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EL SABOR DEL AMOR Y DEL DOLOR:  
VIOLENCE, AFFECT AND THE (TRANS)BODY IN THE CHICAN@ HISTORICAL  
IMAGINARY

BY

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DISSERTATION

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Educational Policy Studies  
in the Graduate College of the  
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 2011

Urbana, Illinois

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## ABSTRACT

*El Sabor del Amor y del Dolor* is a study of the representation of Transgender and gender non-conforming Chican@s and traces the absence and presence of this population in the Chicana/o Historical imaginary. I examine how the transgender and gender non-conforming Chican@ body complicates categories of gender, sex and sexuality in the fields of Queer, Transgender and Chicana/o Studies. Through a theoretical lens informed by Chicana feminist, Queer and Affect Studies I argue for the transgender and gender non-conforming racialized body as a pedagogical site for understanding how transgender and gender non-conforming Chican@s make the world intelligible for themselves. In my research I trace the affective strategies that transgender and gender non-conforming Chican@s utilize for survival in the face of harassment, institutional neglect and violence, while pointing to these strategies as possible sites of resistance.

Building on the work of Queer Chicana Feminist scholars, I maintain that the transgender and gender non-conforming body confounds Aztlán's masculinist and heteropatriarchal symbolic field of signification, therefore a new *lengua* and new symbolic field must emerge. This strategy represents “*el sabor del amor y del dolor*” that springs from Pérez's call for perverting of psychoanalysis, thereby positing a decolonial and perverse interpretive strategy to study the radically perverse. Borrowing from Emma Pérez's *Decolonial Imaginary*, the dissertation has two “case study” chapters wherein the interpretive strategy *el sabor del amor y del dolor* is deployed. These two case study chapters include a reading of Emma Perez's historical novel, *Forgetting the Alamo, Or, Blood Memory* and a “re-framing” of the life and death of Gwen Amber Rose Araujo.

The dissertation concludes by returning to Paulo Freire's formulation of pedagogy as an

indispensible methodology for teaching values about what it means to live in this world and to relate to other human beings. Reflecting on the arguments made in the body of the work, this study breaks through, crosses, transgresses, and disrupts how transgender and gender non-conforming Chican@s are discursively constructed in Aztlán, I move conversation towards creating new solidarities and methodologies in the form of “Travesía Pedagogy”. Having discussed at length the impact of psychic and somatic violence that accompanies transphobia, homophobia and racism, I conclude with possibilities for healing. How do we circumvent the proliferation of homophobic, transphobic, and racist discourses in our worlds? What does it truly mean to move towards a world where Chican@s as a people do not hate ourselves or terrorize ourselves or each other both in the home and in schools?

For my *Wela*, whose love and sacrifice taught me more about dignity and struggle than any book ever has; and for Gwen Amber Rose Araujo, a young woman I never had the opportunity to meet but whose story of strength and courage has irrevocably changed my life.

*Francisca Valdivia Marquez (Dec. 12, 2010-Mar. 15, 2011)*

*y*  
*Gwen Amber Rose Araujo (Feb. 24, 1985-Oct. 3, 2002)*  
*Que En Paz Descansen*

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I'm from a small town and very proud to be from a small town, it has informed who I am and who I want to be. As a kid I growing up, every summer there was one thing that was constant, I could be found in my room or on the couch with a book in my hands. I love to read, and I have always loved to read and have always had an insatiable thirst for knowledge. As a kid, I loved to read because it helped me create new worlds for myself, new worlds where I could dream about who I wanted to be. Nearly 20 years later, I find myself honored to be the first in my family to graduate with a PhD and just beginning to live the life I began dreaming those countless summers in Brawley. I am blessed to have a community of people that have helped me along the way and without their support I know that I would not have completed this painful yet transformative journey. I am eternally grateful to all of you who have supported me and I hope to continue to contribute to *nuestra comunidad* through meaningful and transformative work as a scholar and an activist.

First and foremost I would like to thank my family who have supported me in the pursuit of my dream, even when they didn't completely understand. I left Brawley right before my eighteenth birthday and have been away from them for almost twelve years, I've missed birthdays, graduations, weddings and family parties – but they always understood. First I would like to thank my mom, Yolanda Galarte who always challenged me to do well in school, she instilled a sense and discipline and pursuit of perfection and excellence I have yet to master but without her pushing me I would never have gotten this far. She encouraged me to be the best that I could and always let me know that as long as I tried my best I was successful. Thank you mom, for having the patience to teach me how to read when I was four years old, I've been dreaming ever since. To my Dad, Hector Galarte, thank you for always being my number one

supporter. Thank you for always being proud of me and taking the time to read me a story every night before I went to bed as a kid, when you had to wake up at 5am to go to work the next day. Mom and Dad, thank you for all the sacrifices you made to give me a better life and most of all for your unconditional love. To my brother Jerry and sister Noni, thank you for always being there and letting me know you were proud of me, I am proud of you too. To my nieces and nephews: Jerry Jr, Allyson, Christopher, Isabella and Mateo, you all are the future and I hope from my example you know that you can achieve anything and that I will always be here for you. The last family member I would like to thank is my *Wela*, who passed away while I was writing my dissertation. She migrated to the US as an orphan when she was 9 years old and worked everyday of her life until she became ill seven years ago. She was 100 years old and spent most of her life in the US but never learned to read or to write, it is for that reason that I value the privilege of education and fight for the rights of *nuestra comunidad*. She was the wisest and strongest woman I have ever known, I love you *Wela* and I look forward to continuing your legacy of hard work, dignity and strength.

When I first met Dr. Antonia Darder, she was a visiting Professor at UC Irvine and I was a fourth year about to leave to study abroad. My mentor at the time knew I admired her work and made me walk Antonia to her office so that I could talk with her one on one, I don't remember what we talked about exactly but I do remember that I knew I wanted to work with this amazingly brilliant and strong woman for my PhD. I eventually made my way to the University of Illinois, Urbana Champaign and I sought out to become one of her advisees. Antonia took me under her wing and into her family of students and I cannot put in words how grateful I am for her intellectual and emotional support throughout my journey. Her support and belief in my scholarship has never faltered, she always assured me that I would finish and gave

me hope in the darkest of moments. Her belief in my intellect and my commitment to my community has been an inspiration for me and has kept me on track even in moments when I thought I would never finish. Querida Antonia, I am so grateful to have encountered you, your scholarship, spirit, and heart. From the bottom of my *corazon, gracias*

I met Dr. Emma M Pérez when I was at a crossroads in my life; it was a moment when I still didn't think I was cut out for academe. As an undergrad, reading her work changed my life as did the work of Gloria Anzaldúa and Cherrie Moraga, but Emma's work was the first to inspire me to be a scholar. Emma's mentorship and friendship has allowed my intellectual work to come full circle and has helped me to overcome my own insecurities as a scholar. Most importantly her work continues to inspire me and remind me *that donde hay dolor hay amor*. Emma thank you for having the courage to write and tell the stories many of us dream and live but are afraid to tell.

Dr. Lisa Cacho and Dr. Cris Mayo have also mentored me and supported me through writing this dissertation. They each have taught me so much about the academy and survival. Thank you to Cris, for pushing me philosophically and theoretically to move towards developing my own *teorias* for survival and pedagogy. Thank you to Lisa for supporting my work from the Master's thesis to now, your advice and questions have always proven to be so valuable. Also thank you for your teaching advice and for setting an amazing example on what a successful classroom looks like, it has been an honor to work for you and with you these last seven years. Thank you both so much for your support and mentorship, for always being present and accessible and most of all for believing in me...

I am grateful to the Educational Policy Studies Department, specifically Dr. James Anderson for his support and commitment to students of color in the department. I am also



grateful to the Latina/o Studies Department for their financial support that gave me the opportunity to meet and teach some of the most wonderful students I have ever met. A special thanks to faculty and staff in Latina/o Studies; Dr. Jerry Gonzalez, Dr. Mike Amezcua, Dr. Mireya Loza, Dr. Alejandro Lugo, Dr. Arlene Torres, Dr. Isabel Molina, Dr. Richard T. Rodriguez, Dr. Julie Dowling, Dr. Jonathan Inda, Dr. Edna Viruell-Fuentes, Dr. Gilberto Rosas, David Coyoca, Dr. Alicia Rodriguez and M. Laura Castaneda. Thank you all for your support.

I would also like to thank faculty and staff at the University of Illinois and UC Irvine who have contributed inspiration and/or support during this journey. At UCI I was first inspired to do research and enter academia by: Dr. Louis DeSipio, Dr. Lisa Garcia Bedolla, Dr. Alexandro Gradilla, Dr. Raul Fernandez and Dr. Gilbert Gonzalez – thank you all so much. At the University of Illinois I am grateful to the following faculty and staff: Dr. Siobhan Sommerville, Dr. Fiona Ngo, Dr. Martin Manalansan, Leslie Morrow and Jennifer DeLuna. I am also grateful to all the wonderful students I have had over the years and the members of *Movimiento Estudiantil Chicana/o de Aztlán*. Finally my time at the University of Illinois would not have been as rich without the support and mentorship of Dr. Anna Gonzalez, who I first met at UC Irvine and worked for as an undergraduate and again as a graduate student. Anna, thank you for being an amazing mentor and friend.

I would like to thank my close friends and colleagues who have been there with me throughout this journey. During my short time at UCSB I was blessed to have gained amazing friends and colleagues: Eddy F. Alvarez, Amber Rose Gonzalez, William Calvo, Ricardo Ortega, Amber Gonzalez, Cristina Serna and Chueh Jun Fung – thank you all. I would also like to thank my cousin, Maricela Jauregui for her support. At UC Irvine I am forever grateful to all my MEChistas, specifically those who have come to be part of my chosen *familia* for life – you all

know who you are. I'd like to specifically like to thank my mentees Dulce A. Garcia and Liliana "Pancha" Gonzalez, I'm so proud of you and thank you for your courage, you inspire me. I'd also like to thank my best friend, Maria C. Malagon, who has been there for me unconditionally and with whom I have shared chisme, work, theory, hopes and dreams with for almost 12 years. Thank you friend, we did it! At UIUC, I am thankful for the colleagues and friends I have been fortunate enough to encounter. First I'd like to thank my fellow Antonia advisees: Laura Galicia, Joe Feria-Galicia, Kevin Lam, Rufina Cortez, Charlotte Wilkinson-Davidson, Tanya Kozlowski and Jennifer Chung. A special thanks to my good friends Sonia Mariscal, Micaela Diaz-Sanchez and Dalila Paola Mendez. A very special thanks to Judith Estrada, Gerardo Diaz and their beautiful daughter Esperanza Itzel for their continued support and love. Finally, I would like to thank two individuals who have become a brother and sister to me: Aidé Acosta and Abel Correa. Words cannot express how grateful I am to both of them for their emotional and intellectual support. They are and always will be mis herman@s in the struggle as I will never forget the lessons their caring and generosity has taught me, I admire and respect you both so much. Thank you for always being there.

Finally, I would like to thank Gwen Amber Rose Araujo and her mother Sylvia Guererro because their story stirred something within me that has not let me rest since. Thank you both for your struggle and know your sacrifices are not in vain. I would also like to give thanks for generations of transgender Chican@s whom have passed on and suffered indignity and struggle so that this generation and generations to come can live life a little bit better. We continue to fight for our dignity and humanity; we wage this struggle in your name...

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*y si quieren saber de mi pasado  
es preciso decir otra mentira  
les dire que llegue de un mundo raro  
que no se del dolor  
que triunfe en el amor  
y que nunca he llorado*

*And if they want to know about my past  
This time I will have to tell another lie  
I will tell them that I came from a strange world  
That I don't know what pain is  
That I triumphed in love  
And that I have never, ever cried.*

*- "Un Mundo Raro" performed by Chavela Vargas  
Written by Jose Alfredo Jimenez*

# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

We're living in a period in which people  
are being killed for being gay and in which  
being gay or lesbian can be elided in the  
discourses of difference, including the  
ones in Chicana/o studies"  
--Yvonne Yarbro-Bejarano, 2007

"...la dignidad debiera ser el mundo, un mundo  
donde quepan muchos mundos."  
--Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional, 2001

The Zapatistas believe that "the world should be one of dignity, a world where many worlds are possible." Their dream has yet to be fulfilled. This dissertation does not tell a happy story, but it does tell a story that asserts the dignity of a people, in this case transgender and gender non-conforming Chican@s who are alive, have died, are surviving, or becoming.<sup>1</sup> To be frank, I come to this project through multiple intimate points of entry, the obvious being that I am a gender non-conforming transgender identified Chicano. I only wish it could be simple. It is in fact my hometown that inspired this project the most; and this is surprising because I have long considered my hometown to be so far removed from my experiences as a trans-identified Chicano. But over time I have learned that multiple worlds often intersect, collide and explode. In October of 2002, a transgender teen, Gwen Amber Rose Araujo, was brutally murdered in Newark, California – a conservative city located in the Silicon Valley about 35 miles from San

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<sup>1</sup> The use of "transgender" in this dissertation will function as an umbrella term that encompasses (but does not conflate) various gender non-conforming categories such as butch, andro, genderqueer, female to male (FTM), male to female (MTF), genderfucking, etc. This is similar to the camp of Transgender Studies that solely categorizes Transgender as those who wish to transition from one gender to another with the intention of "passing". For more on this see Sandy Stone's "Post Transsexual Manifesto" and Susan Stryker's "De-subjugated Knowledges". I also deploy "Chican@" in relationship to Transgender and Gender non-conforming subjects. "Chicana/o" functions here to maintain a gendered male/female binary, but I also recognize the significance in the transition from "Chicano Studies" to "Chicana/o Studies" for more on this see Chabram-Deneresian's essay, "And Yes . . . the Earth Did Part: On the Splitting of Chicana/o Subjectivity."

Francisco and hundreds of miles away from my hometown of Brawley, California, located approximately 25 miles from the Calexico/Mexicali US/Mexico border.

Seventeen years prior to her untimely and extremely violent death, Gwen was born Eddie Araujo Jr. in Pioneers Memorial Hospital in Brawley, California; the same hospital in which my siblings and I were born. Gwen spent her early childhood years playing on the street directly behind my grandmother's house; she played on the same streets and the same park where I had played when I was a child. I was completely unaware of this until I had the opportunity to meet Gwen's mother, Sylvia Guerrero a couple years ago when she was invited to speak at the University of Illinois. After speaking with her, I recalled an uncomfortable phone conversation with my mother about the murder and how she had heard that some of Gwen's estranged father's family, the Araujos, had made the trip to the Bay Area to attend the funeral and later the two trials. The violence of her death resonated close to home, not because as a transgender identified person "that could have been me," but because I intimately knew where she came from and what she was up against.

The Silicon Valley and the Imperial Valley are worlds apart in terms of demographics, population, proximity to urban centers, but they both have an economy that relies on the labor of Mexican and Latino immigrants and second and third generation Mexican Americans. The Imperial Valley is both a drug smuggling gateway and one of California's highest agriculture producing counties. While the Silicon Valley is the home of the richest technology and dotcom corporations (i.e., Google, Ebay, Apple, Facebook) and is also just a thirty minute car ride away from San Francisco (the west coast's Queer metropolis).<sup>2</sup> As historian Steven Pitti argues, the region is also marked with an early history of violence against Mexicans.

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<sup>2</sup> Pitti, Stephen J. *The Devil in Silicon Valley: Northern California, Race, and Mexican Americans*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 2003. Print.

Gwen and I grew up in these tenuous regions that represent the promise of economic success on the back of working class Mexican-American families. I, unlike Gwen, spent all of my life in the Imperial Valley and still consider it home, while Sylvia moved Gwen and her other children to the Silicon Valley to escape an abusive father. We were born only four years apart, and it is likely that our paths crossed as children, since I spent my afternoons playing at my *wela's* house on 'H' Street and Gwen lived right behind my *wela's* house on 'G' Street. Perhaps this is what makes her pain and the details of her death hit so close to home. Up until that point, I felt like my dissertation project was in no way connected to what I considered to be home because when I thought of Brawley, queer never came to mind. Gwen's life and mine were in no way alike, aside from the likelihood that we both played in the same park and that we are both trans. But I do think about how intimately both of our lives were affected by the racialized and gendered politics of the geographical spaces we were raised, as well as what we grew up understanding as integral aspects of Chicano culture. As Chicanas and Chicanos, our lives are very much informed by a coherent and stable understanding of race, gender and sexuality, but when those are challenged, a rupture that can be transformative or violent ensues. Gwen and I began our lives in the same place, yet we inhabited distinctly different worlds and our lives led on us different paths; but I will not forget that this story began at home and for this reason I write for Gwen and my family because I carry their histories with me and because remembering is *el sabor del amor y del dolor*.

In June of 2010 as I was doing research for this dissertation, I read online that Lance Reyna, a transgendered Latino was assaulted and robbed in a bathroom at the university he attends in Houston, Texas. Lance is a well-known transgender activist in the Houston community and on the University of Houston campus; he believed his attack to be hate-

motivated due to his gay and transgendered identity. Transgender persons are not protected under Texas hate crime statutes, but the recently passed “Matthew Shepard and James Byrd, Jr. Hate Crimes Prevention Act” does protect transgender persons at the federal level. However as demonstrated by Lance’s case, the FBI’s willingness to pursue hate crime charges is contingent upon the perpetrator’s admission of hate as motive for the attack. This puts transgender men, a population that does not largely report hate motivated crimes (in contrast to transgender women of color and gay white males) to authorities, in a precarious position. In Reyna’s case there was suspicion within the community by his straight peers, who accused him of “exaggerating” the extent to which the assault was based on anti-gay or transgender bias but rather was simply just a robbery. Reyna expressed his sentiments regarding suspicions and disbelief among his peers in the following statement; “I feel hopeless right now, plus all the bullying not being taken serious is something I can relate from my younger days in school.” This is only reiterates the pattern of bullying not being taken seriously that Reyna suffered in K-12, and now faces as a young adult at his University, trumping the notion that it does “get better”. Bullying of LGBT youth and related teen suicides have gotten significant mainstream media attention recently, but bullying has been a subject of concern for educators and students alike for some time. Yet, Dan Savage’s “It Get’s Better Campaign,” purposefully argues that Lesbian and Gay youth can hope that the bullying they incur as children will subside as they get older and move towards comfortable homonormative lives. But only Gay White Men have the economic, racial and gender privileges to assume that kind of homonormative comfort.<sup>3</sup> As education scholars Cris Mayo, Gerald Unks, Cindy Cruz, Ken Kumashiro, and C.J. Pascoe, have noted, there has persisted overtime both a failure and resistance of school administrators and teachers to intervene on behalf of gay, lesbian, transgender, and gender non-conforming youth. This failure to intervene on behalf of

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<sup>3</sup> [www.youtube.com/itgetsbetter](http://www.youtube.com/itgetsbetter)



students has left many with only such options such as: organizing on their own in the form of Gay-Straight Alliances, or organizing through the help of mainstream LGB advocacy organizations, or to commit suicide. This is not to say that queer and transgender youth are not resilient in creating spaces for themselves in educational institutions, however, it is important to hold these institutions accountable for the way in which they fail to serve these populations. In the current neoliberal era where presumably Lesbians and Gays can enjoy the promise of acceptance and equality, a rise in bullying and hate motivated violence towards LGBT youth of color as well as suicides, is not coincidental.<sup>4</sup>

My dissertation examines the endemic damage that racism, homophobia and transphobia enact upon transgender and gender non-conforming Chican@ youth. As noted by Lance Reyna, the reticence of educational institutions to protect LGBT students creates a sense of hopelessness for students, and subsequently these students employ their own strategies for survival (inside and outside the classroom) and it is these strategies that I am interested in understanding. As Cindy Cruz, Gilbert Conchas, and Maria Malagon have noted, there is a resiliency among Chicana/o youth for persisting in educational institutions whose practices and policies are designed to push them out. Transgender and gender non-conforming Chican@s, youth are a population that is significantly under-researched, and given the populations' statistical susceptibility to violence – corporeal as well as psychic- there is a significant need for further inquiry.

As a transgender Chicano scholar, I seek to situate my study within the scholarly fields in which the gaps in research are blaring, Chicana/o Studies, Queer Studies and Transgender Studies. The precarious position of transgender and gender non-conforming Chican@s, goes beyond the bullying that occurs in schools. Such “bullying” behaviors can be traced back to

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<sup>4</sup> “neoliberal era” refers the definition and conditions of neoliberalism by Lisa Duggan in her book *The Twilight of Equality* and is further elaborated on as neoliberalism relates to Queer people of color by Martin Manalansan in his article, “Race, Violence and Neoliberal Spatial Politics in the Global City”

imperial and colonial encounters. In this study I seek to track both the pleasure and pain that the body incurs in the struggle for survival and dignity. The body, then, figures centrally as a pedagogical site for understanding how transgender and gender non-conforming Chican@s make the world intelligible for themselves, which is wedded to Paulo Freire's narration of our ontological vocation to become more fully human, a process or crossing that is by necessity ongoing and not necessarily a process that ends.<sup>5</sup>

### Statement of the Problem

As a person, I, as a people, we, Chicanos blame ourselves, hate ourselves, terrorize ourselves. Most of this goes on unconsciously; we only know that we are hurting, we suspect that there is something "wrong" with us, something fundamentally "wrong."  
--Gloria E. Anzaldúa, 1987

For a moment, I would like to point to Gloria Anzaldúa's use of quotation marks around "wrong." This is significant on many levels, as it is a play upon the fact that Chican@s over time and through the process of colonialism have been taught that they are less valuable, less worthy and, subsequently, this has produced a condition of prolonged hurting, a melancholic position.<sup>6</sup> Meaning that what is "wrong" with Chican@s is perhaps not anything at all, but rather it is the repression of the historical violences that Chican@ communities have sustained over time. Historically, U.S. ideologies of racial and gender superiority have been constructed and maintained through violence, and subsequently these discourses and ideologies create what it means to be a "man" or "woman" (Heidenreich 60). These gender constructs then, already work

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<sup>5</sup> Paulo Freire talks about subject formation as ongoing throughout *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*.

<sup>6</sup> This is posited by Pérez-Torrez in his book: *Mestizaje: Critical Uses of Race in Chicano Culture*.

to relegate racialized masculinities and femininities as outside normative understandings of gender; foreclosing personhood, dignity and humanity for Chicanas and Chicanos. This idea of there being something “wrong,” then produces a position of prolonged hurting and longing; therefore, the term *dolor* characterizes the marginalization and abjection felt daily by Chicanas and Chicanos as their bodies fail to signify within the U.S. nation-state.

Within Chicana/o Studies, Chicano cultural formations and Chicano culture there is a resilience of masculinist culture and discourse and subsequently in the Chicana/o community, gender non-conforming and transgender Chican@s face derision and disavowal given that they do not fit in stable gendered categories of Chicana and Chicano. These stable identity categories I am referring to are embedded in the normalizing imperative of Chicano cultural nationalism that historically excluded Chicanas, Chicana lesbians, and gay Chicanos. There is already a historical context for the current subject position of transgender and gender non-conforming Chican@s as inadmissible subjects, given the documented struggles of Chicana feminists, Chicana feminist lesbians and gay Chicanos.

Transgender Chican@s, however, complicate how Chicana feminists and Queer Chicana/o scholars, up to this point, have theorized the exclusion and marginalization of Aztlán’s queers. Transgender and gender non-conforming Chican@ varied sexual and gender practices and narratives remain at the margins of theoretical space envisioned in Cherrie Moraga’s “Queer Aztlán.” Subsequently, I argue that the transgender and gender non-conforming body then has the potential to push forward a *sitio y lengua* that further pervert the critiques of Chicano cultural nationalism that Chicana feminist and queer Chicana/o scholarship on the intersections of race,

gender and sexuality has given us.<sup>7</sup> This failure to signify in the American imaginary paired with the proliferation of masculinist ideologies in the Chicano cultural historical imaginary creates a precarious position for transgender and gender non-conforming Chican@s who are marginalized both within and outside their communities.<sup>8</sup> This relegates them to a subordinate position where discourses of transphobia, homophobia and racism enact themselves upon their bodies and invite the repetition of the violence of disavowal.

What we know about the transgender community is filtered through both a racialized and a heteronormative guise, given that recognition of transgender individuals usually occurs through a sensationalized news story; a good example being the murder of Brandon Teena which is portrayed in the feature film *Boys Don't Cry*. This film drew on sympathy for the pain that the victim suffered by creating potential for those outside of the transgender community to recognize the pain of the victims, who are portrayed as just like them *except* for their gender identity “disorders/problems.”<sup>9</sup> What this does, however, is create a politics of visibility that is premised on a normalizing imperative, whereas transgender bodies are non-threatening so long as they successfully “pass” or are dead.<sup>10</sup>

This trope of discovery and subsequent violence justified by a discovery of “deception” is all too common in transgender of color narratives. Transgender and gender non-conforming people of color have been described as a highly “vulnerable” population due to the fact most

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<sup>7</sup> I am indebted to the scholarship by Chicana feminist scholars, specifically the following scholars/writers: Emma Pérez, Yvonne Yarbro-Bejarano, Cherrie Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa. I also borrow the concept of “*sitio y lengua*” from Emma Pérez’s essay “Sexuality and Discourse”

<sup>8</sup> Many Chicana feminists and Queer Chicana/o scholars and writers have critiqued the politics of Chicano cultural nationalism including but not limited to: Richard T. Rodriguez, Emma Pérez, Cherrie Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa.

<sup>9</sup> Brandon Teena was a “trans” male who was brutally murdered in 1993 his story was portrayed in the Academy Award Winning Film *Boys Don't Cry* (1999) as well as in the documentary *The Brandon Teena Story*. Brandon Teena has also been an icon of dispute in among Transgender and Lesbian communities who both maintain Teena was members of their respective communities.

<sup>10</sup> Richard Juang’s essay “Transgendering the Politics of Recognition” discusses at length the concept of social death.

cannot pass or signify as a heteronormative white male or female. Violence is what makes these bodies visible but this also is simultaneously coupled with erasure and disavowal, which then circumvents the current position of transgender and gender non-conforming Chican@s, both within and outside the Chicano community. What we do know about transgender and gender non-conforming Chican@s is constructed discursively through a lens of homophobia, heteropatriarchy, and transphobia (these terms are not mutually exclusive).

Data tells us that hate violence is almost four times more likely to occur to transgender people of color than to white transgender and queer populations (“Hate Violence Against Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer Communities in the United States in 2009”). What is just as disconcerting regarding the overrepresentation of transgender and gender non-conforming people of color as victims is the over-representation of men of color as perpetrators of violence. This reproduces stereotypical representations of men of color, Mexican-American and Chicano masculinity that signify as always already heteronormative, sexist, and patriarchal. This understanding of Chicano masculinity then forecloses the possibility for queer or non-normative desires, as well as non-normative gender expression and practices. Therefore, the question of violence against both transgender and gender non-conforming Chican@s becomes normalized into larger mainstream transgender and queer activist campaigns for “protection” of white transgender, gender non-conforming, and LGB individuals from men of color.

Current solutions proposed by mainstream transgender and LGB organizations for hindering hate and bias motivated crimes toward transgender and gender non-conforming individuals are hate-crime laws that add more jail time. As discussed in the works of Linda Heidenreich, Talia Mae Bettcher, and Dean Spade this does not solve the problem for the Chicana/o community, as it further criminalizes Chicanos and extends the work of the prison

industrial complex and does not get to the heart of the matter, meaning, the ways in which homophobia and transphobia have been constructed as part of the fabric of Chicano culture by way of a history of colonialism and racism in the U.S.<sup>11</sup> Moreover, while transgender and gender non-conforming Chican@s are vulnerable to physical violence, the nature in which their deaths/beatings become sensationalized do nothing to curb the violence. Instead, the narrative of violence is taken up to aid mainstream LGBT equal rights organizing campaigns whose gains do not ensure safety for Chican@ communities. In other words, the campaigns criminalize the Chican@ community. Consequently, transgender and gender non-conforming Chican@s can be described as a population that is simultaneously “much too seen and not seen at all” (Cheng, 90).

Transgender and gender non-conforming Chican@s, complicate notions of passing and recognition, however it is these tropes that are commonly central in most studies of transgender populations. Here it is important to understand how to distinguish between the “study of transgender phenomena” and transgender studies. Susan Stryker (year) argues that “the study of transgender phenomena” has a long-standing history as a project in cultures of European origin, while Transgender Studies has emerged as a new critical project whose emergence is closely tied to the “postmodern condition.” Both approaches, however, have constructed transgender and gender non-conforming Chican@s as non-agents, and non-celebrated “gender outlaws.” Transgender populations of color are most often constructed as “phenomena” given their limited access to resources that characterize their “vulnerability” as a population. This also informs their outsider status as “non-passing” which does nothing to further the work of the medical discourse has done to program transsexual individuals to essentially disappear, hence producing “good

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<sup>11</sup> For more on the work of the prison industrial complex and race, class and gender, see: *Are Prisons Obsolete?* by Angela Davis, and *Golden Gulag: Surplus, Crisis and Opposition in Globalizing California* by Ruth Wilson Gilmore

transgender/transsexual subjects.”<sup>12</sup> Not all Transgender Chican@s, however, adhere to the rigidity of the “stealth narrative,” which requires an individual to erase their personal history so that they may be accepted by society. This presents ill effects for transgender/transsexual activists who wish to posit a politics of sexual/gender exceptionalism with the homogenizing propensity of neoliberal times (i.e. “we are just like you, we can disappear seamlessly into the gender binary.”)<sup>13</sup>

Transgender and gender non-conforming Chican@s’ bodies of color and variegated gender and sexual practices/politics complicate common tropes of recognition, passing, discovery, and deception. The complication is largely attributed to the circumscription of historical traumas upon the brown transgender body, whereby “*transgender* bears an intimate and, in many ways, polemically charged relationship to those versions of the term *queer* that equate it with making visible heteronormativity’s occluded structures and operations” (“The Transgender Issue”, 149). As such, theorizing the transgender and gender non-conforming subjectivities in ways that bring the intersections of race, class, gender and sexuality to the fore has the possibility as Jacqui Alexander (2005) writes, to “destabilize existing practices of knowing and thus cross the fictive boundaries of exclusion and marginalization” (6).

