This brings us to the visual and lyrical performance of the artistry of Kendrick Lamar. In his own unique way, Lamar welcomes collectivity through his persistent turn inwards and as such, provides as with various acts of surrender to the wildness of the interior as a way of articulating responsible freedom. Like his spiritual ancestor Bonner, Lamar presents introspection, complexity and surrender as a way of moving beyond Du Bois' doubling. Similar to Bonner, Lamar does not decry or plead for freedom but instead, his very artistry and performance bears witness to a meditation that the "freedom worth having is already always present: the freedom of being, innately and complicatedly, a human being."[69] By stating his truth beyond the expectation of resistance and oppositionality and contrasting that with a surrender to the wildness and vastness of his interior sovereignty Lamar takes us to spaces that are not politically correct nor "authentically" part of the public black subject. As I hope to demonstrate in this chapter, Lamar challenges black male charisma in the age of redemption by allowing

[66] Ibid., 35.
[67] Ibid., 36.
[68] Ibid., 35.
[69] Ibid., 33.

his audience to luxuriate in interiority, thoughtfulness, deliberation, introspection, critique, and intimacy. Moreover, by channeling forgiveness and the vibrations that music causes to our very being and spirit, Lamar also opens black subjectivity to relationality with the Asian-American and Latinx community that are both often read via the pathologizing of double-consciousness.

II.

The sweatshirt that reads "image more valued than truth" that Lamar rocked in his March 2016 performance at FYF Fest in Los Angeles speaks to one of the ways he communicates beyond his voice and that is in music videos.

Figure 1: Kendrick Lamar performs at FYF Fest.[70]

[70]Mikael Wood "Kendrick Lamar thrills an adoring hometown crowd—and conquers at least one skeptic at FYF Fest, *Los Angeles Times*, August 28, 2016.
http://www.latimes.com/entertainment/music/la-et-ms-fyf-kendrick-lamar-20160828-snap-story.html

Paired up with Dave Free and calling themselves “The Little Homies,” Lamar’s videography and the production of iconic images does more than just provide spectacle and visual supplements to his fiery lyrics—it subverts the very words on his sweater worn that Spring night in Exposition Park. For “The Little Homies” the overvaluing of imagery, or in other words symbolism, rather than the embracing of truth is key to their artistic vision. In other words, The Little Homies know that they can represent truth within the visual economy of material consumption.

This is significant in a historical moment when image indeed is more valued than truth. Within the ongoing era of redemption and nostalgia, multicultural liberalism has produced a powerful iconic symbol—Barack Obama. The symbolism during the eight years of Obama’s presidency marked the fruition of the labors of the civil rights movement’s desire for representation; the symbolism of the first black president has also marked an unsophisticated discourse around the importance of that symbolism rather than the ongoing conditions that structure black life in the period of late capitalism. The sweatshirt, for me, reads that we are living in an era that valorizes imagery and symbolism over truth and rawness. Trump’s presidency as an electoral and cultural backlash to Obama’s presidency has solidified the imagery and its subsequent meaning within the multicultural liberal discursive regime.

Lamar himself provides a nuanced approach to understanding this imagery in the song “XXX” on the album *DAMN*. —" Donald Trump's in office, we lost Barack/And promised to never doubt him again/But is America honest or do we bask in sin?/Pass the gin, I mix it with American blood/Then bash him in/You crippin' or you married to blood?, I'll ask again/Oops—accident.” While on the one hand, Lamar dabbles in the

redemptive project, he also returns to his reading of politics as merely set-trippin' where Republicans and Democrats are "ReBloodicans" and DemoCrips" merely flying their red and blue colors with the same result—violence. Within this rendering of the political moment, The Little Homies know the value of image and its exchange value in revealing a truth. Their use of images of racialized life and specifically racialized suffering and injury is bargained not for institutional solicitation but in exchange for truth. We can thus add to the sweatshirt's text—"image more valued than truth" *so then let's find truth through image*.

For Lamar, truth emanates from inwardness and its release via music and its accompanying imagery. Truth is sacred for Lamar; it is located in his faith and conviction of spirituality. His prioritizing of inwardness as the site of sacred truth rooted in faith and conviction means that he will not be commonly trafficking suffering and injury in exchange for respectability, recognition and representation. Instead, his reversal of the very phrase "image more valued than truth" demonstrates that he knows the fungibility of his artwork and therefore, aims to share the wild truths of inwardness via vulnerability, surrender, and intimacy to show that even the over valorization of image can carry excesses of truth, that also exceed the expectation of the image that is anticipated as a rapper.

III.

Lamar's brilliance requires we ask how might the surrendering to one's interiority have the "capacity speak to black collectivity"?[71] How might Lamar's personal meditations on vulnerability and confusion "reflect or influence notions of communal

[71] Ibid., 73.

blackness"[72]? In his most recent work *DAMN.* (2017), Lamar laments that since his grandmothers have passed, that he has no one praying for him. His sense of spiritual loneliness is best illustrated in the beginning of the music video to the record "Element." In what seems to be Lamar drowning (Figure 2) in what I perceive to be the L.A. river that is overflowing due to rare rains in the drought-ridden food desert that is Los Angeles, only one hand emerges from the water. For me, this image serves as the symbolic marker of the interiority that I am speaking of—instead, of the raised fist full of cultural nationalist pride in the post-sixties era, Lamar uses his vulnerability, his sense of social death, of black bodies drowning in the supposed post-racial waters to be the site where collectivity emerges and/or is plunged. It is from this reaching inward, this interstitial and intentional site of wanting to reach for something vulnerable where collectivity that is meaningful, becomes possible.

Instead, of the clutched, tight fist of assured resistance theory, this raised hand, open and vulnerable forces us to reckon with the failure of inclusion and access to the regime of representational politics. It is a surrendering but not a retreat. It is a refusal of the assuredness granted in an era of contradiction, situated quite accurately as a marker of the departure of redemption and the arrival of nostalgia. "Element" provides a visual landscape of intimate violence as an individual, materialist, collective, intergenerational and spatial experience. Without the context of a named setting, the video is as particular as it as universal. Lamar's vulnerability thus can be a site of ambivalence that generates a collectivity beyond the presumed Los Angeles landscape that the video is set in. Sense no setting is named in the video, the river can be any river, the water can be water anywhere.

[72] Ibid., 72.

It may be the excesses of the proposed Dakota Pipeline or it may depict the precious folks who perished in the Mediterranean fleeing the recent war in Syria. Borrowing from the work of Gordon Parks, the raised hand signifies the very act of racialized violence in the drowning of Parks' himself as documented in the documentary *Half Past Autumn*.

Figure 2: Opening image from "Element"[73]

The image also signposts the Middle Passage. Lamar thus may be pointing us to the systemic violence that has conditioned black life since the transatlantic slave trade. While estimates of the exact number of black life that perished through the Middle Passage vary from 14 million to possibly 200 million, historians note that death was so common that sharks themselves learned to follow the routes to fed on bodies overboard.[74] Thus, Lamar's ambivalent body of water—possibly the Middle Passage, possibly the Los

[73] Kendrick Lamar, "Element" 2017, YouTube Video, 3:33, June 27, 2017. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=glaG64Ao7sM

[74] Michael Marriot, "Remembrance of Slave Ancestors Lost to the Sea" *New York Times*, June 19, 1994. http://www.nytimes.com/1994/06/19/nyregion/remembrance-of-slave-ancestors-lost-to-the-sea.html

Angeles River, possibly the Mediterranean Sea, possibly a river across the U.S.-Mexico border—situates his audience in a time-knot; the post-racial era is no longer empty of history, but is full of it. While the body is drowning and not necessarily fully successful in the Obama-era post-racialism, it is still reaching for life.

The drowned hand, not the raised fist, demarcates the vulnerability of drowning in an era of redemption. Lamar's drowned hand is very different than the raised fist of Smith and Carlos. As opposed to a public setting like the Olympics and connected to a movement, Lamar's drowned hand functions as a turn towards the vastness of the oceanic, to the mystery of the water; here, Lamar returns mystery to the black subject, not just the anticipation of resistance. Surrendering to this vastness means refusing the logic of survivability so often upheld and stabilized by the logic of redemption. Thus, the drowned hand's turn to the depths of the ocean as a spirting of black inwardness positions a posthumanist refusal of resistance/dominant forms of identification. A refusal of the mobilization of racialized injury for the purposes of redeeming the state as an ethical actor.

Lamar suggests it is here where freedom exists. Indeed, surrender as a critical articulation of responsible freedom means surrendering to one's spiritual ancestry. This means plunging oneself and becoming one with the ocean. One is no longer subject along the lines of the redemption of the self and other, but is the very spirit of the ocean. Lamar refuses liberal humanist individualism via institutional solicitation and instead, consults the spirits of his ancestors and their ongoing journeys in the abundance of meaning of water; Via this consultation with his ancestors, this scene may not be a scene of a drowned hand. In another reading, perhaps the drowned hand is a carefully deliberated,

planned and coordinated surrender to the depths of racialized interior. In becoming oceanic, one also reminds power that there are other forms of being beyond resistance and dominance, beyond becoming human within the definition of western civilization. If one is oceanic, then one can also evaporate into the clouds, and bring rain and storms to the very order of things.

In *The Reorder of Things: The University and Its Pedagogies of Difference*, Roderick Ferguson opens the introduction with the lines "LET THIS IMAGE BE A LESSON TO YOU." Referencing African American philosopher and artist Adrian Piper's collage *Self-Portrait 2000,* Ferguson writes that the image presents "an arc that traces a line between past promises of recognition and present day catastrophes."[75] Depicting a plane crash and containing a poem that elaborates on institutional deployments of diversity, Piper's work, for Ferguson, disavows the celebratory nature of minority nationalisms. Ferguson argues that "through the substitution of a plane crash for an actual portrait of Piper, the piece refuses any humanist celebration of Man's minoritized replacements."[76] Moreover, Ferguson writes that the substitution of self-portrait with a crash site in *Self-Portrait 2000* offers a substantive critique of institutional incorporation of minority difference—"the image denotes the elaboration of power rather than the confirmation that our 'liberty' had been secured."[77] For Ferguson, this is precisely the work of ethnic studies that allows us to comprehend "power's trick and devise ways to use them otherwise."[78]

---

[75] Roderick A. Ferguson, *The Reorder of Things: the university and its pedagogies of minority difference* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012), 4.
[76] Ibid., 14.
[77] Ibid., 13.
[78] Ibid.,13.

> In *Self-Portrait 2000*, the institutional and artistic forms that are supposedly best equipped for representing people in general, and minoritized people in particular—the state, the academy, the portrait—are utterly incapable of representing those subjects and can only offer a wrecked depiction instead. In doing so, [it] refuses the affirmations that constitute minority nationalisms...We might contrast the absence of a biographical image in Self-Portrait 2000 with revolutionary and cultural nationalisms' presumption that they can make institutional, state and administrative forms in their own image...[79]

The opening image to "Element" does similar work. The absence of a biographical image at the site of recognition states the wrecked depiction that late post-racial, multicultural capitalism has produced—the drowning body of color in a body of water that is treacherous, dangerous and overpowering. However, Lamar provides a slightly different representational point. A hand emerges from the systemic drowning. On the one hand, one could say that this is the hand of the victory of late capitalism's policing, surveilling, disciplining, and warehousing of black and brown bodies. On the other hand, the hand is also a critique of minority nationalism. No longer the raised fist of pride and resistance, it is the hand that acknowledges the complexities of pride in a moment of overwhelming man-made disasters (the overflowing river may be a result of an earthly disaster because of climate change). Lamar is suggesting that perhaps victimhood and oppression go hand and hand with a raised hand and its clenched fist and that we must enter into a critique of ourselves. We must see why the raised fist may be not possible in the current floods. He is also visually ushering in a critique of the role of minority nationalism in considering our relationship to land, climate change and environmental racism.

[79] Ibid., 13.

I place Lamar's image alongside Piper's to assert a critique of institutionalized visions of diversity and representation, structured exclusively by dominant institutions and/or coopted by/or with consultation to, minority nationalism. May these two images be a lesson to all of us and force us to ask: what are we willing to surrender to? The raised hand of the brochure or the depths of the drowning hand. Why seek assurance in externalized representations often structured by otherness in an age of uncertainty and precarity? Why not surrender to the complexities of our ancestral spirits and usher in an age of clarity from our collective, cross-temporal and shared struggles?

IV.

In *The Sovereignty of Quiet,* Kevin Quashie encourages us to ask what it means to study closely "the agency that is found in the inner life even in the midst of the imposition of the world outside"?[80] Quashie writes that in the face of systemic violence against black people, "as well as more individual acts of maiming and meanness, the notion of vulnerability is neutered" by black nationalism. He goes on to say that "rather than being seen as a quality of inner life and a necessary human capacity, vulnerability becomes defined as a liability to black survival."[81] Nationalism, for Quashie, is:

> …too rigid to be able to advocate for the fragility that is a part of being alive; its ambition cannot permit what looks like frailty. Nationalism is pride and boldness, clarity of self and definitive resistance, and the pursuit—if not achievement—of triumph over victimization. Vulnerability is not consonant with much of this.[82]

In his refusal to solely fixate at definitive resistance, Quashie elegantly articulates that the interior is what "goes missing or unacknowledged in depictions of black

[80] Quashie, 80.
[81] Ibid., 76.
[82] Ibid., 77.

collectivity" and should be read alongside the serious initiatives that are often so overly studied as resistance. Quashie writes that our assessments should take account the social history of a subject and object especially as it pertains to the major intersections of power, be they racism and/or black resilience for example. However, these assessments must also explore the inner life of said subjects and objects. Quashie writes that one should not disregard the intimacy of subjects and objects that are often so critical to their power. When we do this, we can articulate the beautifulness, vulnerability, the full grandness, and specific loveliness of racialized subjects as "a kind of consummate agency."[83]

Quashie cites the work of James Baldwin as an exemplar of this form of studying racialized subjectivity through the inner life. Quashie writes that Baldwin's *The Fire Next Time* "uses vulnerability as a metaphor for the threat and endangerment that racism produces."[84]

> Here, the political volatility of the sixties is construed through interiority, and black experience is described through a vocabulary of intimacy. In the pages of *Fire*, there are no grand statements of nationalism, even though Baldwin is clear in his indictment of racism; instead, the narrator's trembling, quirky humanity stands as the example of what it means to be black in America during the freedom movement, of what it means to be self-determined.[85]

Baldwin's work, per Quashie, can be categorized as mainly about American racism but is more accurately cataloged as a meditation of Baldwin's surrender to the interior, and the discussion of his own vulnerability. While social discourse is unquestionably important for Baldwin, it is not the main source of his concerns. For

[83] Ibid., 76.
[84] Ibid., 80.
[85] Ibid., 80.

Quashie, Baldwin's letter writing is motivated by "not only racism as a public discourse but the real impact racism can have on his nephew's heart…His is a particularly intimate take on the injuries of racism."[86] The lush and beautiful significance of Baldwin for Quashie is situated in his "refusal to relinquish the examination of racism to the meager imagination of publicness. He is determined to hold on to what is intimate and precious between him and his nephew, and he focuses on the meaningfulness of race as it affects their inner lives."[87] In articulating vulnerability, multiplicity, confusion, and intimacy generating from the inner life, Baldwin pushes beyond the rhetoric of resistance and nationalism and their shared goal of righteousness and assurance in the face of white supremacy and instead provides a template for how to study and write the act of surrendering to the "full beautiful ambivalence of the inner life."[88] Closeness, vulnerability and honesty mark the ways that Baldwin aims to connect with his nephew and by association with his audience. For Quashie, these are vital in understanding the value of surrender to the sovereignty of intimacy and vulnerability. This connectivity of the interior, for Quashie, is what collectivizes Baldwin's vulnerability as a move beyond the assuredness of nationalism. Here, the individual's expression of intimacy is the main form of connectivity and through it, we see the new avenues interiority provides since as Quashie writes "…a singular conceptualization of race is insufficient to support meaningful collectivity."[89]

Via Lamar's performance and visual supplements from *To Pimp a Butterfly* (2015) and *DAMN.* (2017), I consider Lamar as Quashie considers Baldwin. Lamar, for

[86] Ibid., 82.
[87] Ibid., 82.
[88] Ibid., 88.
[89] Ibid., 93.

me, offers contemporary visual and sonic gestures of surrender to the interior in the age of the arrival of nostalgia and the departure of redemption. Although at times he laments the departure of Obama's redemption, his slippage away/astray from black nationalism is always already complicated by a steady surrender to the interior via a critique of himself, his community and the world. Instead of disavowing the histories of the black freedom movement, Lamar extends them with an artistic repertoire that does not assert a single, definitive identity for himself and black collectivity. Indeed, as Quashie argues, resisting shame, being triumphant and having "a clear and unsullied name" are impulses of any functioning nationalism."[90] The interiority of Lamar's work embraces shame, is not always already triumphant and hardly, if ever, desires a "clear and unsullied name." Lamar takes us to the depths of his lively spirit, not some kind of functioning nationalism.

In this current age of nostalgia and redemption, Lamar's work flees both: he does not work toward an assuredness of self and a type of representational politics for white recognition and at times, black collectivity. In contrast, I argue that Lamar's persistent surrender to the sovereignty of the interior and his capacity to speak of his vulnerability, inactivity, internal disagreements and his community's similar internal conflicts calls for a black collectivity that finds connection at the site of difference, confusion and disruption. Lamar provides an emotive reconfiguration of black pride as a site of deep affectivity and closeness which in turn, manifests a collectively that clearly resists racial violence while also generating a critical space for the capacity of racialized communities to speak from the interior and speak the whole truths that are found when one surrenders

[90] Ibid., 92.

to them. Consequently, Lamar's treatment of racism is not defined exclusively by social discourse. In sharp contrast, Lamar refuses the shininess of most of hip-hop poppy visual and sonic landscapes and through surrender to the interior provides a complex, vulnerable and femininized reflection of black social life. Challenging the traditional notions of black male charismatic leadership, Lamar, similar to Baldwin, refuses to meditate on racism through the "meager imagination of publicness" and is determined to "hold on to what is intimate and precious…"[91] His critiques of violence are always already meditations on the need for a nurturing and vulnerable leadership that strives for a black futurity that is accountable via exploring the contradictions inherent in listening to and expressing one's deepest and truest thoughts. By venturing out and away from the predictability of resistance within racialized life and pain, Lamar articulates responsible freedom and by streaming rawness allows the chips to fall where they may. By challenging authenticity and respectability, Lamar invites us on a tour of the terrain of responsible freedom and its wild detours, u-turns, and off the conventional path of institutionalized freedom. His turn inward is also our turn inward, a turn towards responsible freedom.

V.

Lamar's 2015 album entitled *To Pimp a Butterfly* clearly demonstrates his artistic and political dive into vulnerability and non-normative expressions of masculinity. The butterfly flutters and reflects a convergence of messages and concepts. By the end of the album, we realize Lamar's butterfly is haunted by the ghost of Tupac Shakur. Originally intended to be named To Pimp a Caterpillar which if spelled as an acronym would be

[91] Ibid., 82.

Tupac, the album's essence is Lamar's turn to the sovereignty of his interiority. In this interiority, he is haunted by the infamous Shakur and his guilt for surviving and thriving as his community continues to struggle. As a result of speaking his interior aloud, he provides a concoction of detail in what it might mean to be a leader in the context of the ongoing everyday racialized violence experienced by him and his community.

Lamar's use of a butterfly to articulate vulnerability rhymes with Daniel E. Pérez's theorization of mariposa consciousness. In "Toward a Mariposa Consciousness: Reimagining Queer Chicano and Latino Identities," Pérez defines mariposa consciousness as a move past the masculine-feminine dichotomy.

> …Like racism and the privileging of whiteness, the invention and privileging of masculinity has real and dire consequences... Masculinity and femininity are not mutually exclusive; instead, they can be considered mutually constitutive…Having a mariposa consciousness is about recognizing your outer and inner beauty and strength; it is about being yourself in your true nature, in your own words, in all your *mariposada*—the full splendor of your beauty, strength, gender expression, and sexuality. It is about knowing your history and yourself fully, and embracing all aspects of your identity. It is about maintaining a physical and mental equilibrium so that you can soar in all your glory.[92]

In the music video to the anthem that would be heard at many Black Lives Matter protests "Alright," Lamar literally soars in his *mariposada* throughout Los Angeles (see Figure 3). Throughout the video, he is the butterfly incarnate: his physical and mental equilibrium allow him to soar. Knowing his history, his social location and beauty, Lamar tells the racialized communities that so often turn to his music that "we gon' be alright." Indeed, Lamar's butterfly defies gravity also known as the social discourses and practices that aim to keep black communities from flying. The individual turn inward, to his *mariposada,* is always already a turn to defy the social discourses that ascribe a collective

[92] Ibid., 102.

oppression. But, more importantly, it is also a move beyond the site of resistance. At the end of the video, the only way Lamar stops soaring is through the (in)visible bullet of a white cop. As Lamar plummets to his supposed death, we see the delicacy and vulnerability of being a butterfly; it is susceptible to the altogether insidious nature of white supremacy's violence whether invisible or not. However, as Figure 4 shows, Lamar hits the ground but does not die. When the camera cuts back from black, Lamar is laying on the floor, presumably a conquered victim of white supremacy, but then Lamar opens his eyes.

Figure 3: Kendrick Lamar's "Alright"

Figure 4: End of the music video “Alright”

In the tradition of the blues, he smiles from ear to ear. He ends the video, not as a victim, but as someone who can change the narrative and rescript black social life as joyous. Lamar’s physical expression of a smile amidst social death denotes the song’s explicit illustration of the blues. Here, the interior suffering manifested in this public site of death both defies social logics and expectations and escapes the framing of the black body altogether. He does not die. He has more soaring to do. The bullet does not define the parameters of his body and flesh. By surrendering to his consciousness and interiority, Lamar takes us with him to a site not of victimhood but of possibility within the sovereignty of this interior.

In the track “u” which is also featured in the first half of the music video “God is Gangsta,” Lamar reaches inward, surrenders to his most honest thoughts and situates loving himself as “complicated.” “u” follows black feminism’s project to expand the boundaries of blackness and nationalism. Citing the work of the Combahee River Collective, Quashie writes that the collective wrote transparently about their

disagreements. As stated in their "A Black Feminist Statement" they write "we experienced several months of comparative inactivity and internal disagreements which were first conceptualized as a Lesbain-straight but which were also the result of class and political differences"[93] Here, the surrendering to his interior and the various struggles and conflicts that manifest force us to read Lamar as a deeply complex, introspective, conflicted, aware and contradictory artist. Even with his platform, Lamar laments not being able to help his family, friends and community. He does what the best of artists shine at doing—admit failure. He is able to do this though because he is not speaking to the popularized milieu of lyrical performance that glorifies success and upward mobility as a source of valuable personhood. Lamar ditches this myth in its entirety. By speaking his truth regarding black upward mobility and celebrity, he obliterates the idea that one individual being included in the capitalist hierarchy of white America can change their communities as well as will bring forth a better sense of self. Lamar's report of what happened when he surrendered to his interior as opposed to surrendering to social discourse reveals a push against the dominant recognition of blackness in the powerful hands of the white owned music industry and instead, aims to connect to a specific black collectivity through vulnerability and honesty. He flees representation and bears his heart whole, in honesty. Lamar's authenticity beyond the scope of black excellence, representation, and the assuredness of nationalism again sonically and visual takes us to a new terrain altogether—an articulation of responsible freedom.

This terrain is the site of connection for Lamar, like Baldwin wanted with his nephew, that binds us. The binding is affective, honest and intimate. It is much deeper

[93] Combahee River Collective. 1979. *Combahee River Collective*. LHEF. http://cdm16694.contentdm.oclc.org/u?/p274401coll1,1063.

than the cultural fabric of nationalism. In order to surrender with Lamar—to not raise our fist—we must first surrender to the sovereignty of the interior he makes available to us and then allow the revelation of the wild, lush and rawness of our own insides to fill/feel this terrain. We can call this revelation, vulnerability. This vulnerability offers a conduit map to responsible freedom. It is here where we collectivize vulnerability can fill/feel it with our own vulnerabilities, contradictions, flaws and failures.

By using his platform to help us see this terrain, Lamar takes us with him to a place where failure is possible for racialized communities without discipline and punishment. Here, his vulnerability becomes the main stickiness of our relationship to his music, it is here that collectivity is rendered possible; pride is reconfigured not as assurance of self but in our assuredness in the capacity to surrender, to leap, and to listen to the quiet, to our (in)ability and our internal struggles. It is this journey, this process where we find the truth of liberation and freedom. Our interior has the answers. In the first verse of "u" Lamar does just this.

> I place blame on you still, place shame on you still
> Feel like you ain't shit, feel like you don't feel
> Confidence in yourself, breakin' on marble floors
> Watchin' anonymous strangers, tellin' me that I'm yours
> But you ain't shit, I'm convinced your tolerance nothin' special
> What can I blame you for? Nigga, I can name several
> Situations, I'll start with your little sister bakin'
> A baby inside, just a teenager, where your patience?
> Where was your antennas?
> Where was the influence you speak of?
> You preached in front of 100,000 but never reached her
> I fuckin' tell you, you fuckin' failure—you ain't no leader!
> I never liked you, forever despise you—I don't need you!
> The world don't need you, don't let them deceive you
> Numbers lie too, fuck your pride too, that's for dedication
> Thought money would change you
> Made you more complacent
> I fuckin' hate you, I hope you embrace it

I swear—

Surrender to one's interior does not reveal concise slogans of pride. Our interiors also reveal our doubts, our insecurities and our internal disagreements with ourselves. Who hasn't closed their eyes and felt like Lamar in this moment, especially those of us who are committed to the values of anti-imperialist, anti-racist, anti-sexist, and anti-homophobic intellectual work? Lamar exposes the contradiction of having a huge platform—preaching in front of 100,000 people—but failing to reach his most loved ones. In the next verse, Lamar's interior tells him he is "irresponsible, selfish, in denial" and he "can't help it." The interior asks much of Lamar—"where was your presence? Where was your support that you pretend?" In one instance, the depressed interior reminds Lamar that "a friend never leaves Compton for profit, or leave his best friend, little brother" who he promised to "watch [over] before they shot him." His internal guilt of not being home when his friend was shot, we hear "You FaceTime'd the one time, that's unforgiven, You even FaceTime'd instead of a hospital visit, cause you thought he would recover." Lamar explains the song's presumed thesis at its closure when his interior says—"and if told your secrets, the world'll know money can't stop a suicidal weakness."

Lamar's vulnerability in these lines and his beautiful expression of his secrets challenge cultural nationalism, especially notions of success and pride in celebrity, by outlining its limits. Although he is on a tour and has a platform, he fails and can only find truth in sharing these failures. In doing this, Lamar outlines a blueprint for the work that matters when we work towards a world where Black Lives Matter—proclaiming anti-racist stances also necessitates doing so in the name of the interiority of racialized

subjectivity, not only its exteriority, only its publicness. In other words, one critical question, of the many unwritten here, that Lamar's work forces us to ask—do we stand up only for the representational nature of resistance that black nationalism entails or do we do so beyond the expectation of resistance? See, this is the main problem that, to me, often has no name in intellectual, activist and social justice spaces, especially those that hold on to the remnants of cultural nationalism and that Quashie, Baldwin and Lamar address so beautifully. How much do we love the representation of ourselves in action and in public and how much do we scorn the reality of who we really are in presumed inaction, in our interiority? This is what I mean by beyond representation. Do you love me only when I'm a projection of the representation of resistance or do you love me when I'm my whole *DAMN.* self? Or in Lamar's creative genius—"when shit hits the fan, are you still a fan?"

VI.

Like Baldwin, Lamar pens intimacy as a method to expressing the contradictions of the social world and the limitations of supposed fixity. The fixed nature of cultural nationalism invites little criticism as it is designed to evade fully exploring its contradictions, flaws and oftentimes its futility. In "XXX" Kendrick collectivizes his surrendering to the truths of his sovereign interior by critiquing black nationalism. In the song, he takes the recollection of a private moment when his friend called him to ask for spiritual advice after his son is killed by people who he owned money to and turns this into a critical reflection of the limitations of black power.

In doing this, Lamar rejects the limitations of nationalism's narrative and articulates a moment of interiority that instead, generates a powerful truth—black

nationalism may not tell the whole story, especially in regards to one's emotions and potentiality. The title of the song "XXX" refers to the fact that what he is about to say is X-rated; the title preempts us in revealing the song's content as beyond the norm as it is a lyrical, sonic and visual taboo. Lamar here names the problem for us: in the field of representation, cultural nationalism gives us PG material and not the stuff of taboo. He names the space beyond black power as X-rated, it is beyond the scope of recognition, beyond the scope of respectability and beyond the expectation of resistance as it contains what we are not supposed to say. This is framed by Lamar ending the narrative by saying "matter fact, I'm 'bout to speak at this convention, Call you back" and with the voice over—"Alright kids we're gonna talk about gun control" ending with a call for us, listeners, to reach into our collective interiority and in a spiritual way become his late grandmothers and pray for him; this part also ends with the ultimate signifier of verbal contradiction—and truth—the album's title "damn."

So what is this X-rated interiority that Lamar shares with us that directly contradicts his upcoming public talk about gun control amidst kids—his capacity to kill and ironically with a gun. In many ways, Lamar mirrors Quashie's articulation of the futility of publicness and uses nationalism's criteria to critique it. The "X" rated publicness that Lamar exposes is the one that is located from the space of the raised hand, drowning in a body of water not the raised fist. He pulls the curtain behind the "PG" material he will speak at the school where he will discuss gun control. Lamar takes responsibility for this honesty by asking us to see him raw and bare and to ask us to reach into our quiet, most intimate thoughts, and sacred of actions—prayer.

> Yesterday I got a call like from my dog like 101
> Said they killed his only son because of insufficient funds

He was sobbin', he was mobbin', way belligerent and drunk
Talkin' out his head philosphin' on what the lord had done
He said, "K-Dot can you pray for me?
It's been a fucked up day for me
I know that you anointed, show me how to overcome"
He was lookin' for some closure
Hopin' I could bring him closer
To the spiritual, my spirit do no better, but I told him
"I can't sugar coat the answer for you
This is how I feel—if somebody kill my son
That mean somebody's gettin' killed"
Tell me what you do for love, loyalty, and passion of
All the memories collected, moments you could never touch
I wait in front a niggas spot and watch him hit his block
I'll catch a nigga leavin' service if that's all I got
I'll chip a nigga then throw the blower in his lap
Walk myself to the court like, "Bitch I did that"
Ain't no black power when your baby killed by a coward
I can't even keep the peace, don't you fuck with one of ours
It be murder in the street, it be bodies in the hour
Ghetto bird on the street, paramedics on the dial
Let somebody touch my momma
Touch my sister, touch my woman
Touch my daddy, touch my niece
Touch my nephew, touch my brother
You should chip a nigga then throw the blower in his lap
Matter fact, I'm 'bout to speak at this convention
Call you back
Damn.

VI.

Lamar long ago introduced the masses to this form of interiority in the hit "m.A.A.d city." Regardless of the social discourses surrounding rap and its supposed allegiance to gang life, the chorus of the track states that "if Pirus and Crips all got along/they'd probably gun me down by the end of the song." By referencing what is true to himself in his surrender to his interior, Lamar also directs his anger at these gangs and a truce they struck in 1994 when he says "you killed my cousin back in '94, fuck you' truce!" He goes on to say that 'ain't no peace treaty just pieces BG's up to pre-approve,

bodies on top of bodies, IV's on top of IV's". Pushing beyond the representational notion that the gangster of color is the ultimate symbol of black masculinity and dare I say, resistance, Lamar conjures the dead as a reflection of his memory to defy the reality of this form of violence. Interior over representation and the pain of reality over the dystopia of theory become mantras of truth for the type of connectivity Lamar aims to make with his music.

In "Hood Politics", Lamar states "I don't give a fuck about no politics in rap" precisely because his "lil' homie Stunna Duece ain't never comin' back." For Lamar, this is why you "better go hard every time you jump on wax." The politics of rap do not matter, what matters for Lamar is situated right in the song's very title "hood politics." His critique in "m.A.A.d. city" of gang life extends itself from the hood to the government. He raps: 'From Compton to Congress, it's set trippin' all around, Ain't nothin' new but a flow of new DemoCrips and ReBloodlicans,
Red state versus a blue state, which one you governin'? They give us guns and drugs, call us thugs, make it they promise to fuck with you." In a sharp and concise critique of liberal multiculturalism, he ends the verse with "no condom they fuck with you, Obama say, 'what it do?'". Vulgar, crude, honest, and concise, Lamar does not take notice of the respectability of representational politics nor does he care much of their relationship to the politics of rights for black communities in the supposedly post-racial order. His condemnation of this is situated in his turn inward to hood politics where his individual expressions of politics are tied to the internal dynamics of his hood and vice versa. This internal inwardness reveals an outlook that critiques black hyper-masculinity, state sanctioned violence and myths about post-racial America. For Lamar, the significance of

rap finds itself in the internal inwardness located in the depths of his own community where so many of close friends have died as a result of the violence sanctioned by the U.S. and enacted by gangs. Their collapsing—"DemoCrips and ReBloodicans"—is formed from a black feminist tradition in demanding an end and abolition to violence in all of its manifestations, hues, and shades regardless of its macro- and/or micro- roots and actions.

VII.

Lamar exchanges suffering and injury in return for collective interracial vibrations that are also ghostly; resurrecting the dead and allowing Tupac Shakur to speak once again in *To Pimp a Butterfly* demonstrates one of Lamar's key influences as well as his desire to listen closely to the messaging of Shakur. In "Thugz Mansion," Tupac Shakur conjures the memory of Latasha Harlins, the 15-year-old black girl who was shot in the back of her head and killed by Soon Ja Du, a Korean woman who worked the register at her liquor store and profiled Harlins as a threat. Although she had $2 to pay for the $1.79 orange juice in her hand, Du assumed she was trying to steal the juice. Judge Joyce Karlin did not sentence Du, offering probation while making her pay for funeral and medical expenses. The judge had victimized Du and criminalized Harlins. Protests at the courthouse ensued, churches upheld her memory and gave witness to her life and death, and the ongoing state sanctioned violence against black folks in Los Angeles specifically was further solidified. Along with the LAPD's beating of Rodney King, Du's murder of Harlins predicated and festered the angst that would lead to the L.A. uprisings of 1992.

In "Thugz Mansion" Shakur raps "Little Latasha, sho' grown, tell the lady in the liquor store that she's forgiven, so come home." Shakur's imagined space of Thugz

Mansion creates a space for forgiveness for Soon Ja Du and also imagines Latasha Harlins as a grown woman beyond the teenage years that were stripped from her. Lamar visually conjures this message in the video compliment to the record “King Kunta.” In it, Lamar appears inside a liquor store; at about minute 2:51 of the video, the track slows down, the camera oscillates, and the bridge repeats “by the time you hear the next pop, the funk will be within you.” The song’s repetition of this “pop” denotes the transformative potential of rap in reconfiguring the currency exchange value of racialized suffering. Unlike the “pop” that kills Harlins, the pop in this liquor store provides funk, and conjures the ancestral energies of the liquor store which are shaped by suffering and injury and often constitute a contentious terrain between African-Americans and Asian-Americans (Figure 5) and reshapes it altogether.

Figure 5: Screenshot of footage of the shooting of Latasha Harlins.

Lamar uses the video to exchange suffering for collective vibration. At the end of the video, Lamar literally purchases some goods from the store from an Asian-American storeowner. Although within the visual economy of the video this scene (figure 6 and 7) is brief, it functions as a gesture of significant exchange—an exchange that finds its value not in the institutional solicitation of justice within the courts but in forgiveness, perhaps as pathway toward solidarity. In doing so, Lamar positions Shakur's forgiveness as a way for Asian-Americans to "come home" and be at home with African-Americans in Los Angeles. Another way to read this gesture in "King Kunta" is through the way that often institutional solicitation operates whereby racialized minorities will strive for access to second and/or first class citizenship via the backs racialized others. Helen H. Jun writes that U.S. orientalism and the anti-Chinese movement oftentimes positioned African-Americans within the progressive temporality of modernity.

Figure 6: Lamar in "King Kunta"

Lamar channels Shakur and exchanges suffering in the name of collectivity and forgiveness and thereby, creates an entirely alternative visual economy around interethnic bonds beyond the way institutional solicitation forces one to construct an "other" for entry into the political economy. Moreover and perhaps most importantly, Lamar structures a visual economy that turns inward and listens to ancestors who lived through suffering and uses this scene as a way to commune with the recent past in the present. By doing so, Lamar turns inward to forgive and from this inwardness generates a "pop" where the funk—the vibrations of the music—can transform the way we relate to each other and ourselves. Lamar's gesture also signals a different way of considering forgiveness; it is not redemptive. Forgiveness requires closely analyzing the scene of the violence, reckoning with history and understanding the way ethnic groups are pinned against each other for the struggle over the crumps of the rich and well-adjusted. Suffering here is not to be redeemed by pitting the logic of race onto the racialized subject but in trying to find a way to create a "Thugz Mansion" where African-Americans and Asian-Americans can commune and "come home" to an "iced out paradise."

Figure 7: Lamar in “King Kunta”

The vibrations Lamar encourages also extends his concern of self (“i”) with the Latinx community. In the video for the record “i”, Lamar harnesses these vibrations to imagine life in an era where social death in Latinx communities permeates in the age of redemption. As Lamar grooves his way through the hood he is also simultaneously grooving through the barrio.

Figure 8: Scene from “i”

In a similar gesture and nod to the Latinx community, he dances past a Latinx who is about to commit suicide. Holding a gun to their head, they decide to put down the gun as a result of the groovy and funky vibrations that like the “pop” in “King Kunta” can consume you and literally put your body into different movement and motion. For Lamar, the representation of racialized suffering and injury at least within the visual economy of “i” is not bargained with institutional solicitation but instead, exchanged in a different register of transaction, that of healing together, in collectivity. In this way, Lamar brings us into an inwardness that while individually articulated is always already intended for an imagined collective. This collective grooving, though, is not just rooted in a kind of black nationalism that often frames the significance of Lamar’s work. Lamar

uses vulnerability and intimacy as a way of reimagining his own blackness beyond resistance and its authenticity. Lamar surrenders inward and produces meaningful artistry that redefines blackness and racialized suffering. Turning inward thus also means feeling, sensing and grooving with other racialized formations in need of shared understanding, compassion and healing.

VIII.

If Lamar's most recent album *DAMN!* is played backwards (which he recently stated was an intentional way of listening to the album) Lamar's first line is "it was always me versus the world/until I found out its me versus me." He follows the declarative statement with the repetition of the question: "why, why, why, why, why, why?" Lamar, in reverse, opens the album with a declaration of the significance of the internal and stresses this repeated question as a demarcation of the line he is drawing: he is pushing us to the limits of nationalism, he is taking us beyond it too, asking us to travel beyond it, to be vulnerable and relish the complexities of discourses beyond the expectation of resistance.

Put differently, he is asking a variety of questions. First, why is the "me versus the world" paradigm something of the past or at least, something he has left behind in the present? Second, why has he made the decision to live his life within a "me versus me" paradigm as opposed to the aforementioned resistance theory framework? For fans of his music, this is an assertive statement that also marks a transition. Lamar's main influence for his 2015 album *To Pimp a Butterfly* was Tupac Amaru Shakur. Infamous for his resistant themes in his music, Shakur named one of his most popular albums *Me Against the World.* Lamar hints at the major shift he is making from Shakur "Me Against the

World" mentality in the last song of *Butterfly*. In it, he circumvents linear time and interviews Shakur using a sampled interview. Whereas Shakur assures us that a revolution is coming and that black militancy may be one of the main ways to resist white supremacy, Lamar responds with a kind of spirituality from music that he feels can be transformative:

> Shakur: I think that niggas is tired grabbin' shit out the stores, and next times, it's a riot there's gonna be, like, uh, bloodshed for real. I don't think America know that. I think Americans think we was just playing and its be some more playing but it ain't no playing and its gonna be some more playing but it ain't gonna be no playing. It's gonna be murder, you know what I'm saying, its gonna be like Nat Turner, 1831, up in this muthafucka. You know what I'm saying, its gonna happen.
>
> Lamar: That's crazy man. In my opinion, only hope we kinda have left is music and vibrations, lotta people don't understand how important it is. Sometimes I be like, get behind a mic, and I don't know what type of energy I'mma push out, or where it comes from. Trip me out sometimes.
>
> Shakur: Because the spirits. We ain't even really rappin', we just letting our dead homies tell stories for us.
>
> Lamar: Damn.

