DECOLONIAL DELINQUENCY: GENDER, SEXUALITY, AND CRIMINALITY IN LATINA/O GANG LITERATURE AND FILM

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ABSTRACT

Decolonial Delinquency studies the representation of violence and criminality in Latina/o literature and film since 1950. The project analyzes a range of genres, including fiction, autobiography, poetry, and documentary, to uncover how cultural production discloses a systemic impetus to gang violence in working-class communities of color. In doing so, this dissertation reveals how these texts position gangs as resistant subcultures for persons whom the United States colonizes.

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CHAPTER 1: REARTICULATING *LA VIDA LOCA*: GANG SUBCULTURES AS DECOLONIAL PRAXIS

Tino Villanueva's 1971 elegy "Aquellos Vatos" queers a figure almost always envisioned as heterosexual in popular literature, film, culture, and academic scholarship: the gang member.[1] The poem centers on thirteen former gang members who have aged-out of their gang, leaving behind their youthful lives of delinquency and violence. Except for the anonymous speaker, each of these gang members bears a nickname: la Zorra, el Caballo, la Polla, el Pato, la Rata, el Conejo, la Perra, el Gorrión, la Chiva, el Bear, la Burra, and el Tiger. Disheartened from the dissolution of the community the gang once shared, the speaker reminisces—both amicably and adversely—about each gang member, his attributes, and his capacity for crime, such as "El Conejo" who was "todo locote" [completely crazy] and "la Chiva de McAllen" who "always had a movida chueca [illegal deal] somewhere up town" (Villanueva 42). Unlike banal representations of predominantly male street gangs, this poem does not lionize heterosexual hypermasculinity and instead features queer men not as marginal gang members subject to hate crime but as full citizen-subjects of the gang.[2] Steeped in homoeroticism and Chicana/o Caló, the poem suggests that the majority of these gang members are queer.[3] While el Pato translates word-for-word as "the Duck," in Caló parlance and certain Spanish/Spanglish dialects in the Southwest the term acts as an epithet for queer men. But in "Aquellos Vatos," el Pato does not encounter shame or violence in the gang. By contrast, the speaker mourns the loss of el Pato's friendship and remembers him as the crew's jovial and flirtatious member, "el que se la madereaba " (Villanueva 42).[4]

Similarly, the speaker also bemoans the loss of el Bear, who "was forever / polishing his Cat's Paw" and whom "heterosexual la Perra used to snicker" at for "bending down like *that*" (Villanueva 42, emphasis in original). Although "Cat's Paw" may denotatively refer to the carpentry tool, the gang's practice of adopting animal appellations and the capital "C" transforming "cat" into a proper noun implies that "polishing his Cat's Paw" connotes a euphemism for el Bear engaging in sexual activity with another person whom the gang perhaps dubs "el Cat." While one of the gang's heterosexual members appears to mock el Bear for "bending down like *that*" in another sexual euphemism, the majority of the gang does not deem el Bear an outcast or perverse for his sexuality. Rather, "Aquellos Vatos" revises homophobic stereotypes about queer men as soft, passive, and weak and ascribes these supposed characteristics to heterosexual men. Like el Pato, la Perra has dual connotations in Spanish and Caló, often signaling "bitch." In this gang, its members do not regard queer men as docile, frail "bitches" but, instead, view heterosexual men as "bitches," who also are not worthy of memorialization. As the speaker of the poem says, "I don't recall el Tiger . . . they tell me he was / a chavalón que se curaba con las gabas" (Villanueva 42, ellipses in the original).[5] Not only are heterosexual men associated with pejorative connotations and easily forgotten, but the poem aligns straight gang members with assimilation and racial betrayal (a frequent stigma queer Latinas/os face), as el Tiger pursues *gabachas* (white women), possibly another reason for his lack of commemoration.

As much as "Aquellos Vatos" queers the representation of gang members through its engagements with sexuality, the poem also queers the normative depiction of the gang member's gender performance. Popular culture, film, and literature routinely portray gangs as the domains not only of men but of hypermasculinity. Because misogynist and homophobic discourses

homogenize women and queer men as feminine, women and queer men rarely appear in representations of gangs unless as abject objects. Departing from the norm, Villanueva's poem not only ascribes a hegemonic status to queer sexuality in the gang's internal politics, but "Aquellos Vatos" also presents the gang as a subculture that invites femininity and queer gender performances. While some of the men perform masculinity or identify as men, femininity and gender fluidity characterize almost half the crew. Six of the gang members adopt feminine nicknames, indicated by the definite article "la," such as la Burra or la Polla, though the speaker at times identifies them as men, such as la Chiva whom the speaker refers to as "him." Though the speaker may misgender his crew—an unlikely possibility given the close camaraderie among the gang—the poem's inclusion of characters who move between masculine and feminine identities or inhabit both re-envisions normative representations of and expectations for the gender performativity of gang members.

In many ways, Villanueva's "Aquellos Vatos" anchors *Decolonial Delinquency* and its interventions across the humanities, social sciences, and area studies. This project assembles a collection of post-1950s Latina/o literature and film about queer and women gang members to advance theories of decolonization. Specifically, *Decolonial Delinquency* defamiliarizes Latina/o studies, postcolonial studies, and sociological and anthropological scholarship that overlooks how gender and sexuality affect decolonial violence and gang cultural politics. Responding to this multidisciplinary oversight, *Decolonial Delinquency* discloses how women and queer gang members navigate their predominantly male and heterosexual gangs while altering and using gang culture, violence, criminality, and hypermasculinity to challenge the racism of the U.S. nation-state and gendered and sexual oppression in their Latina/o communities and gangs. By using gangs as a vehicle to theorize decolonization, *Decolonial Delinquency* reveals how gender

and sexuality always implicate decolonial projects and illuminates how to revisit past—and study future—decolonial uprisings, locating the ways that multiply marginalized persons negotiate, refashion, and contribute to social, political, and national revolutions. Most importantly, in theorizing gangs as decolonial subcultures, *Decolonial Delinquency* also confronts the essentialization of working-class people of color as pathological malefactors who engage in violence and crime for no reason other than ostensible "cultural deficiencies." By studying violent and criminalized forms of decolonization, *Decolonial Delinquency* strives to reveal how gender and sexuality intersect with race and class in social death to create a systemic impetus for gang violence in working-class communities of color.

Decolonization as an Always Violent and Psychological Process

Claiming gangs as decolonial subcultures will perplex an array of readers. Though popular culture, scholarship, and U.S. media overwhelmingly sensationalize gang members and gang violence, gangs, admittedly, often engage in several counterproductive actions that undermine current and potential organized revolutions and are detrimental to many denizens in ethnic communities of color. For these reasons, I will explain the theoretical framework I use in this project to interpret gang violence, crime, and culture as oppositional and how the concept of decolonization figures in *Decolonial Delinquency*. My theorization of decolonization primarily draws from Frantz Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks* and *The Wretched of the Earth*, Pablo González Casanova's concept of internal colonialism, and a range of humanities and social science scholars working in critical gang studies, such as James Diego Vigil and Monica Brown.

In the opening paragraph to *The Wretched of the Earth*, Fanon defines "decolonization" as an "always violent phenomenon" that "is quite simply the replacing of a certain 'species' of men by another 'species' of men. Without any period of transition, there is a total, complete, and

absolute substitution" (35). For Fanon, decolonization encompasses subaltern people emancipating themselves by overthrowing the hegemonic apparatus to attain sovereignty through violence, such as in the American Revolutionary War or the Biblical narrative of Moses liberating the Israelites from Egypt through the Ten Plagues, including Death of Firstborn, Boils, and Pestilence of Livestock. Without violence, decolonization cannot materialize. Non-violence or civil disobedience, according to Fanon, cannot produce decolonization because

> [n]on-violence is an attempt to settle the colonial problem around a green baize table, before any regrettable act has been performed or irreparable gesture made, before any blood has been shed. But if the masses, without waiting for the chairs to be arranged around the baize table, listen to their own voice and begin committing outrages and setting fire to the buildings, the elite and the nationalist bourgeois parties will be seen rushing to the colonialists to exclaim, 'This is very serious! We do not know how it will end; we must find a solution—some sort of compromise.' (*The Wretched of the Earth* 61-62)

In short, without decolonial violence, the colonizer refuses to take seriously the outrage of the colonized and integrate systemic and structural change.

While Fanon's postulation that "decolonization is always a violent phenomenon" remains perhaps the most renowned of his assertions, Fanon also contends that decolonization entails psychological consequences. He writes that "Decolonization is the veritable creation of new men" where the "'thing' which has been colonized becomes man during the same process by which it frees itself" (Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* 36-37). In a colonized state, men—and, despite Fanon's elision, women as well—cannot fathom their humanity, as the colonizer treats them as a "thing," but through decolonial violence, the colonized not only shed their material

alterity but also the psychological colonization that potentially results in the colonized believing themselves deservedly abject, inhuman objects. As Fanon says, "At the level of individuals, violence is a cleansing force. It frees the native from his inferiority complex and from his despair and inaction; it makes him fearless and restores his self-respect" (*The Wretched of the Earth* 94). Consequently, decolonization includes psychological sovereignty and a restoration of identity as much as the deposal of a colonial regime.

This psychological inferiority complex that Fanon references arises because, along with the material, colonization involves the psyche and narrative as well. Charles Mills explains that colonial projects always feature a narrative that he terms the racial contract. According to Mills, the "Racial Contract is that set of formal or informal agreements or meta-agreements . . . between the members of one subset of humans . . . and coextensive (making due allowance for gender differentiation) with the class of full persons, to categorize the remaining subset of humans as 'nonwhite' and of a different and inferior moral status" (11). Classifying the colonized as "nonwhite" and of "a different and inferior moral status" justifies and legitimates the colonization of people of color, their cultures, and their lands. As Mills elaborates, "the general purpose of the Contract is always the differential privileging of the whites as a group with respect to the nonwhites as a group, the exploitation of their bodies, land, and resources, the denial of equal socioeconomic opportunities to them" (11). White colonizers rationalize the "differential privileging" of whites and appropriation of resources and labor of the colonized because the racial contract's narrative renders the colonized subpersons, inhuman, or, in Fanon's words, a "thing." Once dehumanized, subpersons "have a different and inferior schedule of rights and liberties applying to them. In other words, it is possible to get away with doing things to

subpersons that one could not do to persons, because they do not have the same rights as persons" (Mills 56).

In a similar vein, María Lugones's theorization of colonial narratives dovetails with Mills's, but she accounts for how gender implicates the racial contract and colonization. Departing from Simone de Beauvoir's concept of sex and gender, Lugones argues that the idea of sex and gender emerges during European colonial projects as a rationalizing, separatist, and dehumanizing tactic.[6] She contends that "Colonialism did not impose precolonial, European gender arrangements on the colonized. It imposed a new gender system that created very different arrangements for colonized males and females than for white bourgeois colonizers" (Lugones, "Heterosexualism and the Colonial" 186). European colonizers distinguished themselves from the colonized by demarcating gender/sex across racial lines, deeming the colonized inhuman by reducing them to sex (male/female) and not gender (man/woman), which they reserved only for white Europeans. Denying the colonized access to a gender category enabled the European colonizer to generate an animalizing narrative that created racial hierarchies and "excused" their colonial intervention in Native land. As Lugones elaborates, "Only the civilized are men or women. Indigenous peoples of the Americas and enslaved Africans were classified not human in species—as animals, uncontrollably sexual and wild" ("Toward a Decolonial Feminism" 743). Under this imperialist narrative, men and women of color do not exist and are only "uncivilized, male and female savages" who require the benevolent messianism of a human civilization that the European man/woman embodies.

Because colonization accompanies narratives such as the above that dehumanize and other the colonized to condone colonial violence, enslavement, and resource appropriation and to maintain the hegemony of the colonizing force, colonial projects often result in the colonized

believing in the "legitimacy" of colonial narratives—a phenomenon that points towards Louis Althusser's concept of interpellation and ideological state apparatuses—and succumbing to the colonizer's psychological power over them. For instance, in *Black Skin, White Masks*, Fanon discloses the effects that colonialism, racialization, and racism have on his identity, subjectivity, and self-worth. He writes of a young white child hailing him with the lines, "'Dirty nigger!'" or, as Fanon explains in other words, "'Look! A Negro!'" (*Black Skin, White Masks* 89). Later disclosing the effects these child's invectives have on his psyche, Fanon says,

> Locked in this suffocating reification, I appealed to the Other so that his liberating gaze, gliding over my body suddenly smoothed of rough edges, would give me back the lightness of being I thought I had lost, and taking me out of the world put me back in the world. But just as I get to the other slope I stumble, and the Other fixes me with his gaze, his gestures and attitude, the same way you fix a preparation with a dye. (*Black Skin, White Masks* 89)

For Fanon, the Other's refusal to grant ontological validation and view Fanon as a full citizen-subject beyond a supposed "Negro" status fractures his identity and imprisons him within his objecthood and subaltern state as if he were a "preparation" fixed "with a dye." Incarcerated within this dye, Fanon succumbs to accepting the discourses of the racial contract and his alleged inferiority, as he writes that this child's statements returned his body to him "spread-eagled, disjointed, redone, draped in mourning" as the words "[t]he Negro is an animal, the Negro is bad, the Negro is wicked, the Negro is ugly" reverberated in his mind (*Black Skin, White Masks* 93). This psychological effect reveals how colonialism always implicates intersubjectivity, a process whereby the Other's gaze determines and grants/denies one's subjectivity through acknowledging/refusing to acknowledge his or her existence as a full citizen-subject and human.

Because the colonizer regards the colonized as a "thing," "subperson," "animal," "bad," "wicked," and "ugly" to rationalize colonial violence, the colonized may remain psychologically entrenched in a subaltern state and believe these narratives until freeing him or herself through decolonial violence. Again, Fanon explains that decolonial violence "frees the native from his inferiority complex" to precipitate the "veritable creation of new men [and women]" and reject the Other's power to reduce him or her to an abject and inhuman status (*The Wretched of the Earth* 94, 36).

Ralph Ellison's famed opening to *Invisible Man* discloses this dynamic between decolonial violence, intersubjectivity, and psychological decolonization. In the second paragraph of the novel, the anonymous narrator claims that invisibility arises not because "of a peculiar disposition of the [physical] eyes" of the Other but "their *inner* eyes . . . with which they look through their physical eyes" (3, emphasis in original). Responding to the Other's refusal to recognize the narrator's subjectivity and his own questioning of his existence that follows, the narrator says, "It's when you feel like this that, out of resentment, you begin to bump people back. And, let me confess, you feel that way most of the time. You ache with the need to convince yourself that you do exist in the real world, that you're part of all the sound and anguish, and you strike out with your fists, you curse and you swear to make them recognize you. And, alas, it's seldom successful" (Ellison 4). While the unnamed narrator concedes that his decolonial violence that responds to invisibility and his desire for the Other to acknowledge his existence seldom succeeds, his use of violence rejects the colonizer's capacity to render him an invisible subperson or "thing." No longer the meek and obsequious object whose identity cannot evolve beyond the ascription the colonial narrative provides, the narrator uses violence against the racist Other, indicating the "veritable creation" of a new man who refuses to remain fixed in

the colonizer's dye as an inhuman subordinate. While gangs do *not* accomplish the "total, complete, and absolute substitution" of U.S. empire for the rule of its subaltern citizens, gang culture, crime, and violence not only supply possibilities for circumventing the hegemony and power of the U.S. nation-state, but they also involve many of these psychological, intersubjective rewards that Fanon identifies in decolonial violence (Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* 35).

El Barrio as an Internal Colony

When theorizing the spatial conditions of colonies and their inhabitants' relations to the metropole, Fanon writes,

> The zone where the natives live is not complementary to the zone inhabited by the settlers. . . . The settlers' town is a strongly built town, all made of stone and steel. It is a brightly lit town; the streets are covered with asphalt, and the garbage cans swallow all the leavings, unseen, unknown and hardly thought about. The settlers' feet are never visible. . . . His feet are protected by strong shoes although the streets of his town are clean and even with no holes or stones. The settlers' town is a well-fed town, an easygoing town; its belly is always full of good things. The settlers' town is a town of white people, of foreigners.
>
> The town belonging to the colonized people, or at least the native town, the Negro village, the medina, the reservation, is a place of ill fame, peopled by men of evil repute. They are born there, it matters little where or how; they die there, it matters not where, nor how. It is a world without spaciousness; men live there on top of each other, and their huts are built one on top of the other. The native town is a hungry town, starved of bread, of meat, of shoes, of coal, of light. The native town is a crouching village, a town on its knees, a town wallowing in the mire. (*The Wretched of the Earth* 38-39)

Whereas the metropole features "well-fed" citizens, an advanced infrastructure, and a hygienic environment that attracts tourism, the colony remains mired in overcrowding and penury, its denizens lives meaningless and invisible as "it matters not where, nor how" they live or die. While Fanon was primarily writing about French Algeria in the 1950s, his description of the French colony, its standard of living, and the metropole's conception of the colonized resembles the geopolitical conditions of those living in contemporary U.S. ethnic *barrios*, inner-cities, and "ghettos." Working-class people of color inhabiting these spaces hold in the United States a status that Mae M. Ngai terms "alien citizenship," undocumented persons and U.S. citizens whom the nation treats as "permanently foreign and unassimilable in the nation" and who always remain "alien in the eyes of the nation" (8). Reduced to alien citizenship, working-class people of color living in *barrios* occupy the spaces of "social death," a phenomenon that Lisa Marie Cacho describes as a state of "*ineligib[ility] for personhood*" because the law, American body politic, and nation-state criminalize the socially dead while denying them the protection of the law and state and "the political legitimacy and moral credibility necessary to question them" (6, emphasis in original). For instance, Kimberlé Crenshaw has famously noted the U.S. judicial system's historical and contemporary excusal of rape against Black women: "When Black women were raped by white males, they were being raped not as women generally, but as Black women specifically: Their femaleness made them sexually vulnerable to racist domination, while their Blackness effectively denied them any protection. This white male power was reinforced by a judicial system in which the successful conviction of a white man for raping a Black woman was virtually unthinkable" (158-159).

In this same vein, Eduardo Bonilla-Silva explains how the state systemically curtails the lives of working-class people of color through slow violence and ideological and repressive state

apparatuses. He delineates the conditions of inner-city schooling and policing: “Inner-city minority schools, in sharp contrast to white suburban schools, lack decent buildings, are overcrowded, have outdated equipment—if they have equipment at all—do not have enough textbooks for their students, lack library resources, are technologically behind, and pay their teaching and administrative staff less” (Bonilla-Silva 35). Even when students of color bus to integrated schools outside the *barrio*, their statuses as socially dead, alien citizens delimit their life chances through tracking: “Whites (and Asians) are considerably (and statistically significantly) more likely to be placed in the academic track than comparably achieving African American and Latino students” (Bonilla-Silva 35). Moreover, communities of color remain subject to policing practices that facilitate and extend the prison industrial complex, enabling legalized forms of segregation and versions of indentured servitude, a racial project that Michelle Alexander calls “The New Jim Crow.” As Bonilla-Silva discloses, “‘stop and frisk’ laws in New York city daily terrorize young people of color. Ostensibly aimed at finding weapons and drugs, nearly 90 percent of the stops are black and brown youth” (46). Collectively, this type of treatment truncates the life chances of working-class people of color and expedites their actual and social deaths. Like the deaths of the colonized whom the metropole glosses over, to the U.S. nation-state “it matters not where, nor how” its working-class people of color live or die (Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* 39). In the words of Monica Brown, “When was the last time the media staged an episode of national mourning for victims of gang-related or urban violence? When was the last time that our culture’s unanimous response to gang tragedies or other urban violence was *Why? Why did it happen? What or who is to blame? Too lenient handgun laws? Parents? Feelings of alienation at school? The Internet? Our violent media? The NRA?*” (xiii-xiv, emphasis in original).

This type of dismissal that Brown cites and the social death, alien citizenship, and systemic racism that Cacho, Bonilla-Silva, Alexander, Ngai, and Krenshaw outline coagulate to render inner-cities, *barrios*, and "ghettos" what Pablo González Casanova calls internal colonies. A Mexican sociologist working in dependency theory, Casanova coined the term internal colonialism in 1963 as a way of describing the racialized and inequitable economic dynamics between the elite *mestizo* class and subaltern Indigenous populations in Mexico (Gutiérrez 286). Though Casanova focused on internal relations in Mexico, Latin American dependency theorists pursued similar subjects from global and transnational contexts. According to Ramón A. Gutiérrez, Latin American dependency theory attempted to answer "[w]hy, in the prosperity of the post-World War II era had Latin America, Asia, and African economies not experienced sustained economic development and growth" (284). The concept of internal colonialism—at least, from a Latin American school of thought—arose in response to this question, offering "minorities an explanation for their territorial concentration, spatial segregation, external administration, the disparity between their legal citizenship and *de facto* second-class standing, their brutalization by the police, and the toxic effects of racism in their lives" (Gutiérrez 282). Scholars studying internal colonies in the Third World, such as André Gunder Frank, argued that these spaces have a "racial dimension of being dominated . . . as well as an economic one; and more clearly lack social mobility (because of racism and their role as cheap labor)" (Frank xix). Because U.S. *barrios*, inner-cities, and "ghettos" are internal colonies, Fanon's postulations about the connections between violence and the psyche in both decolonial and colonial projects remain apropos for theorizing gangs as decolonial subcultures that circumvent the hegemony and empire of the U.S. nation-state and engender the "veritable creation of new men" and women.[7]

Criminality as Decolonial Praxis

For many scholars in the humanities and social sciences, crime and delinquency amongst subaltern groups arise from the conditions of internal colonialism and can function in a revolutionary manner. In *Gringo Justice*, for example, Alfredo Mirandé examines Chicano (not Chicana) criminality in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, analyzing figures like the *bandido*. He contends that "Chicanos have been labeled bandits and criminals because they have not passively accepted their economic and political exploitation" (Mirandé, *Gringo Justice* 236). For this reason, Mirandé considers Chicano criminality always decolonial, as Chicano crime challenges U.S. law and, in some instances (like the *bandido* Gregorio Cortez), internal colonialism and U.S. empire.[8] Other scholars across a range of disciplines and fields have romanticized Chicano (again, not Chicana) banditry and criminality as decolonial agency, such as Rodolfo Acuña's *Occupied America* and Julian Samora, Joe Bernal, and Albert Peña's *Gunpowder Justice*. But as B. V. Olguín remarks, this type of scholarship on male-centered social banditry does not "examine the more common and controversial forms of criminality such as rape, murder, and violent nonproperty offenses" (14). Furthermore, texts such as the abovementioned make the mistake of idealizing a social banditry that, as Eric Hobsbawn says, even while at times resistant, "is little more than endemic peasant protest against oppression and poverty" (5). In short, this scholarship not only struggles to integrate a more intersectional analysis into its framework and move beyond a romanticization of the *bandido*, but these works also do not account for more modern, less pastoral forms of crime commonly transpiring in gangs and *barrios*.