Finally, due to the discursive construction of the transgender and gender non-conforming Chican@ body and the subsequent “vulnerable” status imparted upon this population, it is clear that currently there is not an accessible space or language that takes into account the variegating textures of experiences of such a diverse population; and furthermore, a recognition that the creation of this *sitio y lengua* is not enough. For this reason then, the task at hand is to center the

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<sup>12</sup> “Stealth” is a term frequently used among transsexual and transgendered persons to describe the ability to be able to pass and go undetected in their desired gender.

<sup>13</sup> See the work of D. Irving, “Normalized Transgressions: Legitimizing the Transgender Body as Productive” in *Radical History Review* 2008(100): 38-59

racialized, gendered, classed queer body and the various strategies such bodies deploy to make the world intelligible to themselves. With the body as a pedagogical site, affect (or emotions, feelings) becomes the theoretical tool that can span across multiple disciplines to situate the transgender and gender non-conforming Chican@ body within Chicana/o, Queer and Transgender studies, not as social phenomena but as self-determining historical subjects and agents.

### **Central Questions**

At this current historical moment, when there are more and more Chican@s suffering from bullying and navigating the shortcomings of institutions like schools, government agencies, and the courts as well as dying from racially motivated homophobic and transphobic violence, how then have these violences persisted over time? Social, political, cultural or emotional life of Chican@ transgender and gender non-conforming populations have not been documented in scholarly work, as Marcia Ochoa notes in her 2010 essay, “Latina/o Transpopulations,” “no published monograph exists that focuses exclusively on any Latina/o transpopulations” (230).<sup>14</sup> This is not to say that Chicana feminists and Chicana lesbian feminists such as Anzaldúa and Moraga for example, have not theorized the nuances of gendered, racialized, classed and queer bodies, but rather that most of these works are largely situated within gender binaries, whereby male/female bodies are central to theorizing racism, sexism and homophobia.

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<sup>14</sup> In her essay, she defines transpopulations, the dynamics of Latina/o “transpopulations” and finally provides an overview of trends and gaps in the literature on Latina/o transpopulations. Ochoa chooses to use the term “transpopulations” because aside from its usefulness as an empirical category that references individual experience, social networks, “community” or group category, but also to avoid unifying trans experiences or social formations.



A major goal of this dissertation is not to supplant an existing radical curriculum; but instead to work with an already rich cultural history of a “Queer Aztlán” in order to deploy a pedagogy that engages “transgender,” “queer” and “Chicana/o” histories that consider the implicit mutual exclusivity of each of these terms. The central questions of this dissertation are informed by Jacqui Alexander’s understanding of pedagogy:

...as something given, as in handed, revealed; as in breaking through, transgressing, disrupting, displacing, inverting inherited concepts and practices, those psychic, analytic and organizational methodologies we deploy to know what we believe we know so as to make different conversations and solidarities possible; as both epistemic ontological project bound to our beingness and, therefore, akin to Freire’s formulation of pedagogy as an indispensable methodology. (Alexander 7)

To this complex understanding of pedagogy my work adds by centering the body and the psychic as well as material processes that inform how the body knows and how the body *feels*. I argue that centering the body and the knowledge produced by the body requires a centering of emotion, affect, and feelings, as sites of analysis for theorizing transgender survival practices. This dissertation asks how can affect, emotion and feelings serve as productive sites of analysis for understanding the multifaceted and multilayered effects that the nexus of transphobia, racism, sexism and homophobia incurs upon the Chican@ transgender and gender non-conforming body.

Given that the Chican@ transgender and gender non-conforming body, figures as both inside/outside Chicana/o Studies, Transgender and Queer Studies, this dissertation pushes forward a rethinking of categories of social relations so that the materiality of embodied experiences of queer and gender non-conforming individuals do not go unnoticed. Central to this dissertation is the critique of Chicana/o, Transgender and Queer Studies’ production of the transgender body as both present and absent, as well as the positioning of this population as “vulnerable” and “non-agents.” Therefore, I ask what sorts of affects, emotions and feelings do discourses of racism, hetero-patriarchy, homophobia and transphobia produce and how do these

affects of oppression inform the body, and lastly what kinds of strategies does the body employ for survival and sustenance? What makes this study distinct is that “positive affects” such as love, desire and pleasure figure just as importantly as negative affects such as hate and disgust. Gendered violence has figured prominently within academic works in Chicana/o, Transgender and Queer Studies, as violence oftentimes produces intimate sites, understanding how the residual effects of colonialism manifest themselves in both psychic and material ways. My work builds upon this scholarship by situating transgender hate and bias motivated violence in a socio-historical context while also pointing towards a model of healing for Chicana/o communities, by centering pedagogical strategies for survival as they are enacted by the Chican@ transgender and gender non-conforming body.

This study not only interrogates the Chicano cultural historical imagination to unearth what we know about transgender gender non-conforming Chican@s but also employs a necessarily trans and queer of color gaze, in order to interpret cultural formations so as to not reinscribe bodies with the same colonial imaginaries that have historically pushed these bodies into liminality. Moreover, because this study is guided by a decolonial imperative, the research questions do not focus on what is wrong with transgender and gender non-conforming bodies or with the Chican@ community, but rather on what can the Chican@ community do to heal colonial relations and histories that have occasioned the emergence of homophobic, transphobic, and patriarchal discourses that have assured the disavowal of transgender and gender non-conforming bodies from the Chicano historical imaginary. And lastly, to clarify, this study is not concerned with critiquing the Chican@ community as transphobic, homophobic or patriarchal, given that such an approach only functions to further pathologize Chicana/os as backwards in

relationship to mainstream America and its neoliberal discourses of U.S. sexual exceptionalism.<sup>15</sup>

### **Assembling the Archive: *Sitios* de Amor y Dolor**

“What are the discursive formations that  
pattern the twentieth (and twenty-first) century  
Chicana/o historical imagination defined  
as our self-conscious recognition of  
who we are now and how we arrived here?  
--Emma M. Pérez, 1999

Emma Perez’s words echo the importance of articulating the construction of an archive that is comprised of discursive formations that can illuminate the central questions discussed above. Queer Studies scholar Ann Cvetkovich and Chicana/o Studies scholar Richard T. Rodriguez for example, have assembled their own cultural archives for studying Queer and Chicana/o social, cultural and political life. Similarly, assembling an archive that centers the representation of the transgender and gender non-conforming Chican@ subject helps to illustrate how categories such as gender, race and sexuality are constructed discursively, but are also spatially enacted in the Chican@ cultural historical imaginary. These sites, or *sitios*, are also imbued with the affective work of racism, homophobia and transphobia, which are made visible through the interrogation of the transgender and gender non-conforming body as it is constructed discursively. Discursive formations are a “cluster of ideas, images, and practices that construct knowledge of, ways of talking about, and forms of conduct associated with a particular topic, social activity, or institutional site in society” (Hall 6). For this reason, I point to post-Chicano movement cultural production and discursive formations that work to problematize the

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<sup>15</sup> For more on U.S. exceptionalism and Queer exceptionalism see Jasbir Puar’s *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times*

heteronormative and gender normative discourses of Chicano nationalism, as well as the oftentimes racist and sexist exclusionary practices of queer and transgender politics, in order to resituate transgender and gender non-conforming Chican@s within a politics of resistance and self-determination. Rather, through new readings, these discursive formations can re-imagine the social, cultural and politic possibilities available to transgender and gender non-conforming Chican@s, without reinscribing racist, homophobic and transphobic discourse that position them as non-agents.

Emma Pérez's theoretical space, the decolonial imaginary, is "the rupturing space that functions as an alternative to that which is written in history, an interstitial space located within a time lag between the colonial and post-colonial where differential politics and dilemmas are negotiated and enacted" (*Decolonial Imaginary* 6). Furthermore, Pérez argues that when written from an interstitial space, Chicana/o history happens oppositionally ("Decolonial Imaginary" 7). The decolonial imaginary is also the place from which the gaps and silences are heard; it is the place wherein these cultural and discursive formations produce meaning. Pérez's text opens up the field of Chicana/o history by engendering Chicano history; her work "sexes" the colonial imaginary and tracks Chicana agency on the colonial landscape. The transgender and gender non-conforming body then, is a pedagogical site that springs forth from this theoretical space or "*sitio*." In order to be able to track the ways in which the Chican@ transgender body has both persisted over time and continues to navigate an ever increasing hostile world, the assembling of an archive is necessary.

As recent works in Queer Studies have demonstrated, *feeling backwards* or centering the affects produced from reading back the persistence of deviant bodies, practices and social formations upon history are integral to lesbian, gay and bisexual political movements. In such

affective imaginings that have been theorized by Heather Love, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, Christopher Nealon and Elizabeth Freeman, the politics of affect have refigured the construction of archives for re-telling LGBT histories.<sup>16</sup> Furthermore, in Stryker's introduction to "The Transgender Studies Issue" of *GLQ*, she articulates the concept of "desubjugated knowledges," which spring from what Foucault refers to as, "historical contents that have been masked or buried in functional coherences or formal systemization" and "a whole series of knowledges that have been disqualified as nonconceptual knowledges ... hierarchically inferior knowledges, knowledges that are below the required level of erudition or scientificity" (Foucault in "Desubjugated Knowledges" 12-13). For Stryker, it is precisely these types of knowledges that transgender people (academic or not) have embodied from their everyday experiences and relationships to discourses and institutions that act upon and through them ("Desubjugated Knowledges" 13). Moreover, the radical potential of Transgender Studies lies in the desubjugation of previously marginalized epistemologies about gendered subjectivity and sexed embodiment. The linking together of disparate forms of knowledge located in the approved archives and canons and which is disqualified by academe (lived embodied experience) allows a "recapturing" or a "historical knowledge of particular structurations of power" ("Desubjugated Knowledges" 13). Therefore, taking a cue from Chicana, Queer and Transgender scholarship, I have assembled an archive that ranges in genre, but points to specific historical moments and

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<sup>16</sup> Freeman, Elizabeth. "Turn the Beat Around: Sadomasochism, Temporality, History." *differences* 19.1 (2008): 32-70.

Love, Heather. *Feeling Backward: Loss and the Politics of Queer History*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2007. Print

Nealon, Christopher S. *Foundlings: Lesbian and Gay Historical Emotion before Stonewall*. Durham: Duke UP, 2001.

Sedgwick, Eve Kosofsky., and Adam Frank. *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity*. Durham: Duke UP, 2003. Print.

ideological and political debates that circumscribe the positionality of the transgender and gender non-conforming Chican@ body psychically, socially, economically and politically.

While this study is not historical, it is informed by the interventions made by Pérez, whose work employs non-traditional sources such as novels, music, art and public records to read them through what she terms a decolonial queer gaze that contests absences of queer and non-normative bodies.<sup>17</sup> Just as Perez tracked desire upon the colonial landscape and Cvetkovich refigured trauma in her archive of feeling, my study looks to a myriad of sources to identify the various affects within the discursive formations that have mapped out the presence as well as the absence of the transgender and gender non-conforming Chican@ body.

The corpus of transgender Chican@ related texts I have put together to support my arguments about Transgender Chican@ subjectivity comprise only a handful of cultural texts and represent only a fraction of the multitude of cultural texts that center on gender non-conforming Chican@ subjects. Rather than putting together the many cultural texts available, I have selected texts that occur temporally, spatially, and affectively in relation to important “events” or happenings that are easily locatable in the Chicana/o historical imaginary and LGBT history. Specifically, this dissertation examines texts such as Emma Perez’s historical novel *Forgetting the Alamo, Or, Blood Memory*; the film *A Girl Like Me: The Gwen Araujo Story*; the documentary *Trained in the Ways of Men*; as well as court documents related to the murder trial of Gwen Araujo; the “Matthew Shepard and James Byrd, Jr. Hate Crimes Prevention Act,” and auto-ethnographic observations on pedagogy. These texts readily expose memory’s hard places, by exposing zones of conflict and complicity, creation and erasure, deafening silences, and the screams of resistance that offer a vision of a world worth fighting for.

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<sup>17</sup> See Pérez’s essay “Queering the Borderlands” where she describes the queer decolonial gaze that “sees, acts, interprets, and mocks all at once in order to survive and to reconstitute a world where s/he is not seen by the white colonial heteronormative mind” (124).

## **Decolonial Hermeneutics: El Sabor del Amor y del Dolor**

Somewhere between Foucault's archaeology and  
genealogy, supplemented with a perverse reading of  
psychoanalysis, may lie new perspectives  
for understanding the making, or the poetic, of  
history and its study.  
--*Emma M. Pérez, 1999*

Again, Emma Perez's words signals the theoretical underpinnings for the interpretive practices employed in this work. Pérez (1999) describes a Foucauldian methodological approach paired with a "perverse" reading of psychoanalysis as presenting new ways of writing Chicana/o history. I argue that by a "perverse" reading of psychoanalysis, Pérez is intimating at a re-working of psychoanalysis, one that does not solely rely on the strict diagnostic demands of ego-psychology. Moreover, affects' attention to the body and the unutterable become the conduit for positing a more complex rendering of the gendered ethnic-racialized subject in a Chicana/o Studies context. Pérez is by no means dismissive of psychoanalysis but she points to its limitations in her descriptions of body, memory, history, "and what of the unspoken, the unthought harbored in a memory so brutal that repression is the body's only form of survival?" ("Decolonial Imaginary" 108).

Theories of affect provide a vocabulary to articulate the indescribable, unspeakable effects of racism, homophobia and transphobia that enact what Perez describes as repression, but perhaps this is the body's mechanism for manifesting the transference of pain and pleasure through the body for survival. According to Deborah Gould (2009), "the force of affect, along with its bodily, nonconscious, nonlinguistic, inchoate, and non-transparent qualities, is particularly motivating in this regard; you sense that you have been moved, that you are feeling

something, but you do not quite know what it is because you lack immediate access to it; those qualities spur and give force to the impetus to make sense of affective state(s)” (28). It is this concept of “affective states/positions” in relationship to the brown body that Jose Esteban Muñoz’s describes as “feeling down, feeling brown.”<sup>18</sup> I expand on this notion further in the next chapter, as it enables me to engage the survival strategies of the transgender and gender non-conforming Chican@ body in the *longue durée*.

The theoretical framework, is informed by recent scholarship in Affect Studies, specifically Queer and Feminist Cultural Studies of affect and emotion.<sup>19</sup> I also point to foundational Chicana feminist texts such as Perez’s *Decolonial Imaginary* and Sandoval’s *Methodology of the Oppressed*, as these works also engage the dimensions of affective life, but are oftentimes overlooked. I hope to expand upon this burgeoning field of scholarship that addresses the salience of using affect to theorize racialized, gendered and sexualized subjects, which requires what Ann Cheng (2009) describes as a “state of hermeneutic uncertainty” that requires listening to that which “pass[es] out of the realm of hearing,” which I interpret as a cue to return to the body. Whereas “the body is a pedagogical device, a location of recentering and recontextualizing the self and the stories that emanate from the self,” in this case the transgender and gender non-conforming body becomes the site from which the many stories emerge that not

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<sup>18</sup> See Jose Esteban Muñoz’s article “Feeling Brown, Feeling Down: Latina Affect”

<sup>19</sup> Ahmed, Sara. *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004. Print.  
 Cvetkovich, Ann. *An Archive of Feelings: Trauma, Sexuality, and Lesbian Public Cultures*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2003. Print.  
 Freeman, Elizabeth. *Time Binds, or Erotohistoriography*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2010. Print.  
 Gould, Deborah B. *Moving Politics: Emotion and ACT UP’s Fight against AIDS*. Chicago: University of Chicago, 2009. Print.  
 Love, Heather. *Feeling Backward: Loss and the Politics of Queer History*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2007. Print.  
 Muñoz, Jose Esteban. “Feeling Brown, Feeling Down: Latina Affect, the Performativity of Race, and the Depressive Position.” *Signs: Journal of Women and Culture and Society* 31.3 (2006): 675-688.  
 Ngai, Sianne. *Ugly Feelings*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005. Print.  
 Puar, Jasbir. *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times (Next Wave: New Directions in Womens Studies)*. London: Duke University Press, 2007. Print.



only counter the racist, homophobic and transphobic discourses that have come to categorize and pathologize the transgender and gender non-conforming body of color, but the body is a site for potentiality (Cruz 72). Returning to the body and the affective strategies it employs is a return to thinking about pedagogy in ways that directly connect knowledge to the body and, as such, a turn towards praxis. Moreover, it is precisely through such a pedagogical process that the body also serves as a potential site for the “the development of consciousness and the construction of knowledge” (Darder 2002). This pedagogy of survival then has the possibility to enact a liberatory and humanizing praxis of recognition. Moreover, if praxis is the dialectic between practice and theory, then we see survival and affirmation enacted through the affective strategies employed by the transgender and gender non-conforming Chican@ body.

The use of affect to analyze psychic, social and cultural dimensions pushes forward political strategies for understanding the mechanisms and processes that construct the discursive formations about transgender and gender non-conforming Chican@s interrogated in this work. Furthermore, given the colonial history of Chicana/os in the United States and the profound and enduring melancholia that history has bequeathed us, it is certainly imperative to identify strategies for tracking the affective and imaginary attachments generated by affects like *amor y dolor*. The domain of psychic life has remained strictly apart from the material effects of the legacies of racism, homophobia, patriarchy, and imperialism for too long and for this reason I call for an acknowledgement and acceptance of what I refer to as “hermeneutic uncertainties,” to explore how oppression conditions the very possibility of subjecthood, instead of focusing on the more familiar question, how does oppression suppress the subject. So then, *el sabor del amor y del dolor* as a hermeneutical strategy traces pleasures, traumas, pains and love as a part of beingness, and thus is also a hermeneutics susceptible to what has previously been silenced.

## Summary of Chapters

Chapter two articulates the simultaneous absence and presence of transgender and gender non-conforming Chican@s. In this chapter, I argue that within Chicana/o, Transgender and Queer Studies the transgender and gender non-conforming Chican@ body occupies a position that is both absent and present. Absence and presence, recognition, and misrecognition are then articulated through deployments of the transgender and gender non-conforming body within these three fields of study. This chapter then culminates in a call to expand paradigms of racialized sexuality in Chicana/o studies in order to recognize the presence of the gender non-conforming and transgender Chicana/o bodies as a site inquiry.

Building on the work of Queer Chicana Feminist scholars, I maintain that the transgender and gender non-conforming body confounds Aztlán's masculinist and heteropatriarchal symbolic field of signification, therefore a new *lengua* and new symbolic field must emerge. This strategy represents the "*sabor del amor y del dolor*" that springs from Pérez's call for perverting of psychoanalysis, thereby positing a decolonial and perverse interpretive strategy to study the radically perverse. Borrowing from Emma Pérez's *Decolonial Imaginary*, chapter three and four are the "case studies" wherein the interpretive strategies theorized are deployed.

Chapter Three takes on the genre of the "passing narrative" in the historical novel *Forgetting the Alamo, Or, Blood Memory* by Emma Pérez to interrogate the historically contentious Butch/FTM border wars that have positioned the trans-masculine and gender non-conforming body as a site where Queer Studies and Transgender Studies clash. In this chapter, I "trans" this theoretical debate by examining how racialized bodies complicate the "butch" and "FTM" borderlands.

I undertake a critique of “exceptional” transgender history, whereby icons are created and identified to create a “passing” and “gender bending” history—a project that in this case fails to interrogate the highly tenuous racialized socio-political context of the “American West” by centering the t(r)opography created in Pérez’s main character Micaela. Passing then comes to signify or have meaning only within White transgender history. I then turn to Pérez’s novel to show how “passing” can become a strategy of survival, specifically for transgender and gender non-conforming Chican@s. I argue that Pérez’s novel queers, sexes and “transgenders” the Chicana/o historical imaginary through an affective process of “forgetting” in order to remember, deployed through the centering of a gender non-conforming Chicana character. Unlike Lou Sullivan’s project, which can be categorized as a recovery project through which Garland’s racial position becomes erased, Pérez knowingly pushes through “blood memories” to fundamentally engender and confront the legacy of colonial violence of the “American West”. Pérez’s novel pushes forward a historical project proposed in her writings as well as those engaged by other Chicana/o historians seeking to expand the disciplinary confines of Chicana/o historiography.

Chapter Four examines the discursive formations surrounding the murder of Gwen Amber Rose Araujo, through court documents and the films *Trained in the Ways of Men* and *A Girl Like Me: The Gwen Araujo Story*. In this chapter, I argue that the death of Gwen Araujo complicates the social death narrative constructed in Transgender Studies and challenges Chicana feminist writings on Chicano masculinity and heteropatriarchy. Through a close reading of these discursive formations, I situate Gwen’s death within a larger legacy of “Mexican Woman hating,” first posited by Deena J. Gonzalez. I build on that by looking at how hate

becomes attached to racialized and gender non-conforming bodies.<sup>20</sup> Through a close reading of court documents, I argue that the tropes of (mis)recognition and deception present in writings about transgender women of color reinscribe racialized and gendered colonial violence that undergird hate motivated transphobic violence, perpetrated against transgender and gender non-conforming Chican@s.

Lastly, the chapter critically interrogates how the intersections of race, gender and sexuality are being redefined by the neoliberal, post 9/11 era. The chapter problematizes the racially myopic strategies employed by transgender equality organizing by offering a reading of the death of Gwen Araujo and the “Matthew Shepard and James Byrd, Jr. Hate Crimes Prevention Act,” that situates transgender hate and bias motivated violence in a socio-historical context and critiques the neoliberal racial politics that imbue transgender and LGB equal rights politics. Such political struggles create what Deborah Gould terms “emotional habitus.” My work pushes this concept further by asserting that transgender and gender non-conforming people of color emit political emotions that are outside of mainstream LGBT politics precisely because brown queer and transgender bodies figure only as evidentiary matter for demonstrating hate motivated violence to LGBT communities more broadly, yet oftentimes cannot access and enjoy the rights being fought for.

Chapter five serves as a conclusion where I return to the world proposed by the Zapatistas, “...la dignidad debiera ser el mundo, un mundo donde quepan muchos mundos.” I conclude the dissertation by returning to Paulo Freire’s formulation of pedagogy as an indispensable methodology for teaching values about what it means to live in this world and to relate to other

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<sup>20</sup> See Gonzalez’s Essay, “Lupe’s Song: On the Origins of Mexican Woman Hating in the U.S.”

human beings. Reflecting on the arguments made in the body of this work, this study seeks to breakthrough, cross, transgress, and disrupt how transgender and gender non-conforming Chican@s are discursively constructed in Aztlán, I move conversation towards creating new solidarities and methodologies in the form of “Travesía Pedagogy”.

Having discussed at length the impact of psychic and somatic violence that accompanies transphobia, homophobia and racism, I conclude with the possibility for healing. How do we circumvent the proliferation of homophobic, transphobic, and racist discourses in our worlds? What does it truly mean to move towards a world where Chican@s as a people do not hate ourselves or terrorize ourselves or each other both in the home and in schools? In “Travesía Pedagogy,” travesía springs from Gloria Anzaldúa’s concept of crossing and is central to the process of moving out of the Coatlicue state. This is then a project bound to beingness and a conscious and deliberate acknowledgement of changing how we deploy gendered, racialized, sexualized discourses—discourses that have the potential to disrupt the project of a masculinist and heterosexist Aztlán. In its place, this study seeks to build a new language and conceptualization, embracing the wisdom of Gloria Anzaldua’s words: “*We change ourselves, we change the world.*”

## CHAPTER 2

### EL SABOR DEL AMOR Y DEL DOLOR: THE CHICAN@ TRANS BODY AS ARCHIVE

...while the politics of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgendered activists of color might recognize heteronormativity as a primary system of power structuring our lives, it understands that heteronormativity interacts with institutional racism, patriarchy and class exploitation to define us in numerous ways as marginal and oppressed subjects.  
--Cathy Cohen, 1997

#### Introduction

The categorization of transgender populations of color as “vulnerable” by policy makers, academics, researchers and activists has contributed to positioning trans people of color as very visible, while simultaneously making invisible the various socio-historical discourses and exclusionary practices that contribute to disciplining these bodies into vulnerable positions. There is no doubt, that trans people of color, specifically trans youth of color who have limited access to resources, support and self report, fear of harassments as well as a lack of support from their schools and families. Qualitative studies by Sausa, Wyss, Grossman & D’Augelli found that transgender youth are cognizant of their “vulnerability” as a population. In addition, these researchers also touch upon the survival skills youth employed in schools. However, these studies, designed to bring attention to “vulnerability” and real life experiences of transgender youth and adults, inadvertently further the “transgender phenomena” model of research that transgender scholars like Susan Stryker critique in their work.

These studies are rich in data that establish reasonable evidence that transgender populations are a social group “who experience relatively more illness, premature death, and diminished quality of life than comparable groups;” but attribute this status primarily to the

exhibition of “gender-atypical” behavior among transgender individuals (Grossman & D’Augelli xv; 113). These studies contribute to the fatal coupling of high visibility and vulnerability that unwittingly circumvents the experiences of transgender youth, specifically transgender youth of color. This coupling of vulnerability and visibility are fatal precisely because of the lack of resources and opportunities available to trans youth of color. This facilitates an erasure within transgender equality politics of trans bodies of color in order to acquire the resources to eradicate societies’ stronghold to gender binaries. Transgender people of color, who are overrepresented in hate-related violent acts (specifically murders), are stuck as evidence of transphobic violence, but are largely invisible as social agents. The work remains to “unstick” the transgender body of color from this discursive objectification, as evidentiary matter to prove there is transphobia, while also acknowledging that trans people of color do experience harassment, discrimination and limited access to resources. This can best be done through an analytical framework that centers the interlocking nature of systems of domination as first posited by the Combahee River Collective in 1977 for analyzing one’s place in the world. As described by Cathy Cohen, there are numerous systems of oppression that “interact to regulate and police the lives of most people,” in this case it is racism, sexism, classism and homophobia that work together with transphobia to structure the world that trans folks of color must navigate (441).

The establishment of trans people of color solely as vulnerable, occludes tactics for resilience, resistance and survival that trans folks employ, even if it oftentimes put them at a higher “risk” of “premature death and diminished quality of life” and reifies them among “deviant” non-citizen figurations such as sex workers, drug addicts, thieves, and wards of the state (welfare queens).<sup>21</sup> These raced, gendered, sexualized and classed figurations produce a

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<sup>21</sup> See Puar’s *Terrorist Assemblages* for her discussion “deviant non-citizens” in relationship to terrorist bodies.

systematic disavowal that circumscribes their bodies as in excess, a threat and a burden. However, as Cohen notes, through “existence and everyday survival we embody sustained and multi-sited resistance to systems (based on dominant constructions of race and gender) that seek to normalize our sexuality, exploit our labor, and constrain [dictate] our visibility” (440).<sup>22</sup> The challenge then is to examine the intersection of oppression and resistance as it is enacted by and upon the trans Chican@ body, to further understand the varying relationships to power that different bodies have in varying historical, social, cultural and historical contexts. In this chapter, I argue through a Queer, Transgender and Chicana/o studies framework that the trans Chican@ body and its practices are informed by the intersections of racism, sexism, transphobia and homophobia. Additionally, I argue that the trans Chican@ body is continuously crafted and thereby not static, but nor is it fully owned, rather the body is an archive of the bodily practices that are deployed in response to both psychic and material forms of violence it incurs. The body’s response, in the form of survival practices and tactics, push up against racist, homophobic, sexist and transphobic discourses and exclusionary practices but are also mediated by both socio-historical context and the discourses themselves.

### **Crafting the Disciplinary Trans Chican@ Body**

...genealogy as a method thematizes the body,  
power, and social institutions where fictive truths  
and values are enacted upon the body.  
--Emma M. Pérez, 1999

This process relies on an intersectional framework that recognizes the varying relationships that queer and trans people of color have to power, in this case the varying gender



and sexual practices of trans Chicanas and Chicanos as well as the socio-historical and cultural nuances of this community. This framework is informed by Chicana/o Studies, Transgender Studies, Queer Studies and works that examine the intersections of these areas in similar ways as *This Bridge Called My Back*, which transformed and pushed the boundaries of Chicana/o Studies, informed the creation of Queer theory in its positing of a women of color feminism that interrogates non-normative subjectivities through its “theory of the flesh”; and a theory of embodied experience which also informs much of the literature in Transgender Studies. There are, however, important tensions between the three fields that requires sorting through when the three are deployed to analyze discursive formations that work to construct the trans Chican@ body.