The roots of the transition from *To Pimp a Butterfly* to *DAMN.* occurs in this moment. As Lamar builds on and provides a different articulation of Shakur's resistant militancy with the vibrations of music and the energy they produce, Shakur also reminds Lamar that our internal endeavors are always already collective. When Lamar says he doesn't know what energy will come out when he is behind a mic, Shakur reminds him that what comes out is the spirits of the dead homies, who allow them to tell their stories. For Shakur, our interiority is always already collective precisely because it is ghostly and spiritual. When Lamar responds "Damn," it should also mark what he is coming to realize in interviewing a rapper who is dead, one can pimp the butterfly only by acknowledging that the butterfly

(one's future) and the caterpillar (one's past) are not temporally segregated—they are convivially and spiritually intertwined. It requires one to accept, listen to and think with the collective spirits and voices of our ancestors that shape our interiority. Thus, the transition to *DAMN.* is this realization embodied and expressed in Lamar's work. For Lamar, as with many talented artists, the sharing of one's interiority, filled with rawness and truth, ancestral energies and deep intimacy is the site at which we can engender a collectivity worth working towards. It is important to note, though, that responsible freedom is what is being exercised here and that Lamar is positioning the discourse beyond the expectation of resistance. Pride, assurance and certainty are rejected in lieu of truth from within which is already always collective because it is filled with the spirits and energies of the truths of our ancestors. The vibrations of music that Lamar references that shake us when something makes sense to us, is us sensing the erotic nature of developing an ethics of haunting, which according to Carla Freccero is the "willingness to be haunted by and to haunt," to be in communion with ghosts and thereby, become ghostly. The musical vibrations are the spirits coming for all of us; of course, this is if the music is channeling interiority and its vulnerability from this type of surrender to ourselves and for us, what we are left with is the same thing Lamar says to Shakur, we are left with *DAMN.*

Chapter 2

Black and Brown Moderate and Fugitive Interiorities on Film

Preface

Regardless of the size of my undergraduate classes, I always survey via a raise of hands the question—raise your hand if you know if the U.S. is currently at war? In a class of 57 first year students in an introductory ethnic studies course, only 5 hands went up, 52 hands did not. In a class of 31 first year students in an introductory communications class, I counted only 4 hands. In a survey of American history which had an enrollment of 42, I counted 8 hands. Beyond having students born right before or near September 11, 2001 understand the long history of anti-Muslim racism in the U.S. and the persistent global war that took a new name with the Bush administration, when students do know of the war they often make declarations of war; the following declarations of war are composed statements of a mixture of real comments in papers, evaluations and/or class discussions.

> Since 9/11 Americans, well those who are good citizens are Jews. Arab terrorists are the Nazis. They hate our freedoms. They want us dead. They want to exterminate us.
>
> 9/11 was the rebirth of our nation! It brings every one together against a common enemy—those who do not love freedom!
>
> We should not be so focused on war. I support ending the wars in the Middle East and using the military to secure open borders in Mexico. Maybe then we could stop terrorists from entering into our country freely and also keep immigrants from ruining our economy. Women keep talking about the pay gap, what about the money all these Hispanics steal.
>
> Profiling is not good; but it is necessary to keep us secure and safe. I tell them to just pull up their pants, take off them hoodies, shave those beards and everything will be fine.

> But those protestors—or should I say actors. Why do they loot, break cars and take food? Why can't they be peaceful?

Linking the discourse of terror to a discourse of good "Jews" versus "Nazi Arab terrorists", to women's wages and Latinx immigration, to the shooting of unarmed African Americans and the politics of beards for Arabs, Muslims and South Asians, to "those who do not love freedom" and patriotism, the discourses and practices of the War on Terror do not just give the U.S. project of redeeming the state a language and a grammar but also, they structure the thoughts and feelings of racialized interiority. Even students who are race-conscious in my classes and who know the U.S. is at war often have a hard time moving beyond being careful and often can only demonstrate moderate views when critiquing war. When I respond to students in my classes and inform that they are indeed living and experiencing war on a day to day basis, I make it clear that war is more than the conventional spectacle of attack; also, I make it clear that their racist declarations and moderate feelings about the current War on Terror are also constructed and *fought* at a theater near you.

I.

This chapter examines competing and conflicting discourses coming out of recent Hollywood production. First, the chapter examines how recent major films in the post-911 era are celebrated for the inclusion of minority difference and have been understood to produce representational triumphs. I argue that that the representational triumph of films like *Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them* (2016), *Coco* (2017), and *Black Panther* (2018) relies heavily on developing minority characters who through the resolution of the crisis of difference end up with moderate interiors and thus, redeem the very violent systems of power that generate their struggles in the first place. *Fantastic*

Beasts asserts that through the erasure of magical being history and events, no-maj (human, non magical being) supremacy must be preserved, maintained and redeemed. Any magical being who does not suppress their magic must be contained, is evil or must become an agent of the containment. *Coco* also redeems the very systems of power that generate the crisis in the film. By the film's end, the border between the living and the dead is maintained and never questioned; the border is redeemed through the struggle and suffering of the film's undocumented character—Héctor—who by receiving citizenship via being remembered in a photograph redeems the violence of such a system. While he can only access the land of the living via institutional solicitation, the film does not destabilize the social formations as a result of the border in any clear fashion. Borders and the decades-long suffering that Héctor experienced by not being able to cross over to the land of the leaving are redeemed in *Coco*. *Black Panther*, like *Coco*, hung out too long with Mickey Mouse. By assassinating the complicated formation of the black radical tradition—Killmonger—*Black Panther* articulates that all lives matter in mobilizing its technology for universal concerns via soliciting recognition through the United Nations and via being helped by the CIA throughout the entire film. *Black Panther* positions racialized life and interiority as needing to be contained and only expressed in its moderation. Radicalness is depicted as too hateful, angry and selfish and worthy of state sanctioned violence, in this case murder. I categorize the resolution of these films and their articulation of inwardness as part of irresponsible freedom. Irresponsible freedom is an operative mode of power in the War on Terror—it ensures that racialized interiority even and perhaps most effectively in culturally specific and complex expressions be resolved into moderation for the purposes of redeeming the state as an ethical site.

To contrast irresponsible freedom, I examine films that represent racialized difference *Django Unchained* (2012), and *Moonlight* (2016) as articulations of responsible freedom. These films do not depict racialized interiority as necessitating moderation and as such, do not solicit institutions via redemption in the films' resolutions. Instead, *Django Unchained* and *Moonlight,* consult the erotic and spiritual practice of fugitivity. Instead of channeling a moderate interior to redeem the systems of power that harm characters in their films, they channel ancestral energies and forces from within to beautifully depict characters who aim to live meaningful and complex lives beyond resistance and oppositional identities. Fugitivity as an interiority in *Django Unchained* inspired actors to feel and sense the history present as a violence in the film and in the present. Additionally, fugitivity as an interiority also channels the fugitive inwardness of ancestral spirits such as those of Harriet Tubman and Linda Brent. *Django Unchained* articulates racialized inwardness as part and parcel of responsible freedom and thereby captures responsible freedom as a discourse that destabilizes certainty and authenticity. As a revenge fantasy, the film delivers a critical articulation of responsible freedom and reveals some of the most inner felt thoughts of most slaves—the desire to kill the slave master, to run away and connect with loved ones, and to destroy the entire plantation economy. The film challenges rights, representation and recognition and relies on listening to the fugitive practices of ancestors to live wildly and in abundance. The film is not a film of resistance trying to keep the plantation and its resistant identities together; it is a film of fugitivity trying to destabilize and destroy identity, and live in freedoms only imagined in the sovereignty of the interior.

Moonlight also channels ancestral energies and luxuriates in the inwardness of racialized life. It is not a film of resistance and irresponsible freedom, it is a film of deep introspection and complexity. *Moonlight* does not exchange and traffic suffering via the solicitation of rights and recognition. Instead, the pain and suffering revealed within the feelings and desires of its characters mobilizes complex, beautiful and chilling scenes. Confronting and reckoning with the fullness of pain and suffering cannot be resolved by redress from the state, indeed, it must come from within yourself and your own community.

The films articulate responsible freedom precisely because they do not aim to resolve the complexity of racialized inwardness for the project of redemption. Indeed, the resolutions of these films do not rely on leaving us somewhere ideal, authentic or proper. They often leave us with frailty, fragility, vulnerability and pain and with uncertain futures. However, they also script the vastness and abundance of inwardness—they end with pleasure, laughter, love and at times, healing. Unlike resolutions of irresponsible freedom, they do not subsume the complexity of racialized inwardness and life for institutional solicitation which redeems the state and leaves the door open always already for more violence. They consult ancestral spirits to run away from power and as many of the endings of these films show, to run away… together.

II.

Robert McRuer argues that films often depict the very politics of compulsory heterosexuality, its anxieties and insecurities as a crisis and then, by the end of the film, assures its viewers that the crisis will be resolved. Resolution in films serves to keep the status quo intact and show that dominant cultural forms can come into crisis but that

nonetheless all will be well through the catharsis of closure. In McRuer's analysis of *Titanic*, for instance, hetereosexuality is thrown into crisis and even though, the film shows that straight love could be separated in the Atlantic Ocean through death, the film serves to remind its audience that "my heart will go on," signaling that compulsory heterosexuality will manage all crises that arise, even death.[94]

Studying resolution in film thus allows us to see the intended catharsis on behalf of filmmakers for their audiences. This catharsis, for me, is the intended emotional embrace the audience is supposed to internalize after viewing the film. Thus, resolution is not just a takeaway message, it is an emotional keep sake of the varied representational dynamics of the film. Within the War on Terror, the resolution of films is a key battle site for liberal Hollywood, especially as it is increasingly working to expand their profits by creating films suitable to diverse audiences. The emotional keep sake of the war waged in film is thus also a key extension of the politics of state formations. To be clear, I read the resolution of the following films as a way that Hollywood colludes with state formations to shape the interiors of its audiences and redeem it and its itinerant relationship with the state. Having said that, filmmakers can, especially if they are attentive to making something meaningful, anticipate this dynamic and work towards textual excess that moves us beyond the site of conventional forms of resolution. This is done most effectively when the films consult ancestral spirits. It is within this textual excess where can find responsible freedom; that what escapes the frame must escape moderation and its intended catharsis—the redemption of the state. In film, we can find the ethos of irresponsible freedom as well as the excess of it.

---

[94] Robert McRuer, *Crip Theory: Cultural Signs of Queerness and* Disability (New York: New York University Press, 2006).

III.

Reading moderation as an interiority resulting from the resolution of cinematic crises of minority difference and injury is critical in the War on Terror's battle over the interiority of minorities. Systems of power via the media and the state often demand that Arab, South Asian and Muslim communities racialized as terrorists respond to attacks with moderation. In the West, it is vital that everyone, especially racialized minorities, condemn "acts of terror" so as not to have the fate of Japanese Americans during World War II befall them and be deemed enemies of the state (even though the very request of moderation implies a categorization of enemy). The goal of the moderation discourse is not just to shape the public expression of minoritized difference but more so to shape the interior thoughts, feelings and desires of racialized minorities. As mentioned in the Introduction, Gordon writes that power speaks the language of our thoughts and desire. Power's representational branch in Hollywood constructs the discourse of moderation as a cathartic mode of inwardness, moderation as inwardness is thus taught through cinematic representation.

The battle to ensure racialized interiority remains moderate and not luxuriate in the wildness of sovereignty located there is not an exclusive site for those racialized as terrorists. Instead, within the war of the spirits, it is required that we take an experimental leap and assert that the War on Terror is a war of terror against all racialized life. As was indicated in the preface, students, like political and popular discourse, link the war on terror with race, gender, immigration, income inequality and the future of freedom and democracy. Women of color, Latinxs and African-Americans are all imbricated in this messy and terrifying discourse. This reminds me of the way Republican Congressperson

Louie Gohmert once linked immigration and terrorism in April of 2013 after the bombings that occurred at the Boston Marathon.

> We know Al Qaeda has camps over with the drug cartels on the other side of the Mexican border. We know people are being trained to come in and act like Hispanic when they're radical Islamists. We know these things are happening. It's just insane not to protect ourselves.[95]

A spokesperson for Gohmert pointed to comments by FBI Director Robert Mueller who told a House Appropriations Committee:

> There are individuals from countries with known [Al Qaeda] connections who are changing their Islamic surnames to Hispanic-sounding names and obtaining false Hispanic identities, learning to speak Spanish and pretending to be Hispanic immigrants.

On the other hand, while this discourse is messy, it can serve to connect different communities together. In this discursive terrain, Gohmert is not just naming presumed threats to national security but pitting communities against each other. He is stating that Latinxs surveil themselves of Islam and vice-versa. The discourse of pretending to be "Hispanic" is not just an assessment of a potential performance, but a cautionary call to ensure Latinxs and Muslims in the U.S. remain vigilant of the internal dynamics of their communities. This means ensuring that moderation become a conditioning of the interior; here, power is calling for communities to self-regulate their ethnic performances and as a result, solidify their interior politically towards moderation and surveillance.

The battle of the racialized interior and its moderation thus extends to a multiplicity of communities. In the inaugural issue of the *Journal of Critical Ethnic Studies*, Sohail Daulatzai and Junaid Rana outline the figure of the Muslim as part of a broader third world imaginary. They ask "what is a Muslim? Is it faith? Is it practice? Is it racial other?

---

[95] Kevin Robillard, "Pol: al Qaeda told to 'act Hispanic' *Politico.com*, April 17, 2013. https://www.politico.com/story/2013/04/louie-gohmert-al-qaeda-told-to-act-hispanic-090212

How do you become Muslim? Is it contagious? Sikhs and Hindus are Muslims, Arab Christians are Muslims. Undocumented migrants are them too. Latina/os. Brown people. Atheists are Muslims, they look the part"[96]They go on and ask us to "listen to the white noise and interpret the static…there is an unremarked unity of the left and the right around the Muslim. The right speaks of color-blindness, the liberals speak of multiculturalism and diversity, and you speak of antiracism. But the language is the same. It betrays us, for it utters our dispossession."[97] The figure of the Muslim encapsulates the racialized other within the ongoing War on Terror, between the warfare state and the welfare state.

Daulatzai and Rana identify with the subjects of the essay with the use of the term "we":

> …We who are all together but never meant to survive. Yet we are the thieves, the criminals who crossed borders and jumped fences while staving off the dark angel in the desert, who are housed in your penal colonies left to premature death. We who vote the wrong way, who refuse to vote, who know the system is stacked yet sing for a new day, a new world. We are the critique that perfects the system…We are both lack and excess, a contradiction. Our selves say so little to you, yet you are able to imagine so much. We are both the captivating and the captured, the hungry and the hunted. We are the unruly, the fugitive, the outcast, the dangerous…We are the savages that wreck your civilization. In these oceans of dispossession swim the killing machines that refute a possible future. This refuse, these embers, are the waster of an unwinnable war that permeates every aspect of life. But yet, paraphrasing Brecht, we don't fear death, we are readied for the inadequacy of life…We are attacked and abandoned…we are neither left nor right. We are politics without a center. We are the disavowal of a future, when our future is lost. We are the street, a demographic threat. We are the devastation, life turned to death, the annihilation of all things present in the world.[98]

[96] Sohail Daulatzai and Junaid Rana, "Left," Critical Ethnic Studies 1, no. 1 (2015): 39.
[97] Ibid., 39
[98] Ibid., 40.

The essay "The Left" demarcates the story rarely trafficked by theories of the multicultural left and its itinerant resistance paradigm. It names the limits of such a politics because those on the Left "cannot bite the hand that feeds. In fact, you won't, because it is that tension that is the making of you—a tension that edifies your existence, and makes you not just necessary, but vital."[99]The collusion between radical critique and its liberal reformist nationalism insists and better yet relies on a world ravaged yet nonetheless possessing a "possible romantic redemption" between the abuser and the abused. For Daulatzai and Rana, the racialized other senses that our world is "ravaged with no romantic redemption" and has "nothing to lose" and a "world to gain"[100]. Speaking to the Left, "you don't know want a Muslim is, for it names your limits."[101] Here, this is where the left finds itself, finds its other, other. The deviants, the criminals, the contradictions, the hungry, the hunted, the terrorists, and the fugitives. Those who embrace the ravaging of the world and seek no remedy for its maintenance. They have no hand to bite because they ran away from its grasp far too long ago or just soon enough.

Daulatzai and Rana offer another way to think about the War on Terror and its war over racialized interiority. They critique leftist politics in its desire to seize the state and possibly remedy the calamities it has created. The limits of this leftist imagining is named by the figure of the Muslim which also includes Black, Latinx and Chicanx life. In their formulation, the figure of the Muslim should not be shaped by the interiority of the romance of redemption and instead, should seek responsible freedom and "seek no remedy" for the maintenance of a world built of ravaging racialized life. As stated in the

[99] Ibid. 42.
[100] Ibid., 42.
[101] Ibid., 42.

Introduction, articulations of responsible freedom offer interiority, not to redeem the state and its violence, but instead, options, and in this case, the feelings and desires of refusal of the logics of survivability even if it takes us to non-idyllic and ideal places. For Daulatzai and Rana, the figure of the Muslim has an interiority that senses the ravaging of the world in the name of redemption of democracy and domination. Thus, it is important to note that representations that redeem the current state of affairs are irresponsible articulations of freedom as they aim to redeem the ravages of democracy and domination. Often though, representations that redeem are the ones heralded by progressive activists as triumphant and celebratory narratives while disregarding that these representations are always already within a terrain of war. Thus, as I explore various films that discuss Muslim, Latinx and Black interiority, I am discussing by default a war over multiple racialized interiorities in the War on Terror.

IV.

> Before wizards went underground, when we were still being hunted by muggles, young wizards and witches sometimes tried to suppress their magic to avoid persecution. So instead of learning to harness or to control their powers, they developed what was called an Obscurus.—Newton Scamander, *Fantastic Beats and Where to Find them*

The 2016 film *Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them* is not only a prequel that establishes the foundation of the Harry Potter franchise in its travel to New York, it is also a film that serves as a cultural text to meditate on the scripting of violence during the War on Terror, at the site that the West feels, even though inaccurately, the War on Terror began on September 11th at ground zero. If we consider the realignment of historical time on 9/11, New York as ground zero maps time as if it were graphing real numbers. Ground zero functions as 0, everything before it includes all negative rational

numbers (time/dates) and everything after it are rational positive numbers (time/dates). Ground zero is the site upon which all history becomes into matter and matters. *Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them* reinvites us into the world of Harry Potter by having us travel to ground zero. Quite adeptly, the J.K. Rowling penned and produced film positions questions of minority difference as questions of the *supernatural*, of the magical kind up against the dominance of the *supernational*. Regardless of where the franchise envisions magical difference in the sequels to follow this one, *Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them* situates protagonists as heroic only when they can erase magic for the purposes of American "no-majs" (beings who are not magical) and defines antagonists as evil when they seek to unleash the magical capacities of magical beings regardless of the power of no-maj supremacy to define matters of history and time. Reading 1920s New York as ground zero forces us to reckon with the consequences of 9/11 on minoritized life globally and thus, situates the film as key text in understanding the politics of representation within the era of redemption.

The film, as the title implies, is a film about the surveillance and policing of magical difference. Indeed, the word "fantastic" is a precise way that Rowling's liberalism considers difference—as exotic curiosity to be intimately understood and explored but also and most importantly intimately handled with and managed. In this particular film, Rowling scripts difference as needing to be managed and enclosed as is demonstrated by the suitcase of the film's protagonist, Newton Scamander. The tension of the film relies in this management and enclosure's collision with liberation and righteous anger. Playing the villain in disguise—Grindelwald disguised as Graves—Colin Ferrel's Graves character aims to unleash magical difference. Magical difference

manifests itself in Credence, a teenager whose magical difference was forcibly punished and disciplined and who through this abuse develops into an obscurial; these young witches or wizards become consumed by a parasitical force known as an Obscurus due to suppressing their magical difference in a dominant no-maj society. One of the other protagonists who aims to protect Credence in the film, Tina Goldstein, states that "its an unstable, uncontrollable dark force that busts out and attacks and then vanishes."

Within the context of the War on Terror as the formative template for the project of redemption, it is critical to read the film's scripting of an obscurus as part and parcel of the discourse of the "moderate muslim"; at the climax of the film, Credence becomes a full obscurial but is then killed by the surveillance branch of the Magical Congress of the United States. After his death, three major forces collide—the conservative, liberal and radical articulations wrestle with what just happened at this new ground zero. The conservative articulation justifies his murder as "justice" because one, he killed a no-maj and "risked the exposure of our community" which "broke one of our most sacred laws." Graves' character responds that what was done there was not right and that these "sacred laws" have magical beings "scuttling like rats in the gutter! A law that demands we conceal our true nature! A law that directs those under its dominion to cower in fear lest we risk discovery! I ask you, Madam President, I ask all of you…Who does this law protect? Us? Or them? I refuse to bow down any longer." Graves, who is actually the title villain of the prequel franchise Grindelwald, is apprehended and arrested but it is clear that the rest of the franchise will deal with the aftermath of this ground zero as Graves states "history will surely note that" what was done there was carried out by those who protect such laws that seek to hide magical difference and suppress it. The most

significant scene of the film is the ending where the protagonist, Scamander, "obliviates" the memory of the entire city and the protectors of the law put the city's infrastructure back together. Everything that occurred that day must be suppressed and the supreme and sacred law must be maintained by erasing the obscurial threat. No-maj supremacy is protected by the very witches and wizards it is so scared to confront. The musical score that accompanies the scene implies that indeed this is a heroic act and that the real reckoning with history is too much of a threat to the status order. In this way, the tolerant liberals—the so-called heroes of the film—who aim to protect Credence also erase his memory. Credence's suffering and by association the suffering of magical beings is erased. It seems that, like in many blockbuster films, evil and villainy is always already scripted as difference that needs to be harnessed and suppressed for the functioning of dominant societal institutionality. The heroes of the film are the ones who offer minoritized suffering to dominant society as part of their own application and solicitation within that dominant framework. I presume that the upcoming sequel to this film *The Crimes of Grindelwald* will also further this narrative—the full potential of minoritized (magical) difference must be either contained or at the very most, must be assimilated or, worst, made to be moderate.

Within the purview of War on Terror, the thesis of moderate Muslims, so often articulated by secularist atheists like Bill Moher or commentators of Jewish descent like John Stewart, describes "overcoming nativist discrimination in the United States as part of the general 'immigrant religious experience'—a sociological process Catholics and Jews had completed, providing Muslims with a template for how to successfully

Americanize while retaining core tenets of faith."[102] Additionally, the moderate muslim thesis aims to find "Muslims who can be worked with" and "those who cannot" be worked with and while disregarding the racial configurations of Black Islam, oftentimes calls for an "American Islam" that "will translate into the Islamic and Western vernacular."[103] The moderate muslim thesis also aims to position Muslims as liaisons to the US state and other Muslim communities at home and abroad in critiquing extremism and in effect demonstrating the valor of cultural (read: not racialized) American Islam. The political potential of a Black Islam is seen as an obscurial formation that only operates in anger, hatred, and is thus antithetical to the project of American empire. Enlisting internal community spying and surveillance within the "see something, say something" practice, the thesis of moderate muslims is built to promote US interests first and foremost. The protagonists of the film, Scamander and Goldstein, embody the thesis of the moderate muslim. While they themselves confront discrimination, and are even tortured and sentenced to death by the state they nonetheless would rather erase these psychologically violent realities and histories to maintain the status quo and protect themselves. The lives, histories, magical practices and relations of magical beings are again relegated to keep no-majs in a sustained suspension of reality—the simulation of a world where no-majs do not worry about the magical world while this work is carried out by the very real work of "moderate magical beings" who do the erasing in the name of no-maj interests. The interiority valued in the film is that which regulates and moderates the very real potential of magic and thereby redeems and protects no-maj supremacy.

[102] Corbett, Rosemary. *Making Moderate Islam: Sufism, Service and the Ground Zero Mosque Controversary*. (Stanford University Press. Redwood City, 2016) 2.
[103] Ibid., 2.

Here, magical beings—the heathens, pagans and savages according to no-maj supremacy—must internally regulate themselves according to the law, a law that ultimately is not objective or neutral, but instead, part of the war of the interiority of racialized life. Unfortunately, this articulation of irresponsible freedom dictates much of the representation of Coco, a film about what lies beyond the world of the living. Unfortunately, it seems to do very similar work as Fantastic Beasts—it redeems systems of abuse and their norms in regulating our interiors.

V.

The co-director of the film *Coco* Lee Unkrich stated that his team was honored to provide a film to the world that would contribute positively to the reality of anti-immigrant sentiment and policy. He states "It's been painful for me and a lot of people that there's been so much negativity in the world, specifically and unfairly having to do with Mexico...We're just honored and grateful that we can bring something positive and hopeful into the world that can maybe do its own small part to dissolve and erode some of the barriers that there are between us."[104] Echoing the same sentiment, co-director Adrian Molina calls the film a "love letter to Mexico" stating that the "best way to bring people in and have them empathize with others is through storytelling. I hope…the world will love a family like mine. I think that nothing bad can come from opening your heart to a story. I think only good can come from putting yourself in someone else's shoes."[105] The comments by the directors of the film ensure that Coco is a film about redemption and

[104] Reggie Ugwu, "How Pixar Made Sure 'Coco' was culturally conscious." *The New York Times,* November 19, 2017.
https://www.nytimes.com/2017/11/19/movies/coco-pixar-politics.html
[105] Michelle Ruiz, "Why Coco Just Might Be the Most Important Film of the Year" Vogue, November 27, 2017.
https://www.vogue.com/article/coco-movie-review-political-importance-trump-mexico

empathy that is directly responding to the explicit language and policies of the current Trump administration. The film carries with it an explicit "love" from Molina to Mexico and Molina hopes that "a family like his" will be loved. Molina is explicitly making the film part of an exchange that can be surmised in this way—if I tell you my suffering, will you accept me, will you love me?

Coco is a film of representational redemption and for me, therefore, a film that deeply and unapologetically articulates irresponsible freedom. It operationalizes itself as a film of unquestionable vulnerability for acceptance and inclusion. Like Michelle Obama's statements in the opening of this dissertation, Molina and Unkrich traffic their families and ancestors' suffering for institutional solicitation. They are unconcerned quite frankly with soliciting ancestors for the purposes of healing together in their truths. Instead, they are interested in developing a story arc that receives love and acceptance and is not interested in exploring and constructing characters whose journeys anticipate power's desire to coopt their narrative and thus, move us beyond resistance.

My experience at the movie theater was full of neocolonial affectivity. I cried at the beauty of an immigrant story so wonderfully drawn and animated. The characters reflected so much of my family's history and future that I was exhilarated by its representational potential. However, to be frank, the film's resolution frustrated me. While I did not want to be so critical, I could not help my anger towards the writers of the film. They were trafficking immigrant suffering for the purposes of institutional solicitation; they were in effect only looking to be accepted and loved. If we focus on the film's resolution, which is key in shaping the kind of catharsis intended for the audience, it is clear the film does not just normalize the border but redeems it via racialized suffering. In a *Medium* blog post,

Eliana Buenrostro captures the redemptive project inherent in the resolution of *Coco* with precision.

> Pixar is normalizing surveillance of immigrants. If Pixar intended the use of the border to be subversive, that message does not come across at all. The fact that Hector crosses into realm of the living through the "legal means" or in other words, the rules that the universe of Coco has created, signifies an endorsement of a visa process that dehumanizes immigrants. All the labor it takes to get Hector to the realm of the living before the day of the dead ends, falls on Miguel and his family. Border patrol agents are portrayed as simply doing their jobs when the reality is much different…The final takeaway from the film is not that borders are inhumane, rather that there is always a way to reunite families through legal systems already in place. Hector essentially crossed the legal way and this normalizes a violent reality that is imposed on immigrants. One of the reasons, I was so upset by the way the border was included is because it didn't have to be written that way. These films that exist in imagined worlds don't have to include policing or borders. We can imagine something better.[106]

Buenrostro accurately defines the problematic of this representational endeavor. How does one "humanize" immigrants via the very recourse of their dehumanization? This question thus reflects and reveals how the project of representation and redemption functions as an articulation of irresponsible freedom. It is the main tactic of redeemers in their persistent aim to be loved and accepted by dominant society and therefore, have their interiority and inwardness claimed by a kind of romantic redemption.

Moreover, the film is also part of the war on the interior. Building off Buenrostro's assertion, imagine if the film luxuriated in the interior potential of Héctor and his fungibility and fugitivity. In his efforts to cross the border and commune with the living, there is a key scene where he transforms himself into Frida. However, his cross-dressing to cross over the border is not the site of freedom that the filmmakers intended in their

[106] Eliana Buenrostro "Disney's Pixar Coco Normalizes a Militarized Border" *Medium*, November 26, 2017.
https://medium.com/@musicdissonance/disney-pixars-coco-normalizes-a-militarized-border-459917a53f49

resolution. If anything, the transness of the scene functions as a joke rather than a capable form of delegitimizing the identities constructed by the border. Imagine if the film relied on taking his fugitive fungibility in relation to gender variance as a destabilizing force of the symbolic ordering of gender across the border seriously. Instead of privileging the family's journey to make him legible to the militarized border and therefore, find love through and *yes, love the border itself,* the film instead valued fugitivity and constantly challenged its existence. The film would value Héctor's creative potential in destabilizing the very identities constructed by power. Instead, *Coco* redeems the border and re-constitutes the gendered, sexual and racialized identity politics it creates. *Coco* disregards the fact even though this particular family has resolved its pain and suffering via legal citizenship, it does not mean the border will altogether stop disciplining and punishing other presumed "deviant" and "unworthy" dead. This is precisely why Unkrich and Molina's film is an articulation of irresponsible freedom.

Figure 9: Héctor attempts to cross the border as Frida but is denied.

The transitive expression of gender in narratives of racialized escape beyond state sanctioned violence and enclosure is addressed in C. Riley Snorton's *Black on Both Sides: A Racial History of Trans Identity*. Snorton explores the way slave narratives crafted fugitivity with fungibility. Snorton writes,

> The variegated landscape of enslavement—its applications, abrogations, and diffuse rationales—staged the grounds for fungibility to emerge as a legal intercession intra- and internationally. How, then, would the "slave," as "not fungible" and as a "subject of compensation" come to emblematize a series of crises in imperial sovereignty, value and ontology in the twilight of formal slavery? Relatedly, how did the legal categorization of the slave, in Saidiya Hartman's terms, link "the figurative capacities of blackness [with] the fungibility of the commodity"? If, as Hortense Spillers explains…the capacity for gender differentiation was lost in the outcome of the New World, ordered by the violent theft of body and land, it would stand to reason that gender indefiniteness would become a critical modality of political and cultural maneuvering within figurations of blackness, illustrated, for example, by the frequency with which narratives of fugitivity included cross-gendered modes of escape. Spillers names this process "ungendering," the not accidental coincident of "fungible" in the twilight of formal slavery—also described as the transition from slavery to freedom or from slaving economies to the free market—which prompts an understanding of the phenomena she identifies in terms of the transitive expressivity of gender within blackness.[107]

Snorton denotes that gender indefiniteness is a critical site to consider maneuvering and movement in the transition from slavery to freedom. As Snorton writes, "fugitive narratives featuring 'cross-dressed' and cross-gender modes of wander and escape most often function as kind of map for a neglected dimension of what Spillers defined as the semiotic terrain of black bodies under captivity" wherein "gender refers not to a binary system of classification but to a 'territory of cultural and political maneuver not at all gender-related,

[107] C. Riley Snorton, Black on Both Sides: A Racial History of Trans Identity (Minneapolis ; London: University of Minnesota Press, 2017), 56.

gender-specific."[108] Within the purview of articulating responsible freedom, it is imperative to consider the way gender functions in Spiller's formulation as a territory of cultural and political maneuver, not just a system of binary classification.

Moreover, the gendered and sexualized order of slavery finds itself reproduced in the very border *Coco* redeems. Eithne Luibhéid writes that detention centers and border zones mark bodies as racial, sexual, cultural and economic outsiders to the national body.[109] Citizenship is intimately connected to a patriarchal sexual order that sought and still seeks to maintain white racial and cisgender purity and property relations. Moreover, the narrative of the hard-working, family-oriented and Christian (Catholic) immigrant subjectivity positions capitalist, cisgender and patriarchal social formations as more desirable bodies for potential, if at all, incorporation into the body politic. Trump's rhetoric of the criminal, rapist and immoral Mexican and Central American immigrant figure again reenergizes the gendered and sexualized order of the border. *Coco* had the potential for valuing the critical way gender functions not as a gender binary but as a site of cultural and political maneuver at the border when Héctor cross-dresses as Frida to cross-over as a fugitive.

This moment in *Coco* also could have articulated responsible freedom insofar as it would have revealed a narrative of fugitivity, not immigration. What I mean here is that the film is only a story of immigration when it redeems the border and seeks to find identities that fit into the discourse of respectable immigrants trying to seek a legal recourse into the U.S. Had the filmmakers not been so wedded to the politics of resistant

[108] Ibid., 57.
[109] Luibhéid, Eithne. "Introduction: Queering Migration and Citizenship." *Queer Migrations: Sexuality, U.S. Citizenship, and Border Crossings*. Ed. Eithne Luibhéid and Lionel Cantú. Minneapolis: Minnesota UP, 2005, xix.

identification and redemption of the nation state as a way of resolving their internal desire to be loved, they could have rendered a story not of immigrants but of fugitives. Indeed, responsible freedom reveals the creative wonder and vastness of racialized life in its most sovereign wildness and this, I argue, relishes interiorities oftentimes condemned by dominant forces of power.

This is precisely why moderation is always sought for minority interiority. Moderation keeps one from moving beyond resistance and redemption. Embracing criminality and deviancy is a criminal act. Thus, when Héctor cross-dresses as Frida he is articulating the way Latinx communities turn inward to the sovereignty of their interior, creatively experiment with finding ways to destabilize the anticipation of identity and decide to become fugitives. By choosing to defy the border and its categories of classification, Héctor uses gender variance as a political and cultural maneuvering and endeavors to become mojadx. Becoming mojadx is not a site of respectable identification, but instead, a site of destabilizing the very systems of power and oppositionality and taken together, their logics of survivability. Channeling Snorton and Spillers, I consider mojadx as the site where we can identify the transitive expressivity of gender within the Latinx community. In this scene, *Coco* could have luxuriated the trans capabilities of Latinx communities to defy not redeem border identities. However, the film unintentionally then also reveals how ungendering marks the very site of the transitions between non-citizenry and the free market nation state.

Unfortunately, this is not what happens in *Coco.* Héctor is captured. The revelation of the fugitive ungendering is mocked at and not fully explored as a way to move beyond the resistant and redemptive subject formations that are too be celebrated and made

triumphant within the shaky ground that holds up the weak Achilles of minority nationalism. Héctor's queer transgression of the border has no place in a kid-friendly, family-oriented and Mickey Mousey rendering of Chicanx and Latinx immigration. The film ends with a happy family, legitimized by the work of rights, representation and recognition and this happiness is built on the presumption that the border remains and only with the terrifying knowledge that many more dead will continue to struggle like Héctor to commune with the living. However, it is key to note that Héctor did not try this tactic merely out of wit; he did it because Latinx fugitivity, like all aspirations towards horizons of freedoms, is tethered to the transitive expressivity of gender. Moreover, Héctor's fugitivity, even though temporary in the film, remains us that irresponsible freedom and its work to moderate interiority is necessary for systems of abuse precisely because of the creativity, boldness and vastness of the sovereignty of the inwardness of responsible freedom that knows no limits to its practice beyond recognition and resistance. While the film redeems borders, we can read beyond its frame and imagine the many more creative strategies rooted in the racialized inwardness of responsible freedom that defy the border in Cocolandia and beyond.

VI.

It is critical to place *Black Panther* as part of the cinematic experience whose particular context offers the representation of racialized life within the ongoing renaissance of the super hero genre as part and parcel of the ongoing War on Terror. Spearheaded by the critical and commercial success of DC's *The Dark Knight* (2008) and then, solidified by Marvel's hit *Iron Man* (2009), the last decade of super hero films often posits an external evil threat that is headed towards the internal structure of Western

civilization. The extralegal activities of superheroes, who act outside of the law, reifies the very acts of state formations who act extralegally in practices of torture, detention and surveillance that are often cinematically enjoyed and invested in within the superhero genre. Spiderman, its failed "Amazing" franchise and its recharged Homecoming film, does essentially what the police cannot do (but as we know often do anyways) wrangle criminals and deviants beyond the parameters of the law. For me, the superhero genre and its emergence as critical cultural texts lies in its role in normalizing extralegal state violence against brown bodies the world over. Within the superhero genre is the surreptitious hand of intelligence agencies that aim to acquire information by any means necessary. It is no coincidence that the renaissance of the superhero genre emerges after the establishment of the U.S.' perpetual war on terror which after reports of torture and crimes against humanity that lead to condemnation by anti-war movements indeed needed representational and romantic redemption.

Representation in superhero films then is as much about the biopolitics of warfare than it is about mere celebratory and triumphant identity politics. *Black Panther*, for me, hinges its narrative arc as a text about redeeming the very intelligence agencies that surveil Muslim bodies today and who, through COINTELRO for instance, actively destroyed the Black Panther Party in the first place. Unfortunately, for me, a remixed reading of Ryan Coogler's film requires that we ask what it means that the name, history and politics of the Black Panther will forever be intimately tied now and housed in *Mickey Mouse's* playground. The vilification via the poorly scripted writing of the character arc of Killmonger, for instance, demonstrates the film's inability to give life and nuance to the black radical tradition and also, to offer more than mere rage and anger on

behalf of a subject formation that is indeed interested in arming the black diaspora in a global war against white supremacist western civilization. Indeed, the very operative function of the film is to assassinate any righteous anger that aims to be responsive to the ongoing and historical state-sanctioned violence against black people in America. If Killmonger (mis)represents the interiority of Black Lives Matter, Black Panther accurately represents All Lives Matter. Coogler, perhaps under the politics of Disney and Marvel, does not give us a nuanced rendering of the villain. Indeed, Wakanda's and Black Panther's embrace of the CIA operative Everett Ross as an ally and then, as a border patrol agent (shooting down Killmonger's planes which aim to arm the black diasporic cells worldwide) does very little to suggest an arc other than the film's resolution to position Wakanda's future as one that prioritizes "all life" before "black life."

But to be fair, perhaps Coogler is trying to have us read into the textual excess of the film—that which escapes the film's arc within the frame. What would happen if we read the film as a critique of Disney in the first place? In other words, Coogler enlists Michael B. Jordan who was also his choice for the role of Oscar Grant in *Fruitvale Station*. Like the life of Oscar Grant, Killmonger's life is also taken at the site of a monorail. Both of their deaths—intersecting in representation via Jordan's body—mark their placement in life as outside of the timeline of progress. In other words, by being killed on the very symbolic track of progress they are deemed as having no place in modernity, in capitalist, white time. Thus, when Black Panther gives a speech at the U.N., with approval of his CIA friend and ally and then becomes a developer in Oakland this is done through the assassination of insurgent, militant and fierce black life. What does it mean that the aesthetic beauty of the film resolves its crisis by aligning itself with and

thereby redeeming the very intelligence and state formations that generate black suffering in the first place?

For me, this is an articulation of irresponsible freedom. Coogler writes a tragic villain who wants to arm the black diaspora worldwide and then, scripts him to be so angry he cannot see beyond his goals. Coogler then has Black Panther kill the poorly scripted representation of the black radical tradition. Yet, the end of the film is also what structures the beginning of the film. When Black Panther's father realizes that his brother, who has been a spy in Oakland for the Wakanda government, becomes radicalized by the plight of black folks in the U.S. and steals vibranium to arm an insurrection against the U.S., he kills him and this act leaves Killmonger, who is a child at that point, fatherless. Radicalization, according to Coogler, is a black interiority and an inwardness that must be assassinated and killed, or most effectively, made to be moderate. It is too specific, particular and perhaps, too black to have an interiority that is not authentically aligned with statist moderation? Coogler responds with a film that articulates a resolution of irresponsible freedom.

The inwardness that the film aims to arrive at is similar to that of *Coco*. At the end of the film, after killing radical inwardness—even in its tragic misrepresentation—Black Panther gives a speech at the UN and opens up Wakanda to the world. Instead of prioritizing the plight and suffering of black folks specifically, Disney and its enlistment of Coogler offers up Killmonger as a sacrificial lamb for institutional solicitation and articulates an inwardness that is moderate and universal. Unlike *Django Unchained* where Django blows up the system of abuse and ends with the beautiful smile of his "little troublemaker" Broomhilda when she sees his dismantling of the entire plantation,

which I will discuss next, *Black Panther* ends with the black hero becoming a diplomat of the system of abuse and ends with a smile of a supportive CIA agent.

For Coogler, Killmonger is not redeemable and it is from this, that his form of life defies the logic of survivability and therefore, we can read into a fleeting moment before the resolution of the film that takes us beyond statist modes of recognition and resistance. When Black Panther offers him the possibility of helping him cure his seemingly fatal wounds, Killmonger's last words are "bury me in the ocean with my ancestors who jumped from ships, because they knew death was better than bondage." Instead of choosing a life where he will be imprisoned in a Wakanda prison, Killmonger would rather die than live in bondage. Killmonger taps into the inwardness of diasporic ancestral spirits and repeats the words of ex-slave narratives writers such as Linda Brent and Solomon Northup. In *Incidents in the Life of Slave Girl*, Brent states that "death is better than slavery" when referring to a story about her son's health when he was a boy.