Some academics, however, have analyzed more contemporary types of criminality and violence as decolonial agency, specifically centering on gangs. Similar to Mirandé's conception

of social banditry, José Navarro's work regards historical and contemporary gang violence as a byproduct of internal colonialism and state violence. He argues that Latina/o gangs originate from "the conditions of the imperial/colonial contact of indigenous and conquering nations" (Navarro, *Machos y Malinchistas* 21) and "structures of white supremacy and settler colonialism in the United States" (Navarro, *Machos y Malinchistas* 20). Thus, gangs, for Navarro, are "responses to State discursive and material violence" (*Machos y Malinchistas* 20). For these reasons, Navarro asserts that Chicana/o and Latina/o social movements and resistant cultural production have regarded gang members "as a conduit of Chicano nationalist resistance," such as in Luis Valdez's 1978 play *Zoot Suit* or the Chicano Movement's incorporation of Chicana/o gangs into its marches (*Machos y Malinchistas* viii).[9]

Rosa Linda Fregoso, James Diego Vigil, and Martín Sánchez-Jankowski elaborate on why many consider gang members figures of decolonial and revolutionary resistance. As Fregoso explains, gangs stymie white capitalism and the economic disparities disproportionately afflicting subaltern persons living in internal colonies by "provid[ing] jobs unavailable in the inner cities, even though these are mostly illegal. . . . Because gang members lucidly understand 'the world in terms of rich and poor,' they willingly participate in gang activities to avoid 'dead-end jobs'" (*The Bronze Screen* 128). Sánchez-Jankowski substantiates Fregoso's contentions on the financial rewards of gangs and gang membership as a byproduct of white capitalist inequality in finding in his ethnographic study that "[m]ost gang members come from families whose parents are either underemployed and/or employed in the secondary job market" (41). Addressing the social and psychological implications of gang life, James Diego Vigil writes that "Group identification is a key aspect of gang life and plays an important role for street children. . . . Because of their low self-esteem and fragile and fragmented egos, the street group or gang . . .

helps make these youth feel complete" ("Streets and Schools" 275). As Vigil elucidates, gangs combat the psychological consequences of internal colonialism, undermining the potential inferiority complexes and meager self-worth that arise from an acceptance of the colonial Other's, nation-state's, and racial contract's reductions of subaltern persons to an invisible, abject, and inhuman sociopolitical status. In response, gangs provide social meaning, value, and intersubjective recognition to their members through acknowledging and esteeming participants' humanity, subjectivity, and subcultural citizenship.

Because of the psychological and palpable benefits of gangs, Brown interprets these delinquent subcultures as decolonial "counternations" in their ability to partially flout the hegemony and power of the U.S. nation-state and oppose social and material alienation and colonization. As Brown summarizes, gang counternations enable their members to form "an alternative citizenship," "one that fulfills fundamental needs not accorded by the state, one that provides a sense of economic security (most often through delinquent behavior), one that establishes its own moral and juridical authority with a history tied to territory, and one that provides a sense of communal identity and belonging" (xxiii). Operating from a Fanonian foundation, Brown, as well as other scholars of critical gang studies, views violence as crucial to the decolonization that gang counternations offer. For Brown, "acts of brutal violence are interpreted within their community as acts of honor, loyalty, and heroism" (xvii). In part because gang members' violence often challenges the regime and hegemony of the U.S. nation-state through demonstrating the United States' inability to render the colonized docile, obedient subjects, gangs frequently attribute valor and approbation to their increasingly and severely violent members. The value gang members ascribe to violence and their violence's intrinsic antagonism to the colonial apparatus enable gangs to satisfy the psychological aspects of

Fanonian decolonization. As Robert J. Durán writes, "Joining a gang means shifting one's image from that of a victim who weakly tolerates affronts to that of a strong and courageous warrior who reacts quickly to perceived disrespect" (110). In this way, gangs and gang violence entail the emergence of a transformative identity or, to use Fanon's words, the "veritable creation of new men" and women.

Decolonial Delinquency follows in the tradition of this postcolonial and critical gang studies framework. While neither these theorists nor I consider gangs as decolonial in the sense of dismantling U.S. empire through organized and militarized revolution, they circumvent, challenge, and nullify many of the effects of internal colonialism through delinquent and violent means that have material and psychological consequences. As such, this project deems gang members as decolonial in their capacity to migrate away from a colonized state of social death, alienation, and abject marginality in the U.S. nation-state to a subcultural community, status, and ethos that provide intersubjective recognition, power, belonging, respect, value, protection, a level of sovereignty, and financial stability through a culture and praxis of violence, crime, and delinquency. And yet, throughout this overview of criminality and gangs as decolonial praxis, I have purposely refrained from addressing perhaps the most glaring specter that haunts asserting gangs as resistant subcultures. As much as gang violence, crime, and culture accord decolonization, gang violence also, even concomitantly, often functions in a deleterious manner that frequently exacerbates the colonial state and trauma of working-class class people of color.

For these reasons, *Decolonial Delinquency* does not romanticize or idealize gang members as decolonial while excusing, ignoring, or cosigning their violent actions that often target innocent persons living in internal colonies. As much as gang members may figure as decolonial, gangs also engage in fratricidal violence within the *barrio*. For Fanon, however,

fratricidal violence remains decolonial because when a colonized person or "native" reaches "for his knife at the slightest hostile or aggressive glance cast on him by another native" to engage in "collective autodestruction," the "native's muscular tension is set free" and "armed resistance to colonialism," at this point, becomes "inevitable" (*The Wretched of the Earth* 54). In this way, fratricidal violence functions as a precursor to decolonial violence aimed at the colonial apparatus. Some contemporary scholars, such as Mirandé with his views on Chicano banditry, may subscribe to this Fanonian hermeneutic in reading criminality as always decolonial because crime amongst the colonized demonstrates the colonizer's incapacity to maintain a docile subaltern class. On the other hand, I view these types of contentions as bordering on the tautological. While *Decolonial Delinquency* responds to Gilberto Rosas's observation that "[c]riminality and delinquency constitute subjugated realms of knowledge and antinormative practices that suffer erasure" in the "affirming vision of academic identity politics," I recognize that gang crime, culture, and violence can function counterproductively to systemic decolonization, especially since the U.S. nation-state invests in preserving violence and crime amongst working-class people of color (18). As Olguín explains, "crime-based subcultures are not always empowering. . . . On the contrary, crime-as-subaltern agency can be as repressive as, and integral to, colonial domination," such as in the case of "law enforcement neglect of minority-on-minority crime" as biopolitical "containment practices that limit the threat to middle-class, primarily White, Americans in stratified capitalist societies" (15). When gang violence, crime, and culture result in ethnic minorities harming each other, gang members also help maintain the empire of the U.S. nation-state by curtailing opportunities for allied revolutionary consciousnesses and movements.

Still, although I acknowledge the adverse effects of gang violence and crime, I do not study gangs through a dichotomous lens that views these subcultures as either only decolonial or colonial. Rather, at its core, *Decolonial Delinquency* theorizes violent and criminalized forms of decolonization that allocate material resistance and psychological liberation while simultaneously hinging upon the suppression of other multiply marginalized subjects. In other words, this project studies decolonial movements and projects that, while emancipating and empowering for some, are not always *anti*colonial. In my commitment to remaining cognizant and critical of how gang violence, crime, and culture may not always accord decolonial rewards for every gang member or *barrio* inhabitant, this project intervenes at the site where gangs' "veritable creation" of new identities and circumvention of white capitalist, U.S. hegemony and empire normatively feature a violent, heterosexual hypermasculinity that abuses and demonizes women, queer men, and femininity. For example, in Luis J. Rodriguez's autobiographical gang narrative *Always Running: La Vida Loca: Gang Days in L.A.*, Rodriguez writes of catching his crew intoxicating women and waiting till they were "incoherent and sleepy" to gangrape them, leaving one woman's underwear "torn" and "twisted around an ankle" (122). Deplorably, many male-authored gang, crime, and prison narratives reproduce—sometimes just as, if not more, sexually-violently—this alienation, erasure, and assault of women and queer persons, such as, to name a few, Piri Thomas's *Down These Mean Streets*, Miguel Durán's *Don't Spit on My Corner*, Reymundo Sanchez' *My Bloody Life*, Warren Miller's *The Cool World*, Irving Shulman's *The Amboy Dukes*, Luis Valdez's *Zoot Suit*, and the films *American Me*, *Blood In, Blood out*, and *Sin Nombre*.[10]

Because decolonization in predominantly male and heterosexual gangs often means exhibiting power and superiority over women and queer men to compensate for the feelings of

abject alterity that stem from an internal colonial, alien citizen, and a socially dead status, decolonial gangs commonly mimic and reproduce (if more violently) the hypermasculinity and male- and hetero-centrism present in past decolonial movements, like the Chicano Movement and Civil Rights Movement, which women of color feminists like Anna Nieto-Gómez, Gloria Anzaldúa, Cherrié Moraga, Norma Alarcón, Audre Lorde, and the Combahee River Collective have all critiqued.[11] As a result, as much as this project theorizes how women and queer persons appropriate and transform gang violence, crime, and culture to attain decolonization in subcultures that have traditionally denied them citizenship, *Decolonial Delinquency* also concurrently unravels why and how violent, subaltern, and decolonial, heterosexual hypermasculinities manifest in toxic and colonial forms for other multiply marginalized persons, accounting for the uncomfortable but crucial subject of women and queer gang members potentially reproducing these masculinities toxic' effects when refashioning and performing them in gang life.

Gang Girls, from la Pachuca to la Chola

The violence, crime, culture, and hypermasculinity in gangs that privilege heterosexual men and demonize femininity, queerness, and women has led many academics to neglect women who partake in gang subcultures, beyond acknowledging that they occupy marginalized positions in gangs and consequently suffer material and psychological trauma in them. For example, in *Machos y Malinchistas*, Navarro explicates the gang narratives *Always Running* and *Down These Mean Streets* to reveal how "Chicano/Latino cultural nationalism and masculinity continues to develop and assert itself at the expense of women's (especially Chicana/Latina women's) bodies through sexual violence" because doing so enables subaltern Chicano/Latino men to transform themselves into "'conquerors'" (ix). While Navarro operates from a literary and film studies

framework, these types of analyses are not anomalous and pervade the social sciences, such as Medina et al. who write that "[w]omen's romantic or social association with Inner West gangs" result in male gang members defining them as "gang bitches" (655). Similarly, Jody Miller contends that "gender inequality remains a cornerstone of the urban street scene" (7). Likewise, Cheryl L. Maxson's edited collection *The Modern Gang Reader* and Juanita Díaz-Cotto's ethnography *Chicana Lives and Criminal Justice: Voices from El Barrio* also explain gang girls as alienated subjects in predominantly male gangs.

On the one hand, while consequential, this recognition of the trauma women incur when encountering gang hypermasculinity, culture, violence, and crime only centers on actual gang girls. This scholarship does not account for how gangbanging and decolonization are always shared experiences. How might women who do not participate in gangs but whose partners or kin gangbang also experience gang hypermasculinity, violence, crime, and culture? In what ways do the ideals and effects of violent, hypermasculine decolonization also affect the mothers, sisters, wives, and daughters of gang members who usher gang culture, values, and personas into the private sphere, especially when violent attacks towards rival gang members or police harassment frequently occur not in the streets but at gang members' domiciles?

On the other hand, because the discussion of gang girls in these types of arguments focuses on the marginality and violence they may face in their gangs, this scholarship also does not consider the possibility of women attaining citizenship in these subcultures and participating in them as full subjects equal to their male counterparts. Although many sexist male gang members, such as those Jody Miller and Rod K. Brunson research, may brag about how "[t]here ain't no girls in our gang" and make statements like "the girls we talk to . . . ain't from our gang" (431), studying gang girls beyond acknowledging a hyper-abject status provides pivotal

information about how gender and sexuality intersect with race and class in social death to create a systemic impetus for gang violence in communities of color, a paramount matter since several academic studies estimate that women comprise as much as 40% of the membership of mixed-gender gangs (Peterson 71). As Dana Peterson notes, "we should be concerned about their [women's] gang involvement because of injury not just to society but also (and perhaps more importantly) to the girls themselves," and "we can learn a good deal about how to minimize this harm and help girls avoid or desist from gangs by listening to their reasons and risk factors for gang involvement" (72). Extending the scholarly analysis of women—as well as queer persons, whom I will elaborate on momentarily—in gangs to incorporate why they join their delinquent subcultures and what decolonial rewards they may obtain in them assists in unveiling how internal colonialism, the U.S. nation-state, heteropatriarchy, and systemic racism incorporate gender and sexuality to impel working-class people of color towards gang violence. Disclosing the roles of these interlocking forces not only resists the pathologization of gang members in popular culture, film, literature, and in certain segments of the academy but also reveals information for reducing auto-destruction in working-class communities of color by addressing the structural causes to gang violence and crime.

While the majority of social sciences and humanities scholarship on women in gangs has revolved around their abject status in gang subcultures, some scholars have initiated a dialogue on the decolonization women find in gangs as full citizen-subjects. In Latina/o literary and cultural studies, theorizing gang girls as more than subordinate objects and their reasons for gang membership begins with la Pachuca. The pachucas/os were a Mexican American counterculture that arose in the late 1930s in Los Angeles and were famous for wearing the zoot suit and speaking Caló, a Spanglish/English argot organized by rhyme-scheme and the conjugation of

English verbs with Spanish tenses. During the 1930s, African Americans on the East Coast first wore the zoot suit, which featured excessively baggy suit jackets, trousers, and dress shirts. After the fashion style rose in popularity, Mexican Americans in California began adorning and refashioning the zoot suit ensemble, adding a *tando* (fedora), *calcos* (shiny, pointy leather shoes), a lengthy watch chain that extended past the knee, and pompadour hairstyles. Mexican American women also wore a female version of the zoot suit, maintaining the pompadour and billowing jacket but replacing the pants with tight and revealing skirts. During World War II, the U.S. nation-state took the zoot suit as another reason to criminalize African Americans and Mexican Americans. Because of wartime fabric shortages, many Americans viewed zoot suiters as unpatriotic, an accusation that contributed to the Zoot Suit Riots in June 1943, a two-week event where marines and sailors stalked through Los Angeles hunting, beating, and raping Mexican American zoot suiters under the pretense of defending American citizens from the "internal" enemy.[12]

When discussing the Mexican American counterculture and this heinous event, many scholars use the terms pachuca/o and zoot suiter interchangeably. But as Catharine S. Ramírez notes, for Mexican Americans of the 30s and 40s, as well as contemporarily, pachuca/o denotes gang affiliation. In the interviews Ramírez conducted in her study, Mexican Americans and Chicanas/os "defined 'zooters' and 'zoot-suiters' as youths who wore the zoot suits but who were not necessarily affiliated with gangs. They distinguished 'pachucas' and 'pachucos,' whom they defined as gang members" (5). For those participating in the counterculture, wearing the zoot suit did not automatically equate to gang membership, though for mid-twentieth century Mexican American gang members (pachucas/os), the zoot suit was their preferred aesthetic.

As with late-twentieth century gang members, el Pachuco in Chicana/o culture, history, and cultural production functions as a decolonial, revolutionary figure. As Fregoso explains, the "pachuco is one of the principal actors in the Chicano narrative of cultural affirmation and resistance. He performs as a legendary figure of counterhegemonic masculinity for Chicano nationalists who see in him the embodiment of revolutionary identity and identification" ("Re-Imagining Chicana Urban Identities" 72).[13] Because of the gang membership connotations of the term, the cultural, scholarly, and literary valorization of el Pachuco as a revolutionary archetype implicates gang membership as a decolonial practice. But the cultural and academic discussion and representation of a pachuco decolonial praxis concentrates on a male, heterosexual ideal that subsumes la Pachuca. As Fregoso also says, la Pachuca "remains his [el Pachuco's] dangling object, unseen and unnamed within Chicano movement strategies insofar as their asymmetrical constructions of cultural and political resistance identities relegate the pachuca to an exotic image for public and private consumption" ("Re-Imagining Chicana Urban Identities" 72). While la Pachuca does materialize in Chicana/o literary and cultural production, she usually appears only as a fetishized and sexualized object for consumer consumption, perpetuating stereotypical discourses about women participating in gangs solely as sexual labor for their male counterparts.

According to Ramírez, la Pachuca's erasure from "Chicano narratives of origin and opposition is connected to *machismo*—that is, to a highly gendered (namely female/feminine) treachery" that "failed to reproduce the ideal subjects of normative gender and sexuality and U.S. and Chicano nationalisms" (23). As Richard T. Rodríguez observes in *Next of Kin*, oppositional Chicana/o cultural nationalisms adopted "la familia" "as an organizing principle and symbol for cultural empowerment" that "often rested upon a heteropatriarchal order" (20). Since pachucas thwarted the regulatory power of the heteropatriarchal Chicano family, the private sphere, and

the idealization of the *Virgen* through criminality and delinquency in the streets, many misogynists perceived pachucas as committing "highly gendered (namely female/feminine) treachery," an accusation derivative of the deprecation of Malinalli Tenepal and congruent with the *agringada* (like a white woman) allegations Chicana feminists faced in the 1960s and 1970s.[14] As a result, la Pachuca as a decolonial feminist precursor and her contributions to a revolutionary Chicana/o consciousness initially dissipated from the historical archive and cultural production.

In *The Woman in the Zoot Suit*, however, Ramírez uncovers pachucas' presences in the World War II era to divulge how pachuca gang membership facilitated women's "incursions into the public sphere" (19). Ramírez illuminates how pachucas used fashion, language, and media representation to blur "the distinction between public and private" and combat "gender norms both within and beyond spaces of domesticity" (19). Other scholars have built from Ramírez in revealing how la Pachuca's modern successor, la Chola, achieves similar forms of decolonization against Chicana/o heteropatriarchy through gang culture, crime, and violence. Fregoso, for instance, interprets Carmen Tafolla's poem "and when I dream dreams" and the film *Mi Vida Loca* to illustrate how these representations show how contemporary gangs accord the same liberational consequences for women as past pachuca gangs. As Fregoso writes, "In *Mi Vida Loca*, Chicana homegirls are portrayed as independent and self-sufficient young women" ("Re-Imagining Chicana Identities" 89). For Fregoso, this film positively depicts "Chicana homegirls" as "independent and self-sufficient" because their girl gang "challenges the artificial divisions between the public and private sphere. . . . In the film, the production of Chicana urban identities takes place simultaneously on the streets and in the domestic site of the home, thereby positing the body of the homegirl as a disruption of those spaces restricted by gender" ("Re-Imagining

Chicana Identities" 89). Like the pachucas of the early- and mid-twentieth century who rejected "proper" gender decorum through breaching domesticity, *Mi Vida Loca*, according to Fregoso, discloses how girl gangs enable Chicanas to construct "urban identities" in the private and public spheres and disrupt heteropatriarchal gender propriety.

Additionally, Brown dedicates the majority of *Gang Nation* to proving how male-authored gang narratives about men "challenge stereotypical presumptions" about male gang members and ask "that we come to a deeper understanding of the links between youth violence and systemic, historically based racism, structural inequities, colonialism, entrenched poverty, failing educational and health care systems, a debilitated infrastructure," and the "existential despair that accompany these material conditions" (xiv). But Brown also writes one chapter about gang girl narratives in rejoinder to her "evaluation of gender dynamics in *Down These Mean Streets*, *Carlito's Way*, *Zoot Suit*, *Don't Spit on My Corner*, and *Always Running*" that reveals that women in gangs are "consistently objectified and denied agency, reduced to poverty to be exchanged between men, their bodies receptacles of violence, territories on which the acts of war are played out" (xxxiii). By explicating Yxta Maya Murray's novel *Locas* and Mona Ruiz's autobiography *Two Badges*, Brown unfurls these books' "representation of girl gang members' sense of resistance to and critique of oppressive forces emanating from the inherent contradiction of dominant U.S. nationalism *as well as* the cause and effects of sexism within Chicano culture" (xxxiv, emphasis in original). For Brown, the gang girl characters in these texts are "[e]xcluded from equal citizenship within gang structures" and "not recognized as citizens with equal rights under the law," but these women still create girl gangs as a strategy for attaining intersubjective recognition and initiating rebellion against heteropatriarchy in the nation-state and their Chicana/o cultures (xxxiv). Echoing Fregoso's and Ramírez's contentions,

Brown argues that the characters of these books accomplish this decolonization through "imagin[ing] communities among their families, lovers, friends, and fellow gang members" and "assert[ing] themselves in the public sphere" (xxxiv).

