Spic’ing Into Existence: Epitaph, Epithet, and Ethnopoetic Imagination

Baligh ibn Antonio De Jesús López
“We do this because the world we live in is a house on fire and the people we love are burning in it” – Sandra Cisneros, “On writing,” *The House on Mango Street*

“[He] was beaten, from morning until night. He lived in a shack, in a hut. He wore cast-off clothes…[He] was intelligent…When the house caught on fire, he didn’t try to put it out. [He] prayed for a wind, for a breeze.” – Malcolm X, *The House Negro and the Field Negro*

“Tomorrow,  
I’ll be at the Table  
When company comes.  
Nobody’ll dare  
say to me,  
“Eat in the Kitchen,”  
Then.” – Langston Hughes, “I, Too”

“Echale ganas mi’jo, pa’que no salgas como yo” – My high school’s janitor
Table of (Dis)contents

Agradecimientos - 4

Epa-logue: Desde el punto de mi legua natal – 6

Cuerpo Cero: The Ethnopoet’s Social Contract: An Introduction to Terms and (Pre)Conditions - 8

1. Between the Hunger and Me: Chicano Cartographies and the Ethnopoetics of Deferral – 16

2. Blood in My Corpse: Aesthetics of Coercion and Radical Black Tradition - 34
   2.5 Spic’ing into Existence: Epitaph, Epithet, and the Ethno-Poetic Imagination – 53

3. Que haremos con el cuerpo: Pathologies and the Native Autospy - 66

4. Cross-Examinations: Baldwin’s Pulpit and the Ethnopoet’s Prophecy – 82

5. From Split Personality to Spliced Intersectionality: Lamar, Queen Bey, and the Ethnopoetic Artistry - 98


Code-Switched CODA: Masking paysasiadas in the Mexican Sitcom Tradition – 142

Works Cited - 157
Agradecimientos

Primero doy gracias a mis padres, cuyas energías incansables me permitieron alcanzar a rasca cielos. Mis sueños de un mejor mañana fueron una vez heñidos por sus callos. Su amor es pan recibida, el cual me sostengo en esta dimensión desconocida. Mi hermana lupénín, the Sherly no-mates to my Dr. Watson, midnight oil burning fanfictions, Disney References, post-Fajr breakfast at Baji’s, coffee runs and book-sniffing adventures, I love you bruh. Angela, la tuchi, the impromptu guessing games, her trademark phrases, moments of papá jalando sus greñas con el sepillo and her whining ‘bout it. Aaron, my lil Hermanito, regretting being away in his formative years…regresaré pronto, so we can go to all the parks. He lines up his jugetes as if they’re going to battle—Power Ranger next to Godzilla, next to Stegosaurus—you are a general cooped up in our garage, defending your imagination.

To my thesis advisers, ustedes tienen my deepest thanks. Antonio Viego: es un milagro que terminé este tesis, what with la brujería de aquella tía hechizando cada junta de nosotros. As the sole male Latino profesor que conozco, me inspiras en refugiar un lenguaje que adecuadamente dirige la crisis universitaria. Wahneema Lubiano, an intellectual powerhouse whose eager listening helped me hold the eclecticism necessary for inaugurating the ethnopoet. Both faced hard times indeed this semester, and Viego expressed how I ended up picking the more difficult year to have them help out. Then again, perhaps writing within their respective tragedies actualizes the ethnopoetics of underserved scholars.

Thank you to the kin transposed on my skin, the familial structures we Latinxs must make to survive in this peroxide marfil. To La Unidad Latina, Lambda Upsilon Lambda Fraternity, Inc., that brotherhood I’ve carved out here. Walter Solórzano, my role model for so
long, Erick Hernandez, who taught me true manhood blossoms from restless understanding, Sydney Sarmiento helping me leave my eggshell. I love you brothers so much, and would not be the man I’d be today without you. You all help me make sense of being a Latino man, an endangered species, in this elite space. To Elizabeth Barahona, hermana de mi alma y joya en las parades de mi ser, compañera en la lucha, que inshallah nos acompañemos hasta que podamos. 

To all my hispanohablantes bajo el diablo azul, all the homies of the Global South, my darker skinned black sisters and brothers who’ve nurtured dual consciousness for so long, paving the road pa’ los dos. To our own Muslim Student Association who’ve fostered my inner qibla, a compass guiding me to two-step oppression, a prescience that re-calibrates both where we pray, and where I thrive. To all those I’ve omitted, perdoname, I’m eternally grateful.
Epa-Logue: Desde del punto del non-native lengua.

I understand that this manuscript streams between English and Spanish. *No es accidente.* But before pigeonholing my shit as novel-gazing, or say that I indulge in dewy-eyed self-rhapsodizing, suspend that for a second. Think instead, how in English, we inhabit Latin, Greek, and French origin languages, and not only is this condoned, it registers as high discourse. *De facto, habeas corpus, de jure, a la carte, a propo, a la fregada con sus palabras preciosas,* etc. Juxtapose that with the poverty of hearing ourselves. We’re practically an endangered species out here. *Por ejemplo, el otro día, me contó un amigo:* your work reminds me of Junot Díaz.

Now, I’m gonna give the brother credit, and not mark this as a -- “there are two and half Latinos authors nationally recognized in this country, and so he’s categorizing me with the only Spanglish author he knows” trope-- and give him the benefit of the doubt. Let me take that compliment and work with it.

Díaz said, “Motherfuckers will read a book that’s one third Elvish, but put two sentences in Spanish and they [white people] think we’re taking over.” Diaz succinctly captures an explicit contradiction in Eurocentric book lovers of fan-fiction. Reminds me of my *alma mater:* how to architect this university as a southern Hogwarts, that’s a Gothic reality. But for *Latinidad* to be taken seriously as a token enterprise, to demand systemic change for a marginalized people, to stop witnessing the disproportion of funds towards everyone but you, that’s the fantasy. And yet, as Díaz says, bibilophiles would privilege an invented language—one lacking complete lexical relevance—before ever taking mine as an intellectual enterprise. *Así que les pregunto,* *sinceramente,* “What do you find threatening of my mosaic lips?”

*Déjennme ofrecer una sugeriencia:* in *The Latino Threat,* Leo Chavez argues that xenophobia—particularly against Latinx immigrants—stem from the fear that their presence
would radically tailor the fabric of this country. *En un sentido*, this Latino Threat traces to a genealogy dating back to Catholics, Chinese, Japanese, and southern and eastern European migrations (3). *Somos partes de un* “grand tradition of alarmist discourse,” (3) *con la diferencia que Mexicans* have resided in this territory since the 16th century, not this *mito que vinimos ayer.* *Regresando* to Diaz’s quote, some may find the “we’re taking over,” merely the sensationalized language of a caffeinated writer. This is far from the case.

In Chavez’s “Cultural Contradictions of Citizenship and Belonging,” the author interrogates the narrative that Mexicans are unwilling into integrate to U.S. society. Supposed rationale stems from a linguistic and social insularity, to an outright conspiracy to take over the southwestern United States. On a theoretical level, *puede ser* this gatekeeping stems from a fear of linguistic invasion, that my (re)command of *idioma* violates the purist conceptions of academic scholarship. Using direct testimonies, Chavez demonstrates the overwhelming desire Latinxs have to be accepted into mainstream society. But the minute we ask for some reciprocity, that *pinche frase* that Duke loves to laminate, we fall on (socially) deaf ears.

Therefore, this *epa*-logue pragmatically serves as a challenge to the prompt for the Bascom Palmer Prize for Best Thesis in Literature. Lest folks think I take the guidelines out of context, here they are in full:

Please note that the theses nominated for the Bascom Palmer Literary Prize must be written in the English language. We have recently developed another prize, the James Rolleston Prize for best thesis in literature written in language other than English by non-native speaker.

With all undue respect, these words make insane assumptions. Never mind the undetermined language of “non-native speaker.” Returning to the earlier point, where is the line drawn for non-English terms (let’s call them linguistic expatriates) that have been adopted into the English
canon? The implicit mentality is that the non-Anglo-Saxon other cannot speak as effectively, and therefore, should apply somewhere else. Moreover, I find unsettling that an award quintessentially lumping together all languages besides English is named after a Professor of German Studies. If the aim of this ‘foreign language’ award is to level the playing field, to defer once again the entitlement back to a white body does a disservice to subaltern voices.

But I digress. Fellow Anglophonic colleagues, if you all can endure the “high-level” thinking necessary to read Lacan, Zijek, Deleuze, Soussaire, Derrida, Butler—we can go for days—then how hard can it be to pull up a dictionary to study these phrases? My words aren’t splinter cell *narcos*, hiding under tunnels of abridged misunderstanding—contrary to *ciertos políticos que me denuncian como un criminal o peor, un violador*.

My words aren’t cryptic, but those of a demographic rapidly increasing, predicted as 1/3 of this country by 2050. Try it, *en serio*, it’s gorgeous. *Somos boxeadores lingüísticos*, bobbing and weaving through language to duck—*agachar*, swerve, whatever you want to call it—to avoid a direct assault. *A veces, no nos conviene*¹ *So considere lo que te voy a decir como un aviso,* an “*aguas lector,*” if you will. My speech is the weeds germinating in a Gothic Petri-dish, as an elite academy examines my people under a microscope. Sprawling off a pristinely, high discourse grows *una voz inquieta, a veces invocando la memoria de olores,* fleeting images stitched onto all-white fabric. This section is a theoretical memoir, one that enfranchises—*sin esos* voter ID laws or *aduana* questions—the vibrant imageries of my family’s *costumbres*. *Más ampliamente, este tesis es una auto-examination of a people’s poetry, y la tragedia es que ni tienen cuenta. Es una historia que cuenta el poder de sus palabras, la creatividad de sus acciones, y las promesas of a housebroken tongue.*
This thesis claims a four-fold close-reading: first, analysis of texts: from theoretical meditations to (prison) memoir and film. Second, a half dozen central figures appear, largely Latinx and black American. They cut across a score of registers, socio-economics, ideological reservations, but all are, as Carl Carlton sang, poetry in motion. Writers, poets, theologians, pathologists, artists, comedians, actors, students whose vocation is *invocation*, the inner surge of their calling. Third, the manuscript draws from a series of historical moments—from radical liberation of the late 60s, to contemporary student activism. Finally, this body of work is movement, in all its social, gestural, and kinesthetic viscera. From this last heading, we peel away layers of the ethnopoet, the fascia undoing that reveals its bio-political anatomy, dressing its bare life with kinship speech. First, the social revolutions of the Civil Rights, Black Power, abolitionism, the Black Panthers and Young Lords, boycotts and jarring artistic performances. These events are superficial not in vain sense, but key epicenters of underground murmurings, the workings of a cunning assailant. She robs not lavish estates, but another day to breathe. Gesturally, as perhaps the interlocutor, lies this author, interspersing his own diatribes to conjure her presence. The final branch is admittedly the most intangible. Kinesthetically, we map the nimbleness, footwork ligera of what I call the *ethnopoet*. Ethnopoet is no mere aggregate of ethnicity and poetry, but like chemical reaction, the descriptor for its behavior under certain pressures, temperatures, and elements. Elusive and resisting confinement, and therefore definition, the ethnopoet is a shapeshifting figure of how racialized bodies [people of color] respond to hegemonic powers.

She is, at bottom however, a *native translator*, the plural-lensed subject whose loyalty is only to the imagination of a different world, one whose survival is not contingent upon her
exploitation. The native translator’s constant re-calibrations of oppressive power apparatuses seem taxing at best, and near-impossible, at worst. To effectively navigate through these polarized loci, she must identify ideologies that in turn seek “affective liberatory sances” in relation to the dominant social order (43). In a kind of performative contradiction, she must marshall the knowledge necessary to “break with ideology” while speaking within it.

Chicana Studies scholar, Chela Sandoval, describes this dual movement as “meta-ideologizing”: the appropriation of hegemonic ideological forms in order to transform them (82). In Methodology of the Oppressed, Sandoval schematizes this oppositional consciousness around five principle categories: “equal rights,” “revolutionary,” “supremacist,” “separatist,” and “differential.” Taken by themselves, the first four modes appear mutually exclusive, incapable of occupying the same plane, until a fifth pillar emerges. Cinematographic in nature, differential consciousness, as Sandoval defines it, is “a kinetic motion that maneuvers, poetically transfigures, and orchestrates while demanding alienation, perversion, and reformation in both spectators and practitioners” (44). For Sandoval, then, differential consciousness is a methodology that privileges an incredible sense mobility, one reaching artistic sensibilities.

Our fourth and final analytic of movement serves an apt example of this dual meaning. Lexically speaking, ‘movement’ may be regarded as a political mobilization of aggrieved populations (through sustained efforts), or the process of moving objects (people or otherwise) from one location to another. Praxis-wise, it is both action and ideal, content and form. Thus, an ethnic poetics must be regarded less as a series of stanzas, shortened lyric, or even arrangement
of language, but as a lens through which peripheralized peoples kaleidecope ideological positions in an “original, eccentric, and queer sight” (43).

Moreover, differential consciousness’ premium of turning on a dime complements postcolonial lamentations, and celebrations, of native subjects, not least with Rey Chow’s writings on “Coercive Mimeticism” and the xenophone.² Held side by side, they profess diametrically opposed realities: one espouses ethnic caging, waged [in the most literal sense] to perpetually sing her own inferiority vis a vis a native speaker endowed with a litany of powers--translator-native intellectual-xenophone to mitigate, if not overcome, her subjugation. When in dialectical correspondence, each oppositional mode that Chow raises, transmogrifies to strategic weaponry to usurp power. Differential consciousness’ merely postures these movements as reflexive, aware of their performative quality. They are competing frequencies seeking to harmonize under a handed down radio. Such discords, or more accurately, dis-chords echo Franz Fanon’s study of the French broadcasting station, Radio-Algier, and its ironic impact on the Algerian people.

With the purchase of a radio, “the Algerian who wanted to live up to the Revolution, had at last the possibility of hearing an official voice, the voice of the combatants, explain the combat to him, tell him the story of the Liberation on the march, and incorporate it into the nation’s new life” (Dying Colonialism, 85). In revolutionary quicksilver, Radio-Alger, once a daily invitation not to forget the rightfulness of European culture (71), lost its identity as enemy object, coalesced into a national Algerian political idea, and subsumed under an overall strategy of reconquest of people’s sovereignty (84). We work from within, to serve those without. Moreover, the radio inadvertently wove splinter guerilla groups as waging war under the same banner. Fanon again writes, “The scattered acts fitted into a vast epic, and the Kayles were no longer ‘the
men of the mountains,’ but the brothers who with Ouamrane and Krim made things difficult for
the enemy troops” (84). Allegorically speaking, the radio harmonizes Sandoval’s modes of
oppositional consciousness, weaving those disparate positionalities seeking liberation from
power structure (84). Through tuning into this colonial apparatus, the Algerian people broke with
the metropole’s ideology, while speaking within it.

The ethnopoet también is dedicated to re-weaving the stitched wounds, now fraying at the
ends. Her commitment is truth-telling, not the journalist sound-bite kind, but as Black Womanist
theology lo puso tan hermosamente, “the kind of truth that stings like a serpent’s tooth.” Through
her groundbreaking analysis, Sandoval exposed a decolonial tether, one that will serve as our
starting point, nuestro hilo en el laberinto. Namely, the application of this differential
consciousness paves the terrain for coalition-building for emancipation in global affinities – or to
use Anzaldúa’s words, “hace los puentes al andar.” This thesis pays homage, and stakes as its
foundation, the U.S. Third World Feminists, for they comprised an insurgent social movement
that denied any ideology as the exclusive truth. Sandoval underscores the significance behind
this withholding for the ethnopoet:

Without making this kind of metamove, any ‘liberation’ or social movement eventually becomes
destined to repeat the oppressive authoritarianism from which it is attempting to free itself, and
become trapped inside a drive for truth that ends only in producing its own brand of domination

(Sandoval 58)

Third World feminism’s prescience, grace, and shrewdness act as an ideal analytic for an
ethnopoetics of low-income black and Latino/a peoples. Within this “locus of enunciation,”
abnegated subjects command a tactical subjectivity, an uncanny ability to de- and recenter (58).
This ethnopoetics of differential consciousness is necessarily coalition-driven, contingent upon
the “practitioners”\textsuperscript{4} ability to read current situation of power and deliberately choosing ideological best suited against its configurations (68). In a late capitalist system that forges a Manichean of prosperous North and displaced South, the author’s millennium thoughts prove as relevant as ever.

It is equally urgent to concede the intellectual debt towards the U.S. Third World Feminist tradition, undertaking much of the labor that elucidated these writings. This paper cannot begin to exhaust the rich genealogy of black and brown women—from Sojourner Truth’s “Ain’t I A Woman,” to Toni Morrison, to bell hooks, Audre Lorde, Cherrie Moraga, and countless others—but Sandoval, as aforementioned, provides an abridged introduction. She writes, “U.S. third world feminism rose out of the matrix of the very discourses denying, permitting, and producing difference” (42). Historically speaking, Sandoval refers to the North American liberation movements of the 1968-90 period (42). This dedication is not a lipservice to my sisters, nor an apologism of my own tendencies, but the honest admission that amongst all marginalized groups, they are perhaps the most truly invested in the interstitial “in-between-space,” \textit{ni de aquí, ni de alla}, Fanon’s “New [Wo]man,” \textit{new mestiza}, and other divergent spaces.

Queer Theorist José Muñoz provides a critical addendum to the discourse on differential consciousness. Before delving further, identity must be reconceptualized not as static retrieval, but a site of struggle that indefinitely suspends the former’s crystallization. For Munoz, “disidentification” is a survival working within and outside dominant public sphere simultaneously (5). Laboring one’s identity constitutes a point of collision of sorts. Hybrid identities emerge from abysmal interiority to the surface of representation. Hybridity in turn must be re-understood in the Spivakian sense, as indexical, meant to collect theories of fragmentation
(31). These disidentificatory performances envision new social relations, “the blueprint for minoritarian counterpublic spheres” (5). The social order receives a jolt. This shock registers through a spectrum of decibility, from loud reverberations, to less dramatic, “yet locally indispensable” ways (6).

In the classical interpolation tradition, state powers *hail* subject-positions to order. Althuser offers the example of a policeman calling a pedestrian, “Hey you over there,” but these hailings range from Fanon’s experience in France “Mom, Look, a Negro,” to other loci. Identification, under this subaltern guise, is not mimesis (as Chow argues), but multiple processes of identifying with and against. *The suspension of a crystallized identity, in short, is a Chicana-inspired poetics of difference, or more accurately, deferral* (7). As Jacques Derrida writes, “each invokes dissimilarly located circuits of signification codified by sites of emergence, which nevertheless does not obviate their agreement on the ‘not yet,’ which points towards a future” Derrida’s excerpt clarifies the mechanics of differential consciousness. His use of the phrase, “sites of emergence,’ bring to mind Raymond Williams’ “structures of feeling,” the culture of a particular historical moment. That is, the nascent consortium of meanings, values and relationships stemming from social experiences (Williams 124).

Taking note of the advantages of postponing identifications, the thesis stands its ground on the term *ethnopoet*. Its abstraction is not dewey-eyed philosophy, but an anticipation of poetic justice, of what’s to come from callused hands.

This thesis is divided into 7.5 chapters. The first maps out the ethnopoet’s cartographies of struggle. By revisiting that alleged *Tío Tomas*, Richard Rodriguez, we unearth the tensions that negatively, deny citizenship to one silo, but on the flipside, engender manifold ways of seeing, hearing, and *moving*. The second, through George Jackson’s prison memoirs, pans out
from this ethnography of power, groping for an apparatus that feigns an impervious prestige: ‘the aesthetic regime of coercion.’ In half-way cut, the thesis sidesteps to spic into existence, formally announcing, through Aime Cesaire, myself, and Pedro Pietri, the poeticization of trauma. Such uplift denies New Age transcendence of self, but a rehearsal of our entrapment in these mortal envelopes. Thirdly, conscious of the bleeding ethnic body, we cut open the incipient corpse to observe her pathologist. Her native autopsies offer the ethnic body’s posthumous recognition, the ethnopoetics ability to speak for and through the dead. Chapter five examines prolific black artists—Beyonce and Kendrick Lamar—to elide the circumvention of their consumption via invoking radical black hi/her-stories, ones fragmenting the black body. Sixth, the paper compares the Black Power Salute of the 1968 Mexico City Olympics to Duke’s Mi Gente Boycott of their Latino Student Recruitment Weekend. Both wielded “silent gestures,”⁹ that shrewdly interfered with white noise of numbed negligence. Finally, ‘taking the mask off’ that are her functionalities, the CODA expounds on ethnopoet’s interiority, particularly after the rapid re-calibration of her politics. Through a rerun of El Chavo del Ocho, one of Mexican television’s most cherished shows, we tune into the heart-breaking indigence of barrio residents, only to marvel at the power of humor to, as Friday’s John Witherspoon put it, “fight another day.”

This thesis is the tip of my tongue. Y por una vez, déjala que cante.
Before explicating the functionalities of the ethnopoet, we must example how she came to be.

This chapter foregrounds language as the labyrinth the ethnopoetic navigates through, the maze of one’s citizenship. This essay seeks to lay out the ethnopoet’s encounters of English policing, ethnic intimacies, a lifelong task. At the heart of obstacles is the mimesis problem, the false option to assimilate [copy-cat endlessly exhibiting her own inferiority], or squander in ethnic enclaves (as Rodriguez hints). The author offers a third way, shifting focus not to end-goal, but the methodology. Upon closer in(tro)spection, the ethnopoet holds a host of defensive mechanisms that poetically defers a monopolized politics. Through Hunger of Memory, we approach “cartographies of struggle,” (Escobar 10), a Deluzian-Mohantian re-drawing of the ways in which marginalized peoples locate, chart, and ultimately, experience struggles.

These ethno-poetics thus translate to an inherent political project of survival, one mobilizing a plethora of strategies, ones more effective than others.

**Why Rodriguez?**

Richard Rodriguez’s The Hunger of Memory gestures at the forced claiming of assimilation. Careful not to replicate fetishisms of poverty, nor rehearsed categories of Latinidad (“Let’s have more Grandma”), he ostensibly houses his narrative within a political matrix (5). He wrestles above all with the interstitial erasure when transitioning from a working-class Mexican family, to an isolated life of freelance journalism. He is concerned, among other things, with
appropriating the technique of Eurocentrism—its “high courtly genre,” without its Eurocentric body. The ethnic body faces a tragic bildungsroman, a coming of age inextricably tied with a racial economy valorizing all that is” public,” in exchange for typecasting one’s formative tongues. Rodriguez’s penchant therefore for language stems from a constant obsession in its central role in identity-formation, a process common to the bilingual subjects.

Existing Chicano scholarship on *The Hunger of Memory* criticizes the false choice indicative in Rodriguez’s trajectory. Such scathing readings indulge into a retrospective analysis that scours for any assimilationist logics, thus relying on an abstracted trajectory of Mexican-Americans. Rather than hailing Rodriguez as our whipping post, I emphasize the rich insights gleaned from his painful struggles, one achieved through the axis of language acquisition, and ethnic dispossession, a conflation necessarily one and the same. Re-salvaging Rodriguez stems less so from sympathetic impulse, but because his eliding of assimilation and militant strategies unpack a Chicano cartography of struggle, one fruitful to ethnopoets everywhere.

We first turn to ethno-poetic construction of “self,” one pluralized through the *aduanas*, the cultural customs agents, of language.

*Language, and the Poetics of Power*

Rodriguez follows the post-structuralist tradition of how language shapes self, to the point of dictation. “Obsessed by the way it determined my public identity,” (6) language inaugurated his Anglophonic citizenship, as his schoolteacher sounded out “Rich-heard Road-ree-guess. It was the first time I had heard anyone name in English” (9). Linguistic oppression disempowers migrant speakers (and their children), a barbed wire border that separated ethnic
self-deprecation, and white aggrandizement. Fanon echoes in the background as he writes, “Outside the house was public society; inside the house was private…Nervously, I’d arrive at the grocery store to hear there the sounds of the gringo—foreign to me, reminding me that in this world so big, I was a foreigner” (15). Rodriguez unveils language as what Stephen Graham terms “architectures of control” (77). In Cities Under Siege, Graham describes this concept as summoning strict regimes of marginality.

Through the normalization of a permanent, borderless war, coupled with the blurring of civilian/military technologies, the state disintegrates physical boundaries and reconstructs invisible inside/outside boundaries. Engineered under the security-industrial complex, bodies are digitized, registered within a computerized matrix of interlocking devices. The infinite threats of the shapeless, nameless, abstracted Others in turn coerce our consent to wholeheartedly relinquish our “data selves” (Graham 67). The technological architectures of consumption – the embracing of webcams, cell phones, GPS satellites – integrate these anticipatory seeings within our daily lives. Language may be considered as an analogous technology in the Foucauldian sense.

Graham’s analysis permits us to (re)map Rodriguez’s “accident geography” as under a colonizing transnational urbanism. In this contradictory binary of securitized ‘inside’ and urbanized ‘outside,’ a spatially fixed, imaginary community of Americana confronts ‘global cities.’ Language is an invisible I.N.S., ‘cracking down on the diaspora’ (81). In a mundane sense, language violently reconfigures (an everyday policing of) urban spaces through a scrutinization of pronunciation, accent, and grammar. In Hunger of Memory for instance, Rodriguez recalls the school nun’s visiting his house as “I noted the incongruity—the clash of the two worlds” (19). English is paradoxical a public currency that ethnic cannot afford. As he
put it, “But I couldn’t believe that the English language was mine to use” (18). Ethnic community germinates from this mutual sense of exclusion. He writes,

Spanish speakers, rather, seemed related to me, for I sensed that we shared—through our language—the experience of feeling apart from *los gringos*. It was thus a ghetto Spanish that I heard and I spoke. Like those whose lives are bound by a barrio, I was reminded by Spanish of my separateness from *los otros, los gringos* in power (14)

In the Anglocentric public space however, language summoned an entirely new meaning. “Words were meaningfully ordered. Language, under its English adage, strips to a functionalist role, a vehicle to be understood before a general audience. Language, at the border that is the native speaker, polices citizenship. In a kind of domestic migration, Rodriguez is forcibly removed from the soothing hearth of Spanish familiarity for the public access of English. Note how over-anglicizing pronunciation serves as the verbal equivalent to skin lightening, a conflation Chow shrewdly terms as “tones.” Rodriguez recounts. “Laughing, we would try to define words we could not pronounce. We played with strange English sounds, often over-anglicizing our pronunciations” (20). By parodying an imagined white American accent, Rodriguez’s family achieved a warped sense of ownership, one gained precisely by never having it in the first place.¹⁴ This is possible by demystifying the Benjamian aura emanating from the English language. By speaking to little Richard in English for the first time, Rodriguez’s parents appropriate those “gringo sounds” while simultaneously excommunicating their son from the sanctuary of their kinship (20). Rodriguez describes this scene of angst,

In that moment of trivial misunderstanding and profound insight, I felt my throat twisted by unsounded grief. I turned quickly and left the room. But I had no place to escape to with Spanish.

The spell was broken (21).
By code-switching to English solely for him, Rodriguez’s family marked Richard as an outsider. He mourns the loss of his own heritage, a lament Chow observes as “reverse translation” (66). English speech enacts his status as a cultural orphan. Its consolation however, remains an acute sense of national belonging. “At last,” he writes, “seven years old, I came to believe what had been true since my birth: I was an American citizen” (22). Citizenship, Rodriguez reveals, is (in part) linguistically determined. The notion of a word itself is the death and embalmment of sound, which in turn is poetic charge. Implicitly, Rodriguez naturalizes English as universal bearer of words, whereas Spanish relegates to realm of sound (27). Thus slowly emerges racial temporality that associates Spanish with early childhood and English with maturity and access to the public world (a racialized Freud). Language under English is nothing more than a vehicle of communication, whereas Spanish espouses intimacies, that “magical realm of sound” (40). When attempting to translate a conversation with an elderly women to his white friend, Rodriguez writes, “This message of intimacy could never be translated because it was not in the words she had used but passed through them” (31).

Just as how there is a *Methodology of the Oppressed*, there is also a “methodology of the oppressor.” As far as the ethnopoet is concerned, the inverse of differential consciousness is a “poetics of power.” A re-reading of Foucault’s seminal work, *Discipline and Punish*, elucidates this subjugation. In “Docile Bodies,” Michel Foucault articulates a theology of detail, one procures a hold for power systems that seize it. Docility, for Foucault, is an imbrication of the functionalist and submissive registers of the body, one evident throughout the “Chicano cartography.” (136) Indeed, Rodriguez reiterates this Catholic semblance of education as rote memorization: “[The nuns] would stand in front of the room for hours, drilling us over and over
(5 times 5…5 times 9; i before e except after c; God made us to know, love, and serve Him in this world…) (94). Education translates to a knowledge-acquisition, one already discovered. The ethnic subject enters into this exchange as a mere depository, an information dumping reminiscent of Paolo Freire’s “banking concept.” Foucault characterizes this micro-power as a calculus of constraint, a ceaseless supervision (137). Disciplines for Foucault are therefore methodologies of docility, formulas of domination (137). Detail is “The mystique of the everyday is joined here with the discipline of the minute” (140). In the modality of detail lies a glacial speed of disciplining that buttress hegemonic attitudes, habits, forces, etc. (140) Such control is imminent in virtually every facet of society, as Foucault writes,

The meticulousness of the regulations, the fussiness of the inspections, the supervision of the smallest fragments of life and of the body will soon provide, in the context of the school, the barracks, the hospital or the workshop, a laicized content, an economic rationality for this mystical calculus of the infinitesimal and the infinite (140)

Foucault’s microscopic analysis on detail offers the proper dimensions for a differential reading of Rodriguez’s memoir as a linguistic economy embedded in supremacist power structures. Through its re-organization of a serial space, education become a machine for supervising, hierarchizing, rewarding (147). Indeed Rodriguez idolized his grammar school teachers:

I began by imitating their accents, using their diction, trusting their every direction. The very facts they dispensed, I grasped with awe…Their casual opinion I came to adopt and to trumpet when I returned home (52)

Soon later, such desire reaches ontological heights, “I wanted to be like my teacher [author’s emphasis]” (58). The individualization of place catalyzed the collapse of total
and singular supervision (147). While Foucault primarily discusses military history, language serves as an invisible discipline [a methodology of the oppressor]. Both mobilize a “rhythmics of time” that punctuates temporality and precision. In doing so, power assures the elaboration of the act itself, controlling its development from within (152). Time then penetrates the subjected body and with it all the meticulous “controls of power” (152). Similarly, Rodriguez internalizes education as a rite of passage, one with ostensibly divine qualities. “Remembrance,” he writes, “is itself an activity that establishes a student’s dependence upon and union with others” (94).

Foucault’s “docile body” reaches its pinnacle however as Rodriguez recounts,

In the half-darkened church one nun stood aside with a wooden clapper which she knocked to tell us when to rise, when to kneel, when to leave the pew, when to genuflect (‘All together!’) We’d rehearse marching (the tallest last) up the aisle in straight, careful lines (104)

And the point was not self-expression alone, but to make oneself understood by many others” (19). And yet paradoxically, English marked ownership, a proprietary exclusion that pronounced itself, literally. When asked by his instructors to speak up, he retorted, “But I couldn’t believe that the English language was mine to use” (18). This posture of presumed denial is one endemic to Latinx subjectivity, especially its migratory, 1st generation inception. Du Bois echoes in the background as Rodriguez’s reflects, “I noted the incongruity—the clash of two worlds” (19). The departure of the endearing, and the steady arrival to cultural homelessness, with the consolation of subterranean cognizance.