> As the months passed on, my boy improved in health. When he was a year old, they called him beautiful. The little vine was taking deep root in my existence, though its clinging fondness excited a mixture of love and pain. When I was most sorely oppressed I found a solace in his smiles. I loved to watch his infant slumbers; but always there was a dark cloud over my enjoyment. I could never forget that he was a slave. Sometimes I wished that he might die in infancy. God tried me. My darling became very ill. The bright eyes grew dull, and the little feet and hands were so icy that I thought death had already touched them. I had prayed for his death, but never so earnestly as I now prayed for his life; and my prayer was heard. Alas, what mockery it is for a slave mother to try to pray back her dying child to life! Death is better than slavery.[110]

In another excerpt in the narrative, Brent writes,

> I once saw a young slave girl dying soon after the birth of a child nearly white. In her agony she cried out, "O Lord, come and take me!" Her mistress stood by, mocked at her like an incarnate end. "You sure, do you?" she exclaimed. "I am glad of it. You deserve it all, and more too."

[110] Harriet Ann Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*. 96.

> The girl's mother said, "The baby is dead, thank God; and I hope my poor child will soon be in heaven, too.[111]

Facing the mistresses' hate and her suffering at the behest of raising a child born of being raped by the slave master, the young slave girl's mother sees death as more desirable than the life of a slave. In another excerpt, Brent describes suffering at the possibility of losing her children and desiring to die before the next day's possible separation from her children.

> But to the slave mother New Year's day comes laden with peculiar sorrows. She sits on her cold cabin floor, watching the children who may all be torn from her the next morning; and often does she wish that she and they might die before the day dawns. She may be an ignorant creature, degraded by the system that has brutalized her from childhood; but she has a mother's instincts, and is capable of feeling a mother's agonies.[112]

Killmonger's channeling of these gendered articulations of "death is better than bondage" illustrates how death functions as an inward articulation of freedom beyond systems of abuse. While this articulation, again, does not take us to ideal places, it is nonetheless an inwardness that does not redeem state sanctioned violence. We see this in Solomon Northup's *Twelve Years a Slave* ex-slave narrative where sleep and "eternal rest" drives away the troubles of the oppressed; he writes:

> They left me in the cabin, that I might rest. Blessed be sleep! It visiteth all alike, descending as the dews of heaven on the bond and free. Soon it nestled to my bosom, driving away the troubles that oppressed it, and bearing me to that shadowy region, where I saw again the faces, and listened to the voices of my children, who, alas, for aught I knew in my waking hours, had fallen into the arms of that other sleep, from which they never would arouse.[113]

---

[111] Ibid., 24.
[112] Ibid.
[113] Solomon Northup, *Twelve Years a Slave*, 60.

In describing the beating of Patsey, a fellow slave, Northup does not aim to redeem the plantation, he instead listens to Patsey's suffering and states the following:

> …a blessed thing it would have been for her—days and weeks and months of misery it would have saved her—had she never lifted up her head in life again…Her idea of the joy of heaven was simply rest, and is fully expressed in these of a melancholy bard: "I ask no paradise on high, With cares on earth oppressed, The only heaven for which I sigh, Is rest, eternal rest".[114]

Black Panther's channeling of ancestral spirits in the last lines of its final act and resolution demonstrates that these forms of suffering are only legible as redemptive offers to legal redress and recognition as shown by Wakanda's and Black Panther's ties to the U.N and the CIA. In his speech to the CIA, King T'Chala declares that Wakanda is part of one tribe and that racial and geographical differences should be washed away and thus, resolves blackness' particularity into a universality. The resolution of the film provides a winner in the war of the interior and that is moderation and universality. The wildness of the sovereign interior has no place in the world other than fodder for the ethicality of state and international formations. Black Panther romantically redeems the nation and offers a black body in its claim to be accepted and included into the global capitalist economy. Yet, the fleeting moment that is ultimately sacrificed for the ethical redemption of systems of abuse holds so much. Killmonger's surrender to the vastness and depth of the oceanic spiritual plane with his ancestors of the Middle Passage and then, those who made similar declarations of inwardness expresses so much more than the meager display of publicness for the universal and international community that Black Panther so desires by the film's resolution. Killmonger articulates responsible freedom in that he listens to

[114] Ibid., 103.

the pain of the interior not to redress it by the very systems that produce it but to surrender to it, to embrace it and to have it teach him something about moving beyond the moderation forces that often regulate racialized life back into a romantic redemption of abuse. Surrender to the depths of one's interior defies the logics of survivability that often hold no place for racialized life in the first place.

VIII.

Unlike *Black Panther* and its redemptive qualities, Moonlight does not necessarily resolve the film's racialized suffering neatly and cleanly via institutional solicitation. Instead, *Moonlight* ends with the following image.

Figure 10: Scene from *Moonlight*

Pain and suffering is not offered up to redeem institutions of power and abuse. It is exchanged for care and healing. In this beautiful scene, Chiron is comforted by the very man who in his teenage years was peer pressured to beat him for being queer while he was also the only person to that point who he had been intimate with. In this moment of

forgiveness, healing and care, the traumatic and seemingly never-ending cyclical nature of violence is not offered up to some heroic, monumental triumph with white institutionality and legality but with internal compassion, intimacy and shared desire.

Here, the resolution of queer and racialized injury is not cheap and for a white audience. It runs deep, and its depth is located precisely because the film is an exploration of inwardness in all its hurt, harm, passion and silence. It is important to note too that the protagonist of the film is not precisely the authentic and proper black subject. He hustles in the trap game and the film shows us very clearly that regardless of his masculine exterior his inwardness and interiority calls out to be loved, cared for and looked after. Chiron's complex interior positions us beyond the anticipation of resistance and redemption and is precisely from there that we find connection not via identity but we find connection via vulnerability and intimacy. Connection comes from the connecting of our interiors, in an erotic desire that also heals.

This film, in many ways, demonstrates precisely what I discussed in chapter I. Chiron is Lamar's butterfly, and it is no coincidence that his mariposada is nurtured and cared for by an Afro-Cubano, Juan (Mahershala Ali), who in the first act wonderfully cares for Chiron's interiority. Like the posthumanist turn towards the oceanic via surrender in chapter 1, *Moonlight* luxuriates in the vastness and abundance of interiority located in the Atlantic Ocean.

Figure 11: Scene from *Moonlight*

In the scene, part of the first act entitled “Little”, Juan takes Chiron, also known as Little in this act, to the beach. There, he tells Little to join him in some swimming. By this point in the film, Juan is well-aware of the quotidian violences Little confronts as a result of the intersections of homophobia, racism, and poverty. Juan is also aware of Little’s struggles at home as Little’s mother struggles with drug abuse and often, verbally and mentally abuses Little. Within this context, it is no irony that Juan is also a drug dealer who in one instance realizes that he supplies the drugs to Little’s mother. Thus, the scene where Juan takes Little to the beach to swim is a scene where their entanglements become knotted in time. Juan takes no pleasure in supplying Little’s mother with the drugs that directly influence Little’s struggles at home. This scene, though, does not offer suffering up to power for resolution but instead, depicts perhaps one of the most important scenes in recent cinema. Juan takes Little in his arms and guides him to float in the ocean. Juan tells him to “let your head rest in my hands, relax, I got you, I promise you I won’t let

you go." When Little turns his head up, he reassures him "hey man, I got you." He then tells him "ten seconds…feel that right there, you in the middle of the world man."

Like Lamar and the drowned hand, suffering is meditated via surrender to a body of water. It is no coincidence that in this scene that body of water is the Atlantic. When Juan tells Little that this is the middle of the world, he is caring for and healing Little via the sacred waters that house the spirits of the Middle Passage. The Atlantic as the site of connection for the African diaspora becomes again the meditative space of black diasporic interiority and connection. Moreover, I read this scene as fully embracing the contemplation of being "in the middle" as a way of being in the middle passage, and therefore, Juan's desire to have Little relax, breathe and find oneness, and feel and sense the spirits of the ocean functions as a kind of diasporic baptism; the floating within sacred holy water requires a surrendering to the inwardness of the black diasporic interior, as vast, as abundant and as spirit-filled as the very ocean that carried the enslaved and which also, holds as sacred burial space for those who refused commodification as well as those who did not survive the journey. Juan's Afro-Cubanness becomes meaningful not in its classification as a site of difference but via the oceanic spirituality and inwardness that he senses and feels he needs to share with the vulnerable Little. After the diasporic baptism in the waters of the Middle Passage, Juan tells Little the following beautiful lines, that beyond providing the title of the film, also indicates and luxuriates in the vastness of black interiority.

> I've been here a long time. Out of Cuba. A lot of black folks are Cuban. You wouldn't know from being here now. I was a wild little shortie, man. Just like you. Running around with no shoes on, the moon was out. This one time, I run by this old... this old lady. I was running, howling. Kinda of a fool, boy. This old lady, she stopped me. She said... "Running around, catching a lot of light". "In moonlight, black boys look blue". "You're

> blue". "That's what I'm gonna call you: 'Blue'." [*pause*] [Little asks] Is your name 'Blue'? [Juan laughs and replies] Nah. [pause] At some point, you gotta decide for yourself who you're going to be. Can't let nobody make that decision for you.

In addition to indicating that his desire is a war of the interior, not necessarily of the exterior, by saying that "you gotta decide for yourself who you're going to be", Juan also reassembles race as not a hinderance but a benefit. His anecdote reveals that blackness is also the color of the ocean and is also the hues and saturations of the very name of an artform defined by inwardness and letting suffering speak freely—the blues. Thus, this scene of diasporic baptism also demarcates the exteriority of blackness as critically engaged via the interiority of blueness. Blueness then is the affective inwardness of the reflection of the moon insofar as it gives light and meaning within and beyond a society that deems darkness as outside of reason. Here, *Moonlight* takes us not to the site of racialized interiority as a moderating force but instead, as deep horizons, full of spirits, meditation and potential for oneness. Juan's Afro-Cubanidad links itself with Little's burgeoning black queerness via the vulnerability situated not necessarily in the white-black binary of identity politics but the inwardness of blackness as blueness. Moreover, Juan ensures Little that the exterior world—"nobody"—can make the decision of who one is going to be. Juan shares Lamar's assertion in *DAMN*. that it is not "me versus the world" but "me versus me" and therefore, interiority, one's blueness, pushes us beyond the site of the exterior world's desire to already define blackness, as an exteriority.

Juan feels connected to Little via the oceanic and as is revealed in other scenes, the ocean and its whispers have spiritual qualities. In another scene, this time with Chiron and Kevin as teenagers on the beach, Kevin tells Chiron "that breeze feels good as hell

man…sometimes along the way where we live, you can catch that same breeze, just come through the hood and it is like everything stops for a second, cause everyone just want to feel it, everything just gets quiet you know." Chiron responds "its like everything you can hear is your own heartbeat, right?" Kevin shrugs, "yeah, it feels so good man." Kevin then says "shit makes you want to cry, it feels so good." Then Chiron asks "you cry?" After Kevin says no and then asks Chiron if he cries, Chiron responds "shit, I cry so much, I feel like I am going to turn into drops." Kevin responds "just roll onto the water…" Chiron's tears reveal a reciprocal and spiritual relationship with the ocean. Kevin suggests that this is where folks drown their sorrows. Chiron says that indeed it may not make sense but Kevin reassures him that indeed it does. Drowning as a way of surrendering to one's interiority and thereby collectivizing vulnerability as a site of connection and sociality illustrates the beauty of surrendering within as opposed to surrendering to the external world. Moreover, the reciprocal and spiritual connection with the ocean and its breezes also indicates that the ocean is a place where one's sorrows, if drowned fully, will emerge again and offer via its breezes, air to be breathed. When Kevin says that the breeze makes time stop in the hood, and his things get quiet, and then Chiron says that it allows him to hear his heartbeat, *Moonlight* reaches into the vastness and abundance of the oceanic as a site of diasporic healing. I would add that the Atlantic as "the middle of the world" for the African diaspora then also indicates that paying attention to the breeze is also sacred and spiritual act of inwardness. If one heals with the ocean then one can embrace the love of one's ancestors who know the hurt and pain that is shared within the Americas. It is no coincidence then that these shared moments of interiority, of vulnerability and of intimacy lead them to kiss and then, also lead them into

pleasure and climax. As I will discuss in the next section more explicitly, pleasure and climax is a channeling in of the erotic nature of fugitivity. Thus, *Moonlight*'s serious contemplation with and through the oceanic again moves us beyond resistance and instead, embraces the sovereignty of the oceanic vastness and abundance of racialized interiority, leading to the *pleasures of the interior world* regardless of the *pressures of the exterior world*.

VIV.

Typically read as a "revenge fantasy" *Django Unchained* (2012) offers fugitivity as emanating from the interior, driven by the love and eroticism shared between Django and Broomhilda. While Django's actions are the perspective that we engage the world through, it is nonetheless Broomhilda's love, desire and eroticism that motivates and animates fugitivity and freedom. Unlike the resolution of *Fantastic Beasts, Coco,* or *Black Panther*, interiority in *Django Unchained* originates from the drive of love inside and exteriorizes itself in the act of running away. Fugitivity as an interiority that listens to suffering not for institutional solicitation but instead for the eradication of the entire system is what Django Unchained as a text captures even within the confines of the cinematic spectacle of representation. Moreover, unlike the aforementioned films the main characters do not serve to redeem institutionality; in *Fantastic Beasts,* the laws of no-maj society that restrict magical ways of living in the world and terrorize the interiors of witches and wizards are redeemed by the minoritized subject's acquiescence to obliviate and erase history. In *Coco,* the familial struggle to achieve citizenship for their loved one at the end of the film reifies borders, anti-immigrant xenophobia and the surveillance of brown bodies. In *Black Panther*, the assassination of Killmonger on

behalf of the title character Black Panther does a lot of work—it redeems the very intelligence agencies (CIA and FBI) that destroyed the real Black Panther Party in the US and places their work with the newly "open" Wakanda as legitimate work. Indeed, Disney has successfully turned the conceptualization of the black radical tradition inherent in the Black Panther politics into a commodity that also redeems the very state that aimed to destroy the black radical tradition. Killmonger's plan to arm cells of the black diaspora on every continent to defend themselves from white supremacist violence is butchered and can only give light to a Black Panther figure who becomes a gentrifying force in Oakland and a liberal who claims that "all lives matter." Moderation dominates the interior so that the actions of the hyphenated social formations result in redeeming the ethical capacity of state formations.

Django Unchained is not a cultural text that offers redemption for systems of abuse; it offers black revenge, fugitivity, love, desire, passion, righteous anger, style, and even, kills the white savior! *Django Unchained* is a key text in challenging the moderation of the interior and instead, it exceeds the expectations of resistance and moves us into interiorities that aim for destabilizing their identities as oppositional. While the film is scripted by Quentin Tarantino, it is nonetheless the work of the actors to channel deep ancestral energies and spirit into their performances. Dismissing this work due to its white authorship also dismisses the critical work of the actors to make such a scripting have life. Indeed, the film relies on an interiority of the fugitive; thus, it is not Tarantino that is responsible for its reach and scope. Instead, the only way that the film can offer anything beyond the scope of resistance and redemption of the state is that it,

more often than not, consults and communes with fugitive spirits, and does not solicit institutions for the futurity of black life.

The premise of the movie relies on one key scene and one key moment in that scene. As the canines are howling and the overseers are closing in on Django (Jamie Foxx) and Broomhilda (Kerry Washington) as they attempt to escape the plantation that encloses them, the couple stop in their tracks and look at each other. As she discussed in interviews regarding her performance, Washington says that she channeled serious ancestral energy and indeed, she captures the fear and terror that informs this moment in their lives.[115] However, she *also* captures the emotional assuredness of love when one runs away. Thus, Washington, by engaging the depths of her interiority and sensing the ancestral energies in the spaces she inhabited, channels in critical forms of interiority. She surrendered to these energies and beautifully captured and performed one, the deep sense of fear and uncertainty in being caught by the canines of overseers just as much as she captured the deep sense of assuredness and certainty of running way by surrendering to what her interior desires, to her heart's desire, to love.

[115] MovieManiacsDE. "Django Unchained | Meet the Press (2013) Quentin Tarantino." *YouTube*, YouTube, 1 Jan. 2013, www.youtube.com/watch?v=-1QpScB-HJg.

Figure 12: Broomhilda's kiss.

In the scene, Hildi turns to Django and kisses him (Figure 12). But its not just any kiss. The kiss holds their lives in the balance, and Hildi presses her lips firmly, deeply and passionately into Django's lips. The kiss confirms that their love and desire to be together is what drives them to this terrain of fugitivity. The kiss offers a gesture of leaping beyond the identity created by the violence of the space of the plantation. The kiss signifies the desire to enter a terrain that no longer will define them by "house slave" and "field slave" but by their love, their intention and their passions. The kiss captures beautifully what fugitivity is and is not. Fugitivity is about seeking out the unknown, it is about pursuing love. It is not necessarily about resistant identity and oppositionality. It is about surrendering to the possibilities of leaving all that we know about ourselves behind and trusting that if you do so, you may find something different and while, as Lisa Cacho writes, the "road may kill us" at the very least fugitivity allows for the exercise of full human capacity to surrender to the thoughts of the interior, which if carefully examined, is the key to escape.

In this way, we can eroticize and sexualize fugitivity. Although fully immersed in a project of resistance theory, Treva Lindsey and Jessica Marie Johnson nonetheless importantly write that the "notion that sex could exist as a liberatory tool or as an act of resistance for enslaved black women" often do not factor into critiques of liberatory politics.[116] Indeed, the scene of the kiss for me (figure 12) denotes the significance of following your heart when pursuing, not the relatively *redemptive* project of resistance which always already sees us as defined as the resistant "self" in relation to the dominant "other" within the space of the plantation *but indeed* towards *dangerous* roads which always already assumes the potential of the destabilization of self and other within the terrain of fugitivity. The kiss is an affirmation of one's commitment to this destabilization. Kissing is the surrender to the possibilities that may lie ahead of one's fugitivity. Resistance means staying in the confines of the plantation and everyday having to capture one's fugitivity; fugitivity refuses the liberal project of resistance. It is much more than the ways we have come to define ourselves in relation to the self/other binary and gestures in the possibility of not capturing our own fugitivity. Fugitivity thus can be launched with a meditative kiss.

How might we activate Lindsey and Johnson's critique of liberatory politics for questions of fugitivity? For them, imagining Harriet Tubman, the figure of "Black Moses", as a sexual subject ushers in "sexuality, intimacy, pleasure and erotics into a historical era in which dehumanization and dispossession messily complicate the meaning of consent, complicity, and agency for enslaved black people."[117] As they argue, reimagining Tubman, and enslaved black women and free women of color-more broadly,

[116] Sohail Daulatzai and Junaid Rana, "Left," Critical Ethnic Studies 1, no. 1 (2015): 171.
[117] Ibid., 171.

"as historiographically erotic subjects opens narratives of slavery to a radical black sexual interiority."[118] In essence, Lindsey and Johnson ask: why does the iconicity of Tubman "demand a limited erotic imagination in which her sexual subjectivity becomes a casualty of her canonization as a revolutionary historical figure"? For them, the figure of fugitivity requires an "excavation of radical black sexual interiority during chattel slavery that contends with the erotophobia so deeply entrenched in our collective historicization of US slavery."[119] Lindsey and Johnson direct us to the site of pleasure in slavery as a site of reading between multiple binaries. One specific binary is the slave-owner power dynamic. They write,

> To find intimate encounters beyond the dialogic of slave-owner power is to envision enslaved and free black female sexuality as a thing beyond the Encounter, *a thing belonging to itself,* whether stolen away, self-purchased or manumitted…It is to reject the characterization of sex acts by or perpetrated on enslaved and free women of color as betrayals of invisible black men or of embodied communities in bondage. It is instead to visualize black female sex as flesh and sensation in bodies betrayed and violated, participating and initiating. To know when and where she climaxes, the whole race may climax with her.[120]

The eroticism of the kiss towards fugitivity luxuriates us in the vastness and abundance of racialized interiority. Running away towards dangerous horizons where death and/or further punishment may find them requires a deep dive and surrender not to moderation but instead to the wildness of interiority. Assessing fugitivity as an erotic interiority then also means that this, again, places freedom not in reworking the master's tools but in reaching deep within and surrendering to the escape interiority demands of us. As Sarah Haley writes of black girls and women who faced incarceration after slavery

[118]Ibid., 171.
[119] Ibid., 171.
[120] Ibid., 180.

freedom was not to be found in the legal recourse and redress of the state but instead is fugitivity as an immanence from within—"fugitivity was immanent, freedom ingrained in their interior lives even as the external world indicated they were trapped."[121] This turn to desire for freedom means that the resolution of the film is also a climax of inwardness.

The resolution of the film also demarcates the beauty of loving from a place of erotic fugitivity and takes us to the place of pleasure and climax. While indeed the futures of Django and Broomhilda are uncertain, they nonetheless do not redeem the plantation economy of any form of identification that may linger in their lives after slavery. Instead, we arrive at a beautiful scene that captures the many thoughts, desires, fantasies and dreams of the enslaved—the complete dismantling of the plantation economy. Broomhilda's joy and pleasure at the burning of the plantation also reveals the potential of ecstasy, pleasure and climax beyond recognition and representation. I end this chapter with four images that reflect the difference in discourses I have examined throughout. The first two show the climax of *Django Unchained*; Django destroys the plantation as it denied him and his wife the opportunity to desire, to love and to live their inwardness. Then, we see who this act of radical black interiority is done for as Broomhilda smiles and rejoices in the destruction of a system of abuse. The next two images are from the resolution of Black Panther. Black Panther gives his speech after he kills Killmonger and declares one tribe universalism. Then, we see who this act of black moderation is done for as CIA agent Everett Ross smiles at the mantainence of his systems of abuse. Let this images be a lesson for us—the first two are snapshots of responsible freedom, the second two are snapchats of irresponsible freedom.

[121] Sarah Haley, No Mercy Here: Gender, Punishment, and the Making of Jim Crow Modernity (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2016): 199.

Figure 13: Django blows up the plantation.

Figure 14: Broomhilda rejoices at the dismantling of the plantation.

Figure 15: King T’Chala gives a speech at the United Nations.

Figure 16: CIA operative Ross rejoices at T’Chala’s speech.

Chapter 3

Chicana Citizenship as Haunting in Melina Palacio's *Ocotillo Dreams*

Preface

Melinda Palacio's novel *Ocotillo Dreams* centers around the interiority of a mid-twenties Chicana woman, Isola, who after being notified that her mother has passed must travel to her home and attempt to grief and mourn someone who she had a difficult and complicated relationship with. This chapter argues that *Ocotillo Dreams* repositions gender and racialized citizenship as an interiority that is possessed by a complex ethics of haunting which in turn exteriorizes minoritized citizenship as an articulation of irresponsible freedom. Using the discussions emerging in informal reading groups, student artwork in my classes about the novel and critical ethnic studies discourse, I argue that articulating a critique of responsible freedom, as Melinda Palacios does, does not always already arrive at ideal interiorities. Consequently, *Ocotillo Dreams* reveals troubling moments where responsible freedom and its unabashed inwardness aligns itself with dominant forms of power as well as also moments where the same interiority unapologetically finds fugitivity as a futurity of racialized inwardness.

In taking the novel's articulations of interiority seriously, we find that Palacio successfully writes and scripts oneness for Chicana interiority. More specifically, Palacio anticipates the resistance theory model for subjectivity and pens interiorities where characters are truly complex and nuanced. In this way, Palacio returns the mystery of being to the Chicanx subject who "often seems to be known even before he or she arrives" and allows a Chicanx person to relish in the "fresh space with no reference other than to [their] internal oneness" which thus, balances the social and political realities of

racialized life.[122] What this chapter adds to the theorization of oneness, as Quashie writes it into existence, is that perhaps the external runs so deep into racialized interiority that it can obfuscate and muddy one's sense of inwardness. More specifically, I argue that the novel shows that access to citizenship develops an interiority that runs deep with power and therefore, generates racialized interiorities that can articulate irresponsible freedoms. By the novel's end, Isola both redeems the state's border patrol violences and yet, also chooses to defy them. Her Chicanx interiority blurs the lines of external identification and this shows that the sovereignty of the interior power—its vastness, wildness and abundance—can collide and collude with the sovereignty of dominant external power. Their combinations as forces of the interior are complicated, deadly and ethically disorienting.

I.

In *Ocotillo Dreams*, Melinda Palacio forces readers to collide with themselves. Palacio produces a text where deep self-introspection occurs at the sub-conscious level of dreaming. It is in the dreamscapes of the novel where the reader collides with themselves and by association, the dreamer and the writer herself. For Palacio, the main character, Isola, does not obtain her sense of self through learning the boundaries between self and other and becoming the resilient resistor. In contrast, Isola, like her mother Marina, comes to find herself within herself through suffering, loss and self-inflicted just as much as socially-inflicted injury. Marina often sacrificed time with her daughter to participate in social justice projects. For both characters, their sense of self is also captured through

[122] Quashie., 123.

dreams where the colliding stages of reality, feeling and consciousness are set in and out of motion with one another.

Palacio, in doing so, establishes a lively world where listening to the sovereignty of the interior—in its full nakedness, contradiction and nuance—produced complexity and disorientation of conventional readings of subject formations. The novel teaches us that venturing down the wildness of our interior does not guarantee utopic jubilance at once. Instead, racialized interiority can take us down internal mindscapes—which we can call dreams—that are not always pretty. Indeed, surrendering oneself to the sovereign of the interior is an invitation to the deepest trenches of our minds. While we may find wholeness in some of the journey, *Ocotillo Dreams* is best categorized as a cultural text beyond proper and authentic readings of interiority and more closely outlines the process of deep self-introspection as full of contradiction, and bewilderment, of ghosts and godliness, of sorrow and pleasure.

Isola, after finding out her mother has passed, drops her career as an English Professor to take care of her mother's estate. The novel sets off the journey of leaving one's responsibilities behind—or in other words, the places where one is recognized—through the forces of ghostly matters. The rupturing of the plane between life and death functions as a central act/actor in the novel and for me, narratives an articulation of racialized inwardness. The forces of life and death are what propel the main character's exploration into herself; this is important since what activates the subject in the novel, who happens to be a Chicana, is not the resist/dominate paradigm of resistance theory but instead, the forces of life and interiority.

The novel allows readers to divorce themselves from the formalities of resistance theory. It forces readers to refuse the politics of identity formation as solely a process of confrontation, resilience and endurance and instead, submits readers to contemplate the significance of wrestling with the difficult questions that have no binary; dichotomies of the self/other, oppressed/oppressor, and innocent/guilty within the landscape of modern politics are blurred; *Ocotillo Dreams* forces us to ask where is one's interiority haunted by power?

To consider the complexities of the novel and this question, over the course of three months, I organized two small reading collectives to read the book and meet weekly over coffee and pan dulce. The groups consisted of a beautiful assortment of racialized, gendered, geographical and sexual identities—a straight Chicano from the Central Valley of California, a queer Latina and a straight Chicana who were both from the San Gabriel Valley, a queer Latinx from Guatemala and Los Angeles, and a queer Latino from Orange County. One of the groups that met frequently consisted of two really close friends whom I know through work and college experiences. The other group that meet sporadically consisted of activist and scholarly friendships. As a writing and methodological practice, I have decided to disclose the content of meeting notes and recording that really tackled questions of interiority within the novel. The persistent haunting and ghostly matters of the novel dominated our group discussions and verified my choice of theme and thesis in this dissertation chapter. It is from these informal reading collectives where this chapter finds its life and interiority. Each discussion of the reading collective meetings are composite renderings of extremely complex and nuanced

conversations. I have tried to capture conversations that crossed paths in both groups and flesh out their meaning in the following sections.

III.

One discussion session focused in on how Isola's character is persistently haunted by memories of her mother and the failures in life that she must learn to deal with after her mother's death. One group member choose passages from chapter 2 "Mother's Words" where Palacio describes Isola as full of regret and questioning the person she has become—"How she regretted their lack of closeness and the lost years of her mother's desert days. Who had she become?"[123] After this moment of introspection, Palacio introduces one of the main plots of the story—Isola's mother had promised her late husband's identification card to multiple people and yet, after her death it would become Isola's issue to figure out the mystery of the mica. Our first meeting critiqued Isola's level of privilege and attachments to materiality regardless of the plight of the undocumented community her mother dedicated her life and house to. Unlike Isola who taught English literature as a college professor, Marina, Isola's mother harbored fugitives and dedicated her life to teaching them English and navigate the oppressive terrain of the U.S. when one is undocumented. The first collective was angered at the following lines that reflect Isola's "selfish" inwardness.

> This was too much for her to handle one her own. No, she had to pull herself together. She was a grown girl, a professor, no less, capable of taking care of her mother's affairs. So stop crying, she told herself. She was still sobbing in the empty room when she heard the car screech away from the driveway. Was this woman telling the truth? Isola didn't know what to think, and worse, she was upset with her mother all over again. Wasn't anything sacred to Marina? She had some nerve! Isola didn't doubt that if she herself were dead, her mother wouldn't have wasted any time in giving away her identity. Marina had given away everything Isola

[123] Melinda Palacio, *Ocotillo Dreams* (Tempe, AZ: Bilingual Press/Editorial Bilingüe, 2011): 13.

> had ever owned as a child, her old clothes and shoes. She had even sent Isola's favorite toys to her cousin in Mexico. "I thought you had outgrown toys" her mother would say in her defense of charity. Isola was determined to find her father's documents, but she wasn't going to hand them over to Josefina or Alfonso or anyone.[124]

While most of us agreed that it seemed Isola had turned away from an inwardness that valued social justice and fairness precisely because of an internalized resentment towards her mother, one of us commented that they understood Isola's turn away from home and her mother. On the one hand, they could understand Marina's sentiments to pass along toys and clothes to her community and family, it was clear that Marina could have been a bit more sensitive to her daughter's memories and emotional attachments to certain objects. One comment I had here was the way that Isola's inwardness in the beginning of the book is shaped so much by her privilege and her citizenship. Another member of the collective stated that this reminded them of their families' persistent charity and how much they did not seem to notice once things were gone, and this is precisely the privilege Isola exhibits here, her disregard for others and her persistent dislike of sharing her excesses.

Upon reflection, it is clear that Palacio juxtaposes two interiorities at the beginning of the film. Marina's interiority disregards her daughter's privilege and finds fulfillment in sharing their excesses locally and transnationally with their families. Marina's interiority still haunts Isola, even after Marina's death. Isola has not grown beyond herself and her mother's love extending beyond her daughter's desire to hold onto certain keep sakes of childhood. The novel's brilliance is located in how Palacio handles racialized and gendered inwardness. If Isola is indeed regretful for the lack of

[124] Ibid., 14.

closeness she shared with her mother, resolving this tension requires deep introspection and may never be resolved.

In the same first meeting, our reading collective also discussed the significance of familial archives and how they may haunt our communal feelings but also reshape our interiors toward other forms of oneness. One member of the collective stated that she felt that the novel really pushed her to think beyond activism in the public sphere and how she often neglected (but also choose to because of the complexities of family life) her relationship with her family. Two of us responded that our familial relationships reveal how complicated it is to organize trauma and haunting and perhaps this is the point of reading such a novel—that indeed there is more to who we are than just resistance and oppositionality, there is conflict, contradiction and catastrophe. Not everything can be resolved by resistance, there is definitely more to us than just our wars with the external world.

One place in the text where this discussion emanated from was in chapter 4, "Cobwebs" where Isola is growing through a file folder with her name on it and realizes so much more of the feeling of disconnection she had with her mother but also, the tension that connects them beyond the plane of physical death.

> The file with Isola's name on it contained a few photos of herself as a young child, dressing up in her mother's tie-dyed creations. Isola had noticed a couple of these old dresses in Marina's closet, but didn't register them as being the same ones until she saw the old photograph. Marina had been ruthlessly generous in giving away her daughter's clothes and strangely sentimental about keeping her own outdated styles. Isola's file, stuffed with postcard she and her mother had exchanged over their less-than-communicative years, was the thickest one she'd open so far. Her postcards with their boring and cryptic words chronicled the extent to which her mother pretended they had a normal relationship. Isola now wished she had written more than a few scribbles.[125]

[125] Ibid., 18.

The spiritual connection beyond the plane of death marks the racialized and gendered inwardness that Palacio narrates throughout the novel. Letters within a familial archive spark and spawn the ongoing haunting that will determine the kind of thoughts, feelings and overall person Isola will have\become. Authentic, proper and respectable identities directed towards political goals are important in this novel, which I will discuss later in this chapter, but in order to arrive at a place where they matter in shaping not only Isola's inwardness but actions and relations in the world, Palacio suggests that she has to surrender to the spirit of her recent late ancestor and seriously reckon with how these traumas shape who she is and who she will be in the future. The pain of the "less-than-communicative years" and the way her mother "pretended they had a normal relationship" again marks the way haunting complicates a normative reading of resistance and also, marks anger, regret and resentment, and as is the operative interior force that acts in how we can think and shape meaning.

One member of the collective brought up the way remorse as an affectivity is more critical to Palacio than traditional and conventional resistant identity politics. The feeling of remorse and regret for Isola maps a cartography of complex racialized and gendered interiority that again unravels just how critical it is to study the vastness and abundance of inwardness. The following passage triggered an extensive and exhaustive conversation in our reading collective as a way that we can build community via vulnerability and intimacy, feeling and honesty. It also marked the extent to which we prioritize healing in the different and divergent work we all did. A few of us were in higher education, a few of us were labor organizers and some of us were applying to graduate and professional school for social justice oriented training. The novel's plot took

us inward, and forced us to think through the dynamics of mental health in whatever part of life where were in. It was almost as if by opening the file folder with Isola we were also opening up our deepest thoughts to one another.

> [Isola] wondered what had happened to the long letter she had sent to her mother after hearing she was ill. She had written several tear-stained drafts of her sorrow and apology which ended up charred on the gas stove. The final computer version seemed to have lost the sincerity of her earlier drafts. Had her mother realized how genuine her remorse had been? Isola felt crummy and small at not finding the letter she had struggled over, but reminded herself that it was pointless to try to reconstruct her mother's life from the dozens of boxes she left. If the situation were reversed, her mother would be just as baffled about the infant who had grown up to be so different from her. Isola was convinced her mother had been the one had shape-shifted into another being. [126]

One member of the reading collective spoke candidly and softly about the feelings this part of the novel triggered for them. They discussed their ongoing conflicts and attempts at repairing their relationship with their father who no longer lived in the U.S. as a result of immigration status. They articulated how the novel triggered emotions that they otherwise have been suppressing and that indeed, like the following passage, they fantasized about a better relationship with their immigrant parent.

> When [Isola] saw women glowing with maternal pride in their grown daughters, clinging and caressing them in public she envied their closeness. There were like clouds, the same but different. She spied them at malls and museums, studied the contours of their faces, noting each resemblance and how easily they communication with each other, both silently and verbally. She sometimes had to concentrate hard just to remember the details of her own mother's face.[127]

Within the novel and its affective excess into the collective's dialogues, I noticed that the novel positioned life in the U.S. as a kind of haunting. Not only were the characters haunted by citizenship or the aspiration to it, but so too were all of us in the collective. I,

[126] Ibid., 19.
[127] Ibid., 19.

for instance, discussed how much guilt, sorrow and regret I felt and continue feel as a I result of father's departure to Costa Rica after my immigrant parents separated years back. The transnational distance and the emotive reconfiguration of his departure had left a specific imprint on my mental health. I brought into the group discussion how I also struggled to remember certain details of my father's way of being. Also, the time that had passed also made it awkward to see each other once again. All of these pains as a result of separation and painful outcomes of relationships leave us as people who fantasize about better futures, envy positive interactions and even, look for ways to shift the blame and guilt in who has "shape-shifted" with the time that has kept us apart. The novel's luxuriating within racialized inwardness had us sharing and listening to each other's vulnerability; here, the collectivizing of individual inwardness revealed the ongoing significance of the interior in building community.

III.

Looking back at my notes of the reading collectives, our conversations centered as to how refreshing the novel was in imagining racialized life beyond the burden of resistance. In my contemplation as to why this novel did this work in our reading collectives, I argue that it is because *Ocotillo Dreams* refuses the project of resistance theory by forging a complex mapping of what Carla Freccero calls an ethics of haunting. Frecerro outlines an ethics of haunting as an effort to "theorize affect's persistence across time and its force as that which compels past-, present- and future-directed desires and longings. As such, this ethics "would be reciprocal in that it would entail a willingness both to be haunted and to become ghostly, and insofar as the reciprocal penetrability

entailed would also be sensuous—a commingling of times as affective and erotic experience—it would also be queer"[128] The project of queering time then does so by denormalizing time through "its relation to desire, fantasy, wish and the impossibility of sustaining linear narratives of teleological time."[129]

Over the course next reading collective sessions, we commented on the limited choices for characters as a result of just how much the role of the anti-immigrant surveillance state is front and central. Indeed, the internal dialogue offered by Palacio motions us to consider not just agency of subjects who resist but the sovereignty of subjects who think independently of the traps placed upon them by power. One group member commented on precisely how Cruz, Isola's lover, must strategically navigate the U.S. as the possibility of detention, detainment and/or deportation (and ultimately death as the novel suggests) is omnipresent given the way the U.S. pursues and criminalizes people with less documentation. When he arrives in the U.S., he is greeted by Marina, Isola's mother, with open arms and her network of people helps him on a consistent basis. The novel though shows that strategy can be affective. One can find love even if one needs to be strategic and so when Cruz and Marina develop a romantic relationship, the social relationships that unfold demonstrate that an ethics of haunting offers a more extensive and exhaustive way of reading the novel.

In our third meeting, one member commented on the odd intimacies between eroticism and citizenship and I now read this as how we might read such intimacies in how Palacio writes citizenship as a haunting and ghostly matters of racialized and gendered interiority. During one long conversation in our third meeting, we discussed

[128] Freccero, Carla. "Queer Times." *Southern Atlantic Quarterly (*vol. 106, no. 3, 2007, pp. 485-494) 489.
[129] Freccero, 489.

how Cruz develops a relationship with Marina and after her passing develops a relationship with Isola. Cruz learns that Marina has an available mica that belonged to her late husband. Given his vulnerable status in the U.S., Cruz takes the mica and forges it as his own. This places us at the crux of complex personhood even in a terrain of limited agency. Most of us were comfortable with his theft as identity should not be held onto. Some readers wanted him to ask Isola. It is clear though that all of us agreed that his move was ethical. I commented that the idea of him asking her for permission to safely walk through the streets of the city he lived without fear of state sanctioned violence as well as possibly acquiring employment meant that she had the power to give and take life. Citizenship granted Isola biopolitical power.

Others commented that if we read the novel through resistance theory we would not begin to understand the complicated terrains of these decisions; since, even as a vulnerable subject, Cruz himself does cause harm to others. Analyzing Cruz's decisions based in his listening to his own sovereign thinking, we saw that a lens where an ethics of haunting frames our vision captures more hue and contrast, more shadow and shade. The collective agreed that there was no denying that Cruz loved Marina and Isola and vice versa precisely because of the way Palacio narrates his interiority via dreams. But, some of us commented that there is also no denying that he too had something to gain from loving them. For one member of the collective, this means that the line between pain and pleasure is simply a mirage and as such, even in this wild terrain for freedom from a violent and racist U.S. Cruz too can hurt and be hurt simultaneously. Palacio describes this from the perspective of Isola.

> And then there was the fact the he had her father's identification card hidden from her. That was the worst. What exactly did he want from her

> and her mother? … For now, he simply seemed to have womanized her family and stolen her father's identity. Her father was the most sacred to her. She quivered with disgust all over again.[130]

Here we see the intermingling of a commingling of affectivities in objects that are sacred to two people for very different reasons. As one member of the collective commented "the i.d. is life or death for Cruz" and for Isola, it means the sacred items of her father's posthumous archive. Objects imbued with meaning—loss, lust, love, lure, liability—and objects that nonetheless shape how we come to understand affectivity within the scope of time and history. Unlike the project of resistance that maps a progressive temporal subject on the way to resistance, an ethics of haunting considers interiority emerging out of affectivity and desire, in and out of time, from the past, to the present, to the future and back again, oscillating wildly within the sovereignty of our interior to allow ourselves to be haunted by our past and in turn become ghostly. The experimental leap towards being haunted before we can ever truly come to terms with who we are. In the case of Cruz and Isola, Palacio brings eroticism and love as a way of transcending time and the spiritual plane of life and death. The end of Marina's physical life did not mean that archivally and emotionally she would not be a surplus presence in Isola's present and future. Palacio situates Isola as enacting an ethics of haunting when she contemplates her relationship with Cruz, and by its affectivity, her relationship with her late parents.

> Isola continued to try to cut herself some slack. It wasn't the first time she and her mother shared a man's love. But her father was a different story. Isola's relationship with her dad had been sweet, sacred and nurturing. How dare Cruz steal her father's identity! Even her mother's inappropriate flirtations with Jeremy [Isola's ex] didn't compare…Cruz had pretended his relationship with her mother wasn't an important issue. She tried to breathe through the rippling ire coursing through her. She reminded

[130] Ibid., 144.