While Ramírez, Fregoso, and Brown primarily operate from a humanities methodology and focus on a range of cultural forms (literature, film, poetry, media, performance), social science scholarship on women in gangs corroborates much of their insistence on women achieving decolonization through gang violence, crime, and culture. Vigil, for example, notes that gang violence and crime potentially act as a psychologically-cathartic response to trauma for female gang members:

> Like young males, many female youths are subjected to: culture conflict, poverty, and associated family and school problems. In addition, they are apt to undergo personal devaluation, stricter childrearing experiences, tension-filled gender role expectations, and problems with self-esteem stemming from all these forces. Sexual abuse and exploitation experiences, initially with male relatives and later male street peers, can lead to pent-up rage. Not surprising, some young females are now channeling that rage into holding their own in the violence of the street gang world. ("Urban Violence" 227)

According to Vigil, women "holding their own" in a violent subculture enables the transformation of identity. In their gangs, women no longer quietly succumb to the conditions of social death, alien citizenship, and internal colonialism. Instead, the women alleviate trauma through a decolonial violence that enables them to persist psychologically in a nation-state and in heteropatriarchal cultural systems that render them multiply marginalized.

Marie "Keta" Miranda works from Vigil's contentions about violent aggression to explain more explicitly how women achieve decolonization in gangs, constructing an argument

related to Fregoso's and Ramírez's but from a social science methodology. In the most extensive ethnography of gang girls to date, Miranda's *Homegirls in the Public Sphere* examines two Northern California girl gangs—the East Side Norteña's and Norteñas with Attitude—to reveal how female gang members "resist their localization and objectification" and "challenge prevailing representations of Latina/o youth, gang youth, and girls in particular" (3, 4). Contesting the frequent and sensationalist depiction of gang membership as arising from cultural pathology, Miranda argues that the "bonds of friendship and solidarity found in the girls' gang[s]" are "subjective responses to a social world that relegates youth in general to the margins" (79). For Miranda, this systemic impetus to the formation of girl gangs implicates intersubjectivity, as part of the decolonial rewards of girl gangs center on "creating a group of street peers for social support and recreation" to "validate one's identity as inviolably superior to other groups in public space" (81). While Miranda, Fregoso, and Ramírez concur that girl gangs facilitate decolonization in enabling women to circumvent domesticity and the heteropatriarchal family, Miranda recognizes that the public sphere also operates as a male-centrist space that may dominate women who enter this realm. But according to Miranda, the "bonds of friendship" and violent personas of gang girls allow them to demonstrate that they are "superior to other groups in public space." In this same vein, Miranda suggests that gang girls deploy "forms of unity and solidarity borrowed from the domestic sphere" to decolonize the public sphere and enter "feminine culture in public space," a process that she terms "the publicization of the private" (79).

Though Vigil, Miranda, Fregoso, Brown, Ramírez, and others have contributed excellent work in explaining how women achieve decolonization and emancipation through gang violence, crime, and culture, much of this scholarship focuses only on girl gangs, subsuming women who

participate in mixed-gender or predominantly male gangs and, in the process, insinuating that decolonization for female gang members only exists in girl gangs. Peterson remains one of the few exceptions in briefly attending to women mobilizing decolonial resistance in a mixed-gender gang. While she primarily focuses on trauma women might encounter in predominantly male or mixed-gender gangs, Peterson also admits some of these types of gangs reject misogynist ideals, enabling their female members to accomplish liberation from patriarchal cultural values, expectations, and ideologies through gang membership. Like Fregoso, Miranda, Vigil, and Ramírez, Peterson contends that, for many gang girls, "it is their own culture's roles against which they are rebelling. Girls of Mexican, Puerto Rican, and Dominican heritage, for example, describe their gang membership as a means of casting off or distancing themselves from various aspects of their culture while simultaneously creating new identities" (78). As Peterson elucidates, membership in predominantly male and mixed-gender gangs can also precipitate decolonization for women through these delinquent subcultures' capacity to engender "new identities" or, to revise Fanon's words, the "veritable creation of new [wo]men." With these new identities, these gang girls "reject such values as passivity and subordinance to males" (Peterson 78).

Still, while Peterson recognizes that mixed-gender and predominantly male gangs can accord decolonization for their female members, she conditions this possibility on equitable gangs that do not espouse bigoted, sexist ideologies. As such, discussion of the alienation and trauma women may encounter in heteropatriarchal, male-dominated gangs *and* how women work within these delimiting parameters to claim citizenship and achieve decolonization through gangs continues to remain absent. In her seminal ethnography *Going Down to the Barrio: Homeboys and Homegirls in Change*, Joan W. Moore begins briefly to allude to this subject

when describing the gender dynamics of the longstanding Chicana/o gangs El Hoyo Maravilla and White Fence. She notes that women from each gang claim that "We didn't let the guys tell us what to do" and instead "used to boss the guys" (Moore 53). Although Moore hints at gendered tensions within the gangs and women's success in navigating them, she never pursues this topic further by addressing the role of violence in "boss[ing] the guys," *how* women achieve a non-subaltern status in these primarily male gangs, or how women's power in White Fence and El Hoyo Maravilla may rely on toxic methods that depend on the colonization of others, a commonality that Moore shares with previous scholarship on women in gangs.

Scholarship studying gender and decolonization in gangs often succumbs to romanticizing women gang members and not acknowledging or theorizing how women who achieve decolonization in gangs may replicate the toxic, violent, heterosexual hypermasculinity of men in gangs and colonize other multiply marginalized subjects in the *barrio*. Amaia Ibarraran Bigalondo remains one of the rare academics who skirts this trend. For instance, in writing on Murray's *Locas*, Bigalondo departs from Brown who views the female protagonist as forming a decolonial counternation in a girl gang that espouses violence and crime. Conversely, Bigalondo argues that the girl gang in the novel does not produce decolonization. According to Bigalondo, although the protagonist's "creation of her own female gang shows that her main aim is to prove her total independence from men," the character's violent behavior toxifies her girl gang, stripping the subculture of any potential for decolonial rewards ("Chicano Gangs/Chicana Girls" 46). In clarification, Bigalondo argues that the protagonist "reproduces the worst attitudes of male gang activity" and, as a result, "does not offer any overall, positive solution to the situation of the girls around her" ("Chicano Gangs/Chicana Girls" 47). Though Bigalondo remains attuned to how female gang members can reproduce toxic forms of male gang violence,

masculinity, and crime, her understanding of decolonization hinges on an ultimatum and binary criteria that regards true decolonial violence as having to generate freedom and resistance for every woman in the novel's girl gang in a non-toxic manner. For Bigalondo, decolonization cannot transpire if its resistance depends upon the colonization of other multiply marginalized persons. While I do not excuse or cosign toxic decolonial projects that increase violence and trauma against other subaltern persons, dichotomous theorizations of decolonization that view gang girls' destructive violence as only colonial and that refuse to consider how a systemic impetus for gang violence implicates race, class, and gender result in pathologizing female gang members, rather than revealing *why* these women may mimic the "worst attitudes of male gang activity."

Queering the Gang, or the Lack Thereof

If scholarship theorizing gang violence, crime, and culture as potentially decolonial for women does not normally appear in critical gang studies, then discussion of queer sexuality in gangs almost fails to exist. Virtually zero analysis of actual, or represented, queer women in gangs occurs in the field, with only a slight improvement for queer men. In large part, this aperture arises from the limited availability of cultural production depicting queerness in gangs, as well as the pervasiveness of (often lethal) homophobia in hypermasculine, heterosexual gang subcultures and gang members' sexualities as their own private matters. As a result, academics should not accrue denigration for not incorporating queer sexuality into their scholarship on gangs. Nonetheless, a few scholars have recently attempted to initiate this conversation. Lorena Galván, for example, adopts a vastly different perspective on the novel *Locas* in essaying to excavate queer gang cultural production. In writing on *Locas,* as well as Helena Maria Viramontes's latest novel *Their Dogs Came with Them*, Galván contends the two books queer

gang girl gender performativity. As Galván says, the novels "problematize gender norms by appropriating the tough defiant *Cholo* stance to redefine the *Chola,* thus positioning the *Chola* as both feminine and masculine" (16, emphasis in original). By portraying Chicana gang girls (Cholas) as simultaneously feminine and masculine, the books not only offer "a counter-narrative to the dominant narratives offered by Chicano texts but also the rise of representations about *Cholas*/*Cholos* in dominant society toward the end of the 20th century" (15). Because the gang girls in these novels maintain some of their femininity while performing female masculinity (a topic I pursue in my reading of *Locas* in Chapter 3), Galván views these characters as performing a queer subject position that destabilizes gender performativity in Chicana/o cultural production, the "binary gender system in gang subculture," and "dominant patriarchal ideologies in an experimental way" (163).

Dovetailing with Galván's postulations on decolonial queer gender performativity in gang literature, Dominique Johnson's "Taking Over the School: Student Gangs as a Strategy for Dealing with Homophobic Bullying in an Urban Public School District" centers on the sexual, as well as gender performative, aspects of queer identity. Writing on the Philadelphia, African American, butch lesbian, high school gang Dykes Taking Over (DTO), Johnson responds to what she considers a smear campaign against the DTO, as local television and print media copiously covered a "series of alleged incidents of same-sex sexual harassment by gang members [DTO] on heterosexual students" (88). According to Johnson, "Although the media coverage framed these incidents as sexual harassment, LGBT community members saw them as, at best, sensationalized and, at worse, fabricated by nervous parents and fanned by an overzealous local news media" (88-89). Without excusing the DTO's alleged actions, Johnson contemplates that the "lesbian students' behavior was the result of a lack of programs and services available for

LGBTQ youth" (89). Although Johnson spends the crux of her article delineating the homophobia lesbian students encounter in secondary education and the lack of institutional support available to them, she conjectures about the possibility of the DTO's sexual harassment of other students having decolonial consequences: "Formation of gangs and their same sex sexual harassment of other students may be weapons against homophobia and a means by which they assert themselves in their masculinities" (89). With this line, Johnson insinuates the potential for toxic forms of queer gang decolonization that depend on violence against other women and accounts for how a systemic impetus for gang violence coagulates at issues of race, gender, and sexuality. While Johnson never fully fleshes out this subject, she valiantly constructs an avenue for further pursuing scholarship on this topic and for applying her pondering to queer men in gangs as well.

Cultural representations of queer men who are in (or potentially in) gangs far outnumber depictions of queer women gang members, and, consequently, scholarship on queerness and men in gangs exceeds the scant material on queer women, though the amount still remains scarce. Much of this scholarship on queer men in—or the possibility of them in—gangs, however, cannot (for reasons I momentarily explain) attend to queer men achieving decolonization in gang life and, thus, centers on recovering the visibility of queerness that gang literature and film often displace. For instance, the two most popular "queer" gang texts in Latina/o literary and cultural studies are Piri Thomas's memoir *Down These Mean Streets* and Edward James Olmos's *American Me*, a filmic adaption on the rise of Chicano prison and *barrio* gangs in the mid-to-late twentieth century. In explicating *American Me*, Daniel Enrique Pérez discovers how its diegesis and editing queer the film's antihero: the Mexican Mafia's gang leader Montoya Santana. Pérez observes that upon Santana's release from a twenty-year prison sentence for murdering his rapist

in a juvenile detention center, Santana returns to the *barrio* and courts a Chicana named Julie. But because Santana has spent the majority of his life in prison and has rarely interacted with women in a romantic way, "he is utterly unsuccessful at performing as a heteronormative male. He does not know how to dance, drive a car, or kiss Julie intimately" (Pérez 163). Outside of prison and its *activo*/*pasivo* (penetrator/penetrated) gender and sexual system that uses male-on-male sexual violence and aggression to achieve heterosexual masculinity and power, Santana struggles to perform a heteronormative male gender with women in the *barrio*.

According to Pérez, Santana's inability to adapt to the *barrio*'s cultural codes and an environment with a larger population of women queer not only his gender but his sexuality as well. When trying to have sex with Julie—the first time he has ever had sex with a woman—Santana cannot climax through vaginal intercourse and forcibly turns Julie over to sodomize her as if he were having sex with a man in prison. During Santana's rape of Julie, the camera crosscuts between this scene and an all-male gang rape in prison. Pérez asserts that "Santana's homoerotic desire is expressed through the juxtaposition of the images of the male-on-male rape scene and his sexual encounter with Julie where he simulates homoerotic acts. . . . The closer the gang gets to raping their victim, the more aroused Santana gets" (163). For Pérez, these two scenes problematize *activo*/*pasivo* reasoning through insinuating that the *activo* sexual position indicates queer sexuality—a connotation that in many homophobic rationales only the *pasivo* carries—by juxtaposing same-sex and heterosexual rape and in Santana's preference for a rectum over a vagina.[15]

Similarly, Frederick Luis Aldama re-considers *American Me*'s incorporation of the *activo*/*pasivo* sexual system by reading Santana as queer in his developing relationship with J.D., Santana's best "crime partner." Aldama argues that Santana inhabits a metaphorical *activo*

position with various members of his gang as their hypermasculine, unmerciful, and truculent *jefe* but, over the course of the film, slowly deteriorates into a *pasivo* in his relations with J.D. As Aldama says, Santana "comes into an in-between ethnosexual identity that is both bully/top (the heterosexual macho anal penetrator) and also sissy/bottom (anally penetrated)" (83). Corroborating Aldama's reading, J.D. eventually betrays Santana and orders his death, which fellow gang members carry out via stabbing, signifying J.D.'s figurative penetration of Santana.[16]

Thomas's *Down These Mean Streets* also invokes a version of the *activo*/*pasivo* ideology to displace queer potentiality in gangs. Covering Thomas's journey as a gang member in Spanish Harlem during the mid-twentieth century, *Down These Mean Streets* features a queer gang initiation that marks Thomas's evolution from an affiliate to a citizen-subject of his local crew. As a test of hypermasculinity, the gang and Thomas visit male-to-female crossdressers to receive oral sex. Before entering the crossdressers' apartment, Thomas remarks, "*I don't wanna go—but I gotta, or else I'm out, I don't belong in. And I wanna belong in! Put* cara palo *on, like it don't move you*" (55, emphasis in original). Although Thomas does not wish to receive oral sex from the crossdressers, he wants to earn membership in his gang and, thus, must wear a "cara palo" and prove his toughness, that he "wasn't gonna punk out first" (56). Because Thomas and his gang occupy *activo* positions in this scene (receiving, rather than performing, oral sex), Thomas displaces any potential for queerness and instead regards oral sex with these crossdressers as a performance and validation of his hypermasculinity, demonstrating a pedigree worthy of full membership in his gang. As Brown elaborates on the gang and Thomas's mindset, "This 'transgression' serves to confirm their masculinity and heterosexuality and is evident throughout the scene, as Thomas and his boys refer to these men as 'faggots' and 'maricones,' further

distancing the transvestites from themselves and strengthening through language the dichotomy of 'us' and 'them'" (16). Though Thomas adopts an *activo*/*pasivo* rationale to reject queer potentiality, Brown draws from Eve Sedgwick's concept of "erotic triangles" to disclose how the homosocialism of this scene crosses into queerness, regardless of *activo*/*pasivo* displacement. According to Brown, "Homosocial bonding between the boys in the gang underwrites these sexual exchanges involving the transvestites as passive caricatures—bodies used in a ritual of proving who has 'heart' in the gang. But it is taken a step further, and the 'boys'' desire for each other is triangulated through the body of the transvestite" (18). Like many critics of *Down These Mean Streets*, Brown reads queer desire not between the crossdressers and the gang but between the men of the gang. The crossdressers mediate and facilitate the gang members' erotic desire for each other that their queer panic and homophobia disallow them from expressing.

In contributing these interpretations, Pérez, Aldama, and Brown valuably challenge homophobic ideologies that de-suture sex from sexuality solely to displace queerness and unveil the possibility of queer gang narratives. But because cultural products like *American Me* and *Down These Mean Streets* deny queer sexuality and, therefore, never engage queerness as a serious subject, these types of texts limit the theorization of how queer sexuality may implicate the systemic impetus to the formation of gangs and gang violence in working-class communities of color. Although *Down These Mean Streets* and *American Me* include queer scenes, queerness only acts as a *method* through which men create a gang counternation and never figures as a *reason* for a gang's emergence or violence.

Additionally, while the art they study still does not offer the opportunity to theorize queer gang decolonization and violence, Pérez's other work on the queer Chicano artists Alex Donis and Hector Silva, the latter of whom Rodríguez also writes on, are noteworthy examples of

scholarship about queer gang cultural production that does not necessitate revealing queer visibility. Pérez interprets Donis's *War* series, a collection of canvas paintings that queers normative representations of male gang member and "homeboy" masculinity and sexuality. The portraits present what Pérez calls "queer machos"—hypermasculine, male gang members and homeboys—in feminine and homoerotic positions, often portraying them as flirting or engaging in sexual activity with police officers.[17] Silva's pencil sketches pursue a similar agenda. A Los Angeles-based artist, Silva frequently draws hypermasculine, heavily-muscled, and scantily-clad homeboys in eroticized positions that resemble those of models in Calvin Klein underwear advertisements. In many of these images, Silva's homeboys partake in queer sexual acts with one another. Because of how these representations depart from the normative depiction of homeboys and gang members in popular culture, literature, film, and media, Pérez contends that Donis's and Silva's artwork "feminize otherwise masculine figures to destabilize gender norms" and create "queer macho identities" as "equally viable, transgressive, and progressive" (31).

Likewise, Rodríguez adopts a similar analysis about Silva's sketches that synchronizes with Pérez's observations. For Rodríguez, Silva's work queers the "homeboy aesthetic" (shaved head, tattoos, "wife beater" shirts, and baggy pants), the prominent fashion style amongst contemporary Latino gang members and which Rodríguez contends "has been made always already heterosexual or rendered antithetical to homosexuality" ("Queering the Homeboy Aesthetic" 131). According to Rodríguez, not only do Silva's homoerotic sketches refashion gender and aesthetical norms to render queerness compatible with the homeboy aesthetic. Silva's art also enables queer male viewers to achieve psychological pleasure through fantasy, as Rodríguez claims that "a gay man may situate himself as the desiring subject in the symbolic mirror held up in Silva's work" ("Queering the Homeboy Aesthetic" 133).

While the majority of scholarship on queer men in gangs focuses on their representation in cultural production, Vanessa R. Panfil has contributed the first book on actual queer men in gangs: *The Gang's All Queer*. Panfil's ethnography studies queer African American male gang members in Columbus, Ohio to respond to what she calls the "heterosexual imaginary" in criminology (3). Although Panfil recognizes that "gay gang- and crime-involved men have entered the broader consciousness thanks to popular culture"—such as the work of Silva and Donis—she contends that "criminology scholars remain stuck in a 'heterosexual imaginary' where assumed heterosexuality is not questioned, where queer folk don't exist" (3). Although unsatisfied with an academic propensity for imposing heterosexuality, Panfil also critiques criminal justice and criminology research that attempts to account for queerness, arguing that this "literature focuses on gay men's victimization and thus implies gay men have little agency" (7). As such, *The Gang's All Queer* begins to uncover the agential decolonization queer men in gangs attain and how they might use gangs to "'fight back'" against "bias crimes, intimate partner violence, or homophobic bullying" (8, 9). Panfil's work, thus, constructs a key route for studying queer delinquency and crime as subaltern agency and resistance, as she shows how queerness does not negate men's capacity to participate in violent subcultures like gangs. Though indispensable, Panfil's work on queer men achieving citizenship and decolonization in gangs mimics past scholarship on girl gangs in conditioning this citizenship on participation in queer gangs only. Though Panfil condemns scholarship that exclusively centers on queer victimization, her discussion of queer men in heterosexual gangs only documents the trauma they encounter in these subcultures, finding that, in these gangs, "[g]ay men have been tortured by gang members" and that "some gangs have formal rules against same-sex activity" (109). Panfil's book allocates

no attention to the possibility of queer men successfully navigating heterosexual gangs to achieve citizenship in and decolonization through them.

Moreover, some scholars have questioned the validity of Panfil's study, such as Vernon Rosario who criticizes Panfil's "overly broad definition of a 'gang': 'durable, street-oriented youth groups whose identity includes involvement in illegal activity'" (34). As Rosario recognizes, under Panfil's definition of a "gang," she may dub queer men gang members without them even participating in a gang but only partaking in "illegal activity." Correspondingly, Rosario points out that the queer gangs Panfil examines differ considerably from traditional gangs in that they "are not armed and have no territory to defend" (34). Because these queer gangs do not own territory in their *barrios* or engage in more lethal forms of violence than fistfights, many scholars reject deeming them gangs. Brown, for instance, likely would not consider these queer crews counternations, as territory has an integral role in her counternation theory. Nevertheless, despite these critiques, Panfil's book, as well as the work of Galván, Johnson, Pérez, Aldama, and Rodríguez on the representation of queer gang members, establish a crucial foundation that *Decolonial Delinquency* builds from.