A manuscript that builds upon the foundation of Chicana feminist work, queer scholars, and transgender scholars to attend to the complexities of Chican@ transgender and gender non-conforming subjectivity opens up new vocabularies that are not always already circumscribed by masculinist, heteropatriarchal discourses. Building on the call by the Combahee River collective for a critical analysis of the interlocking nature of oppression, transing the intersections of gender, sex, sexuality, and race bring transgender and gender non-conforming Chican@ subjectivity to center stage, which in turn represents a confrontation to the contours and boundaries of the fields of Chicana/o Studies, Queer Studies and Transgender Studies. Queer, Transgender and Chicana/o are contested terms both ontologically and epistemologically, whose meanings have shifted and continue to exist on shifting terrains. In relationship to bodies, the terms have been imposed, embraced, transformed and deployed in various social, cultural and political contexts over time. These fields of study are critical of various circuits of power that map particular discourses (racist, sexist, homophobic, transphobic, ableist) onto certain bodies

and, therefore, scholars in these areas participate in attachment and detachment from such discourses of the body through cultural critique. In their deployment these frameworks can potentially be exclusionary; for example in Queer and Transgender Studies, this has been enacted through the occlusion as well as the consumption of bodies of color and in Chicano Studies it has been through the subjugation of Chicanas and the abjection of *joteria*.<sup>23</sup> The trans Chican@ body springs from these occlusions, asserting its presence despite the excess these bodies represent to the fictive truths and values that Queer, Transgender and Chicana/o scholars have both purposefully attached or unknowingly attached to these populations.

For example, there would not be a “site” or “discourse” for talking about racialized gendered sexuality in Chicano Studies had Chicana lesbian and feminist scholars not provoked a complete paradigmatic shift by critiquing how Chicano Studies worked to foreground the family and subject in an institutionalized form of compulsory heterosexuality. Yarbrow-Bejarano called for work that made sexual identities and sexualities visible or recognizable within the dominant heteronormative and heteropatriarchal guise of Chicano Studies. While Cherrie Moraga’s *Loving in the War Years* had already “aired out Aztlán’s dirty language” so to speak. It was not until the early 1990s that a canon of “Queer” oriented critique of Chicana/o nationalism and its heteropatriarchal and heterosexist dimensions began to emerge.<sup>24</sup> The centering of gender and sexuality produced the following key paradigm shifts for Chicana/o Studies:

1. Research aimed at interrogating “racialized gender identities,” or “gendered racial identities”.

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<sup>23</sup> See Hiram Perez’s article in “What’s Queer About Queer Studies?” special issue in *Social Text* for his discussion on the consumption of queer bodies of color. Also a reference to Moraga’s use of the term *joteria* as “queer folk” in her essay “Queer Aztlán” which appears in her book *The Last Generation*.

<sup>24</sup> Non-coincidentally same period of the emergence of new queer critic, transgender studies and AIDS related activism, as well as the passage Anti-Immigrant policies in California

2. Chicana lesbian feminist inquiry that was beginning to document the rich social, political and cultural history of Chicana lesbian history (specifically Chicana butch/femme histories)<sup>25</sup>.
3. A renewed commitment by Chicana scholars to produce scholarship that conceptualized Chicanas as agents, not objects.
4. The articulation of “third space feminism”.

These paradigmatic shifts in the field were reflected in the renaming of the National Association of Chicano Studies to The National Association of Chicana Chicano Studies as well as the establishment of the Joto Caucus and the Lesbian, Bi-sexual Mujeres Transgender Caucus. As Richard T. Rodriguez has documented, gay Chicanos also contributed to critiquing the exclusionary politics of the Chicano movement, through cultural productions rather than academic discourse.

Yet and still, there is a reticence by scholars to push the paradigmatic shift a bit further and engage the question of trans Chicana and Chicano subjectivities, practices and social realities. There is only a handful of scholars that engage questions related to trans Chican@s, representing a significant gap given that the initial call for interrogating “gendered racial identities” came nearly 18 years ago. It is clear that new histories, stories and a re-making of “theories of the flesh” are necessary even within the third space posited by Chicana feminists Pérez and Sandoval. Pérez ends her book *The Decolonial Imaginary* with a “third space feminist revision” that declares “it is the maneuvering through time to retool and remake subjectivities neglected and ignored that third space feminism claims new histories” (“Decolonial Imaginary” 127). Although, Chicana lesbian feminists have been successful in claiming and naming new sites and discourses for reframing the inscriptions of coloniality upon the female body, there has

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<sup>25</sup> The work of Yvonne Yarbro-Bejarano, Deena Gonzalez, Alicia Gaspar de Alba, Emma Pérez, Carla Trujillo, Norma Alarcon, Anna Castillo, Catriona Rueda Esquibel, Ellie Hernandez have made invaluable contributions that document the politics of Chicana butch-femme subjectivities, analyzed how technologies of gender and desire inform Chicano patriarchy, offered critiques and perverse readings of Chicana/o cultural production, and documented a gendered and sexed Chicana history that turned Chicano history on its head

been little to no interrogation into what types of bodies, histories, subjectivities are remade or who counts as “female” or “male.” The creation of spaces, or *sitios*, indeed opened up a language for disputing what Rodriguez terms “heteropatriarchal articulations of cultural nationalism.” But does the failure to push racialized gender identities, so that they do not signify a racialized “male/female,” “descend into the pitfalls of coloniality when systems of thought remain unchallenged?” (R. Rodriguez 2; “Decolonial Imaginary” xvii)

Similar to Pérez’s methodology for reading gender and sexuality back onto the “Chicana/o historical imaginary,” the articulation of a trans Chican@ body requires a resistance to disciplining, in what Heidenreich characterizes as, “reading against the grain, disloyal to conventional disciplinary methods, and overtly oppositional—making strategic use of multiple methodologies to meet the multiple challenges of our lives” (53). Heidenreich’s article on the death of Gwen Araujo articulates a “Queer Chicana Methodology” which she deploys to theorize the simultaneous machinations of racism, sexism, homophobia and transphobia. However, what is central to her article is the use of Chicana feminist writings, not as evidence but rather as interpretive tools for discerning the discursive violence such systems of oppression do to bodies. As Sandra K. Soto has noted, the theoretical contributions of Chicana feminists have been historically positioned and deployed as “minoritarian” and “evidentiary” of intersectionality, rather than a radical hermeneutics for understanding how/why/where racialized (trans)gendered sexualities are part of social, historical, colonial relations in the U.S., which continue to “inscribe Chican@ subjectivity as well as the geopolitics of the U.S. borderlands” (6). These racialized, trans(gendered) sexualities exceed traditional gender binaries, which according to policy makers and researchers make trans Chican@s vulnerable, however, in this context they are outside the paradigms of Queer Chicana/o critique, as these bodies figure as sites of embodied knowledge,

which are not static. Or rather, “one is not simply oppressed or victimized; nor is one only oppressor or victimizer. Rather, one negotiates within the imaginary to a decolonizing otherness where all identities are at work in one way or another” (“Decolonial Imaginary” 7). In other words, the intersections of race, gender, class, and sexuality continually shift as the body encounters new discourses, pleasures and dangers.

The trans Chican@ body is formed through these encounters with pleasures, pain, pleasures that are painful, etc – what I am pointing to is the racialized, gendered, sexed body as a site of embodied knowledge whose contours and boundaries are formed by such encounters and also conditioned by them. Pérez writes, “the body is historically and socially constructed...it is written upon by the environment, by clothes, diet, exercise, illnesses, accidents...it is written upon by the kind of sex that is practiced upon the body and that the body practices” (“Decolonial Imaginary” 108). This is to say that the material body itself is engraved with psychic desires that manifest themselves in multiple ways, both through bodily practices but also in response to society’s repressive drive to discipline bodies that unhinge stable subject positions.<sup>26</sup> Just as society and repressive discursive regimes seek to discipline the body into “normal,” the trans Chican@ body pushes back. This resistance is more aptly attributed to constructing the community’s “vulnerability.” The trans Chican@ body refuses to be invisible, but also incurs the violence attributed with such risks – recognizing that the body emerges through both historical and social constructs. Hence, a methodology committed to interrogating both historical and social processes that work to construct, deconstruct and reconstruct trans Chican@ body again and again is essential to this political project. Given that Chicana/o Studies in its erasure

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<sup>26</sup> Foucault, Michel. *The History of Sexuality*. New York: Pantheon, 1978. Print.

of trans Chican@ body and practices also contributes the production of invisibility of the trans Chican@ body in discourse, there is a limit to which theoretical and methodological tools Chicana/o Studies can provide in sexing and (trans)gendering the Chicana/o historical and social imaginary. What Chicana/o Studies does provide however, is the construction of a *sitio* for discerning the trans Chican@ body's response to repression over time, which have constructed resistant, oppositional and transformative subjectivities.

While the trans Chican@ body figures as absent and invisible in Chicano Studies it is subsequently reproduced by this invisibility. Moreover, the trans body figures in Queer studies as a site of inquiry. Transgender bodies as metaphor in Queer Studies are described as productive spaces for furthering Queer Studies' commitment to challenging "normalizing mechanisms of state power to name its sexual subjects: Male or female, married or single, heterosexual or homosexual, natural or perverse" (Eng, Halberstam and Munoz 1). The trans body according to Halberstam is a "contradictory site in postmodernism" whereby the body becomes a productive player in postmodern debates about "space and sexuality, subcultural production, rural gender roles, art and gender ambiguity, the politics of biography, historical conceptions of manhood, gender and genre, and the local as opposed to the global" ("Queer Time" 21). Halberstam's argument about transgender bodies furthers the aims of queer studies and politics, in that the book seeks to retain the transgender body's productive contributions as a site of possibility for unpredictable gender identities and practices. While here, the trans body is centered as a discursive space for fleshing out postmodern debates, there is one key element missing, namely the flesh. The trans body as metaphor or object rectifies the promise of queer critique for challenging the normalizing and disciplining imperative of the state and of discourse but abandons other modes of difference such as race, class, and nationality.

The danger in the use of the trans body as metaphor is that it both creates the myth of a utopian body that is classless and raceless; but it also reifies Queer Studies' presumed exceptional status as having the "only and most significant pursuits" for study of sexuality as a discursive formation ("Of Our Normative Strivings" 85). Roderick Ferguson, writes about this extensively both in *Social Text* as well as in his book *Aberrations in Black*, in which he asserts that that women of color feminism has the longest engagement with racialized sexuality. Ferguson reads race, class and gender back onto Queer Studies, by returning to Cathy Cohen's challenge at the onset of the emergence of "new Queer Studies" in the early 1990s. In "Punks, Bulldaggers and Welfare Queens: The Radical Potential of Queer Politics," Cohen outlines "queer theory's" failure to be "truly liberating, transformative, and inclusive of all those who stand on the outside of the dominant constructed norm of state-sanctioned and white middle and upper-class heterosexuality" (Cohen 441). This, according to Cohen, constructs a type of queer exceptionalism, whereby only the White queer subject actively resists and challenges heteronormativity – leaving interlocking systems of power unexamined. While the trans body as metaphor creates possibilities for gender categories that are not static, it also reinscribes notions of trans subjectivities and embodiment that are only discernable by the white colonial heteronormative and not-so-queer eye.

For example, David Valentine's book *Imagining Transgender: Ethnography of a Category*, is an ethnography of the "conceptual space" of gender and sexuality as political formations that have been shaped and reshaped by historical development and institutionalized understandings of transgender and homosexuality (19). For Valentine, the institutionalization of how we understand "gender" and "sexuality" threatens erasure of the political promises of transgender as a theoretical category (as opposed to transgender subjectivities), which has the possibility to not

be complicit in larger accommodationist gay and lesbian politics, which rely on the separation of “gender” and “sexuality.” “Transgender,” then, does not become an “exceptional” category, but one that reflects everyday forms of “self-making” and transgender, and like any category one lives by, it straddles political, economic contexts and, above all, has a history that produces effects.

While Valentine, identifies “transgender” as an identity category that is liberatory for some, he positions transgender communities of color as non-agents in proximity to the term but as never fully inhabiting the “category” and, thus, further reifies their position as “other.” Valentine’s “queer eye” largely constructs and situates the sexual and gender practices of the majority of trans women of color who are his informants as within the “vulnerable” narrative. Valentine’s study looks at trans women of color in proximity to “transgender politics” but not necessarily served by or a part of such politics. These observations are important but Valentine’s preoccupation with his informants’ resistance to embrace an identity category that is named for them by medical discourse and social service providers takes away from the very forms of “self making” that truly circumvent the realities of these women. as well as the resistance that is part of this “self making” process.

Therefore, Queer Studies seemingly makes trans bodies visible in the contingency of the term queer, whereby according to Butler (1993) should be “vanquished by those who are excluded by the term but who justifiably expect representation by it, to let it take on meanings that cannot now be anticipated by a younger generation whose political vocabulary may well carry a very different set of investments” (230). For example, “racialized gender and sexual formations and practices” are consistently recreated and redeployed and are described by Roderick Ferguson as historically contingent upon its relationship to conditions produced by the



onset of liberal capitalism. Here Ferguson addresses the shortcomings of “queer” and its political promises by returning to what are considered “evidentiary” writings on intersectionality, to formulate a “queer of color critique.” Since, Ferguson and others have articulated the presence of non-normative gendered racialized embodiment and practice and the subsequent socio-historical relationship and regulation of such populations to the state.<sup>27</sup> Additionally, the dislodging of Queer Studies as “exceptional” by Ferguson and Puar articulates U.S. sexual exceptionalism and points towards the possibility for the trans Chican@ body’s emergence in opposition to queer studies’ postmodern pull, which attempts to normalize queer practices and make them so intelligible that it flattens the varying relationships of power that different populations inhabit.

Finally, at the crossroads of articulating the varying academic discourses that enable the emergence of the trans Chican@ body and their interpretive frameworks is transgender studies. Transgender studies in this study refers to the body of literature that works against the normalizing imperative of the medical and psychological discourses that position trans embodiment, practices and identity as deviant or pathological and thus, to be cured. To be more specific, Susan Stryker describes “transgender” as a heterodox interpretation of queer, which has the potential to take up the epistemological challenge of theorizing gendered embodiment that is not premised on recognition, but rather is dependent on the intersections between embodied experience, relationships to discourses, and institutions that act upon and through the body. Transgender here does not conform to the postmodern pull of queer studies, but rather is a non-conventional, non-conforming interpretation of the queer promise to queer. Put another way,

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<sup>27</sup> See the “What’s So Queer About Queer Studies” Special Volume of *Social Text*: Eng, David L., Judith Halberstam, and José Esteban. Muñoz. *What’s Queer about Queer Studies Now?* Durham, N.C.: Duke UP, 2005. Print.

transgender studies does not presume to offer “transgender critique” but rather further dislodges queer studies’ exceptional claim to gendered subjectivity, sexed embodiment and all non-normative practices and desires. Transgender Studies recognizes the embodied experience of the speaking subject as a proper and essential frame of analysis alongside “objective forms of analysis,” although not equating subjective experience as more valuable. Stryker asserts that Transgender Studies makes important contributions towards analyzing and interpreting the unique situation of embodied human consciousness, specifically the body “as a culturally intelligible construct” and the techniques through which bodies are transformed and positioned (“Desubjugated Knowledges, 12). Stryker argues that, the transgender body becomes intelligible through Transgender studies’ centering of “subjugated knowledges,” the “historical contents that have been masked or buried in functional coherences or formal systemization” and “a whole series of knowledges that have been disqualified as nonconceptual knowledges ... hierarchically inferior knowledges, knowledges that are below the required level of erudition or scientificity” (Foucault in “Desubjugated Knowledges” 12-13). For Stryker, it is precisely these types of knowledges that transgender people (academic or not) have of their own embodied experience and their relationships to discourses and institutions that act upon and through them (“Desubjugated Knowledges” 13). There is a sentiment of dissention here and in other works (Namaste, Califia, Stone and Feinburg), with the ways in which the epistemologies of medical and psychological discourses figure trans bodies and practices as symptoms to be diagnosed, and cured in order to render these populations undetectable.

In relationship to the term “transgender,” Stryker observes many trans folks live “the concepts without the benefit of those names,” which is consistent with Valentine’s *Imagining Transgender*. However, a central driving force of transgender studies is embodied practice or

how the lives of these individuals inform a larger understanding of the term transgender. Specifically, those who do not identify with or see themselves as “transgender” in the policy oriented, non-profit descriptor sense – do engage in practices that drive the construction of the term itself. This prioritizing of embodied practice and the knowledge bodies incur as they are constructed in relationship to discourses and institutions is key for understanding transgender populations of color. Transgender studies, then moves towards understanding how institutions work to regulate and/or construct the experiences of discrimination that trans people face, the focus of this study however, is to understand the “uneven distribution of vulnerability and violence across trans populations” which trans scholar Dean Spade explains as the challenge facing trans politics at this moment. As I have described at length above, Spade notes “not all trans people are equally vulnerable, yet the framework of studying, describing, and addressing these harms through the single vector of transphobia often causes the erasure of the reality of conditions facing those most vulnerable” (“Trans Methodologies 447). Spade also notes the importance of intersectionality for interrogating the multiple vectors of power that work to construct the realities of the conditions faced by those who are most “vulnerable” (“Trans Methodologies” 447). Notwithstanding the important intervention trans scholars have made since the early 1990s, there is still a paucity of work in Transgender studies, wherein the embodiment and practices of the communities whom are “most vulnerable” are centered.

With all this in mind, I propose a framework that centers the trans Chican@ body as an epistemological site of embodied knowledge, resistance and praxis for attending to the various form of violence that largely inform the realities of a “vulnerable” community. Queer, Transgender and Chicana/o Studies each provide the theoretical insights and interventions to deconstruct the discursive formations and the varying vectors of power that work together to

construct the trans Chican@ body as vulnerable, but they also provide the framework for exposing how trans Chican@s push up against the discourse, violent circumstances that inform their everyday lives. This figures the trans Chican@ body as a site of resistance as well as subjection, locating trans Chican@s as agents in forming their own realities at different times, in relationship to various bodies and in different spaces. This is a return to the flesh...

### **Trans Chican@ Body as Archive**

...desire rubs against colonial repressions to  
construct resistant, oppositional, transformative,  
diasporic subjectivities that erupt and move into  
decolonial desires.  
--Emma M. Perez, 1999

In contrast to the fictive truths and values that craft the trans Chican@ body in academic discourse as both vulnerable and *volatile*, there are other possibilities that the trans Chican@ body creates and enacts. Here I discuss the Trans Chican@ body as an archive of “affective practices,” or rather the practices the body engages in opposition to repression (corporeal and psychic). These practices further problematize “vulnerability” as a categorical marker for racialized trans bodies and subjectivities and practices. The “body as archive” for trans Chican@s offers an alternative form of resistance for addressing the visceral realities of a “vulnerable” community that is affirming and not premised upon a “journey home,”<sup>28</sup> but rather upon tracing the oppositional, resistant, transformative practices that inform notions of the self. Crawford suggests that “our bodies could be lived as archives rather than as homes,” which is in

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<sup>28</sup> See Crawford (533) - transsexuality as a journey home is a trope common in both the genre of trans autobiographies but also discussed at length by Jay Prosser in his book *Second Skins*

concert with the vexed relationships Queer and Trans Chican@s have with notions of “home.”<sup>29</sup> Furthermore, according to Crawford, “transgender and transsexual bodies not only actively archive – through/with bodies – the possibility of moving beyond binary gender, but also unwittingly archive the violence that our culture perpetuates on those who attempt to do so” (Crawford 533). And what of the racialized transsexual/transgender body? Trans Chican@ bodies also archive the violence that accompanies the legacy of a racist past and present. Therefore, the trans Chican@ body as an archive of bodily practices is contingent, shaped and “bound” by history, but not necessarily dictated by history.<sup>30</sup> As there are desires, amores, dolores that rub up against the grain of that which seeks to discipline the body – these affects and the body’s compulsion for survival, which Muñoz describes as that momentary sense of wholeness, and social recognition that is reparative (“Feeling Brown” 679).

I posit the “trans Chican@ body as archive” in resistance to “trans Chican@ body as vulnerable” in order to point to the varying trans Chican@ bodies, embodiments, practices that I discuss in the case study chapters, as these bodies are situated within their own socio-historical and political contexts as well as t(r)opography, and bound to the varying enactments of racial, sexual, gendered and classed discourses of their respective time periods.<sup>31</sup> This also calls into question the varying claims to and/or “disownership” of trans Chican@ bodies by Transgender Studies, Queer Studies and Chicana/o Studies. As discussed in the preceding section, there are multiple erasures at play in constructing trans Chican@s as vulnerable, which can only be resurrected through a return to a “theory of the flesh” and a return to a body that is complex, changes overtime and never fully owned. Embedded within a positing of the body as archive is

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<sup>29</sup> Anzaldúa has written at length about the Queer Chicana/o vexed relationship to and ever changing definition of home.

<sup>30</sup> There is a indepth discussion of Freeman’s *Time Binds* in Chapter Three.

<sup>31</sup> “tropography underscores the movement between the spatial and the figurative, emphasizing the spatial work of the imaginary and capturing the peculiar nexus between memory, space, the body, and desire.” (Brady 139)

the exposition of the different pleasures, desires and dolores that are enacted upon the body, whereby the process is mediated by the social and the various encounters the body incurs. Therefore the “body as archive” is also mediated by spatiality, hence, “interactions with space are not merely schematic but also highly affective; places are felt and experienced” (Brady 8). Furthermore, this highly social process “has an effect on the formation of subjectivity, identity, sociality, and physicality in a myriad ways” (Brady 8).

The “body as archive” is not a new theoretical idea by any means, as authors such as Cherrie Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa have written about the centrality of the body as memory for Chicanas and Chicanos. Mary Pat Brady’s *Extinct Lands, Temporal Geographies* discusses at length the centrality of memory for creating space in Chicana literature. To conceive of the Chican@ trans body as archive, as a bodily space where memory works to archive the body’s various contacts, the haunting of colonialism and its imperial legacy and the encroachment of neoliberal era politics must be considered along with “how the work of racism, homophobia and misogyny haunt the body and produce the spaces that bodies perceive, conceive, live” (Brady 138). For Chicana/os, there is a constant reiteration of loss and dislocation given that the body incurs the machinations of colonialism, as enacted through racism. According to Raphael Pérez-Torres dislocation and loss lie at the heart of Chicana/o identity. In his book, *Mestizaje: Critical Uses of Race in Chicano Cultural Studies* Pérez-Torres writes at length about how the racialized body in Chican@ culture evokes a historical consciousness. Pérez-Torres situates the body as a site of authority and repository of knowledge that is premised upon loss. He characterizes this knowledge as sometimes empowering and sometimes repressive. His desire is to demonstrate that cultural production (in this case fiction) becomes a medium for transmitting this knowledge as well as a sense of loss, which he contends is ingrained in the body.

Pérez further touches upon this, when she writes “and what of the unspoken, the unthought harbored in a memory so brutal that repression is the body’s only form of survival?” (“Decolonial Imaginary” 108). Body conditions memory because there are traumas (some readily located as a result of the Oedipal-mestizo triangle) that the body remembers but one does not, cannot, or refuses to remember; but, yet, must break free from. The decolonial imaginary is then a interstitial space where confronting and reconfiguring of the traces of coloniality necessitates a process of re(membering) and utilizing the various affective positions/strategies that have been identified by Chicana feminists, which entails what Alarcon describes as “...taking hold of the variegated imaginative and historical discourses that have informed the constructions of race, gender, and ethnicities in the last five hundred years and that still reverberate in our time” (“Traddutora, Traditora 127). Possibilities lie in both a psychic and affective terrain, “that unseen region where our only hope is a new consciousness, where desiring devices can serve to free us and not obstruct stifle and limit our identities” (“Decolonial Imaginary” 124). The trans Chican@ body, then, transforms the psycho-somatic residual effects of these discourses as they have and continue to push through and onto the body, given that the trans body is consistently being possessed, repossessed, and disowned.

The trans Chican@ body as archive is also, then cartographically tied to Aztlán, and to a nostalgia for home and journey to home that is never complete, because the meaning of home changes overtime. According to Alarcon, Aztlán implies “the need to ‘repossess’ the land, especially in cultural nationalist narratives, through scenarios of ‘origins’ that emerge in the selfsame territory, be it in the literary, legendary, historical, ideological, critical or theoretical level – producing in material and imaginary terms ‘authentic’ and ‘inauthentic,’ ‘legal’ and ‘illegal subjects’” (“Inscribing Gynetics” 46). Trans Chican@s are produced as “inauthentic,”

“impure” and “illegal” subjects through this journey for home, as they fail to signify within the larger Chicano cultural nationalist narratives and in transgender historical narratives. This abject space that trans Chican@s occupy in their journey for “home” is multilayered, and not limited to a journey towards becoming “normatively gendered people” for Chicana feminists and others have theorized at length that the body is itself a fearful place. Anzaldúa writes, “though ‘home’ permeates every sinew and cartilage in my body, I too am afraid of going home.” Then consider Prosser’s arguments regarding the transsexuals’ unique capacity to long for bodies that are not fully theirs or, “if [transsexuals] feel confined in the wrong body on a fundamental level, it must be said that [transsexuals] fail to own [their] own skin, to accept it as [their] own” (*Borderlands* 73). These two statements reiterate the notion that “home” is not always a safe space, therefore the “body as home” is not always an available option, but gives way to the possibility that home can be continually created in the sense that it is never fully owned, given that the fear of inhabiting one’s body is so compelling. This bring to the fore the consideration that *nobody fully owns* or is “at home in their homes, their bodies or elsewhere” given the material realities and impact of neoliberalism and late capitalism (Crawford 531). Therefore, if the body is never fully owned, and in relationship to the disciplining of the Chicana/o body, then the body “demands a different kind of care, a self-reflexive fashioning and continuous crafting rather than a static having and holding” (Crawford 532). The trans Chican@ body, then does not represent an archive of a journey or quest for home, but rather overtime archives the practices that condition the body at different times, spaces and places – and is oriented towards finding a self *through* and *with* bodies. The trans Chican@ body spills out of the “boundaries of her(his) own skin,” whereby the journey is a crossing or *travesía* (as opposed to passing which implies a final home),



it is subjectivity-in-process and always contingent upon each encounter the body has as it crosses psychological, corporeal and geographical borders (*Borderlands* 44).

As mentioned above, if the Chican@ body as archive is always crafting itself, the archived bodily practices are informed by the dialectical relationship between affective and psychic domains, which include traumas and loss that do not have an origin that is intelligible to the subject. I argue for the importance of considering how affective and psychic domains are integral for understanding ethno-racialized trans subjects, given the historical legacy of colonialism and its continual hauntings (footnote 33), as this past informs the intersections of racism, sexism, homophobia and transphobia that both create and discipline the trans Chican@ body. As such, being attentive to the psychic and affective effects of this exercise of power can perhaps gives insight into the critical resistance practices the body deploys everyday. The trans *Chican@* body like Pérez-Torres' "mestiza/o body" is a:

...transitional and translational site that maneuvers through extant channels of power linked to the legacies of our colonial past. Loss is inescapably integral to these legacies. Yet dealing with these legacies allows mestiza and mestiza subjects to form spaces in which the self and others can be understood in relation to one another, a relation often mediated through the overt deployment of discourses that define and distribute social and political power unequally." (Pérez-Torres 218-19)

By centering the affective discontinuities that the body gives rise to and the ruptures it provokes, it forces a "chaotic challenge to normative conventions of gender, sexuality, and race, disobeying normative contentions of "appropriate" bodily practices" of the "exceptional" queer, transgender and Chicana/o body (Puar 221). I am not arguing the trans *Chican@ body* as an exceptional body, but rather as a body we know little about – akin to Puar's "terrorist body" the *trans Chican@ body* provokes discomfort in its unknowability, unpredictability, and the futurity these bodies open up, through the critical strategies the bodies employ. Therefore, methodologically this study is an archeology and genealogy of the "body as archive" discerned from a small

archive of texts that give insight and produce knowledge “in the most unpromising places, in what we tend to feel is without history-in sentiments, love, conscience, instincts... not in order to trace the gradual curve of their evolution, but to isolate the different scenes where they engaged in different roles.” (“Nietzsche” 148) Genealogy is sensitive to the reoccurrence of events (the reversal of power) and the sentiments that are linked to these events. It provides the occasion for examining what different times, places and spaces mean and/or do to the trans Chican@ body. This methodological approach is attentive to the body’s encounters with pleasure, pain and other affects that can be tracked. Archaeology permits analyzing the formation and transformation of a body of knowledge about Transgender and gender non-conforming Chican@s by manifesting the ways in which the body catalogues the unknown, affectively producing new resistances, which Puar articulates as “characterized by oppositional stances, but includes frictional forces, discomfiting encounters and unsynchronized delinquency” (222).

### **El Sabor del Amor y del Dolor**

Our greatest disappointments and painful experiences – if we can make meaning of them – can lead us toward becoming more of who we are.  
*--Gloria E. Anzaldúa, 1987*

Care of the self risks ruination in order to precipitate the subject is in the service of an emancipatory politics for the ethnic-racialized subject who must take up her rightful place in the chain of the signifier in order to luxuriate in and suffer the full range of losses that a human subject stands to endure in the world. From here, one can then engage the full range of meanings that can be made of those losses as well as engage in the full range of strategies that can be crafted in response to those losses.  
*--Antonio Viego, 2007*

Thus far, I have argued that there are shortcomings in the trans Chican@ body which Transgender, Queer and Chicana/o studies produces due to each fields' concerns with "rehashing the pros and cons of identity politics" and who can lay claim to or even reject the trans Chican@ body (Puar 215). I turn to affective politics not instead of or to negate the importance of identity politics, but as argued above, because the trans Chican@ body exceeds its own boundaries and befuddles the integrity of identity. Therefore an "affective ideation of identity" is a more adept model for considering how categories of race, class, gender, sex, nation surface as mappings and referents of affect (Puar 215). Body as archive – like assemblages – are attuned to "movements, intensities, emotions, energies, affectivities, and textures as they inhabit events, spatiality and corporealities" (Puar 215).<sup>32</sup> Affect as a paradigm responds to the claiming of trans bodies, histories and foreclosure of subjection, as it elaborates "different and alternative modalities of belonging, connectivity, and intimacy" which the current models of analysis lack (Puar 215). I look to affect as it occurs individually and communally as a form of critical resistance to dominant modes of being and becoming that the trans Chican@ body deploys over and over again. As the epigraphs above by Anzaldúa and Viego signal, the strategies the body crafts in response to loss, pain and even love are integral to thinking through emancipatory, sustaining and decolonial means.