> herself she was at fault too. Somehow, she should have suspected Cruz…Enough, she said to herself. Think about how to get back at him.[131]

The sharing of love between Marina and Isola, along with Cruz's taking of her late father's identity, are not merely markers and obstacles on the path to becoming a resistant subject. As our reading collective revealed in Isola's continued deliberating of how to get back at Cruz, these hauntings are felt as deep wounds; they cause Isola harm and in turn, haunt Isola's interior. This is a critical juncture in what this novel can teach us: surrendering ourselves to the wildness and rawness of our interior may not always be positive. Indeed, as the novel depicts, Isola's interior ire contaminates her being. She is hunted and haunted and she in turn, hunts and haunts Cruz. *Ocotillo Dreams*, thus, depicts what the interior may reveal to us if we surrender to it. We are not merely in opposition to the world and its ideas about us. We too are the world. This means we can become oppressors, we can inflict hurt. This means we are human, not merely abstracted resistant beings.

IV.

One of the most conflicting and deeply troubling aspects of the novel that grasped the reading collective's attention was the conclusion of the novel. In chapter 34 "Turning a Corner" Palacio writes that Isola feels betrayed after learning that Cruz would be a father soon—"she continued to replay all the verbal and silent messages from all the women who had told her not to give in to him. In replaying each scenario, one thing was certain—she had to teach Cruz that he could use her the way he had used her mother. Or use women period. Isola knew that if Cruz had his way, he'd maintain his affair with her, while playing house with Pifi [the woman who was pregnant]."[132] Palacio then narrates

[131] Ibid., 158.
[132] Ibid., 167.

an Isola who has "turned a corner" yet her uncritical surrender to the wildest thoughts align her revenge by hurting Cruz where he is most vulnerable. Palacio writes Isola's thoughts regarding her revenge against Cruz in the following way:

> She didn't lose any time in planning her revenge on Cruz. If Cruz approached her for one last sack session before assuming his so-called responsibility, she'd teach him something about responsibility. She thought about giving Cruz a taste of his own medicine, while making sure she took back what belonged to her. You have to be more cold-hearted than you've ever been in your life, she told herself. You can do this. Cruz always slept so soundly after their lovemaking. His satisfied mouth opened wide and his snores trumpeted throughout the hollow house. She could anything to him, tickle him, jab his sides; he'd still sleep in disgusting comfort. The bumper sticker in front of her read COUNT YOUR BLESSINGS. She counted her blessing of solitude in the sea of noise and motors. You can do it, she repeated to herself.[133]

In our final meeting, all of us could not stand what Isola's surrender to the depths of her quiet yielded. Palacio writes that Isola "placed her mother's birth certificate and driver's license in a plastic bag and tucked it in the bathroom drawer. She had to trust that Cruz would still carry her father's doctored papers in his wallet. Isola knew that he thought his wallet the safest place for all his important papers and his money. He didn't trust banks. If Cruz dared to show up, she would be ready for him."[134] None of us could believe where Palacio took the character's interiority. Her revenge would be to sleep with Cruz one last time, switch out his doctored papers for her mothers and so if the immigration sweeps that were dominating the Arizona desert profiled and surveilled Cruz, he would be picked up and arrested. This was Isola's cruel revenge. Indeed, she executes her revenge plan to the tee and Cruz is profiled, surveilled and apprehended yet he is not just arrested and detained he is taken to the desert and shot by immigration officials. Palacio

[133] Ibid., 168.
[134] Ibid., 169.

renders us a deeply troubling articulation of racialized and gendered inwardness. Isola's solitude and quiet becomes consumed by betrayal and then revenge. Yet, since her interiority is defined by her citizenship and access to power and resources as a result, her plot for revenge against someone who is externally vulnerable is violent and fatal. Citizenship as a racialized and gendered interiority then has the power to disregard life and can align too easily with systems of abuse.

Discussion about the ending of the novel suggests that we were all haunted by the decision of the protagonist. We asked questions such as: how could Isola, our brown Chicana hero, be so cruel? How could her journey take her to ultimately help U.S. law enforcement kill her lover? Had we read the novel wrong? Should we have considered it more like a *novela* not a novel? How could it be that she, an educated and increasingly politicized subject would not realize that Cruz would be left vulnerable to the raids of ICE without the ID card she took from him? Did she not realize that while he was strategic and manipulative and even irresponsible at times, that he nonetheless was making decisions based on the immense pressure by the larger state apparatus? Was this the lesson of the novel?

My notes from the last session of the reading collective reveal a mixture of sadness, anger, confusion, ambiguity and reluctant empathy regarding Isola's choices. Within our progressive circle of readers, we could not fathom why the author took us into such a storm of violence and why this story needed to be told and what could its significance be? One member of the collective discussed how citizenship ultimately shapes our desires and actions and explained that Isola's privilege of having citizenship could not be overcome and thereby citizenship influenced her thinking as she plotted

revenge against Cruz. Moreover, they commented that Isola would not have felt so vengeful towards Cruz if she had embodied knowledge about what it means to not have identification and immigration documents in the U.S. Would she have been so vengeful? Another member of the collective noted that her revenge would have subsided quickly if she understood Cruz's lived experience in an authentic and thoughtful manner and then presumably would have been more understanding of Cruz's decisions.

Some of us, myself included, disagreed somewhat. I noted that the novel set up a context for us to feel why her father's identification card meant so much to her and that ultimately, she was haunted by her father's surplus presence as a ghostly remainder. In a similar vein of thought, another member noted that this could be Palacio's lesson for us—within the context of the U.S. these documents are not documents, they are markers of life and death and will be treated as such in any context. Another member of the group understood this occurrence from a much more poetic perspective. They noted that perhaps Palacio used this conclusion as a metaphor for the pain and revenge Isola felt. As Palacio developed throughout the novel, Isola was in pain and was grieving. She fell hard for Cruz—she felt all the love of her previous loves combined at one moment in the novel towards Cruz. Isola felt so betrayed by Cruz impregnating another woman, his relationship with her late mother and his theft of her father's ID that she would enact the worst revenge of all and it would not require much of her other than the alteration of a document. From the collective came the idea that the worst part of this tragedy of brown love in the desert of ocotillos and sand was how easy Isola could use her citizenship status against Cruz; we concluded that his vulnerability to state violence was the great tragedy here.

V.

The wonderful conversations that emerged in the reading collectives that created space for us to generate community via the connective affectivity of sharing our vulnerabilities, intimacies, hauntings and even traumas motivated me to assign the text in a course. Before I share student artwork and further commentary regarding the work, I would like to share various strands of thoughts that were not explicitly discussed in the collective but motivated by our discussions.

The novel questions identity politics, representation and the extremities of the limits of our interiority. Isola has privilege and her connectivity with Cruz is not a given based on ethnicity and the myths of resistance theory. No. Isola finds connection with Cruz through the gestures of attraction, the possibility of companionship and the ardent freedom felt in moments of suspending worship to Western notions of morality. When she flees her job because the forces of life take her mother's physical presence, she, albeit unwillingly, confronts her interior and the way ghosts of her past—mainly her mother and father—shaped, shape and will shape her life. It is important to note that the anti-immigrant climate of the U.S.' surveillance state is a central character of the novel itself. It thinks, it plots, it deliberates, it adjusts, it raids and it kills. However, the strength of its power, for Palacio, does not lie solely in its actualization of its material forces. Instead, it lies in its surreptitious and clandestine coopting of the sovereignty of our quiet; as the novel reveals through Isola's decision to drug Cruz, seduce him to bed and replace her father's ID with that of hers causing Cruz to later be detained by immigration officers, sometimes the power of the state haunts the sovereignty of our quiet interior. Consequently, through Palacio's articulation of interiority, mostly experienced and

expressed through an ethics of haunting, is a terrain where we learn that we have to consider our complicity to dominant, abusive and structural knowledges.

If we read *Ocotillo Dreams* through resistance theory, we get a very limited and incomplete rendering of the significance of the novel in producing complex and nuanced articulations of modern Latina life. Resistance theory would narrate the story's main protagonist as a progressive figure. Per identity politics, Isola, the main character, would move through a transformative and linear journey of identity. At the beginning of the novel, she is beholden by her white other and white logics and we see Isola has rejected her mother's women of color progressive politics and instead, has become an English professor of white writers and has historically dated white men or light skinned Latinos. She wants little if nothing to do with Chicana/Latina politics and she is introduced to the reader as someone who might call the cops on an undocumented Latino man who she finds sleeping in her late mother's house. The first encounter between her love interest, Cruz, and her is structured by the emotions fear and desire that seemingly catalog anti-immigrant sentiment in the United States about Latinx immigration. Palacio details in the first pages of novel these personal thoughts.

> She'd seen it in a movie. But Isola had no idea where her mother had kept her kitchen knives or other potential weapons. She grabbed her water bottle from the freezer and switched on the lights. "Don't move. I called the police.' She held her cold weapon above her head. The man screamed and sat up. She straightened her back, made herself taller, and threw the frozen bottle at him. He caught it. "The police are on their way." She made her voice strong and commanding. She turned to look for her knife. A pair of metal tongs was all she managed. "Don't move." She waved the flimsy kitchen utensil high above her head as tough wielding a medieval sword. The man cowered in the window seat. "No. Por el amor de Dios. No le llame a la policia."[135]

[135] Ibid. 6.

Palacio denotes that the main character had seen what she was doing in a movie. With this popular culture reference of Latino men as threats in mind, she looks to find weapons to protect herself from this supposedly harmful figure. She finds one of her biggest weapons: the police. While Isola does speak Spanish, she nonetheless uses the technology of English to strike fear in Cruz and says "The police are on their way" in English. Palacio sets a scene where while Isola cannot find the proper weapons to defend herself as she waves a "flimsy kitchen utensil" she nonetheless can access extremely damaging weapons against Latinos—popular culture, law enforcement, and language. And yet, in the same breath, Palacio provides us the inner dialogue of these sentiments. After she realizes Cruz is "another one her mom's projects," she dislodges herself from the social discourse of popular culture, law enforcement and language that deem the Latinx community as other to whites.

> Isola watched her fear abate. His softened face was like a rumpled shirt. He was handsome, she thought. A deeper glance and she noticed he had a striking resemblance to the Venezuelan singer El Puma; his thick hair was almost two inches longer than her own shorn bob. He blushed. She knew he had caught her staring at him. He looked down at his jeans. She looked away. "You knew my mother?" she said in Spanish. The language of her mother started to roll more freely from her tongue. He nodded. Of course. He had known her mother. They both nodded and smiled. Stayed serene and comforted for a while. If he knew so much about her, he must know even more about her mother's life in the desert, a world unfamiliar to her.

What Palacio's novel suggests is that the untethering of racialized social discourse occurs not at the very level of its own narration but by listening to what often remains quiet; when Isola listens to her interior, she changes the power dynamic in the room. Her relationship to Cruz does not change because of social discourse but because she lets herself fall into her own desires. When she listens to this interior this manifests in a quiet gesture—she stares at Cruz, Cruz notices and Isola begins speaking Spanish. Her desire

for Cruz changes the terrain. When Isola allows herself to stop capturing herself, and let go of social discourse and listen to the sovereignty of her interior, she offers Cruz and herself everyday gestures that transcend the terrain of resistance, of the self and other and instead, opens the space for them to nod and smile at each other and creates a serene and comfortable space. Additionally, by moving beyond resistance, Isola allows her desire to generate a space of affectivity that is inherently ghostly as Cruz could introduce her to a "world unfamiliar to her." In this way, Palacio's novel is, as Kevin Quashie writes about Marita Bonner's work, "a deliberate conceptualization of subjectivity as being called from within."[136] As Quashie writes, these kinds of writings imagine human subjects "called into being not by a social discourse, but by desire, ambition, by one's affinity to the 'essences, the overtones, the tints, the shadows' of life as one takes it in."[137]

Theories of resistance would not allow us to see Isola in this way. They would read her as someone called into action by social discourse and becoming into a framework of social discourse. By the end of the novel, Isola essentially mirrors her mother's actions. She helps her cousin cross the border and will presumably help her find stability in the U.S. From a resistance point of view, this would mean that Isola went from assimilated subject to resistant subject and thus a success story in linear progressive activist time. This of course is not only an erroneous reading of the novel but a deeply irresponsible way of articulating subjectivity. If our goal is to articulate the possibilities of freedom, we must write about "the essences, the overtones, the tints, the shadows of life as one takes it in."

[136] Quashie, 40.
[137] Quashie, 40.

It is not only solely Isola who deciphers actions out of her interior desires. Palacio situates Cruz in this same respect when she introduces us to his dreams.

> Working for her was like being in a dream he never wanted to wake from. He thought about how strange it was to meet Isola and how stupid he had been for going in to the house and getting caught. Now that he met her, he didn't want to leave her. How he wanted to take her offer, live with her and not worry about working like a dog. He could easily do it, but it was wrong. He had promised Marina that he would never look at her daughter. She had often obsessed about the fact that her daughter was younger and prettier and that he would find her attractive and fall in love with her. How quickly he had broken his promise to Marina. Marina was right. He had found her daughter irresistible. He started fantasizing about Isola. If he married her, he'd get his citizenship, have a nice house to live in, a young, beautiful wife who would have lots of babies. He'd be a king in America. Don't be stupid, he thought, something will crush you and your plan like a boot stomping a cucaracha. He had lost the two women he had fallen in love with, first Rosalina and now Marina. It was his strange fate.[138]

Cruz feels strange about having met Isola, and how quickly he broke his promise to Marina about her daughter. While he feels strange about it, he cannot help fantasize about a potential life with Isola and becoming a king in America. Palacio captures the wildness of all these interior thoughts by aligning dreams, desires, and fantasies right next to Cruz's future and possible scenarios where he has citizenship. We see the humanizing of Cruz, like Isola, at the level of subconscious. Palacio scripts characters who surrender to their interiors and thereby places the reader, zoomed in and at surrender to that character's interior, locating us in their humanity. And this of course is not always a positive place as one of its intermittent states takes him to consider his previous misfortunes and the haunted figures of his past when he thinks to himself "Don't be stupid…something will crush you and your plan like a boot stomping a cucaracha. He had lost the two women he had fallen in love with…"[139] Hauntings, fate, desire,

[138] Palacio., 54.
[139] Ibid. 54.

citizenship, decision-making, aspirations and even failed promises are all located in the wildness of Cruz's sovereign interior and inform the way he exteriorizes himself. Palacio allows us to listen to the moments when her characters surrender themselves to their interior and consider the volatility of said sovereignty. While this may not always be positive or progressive, it is human.

VI.

After having read this text informally with a group of friends, I decided to assign it in one of my classes. In lieu of a final paper, I assigned students an open-ended art project where they could reflect on and meditate on the novel's themes and lessons. In dialogue with the course's main objective to generate a different sociality out of the classroom, students had to share their work with their classmates and provide friendly gestures of appreciation for each other's work. With every presentation, I learned that formal spaces, if conceptualized and practiced well, could indeed connect students via similar sharing of the depths of our interior and invoke critical ways of being and sensing the world. Before we read the novel, every student in the class had said that the U.S., especially after the civil rights movement of the 1960s, was a better, less racist society. Since I had read the novel with a group of friends who intimately picked apart and emotionally lavished in Palacio's every word, I knew the novel would force students to think critically about their belief that the U.S. was a better society since then.

Figure 17. “Rescate Angeles” by Briana Escobar, November 2015.

One of my students, Briana Escobar, illustrates in Figure 17 her critical (re)thinking of the idea that most students had held dear to and took comfort in. Read closely, we can see that Escobar’s work here provides a critique to the notion of a better U.S. society as well as extends the conversation that my friends and I had in the reading collective. Rather than depicting a resistant and progressive hero in her work, Escobar

depicts a complicated subjectivity for Isola. Escobar decided to have us see Isola up close and even at this proximity, we can see that Isola is not fully recognizable to us. We can surmise that this is a depiction of Cruz's dream but we cannot be too sure. While Isola now seems to be wearing a Rescate Angeles neck choker that illustrates her newly cemented transnational purpose of helping her cousin cross the U.S./Mexico border, she also nonetheless has blood on her face. This blood may signal us to consider the role that inclusion into American citizenship plays in the lives of people of color.

Escobar's work illustrates the reading collective's assertion that Cruz's vulnerability was the greatest tragedy and that Isola's capacity to enact harm because of her status needed to be explored as a critical lesson regarding the novel. I find the lesson to be in what Chandan Reddy calls freedom with violence. Reddy writes that violence and emancipation go hand in hand as our modern political reality.[140] For Reddy, contemporary identity movements "that seek to open up practices of subjectivity (signaled by freedom) can figure as important contradictory formations" and as such, carry the "potential to solidify or disrupt the functioning of the state's ideological apparatus."[141] Contemporary identity formations thus can be the source for the preservation of the nation-state's modern identity, "as a distinct social form that can ratify what it enacts (legitimate violence)."[142] Could this be the lesson Palacio wants readers to consider? Is Isola a representative figure of freedom with violence as opposed to a transformative resistant figure? Or is this the point? Is Palacio's noting that modern social life is always conditioned to be violent? Moreover, if we seek to find a sense of freedom

[140] Chandan Reddy, *Freedom with Violence: Race, Sexuality, and the US State* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011): 37.
[141] Ibid., 37.
[142] Ibid., 37.

through the emancipatory narratives of American citizenship, will there always be bloodshed? The questions here push the project of resistance to its limits and Escobar paints the hues, shadows, contrasts and tints of the contradictions that often do not accompany identity politics. Isola may now be a resistant figure to U.S./Mexico immigration politics but the haunting of death and the way it shapes her interior sever a clean narrative of a progressive subjectivity and interiority. The figure of Isola represents the freedom with violence that must be acknowledged in any responsible theorization of freedom and especially the way it informs our deepest desires, thoughts and feelings. Escobar's art reveals that the novel compels students to seriously consider the way the sovereignty of the interior is always already informed by freedom with violence.

Escobar critiques the project of resistance theory by positioning us so close to see that Isola as a deadly and life-giving as well as beautiful and threatening. The zoomed in image also positions us as viewers to guess where Isola may be headed. This means we can only guess. What the zooming allows then is for us to focus on what we know of Isola: she trusts the sovereignty of her interior. Because we do not have a clear landscape to see, the zooming is pointing us to think about what she may think is her next move. No clear social discourse, or for that case external force, clearly captures her past, present and future in Figure 17. By placing us so close to Isola, Escobar positions the subject we are looking at as the agent of their own future. And even if that path is towards resistance, the subject will encounter violence and it is important to foresee that this kind of freedom, if not properly critiqued and asssessed, may have her enact violence upon other vulnerable subjects.

VII.

One such scene that allows us to divorce ourselves from the formalities of resistance theory are the dreams in the novel. They force characters to confront themselves. In one such scene, depicted by one of my students, Brenda Llapa, in her piece of art entitled "La Petenera" (as shown in figure 18) Cruz, one of the main characters of the novel who also has intimate relations/relationships with Isola and her late mother, shares a reoccurring dream with Isola.

> It's a dream that is very ugly. I'm crossing la frontera. The sun is setting and it's a good time to walk. Farther in the distance I see a woman rocking back and forth, the way somebody tries to quiet a baby. Only the woman does not hold a child. She holds her arms close to her. As I walk toward her, I see she is seated beneath an ocotillo, a skinny cactus with several arms and flowers at the tip of each branch. The red tips of the ocotillo are covered in blood and drip in the woman's face.[143]

Figure 18: *La Petenera* by Brenda Llapa, November 2015.

> When I reach her, I have a strong feeling that I know her, but I don't recognize her because the blood is covering her face. Despite the blood and her being in the desert, she is singing and she is beautiful. When I see

[143] Palacio., 97.

her eyes, I still don't recognize her, but I know I loved her. Every time I wake up, I taste chocolate in my mouth. I think my tongue is bleeding, but it is not. This time I was not biting my tongue.[144]

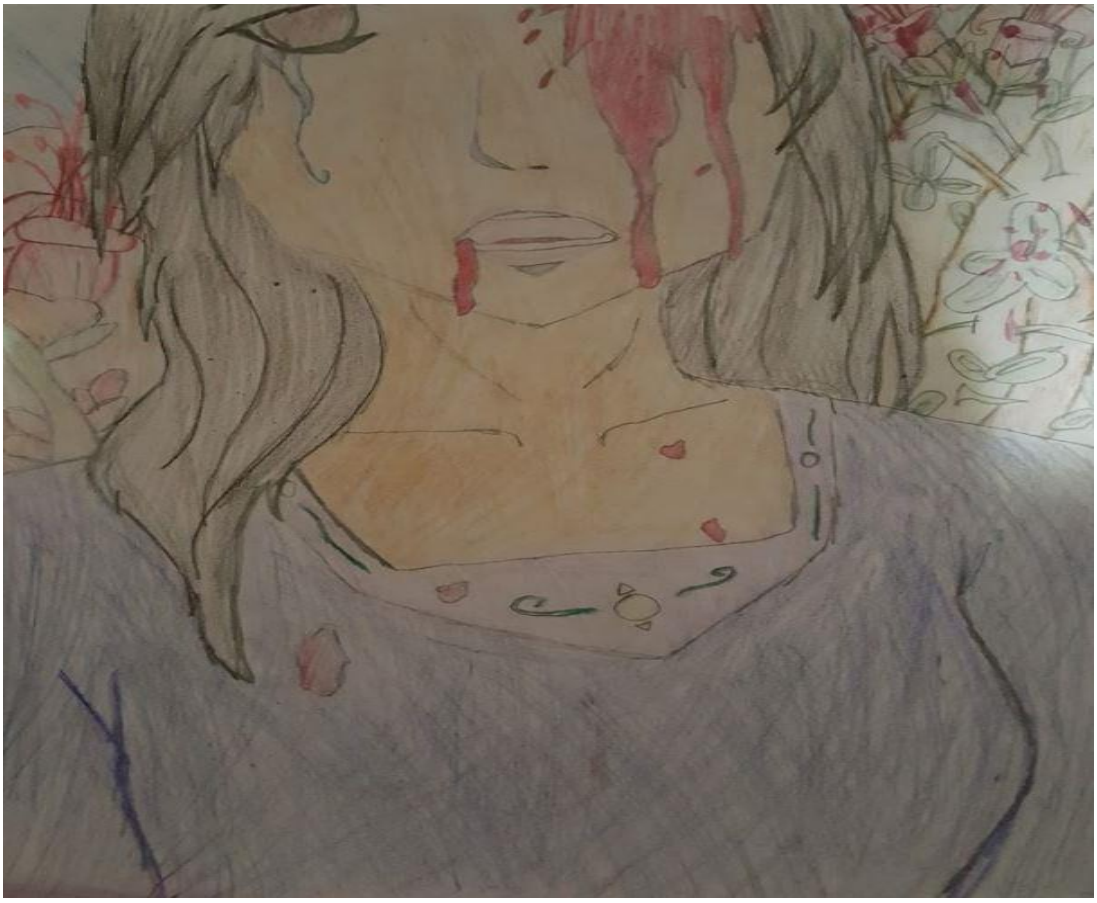


Figure 19: *La Petenera* by Brenda Llapa, November 2015.

In the course, students found this dream to be illustrative of how characters come to be who they are. In Llapa's *La Petenera*, we see the two perspectives that Cruz articulates: in the first image, it is difficult to see the figure near the ocotillo. In the second part of Llapa's work, the figure is now up close and center to us but nonetheless not necessarily recognizable. Llapa describes the work as representative of a foreshadowing. Cruz, by the end of the novel, seems to have been taken to the desert and

[144] Ibid., 97-98.

killed by immigration officers. Llapa notes that the figure could be representative of Isola and her mother as one in the afterlife. Cruz, in this complicated terrain of love, immigration policy, racialized violence, betrayal by his lover, and land of ambiguous morality finds this figure by the ocotillo with all nuances and contradictions visible—although great pain has occurred, the figure still sings and although this figure may have hurt the approaching Cruz, the blood they are partly responsible for shedding, tastes like chocolate. It is important to note as well that the dream world—wild and unruly—does not produce reorganizability. Cruz knows he loved this figure but cannot necessarily recognize exactly who the figure is. This is precisely the significance of a novel that does not deal with personifying characters as mere resistors to some sort of ideological conflict with a larger "other." Instead, conflict is a combination of a plethora of external, internal, subconscious, conscious forces that produce multiplicity of desires, affects and states of being.

Additionally, the dream also marks the way Isola's interior and desires generate the complexity of the characters. One's sense of action and being does not occur because of a signifying statement of public resistance and finding solace in predictability and its progressive reliability; it occurs because Isola surrenders towards the wildness of her interior and allows the slow pulsating forces of its unpredictability to exist and feel the lively authenticity of her interior's intermittent states. These intermittent states include thoughts of carelessness, being moved, being reminded of having privilege, conjuring the ghost of her late mother through memory, the stirring of every ounce of love she had ever felt, allowing dreams to shape how we come to understand our feelings and surrendering to the confluence of these states in making love. Identity and action is not forever tied to

some external, totalizing world and social discourse; in *Ocotillo Dreams*, the complexities located in the commingling of affective forces within our interior and one's surrender to them situate us beyond resistance, in a terrain where we let go of the capture of our own fugitivity by ourselves. Melinda Palacio demonstrates this in the following passage which occurs after Cruz tells Isola the dream.

> She didn't care that he simply repeated a picture dug from the depths of his subconscious. She was moved by his words. She thought of her own mother working in the desert, helping people cross the border, and of how her mother died in the land of ocotillos and sand. She experienced love piercing her being, a feeling she had long forgotten, that had been buried deep, but sided within her nonetheless. Hearing his dream made her realize her infatuation for Cruz was much deeper than she had allowed herself to believe. She was in love with the man of ocotillo dreams. She'd never think the same again of the desert, of the spindly plant known as the ocotillo, of Cruz.
>
> "Ven." Isola cradled Cruz tightly.
>
> They made love again.

Ocotillo Dreams is a text that allows us to ask questions about how to make love. Palacio offers a character that do so by surrendering to one's interior. Desire, fantasy, haunting, memory and conceptualizations of space forged out of contemplating Cruz's dreams all pave paths towards her telling Cruz "ven" and to make love again. And as the novel details, this lovemaking may not yield the best circumstances for them in the near future but that they are embracing their interior sovereignty. As we will learn after Cruz is presumably killed by law enforcement officers in the desert after Isola switched his identification papers, the sovereignty of the interior is not always a positive place, devoid of social discourse; it is a space that can determine the future of our social worlds. It is place where social discourse exists in collision with all the intermittent states just detailed above. It forces us to ask: to what extent does freedom also mean the freedom to harm? In the terrain of fugitivity, accompanied by texts such as *Ocotillo Dreams*, we come to ask

the questions that allow us to think and cultivate fuller and more realistic articulations of what freedom actually is and indeed, realize that freedom, like our interior, requires listening and working with and against the endless oceanic trenches of our so-called desired freed minds. Ultimately if we pay attention to texts like these and to their warnings and cautions we may realize that freedom is always already here, within us and therefore, we must do the work to handle it responsibly.

VIII.

This chapter examines *Ocotillo Dreams* as a channeling of where racialized and gendered interiority may take us. As we see, this terrain is not always pretty and if we are not tuned into the dynamics of power and how it may affect our surrender to the sovereignty of the interior, it may be deadly. By examining the interstitial space of formal and informal learning, this chapter also commented on the way Palacio scripts inwardness as a way connecting an audience to the complexities of racialized interiority.

Isola becoming a figure of freedom with violence is a critical lesson to take from Palacio's work. Within this terrain, the question of victimhood yields foggy if not completely murky intellectual vision. As such, this chapter engages freedom as a problematic that is at once just as intimate as it is global and as transnational as it is interior. Revenge can be overwhelming and it is from our position of power that it can converge and truly harm those we feel vengeful towards. Surrendering within, listening to our desires, and embracing the wildness of this interior has deep consequences. Conversely and back again, this proves that freedom is as free as advertised. It is full of possibility. This means we can do anything, which means *we can do anything*. For me, this is the beginning of an articulation of responsible freedom. We must come to the

realization that we are capable of anything which means that we are *capable of anything*. It means that just as much as we are capable of helping someone cross the border, we are just as likely, if not more capable of being in support of the detention and deportation, and even death of someone who crossed the border. The figure of Isola is the figure of us at any stage of our journey towards responsible freedom. We must work daily, with this fugitive sensibility, to be self-introspective. This means we will never reach our progressive, resistant selves because this is not possible, at least as it is articulated by identity politics. It means that we, like Isola, may get to the place where we help and still have work to do.

At the end of the novel, Isola can be read as someone who has transformed themselves through visiting the complicated archives of her late mother—her house, her papers, her lover, her memories of her and even in doing the work her mother did. However, it is important to note that transformation is a never-ending process. What we seek to change in ourselves requires daily work. Palacio does not write a coming of age story for Isola, she writes a character who oscillates wildly between the multiple temporalities that have shaped her. Even when she helps her cousin cross the border, she still has more work to do since she has not fully asked enough questions of herself. In one instance, Ramón who also crosses the border with Isola's cousin details his experience with the desert.

> I thought the desert would be hot, vast, and empty, only cactus and dirt. He said. Pero no. there's people like la migra, y los Minutemen, small animals like rabbits and birds and prairie dogs. There's clothes, water bottles, and all the things people leave behind. Sometimes you see bones of animals. And I try not to think that I can be those bones left for others to see.

> Isola gazed out into the desert. It looked tame from her vantage point and empty, as Ramón had anticipated.[145]

As naïve as when the novel started, Isola's vision of the terrain of freedom vis a vie the desert demonstrates she has much more work to do even if she seems to have become an ally for folks crossing the U.S.-Mexico border. Her vision of the terrain as "empty" and "tame" means that she herself has much more terrain to cross; she has not yet realized that her modern social formation is constitutive of a freedom with violence. She has bought too often than not in the idea that her social emancipation can be guaranteed by the ultimate purveyor of violence, the U.S. state.

She seems to realize the consequences of her actions and how her interior shaped Cruz's life/death when in the very next lines of dialogue Ramón says that they saw a dead man in the desert; when she realizes that it might be Cruz, Isola's eyes flood with tears, she sinks to the ground and cries into wet paper towels. When they tell her that the man died near an ocotillo, Isola says that they need to help him but the group agrees it is too late. After Isola is told that they do not have time to search for the man, Isola feels paralyzed and she now has come to the realization that her internal scheme to enact revenge on Cruz was deeply rooted in the tragedy of his vulnerability.

> "But…" Isola felt paralyzed. She had only wanted to stop Cruz from taking advantage of her. Never in her scheme for revenge did she imagine he'd end up dead. In prison, arrested, maybe, but not murdered in the desert…
>
> …Not knowing who the man was made her revenge on Cruz seem all the more cruel. Although the dead guy could've been anybody, she had a terrible gut feeling it was Cruz.

In the last lines of the novel, the collision of multiple terrains signpost Palacio's intention to write a character who is deeply complicated and full of contradiction. When her cousin

[145] Ibid., 186.

asks her if they can visit Disneyland before they go to San Francisco, Isola pays attention to the ghost of her mother. The last line of the novel reads "Her mother's voice echoed in her head" (188). She tells Manuelita, her cousin, "Yes, sweetheart" and they presumably visited the "place that meant California and a better life."[146]

This is precisely what comes out of reading a novel beyond resistance and identity politics. If we leave the space of resistance and flee to see characters and subjects as complicated beings, then we see the seemingly complicated set of choices that will be in front of us in our own life journeys. In the last pages of the novel, Isola goes from seeing the desert as vast and empty to a space of haunting filled by the deep sorrow of having committed an atrocious act of violence. Her revenge may have caused death. Also, even if it is not Cruz in the desert, she has finally come to realize the cruelty she is capable of as a citizen of the U.S. Cruz's ghost haunts her as a figure of freedom with violence that she must become cognizant of if she is to make better social decisions. Her mother's ghost haunts her in a different way by the novel's conclusion. Marina reminds her to check her privilege and be kind. Palacio seems to be teaching us a lesson about kindness. As the famous "I Know its Over" The Smiths songs goes: "it takes strength to be gentle and kind." But even more so, it also positions us as readers to consider Disneyland as not vast and empty either and merely a vacuum to be filled with our hopes and dreams. Palacio suggests that if we flee to the horizon beyond resistance, and juxtapose the terrains of the desert to those of Disneyland, we will often discover who we are, who we can be and how difficult and multifaceted this is when the road behind us is so often drenched in blood.

[146] Ibid., 188.

Figure 20. “Ocotillo Dreams” by Melissa Magaña, November 2015.

In Figure 20, one of my students, Melissa Magaña, captures Isola’s future as determined by a dreamy interior. For me, Magaña captures presumably how Isola will look inward in the future. Throughout the novel, Palacio showed us that subjectivity and decision-making runs parallel with the subconscious state of dreaming. Magaña captures Isola surrendering to this dream world in the events that conclude the novel. On the hand, she may be in the desert helping while on the other hand, she must realize that she has caused Cruz to be in a constant state of drowning. As she dreams near an ocotillo, she fully lapses into the intermittent states of the sovereignty of her interior subconscious. Magaña depicts the law enforcement subject without the complexity and color of the other lined paper characters. Magaña may be suggesting that power while indeed present in our dreams, it does not have the color, the hues, the tints and the shadows of the main source of our own sovereignty—our interior. It is heavily present in our lives and we

must come to know this because, like Magaña's "Ocotillo Dreams," the water that we drown in and that we may have drowned others in, also fuses itself into the sky above us. Thus, the terrain of racialized and gendered interiority means that everything and everyone is connected, the vastness of possibility located in the sky above us does not hover over us, calling for us to build a ladder towards it. No, in sharp contrast, the path to the sky requires we point our compass within and that we realize that to be better people "it takes strength to be gentle and kind."

Chapter 4

Archives of Feeling in the Chicana/o and Latina/o Studies Classroom

Preface

Fred Moten and Stefano Harney define study quite beautifully. This chapter builds on the beauty of this definition by using it as a lens to reflect on the wonderful work of students in generating new questions in the field of critical ethnic studies via varied archival projects. Moten commits to a definition of study that is social—"its talking and walking around with other people, working, dancing, suffering, some irreducible convergence of all three, held under the name of speculative practice" which also includes "being in a kind of workshop, playing in a band, in a jam session, or old men sitting on a porch, or people working together in a factory."[147]

I operationalize this definition of study precisely as a way of thinking through the sociality that can be conjured in the act of study. In this chapter, I think of each section as working with, suffering through, and dancing alongside each other as a writing strategy that is done in the "name of speculative practice" which in turn is a way of articulating responsible freedom. In other words, speculative practice is a way to break free of the certain, of the assured, of the boundaries that discipline students into disciplines (and yes, even their subfields). This chapter thus articulates responsible freedom in its pursuit of study as an activation of the speculative, of the journey inward of students pushing beyond the parameters of the non-speculative, of the defined borders of a subfield.

[147] Class War University, "Studying Through the Undercommons: Stefano Harney & Fred Moten – interviewed by Stevphen Shukaitis", November 12, 2012. https://classwaru.org/2012/11/12/studying-through-the-undercommons-stefano-harney-fred-moten-interviewed-by-stevphen-shukaitis/

Thus, when Central American and South American students approached me in the Fall of 2015 who had taken Chicana/o Studies courses and wanted to study Latino/a history beyond the parameters of the American southwest Chicana/o subject formation for an independent studies course, I was thrilled at its speculative potential, at its capacity for study, and in activating sociality through such turn inwardness for study. Students approached me because I too was an outsider-insider in the field of Chicana/o Studies as a Costa Rican immigrant who had been racialized similar to the way they had. Our speculative practice in study engendered a move beyond the "authentic" and "proper" social formations of Chicana/o studies and would yield many divergences and crossroads of Latin America and Latina/o studies and as result more interiorities within the Americas.

I also highly valued the student's decision to commit to an independent (collective) study as a speculative practice in working together beyond the parameters of academic labor and the way it structured activism. At that time at the University of Minnesota, students, like myself, were fighting to fund Chicano/a and Latina/o studies and add additional tenure track lines to the department. This institutional solicitation relatively worked as the department indeed expanded a bit; however, while the activism is also a form of study, it positioned institutional solicitation as the engine of our resistant social formations. Institutional solicitation in that vein regulated and suppressed the kinds of study maneuvers we were envisioning. Although students solicited me as an embodiment of institutionality, I was also interstitially an instructor while also a graduate student. Thus, our shared vision functioned as a way students of color beyond their graduate and undergraduate statuses bound their study to communion in contemplation

together. This was a way to study to define our own (albeit marginal) parameters even within a field that was marginal to the university. It was our activism within the department even when were committed to activism for the department. Study thus became the very sociality for inhabiting these interstitial social formations. Upon reflection, what we did enacted Fred Moten's definition of study,

> When I think now about the question or problem of academic labor, I think about it in this way: that part of what I'm interested in is how the conditions of academic labor have become not conducive to study – how the conditions under which academic laborers labor actually precludes or prevents study, makes study difficult if not impossible. When I was involved in labor organizing as a graduate student, with the Association of Graduate Student Employees at the University of California Berkeley I was frustrated with the way that sometimes graduate student investment in thinking about themselves as workers was predicated on the notion that workers don't study. But this was more than just a romanticization of authentic work and a disavowal of our own 'inauthenticity' as workers. It was that our image of ourselves as academic laborers actually acceded to the ways in which the conditions of academic labor prevented study. We actually signed on to the prevention of study as a social activity even while we were engaging in, and enjoying, organizing as a social activity. It's like we were organizing for the right to more fully embed ourselves in isolation. It never felt like we studied (in) the way we organized, and we never approached a whole bunch of other modes of study that were either too much on the surface of, or too far underneath, the university. I think we never recognized that the most insidious, vicious, brutal aspect of the conditions of our labor was that it regulated and suppressed study.[148]

Taking that final note from Moten in its fullness—the insidious, vicious, brutal aspect of labor as the regulation and suppression of study—this chapter considers study as a way of freeing oneself of the very parameters that defined and regulated study; in other words, what does it mean to plan to study as a way of becoming? How does the speculative practice in the desire to turn inward to meditate demarcate new forms of not just curating

[148] Class War University, "Studying Through the Undercommons: Stefano Harney & Fred Moten – interviewed by Stevphen Shukaitis", November 12, 2012. https://classwaru.org/2012/11/12/studying-through-the-undercommons-stefano-harney-fred-moten-interviewed-by-stevphen-shukaitis/

an archival project but also mobilizing new forms of sociality through study? Following the arteries that run through this dissertation's body, how does the decision to turn inward—to choose interiority over exteriority and study—reconfigure how we think through racialized inwardness?

The students who approached me wanted to study precisely because of the way they felt alienated in classrooms, silenced and who histories were erased. They wanted to be in a space where they could flee the representational terrain of Chicana/o studies while also amplifying its scope and horizons. They turned their alienation into a sociality, a collectivity through study. Thus, study in this chapter comes to be a way to instead of fully embedding ourselves in isolation, as a way of walking together, and moving towards new ways of feeling and sensing the world.

Fred Moten and Stefano Harvey also argue that the first place at which policy is directed is at deputizing academics into capturing their own fugitivity. They call this a "certain reduction of intellectual life"[149]This chapter aims at snapshotting pedagogical efforts in enacting projects where students could flee the protocols of policy and explores what happens when they can flee from reason, objectivity and historicity and instead, arrive in a space where they can feel history and find subjectivity beyond the protocols and demands of the field they are studying in. Here, I situate the main disciplinary missions of interdisciplinary subfields of identity politics as theoretical scripts of policy and bureaucracy. In short, how have some of my students moved beyond the project of resistance in ethnic studies and fled to new ways of being and sensing the worlds around them and the sovereignty within their own interiors? How do the student projects I

[149] Harney, Stefano, and Fred Moten. *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning & Black Study*. (Wivenhoe: Minor Compositions, 2013): 120.

discuss in this chapter exemplify a push against essentialist identity politics? How might building archives of feeling provide projects that push beyond the protocols of our subfields and map ways of study that are initiated by our internal desires?

II.

Teaching students the significance of archival projects requires an understanding of the urgent study of non-linear time. The project of remembering the past by curating it in the present with the intent of spotlighting the future positions the study of history and ethnic studies as a deeply meaningful human project that exceeds its own potential description and makes it a project that is timely and timeless.

A good place to start discussion with students about the significance of archives is with the "Conclusion" to Lisa Cacho's *Social Death: Racialized Rightlessness and the Criminalization of the Unprotected.* In it, Cacho writes about the death of her cousin Brandon Martinez and his friends Vanvilay and William Christopher. The three young men of color died in a car accident but the discourse coming out of the archive of the media signaled the men's deaths "as not-losses and not-tragedies."[150] Since they were racialized as criminal as well as unproductive and lacking a futurity where they could accumulate capital, the "official archive of the written, recorded accounts of their deaths" offered no public sympathy and explicitly refused giving any inclination of sympathy. Thus, Cacho writes that the official archive must be juxtaposed to the "ephemeral performances of their friends' and relatives' mourning, their explicit performances of

[150] Cacho, Lisa Marie. *Social Death: Racialized Rightlessness and the Criminalization of the Unprotected*. (New York: New York Univ. Press, 2012): 154.

love, care and grief beyond words."[151] For Cacho, archival projects provide a method to counter the official, the settled and the unquestionable sources of the social.