Decolonial Delinquency

While this project recognizes that depictions of women and queer gang members deconstruct gender and sexual normativity, *Decolonial Delinquency* principally studies the dynamic across gender and sexuality and race and class in decolonization in gangs. I consider how the literary and filmic representation of "non-normative" Latina/o gang members reveals how women and queers may appropriate, re-invent, and rearticulate gang violence, crime, culture, and masculinity to initiate decolonization against the internal colonialism of the U.S. nation-state, the heteropatriarchy of Latina/o cultural systems, and, at times, the bigoted

intolerance of their own gangs. At the same time, while I am committed to theorizing how women and queers claim citizenship in their gangs to circumvent various colonial apparatuses and engender the "veritable creation of new men" and women, this project refuses to idealize and/or romanticize toxic forms of decolonial violence and crime that depend upon the colonization of other multiply marginalized subjects. But rather than sensationalize gang members and their auto-destructive decolonial projects, *Decolonial Delinquency* strives to combat the pathologizing of gang members in a manner that attends to a range of gender and sexual identities. By asking *why* gang members find gang violence, crime, culture, and hypermasculinity decolonial and rewarding, I unveil how the systemic impetus for gang violence operates at the intersection of gender, sexuality, race, and class. In doing so, this project endemically argues that community and state responses to gang violence that only center on militarization, policing, harsher mandatory prison sentences, and other punitive measures are ineffective for reducing gang violence and crime in internal colonies. Sufficiently accounting for and addressing the structural causes of gang violence means always working from an intersectional framework that attends to internal colonialism, social death, and alien citizenship.

Decolonial Delinquency pursues these subjects by interpreting a range of post-1950s Latina/o gang literature and film, though this volume does not serve as a comprehensive account of primary texts about queer and women gang members. Rejecting acting as a critical catalog of literature and film about "non-normative" gang members, *Decolonial Delinquency* instead selects representative gang texts that center on decolonization and specifically enable the theorization of how violent forms of decolonization and the systemic impetus to gang violence intersect with gender and sexuality as much as race and class.[18]

Decolonial Delinquency commences studying these primary aims by explicating Ana Castillo's autobiographical poetry collection *My Father Was a Toltec* in Chapter 2. Attending to the neglected father/daughter relationship in Chicana/o studies, this chapter ponders how gang members who find decolonization in gangs shape and determine the lives of their families (what I term their "socialities") in the private and public spheres. Through close reading Castillo's poems, Chapter 2 discloses how Chicanas in the private sphere may appropriate gang fashion, culture, and violence that seep into the home as an anti-assimilationist strategy for circumventing white-capitalist induced poverty, state-sanctioned violence against women of color, and Chicana/o patriarchy's regulation of their sexuality and autonomy. Furthermore, this chapter uncovers how the daughter-speaker of *My Father Was a Toltec* transforms normative heterosexual hypermasculinity in gangs into a queer homoeroticism that acts as a decolonial politics for women in and outside gangs and in the private sphere. In this way, Chapter 2 elucidates how Chicanas might use gang culture, violence, and masculinity to challenge racialized, heteropatriarchal, and classed structures of domination in a way that insulates them from *agringada* accusations.

Chapter 3 concentrates on concerns that *My Father Was a Toltec* and much of the scholarship on gang girls overlook, namely the romanticization of gang violence, crime, and masculinity as decolonial praxis for women and *how* female gang members achieve citizenship and decolonization in heteropatriarchal and misogynist gangs. In addressing this aperture, Chapter 3 studies Yxta Maya Murray's *Locas* to show how women in Murray's novel perform what Jack Halberstam terms "female masculinity" to access citizenship and power in their heteropatriarchal, male-dominated gang so that they may bypass lives of domestic violence, psychological abuse, menial labor, and state neglect. In doing so, this chapter advances the

overarching discussion of female masculinity by theorizing the masculinity that women gang members perform in *Locas* as a toxic, racialized (and often queer) female masculinity predicated on the violent abuse and devaluation of other working-class Latinas. Calling for an expanded understanding of how class and race intersect with female masculinity, this chapter argues that *Locas* identifies the toxicity of this type of racialized female masculinity as arising from the vulnerability and violability that the U.S. nation-state and heteropatriarchy impose on working-class women of color's bodies.

Moreover, this chapter refuses the frequent assertion that femininity automatically results in marginalization and ineligibility for citizenship in hypermasculine, male-dominated gangs. Rather, as much as this chapter examines racialized female masculinity as a decolonial performance, Chapter 3 also attends to decolonial femininity in illumining how the female gang members in *Locas* deploy femininity to manipulate male gang members and heterosexual masculinity so that these women may secure avenues for citizenship and power in a subculture that provides women decolonization against the family, private sphere, U.S. nation-state, and heteropatriarchy. In this manner, Chapter 3 explains how women gang members co-opt predominantly male gangs to initiate decolonization and also complicates theories of decolonial violence by considering how the state and patriarchy contribute to subaltern persons potentially relying on toxic forms of decolonization.

Chapter 4 segues to further strategies that non-normative gang members employ for metamorphosing bigoted gangs into decolonial subcultures, in this case focusing on queer men. This chapter centers on how queer men in gangs navigate and alter ideologies of normative gang gender and sexuality to queer decolonial crime and violence. Primarily examining Dino Dinco's *Homeboy*, a documentary about queer Latino gang members, Chapter 4 draws from José Esteban

Muñoz's theory of disidentification to contemplate how these men persist in their homophobic gangs and rearticulate queerness into a signifier for violent hypermasculinity. In doing so, these gang members view themselves not as failing in gangs because of their sexualities but consider their queer identities integral to their success in their delinquent subcultures. In this vein, this chapter unearths how these queer gang members ironically find community in their gangs and initiate decolonial violence to combat the hate crimes and social and familial ostracism they encounter *outside* their delinquent subcultures. Additionally, Chapter 4 charts how the exhibition of *Homeboy* operates as a decolonial performance that helps multiple queer men in and outside gangs attain belonging and psychological decolonization through establishing a queer gang counterpublic.

Whereas the previous chapters focus on "non-normative" gang members who succeed in heterosexual, hypermasculine, predominantly-male, and often patriarchal and homophobic gangs, Chapter 5 reconceptualizes gang violence, crime, and heterosexual hypermasculinity to contemplate how failure in gangs that espouse these ideals may also contribute to decolonization. By interpreting Tadeo García's *On the Downlow*, a film about two queer Latin King and Two Six gang members who develop a romantic interest in each other, this chapter reveals that failure to meet gang expectations of violent, heterosexual hypermasculinity may not foreclose queer men in gangs from achieving decolonization but, paradoxically, may enable liberation. Chapter 5 unfurls this antinomy by exploring how the queer men of this film embrace their failure in gangs and in their *barrio* as a method for constructing a utopian futurity. In this utopian futurity, these queer men achieve psychological and material decolonization through fantasizing about a world outside their present financial and sexual restrictions, even if this decolonization only occurs temporarily. In this way, Chapter 5 proves how decolonization need not always entail

conventional notions of success for emancipation and shows how gangs might facilitate decolonization through failure.

Nonetheless, like many of the gang members and cultural products of this project, *On the Downlow* engages in decolonial work through a method not always anticolonial. In revealing the possibility of decolonial failure, this film also reproduces other colonial structures for queer men by conditioning decolonial failure upon Malinche poetics—or, in other words, ethnic and cultural betrayal. In this way, *On the Downlow* revises the Chicana/o and Latina/o cultural practice of associating gang membership with anti-assimilationist decolonization and propagates—even as the film simultaneously critiques—homophobic environments that impel working-class queer men of color to participate in gang membership, violence, and crime as a decolonial strategy.

By tracing decolonization in gangs across five chapters, *Decolonial Delinquency* exposes how women and queers access and reshape heterocentric and male-centric subcultures to acquire a range of decolonial rewards from gang violence, crime, culture, and hypermasculinity. In revealing how race, class, gender, and sexuality influence violent and criminalized forms of decolonization, this project ultimately urges scholars to, and reveals strategies for, extending our understanding of the intersectional relations between the decolonial process and the systemic impetus for gang violence in working-class communities of color.

CHAPTER 2: ENTER *LA HEREDERA*: GANG SOCIALITY AND PUBLIC AND PRIVATE LIFE IN ANA CASTILLO'S *MY FATHER WAS A TOLTEC*

Luis J. Rodriguez's autobiographical gang narrative *Always Running* opens with family, the book's initial paragraph detailing Rodriquez's childhood memory of his mother, father, brother, sisters, and him cruising through Los Angeles on their way to Union Station to repatriate to Mexico. The paragraph reads, "This memory begins with flight. A 1950s bondo-spackled Dodge surged through the driving rain, veering around the potholes and upturned tracks of the abandoned Red Line trains on Alameda. Mama was in the front seat. My father was at the wheel. My brother *Rano* and I sat on one end of the back seat; my sisters *Pata* and *Cuca* on the other. There was a space between the boys and girls to keep us apart" (Rodriguez 13). This space that emerges during this car ride that splinters brothers from sisters persists throughout Rodriguez's childhood and well into his adolescent participation in gangs, but no matter how steadfast the teenage Rodriguez remains in attempting to create distance between his nuclear family and his *otra familia*—his gang—this forced separation keeps dwindling. Rather, Rodriquez, who prefers to spend so much of his time immersed in gangs, remains haunted by his family, particularly his female kin.

For Rodriguez's mother and sisters, as well as several of his love interests not in gangs, the trauma of gang culture permeates their lives as much as gangs structure Rodriguez's, regardless of their refusal to gangbang. As Rodriguez later explains, "Mama hated the *cholos*. They reminded her of the rowdies on the border who fought all the time, talked that *caló* slang, drank mescal, smoked marijuana and left scores of women with babies bursting out of their bodies. To see me become like them made her sick, made her cringe and cry and curse" (48). Not

only does Rodriguez's mother weep over his menacing decisions, but Rodriguez acknowledges that gang members often reproduce through procreation this anguish for those not in gangs but still tied to gang members' lives and, consequently, to gang culture. In sum, the clutches of gang membership extend far beyond the immediate circle of the gang, implicating many apart from the proverbial, innocent drive-by victims whom U.S. media smear campaigns frequently invoke.

Always Running is not alone in attending to the shared experience of gangs. Many novels, poetry, and memoirs also attest to the mutual trauma amongst gang members and their families, such as Ernesto Quiñonez's *Bodega Dreams*, Asha Bandele's *The Prisoner's Wife*, Sister Souljah's *The Coldest Winter Ever*, Jesmyn Ward's *The Men We Reaped*, and Ana Castillo's *My Father Was a Toltec*. The shared experience of gangs that many of these narratives recognize often means a shared experience amongst and between women because of the frequency of these subcultures as male-dominated organizations. Although many literary writers address women's shared experience of gangs, scholarship and U.S. media rarely observe and take seriously the psychological, emotional, and material ordeals women undergo alongside their gangbanging husbands, boyfriends, fathers, brothers, and sons.[19]

As a result, this chapter fills this multidisciplinary void by building from Ernesto Javier Martínez's contention that queer persons have a "*muted sociality* of queerness" and that queerness "is a social and shared experience, even as oppressive ideologies work at making it seem less real and shared, and even if the queer subject often seems isolated in the process" (229, 241, emphasis in original). In examining how queer of color literatures have shifted from narrating from the perspective of the queer subject of color to the queer's sociality, which consists of "the queer subject's siblings, friends, parents, and neighbors" and "relationship to various people, places, [and] histories," Martínez argues that queers' socialities can provide "a

deeper understanding of the intersubjective and social contexts in which queer subjects come into being" and the "shared quality of queer experience" (227). Working from Martínez's suggestion that the overlooked socialities of queers inform, influence, and experience queer identity, Chapter 2 explores male and female gang members' female socialities and how gangs and gang culture shape and determine these women's life chances, possibilities, and experiences in the private and public spheres.

In pursuing this endeavor, I interpret Ana Castillo's *My Father Was a Toltec*, an autobiographical poetry collection that, amongst other topics, chronicles Castillo's childhood experience of her father in a Chicago gang (the Toltecs) and her later teenage entrance into a gang as well. While Castillo's *So Far from God* and *The Mixquiahuala Letters* are foundational works of the Chicana/o and Latina/o literary canon, *My Father Was a Toltec* has received little scholarly attention.[20] Chapter 2, however, submits *My Father Was a Toltec* as a key Chicana work for advancing multiple fields of inquiry within Latina/o and Chicana/o studies. First, as Margaret Cantú-Sánchez notes, the "exploration of mother/daughter relationships has been a consistent theme throughout Chicanx literature especially in relation to Chicanx identity" (1). But although primary and secondary literature in Latina/o and Chicana/o studies has produced an abundance of discussion on the mother/daughter relationship, critical analyses and portrayals of father/daughter relations are curiously absent throughout much of Chicana literature and even more so within Latina/o and Chicana/o scholarship. According to Alvina Quintana, this absence may arise from the Chicana *feminista* desire to "renounce and overthrow masculine domination, to move the Chicana from sexual subjugation to liberation" (42) and because, as Adriana Estill claims, "when the father does appear, he represents a thoroughly ambivalent and negative force" (46). Ergo, Chapter 2 studies *My Father Was a Toltec* partly to expand the understanding of the

father/daughter relationship in Chicana/o literature and argues that absent fathers in Chicana/o literature do not always equate to liberation from a heteropatriarchal rule that does not necessitate the father's presence but may instead contribute to gendered oppression and trauma within the working-class Chicana/o family. Rather, this chapter submits that the father's appearance in the home may inspire decolonial strategies for Chicana daughters when the father engages in gang life and imports gang culture into the private sphere.

This potential for decolonization for working-class Chicanas points towards this chapter's second pivotal intervention: the abovementioned theorization of how gang members' socialities experience gang membership and culture. On the one hand, Castillo's *My Father Was a Toltec* suggests that many of the decolonial possibilities that gangs afford working-class men of color produce gendered trauma for their female family members, revealing how male gang members may incarcerate women in the private sphere and inundate them in domestic labor to reap the decolonial benefits and freedoms of gang life. Yet on the other hand, private life and the public life that gangs facilitate do not always function in opposition to each other in *My Father Was a Toltec* but, instead, as a nexus of hybridity. As a result, Castillo's poetry collection supplies an opportunity for theorizing how the admittance of gang culture into the home may present pathways for working-class women of color to circumvent heteropatriarchy's and the private sphere's discipline and regulation of women's autonomy, sexuality, and agency, as well as resist white capitalism and racism. In short, the complex father/daughter relationship that precipitates Castillo's gang membership avails her to envision and achieve decolonization against the U.S. nation-state and Chicano heteropatriarchy.

The emancipating potentiality gangs accord Castillo coincides with this chapter's final fundamental contribution to Chicana/o and Latina/o studies: anti-assimilationist Chicana

decolonization. Routinely invoking the Spanish colonization of the Aztec Empire and Malinalli Tenepal, Chicana/o and Latina/o cultural production's representation of Chicana/Latina liberation from heteropatriarchy often romanticizes whiteness and reduces Chicanas/Latinas to assimilationists. For example, in José Antonio Villarreal's *Pocho*, the protagonist's Mexican mother can only halt domestic violence from her Mexican husband once she acculturates to the United States. Likewise, in Julia Alvarez's *How the García Girls Lost Their Accents*, women from the Dominican Republic learn to resist gendered oppression in Latin America only through white feminist literature that neglects intersectionality, not through or alongside third world/women of color feminism. Departing from the literary tradition of associating Chicana/Latina decolonization with whiteness, *My Father Was a Toltec* envisions how gangs may enable Chicanas/Latinas to resist U.S. white capitalism and racism, as well as Chicana/o and Latina/o heteropatriarchy, in a way that affirms Chicana/o and Latina/o culture and heritage and insulates them from *agringada* accusations.

Intersubjectivity and Counternation *Atravesados*

Joan W. Moore's *Going Down to the Barrio* and James Diego Vigil's *Barrio Gangs: Street Life and Identity in Southern California* are two of the most influential studies of Latina/o gangs to attend to gangs' socialities, in this case gang members' families. But the attention these two scholars allocate to gang members' families centers on speculating about how dysfunctional families impel at-risk racial/ethnic minoritarian youth to join gangs. Along with citing the second-class citizenship that the U.S. nation-state relegates people of color to as an impetus for gang membership, Moore argues that dysfunctional families contribute to the proliferation of gangs. She insists that domestic violence, sexual abuse, and deplorable relations with and between parents—all of which Moore contends arise partly because of the trauma and stress

accompanying the migration experience and poverty—compel at-risk youth to pursue gang membership for material and psychological catharsis (Moore 81, 96). Although Moore acknowledges gangs' socialities in her analysis of at-risk youths' dysfunctional families, she abandons serious study of these socialities once at-risk youths leave their nuclear families and become gang members. As such, her work creates opportunities for theorizing how these socialities also experience gangs alongside their kin and how gang members bring gang culture into the home and the implications of doing so.

Concurring with Moore, Vigil also proposes that systemically-produced familial dysfunctionality induces at-risk youth to join gangs (*Barrio Gangs* 25). But Vigil expands further in contemplating gangs' socialities beyond dysfunctional families, recognizing that gang members may carry gang culture into the home and influence their socialities to participate in gangs as well. Vigil's contention, however, focuses on men and siblings. According to Vigil, between male siblings, an older brother who joins a gang acts as a "role model" for a younger brother, which often results in a younger brother desiring "to follow in an older brother's footsteps" and seek out gang membership (*Barrio Gangs* 88). While Vigil shrewdly understands that gang members and gang culture are not entirely exterior to the private sphere, he does not consider the various gendered and sexual reasons behind female gang membership or how gender and sexuality influence decolonial gang violence and crime. Nor does Vigil recognize that the affiliations between gang members and their socialities may also encompass parent-child relations. As Luis J. Rodriguez reminds us in this chapter's opening, in a subculture that frequently idealizes hypermasculinity and hypersexuality, scads of male gang members continually father children, yet the scholarship that has attended to gangs' socialities has only examined the role non-gang member parents hold in cultivating gang membership amongst their

children and overlooked that at-risk youths who join gangs may remain gang members as they reach adolescence and/or adulthood and become parents themselves. Consequently, this chapter gathers this lingering but currently unaddressed thread to contemplate how, then, gang members who are parents affect the life chances and possibilities of their *female* children, especially when accounting for how heteropatriarchy intersects with white capitalism and racism in the U.S. nation-state.

Monica Brown's *Gang Nation* bears essential relevance for the theorization of gang members' socialities, the shared experience of gang life, and the "border crossing" that this gendered sociality potentially participates in when gang culture infiltrates the private sphere. Like Moore, Brown understands gangs as arising from sociopolitical and systemic marginalization, but whereas Vigil and other social scientists regard gangs as "substitute families" that create psychological, emotional, and material decolonization for their members, Brown views gangs as accomplishing these decolonial rewards through replicating the nation-states that ostracize them. As Brown says, Chicana/o and Latina/o gang narratives accentuate the "tensions and inconsistencies that exist between dominant notions of citizenship, protections constitutionally (if only theoretically) available to all citizens of any class, race, and religion" (xvi). Reacting to these inconsistencies that foreclose their claim to material, social, and political citizenship within the U.S. nation-state, many working-class persons of color formulate gang counternations that "emulate existing structures from which they are excluded, including access to 'equal citizenship'" (Brown xvi). Brown's proposition that gangs imitate the structures of the nation that alienates them, such as "moral and juridical authority with a history tied to territory," bespeaks the intersubjective recognition that gangs provide for the socially dead and invisible (xxiii).

To reiterate *Decolonial Delinquency*'s prior exegesis of Frantz Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks*, Fanon famously writes of a young white child hailing him with the lines "'Dirty nigger!'" and "'Look! A Negro!'" (89). Detailing the power of this racist language over his identity, Fanon writes that this child denies him intersubjective recognition, what he terms the "lightness of being," resulting in Fanon feeling incarcerated in a state of abject invisibility and objecthood as if he were a "preparation" fixed "with a dye" (*Black Skin, White Masks* 89). But in Fanon's mind, this dehumanizing state does not preempt him from repairing his subjectivity, as he proposes in *The Wretched of the Earth* that "decolonization is always a violent phenomenon" (35) that "frees the native from his inferiority complex and from his despair and inaction" (94), eventually enabling the subaltern subject to return the Other's racist hailing not with an appeal for a "liberating gaze" but with a bellicose refusal to recognize the Other's power over him or her, indicated by Fanon's development into the "handsome Negro" who returns xenophobic salutations with a "'Fuck you,' madame" (*Black Skin, White Masks* 94). For Brown, gang counternations function as many working-class people of color's "fuck you" to the U.S. nation-state and to its copious figurative and literal white children, working collectively and systemically to render working-class persons of color subhuman, subaltern, and socially and politically invisible and dead. Instead, these counternations enable the subaltern to reclaim their subjectivity, no longer appealing to the Other for intersubjective recognition because these counternations' citizens recognize and affirm each other's existences.

But if, as Fanon underscores, the Other contains the power to deny and grant subjectivity and social citizenship, then what are counternations' ramifications for their citizens' socialities? If, as Vigil contends, a gang "is a force of attraction that provides many family-type functions . . . translat[ing] into what we would call familial supportive behavior," are not gang members'

nuclear families denied a similar intersubjective recognition and familial citizenship when these gang members replace mothers, fathers, brothers, and sisters for alternative kinship networks and refuse to recognize them as meaningful and worthy kin, especially when these kin often succumb to the same sociopolitical marginalization, invisibility, and Fanonian "thingification" from the U.S. nation-state, its national culture, and its hegemonic citizens that these gang members encounter (*Barrio Gangs* 90)? While Moore and Vigil rightfully argue that dysfunctional families wrought with domestic and sexual violence and buckling under the conditions of mass poverty incentivize at-risk youth to join gangs, many literary and filmic gang narratives and scholarly texts also attest to gang members having inclusive and supporting families, such as *Bodega Dreams*, *Boulevard Nights* (1979), and Martín Sánchez-Jankowski's *Islands in the Streets*. In these instances, what, then, are the effects of gang membership for persons whose gangbanging kin refuse them intersubjective recognition, community, and support in favor of their substitute gang families?