The challenge that Queer, Chicana/o and Transgender studies face is one of understanding the capacities transgender bodies of color have to regenerate these varying modalities of being, belonging, connectivity and intimacy – the question is what can these modalities or discomfiting moments "compel, repel, spur, deflate" (Puar 211). Here we can again draw on Pérez's work in that "one is not simply oppressed or victimized; nor is one only

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<sup>32</sup> I am not conflating "body as archive" with "assemblages" as Puar clearly articulates assemblages as fleeting, the body archives sensations, affects in relationship to spaces, time, place and may be remembered, recalled or not.

oppressor or victimizer. Rather, one negotiates within the imaginary to a decolonizing otherness where all identities are at work in one way or another” (“Decolonial Imaginary” 7). This mode of decolonizing otherness, as Emma Pérez argues is dependent upon history, the history of Chicana/os in the borderlands, and as Pérez-Torres has articulated, history engenders, or rather, affects (hate in his example) “carve pain deep in the flesh” and words fail to convey the last effects of this problem (197). What is important here is his observation about the failure of words to convey the complexity, as well as the material realities of a population whose historical imaginary is embedded within the dynamics of colonization and loss (197). Pérez-Torres describes this displaced sense of loss as “Chicano melancholy” which cannot be articulated fully through language but is oftentimes articulated by cultural producers and cultural workers through cultural texts. Pérez-Torres argues that this is a mechanism that helps “us (re)construct identity and take our dead with us to the various battles we wage in their names – and in our names” (“Disidentifications” in Pérez-Torres; 197). Reconfiguring melancholia or attachments to loss can be productive by de-pathologizing the melancholic position so that it is not about self-absorption with loss, but rather an engagement with loss. It opens up sites for memory, history, and a rewriting of the past as well as a reimagining of the future. Therefore, it is how trans Chican@ practices, through the body engage what gets lost, what is beyond words, and allow possibilities for understanding both the present and the *shadow(s)* of the past.

The Trans Chican@ body’s engagement with the past as it negotiates the present is what make *affect*, *affectivity*, and *emotions* central to this project. According to Deborah Gould, affect is “the body’s ongoing and relatively amorphous inventory-taking of coming into contact and interacting with the world “ (20). This recalls the “body as archive” as Gould elaborates on the nonconscious dimensions of affect;

...consider how we often experience our feelings as opaque to ourselves, something that we do not quite have language for, something that we cannot fully grasp, something that escapes us but is nevertheless in play, generated through interaction with the world, and affecting our embodied beings and subsequent actions. (20)

According to Gould we can try to make sense of the intensities that characterize affective experiences, to be able to do this we draw from what she terms a “storehouse of knowledge, habit, experience,” as well as culturally available labels and meanings to articulate a linguistic expression of what we are feeling, but there is a lag or space in what one feels; and to that extent, there are words to capture exactly what the body *feels*. This potentiality is all circumscribed by history, time, space, place, and of course the social. This attempt at representation is, in fact, never complete; language only partially captures, characterizing affect with an “unboundedness” (recall the trans Chican@ body’s unboundedness). The centrality of affect to the body, in other words, means that affect is what makes you *feel* an emotion, therefore “nonconscious, noncognitive, and ultimately uncontainable bodily sensations that do not necessarily line up with our rational selves are a constant motivational force in individual lives and thus a force in social life as well” (Gould 22). The bursting potential and indeterminate nature of affect has made it central to understanding political action and activism overtime. According to Gould, our “affective states” orient and intensify (but do not fix) our “attentions, affiliations, investments and attachments,” as well as our “nonconscious and bodily forms of knowing and sense-making” (26-7).

Recently in Queer Studies there has been a “turn” to affect in the form of “feeling backwards,” examining how “time binds” or the creation of an “archive of feeling” as a mode to document gay and lesbian identities, practices and social formations overtime and the affective states that accompany various contingencies such as space, place and time.<sup>33</sup> Gould’s study

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<sup>33</sup> See Heather Love’s *Feeling Backwards*, Freeman’s *Time Binds*, and Cvetkovich’s *Archive of Feeling*

looks to social movements, as she argues they provide a language for people's affective states as well as a "pedagogy of sorts regarding what and how to feel and what to do in light of those feelings" (28). According to Gould, movements "'make sense' of affective states and authorize selected feelings and actions while downplaying and even invalidating others" (28). Gould's book presents the notion of "emotional habitus" and extends Bourdieu's *habitus* into the realm of feeling; it is an emotional disposition that provides members a sense of what and how to feel (34). There is a significant tension here with Puar's characterization of the potential of affect for creating alternative modes of belonging. Gould's "emotional habitus" suggests a clear demarcation of bodies, as the formation of "emotional habitus" for a particular group rests on specific experiences of oppression and mediates (based upon people's different histories) how they shape their particular feelings and practices. The tension is Gould's reliance on "positionality as a hermeneutic" as she seeks to account for locality, specificity, placements, junctions" as part of the structure of emotional habitus, which fixes affect to particular moments, feelings, practices as integral to a specific group – indicating a vulnerability to management by the varying disciplinary apparatuses of the state (Puar 213-6). Gould, however, also contends that as much as an "emotional habitus" structures. it can have tremendous effect in generating change.

Insofar as affects arise from "social conditions as those conditions are encountered" there are those whose encounters are already mediated, tempered by a "displaced sense of loss" that can be something they have always known but may not know that these feelings are outside the dominant "emotional habitus." Now I turn to the trans Chican@ subject who, quite possibly experiences simultaneous exclusion and retention as a "racial/gender/sexual other," who according to Muñoz put forth "a certain ethics of the self that is utilized and deployed by people

of color and other minoritarian subjects who don't quite feel right within the protocols of normative affect and comportment" ("Feeling Brown" 676). Muñoz describes this as a "feeling down, feeling brown" which characterizes the affective politics of belonging in alterity. *Feeling Brown* then is descriptive of the ways in which minoritarian affect is "always, no matter what its register, partially illegible in relation to the normative affect performed by normative citizen subjects"<sup>34</sup> ("Feeling Brown" 679). Muñoz's aim is to re-situate brown feelings, not as individualized affective particularity, but a larger collective mapping of self and other, and hence, a way to link position (social, historical, racialized, sexualized, gendered) to feelings. Affective positions are then practices of being; therefore, they do not adhere to positivist progressions that urge the subject to move towards a majoritarian idea of subjective wholeness, which is in part intimated at in Gould's work (in the presumed subject). Muñoz is proposing an "ethics of brownness," which incorporates understandings of the psychic to comprehend the social, which therefore enables the (racial/gender/sexual other) to take up the various affective positions to resist disrepair and the forces in the social that break down one's ability to see and know one another. The ability for minoritarian subjects to be able to see, know, and most importantly *feel* each other is made possible through cultural forms and it is the possibility for a collective sharing and identification with an emotional valence that has radical possibilities.

Muñoz's *feeling brown, feeling down* can be considered a mechanism of survival for the minoritarian subject, whereas it enables a sense of wholeness (sometimes momentary) that allows a certain level of social recognition and is reparative, but by no means posits a path to subjective wholeness. Recognition and its reparative impulse can potentially lead to an insistence of change and political transformation. By linking reparation to a depressive position, Muñoz

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<sup>34</sup> I suspect those who participate in and shape an emotional habitus to be the "normative citizen subjects" described by Muñoz

accomplishes two things; first, by situating the depressive position as one of potentiality he depathologizes the various affective practices that characterize living in alterity; and secondly he calls attention to the necessary project of being attentive to the self (for minoritarian subjects) in order to know the other. Reconceptualizing care of the self as a site of potentiality rather than a breaking down of the self, signals a hope not often afforded to minoritarian subjects, especially in times where social recognition is largely limited due to the ways in which epistemic, social and physical violence have largely become normalized in the contemporary neoliberal era. Here I call upon Antonio Viegó who writes of the full range of strategies that are crafted by the ethno-racialized/gendered/sexualized subject, highlighting the right to “luxuriate in” the full range of losses that one endures, from the love (*amor*) to the pain (*dolor*).

As an example of survival practices that the minoritarian subject utilizes I turn to Chela Sandoval’s “differential consciousness,” and her contributions to decolonizing theory and method. Just as Jasbir Puar characterizes the shift from disciplinary societies to control societies as indicative of this particular moment, where there are limitations with the privileging of representation and visibility by intersectionality (215), Sandoval too notes this shift in her work. I read this as a similar moment described by Sandoval’s analysis of Fredric Jameson’s lamentation of the onset of the “fragmentation of the subject.” Sandoval describes this moment as one in which oppressed populations begin to produce survival strategies through the mutation of culture produced by postmodernism. The “waning of affect” that Jameson describes in his essay is a reference to what appear to be fleeting intensities one experiences via cultural production. However Sandoval characterizes these effects as making accessible to oppressor and oppressed alike, new forms of identity, ethics, citizenship, aesthetics and resistance (36-7). Sandoval posits that “the skills, perceptions, theories, and methods developed under previous and



modernist conditions of dispossession and colonization are the most efficient and sophisticated means by which all peoples trapped as inside-outsiders in the rationality of the postmodern social order can confront and retextualize consciousness into new forms of citizenship/subjectivity” (36-7). Retextualizing the self, and identifying new forms of belonging, and beingness in the world blurs insider/outsider, self/other—a process that happens affectively. According to Sandoval “differential consciousness is linked to whatever is not expressible through words. It is accessed through poetic modes of expression: gestures, music, images, sounds words that plummet or rise through signification to find some void—some no place—to claim their due” (140). That “no place” is perhaps the lag between emotion and affect, that space that produces the affective strategies that trans Chican@s utilize in their everyday interactions, their “mode of revolutionary activity” (Sandoval 141). For Sandoval differential consciousness requires puncturing and moving through to another site, where love can emerge as a hermeneutic, an affective strategy that can move citizen-subjects toward social justice, social change, or *amor en aztlán*. It is in this mode of consciousness that citizen-subjects are enabled to utilize love to guide theoretical and political “*movidas*” or “revolutionary maneuvers toward a decolonized being” (Sandoval, 141). These “*movidas*” or affective strategies are bodies of knowledges and practices for reforming “the self and the world” (Sandoval 4).

*El sabor del amor y del dolor*, then as a reading practice or interpretive strategy looks to cultural production and discursive formations to deconstruct both positive and negative affective positions often viewed as solely oppressive or liberatory, but never both: passing, hate, hope, utopia, love and trauma. Genealogically identifying how these affective positions have been and are deployed in representation, discursive formations, overtime probes the unseen or overlooked events as they are represented in cultural works that are in temporal and/or spatial proximity to

“grand events” in the Chicano and American historical imaginary which in turn challenges what qualifies as historical. Because genealogy is sensitive to the reoccurrence of events (the reversal of power) and the sentiments that are linked to these events, it provides the framework for examining what these events in different times, places and spaces mean. Central to this reading and practice is identifying the varying intimate and violent encounters of the trans Chican@ body and “reframing” these encounters by playing close attention to the “(in)appropriate bodily practices” that are pleurably being engaged. Furthermore, given that trans Chican@s modify and transform their bodies, such transformations also transform “what is experienced as delightful” and what such delights or pleasures such transformations may provoke.<sup>35</sup> At times, “a body is not a ‘body’ at all but a figure for relations between bodies past and present,” or touches across time that make historicity an erotic practice; *el sabor del amor y del dolor* (Freeman 119-121). To be sure such pleasures, sabores are contingently lived with consequence, which is why *el sabor del amor y del dolor* is focused in the everyday, given that the everyday means different things in different historical periods and in different spatial configurations. The everyday as Cvetkovich maintains, is productive for calling attention to how “structural forms of violence are so frequently lived, how their invisibility or normalization is another part of their oppressiveness” as well as a site “where history and global politics manifest themselves at the level of lived affective experience” (“Public Feelings” 464, 461).

So then *el sabor del amor y del dolor* is a loving grasp of detail on the part of a transgender Chicano, who takes seriously as Elizabeth Freeman does that;

‘a loving grasp of detail . . . produces affective histories’ entails thinking that a bodily motion (a grasp, a clutch, a refusal to let go) might have something to do with knowing

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<sup>35</sup> See Sara Ahmed’s *The Promise of Happiness* (2010); Puar, Jasbir. *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times (Next Wave: New Directions in Womens Studies)*. London: Duke University Press, 2007. Print. NOTE: my insertion of “in” to make inappropriate. See Ahmed’s discussion of affect, objects and intentionality in *The Promise of Happiness*

and making history – with continuities, contacts, and contradictions among past, present, and future – through both physical sensation and emotional response. (Freeman xx)

This reading practice is one cognizant of the consequences that accompany the affective strategies the trans Chican@ body employs in the name of survival or as a method to “grasp” for pleasure, sustenance, being and intelligibility. *El sabor del amor y del dolor* takes the multiple reframings and comprises them as affective histories long blanketed over by Chicana/o, Queer and Transgender narratives of representation and visibility. The stories, narratives and realities that comprise this archive of discursive texts, and cultural production are “not only or primarily narratives but also practices of knowing, physical as well as mental, erotic as well as loving ‘grasps’ of detail that do not accede to existing theories and lexicons but come into unpredictable contact with them” (Freeman xxi). My offering then, as a trans Chicano scholar is *el sabor del amor y del dolor*, “close readings that are, for most academic disciplines, simply too close for comfort” (Freeman xxi). Through a fury of keystrokes that insatiable fingers unleash upon a computer, my body interfaces with the demands of these stories - their pleasures, promises, tragedies and memories – in my archive are the stories of Gwen Amber Rose Araujo and Micaela Campos – these are also our stories.

## CHAPTER 3

### FORGETTING, PASSING AND OTHER AFFECTS: THE RACIALIZED, QUEER AND (TRANS)GENDERED BODY ON THE COLONIAL LANDSCAPE

Maybe the only justice we'll ever know is in  
surviving to tell our own side of things. Maybe  
that's enough for now. Telling our own stories so  
we won't be forgotten.  
--Emma M. Pérez, 2009

In a 2003 essay entitled “Queering the Borderlands,” Emma Pérez introduces her novel-in-progress entitled, *Forgetting the Alamo, Or, Blood Memory*, which she began writing not only because of her love of literature but also due to her frustrations with history’s texts and archives. Pérez writes, “I’ve always wanted to find in the archives a queer *vaquera* from the mid-nineteenth century whose adventures include fighting Anglo squatters and seducing willing *senoritas*” (“Queering the Borderlands” 122). *Forgetting the Alamo, Or, Blood Memory* represents a decolonizing *movida* on the part of Pérez to inscribe a gaze on the “borderlands that is geographic and spatial, mobile and impermanent.” As she argues, the borderlands are imprinted by the bodies that have roamed and journeyed the region, just as the bodies have been transformed by the laws and customs of the region (“Queering the Borderlands” 122-123). Pérez’s project then is to re-inscribe history to the region with the presence of a Chican@ queer and gendered subject, without reproducing colonial historical narratives. Pérez’s definition of colonial is not one of a simple colonizer/colonized relationship, rather she pushes it so that it is more than the rulers versus the ruled, but also is mindful that the “colonized may also become like the rulers and assimilate into a colonial mindset” (“Queering the Borderlands” 122-123). *Forgetting the Alamo, Or, Blood Memory*, then signals a departure from traditional historical research of the same time period that examines “crossdressing” and “passing narratives” of the

era, which reproduce colonial historical narratives that, for example, attempt to articulate a presence of gender non-conforming practices on the part of women to access “male spaces and/or privileges” such as bars, saloons, battlefields and ballrooms.<sup>36</sup> Even within these “radical histories,” there is a reproduction of the colonial articulations of power that underpin race, gender, sex and sexuality that shape the body on the borderlands and the colonial landscape. The novel, then is a Queer Chican@ reconstruction and reinterpretation of “our” past, as Micaela (Forgetting’s narrator and hero) notes in an epigraph the importance of survival and the politics of telling our own stories so we won’t be forgotten.

Pérez also published the novella *Gulf Dreams*, which Ellie Hernandez argues is an embodiment of a “different historical account of the cultural representation of Chicana lesbian sexuality by making the traumatic psychological ruptures of colonial memory in Chicana/o discourse” (155). Furthermore, Viego argues that Pérez’s novella and monograph dwell in the “interpretive space between historicist and psychoanalytic approaches in order to offer the fullest, most complex theory of Chicano subjectivity” (179). He characterizes her texts as conjuring a trauma that cannot be explained according to its historical effects and, thus, is resistant to being taken up entirely in the order of language in the Chicano symbolic. According to Viego, given that Pérez’s work is informed by both Foucauldian as well as Lacanian thought, “the news that Pérez brings is not always good, a fact that may explain scholars’ reticence to engage her work over the years” (167). This results in the Chicana/o subject consistently attending to the “texture and individual collective Chicano historical losses and traumas, which compels constant action on the part of the Chicano activist” (Viego 166). Furthermore, Pérez’s theoretical and creative work offers a look at Chicana lesbian and gender-non conforming subjectivity as it exists outside of history, via her decolonial imaginary which is outside of the

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<sup>36</sup> See C. Sears, P. Boag

Chicano symbolic, this marginal and liminal existence, according to Hernandez, “creates the possibility of disrupting the dialectics of history as we have thus far experienced under colonialism and national revolutionary paradigms” (157). Additionally, Pérez’s *Forgetting the Alamo, Or, Blood Memory*, actively challenges assumptions that “women share mutual goals in their historical self-production,” through the various challenges that Micaela’s brown, gendered, sexed body presents to Chicana/o, Transgender and Queer historical re-imaginings of this time period (Hernandez 158). Pérez, as well as Deena Gonzalez and Antonia Castaneda have articulated the necessity of deconstructing and resisting existing categories of analysis, including ‘regional history’ and the ‘women’s West.’<sup>37</sup> According to Castaneda, “regions, like maps, are icons of nationhood, it is necessary to deconstruct the representation and location of Chicanas within that cartography and iconography across time and space” (117). Pérez’s novel, set just after the Battle of the Alamo and Battle of San Jacinto, considers the critical aspect of the gender and sexual politics of war prior to the US/Mexico War. This is significant as Pérez reinscribes the queer brown gendered body upon US/Tejas/Mexico geographical and historical landscape prior to the “watershed moment” oft cited by Chicano historians and scholars, signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in 1848. Pérez’s work queerly and critically exposes the racialized politics of the US Southwest rooted in anti-miscegenation<sup>38</sup>. At this historical juncture, Pérez’s main character Micaela becomes emblematic of how queer racialized and gendered bodies complicate racial paradigms of Chicana/os through sexual and intimate transfers of affect between and among bodies over time. The multiple points of contact that Micaela engages with lovers, family and strangers in her psychic, geographic and emotional journey through the Southwest, highlight the racial, sexual, gender and economic tensions that continue to

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<sup>37</sup> See Deena Gonzalez’s *Refusing the Favor* and Antonia Castaneda’s essay “Y Que Se Pueden Defender”

<sup>38</sup> See Somerville’s *Queering the Color Line*

characterize the realities gender non-conforming and Transgender Chican@s. In this chapter I argue that *Forgetting the Alamo, Or, Blood Memory* as a discursive formation offers a new historicity that centers the erotic and traumatic dimensions of intimate points of contact not readily available in traditional archival sources. This new historicity then, carves the presence of a gender non-conforming Chican@ subject, within Chican@, Queer and Transgender historical imaginaries that is not fettered by a colonial, sexist, racist or homophobic gaze.

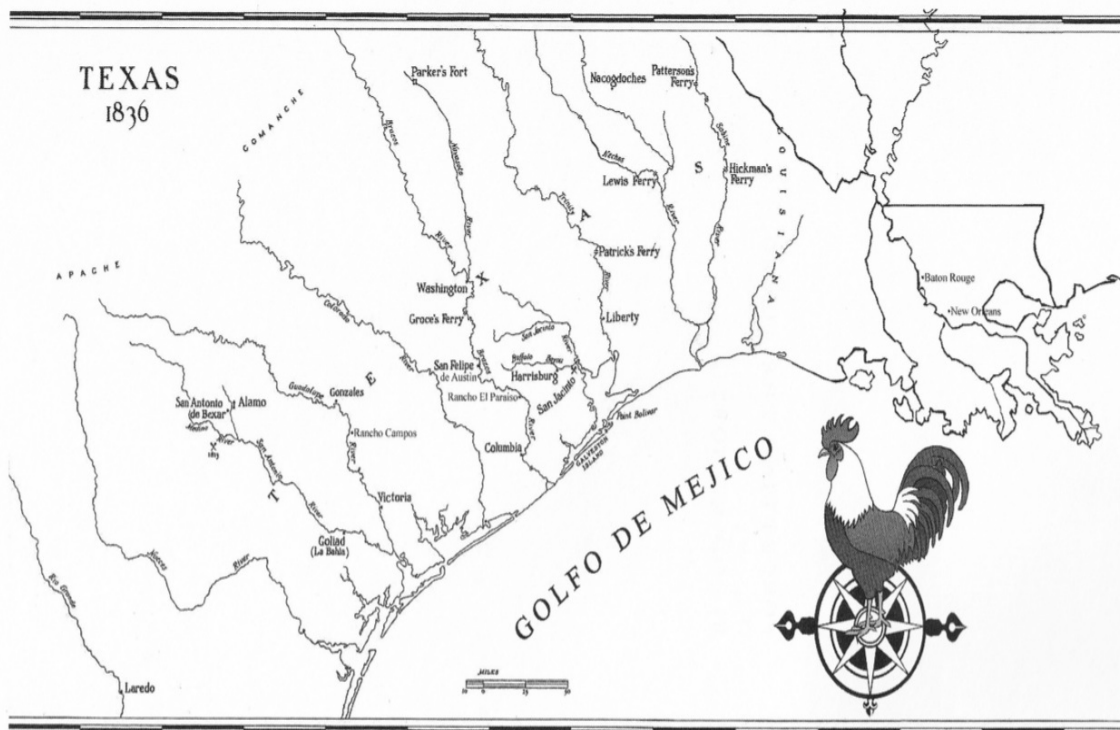
### **Micaela Campos Unbound: Engendering the Borderlands**

I didn't know how to risk all that had to be risked if  
I was to be the victor.  
--Emma M. Pérez, 2009

The novel, whose geographic landscape spans Coahuila, Tejas and Louisiana circa 1836, provides the reader a sound orientation of the racial and sexual hierarchies readily enforced in the Republic of Texas, a hostile space described to Micaela by her friend Lucius, a Black slave she encounters on her journey<sup>39</sup>.

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<sup>39</sup> See Figure 1, for a map specially designed by Chicana Lesbian artist Alma Lopez, which is a cartographic reimagination of the terrain traversed by heroin Micaela Campos.



Map by Alma López

Figure 1. Map by Alma Lopez

Lucius explains to Micaela, “it’s slave lynching country and it’s Mexican killing country and it’s going to be that for a mighty long time.” (*Forgetting* 102). Micaela’s multiple journeys, from female to male, victim to survivor, criminal to outlaw, and hero complicate how we think about “crossing” and “passing” in the spatio-temporal and topographical spaces of the southwest in this time period and over time. These crossings, and multiple sites of racial and sexual violence resonate with contemporary racial and sexual politics that characterize the lives of transgender and gender non-conforming Chican@s today.

Pérez’s novel also works to complicate the notion of the “FTM-Butch Borderlands,” by centering the brown gender non-conforming body that does not cross from one gender identification to another and back again, but rather shuffles between the male/female border for



revenge, survival and to access pleasure<sup>40</sup>. Micaela's brown body calls into question the rigid debate among feminist lesbians and Female to Male transsexuals, by problematizing the use of a trope such as "the border" to refer to such a precarious gendered, racialized and sexed identity.

Pérez's character blurs the historically defined frontiers between lesbian and the passing female to male trans person. I am cautious not to use transgender or transsexual to name gender non-conforming masculine presenting individuals, specifically within the time period during which Pérez's novel is set. C. Jacob Hale's essay, "Consuming the Living, Dis(re)membering the Dead in the Butch/FTM Borderlands," defines the "border-zone dweller" as "someone whose embodied self existed in a netherworld constituted by margins of multiple overlapping identity categories" (318). Additionally, Hale argues, "indiscriminate erasure of a living border dweller's multiple complexities, ambiguities, inconsistencies, ambivalences, and border zone status hinders that subject's ability to build a self through which to live" (318). Hale articulates a gender non-conforming subject whose embodiment and gendered identifications exist in the margins; his critique in this article being that the claiming of the dead bodies of gender non-conforming individuals to "static" identities such as butch and ftm, who may themselves not necessarily be "fixed," erases any hints of subjectivity or agency they may have had in their everyday lives. Additionally, according to Hale this forecloses possibilities for the living to claim spaces that are located in the border-zone, somewhere between and among the categories of "butch" and "ftm".

Also part of Hale's critique is that tropes become disconnected from lives, even though he himself falls into the same logic, for example even in Hale's use of "border zone" and "border dweller" as tropes, there is the erasure of race, class and sexuality that inherently inform where in

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<sup>40</sup> "FTM-Butch Border Zone" is a concept discussed by Halberstam and Hale in a special "Transgender Issues" issue of *GLQ: Gay and Lesbian Studies Quarterly*.

these gender borderlands the subject dwells. While most transgender/butch debates have centered on who gets to claim the dead as part of their history, discursive violences are enacted. The first is that racialized gender non-conforming bodies are often not claimed or acknowledged by either community; and when they are, their bodies become evidentiary matter to inform equal rights political movements. The second violence is that if these bodies are of color, their race becomes erased in the narrations of these individual's histories. This is the case with Louis Sullivan's reclamation of Jack Bee Garland as a female bodied historical figure, who lived as a man as an important facet of initial FTM history and community building in the United States. Louis Sullivan's biography of Jack Bee Garland entitled, *Female to Male: The Life of Jack Bee Garland* chronicles the life of Jack Bee Garland, who was born the daughter of San Francisco's first Mexican Consul, but Sullivan's biography of Garland largely flattens out the tenuous racial climate of Northern California, as Jack Bee Garland was likely to have experienced as a "border dweller" who sometimes passed as male and arguably, according to Sullivan's narrative, always passed as "White".

The claiming of historical figures for building community history is certainly important, but there is a danger in placing contemporary categories of "butch" and "transgender" upon the bodies of those long dead. In the case of Jack Bee Garland, one can only piece together their story through archival remnants, bits and pieces of newspaper articles, clippings and birth records.<sup>41</sup> The person who is retelling the story assumes the responsibility of gendering the dead, both a potentially radical and dangerous project. What of the bodies that are not "worth" claiming, who the Queer and Transgender community do not fight over to claim? This

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<sup>41</sup> This chapter initially was going to center on the tensions of reclaiming the dead for community histories with the case of Jack Bee Garland and such questions are importance to the larger arguments in this dissertation regarding absence and presence of trans bodies of color in Chicana/o, Queer and Trans Studies, however these questions require a much more nuanced discussion than this chapter permits. These questions will be explored in future research.

privileging of which bodies gets fought over and claimed works to create a White trans or butch subject and, in concert, works to discursively occlude the rich cultural history of butch and gender non-conforming Chican@s.<sup>42</sup>

Pérez's creation of the character Micaela Campos offers the possibility of a gender non-conforming female-bodied hero, who as a "border dweller" sometimes by choice and sometimes by force, reshapes and reclaims the socio-historical geography of the borderlands, of Aztlán. While it is desperation, hope and necessity that inform our hero's psychic, physical journey to reclaim her land and her history. Pérez's novel weaves multiple spatial sites, the land, the body, the spiritual and the psyche as a method for "decolonizing the social imagination," or rather to complicate where and how female bodied, gender non-conforming Chican@s and Chicana lesbians find themselves situated with narratives of subjectivity and coloniality. As the novel's title hints, "forgetting" is not so much about the actual act of "forgetting" but rather it is a counterstrategy for resisting the way in which colonialism as a psycho-socio spatial process maps itself affectively on to the body. Pérez's novel works to disrupt the "structure of feeling" created through the phrase "remember the Alamo," which is possible because memory is not a neutral source of data and the past is not fixed but is malleable (Brady 152). Pérez's title is a challenge to the spatiotemporal norms that colonial history has inscribed upon the body in an attempt to script what types of gender, sexual and racial comportments are admissible and present in the historical imaginary.