> Privileging "anecdotal and ephemeral evidence" as José Esteban Muñoz explains, "grants entrance and access to those who have been locked out of the official histories and, for that matter, 'material reality.' Evidence's limit becomes clearly visible when we attempt to describe and imagine contemporary identities that do not fit into a single pre-established archive of evidence." Brandon's friends and relatives created what Ann Cvetkovich calls "an archive of feeling," an archive constituted by the lived experiences of mourning and loss, ephemeral evidence that is now anecdotal.[152]

These archives of feeling mark the "felt traces and sticky residue their deaths left behind in everyone's chests" and are full of "performances of explicit caring, profound pain and deeply felt depression, desperation, and despair."[153] Cacho also writes that these archives document "a different way to measure value," resist the erasure of their loved ones and also make a statement: "These were valuable young men and they are missed. Their audiences were not given the opportunity to ask why"[154]

Although not featured in the written archive of Cacho's "Conclusion" but located in the bibliography, in March of 2003, a memorial published by the Martinez family appears in the obituaries section of the *San Diego Union Tribune*. It reads:

> If we could have a lifetime wish, a dream that would come true, we'd pray to God with all our hearts to bring you back. You left behind our broken hearts and happy memories too. We never wanted memories, we only wanted you.

The fact that audiences are not given the opportunity to ask about the significance of the dead is precisely why these archives are integral to narrating our lives beyond recognition

[151]Ibid., 154.
[152] 155.
[153] Ibid., 155.
[154] Ibid., 155.

and representation. Brandon, Van and Chris are not valuable because they were social justice oriented men of color but because they lived lives. Archives of feeling position us to not even be able to ask that question of value and worth. As the 2003 memorial shows, the Martinez family do not want memories of his life or explore the discursive potential of such social discourse; no, they just want Brandon back. Cacho teaches us to ask students to consider archival projects that are about the complexities of life amidst and beyond social discourse. Oftentimes, theories of ethnic resistance seek too much the resoluteness and assuredness of small splices of racialized interiority. What we seek out in projects that listen to the inwardness of life beyond the exterior forms of recognition and representation is not splices of self but the entirety of the vastness and abundance of who we are as living breathing beings. Regardless of who Brandon and his friends were and where their lives were defined by the exterior world, their families do not care—as they "never wanted memories" they only wanted him to be alive.

If the archive of the social exterior would not grant Brandon and his friends worth, the unofficial archive of the familial interior would. This speaks to the way an archive along resistance theory can and/or cannot narrate complex personhood and subjectivity. For Cacho, the narrative of resistance was not the "right analytical framework for making sense of Brandon's life"[155] Cacho writes that "Brandon didn't need to be devoted to radically progressive politics to be valued by the kinds of epistemologies that motivate anti-racist, anti-capitalist projects and scholarship"[156] Cacho acknowledges that the narrative of resistance does not always produce value for deviant

[155] Ibid., 162.
[156] Ibid., 163.

and different subjectivities. In the following passage, she notes that this method of thinking and writing failed to grant her cousin value.

> I needed to imagine that he would become, or at least could have become, a vital and valuable actor in the struggle for social justice. Although this perspective decriminalizes and depathologizes nonnormative racial masculinities, it ascribes value to his potential rather than his present. An effect of rereading Brandon's actions and attitudes as evidence of his potential to be an anti-capitalist, anti-racist "revolutionary-to-be" is that value can be attributed to him only by arbitrarily divorcing the person he was from the imagine, idealized person he could have been. He might have become an activist, although it seemed just as likely he wouldn't… What did it mean that I had to recast who he was into someone he might never become in order to narrate him as someone who should be valued?[157]

Cacho also asks us to consider how the "category of resistance imposes a teleology of progressive politics" [158]Cacho writes that an archival project that moves beyond resistance and that values people for who they are, and not who they might be, does not necessarily provide us "with blueprints for redistributing resources" but they can help us "to think about the importance of redistributing dignity."[159] Indeed, Cacho writes that she feels like she failed because she "looked in all the wrong places to find methods, narratives, and strategies for ascribing social worth to his personhood, trying to make him fit into over-researched reasons and rationales."[160] She writes that, like the archive of feeling the families and friends put together, she needed to make an effort to remember "what he might have been trying to teach me."[161] For her, Brandon taught her an "unintelligible ethics of deviance that "might be neither unapologetically normative nor radically transformative" but is nonetheless "a way of living that interrogates and

[157] Ibid., 164.
[158] Ibid., 160.
[159] Ibid., 165.
[160] Ibid., 167.
[161] Ibid., 167.

elucidates how normative understandings of morality and ethicality may sometimes mitigate oppositional politics and scholarship."[162]

Lisa Cacho teaches us the necessity of archives that deeply take care of the often forgotten and devalued. Cacho complicates our understanding of archives by arguing that the most prominent theories in ethnic studies specifically resistance theory are not adequate for redistributing value in archival projects. She forces us to see the limits of progressive thinking because it often maps subjectivity onto a timeline of individual progress. Resistance theory often places too much value on who one might become rather than on who one already is.

III.

Another starting place to define archival projects lies in understanding their importance to the construction of power and its formation out of the collusion between state, capital and academy. In *The Reorder of Things: The University and its Pedagogies of Difference,* Roderick Ferguson situates the modern Western academy as an archive of sorts that constantly must be refined to acquire innovation and that is institutive and conservative as well as revolutionary and traditional.[163] Academia serves as an "eco-nomic archive" in that "it keeps, it puts in reserve, it saves, but in an unnatural fashion, that is to say in making the law (nomos) or in making people respect the law."[164]

> As a distinct archival economy, the American academy would help inform the archival agendas of state and capital—how best to institute new peoples, new knowledges, and cultures and at the same time discipline and exclude those subjects according to a new order.[165]

---

[162] Ibid., 168.
[163] Roderick A. Ferguson, *The Reorder of Things: The University and Its Pedagogies of Minority Difference* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012): 12.
[164] Ibid., 12.
[165] Ibid., 12.

Archives in their economic terrain denote the way academia aided the transformation of the political economy from the late sixties and beyond. By recognizing minority cultures, academia would be able to be inclusive under state and capital's archival agenda. For Ferguson, archival projects within the realm of critical interdisciplinarity must pay attention to the way institutions have used recognition as mode of domination. Ferguson details that "what the students often offered as radical critiques of institutional belonging would be turned into various institutions' confirmation."[166] Ferguson positions the incorporation of minority difference into American knowledge, capital and state formations as coopting, absorptive and flexible forces.

In this vein, Ferguson writes that archival projects must engage a new form of critical possibilities. Taking on a cultural form, archival projects should offer "accounts of institutional modes—not simply the disenfranchisements and betrayals of institutions" but also the "rules of inclusion and the anatomies of recognition and legitimacy; not simply how we are entrapped, but also how we might achieve provisional forms of freedom and insurgency."[167]*The Reorder of Things* reminds us to archive work that rebuts the "boast of institutions, that in their archival capacities they can adequately reflect minoritized cultures and differences."[168]The state, the academy, and capital collude to represent and recognize difference and flatten its complexity so as to manage difference. In this vein, difference is included only when it is archived alongside the rules of management. Ferguson reminds us though that power is "utterly incapable of representing those subjects and can offer only a wrecked depiction instead."[169] The

[166] Ibid., 14.
[167] Ibid., 14.
[168] Ibid., 15.
[169] Ibid., 14.

transformation of radical critique into the limited, manageable domain of diversity and inclusion discourse requires an archival project that acknowledges a key golden weakness—minority nationalisms' desire for recognition.[170] The golden weakness to be recognized by your oppressor—which is much of the work of resistance theory—always already constitutes a vulnerability to institutional solicitation.

Ultimately, archival projects that only aim to elicit recognition by the collusion of power between academia, state and capital are extremely limited and flawed projects. They hold onto the notion that recognition can resist dehumanization without realizing that representation under the guise of the power that formed it in the first place can only yield managed, controlled and disciplined fragments of the radical critique that aims to unearth it. Archival projects within the terrain of critical interdisciplinarity offer a refusal of the rights previously refused and sheds light on the limitations of institutions and its representational domain to be conducive to the full, vibrant and complex social life of minority difference.

IV.

A third critique of archival projects that also moves beyond conventional articulations of identity and resistance aims to cross physical and intellectual borders and horizons. In "From Mexico to Palestine: An Occupation of Knowledge, a *Mestizaje* of Methods," Martha Vanessa Saldívar argues that an analysis that considers the spatial and political similarities between Palestine and Mexico can teach us how "each context sheds light on how discursive (i.e., knowledge production) and physical (i.e., militarism, empire and occupation) systems of exclusion and policing work within the context of settler

[170] Ibid., 38.

colonialism."[171] For Saldívar, the policing of knowledge on behalf of the U.S. and Israel is "a critical colonial tool" in solidifying and sustaining the myth of nation-building on top of the lives of people of color. Saldívar calls this the occupation of knowledge and defines it accordingly:

> This systematic erasure, both in the past and present, amounts to an occupation of knowledge. By erasing marginalized histories, settler colonial projects thrive with greater easer as hegemonic narratives of nation building occupy and suppress the critical and oppositional histories of the colonialized and the oppressed. These histories are suppressed because they fundamentally challenge the national narratives from which the United States and Israel draw their legitimacy and justify their existence.[172]

An archival project that manages to escape this suppression constitutes the oppositional histories of the colonialized and the oppressed. To confront the delegitimizing, silencing and erasure on behalf of settler colonial societies' occupation of knowledge, a mestizaje of methods must be practiced and learned. Not merely a form of oppositional knowledge production, archival projects that taken on a mestizaje of methods cross boundaries, make connections and take elements from different disciplines, different histories and different communities and bring them into the same analytical space to better understand questions of power.[173]An archival project that enacts a mestizaje of methods would "deviate from disciplinary, geopolitical and other hegemonic borders and boundaries" and by doing so, would generate a fusion of knowledge production that would combat the erasure and isolation of hegemonic discourse amongst racialized communities throughout the globe. Saldívar builds on Ferguson call for critical interdisciplinarity in that her call looks to

[171] Saldivar, Martha Vanessa. 2010. "From Mexico to Palestine: An Occupation of Knowledge, a "Mestizaje" of Methods". *American Quarterly*. 62 (4): 821-833: 823.
[172] Ibid., 826.
[173] Ibid., 827.

unearth the way hegemonic power has cultivated the incorporation of difference through the telling of minoritized stories to reveal the limits of such power. Additionally, she collectivizes Cacho's project in that it aims to "make connections, to give our testimonies and to excavate our histories."[174] She asks us to think of the devaluation of racialized communities on a transnational and geopolitical scale.

For Saldívar, the manipulation of discourse by dominant and official archives allow for "the carving up of land, the exploitation of resources, the ethnic cleansing and violence against other communities of color."[175] Moreover, official archives of settler colonialism then position themselves to frame these acts as "progress, civilization, manifest destiny or national security."[176] The forces of securitization and exclusion are then a part of a colonial modernity that must be challenged and in doing so, archives that use a mestizaje of methods will think cross-regionally and transnationally "about questions of power, about how histories of settler colonies are often repeated, and about the perpetuation of exclusionary practices and the creation of divisions in theoretical realms."[177] Without bringing these question into the same analytical space, we will not comprehend the interconnected and global nature of colonial modernity. Moreover, the reproduction of hegemonic archives will continue suppressing colonized communities and keep us in what Chela Sandoval calls "intellectual colonialism." Saldívar quotes Sandoval extensively to draw out the possibility of scholarship and archival work that moves us away from intellectual colonialism.

> To recognize this [i.e., hybrid, mobile, nomadic, and radical *mestizaje* forms of situated subjectivities] equivalent and similarly constructed

[174] Ibid., 828.
[175] Ibid., 828.
[176] Ibid., 828.
[177] Ibid., 828.

> method across disciplines can work to undo the apartheid that divides theoretical domains, and redirect academic desire away from its tendencies toward intellectual colonialism.[178]

The archival project becomes a question of pushing us beyond thinking that reinforces borders and makes sites of meeting impossible. Undermining these dominant archives with archives of feeling on the local and regional level and linking them up with other archives of feeling serve to push the limits of institutions and settler colonial societies grasp of the way we come to understand ourselves. While Saldívar frames this as an oppositional knowledge formation, I would argue that this mestizaje of methods offers an entirely new way of being and sensing the world around us. It is, in my view, a way that communities-in-relation to each other look inward, surrender themselves to the interiority of their truth and selves and articulate these truths as ways of finding for ourselves the humanity that cannot be found in resistance and oppositional politics. In whatever frame we use in the classroom, a mestizaje of methods ensures that we focus on making connections and knocking down the theoretical walls and borders between groups of people who would otherwise not meet in the first place. This archival project allows us to be the curators and liaisons of communities meeting with the intent to build better ways of being.

V.

Saldívar's theorization of a mestizaje of methods can be further solidified by defining the politics of reading the colonial archive. In *The Intimacies of the Four Continents,* Lisa Lowe writes that her study involves connecting the archive of liberalism.

> …that is, the literary, cultural and political philosophical narratives of progress and individual freedom that perform the important work of meditating and resolving liberalism's contradictions—with the colonial

[178] Ibid., 828.

> state archives from which it has been traditionally separated, and the anticolonial intellectual traditions infrequently considered along the imperial one.[179]

For instance, Lowe regards the Great Britain National Archives as "organized to preserve government records and information for the public; its imperatives are classification, collection and documentation, rather than connection or convergence."[180] She writes that there are "separate records of the settling of territories around the world, the transatlantic slave trade, the governing of the colonies, the abolition of slavery and the emigration of Chinese labor to sites in the Americas."[181] For Lowe, like Saldívar, she sees the archives of the official record as discouraging the connections between these sites. She writes that "it is fair to observe that there is scarce attention to the *relationship between* the matters classified within distinct stores; the organization of the archives discourages links between settler colonialism in North America and the West Indies and the African slave trade; or attention to the conjunction of the abolition of slavery and the importing of Chinese and South Asian indentured labor…"[182]

Lowe details her reading method that aims to read across the colonial archives. Finding the intimacies of the four continents thus requires implicating one set of preoccupations in one repository with another one. Lowe also examined well-documented events as well as paid attention to the ones that are absent altogether. She writes that she takes notices of logical inconsistencies in one archive and pays attention to "discrepant tone or insistent repetitions" as well as remark the "rhetorical anomalies" that

[179] Lisa Lowe, *The Intimacies of Four Continents* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2015): 4.
[180] Ibid., 5.
[181] Ibid., 5.
[182] Ibid., 5.

can be read across texts and archives.[183] This approach is about endearing a closeness and proximity of these texts regardless of their place in the catalogued archive. The emphasis of this archival approach to find the intimacy of the four continents stresses the "relationality and differentiation of peoples, cultures, and societies, as well as the convergence and divergence of ideas, concepts and theme."[184] As such, this approach refuses historicity as a disciplinary and policing paradigm for archival projects and their methodology. The approach does not "foreground comprehensiveness and teleology, in either a historical or geographical sense" but rather "particular intimacies and contemporaneities that traverse distinct and separate studies 'areas.'"[185] One of the goals of this approach is to unsettle the myth of national histories in "isolated origins and independent progressive development" and as such, elicit the connections that actually constitute the making of the modern world.

> Over the course of the seventeenth to nineteenth centuries, liberal and colonial discourses improvised racial terms for the non-European peoples whom settlers, traders, and colonial personnel encountered. Settlers represented indigenous peoples as violent threats to be eliminated in ways that rationalized white settlement and African slavery; they discounted native people as uncivilized or non-Christian, conflated the inhabitants with land and nature, imagined them as removable or extinguishable, or rendered them as existing only in the past…the "coloniality" of modern world history is not a brute binary division, but rather one that operates through precisely spatialized and temporalized processes of both differentiation and connection.[186]

Archival projects, for Lowe, thus should aim to reveal the connection between the colonial archive and liberal humanism because dominant archives only serve to legitimize the subjugation of enslaved, indigenous and colonized peoples and "obscure

[183] Ibid., 5.
[184] Ibid., 6.
[185] Ibid., 6.
[186] Ibid., 8.

the violence of both their separations and their mixtures."[187] The refusal to impose the historical method onto the reading of colonial archives redirects our intent as scholars. The intent becomes connecting liberalism to coloniality and linking across time the history of the present as an intimate experience. Differentiation and connection was a key strategy of coloniality and in many ways, this speaks to the significance of archival reading practices that force to see the rules by which power govern itself and its subjects as well as the ways that we can read against such rules and ultimately, find the complicated intimacies of the four continents.

VI.

Jasbir Puar's *Terrorist Assemblages* defines assemblages as a method of sorts for conducting queer archival work. Puar writes that the book engages a "range of different theoretical paradigms, textual materials, and tactical approaches that are reflective of a queer methodological philosophy."[188] For Puar, queer archival projects are meant to challenge the teleology of dominant forms of archiving; this includes examining government sources on surveillance, films, documentaries, television shows, print media, newspapers, magazines and even ethnographic data, press releases and manifestos to name a few of the sources in her archive. Puar conceives of queer archival work as possessing "no exact recipe for a queer endeavor, no a priori system that taxonomizes the linkages, disruptions and contradictions into a tidy vessel."[189] Puar's goal is to replace the instinctual, the natural or the commonsensical with the unexpected, the unplanned, the

[187] Ibid., 8.
[188] Jasbir K. Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer times* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017): xv.
[189] Ibid., xv.

lines of flight, "the denaturalizing of expectation through the juxtaposition of the seemingly unrelated…"[190]

The project should aim to undo the normalization of the discourse of terrorism, especially as it relates to queer formations. For Puar, this occurs at the level of the very purpose of archiving—she "hopes to contribute to the building of an alternative historical record, archive, and documentation of our contemporary moments."[191] This kind of work possess significant question for the archivist: "What does it mean to be examining, absorbing, feeling, reflecting on, and writing about the archive as it being produced, rushing at us—literally, to entertain an unfolding archive?"[192] Thus, the emphasis must be less on historicization and instead, on the collection, shaping of, and interrogation of an archive "that will be available for future historicization."[193] In this regard, Puar borrows the concept of haunting from Avery Gordon to articulate that we keep an eye out for "shadows, ephemera, energies, ethereal forces, spirit, sensations" that ultimately can defuse a binary between past and present.[194]

Puar invokes Ghassan Hage's question in *Terrorist Assemblages*—"why is it that suicide bombing cannot be talked about without being condemned first…"?---as a way to mark the way an archive denaturalizes expectations. Taking the clear political risk of explain suicide bombing, Puar challenges the Hegelian self/other dialectic by thinking through the forces of affect, body, and matter.

> …Self-annihilation is the ultimate form of resistance, and ironically, it acts as self-perservation, the preservation of symbolic self enabled through the "highest cultural capital" of martyrdom, a giving of life to the future of

[190] Ibid., xv.
[191] Ibid., xv.
[192] Ibid., xix.
[193] Ibid., xix.
[194] Ibid., x.

> political struggles—not at all a sign of "disinterest in living a meaningful.l life." As Hage notes, in this limited but nonetheless trenchant economy of meaning, suicide bombers are "a sign of life" emanating from the violent conditions of life's impossibility, the "impossibility of making a life." This body forces a reconciliation of opposites through their inevitable collapse—a perverse habitation of contradiction.[195]

Puar writes that the bodies of suicide bombers are indeed "in the midst of becoming and blur the insides and outsides, infecting transformation through sensation, echoing knowledge via reverberation and vibration"[196]. The suicide bomber thus produces knowledge that functions as a queer temporality bringing forth "waves of the future breaking into the present."[197] For Puar, an archival project of this nature consists of the organic as well as inorganic, flesh as well as machine, death and becoming as one; in offering an archival exploration of the suicide bomber, for instance, she writes that they "foreground the flawed temporal, spatial and ontological presumptions upon which such distinctions [such as rational and irrational] flourish"[198] Distinguishing queer assemblage from the queering of an entity or identity, Puar writes that indeed burning flesh, body parts and say skin denaturalize race and sexuality through "the impermanence, the transience, the fleeting identity replayed backward through its dissolution.[199]

VII.

In *Archives of Flesh: African America, Spain and Post-Humanist Critique*, Robert F. Reid-Pharr writes that he, like Alexander Weheliye, extends Hortense Spillers's argument that alternative modes of life have existed alongside Western knowledge and

[195] Ibid., 216.
[196] Ibid., 216.
[197] Ibid., 218.
[198] Ibid., 218.
[199] Ibid., 218.

practices of racialized violence.[200] The useful distinction between body and flesh is what Reid-Pharr, Weheliye and Spillers use to draw this point out: "the flesh marks the site at which 'lines of flight, freedom dreams, practices of liberation, and possibilities for other worlds" might be made visible. Reid-Pharr attempts to provide an answer to the question "how might we begin to access the tantalizing political/ethical/theoretical possibilities that Weheliye names?"[201] In response Reid-Pharr writes that it a return to the archives is not enough, but outlines instead a "Critical Archive Studies" approach.

A "Critical Archive Studies" approach can be reinvigorated by defining critical as "the sense of operating to end the terror of white supremacy" while "also naming how the humanist split between Man and (not)man has been achieved and maintained."[202] Reid-Pharr does not discourage the analysis of the lived experiences of people of color up against humanism. However, he is more interested in reviving a push beyond Western knowledge; he is especially interested in not understanding humanism through the disciplines of sociology and philosophy. The Critical Archives Studies approach examines the "many moments of illogic, indeed of wildness and bestiality, that one finds in humanist discourse" via the "many instances where the specificities of 'the flesh' are utilized to announce humanism's dream of transcendence."[203]

This approach pushes us beyond the project of identity politics and representation in that it does not want to imagine the future under the current prescriptions of humanity. The question for Reid-Pharr that one must ask is "what does a project of black liberation

---

[200] Robert Reid-Pharr, *Archives of Flesh: African America, Spain, and Post-humanist Critique* (New York: New York University Press, 2016): 10.
[201] Ibid., 10.
[202] Ibid., 10.
[203] Ibid., 11.

not built on the 'need' to prove that we are indeed men might entail."[204] Reid-Pharr writes that moving beyond the representation mode of Western humanism also entails an archival project that can confront and recognize that this idea of the dissolubale distinction between "man" and animal "reaches its highest—and most bizarre—level of clarity at those many moments in which some human animals are understood to be more human than others."[205] The aim of the project is then to reveal the functioning and the dis-function of these structures, and see nuance and complexities of the "cultures of slavery, white supremacy, and empire"[206] Thus, not to see the totalizing nature of these forms but also the ways the flesh lives alongside its powerful and violent forces. The archive here should include the rupture of oppression/victimhood by remaining sensitive to the fact that "(black human) bodies were not only abused by slavers but also utilized by the enslaved themselves as key sites of resistance and change."[207]

VIII.

I situate two class projects from my time teaching as a graduate student as illustrative of some, if not all, of the outlined articulations of archival projects. Throughout the rest of this chapter, I will discuss these class projects as archival projects that aim to move beyond the identity politics of resistance theory. With student permission, I curate an archive that aims to enact a contradiction: a written encapsulation of artistic renderings of fugitivity. For the purposes of this chapter, fugitivity is an active move beyond the conventional rights, representation and recognition projects in ethnic studies. In analyzing the archive of student work, I reflect on the possibilities of teaching

[204] Ibid., 14.
[205] Ibid., 13.
[206] Ibid., 13.
[207] Ibid., 13.

Lisa Cacho, Roderick Ferguson, Martha Vanessa Saldívar, Jasbir Puar, and Robert Reid-Pharr together; I see their work as outlining a multiplicity of ways for us to enact archival fugitivity in our pedagogical and political endeavors. In their resistance to conventional modes of representing minoritized subjectivity, I imagine them quietly whispering to students—keep running.

I argue in this chapter that archival pedagogies that feature a combination of some, if not all, of the critiques of conventional archival projects can offer us new terrains of fugitivity away from rights, representation and recognition. Archival pedagogies that include Cacho's use of an archives of feeling, Ferguson's articulation of a critical interdisciplinarity, Saldívar's nuanced *mestizaje* of methods, Lowe's methods of finding the intimacies of the four continents, Puar's queer assemblages, and Reid-Pharr's post-humanist "Critical Archives Studies" will render spatial, visual and philosophical terrains of study; the search for these archives unsettles definitions of progressive activist principles as much as it formulates new sets of methods for asking questions through the curation of new kinds of archival analysis.

IX.

The first project I would like to discuss is titled "Crossroads in Latino America and Latin American Studies" and was completed by three students of mine, Melissa Magaña, Jessica Paucar-Lema and Kathleen Zuna in the Spring semester of 2016 as part of an independent studies project that I served as the instructor. Melissa approached me in the Fall of 2015 because she was taking one of my classes and informed me that she, along with her friends, wanted to work with me in the Spring to create a class and intellectual space that centered the knowledges of non-Chicanx Latinx students. As a

group of students who were of Central American and South American descent, they let me know that they felt alienated by courses in Chicano Studies as according to them, "everything had to be understood through the prism of the Mexican-American experience." This grew frustrating for them and they wanted to do an independent study with me, a fellow Central American, to ensure that they could understand Latino Studies beyond the starting place of Chicanas/os. I deeply empathized with their concerns as I too often felt alienated by some of the protocols that seldom were interrogated with rigor by my Chicana/o Studies colleagues. The goal of the project ultimately was to flee the U.S.-Mexico border as well as the American southwest as the exclusive and often triumphant sites of Latinx studies. In doing so, the group's archival starting point was to flee essentialism.

During the first weeks of the independent study, I made use of Lisa Cacho's work to help them think through developing an archive of feeling that ultimately did what they intended to—to redistribute dignity and value for often overlooked subjectivities, such as Afro-Latinx and indigenous communities from Central and South America and the Caribbean respectively. In our first class time together, we discussed how they felt that Chicano Studies, in its overinvestment in Mexican-American subjects and figures, left them feeling inadequate about what they could contribute to U.S. politics, culture, history, social life, and academia. Students articulated that they wanted to find ways to see Latinx culture as more than just a story of how to become a Chicana/o political activist. Cacho's work here is deeply instructive in allowing us to think through the subjects and figures that the group had studied and as a result, understood to have more value than their own stories. Cacho's work allowed us to ask: was Chicana/o studies

imposing "a teleology of progressive politics" through its exclusive examination of Mexican-American subjects? How might the groups' independent study allow us to look for methods, narratives and strategies for ascribing social worth without falling into the similar traps of identity politics in ethnic studies?

To do this, we turned to Saldívar's mestizaje of methods as model for challenging the imagined borders that can be constructed when ethnic studies becomes an exclusive, closed off archive. If our goal in the independent study was not to reproduce the alienation we often felt, we needed to consider communities-in-relation to each other as opposed to communities-in-isolation from each other. The archival goal of the group's final project ultimately clearly demonstrated this approach. The students chose not to focus on one experience but instead, chose to "make connections" by excavating shared histories.[208] Different disciplines, histories and communities would be brought into the same analytical terrain to show the heterogeneity of Latinx studies and Latin America; the group's final project which was a digital story map literally brought racialized communities together through a shared history "on a transnational and geopolitical scale."[209] The theoretical borders of academic study of single groups acting in isolation from one another were shattered by the group's persistence in mapping their research of U.S. Latinx, Caribbean and Central and South American knowledges in the virtual story map.

When we press the "start the journey" button on the homepage, we are zoomed into the coast of Florida with a discussion of Laila Lalami's *The Moor's Account*. From the first button, the American Southwest is displaced for a complex rendering of the

[208] Saldívar, 828.
[209] Ibid., 828.

history of racialization against Moors and Islam as originating in Europe as well as the formative ground for the colonial history of the Americas. For them, Lalami's fictional memoir of the Moroccan slave named Estabanico catapults us into this terrain beyond the representational politics of Chicana/o studies. The story map tells the story of contact, not through the lens of Spaniards, but through the lens of a person of African-descent with Muslim roots. In our discussion for how to discuss the novel's cultural and political significance, we discussed an article by Hisham Aidi entitled "'Let Us Be Moors'; Islam, Race and 'Connected Histories.'" Our discussion cemented the novel be featured as a way of ensuring the archive, while chronological in some respects, allowed for the queering of time and history. By starting the archive with *The Moor's Account*, the group was acknowledging and accounting for the erasure of a "tricontinental counter-modernity" arising during the war on terror but set firmly in the early colonial era. In this way, we are introduced to an archive that enacts Lowe's reading practices of intimacies across time and space as well as unearthing Reid-Pharr's post-humanist critique. More specifically, The Moor's Account situates us in unearthing questions of the figure of the terrorist as a racial one in a truly complex narrative of slavery, freedom, and colonialism. Here, we see that the definitions of man and not-man that are so ardent in the current war on terror stretch to the Spanish Inquisition, its invasion into the Americas and its racialization of indigenous communities and people of African descent. Read intimately as a queer temporal project, we can see the significance of Aidi situating this modernity as follows:

> With African-American and Latino converts speaking of the tragedy of 1492, and with Muslim minorities in the West becoming increasingly race-conscious and inspired by black America, the world is witnessing a new fusion between Islam and pan-Africanism. Today,

> however, this racialized Islamic internationalism contains elements of other cultures and diasporas as well. Islam is at the heart of an emerging global anti-hegemonic culture, which post-colonial critic Robert Young would say incarnates a "tricontinental counter-modernity" that combines diasporic and local cultural elements, and blends Arab, Islamic, black and Hispanic factors to generate "a revolutionary black, Asian and Hispanic globalization, with its own dynamic counter-modernity...constructed in order to fight global imperialism.[210]

From there, students take us to Mesoamerica via the text *Mesoamerican Voices: Native Language Writings from Colonial Mexico, Yucatan and Guatemala*. Here, students take us from a Moor navigating the perils of the New World to the various Mesoamerican indigenous communities who learned Spanish to navigate the land, laws, and religious codes tied to both. The map then takes us from Spanish to Portuguese colonialism, and takes us to Brazil via *Children of God's Fire: A Documentary History of Black Slavery in Brazil*. Connecting the enslavement of people of African descent in Brazil, the students then quickly turned to maroon societies via *Maroon Societies: Rebel Slave Communities in the Americas*. Students here took us to the Caribbean and discussed palenques and how their served as "virile protests against the infamies of slavery."[211]

Again, students utilized a mestizaje of methods to break disciplinary ways of study. The next stop of the map journey is Cochabamba. Students viewed the film *Even the Rain* which aims to depict how Spanish colonization is still present in modern Bolivia. In their selection of a film that makes use of queer time, students also enacted what Saldívar discusses regarding archives that show how histories of settler colonies are often repeated. The interconnected nature of the story map again shows the colonial history of the present and how it shapes an intimacy with the past. Students connected the

[210] Hisham D. Aidi, "Let Us Be Moors Islam, Race, and "Connected Histories"1," *Souls* 7, no. 1 (2005).
[211] Richard Price, *Maroon Societies: Rebel Slave Communities in the Americas* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996): 42.

maroon societies' resilience with that of the indigenous communities of Cochabamba, who in the film fought for water to not be extracted from their community to the privatization of water. Here, the project moves us away from intellectual colonialism and the occupation of knowledge and extends Saldívar's method by bringing the past and the present intimately together; the students ruptured the imaginary border of the past by using a film that queers time.

From here, the archive takes us to the black Cuban diaspora. The complexities of interactions between a post-emancipation American South for African-Americans and an occupied Cuba by the U.S. for Afro-Cubans made the forging of diaspora not only extremely difficult but an endeavor full of divergences and convergences. The reading of Frank Guridy's *Forging Diaspora* introduced students to an archive of feeling that showed that identity is not a site of strict historicity and instead, requires attention to feeling just as much as class, race, and gender. Indeed, the student's decision to include this text allows us to see what happens when diaspora is attempted to be forged when difference is at the crux of its management. Therefore, students enacted Roderick Ferguon's critical interdisciplinarity and allowed us to see the lines drawn by the powers of white supremacy as well as the communities that attempted to forge something new altogether.

Students then take us on a journey of the Caribbean and its queer formations amidst social turmoil and radical change. Students discuss Tomas Gutierrez's *Fresa y Chocolate* as well as the Ian Lumsden's *Machos, Maricones and Gays.* We are introduced to a Cuba that is at once revolutionary in regards to class struggle and reactionary in regards to the oppression of queer communities. Amidst the winding

intimacies of sexuality and the institutionalization of Castro's early homophobic revolution, students take us to the intimacies so eloquently articulated by Jamaica Kincaid. We venture to a place few of us travel to, and where many white people tour—Antigua. Students archive Kincaid's *A Small Place* and discuss the intimate portrait Kincaid draws of the tourists and in turn, provide a critique of the liberal humanist project rooted in colonial power relations that is called tourism. *A Small Place* reorients our attention to the Caribbean, and recaptures the value of critique that can be found when the Caribbean, Central and South America is more than the value of its hotels, airfare and beachfront hospitality services. Indeed, *A Small Place* meditates on and generates a new economy of feeling by forging a critique of the humanist liberal subject—the tourist—and its neocolonial servant. Glimpses of the archival critiques offered by Cacho, Ferguson, Saldívar, Lowe, Puar and Reid-Pharr are encapsulated in her vibrant and fierce critique of the figure of the tourist as a representative mode of the nasty intimacies produced by the tourist economy.

> …and since you [the tourist] are being an ugly person this ugly but joyful thought will swell inside you: Their ancestor were not clever in the way yours were and not ruthless in the way yours were, for then would it not be you who would be in harmony with nature and backwards in that charming way? An ugly thing, that is what you are when you become a tourist, an ugly, empty thing, a stupid thing, a piece of rubbish pausing here and there to gaze at this and taste that, and it will never occur to you that the people who inhabit the place in which you have just paused cannot stand you, that behind closed doors they laugh at your strangeness…[212]

Kincaid also provides a clear example of the political act of writing from the sovereignty of one's interior. In telling her truth, fully embodied and unhampered by whiteness, Kincaid reveals the uneven dynamics of neocolonialism. Her text reveals a deep

[212] Jamaica Kincaid, *A Small Place* (London: Vintage, 1997): 16-17.

meditation on the conditions under which Antigua experiences tourism, resists it and has the capacity to imagine something else. Her vivid descriptions of place and space, specifically of the government's lack of funding infrastructure, education and public sites like libraries, underscores Kincaid's efforts to connect her interior to a collective and as such, provides a critique and blueprint of the past, present and future of Antigua. Students chose this text to demonstrate that they comprehended that state violence is an intimate and psychological as well as collective and transnational act.

This is precisely why when you click the next arrow, and arrive in Chile and are asked to engage Macarena Gomez-Barris' *Where Memory Dwells,* we see how a book which is an archive of feeling can shield light on the emotive dimensions of exile life and national memory. The digital story archives a Latinx experience that extends beyond the U.S.-Mexico border and yet, we find the common ties that bind and bend the heterogeneous Latinx community in the U.S. Exiles from Pinochet's dictatorship, in rubbing shoulders and memories with other Latin American and Caribbean peoples in this digital archive, find vectors and intersections through the methods these students used in curating texts and new geographies of communities in relation. Students fled from essentialist politics and sought new horizons outside of the story they had learned and in doing so, forged complex diasporas and imaginaries in a formal classroom project.

From here, students read and archived Junot Diaz's *The Brief and Wonderous Life of Oscar Wao* and a collection of essays entitled *The Other Latinos*. The focus of these texts, even in their respective genres—novel and academic anthology—is to elicit concern for experiences often overlooked, devalued, and undermined by dominant U.S. cultural politics. The digital story narrates the desires, histories, and entangled web of

social life amongst Dominican-Americans, Cuban-Americans, and Salvadoran-Americans to name a few. Students really took their knowledge of the U.S.-Mexico border discourse and expanded it into a broader hemispheric, transnational, diasporic and international context. As established in our first classes, the main goal of the independent study was to not reproduce the kind of alienation that a study of one ethnic group can produce if that ethnic group is the primary vehicle for discussions of history, culture, identity, sexuality, gender and race. Every week, by putting diverse geographies in relation to one another as opposed to isolation, we fled the established protocols of nationalism and its clone, cultural nationalism. The ties that bound us were not the paradigms of history, objectivity and progressive chronology. Spawned by the collective desire to learn more about the complex collisions of slavery, indigenous histories, colonial modernity, the often-silenced history of Caribbean peoples, and the shared struggle of the Americas against U.S. imperialism in the region, the wonderful digital story project from the independent study I guided divulges a critical interdisciplinary archival project that prioritizes intimacy across geographies as well as entices a pedagogical statement about ethnic studies—to flee the ties of disciplinary concern and arrive at terrains of fugitivity.

X.

How do we teach students to communicate from a place of authenticity? How can we cultivate students accessing this internal place of authenticity through activities that are quiet? How might the quiet be conjured through the critique offered by indigenous forms of communication? In the spring semester of 2016, I had students meditate on

course material through coloring Israel F. Haros Lopez's *East L.A. Barrio Codex: A Journey into Asemic and Codex Writing*. The goal of the project was to encourage students to read, understand, visualize, dream, speculate, meditate and color course concepts. This would be the place where they could arrive at brainstorming for essays that dealt with contemporary Chicanx and Latinx cultural studies as well as venture into a journey through asemic writing. At the end of the semester, after they had colored their barrio codex, they wrote stories about their journey into ethnic studies through asemic writing. To start off, I introduced students to the many codex that exist, from the Vaticano to the Borbonico. We paid attention to the ways they told stories, shifted over time, and held onto their narrative integrity even after the last 500 years of colonialism.

Lopez's *East L.A. Barrio Codex* is a 21st century amoxtli that documents the colonial modernity and indigenous ancestry of the many people in Los Angeles who can trace their roots to Mesoamerica. Damián Baca defines these amoxtli as "pictographic 'codex books' that were destroyed by European combatants as a strategy for subjugating indigenous minds" (2009, 564). Citing Cherríe Moraga, Baca also adds to this definition: "The Chicano Codex is a map back to the original face, una peregrinación to an America unwritten: the brown swell of tierra indígena debajo de la Calavera."[213] For Baca, amoxtli manuscripts, like those of Lopez, rechart and revise the dominant historical narrative of native/mestiza/o assimilation.[214] Consequently, they reveal the enduring struggle against Western colonization that their rhetorical emergence in the 20th and 21st century encapsulate. Baca writes,

[213] Damian Baca. "The Chicano Codex: Writing against Historical and Pedagogical Colonization.**"** *College English*, v71 n6 p564-583 Jul 2009: 564.
[214] Ibid., 564.

> …such symbolization [can be interpreted as a] resistant rhetoric that addresses the larger backdrop of colonial subjugation and resistance in the Americas. Specifically, I argue that codex rhetorics revise and displace the dominant historical narrative of cultural assimilation through continuous symbolic play…By infusing and embellishing Mesoamerica pictography into Western inscription practices, codex rhetorics promote a new dialectic, a new strategy of inventing and writing between worlds. The Chicana and Chicano dialectic works to overcome a hubristic historical and pedagogical colonization that disowns and suppress the intellectual contributions of Mexican cultures, both ancient and new.[215]

After introducing students to the beautiful Mesoamerican writings, we discussed a brief history into the codex and the pictography. Baca outlines that Mesoamerican writing can be catalogued as "semasiographic." Baca defines this as a "configuration of permanently recorded marks that signify thought, ideas and imagery rather than visible speech."[216] The writing thus does not necessarily "correspond directly with spoken language" and as result, fuses into a "…single symbolic account diverse elements that, for Western minds, are separate and hierarchical concepts of annotation and illustration."[217] Naturalistic images, pictorial conventions and abstract symbols in an organized writing structure allowed readers who were familiar with their arrangement and meaning to interpret the pictographic messages. Baca also outlines that extensive history of these Mesoamerican writing traditions.

> The Teotichuacános (100BCE-900ADE) …provided the template for civilization that was taken on by later Nahuatl-speaking groups, including the Aztec and, to some degree, the Maya. The Zapotec (500 BCE-900 ADE) developed calendrical literacy and logographic writing that used separate glyphs to represent syllables. Finally, the traditions of the Olmec (1000-400 BCE), whose hieroglyphic inscription practices predate the Greek alphabet, are the progenitors of Mesoamerican culture.[218]

---

[215] Ibid., 565.
[216] Ibid., 564.
[217] Ibid., 565.
[218] Ibid., 569.

By the time the Spanish invaded the Americas, these complex forms of communication became weapons for Spanish Christianization efforts. The Spanish denigrated Mesoamerican pictography as "inherently inferior to the Western art of letters" and "set out to systemically destroy them."[219] The rich and extensive history of pictography from Mesoamerica was under attack and its use became widely a form of control and to resolve land dispute.[220] The rhetoric of codex persists in the work of Cherríe Moraga as well as Enrique Chagoya, Guillermo Gómez-Peña, and Felicia Rice in *Codex Espangliensis: From Columbus to the Border Patrol*. For Baca, the retelling of history from the perspective of this codex flees Western and Christina narratives of history.