Furthermore, if Brown suggests that gang counternations resemble the social, political, material, and hierarchical structures of the U.S. nation-state, then one must account for how counternations, like all nations, build themselves not only through expansionism but also through exclusion and the erection of borders. Gloria Anzaldúa claims that the borderlands are home to *los atravesados*, "those who cross over, pass over, or go through the confines of the 'normal'" (25). Likewise, *atravesados* in "gang borderlands" also migrate across the borders of gang counternations, which include the boundaries between nuclear family and alternative kinship network, private and public life, and alterity and decolonization. And yet, despite the migrations that have always transpired across every nation's geopolitical borders, the gendered border

crossings that gang members' socialities engage in remain unaccounted for in almost all scholarship on gang counternations, regardless of discipline.

José Navarro's "Revisiting the Boulevard: The Gender & Sexual Politics of Michael Pressman's *Boulevard Nights*" remains the lone study of Latina/o *literary* or *filmic* gang narratives to centralize gangs' socialities. Navarro reviews *Boulevard Nights* to contend that gang members' female socialities are often antithetical to gang life, lowriding subcultures (which are often male-dominated, hypermasculine, and closely tied to gang culture), and *carnalismo*, the close-knit, homosocial bonds between male gang members that render them "blood brothers." Rather, these socialities experience gangs as competition where gang and lowriding subculture participants prefer the company of their male *carnales* over their wives, girlfriends, and sisters. Therefore, Navarro suggests that the women of gang members' socialities threaten the foundations of *carnalismo* and the gang through the specter of marriage, reproductive futurism, and a life, culture, and values committed to and characterized by the private sphere ("Revisiting the Boulevard" 771-773). Navarro's assertions have invaluably begun to consider the representation of gangs' socialities in literary and filmic narratives and are crucial for my work. This chapter builds from his essential observations to consider how gang members' female socialities may also *enable*, rather than endanger, the decolonial possibilities in gangs. Furthermore, *My Father Was a Toltec* reveals how these women may aspire to (and gain) entrance into gangs for gendered and intersectional reasons, as opposed to universally condemning them. Without reducing Chicanas to assimilationists idealizing whiteness, Castillo's poetry collection portrays border-crossing into gangs as an avenue for Chicanas to resist heteropatriarchy, racism, and white capitalism.

Dandyish Decolonial Violence, Toltec Style

Composed of poems from a fifteen-year period in the late-twentieth century, Castillo's *My Father Was a Toltec* features eight chapters, each working to create a chronological narrative of Castillo's maturation from a young girl to the radical Chicana feminist writer many now perceive her as, but I am specifically interested in the first chapter of her collection, which has received the least scholarly attention. The first chapter's eight poems, which I interpret collectively as a sequential ensemble, depict gangs as decolonial. Although gangs might also exacerbate colonization—such as leading to racialized police violence, incarceration, psychological trauma, social panics that criminalize working-class people of color, and fratricidal, rather than decolonial, warfare—Castillo's book understands gangs as decolonial for their members but often colonial for their female socialities. In doing so, *My Father Was a Toltec* traces Castillo's and her mother's shared experiences of her father in the Toltecs and her development into the appellation she adopts as a teenager: *la Heredera* (the heiress), her father's successor to the Toltec throne.

A little-known Chicano, Chicago gang that has since dissipated, the Toltecs appropriated their name from the indigenous Toltec civilization that prospered in now Central America during the tenth through twelfth centuries CE. The Toltecs and their legacy bore immense prestige amongst the later Maya and Aztecs, the latter of whom claimed the Toltecs as their ancestors and conveyed their reverence for the nation with the Nahuatl expression *Toltecayotl*, which denoted having a "Toltec heart" and excelling in every facet of life (Cartwright). As Castillo more colloquially explains, "No Aztec worth his salt did not claim lineage to that civilization" (*My Father Was a Toltec* xviii). Moreover, Elizabeth Salas observes that this indigenous nation also broke from heteropatriarchal indigenous traditions, as Toltec queens not only often ruled the

civilization, but Toltec women also fought alongside men in war (3). Toltec legends even suggest that when Queen Xochitl died in war, her spilt blood formed the phase, "This is the end of the Toltecs" (Castillo *My Father Was a Toltec*, xviii). While the modern gang built from the Aztec tradition of idealizing the Toltecs by associating the name Toltec with resistance and prestige, the twentieth century Toltecs partially departed from the indigenous civilization's gender egalitarianism, a topic Castillo broaches in her collection's first poem: "The Toltec."

"The Toltec" represents gangs as supplying material, psychological, and ideological decolonial possibilities for working-class men of color, with fashion, violence, and women having vital positions in this decolonization. In its entirety, "The Toltec" reads:

> My father was a Toltec.
> Everyone knows he was *bad*,
> Kicked the Irish-boys-from-Bridgeport's
> ass. Once went down to South Chicago
> to stick someone
> got chased to the hood
> running through the gangway
> swish of blade in his back
> the emblemed jacket split in half.
>
> Next morning, Mami
> threw it away. (Castillo 3, emphasis in original)

With the father's "emblemed jacket split in half" connoting the gang cultural practice of emblazoning gang insignias on members' clothing (usually caps or leather coats), this poem pinpoints style as a paramount characteristic of the Toltecs and the father's public life, a theme continually manifesting through much of the first chapter of *My Father Was a Toltec*. For instance, in another poem, "Saturdays," the speaker also defines the father by fashion, commenting on his habit of donning a "tailor-made silk suit" (Castillo 6). Similarly, in the introduction to the book, Castillo mentions her Toltec father as memorable for his "shark-skin suit" (xviii). These continual references to the father's clothing accent the connection between

style and ideology and how, in the first chapter of Castillo's poetry collection, fashion often signals decolonial resistance against U.S. white capitalist and racial hegemony, ideology, empire.

In his analysis of youth subcultures of the mid-twentieth century, Dick Hebdige discerns contesting fashion styles as sites of ideological warfare. According to Hebdige, the "struggle between different discourses, different definitions and meanings within ideology is therefore always, at the same time, a struggle within signification: a struggle for the possession of the sign which extends to even the most mundane areas of everyday life" (17). For Hebdige, every signifier, no matter how "mundane," signifies an ideology, discourse, and meaning, and he consequently views non-normative, subcultural fashion styles—such as those the primarily white, British, and working-class mods, teddy boys, punks, and rockers of the 1960s and 1970s adopt—as in conflict with hegemonic culture and its ideologies. Thus, subcultural resistance, in Hebdige's mind, manifests not solely through material violence but "is expressed obliquely, in style" (17). Because hegemonic fashion often evokes white supremacy, aristocratic elitism, a politics of middle-class respectability, and/or heteronormativity, the subcultural appropriation, incorporation, and re-deployment of banal items in a non-normative style functions as a "form of Refusal" by signaling "noise" and "semantic disorder" within the ruling ideology that rationalizes and legitimates the exploitation and suppression of the subaltern subject (Hebdige 2, 90). In short, subcultures ideologically challenge hegemony through their own distinct fashion styles.

Although the speaker's father in "The Toltec" does not necessarily co-opt normative clothing in the same ways that the punks adorned themselves in lavatory chains or trashy fabrics with loud designs, if, as Hebdige says, signs and style are always ideological, then the father's knifed jacket and dandyish suits evoke an ideology and resistance that refuses the invisibility and

racism the U.S. nation-state and many of its hegemonic citizens impose on working-class Chicanas/os. Early in "The Toltec," the poem identifies the actions and rewards of the father's gang ideology and culture that his "emblemed jacket" broadcasts. Although the "swish of a blade in his back" of his jacket after a knife fight in Bridgeport, South Chicago accentuates the precariousness of gang life, earning this tear in Bridgeport elucidates the decolonial resistance against U.S. white supremacy and racism that gangs accord Chicanas/os. While Black persons primarily inhabited the far South Side of Chicago during the 1950s (the approximate date Castillo sets this poem), Irish Americans lived in Bridgeport of South Chicago as well, hence the line "Kicked the Irish-boys-from-Bridgeport's / ass." As such, while the possibility remains of the father partaking in gang violence against Blacks, Chicanas/os, or another ethnic group in South Chicago, his encounter with Bridgeport "Irish-boys" reveals his participation in a violent Chicana/o-Irish American war, which indicates decolonial violence against agents of U.S. white supremacy and racism.

In *Racial Formation in the United States*, Michael Omi and Howard Winant admit that nineteenth and early-twentieth century "Atlantic immigrants were not considered WASPs or white," but they also acknowledge that European immigrants "possess[ed] an intermediate racial status" where the U.S. nation-state and white Americans did not consider these immigrants "black or Asian either" (25). Despite this intermediate status, white Atlantic immigrants assimilated into the American nation, its culture, and whiteness, a phenomenon that birthed an "immigrant analogy" model that assists in pathologizing U.S. citizens and migrants of color for supposedly not acculturating to the United States. As Omi and Winant explain, this analogy assumes "that each racialized 'ethnic group' faces the normalized white society in the same way that [white Atlantic immigrants] did" and that the "achievement of mobility" that these earlier

immigrants attained "reflects group willingness and ability to accept presumptive white norms and values" (43). Within this logic, the real or imagined failure of certain racial/ethnic groups to achieve the upward mobility of previous white Atlantic immigrants results from their unwillingness to embrace dominant white American culture, values, and norms, not from differing systemic circumstances and opportunities.

Part of the reason that nineteenth and early-twentieth century white European immigrants flourished and gained inclusion within the United States' national culture arises from the American upper-class and bourgeois desire to suppress radical revolution amongst the white working-class. Ignorant of (or indifferent to) how their actions maintained their own economic exploitation, white Atlantic immigrants espoused racism because of their eagerness to distance themselves from people of color to approximate the wages of whiteness, a "pyrrhic victory" that stymied allied revolution amongst the white working-class and people of color. In Omi and Winant's words,

> The cultivation of European workers' desires for inclusion became a political and corporate priority in the turn-of-the-20th-century United States: It was a powerful antidote to the radicalism and syndicalism that were brewing among these same workers. Ensuring that European immigrants would not be racialized as blacks and Asians had been, guaranteeing that they would not be equated with the (barely) emancipated ex-slaves or the 'coolies' . . . cement[ed] the loyalties of working-class whites." (25)

This enthusiasm of white working-class immigrants to identify with their race over their class as a strategy for upward mobility epitomizes what George Lipsitz terms "the possessive investment in whiteness" and Cheryl Harris' claim that whiteness "does not mean that all whites will win, but simply that they will not lose, if losing is defined as being at the bottom of the social and

economic hierarchy," because those "whites that are disadvantaged in society suffer not because of their race, but in spite of it" (1758-1759, 1786).

Because of Irish Americans' desire to achieve upward mobility through championing racism against people of color and their legacy of assimilation into whiteness and U.S. national culture that the U.S. nation-state invokes to pathologize people of color, the Toltec "Kick[ing] the Irish-boys-from-Bridgeport's / ass" constitutes decolonial resistance against U.S. white supremacy, racism, and hegemony, regardless of the Irish Americans' class positions. If, as Brown claims, gang subcultures resemble the dominant nation in their formation as counternations and, as Fanon says, decolonization entails "the restoration of nationhood" via an "always violent phenomenon," then the Toltec's violence against rival whites participates in Fanonian (counter) nationbuilding by repudiating the subaltern status the United States imposes on him to expand territorially and to defend the Toltec gang and its sovereignty (*The Wretched of the Earth* 35). Moreover, as Chapter 1 explains, Fanon also identifies the connection between identity, subjectivity, and decolonial violence, as this violence functions as a "cleansing force" that produces a psychological alteration within the hailee—a veritable creation of a new man or woman—who now refuses the racist Other's capacity to withhold intersubjective recognition and reduce him/her to abject objecthood. By exhibiting violence against Irish Americans, the father of the "The Toltec" implicitly wars with the racist narratives of internal colonialism that deem Blacks and Latinas/os as subhuman and inferior to white Atlantic immigrants.

Additionally, decolonial violence also potentially impels the racist hailer to acknowledge the subaltern person's subjectivity, if the hailee still desires that the hailer do so. As the first chapter mentions, the anonymous narrator to Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* initially responds to invisibility and racism with violence. He "begin[s] to bump people back" and "strike out . . . to

make them recognize you," even if "it's seldom successful" (Ellison 4). Though admitting that his decolonial violence does not always succeed, the narrator does not entirely preempt the possibility of violence negating invisibility and leading to the Other acknowledging his existence. For violently striking out may force the racist Other to recognize the hailee's existence as a consequence of the power the hailee wields over the hailer through violence. Of course, the response the hailer provides after encountering violence may not necessarily lead to a recognition of one's humanity but instead further dehumanization, such as another version of the "Look! A Negro" line. Still, the potential for decolonial violence to effect intersubjective recognition from the Other remains, a possibility present in the father's "ass-kicking" of the Bridgeport "Irish-boys."

If decolonial violence does not invite intersubjective recognition from the Irish American Other in "The Toltec," the *reputation* for resistant decolonial violence, as well as dandyish fashion, nonetheless validates the father's subjectivity amongst his Chicana/o *barrio*. As the speaker of the poem says, "My father was a Toltec. / Everyone knows he was *bad*" (Castillo 3, emphasis in original). The Irish American targets of the father's decolonial violence are not the only persons aware of his reputation, as "Everyone" accounts for all persons within the vicinity of the Toltec counternation and those who come into contact with the father. This sociality does not acknowledge his existence with a "Look! A Negro" hailing that reduces him to an invisible and inhuman status but regards the father as exemplifying the "bad." In this line, I read "bad" in the way the word operates within slang dialects commonly spoken in working-class communities of color, often signaling an attractive style or impressively combative, tough, and dangerous person who provokes awe or admiration. The connotations of an appealing style and a remarkably rowdy and truculent persona align with the father's decolonial actions and

ideologies, as in his violence against the Irish Americans and in his shredded leather jacket bearing gang insignias that telecast his violent resistance. The daughter-speaker attesting to everyone deeming her father "bad" thus expresses that these particular socialities find him a person to admire because of how he stylishly throws down in his gang jacket against white ethnic groups that strive to maintain many Chicanas/os' alterity. Consequently, his reputation for dandyish fashion and decolonial violence enables intersubjective recognition from the Toltec's Chicana/o *barrio*, even when decolonial violence may not lead to the Irish Americans acknowledging him beyond a state of social invisibility and abject objecthood.

While the father's "emblemed jacket" partly signals a violently-resistant ideology carried out in gang wars, the "tailor-made silk suit" also connotes gendered ideologies of decolonization. Though Fanon argues that "decolonization is always a violent phenomenon" that "frees the native from his inferiority complex," women are also central to subaltern, heteropatriarchal persons shedding inferiority complexes in that many psychologically-decolonial projects often work through the possession of women's bodies (*The Wretched of the Earth* 35, 94). Colonial movements normatively rely on violence (especially sexual) against women not only to create psychological and tyrannical terror for women—and to fulfill biopolitical agendas necessary for colonizing a people—but also to fracture the psyches of and emasculate colonized rulers of heteropatriarchal societies. For example, in *An Account, Much Abbreviated, of the Destruction of the Indies*, Bartolomé de las Casas writes of the role of racialized sexualized violence during the Spanish Conquest of the New World: "The Christians would smite them [Native Americans] with their hands and strike them with their fists and beat them with sticks and cudgels, until they finally laid hands upon the lords of the villages. And this practice came to such great temerity and shamelessness and ignominy that a Christian captain did violate the wife of the greatest king,

the lord of all the island" (68). According to de las Casas, Spanish soldiers tactically rape the wife of the most powerful Native American king, presuming an ideology of heteropatriarchal control and trying to imply that the "lord of all the island" cannot protect and halt the Spanish from arrogating his "possessions," including land and woman. Because colonization relies on racialized sexualized violence for psychological and physical conquest, certain heteropatriarchal decolonial projects might also venture to "re-possess" stolen "property"—again, land and woman.

This postulation of racialized sexualized violence as having emasculating/masculinizing ramifications for the colonized/colonizer coincides with contemporary understandings of hegemonic masculinity. According to Frances Beale, in the United States, "an individual who has a good job, makes a lot of money, and drives a Cadillac is a real 'man,' and conversely, an individual who is lacking in these 'qualities' is less of a man" (90-91). Although power and capital indicate hegemonic masculinity, women are central to the performance of hegemonic masculinity as well. As the character Tony Montana makes clear in his famous line from *Scarface* (1983) that has now become an American adage: "In this country, you got to make the money first. Then, when you get the money, you get the power. Then, when you get the power, then you get the woman." Therefore, as a result of a legacy of colonialism, certain subaltern, heteropatriarchal masculinities may encompass womanizing or the "possession" of both subaltern and/or hegemonic (read white) women to prove symbolically and psychologically that the colonizer has not rendered the colonized inferior or effeminate.[21] Regarding the "possessing" of hegemonic women specifically, subaltern persons performing these types of masculinities also gender decolonial "violence" in reversing colonization's use of racialized sexualized violence by carrying out an offensive and emasculating attack on colonizers through philandering with—or

"stealing"—white women. In either case, the philandering subaltern subject uses women to respond to colonial history and prove that masculinity and power remain intact.[22]

This subaltern masculinity manifests in the father's gang life, which not only entails decolonial violence against whites but also maintaining his dandyish visage to attract and carouse with other (possibly white) women in the public sphere, despite his wife at home. For instance, in "Saturdays," the speaker remarks that the father "donned the tailor-made silk suit" before leaving for a night out—without his wife (Castillo 6). As the speaker says, her father "married her, a Mexican / woman, like his mother, not like / they were in Chicago, not like / the one he was going out to meet" (Castillo 6). The father forsakes his Mexican wife in favor of another woman unlike her. While this contrast between his paramour and his wife may involve multiple distinctions, they include the possibility of the father having a white lover, especially when considering his other decolonial actions and the decolonial ramifications of philandering with white women. As a result, the father's fashion, whether emblazoned jacket or tailored suit, signals an ideology of resistance against white supremacy, racism, and legacies of colonialism that he enacts through style, violence, and womanizing.

This philandering, however, discloses a divide between the decolonial privileges gang life may accord heterosexual male gang members and some of these men's female socialities, a point that the final stanza of "The Toltec" underscores. In "The Toltec," the mother remains separate from and opposed to gang culture and gang life, indicated in her throwing out her husband's fashionable marker of decolonization ("Next morning, Mami / threw it away") and the bracketing of her character in a separate stanza so as to never come into contact, neither in content nor in form, with her husband. Furthermore, her seemingly minor presence in a discrete, two-line stanza implies her marginality and invisibility, both amongst her *barrio* and her husband

(though not to her daughter-speaker and, perhaps, not to girls and women) and a lack of agency. Whereas "Everyone" knows the speaker's father, no one in this poem—not even her husband—engages with the mother or acknowledges her existence. Instead, she remains like an afterthought in the poem, as her narrative action consists solely of trashing the father's jacket, a deed that evokes connotations of betrayal because the poem not only positions her as exterior to the father's decolonial project but as using fashion to impede symbolically decolonization as well. As such, "The Toltec" typifies Navarro's reading of gang members' female socialities as oppositional to the *carnalismo* and decolonial potentiality of gang counternations.

In one of the rare explications of *My Father Was a Toltec*, Rafael Pérez-Torres measures how "The Toltec" engages Chicana/o cultural memory, contending that the poem follows the Chicana/o literary tradition of mythologizing the male gang member as "the quintessence of noncomformity and resistance" (124). While I agree that "The Toltec" romanticizes the male gang member as decolonial, this poem also simultaneously criticizes this figure in revealing how the potential decolonization available in male-dominated gangs may depend on the colonization of their female socialites. My analysis, however, extends beyond the observation that female socialities are antithetical to gang life and the scholarly tendency to abandon the discussion at this point in preference of further examining decolonial resistance for men in gangs. Rather, I move away from the father to scrutinize what lies within the mother's two solitary lines, within her ordeal of marginality and invisibility in this opening poem. For answers, I turn this initial page of *My Father Was a Toltec* to encounter the mother's and daughter's shared experiences of gang life, which transpire behind the closed doors of the private sphere.

The Absent Father as Colonial Apparatus

In studying the "Toltec chapter" of Castillo's poetry collection, Estill contends that "the father about whom this daughter-speaker writes represents not authority but rather rebellion" (54). While I concur that the father represents rebellion—both for himself and for his daughter, which I will later explore—the early poems of the "Toltec chapter" belie Estill's reading of the father as entirely emancipatory. Beginning with "Electra Currents," the poem that immediately follows "The Toltec," the daughter suggests that she and her mother experience the father's decolonial gang life and ideology as an absent fatherism/husbandism that manufactures and exacerbates a nexus of ruling oppressions where the family, heteropatriarchy, and the state all coagulate. "Electra Currents" reads:

> Llegué a tu mundo
> sin invitación,
> sin esperanza
> me nombraste por
> una canción.
>
> Te fuiste
> A emborrachar.
> (Castillo 4)
>
> [I arrived to your world
> without invitation,
> without hope
> you named me after
> a song.
>
> You went
> to get drunk.]