According to Brady, "somewhere memories lie, rooted in bodies and spaces, in songs and words, signaling the terrains of power which Chicana/os navigate; memory makes interpellation

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<sup>42</sup> There is a significant archive of works by both cultural producers and academics that document the lives, desire and traumas of self-identified Chicana butches. An excellent resource that is not specifically about documenting Chicana butches, but rather Chicana lesbian literature is Catriona Rueda Esquibel's book *With Her Machete in Her Hand*, and the edited volume, *Chicana Lesbians: The Girls Our Mothers Warned Us About* by Carla Trujillo.

always already incomplete if not completely undone” (138). Therefore, the character and hero Micaela Campos’ journey to avenge her family’s honor but also emblematic of how queer and gender non-conforming Chican@ bodies are spatially created in, through and push back upon discourse. Furthermore, interactions with space show how “places are felt and experienced, and the processes producing space therefore also shape feelings and experiences” (Brady 8). Pérez’s use of the novel to accomplish such a task is important, in relationship to the larger intervention this work is attempting to make, as it creates space through narrative in an accessible form for generations to read and see themselves as part of a larger history and the world. Mary Pat Brady further articulates this, in her crucial work on Chicana literature and spaces:

Literature thrives on the intersections between the shaping powers of language and the productive powers of space. Literature attends to affect and environment; it uses space and spatial processes metaphorically to suggest emotions, insights, concepts, characters. It also shapes the way spaces are perceived, understood, and ultimately produced. Thus literature illustrates and enlarges the shaping force of narrative in the production of space, highlighting the discursiveness of space...If the production of space is a highly social process, then it is a process that has an effect on the formation of subjectivity, identity, sociality and physicality in myriad ways. (Brady 8)

Moreover, Pérez’s *t(r)opography*, or the movement between the spatial and the figurative, emphasizes the spatial work of the imaginary and captures the nexus between memory, space, the body, and desire with Micaela’s self inventory at the beginning of the novel, “I was impatient for victory, the kind of impatience that makes you look nervous to others, especially since I didn’t know how to risk all that had to be risked if I was to be the victor.” (*Forgetting* 1).<sup>43</sup>

Micaela Campos would soon experience events so life changing that she would be thrown into multiple situations that required her to risk everything, her *familia*, her *tierra*, her *body*, and her *life*. In the novel, Micaela Campos’ masculine identifications complicate questions of passing and the role of (gender) outlaw, as the character encounters emotional and

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<sup>43</sup> The word *T(r)opography* was coined by Norma Alarcon, but is used as a theoretical concept by Mary Pat Brady in her discussion of Cherrie Moraga’s oeuvre in her book.

physical violences that she is not equipped to handle. In the novel, Micaela leaves her mother and younger twin siblings behind to follow her father and cousin Jed to the battle at the San Jacinto River. Micaela also leaves in order to escape having to face her mother's realization that Micaela has known for sometime that she kept a lover Don Venustiano. Moreover, prior to leaving for a Battle he knew he would probably die fighting in, Micaela's father arranged for her to marry her mother's lover and betrayed the matrilineal tradition of leaving family land to one's daughter by willing the Campos ranch to Micaela's cousin and rival Jed. Yet, Micaela's masculine identifications and practices had always been discernable by her mother,

“Agustin. Mira a tu hija,” and my mother pointed to the patio where I messed about. “Es un machito.” (*Forgetting* 11)

While Micaela's mother easily noted and accepted her daughters' macha behaviors and posturing, her father's investments in traditional gender roles underlie his justification for arranging that his daughter marry Don Venustiano, rather than accepting his daughter's competency as a probable “man of the house.” Micaela cogently observes,

“I was more like a son and less of a daughter but his propensity for proper rituals and traditions often plagued his common sense.” (*Forgetting* 11)

In spite of, or perhaps in order to assert her role as son/daughter Micaela ventures after her father and cousin. After three days of riding to the San Jacinto Rivier, Micaela encounters a massacre and piles of dead and disfigured bodies, rather than the battle she expected to fight alongside her father. Micaela's sexual, gender and spiritual journey begins with the death of her father in the Battle of San Jacinto. After this moment ,she would never be the same, and wage multiple battles in her and her families' honor.

On the third day I saw him. My father. I recognized his brown suede jacket and I recognized his boots but I stood paralyzed wishing I were seeing things. But I wasn't. I stood ten feet from his corpse and falling to my knees, I crawled to him.

There was a knife mama had said would be his end. I pulled it from his heart and held it close to my chest and then something came over me, maybe ghosts or spirits because I didn't realize what I was doing nor did I remember having done it. It was as if a strong spirit forced my hand and I cut my cheek from eye to mouth in a crescent moon like my Tio Lorenzo's brand and blood dripped onto my hands and onto my father's chest. Then, and of this I was wholly conscious, I sliced off my long braid and tossed it into a ditch and right away I felt strength come over me. I heaved my father's corpse to pull off the jacket and I put it on. I was in some kind of dream state or nightmare and if not for some stronger spirit advising me I may not have mounted up and left that field behind me. (*Forgetting* 30)

Despite her father's betrayal, the moment of finding her father's dead body with a knife to the heart provokes an affective and emotional break for Micaela, where pain or *dolor* provokes within her a desire to hurt physically to overtake the emotional hurt she cannot cope with at that moment. This moment is earthshaking for Micaela, as it provokes a transformation that is both emotional and physical. Willfully and consciously, Micaela cuts off her feminine marker, *her trenza*, puts on her father's jacket and assumes her role as the Campos patriarch. Her cutting of her cheek and the mixing of her blood with her father's becomes the *blood memory* that will forever bind her to her father in the ways she longed for, tie her to the memory of Battle of San Jacinto and the slew of painful and pleasurable encounters she will face on her journey.

### **Healing Traumas through Pleasure and Desire in Passing**

Erotohistoriography...sees the body as a method,  
and historical consciousness as something  
intimately involved with corporeal sensations.  
--Elizabeth Freeman, 2010

As part of Micaela's journey to avenge her mother's rape and murder of her brother and sister, she passes as male to gain visible access to the spaces where she was often rendered invisible, due to both her female presentation and the accompaniment of her father or cousin. As

long as she was with her father or cousin, she was protected from potential sexual harassment or assault from the many single men whom frequented bar spaces or had the freedom to journey the countryside; their masculinity made her female masculinity permissible and invisible. With her freshly cut hair, her father's jacket, oozing wound on her cheek and with her trusty horse Lágrimas she "passed" as male, and began her mission. On this journey to hunt down her mother's perpetrators, Micaela experiences sexual violence, the healing possibilities of love, and the trauma of desire. The above epigraph from Freeman's *Time Binds: Queer Temporalities* signals the possibility of sexual practice and intimacy among bodies within representation in fiction and narrative to bind the reader affectively and historically.

Micaela's "passing" figures as an entry for historically situating desire and pleasure as bodily affects that have healing possibilities. Amidst the violence that largely frame the passing narrative within *Forgetting the Alamo, Or, Blood Memory*, there are traces of pleasure that inscribe queer sexual practice and relationships into the historical imaginary that the novel reframes, reimagines, and the traumas it seeks to repair. This inscription of pleasure, touch and erotic practice upon the Chicano historical imagination in *Forgetting the Alamo, Or, Blood Memory*, alongside the trauma and violence that circumscribes Micaela's journey figures as a mode of reparative criticism. According to Freeman,

erotohistoriography honors the way queer relations complexly exceed the present, insisting that various queer social practices, especially those involving enjoyable bodily sensations, produce forms of time consciousness – even historical consciousness – that can intervene into the material damage done in the name of development, civilization, and so on (120).

These moments of intimacy, desire and pleasure that serve as humanizing moments for the character of Micaela at the same time suggests the possibility of haunting not just of trauma but of positive affects as well, (idylls, utopias, memories of touch), which are also a part of this

Queer Chican@ counter-historiography (Freeman 120). Freeman describes this as a kind of historicist *jouissance*, we see this *jouissance* in the butch/femme courtship and relationship between Micaela and Clara.

Micaela's passing as a man is what brings her into contact with Clara, Pérez playfully maps on butch/femme courtship/erotic practices upon the relationship between the two women. This not only queers and sexes the colonial landscape upon which Micaela makes her journey, but posits the possibility of sustaining love and desire for the protagonist. This was a possibility prior to her father's death and transformation that Micaela had never considered. Furthermore, the intimate space/place/time shared by Micaela and Clara, becomes a space for Micaela to feel human and, for a moment, to forge the rage, hate and other affective traumas that have largely worked to produce Micaela's sense of self. Micaela's desire for Clara and the psychic and emotional connection the two share, given the liminality they face due to their racial, sexual and gender positions, produces safe spaces for healing and transformation for Micaela, but not without complications. Note below in a scene after Clara and Micaela's first intimate encounter;

Clara tossed her hair back, laughed and grabbed my face between both her hands. 'Preciosa, eres bien preciosa.' She kissed my lips so kindly that I felt tears swallow up my face. Suddenly, all the treachery and blood that had come before me and that would come after today swept through me in that kind, tender kiss and I sensed that Clara was fierce enough for someone wounded, inside and out, like I was. She understood things before I did. And she purged me of the hurt I had been carrying for so long. The thing was, I wasn't sure I could do the same for her. I wanted to try.

"It's hard out there," she whispered. "I know."

Her forehead touched mine and she wiped away my tears with her thumbs and kissed my eyes. That's when I cried with so much force that I almost became embarrassed of myself but the way she cooed and pacified me made me feel like could be anything with her and she wouldn't mind. We both got up to dress and as I stared at her naked body I felt such solace that I thought, maybe we can have a family together. Maybe that's what she meant. But I didn't have the courage to ask her. I'll ask her later. For sure I'll ask her later. (*Forgetting* 75-6)



This encounter between the two women is reparative momentarily for Micaela, as she hints that she may not be emotionally capable of reciprocating the care and purge that Clara was able to do for her with her touch. Here touch (both emotional and literal) figures importantly as part of historically situated debates in butch/femme politics. Micaela's ability to feel and to be touched emotionally, are tempered by the prior traumas and violence she has encountered (namely being raped and witnessing a young woman being raped and killed by marauders whom she believed to have raped her mother and killed her siblings). While Clara can "take away" these memories momentarily, there is limitation in Micaela's ability to feel, to feel vulnerable and to touch Clara in these same ways. This is tempered by the traumas as well as the masculine identifications she has adopted as she navigates the world.

These traumas of violence and desire that inform Pérez's t(r)opography extend beyond spatial boundaries and extend to uncover those desires and traumas that are repressed. Much of the working out for Micaela is through touch, emotional touch and corporeal touch. In Cherrie Moraga and Amber Hollibaugh's famous essay, "What We're Rolling Around in Bed With," Moraga describes the emotional presence, desire and trust she feels from her partner during sex as a sense of power, a transformative power "strong enough to heal the deepest wound" (398). Juana Maria Rodriguez also builds on this in her essay, "Gesture and Utterance: Fragments from a Butch-Femme Archive," adding that

As queer racialized subjects, control, defiance, accommodation, and violence have historically formed an integral part of our formation as social beings. Therefore these articulations of power can come to bear special meaning in our sexual practices. (J. Rodriguez 286)

Within butch-femme culture, "the intimacy of sexuality, serves as a semipublic sphere that makes up for the failures of the public sphere, providing a space for emotional expression that is not available elsewhere" (Cvetkovich 82). While eroticization and pleasure present the

possibility for repairing and reinterpreting pain and refusals of social intelligibility that constitute daily life of queer, racialized, gendered and sexual subjects, there is still a negotiation of vulnerabilities and investments. As Rodriguez notes,

In butch-femme sex, sexual vulnerabilities are negotiated through language and gesture as each partner communicates their erotic desires, a process of reaching mutual recognition that is always utopian and always presents the possibility of failure. (J. Rodriguez 288)

Pérez communicates both a yearning for futurity, in Micaela's imaginative interpretation of the possibility of a family with Clara. This initial encounter leads to other encounters that in turn work to feel and experience bodies, pleasures, dreams that are "inside, through, and against the evidentiary logic of heterosexuality" (J. Rodriguez 290). Moreover, Pérez's t(r)opography offers survival and recognition for queer, (trans)gendered Chica@ subjects in the borderlands.

The dimensions of Clara and Micaela's relationship, emotional, psychic and physical occurs in the most liminal of spaces, but it is here that spatiality is refigured so that it is queer and most importantly sustaining.

At the end of a narrow passage, she shoved me into a room against a wall and as she bit my lips and tongue, she removed my jacket and pushed me on the bed unfastening my trousers. I darted up securing the buttons she loosened but she was persuasive and her yearning was as fanatical as mine and although I wrangled with her for a moment, more for fun than anything, I finally gave up and gave in. I let myself be pulled back down and I did not rise from that bed or leave her room for days. To be with her meant my inner turmoil subsided momentarily and I was hopeful again about some kind of future for me but only if she was in the future I envisioned. I must have been fooling myself thinking she would want what I wanted but at the same time I fell under her spell even if she may have told me lies. In her bed and in her arms, nothing she said to me was a lie. I believed Clara's words and believed her body when she came unto me. It was bliss I had not known and it was one I yearned to feed forever, even if forever is a foolish prospect, I wanted to crave that possibility. The thing is, I hadn't given up on my quest to find those who had murdered the twins and sometimes I think I fell upon bad luck because my love for Clara distracted me from my plan. (*Forgetting* 109)

In this encounter, Micaela and Clara are as Rodriguez describes, fucking against the walls "of violence, the memory and threat of other forms of touch, of other daily social inquiries that

constitute us as abject, perverse, colored, illegal, and outside love” (290). This scene exposes the interstices between psychic life as sexual subjects and lived experience as “desiring carnal bodies” living life in a hostile world. Although the sex and intimacy of this relationship offers Micaela recognition within her own emotional traumas and psychic journey, it cannot fulfill the demands of her quest for revenge that springs from that originary blood memory which bound her to her father, and their family’s legacy.

While Micaela and Clara figure as butch-femme subjects-in-process, who through their sexual and romantic encounters make spaces of survival and recognition but also “bind and unbind historical subjectivity; collective experiences are implanted and disseminated, such that they overflow their containment both as individual traumas and as events over and over with” (Freeman 160). In the novel, Micaela and Clara’s relationship is underpinned with a narrative of impossibility, not because each does not desire a family or togetherness, but rather it is how each of the characters survive and navigate their individual circumstances; Micaela’s gendered, racialized masculine presentation and Clara’s queer racialized femininity that posture their bodies differently and present extremely different possibilities for each of them. As intimated above, the trauma of loss and the will for revenge gums up Micaela’s ability to be fully present in what could possibly be a sustaining relationship, perhaps even one with a family, and a home.

### **Reclaiming the Future: Decolonial Landscapes and Imaginaries**

...more than anything I was confused about my  
location, both geographic and of the psyche.  
--*Emma M. Pérez, 2009*

Vamonos...donde no haya justicia, ni leyes, ni nada  
no mas nuestro amor.

Pérez's t(r)opography of *el sabor del amor y del dolor* is precisely that messy play between the pleasure of love and sorrow and pain that depend on each other for the performance (in this case passing) to be successful. Pérez's text enables a moment of intense affective response for the reader, specifically the Chican@ queer and trans(gendered) reader which is a representation of how bodies connect and relate to each other not through emotions, as emotions can be policed and constructed discursively. Whereas, *el sabor del amor del dolor* creates a "structure of feeling" where these affects escape or remain outside the body or, in other words, what is beyond emotion at a material level, at a corporeal level; it is the mode through which bodies connect and relate to each other.

Pérez's text is a vehicle through which affect is transmittable among bodies, as the text permits multiple points of entry to the narrative, traversing notions of community bound solely to geographical location. According to Jasbir Puar affect "reveals how bodies can be in multiple places and temporalities simultaneously, not (only) tethered through nostalgia or memory but folded and braided into intensifications" (171). A sense of place is created through this convergence of spatiality, temporality and corporeality and also creates new sites for producing knowledge and humanity for the queer and transgendered Chican@ subject. This discussion of Pérez's work approaches Chicana/o Cultural production to provide insight into the idiosyncrasies of the experiences of non-normative gendered and queer bodies and the encounters these bodies may and may not have, by conjuring the affect that bodies potentially possess in relationship to each other.

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<sup>44</sup> Song written by Jose Alfredo Jimenez, but made popular by Chavela Vargas, a famous Costa Rican Butch Lesbian ranchera singer, whose repertoire functions as a archive of feeling for Chicana lesbian butch femme communities. The song, "Vamonos" when sung by Vargas functions as a narrative about the impossibility of queer love in the world we currently live in, and considers the possibility of a world where queer love is possible for queer/trans of color subjects and their partners.

I would like to return to the sense of geographic and psychic confusion that Micaela observes in the novel (cited in the epigraph), created through the convergence of space, memory and trauma. Pérez's novel, figuratively asserts an ownership to the land despite the encroachment of White squatters, marauder and criminals. This is figuratively an assertion of ownership to spatial, geographic and psychic homes that are often robbed of Queer and transgender Chican@s. Recall the border-zone trope that erases the brown transgender and butch body. Pérez's novel reclaims the border-zone in and through her Queer Chicana feminist revisioning of the landscape of her own childhood. This sense of (dis)placement is best framed through a paradigm of queer diaspora, which accounts for connectivity among bodies and that, according to Puar, is "beyond or different from sharing a common ancestral homeland" (171). This signals a shift away from origins and produces the possibility for bodies to show their affective powers.

Puar's queer diaspora is in conversation with Emma Pérez's formulation of Chicanos and Chicanas as a diasporic group. Pérez writes "if nation is conceptualized as traveling and shifting through time and space—then Chicanos/as take their 'nation' with them beyond the Southwest and throughout the United States to invent Chicana/o nations as they disperse. Origins are, therefore, refutable" (78). Therefore, Pérez's Chicana/o diaspora is not dissimilar to Puar's queer diaspora. Pérez's discussion of diaspora also evokes the convergence of spatiality and temporality, through the diasporic subject who, according to Pérez, "reminds us that Aztlan, the mythic homeland shifts and moves beneath and around us. The mythic homeland is longed for, constructed, and rewritten through collective memories" (78). Pérez's formulation of a Chicana/o diaspora whose homeland is constructed and rewritten by collective memories that are

constantly re-making themselves is to say that it is the diasporic subjects, who create the homeland.

Evoking my prior discussion of the possibility of affective analyses to account for the production of spaces for community through bodies and their affective potential, Aztlán can be described as almost already queer due to its many queer inhabitants and the cultural work they produce, which constructs and rewrites collective memory and thus consistently re-making Aztlán. This mode of conceptualizing homeland and belonging de-privileges the binary between queer and non-queer subjects, as it “underscores contingency and complicity with dominant formations” (Puar 205). Pérez points to the ways in which the diasporic subject is adaptable and finds ways to “keep weaving through power, to grasp and re-create culture, and oneself through and with diasporic communities. So that as she says, “the diasporic subject is not only here and there, not only Mexican or American...or Chicana/o but more, much more always re-creating the unimagined, the unknown” (“Decolonial Imaginary” 79). Therefore, through the centering of the affective sensations, vibrations, and reverberations the body experiences, there is possibility and hope for non-normative bodies like Chicana butches, trans men and other bodies who are still unknown or just becoming and that have been marked as deviant or completely erased by the Chicano historical imaginary.

Pérez’s work makes the gender non-conforming body visible through the genre of the novel, subsequently disrupting the symbolic order and bringing the body out of liminality. The disruption occurs through the affective positions, strategies and encounters Pérez’s hero encounters. Micaela’s pain cannot be contained in her gender non-conforming body; it is in excess. It exceeds both the masculinist and heteronormative narratives that have documented the southwest, as well as passing narratives that insert the presence of gender outlaws in the “west”.

The pain, love and desire in the novel, seduces the reader to identify for a moment with Micaela Campos and savor the *dolor*, for a moment shattering the mirror and conjuring a *sitio* where the colonial self and colonized other become elements of multiple, mobile categories. The active role the reader plays, creates an intimate connection with Pérez's narrative, whereby the "structure of feeling" created in the novel, is formed and organized around various historical and material contingencies that include race," and colonialism. Therefore, cultural production like Pérez's can provide transformative sites for "affective particularity and belonging" not historically afforded to queer and gender non-conforming Chican@s. This act in the words of Anzaldúa, "changes your relationship to your body, and in turn, to other bodies and to the other world." (547).

At the close of the novel, after escaping a death sentence of hanging to the sanctuary of a convent, our hero reflects on the future and generations to come who will settle and fight future battles along this cartographic and psychic landscape. The narrator's journey has provoked a change in the realization that the justice she so desperately sought was not a type of justice that was available to her, even through her masculine presentation. Micaela's love and relationships remain queer, no longer tempered by affects such as hate and vengeance but rather are now replaced with love, for her mother, for Clara and for the twins Clara gave birth to. Clara's children are bound to Micaela through blood, as her cousin Jed fathered the children, as Micaela makes peace with her early observation about Jed, "blood enemies but still kin" (*Forgetting* 63).

...I raise each child above me and my infinite love for them enters my body and I see the future. It's a strange and satisfying thing, the power of future generations in one's arms and I guess that's part of the change inside me I've been trying to explain. That another war is coming doesn't dishearten me as much as before because so long as men like Walker and the Colonel occupy our land, there will be more wars. Maybe the only

justice we'll ever know is in surviving to tell our own side of things. Maybe that's enough for now. Telling our own stories so we won't be forgotten. (*Forgetting* 206)

The protagonist's reflection above signals the possibility of a new legacy, new familial bonds, through generations to come, generations that are bound to that blood memory as Micaela is, but whose possibilities are not limited by violence and trauma. Micaela's journey and transformation informs a sense of hopefulness that she did not have access to prior to her father's death. Micaela is able to access infinite love through these children and through this alternative sense of kinship that has resulted in the survival of three very strong women; Micaela, Clara and Micaela's mother. Micaela feels as though she holds the future in her arms, the generation who will, like her, face many wars and battles for their family's land and legacy; but the survival of these women ensures that this generation will not suffer the same injustices these women faced. In the novel the futurity is symbolized through the twins Micaela holds in the air. Here the child figures as possibility rather than simply offspring or heteronormative familial formations. The future is deployed through *la familia* as it is reconfigured outside the masculinist symbolic of heteropatriarchy and *la familia* becomes a structure through which *joteria* can "tell our own stories so we won't be forgotten" and reclaimed as a place "where for better or worse we learn how to love" – (*Loving 12*; *Forgetting* 206).



## CHAPTER 4

### ‘RE-IMAGINING’ THE LIFE AND DEATH OF GWEN ARUAJO

For Chicanas in particular, the past is filled with narratives about maligned Chicana/Mestiza bodies that have been, in effect, used in violent ways to confirm male domination, cultural superiority, and imperialistic practices in the borderlands.

--Nicole Guidotti Hernandez, 2008

This chapter articulates a “re-imagining” and “remembering” of the life and death of Gwen Amber Rose Araujo, a transgender Mexican American teenager who was murdered in the fall of 2002. Gwen’s story prefaces the introduction to this dissertation and fundamentally informs the necessity that inspired me to write a dissertation centered on the experiences of Trans Chican@s. Transgender women of color are described as a “highly vulnerable population” given their overrepresentation among homeless and sex worker populations. According to legal scholar Dean Spade statistics reveal, “that trans people face severe economic insecurity, exclusion from social services, high rates of imprisonment, and high rates of violence” (“Transgender Issues” 445). These factors all largely contribute to the common normalization of or de-sensitizing toward the deaths of Transgender Women of color, whereas the following trope takes hold, transwomen of color as deceivers (their presentation hides their “biological sex”, therefore they are asking for it)<sup>45</sup>. What is interesting in the case of Gwen Araujo is that her trajectory does not fit the typical “deception” transgender murder plot. Araujo’s murder is a mob murder, a group of young men plan and enact their own pseudo trial of Gwen’s deception in a basement, subsequently beat and lynch Araujo, and impart a perversely

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<sup>45</sup> Bettcher discusses this at length in her article: Bettcher, Talia Mae. “Evil Decievers and Make-Believers: On Transphobic Violence and the Politics of Illusion.” *Hypatia* 22.3 (2007): 43-65. Print.

informed sense of justice that is highly racist, sexist, homophobic and transphobic. According to Linda Heidenreich, Gwen's murder sent a message to queer communities across the US, "there are shades of queer – gay and "just like you" and transgender and 'could not pass for you if my life depended on it '" (52). The trial and activism that followed the murder of Gwen Araujo has subsequently informed both state and federal legislations that theoretically extend protections to transgender and gender non-conforming populations. The brutal murders of Matthew Shepard and Brandon Teena, which shocked the nation in the 1990s, remain important historical moments for LGBT activism and cultural memory. However, as Heidenreich's "shades of queer" illustrates, the murder of Gwen Araujo and other trans women of color remain at best, a shadow in the LGBT historical imagination and within Chicana/o Studies, Gwen Araujo may have not ever existed.

A "reframing" and "remembering" of the life *and* death of Gwen Araujo, offers insight to both the violence that Gwen suffered at the hands of her killers the night she died, but also the everyday violence that informed her subjectivity as a transgender woman of color. Additionally, this chapter posits transphobic violence as part of the "imperialistic practices" on the borderlands that Chicana feminist scholars have documented and asserted as part of the Chicana/o historical imaginary. Guidotti-Hernandez, suggests that we can understand the "violated body as a living narrative," where telling and retelling narratives position the body as a text and position the body in relation to larger cultural and social narratives (79). Transphobic violence, particularly the murder of Gwen Araujo, then becomes part of a larger history of lynching and sexual violence as instruments of racial subordination in the US borderlands<sup>46</sup>. Gwen had been sexually intimate with two of her killers, weeks prior to her murder; this time lag between intercourse and

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<sup>46</sup> Antonia Castaneda, Emma Pérez, Deena Gonzalez, Guidotti-Hernandez have documented the use of sexual violence in the US borderlands and Talia Bettcher argues that transphobic violence is embedded in a history of sexual violence in the US.

discovery of deception/betrayal locates her murder within a web of intimacy, whereby her perpetrators were at one time her lovers. This murder then is “a crime of passion” but not in the ways the defendants’ attorneys argue in their “trans panic defense”. What makes this particular murder so powerful, so memorable is its location in the intimate, a space that Laura Ann Stoler refers to as site infused with “dense transfer points of power.” In this instance desire, pleasure and sex inform “gendered and racialized intimacies.” where Gwen was produced as a particular kind of subject – one to be desired *and* abhorred.

Chicana feminists have produced the theoretical work necessary to “reframe” and “remember” the life and death of Gwen Araujo within a specific history of gendered and racialized violence that has constructed the figure of the Mexican woman as “betrayal”. This historical trajectory, according to Cherrie Moraga, is linked to “a complex and contradictory history of sexual exploitation by white men and from within our own race” (“Loving” 118). Similarly within transgender studies, literature has emerged that problematizes the notion of transgender women as “deceiver.” In context to the death of Gwen Araujo, we see a play of slippages between these two metaphors, “betrayal” and “deceiver”. Both of these metaphors, “betrayal” and “deceiver” emerge from specific histories that are tempered by highly racialized, gendered and sexual discourses. The endeavor then, is to decipher the multiple discourses at play through these spatially and temporally enacted “strategic metaphors,” in order to grasp “the points at which discourses are transformed in, through and on the basis of relations of power” (Foucault 70).

This chapter tracks the multiple forces at play in Gwen Araujo’s life, which ultimately lead to her violent death and continue through the trial of her murderers to inform the everyday lives of transgender Chican@s today. These forces, which are informed through the larger

history of gendered, racialized and sexual violence on the borderlands, although our contemporary moment seems so far removed from the lynching and mob murders of the “West”, their effects and forces continue to haunt. As Avery Gordon reminds us, “in haunting, organized forces and systemic structure that appear removed from us make their impact felt in everyday life in a way that confounds our analytic separations and confounds the social separations themselves” (19). Additionally, Gordon notes that the appearance of specters notifies “that what’s been concealed is very much alive and present, interfering precisely with those always incomplete forms of containment and repression ceaselessly directed towards us” (xvi). This is to say that Aruajo’s death functions as an instance where the specter cannot be contained, the history of rape and lynching as instruments of racial and sexual subordination in the US borderlands are not contained in the past, these same discourses of racial, gender and sexual superiority are still deployed, and in very intimate ways. So then, how does the body resist? What are the affective survival strategies that Araujo is able to deploy in the everyday?

According to Juang, transgender women of color and other racialized and gendered subjects are often constructed as “socially dead,” whose bodies are refused recognition as proper civil subjects and therefore this non-recognition furthers the invisibility of the frequency of violence towards these individuals and therefore violence is common place or rather a lived reality or consequence they bring upon themselves (Juang 712). Transgender literature has extensively documented the role of hate crimes as symbolic messages to transgender communities and as attempts to reinforce racist, sexist, homophobic, and transphobic violence. It is evident, that Gwen largely experienced exclusion and non-recognition as a proper subject by institutions like school and church; but in her intimate spheres, including home, family and

relationships, she was largely recognized as a woman (however not without slippages or exceptions).

Moreover, the events that lead up to Araujo's death do not fit into the frame of "non-recognition," but rather rely upon *mis*-recognition. The mis-recognition of Gwen Araujo as an acceptable, passable female occurs long after sexual intercourse with two of her murderers and triggers a sequence of slippages whereby Gwen is recognized as "deceiver," or "betrayor," and sometimes both. Gwen's recognition as a woman by her family as well as her intimate relationships with these men largely inform how in bodily practice Gwen made the world intelligible to herself, despite the multiple sites of non-recognition she encountered; but it is precisely the "betrayor within" assigned to Mexican Women - one of the many byproducts "of colonialism and capitalist patriarchy" that trigger the sequence of violent events that lead to Gwen's death ("Sexuality and Discourse" 161).