> …Chicana codex rhetorics invite readers to envision simultaneously the Spanish colonial sixteenth century and the present era of late global capitalism. By fusing different temporalities, the *Codex Espangliensis* mirrors the same tactic employed by early pictographic artists during the time of the early conquest. The suggestion of Mesoamerican chronology recuperates the Aztec cyclical nature of time, change and growth. But this time, readers are confronted with the Chicana and Chicano past and present in light of the capitalist development that permeates the United States, the highly militarized borderlands and the world. The theft and appropriation of Mesoamerican land and culture by Western colonial regimes are juxtaposed with contemporary images of Mexico, symbolized as cheap labor and raw materials—a source of profit for the new conquistadors, landowners, foreign investors, and transnational corporate entities.[221]

Students read Baca's work in my class with the intention of persistently and intentionally seeing the colonial history of the present and practicing queer temporal frameworks rooted in indigenous ancestral cultures and traditions. In my pedagogy, I understand Baca's work as an archival project that again offers us a pedagogy of confronting the past, the present and the future together at once. This form of archival fugitivity proposes

[219] Ibid. 570.
[220] Ibid., 570.
[221] Ibid., 574.

"a detour, a revision or creolization of dominant assimilation narratives" and calls for new ways "reading and knowing" that enact "syncretic visions and revision of geographic colonialism and economic imperialism."[222] Students colored Lopez's work and often would include some writing, annotating important concepts that they felt the images represented and/or could speak to if viewed through the lens of the course. In Figure 21, the student annotates two concepts that in the course speak to Latinx queer sexualities and geographies. The mariposa iconography captured the vulnerability, delicacy, and beauty amidst possible annihilation that Latinx communities live with as mariposas themselves.

In the next few pages, I feature student work to demonstrate the beauty of coloring codecies and the possibilities of feeling and sensing our spirits in our intellectual work.

[222] Ibid.

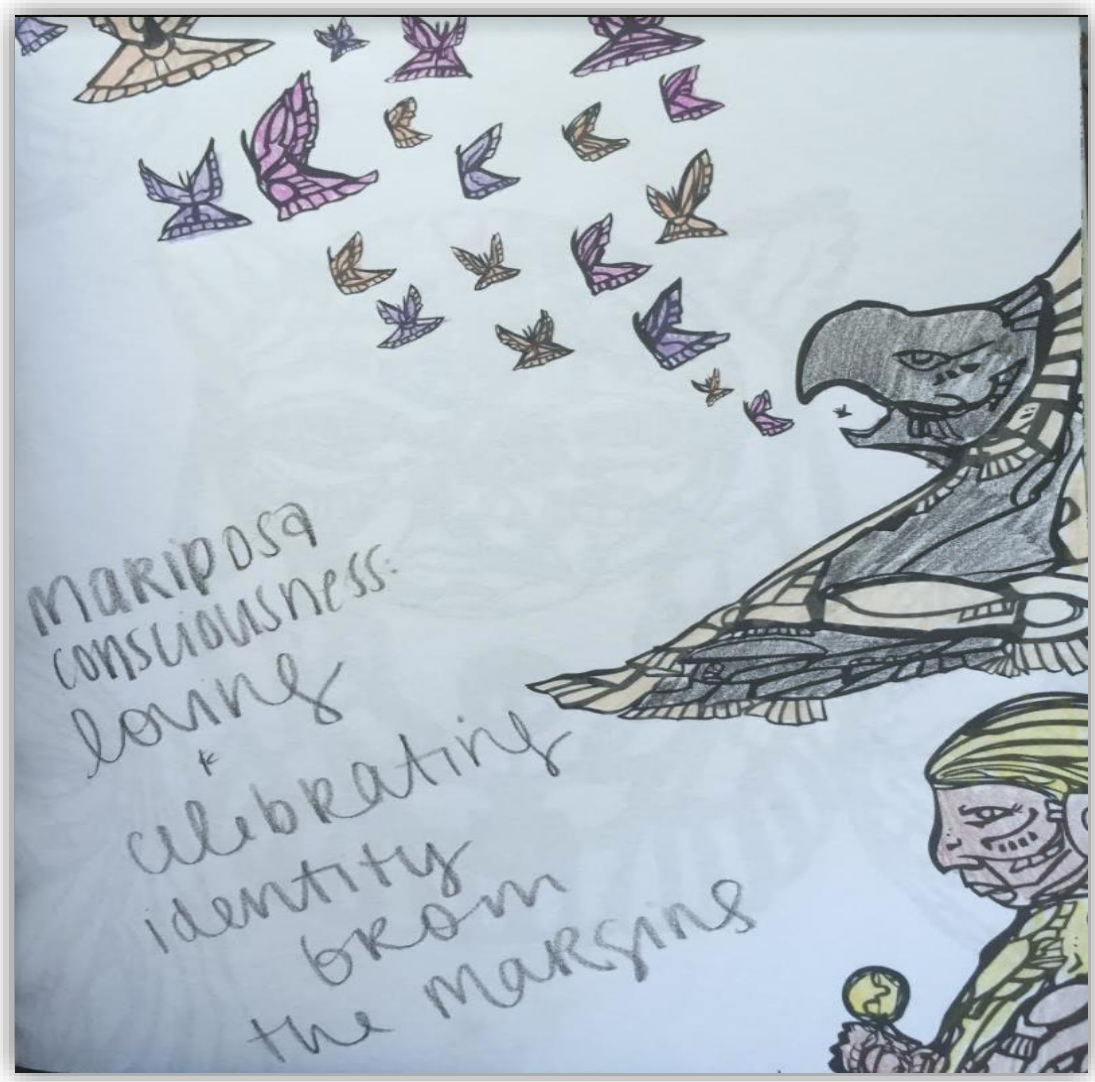


Figure 21: “Mariposa Consciousness: Loving and Celebrating Identity from the Margins” by Kaitlin Merkel.

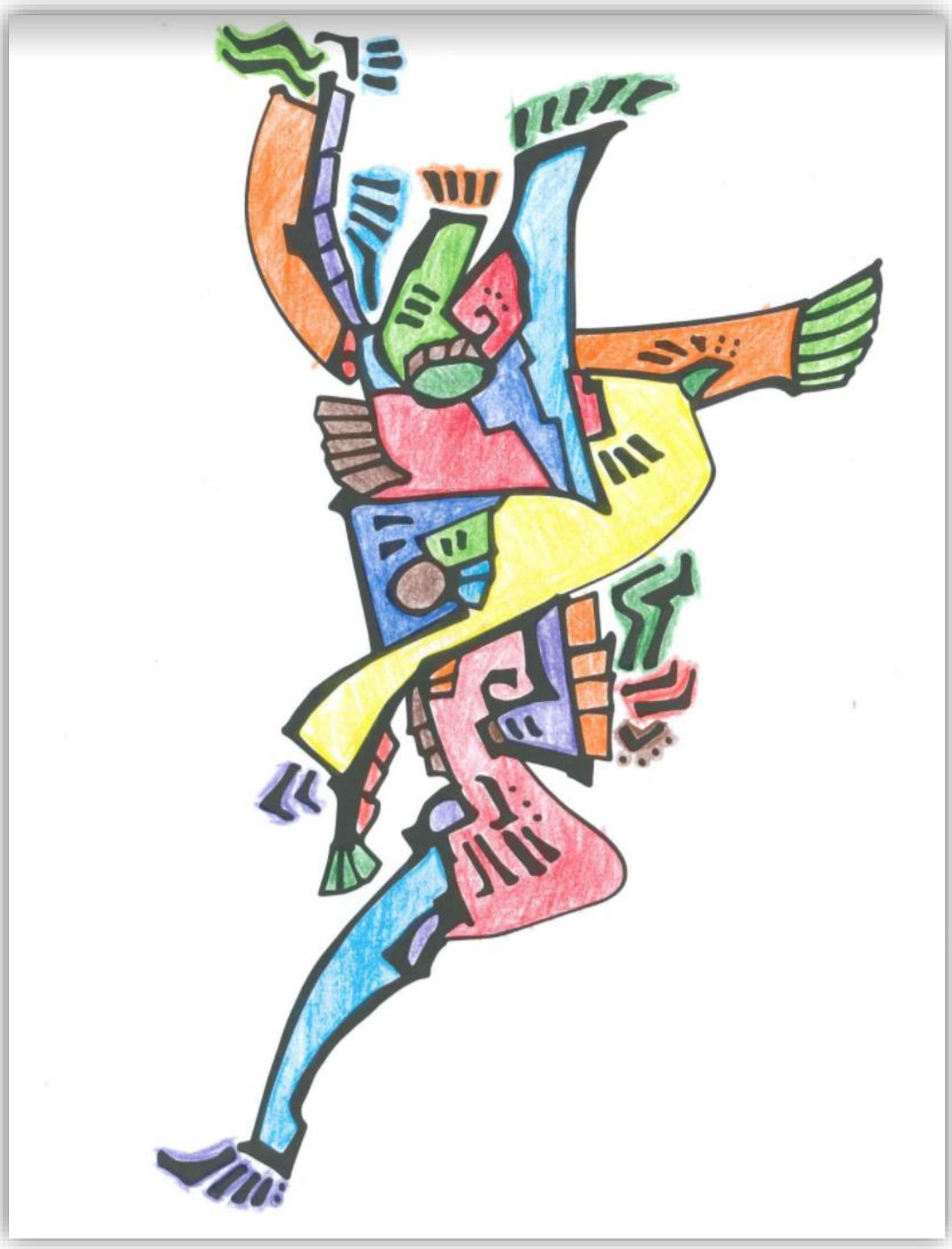


Figure 22: “Codices Reflection” by JaLisa Jackson.

Figure 23: “Coloring Book Story” by Briana Escobar.

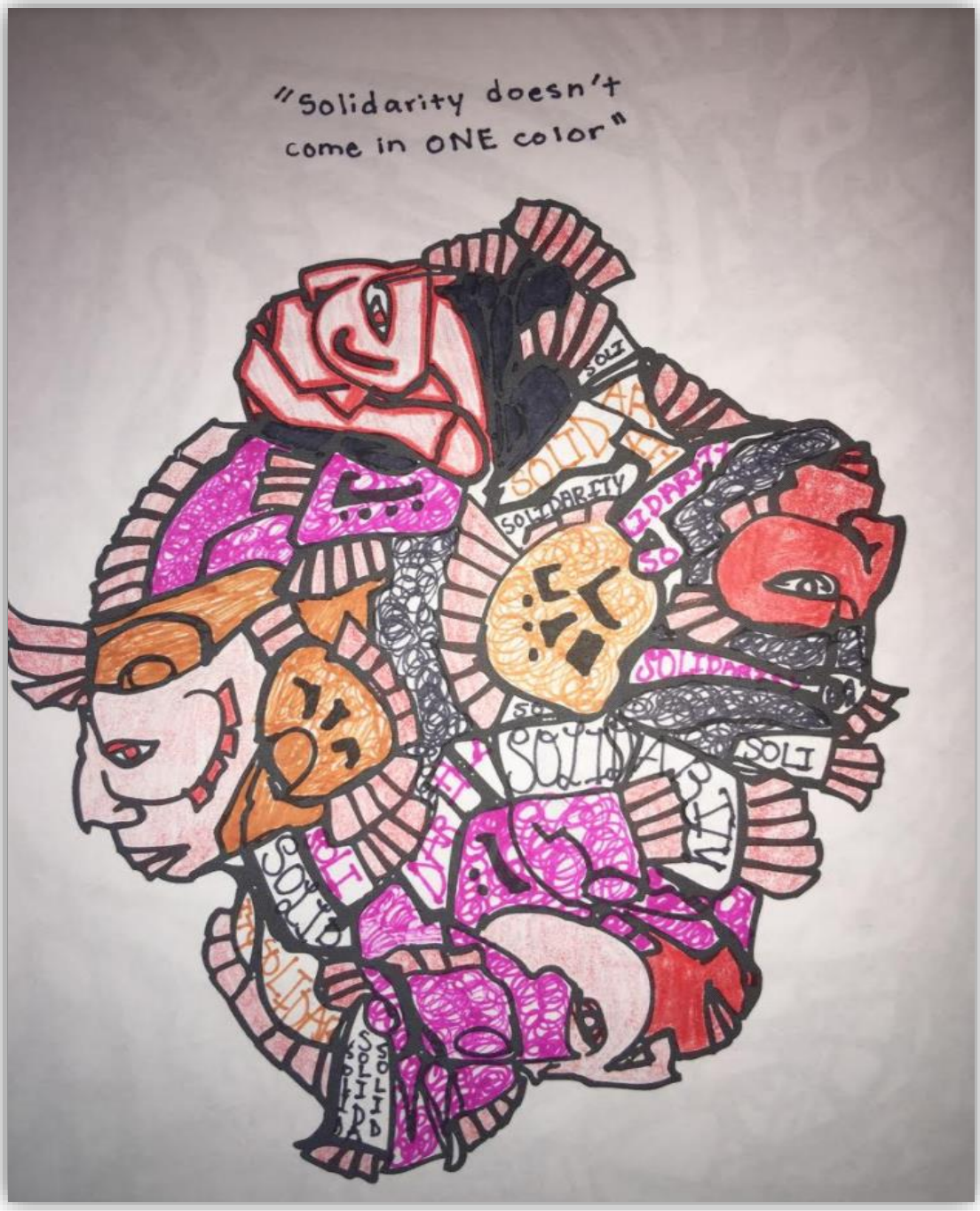


Figure 24: “Solidarity doesn’t come in ONE Color” by Genaan Abdelal

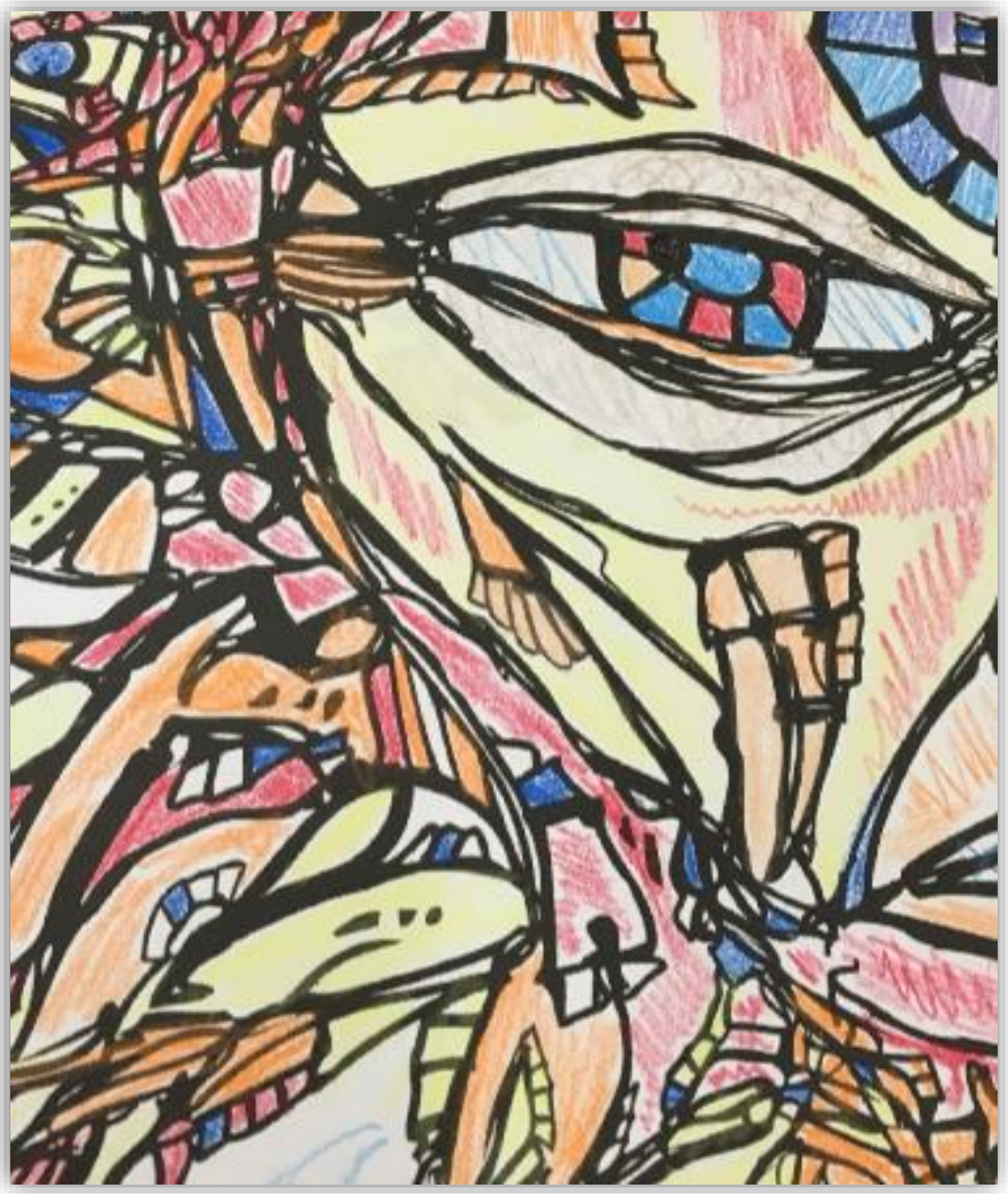


Figure 25: “Untitled” by Kasia Guzior

Figure 26: “Untitled” by Grace Peterson

A vital part of archival fugitivity came from artist Israel Lopez's guest lecture in our class. Lopez encouraged students to flee from the conventional forms of expression when we engaged his codex coloring book. He encouraged students to embrace color and the feeling, senses and nerves that different, bright colors to their coloring elicit. He encouraged students to feel their coloring and connect with the astral and ancestral energies as they worked the class ideas and codex. By offering us a spiritual canvass, students had to flee the spoken and written word and embrace the possibilities inherent in channeling our ancestors into our intellectual work. The archival fugitivity that is featured in the preceding pages also demarcates the importance of channeling our interiors onto intellectual work. In doing so, it channels archives of feeling, critical interdisciplinarity, posthumanist critique and the intimacies of the four continents. As best demonstrated by Genaan Abdelal's "Solidarity does not come in one color", archival fugitivity in pedagogy has the capacity to have teachers and students alike feel, sense and color the past, in the present, and towards better futures.

Chapter 5

Refusal in Personal Testimony and Immigrant Latina/o Oral History

Preface

This chapter analyzes parts of an oral history interview with my mother that did just that—articulate responsible freedom by not redeeming systems of abuse but instead, paying attention to my mother's narratives of refusal and escape. This chapter moreover conceptualizes oral history as a cultural exchange of transgenerational ancestral wisdom via the linkage of sharing and listening to each other's personal archives of feeling and therefore, finding connection through vulnerability. I speak of my mother's confrontation with racialized and gendered violence as an immigrant Latina not to solicit suffering for the purposes of redeeming state formations but to consult her spirit and listen to her inner most thoughts for wherever they may guide us and take us. More specifically, I pay attention to refusal as a critical expression of racialized and gendered interiority. Thus, instead of the cult of resilience and its desire to create perpetual and possibly fatal oppositional identities, I enlist my mother's listening to the inwardness that told her to refuse oppressive systems of abuse as a shared site of inwardness that resonate with how I look back on difficult experiences in my pursuits in higher education. Responsible freedom, in this chapter, offers racialized suffering not for the fodder of redemption of abuse but for the charging of reinvigorating life beyond abuse. Thus, I share stories of refusal from both a mother and her son (my mom and I) that while experiencing albeit different experiences in the U.S., nonetheless both refuse external pressures to either resist and/or integrate into dominant forms of self and other relations in the U.S. I share stories of refusal as expressions of racialized and gendered interiorities that taken

together reveal a kind of shared intergenerational refusal of the resistance and dominance paradigm of racialized life in the U.S.

Refusal is a significant category of analysis. Elisa Sobo writes that it is important to depathologize how we think about resistant non-conformity and thus, argues that refusal "accommodates action taking place directly within the here and now of local social life" and rather than "existing as simply a synonym for resistance, the refusal construct can offer…a complementary, albeit partially overlapping point of view"; Sobo continues writing that:

> [refusal] restores humanity agentic engagement with life, diverting our attention from foreclosures to openings—from angry nos to happy yeses. Instead of treating subversive discourses and tactics as "windows into the workings of power" which has been common in resistance-oriented work, theorizing refusal in terms of becoming allows us to reads such subversions in reverse. That is, enable us to see them not only as sign or symptoms produced in a top-down fashion by existing power structures but also as crucially generative, in and of themselves of local in group relations.[223]

The work of refusal, for Sobo, is what it does for "immediate social relations." In analyzing Israeli military service refusal, Erica Weiss argues that for the "radical potential of refusal as abstention" and that while military "refusal can be understood as resistance, refusal as abstention should be understood as an affirmative investment in another possibility"[224] For Weiss, refusal that remains below the surface stays "unadorned" and "uncelebrated", operates as a "tense stillness that hopes to avoid the state's gaze, is a king of 'playing dead' to avoid the traps of citizenship' whereby their

[223] Elisa Sobo, "Theorizing (Vaccine) Refusal: Through the Looking Glass" *Cultural Anthropology,* American Anthropological Association. Vol 31, Issue 3, pp. 342-350,343.
[224] Eric Weiss "Refusal as Act, Refusal as Abstention" *Cultural Anthropology,* American Anthropological Association. Vol 31, Issue 3, pp. 351-358, 352.

refusal "is, rather, a quiet groundswell of abstention."[225] Weiss writes that these "refusers' motivation resembles that of other groups…: the decision to invest their hopes and energies elsewhere. In contrast to public military refusal, abstention avoids the state's resistance trap, which dooms public refusal to be claimed and co-opted by the state."[226] Carole McGranahan writes the refusal while indeed a political stance is both optimistic and possible. She asks—"what if to refuse can be an element of group morality, a generative act, a rearrangement of relations rather than an ending of them?"[227] Moreover, McGranahan argues that refusal is "in formation, arising as practice and effect in relation to both ethnographic grounds and political projects."[228] Moreover, McGranahan writes that "Refusal marks the point of a limit having been reached: we refuse to continue on this way. We can also find refusal in refutations of theoretical models…"[229]

This chapter defines refusal as part of a racialized and gendered interiority rooted in the Latinx immigrant experience. Refusal as interiority in this way lays bare a "point of a limit having been reached," a "way of 'playing dead' to avoid the pitfalls of citizenship" and an interiority that is an "affirmative investment in alternative possibilities." Refusal, here, is also a refusal to redeem systems of abuse via soliciting the pain that produces the refusal in the first place. The refusal to redeem the ravaging of abuse in the world is a political act that emerges from not necessarily entirely intersections of exterior forces but instead from a commingling of interior affectivities; refusal and the exteriority it may lead to—for instance, escape—is not a passive act, it is

[225] Ibid., 352.
[226][226] Ibid., 352.
[227] Carole McGranahan "Refusal and the Gift of Citizenship" C*ultural Anthropology,* American Anthropological Association. Vol 31, Issue 3, pp.334-341, p. 335/ .
[228] Ibid., 335.
[229] 335.

a generative act. Thus, refusal as interiority also offers a glimpse as to what it really means to choose otherwise, and relish and luxuriate in the wisdom of inwardness and its sovereignty.

I

Fred Moten articulates that the "ubiquity of policy making, the constant deputisation of academic laborers into the apparatuses of police power" constitutes an effort to "capture the ones who are trying to get out—especially themselves, trying to capture their own fugitivity."[230] For Moten, the capturing of one's self from one's own fugitivity is the "first place at which policy is directed."[231] The recognizing self becomes the governing self which for Moten produces a "certain reduction of intellectual life." This includes the reduction of study to critique, and the "brutal reduction of critique to debunking which operates under the general assumption that naturalized academic misery loves company in its isolation…"[232] The bureaucratization of study keeps us from not "just studying by walking with others [but] walking through study."[233] This isolating nature and its excruciating suction of time must be refused; this refusal to the order of policymaking can lead us to a life where we can walk with others, not just walk through study and perhaps, allow us to not be miserable and more importantly, not capture our own fugitivity. This desire to study can lead us to an undercommons of maroon intellectual communities. Moten here illustrates the disciplining of minority difference

[230] Stefano Harney and Fred Moten, The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning & Black Study (Wivenhoe: Minor Compositions, 2013), 120.
[231] Ibid., 120.
[232] Ibid., 120.
[233] Ibid., 118.

via the incorporative protocols of administrative inclusion as an effort to capture the potential fugitivity one is capable of articulating and becoming.

II

Moten and Stefano Harney define fugitivity as not only exit, escape or exodus. For them, fugitivity is "being separate from settling"; it is a "being in motion that has learned that 'organizations are obstacles to organizing ourselves" and that there are "spaces and modalities that exist separate from the logical, logistical, the housed and the positioned" (11). The goal is to seek the other side of unasked questions and refuse self-consciousness and knowledge.

> …Moten and Harney calls this mode a 'being together in homelessness' which does not idealize homelessness nor merely metaphorize it. Homelessness is the state of dispossession that we seek and that we embrace: "Can this being together in homelessness, this interplay of the refusal of what has been refused, this undercommon appositionality, be a place from which emerges neither self-consciousness nor knowledge of the other but an improvisation that proceeds from somewhere on the other side of an unasked question?" I think this is what Jay-Z and Kanye West call "no church in the wild." (11)

Moten and Harney situate refusal as integral to fugitivity. Refusal is "game-changing" in that "it signals the refusal of the choices as offered" or in other words, it is the beginning place where we can exercise the "right to refuse what has been refused to you" (8). Moreover, by trying to be fugitives—always and already—we conjure wildness and messiness over accepting assurance and order. Additionally the figure of the refusing fugitive desires not to settle for the tamed and domestic, indeed, the refusing fugitive is always already a queer subject—wanting and venturing for something beyond. Fugitivity then becomes the terrain where there "is no church in the wild" and as such, our desire to venture into the wilderness of endless possibility takes us beyond anything recognizable and representational. For Moten and Harney, refusal is not an inactivity or a passive

apolitical act that heretofore does not have a place or merely a stall to "real politics." For them, refusal refuses the "call to order" ourselves and others which would include interpellation and the reinstantiation of the law.[234] As a refusal of rights and representation as the modes of recognition, Moten and Harney instruct us to "refuse the offers we receive to shape that noise into 'music."[235] Subversive intellectuals also refuse the academy of misery and rather, place their ears to the joyful noise of the scattering of the undercommons. In doing so, refusal is the process through which one can let one's self go of one's one grasp of their fugitivity.

This chapter examines quotidian acts of refusal as a move towards responsible freedom; we look to the ruptures of immigrant testimony and life history and some of the many violences they confront to seemingly reveal how minoritized subjects refuse modes of representation, and choose to be unsettling forces in the disruption of power, knowledge and time. In this, I argue that these ruptures of refusal which gesture us to responsible freedom do not write tragic subjects that resist the dominant other, instead they whisper in refusing and fugitive forms of confronting violence. Moreover, I explore immigrant testimony and oral life history as sites that understand that organizations are obstacles to organizing ourselves and as such, are the sites that exist separate from the logical, the logistical, the housed and the positioned.

The selected archive of my own testimonio and the oral life history of my mother render different sites of rupture that aim to show what liberalism has done to us just as much as what we do to it. Throughout this chapter's selected archive, I define responsible freedom as carrying the template for: a refusal of liberal projects masked as decolonial,

[234] Ibid., 9.
[235] Ibid., 9.

an active fugitivity from queer white linguistic imperialism, a grooving away from Marxist expression of work ethics and deviancy, a solemn critique of the pitfalls of ethnocentric identity politics, a critique of white feminism, a call for the end of heteronormativity and patriarchy, a re-envisioning of immigrant (rights) discourse, and a demand for the end shame and self-hate. Responsible articulations of freedom are not limited to these calls and demands but this is what I argue can be the result of reading immigrant kinship suffering as a site outside of liberalism's identification, visibility, recognition and empowerment frameworks. The materialist reconfiguration of suffering thus reorients the method of life history to the terrain of the anti-statist, anti-hegemonic and ultimately, towards a sub-conscious state of decolonial dreaming, whereby one's dreams are not of the "American dream" flavor and more a complexity of streaks, streams and séances that bring us into perpetual recalcitrance.

III.

Like all life on earth, the birth of this chapter spawns from the perpetuity of light and its absence. The absence of light that inspired this chapter often obfuscated my desire to write it and blinded me to the capacity to capture the other senses of my body when my sight failed. I pitched a version of this work to a prominent faculty member in the field of memory studies and Latin American/Latino/a studies and their response to this work was "no one cares about Costa Rican immigration to the states. What violence exists in research about it?" Too young, too scared and too unwilling to fall into these person's absence of light, I decided to find illumination elsewhere.

I was fortunate that the American studies program at the University of Minnesota saw value in the transnational study of Costa Rican immigrants and upon admittance to

its doctoral program, the Interdisciplinary Center for the Study of Global Change did so too. I found the responses from academia--the negative one from a prominent individual and the positive ones from funded institutions—deeply contradictory. But I stuck it out. Over the summer of 2012 and 2013, I wrote a draft regarding the emotive qualities of Costa Rican immigration to the US and its relationship to identity formation and subsequently submitted it for publication.

And yet again, academia's absence of light began to blind me. The review of the article from one of the most prominent journals on Latinas/os wanted me to revise and resubmit; however, their notification email misspelled Costa Rica as "Costa Rico" and the collapsing of a Central American country as an island, especially of Puerto Rico who has such an important history vis-a-vie US imperialism, was an error I was exhausted of hearing. This simultaneous valuing and devaluing defined my experience of identifying with the country to which I first experienced the light of life. The voices kept saying that Costa Rica was unimportant and small yet it somehow was the all wonderful escape and paradise for Americans. This tired rhetoric of it being a safe-haven for criminality and deviance is exemplified in Quentin Tarantino's *Reservoir Dogs* when the infamous "if I was him, I would be half-way to Costa Rica" became cinematic. Steven Spielberg's *Jurassic Park's* fake Isla Nublar further intensified my exhaustion with American exoticism of Costa Rica and as I would come to learn exhausted an older neocolonial and neoliberal concern over the overpopulation of the third world and its threat to whiteness and heteropatriarchy. In this decade, Ben Affleck's and Justin Timberlake's *Runner Runner* bored audiences with a Costa Rican landscape empty of critical agents. The Showtime show *Shameless* also confuses Costa Rica with Brazil as sites where one can

escape punishment and be an outlaw "ex-pat." In geopolitics, President Obama's visit to Costa Rica was understood as a "cream puff" move regardless of the endless protests that defied his visit to the country.

This obsession with ascribing Costa Rica as a site of meaning without input from Costa Ricans and much less without the input of Costa Rican-Americans does a lot of work. The prominent professor's claim that Costa Rica does not matter as a site of study erased the reality that the country, while relative to other countries in the region was performing better, suffered from increasing income inequality and an economy that would only keep it indebted to the neoliberal order of international banks, the US, and unfairly structured free trade agreements. Indeed, the professor's comments reified the notion that capitalist economic "success" grants people "better lives." This confluence of information I was receiving was inextricably personal to me. I had often been told, well into my undergraduate years, that I should just identify as Mexican since that's what it means to be Latina/o in Los Angeles, California while also being told that I came from a beautiful place. These experiences and their exhaustive nature taught me the significance of continuing to fight for not just identity but for politics that could imagine better ways of valuing space and immigrants and the space immigrants come from. The resiliency involved in navigating American cultural politics always favors turning oneself over to dominant cultures and/or subaltern dominant formations. In fact, this ambivalence of valuation, for me, marks one of the significant ways systems of power push minority and immigrant cultures to demand recognition from power and thereby, determining injury from such ambivalence of meaning as a mode to be a part of a freedom with violence.

IV.

This of course manifests itself in the classroom as well. In a graduate seminar, a professor told me that they thought Costa Rica was full of European people and very little mestiza/o people lived there. After I discussed the role of colonialism in the construction of this myth and poor census data that equates mestizo/a identity with whiteness, I was dismissed by a white professor whose vast research grants allowed them to visit a place that I could hardly afford when my own family members were sick. I was outraged that blackness, indigeneity, Nicaraguan-Costa Rican, Asian-Costa Rican and mestiza/o life, identity and culture were reduced to footnotes in a seminar on historical thought. One shadow that emerged in this absence of light came in an odd form. I realized that the Jurassic scripting of Costa Rica where it is an empty wilderness for American and European people to reproduce the prehistoric for modern neoliberal interests and a site where the gaps of the very modernity it hopes to solidify—alienation and unhappiness—are worked through and supposedly made whole were always already part of the psychology of the tourist industry. In a March 2009 article entitled "Costa Rica Any Way You Want It" Ethan Todras-Whitehall writes that he and he himself could pick and choose the meaning of Costa Rica. The article sums up the plethora of miscues and misstarts on conversations of the place and people on the daily. Todras-Whitehall writes:

> THINK of Costa Rica as a Rorschach test for travelers. Outlined on a map, it has no recognizable shape. But enclosed in tropical lines of latitude, with appropriate squiggles for mountains, coasts and interior borders, its an inkblot for projecting travel fantasies. Beach lovers trace the craggy coasts and see hammocks swinging in the sunset breeze. The eyes of the nature-minded glaze when they note all the national parks. And adrenaline fanatics fixate on the mountains and rivers.
>
> Costa Rica is tiny, smaller than West Virgina, but huge in versatility, with coasts on two coasts, coral lined beaches and active volcanoes, luxury resorts and surf camps, roaring streams and rich biodiversity. Planning a trip for myself and my father last November, I set

> myself a challenge. How many Costa Ricas could we sample in just eight days? I settled on three: the rich primordial forest, the adventurer's playground, and the beachfront paradise. After subtracting travel time within the country, we would have a day and a half to two and a half days at our chosen location for each one, time enough for a taste, at least of the country's riches.

Without light, sometimes one must continue meditating and deliberating for a way to see the illumination of history and by the time I had read this outdated article on Costa Rica for my research, I decided I could not rationalize the injuries of so much nonsense. By this time in my graduate education, multiple microaggressions (which I will describe in the rest of this chapter) throw me into therapy. I did not make it through one session; I was assigned to a white Jewish counselor. In the first ten minutes of our session, he probed me about my father. He kept asking me about "machismo" and how it may have to do with what I was feeling. When I said that yes, indeed my father was a complicated person, the white counselor responded, enthusiastically, making the face I imagine Cortez made when he laid eyes on silver, and stated something like "my Mexican friend also has a father that is a machista and can be rather troubled." Not only did the counselor assume I was Mexican, he nailed some heavily racist stereotypes about Mexican men of color that were older than the Treaty of Guadelupe-Hidalgo itself. This is where I walked out. I could not have other people—friends, professors, counselors, writers, Hollywood, departments and institutions—tell me what I needed to know about the place and people I loved so dear on the daily. I had had enough of Costa Rica's versatility for Americans and the way they made it a Rorshach test for the fantasies about it as a space and how these ideas were carried with me as an immigrant in the U.S.

As a response to this ambivalence of valuation, this chapter assembles recent testimonies of my life in the American academy as an integral part of my lived

experience as an immigrant to the U.S. Additionally, it also assembles an oral history interview with my mother who brought me with her in the 1990s to the outskirts of Los Angeles County from San José, Costa Rica. The excerpts of this chapter are part of an extensive archive of memory and reflect my selective decision to challenge most and hopefully all the aforementioned "inkblot" fantasies about Costa Rica, those of us who leave it, and how we make and carry new stories with us. When stories about Costa Rica and Costa Ricans are told by Costa Ricans themselves, the framework of the stories shifts away from the expectations of immigrant testimonio and oral life history. As I hope this chapter exposes, we must tell our stories, not to be recognized under the plot of the nation state and its exoticism of our culture for second-class cultural citizenship, but instead, to share that we are far more than the spaces we come from and in exceeding the meanings the spaces we come from, change the very meaning of where we're from as well as where we choose to live. I take great pride in the many moments of refusal of these discourses and as such do not tell a story of uplift; nor is it an attempt to be recognized in the purview of American identity politics or to be part of the lexicon of Latina/o/x studies. This is a story that has had enough of trying to fit within American liberal cultural politics.

V.

While the stories I introduced inform what parts of the archive I provide, this is a story that is asymmetrical to the discourse of ambivalent value. I made the decision to provide parts of the archives of my heart's memory and my mother's story that while revealing episodes of hurt and injury nonetheless serve as signposts of a story of Costa Rican immigrant refusal. I take great pride in saying that I walked out on that counselor; I

refused to begin understanding my emotional and psychological state with someone who characterized Mexican and Costa Rican fatherhood and masculinity as the root of all toxicity and violence. Contrary to the popular ambivalence of meaning that Costa Rica and Costa Ricans experience within the identity politics of the U.S., this chapter provides episodes of testimony and oral life history that bring suffering, injury and hurt to the forefront of articulating meaning. In the following narratives that I share, you will see my friends and I cancel the liberalization and professionalization of decolonial praxis, my refusal to be a part of class where I was mocked about my pronunciation of academic terminology, and a grooving away from narratives of Marxist work ethic and its discourse of deviancy. Additionally, you will read my mother's decision to run when disrespected, move her daughter back to Costa Rica when she was deemed a cultural outsider, and articulate a discourse against pursuing the American dream as critical narratives of immigrant fugitivity.

I situate these narratives of cancellation, refusal, grooving away, hitting and running, migrating, and articulation of defiance as actions that express fugitivity towards what Hortense Spillers calls responsible freedom. The discourse of resistance would pen these acts as meaningless or not worth serious political consideration because they do not play into their nostalgic and yes, cinematic rendering of always confronting power head on. Indeed, the lack of spectacle and lack of orgasmic climax that would end in the ideal picture of violenceis intentional. This archive of suffering and the refusal of liberal modes of confrontation suggest that fugitivity, a practice so incisively deliberated and attempted during racialized slavery in the US, is an ongoing practice, that is daily in its practice and resolute at offering other modes of healing from injury that say resistance fails at it, in its

aims to seek recognition from the very system that generates suffering in the first place. In many ways, this is a re-envisioning of the statement that the first thing immigrants learn once they arrive in the US is what it means to be black. We learn from African-American fugitivity and find solidarity in this act. Moreover, this kind of work demonstrates that we do not need to turn to the state, academy, and capital to find meaning and/or resolution over the ongoing suffering, injury and harm that they cause in the first place. We can find each other both in studying our methods and in sharing our company. This means that we refuse resistance because it only offers survival and the many acts of surviving. But resistance cannot be the only goal for communities of color. Fugitivity, in sharp contrast and in a post-slavery subjectivity, reflects an effort towards something unknown—life and the many acts of living. This begs a question: is resistance a discourse that articulates irresponsible freedom? I argue that yes it is, and that fugitivity and refusal towards responsible freedom has the capacity to offer what we all want in this deathly neocolonial, modern apparatus—more life.

VI.

Minnesota's winters were long and during my first year there, we faced both a polar vortex and a six-month long period before any of the snow thawed. For professors, just as much as students, this wore us down. As I approached my second winter at the University of Minnesota, microaggressions coupled with the general tundra of coldness and bitterness always had me searching for plane tickets on Google flights. I was ready to enjoy the non-winter winter days back home in Los Angeles. The warmth of the 75 degree days along with the warmth of unconditional love on behalf of my family always served as a juxtaposition to the difficult days of graduate school.

In the winter of 2015, the coldness of the winter sipped into the century old walls of one of the university's oldest buildings. I, along with my cohort of three other graduate students, were taking a practicum on teaching in American studies. During the seminar, we read some important texts in critical pedagogy studies—Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* and even bell hooks' *Teaching to Transgress.* Our cohort and the professor seemed to be having good dialogues on the importance of pedagogy in understanding the crossroads and divergences of gender, race, transnationalism, empire and even decolonialism. The latter concept—decolonialism—became the organizing principle for our professors' call for an event that they wanted us to host. The professor entitled the event "Decolonializing Education" and the planning ensued in and outside of class. We met and had coffee and we began outlining how we might host the event.

Three weeks before the event, we met for class and it so happened to be my turn to lead discussion on Roderick Ferguson's *The Reorder of Things.* We delved deep into Ferguson situating the university in the crux of power and its collusion within academy, the state and capital. We interrogated the ways we had all gone through these power systems and how it informed the politics of our dissertation projects. Little did we know that the discussion—the theory—would have very little to do with the praxis of our class much less the upcoming "Decolonializing Education" event.

As we wrapped up our discussion on Ferguson, the professor turned to us and asked if we could stay a bit longer to discuss the upcoming event. The professor then turned to myself and one of the other men of color in our cohort and proceeded to telling us that we should consider arriving to the event with the intention to look, act and be professional. Baffled at the contradiction taking place, my friend and I looked at each

other, both of us at once dismissive of the instructions as well as angry at what was being said. How could we be having this discussion around the incorporation of minority difference just less than two minutes earlier and now we were being asked to turn our minority aesthetic into a professional scholar?

The professor, who was of color, referenced that we should not wear beanies, hoodies, and sweatpants to the event. Additionally, the professor asserted themselves and further provoked the situation by instructing that we needed to imagine a rock star in our field—they referenced Lisa Lowe—being at the event and ask ourselves how would you want your first impression with Lisa Lowe to go down? Without any of our input, they continued referencing the "conservative" aspects of academia while excusing themselves of reinforcing these conservative aspects by saying they "were looking out for us."