Forked Tongues: Ethnic Caricias, Mimetic Mourning
Caught between ethnic intimacies and English dociltizing, Rodriguez is aware the myriad interpretations encircling him. At pains to control the narrative, he mocks his own typecasting, one that evidently comes from all sides. He writes, “I have become notorious among certain leaders of America’s Ethnic Left, I am considered a dupe, an ass, the fool—Tom Brown, the brown Uncle Tom, interpreting the writing on the wall to the bunch of cigar-smoking pharaohs” (3). Rodriguez furnishes a satirical theatre that harks on its audience members, both white sympathizers—“There are those in White America who would anoint me to play out for them some drama of ancestral reconciliation” (3) – as well as presumed Chicano nationalists – Aztec ruins hold no interest for me. I do not search Mexican graveyards for ties to unnamable ancestors” (3). That is, Rodriguez is contesting the labelling itself, all the while speaking within it. In other passage, he writes, “Consider me, if you choose, a comic victim of two cultures” (4).

Utilizing the unconventional 2nd person, Rodriguez constructs a spatio-temporal telos of language, where Spanish is the posited marker of antiquity, and English that of the future. When describing the physical strain of his family pronouncing English, he remarked, “The language of their Mexican past sounded in counterpoint to the English of public society” (11).

In contradistinction to this underdevelopment discourse of languages lies its sensitizing qualities, one reaching literary heights. For Rodriguez, language is synesthetic awareness, a poeticization causing a minute attention to detail. Referring to his father, Rodriguez writes, “At one point his words slid together to form one word—sounds as confused as the threads of blue and green oil in the puddle next to my shoes” (14). The ethnic subject’s language then disrupts Western notions of temporality, engendering a “joyful return” that reifies an internal distance to his travels (14). At the same time however, ethnic language partitions a barbed wire separation of access (or lack thereof) and excess, a subtle reminder of one’s trivial existence and white
aggrandizement—“that in this world so big, I was a foreigner” (15). With an undying prescience, language marks one’s level of marginality. Rodriguez reflects, “Like those whose lives are bound by a barrio, I was reminded by Spanish of my separateness from los otros, los gringos in power” (14).

Within this paradox of racialized time vis a vis cognizance, ethnic language wedges an affect, “a celebration of sounds,” which are a boundless affirmation of subaltern sociality. Rodriguez’s bilingualism compels a creative interweaving that domesticates otherwise mutually exclusive worlds—“We pieced together new words by taking, say, an English verb and giving it Spanish endings” (17). He writes, “Voices singing and sighing, straining, then surging, teeming with pleasure that bust syllables into fragments of laughter” (17). The poet never beat so strongly when Rodriguez stated, “Tongues explore the edges of words” (17). Such sentiments reflect not only the emotional complexity of language, but also its pre-natal articulation; how the author arrives before to it already with “a celebration of sounds.”

Rodriguez’s autobiography is grounded in a strained poetics of deferral, relegating all marker’s indigenous upbringing as foreign, private sphere. And yet, Rodriguez pays homage to its “exotic polysyllabic sounds,” centers of fertile ground to bloom. Language truly is “an accident geography,” mapping out the socio-visual ideologies surrounding him, elucidating the intention underneath all interactions. Yet, for Rodriguez, language, when prescribed within familial boundaries, remains an enigma, outside the configurations of meaning. Reminiscing over his mother, he writes, “The words she spoke were almost irrelevant to the fact—the sounds she made. Content. The mystery remained: intimate utterance. For Rodriguez, Spanish is extra-semantic and pre-natal. Its warmth lies in the pure sounds themselves, connoting musical qualities to his heritage.
Unsurprisingly then, Rodriguez on the very next passage, muses over the mnemonic services of poetry as pensive, reservoir of the intimate. This description by its very proximity suggests that Rodriguez, for all his criticism towards his parents, regards them as makeshift poets, deploying language in ways that “forces remembrance. And refreshes.” In doing so, Rodriguez compels us to re-conceptualize poetry not as high art reserved for the educated elite, but as vernacular genre. As literary scholar, Kirsten Gruesz, demonstrates in her monograph, *Ambassadors of Culture: The Transamerican Origins of Latino Writing*, poetry serves an improvisational behavioral space (23), a social performance that enfranchises otherwise marginalized subjects to citizens (3). Despite their periphery from mainstream political-cultural influence, these sidelined “poets” write less as an experiment in self-expression, than as a symbolic claim to larger forms of authority. These ambassadors are transamerican by necessity, unfastening conventional geographical boundaries traditionally associated with history of U.S. national culture, and towards a “*Geografia Nueva,*” (6) or Borderlands, as Anzaldúa defined it. The “poem” whether ostensibly defined, or suggested, (as Rodriguez does) possesses a geometry of distribution, reception, and influence (9). Nimble and compact, the poem is thus “better positioned” to resist centralization, and capable of keeping up with global patterns of migration, diaspora, and exile (9). Mexican immigration, and its subsequent Latino diaspora, is no exception.

As a subaltern Man of Letters though, Rodriguez occupies a disorienting cycle of disaffiliation. That is, he must construct and manage an internal dialectic with the canonical and *folclórico*—those sounds and traditions of his childhood. As a hyphenated subject, he must simultaneously wrestle with questions of mimesis, finding upward mobility at the expense of deserting one’s native language. Rey Chow succinctly captures this ever-straining politics of
(il)legibility. In Rey Chow’s “Keeping Them in their Place: Coercive Mimeticism and Cross-Ethnic Representation” she writes, “third-world cultural workers, the ethnics caught up in the plight of postimperialist nationalisms—are bound to be out of focus because they are the producers of a certain kind of gaze to which they are (pre)supposed to play as, to act like, to exist in the manner of something” (100). In other words, ethnic subjects must carve out their identities through a gaze’s reflection, an assumed performativity of how one should and will act, one that for Chow reduces to a Platonic act of imitation. And as Emerson famously wrote, imitation is suicide.

Chow charts a tripartite process of mimeticism: 1) the imperative, a Sisyphean world wherein the colonized subject must copy her master whilst fully cognizant of its futility. She will always remain “a bad copy.” As J Cole rapped, “Damned if I do. Damned if I don’t”; 2) existential ramifications: a psychologically nuanced economy of angst, self-hatred, and desire. Such a tormented, psychic interiority births an entire epistemological space, engendering postcolonial subjectivities (105). Such affective flux enacts Avery Gordon’s “right of complex personhood” (*Ghostly Matters* 4). 3) the colonized’s unsuccessful imitation devolves to sinister default, a social expectation to self-objectify in order to authenticate preconceptions of what is deemed *ethnic*.

As anthropological artifact in plain sight, identity then is a two-pronged process of imposed rules and an unconscious automization, impersonation, and/or mimicry (110). Under postmodern obsessions for diversity, the ethnic subject is encouraged, even rewarded, to capture the unique, solitary, and particularistic. Her self-referentiality [confessional narrative] is an exoticized commodity marketed as institutional corrective. Her resistance thus is largely compromised as an inherent marker of progress.
Quién Soy Yo: Mimeticism ‘gainst the Xenophone

And I ain’t even goin’ lie, Chow sounds mad convincing. This coercive mimeticism rouses my own struggles as a first generation Latino student, the temptation and resistance to lament one’s exhibition. With Latino Heritage Month as the rhetorical occasion, I wrote an article in October 2015 that sought to capture the psycho-social condition of the Latino body, and its white liberal culprit: “A Dying Paternalism.” I offer this excerpt:

There is a house in ruins, and we are its children on display. Lamentablemente, our people are treated like moving furniture, sentenced to build, set up, and clean up spaces that rarely include us. As I doze off and on into self-care, I find mi pueblo shuffling garbage cans as I leave from Perkins at 4 am, only to re-appear greeting me at McDonalds, hollering, “Qué pasó licencado!?” (What’s up lawyer?). Y me pregunto constántemente, como una mosca perforando el ruido blanco de la complacencia, quién soy yo? The perennial question emerges, how does the racial-ethnic body survive in captivity? What is its life-source, when dissected from its social body?

Rey Chow’s Not Like a Native Speaker fleshes out this dilemma as existential crisis: what is the ethnic subject, under the throes of a colonization in media res, to do? With intellectual rigor, Chow explores how language becomes a chief agent of cultural imperialism. Far from mere vehicle of communication, cultural modes of subjectivity, hierarchies of value, and national myths, are all inscribed and codified within language. The ethnic subject will necessarily understand and relate to the world through these lens, thereby displacing the very means to read herself. She assimilates into the colonial culture, while losing the means to read herself as a
product. Thus, the process of English acquisition juxtaposes social mobility, on one hand, and self-estrangement on the other.

Caged and forced to sing our own inferiority, the ethnic subject appears trapped. But elucidating the ethnopoet’s “subterranean pitches” offers latent abilities to this predatory gaze.

*Doy mi propio ejemplo,*

A war-clad boot, pressed against the
the Native Son
beseeched at gun-point
to turn the other cheek.

While
the earth underneath,
singed his flesh.
His fecund antennae,
picked the subterranean pitches,

of muffled spirituals, n’ strained spines.
Sepia ballrooms - clanks of stainless silverware.
A feigned smile.
But Chow is not solely invested in describing the gradual erosion of the ethnic subject. Power is not unilateral, but rife with crevices whereby to peer through, to listen in; a bug under the conference rooms, a fly in the wall. Against this mimeticism, hones in on precisely the locus of transition to discuss the rare insights an ethnic subject’s relation to language may offer. Through her hybridized lens, the ethnic subject destabilizes the uniformity of colonial discourse, rendering visible those “subterranean” traces of an Other’s knowledge. I am, as Chow writes, “much closer to the truth of the mediated and divisive character of all linguistic communication” (Chow 42). The colonized subject becomes a “broken” antennae, (Chow’s “external graft”) receptive to the numerous discourses endlessly overlapping, mutually illiterate to one another. While the colonized subject is poly-lingual out of necessity, she is perceptive to the politics, attitudes, and ideologies of the different frequencies she hears. This accessing to multiple truths creates a vibrant assortment of knowledges, affirming the centrality of the ethnic subject to the deconstruction of the linguistic violence of colonization.

As a colonized subject myself, Chow’s book reminds me of the perpetual struggle in making sense of this heavy traffic of chatter (unfiltered discourses), as I negotiate my internalization of these worlds. I must necessarily discipline that most intimate part of myself, leaving it petrified and irrelevant, in order to navigate the institutionalized avenues of an English-speaking world.” I am reminded of the cultural violence mobilized in adopting English as my dominant language. To relegate Spanish to the outermost limits of my schooling deprives me of childhood memories, it weakens connections with my grandfathers, my aunts, my relatives. It pre-figures an ongoing, internal crisis: what constitutes “I” that names me? Is it Tony the child, growing up Spanish oldies like Los Bukis, Vicente Fernández, Olga Tañon over a crackling radio. Who awoke to a giant casuela of pinto beans bubbling over a small stove, with...
tortillas hardening to a crisp golden brown on top of an old comal? Is it Tony, the adolescent, who grew up surrounded by black and brown peers, intermixing the teachings of an under-funded public school with Spanish slang, jokes, idioms. Or is it Tony Lopez the token scholar, the Latino who “made it” in Amerikkka, who performs his alterity with an academic sleeve, who endlessly theorizes the external world, only to forget the most unsolved discipline…is himself?

My point is not to lay out a biography or to impose an air of lament, but to reinforce Chow’s point that language is inseparable from an ethnic subject’s process of Othering. That same mélange of slang, Spanish idioms, and sayings becomes replaced secondary to the strange words I travel with, words like “dichotomy,” or “transcend,” that feel against my tongue feel like a piece metal, cold and bitter. I am trained to regurgitate phrases such as “inextricably bound to,” “becomes the means by which,” which detach me further my upbringing and my working-class, Latino roots. It may be countered that I am articulating an essentialist conception of ethnic identity; that Latinidad occupies a specific class position. But my argument is not that Latino authenticity resides in a proletarian milieu.

Rather, my experience says that English, its expertise and “proper” enunciation, re-enacts the socio-political structure of inequality. This is the truth of which Chow speaks. For example, one would not imagine one of our Latina custodial ladies saying, “Sabes que, Marx’s theory of commodity-fetishism makes perfect sense, given the fact that students who sit on this table have no idea that I cleaned it last night.” We would not imagine her saying it precisely because we’ve internalized that this individual is located outside the fields of intellectual ability. Likewise, we wouldn’t imagine one of the marketplace or Pavilion, a predominately African-American workforce, ask a hungry Duke Student, “Excuse me, but are you aware of the ways through which you construct me as liminal figure in this campus?” Language, and its everyday
performance, codifies which bodies are articulate and who has the right to cultural citizenship. Hence, for me to speak in an academic English, is a contradiction in itself. As such, there is a great racial burden in my voice, an urgency to translate those fragmented voices of Latinos, while in the process of being and finding myself.

But I would be doing Professor Chow an injustice if my comments stopped here, for this linguistic binary of the privileged versus the systematically disfranchised, one mediated by colonialism, ironically ignores my own deconstructive work in enmeshing these worlds together.

The colonized subject’s roots, she reminds us, constitute the foundation that pre-figures all her theoretical explorations, with the crucial distinction that this fissured identity affords her a dual citizenship. Given her direct access to experiential knowledge, what eminent black scholar W.E.B. Du Bois termed “Double Consciousness,” the native speaker may properly enunciate a “xenophonic” dialect (Chow 59). My speech therefore, the way I express myself, the code-switching; the moments I choose to translate my native language, become critical moments of identity-formation. Mi alma lucha contra su propia borradura, regresando a un pasado que es mas caricatura que memoria. Parte mojado, y parte establecido, mi ser Latino sangra dentro las torres de éxito, pero aún permanece impasionado por el espíritu de nuestra raza, por esa orgullosa herencia histórica que corre por mis venas. This “creative domain,” Chow writes, thrives off contradiction, drawing from adaptation, yet preserves that cozied marginality, “the murmur, the passage, of diverse found speeches” (Chow 59). My fissured being serves as the source of productive tension, for its theorizing must be ethnic and legible. As the colonized subject, I inaugurate the ground-breaking work in translating racialized experience, and yet preserving my cultural ties. As the emerging “xenophone,” my cultural work is barely scratching the surface (59).
And yet, such labyrinthine forces do not result in one’s paralysis, but necessitate a prescient switching between “inequitable temporalities.” In *Not Like a Native Speaker*, Chow highlights the extra-linguistic tenets the [postcolonial] translator. This speaker, both multi/intra-lingual, accesses the “illegible and often unconscious elements of language as accent, tone, texture, habit, and historicality as well as what is partially remembered, what is erroneous but frequently remembered, and ultimate, *what remains unsaid and unsayable*” (65). Moreover, by mourning one’s inability to measure up the original, the latter is deemed inferior. The very act of mimesis is indicted and scrutinized as an unjust burden.

Chow’s theoretical frameworks are a manifesto, survival guide, and caution all in one, as she urges that the question is not faithfulness towards the original, but an explicit disavowal and intercepting of original (68). It is betrayal itself that registers not the lauded semiotic qualms of Jacques Derrida, but the socio-political unevenness of different languages. Therefore Rodriguez’s memoir deserves of reappraisal for its honest, painfully-woven, findings of linguistic oppression. Mourning isn’t an overflow of private trauma, but an inevitable by-product of disparate circulation of (il)literacies. As an arbiter of values, the translator prefigures the crisis of the postcolonial intellectual as a de facto mediator of cultures.

This chapter attempted to carve out an ethnic cartography, one largely predicated by language’s relentless and unpredictable re-calibrations. One minute instructing, another tokenizer, another Otherizing, another nurturing, *todo atrapado dentro nuestra subjetividad*. As Rich Medina mused:

> Often my delirium is so strong that I can’t dance to the music
> or walk the line between my drums and everyone else’s
> attempting to shoot down the sun with a slingshot and bad aim
got me missing the point and, losing my religion hand to hand, shit…\textsuperscript{17}

Here, we briefly alluded to the poetics of power as obsessed with detail. Such microscopic investigations are pertinent to ethnopoet’s quotidian struggle, trin’ make it from way down to the next. But what of the larger apparatus that legitimates a militarization of language, what we may call “regimes of mis-representation”? For this, I turn to black radical tradition.
I dedicate this poem to Amerikkka\(^{18}\), that dream-place that reminds me I am not Home, (nor will ever be)\(^{19}\). Whether at my legal birth in the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, the untold lynchings,\(^{20}\) the unpaid \textit{bracero} contracts, the insatiable growth of detention centers, or right-wing demagoguery, I’m reminded of Gil Scott’s “Home is Where Hatred Is” (1971). Pieces of a Man… \textit{Un extranjero en tu propio país. Ad nauseum. } \\

There is a House in Ruins, 
Creep through the back porch. 
Hear the guttural cries of a democracy betrayed. 
Raw flesh that if stripped away enough, 
matches the whip-wielder’s godliness. 

But 
knock on its gold-studded front door. 
Instead of floral wreaths, 
an alarm sounds off. 

That patience, after 4 hours of neglect, 
bled out. And 
riots screamed the eulogy, finally 
shattering the white-noise
of complacency.

(America’s interior décor.)

Midst of raucous screams,

beaten inmates.

A silhouette spiffed in chained crossroads.

Huey wipes his snub-nose,

from hustler and street-fighter,

from 11th grade illiteracy and teachers calling him brainless. He

Stays afloat through theft and fraud.

Well-versed in law,

leaving juries in shock, defending himself in courts.

Spear and rifle, he stares solemnly into nightly prelude.

Mane of splintered hatred,

a cocked nationalism. High-pitching street incantations,

written in bedlam.

And finally, at the foot of his cell,

he sits at the Wickered Throne.

The Second Reconstruction,

penned as slums heaved.

Pundits plagiarize the desecrated lives,

ghostwritten as pure hate.
When in reality,
Black beret’d scholars. Simply stormed a capital
that was never theirs.

Teleprompters rewinded, as Bobby Seale busted out
Executive Mandate #1.

Finally, an indictment.

Law’s in session,
And brothers enter,

Lil’ Bobby Hutton cries the preamble.

He’s more beautiful after death.

“I ain’t fina spit this,” barreled throat trembling.

“In 3/5th’s! Compromise the truth,”
for a bootlicker’s recluse.”

finishing his own epitaph,

“Peace is a struggling doctor,
And my black rage its patient!”

Johnathan Jackson, 19 and resolute,
struts with
a sawed-off attitude,

“That’s right gentlemen,
we’re taking over now.”

George wipes the *Blood in his Eye*,

scuffs the last cigarette on his old strip cell,

chuckling,

“They will never find me amongst broken men.”

*Cien años de Soledad*, Brother. (‘Naw, more like four hundred.)

Before the firing squad,

spitting on the Warden’s ashtray.

This sections ends where my poem leaves off, wiping the blood in my eyes.

By asking the question, “How does the subaltern poetically respond to power,” we must first grasp what exactly we are up against. Well, for one, we face *The Rise of the Warrior Cop*, the morbid *nom de guerre* Radley Balko describes for the militarization of United States’ police forces, the rapprochement to a police state. But the war-clad boot *de la chota* seems to press against a multitude of dark-skinned faces. In this year’s State of the Union Address, President Obama stated the United States spends more in its military than the next eight nations combined. But such coercive apparatuses, in their naked brutality, provoke frustration from the domestic population. Power thereby needs to literally (*re-*)dress itself a phenomena I coin, “aesthetics of coercion.”

‘Aesthetics of Coercion’ roughly refers to the visual regimes propped to intimidate, distract, or otherwise negate any opposite. And rather than drawing upon long-worn statistics on
the dismal nature of things, in this chapter, I turn to native intellectual George Jackson, arguing that through surreal renditions of a para-fascist state power, the late Black Marxist levels Establishment to what it truly is. That is, to “objectively”\textsuperscript{24} elaborate on this aesthesis of establishment still leaves intact its art of seduction, a point I attempt to raise through Jackson’s text. His imagination is that of Richard Iton’s “Black Fantastic,” one that transgresses the threshold of the concretely real, and de-legitimizes Amerikkka as a monster in the strictest sense of the word. You prolly think I’m tripping, that this shit’s a lotta gas, pero creeme, no lo es. Metaphors, particularly for displaced subjects, are stand-ins for material reality—for the latter is deemed insufficient to explain itself. Thus, ethnopoets deviate from the Man of Letters romance, and employ language to expose the naked reality of one’s brutalization. Interrupting this allegorical argument, this section extends its exposure to the ethnopoet himself, Jackson, as the embodying possibility of self-transformation.

\textit{Burining and Excavating a Brother}

Without question, George Jackson is an intellectual powerhouse. Writing amidst the raucous screams, \textit{Blood in my Eye} is a weapon of liberation and poem of love. Drenched in scenes of depilated slums, and yet rejoicing in the untapped capabilities of the black lumpen, \textit{Blood in my Eye} is precisely what it sounds, an intimate blueprint of revolution, yet one deeply implicated within the black body. For Jackson, architecting a better future, and saving the black body from white supremacist harm, are one and the same. The title may thus be re-read as a reflex to one’s erasure from public memory. Addressing his only “surviving son”\textsuperscript{25}, Jackson’s father writes:
I went to Mount Vernon August 7th, 1921, to visit the grave site of my heart your keepers murdered in cold disregard for life.

His grave was supposed to be behind your grandfather’s and grandmother’s. But I couldn’t find it. There was no marker. Just mowed grass. The story of our past. I sent the keeper a blank checker for a headstone—and two extra sites—blood in my eye!!! (8)

But as critical race theorists, we must focus not just on the content of ethnopoets, but the means she uses to project her plight. Epigraph, in its most formal definition, is an engraved inscription on a building, statue or coin, or a short quotation at the beginning of a book or chapter, intended to suggest a theme. Jackson, by including this letter, recapitulates the epigraph’s symbolism. The privacy of both readership and a father-son correspondence transforms into public ceremony. We witness the denial of black Americans even the ability to pay their respects, as their forefathers are erased from the landscape [“There was no marker”]. The narration of an entire people, “story of our past,” is nowhere to be found. Before uttering the first word, Jackson inaugurates the treatise of sorts by speaking through the absence, the denial of memorializing one’s forefathers. This grave site, Jackson reminds us, is not just an invitation to mourn, but the afterimages of a crime scene, the murder “of my heart” (8). Such poetic musings are reminiscent of American Indian historiographies, most notably, Bury my Heart at Wounded Knee. By mowing through the grave site, the Amerikkkan police state violates its own laws against tampering with evidence. Disfranchised from official petition and litigation, the ethnopoet broods with rage, rupturing her blood vessels, distorting her vision. “I sent the keeper a blank check,” Jackson Sr. writes, “and two extra sites—blood in my eye!!!” (8). With prophetic clairvoyance, Jackson Sr. prefigures his own death, inviting his son to a death-cry for martyrdom. Its pre-text is the aggrieved, and perhaps more accurately, un-grieved, sense of injustice.
Along with medium, we must also pay close attention to literary genealogy. Within the slave narrative tradition, the first installment of the African-American Studies canon, the memoir or autobiography is a defiant act against the criminalization of black literacy that characterized antebellum Amerikkkka. James Olney unpacks the autobiography’s special nature as a “memorial, creative act,” (149) one that first and foremost attests to the real existence of the narrator. Hence, the tedious title of renown works such as *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave* is less so the dry phrasing of free man, but an overcompensation to corroborate the veracity of Douglass’ claims.\(^29\) The “simple, existential claim,” “Written by himself,” is cognizant of the speculations that slaves [black bodies] are incapable of “civilized speech,” and thus write the self through language. Beneath Douglass’s\(^30\) polished prose are not the high art pretensions, but the ontological argument to speak into existence. Descartes takes an Afrocentric turn, as Onley summarizes the re-appropriation of the English language as prefiguring emancipation: “I subscribe myself.” A trifurcation of social themes—literacy, identity, and freedom, are intimately related to one another. Despite the legal abolition of slavery, African-American scholars have paid close scrutiny to the shrewd means of post-bellum incarceration of black bodies, Jackson’s own locus of enunciation. Indeed,

Jim Crow,

once perched at every Mom and Pop store,

spigot and lobby,

now nestles in the bosom of a soft crime,

re-sharpening its talons

at the bars of a prison cell.\(^31\)
Jackson’s own writings therefore fall within this larger genealogy of the Black Freedom Struggle, deploying the written word as abolitionist force, one simultaneously humanizing the speaker. Completed barely a week before Jackson’s death in San Quentin on August 21, 1971, *Blood in my Eye* was sent to the prison’s Adjustment Office with specific instructions on publication (ix). This manifesto of sorts is also then a will, the last tract of wishes Jackson had for “a young black growing up in the ghetto” (x).

Finally, reading Jackson enacts a simultaneity of burying and excavating. Before delving into the latter, we must address the former. In a 1971 issue, *Jet* magazine documents how exactly one year and 13 days after the burial of his younger brother, Jonathan, 29-year-old George Jackson was “interred in an adjoining grave at Mount Vernon, Illinois.” The magazine’s choice of the term internment is a crucial one here, as it suggests an attempt at closure. In his essay, “The Impossible Embodiment,” French film critic and experimental composer Michel Chion explains how suspense is created by divorcing sound from its source. Closure is, in contrast, accomplished by re-uniting the two, an act which Chion says is often cinematically portrayed by burying the threat itself, for such an internment signals death. “To bury someone,” he writes, “is not merely to be rid of a decomposing body; it is also to assign a place to his or her soul” (Zizek 195). A funeral then, he stresses, is not simply a ritualized act of mourning, but consolidates the threat’s silencing, “which tell[s] the dead person: ‘you will remain there’” (Zizek 195). Through the false grave, Jackson inaugurates his quixotic manifesto by suggesting the black body is denied this closure, metaphysical or otherwise. The black body thus is the *par excellence* of impossible embedment, an earthly phantom:
--The vagrancy of a freeman, forever condemned to
soliciting this House’s city halls.--
To petition his Humanity,

only to face imprisonment
--The loophole of the 13th amendment,
Where only darkened wrists seemed to fit.--
Convict-lease system brutalized his body.

In short, through Blood in my Eye’s epigraph, we realize that history may not be swept under the rug, certainly not six feet under. Yes beloved Marable, history is alive. He is a brother walking amongst us. And he is terrifying, not just from his mangled corpse, his false grave, but the invisible assailant that he presc(i)ence conjures.

White Demonization and Propping the Aesthetic Regimes

In the anonymous, “Letter to a Comrade,” Jackson allegorizes the U.S. nation-state as this mythical chimera. He writes,

The history of the U.S.—the blood-soaked, urine-steeped essence of its being; the wreckage and demise of its human character under the wheels of a two-hundred year-old headlong flight with heedless, frightened animals at the control of a machine that has mastered them—allows for no
appeal on a strictly ideological level" (28).

History

--From Black Power,

to the CIA’s White Powder-- a

stained homage to narco-saints.

Through these words, Jackson caricaturizes Amerikkkan history as a merciless hydria-like creature exercising absolute domination over its leaderless, black subjects. Such remarks should not be dismissed as allegorical, but rather, vividly project the psychic torment American terror inflicts on black Americans’ nervous systems (19-20). Jackson’s language draws from a virile black masculinity trope that delineates an imagined teleology of “the Fearless Negro,” an increasing calcification of black (male) rage over unsung grievances. Indeed, he visualizes law in the ritualized theaters of violence as: “gangs of militiamen,” “pigs wearing sheets and caps,” “a white oak and a barefooted black hanging” (168), “lenses of telescopic rifles” and “conspiracy trials” (168). The Benjamian aura of white supremacy feigns a “splendid permanence” but is nevertheless abstract, intangible, lacking material basis and no substantial objective reality (47). In essence, Jackson’s manifesto calls for a demystification of [white supremacy’s] prestige of power.

That is to say, it is impossible for the subjugated to confront head-on its oppressor, to debate the tenets of the former’s doctrine on a logos footing. Jackson inspires us to muster up our own chimeras, fighting fire with fire. Es decir, these literary renditions re-mystify state power to the point of the grotesque, a repulsive creature to be annihilated immediately. Rather than mounting door-stopping statistics, Jackson conjures. He summons—almost out of nowhere—a
para-fascist state, whose vulnerability at its invulnerability. “Allow[ing] for no appeal on a strictly ideological level,” Jackson resorts to guerilla stigmatizing, transmogrifying power as an ugly beast. Hobbes’ leviathan is not the god-like, rational arbiter, but disease-ridden bogeyman terrorizing its subjects.

Moreover, Jackson highlights how a face-to-face collision with power is futile. But let’s back-track for a minute. Jackson isn’t just calling power out, but the discourses we use to describe it. By exploring the theoretical implications of this re-reading, we may sketch how aesthetics of coercion fleshes out under the auspices of a white supremacist structure bent on destroying black self-determination. 35 Before elaborating an “Aesthetics of Coercion,” we must necessarily build from foundational vocabularies, but not without revising their faults—in the geological sense. Just as how we must depart from “reality”36—or rather, hegemony’s construction of it--, we must interrogate the elitist conceptualizations of long established concepts.

Prior to the canonization of ethnic studies, academia rarely included me, and if it did, it was through anthropological cannibalisms that dissected, obsessed, and gazed at my body. In order to illustrate how displaced subject poetically respond to power [ethnopoetics], we must level ivory tower terminologies to our level. This section “rescues” just two: Walter Benjamian’s aura and Marx’s reification. Through their revision, we may legibly see the grotesque serpent in all its morbid luster. Whereas Marx and Benjamin deploy a reification that begins with the abstract, and toward the concrete, a Jacksonian reification, one that begins with the concrete, towards the abstract, finally reaching the absurd.37
Revising Terms (Because Old White Men Ain’t Cuttin’ It)

For Marx, reification entails an increasing externalization of man’s labor, objective and independent of him, controlling her by alien autonomy. He writes,

A commodity is therefore a mysterious thing, simply because in it the social character of men’s labour appears to them as an objective character stamped upon the product of that labour; because the relation of the producers to the sum total of their own labour is presented to them as a social relation existing not between themselves, but between the products of their labour. This is the reason the products of labour become commodities, social things whose qualities are at the same time perceptible and imperceptible by the senses ... It is only a definite social relation between men that assumes, in their eyes, the fantastic form of a relation between things.\textsuperscript{38}

According to Marx, a world of objects and relations between things spring into being, a world of commodities to be precise. At the same time, subjectively, the proletarian undergoes a process of self-estrangement of her activity into a commodity.\textsuperscript{39} Reification involves a rigid bifurcation of an unspecified natural order into the subjective and objective, again entirely driven by the telos of capital. For Marx then, reification is an increasingly disembodying phenomena. More broadly, since its coining in 1854, reification signifies the regarding of the abstract into a material or concrete thing.\textsuperscript{40}

But Jackson, as a native ethnopoet, abjures this conceptualization, turning it on its head (as Marx did Hegel). Rather than expropriating from the abstract, Jackson begins with the grittily concrete: Fanon’s wretched of the earth and transgresses to the fantastic. But in trespassing to these imaginative realms, Jackson blurs the supposed boundaries of both. Through Jackson then,
we retroactively re-assess the salience of what seemed universal concepts of commodity fetishism, and argue for their inadequate explanations under ghettoized conditions of post-Civil Rights Black America.