### **A Legacy of Mexican Woman Hating: Articulating the Betrayer Within**

She lay under me whimpering.  
I plowed into her hard  
Kept thrusting and thrusting  
felt him watching from the mesquite tree  
heard him keening like a wild animal  
in that instant I felt such contempt for her  
round face and beady black eyes like an Indian's.  
Afterwards I sat on her face until  
her arms stopped flailing,  
didn't want to waste a bullet on her.

The boys wouldn't look me in the eyes.  
I walked up to where I had tied her man to the tree  
And spat in his face.  
Lynch him, I told the boys.  
-- Gloria E. Anzaldúa, 1987<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Excerpt of the poem "We Call Them Greasers" in *Borderlands: La Nueva Mestiza* (1987)

The above excerpt from the poem “We Call Them Greasers” appears in Gloria Anzaldúa’s book *Borderlands: La Nueva Mestiza* and portrays a scene of violence characteristic of the American West circa the 1840s to the turn of century, perhaps even later since Carrigan documents the lynching of Mexicans in the US through the 1930s<sup>48</sup>. In this poem Anzaldúa evokes a colonial legacy of violence against Mexican and Indigenous women, as well as the relatively ignored history of lynching of Mexicans in the United States. Chicana feminists have uncovered and theorized the origins of the legacy of Mexican woman hating to Malintzin Tenapal’s original betrayal, which remains rooted in Mexican history and mythology. According to Cherrie Moraga, “Chicana’s negative perceptions of ourselves as sexual persons” find its roots in the story of Malintzin Tenapal (“Loving” 99). Anzaldúa further elaborates, that “the worst kind of betrayal lies in making us believe that the Indian woman in us is the betrayer,” which we see in the scene of violence in her poem above (“Borderlands” 44). Both Moraga and Anzaldúa are bridging a connection to the racial and sexual violence that Chicanas have endured historically and still reckon with today. Chicana feminism emerges in part from a tradition of examining the violence(s) that are part of the Chicana/o historical imaginary, and many Chicana scholars have documented and tracked the legacy of Mexican Woman hating and how a history of sexual violence has worked to shape Chicana subjectivity. The policing and punishment of Mexican women’s bodies has a historical legacy that dates back to conquest and continues to enact itself in violent ways in the contemporary historical moment.

Cherrie Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa both write about cultural memory and the historical violence of conquest, and through their writing continually re-open these wounds that have inscribed themselves upon the Chicana body. Chicana feminists have begun the process of re-

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<sup>48</sup> For more on Mexican lynchings see Carrigan and Webb’s essay, “The Lynching of Mexican Origin or Descent in the United States, 1848-1928.”

visiting these traumas or opening these wounds to be able to expose and uncover social and bodily violence and make meaning of pain (“Loving” 118). According to Moraga, “it is nearly earth-shaking to begin to try and separate the myths told about us from the truths; and to examine to what extent we have internalized what, in fact, is not true” (“Loving” 118). It is these earth-shaking moments of realization that challenge the historic legacy of Mexican woman hating, by calling attention to the violences the body has been subject to and naming that bodily knowledge as subversive knowledge. Anzaldúa describes this process as “*conocimiento*” a process where one begins to question the social order and how we think about the construction of certain categories like; race, gender and sexuality. *Conocimiento* is an affective process, as it requires one to pay close attention to the link between the inner and the outer selves, “the mental, emotional, instinctive, imaginal, spiritual, and subtle bodily awareness,” and when linked to social, political action and lived and embodied experience “generate subversive knowledges” (“Now let us” 542). This is considered an alternative form of knowledge that both Anzaldúa and Moraga use to recall a history in which women have overtime been punished for pursuing knowledge that questions the status quo.

Anzaldúa locates this history in female origin figures such as Xochiquetzal and Cihuacoatl (also known as “*la llorona*”) who made the choice to pursue knowledge and individual agency and whose “original sin precipitates the myth of the fall of humankind, for which women have been blamed and punished” (“Now let us” 542). This is an important intervention in Mexican and Chicana history as Anzaldúa dates Mexican woman hating prior to conquest, disrupting the notions of the existence of a pre-Columbian paradise often glorified by Chicanos. While the symbolic and mythic value of Malinztin to Chicana history is integral to understanding the historic legacy of Mexican woman hating, Anzaldúa’s intervention re-creates

these “original sin” moments to recuperate a history for women embedded in the creation of a sense of self. Through her writing, Anzaldúa is creating new histories for Chicanas that are not based in narratives of betrayal and shame, but rather of self-affirmation and self-love as a form of resistance.

The mythology of Malintzin’s betrayal and its subsequent reenactment of conquest both of Mexico and Aztlán, remains at the center of understanding a history of Chicano patriarchy. Norma Alarcón describes the myth as being made “to see betrayal first of all in her very sexuality, which makes it nearly impossible at any given moment to go beyond the vagina as the supreme site of evil” (“Traidora, Traidutora” 203). Alarcón further expands on the myth of betrayal by locating the ways in which the myth seeps in women’s consciousness to understand their sexuality as a means of enslavement, which subsequently manifests itself as self-hatred (“Traidora, Traidutora” 203). This results in following sexual possibilities where women are sexually passive and therefore their bodies are at all times available to men through seduction or rape (“Traidora, Traidutora” 205). Moraga describes Chicanas as coming from a “complex and contradictory history of sexual exploitation by white men and from within our own race,” and goes on to describe the process of discerning the myths from the truths as earth shattering, as it a process of undoing over four hundred years of internalized shame (“Loving” 118). Because women internalize these sexual possibilities and the role of the betrayer, they become relegated pawns to be used “intraculturally” and “interculturally”. Therefore, women are never conferred the ability to choose and, thus, remain highly vulnerable to sexual exploitation.

This we see and have seen over the last four hundred years. The sexual exploitation of Chicana, *Mexicana* and Indigenous women has remained a central issue of struggle for Chicana feminists. In fact, Moraga cites this deep trauma as the inspiration for her desire to develop a



new kind of Chicana feminist theory. She believes that she has “deep racial memory” and that Chicanas have the possibility to not figure as betrayer if “somewhere in the chain of historical events and generations, she were allowed to love herself both as female and mestiza” (“Loving” 136). Both Anzaldúa and Moraga have centered the process of re-opening old wounds in order to feel and channel that pain for survival as well as self-love and resistance. Because this history has worked to construct the world as an unsafe place for Chicanas, Anzaldúa and Moraga suggest a theory of the flesh in order to theorize new epistemologies for Chicanas. These epistemologies are centered in the body and the liminal spaces that Chicanas (y los atravesad@s) inhabit in a world that is not safe.<sup>49</sup>

Gwen’s death occurs in the Silicon Valley, an area of northern California that is a space where the “progress” and promise of technology collides with the historical legacy of racism and violence that imbues the area. Specifically here is what Steven Pitti terms “Silicon inequalities” which can be described as the “progress” reproducing historic contradictions between capital and labor. Additionally, Pitti documents the area’s colonial history – this area being part of the “intimate frontier” where nearly 150 years later we see the same assertions of racial and gender superiority enacted upon the bodies of women. Chicana historians too have documented the use of violence to assert superiority on the part of both White settlers in the American west, as well as by the Spanish in their conquest of indigenous peoples in the Americas. For example, Antonia Castañeda documents the experiences of Amerindian women in California, “In California as elsewhere, sexual violence functioned as an institutionalized mechanism for ensuring subordination and compliance. It was one instrument of sociopolitical terrorism and control – first of women and then of the group under conquest” (Castañeda 29). Similarly, Heidenreich’s

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<sup>49</sup> This is a term used by Anzaldúa in many of her essays to refer to queers, transgender people and generally any other subject position on the margins.

*This Land Was Mexican Once* notes that each groups' (Indigenous, Californios/as) "struggles against white supremacy were often met with violence: violent discourse, physical violence, and juridico-political violence" (170).

A notable example of documented violence against women largely ignored and very pertinent to the murder of Gwen Araujo is the lynching of Juanita/Josefa de Downieville in 1851. Juanita/Josefa was lynched on July 5, 1851 in Downieville, California a day after celebrations marking the one-year anniversary of California's admission to the union. Earlier that day, amidst the drunken celebrations Juanita/Josefa stabbed and killed an Englishman named Fred Cannon, whom depending on what source you consult, had been sexually pursuing Juanita/Josefa for some time. According to Guidotti-Hernandez, eyewitness accounts provide a meta-narrative that is dramatically different from the dominant narrative and speculate that Cannon had previously made unwanted sexual advances toward Josefa/Juanita (83). Most accounts speculate that the murder occurred in self-defense. Yet, Juanita/Josefa was apprehended and given a pseudo-trial a few hours before she was to face the lynch mob. Scholars such as Nicole Guidotti-Hernandez and others have written about Juanita/Josefa's erasure from California history as well as Chicana/o history. Guidotti-Hernandez re-reads the lynching of Juanita/Josefa so that it becomes an instance of violence in the Chicana historical imaginary that "sheds light on contemporary discussions of subjectivity" (77).



Figure 2. “Hanging of the Mexican Woman” California State Library

Above (Figure 1) is a portrayal of Juanita/Josefa’s lynching, which appeared in local newspapers after the public event. There are significant lapses of memory regarding this lynching, as well as the lynching of Mexicans in the history of the U.S. West. It is not coincidental that Juanita/Josefa’s lynching occurred at the onset of the decade with the most documented lynching deaths of Mexicans between the years 1848-1930 (Carrigan 423). It is important to stress that this is the only *documented* lynching of a Mexican woman, which does not mean there were not other violent encounters that resulted in the lynching of Mexican women. The image above portrays Juanita/Josefa surrounded by the lynch mob, who is impatiently awaiting the entertainment of death by hanging usually provided at the time. According to historical record, Juanita was said to have had a plank sawed out from under her

suspended from a bridge. This portrayal however, locates her in the middle of the lynch mob and with a defiant stance. The facts behind the actions that took place on Juanita/Josefa's last night of life are at best obscure; however, it is certain that she did not regret the act of standing up against rape or death at the hands of her perpetrator Fred Cannon.

So then consider two women; Juanita/Josefa and Gwen Amber Rose Araujo. Both women's murders are sensationalized and result from an enraged and emasculated group of men who decide to make themselves the legitimate authorities to impart justice for the alleged betrayals of these two *Mexican* women. Juanita/Josefa is a betrayer because she does not fit into the acceptable Victorian ideals of womanhood at this historical moment; and due to her Mexicanness, is relegated to a position where she is both desired and loathed simultaneously by White miners. Juanita/Josefa is rumored to have killed Cannon in self-defense at the threat of sexual violence, this is a metanarrative that Guidotti-Hernandez uncovers. The lynching is both gendered and racialized; whereby it enacts Chicana/o battle for recognition post-Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo (1848) and the imagining of the Chicana body in historical discourse. Furthermore, the violence that engraves them into historical record is the result of how their bodies betrayed them.

In other words, Anzaldúa's gendered, racialized and sexualized mestiza body is one that will always already betray because of the traumas of colonialism and how they work to mark women's bodies as always betrayers. Both these women's deaths, however, are not in vain; they resisted the ways in which their perpetrators attempted to violate their bodies and both women's stories have an air of resistance and hope for future generations of Chicanas. Violence against Mexican and Mexican American women can be traced across and over time from the colonial to

the present; however, this reenactment or reiteration of violence is what can no longer be ignored.

Gwen's murder complicates how one understands the historical trajectory of Mexican/Mexican-American woman hating, but works to provide insight to the ways in which hate travels over time. Both Juanita/Josefa and Gwen lived in worlds where they occupied abject spaces and their livelihoods were precarious, however, their subjectivity was not produced in those abject spaces but in the words they uttered before their respective deaths. Juanita/Josefa reportedly walked out onto the plank that was to be cut from under her and put the noose over her own head and around her neck and declared, "I would do the same again, if so provoked" (Rojas, 127). According to court testimony, the last words the defendants heard Gwen utter while they were beating her were, "please don't I have a family". What is symbolic of these two sets of "last words" is that they resist rather than confirm the gendered, racialized, sexualized discourses that wrote their fates and were written upon their bodies through a history of violence and colonization.

In the contemporary age of neoliberalism, discourses of violence have been normalized so that the policing, punishment and subjugation of certain bodies (namely racialized bodies) goes overlooked – whereas some bodies are overly surveilled and others are relegated to liminality. Therefore, the bodies of Chicanas are constantly being policed, conditioned and controlled because they are a threat to the security and prosperity of the nation, or as Gloria Anzaldúa writes, "because we do not fit, *we are a threat*" ("La Prieta", 209, emphasis in original). Whereas the construction of subversive knowledges become a threat, "if the security and prosperity of the nation are reflected in the bodies of its people, making pain visible presents an affront to the sanitized, white, middle-class, misogynist commodity-invested self image of the

United states” (Bost, 24). Chicanas become a recognizable threat when they begin to act outside of the norms that construct proper notions of gender and sexuality and therefore present contestation to both Chicano and White culture. This manipulation and control that have ravaged the psyche of the Chicana, has worked to construct strict notions of gender and sexuality that are repressive. Moreover, the punishment for venturing outside these norms is both psychically and physically violent.

Emma Pérez argues that the “decolonial imaginary” helps to rethink history in a way that makes Chicana/o agency transformative; the task at hand then is to re-imagine scenes of violence so that they do not remain instances of passivity, but rather their lives remain engrained upon the Chicana/o historical imaginary. As Vidal-Ortiz argues, “the experiences of racialized sexualization and racialized femininities connect transwomen of color to other women of color,” and that is why I locate Gwen’s murder as an event that is part of the Chicana/o historical imaginary (101). Her story straddles Queer Chicana/o History as much as it does Transgender history; however, it is her embodied experiences as a Trans Chicana that has much to teach us about the positioning of trans bodies in Chicana/o history. Gwen’s story is one that is not typical to what one finds in the literature regarding transwomen of color who are murdered; she was not a sex worker, homeless or without a familial support system.<sup>50</sup> Gwen was experiencing difficulty finding a job due to her female presentation and mismatching male designation on her government issued forms of identification; she had been pushed out of school and was struggling to find her place in a conservative Bay Area suburb. Institutions such as school and church had failed her, and later in her death the criminal justice systems also fail her.

Although, in life and death Gwen faced many failures, her death became a vanguard for organizing for transgender rights in the state of California. Her murderers were not convicted for

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<sup>50</sup> See David Valentine, *Imagining Transgender: Ethnography of a Category*

their hate crimes charges and their attorney's use of the "trans panic defense" resulted in a hung jury. The trials for Gwen's murder, however, served as impetus and evidence for passage of two legislative acts; California Legislation AB 1160, "Gwen Araujo Justice for Victims Act" and the Federal Legislation "Matthew Shepard and James Byrd, Jr. Hate Crimes Prevention Act". The California bill was signed into law on September 28, 2006 and the Federal Bill was signed into law on October 28, 2009. There is however a vexed relationship between the ways in which Gwen lived her life and the subsequent use of her death as a vanguard for transgender rights.

Historically, mainstream Transgender Rights Organizations and advocacy organizations have called for inclusion of acts of violence committed against transgender persons to be included under hate crime provisions. While, I am a proponent for transgender rights and that all persons should be extended equal protections by the law, there is a disconnection with exactly how such acts work to deter or prevent violent acts motivated by intolerance, racism or homophobia and which are entrenched in the United States' complex colonial history and neo-colonial present. Such legislative acts cannot function as corrective solutions to racism, sexism, homophobia and transphobia. There are multiple examples of hate motivated violence toward Mexican/Mexican American women in Chicano history, but what has yet to be interrogated is the emotional residue that has accumulated overtime on the body and in this case the bodies of Aztlán's *jotería*. There are clearly residues of colonial violence at play that rub up against how we think of Chican@ history contemporarily.

Emma Pérez asks, "how will we choose to describe our past, now, at this moment, as an enunciation of the present?" ("Decolonial Imaginary" 27). This is an important stake in this project, as Gwen Araujo's murder is part of an economy of hate that is a product of the historical legacy of woman hating that has shaped the figure of the Mexican woman as "betrayed" and now

contemporarily the figure of the transgender Chicana as “deceiver”. Gwen refuses to be forgotten and we cannot forget her, as her murder and death has given us so much that how she died has come to mean much more than how she lived.

### **Gwen Araujo: Deceiver and Betrayer**

I couldn't believe that someone would ever do that,  
that someone would ever be that deceitful.  
– Jaron Nabors<sup>51</sup>

Eddie was tried, convicted and executed.  
–Chris Lamiero,<sup>52</sup>

During the two trials of Jose Merel, Michael Magidson and Jason Cazares there was an attempt by the defense to construct “Lida” (the name Gwen gave the young men) as a sexual deceiver, who tricked and lured these young men into having sex with them in order to substantiate a “reasonable heat of passion argument” or “trans panic defense”<sup>53</sup>. The trial of these men serves as a site where Gwen’s life is retold, so to construct her as both as a betrayer and deceiver, two tropes I have identified as part of the Chicana/o discourse and transgender discourse. The trial also frames the portrayal of Gwen Araujo’s journey from little boy to Transgender woman in the Lifetime film *A Girl Like Me: The Gwen Araujo Story*. Both the “reasonable heat of passion argument” and the function “made for TV movie genre” re-produce common misconceptions about both Chicano culture and Transgender Women of Color, and these two discursive sites inform the production of the figure of the Chicana Transwoman.

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<sup>51</sup> *Without Mercy*. Dateline NBC, 2005. DVD

<sup>52</sup> *Trained in the Ways of Men*. Dir. Michelle Prevost. Reel Freedom Films, 2007. DVD.

<sup>53</sup> “A defendant invoking a trans panic defense utilizes a heat of passion framework, claiming that his violent acts were triggered by the revelation that another person, sometimes with whom he has been sexually involved, is transgen- dered.” (Steinburg 3)



Gwen Araujo's life is framed within a narrative that affords her memory as a means to an end, in this case the undoing of the "trans panic defense" – a very important political victory for transgender persons, but it secures this community protection only in death. It does not address the institutional failures of schools and church, for example, that transgender women like Gwen face. The trial and the movie frame Araujo's death as a "story about deception and betrayal," both also largely rely on constructing Gwen's as a Transgender Chicana who is self loathing, cannot be trusted, is overly sexual and therefore available for sexual exploitation. Various affects, such as hate, shame, humiliation and revulsion are also evoked in both the film and trial to inform a "reasonable heat of passion" or rather to inform substantiated hate towards brown gendered, sexualized bodies as reasonable motivators for murder.

Emotions are central to understanding how the notion of "sexual deception is fundamentally grounded in sexual violence against women and in race-based oppression" (Bettcher 44). The varying affects that circulate between Gwen and her perpetrators as they are re-told in the courtroom and in the film produce the figure of the TransChicana, through the slippages that occur as Gwen's body slides between "deceiver" and "betrayor". These signifiers are entrenched within a legacy of violence against Mexican women as well as a legacy of transphobic violence against transgender women of color.

No doubt there are "shades of queer" as to what kinds of queer bodies the American public can mourn as victims. Heidenrich writes,

"...bodies of color are constructed as over-sexed, while white bodies are constructed as 'innocent victims' and/or sexually restrained. Thus the queer brown body remains typed as 'threatening,' newsworthy as perpetrator but seldom as victim." (Heidenreich 71)

According to Heidenreich, this constructs the following myth: "queers are white, people of color are heterosexual," which is reinscribed in the courtroom through the legal system where brown

and queer cannot exist in the same space. While Heidenrieck's assessment of "shades of queer" is productive, I push these myths a bit further. In the case of Gwen Araujo, the "heat of passion argument" largely depends on the construction of brown, gendered and queer sexual practices and norms to construct the Transgender woman of color as betrayer/deceiver. The construction of a "reasonable heat of passion" rests largely on Gwen's sexual, gender, class and racial positions, which become the signifiers through which Gwen is constructed as perpetrator rather than victim.

In other words, the defense goes at extreme lengths to construct Gwen as the true perpetrator of deceit and betrayal that would enrage any "reasonable (white male heterosexual) person". "Mexican", "Woman," "Queer," "Transgender" are not empty a-historical signifiers when contrasted against "White," "Heterosexual," "Man." These markers of difference are deployed affectively, thereby making the affective exchanges between Gwen and her perpetrators a very public matter. Within the court room the re-telling of the events of the night of Gwen's death creates an affective economy that is predicated upon rearticulating the violence as deserved, but what transpires is the plight of District Attorney Lamiero to assert the culpability of the White Heterosexual male, Michael Magidson, who the other defendants claim strangled Gwen after she was brutally beaten.

According to the autopsy report the cause of death was "asphyxia due to strangulation, associated with blunt trauma to the head," and "both the strangulation and the blunt force trauma were potentially fatal, and death could have occurred from the blunt trauma to the head even if Lida had not been strangled" (*The People v. Magidson and Merel*). What is of importance is that the District Attorney contended in his case that, "after the blows, she could have remained conscious and able to communicate and move on her own" (*The People v. Magidson and*

*Merel*). When reviewing the people's case against defendants Magidson and Merel, as it appears in the Court of Appeals' decision on Merel and Magidson's conviction appeal, what appears to have been the focus of the prosecutor's office was to reveal Magidson's culpability as the one who strangled Gwen. Although the autopsy reveals that both blunt trauma and the strangulation as the cause of death; there is symbolic resonance behind the strangulation which was committed by Magidson, a white male.

According to testimony, on the ride home after the group of men had buried Gwen, "Magidson made a reference to having twisted the rope, and Cazares immediately remarked that Lida had urinated" (*The People v. Magidson and Merel*). This triggers the Chicana/o colonial imaginary of a history of lynching of Mexicans in the American West, given that the Silicone Valley, the very geographic area where the murder occurred, was a tenuous racial battlefield pre and post 1848.<sup>54</sup> The imagery of a rope around Gwen's neck being twisted and the subsequent urination that is common when a person is hung, triggers both the suffocation and rape of the Mexican woman (Gwen had been pinned down and had her genitals exposed, after she had refused to consent to an examination by the men) and the lynching of the Mexican man described in the poem "We Call Them Greasers".

The death of Gwen Araujo complicates the notion of "hate crime" as her perpetrators; a man of color and a white man come to her from different subject positions. Jose Merel and Michael Magidson's acts of violence signify differently as their masculinity signifies differently in relationship to her body<sup>55</sup>. The narrative the prosecutor created in the people's case against the two men constructs both of them as markedly different people in relationship to their actions upon the "discovery" of Gwen's "biological sex". Prior to the discovery of Gwen's "biological

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<sup>54</sup> For more on the violence of the area a good source is Steven Pitti's *Devil in Silicone Valley*

<sup>55</sup> I focus primarily on Merel and Magidson's involvement because they are two who were convicted of second degree murder, their claims for "reasonable heat of passion" were not found compelling by the jury.

sex,” both men had already inscribed her body as hyper sexualized and sexually available; akin to the sexual possibilities ascribed to Chicanas described by Alarcón. For Magidson and Merel, Gwen was already sexually available to them, in this case through seduction because they had both on separate occasions engaged in both anal and oral intercourse with her. It is the very question of her sexuality, what they regarded as promiscuity that prompts their insecurities surrounding her gender.

This sounds all too familiar; we see the virgin/whore dichotomy deployed and the subsequent and inherent mistrust that must follow true to suit, “to see betrayal first of all in her very sexuality” (“Traidora, Traidutora” 203). There are multiple discourses of gendered and racialized sexuality being deployed here; Gwen’s promiscuity for a “girl her age,” her sexual involvement with both men and the nature of the sexual activity; oral and anal sex – anal sex being the act which unhinges both men’s masculinity and heterosexuality upon discovery of her biological sex. The men compared their sexual encounters with Araujo to discover she had refused vaginal intercourse because she was on her menstrual period, and given that she had had sex with the two men within a period of 14 days, they concluded it was not possible that she was really on her period. They both also noted that Gwen moved their hands from where “breasts would have been” – both of these examples demonstrate Gwen’s ownership of her body and her decisions of how she would be intimate with these men, disrupting the notion that the racialized woman is always sexually available, even owned by men.

The discussion feeds into underlying insecurities that this girl they thought was hot, might be a guy – as Merel and Magidson’s peers had questioned Gwen’s gender based on prior observations like “Lida moved like a man in drag” by Cazares (who had not had sex with Gwen, but perhaps made such comments because he was rejected by “Lida,” this we do not know).

The sexual encounters suddenly shifted from feats to brag about to an ambiguity that had to be resolved. The group looked for the provocation to assure the stability of their positions as heterosexual men. It was acceptable for Gwen to occupy the figure as betrayer as that made her sexually available, but confirmation of her as deceiver would prove to be fatal.

Her body slips between “betrayer” and “deceiver” as the two men cannot deal with the shame – Merel upon the discovery cries and repeats, “I can’t be fucking gay, I can’t be fucking gay.”<sup>56</sup> This represents both intolerance and inability to deal with ambiguity, the slippage that the transgender body signifies – as well as the claim that “Men even more than women are fettered by gender roles” (“Borderlands” 27). These men had seen Gwen as sexually available, but now viewed themselves as the ones “lured” into sex by a man posing to be a beautiful woman – this is the slip from betrayer to deceiver. This logic also becomes a coping strategy for these men to deal with the shame and emasculation they suffered in the presence of their friends, who had not been “deceived.” They all were willing to seek out their confirmation and welcomed a provocation to unleash the violence they already believed was justified, given the positioning of Gwen’s gendered/racialized body, and the decisions she had made regarding her body. Gwen had already been tried, convicted and positioned as the whore.

The “transpanic defense” when deployed by Magidson signifies as racialized/sexualized/gendered discourse of deception, and simultaneously betrayal and loss. As described earlier in, Gwen Araujo is already a “betrayer,” therefore she represents a perpetual threat to the white heterosexual male. The signifiers that are under attack are “white,” “heterosexual” and “male”; and the hate that Magidson deploys toward Araujo both in his sexual

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<sup>56</sup> People v. Jose Antonio Merel and Michael William Magidson. No. A113056. Court of Appeal of California. 12 May 2009.

relationship to her and in his act of murder are normalized under Aruajo's existence as always already a threat.

Sara Ahmed describes the emotion of hate as working to "animate the ordinary subject;" in this case the "white heterosexual male" and this is a fantasy as "white heterosexual male" cannot exist as a stable and pure signifier, however the emotion of hate is what brings that fantasy to life ("Affective Economies" 118). This is accomplished by constituting the ordinary as in crisis and therefore the real victim; the bodies of the "others" become the "hated" as the ordinary is already always under threat; and so then it is solely the proximity of the "others" that "causes" injury to the ordinary subject. The ordinary needs the "hated" and this economy of hate to exist. Ahmed describes this as a "narrative of injury" whereby hate is distributed across various figures; who come to embody the "threat of loss" ("Affective Economies" 118).

Therefore, in the case of Gwen Araujo her proximity to Magidson as a Mexican American woman already presents a threat to Magidson's racial and sexual superiority and upon his discovery of her biological sex there is a doubling of this threat. Whereby, his ordinary subjectivity is violated and his racialized, gendered and sexualized superiority no longer signify purely. The hate in this instance does not solely reside in Gwen but circulates between the figures that Gwen signifies: Mexican Woman and Transwoman or in other words "betrayal" and "deceiver". Sara Ahmed writes:

The slide between figures constructs a relation of resemblance between the figures: what makes them alike may be their "unlikeness" from "us." Within the narrative, hate cannot be found in one figure, but works to create the very outline of different figures or objects of hate, a creation that crucially aligns the figures together and constitutes them as a 'common' threat. Importantly, then, hate does not reside in a given subject or object. Hate is economic; it circulates between signifiers in relationships of difference and displacement. ("Affective Economies" 19)

Therefore, in the relationship between Araujo and Magidson hate circulates between the figures of transwoman and Mexican American woman and therefore aligns them as a common threat. This instance of violence creates another mark in the Chican@ historical imaginary, where the figure of the Mexican American woman or Chicana becomes complicated. Magidson's hate works to create the outline of the figure of the transChicana – Gwen's death is both within and outside the existing historical record of Mexican woman hating. Gwen's death complicates notions of gendered violence in the Chican@ historical imaginary, as we know it contemporarily. As I argued earlier, Gwen becomes both "betrayers" and "deceivers," two signs that emerge from specific histories. "Betrayers" emerging from pre-colonial and colonial mythology and "deceivers" is commonly used in reference to trans individual who do not "reveal" their trans identity to presumed "heterosexual lovers".

### **Transgender Chican@ Spaces: La Familia, La Escuela, La Iglesia**

Just as having sex with different women boosted their egos and made them feel more macho, maybe her having sex with them just validated her feelings of being a beautiful young woman. She lived every day of her life yearning and longing to be a girl in every sense of the word. So if anyone who didn't know her, made her feel that way, why would she reveal that she is transgender...She was rejected at school, her church and even within her own family, so I don't blame her for doing drugs and drinking, the only things that didn't reject her.  
 – Emma Rodriguez (Gwen's Aunt)<sup>57</sup>

In a 2003 Dateline news broadcast special entitled, "Without Mercy; The, Life and Death of Gwen Eddie Araujo Jr., Victim of Transgender Violence," the announcer describes Gwen suffering three casualties after she came out as transgender to her mother, Sylvia Guerrero;

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<sup>57</sup> This is from the filmed Victim Impact Statements at the sentencing of Merel and Magidson from the film, *Trained in the Ways of Men*

School, Church and Family. In the epigraph above, Gwen's Aunt Emma describes these three casualties as institutions that rejected her. She later goes on to add, "imagine not having a place to work, to learn, a place to worship because you are treated as if you are not human" ("Trained in the Ways"). Emma Rodriguez's witness statement clearly articulates the spaces that are thought of as integral spaces to the life of a teenager like Gwen; work, school, church, family. These spaces are also places in which one typically should be treated as "human", as a subject deserving of the economic, educational, spiritual and emotional benefits that these spaces afford and that most people have access to—and largely take for granted. Rodriguez also points to alternative spaces of intimacy and intelligibility that Gwen created for herself by turning to sex, drugs and drinking – all things Rodriguez describes as things that didn't reject her, albeit they positioned Gwen in a precarious position. Rodriguez's statement also asserts that just as these young men's initial braggadocio about their sexual exploits with Gwen, a girl they thought as "hot" – perhaps the sex, the intimacy she shared with these young men made her feel like the "woman" she yearned to be. As Gwen was shut out of the spaces where she was supposed to feel protected and human, she looked to spaces that were considerably unsafe to find a way to feel human, validated and desired.