While this moment put our cohort at a crossroads, the three graduate students of color, including myself and my friend who had been targeted, decided to cancel the event instead of adhering to these conservative-based and liberally-implemented norms in academia. Our collective anger in having our minoritized aesthetics—which for us were also the outfits that we were to stay warm in subzero weather—be called out for not having a place in a decolonial event strengthened our resolve in standing in solidarity against these liberal decolonial politics. Although at one point, we considered attending the event and wearing prison suits, we convened and decided that the only decolonial act at this point would be cancellation of the event.

VII.

We are writing this letter in regard to the "Decolonizing Education and the University" event scheduled for the Monday we return. We no longer feel that this event would generate a productive conversation. Given the post-seminar comments last week, the

three of us have been deeply engaged in a discussion around respectability politics and its relation to our politics, ethics, and responsibilities as scholars of color.

This issue of respectability politics has furthered the feeling that this event is being used primarily as recruitment tool. Having previously discussed our concerns with you regarding the department, it is becoming counterproductive to view this conversation of decolonization as a legitimate attempt at exploring possibilities and creating spaces for safe discourse of critique. We feel that holding this important conversation in a space of co-option would devalue the very real politics of decolonization.

In an effort to remain true to our politics, we would like to cancel the "Decolonizing Education and the University" event and the March 23rd seminar. We hope to discuss our concerns with you at our next seminar on March 30.

VIII.

Excited by the prospect of taking a course that centered the analytics of queer time in assessing questions of race, gender, sexuality, history, nation building, slavery, immigration and identity formation, I fantasized about an educational space that would help me further develop my dissertation as well as intellectually challenge me to think old ideas anew. I recall telling my roommate in the weeks leading up the spring semester, "yo, this class is going to be fire!" and he, after reviewing the course syllabus, thought the course suited my interests spot on. As I began the first course reading, my feelings were more than not confirmed. I had entered queer time debates and conversations in ethnic studies and the readings explored the many ways time structured liberalism, progressive thought and white supremacy.

Yet, the reality of whiteness and its toxicity in classrooms—omnipresent as sin is for the holy-minded—shot back, and forced me to reconsider myself as a person and the

identity I was growing into, that of a queer brown graduate student of color. This is precisely the entry point to this piece of this selected archive.

I enter into this tenuous archive a paper dated April 16, 2015 entitled "Coincidence." I presented this paper two days before my 24th birthday and I like always was nervous about so many things: would my perspective as the only graduate student of color in the classroom be welcomed? Or would it, like it always had, become tokenized, relished and exoticized by "my peers"? To avoid the suspense, of course all of these things happened. However, another moment that haunts this archival admission is what I would like to discuss further.

It was my turn to present the aforementioned paper "Coincidence" which combined a summary with a short analysis of Tom Boellstorff's *A Coincidence of Desires*. In the paper, my concerns dealt with Boelstorff's desire to move away from the liberal progression of straight time and its manifestation in queer studies work. Boellstorff was concerned with the move away from messianic time and as such, producing an interdisciplinarity that does not apply liberal ideology vis a vie progressive time to epistemology. For Boellstorff, the aim of such a project is to displace straight time not just merely slow or reverse it.

It is important to remember that the classroom should be on principle an effort to practice the theories in the work one reads. I'd like to repeat that a few times but once is sufficient for our purposes here. As I was reading my paper aloud, I noticed that the white gay graduate student who sat next to me but actively avoided speaking with throughout the semester (would not say hello) was taking the time to write something down. But this note-taking was awkward. The class was small and we sat in a roundtable so we were at

an elbow's length away from each other. So, when he was taking notes, I noticed and this time as I was reading my paper out loud, I could see he had moved his paper closer to my peripheral vision. He wanted me to catch what he was writing on his paper. And, of course, I did.

On the bottom right of his lined paper, he wrote "what kind of graduate student can't pronounce the word 'oscillate'"? I looked right at it and could not believe that in graduate school this kind of nonsense was going on in the middle of the presentation. I was not in disbelief of the kind of power and privilege one must feel to exert such an action but was caught in awe of the shrewdness to do it in a space that aimed to include me and to hear me articulate my insights on the book. His perception of the space as a queer space, in queer time, rendered his notes acceptable. He felt he could assert his power. He is not an exception; he is the rule. When I saw his note, I felt myself losing control, my hand was in a fist, my blood pressure was through the roof, and the level of contradiction and cognitive dissonance required of me gave me acid reflux. I only had one paragraph left to read. In the last paragraph, beyond "mispronouncing" oscillate again, I did discuss briefly homonationalism—the complex interplay of inclusion on behalf of the nation state of queers into its representative modes and the way queers position themselves against "others" of the state's body politics. I ended the presentation, coincidently, critiquing homonationalism and the politics of inclusion.

At this site of coincidence and heavy contradiction, I decided to leave the class. Of course, this was not the first major microaggression that occurred in the class but it was the last I would be exposed to directly and explicitly. I left the class that day distraught, so much so that the acid reflux I was feeling was not just acid. It was blood.

When I went to the bathroom after that class, I coughed up blood. This, in turn, led me to not just leaving the class for that day but running away from it. Although I did not drop out of school, which at that point I wanted to, I did speak to the professor and never returned to that class. This is the story of many graduate students of color.

For me, that note left me speechless. It brought flashbacks of being called a dirty beaner by kids in gym class because my payless shoes did not have the right amount of fake Adidas stripes. It took me back to fourth grade when the ESL students, which I was one, left the larger class and then were teased by the multiracial cluster of nine-year-olds who grew up with the privilege of learning only English in an Anglo-Saxon supremacist society. And to this day, I have not been able to present a paper at conference. I have difficulty admitting that but I cannot seem to bring myself to do this regardless of the "professional development" points I would get on my CV.

I do not write this to rationalize this form of homonationalist politics. I write it to act back against it in the spiritual form. I do it to oscillate wildly a concern and central tenet of what I have learned about suffering and injury in this minoritized life I live: suffering should not be a site of voicing one's grievance for recognition; no. it is a site of saying that I am still alive and that only in fugitivity can one stop the bleeding. I sat at the table and bleed. I now choose to make my own table and find joy. It is only in this active fugitivity, and may I stress *not* resistance, from white linguistic imperialism that I can tell this story. I open this wound because in it lays the lessons of life and in it, we find a life worth living but on my terms. I do not offer this testimony to create identity out of resistance but instead, in my refusal to ever go back. I do not open a wound for it to heal. I open a wound so that you see that I bleed. I open a wound so you see that the healing

properties of your nostalgia with nationalism can see, in perpetuity, blood, everywhere. From the streets of Ferguson to the banks of Palestine to the deserts of the borderlands, blood everywhere. Because, yes, I am the kind of graduate student who can't pronounce oscillate and you, my dude, are just an anecdote in a story of fugitivity. To see beyond the liberal politics of white queerness, one must run from its plantation. It is only fugitivity where the horizon of beyond nostalgia and redemption can be witnessed. The fugitive refusal to want to be recognized as someone who can transform these spaces is structured by a collective desire to stop valuing myself at the expense of myself.

IX..

In the early months of the Fall semester of 2015, my third year in graduate school in the department of American studies, I attended a party at a fellow graduate student's house. The night was fun, funky and full of life.

Between the blur of the buzzing sounds and the buzz from the nights' liquid spirits, I come across many conversations with many different folks, most of whom were students and some who were activists and as most of us identified, a bit of both.

Towards the end of the night, amidst the informalities of dancing reggaeton, bachata, and some cumbia, one conversation has haunted me.

It was nearly one am in the morning and I noticed one of my friends was discussing departmental politics with an acquitance of mine. With the attempt of trying to move the conversation into the dance floor so that perhaps it would dissipate, I approached them.

Once there, I found that the conversation was actually a critique of some of the recent events in the department. The conversation was essentially about the two strands

of actvity that graduate students were approaching the department and the university with. The first was active formalization as a student group in order to have formal recognition and representation in some departmental business. The other strand was active informalization from the department and the university at large. My friend and I's mutual acquitance, who was part of the formalization efforts, critiqued our being apart of the second strand pretty harshly.

Little did this person know that my friend and I, along with other students of color, had been at the forefront of the early mobilization efforts in the department only months before this person became a new student. Most of the students of color who participated in those efforts left it not feeling like we had been heard completely by the white students who outnumbered us. The white students called for us to not necessarily address our concerns as entirely intersectional but instead as more isssues related to class.

After tears were shed and white students angry over our honesty, most of us, and my friend and I specifically, began considering informalization as a tactic to our struggles. In informal spaces we would have the autonomy to say what we wanted, be who we wanted to be and not accommodate ourselves to the demands of whiteness.

My friend and our acquitance stubbornly slurred their way into this conversation. I regrettably was now caught in its whirlwind. My friend explained that most gradaute students of color were shocked at the pace the emerging official graduate student association had emerged. We had hoped demands could have been made without creating an official organization since governance, as Fred Moten and Stefano Harvey argue, has never benefittied marginalized peoples. Instead, it has served to surveill, police and

rewrite the radical potential of people of color. Some of us refused to attend the meetings of this official group and instead paid attention to the minutes of the meetings.

I recall my friend, even in the queered state they were experiencing, wonderfully citing the minutes of the most recent meeting. They said something like: “did you not read the minutes! They argued that a “pro” of formalizing the student group was funding. A “con” was that it would further alienate those of us who felt estranged from the department. The group, with those who felt alienated and would be futher estranged from this decision not present, decided nonetheless that funding was necessary” (ASGSA, 2015, p. 2). I explained that indeed formalization was a matter of governance that ultimately would not benefit the most marginalized in the department. It benefitted those who claimed to speak for the marginalized, in this case white students.

Surprisngly, as with some inebrited fragments of life, some truth was said. Our acquitance looked at us plainly and squarely in the eyes and said—“you two are quitters, all you do is bitch and complain, and do nothing! Why not continue organizing and finding a way to negotiate and have your demands heard by them?”

Caught in this hazy puzzle of a light buzz and in between the heavy turbulence of the conversation in front of me, that night I was taken aback but not surprised by the response of this acquitance. Their disregard for my concerns and the way I chose to live my life was exactly what I am pushing against; I told them that they were judging and devaluing our response under the guise of the logic of the rise of a body that disregarded its actual inception and that functioned like an NGO, saying it allowed the people to speak while claiming benevolence in the process. It deployed diversity through the echoes and names of the silent but indeed in the sole interest of themselves. I told them

that our approach was not one of bitching and complaining, often critique misread as such, and one not merely of doing nothing, but one that they could learn from.

I told them that our approach to informalize was theoritically sound in critical ethnic studies, emboldened by our embodied practice, and materialized through our words in paper and resilience in our dance moves at that party.

I am sure that I did not say that in that way that night. Indeed, I am certain it did not come out that way. However, one question that ended our conversation was one that I do remember clearly. I told her that we had failed to work together but that that failure lead to new ways of learning about living and loving; precisely, we learned that living and loving can be done a new way and did not require supposed "allies" who cared very little if we became more estranged and alienated in the process. We learned that we were traumatized by so much contradictory, surreptious and clandestine tactics. I remember ending the conversation and leaving them with few words in return when I asked what I hope this selected archive offers a meditation on—"how do you organize trauma?"

Better yet, and to be clear, I don't think the right word was trauma. Indeed, after two years in graduate school, I was incrementally developing digestive problems, had prescription medication for chronic cluster migraines, suffered from anxiety and depression, was mourning the lost of a fellow queer graduate student of color and was grewing ever more insecure in classrooms and in other spaces over my thoughts and insights that I often found myself remaining silent. I was growing sick but I was also growing intellectually. I was learning to disengage the spaces that made me feel this way and engage the spaces that comforted me.

Ultimately, what I was asking them was if they wanted us to participate it was long ago impossible. Some historical wrongs are insurmountable and cannot be managed, resolved, or corrected. In many ways, I was asking them to consider the reality that those of us who were informalizing, not organizing ourselves, felt *hunted* by the university. Our absent-presence was a way to *haunt* back.

I told them a few experiences that I felt took many of us away from the organization that was forming. I for starters mentioned the “wow, what kind of PhD student can’t pronounce oscillate?” story. I also discussed how one of the white "officers” of the so-called ASGSA had once interrupted a conversation I was having with another student, stood in front of me, ignored my presence, and asked the other student “how their weekend went?” After the other white student, also heavily involved in the ASGSA, told them that they had partied all weekend and their house was a mess, the now “officer” of the ASGSA responded “well that’s why they call Mondays *Maid Mondays*? Isn’t that what maids are in this country for?” I told them about the “Decolonizing Education” event.

What I meant to tell the new graduate student was that I and many graduate students of color were haunted by our time as graduate students. The way I pronounced words, the reason why my mother (a person who immigrated to the US and because of white imperialist capitalist hetereopatriachy cleans homes in the richest suburbs of southern California) lived here, and the way I dressed (among a variety of countless stories I do not wish to repeat) were understood as simple, backward, basic, stupid, useless, unprofessional, trashy, ghetto, third world, not-American, and among other things unacademic haunt me everyday when I walk into the university. Now, in this space

where I wanted to dance and be free, I was being told that the way I responded to this haunting was merely bitching and complaining because I had not adopted the ways of traditional labor, political and community activism. I was devalued for my refusal, I was devalued for my decision to stay alive under my own terms

This testimony of life and survival and how to respond to hurt and injury is where I begin so that it always haunts the theories that I am engaging in. It is a way that an archive can haunt what hunts you. As this testimony shows, that there is no easy way to organize the things we are haunted by and therefore, need new tactics and spaces to be able to offer critiques of the things that haunt us as well as new frameworks for theorizing new tactics especially in the context of being a graduate student of color in the American university system.

I open with a *testimonio* (testimony) regarding my experiences in graduate school to situate first and foremost the absolute need, not luxury, to imagine better ways to heal from this complicated and oftentimes tramautic experience and articulate better ways to live. I argue that informalization, best articulated within the subfield of critical ethnic studies, better theorizes ways for students of color to live fully and be their radical selves than in the realm of formalization.

I write this story so that minority difference is not managed or coerced into the supposed therapeutic logics of the state, academy and capital, and instead, allowed to live fully, live in contradiction, and in its most complex articulation, in fugivitiy.

X.

I replay all of these moments in academia all the time. They haunt me when I go lecture as an adjunct; they haunt me whenever I want to write about something that is not

necessarily personal. Of all the moments I have shared, one repeats itself constantly: "isn't that what maids are in this country for?"

XI.

Isn't that what maids are in this country for?

Isn't that what maids are in this country for?

Isn't that what maids are in this country for?

Isn't that what maids are in this country for?

Isn't that what maids are in this country for?

Isn't that what maids are in this country for?

Isn't that what maids are in this country for?

Isn't that what maids are in this country for?

Isn't that what maids are in this country for?

Isn't that what maids are in this country for?

Isn't that what maids are in this country for?

Isn't that what maids are in this country for?

Isn't that what maids are in this country for?

Isn't that what maids are in this country for?

Isn't that what maids are in this country for?

Isn't that what maids are in this country for?

Isn't that what maids are in this country for?

Isn't that what maids are in this country for?

XII..

How was I supposed to become friends, or better yet be "colleagues", with these people? White graduate students whose beds were made by people like my mother and yet, in their most absurd twisted form of white privilege, studied comparative ethnic studies, feminist Marxism and whatever other convoluted spaces allowed them to study American Indians. How could I be friends with them?

This is the bridge that I would not cross. I was not willing to bend over and be its back. Instead, I decided that the only way these stories would matter was if I my mom was central to the first part of my dissertation. What I learned is not only does she challenge the idea that she is only here for work, but that she is also capable of taking us to the other side of unasked questions. Beyond knowledge and self-consciousness, she brings stories of everyday fugitivity. The only bridge worth crossing in these days of academic thought was the bridge shared with my mom. Her daily acts of fugitivity in the face of violence taught me and continue to teach me the gestures necessary for living life towards responsible freedom. Moreover, the selected archive from her oral life history story demonstrates that our lives as immigrants, while distinctly experienced because of gender, age, language, and immigration status, nevertheless intersect in dynamic ways. I realized after interviewing her that she did not confront power/knowledge in a conventional sense of resistance. She fled from it. Whenever she faced and confronted a systemic racism, she imagined her

choices as always already having a transnational option and always altogether having a route to unsettle the very organizational nature of power by enacting fugitivity. The following stories that I will share demonstrate my mother's resolve in the face of confronting situations that made her feel humiliated—her sharing of these stories, though, were often not told with tears but instead with smiles and even laughter. As such, my mother, like myself and like Moten and Harney write, refused the misery of American institutional and cultural discourse. She instead chooses to live her live in the blues where great pain and suffering always encompasses great pleasure and joy. She unsettles the very logics, logistics and plans of power through her refusal to accept the terms under which her presence in the U.S. is understood.

XIII.

There is a pitfall to ethnocentric identity politics; if it is your only reference point, it becomes increasingly difficult to pivot and listen to the concerns of people that are dealing with similar concerns as you but whose ethnicity might not align with yours. This is a lesson, not a theory, I learned from my mother a long time ago. When I interviewed my mom, one pattern in my notes emerged, we both confronted power in similar ways. We did not choose to resist it in a traditional format that would be regarded as extremely oppositional but instead, we choose to run away from episodes of violence to heal and find solace in our own ways.

When we immigrated from Costa Rica in 1993, my brother and sister also joined us. My sister was 12 at the time and as she neared the time to enroll in high school, my mother grew increasingly worried. Confronting the racist norms placed on Latina students, my sister did what she needed to do to survive in an environment designed for

English speaking students. As my sister began her first year of high school, my mother recalls that she was called in for parent-teacher meetings. Ascribing to Costa Rican standards of education, my mother saw this is a welcome opportunity to collaborate with the teacher and/or counselor to help her daughter thrive.

Once there, my mother was taken to meet the counselor who my mother felt comfortable with because it he had a Latino surname. When she entered the counselor's office, she noticed he actively refused to speak Spanish with her and instead, choose to explain most of the situation in English. My mom, who at the time did not speak English but understood it, responded that her daughter needed more support because she was a new arrival to the country and was still learning to speak, write and communicate in English. The Mexican-American counselor turned his cheek upwards, my mother recalls, and after much discord, told my mother if she wanted her daughter to be supported culturally on those terms, then maybe my mother should her daughter back home to Costa Rica. In this moment, my mother recalls feeling rejected, separated and dismissed from the rest of the school community. She felt so ostracized by the counselor, in particular, and the school in general that she decided that educating your daughter in a place that would not meet her where she was, required leaving it altogether. This was one of the saddest decisions my mom ever made. I remember my brother and I crying that our older sister was leaving back to Costa Rica indefinitely. My mom attributes these changes to the "radical changes" that minorities have to experience in the U.S. For her, these radical changes include realizing that you are no longer respected as a person and this realization has serious consequences for minority and immigrant families.

However, my mother attributes the decision she made about her daughter essential to her daughter's well-being. Her decision to run, instead of trying to confront, demonstrates the way immigrants use a transnational imagination to resolve difficult and oftentimes mentally violent circumstances. My mother notes that my sister returned to Costa Rica, and finished high school, and graduated from college. She could do so knowing that she would never be questioned for ideas of who she was and could thus have a positive sense of self-worth. My mother's decision to flee the epistemic field of identity politics also reveals the importance of cultural exchange. What would have happened if the counselor had a different understanding of Central Americans and Spanish speakers broadly speaking? But that question matters less than the fact that my mother's decision to flee is an act of everyday fugitivity, expressed transnationally. Minoritized subjectivity then is not always shackled by the white supremacist, and in this case multiracial nationalist formations that often define inclusion and entry to American institutions. Indeed, this act of everyday fugitivity situates minoritized subjects as holding much broader definitions of self that extend and are not limited by the arbitrary fictions of borders and nationalisms. Like the decision to cancel events and groove away from discourses that harm you, this decision is all about sensing what is best for our mental health and acting on it. Like my experience with the white counselor, my mother realized that power would not absorb or define her daughter and that solutions outside of the recognition of American cultural politics were necessary. Her transnational response to this form of suffering reveals again how everyday fugitivity encompasses gestures towards responsible freedom.

XIV.

It was a slight fender bender, my mom recalls. She barely hit the blue car in the bumper. Nothing had happened. For my mom, it was something that could be easily resolved. They could exchange numbers, and my mom could set up a payment plan with her. Nothing should be that complicated. My mother recalls getting in this small fender bender in Santa Fe Springs, right out in front of where she dropped my brother off for school barely right around 1999. She said the fender bender occurred because of the hectic traffic that accumulates when parents and guardians try to drop of their kids to school.

My mother says that once she hit the car, she stopped and tried to collect her thoughts. Before she could do that, a Mexican-American woman was already yelling at her to roll down her car window. My mother said she told her that she did not speak English and if they could speak Spanish. The woman, who my mother said clearly could speak Spanish due to her English accent, refused to do so. She proceeded to yelling at my mom and what ensued was a racist tirade. She said that they were in the United States and here, we speak English. Then, she proceeded to telling my mom that she should go back to wear she came from and learn to defend herself. My mother recalls this story as a scene that happened all too fast. She was caught off guard by the women's anger just as much as she was embarrassed by the things she was saying yet could not effectively respond to. My mom recalls not saying anything and not moving from seat. She was motionless at what was happening and felt humiliated by the woman's behavior.

In response to my mom's silence, the woman decided to call the cops. My mom recalls that this was the moment she felt most scared—"not speaking English and confronting the cops is one of my biggest fears when I drive" my mother confesses to me.

My mom tells me the story knowing that the woman presumed she was undocumented and that calling the cops had little to do with resolving the fender bender and more with trying to hurt her. It was at this moment that my mom put the car in reverse, then to drive and "hit and ran." My mom says that this too her was the only option she felt maintained her well-being. She refused to continue dealing with the individual racism coming from the Mexican-American woman and refused outright the abuse that would indeed come from the Whittier Police Department.

The individual and systemic responses that were available to harm my mom that day situated a great threat to her and for what, for barely scratching any paint on an old blue Camry. The investment in private property and its protectors and servants—the police—forced my mom to feel humiliated and not be able to resolve the matter without her facing presumed criminality and deviancy when all she was doing was dropping off her son at school. In America, quotidian experiences as small as fender benders can be as life threatening and scary for minorities as 9/11 was to white folks. So what are the available options here? For my mom, she teaches us to embrace the "hit and run" fugitivity. When she came home, her tears were greeted with hugs and support by her family who had gone through similar episodes. Her decision was to heal from suffering by turning to her kinfolk and this proved to be the best strategy. My mom tells this story with a laugh at the ridiculous nature of American social life. She says that she cannot believe she fled the scene but she also notes that something inside her told her to flee. In lose-lose situations, faced with abusive structures of power, the only response that can keep us together and maybe one day find joy in pain is the act of fleeing, of becoming the hit and run fugitive, in being like my mom.

XV.

America is not a welcome place for immigrants; the white student who studies American Indians who said in front of me “isn’t that what maids are in this country for?” represents precisely the link between academia and social life and the significance of learning from our kin in and out of the academia. First, to claim any space in the American academia is an arduous task and will be full of white liberal politics masked as decolonial education. This must first be refused. The white students in academia do not know what it is like to be a person of color in the US. This is plain and simple.

As such, if one finds oneself in these spaces, we must also refuse what has always been refused to us. We must not resist these spaces and become part of a never-ending self/other binary. Instead, we should develop a fugitive praxis to unsettle the settlers and ensure the logical, the logistical and the commonplace never goes without its set of fugitives. I come to these moments of suffering and injury amidst academic discourse and students because they also bring me to the comfort and unconditional love of my kin, specifically my mom. A housekeeper herself for white people in the large suburbs of Orange County she taught me the value of work but not for the sake of work itself but in contrast, to living a better, happier and healthier life. In the context of American social life, this requires acts of fugitivity: one must be willing to bounce when conditions are not aligned for your overall mental health. We must be willing to refuse outright what is not in the best interest of ourselves and our communities.

Responsible freedom, as such, can be revealed by revealing the parts of ourselves and those of our loved ones that actively refuse that which hurts us. Articulating responsible freedom, as both an intellectual and activist form of writing, ensures that we

do not advise that we turn to our abusers for solutions to the problems and traumas they generate. Conversely, responsible freedom is a refusal of the settlement of ourselves by organizations of power and by ourselves—for as Moten and Harney remind us, policy is directed at capturing the fugitive aspects of ourselves in the first place. Therefore, I argue that when we tell stories about ourselves, our families and our communities that we seek out the parts of testimonies and oral histories that exceed resistance to power and reveal fugitivity. My mom recalls that often this desire to flee and "hit and run" is an instinct that we must trust; it's the "something in you" that tells you it's time to go when violence is all around you. It is not a knowledge or a form of consciousness, it is a feeling inherent in our core to exist.

As Abbas reminds us, liberalism has a hold on how we talk about suffering. Suffering for liberalism is about being recognized as one who suffers by those who do not suffer. But, this tactic makes us forget the fugitivity in suffering. In many ways, suffering as a human experience should direct us to new worlds where we do not suffer. And this is where nostalgia hurts us. We can no longer view with nostalgia the 1960s and 1970s social movements as ushering in a new way of being a minoritized subject. We must reckon with the fact that power and its absorptive qualities took suffering and generated a set of protocols for how it would be heard, and responded to. Those social movements are guilty of ascribing too much value to the nation-state, to knowledge and to capitalism. But we can write new ways of archiving a critical interdisciplinary that revives the complexities of minoritized life in the face of the forces of bureaucratic, administrative and police power. We have to. The minoritized subjects who told my mom to leave the country and that dehumanized her are also causalities of nostalgia. They

believe it is their turn to enact violence on newly racialized communities because they have suffered and, in many ways, are the agents of creating the quotidian post-racial terrain that we supposedly live in today. But as these stories reveal, this is not true and we must see the limits of essentialist thinking. Indeed, I look to this archive as a way of demanding that we all refuse the privileges bestowed by whiteness' inclusive agenda in the last 50 years. It is perhaps the only way we can walk somewhere else other than this fire of violence.

Conclusion

Articulations of freedom that redeem nation states of the very violence they produce are irresponsible. Redemption and irresponsible articulations of freedom thus go hand in hand. One of the main voices of this marriage between irresponsible freedom and redemption is multicultural liberal thought. Multicultural liberalism often traffics racialized suffering in its institutional solicitation; it makes use of racialized, gendered and sexualized suffering and injury as a currency in exchange for redeeming the very state and power apparatuses that produce pain.

In the waning summer days of 2017, multicultural liberal thought committed itself once again to the project of redeeming the US nation state from its violent history against communities of color and prompting up slaveowners and soldiers—committed to violently enclosing people of color at home and abroad—as patriots who were somehow oppositional to Nazi protestors in Charleston, Virginia. Nazi and white supremacists were protesting the removal of the statue of Confederate General Robert E. Lee. After counter protestors took to the streets, James Fields, a 20-year-old white supremacist used his car as a weapon and ran over protestors and killed a woman and injured several protestors. Social media feeds highlighted the differences between the way police treated the protests in Charlottesville, Virginia versus in Baltimore, Maryland. In Virginia, police protected the white supremacists and in Maryland, the militarized police issued warrants, established a curfew, shot tear gas, wore riot gear and the National Guard was called in. The responses to the public mourning of the death of 25-year-old Freddie Gray and the white nationalist protest of the removal of a pro-slavery Confederate General mark the deep protection of white supremacy in this country that ultimately demarcates the

underlying reality, roots and reasons of both sites of protest. One, an assertion of white power, the other, a muted scream, in a frequency too often always already muted.

Noting the fact that the Nazi, White Supremacist, and supporters of Donald Trump at the rally were mostly young white men who without their KKK hoods felt reassured of their status in the current political climate, this protest also exposes us to the limits of liberal discourse in providing any sort of healing in the now, in the past and for the future. My Facebook feed, which predominantly features friends who are committed to a politics that is anti-racist, anti-sexist, anti-homophobic and anti-transphobic posted and re-shared, perhaps in desperation to hear anything remotely condemning from people in power as Trump touted a "violence exists on both sides" divergence tactic, the speech of Virginia Governor Terry McAuliffe. I noticed a pattern—my progressive friends felt that McAuliffe's message to the white supremacists was more reasonable than Trumps. While McAuliffe did the obvious—he named the groups white supremacists—his response was not "reasonable" it was outright racist, imperialist and worst of all, *redemptive.* Talking directly to white supremacists, all McAuliffe had for communities of color as a response to the violence was to tell the white supremacists to "Go home" and to relish in the redemptive promise of the "true heroes" and "patriots" of America.

> Go home. You are not wanted in this great commonwealth. Shame on you. You pretend that you are patriots, but you are anything but a patriot. You want to talk about patriots, talk about Thomas Jefferson and George Washington, who brought our country together. Think about the patriots today, the young men and women, who with wearing the cloth of our country…Somewhere around the globe they are putting their life in danger. They are patriots. You are not. You came here today to hurt people. And you did hurt people. My message is clear, we are stronger than you…You will not succeed. There is no place for you here. There is no place for you in America.[236]

[236] "Virginia gov. to white supremacists: Go Home" CNN.com https://www.cnn.com/videos/us/2017/08/12/charlottesville-governor-mcauliffe-presser-sot-nr.cnn

McAuliffe articulates a truly slippery multicultural nationalism that in its domesticity while denouncing its internal "other" white supremacists, it also clearly announces its (inter)national heroes and its external others—the patriots who patrol, surveil, and kill all over the world in the name of this multicultural nationalism. Ironically, McAuliffe's demand for the white supremacists to "go home" is redundant. In America, white supremacists are indeed home.

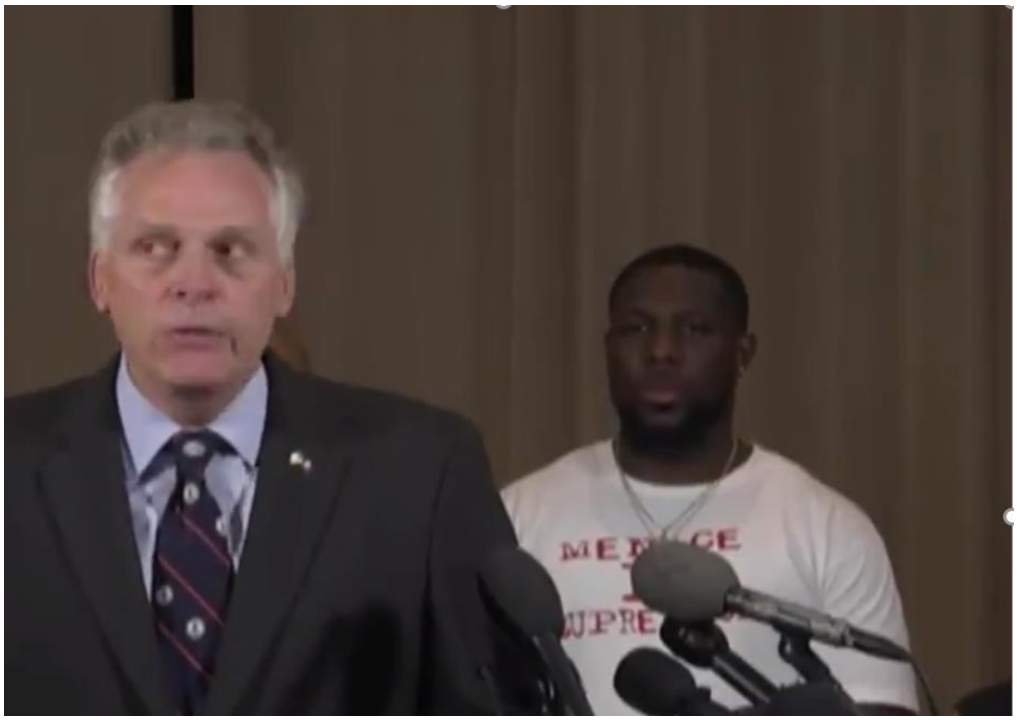


Figure 27: Virginia Governor responds to white supremacist rallies. [237]

Redemptive multicultural liberalism and its upholding of institutions rooted in white supremacy was not the only response to the events in Virginia. When McAuliffe gave his speech, behind him stood a black man with the shirt "Menace II Supremacy." Throughout most of the speech, he enthusiastically nods in agreement with most of what

[237] "Virginia gov. to white supremacists: Go Home" CNN.com https://www.cnn.com/videos/us/2017/08/12/charlottesville-governor-mcauliffe-presser-sot-nr.cnn

McAuliffe is saying up until when McAuliffe says that the true patriots of America were Thomas Jefferson and George Washington. The man stops his nodding altogether and without saying a single word quietly surrenders to the depths of his interior and channels the ancestral energy necessary to not let white supremacist discourse have its day. He stops nodding. His stoic silence and embodied anger say so much; he will not support the idea that Jefferson and Washington—glorified slaveowners—are the true patriots of American society. In his silence, we can locate a loud and strong challenge to McAuliffe and in doing so, realize that we are in truth, even if we are currently in the background of the multicultural liberal frame. This dissertation is dedicated for the many "Menaces II Supremacy" in the world who stay in their truths and refuse to surrender to the disciplining logics of white supremacy and its itinerant and intimate partner liberal multiculturalist redemption.

Unfortunately, this frame—with redemption in the foreground and surrender to interiority in the background—is too often the dominant frame of reference to discuss and response to racialized suffering and injury. McAuliffe and the constituency he mobilizes through the discourse of redemption is not only dominant and repetitive, it has also positioned itself as a way of subsuming and absorbing the very interiority expressed by "Menaces II Supremacy."

Additionally, this narrative of redemption is one of the main calls of liberal multiculturalism when responding to the fringe right. For instance, in her speech to the Democratic National Convention in the summer of 2016, then First Lady Michelle Obama responded to then Republican Presidential Nominee Donald Trump's campaign slogan "Make America Great Again." With a powerful image full of intimate

contradictions, Obama conjures the ghosts of slaves to oddly justify a narrative of American exceptionalism which is also designed to explain why Americans should support Democratic Presidential Nominee Hillary Clinton.

> I wake up every morning in a house that was built by slaves. And I watch my daughters, two beautiful, intelligent, black young women, playing with their dogs on the White House lawn. And because of Hillary Clinton, my daughters and all our sons and daughters now take for granted that a woman can be president of the United States. So, don't let anyone ever tell you that this country isn't great, that somehow we need to make it great again, because this right now is the greatest country on Earth.[238]

Here, Obama engages in what Christina Sharpe calls a "redemptive project"; one that lays claims to "a historically erased national (un)belonging."[239] The redemption of America's sin from slavery occurs through her observation of a very intimate scene; she takes pride that her black daughters can play with their dogs on the premise of the presidential house built by slaves. Additionally, Clinton's possible presidency would combine with that intimate scene and produce a doubly redemptive moment for American society: the ghosts of racism and sexism in America would be conjured only for their exorcism from the national body. Indeed, the conjuring of these ghosts and their ultimate redemption serves as the main intimate narrative strategy to contrast Trump's nostalgic slogan to "Make America Great Again." For Trump, as demonstrated in his campaign speeches, America was great when it had the freedom to violently silence protest and dissent specifically from people of color and women. For Obama, America is already great

---

[238] Washington Post Staff, "Transcript: Read Michelle Obama's Full Speech from the 2016 DNC" *The Washington Post*, Jul 26, 2016. https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/post-politics/wp/2016/07/26/transcript-read-michelle-obamas-full-speech-from-the-2016-dnc/?utm_term=.3f3bb24b70e3

[239] Christina Sharpe, Monstrous intimacies: making post-slavery subjects (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010). 73.

precisely because of the strange intimacies that it allows: black girls could play freely in the presidential house built by slaves.

While Trump's formulation conjures a violent past (Jim Crow Segregation) to pursue a silencing of opposition in the present, Obama's response also conjures a violent past (slavery) to pursue a silencing of the vast injuries that she both references and yet, ultimately, hopes to move past from. Indeed, as Sharpe writes, the redemptive project in its emphasis on "deliverance from sin and its consequences" replaces a "real reckoning with history (state brutality, colonialism, slavery, apartheid, ethnocentrism, truth and reconciliation) and its consequences with a symbolic sacrifice."[240] By redeeming the state from slavery, Obama offers the ghosts of slavery as a symbolic sacrifice for the intimacy and play that it allows her daughters to have. Here, Obama's narrative demands that "some atrocities remain unspoken and unspeakable."[241] As such, the redeemer does not allow room for real reckonings with the past and as a result, does not create space for people who continue to live with psychic, actual and social death in the midst of an era of politics—the Age of Obama—that aims to give hope to American narratives of progress while being interstitially caught between it and the Age of Trump—that which seeks to tether the future to a supposedly past (but ongoing structures and institutions) of white supremacy.

This dissertation critiques the project of redemption; it understands Obama's project of redemption as an extension of multicultural liberalism's discursive terrain and thereby a project that holds racialized injury and suffering hostage to the demands of the imperialist state and therefore, turning suffering into mere political currency and fodder.

[240] Ibid., 73.
[241] Ibid., 73.

This dissertation argues that the project of redemption—which holds the state as an ethical site for bargaining racialized suffering and injury—is an articulation of irresponsible freedom. Irresponsible freedom, I argue, consists of political discourses that uphold the state as an engine for addressing the historical grievances of racialized communities. Irresponsible freedom also positions the theorization of racialized life as always already having to speak to the lexicon of democracy and its representational and rights-endowing capacities and therefore, pulls a curtain in front of the ongoing reality of state sanctioned violence in the murder of black folks, the detainment, detention, deportation of Latinx folks and the persistent war on terror that surveils, tortures, detains and kills racialized "terrorists" figures. Irresponsible freedom, as my own conceptualization, thus rhetorically substitutes domination with democracy, reduces complexity to representation and absorbs the radical potential of racialized life within the purview of neoliberal capital and its globality.

For Roderick Ferguson, since the 1960s and 1970s, power in its constitutive collusion of academy, capital and knowledge has absorbed the radical potential of minoritized critique into the protocols of administration and bureaucracy.[242] However, for Ferguson, this is in part due to the golden weakness of minority cultural nationalism—its desire to be recognized via institutional solicitation. For Sean Coulthard, statist modes of recognition define the political terrain upon which indigenous and minoritized communities come to resolve historical injury. This generates a problem.

> …instead of ushering in an era of peaceful coexistence grounded on the ideal of reciprocity or mutual recognition, the politics of recognition in its contemporary liberal form promises to reproduce the very configurations

[242] Roderick A. Ferguson, *The Reorder of Things: The University and its Pedagogies of Minority Difference* (Minneapolis: University Of Minnesota Press, 2012).

> of colonialist, racist, patriarchal state power that Indigenous' peoples' demands have historically sought to transcend.[243]

Oftentimes, indigenous and ethnic studies practitioners have studied this complex political terrain of the redeeming and recognizing state via resistance theories that relay on a dangerous perpetual confrontation with power. The golden weakness of minority cultural nationalism to be recognized by power often leads to definitional practices that are perpetually tied to power. It is important to note that irresponsible freedom generates some if not a significant amount of its intensity from power's understanding of the Achilles' heel of minority cultural nationalism. Other scholars, like Ben Olguín for instance, insist that the U.S. state mobilizes hybrid social identities, like Chicano/a, for the execution of war, surveillance, torture and detention.[244] Gina Pérez argues that the U.S. military recruits and appeals to Latino/as precisely because it offers a form of institutional solicitation for first class citizenship through service and its potential martyrdom.[245] The work of Jasbir Puar[246] and Chandan Reddy[247] respectively examine the way state formations mobilize and generate queer docile patriots as a way of fashioning modern social formation along the lines of race, gender, class, nationalism and sexuality as existing in a persistent freedom with violence. Olguín, Pérez, Puar and Reddy remind us that resistant identity formations are never only that, and that their

---

[243] Glen Sean Coulthard, *Red skin, white masks: rejecting the colonial politics of recognition* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014).
[244] Ben V. Olguín. "From Counter to Hegemonic: Re-Mapping Ideology in Latina/o Life Writing from the War on Terror," *Biography*, (University of Hawai'i Press, Vol. 36, 1, Winter 2013), pp. 179-210.
[245] Burgos, Adrian, Frank Andre Guridy, and Gina M. Pérez. 2010. *Beyond el barrio: everyday life in Latina/o America*. (New York, NY [u.a.]: New York Univ. Press)
[246]Jasbir K. Puar, Terrorist assemblages: homonationalism in queer times (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017).
[247] Chandan Reddy, Freedom with violence race, sexuality, and the US state (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011).

golden weakness to solicit institutions often serves as a way of articulating irresponsible freedom—redeeming the imperial state's call for freedom with violence.