As ethnopoets, we cannot afford to luxuriously parade our critique. More often than not, we smuggle it within the sweeping urgency of the hour. As such, the ethnopoet is a de facto scholar, engaging with critical terminologies to adapt them under novel conditions. To make sense of our surroundings, all the while a panoptic gaze animalizes our bodies. So through Jackson’s levelling, we gain eye-level portrayal of power, not the monolithic, distanced renderings of early sociological thought. Literary in its character, Jaekson’s sketch of power is elegant and lethal. He writes,

The aura of magic, glamour, luster, and splendid performance covers the fascist like a protective layer of fat. The slimy scales of majesty shield and conceal the dilapidation of the old bourgeois reign of terror. Although in reality, nothing remains but an illusion. Power is far from bare, but glazed in a seductive tissue (47)

That is, beneath the oneiric layers of aesthesis, Amerikkka bears a nightmarish decay:

Through open-veined conspiracy,

naked windows,

I watch America undress herself.

Expecting a swastika on her left breast, charred rope tucked ‘neath the blonde hair,
yanking my blue collar, I stutter at the culture shock.

The gashes n’ abrasions,

varicose veins.
Through *ethnopoetic imagination*, Jackson captures the insidious transgressions of a para-fascist United States, one more broadly oriented towards late capitalism. By late capitalism, I wish to employ Jameson’s definition. Originating from the Frankfurt School, the term late capitalism contemporaneously refers to “the vision of a world capitalism system,” one fundamentally distinct from Lenin’s imperialism (Jameson xix). Aside from emergence of transnational business, its features include new international division of labor, vertiginous dynamics in international banking and stock exchanges, media interrelationship, and other pertinent social consequences (xix).

But aside from the hysterical financial speculation, one must devote equal attention to the affective tenets of this paradigm. David Howes describes this ‘Empire of the Senses’ as “Hyperesthesia,” the supermarket consortium of goods that inundate the eye. Whereas Marx described workers as living amidst ‘the sewage of civilization,’ Jacksonian subjects live in close proximity with opulent displays of wealth. In our globalized world, working-class subjects (especially those of color) consume an unprecedented amount of goods, while nevertheless living under relative poverty. David Harvey coins this ideology as neoliberalism, the proposal that human well-being is advancable exclusively by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedom and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade (Harvey 2). The state, now austere, is hailed solely to create and preserve these practices.

But these top-down projects of de-regulation, privatization, and state austerity dramatically transform the individual as well. The insatiable creation of new needs, coupled with the global flow of capital, generates a consumer capitalism, which in turn furnishes endless spectacles and consumer desires. A commodity fetishism on steroids, this sensory
overstimulation sparks an “atmosphere of self-indulgence” (Howes 285). If industrial capitalism thrived off the backs of proletarian, then a hyperesthetic regime hinges on the flaneur (Howes 285), the voyeuristic idler who animated all she saw, strolled, espied, and relished off every single display—and implicitly justifying it. Her consumption is her consent.

One alternatively may conceive of this aesthetic regime as the visualization of Gramsci’s cultural hegemony, the universalizing of the ruling class’s sensibilities, tastes, and so forth. The prestige of corporate fascism then that Jackson conjures is less an aberration than waging war with these forces on its visual economy. Hence the lethal phrase, “a blade in the throat of fascism” (126), one that echoes Fanon’s own musings: “The native’s back is to the wall, the knife at his throat (or more precisely, the electrode at his genitals)”44 These illustrations aren’t literary indulgence, or even embellishments of the state of things, but again, portraits of these structures of feeling. They both raise a counter-spectacle, and its gravity attracts, rather than repulses. That is, the grotesque, nightmarish world that Jackson sees is not a distortion, but the world as it is lived, for racialized subjects. It is, in short, the blood in his eye.

Guy Debord’s Society of Spectacle remains a crucial piece in understanding the pervasive imminence of this visual sensorium. Published two years before Jackson’s death, this text served as important text for the Situationist movement. Debord’s writings, while almost half a century old, are just as relevant. He writes in our world, the illusion is sacred, and the truth profane. In this topsy-turvy paradigm, the spectacle is “the omnipresent affirmation of the choice already made,” a permanent presence of legitimacy. The spectacle shelters within itself an “absolute denial, its fallacious paradise,” the subjugation of all reality to appearance: (20). From a materialist vantage point, the spectacle is the moment when a commodity attains total occupation of social life, its uninterrupted self-contemplation (42).
More in alignment with Jackson, Debord elucidates a bureaucratic economy that eliminates all choice, thus necessitating permanent violence. Its succession of production engenders a spatio-temporal alienation, and so the seer experiences an abundance of dispossession. Debord’s dense jargon takes a belligerent turn as it describes this dispossession as a “permanent opium war” (44). It is the aesthetic compliment of capital, what one only looks at. Most importantly, Debord cuts through geographical distance, and (re)produces of internal distance. Indeed, mythologies abound us:

Because history itself haunts modern society like a spectre, pseudo-histories are constructed at every level of consumption of life in order to preserve the threatened equilibrium of present frozen-time (200)

I walk across this house’s hallways,

steeped in mythology:

beaten-in folklore, trodden nursery rhymes.

Stained glass bleeding ‘gainst

a stolen sunlight.

Oiled portraits of

pale-faced Presidents, a God that’s white.

Jackson revises Debord’s elitist preoccupations of spectacular society, and resituates it under a black proletarianism. Debord’s abstract ruminations turn to vociferous scenes of carnage, death, and social malaise. Moreover, power is the Burgessian fixation to spectacle, the subject isn’t forcibly strapped to a chair.45 Returning to Jackon’s aural fat of the fascist, we may de-bunk the
feigned totalitarianism of Debord’s spectacle. The “omnipresent affirmation” ain’t nothing but a façade. Power be frontin’. Matter of fact, it ain’t even power.

Now that we’ve talked about the form, we can *por fin* delve into the text.

*Blood in My Eye, Knife in My Hand: The Ethnopoet as Surgeon*

*Blood in my Eye* is prophetic, an oracle warning of the secular apocalypse puppeteer by the United States. Through his description of the United States as the “mortal enemy of all people’s government,” Jackson elucidates a pan-ethnic religiosity of the oppressed. The word now holds the Master captive, hidden in plain fright. As such, the Master is a shape-shifter, transmogrifying *de repente*. One minute a folkloric Leviathan, another, “a beleaguered, toothless tiger” (29). Allegory departs from literary concern, a Baudelairean “art-for-art’s sake,’ and onto a native intellectual’s body cam,46 documenting the ever-changing face of oppression. If fiction, as Kafka famously wrote, breaks the frozen sea within us, then when appropriated by native subjects, it transforms to a graceful surgery. It is this surgery that I’d like to address: my earnest belief in the ethnopoet as surgeon, *sin licencia*.

This metaphor of writing as a medical operation draws its inspiration Richard Selzer’s *Mortal Lessons: Notes on the Art of Surgery*. Specifically, I drew from his short story “The Knife,” (1928). The author, a professional medical surgeon, also freelances as a writer, incorporating much of his extensive knowledge of the human anatomy in essay of sorts. Using vivid concrete details to paint the graphic scenes of operation, the rare character development of the knife itself, and a thorough sensory involvement, Selzer provides the reader with a newfound perspective of medical operations. In vivid detail, Selzer writes of a surgeon and his scalpel, as
together they cut through the patient’s cellulite, “the fascia, the tough fibrous sheets encasing the muscles” (Selzer’s “The Knife”). Throughout the essay, Selzer uses graphic detail to enhance the visual effect of this essay, and facilitate the reader’s understanding that an operation is a dangerous, meticulous, but nonetheless necessary.

By synthesizing specific details and a variety of sensory involvement, the writer personifies the medical knife, transforming it from a non-sentient piece of machinery, to a cruel, heart-less, and bloodthirsty creature. (Sound familiar? Te digo, la escritura es un contra-poder). Selzer writes, “The knife is not for pressing. It is for drawing across the field of skin.” Through the phrase, “field of skin,” the author suggests that the knife is akin to a paintbrush, an artistic tool used to draw across the canvas of human flesh. However, as the operation progresses, Selzer elaborates how the knife is this “steel-bellied thing,” thus tying the knife to the qualities of a metal-monster. Furthermore, it is pervasive in its nature; as the blade penetrates deeper and deeper into the body, Selzer admits, “The sense of trespassing is keener now.” In a matter of paragraphs then, the knife is no longer this unbiased medical utensil, turning almost into this perverted killer who seems indestructible.

Toward the end of the essay, its transformation is complete, with both the knife’s behavior and qualities that of a murderer. Selzer writes, “Without the blade, the knife has a blind, decapitated look… But slide the blade, click it home, and the knife springs instantly to life. It is headed now, edgy leaping to mount the fingers for the gallop of the feast.” Like a human without his heart, Selzer writes on how the knife’s core lies in the blade, and that without it, it is useless, a glorified stick. But with the blade, the knife returns to its innate, voracious state. However, the irony that Selzer alludes to is that this knife, this seemingly apathetic force of evil with nothing in its mind but homicidal intent, is needed to save a patient’s life.
To me, Jackson’s political poetics may be re-thought as an operating table, painstakingly carving [charting] the lard corpus of a fascist state apparatus [its “field of skin”]. *Como un cirujano*, one mutilates the body, perhaps beyond recognition, precisely to salvage it.

But the question persists, what exactly are we as ethnopoets saving? Ourselves, from our own self-mockery…

Gracias *hermano* Jackson, I’ll take it from here.
2.5 - Spicing into Existence: Epitaph, Epithet, and the Ethno-Poetic Imagination

We interrupt this mind-numbing theorizing—*porque de veras, hasta se me entumen el cerebro con tantas semánticas*—for breaking news. Well actually, since for us, shit ain’t change but the fucking day, none of this is “breaking” in the sense of novelty. But “breaking” in the *crushing* sense, *ese teatro conocemos muy bien*. And so, the brown and black are doubly maimed: externally, their tongues are straightjacketed to a system of thought that does not celebrate their difference. But at the same time, they are internally bleeding.

Burdened with double critique, I as surgeon have a lot do, with little to work with. I am only armed by the memories stitched on my back. Oftentimes, it is clandestine, within the folds of things—hence, the chapter’s hyphenated designation as “2.5.” Both ethnopoiesis’ creation and re-visiting can occur at any given moment, making it one of the most nomadic and accessible weapons for displaced subjects. The beauty is, the surgery does not require extra effort, for in so many instances, we are embarking in it, and not even noticing.

Last half-chapter, Jackson exposed the erased epitaph, the past of those slain before, often our own kin. As Nuyorican poet, Pedro Pietri penned it, “All died yesterday today/and will die again tomorrow.” Note then the ethnic subject’s collapse of temporality. As death transpires as we speak, it’s imminent we treat its wounds properly. After all, if Plato said philosophy is a meditation of death, then our speech is a treatise, that treats dis’ awful incision on our bodies. Hence, the phonological utterance, “The struggle is real,”-- the daily corroboration—and reminder—of a hellish reality.
There’s countless operations to execute. In these short moments, I’ll seek to perform just one: to reclaim the epithet, once a source a shame and reminder of inferiority, as a marker of pride. Re-claiming is a tradition that knows by working within, one creates without. Such a decolonial aesthetics hark back to Fanon’s comments Aime Cesaire. And indeed, the founder of the negritude movement wrote,

*My blackness is neither a tower, nor a cathedral*

*It thrusts into the red flesh of the sun*

*It thrusts into the burning flesh of the sky*

*It hollows through the dense dismay of its own*


In similar vein. I singe my flesh to another sun.

My mestizaje is

Tenochtitlán – place of the prickly pear.

Genesis of Self blossomed

‘gainst the ear of a cactus. In 1487, it soared across gleaming white towers, the Great Temple amidst floating islands. It enshrined metropolis, bustling my spirit against a quarter million inhabitants.

My mestizaje is

a dimly lit *bodega*, plundered of its silvered rivers;
armories of long-yawned ash.
Spewing cannons, emptied of their canon.
Its plaster caved in
upon my sun-splattered skin.

My mestizaje is
a newlywed groom,
with hands fixed at his bride’s dimpled back.
She dances with dragged tacones. I
accent my past tense,
to half-drunken pegaditas.
How it clutches the fragments
of her dark hips.

This other sun emanates from the same rays as the past. Blackness (and its diasporic subjectivities) acts as a surrogate that allows me to reflect on my own work, and its power of secular resurrection. Resurrection not in the messianic sense, but by rescuing humanist claims from once desecrated ruins, a revival of sorts occurs. With the poem, “Retorno a mi tierra natal” as its epitome, my collection takes direct inspiration from the decolonial aesthetic that is Aime Cesaire’s negritude movement, one that espouses not a politics of refusal, but of re-existence. Specifically, my poem first pays homage to a “middle aged woman,” or the unsung heroine of female campesina, one who continuously reincarnates to iconographies of struggle (Aztec Eagle, the migratory hummingbird, the recurring reina of an indigenous matriarchy).
She is: an Azure *chuparrosa*. Bird of the New World. With her 250 breaths per minute, beating life into *las cienegas*.

Flapping her wings at 50 times per second, she wakes at 4 in the morning, to stir the earth awake.

This Avian scribe migrates ‘cross continents, cross-pollinating golden *jirados*,

the roaring *cerros*. To consulates that deny legal residency. To the House in ruins, tattooing its walls with nectar, in jagged penmanship. She is Dolores Huerta.

She is the Aztec eagle insignia, perched at thorny fence,

*Pero siempre, siempre*...

Her *corazón* beats to the stagger *del agachado*. And now, the landless may fly.

But again, as discussed with Jackson last (half)chapter, these reincarnations aren’t literary relish, but again, in concert with Sandoval’s methodology, that *poetic transfiguration* that breaths, in the same exhale, a whole host of subject-possibilities. Rather than remain confined in a limiting politics of opposition (anti-racism for instance), the poem asserts the vivid tapestry of Aztec ancestry *a priori*, and destigmatizes the legacy of mestizaje, or the historical
process of indigenous-European intermixing primarily through rape and consensual marriage. The poem illustrates *Latinidad* not as a monolithic entity, but is problematized in the conflicting camps of Chicano protest and suburban assimilation (to enunciate just two). And yet, regardless of the fruits of individual success, the leitmotif of “House in Ruins” returns to torment the speaker.

Outside the House in Ruins,
from just 1998-2004,
lay 1,954 small white crosses.
As their struggles incarnate, I burlap-sack their remains,
a half-buried dream. I inhale the same Juarez Desert my mother coughed.

From a macro-approach, the unfinished book of poems, “A Return to my Nativist Land” articulates the socio-political fact that to be Latino is to inherit an existential crisis of blood-drenched history, one found not in centuries-old transatlantic slavery, but palpably felt at the barbed wired border. Burdened to make sense of these uprooted genealogies, the Latino poet is left splintered and paralyzed, mourning the thousands of *indocumentados* who all once hoped to stake their claim in “The American Dream.” My inspection, like the lungs of democracy, is at once an introspection.

As Fanon succinctly states, “It is the white man who creates the Negro. But is the Negro who creates negritude” (47). This axiom is merely a racialized variant of Marx’s famous excerpt
the “18th Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte.” In it he writes, “Men make their own history, but they do not make it as they please; they do not make it under self-selected circumstances, but under circumstances existing already, given and transmitted from the past.” For me, reclaiming, at the level of language, is a microcosm of the enormous task of civilizational excavation. Ethnopoiesis requires no official degree, but a sincere awareness of the power of language.

This politics of reclaiming/renaming has long been rehearsed, even within everyday patterns of speech. Take for example the well-worn question over black Americans’ use of “nigga.” Langston Hughes, when discussing the virulent reception to Carl Van Vechten’s Nigger Heaven, excavates the emotional weight behind the term,

The word nigger, you see, sums up for us who are colored all the bitter years of insult and struggle in America: the slave-beatings of yesterday, the lynchings of today, the Jim Crow cars, the only movie show in town with its sign up FOR WHITES ONLY, the resturants where you may not eat, the jobs you may not have, the unions you cannot join, The word nigger in the mouths of little white boys at school, the word nigger in the mouths of foremen on the job, the word nigger across the whole face of America! Nigger! Nigger! (205-6).

Language houses centuries of psychic trauma that are inescapable, and therefore, sites one must wrestle with. The strategic use of slurs aren’t vulgarities for their own sake, nor are they their naïve appraisal. Rather, they perform an essentializing through which the ethnopoet may navigate through the labyrinthine imitations of herself. I again draw to my own work:

And I, in observatories of privilege .

The Americanization of a spic

Theorize, essay, posit.
The way a drunkard miscalculates
a doorstep.

Studying its archaeology, dicta in unwashed comales.

Wrought archway, empty bodegas,
Chuy’s última cena. Arrested for trespassing
Tar-carpeted streetlights,

moon still laughin’,
Imprisoned,
‘hind a squad car. y America,
illiterate to her own hatred,
before sunrise,
tailored his baseball cap
for a burglar’s disguise.

Shot between the eyes.

My point is not to advocate the use of derogatory slurs to illustrate the differential consciousness at work—the poetic sleight-of-hand to break with ideology while working within—inherent in such an act. Through this investigation, one sees what can never be unseen. Moreover, by re-visiting these scenes on our terms, we undermine its power over us. We dis-arm it, to recall the opening argument of ethnopoesis as treatise[treat dis’]. Later in the “Retorno,” I re-visit the mythic mother’s burial site:
I finally greet her,
offering her the streams of our wedding.
I kiss her bed,
*los siglos* ingrained in stone,
where my barefooted *reina*,
*ay mi reina, ya por fin*
lies to rest.

By revisiting the epitaph-epigraph (whether Jackson’s, my own, or beyond), we encounter a morbid beauty that moves us, that blossoms from crimsoned meadows. Semiotically, we accomplish this flowering by re-attaching the trauma to poetic memory. Por ejemplo, go to any spoken word event; the audience’s “hums,” “yeses,” “don’t be nice,” and the like, act as both a tacit acknowledgement of the line’s eloquence, but also allows for public healing. Secondarily, revisiting acts as sublimated form of self-mutilation, which, while painful, offsets our complacency. In colloquial terms, ethnic subjects describe such complacency within a discourse of sleep. Hence, the soft demand, “Stay Woke.”

Therefore, *ethnopoesis* necessitates the marriage of politics and artistry, a dialectic that ebbs and flows given its specific context. But we are not trying to wear politics on a sleeve. There isn’t anything flashy about this work. To expound on the art of ethnopoesis over an entire manuscript, only to never actually foreground explicit poets, would seem far-sighted, failing to
delve into what’s most pertinent. This latter section of this semi-chapter turns to a classic work, one that arguably, “ignited a movement.”

First read in 1969 in support of the Young Lords Party, a Puerto Rican nationalist group based in Spanish Harlem. Taking their inspiration from the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense, the Young Lords were first and foremost community activists. In their 13-Point Program and Platform, they advocated for fair and affordable housing, decent health care, Their militancy extended from the neighborhood—running free breakfast programs for children—to the global sphere—calling for the end of U.S. adventurism in Vietnam, and a larger Third World liberation.

Unfortunately, the Young Lords met the same fate as the Panthers, systematically dismantled in part by the FBI’s Counter-Intelligence Program [COINTELPRO]. Pietri however continued as a radical activist and poet, making no distinction between the two. Pietri founded and sustained the Nuyorican Poets Café, a hailed center for oppositional arts and literature.

Born in Ponce, Puerto Rico in 1944 and raised in Harlem, Pietri’s biography is a Latino diaspora of disenchantment. After he high school, he drafted into the U.S. army, serving in Vietnam, and returning to the United States as a fierce war critic. His service is integral to the Jacksonian disillusionment of chimerical state (see Chapter 2), writing, “I realized who the real enemy was, and it was not the Vietcong in their black pajamas, but the mercenaries who invaded their country” “Puerto Rican Obituary,” first published in 1973, captures that rage from boasting as the moral policeman of the world, only to degrade its darker citizens to the point of social death.

As such, “Puerto Rican Obituary,” is a public eulogy that mutes its rage against a white power structure through humoring the manifold ways of Latino [Puerto Rican, specifically]
suffering. His opening lines of the poem, “They worked, they were always on time,” from the start connotes a subject no longer with us. With obituary as its title, Pietri remembers a herculean people, for their endurance flirts with the absurd. Indeed, Pietri recites, “They worked for ten days a week and were only paid for five.” Its delivery is gong-like, musical, each name uttered shudders like solemn church-bells that signify the day’s dead. “Juan, Miguel, Milagos, Olga, Manuel, all die yesterday, today, and will die again today.” Pietri is (fore)telling the deaths of working-class Puerto Ricans, a report that will ruthlessly continue. In satirical cloak, Pietri imbues the United States with heavenly qualities. “They died waiting for the Garden of Eden to open up again, under a new management.” Later, he references the well-known Ecclesiastes 12:7 verse, “Then the dust shall return to the earth as it was,” revising it to “social security number to ashes/union dues to dust.” Pietri intentionally wedges his poetry within biblical tradition, illustrate the religiosity underpinning these people’s struggles.

Pietri poignantly shows the psychic trauma of inner city living conditions, and its heartbreaking comparison to the lowliest of animals. He writes, “From the nervous breakdown streets/where the mice live like millionaires/and the people do not live at all/are dead and were never alive.” Pietri reveals the ethnic body as a contradiction, for how can she both be dead and never alive? Pietri nuances death not as the flat-lining of a heartbeat, but as a political-existentialist reality of the oppressed. So when Pietri writes, “They were born dead/and they died dead,” Pietri attenuates Orlando Patterson’s argument of slavery and social death to the 20th centuries ghettos of ethnic United States. Contrary to elitist preconceptions on “the masses,” these people however are not ignorant of their degraded treatment, but are, as Dolores Huerta commented on farmworkers, “tan dispuestos a sufrir.” As Pietri writes, “They knew/they were born to weep/and keep the morticians employed.” Juxtaposed with Omalu’, one speculates, then
realizes, both are autopsies (a term I’ll elucidate next chapter), meticulously searching for the wounds inflicted upon the neglected body.

Amidst the racialized death, masked with television opiates, Pietri intersperses the piece with nascent agencies. He writes, “They are dead/They are dead/and will not return from the dead/until they stop neglecting/the art of their dialogue.” The usage of the word return may come off as arbitrary, or interchangeable with another word, but it in fact equivocates return and resurrection. Cesaire’s *Return to my Native Land*, may be retroactively seen as possessing a second, emerging return, that of re-birth. The art of dialogue requires flight “from broken English lessons,” and an inward reflection to the one’s own language. That is, the ethnic subject must tune out the noise of mimesis, proven impossible to attain by one’s “broken English,” lest, perpetual self-destruction. In the current state of, these dead fight, even kill, each other for the most trivial of differences.

In this section, we’ve briefly discussed the ethnopoetics of speaking into (re)existence, the configuration of one’s conditions through a re-visiting of “the past.” As aforementioned in the previous chapter, to do so requires us to work with (not against) violent scenes of trauma, ones condensed in the pejorative. Thus, the coined term “spic’ing” is purposeful worded. Literal rooted in an epithet used against Spanish-speaking persons, we’ve heard the hateful word all too many times. But even within this painful opening of psychic wounds, we create newfound suns to kiss our (s)kin.

In “Puerto Rican Obituary,” Petri nuances “spic” not as epithet, but a degraded subject-formation. One that bellows in laughter, that is lowly, and therefore, repulsive. The “broken English lessons” *puertorriqueños* serve no purpose, for they’ll never persuade a system to deviate from one’s inferiority. *Jamás* they’ll:
Impress the mister goldsteins
Who keep them employed
As lavaplatos porters messengers boys
Factory workers maids stock clerks shipping clerks assistant mailroom
   Assistant, assistant assistant
   To the assistant’s assistant
   Assistant lavaplatods and automatic
   Artificial smiling doormen
   For the lowest wages of the ages
   And rages when you demand a raise because is against the company policy
To promote SPICS SPICS SPICS

Employment is a stepping stone from indentured servitude, a half-dozen rotation of menial jobs that assignment one’s value. In comical iterations, Pietri repeats “Assistant” to the point of delirium. Its prominence in the text gestures its ubiquity within the social order. Moreover, Pietri indicates that the pathologization of racial orders is not an anomaly, but the very foundation of Amerikkkan society, “the company policy” (a point I’ll expound next chapter). The subtle use of “is” re-claims the broken English use of “is” to actually mean the contraction, “it’s.” Pietri wedges vernacular grammar in order to validate the speech of those lacking a voice. In doing so, we dissociate from charge of “Spic,” no longer simply the culmination of “all those years of insult and struggle.” It is a crime in progress, the prime evidence that records a half-hearted conspiracy to confine Latinos to the lowest strata. Through public obituary, we bear witness not to our death, but to our artifacts, of who we’re expected to be.

That sounds all lovely, but we these moments are mortal, quite bluntly because human beings are. To negate these attacks, dis-arm the oppressor in his very gaze, is a volatile thing.
Muchas veces, we lack the privilege to work with the living, even in their last moments. As such, we face a serious problem: what are we to do when we cannot prepare for our death’s, instead faced to deal with the corpse, the physical body in its decaying, putrid form?
In this section, I return us to the surgeon’s abilities to meticulously carve through the “field of skin.” Figuratively speaking, I make the surgeon work over-time to a graveyard shift.

The title, “Que haremos con el cuerpo” makes fruit of the ambiguity of “cuerpo,” which while colloquially referring to a body, very much retains close resemblance to corpse. It’s a poetic reminder that even in full vitality, we are not far from death. Through exploring the recent film, Concussion (2015), I argue the ethno-poet as forensic pathologist, conducting a “native autopsies” that documents the damaged done, in the hopes of provoking public outcry. The pathologist’s work is under-valued, under-mined, under-funded, and yet, her sincere oath to truth-telling leaves no option.

The etymology of autopsy derives from the Greek roots autos [self] and optos [seen], roughly translating to personal observation. Thus an autopsy, when deployed by the native speaker, figures as a painful introspection. The victim’s body is retroactively offered as redemptive suffering, consenting to being carved open for the advancement of the larger group. An autopsy, in short, is a ritual marshalling such an excavation.

Before delving into the movie, it’s critical to explain the linkage between pathology as scientific examination of organs, tissues, and bodily fluids to diagnose disease, and philosophical inquiry dealing with persons of social deviance. Their imbrication opens a bio-raciality, the myth of the ethnic subject as a less form, not merely in the abstract, but intimately implicating her body.

Philosophical Underpinnings of Race as Pathology
This section roughly sketches a genealogy of pathology: coloniality, the sub-ontological, bare life, to finally, the non-person.

The construction of race as pathology is far from hyperbolic, but stepped in what decolonial theorist, Anibal Quijano, termed, la matriz de poder colonial [“the matrix of colonial power” (Mignolo). This phrase describes a form of social discrimination in our globalized world, one that outlived formal colonialism. The coloniality of power inscribes the axes of oppression—racial, political, social, gender, etc.—that characterized the European hierarchical order. Moreover, this racial order prescribed value to certain bodies, while disfranchising others. Quijano argues this colonial structure birthed a caste system whereby Spaniards ranked supreme, while the conquered ‘raced’ to the bottom, depending on their own phenotypes and cultures, presumed to be inferior. Such categorizations in turn extended to the colony, as an invisible institution that codified a discourse of exclusion. Coloniality’s far-reaching into modern “postcolonial” societies question the temporal claims of “post” as after, re-defining it instead as attenuation.

Similarly, in Nelson Maldonado Torres’ “On the Coloniality of Being,” the author describes this insidious power dynamic as the “sub-ontological difference” (8). That is, the hierarchical difference between Being and what lies negatively marked as dispensable, routine targets of rape or murder (254). At best, the untouchable Other possesses a partial mortality--“life something resembling an incomplete death” (Maldonado-Torres 255). Such incompletion contradicts neoliberal subject-formations and epistemologies of the individual as ostensibly the rational, “self-actualizing or self-enterprising subject” (See chapter 2, Ong 5). By pathologizing the racial Other, social death is naturalized an immutable condition.
existentialist, Frantz Fanon, poignantly paints the existential reality of the global damné, of which the ethnopoet is a part of:

…the colonized person, who in this respect is like men in underdeveloped countries or the disinherited in all the parts of the world, perceives life not as a flowering or a development of an essential productiveness, but as permanent struggle against an omnipresent death. This ever menacing death is experienced as endemic famine, unemployment, a high death rate, an inferiority complex and the absence of any hope for the future (Maldonado-Torres 254)

Pathologies mobilize a “sub-ontological colonial difference” that hierarchizes racial bodies as below the threshold of an implicitly Eurocentric system of value, specifically, the colonial matrix of power.

Now that we’ve dealt with the structural components of bio-raciality, we may address its interiority, its ramifications to the racial body itself. In Homo Sacer, Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben describes “bare life,” as both the counterpart of exceptional state, and the target of sovereign violence. Not yet human, bare life describes “a zone of indistinction and continuous transition between man and beast” (109). Bare life is a damaged life, stripped of any political worth. Bare life manifests “the concealed nucleus” of Western biopolitics through its emphasis on double exclusion. First, denial from the polis, and a carte blanche of violation, therefore ineligible as crime. The ethnic pathology then is precisely the foundation of sovereign power, the sacrificial referent [Agamben coins homo sacer] that both confirms and suspends the operation of law. Development economist Patricia Northover permits us to re-situate this abstracted legal history within racial terms. Drawing from the work of Amartya Sen’s “Development as Freedom” and Derrida’s Spectres of Marx, Northover formulates “abject blackness” as a non-class that signals conditions of formal impossibility—beings which can never be/appear in this
form of transparency. Her non-presence simultaneously situates and threatens this figure of freedom (79).

For native speakers of all calibers and occupations, this pathology of a non-present present, to breathe life into hold hauntings, is exacerbated by a crisis of representation (79). After all, our postmodern era is one marked by an obscurity of accuracy, erasing all distinctions of measure. Frederic Jameson describes the difficulty of this diagnosis as the equivalent of “taking the temperature of the age without instruments and in a situation in which we are not even sure there is so coherent a thing as an ‘age,’ or zeitgeist or ‘system’ or ‘current situation’ any longer” (Avery Gordon 12). Indeed, visibility, Gordon explicates, is a complex system of permission, prohibition, presence and absence, punctuated by apparitions and hysterical blindness (15). Nevertheless, Gordon’s *Ghostly Matters* captures the elusiveness of said abjection as “haunting,” a language and experiential modality to understand convergence of force and meaning (xvi). As a remedy for these ghostly matters, she prescribes a tactic of conjuring. In conjuring, one calls up and *calls out* forces, transforming a troubling situation (23). Conjuring is a merging the analytical, the procedural, imaginative, and effervescent (23). Most importantly, conjuring retrieves cases of otherwise inarticulate experiences, symptoms, and spiraling affects (25). Autopsy, rather than an unwarranted fascination for black immiseration, emerges in Gordon’s work as a methodology to represent the damaged (xvii). That is, the harm inflicted or loss sustained by social violence (xvi). Therefore, to borrow the term pathologist is not hyperbolic, but an extension of the tireless work of native speaker, ceaseless changing her vocation, and visage, to resist her dehumanization.

And perhaps no one described racialized Other’s ontology, or lack thereof, as non-human, better than Fanon. In poetic diatribe, he describes blackness as “a zone of nonbeing, an
extraordinary sterile and arid region, an utterly naked declivity where an authentic upheaval be born” (9). But inseparable from this inner corrosion lies the possibility to re-exist. Indeed, Fanon elucidates a man of pure affirmation, “a yes that vibrates to cosmic harmonies,” rooted in love and understanding (8). The prerequisite of this New Man however necessitates self-examination, or as Fanon verbalizes, self-excavation, “a digging into [mankind’s] own flesh to find a meaning” (9). This “digging into” directly carries us back to Jackson’s epigraph, invigorating the ethnopoet with a spirit of self-transformation. But again, this transformation is not a transcendence of our mortal envelope, but its introspection. Or perhaps more accurately said, its incision.