This section interrogates the construction of "school, church, family" in media and film, as the three integral sites from which Gwen was cast out, and which leads her on a path to "flirt with danger." Springing from the discussion of trans Chicanas as always sexually available and as inevitable deceivers, I scrutinize the portrayal of Gwen Araujo's life in the Lifetime movie *A Girl Like Me: The Gwen Araujo Story*, which does not stray from the "Chicanas as oversexual, blame the dysfunctional family" equation.<sup>58</sup> The film documents Gwen's childhood, her struggles at school and church, her intimate relationships and finally her death, in the form of

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<sup>58</sup> See Rosalinda Fregoso's work



flashbacks in between snippets based on testimony from the trial. The film tracks the life of Araujo in a way so to create an image of a transgender person of color whom both queer and straight white middle-upper class Americans can relate to, but also safely distance themselves from.

As such, the film relies upon stereotypes about Chicano families to highlight how out of “place” Gwen’s transgender identity was in relationship to her extended family, and also highlights Gwen’s single mother upbringing as part of her path to “flirting with danger”. The film also portrays Gwen in a romantic relationship with a straight man that is not aware of her transgender identity. This relationship is, shortly after, thwarted by her mother, who discloses Gwen’s “biological sex” and thus further reifies transgender women as deceivers, while positioning Gwen’s family as non-supportive. The following paragraphs employ close readings of various scenes from the film that illustrate the above assertions of the film and also illustrate the failures of school, church and family, which Rodriguez articulates in her victim impact statement.

The film begins with Sylvia Guerrero and her children preparing to attend a birthday party at her parent’s house; it is clear that Sylvia, Gwen and her siblings have just moved back to Alameda County.<sup>59</sup> Sylvia’s mother, played by Lupe Ontiveros, makes the following comment prior to Sylvia’s arrival at the party, “Children need a father, no woman can be father and mother at the same time” (*A Girl Like Me*). This foreshadows the chastisement Sylvia receives from her mother at the party for choosing to “abandon” her husband despite the domestic abuse she and her children suffered; according to her mother, “when a man feels respected he will behave.” This instance largely constructs Sylvia as incapable of raising her children, as her mother reifies

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<sup>59</sup> As I mentioned in the introduction of the paper, Gwen was born in Brawley, California. Sylvia left her abusive husband and moved the family to be close to her parents, siblings and extended family when her first two children (Gwen and Pearl) were young.

the heteronormative traditional family with a mother *and* father as the only appropriate familial configuration. Soon after, Sylvia's mother's inference regarding Sylvia's ability to raise a proper family is confirmed by unveiling of 9 year old Gwen or Eddie in a dress to the entire family (see below).

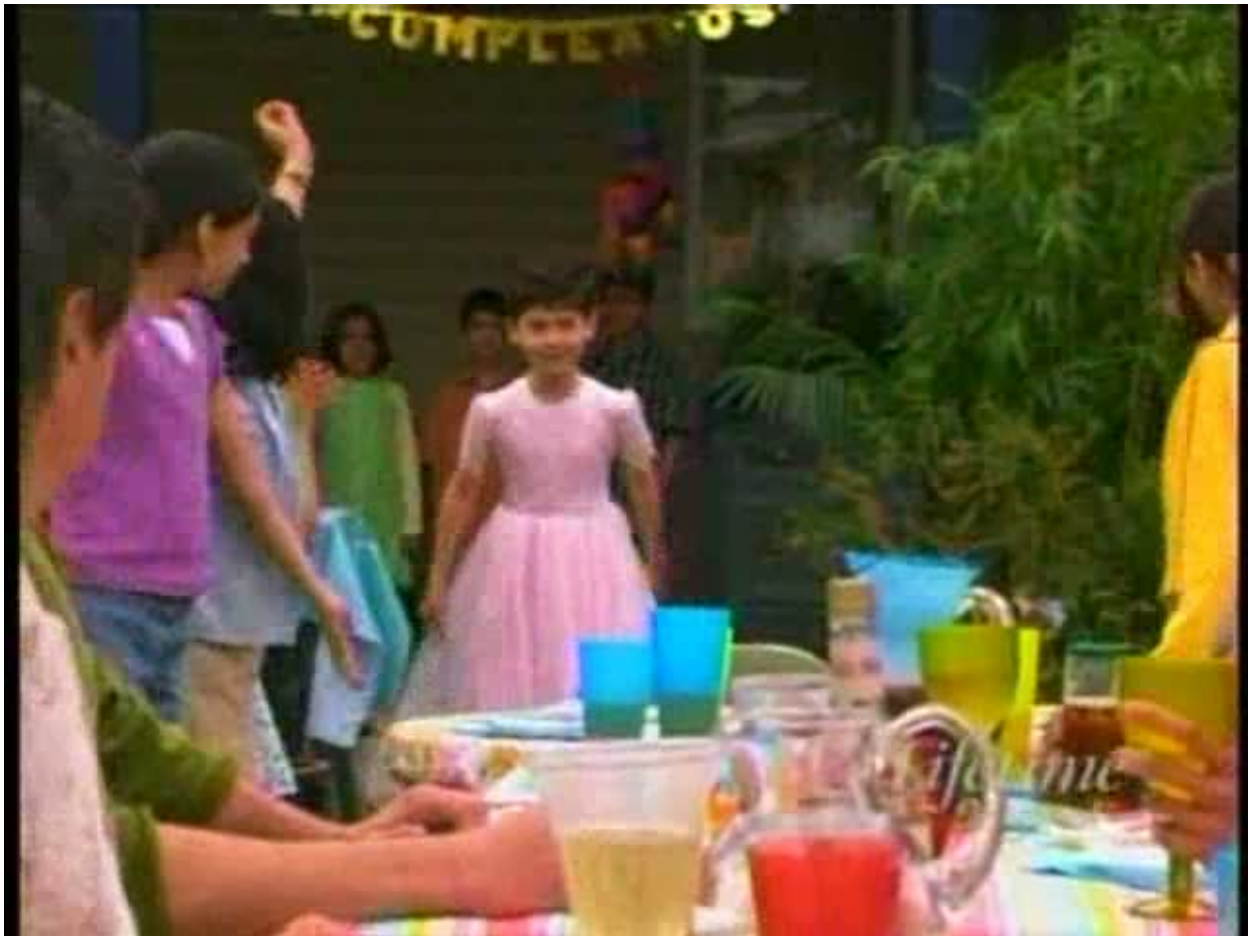


Figure 3: “Eddie” unveiled in a dress

“Eddie” is revealed to the family in the pink poofy dress that his sister Pearl was forced to wear to the party. The film also opens up with Sylvia forcing Pearl to wear the dress against her wishes, as Pearl is a “tomboy”. This unveiling both confirms Sylvia's mother's belief that single mothers are not able to raise and instill proper morals (such as appropriate gender roles) to their children. The film highlights this conflict between Sylvia and her mother the matriarch, who consistently finds Gwen's development into a woman unacceptable and largely attributable

to Sylvia's choices to raise her children on her own. Historically, married Mexican women have been constructed as responsible for imparting tradition and morals to their children; single mothers are conversely constructed as teen mothers, welfare queens and ill fit mothers, and within Chicano culture as *vendidas/deceivers/betrayers*.<sup>60</sup>

As the film documents the life of Gwen as a child, her identifications with more feminine behaviors and practices such as wearing women's clothing and makeup is contrasted with her sister's masculine identifications as a "tomboy". In a scene in which Sylvia catches Gwen in earrings, makeup and a bra it is clear that his feminine "tendencies" are not acceptable, while his sister's tomboyism is just a phase and is not any cause for alarm. Tomboyism is just "an extended childhood period of female masculinity. If we are to believe general accounts of childhood behavior, tomboyism is quite common for girls and does not generally give rise to parental fears" ("Female Masculinity" 5). In the film still below (Figure 4), we see Gwen being scolded while sister Pearl looks on and confesses that it is not her that put the make up and clothes on Gwen, but rather it was Gwen who chose to put them on. Had Pearl chosen to use Gwen to play dress up, the behavior would have been welcomed or even praised, as it would have both reaffirmed Pearl's tomboyism as just a phase; but because this confirms Sylvia's fears about her "little boy's" feminine behavior, it becomes more than just an innocent game of dress up<sup>61</sup>.

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<sup>60</sup> George Sanchez documents the targeting of Mexican women by Americanization efforts at the turn of the century. See "'Go After the Women': Americanization and the Mexican Immigrant, 1915-1929".

<sup>61</sup> See Judith Halberstam's *Female Masculinity* for her discussion on the representation of "tomboys" in film and literature.



Figure 4: Gwen and Pearl play dress up

The film then later turns to Gwen and Pearl as adolescents, in which both are attending the same high school. It is Gwen's first day at this school, because she had been teased tremendously at her prior school. As the two are entering the school, Pearl turns to Gwen and says, "It's okay if you're a fag, just don't flaunt it," to which Gwen responds, "I'm not a fag." This exchange is demonstrative of Gwen's identification not as a "fag," but as a gender non-conforming individual, which is illustrated in the scenes following her sister's warning, as Gwen proceeds to the restroom to put on lipstick and jewelry. Soon after Gwen leaves the restroom, she is threatened by one of her peers, who in the film would later be one of her killers (See Figure 5).



Figure 5: Gwen Being harassed at school

As a recent study on transgender discrimination entitled “Injustice at Every Turn: A Report of the National Transgender Discrimination Survey” confirms, a staggering amount of gender non-conforming youth reported experiencing either verbal or physical harassment in schools<sup>62</sup>. The film importantly documents the hostile environment these youth face, as well as the lack of institutional support from administrators and teachers. Gwen’s sister intervenes to protect her sibling and this results in a physical altercation between Pearl and the “pretty boy” (as she calls him), which lands Gwen and Pearl in the principal’s office. The next scene is one in which Sylvia comes to pick up Pearl and Gwen who are both apparently being sent home for the

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<sup>62</sup> The study was conducted by the National Center for Transgender Equity and the National Lesbian and Gay Taskforce.

day, while the harasser presumably gets to stay without consequence. The principal is not as concerned with Pearl whose appearance and



Figure 6: Gwen and Pearl in the Principal's Office

behavior has grown from “tomboy” to “chola/homegirl,” but indicates that Sylvia should be more concerned with addressing Gwen’s gender non-conforming behavior (See Figure 5).

Again we see the reiteration of Sylvia, the Chicana single mom who is incapable of controlling and successfully parenting her children. The principal puts the responsibility back on the parent to deal with issues related to gender/sexuality, rather than addressing the harassment that lead to the provocation in the first place. In the state of California, LGBT students are protected from harassment by AB 537, the “California Student Safety and Violence Prevention

Act,” which was passed in 2000, around the time when Gwen started presenting as Gwen full time. As documented by C.J. Pascoe in her book and recent studies on transgender youth, teachers and staff rarely address verbal or physical harassment. We see this in the principal’s treatment of Gwen’s gender identity as a behavioral problem rather than acknowledging Gwen’s gender identity expression and practices.

Later in the film, after Gwen has dropped out of school and has been alienated from most of her intimate personal relationships, her younger brother indicates to Sylvia, “they hate him, everyone kids, teachers”. Sylvia demands to know who hates Gwen, to which Gwen’s brother responds, “Mom, the principal makes him use the boy’s bathroom, even though the guys say if he tries, they’ll cut it off.” This clearly illustrates the institutional mistreatment of queer and gender non-conforming students and the participation of schools in reiterating an environment that is perpetually threatening and unsafe for these students, both physically and emotionally. The film, *A Girl Like Me*, struggles to depict the very real circumstances, consequence and misunderstanding that transgender youth face, but the film’s narrative repeatedly reifies stereotypical assumptions about Chicanas and Chicana/o families. The price of depicting a story of a young transwoman and her unfortunate encounter with a group of young men with whom she had intimate relationship is the re-writing of important details about Gwen, her family and her relationships, so that they fit viewers’ expectations or assumptions about transgender people and Chicanas/os. For the viewer, this creates a perceived incompatibility between Chicana/o culture and transgender subjectivities whereas the only productive sites for affirmation for transgender youth are LGBT serving resources and organizations that are largely white run and oriented spaces. This intimates that Chicana/o families can never be affirming spaces for

transgender Chican@s, which we see largely highlighted in the portrayal of Araujo's extended family.

The tensions between transgender and Chicana/o are significantly highlighted in scenes where the role of church, specifically the Roman Catholic Church in Gwen Araujo's family. A notable scene in the film that highlights the tension between the family's acceptance of Gwen and the Church is a discussion between Sylvia and her mother regarding Gwen's participation in her sister's wedding. Pearl had asked Gwen to be her maid of honor, but this was met with significant contention, as this would require Gwen to stand in the altar in a dress; or in her grandmother's and priest's eyes, a man in a dress at the altar is unacceptable. This is a moment in which Gwen's transgender identity becomes real for the family; her grandmother agreeing to this signals her and the families' acceptance of Gwen as a *woman*. Gwen's grandmother, the matriarch, is the person from which Sylvia must ask permission on Gwen's behalf to participate in the wedding ceremony.

The film depicts the mother and daughter sitting at the dining room table, a space in which the family gathers to discuss what is a highly tenuous issue. This familial space is not without the iconic religious statue of one of the many representations of the Virgin Mary, that foregrounds a camera shot of Gwen's grandma as she explains to Sylvia that Gwen's presence at the altar would be an abomination (See Figure 6).

Grandmother: This is because you stopped going to church.

Sylvia: No... I stopped going to church because I was no longer welcome there.

Grandmother: *No vestirá la mujer en traje de hombre, ni el hombre vestirá en ropa de mujer. Es Abominación...* You are supposed to be his conscience, not his friend.

Sylvia: I am supposed to be his mother.

Grandmother: If Eddie stands in a dress next to our priest, we will be mocking what they teach. (*A Girl Like Me: The Gwen Araujo Story*)





Figure 7: Sylvia and her mother have a discussion

In the above exchange that occurs at the table, Gwen's grandmother asserts that it is Sylvia's single mother household that is to blame for Gwen's transgender identity. There is a tension between two generations on what constitutes "motherhood," whereas Sylvia's mother believes a "good mother" enforces a morality that is taught by the church, "you are supposed to be his conscience," while Sylvia asserts that being a mother doesn't include being your child's conscience. These intergenerational tensions in Chicana/o families that are the result of conflicting ideologies regarding gender and sexuality are becoming much more common place.

While the film signals the icon Virgin Mary as being on the side of the old generation, there is a whole generation of Chicana feminist writers, scholars and artists have long reconfigured *La Virgen* as a feminist and queer icon. This, paired with Sylvia's assertion of her

differing view of motherhood that is not premised upon the morals the church teaches, signal that despite the assumptions that Chicana/o families and transgender subjectivities are not compatible, there are families that make it work and creates sustaining spaces in ways that they know how. For example, while Gwen is not allowed to serve as maid of honor, she is allowed to wear a dress. While in the film it is clear that Gwen is hurt, the wedding becomes a space where her identity as Gwen is presented to the family.

The film documents the difficulty and confusion faced by a working class Chicano family with a transgender family member, while Gwen is not allowed to stand at the altar as maid of honor, her grandmother's hesitant yes to Gwen in a dress at the wedding is important. This is an example of the day-to-day interactions transgender people of color navigate with their families and other institutions like the church, for example. While Gwen's family is not necessarily fully accepting, acceptance happens *their* way. Furthermore, in the film it is at her sister's wedding that Gwen meets her boyfriend, Joey, who does not know that Gwen is transgender.

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This romantic relationship as portrayed in the film takes on the issues of disclosure that would later become centered in the trial of Gwen's assailants. In the film, Gwen is portrayed as having a very passionate relationship with her partner, a relationship that affirms her

identifications and yearnings for a woman (See Figure 8).



Figure 8: Gwen and Joey

While on the one hand, the portrayal of the relationship could be read as furthering the notion that passing without disclosure is a deception. I however choose to read it as an instance in which passing enables a sustaining affective bond with another person, where the intimacy and the erotic enables transgender persons to feel human, as Audre Lorde writes, “the need for sharing deep feeling is a human need” (58). In her relationship with Joey, Gwen does not disclose that she is biologically male, and through this the film only portrays one type of sexual practice that the two can engage in, vaginal intercourse. This is confirmed through the tensions portrayed between Joey and Gwen in the film. There is a scene in which the two are making out and Joey

poses the question of when the two will have sex, and Gwen responds by indicating that she does not feel ready, and that the two do not know each others close friends and relatives.

In portraying Gwen in a romantic relationship, the film offers a glimpse into the sustaining value of intimate relationships, however it also reaffirms the transgender woman as deceiver by having Gwen lie and say that she was a virgin and not ready to have sex. In the film, her mother intervenes and informs Joey that Gwen is transgender without Gwen's consent; this affirms Gwen as deceiver and her mother as betrayer. While Sylvia is portrayed as doing so to protect her daughter, it positions the narrative to go only in one direction, a direction in which Gwen is "forced" into depression, drugs and alcohol by her family. Again the Chicana/o family becomes positioned as a moral authority that surveils, intervenes and reasserts both heteronormative sexual practices, as well as heteronormative relationships. We see a simultaneous affirmation of transgender woman as deceiver and Chicana/o family as the institution, which affirms and resolves the deception and subsequently cuts off a romantic relationship that was sustaining, affirming and humanizing.

In the film, this moment is what unhinges Gwen and culminates in her seeking out spaces that are "unsafe," where she is partying and has successfully alienated herself from her family and from school. Gwen begins drinking and hanging out with the young men who would later become her attackers. In the film, however, Gwen is portrayed as desirable and sexually available to her assailants. While in the film we do see in the court dramatizations an affirmation that oral sex occurred, it is constructed as not "sex" but "oral sex," whereas vaginal sex becomes the only form of sexual practice that actually counts as legitimate sex, and the film completely erases the anal sex that occurred between the Gwen and two of her attackers.

The scenario becomes constructed within a sensationalized narrative of discovery, deception and betrayal. The night of Gwen's death is premised upon Gwen seeking out revenge upon her estranged boyfriend in a space where multiple men desire her, but these men have already planned to confirm their suspicions regarding Gwen's biological sex. The film portrays Gwen's arrival to the party and portrays the scene of discovery that would "trigger" the young men into a rage in which they would beat, strangle and then dispose of her body. Gwen is forced into a bathroom with the "pretty boy" (Magidson) who was portrayed as harassing her earlier in the film, in the bathroom he would forcibly unbutton Gwen's pants and expose her genitalia. In the film we see Gwen sitting on the sink crying and Magidson's expression of disbelief, moments later the rest of the group would force open the door to see the discovery (Figure 9).



Figure 9: The Discovery

The group then proceeds to beat Gwen in what is portrayed as a heated passion, and the film concludes by depicting the funeral and other key moments in the first trial. Gwen's funeral provoked significant media attention because many Queer and Transgender activists made the journey out of San Francisco to the Silicon Valley to attend the funeral. Again we see a tension between Sylvia and the church, as the priest advised that an open casket viewing would perhaps not be the most appropriate, given all the unwanted attention the funeral was receiving with the presence of Queer and Transgender activists.

At the end of the film, the Guerrero family is portrayed as uniting in acceptance of Gwen, despite her transgender identity and the presence of so many Queer and Transgender individuals who did not know Gwen. In the Dateline special on Gwen, Stone Philips notes, "Alive she had been a pariah, an outcast, isolated and threatened and now dead she gained acceptance and celebration" (*Without Mercy*). The activism and unity that Gwen's death created has been instrumental in achieving protections for transgender persons on paper; Heidenreich (2005) has documented the significance and importance of such activism. But the limitations of such activism is that it only affords protections to transgender people *after violence* or in most cases death has occurred, how do legislations that protect trans people in death, afford them equal treatment by the institutions that alienate them and negate their humanity?

### **Dangerous Desires, Necessary Survival Practices**

As is the case with most queer and transgender teen deaths, community comes out to show support and remember those lost in droves, but these teens do not have this same type of systematic support available to them when they were alive. In the case of Gwen, her story demonstrates that she had a family who was there for her; she was not kicked out of her home as

she was from school and church. She had sustaining and supportive relationships with her mother, sister and brothers and aunts and uncles – but those relationships were not enough. Her family could not protect her from the day-to-day interactions “with various institutions of power that classify us (transgender people) differently and respond to us with simultaneous sexism and transphobia, in addition to, the racism, xenophobia, ableism, and ageism that the most vulnerable trans people face” (Spade 251). As noted above, Sylvia did not know the extent to which school administrators contributed to Gwen’s disengagement at school, which is confirmed by data in a recent study by GLSEN which indicates that only 11% of gender non-conforming students reported that school staff intervened “most of the time or always” in response to negative remarks regarding gender expression, whereas 90% of students reported hearing negative remarks regarding gender expression by students “sometimes” “often” or “frequently” (“Harsh Realities” 12). Furthermore, 82% of transgender students reported feeling “unsafe” at school, and 46% of transgender students reported missing at least one day of school in the past month because they felt unsafe.

While this study provides significant insight to experiences of transgender youth in schools, a major limitation is that more than half of the participants were White (64%), with data collection primarily occurring through community based groups and service organizations serving LGBT youth, as well as through GLSEN’s website with recruitment occurring through myspace.com and other social networking sites. Although transgender students of color were targeted to assure adequate representation, they are grossly underrepresented in relationship to rates of hate or bias motivated violence that they incur, and such violence occurs within schools as much as it occurs in alleys and on the streets.

As Spade has argued, trans people face lack of recognition in multiple sites, which also contribute to disproportionate incarceration and poverty among transgender populations (“Trans Methodologies” 251). This said, transgender individuals battle continuously against state violence, bodily violence, and psychic violence that necessitate varying survival practices. Such practices are described by Spade as, “the utilization of multiple narratives about our identities, our beliefs regarding gender and our bodies, our sexual practices and proclivities, our relationships to family, and the other information that culture continually demands or forces we alternately disclose or deny” (“Trans Methodologies” 251).

These are practices and strategies that we see Gwen deploy in her life, as she did not have many spaces that afforded her safety or that were humanizing. She sought out to create these relationships and/or spaces. which necessitated that she make important decisions about her body, her relationships and most importantly about disclosure. As her aunt poignantly points out, why would she disclose her transgender identity if it meant risking loss of the desire she felt from these young men; even if the desire or pleasure was fleeting, it for a moment enabled her to feel human, a sense of self as described by Lorde;

The erotic is a measure between the beginnings of our sense of self and the chaos of our strongest feelings. It is an internal sense of satisfaction to which, once we have experienced it, we know we can aspire. For having experienced the fullness of this depth of feeling and recognizing its power, in honor and self-respect we can require no less of ourselves. (Lorde 54)

This is not to assert that Gwen’s sexual acts with these young men are the measure of her sense of self, but she did make those choices as a transgender woman to engage sexually with these young men and be empowered by the choices she made with her body. As Elizabeth Freeman asserts, erotics “traffics less in belief than in encounter, less in damaged wholes than in intersections of body parts, less in loss than in novel possibility.” Therefore, while these



encounters were fleeting and potentially dangerous, they also presented empowering moments of possibility for Gwen to make decisions about her body. Given that the racialized, classed, (trans)gendered body is one “intelligible only through its encounters with other bodies” (Freeman 11).

Yet again, this is not to say that the erotic encounters that Gwen had with these men should be the focus of her story, nor the sole survival practice that should be highlighted, but it is at the same time overlooked and strategically deployed to make the rage, shame and humiliation these men felt upon the “discovery” of Gwen’s biological sex real and relatable. It is how the erotic relations and bodily acts that “gum up the works of normative structures we call family and nation, gender, race, class, and sexual identity, by changing tempos, by remixing memory and desire, by recapturing excess” that is missing from Gwen Araujo’s story (Freeman 173). How sex is deployed in the case to construct a “heat of passion” and “transpanic” defense is affectively premised upon both the emotions and physical sensations that were exchanged between Gwen and these men, which are in turn mediated by race, class and a history of coloniality that constructs the Mexican woman as betrayer, deceiver and figure to be hated.

Undoing, the events as I have in this chapter, lays bare the “carnal aspect of ideology”, that common “sense” is underwritten by emotions and physical sensations (Freeman 172). Gwen’s transgender body undoes the “common sense” of ideology as it pertains to gender, sex, sexuality, race and class; and it is at the moment of undoing that her body comes to matter and will matter for generations to come. This is why she is accepted and celebrated in death, although barely acknowledged or understood in life. Gwen’s body and the encounters she had were “improvisations of the social” and are very unpredictable given the harsh realities of transphobia,

homophobia, racism and sexism that are generated and maintained by capitalist modernity and neoliberal agendas of postmodernity (Freeman 172).<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> Such agendas, and/or neoliberal political gains I am referring to are hate-crime legislations and other legislations that work through the legal system, which has historically surveilled, policed, incarcerated and failed to protect the very same populations these laws are designed to protect only after they are dead. (See Spade, “Methodologies of Trans Resistance”)

## CHAPTER 5

### CONCLUSION: TRAVESÍA PEDAGOGY

It is impossible to export pedagogical practices  
without reinventing them.  
--Paulo Freire, 2000

I write the myths in me, the myths I am, the myths I  
want to become. The word, the image and the  
feeling have a palpable energy, a kind of power.  
--Gloria E. Anzaldúa, 1987

The quote above from Gloria Anzaldúa's *Borderlands: La Nueva Mestiza*, speaks to the key components of what make up the foundation of a pedagogy-in-process; that I have tentatively named "Travesía Pedagogy." Travesía pedagogy integrates, "the word, the image and (most importantly) the feeling" as integral parts of articulating a pedagogy to both understand the intricacies of Chican@ transgender subjects but also how they understand themselves. Teachers and cultural workers become integral allies here, as their responsibilities include supporting transgender and gender non-conforming Chican@ students in linking the word, image and the feeling to the worlds they navigate. Educators and cultural workers are integral, as Macedo notes the "inability to link the reading of the word with the world, if not combated, will further exacerbate already feeble democratic institutions and the unjust, asymmetrical power relations that characterize the hypocritical nature of contemporary democracies" (15). Therefore, in order to further combat the institutions and systems of power that position this population as "vulnerable," there is a necessity to cultivate a praxis-oriented pedagogy that links the body, affect and education. "Travesia Pedagogy," then picks up where the dissertation began, a call for humanity, "un mundo donde quepan muchos mundos" this humanism is found in the pedagogy of liberation articulated by Paulo Freire, Antonia Darder and in the work of Chicana

feminists that have framed and informed the theoretical interventions that this dissertation makes.

Thus far, this dissertation has articulated the Chican@ trans and gender non-conforming subject within discourse and the traced varying affective strategies the subject employs for survival. The works that make up the cultural archive assembled here are the word and the image, while affective strategies comprise the *feelings*, which I have argued arise from the human body, the “flesh and bone.” Together word, image and feelings impress upon the consciousness a kind of transformative power (*Borderlands* 93). Travesía Pedagogy, is the acknowledgement of a way of knowing that begins in the carnality of the body, as it is through the body that Transgender Chican@s deconstruct dominant ideologies that mediate how race, class, gender and sexuality construct Trans identities and practices. Through these affective strategies and ways of knowing represented both in discourse and in everyday life Trans Chican@s embody theory and practice.

### **Reflexiones Pedagógicas**

It does not matter where or when it has taken place,  
whether it is more or less complex, education has  
always been a political act.  
--*Antonia Darder, 2002*

Lastly, this dissertation argues for the inclusion of the brown trans(gendered) body as an integral site of inquiry in educational research. As Cruz has noted, “the body holds the beginning of charting new territories in epistemic approaches, where we can begin to develop strategies to rethink our work in education to reflect multiplicities of language and history in less partial and less distorted ways” (72). Travesía pedagogy is both critical critique and a practice of

beingness that is already at play inside and outside the classroom and when acknowledged by educators can provoke the transgender Chican@ subject to move towards self-reflexivity and healing. As noted by Darder, Freire's pedagogy of liberation attends dialectically to "the specific or local 'act of knowing' as a political practice that takes place in the larger conflictual arena of capitalist relations of exploitation, an arena where large groups of people palpably and undeniably suffer needless privations and pain due to alienation..." (Darder 250). This dialectic then requires educators and cultural workers to validate and center the narratives of survival, transformation and emancipation of transgendered and gender non-conforming Chican@s, as they reclaim their histories and identities. Travesía pushes Freirian pedagogy to attend to emotions and affect as central to the social and political analysis of everyday life that is at the center of curriculum.