The daughter-speaker notes that detachment has permeated her relations with her father since her birth. Similar to the "The Toltec," the poem's form accentuates the distance between father and daughter and what each represents by bracketing off characters in separate stanzas. Although the first stanza discloses the daughter's birth as unplanned (at least, from her perspective), the stanza

also suggests promising relations between the two, as, unlike in "The Toltec," not only do these two characters inhabit a stanza together, but the father naming the daughter after a song expresses an emotional investment in and commitment to his daughter.[23] Despite these early indications that portend auspicious kinship ties between the two, the father quickly abandons his daughter in preference of alcohol, which the poem also accents in the father's desertion of his daughter in form, the father leaving the communal first stanza for his own where his bottle awaits.

Furthermore, the contrast between these two stanzas and characters indicates a dissonance between the distinct life chances that each stanza and character represent. According to Rosa Linda Fregoso, "the private realm is more than the home, for the private encompasses both official economy of paid employment (the private system of market relations) as well as the family (the private lifeworld sphere)" ("Re-imagining Chicana Identities" 76). While Fregoso departs from many separate spheres theorists in reading paid employment as private (a point I momentarily return to), she adheres to traditional theorizations of the public and private spheres in conceiving of the family as private. Thus, whereas the daughter and the first stanza imply a life committed to the private sphere and attached to the nuclear family, the second stanza connotes a life free of private responsibility. Instead, the second stanza evokes the recreational liberty and sovereignty to travel as one pleases throughout drinking spaces in the public sphere, the sphere where the father marshals decolonial projects against agents and legacies of U.S. white supremacy and racism through fashion, violence, and women. The daughter's presence, then, represents not only a threat to the decolonial potential that the Toltecs accord the father but also the "colonial" threat of the private sphere regulating and policing his life. While intersubjective recognition combats the sociopolitical invisibility and abject objecthood that

many dehumanizing racial contracts and the U.S. nation-state often reduce people of color to, the intersubjective recognition that the father's daughter and wife may provide does not appear to satisfy him, for he continually forsakes this acknowledgement in preference of recognition from his gang and *barrio* and the more material forms of decolonization available in the public sphere.

This absent father theme manifests throughout "Red Wagons" and "Saturdays" as well, but, differing from "Electra Currents," these two poems focus on the mother's and daughter's lives in the private sphere to divulge the effects of absent fathers for the female socialities of men who participate in decolonial gang life but who do not envision these women alongside them. In particular, "Red Wagons" attends to the daughter's experience of her gangbanging, absent father:

> In grammar school primers
> the red wagon
> was for children
> pulled along
> past lawns on a sunny day.
> Father drove into
> the driveway. "Look,
> Father, look!"
> Silly Sally pulled Tim
> on the red wagon.
>
> Out of school,
> the red wagon carried
> kerosene cans
> to heat the flat.
> Father pulled it to the gas
> station
> when he was home
> and if there was money.
>
> If not, children went to bed
> in silly coats
> silly socks; in the morning
> were already dressed
> for school.
> (Castillo 5)

Whereas the father attains intersubjective recognition through decolonial violence against Irish Americans or from his *barrio* through the reputation for violence and his dandyish style, the daughter of this poem, whom, like the father and as a working-class Chicana, the U.S. nation-state also relegates to a multiply marginalized and abject status, also yearns for acknowledgement of her subjectivity. But where the father renounces the nuclear family in favor of a gang counternation that recognizes his subjectivity, the daughter aspires to jettison social and state-induced invisibility through nuclear family, crying out for her father to recognize her existence ("Look, / Father, Look!") on the scarce occasions that he returns home. Yet, as "Red Wagons" later insinuates, the father rarely grants his daughter this desire because he maintains an infrequent and arbitrary presence in the home, instead preferring the company of his *camaradas* and other (possibly white) women. As such, "Red Wagons" intimates that men who participate in gangs or decolonial movements that require a rejection of the nuclear family force the women of their families to experience these men's decolonization as absent fatherism and exacerbated invisibility.

Additionally, as much as "Red Wagons" underscores the psychological consequences of absent fathers for these men's socialities, the poem also spotlights their material effects on their families as well. Inundated in poverty, the young children who likely cannot physically haul kerosene cans in their wagon "to heat the flat" must rely on their father do so, "when he was home / and if there was money." But because the father maintains an unpredictable presence in the home, the children often "went to bed / in silly coats / silly socks." Incapable of heating their flat, the children must wear their school clothes to sleep to keep warm. As a result, when they wake in the morning, they are "already dressed for school" but must attend appearing "silly" in their sleep-wrinkled clothing. As mentioned earlier, fashion in the opening chapter of *My Father*

Was a Toltec has an integral and omnipresent role: the father weaponizes style to participate in ideological warfare and to signify a politics of decolonization. But whereas, for the father, fashion connotes resistance, power, and subjectivity, clothing, for the children of "Red Wagons," signals and heightens their invisibility, marginality, poverty, and abjection. These connotations specifically arise as a result of the father not lighting the kerosene because his gangbanging and decolonial lifestyle requires a repudiation of the nuclear family, materializing not only in the father's unavailability to haul the kerosene but also the family's penury ("when he was home / and if there was money"), which, as I soon show, the father's gang life contributes to as well. In short, the father's decolonization depends upon the aggravated colonization of the women of his nuclear family.

In "Red Wagons," the mother's absence, as well as the financial juxtaposition between the father's lavish, customized, and tailored clothing and his children's poverty, resonate conspicuously. Addressing these preponderances, "Saturdays" advances the opening chapter's chronological narrative to reveal how women's internalization of heteropatriarchy enables material and psychological decolonization for gangbanging men mobilizing decolonial projects that are not always anticolonial. "Saturdays" also discloses how absent fatherism systemically produces absent motherism for many working-class communities of color, creating a cyclical pattern where *de*colonizers' female socialities experience these men's decolonization and the family as their colonial burden to bear. "Saturdays" begins with the lines, "Because she worked all week / away from home, gone from 5 to 5" (Castillo 6). Besieged by poverty, the mother works from 5 am to 5 pm to house and feed her children and to supplement the household income that her absent husband does not sufficiently contribute to because he prefers to live a decolonial and recreational life that consists of drinking, philandering, and participating in gang

wars. Consequently, the family's financial destitution that the father's gang life augments also engenders absent motherism in the home, escalating the children's own feelings of invisibility as the mother's and father's infrequent presences in the home impede them both from regularly recognizing their children's subjectivities.

Since the father's decolonial lifestyle transpires primarily outside the realm of family and domesticity, the mother's continual absence from and paid employment outside the home may, for some, suggest access to the public sphere and its decolonial capacities, freedoms, and privileges. As Nancy Fraser says, the term "public sphere" "has been used by many feminists to refer to everything that is outside of the domestic or familial sphere. Thus the 'public sphere' in this usage conflates at least three analytically distinct things: the state, the official-economy of paid employment, and arenas of public discourse" (57). Following Jürgen Habermas' theoretical model of the "public sphere," Fraser rejects the tendency to homogenize the public sphere as every facet of the world outside of the home, domesticity, and "private" life. Rather, for Fraser and Habermas, the public sphere refers to "a theater in modern societies in which political participation is enacted through the medium of talk. It is the space in which citizens deliberate about their common affairs, hence, an institutionalized arena of discursive action" (Fraser 57). Understanding the public sphere as an arena of public discourse that (ideally) epitomizes democracy, Habermas and Fraser view the official-economy of paid employment as disparate from the public sphere because the public sphere "is not an arena of market relations but rather one of discursive relations" (Fraser 57). Thus, as Fregoso observes, Habermas and Fraser consider the "'(official) capitalist economy'" as instead endemic to the "'private' system of market relations" ("Re-imagining Chicana Identities" 76).

While I refrain from reducing the public sphere solely to a theater of public discourse and regard various aspects of public life and space discrete from family and domesticity as also comprising the public sphere, I adhere to Habermas and Fraser's re-conceptualization of the official-economy of paid employment as a constituent of the private sphere. As Fregoso explains, for working-class women of color, deeming employment as private "is important . . . because in order to support their families, Chicana working-class women are allowed to work outside the home in the 'private' official economy of paid employment" (77). Although many working-class women of color access employment outside the home and, thus for some, the public sphere, the official-economy of paid employment does not necessarily lead to the typical benefits that citizens of a non-subaltern status amass in the economic market, such as power, freedom, capital, and extravagant materialism. Despite the mother working, not only do her children and she remain impoverished, but her employment instead *limits* her freedom, as her employer's timeclock imprisons her, requiring her to work 12-hour shifts five (and possibly six) days a week so that her family can barely subsist. Moreover, the heteropatriarchal rule of the father still regulates her meager monetary compensation, as the mother's husband pilfers her labor to finance his dandyish clothing that declares his decolonial politics, the daughter-speaker of "Saturdays" commenting that her father "donned the tailor-made silk suit / bought on her credit" (Castillo 6).

Although the mother spends most of her time toiling in the official-capitalist-economy, her workweeks do not conclude on Friday evenings but continue as domestic labor in the unofficial-economy of the home. Just as the father purloins his wife's labor in the official-economy to finance the tailored and customized clothing essential to his gang life, he also

inundates the mother and daughter in domestic labor to help secure decolonial privileges. As the daughter-speaker explains:

> Saturdays she [the mother] did the laundry,
> pulled the wringer machine
> to the kitchen sink, and hung
> the clothes out on the line.
> At night, we took it down and ironed.
> Mine were his handkerchiefs and
> Boxer shorts.
> (Castillo 6)

After working, at least, a 60-hour week, the mother joins the daughter in domestic labor, washing the laundry and ironing her husband's clothing, the daughter "his handkerchiefs and / boxer shorts" and the mother his "shirts / press[ing] the collars / and cuffs, just so" (Castillo 6). The profits that the father extracts from his sociality's domestic and official-economic labor differs vastly from previous theorizations of the dynamic between gang members and their female socialities. As mentioned earlier, Navarro analyzes the gangxploitation film *Boulevard Nights* to uncover how gang members' female socialities inhibit *carnalismo* and the decolonial freedom and possibilities afforded men in heterosexual, predominantly male gangs. *My Father Was a Toltec*, on the other hand, divulges how even though gang members' female socialities may view gangs antagonistically, their actions do not always disrupt gang life for the men in their lives. Rather, as with the father's daughter and wife, their subjugation and the exploitation of their domestic and official-economic labor may instead enable decolonization for male gang members. The father retains the freedom to enact decolonial projects in the public sphere because he circumvents parental responsibility and relegates this duty—including its financial elements—to the mother, and he exploits the domestic and official-economic labor of his wife and daughter to obtain and perform the fashion style integral to his gang life.

In part, the father's ability to benefit from his wife and daughter's labor relies on the ubiquity of heteropatriarchal hegemony in the home, which does not demand the father's presence, and the cyclical and gendered patterns of domestic labor. The final stanza of "Saturdays" reads:

> "How do I look?"
> "Bien," went on ironing.
> That's why he married her, a Mexican
> woman, like his mother, not like
> they were in Chicago, not like
> the one he was going out to meet.
> (Castillo 6)

After donning a tailored, silk suit, the father has the mother adjust his tie and asks her opinion of his appearance before he visits his paramour. Though the speaker discerns the father's unfaithful intentions, the mother's submissive and dutiful reaction suggests cognizance on her part as well. But rather than vocalize objections at her husband spending a night out with another woman while she and their daughter remain steeped in domestic work, she only acknowledges her husband's fashionable image and continues ironing his clothing, like a servile and subordinate "Mexican" wife—the reason the father marries her.

The mother's passivity in this stanza points towards an internalization of heteropatriarchal expectations of Mexican and Chicana women. In *Borderlands/La Frontera*, Anzaldúa writes, "The culture expects women to show greater acceptance of, and commitment to, the value system than men. The culture and the Church insist that women are subservient to males. If a woman rebels she is a *mujer mala*. If a woman doesn't renounce herself in favor of the male, she is selfish" (39). Referring to Chicana/o and Mexican "culture," Anzaldúa insists that if women are not passive and subservient to men, then their cultures and communities ostracize them, casting them as "*mujeres malas*." Addressing these cultural beliefs about women,

Margaret Cantú-Sanchez argues that "younger generations [of Chicanas] who have grown up in more privileged households have begun to question these traditional expectations," but she also concedes that these heteropatriarchal ideologies "often compel women to adhere to these same concepts" (3). While Cantú-Sanchez elides the *feminista* consciousness of working-class women in associating the rejection of these heteropatriarchal expectations with privileged class backgrounds—an issue that *My Father Was a Toltec* also covers and that I analyze in the following section—her observation that many Chicanas abide by these sexist traditions identifies the Fanonian "inferiority complex" that the internalization of heteropatriarchy can produce. In the mother of "Saturdays," the reader not only observes how this internalization renders her stagnant in her own colonial affair whereby the father, gang life, and heteropatriarchy function as colonizers but also how the mother's refusal to defend her daughter from gendered exploitation (imprisonment in domestic service to her father) contributes to a generational cycle of domestic enslavement for absent fathers' daughters.

For example, in Jesmyn Ward's autobiographical memoir *Men We Reaped*, Ward writes of similar structural conditions during her teenage years. As the "eldest daughter of an eldest daughter," Ward explains that her mother one day returned home with materials to build a clothesline (133). After erecting the line, Ward's mother

> unloaded a fresh basket of clothes from the washing machine, walked through the kitchen, and said, "Mimi, come here." . . .
>
> "Hang up these clothes," she said. She pulled a wet shirt, wrinkled and heavy, from the hamper, and then a clothespin from a bag she'd pinned to the line. She then took a pin from the bag, looped the shirt over the line by its bottom hem, and clipped it to the line.

"This is how you hang shirts. Upside down." (Ward 133-134)

Just as the young speaker of "Saturdays" finds herself engrossed in domestic labor, handed down from mother to daughter, so, too, does the teenage Ward—her mother teaching her how to dry laundry. Like the Toltec, Ward's father, for a time, also participates in a gang and, accordingly, rarely returns home. Because her family also faces excessive poverty, Ward's mother, like the Toltec's wife, spends considerable time away from the home, attempting to supplement the household income that Ward's father fails to contribute to. As Ward notes, because her parents (for distinct reasons) seldomly appear at home, and because of her position as eldest daughter, the responsibility of domestic labor and maintaining the home and family (her younger sisters and brother) falls into her (the "eldest daughter of an eldest daughter") hands. This cycle of gendered domestic oppression at the intersection of indigence, absent fathers, and heteropatriarchal rule ultimately transmutes the family into a colonizing apparatus for many working-class women of color. As Ward says, "Like the women in my family before her, my mother knew the family was her burden to bear. She could not leave" (131).

In revealing how the family can act as Chicanas' burden to bear, *My Father Was a Toltec* re-envisions the father/daughter relationship in Chicana/o literature and culture to complicate the absent father trope. As Raymund Paredes discerns, in Chicana literature, "the father is conspicuous by his absence" (152). Examining this habitual absence in Chicana literature, many literary scholars have proclaimed this absence a byproduct of "a society perceived as patriarchal" and the resulting Chicana desire to create "a world filled with women and the bonds among them" (Estill 46). As mentioned earlier, Quintana theorizes that the father's absence from Chicana literature "renounce[s] and overthrow[s] masculine domination" to "move the Chicana from sexual subjugation to liberation" (42). Indeed, Quintana does not remain alone in

associating fathers' absences with Chicana agency and autonomy. As Cherríe Moraga contemplates, "Had I been born of a Chicano father, I sometimes think I never would have been able to write a line or participate in a demonstration, having to repress all questioning" (112-113). Although Moraga's comments suggest a romanticization of whiteness as devoid of (or not as intense as Chicano) heteropatriarchy, she verbalizes commonly-held assumptions that the absence of a Chicano father automatically equates to the vacancy of heteropatriarchy and thus enables Chicana liberation. *My Father Was a Toltec*'s refashioning of the father/daughter relationship, however, questions this narrative trope in Chicana literature. The father's absence in *My Father Was a Toltec* does not engender Chicana agency and autonomy nor dissipate heteropatriarchy. Rather, the poetry collection raises the issue of heteropatriarchal rule materializing through internalized sexism and introduces intersectionality into the father/daughter dyad, proposing that women's oppression in the working-class Chicana/o family materializes as a consequence of gender, race, *and* class inequalities. *My Father Was a Toltec*, therefore, reveals how fathers' absences, which may arise from gang life or other reasons, not only furthers a gendered cycle of domestic labor and oppression but also amplifies economic turmoil for working-class Chicanas.

A Note On Racializing Sexism

I want to acknowledge that these poems cast a disturbing picture of the Chicana/o family and Chicana/o culture and potentially reify the pathologization of both because the "Toltec poems" subsume capitalist economies, the legacy of conquest, and systemic racism's culpability in creating financial and emotional trauma for Chicanas and in manufacturing and maintaining Chicano heteropatriarchy. As Paredes remarks, scholars analyzing the father/daughter relationship in Chicana/o literature and culture "must engage a complex of cultural traditions

often described as among the most patriarchal in the world. Inevitably, directly or indirectly, the writer must come to terms with machismo, that distinctive Latin American code of masculinity so widely misunderstood in the United States" (136). Indeed, many inside and outside academia perceive Chicana/o, Latina/o, and Latin American cultures as inherently heteropatriarchal and men of these ethnicities as obsessed with performing whatever racist reduction of *machismo* these people envision.[24] As Alma García writes in her reflection on the gender politics of the Chicano Movement, "Machismo, some Chicana feminists proposed, had been highly exaggerated, especially by white feminists, as it pertained to Chicano men and this constituted an example of white feminists racializing sexism" (192). Essentializing Chicana/o, Latina/o, and Latin American cultures as intrinsically heteropatriarchal and steeped in *machismo*—what García refers to as "racializing sexism"—betrays white liberalism's investments in co-opting identity politics to reify and obtain the benefits of white supremacy and racism, rather than (or even when) "emancipating" oppressed working-class women of color.

While I do not deny the heteropatriarchy and misogyny in Chicana/o, Latina/o, and Latin American cultures (as in any culture, regardless of color), racial inequality, white capitalist economies, and the legacy of conquest have a paramount part in propagating the commonly-cited heteropatriarchal exploitation of women in these cultures. According to Fregoso, the heteropatriarchal subjugation of women stems more from the foundations of modern capitalist societies than ethnic cultural values ("Re-imagining Chicana Identities" 76). Similarly, the gendered division of labor that deems the home, family, and child-rearing as women's societal obligations and that privileges the "public (masculine) citizen-subject in the formation of the nation-state" creates an "institutional arrangement" that forms the "'linchpin of modern women's subordination'" (Fregoso, "Re-imagining Chicana Identities" 77). Moreover, modern economic

racial inequalities that emerge from U.S. white capitalism force large portions of Black and Latina/o populations into poverty, which contributes to fathers' absences and, consequently, the gendered trauma that commensurately ensues for women. For instance, as Ward writes in her deliberation on her father's rationale for abandoning her as a child, "This tradition of men leaving their families . . . seems systemic, fostered by endemic poverty. . . . Like many of the young Black men in my community across generations, the role of being a father and a husband was difficult for my father to assume. He saw a world of possibility outside the confines of family, and he could not resist the romance of that" (131). Overcome by the unfeasibility of economically providing for a family while underemployment and undereducation afflict working-class communities of color, Ward's father relinquishes his familial obligations to attain "a world of possibility" devoid of the financial burden of family. Likewise, "outside the confines of family," the Toltec father can also enact decolonial projects through violence, fashion, and philandering in a way not possible if he fulfilled his financial and fatherly/husbandly duties to his family. As such, the pattern of absent fathers in working-class communities of color prevails not because of an inherent cultural pathology but, in part, because the white capitalist exploitation of working-class persons of color propagates heteropatriarchal, male selfishness, contributing to financial and emotional trauma for women.

Along with capitalist economies and systemic racism leading to the oppression of working-class women of color, cultural inheritances from the Spanish empire also figure into Chicano heteropatriarchy and Chicana subjugation. As Octavio Paz notes, the Spanish were notorious for their maltreatment and demonization of women, as they claimed that a "'woman's place is in the home, with a broken leg'" and that a woman "'is a domesticated wild animal, lecherous and sinful from birth, who must be subdued with a stick and guided by the reigns of

religion'" (36). As the latter statement insinuates, the Catholic church influenced Spanish misogyny and the regulation of women's autonomy. According to Paredes:

> Traditionally in Spanish culture, women have carried the primary responsibility of preserving and conveying church doctrine. And as loyal Catholics, they have also been expected to obey church fathers as diligently as they would their natural ones. The profoundly patriarchal structure and vocabulary of Catholicism instilled in Spanish women an intense reverence and humility before their various father figures. The church promoted patriarchy . . . as a social [principle], considering it to be the cornerstone of orderly community life. (138)

In other words, the Catholic church regarded women as subordinate to father figures (religious and biological) and deemed women's adherence to heteropatriarchal regulation as necessary for "community life."

Although the Spanish Catholic church regarded heteropatriarchy as a prerequisite for social order, the confinement of women to the home also managed the Spanish anxiety about miscegenation and men's inability to "protect" women. As Jean Franco observes, "the virtual confinement of women to the home had not only been required by the Church but was also intended to insure the purity of blood that Spanish society had imposed after the war against the Moors" (507). Despite the Spanish concern about racial mixing, which occluded and "excused" the heteropatriarchal policing of women's sexuality and the reduction of women to sexual property, these Spanish fears would later materialize in the Spanish colonization of the Aztec Empire and birth of the *mestizo*. As during any colonial project, cultural violence and conversion eventuates as much as, if not more than, physical violence, and the lasting hegemony and

inheritance of Spanish Catholicism still shape contemporary Chicana/o and Mexican communities.