With this brief history of pathology, we may hone in a recent crisis of representing a particular black subjectivity, one whose invisibility is obfuscated by its exorbitant profits. How does the ethnopoetics pathologist properly bandage the black subject as an athlete? What are we to do in our contemporary moment that both pedestals black life for its supposed ‘natural’ athleticism, and yet mocks its life as mattering? Again, qué haremos con el cuerpo?

Concussion: The Native Autopsy

In Peter Landesman’s Concussion (2015), Nigerian immigrant Bennet Omalu is a neuropathologist who conducted the autopsy for Pittsburgh Steelers Mike Webster, leading to the discovery of a new disease he coined Chronic Traumatic Encephalopathy (CTE). Upon approaching the body of the deceased football star, Omalu speaks in a nurturing, almost confessional, speaks to the dead corpse: “Mike, people are saying bad things about you. I could tell something is wrong, but I can’t do this alone. I need your help, to tell the world what
happened to you.” With these words, Omalu is summoning the help of this fallen figure, albeit post-mortem. In requesting for the deceased corpse assistance, Omalu endows it with immortal-like features, ones necessary to invoke in order to effectively do his job. Before officially beginning the autopsy, Omahu utters a temporal resuscitation, “a bringing to life” Omalu may then transcribe into the official language of scientific discourse. Resuscitation, under this context, has little to do with the biological revival from an apparent death, but the recording [the representation] of the harm inflicted.

Omahu’s nurturing tone is just as important as his surgical skills. It acts as the ambience, in the most musical sense. During the procedure, Omahu listened to Teddy Pendergrass’s “Close the Door,” on his mp3 player, Omalu commences work on the corpse. The amorous soul music again suggests an affective work, a kind of morbid intimacy between the pathologist and her subject. As he carves through the torso, Pendergrass sings in the background, “Let me give you what you been waiting for. I got so much love to give,” In a visceral sense, it seems almost necrophilic to couple the baby-making jams of Pendergrass, to a medical autopsy. A brief detour to ethnographic work illumines how such sentimental work is a touchstone of care-giving work, especially for particularly vulnerable populations.

In Improvising Medicine, American medical historian Julie Livingston documents the quotidinal experiences of patients of Princess Marina Hospital (PMH), Botswana’s central hospital. In a biopolitical sense, the book maps the imbrication of a whole host of structural forces: the worst HIV epidemic in the 1990s, a universal health care system that remains a public good (17), an increasing socio-economic divide (17), an under-resourced/staffed hospitals (19), a metropolitan oncological imagination that peripheralizes the strained condition of Botswanan patients (20) – onto the collective body of PMH’s cancer patients.
These preconditions form a corporal conjecture of sorts, a strain on already-distressed bodies. As Livingston writes, “The cancer ward is a dramatic place animated by pressing existential concerns and aversive bodily experiences” (22). Such overbearing grief results in spatio-temporal flux that erases any linear conceptualization of time, instead accelerating according to infection’s pace itself. Livingston connotes the unpredictability as she writes, “But among the dramatic deaths, the arguments, the sudden crisis, the curious events, and the quiet tears, it is also a tedious and boring place” (22). Such bleeding of the spectacular and mundane illustrates the patients’ attenuated trauma. Specifically, how cancer prefigures space and time manifest in an uncertain, yet confined terrain. Indeed, forced to switch between a prolonged suspension of wait (22), sparse links to the outside world, and episodes of intense pain – often within at a moment’s notice – these individuals must first cope. And by utilizing an intricate web of socio-cultural resources, patients help construct a space conducive to such collective healing.

The hospital staff buttress these efforts by forging a poetics of care-giving, one grounded in *botho* (African humanism) (93), a precolonial political economy whereby a circulation of collective wealth offsets intense vulnerabilities (93). Livingston describes care-giving not as some feel-good impulse towards an abstract subject, but as an empirical endeavor with personal, social, moral, and political concerns. Nurses epitomize such tremendous power of healing, for it rehumanizes isolated, disfigured patients through their daily acts of empathy.

Furthermore, Livingston’s extensive field notes illustrate how the smallest details, while perhaps trivial from an outside perspective, constitute the sentimental work necessary for this holistic healing. In fact, she begins the monograph by describing a lymphoma-stricken twenty-old. writing, “He is trying to with little success to drink a small carton of strawberry-flavored Ensure, as Mma T encourages him in that matter-of-fact joking way that nurses so often use to
cajole their patients” (1). Her ethnographic prose capture how these minute interactions between patients and staff normalize, however briefly, their chaotic condition. Such careful inspection suggests that marginalized bodies—like those frequenting PMH – seek and find novel means of dignifying, enduring, and humanizing a cruel disease.

In the same vein, Concussion is at pains to illustrate, or more accurately, choreograph, Omalu’s devotion to seeking the truth, one literally interned (to invoke Chion’s term; see Chapter 2) in the abjected racial body. The autopsy then is less so an explicit medical examination, but a social performance, one dedicated in documenting the Other’s mutiliazation, and publicizes their findings. This poetics of care-giving is evident through Concussion as a necessary instrument to Omalu’s work.

But the ethnopoet does not live in a vacuum, and her vocation as pathologist is no different. As raised before, the “native autopsy” is often outside the boundaries of official documentation, and thus, is at pains to authenticate her inspections. But even in a case like Omahu’s, where by rarity, she obtains the degrees to rubber-stamp her work, she is up against a corporate-police complex that mounts surveillance, intimidation tactics, black-balling, even murder, to deviate her truth-telling. Concussion illustrates the disgraceful lengths an oligarchy such as the United States will go to discredit the work of a licensed doctor.

Following the publication of his findings, Omalu faced intense backlash from both football fanatics and the multi-billion dollar conglomerate of the NFL. Notwithstanding its veracity, the ripple-effects of his work amounted to manslaughter the League’s standpoint, deliberately and knowingly sending injured players. For the sake of racking up team-points, the League jeopardized the players’ physical and mental health for the sake of sports highlights. The correspondence between Omalu and Pittsburgh neurologist Dr. Maroon reiterates this contrast in
priorities, of ratings over (black) bodies. The first question coming from Dr. Maroon’s mouth is “You want to fold up the national foot-ball league?” Omalu responds with steady conviction, “I want to solve the problem.” From the beginning of their dialogue, Omalu repeats his priority as documenting the mental degeneration of former football stars. But Threatened and shocked by his determination, Dr. Maroon re-routes his line of questioning through an ad hominem, asking, “Who are you?” Like the bare life she transcribes, the ethnopoet [as pathologist] is beyond recognition. At best, the ethnopoet’s politics are illegible to late capitalist economy that valorizes her body only specific circumstances. And when Jackson’s bogeymen feels threatened, it will discredit the poet’s work. Maroon then, as representing the bought intelligentsia of the NFL, is no exception.

Capital vs. Humanism: Ethnopoetic Struggle of Competing Logics

Omalu is confused about the relevance of the question. “Wha- wha- what are you asking?,” Omalu states. Undeterred, Maroon seeks to invalidate Omalu’s work as out of place. “You’re a pathologist. Yo- you perform autopsies,” Maroon cries out. Omalu quickly dis-identifies (a la Munoz) his occupation, putting his hands up and sarcastically replying, “Yes, I am a mere pathologist, that’s it that’s all all I am.” That is, Omalu’s accepts the terms, but mocks this attempt at de-legitimacy.

In the midst of this, Omalu realizes the corruption of un-ethical doctors, whose services may be commodified so when inconveniencing the organization, are muted. His eyes get watery, and places his hands over his mouth, as people in grief do.

Jules remains silent, but bearing all of the expressions of the Nigerian doctor.
Maroon is taken aback by the spectacle of his colleague Jules, presumably for even entertaining this truth-telling. Undeterred, he asks Omalu, “Do you understand the impact of what you are doing?. Analogous to Gramsci’s distinction between organic and traditional intellectuals, Maroon betrays his concerns with the status quo, desiring the least change even at the expense of the men he is supposed to serve. Here, his Hippocratic oath devolves to a hypocritical one.

Former Pittsburgh neurologist, Dr. Julian Bales, is at a moral crossroads. One the one hand, he repentant for his own wrongdoings in consciously permitting injured players back to the field. And yet, Bales’ motives are selfish, prioritizing the absolving of guilt over the genuine welfare and justice for these fallen players. His position is less of direct aid towards Omalu’s cause, and more so its translation to a business mind-set. He reminds Dr. Maroon that Dr. Omalu does autopsies, he’s not in the outcome business,” to which Maroon immediately replies, “He. Has no business.” By situating his ethics outside the logic of capital, Maroon seeks to discredit Omalu’s investigation, through economic pragmatism. At the same time, Maroon attests to the necessity of a business. The complete dominance of ideology is when it becomes impossible to envision a system outside of it. Dr. Maroon performs at meta-ideology, arguing one’s commitment to seek justice for the dying is a counter-public to the NFL legacy. In fact, Omalu’s [the ethnopoet] very presence contradicts this grandiose claim, and points towards a different ethic. It is the ethnopoet’s prerogative, and perhaps burden, of unadulterated truth-telling.

Omalu extrapolates their situation further, vocally anticipating its historiographical reflection. His finger pointing as moral cross-hairs of sorts, zeroing in on the “Do you know what history does to people? Trained physicians who ignore science.” Omalu is using the oppressor’s own language against him. Dr. Maroon turns away at the ludicrous charge with the
dismissive, “Oh wow.” Omalu, frustrated, slams the table and shouts, “I am not done.” The camera again turns to Omalu, portaying his intensity. Nostrils flared, anger seething his teeth, Omalu states, “If you continue to deny my work, the world will deny my work, but men, your men, continue to die, their families left in ruins…” Despite the conditional “if,” it’s critical to emphasize that Omalu is making no direct threat. At the least, a threat in the conventional sense of inflicting physical harm. The stress on “your men” strains the issue of accountability to underline corporate doctor’s hypocrisy. Moreover, the use of the phrase, “families left in ruins” is an interesting choice, as Omalu could have used “ruined.” Alternatively, given how Omalu is not a native English speaker, the argument may be made his distinction was not intentional, but parallels Ann Laura Stoler’s re-directing from ruins as evidence of the past to “ruination,” as the processes through which imperial power occupies the present. As she writes in her introductory essay,

This is not a turn to ruins as memorialized and large-scale monumental ‘leftovers’ or ‘relics,’ but rather to what people are ‘left with’: to what remains, to the aftershocks of empire, to the material and social afterlife of structures, sensibilities, and things. Such effects reside in the corroded hollows of landscapes, in the gutted infrastructures of segregated cityscapes and in the microecologies of matter and mind.37

Concussion then may be re-read as a personalization of ruination, a micro-theatre of the intersecting state, corporate, scientific actors, and their impact on athletic bodies (predominately black) and their family. But as opposed to edifices and eroding pillars, the ruins—and their aftershocks—are biological: trauma and self-harm. The examples are evident throughout the film. In Mike Webster’s case, we witnessed his tasing of his thighs to induce unconsciousness, pulling out his teeth, only to glue them back in, inhaling chloroform, living in isolation I in a decrepit van, and others. Other players, such as Justin Strzelczyk, suffered from “hearing
voices,” causing unpredicted episodes of rampage, from destroying objects in his home, to beating his wife, striking terror in his family. Tragically, Strzelcyk’s mental condition culminated in a fatal car crash. And so when Omalu iterates to Dr. Maroon to, “Tell the truth,” he is conjuring up this grief. Maroon is silent with his mouth slightly gaped. Omalu raises the issue of accountability.

The scene ends with Dr. Maroon’s loudest question, “Are you sure you want to do us.” Omalu replies, “I would ask you that same question.” Their exchange reaches an impasse, as Omalu pushes his (ethno)poetics of care-giving against the hegemony of finances. As hinted by this section’s title, Omalu-Maroon exchange is a debate of competing logics. Maroon, as corporate representative, is backed by the “most economically powerful sports league in the world,” with, as the film purports, connections to the FBI, the courts, medical practitioners, and other agents of interest. The ethnopoet, on the other hand, holds an insatiable commitment to social justice.

However, in every ethnopoet’s minds, arises the dilemma of to what threshold of suffering (if any) one endures? When the stakes become too much, and the ethnopoet surrenders, for the sake of self-care? This section shifts to the step where the ethnopoet’s voice gains salience in national conversation, and faces ferocious backlash.

Racial Insomnia: Ethnopoetic Persecution, Fatigue, and Reassured Kinships

As Omalu’s investigation gained tractions, debunking the mysterious deaths of more players, Omalu received countless death threats. He is even harassed by the FBI, one culminating
in a car chase that causes the miscarriage of his pregnant wife, Prima. With the mounting press, sleep-deprivation, and hostile fans, Omalu’s spirit grows weary.

The very next scene after his conversation with Dr. Maroon, Omalu talks with his wife Prema Mutiso nearby a lake, admitting to her that as crucial his work is, it isn’t worth these sacrifices. Omalu faces the body of water to gesture a pensive state, while she stares at him. What’s so significant is how Omalu starts not with the cases themselves, but his disenchantment with his American citizenship, one that he’s fantasized over since early childhood. “When I was boy,” he explains, “Heaven was here, and America was here,” placing his hand slightly lower.” A devout believer of American exceptionalism, city on a hill ideology, and Manifest Destiny, Omalu reveals his worship for this country, one on par with his regular church attendance. “To me,” Omalu says with a smile, “it was the place where God sent all of his favorite people…Americans were the manifestation of what God wanted us all to be. I have never wanted anything than to be accepted as an American.” Rather than underscore the naiveté of such a statement, what’s more fruitful to raise is the process of conscientization, or self-interrogation of this once-cherished belief, solely and precisely due to that nation’s apathy for investigating the root cause of football players’ deaths. He continues, “They want to pretend his disease does not exist, and they want to bury me.” In the recurring leitmotif of death, Omalu he conflates internment (burial) as foreshadowing death. Moreover, his use of the word burial raises Michel Chion’s corporal paradox of “impossible embodiment,” (discussed in Chapter 2) but a nuanced twist. Whereas for Chion, the burial acts a closure, here, translates to assassination, whether character or literal. Omalu, now reflecting, sees how far he’s deviated from his romanticizations of nationhood, disqualifying his competence for the daunting task. In prophetic posture
reminiscent of biblical tradition, he thus refutes this calling of truth-teller. I am the wrong person to have discovered this.”

And just as Omalu shifted the logic (from economic to moral), Prima re-focuses it from citizenship, to faith and reason, reassurring him that “nothing is a coincidence in this world…” She then raises the statistical probability that a Nigerian doctor would arrive to the United States, to Pittsburgh “this rusty place,” only to be the first to publish findings of chronic traumatic encephalopathy. She offers a third mode of persuasion, reminding him of the trauma she’s endured as a woman. So unbeknownst to Omalu, he asks, “What happened,” to which Prima reassures, “something that is better left unsaid.” She of course is euphemistically referring to her sexual assault upon arriving to the United States. With the camera zooming in on her, Prima states, “I wanted to give up, and go back.” Almost broken, she affirms her faith in God, and reminds her husband the meaning of his name. “Your name. It means ‘if you know, you must come forth and speak.’”

Here, the ethnopoet’s obligation of truth-telling is ancestral, deeply rooted in his lineage. By invoking his name, Prima legitimates his duty as etymological, and inextricable aspect to his identity. Not only therefore can Omalu not refuse his task, but as Prima points, such truth-telling is the only name he knows.

But aside from re-assuring Omalu’s chosen-ness to lead this fining through an ethno-religious lens, she also performs critical nurturing work. Prime is weaving her struggle with his, constructing in the process a kinship of endurance, one that undoubtedly builds from their migratory aspirations. She hits home further, reminding him of his ethnic heritage. “You are of the Ibo tribe Bennet. When you have truth, the thing you are told you cannot do is the thing you
must do. Embrace that.” Prima is at pains to describe the ephemeral state of this persecution, and therefore, given their resolute faith, “nothing created by man can bring you down.”

In closing, Concussion allegorizes an additional function of the native speaker as pathologist, committed to documenting social death in plain sight. In this section, I argued that autopsies serve as powerful mode of truth-telling, one requiring both affection towards the deceased, and well as conviction in the humanist tradition.

And in this world of posthumous recognition, whereby blackness is recognized as human only after death, the autopsy aggrandizes to a critical site of remembrance. Within this same guise, or disguise, white complacency may be ciphered as such:

What is the white moderate,
but a sympathetic coroner, that
performed the autopsy; whose authenticity
corroborates social fact?

Thus, this author makes the racialized distinction between coroner and pathologist. Whereas the coroner are officials who investigate deaths, it serves as an after-the-fact corroboration, one due to her privilege, becomes legible to a public audience. But the “native pathologist” is one that speaks for the dead. The coroner body-bags the corpse, whereas the pathologist dwells on it. The pathologist speaking however, as Concussion purported, is not without experiencing the fatigue from both the sleepless work, and received backlash. So intense is her persecution, it may warrant surrender, as it takes too much of a toll. Lamentably, the pathologist appears as the sole
person capable, less so due to her qualifications, but her compassions. For after all, as Prima poignantly reminds us, “If you don’t speak for the dead,” who will?

But what if the corpse isn’t an individual, physical one, but a collective body? As Fanon realized in his psychiatric years, psycho-analytic treatment to individuals is effective, but is too slow of a process for de-colonizing structures of power. This next section foregrounds a figure who has a ‘prophecy’ for a people largely refusing to listen. A decreed warning that white wupremacy (and its agents, whether cognizant or not) must take heed to. Otherwise, as the Black Jeremiah said, “it will be a terrible thing for the West.”
4- Cross-Examinations: Baldwin’s Pulpit and the Ethnopoet Prophecy

This chapter departs from native autopsies, private scenes of affection to loved ones no longer before us, and embarks to the public sphere. Indeed, oftentimes, this pain of pouring one’s suffering proves too taxing, leading figures to self-exile. Who must be summoned when the open casket is not the battered face of Emmet Till, but an entire history of psycho-physical enslavement? When the violence is not a single crime scene, but the stuff of history textbooks whose pages came from trees that once bore strange fruit? For above all, racism’s greatest violence lies in the complete surrendering of identity, and how after four centuries of cultivating its empire, it never accommodated a place for people of color.

The ethno-poet subsequently, as a survival tactic, mobilizes a bio-cartography, (re)mapping its disparate horizons to produce a subjectivity expansive in its prophecy. This chapter is less an academic exercise in theoretical ruminations, than an open-hearted letter to these prophets of rage, who’ve transcended the mortal envelopes of their own hurt by speaking [spic’ing] a people’s history. This letter agues the ethnopoet as prophet mobilizes a “people’s autopsy,” deploring the assault against a collective body. In this enraged speech, the ethnopoet resurrects the buried voices undergirding her ancestry, a public haunting that petrifies white privilege in its tracks. But such shock necessitates a larger climate from which the ethnopoet draws from. In Baldwin’s case, the specter of ghetto militancy that characterized the Black Power movement. Finally, despite the ethnopoet’s charismatic truth-telling, we must perpetually suspend their claim to exclusively truth-telling via adopting a womanist position of multiplicities. In short, that at any given moment, the ethnopoet’s testimony—for indeed, its raw voice amounts to an indictment that legitimates legal recourse—it is not the end all be all.
I call to the stand the late Mr. James Arthur Baldwin, that, as Amiri Baraka eulogized, “glorious, elegant griot of oppressed African nation.”

Mr. Baldwin, on October 26, 1965, at approximately the hour of where the fabric of Amerikkka begin tearing apart, I watched as you approached the pulpit of a Cambridge University debate. You patiently waited the white applause to subside, pulled out a folded piece of paper from your jacket, and began your lecture. With a tactful confidence, you elucidated the geohistorical locus of (d)enunciation, you parenthesized white hegemonies, and you meticulously began to carve new ways of thinking and doing. You recollected the Southern Sheriff confronting a black person; one who must be insane, according to the racist officer, for attacking a system to which he owes his entire identity. It is this addendum of the non-white Other combating a white supremacist uni-verse that inspires my letter to you.

Dear James Baldwin,

Given the 50 years that span your brilliant speech, and this present moment, it seems fruitful to start a conversation, however posthumous. This private conversation of sorts aspires to shift the paradigm from the hideously loaded question, “Is the American Dream at the Expense of the American Negro?” to the much larger prompt, “How do we achieve pluri-versality?”

However, after contemplating the vast, inter-galactic scale of a pluri-versal imaginary, I realized the incredibly complex histories that not only inform your reified exile—how in your mid-twenties you left the United States to go to Paris—but also the mid-60s transition from Civil Rights to Black Power. Exhaustion hunched its shoulders on all sides: on Malcolm X’s death February 1965, on the specter of a 12 gauge revolt haunting white America, on Stokely...
Carmichael and Martin Luther King marching from Memphis to Jackson, and “Black Power” caught fire. In the midst of these excerpts of Huey Newton’s Wicker Throne, where everywhere black and oppressed peoples syncopate in raucous screams, hushed breaths, cowered dictions. Such is the ethno-poetic plight of telling truth to power, and not of its institutionalized manipulation, but for that nobler cause—as a cry for liberation? For the ethno-poet, truth is embodied, it is the most salient approach that ebbs and flows in countless river. If Ossie Davis called Malcolm “our black prince,” then you are “Black Jeremiah,” the warning to white Amerikkka of the repercussions of a hatred dangling over whipping posts, murky water fountains, all-white juries, and the like.\(^{62}\)

*Black Jeremiah: Baldwin and Liberation Theology*

At the debate, the very first words uttered from your lips were: “I find myself, not for the first time, in a position of a kind of Jeremiah.”\(^{63}\) According to African-American historian, Wilson Moses, the Black Jeremiad embodies a series of lamentations, or doleful complaints (30). From Othello’s “Essay on Negro Slavery,” to Benjamin Banneker’s letter to Thomas Jefferson, the Black Jeremiad directs his attention primarily to white audiences. Rather than prescribe revolution, Jeremiad’s social role is denoting the moral bankruptcy of certain evils. Despite your explicit disillusionment and rejection of the black Christianity, your speech preserves a religiosity, one in proximity with Black Theology—more specifically, its imperative of speaking of truth.

In *God of the Oppressed*, American theologian James H. Cone argues that truth is first and foremost intrinsically forged in people’s struggles, therefore pinpointing the black
experience as a source of theology. And I see you at pains (quite literally sometimes) to explain your necessity “to speak as one of the people who’ve been most attacked.” In *Black Theology* moreover, truth is not hermeneutical, but disclosed in a movement of language and passion (22). The shout, hum, moan, or unspecified sound takes precedent over the content. Thus, the climactic moment in the speech where you cried, “And I picked the cotton!” is powerful in several respects. First, the yell connotes an overcompensating gesture that affirms blackness as an indispensable part of humanity (*God the Oppressed*, Cone 28). Indeed, your performativity throughout the debate is laden with piercing one-liners, “Isn’t 400 years enough?!” that pack immense historical-affective weight, especially for your uneasy Cambridge, and yes, white, audience.

Rhetorically speaking, your first person use of the “I” mobilizes a self-interjection into a hegemonic epistemology which negotiates and ultimately reduces the complexity of origins of Blackness (Wright 14)—the “Middle Passage Epistemology,” a term I’ll return to later. Almost miraculously, you carve a subjectivity through what Black Womanist theologians call the “sea of forgetfulness.” So when you hear, “and I carried to market,” you invoke a retroactive, posthumous speech that allows all of the Black Atlantic to speak through you. But not only that, you push this antebellum imaginary up until the present moment, declaring, “I am not a ward of America. I am not an object of missionary charity. I am one of the people who built the country.” Thus, while you discusses blackness within ostensibly secular lens, your “preaching” takes on several qualifiers of black sermon: freedom as constitute of language itself, rhythm and emotions of bodily response, the arising totality of people’s existence, in short the soul laid bare. Through this performing of memory, you achieve the subjective terrain of what El Kornegay Jr. called, “the blues body.”
The blues body is primarily an exiled body concerned with survival, living in ghettoized spaces where survival is a perpetual state of (non-)being (Kornegay 63). The “urban renewal” of federal housing projects, rat infestation, crime, high infant mortality rates, disease, poor public education all bring into question of who is being renewed from what? (Manning 25) Suffering from the “quadruple canopy” of oppression, exile, trauma, and depravity, the blues body is not an ontological creation, but an existential reality (76). The black body then lives in an existential absurdity, caught between what is and what ought to be (Black Theology, Cone 8-9). This collective corpus must reckon with a country that has never, in its four centuries of your inhabitation, evolved a place for you. Such a historical affect is officially inaugurated by the Dred Scott decision, wherein the landmark decision stated that the black man “had no rights which the white man was bound to respect” (Black Theology, Cone 10). Necessarily fighting back with the whole of his being, Black Theology is inflected with Black Power axioms of inward affirmation of blackness’ essential worth (Cone 8).

*Revolution has Come: Language of the Gun, and Black Power*

Prior to African decolonization, a tragic closed circuit (or “Mill,” to appropriate your term) processed the black body. The locus of disaffection/demoralization lay not in the infinitude of details that spelled out his own meaninglessness, but to the realization of living in a country that was never his. While America lauded its material prosperity, a leader of the free world, it systematically silenced the subjugated’s speech on every conceivable level, purporting: Africa lacked any history, the black American was formerly a savage rescued from Europe, and whose 2nd class citizenry thereafter is nothing short of salvation. The material destitution enveloping his small, growing body—from the federal housing projects, to white flight-induced ghettoization, to
government-sponsored eugenics [most infamously in the 1932 - 1972 Tuskegee Experiment], to the commonplace miseducation in school textbooks—only seems to validate this missionary ideology. But the decolonization of Africa and its diaspora produced a counter-image, a struggle for liberation that transcended widely held stereotypes of the porch-monkey, minstrel, Uncle Tom, and other caricaturizations.

On that note, it’s important to highlight that your debate took place on October 26, 1965, in order to contextualize your oratory within the vast genealogies of counter-publics, ones that found numerous avenues of articulation. Many were directly oppositional—two months earlier Watts, CA exploded in flames for a week, with the total inventory of destruction amounting to 34 people killed, at least 1,032 wounded, 3,952 arrested, and $40 million in property damages spanning 600 buildings, and 200 of rubble (Bloom and Martin 30). No doubt, the towering flames of neglected black America loomed at the forefront of your mind, for like a Jeremiah indeed, you warned that if the mass underbelly of black (lumpen)proletariat, the ‘brothers on the block,’ remain disfranchised, they will wreck this country to pieces. And indeed, shortly after this omen, your prophecy materialized over the next few years, as urban rebellions engulfed this nation: 300 riots occurred between Rochester’s Race Riot in 1964 and Detroit’s in 1967 (Stahl); 164 in the first months of the latter year alone (Bloom and Martin 90).

In total, the ghetto rebellions from 1964 to 1972 took an inventory of 250 deaths, 10,000 serious injuries, and 60,000 arrests (Marable 90-1). But amidst these alarming statistics, one social fact is yet to be decried: the perpetual abjection of ghetto blackness. Whereas the median black family in the U.S. increased from $5,921 to $8,074, and the percentage of black families below U.S. poverty declined from 48.1 in 1959 to 27.9 in 1969, ghetto immiseration continued to deteriorate (Marable 91). In fact, in the last years of his life, King’s rhetoric shifted from
reforming existing institutions, and quietly articulated a democratic socialist program: the nationalization of basic industries, massive federal expenditures for metropolitan revival and guaranteed income for all (Marable 101). With King’s martyrdom came the disenchantment of nonviolence as means of social change. In HBCU’s across the country, students routinely experienced extraordinary police invasions, three campuses are particularly infamous. First, on May 1967, police led a full-scale assault at Texas Southern University, firing 3,000 rounds of pistol and automatic gunfire into a dorm, arresting 488 students, and dragging five or six students, as witnesses described, “bloody as beef” (Biondi 31). Second, in February 1968, South Carolina Law Enforcement Division officers shot and killed three black Americans on the campus of South Carolina State University, an event known as Orangeburg Massacre (Biondi 32). Regarded as the “forgotten tragedies” of the civil rights movement, the Orangeburg Massacre nevertheless sparked waves of sympathy.

From burning an effigy of South Carolina governor in North Carolina A & T, to generating a national student demand for Black studies, students nationwide sang the cry of non-negotiating politics (Biondi 33).

Returning to the spirituality underpinning these struggles, how then does your blues body intersect (if it all) with the bourgeoning black power movement, the former relying on its diasporic interiority and the latter on its structural changes?

A shift to Black Panther George Jackson’s *Blood in my Eye* (discussed earlier in chapter 2) (1972) serves two purposes in this regard: 1) pragmatically speaking, Jackson’s prison narrative contextualizes its reader within the barbed wire politics of Black liberation; 2) from a literary standpoint, the revolutionary literature is a pulsating, incantatory weapon of liberation and poem of love. Sentenced from one year to life for stealing seventy dollars from a gas station,
Jackson necessarily writes from a disillusioned, pre-meditative, and unequivocally-embracing armed struggle (80). First, Jackson sets off on demarcating blackness’ coloniality of non-being, stating, “Born to a premature death, a menial, subsistence, odd-job man, the caught, the man under hatches, without bail – that’s me, the colonial victim” (7). Maldonado-Torres’ “sub-ontological colonial difference” provides the discursive framework for polemics such as Jackson’s. The “Coloniality of Being” normalizes spectacular wartime events of Third World/Inner Colony territories (254), a racial calculus that negatively marks what lies below [White] Being as dispensable, (255). Partial mortalities of black bodies reduce to a wage-slaved furniture, constantly brushing up against one’s liminality (257). State repression thus exposes a tripartite effect to a blues body: a black conditioning to acquiescence, a system unable to meet their demands, and demarcation of limits of existence (23).

Additionally, Cones’ Black Theology and Black Power (1967) provides an inter-discursive text to sift through these imbricated discourses of the black spiritual-political. According to the author, violence is a subordinate and relative question, an a priori constitute of a revolutionary situation (142). Violence, in its televised-manufactured form, is interpreted as a natural facet of black (male) aggression. The paradigm shift then, as Jackson tragically suggests, lies not on black suffering, but on black consciousness (141). Black Power therefore privileges not an aberrant obsession with anti-state violence, but the ethical maxim “to be human is to be something worth dying for” (8). At any rate, whether it be the metal bars of Jackson’s cells, or its construct, “black cannot live according to what ought be, but according to what is” (17). And with the decline of the Old Guard, coupled with the systematic campaign to marginalize black participation, Black Power increasingly emerged as both a mechanism for self-defense and a method of analysis (Slate 150). Finally, for Cone, black hatred is not the deviant of reverse-
discriminating bigots, *but a natural reaction* to oppression, insult, and terror (14). Most disturbing is the imagined expectation of black America as a suspended *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, with the black body taking center stage, endlessly beaten to see if it can cry. Or if the flesh strips to white – whichever comes first to confirm his humanity.

SNCC Chairman Stokely Carmichael and Charles V. Hamilton’s *Black Power* (1967) theorizes this historical disjuncture of rejection of civil rights politics and towards an imprecise body politics. Black liberation is a racially grounded project with global implications. He poignantly writes, “To rid the world of ‘niggers’ is the Black Man’s Burden, human reconstruction is the grand objective” (39). For Carmichael, Black Power is a decolonial option whose horizon aims for Fanon’s “new humanism” (Wretched). Carmichael is not solely asking for a dramatic restructuring of power, but the total *reorientation* of society’s values: 1) emphasizing dignity of man and 2) rejecting human misery and poverty as repugnant (41). Black Power then is a three-part politic, fighting for: 1) full participation in decision-making process; 2) recognition of virtues; and 3) blacks as positive and functional to free and viable society (47). However, presupposing this platform is a growing sense of community as a means of developing awareness of cultural heritage (38) as well as clarifying one’s own purpose in the world (39). Community, according to Carmichael, is the “vital first step” of a new consciousness (39).