This pedagogical move centers the transformative process whereby the subject makes meaning of both their "greatest disappointments and painful experiences" to lead them towards becoming more of who they are (*Borderlands* 68). The Chican@ transgender subject, cannot fully do this on their own; as I have argued, Chicana@ Transgender subjects are simultaneously targets of protection and violence. This over surveillance, coupled with repeated disavowal, exclusion and abjection require a pedagogy and methodology for survival that are made palpable through the ways in which the Transgender Chicana@ subject moves and weaves through multiple discourses and structures of power, that seek to discipline the body. This spatial regulation of the body and psyche by institutions and schools, however, can also create the possibility for the articulation of these new subjectivities. These new subjectivities and possibility for humanity for transgender Chican@s lie in revolutionary pedagogies, that not found in schools. Schools, according to Darder, "socializes students to accept their particular

role or place within prevailing social order – a role or place that historically has been determined for particular groups in society on the basis of the political economy and its sorted structures of oppression” (56). Hence, “schools are political sites involved in the construction and control of discourse, meaning and subjectivity” (Giroux in Darder 57). Herein, lies the possibility of the radical educator, ally and cultural worker to turn traditional public educational spaces on its head, by centering the lived experiences of transgender Chican@s as integral sites of knowledge and learning.

“Travesía pedagogy,” is an embodied practice of feminist oppositional theoretical frameworks and tactical strategies of survival that involve the strategic utilization of emotion and affect to deconstruct and decolonize the body’s relationship to coloniality’s residual effects as well as the effects of late capitalism. Sandoval posits these conditions as the occasion for the citizen subject to emerge and deploy a differential mode of oppositional consciousness. Travesía pedagogy, describes the body’s resistance of the varying policies and practices that create these conditions for new Chican@ transgender subjectivities to emerge. This process requires an interrogation of past and present structures of domination on the part of the subject and their allies.

According to Cruz, “understanding the brown body and the regulations of its movements are fundamental in reclaiming narrative and developing radical projects of transformation” (68). Such transformations require self-reflexivity which can either be defeating or transformative. For Anzaldúa, this is the Coatlicue state, a third space in which one makes meaning of one’s “greatest disappointments and painful experiences”. This third space can lead the individual towards “becoming more of who (*they*) are” and an acknowledgement of the self. Anzaldúa describes, “becoming more of who we are” as a step forward, a “travesía” or a crossing into new

territory, where one is an alien in new territory, again and again. She describes this knowing ( as I have argued *el sabor del amor y del dolor*) as painful, because the knowledge that one is no longer the same person they were before, is like “an endless cycle of making it worse, making it better.” But there is always a production of meaning, arising from the human body, flesh and bone.

The brown body, specifically the impure brown body that is fragmented by multiple identities and subjectivities and its survival tactics, strategies and methodologies are what inform “travesía pedagogy,” which is the suturing of the “travesía” or “becoming more of who we are,” or “the crossing” to the body and its emotional or affective methodologies of survival. According to Sandoval, this kind of differential maneuvering is a sleight of consciousness that constructs a cyberspace where “the transcultural, transgendered, transsexual, transnational leaps necessary to the play of effective stratagems of oppositional praxis.” (63) For it is love and pain, or what Emma Perez describes as the “trauma of desire” or “erotic despair” (all of these are affective states), that emerge from the body, to bring one to the psychic point of “breaking through or crossing over”. Sandoval underscores the importance of affect or emotion to this process. She notes “entrance into this new order requires an emotional commitment within which one experiences the violent shattering of the unitary sense self as the skill that allows a mobile identity to form takes hold.” (197). And to borrow from Cindy Cruz, what results is “...the brown body becomes agent, witness, and provocateur” (63).

Here I turn to the transgender Chican@ body that fashions survival mechanisms so that “it gets better,” is more like “I will survive today, tomorrow, and the next day”, enabling a commitment to “a well-defined structure of identity for one hour, day, week, month, year, transform that identity according to the requisites of another oppositional ideological tactic if

reading of power's formation require it" (Sandoval 60). The Trans subjectivity that I am describing here is one that is tactical and enacts a strategic play comprised of "the utilization of multiple narratives about our identities, our beliefs regarding our gender and our bodies, our sexual practices and proclivities, our relationships to family, and the other information that culture continually demands or forces we alternatively disclose and deny" (Spade 251).

Furthermore, Spade observes,

"to survive our day-to-day interactions with the various institutions of power that classify us differently and respond to us with simultaneous sexism and transphobia, in addition to the racism, xenophobia, ableism, and ageism that the most vulnerable trans people face, we are often required to alternate between varying and contradictory narratives about our own experience and identity as needed" ("Trans Methodologies" 251).

### **Re-inventing (Trans)Formative Teaching**

I have argued in my discussions of affect and the transgender Chican@ body as archive, that the Transgender Chican@ subject utilizes survival tactics that emerge within the body and manifest affectively. This continual crossing and repetition of "crossing" is the "Travesía". Each crossing and or encounter then has the potential for a kind of *conscientizacion*, and according to Moraga, a consciousness "born of a body that has a shade, a language, a sex, a sexuality, a geography and a history" sometimes changes everything, "including with whom you love and lay" (*Loving* 175). The reality is that for Chican@ transgender populations home, school and church can be hostile spaces that disconnect the Chican@ transgender subject from a "personal and social motivation to transform their world and themselves" (Darder 35). Therefore, the transformations occur through practices that are characterized as "at-risk" behaviors and/or "problem behavior" by various institutions: schools, church, family, government, non-profit organizations. This results in policies, politics and programs that push to "fix" what is "wrong,"



rather to accept and nurture what is. It is the race and culture that is constructed as “wrong,” which results in the occlusion of the possibility for institutionally funded and created spaces that foster the possibility for conscientization among Transgender and gender non-conforming Chican@s. Sandoval describes such conditions of the oppressed,

As a *symptom* of transnational capitalism in its neocolonizing postmodern form (insofar as interest in this mode of resistance is arising out of pressures peculiar to this newest form of globalization), as well as a *remedy* for neocolonizing postmodernism both in spite and because of its similarities in structure to power’s postmodern configurations. (Sandoval 179-180)

Now, more than ever, if these behaviors/practices emerge from the conditions produced by transnational, neocolonizing postmodern capitalism, then the solutions must come from within and outside power’s postmodern configurations. For this reason a reinvention or engagement with Freire is key, as Peter McLaren notes:

The “globalization” of capital, the move toward post-Fordist economic arrangements of flexible specialization, and the consolidation of neo-liberal educational policies demands not only vigorous and ongoing engagement with Freire’s work, but also a reinvention of Freire in the context of current debates over information technologies, global economic restructuring, and the struggle to develop new modes of revolutionary struggle. (McLaren in Darder 251)

Freire’s work gave the word “educator” new meaning and shifted the word to encompass multiple perspectives: “border intellectual, social activist, critical researcher, moral agent, radical philosopher, and political revolutionary” (Darder 249). Therefore, Transgender and Gender non-conforming Chican@s need allies and educators that embody the set of “indispensable qualities” Freire describes as integral to the progressive educator. According to Darder, these qualities “reflect human values that expand a teacher’s critical and *emotional* capacity to enter into effective learning-teaching relationships with their students” (Darder 48). These “indispensable qualities” are rooted affectively in ways that the educator and allies, foster within themselves and others a commitment to openness, to new ways of being, new ideas and new dreams. According

to Darder, Freire passionately argued that we “must dare to do all things with feeling, dreams, wishes, fear, doubts, and passion” (47).

The qualities identified by Freire are; *humility, courage, tolerance, decisiveness, security, the tension between patience and impatience and the joy of living* (Darder 49-50). These qualities underpin Freire’s “praxis of hope,” through which alliances across differences can be forged – so those aligned together can learn together, teach together, create together, and organize against the obstacles that “prevent the expression of our humanity and steal our place as subjects of history” (Darder 29-30). These indispensable qualities are very important for Travesía Pedagogy, as these qualities challenge the educator in the same ways that they are challenging their students to discover new ways of seeing and reading the world. *Humility*, as described by Darder, is a quality that allows the educator to listen beyond differences and is associated with the “dialectical ability to live an *insecure security*” (48). Much like the “hermeneutic uncertainty” that underpins *el sabor del amor y del dolor* this dialectic means that the educator “even in the certainty of the moment, could remain open to new ways, new ideas, and new dreams” (Darder 48). *Courage*, for Freire emphasizes the confrontation of fear, and a willingness to challenge and overcome our fears and central to this is the ability to accept and control fear (Darder 48). This characterization of courage, is linked to humility as it too requires the ability to confront and be okay with “insecure security” very much like Transgender Chican@s live their lives daily confronting and challenging myths and the dominant ideology regarding gender and sexuality, the educator must be equally courageous in confronting these ideologies and myths, they must not let their fears immobilize them. *Tolerance*, is not about “acquiescing to the intolerable; it does not mean covering up disrespect; it does not mean coddling the aggressor or disguising aggression,” rather according the Darder, “the critical

expression of tolerance is founded on the basic human principles of respect, discipline, dignity, and ethical responsibility” (49). For Freire, the critical expression of tolerance is central to actualizing authentic democratic experiences in the classroom and in our lives. Freire’s formulation of tolerance is founded on basic human principles which make it also very integral to Travesía Pedagogy, as a transformative project that cannot be successful if educators do not have this critical understanding of tolerance so that they can work alongside Transgender and gender non-conforming Chican@s. *Decisiveness and security* are both linked to a sense of competence, political clarity and ethical integrity, which Darder links to the teachers’ ability to make decisions despite the possibility of rupture. The *tension between patience and impatience*, according to Darder, “allows teachers to both feel the urgency of the difficult conditions they are facing within schools and at the same time respond with thoughtful and reflective tactics and strategies, rather than *blind activism*” (49). This is one of the most important virtues, as it requires educators to be willing to grapple with ambiguity, complexity and tension that they may encounter on their journeys toward creating a democratic and liberatory space for transgender and gender non-conforming Chican@s, the dialectic is informed by a tolerance for ambiguity and uncertainty, similar to Gloria Anzaldúa’s mestiza consciousness. It is the conscientious utilization of strategies and tactics in the classroom that cohere with the dream of a liberatory classroom and the struggle for humanity, rather than blind activism which is most often quick-fix recipes that do not undo the wounding work of dominant ideologies and myths. An example of such *blind activism* will be discussed later in this chapter.

Finally, *the joy of living* Travesía pedagogy requires those who dare to teach or to be allies, to be just as prepared to take emotional risks, as they are physical and mental risks. The *joy of living*, asks educators and activists to fully embrace life. It challenges one to maintain the

notion that one's life and political activism are not separable from one's teaching. It is being an example for their students in order to reaffirm that despite the stifling forces of economic and social injustice. Most important educators and cultural works must demonstrate to their students that transformative and revolutionary praxis as a political project is always underpinned with a love (*amor*) for the very act of teaching and learning, as described by Freire, Sandoval and of course very famously by Che Guevara<sup>64</sup>, despite the many painful (*dolor*) moments and obstacles one encounters.

Here I turn to my own reflections as an educator:

Teaching, as a political and transformative act, requires from me courage, humility, decisiveness and hope. As a transgender identified Chicano who teaches in a college town, in the heart of the Midwest, I find myself employing strategies I have described in this dissertation that involve varying narratives about my own transgender identity and history. Because I never know how I am going to get read, sir, ma'am, she, he, butch lesbian, gay man, or just Frank. My daily experiences involve seamless vacillating between these varying sexualized, racialized and gendered positionalities, and readings by those who I encounter. I don't always correct people who mis-read me and use female referents/pronouns, I know far too well the consequences of contesting a "mis-reading" of my presentation by a stranger. Asserting my humanity and dignity among strangers or those not familiar with my life, my history, or my identity has a violent price. When I teach, I come out the first day of every class, because I have not legally changed my name and only recently started hormone replacement therapy – therefore I am forced to disclose my transgender identity and my journey in order to assert my humanity and to make it clear to my students that to them I am Frank or Mr. Galarte. I have been fortunate to have students who are for the most part respectful; only a handful of students have asserted their non-recognition of my trans male identification through writing "Ms. Galarte" or using female pronouns on mid-term class evaluations.

What I have briefly described are fragmented realities or what Sandoval describes as "schizophrenic effects" and "war zones" that have the potential to shatter one's sense of self into hysterical exhilaration or depression beyond scope. This is because part of Travesía Pedagogy, as I embody and practice it, is that I always give far more than I receive in and outside the classroom, my body endures multiples crossings. The recognition of my humanity and dignity is

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<sup>64</sup> "Let me say, with the risk of appearing ridiculous, that the true revolutionary is guided by strong feelings of love. It is impossible to think of an authentic revolution without this quality" –Che Guevara

always tenuous, therefore I must always be prepared to defend myself, my subjectivity as a trans Chican@ identified subject and educator. This also means that I ask my students to step outside of their comfort zone, most times to defy what religion, their parents and their culture has taught them about gender and sexuality. As Anzaldúa have notes the one must be courageous, I must “write the myths in me, the myths I am, the myths I want to become”( *Borderlands* 93). From my experiences in the world and as a teacher, I know that I am a survivor, everyday I turn towards “something else to be;” resisting spatial, psychic and bodily disciplining, I hone my modes of perceiving, making sense of and acting upon reality that are the basis for “effective forms of consciousness,” this is travesía pedagogy in the flesh. This process is praxis, the living and breathing of a pedagogy of love and pain, a liberatory practice that is palpably bound to beingness and a commitment to transforming the world. A world in which the transgendered Chicana and Chicano subject has the “freedom to want passionately” ( *Loving* xi). For the impure, the transgendered Chican@ subject, travesía is the road to survival, the road to revolution, the road to the future.

This pedagogy is theory driven by critique and practice on the part of both the Chican@ transgender subject and their allies. This work is fundamentally inspired by Paulo Freire’s call to teachers and educators to “reinvent” his vision of liberatory education, and seek to expand upon what Antonia Darder describes as “living a pedagogy of love,” or the “‘reinvention’ of our radical vision not only of schooling but of American society- a vision of a society that is unquestionably shaped by democratic commitment to human rights, social justice, and a radical redistribution of wealth and power” (Darder 30-31). Moreover, Darder adds “for Freire, a liberatory education could never be conceived without a profound commitment to our

humanity...a deeply reflective interpretation of the dialectical relationship between our cultural existence as individuals and our political and economic existence as social beings” (Darder 35).

At the heart of Travesía pedagogy is, Freire’s critical vision for the future, which “is impossible without a sense of hope, firmly anchored in the knowledge that there exists ‘no historical reality which is not human’” (Darder 29). Through a “praxis of hope,” Freire argues that alliances across differences can be forged, where teachers, students, cultural workers, “learn together, teach together, be curiously impatient together, produce something together and resist the obstacles” (Freire in Darder 29-30). Here is the point in which the Zapatista’s call for humanity and dignity across and within communities becomes most salient. There are however, those who despite how well meaning they may seem, “actually participate in disabling the hearts, minds, and bodies of students (in this case communities) – from the personal and social motivation required to transform their world and themselves” (Darder 35). In this next section, I look to an example of *blind activism*, as described in this section as actions on the part of educators and activist who solely are seeking quick-fix solutions that further the wounding work of discourses and myths that further wound students by providing solutions that in the long run will not help them to be able to see themselves in a world and future worth fighting for.

### **“It Gets Better”: The Criminalization of Brown Bullies**

An example of pedagogical efforts that participate in disabling the hearts, minds and bodies of students is columnist Dan Savage’s “It Gets Better Campaign,” which was launched online on Youtube.com in 2010 in response to a series of highly publicized gay teen suicides. The mission of the campaign was to provide reassuring messages by both Gay and Lesbian celebrities to LGBT youth, that despite the bullying and teasing that they face during

adolescence, their future holds a myriad of possibilities. Rather, than despair, the message conveyed that as LGBT individuals mature and grow older, “it gets better.” Savage’s “It Gets Better Campaign” has recently been turned into a book, according to Savage it was published in book form as a resource for LGBT youth to pick up in their libraries and for generations to come to be able to look back on this “period of increased gay teen suicides” and “activism” that has followed. At best, the “it gets better campaign” works in concert with what Queer theorists have termed the “antisocial thesis” or rather the “the conceptual privilege of white middle-class male subjects who are always already guaranteed a future and so can afford to jettison the idea of one” (“Introduction” 167).

Savage’s concept of “it gets better” rests on this guaranteed future, while foreclosing a future for Queer and transgender youth of color who are far more vulnerable than the white middle class gay, lesbian and transgender subjects we see represented in the videos in Savage’s project and whose socio-economic realities limit their access to the internet or who attend schools whose libraries are not likely to purchase the book. For many queer and transgender youth, we know the reality is that as many before me have said “it needs to get better right now” because statistically we know we do not have the privilege of waiting; or as Cherrie Moraga reminds us, “Coming out is about choice(s) and running out of them” (*Loving* 203). And, according to Dean Spade, the average life expectancy of a transgender person is 23 years. So then, I ask, who has time to wait or rather, who has the privilege to wait?

There are serious racial and socio-economic contingencies that underpin Savage’s message, which leaves a lot of youth with a vision of a future they may not ever access. In a recent interview with the San Francisco Guardian, Dan Savage,” was asked, “Most of the times, the bullies themselves are the ones in more of a crisis. Who’s reaching out to those kids?” To

this question first he laughed, then responded, “I don’t know and I don’t care, quite frankly. If someone wants to start a project to help bullies’ inner torments they’re free to do so”. As previously articulated, men of color are overrepresented as perpetrators of Hate and Bias Crimes towards Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender persons each year. Therefore, based upon the arguments I have articulated in this study, close reading of Savage’s response then reads, “I don’t know and I don’t care about homophobic men of color, but if someone wants to help these homophobes, they’re free to do so.” In this reading of Savage’s response, Anzaldúa’s words again are salient,

As a person, I, as a people, we, Chicanos, blame ourselves, hate ourselves, terrorize ourselves. Most of this goes on unconsciously; we only know that we are hurting, we suspect that there is something ‘wrong’ with us, something fundamentally ‘wrong’. (*Borderlands* 67).

Savage’s wounding words work alongside countless racist and sexist discursive formations that have historically constructed Chicanas and Chicanos as inferior, as well as the discursive formations surrounding the vulnerability and invisibility of Transgender and gender non-conforming Chican@s that I have discussed at length in this work.

Writing the conclusion to this dissertation, I did not know that bullies would figure so centrally in this project. Perhaps this is because we are not used to thinking about the bullies and crises they face. Yet, as I began writing the conclusion and soon thereafter, it became crystal clear that we prefer not to think of bullies. We are not supposed to care about them, even though it is very possible that our brothers, fathers, *primos* and *tios* were at one time bullies or participated in bullying behaviors as boys and adolescents. However, there is a lot at stake in the bully/sissy relationship/dependency that further contributes to the fettering of gender roles in Chicana/o culture. Piedra traces the bully/sissy relationship/dependency to Spanish colonialism and US imperialism, he notes:



From a colonialist perspective, everyone benefits from the paternalistic bully's colonial equation. According to this equation, to be sissified is to belong to the bully's colonizing order – under whose aegis, vicarious and/or submissive intercourse, belonging and empowerment, be it sexual or just social, are better than none at all. (372)

If the bully figures as the colonial power, the colonized engage in varying self-saving/self-sacrificing activities in order to survive, which is a painful exercise for the colonized as they compete for illusions of domination over each other. In this case for Chicana/os, it manifests as rigid gender roles and notions of sexuality. We know from Gloria Anzaldúa, that “men more so than women are fettered by gender roles.” And in the worst cases, the fettering of gender roles, sex and sexuality has produced men like Jose Merel (one of the young men convicted of killing Gwen Araujo), and Allen Andrade (who was convicted of killing 20 year old Angie Zapata of Colorado), both these men are serving prison sentences for their crimes. Merel was sentenced to 16 years for second-degree murder and Andrade was sentenced to life in prison without the chance of parole for first-degree murder and with bias crime sentencing enhancement. Andrade was the first case to fall under the Matthew Sheppard and James Byrd Hate Crimes Prevention Act, that extended federal hate crime provisions to include gender identity and sexual orientation that provide harsher punishment for those convicted of hate and bias crimes.

Yet, this reframing of violence to be dealt with by the criminal justice system does not provide a means for safety from violence for trans and queer people (specifically queer and trans people of color who are grossly over represented in reported hate or bias motivated acts of violence). Moreover, according to Spade such laws “promote the idea that homophobic and transphobic violence is primarily an issue of individual violent people, rather than systemic conditions that endanger the survival of queer and trans people;” and furthermore, “there is no evidence to suggest that hate crimes laws operate as a deterrent to crimes motivated by bias”

(246). Rather, such provisions operate to give gay activists such as Savage peace of mind that they are protected from the hypermasculine brown body, the *macho*, or *men of color who become the face of bullies*.

Curtis Marez's 1996 essay, "Brown: The Politics of Working-Class Chicano Style" figures importantly here for deconstructing Savage's racializing discourse. Marez writes:

The Anglo construction of a hypermasculine brownness reflects a fascination with the *macho* as a uniquely Chicano characteristic: in the Anglo imagination, brownness often stands for the extremes of masculinity as such. Thus in Anglo-English, *macho* has been assimilated as a synonym for male. By assuming in this way an essential link between brownness and masculinity, Anglos are able to disavow patriarchal structures at the same time that they participate in them. As long as Anglos are able to point to *machismo*, they can either ignore the excesses of white masculinity or reimagine them as instances of courage or fortitude. (117)

According to Marez's logic, Savage's comment does the ideological work of constructing the bully as brown, where the brown masculine body reads: Macho, Patriarch, Homophobe, Gay Basher, all the while Savage maintains the position of courageous and fortuitous White Gay male. This further reifies discourse that constructs the blame, the hate, and the hurting that informs the idea that something is "fundamentally wrong" with Chicanos.

Hence, I agree with Anzaldúa's statement "we need a new masculinity and the new man needs a movement," to be briefly specific, we need a masculinity that is not at the expense of Chicanas, and asserts that whether white or brown, masculinity is an intercultural construction and not a racial essence (Marez 118). This is why Freire's indispensable qualities are important, as courage is integral to Anzaldúa's vision of a new kind of masculinity. While Savage and other celebrities presume to know what the future holds for those who can afford to wait; what he does not know, and I quote Stuart Hall here, is that "the future belongs to the impure, the future belongs to those who are ready to take in a bit of the other, as well as being what they themselves are" (299). As Queer and Transgendered Chicanas/os our racialized, gendered, sexed bodies by

virtue make us impure sons and daughters of Aztlán. This is my point of departure, the impure—and the positing of an epistemic and ontological project that is bound to beingness, “travesía pedagogy”.

## **Conclusion**

This new social movement is infused with what  
Foucault calls a ‘desire’ capable of driving the body  
and the will beyond their limits.  
--Chela Sandoval, 2000

For a moment, I’d like to turn to a recent song by the popular music group Ozomatli, which has caused much controversy both within and outside the Chican@ community. In 2010 Ozomatli released a new studio album, entitled “Fire Away” which featured the single “Gay Vatos in Love”. The song begins like any standard Freddie Fender or other Chicano “cruising oldie” but once the song gets to the chorus, which is the refrain “gay vatos in love” it is clear the song is a queering of the traditional love and impossible love stories and narratives characteristic of these genre. The song stirred controversy among Ozomatli’s fans, because of its “homosexual content” but also among the queer and transgender community for the inclusion of the name of Angie Zapata, a young transgender woman killed by her Chicano lover Andres Andrade. The line in the song is, “Juan Gabriel says amor es amor/but Angie Zapata is lying on the dance floor,” and while most Ozomatli fans or listeners may not even discern Angie Zapata’s name or know who she is, the song writes her memory into the groups repertoire. The line’s reference to

Juan Gabriel is also a reference to the singer's messages of tolerance and acceptance, "amor es amor" or "love is love" read: queer relationships are okay, but not queer like Angie Zapata<sup>65</sup>.

There is seemingly no rhyme or reason for the inclusion of Angie Zapata's name in the song, but for queer and transgender activists who commented on youtube videos for the song, they criticized the song for perpetuating the equation of transgender identities and subjectivities as part of "gay subjectivities." Or rather, that the song perpetuates the common belief that transgender women are just gay men who "pose" as women to seduce and deceive Chicanos. Despite the song's controversy, it was embraced by various members of the Queer Chican@ community. The song marked the memory of Angie Zapata with a message of hope for many that the Chicana/o community would begin to unfetter its understandings not only about gender, but about sexuality as well. Not without contradiction, the song begins a critique of colonial workings of heteropatriarchy by introducing the possibility of beginning to talk about transphobia and homophobia in the Chican@ community via a form of popular culture. As noted by Sandoval,

Citizen-subjects have become so surrounded and 'trapped' in our own histories of domination, fear, pain, hatred, and hierarchy that the strategic adversary under postmodern times has become our own sense of self. (Sandoval 164)

It is a small step in a larger struggle for confronting our "strategic adversaries" within and outside that have oppressed and limited the expression and humanity of transgender and non-conforming Chican@ subjects.

While Ozomatli's song challenges the Chicana/o community to think about Queer relationships, it also reinforces the damaging discursive construction of transwomen as

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<sup>65</sup> Famous Mexican singer who is widely loved and celebrated by many Mexicans and Mexican Americans, despite the artist's sexual orientation. The artist has never "come out" as gay, the artist's only acknowledgement to queerness is his famous statement, "lo que se ve no se pregunta", or "you don't ask what's obvious". He is also a key icon for the Mexican LGBT community, and is embraced despite his refusal to "come out of the closet"

deceivers. Yet, despite its own impurity, the song opens up the possibility for queer and trans subject formation. Through images, words, stories Chicana/o cultural producers and educators are creating an alternative archive of curricular materials for educators to challenge the fettering of rigid gender roles for the new generation of Chicana/o and Chican@ youth. Liberating pedagogies, informed by the cultural texts I have analyzed to rescript the master narratives of Chicana/o, Queer and Transgender histories, can “enable students to construct meanings that are lived in the body, felt in the bones, and situated within the larger body politic in the form of public metanarratives aimed at increasing social justice and emancipation” (McClaren 277).

As I have demonstrated, the Transgender and gender non-conforming Chican@ subject already deploys the body as a pedagogical device, through which the subject deconstructs racialized, sexualized, classed and gendered ideologies that discipline and construct the body. Furthermore, these methodologies of survival, that are premised upon affect such as love, pleasure and pain, expose the violences the body encounters. What is necessary then, is a commitment on the part of transgender Chican@s and gender non-conforming subjects and their allies to a praxis of relating and living together, or *convivencia*, which entails the creation of spaces which “respect and work from the power of relationships, commitment, wisdom and sensibilities born of a life’s work of straddling fragmented realities” (Bernal et al 5). As described by Lisa Cacho, the disruption of racialized, gendered, and sexualized disciplining such spaces create offer us “alternative ways of knowing to reconceptualize systems of value, measures of worth, and standards of living, dying, and desiring” (184). Furthermore, such spaces of connection and *convivencia*, enable empowerment as a bodily feeling, an “alchemy of connection” that provides knowledge, strength and energy to persist and be resilient in collective actions (“Now Let Us” 571). *Convivencia*, is integral to this liberatory pedagogical philosophy,

as Freire notes, “full humanity could not be carried out in isolation or individualism, but only in fellowship and solidarity” (Freire 73). For it is *convivencia*, that has the transformative power to provoke Transgender Chican@s to work through the dolor that largely informs their lives and create spaces where *amor* informs their existence just as much or if not more than the *dolores* they face on a daily basis.

In this dissertation I have looked to the body, multiple sites of power, and social institutions to expose how fictive truths and values are enacted upon the body. In doing so I have exposed the pleasure, desires and traumas that characterize the affective strategies for survival employed by transgender and gender non-conforming Chican@ subjects. In Chapter two I uncovered how the transgender and gender non-conforming body is constructed discursively Queer, Transgender and Chicana/o Studies scholarship as both present and absent. In that chapter I also described the importance of affect and the body as archive as a mode of survival and consciousness utilized by transgender and gender non conforming Chican@s to decode and deconstruct their own relationships to power. Through case study in chapters three and four, I demonstrated the productive possibilities of affect for articulating the presence of the transgender and gender non-conforming Chican@ body in the Chicana/o cultural and historical imaginary and, hence, built upon the contributions of Chicana historians and Queer Chicana/o scholarship.

Most importantly, in articulating the discursive presence of the transgender and gender non-conforming body in the Chicana/o cultural and historical imaginary, I have created resource and archive of texts and affects that inform a critical pedagogical practice for Transgender and gender non-conforming Chican@s and their allies. I have argued for the brown and trans(gendered) body as an integral site of research in educational research and in Chicana/o

Studies, Queer Studies and Transgender studies. My final contribution in this dissertation is a critical pedagogical practice that recognizes:

...the oppressed have only one true mode of revolutionary activity, the ability to perceive and decode dominant-order sign systems in order to move among them with a certain literacy, thus ensuring their survival, and one true mode of revolutionary consciousness, which is the ability of consciousness to differentially move through the being of meaning, and toward a possible and utopian world of desire, social and psychic life, amor en Aztlán... (Sandoval 183)

It is my hope that through Travesía pedagogy and a politics of *convivencia*, informed by a “desire capable of driving the body and will beyond their limits,” that new pedagogies and methodologies of resistance can emerge that are both affirming and revolutionary in theory and practice, which can make a new social movement possible. It is my hope that this dissertation is only the beginning in formulating critical praxis that is both liberatory and revolutionary for transgender and gender non-conforming Chican@ youth, for they are the future...

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