In reviewing the legacy of conquest's, modern capitalist economies', and systemic racism's roles in influencing Chicano heteropatriarchy and the gendered effects of absent fatherism, I am not attempting to vindicate the Toltec, Ward's father, or Chicano maltreatment of Chicanas. But I am aiming to resist the racist homogenization of Chicana/o culture as inherently and extraordinarily heteropatriarchal and misogynist without recognizing the U.S. nation-state's and Spanish colonization's influences in, and maintenance of, the male subjugation of working-class women of color. Because *My Father Was a Toltec* does not specifically address these colonial, neocolonial, and internal colonial legacies, the book enables its co-optation for the racialization of sexism as a strategy for reifying white supremacy and racism. Nonetheless, Castillo's poetry collection still remains invaluable for re-imagining Chicana literary tropes and for theorizing how gender and sexuality intersect with race and class in decolonization and the impetus to gang membership. The "Toltec poems" not only reveal how decolonial projects for men in gangs often depend upon intensifying trauma for their female socialities, but these poems also divulge how the trope of absent fathers in Chicana feminist literature may not always lead to agency and autonomy for working-class women of color. However, for all the toxicity and distinctions between the father and his wife and daughter in *My Father Was a Toltec*, the public sphere, gang life, and the father are not *entirely* dichotomous with or absent from the private sphere or the daughter's life. Rather, the father's rare entrances into the home and the way his public life and gang persona "hybridize" the private sphere contain decolonial—as opposed to *only* colonial—ramifications for the daughter. Simply put, despite the highly complex and contradictory relations between the father and his daughter, introduction of gang culture and

public life into the home facilitates raced, classed, and gendered forms of decolonization for the daughter and her emergence as *la Heredera*.

Enter *la Heredera*

As the previous sections explain, Chicana/o and Mexican cultures often expect women to conform to various heteropatriarchal expectations that govern their agency, autonomy, sexuality, and life chances. Part of this conformity encompasses Chicana/o and Mexican women adhering to *marianismo*, an ideology that idolizes the Virgin Mary, demands women's subordination to men, and criminalizes their sexual agency. According to Paredes, *marianismo* "extols the virtues of humility, sacrifice, and submissiveness" and proposes that "[d]ecent Latin American women . . . are not to enjoy sex but merely to endure it as a marital and biological obligation" (Paredes 144).

Marianismo has also promoted the gendering of separate spheres by impelling fathers to "supervis[e] their daughters closely and seldom allo[w] them away from the home" (Paredes 145). Although fathers may sequester daughters from the public sphere to try to ensure their sexual and moral "purity" and dependence on men, the private and public spheres are not as bisected as many scholars suggest. Past scholarship on Chicana gang members and the public sphere has focused on Chicanas escaping the home/private sphere to enter public life though gangs, such as Fregoso's analysis of the film *Mi Vida Loca* or Marie Miranda's ethnography of Northern California girl gangs, *Homegirls in the Public Sphere*. Although these two scholars present fruitful accounts of how gang membership accords Chicanas access to the public sphere, these and many other feminist theorizations of the separate spheres focus primarily on the private infiltrating the public and rarely consider how the public penetrates the private.

On the other hand, I view the public and private spheres similarly to how Homi Bhabha reads the colonizer/colonized relationship. In *The Location of Culture*, Bhabha regards the colonizer/colonized binary as porous, featuring crosspollination that produces cultural hybridization. For Bhabha, this hybridity leads to what he terms mimicry, a phenomenon where the colonized adopt the colonizer's culture, such as language, government, clothing, or religion. While Bhabha concentrates on the colonized mimicking the colonizer, Robert Dale Parker observes that colonizers, too, mimic the colonized, as in racist "ghetto" or "taco and tequila" parties where whites dress up as Mexicans or Black persons (299-300). Since the common gendering of the public sphere as male and masculine functions as a colonial apparatus that exerts hegemony over the "colonized" private sphere, Bhabha's postulation of the colonizer/colonized dyad as hybrid bears relevance for theorizing the public and private spheres. Like the colonizer and colonized, the private and public spheres also "hybridize" and do not remain exclusive, as Castillo's "The Suede Coat," "Dirty Mexican," and "Daddy with Chesterfields in a Rolled Up Sleeve" intimate. Instead, these later poems of the "Toltec chapter" expose how public and gang culture in the home may "hybridize" private life and facilitate gendered forms of decolonization for working-class Chicanas. In addition, these "Toltec poems" also further re-envision the father/daughter relationship in Chicana literature. Whereas "Saturdays" and "Red Wagons" reveal how absent fathers do not always equate to liberation for working-class Chicanas, these poems about the daughter's adolescence also—if contradictorily—illuminate how Chicano fathers' presences may, perhaps inadvertently, accord Chicana emancipation, rather than *solely* perpetuate heteropatriarchal oppression, when the father engages in decolonial subcultures like gangs and "hybridizes" the private sphere.

In “The Suede Coat,” the father’s arbitrary presence, for the first time in the sequence of the poems, visibly brings gang and public life into the home and provides the avenue for his daughter to resist white capitalism, racism, and Chicana/o heteropatriarchal expectations that regulate women’s sexuality. The poem reads:

> Although
> Mother would never allow
> a girl of fourteen to wear
> the things you brought
> from where you wouldn’t say—
> the narrow skirts with high slits
> glimpsed the thigh—
> they fit your daughter of delicate
> hips.
> And she wore them on the sly.
>
> To whom did the suede coat with
> fur collar belong?
> The women in my family
> have always been polite
> or too ashamed to ask.
> You never told, of course,
> what we of course knew.
> (Castillo 7)

As “The Toltec” conveys, style remains crucial to the father’s public and gang life, broadcasting a decolonial ideology that entails violence, fashion, and philandering with women. By contrast, in “Red Wagon,” unfashionable, wrinkled, and “silly” clothing for the father’s young children evokes invisibility, poverty, and the private sphere. But despite the mother’s past attempts to trash the clothes (knifed jacket) so paramount to the father’s gang life, the mother cannot conceal from her daughter’s gaze all the clothing that the father amasses in public life. No longer the child of “Red Wagon,” the teenage daughter of “The Suede Coat” swaps her “silly” attire for “narrow skirts with high slits” that the father “brought / from where [he] wouldn’t say.” Although the origins of these revealing skirts and “the suede coat with / fur collar” remain a

mystery, the women of the daughter's family's silence and shame at these clothes' presences in the home imply that this attire arises from the father's philandering, belonging to (or gifts he plans for) the women he forsakes his wife for.

As I argued earlier, because colonization often features racialized sexualized violence against women, subaltern, heteropatriarchal masculinities may encompass womanizing as a method for psychologically resisting colonial projects and their legacies. As such, the skirts and suede coat signal a decolonial ideology for the father, proving the colonizer's inability to pilfer "his women" from him or his capacity to "collect" hegemonic (white) women. But in this case, the decolonial possibilities that these clothes afford span multiple genders in distinct ways. Whereas, for the mother, the skirts and coat elicit and heighten colonization in invoking the father's rejection of her and the Chicano heteropatriarchy that demands her silence at this offense, for the daughter, these clothes signal material and psychological decolonization from heteropatriarchal and working-class life chances. While the mother remains the dutiful Chicana wife who attempts to police her daughter's sexuality in "never allow[ing] / a girl of fourteen to wear / the things [the father] brought / from where [he] wouldn't say," the appearance of immodest fashion "hybridizes" the daughter's life in the private sphere to enable decolonial rewards. Although, at this point, the daughter remains in the home and subject to heteropatriarchal rule—indicated by her need to wear these clothes "on the sly"—this daughter of the private sphere no longer fully adheres to the *marianismo* that understands women's sexuality as deplorable and sexual intercourse as "a marital and biological obligation" for women (Paredes 144). Rather, she breaches the confines of heteropatriarchal regulation—even if still in its domain (the home)—to reject "proper" Chicana decorum and embrace her sexuality and womanhood through sexualizing clothing that "glimpsed the thigh." Moreover, the suede coat, in

particular, contains further decolonial consequences for this working-class Chicana. Whereas, as a young girl, "silly" and wrinkled coats magnified her indigence, this elaborate coat with its "fur collar" permits her to, if temporarily, live and fantasize about the luxurious materialism of an upper-class status and psychologically migrate away from the penury that structures her life.

These skirts and the suede coat that arise from the father's infrequent presence facilitate a veritable creation of a new woman who perceives the multiple and gendered forms of decolonization available to working-class Chicanas in gangs. As a result, the daughter emerges as *la Heredera* in "Dirty Mexican" and "Daddy with Chesterfields in a Rolled Up Sleeve" to fully commit to a gang life where she may resist agents of U.S. white supremacy and racism, shed intersubjective invisibility, and reject the heteropatriarchal expectations that regulate Chicanas. "Dirty Mexican" opens with *la Heredera*, now a fully-fledged member, mirroring her father's prior gang behavior, both in style and violence.

> "Dirty Mexican, dirty, dirty Mexican!"
> And i said: "i'll kick your ass, Dago bitch!"
> tall for my race, strutted right past
> black projects,
> leather jacket, something sharp
> in my pocket
> to Pompeii School.
> *Get those Dago girls with teased-up hair*
> (Castillo 8, emphasis in original)

Like her father who initiated decolonial violence against Irish Americans while wearing a knife-shredded jacket with his gang's insignia, *la Heredera* swaps her suede coat for the leather jacket and knife that typify Toltec gang life to precipitate decolonization against agents of U.S. racism and white supremacy. An epithet for Italian Americans, "Dago" invokes other white Atlantic immigrants who promoted racism against people of color as a strategy for claiming whiteness and inclusion into the U.S. body politic, which the poem alludes to with the line "Dirty Mexican,

dirty, dirty Mexican!" Similar to Fanon's "'Dirty nigger!'" hailing, these words attempt to reduce the daughter to an abject, inferior, inhuman status. But unlike her mother who accepts the invisibility and degradation that the father casts upon her, the daughter refuses to remain submissive and instead rejects the Other's intersubjective power over her. Refusing incarceration in a Fanonian "dye," *la Heredera,* as a gang member, replies with the equivalent of Fanon's "'Fuck you,' madame"—"i'll kick your ass, Dago bitch!"—to threaten these Italian Americans with decolonial violence, an act she plans to undertake in either case, as she struts with "something sharp / in [her] pocket" to an Italian American space ("Pompeii School") to "*Get those Dago girls with teased-up hair*"—like her father with the Irish Americans.

Moreover, earlier I referred to the role of racialized sexualized violence in colonial projects, arguing that, because colonization symbolically and materially materializes across women's bodies, certain decolonial projects may also operate through women's bodies as well. Not guilty of only vocalizing racist epithets, the Italian Americans in "Dirty Mexican" also deploy racialized sexualized violence against a likely Chicana woman in Sheridan Park (a predominantly Latina/o area in the mid-twentieth century), which, if so, further re-inscribes their commitment to neo- and internal colonial projects against Chicanas/os. The daughter-speaker notes:

> Boys with Sicilian curls got high
> at Sheridan Park, mutilated a prostitute one night.
> i scrawled in chalk all over sidewalks
> MEXICAN POWER CON/SAFOS
> crashed their dances,
> *get them broads, corner 'em in the bathroom*
> (Castillo 8, emphasis in original)

Though not specifically identified as Italian American, these boys who murder this prostitute sport "Sicilian curls," indicating that they, too, may descend from or are Italian immigrants, as

Italy considers Sicily one of its regions. The ethnic identity of the prostitute also remains anonymous, but the daughter's immediate responsive tag in the succeeding lines and her declaration of "MEXICAN POWER" suggest that the Italian Americans kill a Mexican/Chicana prostitute, which provokes the daughter's retribution. The daughter also tags "CON/SAFOS" after her proclamation, a colloquial phrase in Chicana/o *barrios* that, according to George Lipsitz, "serves to 'protect' the writing on the walls by warning 'don't touch,' . . . or 'anything negative that you say or do about this graffiti will happen to you'" ("Con Safos" 47). Scrawling "MEXICAN POWER CON/SAFOS" "all over sidewalks" in presumably Sheridan Park proclaims the area as Mexican/Chicana/o territory and "protects" this space and its denizens with a "don't touch" warning, an admonition that, in this case, contains dual meanings: "don't touch" this tag *or* Chicana women. As Lipsitz says, *con safos* promises violent punishment to anyone who violates the "protection" its tagger offers, and the daughter fulfills this threat by reacting to racialized sexualized violence against Chicanas with decolonial violence against Italian American women. She "crashe[s] their dances" in search of Italian American "*broads*" whom she and her gang surround in the bathroom.

In this instance, *la Heredera* incorporates white women into her decolonial project much differently than her father, even if doing so still engenders comparable effects. Whereas the father may philander with potentially white women to aggrandize his own masculinity and symbolically prove the colonizer's attempted conquest futile, *la Heredera* plans to satisfy the *con safos* contract by treating Italian American women—who are not civilians in this war, as they term the daughter a "dirty Mexican bitch"—in the same manner that the Italian Americans acted towards the prostitute: violently (Castillo 8). Although the father's womanizing may represent an act of "violence" against white hegemony and empire in showcasing how he "seizes" white

women, *la Heredera*'s decolonial actions literally materialize as gendered violence. In doing so, she appropriates the same violent and heteropatriarchal methods and ideologies that colonizers deploy against the colonized in colonial projects. In jumping Italian American women in the bathroom, she proclaims to a larger Italian American heteropatriarchal apparatus that Italian American men cannot protect "their" women and symbolically emasculates the Sicilian boys who mutilated the prostitute in Sheridan Park. As a result, gangs, in this poem, accord Chicanas strategies for resisting intersectional forms of colonial oppression, both as persons of color and as women.

Unlike for the father, however, gang life does not only function as a method for mobilizing decolonial projects against the racism and gendered violence of the U.S. nation-state and its white cronies. For this Chicana, gangs provide an avenue for circumventing dismal life chances where women are subject to gendered violence and heteropatriarchal hegemony in some *Chicana/o* spaces. In "Daddy with Chesterfields in a Rolled Up Sleeve," the daughter-speaker explains how her father's mother encounters gendered violence similar to the prostitute in Sheridan Park:

> The curandera from Guanajuato—
> with jars of herbs
> grown in coffee cans—
> had raised the Toltec long
> after her sons had grown,
> her only daughter murdered by her husband.
> (Castillo 12)

This *curandera*—the father's (Toltec's) alleged mother who supposedly gives "birth to him at 60"—raises and cares for him as her only child because she no longer has other children, her past sons grown and "her only daughter murdered by her husband" (Castillo 12). In this poem, Chicano heteropatriarchal rule possibly reaches its acme in the ambiguity of the *curandera*'s

daughter's death. Why does this husband kill her daughter? Are the husband's actions a byproduct of emotional instability and/or alcoholism, which culminates in a fatal outburst directed at his wife's daughter? Or does this murder arise from a larger misogynist and hegemonic ideology that sanctions the Chicano patriarch to penalize women's transgressions, in this instance, with death, especially because of the legacies of conquest? Did the daughter skirt *marianismo* and exert sexual agency with white men, and does the father rationalize the daughter's murder with the need to defend his fragile masculinity from any emasculation that this potential racialized, sexual transgression might represent? Does the *curandera* remain the passive, dutiful, and subservient Mexican wife who refuses to secure her daughter to safety because she internalizes her inferiority? Though the poem never addresses why the husband murders the daughter, the Toltec's daughter, as the speaker of the poem, knows of this murder and also feels the effects of Chicana/o heteropatriarchy through her own mother and father, though not to such a severe extent, if heteropatriarchy contributes to the *curandera*'s daughter's murder.

Realizing the life chances afforded working-class Chicanas after witnessing her mother's oppression and hearing of this murder, the daughter-speaker bypasses these limiting expectations and outcomes by completely pursuing gang life, which also grants her a violent means of self-defense, indicated by her willingness to fight back and with "something sharp / in [her] pocket."[25] As the mother says to *la Heredera*:

> "You're like your father,
> don't like to work,
> a daydreamer,
> think someday you'll be rich and famous,
> an artist, who wastes her time
> travelling,
> wearing finery she can't afford,
> neglecting her children and her home!"

(Castillo 13)

Mimicking her father's gang life through her recreational and opulent behaviors ("travelling, / wearing finery she can't afford") that contrast with the white capitalist-imposed poverty of her childhood, *la Heredera* daydreams of and pursues life chances beyond the Chicano heteropatriarchal expectations that mandate that she remain in the private sphere and within the confines of heteronormative *familia*, engaging in reproductive futurism and caring for her children and her house. Instead, in gangs, she repudiates "appropriate" Chicana decorum and "say[s] 'man,' smoke[s] cigarettes, / drink[s] tequila" and adorns "the silk dress accentuating breasts—" to "try and catch those evasive eyes" (Castillo 15). In embracing her sexuality and stepping outside the boundaries of heteropatriarchal rule, *la Heredera* opposes herself to *marianismo*'s idealization of the Virgin Mary. As result, the daughter says, for the first time in the "Toltec poems," "And so, i exist," revealing how decolonial gang life has precipitated the veritable creation of a new woman (Castillo 15). Through her entrance into gang life, which the revised father/daughter relationship has facilitated—even if simultaneously exacerbating the daughter's gendered and classed hardships as a young girl—*la Heredera* mobilizes decolonial projects to shed the manifold forms of invisibility and oppression that she encounters from Chicano heteropatriarchy and the U.S. nation-state.

Throughout this chapter, I have argued that as much as the father's infrequent presence in the home "hybridizes" the private sphere to facilitate intersectional forms of decolonization for the daughter, his decolonial projects in the Toltecs simultaneously depend upon the colonization of his female sociality, whereby his wife and young daughter experience gang life as an absent fatherism/husbandism that partially produces and amplifies their classed and gendered trauma. Since the now teenage daughter also joins a gang, she, then, presumably retains her own sociality

as well, and one might expect the previous postulations about male gang members' female socialities to also implicate female gang members' socialities, if female gang members perform the same gang life and culture. In theory, I maintain that, for many female gang members, many of my contentions about the shared experience of gang life for female socialities of the private sphere still apply. Gang life that requires absence from the home carries classed and gendered consequences for working-class women of color in white capitalist, heteropatriarchal societies that privilege a gendered division of labor. As Ward mentions earlier, in many working-class homes, ideologies of "keeping house" materialize through a generational cycle that assigns domestic responsibility to the eldest daughter. Even when fathers are not absent from working-class households, financial austerity typically requires the employment of both parents, creating the gendered succession of domestic labor that Ward identifies. If the gangbanging daughter/mother/sister abandons the home, then her absence may also intensify financial and gendered trauma for the women of her family who depend on her domestic aid. Likewise, queer women gang members performing various subaltern masculinities may seize the heteropatriarchal ideologies of colonial projects and philander with women as a method for symbolically proving subaltern power over the colonizer, potentially compounding invisibility and marginality for their working-class female partners of color, as with the Toltec's wife.

Despite the minimal textual evidence, the reader may infer that, for *la Heredera*'s female sociality of the private sphere, her decolonial actions in gangs create gendered and classed trauma for the mother similar to how the father's behavior does. This absent daughter who neglects "her home" no longer remains to assist her mother with domestic labor, nor do the "Toltec poems" provide any indication as to where the daughter attains the funding to finance the "finery she can't afford." So like her father, has the daughter learned to also purchase this

"finery" on her mother's credit? On the other hand, while the daughter's decolonial participation in gang life implicitly generates further subjection for her female sociality of the private sphere, her experience of gendered and class trauma in the home also provokes an alternative gang member identity that simultaneously departs from her father's, specifically at the point of queer homoeroticism and Chicanas' bodies in her decolonial projects. Like her father, the daughter's gang life also entails philandering with women, but, departing from her father's infidelity towards his wife, her womanizing practices do not enlarge the invisible, marginal, and abject status of Chicanas.

Moreover, *la Heredera*'s homoerotic actions with Chicanas depart from her incorporation of Italian American women's bodies into her decolonial projects. In her attack on Italian American women, the daughter appropriates heteropatriarchal and colonial ideologies that rely on gendered violence, a type of violence that, whether enacted by male or female colonizers or *de*colonizers, always results—at least, in part—in the reification of *a* heteropatriarchal hegemony. In *la Heredera*'s circumstance, her retributive hit on Italian American women acts as a decolonial project for Chicanas that rebels against the racist and heteropatriarchal rule of white neo- and internal colonizers and concomitantly affirms, for Italian American women, Italian American heteropatriarchy in rendering Italian American women's bodies ammunition against Italian American racism towards Chicanas/os. When enacting decolonial projects through Chicanas' bodies, however, the daughter's philandering epitomizes a resistant subaltern masculinity in "collecting" women but in a gendered manner that vouchsafes liberation from heteropatriarchal rule within Chicana/o culture and the family for the womanizer, womanizee, and *la Heredera*'s female sociality.