However, while Black Power espoused a revolutionary ethos, even communal-based, it (more so Carmichael—political modernization) also dictated a *black* linear modernity that treated the past as monolithically obsolete, thereby discarding any and all of its figures, discourses, strategies, etc. As Carmichael boldly writes, “the language of yesterday is indeed irrelevant: progress, nonviolence, integration, fear of ‘white backlash’ coalition” (50). Certainly, a modest study into post-Jim Crow America reveals a disheartening realization that this
cornucopia-imaged Civil Rights Movement never challenged de facto, customary, economic, or political exclusion in the North and West (Harold and Bloom 25). Moreover, its cultural nationalism severely policed conceptualizations of blackness – female, gay, bourgeois — that threatened the mythic heroism of the (male) black revolutionary. Retrospectively, the Civil Rights—and the countless black women sustaining it (At the Dark End of the Street McGuire) – are disregarded as vacuous of tangible change, nothing but a “buffer zone” that offered routine beatings to participatory bodies. Thus, to undo this verticality of blackness, one must destabilize the hegemonic discourses—namely, the Middle Passage epistemology—which afford its imagined exclusivity.

Buildings burned during the Watts Rebellion.
Towards a Womanist Theology

Michelle Wright argues the phenomenology of blackness is contingent upon its spatio-temporal locus of imagination, definition, and performativity (3). Middle Passage epistemologies centralize a heteropatriarchal male body under default assumptions of their leadership and agency within any given collective (Wright 12-13). “Truly soul-destroying,” it erases or marginalizes vulnerable identities of blackness, most notably the black woman (Wright 13). Blackness must be re-opened as an intersection of constructs locating a Black collective in
history and in a specificity of the now (Wright 14). Wright calls for a World War II/post war epistemology, one whose valances vary across time (20).

A discursive intervention of black womanist theology creates the necessary spatio-temporal framework to (re)articulate blackness in rhizomatic, non-linear digressions. As Mae G. Henderson argues, individuals such as black women are necessarily *dialogic*, given their intersection with other minority identities. Deploying quantum physics terminology, black women embody the “principle of superposition,” or the ability to occupy two loci at once (24). Such multi-enunciations represent a kind of *quantum blackness*, its character changing depending on one’s positionality.

Responding to a triple oppression which relegates them to “outside of humanity entirely,” black women must assert a freedom and space that empowers themselves as well as engages in own efforts at consciousness-raising (Hayes 137). Novelist Alice Walker defined the womanist as a feminist of color who encompasses love for virtually all aspects of life. At the same time, she is committed to survival and *wholeness* of an entire people (Hayes 140). Ironically enough, Womanist interiority manifests then a powerful counter-example to the vulgarized landscape that Carmichael and Jackson map out as *revolutionary*. Womanist voices, for example, read black life as “psychologically internal – not mutilated half-lives, stunted by the effects of racism and poverty” (Hayes 142). Such material transcendence makes sense when incorporating Delores’ Williams “psychological substitution” (Hayes 69). Given the historical neglect by their husbands, black women deploy religion as a surrogate of psycho-emotional support (Kornegay 69). In this sense, black woman embody a “fixed psychic point” teaching the art of survival via nature (Kornegay 72). Through this “vigorous spiritual self-confidence,” the feminine is a source of incarnation, salvation, and redemption (Kornegay 76).
With this gendered comparison, I argue that a womanist theological methodology not only serves as a derailing of monopolized representations of blackness, but also provides a nuanced framework through which to negotiate and complicate future constructs of blackness. Again borrowing from Dolores Williams, this methodology includes four criteria: 1) multi-dialogical intent: allowing dialogue/action amongst womanists with many diverse communities; 2) liturgical intent: reflecting thought, worship, and action of the Black Church; 3) didactic intent: teaching new insights on moral life based on ethics for women; 4) commitment to reason/validity of female agency that instrumentalizes black women’s history, culture, and religious experience into Christian theology (Hayes 145-6). Finally, no longer are questions of black authenticity signified by the metronomic, “Black is, Black Ain’t,” (1994) but the entire notion seems to shake on its pillars.

Given the synergetic interactions of black womanist theology—it’s ability to house a plethora of identities constantly slipping, blending, speaking to one another—Jacquelyn Grant seems hardly a step farther with her claim that womanist theology begins with liberation of an entire community (Hayes 148). In other words, women’s struggles are the focal point, but they do not by any means hierarchize bodies according to some patriarchal transference. The ubiquity of oppression towards the black woman—her “mule degradation”—engenders a new spatio-temporal framework of a tri-dimensionality reality. Under this triptych rubric, black women fall both as a particular within a particular, as well as an “implied universality” (Hayes 150). Such complexity appears paradoxical only when remaining within the linear narratives of hetero-normative black masculinity.

A final word: in “Asia as Method,” cultural studies theorist Kuan-Hsing Chen denotes several strategies of dealing with West: disrupting the Other by deconstructing it (217); the de-
universalization, provincialization, and regionalization of West (218); de-plagiarization (219); third-world nativism; and finally arriving to a positing West as fragmentary, intervening in local social formations, but never in a totalizing way (223). Blackness too, may greatly benefit from multiplying frames of reference via inter-referencing. I argue however, that Williams’ womanist theological methodology concretizes these theoretical propositions through the grounded, lived experiences of black and other women of color. The West, in this case, would be the more immediate usurpation of heteronormative black male history as Black American history.

**Blackness and Discontinued Futures**

Just as how Mignolo’s “cosmopolitan localism” states that one does not need to cite Kant when making a philosophical claim, I too did not have to start my argument with you, the great James Baldwin. Regardless of the locus, the decolonial imperative is to provide the necessary discursive sovereignty needed for achieving pluri-versality. But as this letter illustrated, the elusiveness and mirage-like quality of blackness affords its oft-slippage from the recognized spatial-temporal frameworks, a(n) (in)visibilization depending on numerous factors. At worst, this erasure is caused by a systematic silencing by hegemonic constructions of blackness and at best, its infinite interactions produces a gradation of identities which at some threshold are bound to be illegible. At a minimum, my letter sought to explore the historical entanglement of a few prominent projects of liberation -- Black Theology, Black Power Movement, Woman’s Liberation Theology – in order to better understand their collective informing of the mid-to-late 60s. But to be honest, these are still academic concerns. Discourse and theoretical abstractions aside, my hope in writing to you is to hear about your way, your option, of surviving.
For amidst the guttural spectacle of the colonial matrix of power, especially amidst the anesthesia of jargon and couched academia, we forget the simple maxim: words can move a nation.

A non-return then to pluri-versality requires not a rigid program, but an enduring patience. Decoloniality is a horizon that one migrates to, equipped with little beyond Fanon’s “fecund antennae” (Fanon 1986, 97), or the mental nepantilism of mestiza consciousness (Anzaldúa 100)—both a pained mapping that senses the gaze of the Master (Mignolo 2011, 93). Decoloniality’s directionality is perhaps best illustrated by the Zapatista’s maxim of “caminando preguntamos,” (Solnit 181) or the unequivocal rejection of established hierarchies, while relying on an inclusive civil society to determine where it is going. To me, this is revolution in its most earnest. The restless search for a cosmos that accommodates your being as best it can, but one subsumed under a larger pluri-verse. Sometimes, decolonial thinking implicates the separatist impulse of voluntary exile, other times coerced migration. But before all this, it requires to trek enormous distances of interiority—pleading the body, to “make of me always a man who questions” (Fanon 1986, 181), along the way.

Mr. Baldwin, in closing, I shall end with this: to metabolize the pesticides of racism is the minority’s biology (body politic). To this day, I still believe its carcinogens caused you to leave our world too early. The cancer in your stomach came not from countless cigarettes, but from the imprint of a restless human being who caught hell in his nativist land, only to tell the tale.

As I pry my lips against the frontera’s barbed wire, and watch in cross-stitched visions the endless rows of small white crosses of migrantes that never made it, as I excavate the earth for a land that’s mine, I take solace in one fact:
That your words still stir in my soul.

Antonio López
The previous chapter honed in on James Baldwin to elucidate the ethno-poet as prophetic truth-teller, one compelled by an epistemic privilege\(^6^4\) to warn an oblivious elite to mobilize anti-racist protest. It is critical to realize however that Baldwin afforded this earnest bully-pulpiting given the academic setting of “debate,” where contestation is worn as a sleeve. What are we to do however in “scenes of power”\(^6^5\) more compromising, where ethnic bodies must play for their part, where capital chokes one’s throat. Is it still possible to truth-tell in this a hyper-commodified world?

This chapter articulates the ethnopoet as contemporary artist, a person devoted to entertain for a living. At surface value, this entertainment arguably dilutes the potency of voice, as the ethnopoet arrives to the occasion, she gains her 15 minutes, to please the people. I argue *lo contrario*: for here, artists smuggle their bullets, piercing through divested moderates and striking at the heart of privileges, exposing anOther world to the latter. The black artist, in loose terms, serves as a crucial power-broker, capable of recalibrating the discursive agenda of hegemony. Popular culture represents an underestimated arena, whose synesthetic terrain makes the invisible audible, and the unheard visible. These cultural productions—of what may be loosely termed “black entertainment”—contest the boundaries of clandestine and open, the popular and marginal, silent and loud, and other stark dichotomies that these artists appear to seamlessly navigate. These performances must then be extrapolated from their primetime slot, for their implications are enormous. Namely, that as black Americans grapple with the demoralization, Afro-pessimism, and the postcolonial melancholia of our New Jim Crow era, performativity surfaces as an opaque weapon. Indeed, black performance offers, as African-
American Studies scholar, Richard Iton writes, a “potentially transformative, thickly emancipatory, and substantively post-colonial vision” (28).

This paper begins its attention with black performer, Kendrick Lamar, arguing that he (and other artists of his vein) embodies a modern sailor of what Paul Gilroy conceptualized as the chronotypic “ship,” charting through what Iton coins “the black fantastic.” Specifically, the essay hones in on the aesthetically loaded performance at the 58th Annual Grammy Awards, as a case study of the cartographies of struggle Lamar charts out for an affluent, predominately white audience. Regardless of the multiple directionalities and destinations Lamar sets sail for, he ultimately anchors himself within a “Compton-Africa genealogy,” one that revises static myths of Africa as “the dark continent.” Embracing Gilroy’s anti-anti-essentialist posture, I argue that Lamar imbricates these imagined geographies with the Kafkaesque reality of early 21st century black America.

But sensible inspection of ethnopoetic performativity must contend with the gendered distinction in the consumption of their bodies. The second half thus analyzes Beyonce’s “Formations,” video, arguing that she utilizes clothing as nodal points that signify key historical moments that she then may access and re-interpret. Through these wardrobe functions, Beyonce fluctuates across various spatial-temporal imaginations, resulting in time-jumps. Notwithstanding these re/un-dressing of black resistance, Beyonce must navigate through her sexualization. In response, this latter text argues she fashions a stylistics that elides sexual objectification with resistance. Hence, black leather jackets on top, fishnets as bottoms. Finally, whereas Kendrick dresses blackness as a uniform66 assault on black men, Beyonce excavates an underground black queer subject, one creating fissures and fractals of black alterity. Thus, in analyzing Beyonce’s
role, I wish to shift discussions onto the actual music video itself. Such a switch stems in part from Beyonce’s strategic release of the video *the day bore* the Superbowl Hallftime Show.

*I Heard You Wuz Conflicted: Lamarian Splits of Self*

The performance begins with a distorted jazz opening, as a file of prisoners march in the formation of a chain gang. Lamar leads the funeral procession of sorts, his face twisted and pained. On the periphery is a larger inmate, in isolation, and behind bars. He puffs his chest and walks across his holding cell, taunting the prisoner opposite of him: a blues-styled saxophonist playing a mournful riff. Lamar, as the chain gang’s leader, then takes hold of the microphone, hands stuttering in arthritic speed. To do so, he must carefully adjust his chains.

Despite this strained posture, Lamar lets loose a fierce retaliation. With the rapid-fire speed of a maxim gun, out from his lungs erupt lines such as “[I] came from the bottom of mankind. My hair is nappy, my d*ck is big, my nose is round and wide.” These excerpts originate from his single, “The Blacker the Berry, the Sweeter the Juice,” from his latest album, *To Pimp a Butterfly* (2015). Prior to the Grammy’s performance, Lamar received mixed criticism for certain lyrics, most notably with, “So why did I weep when Trayvon Martin was in the street, but gang-banging made me kill a nigger blacker than me. Hypocrite!” Some questioned the lines as entertaining respectability politics while others viewed it as an artful dissection of how an oppressive system divides loyalties and engenders self-loathing. Notwithstanding its controversy, the track held an entirely different meaning here: the raspiness of the voice, its vociferous
register, the sweat falling from his face that connotes hard labor, all serve as “aesthetic grammers” (Iton 9) that amplify this moment as a marker of pride.

Through virtuosic lyricism, Lamar performs an intervention in modern considerations of race as philosophy. That is, if blackness is whiteness’ mode of negation, then Lamar speaks within the former’s degraded sutures. Again, he demands, “You’re fucking evil. I want you to recognize that I’m a proud monkey.” Through the artistic modality, Lamar inverts the self-hatred—and its normalized scripts of master-slave—to name his assailant. His earlier use of the term “witness” further underlines the judicial overtones of this ‘cross-examination.’ Hence the loaded question, “You hate me, don’t you?”. That is to say, Lamar inaugurates—and interrogates—the de-invisibilized white subject, and the racial hierarchy institutionalized at the genesis of European colonialism.

Outside explicit text, the musical ambience only heightens the mise en scène, or more accurately, scene of the crime. The drum-rolls mimic gun-shots, accompanied by intense lights and smoke emanating from the background. The flickering spotlight imitates those of police lights, helicopters, and other modes of surveillance. Finally, the deliberate disorientation of the camera angles connotes the disjunctures of blackness. Nate Scott succinctly captures the poetics behind these camera cuts:

By cutting over and over, showing us multiple angles of his face, he ceased to be one man and

instead became the voice of many, a furious righteous voice speaking directly into the living

rooms of America
Lamar in essence artifies the social entrapment of a collective people, careful to not romanticize the post-mortem message. He mobilizes a counter-visuality that opens up a dual lens: one that gazes back at the Master, and by extension, at himself.

Iton contextualizes such overinvestment in cultural politics as a response to shortcomings of a racist nation-state (Iton 6). Aesthetics, under his scrutiny, must be freed from its “arts for art’s sake” paradigm, for it rests on an impossible dichotomy. Iton instead re-focuses black popular culture as a political medium that premiums experience over explanation, the deployment of omission as method, and silence as meaning. In other words, for historically disfranchised populations, such as black Americans, ones largely excluded from the official democratic process, therein lies a hyperactivity at the cultural front (Iton 17). Given African-Americans’ greater discretion over their own culture, it’s always served as critical battleground for freedom struggle.

Lamar’s act then, as black performance, abdicates modernity as a master signifier within discourses of global blackness. In this sense, Lamar, advances Paul Gilroy’s findings of the Black Atlantic as a counterculture to modernity. The Black Atlantic, as Gilroy conceives it, is a rhizomatic, fractal, transnational, and transcultural entity. Its jagged geography therefore forecloses modernity’s geographies of the self-contained, singular landmass.

For instance, in the final moment of Lamar’s act, the drawing of Africa is illuminated through a white silhouette, with the artist himself standing in the middle, but is now nothing but a shadow. Here, Lamar makes allusion to Fanon’s axiom, “what is often called the Negro is the white man’s artifact.” To put it another way, he moves to the Freudian return of the repressed, only it haunts in racialized form. As James Ferguson succinctly puts it, “Historically, Western societies have found in ‘Africa’ a radical other for their own constructions of civilization,
enlightenment, progress, development, modernity, and indeed, history” (2). And notwithstanding their anti-colonial intentions, early pan-Africanist movements within the United States have fallen victim to the same projections for a space marked as *terra incognita*. Lamar departs from these fantasies and juxtaposes psychic homeland with a physical one. Inscribed in Africa’s center are the words, “Compton,” written in Olde English font. Through this striking image, Lamar is directly cross-pollinating the continent “without history” (as Hegel infamously described) with Compton as a historical conjecture of the 90s rap/hip-hop era, spearhead most ostensibly by groups such as N.W.A (Niggas with Attitude). For Lamar then, “Africa” is not a homeland that’s static or remains in the past, but one in direct conversation with the social degradation pervading in inner cities across the United States.

The black body is the alienated after-image of a white construct of Africa. We therefore must insert images not solely to do justice to the spectacular, but serves as metacommentary. Its binary color scheme is analogous to Lee Edelman’s “homographesis,” a term capturing the ways Western metaphysics (and its traditions) determine homosexual identity.⁶⁷ Indeed, gay writing deconstructs dichotomous logic of sexual difference, a mobilization most salient “within this tradition itself.” Lamar’s own Compton projects speak within this belly of beast imaginaries, the continental fetishization of dark-skinned peoples as “Africa.” Lamar tags this white geography as
“Compton,” as his own. He reclaims its sacred degrading, “I came from the bottom mankind.”
move to and from nations, crossing borders through this systems of linguistic-political hybridity. Drawing from Gilroy’s foundational analysis, Iton “steers” us towards a transformative approach: “the black fantastic.” For Iton, the “black fantastic is less so an imaginary, but rather, a referent to:

the minor-key sensibilities generated from the experiences of the underground, the vagabond, and those constituencies marked as deviant—notions of being that are inevitably aligned within, in conversation with, against, and articulated beyond the boundaries of the modern (16)

Through Iton, the ‘sailor’ shape-shifts into an artist, with the implicit understanding that this figure may change face at any given moment. Iton even suggests that representations of blackness are inherently surreal, due to their irregular and provocative qualities. If so, the surreal, within black subjectivity, elevates from a disembodied genre to an existential reality, as black Americans must by necessity fuse dream worlds and everyday practices. And given the effusive, nightmarish quality of his piece, Lamar may be squarely recapitulated within this tradition.

As we conclude our voyage through Lamar’s performance (or sailing), it behooves us to understand the national reception to the piece. Language used by premier news outlets allows us to gauge precisely this—to a get a pulse, so to speak, on the public body. Slate hailed Lamar as successfully bringing mass incarceration, Ferguson, and Trayvon Martin in a single performance, “making his political and artistic intentions as plain and as blazing as the bonfire on stage.” The near-fatal power of his lyricism is duly noted as the blog further explicates, “Lamar had ‘an ace up his sleeve’: a never-before-heard, mercilessly bleak new song.” But amidst the awe-inspiring analysis, the columnist is left with speechless inundation: “the performance is a lot to take in.” USA Today described its multimedia platform as a “performance art, a pyrotechnics show, and an outright challenge to white America.” The author evokes recurring images of a physical
altercation, with phrases such as “a nation’s dark history yanked in front of us,” “grabbed us by the throat,” and other after-images involving the body. Themes of paralysis, muted response, and corporality are therefore abundant in popular press, interpreting Lamar’s piece as an allegorical slugfest with white supremacy.

*The Atlantic’s* account, however, takes us beyond the currency of this “shock value,” and into the viscera of a black interiority. Whether the lethargic slouch of the prison walk, the nausea elicited by jazz “queasily” playing, the stabbed rythmics (“bam bam”), a flinching Lamar, or other reflexes, Lamar superimposes (but not completely eclipses) a native bonfire over urban rebellion, and thus, fire acts as a temporal agent delineating Lamar’s “Back to Compton-Africa” genealogy. To echo Jacqueline Brown’s radical dislodging of “place,” inspired by a sixty-year old black Brit’s assertion, and opening line to *Dropping Anchor, Setting Sail*, “To understand Black people, you’ve got to understand Liverpool” (1). But amidst these noisy entanglements of race, diaspora, militancy, and affect, *The Atlantic* author overall stresses Lamar’s therapeutic message. That is, Lamar’s performance is surgery, operating on the damaged psyche of the black subject, one that historian Leon Litwack titled, *Trouble in Mind (Black Southerners in the Age of Jim Crow)*. Hence, Lamar’s self/collective diagnosis of racial fatigue, as evidenced by the third and final verse of the night: “It’s been a week already/Feeling week already… It’s like I’m here in a dark dream/Nightmare, hear screams recorded.” Lamar is at pains to corroborate his sanity, but is trapped within the reality-denials of a white supremacist system. He is a somnambulant, blindly groping through these abysmal corridors of the United States. As guests in this bedlam, we nevertheless set sail through his world.
In spite of radical transgression of Lamar’s performance, it is nestled squarely within Wright’s “Middle Passage Epistemology,” a uni-dimensional genealogy that privileges a specific historical, gendered trajectory of what blackness is.

**Splicing Herstories: Beyoncé Formations of Blackness**

On February 8, 2016, world-renown icon, Beyoncé, performed “Formation” at the 50th annual Superbowl Halftime Show. The music video, released just a day before, asserts an unapologetic blackness, one that indicts the federal negligence of New Orleans following Hurricane Katrina. Dressed in tight black leather jackets, with golden bandoliers across her torso, and black berets cocked atop natural hair, their attire emulated the militant aesthetics of The Black Panther Party for Self-Defense. Moreover, the formation of ‘X’ across the football field, the singing of lines such as, “Take what’s mine,” the pyre explosions in the background, all nod towards a black protest, ironically played out in arguably the most celebrated day of Americana.

But Beyoncé aprovecha this gaze as indulgence, the ‘hook’ to her fishnets. In the music video of “formation,” In the music video, Beyonce splits and juts to and from scenes of black America. In a taunting, pandillera stance, Beyonce is crouched above a New Orleans squad car, sinking into the flooded city. She is wearing, alluding to the type of night-gown clothing many of the residents were wearing, trapped in their homes. A voiceover in New Orleans “Yat,” asks, “What happened, after New Orleans,” in fact sampled from underground Rapper/Comedian Anthony “Coo” Barre,’ also known as Messy Mya. Flamboyant in style and speech, Mya was a Youtube Star with a trifecta of talents. He is known by his skilled rapping in the New Orleans gay bounce scene, dancer, and comedian, but perhaps most striking of Barre is his “fluorescent
hair and caustic barbs.” On Sunday, November 15, 2010, an unknown assailant shot Barre’ 5 times in the neck. Police pronounced him dead on the scene. His death comes a day after his friend Rodney “Money” drowned in a Kenner canal after pursued by the city police department for store theft.

By interjecting regional dialects at its initial first seconds, Beyonce, as one Vice article worded it, “asks us to revisit his death.” The video validates his question, but more importantly, the person behind it. Finally, the video amplifies from a barrage of insults to presumed local friends—lamentably, then, not taken seriously—and into a national discussion of the vulnerabilization of black bodies.

In sepia-colored hallways, Beyonce wears a revealing burgundy halter. Her positioning in this postbellum home enacts an intimate invasion of blacks otherwise barred of entry. In contrast to Lamar’s jumpsuit, one that confines him within a context of mass incarceration, Beyonce’s stylistics employs a greater currency of attire. She uses clothing to recapitulate certain class and historical positions of blackness. Phrases like, “Paparazzi, catch my fly, and cocky fresh,” relay instruction to the very same persons stalking her every move. This summoning in part is afforded by the assertive posture of “stylin,” an aesthetic regime that intersperses high-retail clothing as markers of untouchability. Beyonce appropriates masculine tropes of possession as female empowerment, again accomplishing this via dress. Hence the next line, “I’m so possessive so I rock his Roc necklaces,” a reference to Jay Z’s Roc-A-Fella chain worn on 2003’s “Public Service Announcement,” where he announced he had “the hottest chick in the game.”

One minute, Beyonce peers on the side of a Chevrolet El Camino, hair dangling down, with pursed lips staring directly into the camera. She is wearing a giant white mink coat, what others may classify as a “pimp coat.” Within that exploitative industry of human trafficking,
Beyoncé adds a glamor to the tune of the Barre’s voiceover, “Ooo, yes girl I like that.” A static suddenly interrupts the video, the likes of which resemble television, as well as connote the spliced velocity of these time-jumps. The next scene portrays a Beyoncé draped in all black, akin to a funeral, bobbing her head up and down repeatedly to imitate ghostly possession. Indeed, she suspends her own rap, a preacher-like voice enters. Her eyes, once staring straight into the viewer, now covered by her black top hat. Encircling her are men in formal attire: one dressed like Baron Samedi, a Haitian Voodoo spirit in a top hat and 19th century frock coat, and finally, one donning a fez, a subtle reference to the Ancient Egyptian Arabic Order of Nobles of the Shrine [Black Shriners], mutual aid societies which adopted Islamic iconographies as pre-colonial claims of black wealth. This interlude features Big Freedia, another New Orleans artist adored by locals, one decibel short of shouting. “I did not come to play with you hoes, haha.”

Through the juxtaposition of these national known scenes of black depravity, Beyoncé speaks bolsters a threatening response from the subaltern. Specifically, within the guise of black queer men. The line, “I came to slay, bitch,” flirts this benign, internal dialogue amongst friends, with a reflexive declaration of violence. This voice is therefore elusive, difficult to pinpoint as “fighting words,” due to its flamboyant, localized nature. He continues, “I like cornbreads and collard greens, bitch,” is almost comical in its love for Louisiana regional cuisine amidst this post-Katrina discourse. Therefore, the queer subversive quality derives from a dis-identification with the homophobic trivializations against gay men as effeminate. He affirms the seriousness of his claim, only to again deny it, as he ends with, “Oh yes, you besta believe it.”

The term “slay” deserves its own chapter, a term first coined within the black American gay community gaining profuse popularity, meaning “to succeed in, conquer, or dominate something.” Slay departs from medieval folklore and enters into black American vernacular. It
promotes a Protestant ethic, one eliding the universalized language of self-help uplift, with the lived experience of violence and intolerance on the Other.

But in addition to this vibrant historical imagery, Beyonce inserts choreography as well. Such meta-commentary thinks about the music video itself, and its functionality within stylin’ transgressions. Practicing in an empty swimming pool, only partially lit, their ensayo reminds us, as Michelle Wright did, the tension of blackness as construct vis a vis as eiphenomonology manifestation. That is, blackness “is always already the effect of a specific, previous moment.” By rehearsing the dance numbers, Beyonce is laying threadbare its in media res production, one exclusively through black woman. Briefly reverts to the funeral scene, now twirling her braided hair as if they were nunchucks.

The camera, as the optic visualization of focus—wavers between Beyonce as the egocentric black subject, with all the materialist trappings, and Beyonce as actress atop a sinking squad car in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. She blurs the subject-position of her particularized fandom, with the counter-public of a spliced black diasporas, ones converged to address the country’s mismanagement of black bodies. Therefore, when Beyonce states, “Get what’s mine (take what’s mine), I’m a star,” she’s by that point effectively blurred the locus of (de)nunciation. Her subsequent quasi-chorus repeats “slay” 17 times, which by virtue of its frequency, normalizes this black gay vernacular speech.

Beyonce hails herself as now a general of sorts, ordering “her” ladies, “now let’s get in formation.” But the slippage to the self immediately follows as she justifies such formation as “cause I slay.” The legitimacy of this re-organization—one that is largely yet to be articulated—due to her private success. In her ensayo, she gestures this choreography as a test. “Prove to me you got some coordination…slay trick, or you get eliminated.” At first glance, given the preceding
iteration, “cause I slay,” this last line surfaces as a threat from Beyoncé. But the use of the passive verb, “you get eliminated” only discloses the ladies. But the assailant behind such elimination however, like those responsible for Barre’s murder, remains ambiguous. It is this ambiguity that affords Beyoncé’s stylin’ time-shifts, engendering a stylin’ habitus that regulates co-existing forms of blackness.

A few seconds after this disclaimer of elimination, the camera zooms in on a funeral-clad Beyoncé, now flipping the middle finger, akimbo style. Her ostensible subject is a nameless “He,” addressing both Jay Z ownership claims, as well as a larger male audience that commodifies female sex-work with cheap restaurants. Hence, the line, “When he fuck me good I take his ass to Red Lobster.”
Each scene is an ongoing snapshot of select black Americana. The soiree of black aristocracy, hauntingly fanning themselves inside a lavishing home, a woman in turquoise sequence, in the middle of Mardis Garas celebration, tilting her head in a cocky matter, a large, low-income women looking off-camera in what presumably is her front porch, a marching band in a suburban neighborhood, a black cowboy dressed in jeans nikes, gold chain, long white t, and Texas hat, strutting off with his horse, and most notably, a hooded black boy dancing in front a file of war-clad police officers, a Christian in the height of a sermon, with a testifying congregation…But amidst the chaos of these spliced imageries, the video concludes with Beyonce sprawled out on the roof of the police car, now sinking until completely submerged.

Metaphorically, this implicit drowning alludes to an annihilation of self. Beyonce, now announcing her David Walker-esque appeal to all colored citizens, has served her role. Moreover, viewers received the morbid confirmation of what “you get eliminated,” entailed, in fact dealing with murder of black bodies—whether by state negligence [FEMA in this case], or through the barrel of a gun. In a retrospect then, “Formation” may be read as Beyonce’s summoning of black women across classes, time-periods, sizes, ethnicities through an aesthetic regime of fashion, a stylin’ that valorizes via its mimetic masculinity.

But what perhaps most remarkable is that in essence, Beyonce utilizes these tabloid, head-liner gossips of her own personal life, and re-configures them as subtle commentaries on race relations in the United States—particularly from the experience of black Americans. She ends with the signpost of dissidence, “You know you that bitch when you cause all this conversation. Always stay gracious, best revenge is your paper.” Centering herself as example, she warns dissidents warrant a wholesale assault of hysteria production. As pre-emptive measure, Beyonce de-stigmatizes this notoriety as a signal that says, “You know that bitch.” And yet, on
face value, Beyonce may also simply to petty rumors circulating around the songstress. Again, the ambiguity of the term “conversation” may be a private dialogue amongst friends, or a national controversy.

The fact that neither these lyrics nor its accompanied video is irrelevant. “Formation”’s subversive quality seeped into Americana in osmosis, until the spectacle of black raged bled with capitalist bought-off, until the two were indistinguishable. The “solution,” to use chemical language, is precisely the mixture of radicalism and commodification, in what may be deciphered as the pinnacle of black post-modernity.

Despite their gendered split, both Kendrick and Beyonce both espouse an unapologetic blackness, nestled within mainstream [white] consumption. These “spectacular interentions,” as The Guardian worded it, paradoxically mute and amplify their protest. “Employing words and visuals to gritty and poetic effect—cleverly eschewing blunt aggression, the key accent is languid, dream-like menace – the message of ‘Formation’ pounds through, like an elegant, detailed modern civil rights seminar.”