Redemption, as a vital tactic of the discourse of irresponsible freedom, also coexists and is intimate with nostalgia. For starters, many progressive activist circles turn to Obama's presidency with nostalgia as a response to Trump's nostalgia for an America that can return to its explicit forms of white supremacist talk and practice. Even though Obama called people of color in the uprisings of Baltimore "criminals and thugs" who needed police supervision, deported the highest number of immigrants than any other administration ever before, and intensified drone warfare in the perpetual war on terror, multicultural redeemers look to his presidency as a respectable and redeeming lesson for the constitutional project of America. Moreover, multicultural redeemers also hold the civil rights movement as a monumental epoch of history which positions the rights, representation and recognition struggle as the foundational form of politics for communities of color. The air within this redemptive terrain is stifling and as a result deadly. Eric Garner said this so. This dissertation does not aim to convert his pain and suffering into a slogan for a movement but as deathly reminder of what publicness entails in a white supremacist society that is trying to be redeemed; also, his last words should force us to meditate on the complexities of life lived in an environment that strangles black and brown life, then demands that we reconcile and find justice within the courts of its abusers. The goal of this study is to not fall into the infinite loop of irresponsible freedom.

Figure 28: Floormat at S.N.A.F.U. Bar.

In our contemporary moment, the legacies of slavery and Jim Crow manifest themselves quite clearly. The jerseys of Marshawn Lynch and Colin Kaepernick were placed right next to each other as floor mats at the entrance of a Missouri sports bar. When interviewed, Jason Burle, the owner of the Laker of Ozarks S.N.A.F.U Bar, said that it was not a "race thing" and said that he fought for the "right to place the doormats out there." But beyond the first amendment rights argument about the issue, the image denotes the ongoing "monstrous intimacies" and "post-slavery subjectivities," as Christina Sharpe describes, that maintain the order of white supremacy intact today. The floormat which reads "Lynch Kaepernick 24/7" demarcates a significant lesson for the need for responsible freedom—the turn inward to the sovereignty our interiorities and refuse once and for all the romantic redemption of state power in giving white supremacy the right to this form of property. White supremacy will always, in perpetuity and as a daily practice, want to violently discipline, punish and murder racialized bodies that dissent. The temporality here is significant—lynch dissent 24 hours, 7 days a week.

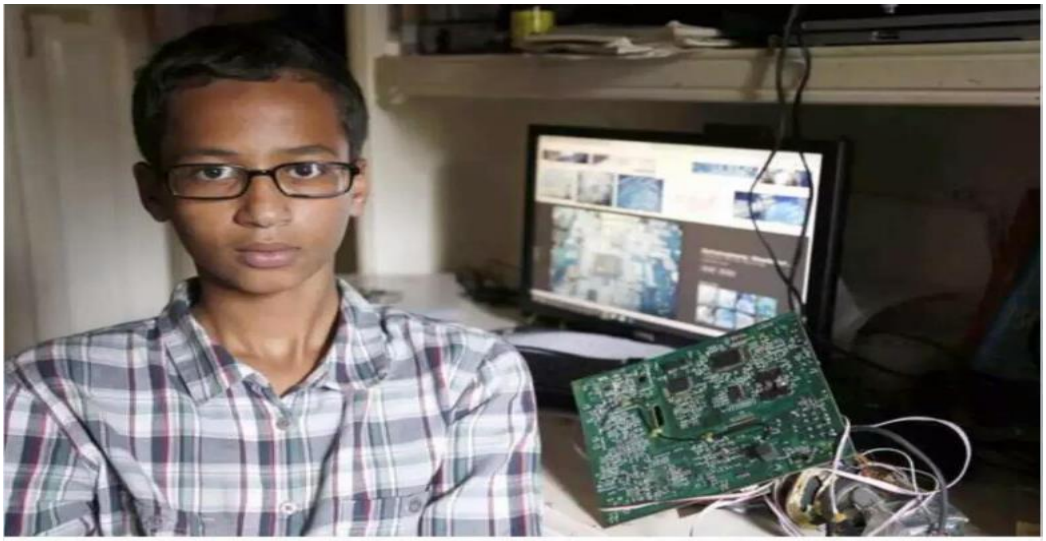
Indeed, invoking the legacy of lynching for the peaceful protest that Kaepernick ignited last year means that we also need to deploy different tactics in the work we do. I believe this begs the question—is resistance enough?

Resistance implies that we challenge white supremacy and find crevices of activation that will allow us space to be included, heard and recognized. However, I cannot seem to cleanse my spirit of this image. The image, to me, demarcates our need to refuse whiteness and access to white inclusion. It reminds me that we should not doubt what the depths of our insides tell us (and that which is oftentimes said in the privacy of friends) that the project of American inclusion under the guise of white supremacy is *absolutely and utterly hopeless.* Why do we continue to think that this image will ever go away? What other act of peaceful resistance, so beautifully done by Colin Kaepernick, will ever be successful at challenging the 24/7 violence of white supremacy? The narrative of lynching Kaepernick should direct us, not towards direct confrontation with the lynch mob, but should tell us something—we need an escape plan, we need a reassuring kiss, we need a surrender to the oceanic, and refusal of authentic ways of living in the U.S.. Just as our intellectual and spiritual ancestors Harriet Ann Jacobs and Harriet Tubman showed us, we need to run away and surrender not to the logic of ourselves as oppressed peoples but indeed to that freedom ingrained in our interior lives, telling us to run away. This dissertation suggests a surrender to the immanence of fugitivity that always already, quietly yet powerfully demands that we listen to it.

As I have tried to show in this dissertation, representation has its limits and taken seriously the urgent need to surrender to what is beyond its limits and meditate in this terrain. However, I have also sought out to show that this cannot be done without careful

and deep personal introspection and critical reckoning with the way dominant forms of thinking, or as Martha Vanessa Saldívar calls it the occupation of knowledge, occupies our mindsets. The study of history, sociology and ethnic studies to name a few is not just the story from below and our ability to empathize with ourselves and those who are multiply abused but also a way of carefully unpacking the story from above. Our politics must consider the thin line between oppressor and oppressed and consider how might my thoughts be oppressive if I am to surrender to them? *Ocotillo Dreams* offers us this bountiful lesson of the importance of decolonizing our colonized minds.

Moreover, I think of a second image. The image of Ahmed Mohamed.



Vernon Bryant / Staff Photographer

After taking a homemade clock to school, Irving MacArthur High student Ahmed Mohamed, 14, was taken in handcuffs to juvenile detention. Police say they may charge him with making a hoax bomb — though they acknowledge he told everyone who would listen that it's a clock.

Figure 29: Picture of Ahmed Mohamed.

Ahmed took a homemade clock to school and was arrested and sent to a juvenile detention center on the premise that he was trying to make a hoax bomb. Even though the shameless cops acknowledge that Mohamed always said that it was a clock, Mohamed was always already deemed to be a terrorist, a potential threat to the life of white

America. He was read as the suicide bomber, whose clock winds down capitalist time and suspends its formations of nationalism and imperialism.

White supremacy functions as a matter of time. On the one hand, it deems an endless clock of violence against racialized dissent while on the other hand, it protects itself in perpetuity against the stateless enemy of the vaguely defined terror subject. In both instances, people of color in the U.S. are out of capitalist, modern time and must be punished via ongoing, daily violence. If we take these images seriously, we are beginning to demarcate some of the traces in the sand around time and space. Does resistance allow us our own constructions of time if we, by the dominant systems of knowledge, are read as always already out of time? What other frameworks, other than the project of resistance are available to us reimagine notions of freedom and liberation that our indeed out of time?

This study attends to the urgent need to run away from the framework of asking our abusers to end the abuse they cause. We can no longer plead to the master for crumbs, tolerance and maybe, one day, acceptance. These efforts are futile. These efforts of resistance, in my view, are merely public displays of social death. When we turn to cops for permits to protest in the streets for police brutality, these are public displays of our acceptance of our social death. These acts often only account for our identity in the present moment. They do not suspend our identities and provide very little, if any, fruitful forms of creativity and activation. Memory must serve us best in our continued struggles. Remember that it was an Indian that killed Sitting Bull. Power often incorporates difference to provide a different hue to the finger that pulls the trigger. Remember, the gun is still the same gun. I consider Patricio Guzman's words from his beautiful and

beautifully meditative documentary *Nostalgia for the Light*: "Those who have memory are able to live in the fragile present moment. Those who have none, don't live anywhere." This dissertation is concerned with our ability to be mindful and remember not just the acts of resistance of our ancestors but also the acts of fugitivity as they make take us towards the horizon of life, not mere social death. If we do not do this, we will continue living in the time of resistance, defined and dominated by the image of the self in relation to the oppressive other, in perpetuity. How might we come to know a site of fugitivity beyond resistance?

Additionally, acts of public protest within the terrain of resistance and direct confrontation situate us in sites of contradiction. For example, a year after Kaepernick's kneeling protests, a vast majority of NFL players and owners also took a knee. While we know that owners do it to manage the ongoing crisis of racial capitalism, a central contradiction of resistance politics is a play here—cultural nationalism and its relation to indifference and neglect. What I mean here is that while the spectacle of protest occurred and forced folks to meditate on the contradictions of America's internal conflicts, it served a very light plate of thin sympathy for black life and an indifferent, if not, gleeful negligence for life outside of U.S. borders. Oftentimes right after the knee came fighter jets that soared over NFL stadiums, military propaganda about toughness and patriotism and an endless charade of a light critique of police brutality with a mix of nationalist fervor. Indeed, cultural nationalist protests in the name of critiquing American domestic affairs over us very little in assessing the major global police force that occupies, targets and destroys the lives of people in Iran, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Yemen and Somalia. While we can meditate by taking a knee, we often do not push ourselves deeper into our

quiet interiors and ask ourselves who we are outside of the project of internal resistance and cultural nationalism.

Fugitivity offers us the meditative terrain to close our eyes, and dig deeper, beyond internal resistance cultural nationalism. Take for instance, JAY-Z's latest music video supplement to the single entitled "Moonlight." In it, some of the most up and coming black actors are placed into a remake of the NBC show *Friends*. While the cast plays out one of the most famous episodes of the show, Jarrod Carmichael, who plays Ross, has a moment of clarity after talking to Hannibal Burress who tells him that the remake of the show is trash. Issa Rae, who plays Rachel, also decides to step outside the scene and takes Carmichael by the arm off stage. All of the up and coming artists represent the new wave of representational power for black film, television and comedy and yet, the music video turns the paradigm of representation on its head. Rae guides Carmichael off stage and to the "Exit" sign. As this is happening, JAY-Z raps that "we stuck in La La Land, even when we win, we gon' lose" and later states "Fuck what we sellin', Fuck is we makin'?, Cause their grass is greener, 'Cause they always rakin' in mo', nah, nah, nah, nah, nah, nah.'

JAY-Z's "Moonlight" gestures us to rethink winning within the terrain of resistance through representation, recognition and by association, rights to American cultural and social life. By sampling the distorted way that *La La Land* won the academy award for best motion picture by mistake and then it was given to the rightful winner *Moonlight* highlights the problem at play with representation--that we stuck in La La Land and even when we win, we gon' lose. Thus, when Carmichael arrives at the EXIT door, the place beyond the representational politics of the *Friends* remake, JAY-Z is

telling us to walk through it, to go there and meditate in this terrain that aims to escape the conventional ways of redefining ourselves through the specific self/other binary inherent in resistance politics. Carmichael chooses to exit the site of resistance and representation (Figure 30). After he walks through it, he emerges into a starry, rainy night (Figure 31) and walks to a bench, sits down and stares at the moonlight (Figure 32). It is only when Carmichael suspends the way he comes to see himself as other that we get somewhere critical—to the site of departure. The place beyond representation and recognition is the terrain of fugitivity—it is here, in the moonlight, where black boys look blue. It is here where our identities, as we know it, are suspended and the very act of meditation and reflection are activated. It is here where we can come to something else, something more meaningful than defining ourselves using the master's tool. Indeed, we must surrender to ourselves, for we are the only ones that can unleash ourselves from captivity.

I have hoped to take you where Jay-Z took Carmichael and have you sit next to him, stare at the moon, and embrace its transformative light. The aim is to imagine ourselves beyond the project of confrontation and resistance. It is to take the leap towards dangerous paths inwards and embrace the freedom ingrained in ourselves even as the external world indicates that we are trapped. It is only in the amateur (in the sense that one does not know the end result) act of running away where we can find our true sovereignty, only in the wildness of our interior. From this position of wildness, maybe we can imagine something else beyond the land of "Lynch Kaepernick 24/7" and instead, feel, sense, nurture and foster our collective mental health in the pursuit of love, in fugitivity from that which makes us criminal in this wild pursuit.

Figure 30. Scene from “Moonlight”

Figure 31. Scene from “Moonlight”

Figure 32. Scene from “Moonlight”

Epilogue

I conclude *Articulations of Responsible Freedom* with creativity that fuses fiction and fantasy, the past, the present and the future together. The following screenplay—this couch and these friends—tells the story of three friends—Monster, Terrorist and Fag—and channels in a story of interiority as a place to meet among friends. Sharing and valuing each other, Monster, Terrorist and Fag choose to run away from a night of protest and activism near the campus where they are workers-students-scholars at and instead choose to embrace in the warmth of their shared interiorities. The screenplay's rendering of three friends opting out of traditional resistance politics is an act made possible by listening to their collective shared interiorities; they have chosen to surrender, to run away, and to refuse that which is dominant in their circles—resistance. The following screenplay is important to end this dissertation because it is also a composite rendering of the moments that truly saved my life in my early twenties while in graduate school. Without the care and love of good friends, I would have fallen into a deep sunken place. Writing a screenplay is also very intentional as screenplays by design are proposals for representation but are not yet casted, choregraphed, and funded. They embody scenes to be acted out and characters that perhaps one day may find worth in visual economies that value their push against redeeming abuse but are nonetheless proposals. I end the dissertation here precisely to engage the opening framing of the dissertation which had redemption in the foreground and menaces II supremacy in the background. Here, I place what is menacing—the Monster, Terrorist and Fag-- in the foreground and place in the background redemption, recognition and rights. I name the characters these classifications precisely if they are taken together monster-terrorist-fag are stateless, and

do not aim to redeem states and states of being that drive the real force of torture. As Jasbir Puar writes in *Terrorist Assemblages,*

> Torture, to compound Axel's formulation, works not merely to disaggregate national from antinational sexualities—for those distinctions the stateless monster-terrorist-fag) are already in play—but also, in accordance with nationalist fantasies, to reorder gender, and in the process, to corroborate implicit racial hierarchies. The force of feminizing lies not only in the stripping away of masculinity, the faggotizing of the male body, or in robbing the feminine of its symbolic and reproductive centrality to national-normative sexualities; it is the fortification of the unenforceable boundaries between masculine and feminine, the rescripting of multiple and fluid gender performatives into petrified sites of masculine and feminine, the regendering of multiple genders into the oppressive binary scripts of masculine and feminine, and the interplay of it all within and through racial, imperial and economic matrices of power. This is the real force of the torture.

The commingling of the interiorities of such a racialized and gendered classification hopefully says something of the need to push against identification and recognition in the age of redeeming racial, imperial and economic matrices of power that aim to destroy the live worlds of those they deem monstrous, terrifying and abnormal.

"To my friends, without whom…nothing"
-Chandan Reddy

"I need a place to rest my head with the little bit of homeboys that remains…"
-Tupac Amaru Shakur

"We don't always proclaim loudly the most important thing we have to say. Nor do we always privately share it with those closet to us, our intimate friends, those who have been most devotedly ready to receive our confession."
-Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations*, 205

“this couch and these friends”
a screenplay

CHARACTERS

MONSTER	Monster is a seventh year graduate student of color. They have grown discontent with their program. Monster was born to immigrant parents from the place beyond and in between the eagle, and all Monster wants to do is move back home to *Aztlán*.
TERRORIST	Terrorist is a first year graduate student of color. They are trying to figure who they are in this world. Originating from the world Columbus hoped to see, Terrorist is trying to find community in their new setting, terrorist is passionate about their friends but misses their true love, whom sends them love always.
FAG	Fag is a third year graduate student of color. Emerging in the funk in the tourist world created for the fat, sunburned, pale-faced euros, Fag aims to express themselves since Fag is dubious about most of what they see.

SETTING

In a small living room in a small apartment in the south side of the Twin Cities of Minnesota, U.S.

TIME

In the mid-2010s, protests headed by the Black Lives Matter Movement, various other community organizations connected to student-led organizations from the major research university, the University of Minnesota, have taken to the streets to demand justice for the deaths of unarmed youths of color from predominantly black-brown-red communities. Monster, Terrorist, and Fag have participated in many of the protests. They, on this particular night, after long work on their discussion papers, preliminary exams and dissertations, which they are all working on respectively, decide to *not* participate in the protests and instead, are hanging out, drinking beer, smoking weed and listening to music. On this particular night, they are on a brown L-shaped sectional, drinking Victoria's, smoking OG Kush and playing Kendrick Lamar's newest album—"TO PIMP A BUTTERFLY."

ACT I

SCENE 1

TERRORIST

Yo past that blunt. I’m getting itchy over here.

FAG

Calm down foo. Fuck. Wait up.

(Repositions joint so as to pass it carefully)

FAG (continued)

Alright, here you go homie. There should be a last hit in there.

(*Kendrick Lamar’s “u” plays in the back*:”loving u is complicated, loving u is complicated u is complicated, loving u, loving u, loving u is compli-ca-ted)

TERRORIST

Yo! I am getting that feeling lately.

(takes a hit, and begins coughing repeatedly, to the point of being out of breathe)

MONSTER

Damn foo, relaxxxxxxxxxx! You cant breffff or what!!!

TERRORIST

Fuck you! (*coughing, followed by laughter*). Why am I always your fucking piñata! Let me live!

(*Monster and Fag laugh hysterically, followed in by Terrorist*).

TERRORIST

No but I have been getting this feeling that what we got going on out there in the streets ain't gonna produce shit. It's a fuckin' contradiction. Out here, calling for justice, calling the state and its system broken, but that shit works! The people they want warehoused are warehoused, the people they want dying are dying. People be calling for justice for the killing of this young cat but justice through what? I mean seriously, this dude is going to go to jail. Doesn't that just give THEM the reasoning for having prisons! Fuck I ain't tryna go out there, freeze my ass off, maybe get shot, and act like THEY will listen and front as if I am making a change in this world. Ain't nothing changing, this is the way it is. Pac said that now almost twenty years ago. Odd chances in this mad world when it serves up a hand, twice dealt over, twice wrapped up with the outcome already determined. You know what fuck it!

(takes a hit, coughs, and begins to roll a new one)

MONSTER

Roll that shit! I don't know. I think that is on point. Making demands, asking the state for things, ain't gonna give us what we want. But really, what is it that we want especially since the deck is already stacked?

FAG

That is what we should be caring about. Its cool to push back in the political theater of the streets but that shit could cause you some serious damage—getting maced, beaten by the baton, left you on the ground where they want you. We talk a lot about how documenting this will somehow cause Amerikkka to see what it is that it is. But we got the images from the 60s and 70s, our folks gettin' beat, dogs biting our asses, hoses ripping away our dissent. That shit is documented, books been written, theories been made, archives upheld, faculty be talkin bout this shit for decades, we even got more people in the media talkin' bout

this shit, but what? Should we keep hoping for Amerikkka to change? Keep dreamin.

TERRORIST

Ha! Yo! That is the AmeriKKKan dream! Dream for a job, dream for a car, dream for a better future, dream, dream, dream. Folks got to stop dreamin, and start deciding otherwise. Shit I'm all about that other world making... That whole Kanye "don't tell yo mom shit!"

MONSTER

Did you just sample that Kanye song? We were just talking about dreaming and you made a joke about fuckin'?

TERRORIST

Hey! Freedom to make love without the impetus of the nuclear family should be part of this imaginary revolution anyways! But like I was saying this is the feeling I got: these tactics ain't gonna do na'tinggggggg.

MONSTER

I felt that immediately when I was at the march through the I-94W out near the U. It hit me like a sudden cold breeze from the Mississippi River, so damn immediate. We were protesting outside the police station but the police were guiding the protestors, shit, even providing protection. These protests are outdated. For real. *They are outdated*. You got a bunch of white people chanting "hands up don't shoot!" and "I can't breathe!" They love it, the spectacle. We all feel it too—people of color, women of color, queers of color and all of us pushed into the corner—we all feel it. We all know it. I sense that… they ENJOY protesting, they love it! Hell, they switch up their jogging outfits for protest boots, it's fashionable. I honestly think we all know, and have a strong sixth sense about who is genuinely walking with us in solidarity. I don't need to be strategic about it, but like you said T, it is definitely a feeling.

FAG

Its academia too.

(Monster and Terrorist agreeing…)

It is. We got all these social theories models and that's what they are… theories, but they are treated as glorified

truth. People out there getting maced ain't revolutionary, and it doesn't reveal power, because we already know because we feel it on the daily and know our history…that this is how power works. But people stick to it. We should be grinding though, T is right, love and sex are the revolution. Its Tupac. Black Cotton. "Old heads say live your life like such/your sure to catch her witcha one day boy/I wouldn't listen to 'em/Your power movement was cool/but it ain't fixin nothin'/so I just go with what I know/I don't trust none/look what the 80s did/to what's bebe's kids…" Still pickin cotton in the strawberry fields of Califas, still pickin cotton in the factories, still pickin cotton in the houses of the rich. Fuck! After the 60s, they let us in to some shit, we got heads, but we ain't got shit. They increased surveillance because they want to know where we were. Damn, like the protests, we got permits to protest. A permit to protest! What the fuck! More surveillance, more crack, more war, more pigs, more 3 by 6 cells, more like 6 feet under, when we dream we talk as if we are under water, we drown even in our fantasies. That is the game: they one thousand feet ahead, with some guides that look like us, telling them how we live our lives. 1 million man march in the wrong direction.

TERRORIST

Walking towards the white house to be cozy with power. Resist and what? I say: home and knowledge. We got to return to the place where we found love originally and make our own ways of loving from these spaces. Continue that loving. Hold up though. Let me rewind that k.dot verse.

FAG

To Momma?

TERRORIST

Second verse.

TERRORIST

Listen.

(They listen, and while smoking, pay attention to k.dot)

I know everything
I know everything, know myself
I know morality, spirituality, good and bad health
I know fatality might haunt you
I know everything, I know Compton
I know street shit, I know shit that's conscious

I know everything, I know lawyers, advertisement and sponsors
I know wisdom, I know bad religion, I know good karma
I know everything, I know history
I know the universe works mentally
I know the perks of bullshit isn't meant for me
I know everything, I know cars, clothes, hoes, and money
I know loyalty, I know respect, I know those that's ornery
I know everything, the highs, the lows, the groupies, the junkies
I know if I'm generous at heart, I don't need recognition
The way I'm rewarded, well, that's God's decision
I know you know that line's for Compton School District
Just give it to the kids, don't gossip about how it was distributed
I know how people work
I know the price of life, I'm knowin' how much it's worth
I know what I know and I know it well not to ever forget
Until I realized I didn't know shit
The day I came home

FAG

Ooo k dot. Been at this graduate school life for a minute. Graduate school got people feeling this way and I am guilty of it. You read articles and books, attend talks, and listen to people masturbate in class…

(meet with laughter, Monster makes hand gesture as if masturbating while pushing a fake set of glasses to their face).

FAG CONTINUES

People know everything. I know about capital, production, ideology, ideological state apparatuses, "the ways in which" things work, agency, resistance, power, technology, space and place and what? Shit, I have even gone back home and tried to educate my friends and family about the fucked up things they say. I thought I knew everything out here. Kendrick's line is raw. Wait how does it go? I know…

TERRORIST

I know what I know and I know it well not to ever forget/until I realized that I didn't know shit/the day I came home. That one?

FAG

Get out of my head!! That's the one. That's Kendrick's point: you may think you know things but that ain't shit if you forget where you come from, what your people are doing, what their struggles are, and what may influence their decisions. You can't just come and tell people what to do cuz you got, scratch that, are trying to get a degree.

MONSTER

But I mean, fuck, be willing to say I don't know because this shit is complicated and hard. I don't know is the beginning, middle and end yall. This links up with our capacity to know from feeling, Anzaldúa's *facultad*. Spotting the love, the greed, the generousity in others and ourselves, and knowing that not knowing something, and embracing this knowledge is a tactic of survival. Not everything can be resolved so easily. Not everything has a celebration and a ceremony. Somethings are not public. Somethings are internal to us. I don't know what the fuck I am saying or if I am making any sense. Ya know?

TERRORIST

I don't know.

(busting up in laughter and followed by coughing)

FAG

Fucking ironies. Piñata always knows about the ironies of being a hitting bag. Ha! Just kidding foo! All that matters is that you're sweet inside!

TERRORIST

Always the piñata.

FAG

I don't know, M, but you are so right. As people who like to read and write about creating new ways of being and knowing and preparing classes, I think I don't know should be the place where we start.

MONSTER

(*taking a huge hit, coughing and then clearly his throat, turning and looking at T,)* Ha! T, you know we love you! Its your sweet insides that are the best.

For me, graduate school, activism, knowledge production, and being able to be happy as a person are questions of work and culture. Who gets to be happy in graduate school? White people are always the ones heading committee, they love the abstract, they love to govern, because the abstract and the ability to govern is part of the white ethos in graduate school, even, yes even, in the fucking ethnic studies.

FAG

Damn. M. Do you remember that Smiths' song "Still ill"? "We cannot cling to the old dreams anymore/no we cannot cling to those dreams…" Something like that, no?

MONSTER

In another part of the song, they talk about work. "oh ask me why and I'll die/and if you must go to work tomorrow/well if I were you I wouldn't bother/for there are brighter sides to life/and I should know because I've seen them/but not very often." Or something like that? I'm not sure.

FAG

That line right there is everything. Damn, homie, that line is everything. That is my critique of the university and student-led movements though.

TERRORIST

Fo real.

MONSTER

What do you mean though?

FAG

Well, recently there has been a lot of discussion around cosmetic diversity versus substantive diversity. Folks do not want the U to be using the aesthetics of having a few people of color on campus to see that it is full of diversity. Brochures with our faces on it, doesn't get at

the realities of students of color on campus. Cool, but substantive diversity ain't that great either. If substantive diversity means the hiring of more faculty and increasing students of color, and funding ethnic studies wouldn't that produce more of the same cosmetic shit. If true diversity existed, as that the homie posted the other day on Facebook, the university would seize to exist.

TERRORIST

Yo, as a TA I feel like shit. I worked with an instructor of color but they were on that professionalism, productivity, efficiency, and grading life. Once when I told the professor that I was going out of town for some research stuff, the professor told me I didn't give them enough notice and they stopped making eye contact with me the rest of the semester. I honestly felt like a worker under some real shitty conditions. Mind you, this is the problem: this professor, a person of color, was treating their "worker" like garbage while lecturing about the importance of labor organizing in the 60s and 70s. And there I am, overworked, grading upon grading upon grading upon grading, tried as hell, sitting listening to this talking head spit theory but not know how the hell to talk to their "worker." Talking heads for theory, but ain't shit for embodied practice. At the end of the day, if there is a contract, all of the facultad sensing, that you were talking about M, that that person could have had went out the door, into my subjugation.

FAG

Yo! I feel you T. I feel you. (reaching out, grabbing T's hand, asking T if he wanted another Victoria).

MONSTER

I see what yall mean. And ya. Seriously. Even when people get into these higher positions, that substantive diversity stuff, it does not guarantee they will transform these spaces into viable hubs of love. Given the culture of academia, they most likely end up becoming the very oppressors they so love to write about. When I was in my MA program, one of my faculty advisers' told me I should not go to PhD, they said that I would embarrass the program. So ya, we have to rethink resistance through the academia. And if there is where we land as a temporary tactic, then we have to for sure be critical of ourselves and how we treat

students of color. People can be victims and oppressors at the same time.

FAG

So real.

TERRORIST

That's crazy. What we gon' do?

FAG

For me, this has got me twisted…(shaking head). I… (forming a fist in one hand while taking a hit of the blunt)…think it is this tho! Its us! Its us…right now. It's kickin' it with the homies. Academia is the institutionalization of the life we hoped could be lived. But it is only poetry in a book. Its like that Sebald shit we read in that class.

TERRORIST

That book was wack.

FAG

It was but it had a nugget. That foo talks about a bird being trapped inside a library. Hold on. Let me get that book. Here anyone want a hit of this?

(passes the blunt to M)

TERRORIST

Yo, hows everything M? How's that cousin of yours?

MONSTER

They doing okay. Their family was out there checking in on them in the hospital. I called and spoke to my Tia and they seem to be doing fine. They will survive and the accident should keep them in the hospital for a few days but you know they are tough and they'll push through. Its complicated though. They seem to have just broken up with their partner the day before the accident. Its seems their partner hasn't made it to the hospital yet. My cousin, L, called them up: told them that they would regret not going. It's a tough call. I would definitely go on that unconditional love but you know its much harder than that. Its just that my cousin wasn't the best partner you know?

TERRORIST

Damn. That's that complicated life. I am sure things will work out though. Hopefully that relationship can carry itself to something else for the good of both them. Sounds like this accident, this collision could change things. Maybe she will be there for a bit, maybe drop a hug and line, and maybe it could work out but then again maybe it would be good for them.

MONSTER

Yeah. I want them to be okay. They need to learn from the accident. That car flipped homie. They were trapped inside the car. They couldn't get out of the car…but yeah. I don't know. I have a feeling she will show up bedside and drop a line and not return. The accident could force them to pause, reflect, and get some perspective on things. Breaking up from abusive relationships and entanglements is the best way to go. The unconditional love doesn't always got to be the love that sticks around but the one that knows that the space we are in right now is just not the most suitable for our love, you feel me?

FAG

Yo! (hustling in)

TERRORIST

(To M) yeah, let me know if you want to talk about it. (turning to F) you find it?

FAG

Yeah! Here it is. I couldn't find the book but I used it in a paper last year, find it in my dropbox. "…birds which had lost their way in the library forest flew into the mirror images of the trees in the reading room windows, struck the glass with a dull thud and fell lifeless to the ground" (281). We got to know that theories in books are not ways of life. They can inform us but they ain't us. They can tell us things about how the world works but it don't change that they are books in the library, that the trees are fake. We gots to realize that the reading room windows are not where our futures exist, and we gots to realize this before we hit up against those walls and die. For real.

TERRORIST

Damn. That book as whole didn't speak to me but that line is dope. In between the nonsense of the archive and the library, but yeah, we also got to be in between the protest and the demand too. Have yall read Lisa Cacho's work. Damn! That reminds me of that.

MONSTER

I haven't. She good?

FAG

Disorienting like this cush.

MONSTER

Yall cold?

TERRORIST

A bit.

(M leaves)

FAG

Cacho is dope.

TERRORIST

Cacho talks about the impossible. She cites Derrick Bell and writes about racial realism. I got it on my phone. Can I read it to you?

FAG

Of course. Yo but I just realized something critical. It ain't about schoolin' tho. It ain't about being graduate students. We ain't some tragic foos, failing in our writing or failing as activists, or failing as intellectuals. You reading this, me sharing things with you, and M dropping knowledge is what its about. We escape the reading room—the plantation—when we do this. New book that's coming out in 2016, talks about that. But what were you saying, sorry.

TERRORIST

Its all good. Naw. Yeah. Its this (passes phone to F)… check it.

FAG

(holding T's phone) When implementing Racial Realism, we must simultaneously acknowledge that our actions are not likely to lead to transcendant change, and…

(*M returns, holding two blankets, passes them over to T and F*)

MONSTER

Sorry F but here yall go. I know, the cold seeps through the floors.

TERRORIST

You know. Its all always snowing in Minneapolis, thanks M. Your too sweet.

FAG

Too sweet boo! Thanks! Ready to get these toes unfrozen.

(F lightly grabs M's shoulder and massages M's back)

MONSTER

You know I love you foos! Go on F. What were you reading?

FAG

We love you too! (pauses and gets under the covers, then remerges and takes a hit) We were reading that scholar we told you about, Lisa Cacho?

MONSTER

The one who gave a lecture to those law and sociology students and told them that law ain't for folks of color?

TERRORIST

Yup.

FAG

Alright here it is: When implementing Racial Realism, we must simultaneously acknowledge that our actions are not likely to lead to transcendent change, and, despite our best efforts, may be of more help to the system we despise than to the victims of that system we are trying to help. Nevertheless, our realizations, and the dedication based on that realization, can lead to policy positions and campaigns that are less likely to worsen the conditions for those we are trying to help and more likely to remind those in power that there are imaginative, unabashed risk-takes who refuse to be trammeled upon. Yet confrontation with our oppressors is not our sole reason for Racial Realism. Continued struggle can bring about unexpected benefits and gains that in themselves justify continued endeavor. The

fight itself has meaning and should give us hope for the future (32).

MONSTER

Cacho! Ooooooooo! Got em!

TERRORIST

As important as it is to fight and confront and let them know we are willing to take-risk, Cacho is pointing us in another direction and that is real dope. Continued struggle outside of direct confrontation is also valuable. Cacho talks about how we need to fight for basic survival needs. But she also notes that it is important work to have meaningful lives. In another section of the book, may be even in that same chapter, she says that a meaningful life is not a luxury but rather the purpose of the struggle itself, the difference between surviving and living (33).

FAG

Yo T. That's what I was trying to say homie. I mean seriously, it all comes back to Pac and that sample from the Running track—"why am I fighting to live, if I am just living to die." We can't just be surviving, and *trudging slowly over wet sand, waiting for Armageddon to come, wishing we were not here*.

MONSTER

Is that the Smiths?

FAG

Trudging slowly over wet sand…every day is like Sunday. M, you know me too well.

(M smiles at F)

FAG continues

We are somewhere ambivalent, somewhere in between, in between the borders of the state, academy and capital. We are in between the classroom and in between the public and the private. Somewhere in between power and resistance and I think, most especially, this in between space and the place beyond, its (F tries to sing like Nate Dogg) where I want to be! I feel as if when we kick it, like this, and we share things we have written, and talk to each other, and let each

other be, I feel like this is where I want to be, and how I want to be.

MONSTER

When you kick it with friends, I think that’s living more than surviving. I learn so much from getting high with yall than I do from a fuckin’ lecture with words that I don’t even what to learn. I think homies that these are the bright sides of life that Morrissey talks about, no? I have seen them, I have felt them, I am seeing them now, and I am feeling them now, and I know that they exist but they do not come around too often because of all the shit that we have to go through to get here.

(blackout.)

Bibliography

Aidi, Hisham D. "Let Us Be Moors Islam, Race, and "Connected Histories"1," *Souls* 7, no. 1 (2005).

Asma Abbas, *Liberalism and Human Suffering: Materialist Reflections on Politics, Ethics and Aesthetics*, New York, Palgrave Macmillan: 2010.

Baca Damian. "The Chicano Codex: Writing against Historical and Pedagogical Colonization.**"** *College English*, v71 n6 p564-583 Jul 2009.

Buenrostro, Eliana. "Disney's Pixar Coco Normalizes a Militarized Border" *Medium*, November 26, 2017.
https://medium. /@musicdissonance/disney-pixars-coco-normalizes-a-militarized-border-459917a53f49

Burgos, Adrian, Frank Andre Guridy, and Gina M. Pérez. *Beyond el barrio: everyday life in Latina/o America*. New York, NY [u.a.]: New York Univ. Press. 2010.

Cacho, Lisa Marie, *Social death: racialized rightlessness and the criminalization of the unprotected*. New York: New York University Press, 2012.

Class War University, "Studying Through the Undercommons: Stefano Harney & Fred Moten – interviewed by Stevphen Shukaitis", November 12, 2012.

Combahee River Collective. 1979. *Combahee River Collective*. LHEF. http://cdm16694.contentdm.oclc.org/u?/p274401coll1,1063.

Corbett, Rosemary. *Making Moderate Islam: Sufism, Service and the Ground Zero Mosque Controversary*.. Stanford University Press. Redwood City, 2016.

Coulthard, Glen Sean. *Red skin, white masks: rejecting the colonial politics of recognition* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014.

Daulatzai, Sohail and Junaid Rana. "Left," *Critical Ethnic Studies* 1, no. 1 (2015).

Facio, Elise and Irene Lara, *Fleshing the spirit spirituality and activism in Chicana, Latina, and indigenous womens lives.*Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 2014.

Ferguson, Roderick. *The Reorder of Things: the university and its pedagogies of minority difference*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012.

Freccero, Carla. "Queer Times." *Southern Atlantic Quarterly.* Vol. 106, no. 3, 2007, pp. 485-494

Gordon, Avery. *Ghostly matters: haunting and the sociological imagination.* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011.

Haley, Sarah. *No Mercy Here: Gender, Punishment, and the Making of Jim Crow Modernity* Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2016.

Harney, Stefano, and Fred Moten. *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning & Black Study*. Wivenhoe: Minor Compositions, 2013.

Haslett, Tim. "Hortense Spillers Interviewed by Tim Haslett for the Black Cultural Studies Web Site Collective in Ithaca, NY" February 4, 1998, accessed November 27, 2017.
http://www.blackculturalstudies.net/spillers/spillers_intvw.html

Kincaid, Jamaica. *A Small Place*. London: Vintage, 1997.

Jacobs, Harriet A., and R. J. Ellis. *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015.

Lowe, Lisa. *The Intimacies of Four Continents*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2015.

Luibhéid, Eithne. *Queer Migrations: Sexuality, U.S. Citizenship, and Border Crossings*. Ed. Eithne Luibhéid and Lionel Cantú. Minneapolis: Minnesota UP, 2005.,

Marriot, Michael. "Remembrance of Slave Ancestors Lost to the Sea" *New York Times*, June 19, 1994.
http://www.nytimes.com/1994/06/19/nyregion/remembrance-of-slave-ancestors-lost-to-the-sea.html

McGranahan, Carol. "Refusal and the Gift of Citizenship" C*ultural Anthropology,* American Anthropological Association. Vol 31, Issue 3, pp.334-341.

McRuer, Robert. *Crip Theory: Cultural Signs of Queerness and* Disability. New York: New York University Press, 2006.

MovieManiacsDE. "Django Unchained | Meet the Press (2013) Quentin Tarantino." *YouTube*, YouTube, 1 Jan. 2013, www.youtube.com/watch?v=-1QpScB-HJg.

Olguín, Ben V. "From Counter to Hegemonic: Re-Mapping Ideology in Latina/o Life Writing from the War on Terror," *Biography*, University of Hawai'i Press, Vol. 36, 1, Winter 2013.

Palacio, Melinda. *Ocotillo Dreams*. Tempe, AZ: Bilingual Press/Editorial Bilingüe, 2011.

Price, Richard *Maroon Societies: Rebel Slave Communities in the Americas*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996.

Pulido, Laura. *Black, Brown, Yellow, and Left Radical Activism in Southern California*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006.

Puar, K. Jasbir. *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer times*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2017.

Quashie, Kevin. *The Sovereignty of Quiet: Beyond Resistance in Black Culture*. New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2012.

Reddy, Chandan. *Freedom with Violence: Race, Sexuality, and the US State*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2011.

Reid-Pharr, Robert. *Archives of Flesh: African America, Spain, and Post-humanist Critique*. New York: New York University Press, 2016.

Robillard, Kevin. "Pol: al Qaeda told to 'act Hispanic' *Politico.com*, April 17, 2013. https://www.politico.com/story/2013/04/louie-gohmert-al-qaeda-told-to-act-hispanic-090212

Ruiz, Michelle. "Why Coco Just Might Be the Most Important Film of the Year" Vogue, November 27, 2017. https://www.vogue.com/article/coco-movie-review-political-importance-trump-mexico.

Saldivar, Martha Vanessa. "From Mexico to Palestine: An Occupation of Knowledge, a "Mestizaje" of Methods" *American Quarterly.* 62 (4): 821-833, 2010.

Sharpe, Christina Elizabeth. *Monstrous Intimacies: Making Post-Slavery Subjects*. Duke University Press, 2010.

Snorton, C. Riley, *Black on Both Sides: A Racial History of Trans Identity.* Minneapolis. London: University of Minnesota Press, 2017.

Sobo, Elisa. "Theorizing (Vaccine) Refusal: Through the Looking Glass" *Cultural Anthropology,* American Anthropological Association. Vol 31, Issue 3, pp. 342-350.

Ugwu Reggie. "How Pixar Made Sure 'Coco' was culturally conscious." *The New York Times*, November 19, 2017. https://www.nytimes.com/2017/11/19/movies/coco-pixar-politics.html

Washington Post Staff, "Transcript: Read Michelle Obama's Full Speech from the 2016 DNC" *The Washington Post*, Jul 26, 2016. https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/post-politics/wp/2016/07/26/transcript-read-michelle-obamas-full-speech-from-the-2016-dnc/?utm_term=.3f3bb24b70e3

Weiss, Eric. "Refusal as Act, Refusal as Abstention" *Cultural Anthropology*, American Anthropological Association. Vol 31, Issue 3, pp. 351-358

Weheliye, G, Alexander. *Habeas Viscus Racializing Assemblages, Biopolitics, and Black Feminist Theories of the Human*. Duke University Press, 2014.

Wood, Mikael. "Kendrick Lamar thrills an adoring hometown crowd—and conquers at least one skeptic at FYF Fest, *Los Angeles Times,* August 28, 2016. http://www.latimes.com/entertainment/music/la-et-ms-fyf-kendrick-lamar-20160828-snap-story.html