The Panthers, once mowed down with police acquittal by all-white grand juries, take center stage. Beyonce, and Kendrick, tacitly refuse the deboning of white consumption—that is, removing the skeletons of black horror, savoring its produced meat—serving as lightning rods for a restless black America. The ethopoet as popular artist, at first blush, seems straightjacketed, bound by corporate contracts and sponsorships to speak her mind. Such meta-ideologizing—speaking within “white noise,” yet breaking from it, answers us the racial koan: if an ethnic body’s fall, does it sound? That is, as ethnopoets in prestigious, how does one speak in silence? The following chapter seeks to tackle just that.
“It put out a message to be seen, not heard. We said nothing…It was a silent gesture heard ‘round the world” (170) – Tommie Smith

6- *Spic’ing in Silence, From Dais to Die-In: Transnational Entanglements of Black Power*

*Salute and the Brown Boycott*

Prior to this chapter, all scenes of subjection\(^8^3\) against an ethnopoet left her unperturbed in one crucial realm, her voice. That is, despite the assimilated “ethnic” [Rodriguez], mowed-down epigraph [Jackson], the nationalist obituary [Pietri], the forgotten corpse [Omalu], the schizophrenic\(^8^4\) self [Lamar], and spliced intersectionalities [Beyonce], the ethnopoet treated these wounds by speaking to power. This section addresses the contemporary normalization of ethnic subject, a process tantamount to saying nothing at all. Her speech no longer jolts the socially deaf into awareness, only reinforcing an apathetic posture that tolerates protest, but never takes it seriously.

*Ethnopoetic speech* then stresses the kinesthetic economy of orality, rather than a verbal or cognitive one.\(^8^5\) To speak does not necessarily require an audible register. In fact, by circumventing verbal speech, the ethnopoet avoids the aggregation of more noise. This noise is the currency of a racial hegemony which I jokingly call, ‘white noise,’ a term I vaguely hinted at in the previous chapter. By ‘white noise,’ I build upon the scientific definition: a seamless succession of sound of same pitch. Whether utilized as a tool of study, sleep, white noise is inherently designed to interfere with the outside environment such that it no longer “distracts.” This view of the outside as irritant, an obstacle aligns with [diagnoses rather], the condition of
the socially deaf. White noise is a relational concept, instrumentalizing a negation of a milieu, regardless of its magnitude of distress. It is the racist epitome of business of as usual.

But more importantly, ethnopoet speech successfully departs from Rey Chow’s mimetic exhibition (discussed in chapter 1), the self-fulfilling entrapment of exhibiting one’s inferiority via protest, thereby repeating it. Through her “silent gestures,” the ethnopoet enacts a non-negotiation. Moreover, this silence punctuates noise through a visible disavowal to fill it. Ethnopoetic silence works within the language of white noise, breaking with its inaudible “grammar of privilege, how it bleeds into every syntax of life.” Ethnopoetic silence is the registration of her absence.

The first half of this chapter explores the founding moment of this “silent gesture,” as none other the Black Power Salute during the medal ceremony for the 1968 Mexico City Olympics. This gesture, at its inception, articulated the frustration of collegiate athletes, ones later organized into a student movement, and boycott. The second half mediates on the power of the boycott through our localized, contemporary moment of activism within Duke University. Specifically, I historicize recent Latinx student activism, as it recapitulated “silent gesture” through this Mi Gente’s boycott of Latino Student Recruitment Weekend, one officially signaled by the article, “Duke Without Mi Gente.” Like the Black Power Salute, the LSRW boycott commissioned a series of op-ed pieces (from alumni, individual Latinx students, and others).

The author argues this “brown boycott” signified the refusal to endorse one’s own recruitment. Moreover, it successfully amplified the lack of infrastructure dedicated to the Latinx community. Such politics of architecture exposes a racialized double standard on the University’s one that boasts a carte blanche endowment for athletic facilities, refurbished dining halls, but little for minority groups. Returning to the ethnopoet, Mi Gente’s deliberate removal
from circuitry of tokenization\textsuperscript{87} effectively disrupted the white noise, by summoning its own registering.\textsuperscript{88} Both historical examples seek to show that whether at the apex of nation-state representation,\textsuperscript{89} or shuffling in between classes for a demonstration, the ethnopoet as silent subject merely transfers her speech onto the symbolic realm. The ethnopoet, in sum, may speak herself into existence\textsuperscript{90}, without ever speaking at all.

\textit{Smith and Carlos}

Carlos and Smith’s protest, popularized as the Black Power Salute,” is not the anomalous actions of two “uppity black men,” but the attenuation of a Civil Rights Movements sub-movement among black athletes, one dating as early Jackie Robinson’s 1946 entry into minor league. But despite the empowering sentiment behind these early desegregation efforts, soon, sports devolved into a cruel reminder of black exploitation, pigeonholing mobility solely through the literal \textit{exercise} of their bodies, reinforcing racist mythologies of physiology (Witherspoon 89).

Aside from legal precedents and biological conceptions of race, black athletes, particularly at the collegiate level, faced a number of challenges. Ostracized from social events, often one of the few blacks students in the university, scarcely dated, confined to “easy courses,” graduating with an empty diploma, if one at all (Witherspoon 90). Professionally, black athletes were relegated to positions that required little thought, paid far below worse, and struggled to obtain endorsements. Media gravitated towards white athletes, while their black counterparts faced racial slurs and taunts from fans, fellow athletes, even coaches. Whites, according to one athlete, as one athlete quoted an \textit{Ebony} magazine put it, treated black athletes as “super-
animals,” expendable and de-humanized “pieces of equipment” worth only their performance, then discarded like trash (Witherspoon 91).

Meanwhile, the year 1967 marked the eve of Black Power (see chapter 5’s section. “Revolution Has Come”), one that energized black athletes towards quasi-unionist tactics. The enduring fists, as Kevin Witherspoon reminds us, stamped an atmosphere grayed by apartheid South Africa’s participation, and Cold War flexing amongst nation-states. Despite talks amongst prominent black figures—comedian Dick Gregory most notably—to boycott the Tokyo Olympics, black athletes remained unconvinced of the necessity. The “changing currents” of the Civil Rights Movement, the assassination of Dr. King, Black Power advancement, catalyzed greater traction to boycott among athletes. Athletes incorporated these confrontational tactics, while still dancing around stadium regulations. Instead of wielding fire-arms, as their asphalt counterparts, they brandished dark sunglasses, berets, black jackets, and perpetual scowl on their faces (84). And juxtaposed to the ubiquity of racism was the presence of Black Power, its language, tactics, and symbols, especially visible in colleges and universities (as discussed in chapter 4)), where many future Olympians lived and trained.

The leader of these disenchanted black athletes was San Jose State University sociology instructor and track coach, Harry Edwards. Vociferous and with an imposing figure of 6’8’’, Edwards embodied the hyper-masculinities of the period in all its stature and intellect. Cataloguing the troubles of his students, Edwards compiled a hefty list of complaints against white establishment (85). He drew inspiration in particular from heavyweight boxing champion Muhammad Ali (formerly Cassius Clay). Ali’s own comic “bob and weave” of disparity of athletic heroification and civil degradation is worth noting. Opening with the childish curiosity of “Why is everything white,” Ali remarks,
I’ve always asked my mother, ‘Mother, how come everything is white?...Why is Jesus white with blonde hair and blue eyes, even the angels are white...And Tarzan is the King of the Jungle of Africa, he was white...and Ms. America was always white...Ms. Universe was always white, and then you got some stuff called White Owl Cigars, White Swan Soap, King White soap, White Cloud tissue paper, White Tornado Floor Wax, everything was white... I said ‘Momma why is everything white,’ and the president lived in a White House...’ Santa Clause was white...I was always curious, this is when I knew something was wrong. [I] won the Olympic Gold Medal in Rome, Italy. Olympic Champion. The Russians standing right here [gestures right], and the Pole right here [opposite side]...I’m defeating America’s so-called threats and enemies...and the flag is going tan tan tan tan tan tan [imitates Star-Spangled Banner, raises hand to imitate ascendance]...I’m standing so proud, tan tan tan... I done whupped the world for America...tan tan tan...I took my gold medal and thought I’d invented something. I said know imma get mah people freedom now I’m the champion of the whole world, Olympic champion, I know I can eat downtown now, and I went downtown that day, got my big medal, on and wore my best dress...See that time black things weren’t integrated, black folks couldn’t eat downtown, and I went downtown and sat down, and I said, ‘I’d like a cup of coffee, uh, hot dog,’ he said – lady said, ‘We don’t serve Negroes.’ I was so mad. I said, ‘I don’t eat ‘em either. Just give me a cup of coffee and a hot dog’...’ they put me out...And I had to leave that restaurant, in my hometown where I went to church and served in their Christianity and fought-- and daddy fought—in all the wars...just won the Gold medal and couldn’t eat downtown, I said ‘something’s wrong.’ And from then on, I been a Moslem. 91

While this quotation is an extended transcript, Ali deserves every word. Through the insertion of indiosyncracies, Ali juxtaposes the reverent alongside seemingly irrelevant. Ali de-fangs his language while still displaying its candidness, an “art of dialogue” unbeknownst to the white audience. Moreover, he begins the story as a young boy, underlining the innocence behind the question, “Why is everything white?,” a naiveté that deflates the otherwise tenuous race relations. Ali in this sense returns us to previous chapter’s considerations of the black
entertainment, denoting how the ethnopoet may appear as a court-jester one minute, and messenger in another. Thirdly, Ali, in his smuggled stand-up, matches the incredulity of racist fantasies [Tarzan as African King], as well as exposing its entrenchment in every pocket of minute—from cigars, to soap, even to tissue paper.\textsuperscript{92} It’s a tangent serving as comedic relief, powerful in both content and ability to stay on the central argument. Fourthly, Ali is show-casing to the world a black child’s socialization of white universalizing, thereby de-naturalizing it. He manages to convince the audience such racial inquiries are not un-patriotic, nor threatening, just nothing more than childhood curiosity.\textsuperscript{93} He downsizes that invisible institution of white supremacy to the simple amenity, “I just wanted to eat downtown.” Lastly, Islam here serves as a counter-image, one existing outside the Western project of Euro-Christian slavery. Edward Curtis’ \textit{Islam in Black America} explains these sentiments of African-American Islamic universalism as idealistic expression of hope for human equality and dignity, and parcel to the struggle for black liberation\textsuperscript{94} (15). Ali’s striking balance of the comical with hard-hitting reifies his boxing-like movement through nerve-wracking issues, a dance all the more awe-inspiring in 1971, the year the interview took place. Ali in short served as the paragon of black athleticism, one that entire black athletic world took meticulous note of, not least Edwards.

Edwards then directed a protest of some thirty-five black students and one hundred whites waving signs, chanting against campus conditions in housing, social organization, and athletics. Within hours, these 150 turned into over a crowd of seven hundred students, faculty, and administration. Thus spontaneous gathering birthed a student movement, one that successful cancelled its first target, the opening game of the football season. But prescient to this power of mobilization, Edwards shifted the focus from “tiny theater of campus life,” to form the Olympic Project for Human Rights (OPHR) in October 1967, calling for a national meeting of athletes at
the Los Angeles Black Youth Conference that November. Concluding the event, the group voted
to boycott the Olympics, with not a single active athlete voting against it (Witherspoon 96).
Edwards consolidated their burgeoning grievances to six specific demands: the restoration of
Muhammad Ali’s heavyweight title; Avery Brundage’s removal from the International Olympic
Committee (IOC)–given his alleged Nazi affiliation; South Africa and Rhodesia’s banning from
international competition; black placement in key admiration and coaching positions; and
desegregation of New York Athletic Club, eminent sponsor of track meets (97).

IOC’s readmission of South African fueled an already-planned NYAC boycott. Groups of
protestor sought to storm the area, forcing back only by the call of nightsticks, at other times
blocking entrances used by athlete. By aside from this tenuous spectacle, the reality remained
that many top athletes either outside of sidewalk or away from arena. The contest was essentially
empty, bereft of black competitors.

This instant success inspired quick organization of subsequent protests, with goals
varying from firing racist coaches, to excusing players from competing against Brigham Young
University, a Mormon institution whose central text “castigated the black race as inferior and
descended from the devil” (84). While each variegated in tactics, objective, and backlash, over
thirty universities launched student athlete protest, all assisted by the OPHR. The “ire of white
critics” manifested in boos, hate mail, death threats, epiphs like “uppity nigger,” salutations of
“dear Traitor,” and ultimatums of “I’d rather have our country finish last, without you, than first
with you” (99). Honest criticism must avoid romanticization of these activists, for many were
unwilling to sacrifice years of training for trivial protest. Furthermore, famous athletes, steeped
within the black pantheon to voice their opposition, such as Jessie Owens and Jackie Robinson.
Soon frankness dusked the sweltering sky, as virtually all athletes were unwilling to discontinue their training indefinitely. Lack of unanimity proved the fundamental cause of the boycott’s decline. With half the team of 26 refusing to boycott, Edwards explains, “To boycott under such circumstances would likely have been an empty protest, a meaningless sacrifice for those who chose not to attend” (101). The paucity of white sympathizers forced a defensive posture from black athlete, one which calcified any prospect of support. A generational rift between the liberal “Old Guard” and militant youth transpired. Thirdly, OPHR marginalized women within the movement, their opinions and interests second to men. Finally, the allure of competing on the premier exhibition of athleticism, the Olympics, proved too tempting to pass, even for a cause as noble as dramatizing racial inequities. Edwards offered the conciliatory idea of wearing black arm bands, refusing to walk in formation, non-recognition of the American flag, and the like. Athletes entered Mexico City without an up-front plan, leaving any protest to each contestant.

And so despite popular hagiography, Tommie Smith inadvertently stumbled onto the center of boycott, rather than deliberately seeking it. When asked by reporters of potential boycott of the 1968 Olympics, he answered, ‘Yes, this is true,’ Smith found himself the center of a nascent movement, with Edwards the unofficial muscle (Witherspoon 84). And just days before the opening ceremony, Carlos watched his Mexican counterparts. Thousands screaming in television screens, waving banners, and shaking their fists. His fellow black athletes lingered in his mind, freshly imprinted from host city’s unrest.

The following section is an intermission of sorts, briefly touching on the Mexican student protests. My reasoning is two-fold: (1) to demonstrate the transnational entanglements and cross-examinations (see also chapter 4 on Baldwin) of the Black Power Salute I the context of Mexico
and (2) to stress the ethnopoet as student, a subject countless social movement sociologists have come to realize form an ideal source of protestors.

Intermedio de la bala

The Plaza de las Tres Culturas itself is a site of triptych significance: partially excavated Aztec ruins, cathedral of Spanish missionaries, and a cluster of apartment buildings. Here, Aztecs staged final bulwark of defense against Hernando Cortes (Witherspoon 104). It is here that on October 2, 1968, at 5:30 p.m., around 10,000 people gathered. The assemblage was entirely peaceful, composed of students, their families, and children running around ruins.

These Mexican students were generally above the lowest financial strata, “educated,”“literate, politicized, energetic, youthful, and therefore unbounded by responsibilities. Couple this traits of this historical actor with the larger conjecture of 1968. Mexican students draw inspiration from Mohandis Ghandi’s anti-colonial activism and Dr. King’s civil rights vision, the atrocities of the Vietnam War, and authoritarian nature of governments world-wide.

Notwithstanding the parochial tendencies of Mexican students, they adopted the revolutionary rhetoric of Albert Camus, Herbert Marcuse, and other intellectuals. The 10th anniversary of Fidel Castro’s revolution in Cuba inaugurated the protests, as students marched through the streets in celebration. Such radical appraisal counterpoised with the granderos, Mexico’s timorous riot police, intervening in a fist-fight with two student groups, the Vocational School Number Two of the National Polytechnical Institute and Prepatory School Isaac Ochoterena (109). Such disruption constituted a direct violation of policy of university autonomy traditional to Mexico. The students subsequently issued six demands: release of all political prisoners of Mexico, repeal
of Article 145 of penal code, allowing for arrest and punishment of dissidents on grounds of “social dissolution”; elimination of granderos, dismissal of police chief, Luis Cueto; payment of indemnity to victims of police aggression; and admission of responsibility for violence committed (109).

While touting banners of Che Guevara and Mao Tse Tung, Mexican students were not calling for a revolution as their international peers in France (only a weeks prior), United States, Ireland, Italy, and elsewhere, nor did they explicitly mention the Olympics in formal demands. Nonetheless, as police devised methods of infiltration, the protests’ locales expanded to fliers, emblazoned buses and walls. Demands grew to include expansion of democracy, But most alarmingly, they questioned PRI’s political domination, and eventually came to attack the Olympic Games themselves.

Student-activism caused traffic jams. They finally reached workers, the urban poor, and indigenous peasants. They marched outside President Díaz Ordaz office in Zócolo, calling him an “assassin,” his offer nothing but a caricature of an extended claw. Following national holiday observance of September, students re-commence, forming “brigades” distributing literature in streets, preaching corrupt government of oligarchy. They used the National University as headquarters as campus grounds for planning upcoming protests. This “improper use” prompted army’s greatest response. On September 20, at 10 p.m., trucks and armored cars storm the campus, breaking student offices and arresting hundreds of students, faculty, and administrators. The U.S. watched in mild concern, lest infiltration by Communist radicals.

Finally, these students threatened the a statecraft-bolstering of the Olympics, one long in the making. Mexican government invested $150 million in preparation for the games, the equivalent of $1 billion today. But President Gustavo Díaz Ordaz’s administration already
gained notoriety for suppressing independent labor unions, farmers, and heavy-handed directing of the economy. Further violent repression of fights between porros (gangs) catalyzed mobilization of the student movement in Mexico City. Already dissatisfied with the PRI (Partido Revolucionario Institucional) regime, a loose amalgamation of urban youth banded under a varied desire of democracy. Their leaders: the CNH (Consejo Nacional de Huelga, or National Strike Council), a delegation of students from 70 universities and preparatory schools in Mexico. These groups organized all protest against the Ordaz regime.

And so it came to no surprise that at 6:20 pm, thousands of army troops sealed off all exits from the square. Hour-long onslaught of bayonets, gunfire, helicopters, and tanks ringed from this Olimpia Battalion. A mysterious wound from a .22 caliber weapon supports a conspiracy theory that a military sniper was intentionally fired to General Hernández Toledo to make it appear that students fired first shot (Witherspoon 116) Those fleeing into apartment buildings met bullets and grenades, the belligerent couplet blowing windows. Graveyard workers and hospital staff refute the official reporting of 38 dead, attesting to witnessing clandestine cremations that hide the actual number of around 300. *Y ante los ojos del mundo*, that Latin American paragon of progress exposed its scars, intimating *dictadura*, subjecting its citizens to beatings, electric shocks, mental torture, food deprivation, and simulated castration (Witherspoon 105). *Un soldado en cada hijo*, so he can beat the living shit out of his brother.

But the Mexican government acted as if nothing happened. On August 23, 1968, the Olympic flame re-traces Columbus voyages to New World, crossing the Mediterranean, to San Salvador (first landed in Americas), to Vera Cruz, finally reaching Pyramid of the Moon at Teotihuacán, and *el distrito federal* (Witherspoon 124).

*Oh quierida patria*, sweep your dirty wars under the rug.
**Himno del Dais**

With this Mexican climate carnage, wealth-disparity, constant police aggression, and national discord—all dramatized by students—Carlos and Smith contemplated how to mount their dissent. On day four of the Games, Smith and Carlos competed in the 200 meter sprint.

John Carlos’ anger stemmed from double assault, a string of injustices against him as both a black athlete and black American living in 60s United States. Weeks before ever setting foot on the dais, Carlos faced the racist aggressions of white officials. They informed him on the condition that he’d qualify for the Olympics that he, along with all black athletes, were obliged to perform “in honor of the United States,” or face being sent home. These officials also qualified him for the 200 meter, but not the 100, his best event. Finally, they permitted an unusually large pool of qualifiers to trial run in Lake Tahoe, in the hopes of procuring sufficient white competitors in case of a black boycott. The day of this event, Olympic officials, aware that he wore an illegal “brush” Puma shoe, ruled his record-breaking race ineligible (Wotherspoon 88).

Just two hours before the seminal-final heats, Carlos approached Smith. Perhaps no other phrase, in the entirety of this iconic moment, captures the poetic complexity in black athletic subjectivity than Smith’s warning to Carlos: ‘the national anthem is sacred to me, and this can’t be sloppy. It has to be clean and abrupt’ (Witherspoon 79). Carlos stresses a minimalist economy, one akin to physics law of force which dictates the least time of collision grants the greatest impact the other mass takes (hence the boxer’s maxim: “roll with the punches”). Furthermore, such preoccupations of avoiding indulging in rebellion for its own sake, preferring
instead an ‘iconoclastic patriotism,’ a devotion to the United States predicated on challenging its more hypocritical tenets (82). Their gesture was solemn, a public obituary, of fallen heroes of the civil rights movement, an attack not on America, but American injustice.

Co-favorites in the dash, the time provide fertile to harvest their dissent.

The race, as famously re-run, shows a Carlos with a tremendous head-start after 130 meters, but the interpretation is split. Carlos, deciding to let Smith ‘win’ the race, slow down, but failed to account for another runner, Peter Norman, who’d catch up to barely clutch second. Smith argued his habit of finishing kick, coupled with his quicker winning times, would’ve caught with Carlos anyways. In the ten-minute interlude between the race’s end and the ceremony, Smith and Carlos ‘got dressed,’ all-black everything: throwing on their black gloves, black scarf, black shirt, and black love beads. As they took their steps on the medal platform, Smith, as explained in a later interview, prayed. “I was praying underneath the bleachers, I was praying on the walk up to the victory stand, and the entire time I was up there.”

And underneath an American flag, Smith and Jones invoked the patriotic aspirations of a United States, and inverted its external boasting of power, to reveal the ongoing racist history. As Smith later put it, “It was a cry for help.” Nevertheless, with their heads bowed, and the national anthem playing in the background, the runners wedge Black Power squarely within US History. The simultaneity of breaking within ideology, while living within it, speaks not as paradox, but the mobilizing of Sandoval’s differential consciousness (see chapter 1). Moreover, the prescience to capitalize on the salience of this moment affords it ethnopoetic qualification. In their gesture of silence, Jones and Smith amplify the muted sounds of urban rebellions, engulfing a nation. Their gesture dethroned white supremacist fantasies of the United States, with an exposition of the double-consciousness that is at the heart of the black American tradition.
The Black Power fist was the same insignia of the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense, a revolutionary organization that former FBI Director, J. Edgar Hoover, declared, “the single greatest threat to the internal security of the United States.” The Black Power fist, those donned by black beret cocked brothers, afro’d out sisters, together singing, “Revolution has come, time to pick up the gun.” The Black Power fist, that same one Angela Davis flashed in court, in her a long drawn-out battle for bail. Smith succinctly explained the symbolism of their attire, one deserving a full excerpt:

I wore a black right-hand glove and Carlos wore the left-hand glove in the same pair. My raised right hand stood for the power of black America. Together they formed an arch of unity and power. The black scarf around my neck stood for black pride. The black socks with no shoes stood for black poverty in racist America. The totality of our effort was the regaining of black dignity

(Smith and Steele 131)

These otherwise random assortment of fabrics mapped several nodal points of black militancy. But whereas with riots, where the specter of black revolt frightens white moderates, the Olympics epitomizes the ideological theatres of statecraft. That is to say, indeed, the whole world was watching. But presupposing Smith’s declaration are the platforms (both figuratively and literally) legitimating and broadcasting his claims. As prized athletes representing the United States, Smith and Jones possess a tremendous and opaque political capital, the likes of which their comrades on the streets can only imagine.

Both received their medals a shoeless, soles [souls] with nothing but black socks. The San Jose State athletes have come a long way, and yet, this decorum brushes their victory in
close proximity with issues of ghettoization, redlining policies, welfare offices, and other scenes of depravity. Their fists jolted the worldwide audience from ceremony into obituary *a la Pietri.* Moreover, the levelling power of the dais cannot be overstated. As one three-time gold medalist Mal Whitfield put it, ‘The Negro champion and the white champion may stand equal on a dais as they each receive gold medals, but when they leave the dais only the white champion’s accomplishments assure him a stable and successful future” (Henderson 91). The dais then is a suspension (literally elevated above), of the otherwise routine state of black precarity.

Extremities in opinion underscore the restless search for meaning [or intent] behind Smith and Carlos gesture. Such is the latent advantage of silence: the limitless expansion of interpretation, disorienting racist critics to scour all options, without isolating a single one in suggestion. Periodicals put their two cents on athletes who they scarcely were invested in the first place. Their response’s ranged from the usual respectability politics [*The Los Angeles Sentinel*’s argument of protest as out of place in the Olympics], to demonization [*The Los Angeles Times* described the gesture as a “Hitler-type Salute’], to mongrelizing [*Time* magazine re-naming the Olympic motto as “angrier, nastier, uglier,”; the subtle wedging of protest within the realm of affectionate patriotism (Carlos’ remark of the ‘sacred’) is soiled to a ‘public display of petulance], to lionizing, [*The Pittsburgh Courier* ran a cartoon with a giant black glove fist raised aloft the stadium], to balanced (Henderson 81). Such dizzying reception is testament to the “enigmatic nature” of the podium salute*99* (81).

But why is this stunt so dangerous to establishment? In large part, the answer stems from the slippage between white consumption of black athletic body vis a vis beating the black civil rights activist illustrates the fear stems not from the actions themselves, but what they represent. As Henderson writes:
The black football player who pummeled white opponents and sacked the opposing quarterback was lauded as a fine sportsman and as a credit to his race. Yet, if he stepped off the field and complained of the racial injustices he faced, wearing a black armband or black glove to register his non-violent protest, he was criticized for ingratitude and perverting the sporting ideal (88).

The incipient fear of the Black Power Salute stems from this deadly conflation. Brudage’s qualification of the stunt as ‘nasty demonstration,’ betrays the purist conceptions of sports as apolitical. Carlos and Smith, as world-renown athletes, paid dividends to a country seemingly divested of their bodies, unless it garnered profit. The dais transformed into a springboard for airing the “dirty linen” of the United States, as well as the Black Nationalist (see section on Carmichael in chapter 4) agenda writ large. Namely, to sought to forge links between the black American freedom struggle with oppressed peoples of Africa and other parts of the Third World. Their two-man demonstration illustrated the power of a few dedicated people to change the conversation in one’s favor, especially in light of earlier setbacks.

That day, Tommie Smith and John Carlos set the precedent for all future political protest in the Olympics (Henderson 78). As Henderson eloquently captures the paradox: “The podium salute was both non-violent and threatening, it was simultaneously moderate and radical, and it displayed Black Nationalism, and inter-racial cooperation” (78). Such ideological mixture is solely possible through ethnopoetic gesture, the anatomical sifting of silence. The dais served as the cathexis of the Civil Rights Movement, in all its divergent threads. The podium salute is an oblique encapsulation of state of the Civil Rights Movement in 1968. That day, the neglected alleyways of hosed down freedom fighters took the dais. Smith and Carlos usurped not simply an elevated stage, but American exceptionalist myth itself.

When dramatizing her plight, the ethnopoet, often deprived of resources, appropriates hegemonic entertainment spaces, and ephemeral claims them as her own. She gazes at the
disproportion of care (or lack thereof) given to her body, and meditates on we see that ethnopoet doesn’t directly antagonize power, but literally re-dresses one’s politics, and shows up in a radical ways. We, as Duke students of color, are on the same page. Page Auditorium, that is…

Black Die-In, Brown Boycott: How Ethnopoets Speak in Silence

Me cansé de rogarle

Me cansé de decirle...

To understand the Mi Gente boycott, it is critical to lay out the socio-historical climate that informed its execution. The endless pensive from which the activists drew from. To demarcate any starting point is historiographical arbitration, but perhaps a salient one is the ‘noose incident,’ one that demonstrates the cross-racial collaboration frequenting university activism.

On April 1, 2015, a piece of yellow cord clumsily dangles outside the Bryan Center Plaza. Upon closer inspection, the historical artifact of a noose is too eerily mirrored. Its culprit, a slew of apologism, blabbering his self-defense in an open-letter apology. He writes, “Unfortunately, through my own lack of cultural awareness and joking personality” (https://today.duke.edu/2015/05/nooseinvestigation). In those bizarre moments, I remember my girlfriend being too scared to go outside. The national echoes of a fraternity’s “Old Boy’s” chant,
and the University of Oklahoma President’s immediate expulsion of these members. But in the words of Panther cub, Tupac Shakur, “I ain’t mad at cha.”

The official University found no racial motive, attributing the action to a lack of cultural awareness. Vice President Larry Moneta declined to comment on timeline of student conduct investigation. The next day, the Black Student Alliance leads several hundred students in organized protest in West Campus.

In a response to the student’s apology, BSA President Henry Washington, writes a letter titled, “Did You Change Your Mind.” It appeared as a special feature to African-American Studies Professor, Mark Anthony Neal’s, blog, NewBlackMan (in exile). In this latter, he criticizes the “with all-deliberate speed” of an administration provoked less by a noose’s visceral provocation of lynchings, than in preserving the “brand.” Moreover, he contextualizes BSA’s frustrations within the socio-political backdrop of the Baltimore rebellion. The astonishingly “lax sanction” for the student in question, are “slaps in the face,” to the black student body.

Washington writes how acts of racism are routinely institutionally absolved on this campus on the grounds of their un-intentionality—regardless of degree of harm inflicted. Unlike Eurocentric compartmentalizing, the black body cannot separate the macro/micro, the local or national, for as Washington insinuates, they are one and the same. Hence, his salutation of exhaustion, “A tired, tired black student.” Such fatigue is founded on white supremacy’s wavering treatment of black America: at worst, a direct threat, at best, a lukewarm apathy.

But on April 7, 2015, a fire raged across Duke’s campus. But its smog elicits not the cracked skulls of the neglected, inner-city plight, but of collegiate frenzy. That night, Duke Men’s Basketball wins its fifth national title. In the historical amnesia of the Gothic Wonderland, all is washed away, in the intoxicated comradery. In juxtaposing these scenes, my moment is not
to equate them, but rather to illustrate the post-mortem celebration immediately washing these afflictions. Massacre isn’t the actual skewering of flesh, but its complete erasure, when we forget how it felt.

*Oh quierida alma mater*, trade the rusty chains for the winning net, and we’ll call it a day.\(^{104}\)

Whereas black student body calls BlackLivesMatter, Latino students lacked such national scope to frame one’s protect. Nationally we’ve witnessed the senseless police brutality killings of unarmed black Americans, racist rhetoric against Latinxs *por ese payaso naranjado*, the rise in deportation and detention centers, but most critically, student activism in universities across the United States (most notably with Mizzou).

On October 20, 2015, the group Concerned Student 1950—named after the year African-American students were first admitted to the University of Missouri—issued a list of demands\(^{105}\), including: an apology from President Tim Wolfe for his “gross negligience” in addressing on-campus racial injustices;\(^{106}\) his removal from office, and comprehensive awareness and inclusion curriculum overseen by minority students. On November 6, Wolfe meets privately with Concerned Student 1950 members, but does not agree to the demands. Making matters extremely personal, Jonathan Butler launches a hunger strike, explaining that “Mr. Wolfe had ample opportunity to create policies and reform that could shift the culture of Mizzou in a positive direction but in each scenario he failed to do so.” The strike dramatized, but gave administration a biological time-clock whereby they *must respond*, lest the death of one their students.\(^{107}\) The next day, a student boycott emerges in support of Butler. On November 8, in the spirit of the black athlete half a century ago,\(^{108}\) black football players announced indefinite refusal to practice or play until Wolfe is removed. The Athletic Department, Coach Gary Pinkel, even the
white boys on the team, announce their support of the protest. And on, November 9, hours after the Missouri Students Association’s executive cabinet followed suit, saying Wolfe “has undeniably failed us,” Wolfe announces his resignation.

Wolfe’s resignation revealed to college students nation-wide the power of their collective force. Claremont-McKenna, Georgetown, Cornell, Yale. The tidal wave seemed to finally reach Duke’s shores, and our own beloved President, Richard Broadhead, pre-emptively implemented damage control. Four days after Wolfe’s resignation, Broadhead held the vaguely titled, “A Conversation at Duke,” at our Page Auditorium. But racism at Duke is like a cup of coffee, seems like you need one every morning. That same morning, as a group of student activists calling themselves DukeEnrage\textsuperscript{109} worked through the night to plan a disruption-demonstration, we saw a Duke statue in front of the university chapel, spray-painted with the words, “BlackLivesMatter.”\textsuperscript{110}
But at the event, a few dozen students held signs and banners, distributing literature showing long-standing grievances from a whole host of student organizations. Call and response chants of “Whose university, our university,” rang through the Page Auditorium. After the shouts subsided, a group called Concerned Students 1969 rushed to the stage, calling out the administration’s decision to schedule the conversation on a Friday at noon, when many students are in class. In support of this call, DukeEnrage then staged a walk-out, a classic Chicano movement tactic, shouting as they exited, “Duke you are guilty.”

On November 20, at 5 p.m. students then re-convened on their own terms in an event titled, “Duke Tomorrow: Student-Organized Discussion with Brodhead and Administration.” Concerned Students. First, Concerned Students, led by Chandler Philipps and Taylor Marie, gave a brief history of student demands in the past, then rattled off a full reading of the “Demands of Black Voices,” divided into ten categories. These demands included: bias report policy, protocol for hate speech and racial bias, increasing diversity in high-ranking faculty and administration, cultural climate consultation, increasing socio-economic diversity, mental health reforms, representing distinguished black figures on buildings and monuments, formulating administration positions to work with students of color to improve campus experience, living wages, and accountability in implementing these demands. After allowing a few minutes for administration to respond to their demands, “other communities,” as Jay worded it, came to the stage to also give their demands.

On November 20, I, along with Mi Gente Vice President, Elizabeth Barahona, stepped onto the stage, bulleting off each of our student demands, That week, I worked with her directly, and together, we developed a 13-point program, we called for the creation of a permanent, public space in the form of un centro Latinx, a larger office space, “not a janitor’s closet in between two
bathrooms,”

115 statues to honor our unsung guerreros, full funding for our annual Latino Student Recruitment Weekend (LSRW), hiring faculty to coordinate LSRW, increased hiring practices for Latinx staff, faculty, and administration, the creation of a Latino/a Studies in the Global South Department, need-blind admission for indocumentados, a public apology for the “routine negligence” of Latinx issues on campus, increased pay for all black and brown laborers to $15/hour, funding annual Latinx awards, biannual hearings to document testimonies from Latinx undergraduates, an oversight committee of Latinx students, and finally, stronger linkages with our local Latinx population.

116

This list of demands directly descended from a letter Mi Gente sent to President Brodhead in 2005 requesting a cultural center and plans to increase Latinx faculty hiring. Requests were unmet. Hence, where we are today.

On November 19, 2015, President Brodhead announces the creation of a Task Force on Bias and Hate Issues. 117 They charged themselves with the triptych no-brainers of: 1) debating specific mentioning of bias and hate, 2) consider issues related to “incidents of intolerance,” and 3) recommendations for “achieving greater transparency.” Broadhead encouraged us, in an email he wrote to the community, to participate in this effort. What so many neglected to mention that student applications were due during finals week, once again forcing undergraduates to sacrifice academic performance.

On December 3, 2015, I headed a Mi Gente General Body Meeting titled, “De-stress and Debrief,” After handing out a timeline of the Mizzou protests, we discussed its relevance to our own issues as Latinx students at Duke. We spoke of these demands, with biggest questions on how to move forward. Then, talks of boycotting LSRW arose, albeit more jokingly and without follow-up.
Over Winter Break, I worked closely with Elizabeth and Mi Gente President, Gloria Tomlinson, to draft a letter to be sent days after classes resumed. On January 25, 2016, we released the article, “Duke Without Mi Gente,” signed by the entire executive council. In this statement, Mi Gente announced indefinite cessation of collaboration with the Admissions office regarding LSRW. Instead of aiding recruitment efforts, Mi Gente urged the re-directing of energies to “demanding that our voices be heard.” It cited the 11-year long standing request to President Brodhead and re-iterated the imperative for a cultural center. Moreover, the article referenced peer institutions, including: Stanford University’s El Centro, Yale’s La Casa Cultural, University of Pennsylvania’s La Casa Latina, Cornell’s Latino Living Center/Latino/a Student Success Office, MIT’s Latino Cultural Center, and others. Instead, the Latinx community, represented by Mi Gente, given the unkept promises by administration, initiated a boycott of the Latino Student Recruitment Weekend. The letter exposed the burdens Latinx students have endured for so long, writing:

We must perform the duties of the administrators, educators, and admissions officers. We must assert our humanity in classrooms where our professors or peer students project micro and macro aggressions…It is time that Duke recognize that its students of color should not bear the burden on being academics, educators, poster children for brochures, panelists regarding diversity, Latinx student recruiters, party planners and students.

Before laying out the demands, Mi Gente prefaced with “Once again,” connoting the sense of racial fatigue of having to repeat yourself over and over. But white [liberal] supremacy is an answering machine. We leave a message after the tone, but never get a call back.

The language “Duke Without Mi Gente,” is a carefully-chosen reference to the “Day Without Immigrant” protests of May 1, 2006. Referred as the Great American Boycott, an
estimated 3 to 5 million people poured into downtowns streets of 160 cities across the United States. Spanish-language radio, television stations, and social media. As Juan Gonzalez put it, “Not even during the heyday of the American labor movement in the 1930s, or during the high tide of civil rights protests and public opposition to the Vietnam War during the 1960s, had such astonishing numbers paraded peacefully in so many different localities over a common grievance” (1). The phrase, “without Mi Gente,’ pays homage to this watershed moment in Latinx history, one that undoubtedly inspires so many of us today. Furthermore, to stress a “without” elucidates the ethnopoetic power of omission. To inaugurate a boycott as “without” effectively disrupts the white noise that hitherto blocked all redress. Again, if a person of color falls, does it make a sound?

The letter, like the Black Power Salute, triggered an onslaught from responses. All degrees of separation with Mi Gente, from current members to alumni, to student organizations, commented on the editorial spectacle.121, 122 Numerous student organizations shared the letter on social media. Former student, such as Co-President Alexandra Villansante-Fricke, quibbled on the letter’s “tone”123 as unhelpful, encouraging current students to instead “exude contagious excitement” and meet with leaders across campus. Others, like Michael Courtney, claim the Mi Gente letter “missed the point,”124 and consider shifting tactics, feeling compelled to remind us of “the privilege we each have been given to attend such a great educational intuition,” one heightened with our additional invitation to LSRW. In response to the public ridicule against Mi Gente’s demands, I exposed the paternalism behind infantilizing minorities’ call for systemic change. “These lily-white aspirations were never meant for us. To them, you are nothing but a toddler in a high chair, chillando for your demands, too ‘substantive’ to be taken (token)
seriously.” That is, white noise and paternalism go hand in hand, as the formal is the liberal policy of the latter.

Other Latinx alumni came to our defense, disappointed to see Latinx students facing the same struggles as when they were students. They importantly infused their epistemic memory of their experience. “We understood the double bind. If we did not do it, the recruitment weekend would not happen and that would mean fewer Latin@s at Duke.” Such nuance of lament over the resorting of boycott debunks opposition that trivialized demands as boisterous, unnecessary, at best, not the best strategy. The letter closed with a warning of negotiations, “We would be granted meetings in which we presented ideas that eerily resemble the list presented by Mi Gente only to have them suffocated with the same bureaucratic excuses and unanswered emails.” Mi Gente Alumni came together to write the slogan-article, “Un Pueblo Unido Jamás Será Vencido,” at pains to remind that the Mi Gente demands are not exhaustive, but the “beginning of a series of a series of necessary institutional improvements.” The letter pushed back at the letter as rejecting LSRW altogether, but “needs greater assistance.” As Brother Smith said earlier, “a cry for help,” They invoked the importance of a supportive alumni, one that before all else, listen to current students’ voices.

Like the black athlete boycotts, many current Latinx students did not support the boycott, one I attribute to several factors. First, generational, as many first-year voiced their classmates’ displeasure of Mi Gente’s recent politicization. As Jonathan Salzar put it, “People want community, not politics.” In other words, first-years for the most part lacked the experience to understand the institutional memory of neglect that upperclass folks felt. Others were largely apathetic. Some, like Jessica del Villar, were quite honestly exhausted with the injustices, and “checked out.” I interject this brief on Latinx undergraduate reception to avoid romanticization
of this boycott as not the fired, rally consensus of militant students, but the workings of an overworked cadre.

Nevertheless, the leverage provide effective, illustrating that, as comedian Katt Williams put it, “‘Cuz all real motherfuckers is waiting is for one opportunity. And that’s the opportunity of a lifetime to show a motherfucker, they ain’t bullshitting.” This boycott sparked immediate concern from top administrators, who agreed to meet Mi Gente representing in the upcoming weeks. On February 10, 2016, I, along with Elizabeth, Gloria, the chair of community relations [Norma De Jesus], and chair of first-years [Erick Aguilar], met with Vice President of Student Affairs, Larry Moneta, Dean of Trinity College of Arts & Sciences, Valerie Ashby, and Provost Sally Kornbluth, to discuss the efficacy of our demands. The night before we spent hours rehearsing [ensayando] potential responses from administration, emailing chairs of every single faculty department, contacting key trustee members, all to ensure we presented the best defense for what had been degraded on every side. Parallel meetings with representatives of the Asian-American Student Association (ASA) and the Native American Student Association (NASA) also transpired at this period. Cognizant of the failed promises, I proposed the initial meeting to be recorded, compromising for signed memos.

On March 1, Mi Gente hosted a Town Hall on updates on demands and boycott. Led by Elizabeth Barahona, we unveiled the results of those string of conversations: a Latinx Cultural Center to replace the Office of Fraternity and Sorority Life, with one fully-funded staff member, administration’s full funding of LSRW, and monthly meetings set in place.127 We postponed the implementation of other demands, thus leaving the task for future Latinx leadership to undertake.
Last Thoughts

With this genealogy of the “Dais to Die-In,” this chapter argued that ethnic degradation is abundantly found outside the streets, as much in in ivory towers. The struggle for recognition elicits an uneven topography of certain ethnic bodies—through class, race, gender, and other intersectionalities—accessing greater resources than others. As such black athlete, with Tommie Smith and John Carlos, holds an uncanny ability to radicalize the sporting exhibition in accordance with black liberation. Careful to navigate the trappings of “invested patriotism,” they raised a silent gesture of the Black Power Fist, electrifying an rebellion-rife Black America, and demythologizing American exceptionalism, in one of grandest stages of international theater. On a micro-level, the 2016 “Without Mi Gente” boycott exposed the university’s dependence on unpaid, brown labor, to recruit their peers. Building off the cross-fertilized inspirations of BlackLivesMatter, Mizzou, and Concerned Students 1969, Mi Gente’s refusal to execute LSRW disrupted this “white noise,” provoking a catalogue of self-hailed pundits to comment. Notwithstanding these peanut galleries, top administrators soon after with Mi Gente representatives, and negotiated to implement major elements (but not all) of the demands.

For the ethnopoet, the questions lingers at the corrugated tin-roofs of their tongue: how to speak silence, drenched in white noise? Given the obelisk apparatus of aesthetic regimes (see chapter 2), such decolonial “noise-cancellation” appears almost insurmountable. But the prescient awareness of one’s own (counter-)power opens creative means to truth-tell. Even when deprived of the premier medium of expression, speech, the ethnopoet perforates white complacency. Through the “silent gesture,” she arrives at exposing the deep-seated hypocrisy of hegemonic institutions, their dominant views. Sacrificing her own material concessions, she
summons power-brokers, and (re)opens lines of dialogue that achieve what before seemed impossible.
**Code-Switched CODA: Masking Payasiadas in the Mexican Sitcom Tradition**

The cruising mobilites required in [differential praxis] demand if the practioner commitment to the process of metamorphosis itself: this is the activity of the trickster who practices subjectivity as masquerade, the oppositional agent who accesses differing identity, ideological, aesthetic, and political positions – Sandoval’s *Methodology of the Oppressed* (61)

> We wear the mask that grins and lies,<br>It hides our cheeks and shades our eyes –<br>This debt we pay to human guile;<br>With torn and bleeding hearts we smile,<br>And mouth with myriad subtleties - Paul Laurence Dunbar’s “We Wear the Mask”

> En el cofre de vulgar hipocresía<br>Ante la gente oculto mi derrota<br>Payaso con careta de alegría<br>Pero tengo por dentro el alma rota – Javier Solis’s “Soy Un Triste Payaso”

**Preface: Un Breve Informativo on (Un)Mask(ing)**

In previous chapters, this thesis delved into the cultural topography of differential consciousness—that is the external graft that germinates from native speaker’s ability to gauge any given power dynamic, and deploy it, at the ready, the most effective response. This section is an ultrasound of sorts, a retreat to the psychic interiority of native speakers; the sense of fissured self *la facultad* (Anzaldúa) that we all feel. And grow. This figurative mutilation is often interpreted through a deficient model, whereby the ethnic body is perpetually insufficient (to survive on its own). In short, prior to this moment, her expression remained static. Such passive readings stem not from the ethnopoet’s actual rigid movement, but critical theory’s poor
competency to track her *internal* movement. What's at stake, in this CODA, is illustrating the side effects of the deploying ethnopoetics functionalities.

As makeshift analytic, I call upon a popular cultural object: *la máscara*. Conventionally, masks are covers worn to identify a character and project the voice. Often a grotesque face at carnivals or rituals, or ornament for social gatherings, masks for displaced subjects strip to a functional role. Far from vibrant molds easily taken and off, masks, under the pretense of ethnic survival, bleed onto the speaker’s visage. Masks for us is more than just a concealment or disguise. They are facades erected to protect oneself from an implicitly hostile environment. Its adornment however carries a heavy burden of anguish, melting into one’s features, one’s identity itself.

This chapter shifts the attention from the mask to its bearer. Indeed, *la que aguanta las tonterías de una sociedad que nunca y la quiso, y jamás la quedrá*. We can call her a folkloric social court-jester. Theoretically speaking, each of her performances constitute nodal points (however roughly mapped) of the satirical jesters Latino ethnopoets have at their disposal. This section verbalizes masks not as noun, but a process through which ethnopoets bleed into the foreground of comedy. That is, they perform their pain in plain sight, and yet buried as a subtext for an otherwise hip-busting, knee-slapping skit. Humor, *para nosotros* is less so the Cheech Marin/George Lopez sidekicks that we’re routinely type-casted in. Humor is the nothing short of the management, *diré yo*, of our daily trials. By extension, in studying the *payaso* jokester, we realize the profound lamentations inflicting her.

*Ethnopoet as cómico*: Cultural and Theoretical Considerations
There are innumerous clowns\textsuperscript{130} that each deserve their own monograph. But desafortunadamente, I cannot begin to flesh their story. But perhaps we can address the question, why aren’t they discussed? No podemos llenar el hoyo en un tiro, but we can pronounce its absence. Chicano essayist Ilan Stavans rests the issue within Mexican culture itself. Indeed, según el, within the country rests a “wound” bleeding within the nation: the highbrow, Europeanized elite dreams of globalizing/outsourcing domestic talent onto the global arena, and a native hybridity resting on ancient and borrowed elements, citing from a whole gambit of celebrated cultural-producers: from Frida Kahlo, opera singer Plácido Domingo, to Pedro Infante and Juan Gabriel. A stigma persecutes the latter as, what he calls, “kitschy,” a excessively exaggerating, obsolete, vulgar, taste—a depository of everything deemed of proletarian, and therefore, inferior, origin. Yes, aparentamente, we can be bougie too. Our cultural inspections into these masks inherit a class and gender bent to them, one sometimes fading away in the diasporic aspirations of estadounidense-bred Latinos.\textsuperscript{131}

The question remains, how does one find nobility in pobreza, without glorifying it either—nimodo que fueramos some suburban bohemians.\textsuperscript{132} For this reason, Stavans turns to the term, “rascuache.” Lacking a proper English cognate, its untranslatability demonstrates its inability to fully conceptualize within an Anglophonic imagination. He offers not definition of the concept, but a kind of random catalogue: porcelain replicas of ballerinas at a department stores\textsuperscript{133}, imitations of Ralph Lauren, Aeropostle\textsuperscript{134}, local Jarritos sodas, certain produce like tamarind\textsuperscript{135}, piñatas\textsuperscript{136}, telenovelas with the same tropes\textsuperscript{137}). This cheap inventiveness is deemed as a source of pride and self-defense among our dispossessed.
Such resourcefulness revises concerns raised in chapter 1 of mimesis, Rey Chow’s claim of the ruthless entrapment of ethnic peoples to perform *ad infinitum* their own inferiority. In *Ambassadors of Culture*, Kristen Gruesz argues that imitation constitutes what she coins as “vernacular authorship,” (26) a highly portable, readily translated and memorized modality. In fact, she privileges lyric poetry as the epitome of vernacular genre, one eagerly used by transnational authors. In a linguistic sense, this authorship adopts localisms and dialect speech for novel effect. What’s said in one place is repeated in another, but with a dramatically different effect. Their low-income community is bereft of the Renaissance Man of Letters. En vez de el, displaced communities have “ambassadors of culture.” The latter “oblingly” represents the national body by codifying metaphor and figurative in cultural identity and specificity.

No longer are 3rd World audiences victim of these cultural objects. They are ambassadors, whose presentation of a foreign text to a given linguistic community is a profoundly political act. This re-appropriation acts as what she calls a “vernacular authorship,” setting out new impressions of an already known template. Imitation for her transcends the reiterated explications of dominance and submission, and involves a complex selection process (29). And yes, *a veces falla en su proyecto, but en otros casas, supera*.

All this to say that before venturing into iconic jokesters, we must wrestle with the tensions within her culture milieu. And with generous re-application of Gruesz’s meditations on poetry, we can conceive of the jokester as translating these high registers into accessible art for general audiences. But just as how Jackson’s memoir compelled a revisiting of canonical definitions of reification, the sitcom jokester destigmatizes antiquated considerations on television.
Indeed, often dejected as “the idiot box,” television is ridiculed by Theodor Adorno as a series of repetitive features that the audience expects and readily consumes. Moreover, he argues it dissuades human sociality and preventing the questioning of oppression. Television, in its hyperbolic access, flattens class differences. It provides an alternative picture of reality that implicitly distracts viewers from the present one. Culture, increasingly commodified, transforms to a crucial medium of ideological domination, and the sitcom to be the *par excellence*.\textsuperscript{138} Sitcom a vital means of capitalist order’s maintenance. Packaged in canned laughter, the sitcom summons the audience the laughter, but dispossess them of that very act.

This next section examines the subversive quality of the Mexican sitcom, masking its therapeutic work in Spanish slapstick. It simultaneously tackles agents of class oppression, while providing solace to *barrio* inhabitants.

*Presentando El Chavo*

Often nicknamed *El Chavo*, *El Chavo Del Ocho* is a television sitcom first appearing in 1971 as a sketch in the *Chespirito* show, produced by Television Independente de Mexico.\textsuperscript{139} In 1973, following the merger of TIM and Telesistema Mexicano, Televisa transmitted El Chavo, turning it into a weekly *media hora* series. At its apogee in the mid-1970s, El Chavo de Ocho boasted the highest watched show in Mexican television, and a Latin American audience of 350 million viewers per episode.

Since then, re-runs have appeared (since May 2, 2011) have appeared in the United States on the UniMás network. Additionally, El Chavo also inspired a caricature series titled *El Chavo*
Animado. And since 1984, the Brazilian TV Network SBT has broadcasted the Portuguese dub, Chaves. And yes, El Chavo has even reached the global movie provider, Netflix.

But amidst its recapitulations, El Chavo is al final del día, an open-hearted chuckle that pangs at its own hunger. Its importation to our ingle-fied audience also deserves examination. And given the constraints of length, this paper may only mention a few observations that I hope anticipate future scholarship on the richness of the socio-cultural labor these actors undertook for a nat’l audience. Noten por ejemplo the brief description on the Netflix page: “El Chavo is a poor nameless orphan who lives in an apartment building with La Chilandrina, Quico, Dona Florinda, Don Ramon, and Professor Jirafales.”

From an outsider view, or por lo menos, that of a global consumer, El Chavo sobers from comedy, to nail-biting tragedy, a documentary in the line of a migration story. Nevertheless, an analysis of one of my favorite childhood capitulos illustrates the healing practices (among other functions) of this show. I hope to demonstrate the social masking in media res that El Chavo functions especially as we consider how in the 1970s, the Mexican economy deteriorated through a 1973 oil shock, and the 1976 devaluation of the peso. Amidst these moments of fiscal uncertainty, one can at the very least speculate on El Chavo’s role in diverting one’s attention to la vecindad – the low-income housing complex. And yet, by laughing at the latter, El Chavo subtly marks a social commentary of the tribulations of Mexican citizens.

A modest survey of one episode suggest El Chavo’s dance from a fictitious decrepit neighborhood, and an all-too-real one.

In the episode, “El desayuno,” Don Roman invites Chavo over for breakfast, but the latter keeps breaking them, inadvertently, after going to get another batch at the marketplace. The
scene opens with El Chavo asleep against the doorway of Don Ramon’s house. Chilindrina opens the door, causing him to fall back. After this rude-not-so-rude awakening, Chilindrina asks him *qué estás haciendo aquí?* He responds by explaining that the last time he was invited, Ramon had already left, so he decided to stay reclined by the door to ensure “que no se me escape.”

Here we already have a series of pre-suppositions already made. First, there exists some type of communal system whereby the neighborhood shifts homes to eat in, implicitly as a way to make sure regardless of the economic flux, each person has a place to eat. Second, note El Chavo’s appearance. He’s wearing casted clothes, too big to fit in his holed t-shirt, and small yellow paints that are at this point shorts -- and therefore, we can presume he’s had them for several years -- and finally, suspenders along over one shoulder. Additionally, because he wears this same set of clothing throughout the show, it indicates this hand-me-down as the only set of clothes he has. His high-pitched voice only amplifies the paradox of this middle aged orphan, all the while normalizing that very condition. In any other circumstance, this kind of state would cause sympathy.

Thirdly, by Chilandrina not asking El Chavo by phone what hours he’d be up, viewers can infer either the latter lacked access to one, or worse, he never even thought of this an easier option.

I raise these three suggestions only to bring to light the critical preconditions that inform a show like *El Chavo*. What are the unspoken tensions that afflict the ethnopoetic comedian? How are questions of depravity, food insecurity, and the like-- trivialized—and simultaneously, amplified—through the performed musings of *cómicos* like El Chavo. These sitcoms embody ethnopoetic variant of Tanya Shields’ “feminist rehearsal” repeated engagements with the
structural violence of social disparities. That is, within each staging of social plight, El Chavo—as the comic personification of an entire disfranchised class—one nurses an uncanny sense of (non)belonging.

Upon entering the house itself, we close in on Don Ramón, snoring on a small green leather couch, wrapped by a single *serape*-turned-*cobija*. In lieu of an alarm clock, Chilindrina uses a frying pan and pot to wake him up. Such resourcefulness than latently endorses the viewers’ own working-class inventions, creative contraptions *al mismo nivel que el mentado* MacGyver. Shuffling from his sheets, Don Ramón is a figure who my father would describe as *un gato seco*.141

Don Ramón asks his daughter, ‘where did she leave the egg basket?’ Nervously laughing, she corrects her father, now in a fit of rage, that she didn’t eat the eggs, but opened them to see if they had chicks inside. Before Don Ramon can finish his frustration at Chilindrina’s foolishness, Chavo cries out, “dumb, silly, stupid, fool, bobby. Don’t you know, that you have to plant the egg if you want the chick to come out?” This brief exchange itself choreographs one of the arties (or vital elements) of this show: a hidden competition to show who can out-wit (or out-dumb) the other. It’s a dialogue that seeks to entrench even deeper a cathartic silliness; to stretch this moment to the threshold of delirium as much as possible.

But then reality hiccups to the surface once more, staying lodged at the throat. *Eschuchen nomas lo que le dice Don Ramón*, “Chavo, uh, podrás aguantar el hambre?” *Contesta el mentado Chavo*, “Si señor, llevo ocho anos aguantándome.” This social plight slightly overpowers the humor, and a melancholic piano sets the scene. Don Ramon is speechless. Just before the camera, in a fit of bad editing cuts him off, he scratches his head and says, “*Menos mal Chavo.*”
Later in the scene, Quico, Chavo’s schoolmate, invites him to play ping pong. After a bit of persuasion, the latter decides to go ahead and play. He bounces the ball on the floor, to practice swings. Quico teases him on how he keeps missing. Two tries, no luck. Chavo protests, “La vencida es en la tercera,” and without even noticing it, smacks Mr. Barrega, the neighborhood landlord, here to collect the month’s rent. Con su introduccion, pienso en mi querido Piedro Pieti, él que mencioné en el segundo capítulo.

To kill kill kill,
the landlord of their cracked skulls, and communicate,
with their Latino souls

But we find none of the malicious, yet unrequited, poetry of Pietri. But still, with the entrance of the land-lord, this insular comedic barrio is interrupted by the reminder of socio-economic plight. Indeed, we arguably encounter its agent, that historical subject who has and continues to benefit from it. El Chavo here reminds us that at the end of the day, despite all the shenanigans the characters get into, they all must answer to the ruthless logic (or lack thereof) of capital. The landlord of course resembles its Marxist caricature of a portly, suit-and-tie-touting gentleman: the typical fat-cat.

But within these dire straits, the ethnopoet still resists, and once again, poetically responds to power. First obvious one is Chavo’s ability to harm the landlord. That is, he is not above anyone, ni los perros de abajo. Agitated, Barrera retrieves his briefcase (getting down to business) and screams, “Tenía que ser el Chavo del Ocho.” This phrase denotes two-things: first, that because Don Ramon yelled El Chavo, we get a sense of the public notoriety But rather than popping off on Chavo, Mr. Barrera, approaches him, voice aggravated, “Siempre que llego al vecindad, me tienes que recibir con un golpe?” And rather than ordering him to stop, he
rhetorically asks, *casí hasta al punto de llorar*, “No habrá otra manera de evitar esto Chavito.” And *fíjense nomás*, Chavo responds, “Yes, don’t come to the neighborhood.” And this is the beauty of the moment. The fact that whereas Mr. Barreras must elide direct confrontation with Chavo, our *querido huérfano* fully embraces it. Rather than his abject status (whether economically, or otherwise) serving as an impediment to facing “The Man,” *a lo contrario*, it actually affords it. It is precisely because of his notoriety as the community’s *pendejo* (forgive my *insulto carnal*), that he can get away with these remarks. But even so, the landlord can’t believe what he’s hearing, I mean, just look at his face: *osico* flared, *ojos pelados*, no puede creer lo que esta escuchando. But el primo Quico pulls through with “Mr. Tummy has to come, because has to collect the rent.” (The joke is a bit lost in translation, as the landlord’s lastname, Barreras, closely resembles the slang word for tummy, “barriga.”) So even while telling Chavo, “you’re an idiot,” Quico sneaks in his own jabs as well.

Again, cut later *por ejemplo* into the scene where the landlord asks Don Ramón for money. Barreras presses on with the capitalist logic of complete apathy for unfortunate circumstance. Sarcastically, Barreras asks I’m sorry to hear that, but you bear in mind that it has nothing to do with the payment of the rent. Do you think I eat air.” Note El Chavo’s retort. Pointing to his stomach he says, “Pues parece que sí.”

Never once does the landlord gain the upper hand, instead he tosses him around *como un mono tirado*. In fact, not only does Mr. Barriga fail to collect the rent, but in a rare captivity of pathos, pays for a meal for Chavo. Inquisitively, and with clear concern, Mr. Barriga asks, “Quieren decir que esos huevos que rompieron eran el desuyano del Chavo Del Ocho.” To which Don Ramón responds, “Y el mío durante ocho días.” The camera, as Ramon is saying this, zooms in on Mr. Barrigo, thus implicating his accountability in this issue. Barrega stutters and
looks down (in symbolic shame) for having demanded for rent when his tenets can barely afford a meal a week. He quivers from his pocket as asks, “Bueno, yo quisieria saber…con diez pesos alcanzará.” Es decir, by asking if ten dollars would be enough, Barrega essentially offers a blank check. This poor’s biblical period of waiting to eat has left an indelible mark on the landlord. Pero los de la vecindad aren’t bowing in gratitude, but in their constant mishaps (in pronunciations), mock the la clase media even further,

Don Ramon halts the excited Chilindrina and Chavo, to give an impromptu thank you. He invites a moment of veneration. Pero como los de mas, he keeps tripping up on his words. Ramon says, Usted es un barriga senor santo.” Ramon catches the mistake, and corrects himself (only to mess up again): “Digo usted es un santo, senor Barriga.” Even while using the respectful “usted” grammar, as well exalting the landlord to the status of saint, Ramon inadvertently manages to insult Barrega, on account of his portly build. Such jabs quickly devolve the words of dedication into a roast, in a sense, brining Barrega to their level. Or if one would like to re-phrase the action in political term, levelling. Through mundane acts of humiliation, the oppressor’s illusion of power—recall George Jackson’s writings on the prestige of corporate fascism—is demystified. Retrospectively then, perhaps these mistakes aren’t errors at all, but calculated, shrewd efforts to cut into the imagined untouchability of the higher classes.

If we extrapolate a bit further on the power of this function, we may position TV sitcom within a larger genealogy of subaltern techniques of resistance. Thus, we can rescue television from elite readings as the par excellence of a brainwashing “Culture Industry,” and as a radical imitation of an unjust class system. Impersonating the oppressor has a rich tradition through media such as “The People’s Court” (a notable protest repertoire of the Black and Chicano Power movements), Augusto Boal’s Theatre of the Oppressed, and other examples.
From the vantage point of a scholar, I’d suggest another addendum to re-reading the medium of television. We may re-consider *El Chavo del Ocho* as tele-ethnography. A revision of anthropological work itself as not the fieldwork of a specific and confined geographical site, but the study of a people through the hyperbolic tendencies of vernacular comedy. It is the black American “dozens” *in media res*, a collective therapy session for listeners across Mexican barrios for how to live in a space increasingly threatened by (An)globalization. For if they can laugh at their pain, we can certainly make sense of ours, which however rough pales in comparison.

The episode *El Desayuno* ends without an actual breakfast. Moreover, it ends how it stats, with El Chavo helplessly waiting for Don Ramon to wake up and serve him a meal. The capítulo comes full circle. A pessimist reading would dictate that nothing has changed. *Y a lo mejor, tendrá razón*. Chavo is without food, the landlord at best postponed the rent for next month. One critical difference remains however: the characters and viewers gained a powerful laugh. It wouldn’t be farfetched to compare such emotional uplift with the empowering effect of the Black Church. Such is, the quasi-divine uplift of laughter.

**Concluding Thoughts: Man Behind the Mask - Chespirito and Self**

This section etched out the redeemable qualities of the TV sitcom medium, specifically within the context of late 20th century Mexican television. Figures like El Chavo perform a social masking that ostensibly is a bunch of payasiadas, but inherently addresses painful issues of food insecurity, indigency, and social inequality. Chicano readings of mask then retroactively re-
define mask not as a concealment, but an oblique exhibiting of suffering, one dressed in *carcajadas*.

But to reinforce the nimble movement of the ethnopoet as actor, consider the interview with the writer himself, Roberto Gomez Bolanos, a.k.a., “Chespirito.” In a 1987 interview, when asked if he worked for the kids, he responded, no, I don’t work for the kids. He instead responded with, “Yo trabajo por todo el mundo.” Throughout the interview, Bolanos resists professionalization itself, the relegating of his humanist craft to certain age groups, the assignment of having “to work for” someone. And so here is one of arguably the most prolific, celebrated writers of Mexican television history, being pigeonholed as writing cartoon shows. Clearly, you can see the grimace in his face, the way he grips his shoulders, the bitten lips. When asked if he has any vices, he responds, with eyebrows widened, “No, una nostalgia.” Bolanos, at every opportunity, opens the discursive space, nuancing it to mock the poverty the current state of comedy within Mexican popular media, without his interviewers detecting even the faintest hint of trickery.

Chespirito es en filosofó. But he’s also more than that. As cultural critic, Chespirito pushes the envelope of meaning past its corporate semiotics. For example, when asked about if anyone thought he didn’t know how to manage his success (“éxito”), he stated, “success is when one dies.” For he who believes he has success, “Suddenly the interviews cut him off with, “But that’s the objective,” he insists, “No…” *hay que buscar el siguiente y el siguiente y ascender. Llegar es fatal.*” Chespirito has already said so much, and sadly, is so under-understood. For the ethnopoet, there is no endgoal, only a ceaseless trajectory, an ethic of self-improvement. Now when asked if Superman is a hero, Bolanos responds, “No, to me, Chapulín is a hero, and this is
serious. Heroism doesn’t consist of lack of fear, but rather to overcome it. Those guys don’t have fear. Batman, Superman they’re all-powerful, they can’t be afraid. El Chapulín Colorado *se muere de miedo. Es torpe, debil, tonto, etc., y consciente de esas deficiencias se enfrente al problema. Eso es un heroe.*” Indeed, as it would seem, Bolanos has departed miles from the masculinized, glorified figure of superman. That elevated icon, completely severed from mortaled beings, is not the one worth emulating. No, *para “Chespirto”* this acknowledgement and one’s fears, and necessarily working through its limitations, embodies true heroism.

How does the ethnopoet dance through her intentions, all the while hiding them? How does she disrupt cultural constructions of what defines success, legacy, celebrity, art without ever making of herself? What ciphers, translations, and other ‘acts’ are necessary to mediate these interventions? How do displaced subjects respond to seemingly ruthless power structures in ways that level (even the odds) of negotiating the agency in their spaces? This section sought to map out praxis navigation of such movements, calling for a couple reading of mask as noun and verb. The former, as crystalized mode of disguise, with the latter as unpacking the complexity of the former. As aforementioned, such concealment is not a uni-dimensional smuggling of shame, but a punctuation of the silence. We once again return to the classic, post-colonial inquiry, how does one speak within silence? The Zapatistas, to quote just one revolutionary group, responded with the poetic maxim: “We wear our masks to be seen.”

And as I close an inexhaustible topic, frustrated at how little I’ve gleaned on a rich tradition, I take solace at my own ambassador role. All my life, I’ve studied under this strange language (or *diré*, languish), trying to *arrinconar* my own sensibilities, mannerisms, customs. I take off my own mask, and recite myself…
I, in observatories of privilege.

The Americanization of a spic

Theorize, essay, posit.

The way a drunkard miscalculates a doorstep.

I let my guard down, and reach that out-of-reach Shakespearean script: “drunkard.” Oigo MacBeth, an affluent 10th grade English class, and finally, retrieve myself. I look across the poetic reflections, and see Antonio Lopez, the Mexican Muslim radical poet. One minute masking my pain, another boasting it, code-switching, two-stepping Chicano, vicariously studying blackness as a racial surrogate, a roadmap to make sense of minoritization within the United States. Para llegar a los pasillos de poder, it is inevitable that I encounter white supremacy. And so, like chespirito—literally Spanish version of “Little Shakespeare”—I adopt the name, but not without Latinizing it first. That is to say, I study the English language, without succumbing to its feigned universality. As my father remarked to me once, “no estás en escuela para tener amigos.” Y sabes ‘pa, tienes razón. I am here para honorles, y más importante, las tradiciones que me crillaron. Barely audible are the Audobon Ballrooms that cultivated my bottomless commitment to social justice. So if Louis Reyes Rivera asked, “Did you hear the bullet cry,” if Amiri Baraka transformed “Lyrics into bullets,” and if Subcomandante Marcos proclamó that “The Word is My Weapon,” then nothing I’ve said is new.

This thesis is a vow, one doubly instilled as a servant of Allah and by family. To me, there is no greater homage paid than to theorize (and academically speaking justify), que mi vida vale. Before I may speak, I must spic, into existence...
Works Cited


---

1 Case in point, if I would’ve said this in English, it’d be: Sometimes, it doesn’t convenience us. Sounds so blocky and antiquated right, doesn’t capture the texture of what the moment demands. Indeed, poetry is a demand, for the language chooses me, y no el contrario.
2 See subsequent chapter greater detail.
3 It is critical to distinguish between “the grammar usage of “the” vs. “a,” for the former supposes a singular recourse, while the latter simply declares one option, presumably amongst many. The power of decolonial thinking, as Walter Mignolo and others have described it, lies precisely in its aversion in monopolizing any set of alternatives within any given moment
4 Note Sandavol’s insistence to enfranchise *all* peoples, using the term practitioners as opposed to one demographic
5 This deferral is the subject of our next chapter.
6 Note once again the use of ‘a’ versus ‘the’ as a pluralizing of decolonial options. Lest, we return modernity’s feigned teleology of the future
8 I use moving in both the kinesthetic, and affective sense.
9 A term borrowed from the title of Tommie Smith’s autobiography
10 I use the term example to emphasize how this chapter is just one instantiation of the limitless trajectories of ethno-poet’s origins.
11 In *Encountering Development*, Arturo Escobar offers “regimes of representation” as one of the theoretical-methodological principles for examining the mechanisms of Third World’s construction. Charting these regimes of representation is a Deluzian cartography. That is, maps of knowledge and power configuration defining the post-WWII period. These maps, by extension, reveal cartographies of struggle, the categories through which people fight through. This essay wedds then two theoretical concepts within the subject-position of Chicano literature.
12 Returning to the question of “cartographies of struggle,” Sandoval stresses this method of oppositional consciousness not as typology, but as *cultural topography*, a “charting of psychic and material realities.” That is, this landscape delineates a set of critical points that capacitate subaltern groups to transform dominant powers to resistant citizen-subjects—Fanon’s “zone of hidden fluctuation,” Althusser’s “means and occasions” (42). Each locus is a “repository” wherein these groups may take on or discard subjectivities. Reading Rodriguez’s auto-biography in this sense nuances his memoirs less as a chronological series of events, but uneven cesspools that hold complex affects, all again inscribed within the crisis of the native speaker. A translator, traitor, mourner, enunciator, amplifier, all in one breath. But far from *traisionero*, one holds into the ideologically contradictory object, in order to invest it with new life (Munoz 12).
13 For instance, Rodriguez inadvertently “chooses” the loss of his Mexican heritage for upward mobility. Note the complication of “choice” for the ethnic subject, given the destabilization of a self-governing individual
14 This language-policing is intra-linguistic as well, stigmatizing racialized vernaculars, forms of speech, and accent. Note the casual anti-black rhetoric in the passage, “My city seems silent until some ghetto black teenagers board the bus I am on…Of all the accented versions of English I hear in a day, I hear theirs most intently. They are the sounds of an outsider. They annoy me for being loud…(33) Latino native speakers therefore face a dual oppression of both learning English and approximating a *white voice*.
15 For less abstract musings on the complex agency within mimesis, consider the role of comedian as disguised public intellectuals. In Kovie Biakolo’s subtitle title, “Why do people of color make fun of white people,” the author explicates this “anti”-white humor as a tool of survival in a matrix of identity, privilege, and disadvantage. In “making fun of *the oppressor,*” dispossessed subjects cut away at the imagined allure, but again, precisely by imitating them. Thus, mimesis cannot be a vicious telos that inevitably leads towards grieving over own’s exhibition, as Chow
hindered, but reveals crevices of resistance, ones founded at the realm of (re)imagination. It circumvents the constraints of “political correctness.” These payasos are modern court-jesters, bearers of bad news to the King that no one else dared deliver.

16 I purposeful use poly-linguistic in contrast to multi-, which suggests an aggregate that flattens the contours within each language, thus flattening them under an epistemological violent liberal discourse.

17 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2Wh_yMmEFTI-A

18 I’m well aware of overdue revision that America doesn’t entail the entire Americas. To depart from such arrogant qualifiers, I instead use the term Amerikka, a reference to the Ku Klux Klan as rather than an anomaly to our historical textbook, is at the heart of the United States project. Hence Ta-Nehisi Coates’ “Letter to My Son,” where he confesses, “In America, it is traditional to destroy the black body—it is heritage” http://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2015/07/tanehisi-coates-between-the-world-and-me/397619/

19 I must detract from my own pessimism

20 A New York Times opinion piece reported that from 1848-1928, mobs murdered thousands of Mexicans, though surviving records allowed only clear documentation of 547 cases - http://www.nytimes.com/2015/02/01/opinion/when-americans-lynched-mexicans.html?_r=0

21 Indeed we must emphasize the subtle distinction between politically vs. poetically, the former bound within the Aristotelian ethic to raise up a virtuous community [see http://www.unc.edu/~wfrance/antonius.html#], thus confined within relations of power [however moralized], vs. an ostensibly dis-engage ment with an uphill battle. Poetics serves as a shorthand for the myriad ways marginalized peoples resist oppressor, precisely by re-existing (and thereby dissolving these binary positions).

22 http://www.politifact.com/truth-o-meter/statements/2016/jan/13/barack-obama/obama-us-spends-more-military-next-8-nations-combi/

23 One should not lose sight of the close association of dress and re-dress. That is, the physical choice of clothing, but the rectifying of an unfair size. As Merriam Webster defines it, http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/epigraph

24 Or perhaps end-text its more apt, as these are the epigraph’s last words.

25 “I was Born”, Slave Narratives, Their Status as Autobiography and as Literature

26 And for all ensembled subjects, whether explicitly or by default by the entrapment of their social conditions

27 See endnote xv

28 Angela Davis’ Are Prisons Obsolete? calls for abolition of the mass incarceration system, constituting a new age slavery. Michelle Alexander’s New Jim Crow further attenuates the present moment as haunting [to invoke Avery Gordon’s own methodology], us back to formal segregation, with all its caste inequities.

29 Manning Marable’s Living Black History: How Reimaging the African-American Past Can Remake America’s Racial Future

30 See a brief survey of documentaries such as National Geographic’s The Worlds’ Most Dangerous Gang, Betrayal an insidious, sahara-like, consumption of the ethnic body. Just for kicks and giggles, take Time article’s “Pocho’s Progress,” (1967), describing East L.A. as “Rollicking catinas with the reek of cheap red wine and greasy stands and the rat-tat-tat of low riding cars down the avenue.” http://content.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,843658,00.html

31 Never mind the use of the word pocho, a derogatory term for those who lack fluency in Spanish, originally reserved for rotten fruit. Chicano movement leader Sal Castro said he began feeling a weight on his shoulders. Indeed, such peso is a concientzacion [to employ Paolo Freire’s term] of the white gaze.

32 In his preface to Wretched of the Earth, Jean-Paul Sarte phrased the challenge for self-reflection as such: “Let us look at ourselves, if we can bear to, and see what is becoming of us. First, we must face the strip-tease of our humanism. There you can see it, quite naked, and it’s not a pretty sight.” Such parallels are non-coincidental, as both gesture to the eroticism of white power. Another classic instance is found in Ralph Ellison’s Invisible Man, where in the first few pages of the widely acclaimed novel, the protagonist is ushered into a boxing match watched by the upper echelon of white male society. “The hair was yellow like that of a circus kwickie doll, the face heavily powdered and rouged, as though to form an abstract mask, the eyes hollow and smeared a cool blue, the color of a baboon’s butt. I felt a desire to spit upon her belly and cover her from my eyes and the eyes of the others with my body; to feel the soft thighs, to caress her and destroy her, to love her and murder her, to hide from her, and yet to stroke where below the American flag tattooed upon her belly her thighs formed a capital V.” (Ellison 15-16). Note Ellison’s withholding to gender the subject until after a few lines His use of the peculiar phrase, a “coming to” ingrained in the author’s syntax. The phrase, a “bacon’s butt,” underlines the absurdity of the whole spectacle. Lastly, it’s critical to stress such violent, sexually deranged language only makes sense within a heteronormative, male of color mentality, the simultaneous desire to be ‘fuck’ and reject whiteness. He, to put it bluntly, doesn’t know what to do with himself. Black subservience and male chauvinist aggression trip over each other, creating a delicious, all-over-the-place pacing. Elridge Cleaver’s Soul on Ice illustrates this distortion at its most misogynistic, “Rape was an insurrectionary act. It delighted me that I was defying and trampling upon the white man’s law, upon his system of values, and that I was defiling his women…I felt I was getting revenge.” We can better stomach Fanon’s variation, “By loving me she proves that I am worthy of white love. I am loved like a white man.” The reiterations of “white” act are, in one sense, the corollary to Petri’s own repetition of “SPIC SPIC SPIC” (see chapter 2.5). Within black misogyny, citizenship is accessed and article through female possession.

33 http://www.marxists.org/archive/sartre/1961/preface.htm

34 The use of the word “surviving” already alarming the reader to an encroaching endangerment of black Americans.

35 As Marshall McLuhan tells us, the medium is the message.


37 Or perhaps end-text its more apt, as these are the epigraph’s last words.

38 “I was Born”, Slave Narratives, Their Status as Autobiography and as Literature

39 And for all ensembled subjects, whether explicitly or by default by the entrapment of their social conditions

40 See Manning Marable’s Living Black History: How Reimaging the African-American Past Can Remake America’s Racial Future

41 The phrase is consciously modeled on Avery Gordon’s Ghost Matters for more detailed explanation of conjuring, and the way I intended to use it. The carnal quality of using the word “flesh” is intentional.

42 Since should deconstruct the phenomenology of such a vague construct, instead point towards the social, cultural, political constructions of ‘reality.’ A constant, yet unstable and tenuous, awareness of the present moment.

43 Such absurdity is not Camus’ struggle to seek inherent value and meaning of life in a world bereft of one. Rather, this absurdity is a haunting, that goose-bump, fatigue-provoking feeling, that ‘shit ain’t change but the day.’ Dark bodies are still hunted and still being held down, Trump supporters raise their right-hand like the Third Reich, clansmen be holding rallies on the weekly.

44 https://www.marxists.org/archive/lukacs/history/hcc05.htm

45 See endnote xv

46 http://www.politifact.com/truth-o-meter/statements/2016/jan/13/barack-obama/obama-us-spends-more-military-next-8-nations-combi/

47 See Manning Marable’s Living Black History: How Reimaging the African-American Past Can Remake America’s Racial Future

48 See endnote xv

49 http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/reify

50 A brief survey of documentaries such as National Geographic’s The Worlds’ Most Dangerous Gang, Betrayal an insidious, safari-like, consumption of the ethnic body. Just for kicks and giggles, take Time article’s “Pocho’s Progress,” (1967), describing East L.A. as “Rollicking catinas with the reek of cheap red wine and greasy stands and the rat-tat-tat of low riding cars down the avenue.” http://content.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,843658,00.html

51 Never mind the use of the word pocho, a derogatory term for those who lack fluency in Spanish, originally reserved for rotten fruit. Chicano movement leader Sal Castro said he began feeling a weight on his shoulders. Indeed, such peso is a concientzacion [to employ Paolo Freire’s term] of the white gaze.

52 In his preface to Wretched of the Earth, Jean-Paul Sarte phrased the challenge for self-reflection as such: “Let us look at ourselves, if we can bear to, and see what is becoming of us. First, we must face the strip-tease of our humanism. There you can see it, quite naked, and it’s not a pretty sight.” Such parallels are non-coincidental, as both gesture to the eroticism of white power. Another classic instance is found in Ralph Ellison’s Invisible Man, where in the first few pages of the widely acclaimed novel, the protagonist is ushered into a boxing match watched by the upper echelon of white male society. “The hair was yellow like that of a circus kwickie doll, the face heavily powdered and rouged, as though to form an abstract mask, the eyes hollow and smeared a cool blue, the color of a baboon’s butt. I felt a desire to spit upon her as my eyes brushed slowly over her body. . .I wanted at one and the same time to run from the room, to sink through the floor, or to go to her and cover her from my eyes and the eyes of the others with my body; to feel the soft thighs, to caress her and destroy her, to love her and murder her, to hide from her, and yet to stroke where below the American flag tattooed upon her belly her thighs formed a capital V.” (Ellison 15-16). Note Ellison’s withholding to gender the subject until after a few lines His use of the peculiar phrase, a “coming to” ingrained in the author’s syntax. The phrase, a “bacon’s butt,” underlines the absurdity of the whole spectacle. Lastly, it’s critical to stress such violent, sexually deranged language only makes sense within a heteronormative, male of color mentality, the simultaneous desire to be ‘fuck’ and reject whiteness. He, to put it bluntly, doesn’t know what to do with himself. Black subservience and male chauvinist aggression trip over each other, creating a delicious, all-over-the-place pacing. Elridge Cleaver’s Soul on Ice illustrates this distortion at its most misogynistic, “Rape was an insurrectionary act. It delighted me that I was defying and trampling upon the white man’s law, upon his system of values, and that I was defiling his women…I felt I was getting revenge.” We can better stomach Fanon’s variation, “By loving me she proves that I am worthy of white love. I am loved like a white man.” The reiterations of “white” act are, in one sense, the corollary to Petri’s own repetition of “SPIC SPIC SPIC” (see chapter 2.5). Within black misogyny, citizenship is accessed and article through female possession.

Aihwa Ong’s “Neoliberalism as a Mobile Technology” adds that proviso that its universalization is not taken uniformly, but rather, “a logic of governing that migrates and is selectively taken up in diverse political contexts” (http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1475-5661.2007.00234.x/abstract (3))

Frantz Fanon, “On Violence”

Anthony Burgess’ A Clockwork Orange

A reference to the cell phone video documenting Staten Island police’s murder of Eric Garner

I am again insistent on the anatomical analogies

Claudia Milan’s “Southern Latitudes” is ground-breaking in even further expanding the conventional boundaries of what (and where) it means to be Latino. Found in Black-Brown Passages and the Coloring of Latinolà Studies

https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/download/pdf/18th-Brumaire.pdf

And rehearse, to use Tanya Shields’ term. https://monthlyreview.org/2004/06/01/puerto-rican-obituary/

http://palante.org/YLPProg.html

Although as Juan Gonzalez comments, their dissolve is also due to internal divisions

http://monthlyreview.org/2004/06/01/puerto-rican-obituary/

which of course is all due to the fact that white society chose not to see what had been going on. And this was a very important part of black colour in the United States. And it is an important part of black colour in the United States. And it is an important part of black colour in the United States.

My use of the term racial insomnia is inspired by earlier considerations of 9-member rap collective Wu-Tang Clan is a comprised of All in Together Now and six Five Percenters. From their third album, The W (2000), Wu Tang Clan’s “I Can’t Go to Sleep,” performs the racial insomnia endemic in remembering horrible atrocities committed against one’s own people. In mournful riff, Ghostface Killah cries, in a Jeremiah-like resurrection, a prophecy spelling damnation for his killers, “For those that murdered me shall stand before God/Tol fall at the hands of fate, then out comes the rod.”

In his introduction to Wretched of the Earth, Sartre plays [performs] a similar role of warning. Sartre acts as a kind of coroner, a native informant to his white peers of the horrors of their own actions. He writes, “the yellow and black voices still spoke of our humanism but only to reproach us of inhumanity. We listened without displeasure to these polite statements of resentment, at first with proud amazement. What? They are able to talk to themselves? Just look at what we have made of them!” Through his satirical hand-walking, Sartre is mocking the paternalist logic that deems people of color as inarticulate, degenerate, and largely unwilling to fend for themselves. But Fanon’s explanation is more than sufficient, so the question is, why the need for Sartre? Reason being is because Fanon, by himself, possesses a terrifying intellect, literally striking fear into the hearts of uppity humanitarian. As such, white liberal preface acts as a saucer, rendering tepid (and therefor insufficient, so the question is, why the need for SarPRI 15). Significantly, the term also encompasses a high possibility of error and accuracy in interpreting what happens to us (40). It is a case of cinematic reenactment, as the martyr’s final moments may be replayed on the screen, as if to say, “Not to worry, I know them personally. We may pass through the trap, but we know the escape route.”

I retrieve the term and re-frame within inner city Amerikka. I am again insistent on the anatomical analogies

61.2007.00234.x/abstract (3)

Paula Moya argues that some identities are more “politically progressive,” for they allow a critical perspective from which we can disclose the “complicated workings of ideology and oppression” (27). Implicit in this claim is a reality that’s causally independent of human mental constructions. The different social categories that together constitute an individual’s location affect the experiences she will have. Experience induces identity, but does not determine, the formation of cultural identity. Each identity, in turn, contains an “epistemic component” that allows for the possibility of error and accuracy in interpreting what happens to us (40). It is this theoretical meditation of ongoing experiences that creates disparities between understandings with reality. Because some identities more adequately account for the social categories that constitute an individual’s social location, it possesses greater knowledge-value.

To emphasize the theatrical, performative quality of power

Literally, as in a blue jumpsuit

https://muse.jhu.edu/journals/ah/summary/v012/12.1haggerty.html

http://fivestandard.com/UserMedia/21445408

The Spanish word aprovecha is most appropriate here. It closely translates to “take advantage of,” without the sense of abuse it confers. I could’ve used the English alternatives of utilizes, deploys, privileges, but they were too clunky and doesn’t capture the ethno-poetic resistance Beyoncé mounts.


Ibid. His death sparked memorial videos online as well, going to show how loved the man was. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KgqndCACiBo


The term ‘vulnerability’ is borrowed from conventional discourses of underdeveloped countries. As Caribbean think-tank CaPRI defines it, vulnerability is a multifaceted concept, implying a susceptibility to risk or threat of harm which augments significantly depending on specific characteristics of a particular country (15). Asha Kambon nuances this definition with an applicability to any human or natural system interacting with its environment (Kambon 108). Economically, vulnerability refers to an exposure of an economy to exogenous shocks resulting from economic openness, export concentration, and dependence on strategic imports (CaPRI 15). Significantly, the term also encompasses a high susceptibility to natural disasters such as storms and hurricanes, both frequently transpiring in Caribbean region (CaPRI 15). Ultimately, due to vulnerability’s inherently structural quality, coupled by a lack of market power and domestic resource-base, little may be done to fully ameliorate external shock’s impacts (CaPRI 15)1. I retrieve the term and re-frame within inner city Amerikka.
I use the term “a Beyoncé” to underline the self-multiplicities she is navigating through as a means of charting these historical productions of blackness narrated by “stylin’” womanhood.

The use of the Spanish ensayar is crucial here, as it may express either an “essay,” or a test. I fondly remember childhood memories of practicing for *quinceañera* around the family, and being one of the only male cousins in the extended family. I became the go-to *chambelan*. But when rehearsing for our entrance walk, introducing the young woman of the evening, we’d call it ensayar. This simultaneity of rehearsal and essaying is fruitful when addressing the historical-epiphenomenological (re)productions of blackness. Lastly, *ensayo* expands the presumed ownership of Beyoncé’s video as in fact, a collective event.

To return to the previous chapter’s opening remarks on James Baldwin’s *Notes of a Native Son*, it’s crucial to note that she never uses the term “my ladies,” thus distancing the masculinist language of empowerment via possession. To employ French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu’s term, a socialized norms or tendencies guiding behavior and thinking. http://www.powercube.net/other-forms-of-power/bourdieu-and-habitus/

In her 1989 landmark essay, Linda Hutchinson coined post-modernism as “complicitous critique,” the simultaneous rejection of a position whilst speaking within its very corridors. Andy Warhol’s mass culture critique of “Campels Chicken Noodle” is the par excellence of this.

To borrow from Saidiya V. Hartman’s term, illuminating the forms of domination that usually go undetected.

In no way, shape or form, seek to mock the mental health condition, nor to equate and say they are one and the same. Rather, I merely wish to use its connotation of split personality, one I fruitful, especially when considering the aforementioned pathology of the ethnopoetic patient. (Those who never made it to their beloved subject, must wait four hundred centuries in order to witness some form of redress).

Conventionally, orality is defined as the thought and verbal expression in societies where literacy technologies are unfamiliar to the majority of the population. Indeed, it is a re-reading (perhaps a re-reading of re-reading itself), of illiterate peoples, one that breaks into the very understanding of what it is to be human being, conscious of self, and other abstract philosophical questions. Orality is thus intended as a democratization of voice that accounts for the disproportionate access to traditional resources of literacy, and stresses the intrinsic value found outside the margins of writing, print, and electronic technology. See Walter Ong’s *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word*.

Self-quoting from an article I wrote earlier this year in honor of LatinxHeritageMonth. http://www.dukechronicle.com/article/2015/10/a-dying-puternalism.

An insidious nexus of recruitment, acceptance, and the disillusionment that such efforts to obtain you were largely student-driven, and lacked critical infrastructure of retention, that students may rely on continually and adequately foster a sense of community.

Which, if you recall, in dominant schemes, works invisibly.

When your face is on the box of Wheaties type stature.

Existence in the sense of legibility to the public sphere.

In other words, even when taking a shit, whiteness presents itself as, implicitly, the remover of filth.

Carlos and Smith would not receive the same warmth.

Other interpretations of early 20th century black Islam are far less generous. C. Eric Lincoln’s classic, *The Black Muslims in America* (1961), for instance discounted any religiosity of the Black Muslim movement, spearheaded by the Nation of Islam. For Lincoln, spirituality mattered insofar as it fostered “the sense of group solidarity” (2). Its salience stemmed from an “exclusionary sense of community” among members; the essence of black nationalism,

To use Manning Marables’ term, found in Race, Reform, Rebellion: The Second Reconstruction and Beyond in Black America, 1945–2006, page 73.

An elitist, problematic term that we must interrogate, if not for a brief moment.

Paralleling Beyonce and Lamar’s own choice of attire for their respective performances.

The salute parallels the myriad of interpretations of the Civil Rights Movement, a discursive historical term that, when broken down, reveal a whole slew contradictory messages.

It’s important to remember however, that 2nd place winner, Peter Norman, expressed his sympathies and support for Smith and Carlos’ actions, exemplified by his decision to wear the OHIP badge. The inclusion of Norman alone in the conversation debunks the narrative of Black Power as refusing to work with white people, and shows the inter-racial components.

Nevertheless, another caveat must deal with the sanitization of Carlos and Smith’s public memory, depicted as courageous men in no way, shape or form, see the triple homicide as a parking dispute. May Allah make their graves a garden in Jennah.
I remember earlier this year contemplating a similar thing, to which a fraternity of mine responded with, “They’ll just let you die bro.” An opinion piece even emerged from the Mizzou athletes, titled, “When athletes unite, the powerful listen” http://www.cnn.com/2015/11/09/opinions/mizzou-missouri-president-resignation/index.html

http://dukechronicle.com/article/2015/11/students-present-demands-to-administrators-at-follow-up-forum-friday

The same white man, so he doesn’t even have the excuse to say that was the previous administration. Never mind the fact that institutional memory stresses that shrugging your shoulders to say an issue wasn’t your specific doing does not absolve you of fault.

“Sabes he tenido tantas personas, administradores, what is so important about a physical space. And to make the record clear, it is a symbol that this university gives a damn that their students have some roncconcierto en el cielo (Ramon Ayala style) to call their own. It is in integral in establishing “a safe environment conducive to learning” (“Duke Without Mi Gente”).

By juxtaposing the two, I do not seek to equate them only to reinforce their mutual deployment of silent gesture, one that Carlos and Smith performed, and Mi Gente articulated.

As Latinx studies scholars then, we are double burdened to both salvage these sounds that rang through our salas, while still preserving this agro quality of el triste payaso. Other sites include the pandillero’s clown face – “Laugh now, cry later.”

As Latinx scholars then, we are double burdened to both salvage these sounds that rang through our salas, while still preserving this important tensions. Otherwise, we romanticize these images due to our pseudo-nationalist sentiments. We’d do a disservice to the complexity of our people.

After all, como declaró ese gran maestro, Marco Antonio Solís, (A.K.A. that guy we saw on the tele that we thought was Jesus Christ), “En la pobreza se sabe a quimer” – Tu Carcel (1987)

You know, that same tienda que tu mamá would go to, circling the same clearance rack for four hours, while you sat at the bottom bars of it, waiting.

Just the way we pronounce this word is a tienda in itself, bustling with sounds and vibrant energy. (A-ey-ro-pos-le). Of nomas.

See Banda Jerez’s song, “Tamarindo.” Excerpt of one of the lyrics are as follows: tamarindo/pa las mujeres que estan deseosas de mariditos/tamarindo/si mis mujeres me piden uno/y se los doy uno me piden dos/yo les doy dos me piden tres/yo les doy tres me piden cuatro/yo les doy cinco/tamarindo.”

Remember having 2 or 3 at parties, one for the little chiquillos, another for adolescents, another for grown folks, but theirs just had toronjas or something.

Our lovely actors always playing the game of hot-potato (pass the darkest complexion)

A technique so artificial and inorganic, it tells the audience when to laugh. It’s commodified disembodied laughter.

http://chespirito.com/

A brief note on the collective pronoun, “We.” It’s critical to highlight to participatory power of television audiences. The camera in particular, is a medium that aligns itself with the viewer, and vice versa. Therefore, whereas I originally wrote, “the camera closes in,” I realized that we too, as viewers, are implicated and responsible for all affect produced by looking through its lens.

Skinny eats from my father’s childhood who were so skinny, the word “seco” [dry] re-signifies as an emaciated state.

Note again, the anger over 12 broken egg only underscores further their abject predicament.

I use the word arteries intentionally, to connote the biological sense of how the dialogue is the lifeblood of the show. Indeed, the means by which it transmutes messages of healing to its viewers.

Notoriety in the very sense of the world, as it designates an official documentation, as well as a kind of infamy.

Otro dicho de mis papas. The cultural imperialism lies in the fact that I cannot cite them. There is no glossary that includes them. Therefore, it’s up to me to inscribe them. Hence the academic borderlands I must wander through: “I speak of El Rio Grande, of my father’s sweat, christening the border fence—that coyote ritual baptizing entry. He is an unlicensed doctor, each I.V. drop cleanses the barbed wire politics lodged inside my broat. He is a historian sin doctorado, for his heroism never appears in textbooks, at best smuggling footnotes in his huaraches, in costales de frijol” – Antonio Lopez, “A Dying Paternalism”
Again, the joke is lost in translation. *Les digo que el ingles no es lo mismo...*

Leon Litwack’s Trouble in Mind documents the psychological refuge of this sacred institution.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lVorDxawquaM

See how butchered it sounds in English. *Vices. Sounds so formal, whereas vicios just rolls like freshly cerro’d rain off adobe shingles.*

As if already anticipating the ridicule from the interviewers.

Joy James’ *Imprisoned Intellectuals* makes the apt distinction between radical and revolutionary, the former merely espousal leftist ideologies, while the latter both actively seeks to destroy the status quo, and create new structures (xiii)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ElAqJK4rJs

Recall Baraka’s “Black Art” http://www.nathanielturner.com/blackart.htm

I parenthcize justify because under its sanitized scrutiny, the Euro-worshipping tower relegates our struggles as ethnic fantasy. I am burdened to first deflect the white noise, marketing apparatuses that strategically elide my difference—stripping it of its threat—to exhibiting skin-toned cash crop.

In no way do I seek to re-appropriate the #BlackLivesMatter slogan.