In the final few stanzas to "Daddy with Chesterfields in a Rolled Up Sleeve," the speaker says:

> Men try to catch my eye. i talk to them
> of politics, religion, the ghosts i've seen,
> the king of timbales, México and Chicago.
> And they go away.
> But women stay. Women like stories.
> They like the thin arms around their shoulders,
> the smell of perfumed hair,
> a flamboyant scarf around the neck
> the reassuring voice that confirms their
> cynicism about politics, religion and the glorious
> history that slaughtered thousands of slaves.
>
> Because of the seductive aroma of mole
> in my kitchen, and the mysterious preparation
> of herbs, women tolerate *my* cigarette
> and cognac breath, unmade bed,
> and my inability to keep a budget—
> in exchange for a promise,
> an exotic trip,
> a tango lesson,
> an anecdote of the gypsy who stole
> me away in Madrid.
> (Castillo 15-16, emphasis in original)

The disinterest that men have in a Chicana who rejects her place in the heteropatriarchal family and private sphere and instead maintains a critical awareness of politics, religion, and the colonialism that "slaughtered thousands of slaves" emphasizes the homoerotic mood of the first stanza and its dynamic between queer "womanizing" and decolonization. The daughter wraps her "thin arms around [women's] shoulders," allowing the "smell of perfumed hair" to linger, while she whispers reassurances. Here, this homoeroticism begins to cultivate a resistance to heteropatriarchy and foster a decolonial epistemology and psychological preservation between women that the latter of these two stanzas exemplifies. On the one hand, *la Heredera*'s homoerotic engagements with Chicanas resists the *marianismo* and heteropatriarchy that regulate

their sexualities and relegate them to the private sphere, demanding their participation in reproductive futurism and presence in the home where they will rear children. Through her queer womanizing, the daughter refuses to acquiesce to the authority of these ruling institutions. Unlike her father, however, her erotic interactions with women do not result in the marginalization of her female sociality or the women she alluringly captivates. Rather, *la Heredera*, for the women confined to the private sphere, functions as an epistemologically decolonial figure who confirms their skepticism (unlike the father's wife) about ideological apparatuses (politics, religion, and colonial histories) that suppress and govern their lives at the intersections of race, class, gender, and sexuality.

Moreover, as much as *other* aspects of the daughter's gang life may mimic her father's in depending on the colonization of her female sociality (her mother), her cognizance of the trauma of the private sphere also produces an alternative, gendered gang identity that leads to her returning to the private sphere to "hybridize" the home and facilitate gendered forms of psychological decolonization/preservation for other members of her female sociality. Although, unlike with her father, admitting a "gang member lifestyle" into the private sphere does not appear accidental. Inhabiting her "rightful" place in heteropatriarchal Chicano culture (the kitchen), *la Heredera* undermines and critiques this sexist ideology by distancing herself from proper Chicana decorum in smoking cigarettes, drinking cognac, and refusing to make her bed. In addition to mocking proper Chicana behavior in this hybridization of public and private, *la Heredera* commences psychologically decolonial acts for the Chicanas whom the family and heteropatriarchy relegate to the private sphere. Staving off institutionalization, these Chicanas psychologically persist through the anecdotes of a life beyond the private sphere ("exotic trips," "tango lessons," excursions with gypsies in Madrid) that *la Heredera* disseminates. Thus, *la*

Heredera's relationship with her female sociality does not *entirely* mirror her father's in that she does not completely forsake women of the private sphere to pursue decolonial gang and public life. Rather, in her return to the private sphere to help her female sociality persist psychologically and vicariously, these women remain at the center of *la Heredera*'s decolonial project, instead of at its margins where the female sociality's only purpose revolves around enabling decolonization for the gang member.

In *Homegirls in the Public Sphere*, Miranda writes, "Since politics and power are defined as public displays, the study of alternative politics and forms of empowerment produced in the private realm by women and children, sibling and kinship relations, and community networks are demeaned and insufficiently analyzed" (79-80). In analyzing the gendered forms of decolonization that *la Heredera* launches in the public sphere, I am not attempting to reify false dichotomies that, as Miranda observes, essentialize the public as the realm of political action and the private as devoid of agency. While I view the daughter's exit from private life and into gangs and the public sphere as having decolonial consequences, I also regard the "Toltec poems" as revealing how the neglected private sphere also operates as a site of political discourse and action. In "Daddy with Chesterfields in a Rolled Up Sleeve," agency in the home materializes through the medium of "private" talk where gang girl and female sociality create "alternative politics" to precipitate psychological decolonization against Chicano heteropatriarchy and *marianismo*. In this way, I see my analysis as in conversation with Fregoso's explication of the Chicana girl gang flick *Mi Vida Loca* where she argues that "the home is not linked to women's subordination and containment; instead, the film transforms the privatized space of the home into a public sphere of 'discursive action'" ("Re-imagining Chicana Identities" 90). Through featuring psychological fantasy and the hybridization of the spheres, *My Father Was a Toltec*

contributes to the broader understanding of the many methods that people in the private sphere use to resist those who attempt to transmute the private realm into a disciplinary and apolitical prison.

Anti-Assimilationist Decolonization

The previously analyzed decolonial possibilities that gangs afford Chicanas deviate from other literary and filmic accounts of working-class Latina and Chicana decolonization, as many narratives, such as the aforementioned *Pocho* and *How the García Girls Lost Their Accents,* envision Chicana and Latina liberation from Chicano/Latino heteropatriarchy as requiring some form of whitewashing, leading to sexist accusations of Chicanas and Latinas as *agringadas* or race traitors. Similarly, many scholars theorizing Chicana/Latina resistance to heteropatriarchy have regarded class privilege and/or whiteness as the only avenues through which women may liberate themselves from heteropatriarchal oppression in their ethnic communities. As noted earlier, Moraga romanticizes whiteness as less (if at all) heteropatriarchal, pondering whether her emergence as a feminist theorist would have materialized if she had not had a white, but instead Chicano, father. In this same vein, Paredes considers white culture and the United States as an epicenter of women's salvation and the "cure" to Chicano and Mexican heteropatriarchy, noting that, in the twentieth century, "Anglo-American culture threatened to undermine not only the Mexican-Americans' language and collective identity . . . but their system of patriarchy as well" (148). Cantú-Sánchez also dovetails with Moraga and Paredes but, instead, integrates class into Chicana feminist analyses, contending that Chicanas "who have grown up in more privileged households have begun to question . . . traditional expectations" (3). Although Moraga acknowledges the racist exclusionary practices of white feminism in "A Long Line of *Vendidas*," contentions like hers, Paredes', and Cantú-Sánchez's erase the *feminista* consciousness and

decolonial actions of *working-class* women of color and reinscribe and enable misogynist ideologies that affiliate Chicana and Latina feminists only with class privilege and deem them assimilationists who participate in cultural genocide.

My Father Was a Toltec intervenes in this literary, filmic, and scholarly tendency to idealize whiteness to reveal how gang membership accords Chicanas/Latinas decolonization in a way that insulates them from *agringada* accusations because gang membership as decolonial praxis affirms ethnic/cultural heritage. According to Vigil, Chicana/o and Latina/o gangs often reject assimilation and embrace their ethnic roots: "Although cholos are Americanized . . . they refuse or are unable to be totally assimilated. In important ways, they consider themselves traditionalists and retain certain Mexican customs. . . . For example, they have retained the caló idiom of expression, the strong sense of group as family; the adolescent *palomilla* cohorting tradition" (*Barrio Gangs* 7). For Chicana/o gang members, maintaining Mexican linguistic and cultural practices to avow Chicana/o and Mexican identities is a pivotal principle of gang life.

In "Dirty Mexican," the daughter exemplifies this anti-assimilationist gang ideology, as this working-class Chicana not only embraces her Mexican/Chicana background but also wars with whiteness, as opposed to attempting to approximate white culture for its ostensibly liberatory practices. Recall *la Heredera*'s *placa* in "Dirty Mexican"—"MEXICAN POWER CON/SAFOS"—that declares her warning and protection of her *barrio* and Chicana women from racialized sexualized violence. As much as this *placa* defends her space and people, the statement also avouches her affinity for and embracement of her heritage, a point she reiterates when racist Italian Americans label her a "Dirty Mexican." Refusing to read "Mexican" as a marker of shame and an ethnicity to distance herself from, the daughter responds in affirmation: "'*That's right, honey, I'm Mexican! / Watchu gonna do about it?*'" (Castillo 8, emphasis in

original). Gangs, gang culture, and her identification with her father initiate the daughter's decolonization against Chicano heteropatriarchy and U.S. white capitalist and racial hegemony. But her decolonial projects and *feminista* consciousness do not require any type of class privilege or infatuation with white culture. Instead of Simone de Beauvoir galvanizing her feminist stance, working-class, Chicana/o gang culture catalyzes her revolutionary mindset.

As mentioned before, Estill remains one of the few scholars to critically examine the "Toltec chapter" of *My Father Was a Toltec*, though her reading conflicts with my understanding of the father and gangs as signifying and facilitating anti-assimilationist decolonization for the daughter. Disparately, Estill interprets the father as white (culturally and biologically), rather than Chicano or Mexican, making the daughter's identification with the father an investment in and identification with whiteness. In "Daddy with Chesterfields in a Rolled Up Sleeve," the daughter relays a memory of her father arriving at her school:

> The school principal was a white lady
> who came to class one day
> to say a man claiming to be
> my father
> was in her office. (Castillo 11)

For Estill, the principal's apprehension about the validity of the father's claim to fatherhood implies a difference in skin gradation—the daughter Brown and the father white. As Estill says, "The principal's doubts about his claim to parentage suggest his possible visual and *therefore* racial difference from his daughter" (55, my emphasis). Estill corroborates her reading of the father as not Mexican or Chicano in his response to his wife's accusations:

> —No creo que fue tu mamá,—your wife whispers.
> "I don't care!" you reply.
> —Que ni eres mexicano,—
> "I don't care!" you say for
> doña Jovita,
> la madre sagrada

su comal y molcajete
la revolución de Benito Juárez y Pancho Villa,
Guanajuato, paper cuts, onyx, papier-mâché,
bullfighters' pictures, and Aztec calendars. (Castillo 15).

[—I do not believe that she was your mother,—your wife whispers.
"I don't care!" you reply.
—nor that you are Mexican,—
"I don't care!" you say for
doña Jovita,
the holy mother
her griddle and pestle and mortar
the revolution of Benito Juárez and Pancho Villa,
Guanajuato, paper cuts, onyx, papier-mâché,
bullfighters' pictures, and Aztec calendars.]

In these lines, the mother questions the father's Mexican lineage and refutes that the *curandera* could possibly birth him at 60 years old. When accounting for the principal's hesitation and the father's English rather than Spanish rejoinders, Estill concludes that the father "does not have the same cultural background (or at least as 'authentic' or 'pure' a heritage) as [his wife] does, a point she underscores by speaking to him in a language in which he obviously cannot answer" (55).

When Estill reads the father as white or not Chicano/Mexican "enough," she predicates her contention on a disturbing and an erroneous rationale, for multiple reasons. Firstly, Estill deduces that, because the principal perceives a "visible" difference between the daughter and father (read skin tone), the daughter and father "therefore" must differ racially. This presumption about skin tone negating ethnic lineage disregards the entire history of *mestizaje* by essentializing all Mexicans and Chicanas/os as having Brown skin when the blood of the Spanish colonizer has resulted in many light-skinned Mexicans and Chicanas/os. In this same vein, reducing ethnic authenticity to skin tone gradation only harmfully propagates colorism in Mexican and Chicana/o communities.

Secondly, Estill sutures language to ethnic and cultural authenticity, arguing that, because (she believes) the father cannot speak Spanish (answering "I don't know" instead of "*no sé"*), he does not have an "authentic" or "pure" Mexican/Chicana/o heritage, thus making him culturally—in addition to phenotypically—white. But the father's ability to respond in Spanish matters not for his Mexican/Chicana/o cultural authenticity. As Anzaldúa says:

> Often with *mexicanas y latinas* we'll speak English as a neutral language. Even among Chicanas we tend to speak English at parties or conferences. Yet, at the same time, we're afraid the other will think we're *agringadas* because we don't speak Chicano Spanish. We oppress each other trying to out-Chicano each other, vying to be the 'real' Chicanas, to speak like Chicanos. There is no one Chicano language just as there is no one Chicano experience. A monolingual Chicana whose first language is English or Spanish is just as much a Chicana as one who speaks several variants of Spanish. (80-81)

As Anzaldúa adroitly points out, Chicanas/os speak multifarious dialects of Spanish and/or English, and no single version can measure one's authenticity or "purity." In fact, attempting to do so only leads to Chicanas/os and Latinas/os endeavoring to "oppress each other trying to out-Chicano [and Latino] each other," victim-blames in faulting the subaltern subject (Latin American migrants and descendants) for the "linguistic terrorism" (Anzaldúa 80) of the neo- and internal colonizer (the U.S. nation-state), and uses the same racist ideology as nativists who equate American authenticity with language through statements such as "English only" or "if you are in America, you need to learn English." In short, for Estill, skin color and language proficiency constitute Mexican/Chicana/o cultural and biological authenticity, which, even if this logic were not misguided, the "Toltec poems" also contradict.

Even if the father cannot speak Spanish and has light skin, I still read the father and his Toltec gang as anti-assimilationist symbols that connote Mexican/Chicana/o affirmation and culture. In her analysis, Estill carefully does not address that Doña Jovita—the *curandera* and father's mother—"had raised the Toltec long" (Castillo 6). Moreover, as the speaker of the poem expresses, Doña Jovita, even if she were not the father's biological mother, exemplifies Mexican cultural "authenticity" as "la madre sagrada" with "su comal y molcajete," whom the speaker affiliates with "la revolución de Benito Juárez y Pancho Villa," Mexican cities (Guanajuato), Mexican cultural practices (bullfighting), and indigenous heritage ("Aztec calendars"). As such, designating the father as culturally inauthentic after this woman raises him reads as an inaccurate and a selective analysis. The accusation of whiteness and cultural inauthenticity also ignores the father's participation in the Toltec gang, which embraces indigenous, pre-conquest ancestry in the appropriation of the Toltec name and wars *against*, rather than alongside, whites. As a result, the daughter's identification with the father and gang culture/life still function as methods of decolonization for this working-class Chicana in a manner that does not require a renouncement of her ethnic background but, instead, offers avenues to affirm Mexican/Chicana/o identity.

Ultimately, this chapter has intervened in the multidisciplinary study of gangs to acknowledge and analyze gang members' socialities and how gangs are always a shared experience, especially amongst and between women when gang life and culture privilege a male-centric organizing principle. A severely neglected text that warrants much more critical attention, *My Father Was a Toltec* reveals how the decolonial possibilities in gangs may depend upon the colonization of, and exacerbate already present trauma for, working-class female socialities. At the same time, Castillo's poetry collection re-envisions the father/daughter relationship in Chicana literature in its refusal to portray the public and private spheres as always dichotomous,

with the private devoid of political agency. Instead, the father's hybridization of the private sphere births *la Heredera*'s emergence, affording her avenues for decolonization inside and outside private life. In this same vein, this chapter has also begun to expose how the systemic impetus for gang membership and gang violence in working-class communities of color implicates gender and sexuality as much as race and class. As this chapter shows, for working-class Chicanas, gangs as anti-assimilationist, decolonial praxis enable resistance against the white supremacy and racism of the U.S. nation-state and its agents, as well as heteropatriarchal logics that structure certain Chicana/o cultures and families to regulate Chicanas' life chances.

Yet throughout this explication, an aporia that I have purposely left unaddressed haunts this chapter and Castillo's "Toltec poems": the internal politics of gangs. If, as an array of scholars in critical gang studies document, many gangs often venerate maleness, hypermasculinity, and heterosexuality, how, then, does this queer heiress become a citizen-subject to attain decolonization in a subculture that often operates with its own heteropatriarchal ideologies? Perhaps detrimentally, *My Father Was a Toltec* sidesteps this concern, only covering *la Heredera*'s reign as a full citizen-subject of her gang, but *Decolonial Delinquency* does not dodge this pressing question. As such, I now turn to another Chicana gang narrative to wrestle with the vital question of the heteropatriarchal politics of heterosexual, male-dominated gangs and their ramifications for their women members: Yxta Maya Murray's *Locas*.

CHAPTER 3: THE TRAUMA OF THE GANG GIRL: TOXIC RACIALIZED FEMALE MASCULINITY AND DECOLONIAL FEMININITY IN *LOCAS*

In the 2005 film *Havoc*, Anne Hathaway and Bijou Phillips play two white upper-class teenagers—Allison (Hathaway) and Emily (Phillips)—from the Pacific Palisades, an affluent coastal neighborhood in West Los Angeles. The young girls are part of an opulent white gang—called the "PLC"—at their local high school, though this gang does not replicate the racial hatred of white supremacist groups like the Aryan Brotherhood or Ku Klux Klan. Instead, the PLC fetishizes and arrogates early African American gangster rap culture. The majority of the PLC members' days consist of rapping and dancing to Tupac Shakur, speaking African American English and calling each other "nigga," pontificating about their penchant for violence and the peril of "the streets," and wearing hip hop aesthetic clothing articles, like oversized Ecko and Enyce hoodies and diamond chains. Although the PLC views itself as a dangerous, aggressive, and "from the bottom to the top" gang, its participants have all grown up in lavish, two-parent homes and drive luxury vehicles.

Cognizant of the PLC's façade and wishing to experience "real" gang life, Allison and Emily travel to the *barrios* of East Los Angeles to purchase cocaine and meet Latino gang members. After weeks cultivating relations with a gang member named Hector, the two young women approach him about admission into his 16th Street gang, an allusion to the actual 18th Street Latina/o gang of Los Angeles. Eventually, Hector and other male members of 16th Street relent and offer the two membership, but these men claim that Allison and Emily must first fulfill a requirement before they can join the gang: roll a die and have sex with the number of male gang members that their die rolls. The two ladies agree—Allison rolling a one and Emily a

three—and begin to have sex with gang members for their initiation into the gang. But midway through the process, the two have second thoughts and run out of the room, leaving the gang and gang culture for good after deducing that the lives of authentic gang girls consist only of serving as sexual objects for the pleasure of male gang members.

This depiction of gang girls as subordinate and passive sex objects in heteropatriarchal, male-dominated gangs permeates much of popular culture, as well as the few academic studies of girls in gangs. According to Cresencio López-González, academics have studied counterhegemony in gangs,

> pero no en agrupaciones dominadas por mujeres ya que su participación se consideraba marginal o pasiva. . . . Además, existía la caracterización despectiva de la mujer pandillera como objetos sexuales. . . . Dicha información principalmente era propagada por los medios de comunicación que de modo sensacionalista exaltaban la historia personal de la pandillera como una 'chica mala.'(67)[26]

Although sensationalist media and popular culture propagate this stereotype about gang girls, scholars—as López-González notes—rarely examine women's positions in gangs to challenge this presumed exploitation because they, too, subscribe to the narrative of gang girls as "marginal o pasiva." Anne Campbell concurs with López-González, writing that most academic studies of gangs view gang girls as "invisible," resulting in female gang members appearing in scholarship usually as a "footnote, an enigma, an oddity" (5). On the other hand, Campbell also argues that the rare scholars who allocate "disproportionate coverage" to gang girls instead of their male counterparts focus mainly on their sexuality, which, in her words, "is particularly annoying since writers on male gang members provide almost no information on the boys' sexual activity by which a comparison might be made" (28). Furthermore, if scholars do not view gang girls only

as sex objects, then they contend that their purpose in gangs consists of functioning as "yes-women" to aggrandize male gang members' hypermasculinity. As Amaia Ibarraran Bigalondo says, for these academics, "the women in the *clicka* have become voiceless companions, whose only role is to pamper his [the male gang member's] pretentious macho image" ("Chicano Gangs/Chicana Girls" 49). In short, popular culture and academics seldomly recognize women in gangs, but if they do envision gang girls, they primarily understand them as sex objects devoid of agency, power, and full citizenship in the gang.

Although the study of gang girls remains sparse, a few scholars have deemed these assumptions about women in gangs erroneous and essentializing. Daniel Enrique Pérez, for instance, acknowledges that though some gang girls may encounter heteropatriarchal and sexist oppression in male-dominated gangs, "women sometimes still attain leadership roles and assume positions within a gang where they have authority over the others" (152). Pérez's assertion coincides with many of the claims of actual gang girls. In Joan W. Moore's ethnographic analysis of the Chicana/o Los Angeles gangs White Fence and El Hoyo Maravilla, she asks former and current gang girls about the belief that male gang members treat women in gangs as possessions. According to Moore, "Most of the women—almost two thirds, older and younger—vehemently denied the truth of such assertions. A White Fence woman said, 'No, I think my homeboys treated us good, the way we should be treated. . . . In my day they treated us the way we should be treated, with respect'" (53). Likewise, Sonia Rodriguez's autobiographical gang narrative—*Lady Q: The Rise and Fall of a Latin Queen*—about her former life in the Puerto Rican gang the Latin Kings, which famously transitioned to the Almighty Latin King Queen Nation to better recognize its female membership, also attests to gang girls achieving positions of leadership and power in one of the largest Latina/o gangs in the United States.

While the presumption that male gang members reduce women in gangs to powerless sex objects may rely on and spread exploitative stereotypes, some truth lies in these beliefs about gang girls. After all, in Moore's study, two-thirds of former and current female gang members may have denied that men in gangs treated them improperly, but one-third of women agreed with the allegation. Similarly, in another examination of Latina/o gangs, Moore and John Hagedorn write that "[h]alf of the male members claimed that female members were 'possessions'," though Moore and Hagedorn note this boastful claim "reflected the males' general need to be in charge" (3). Although women are not always powerless, non-agential sex objects in gangs, popular culture and academics have used instances where they are to homogenize gang girls, which erases their lives and agency and co-opts identity politics to further sensationalize gangs and criminalize Black and Latina/o culture. Nevertheless, though I recognize that many women gang members do not customarily encounter the gendered oppression commonly cited in popular culture and academia and, instead, resemble *la Heredera* of *My Father Was a Toltec*, gangs are not always—or entirely—emancipatory for all women. Although gangs may offer decolonial possibilities for working-class women of color, for some women, gangs may function as a colonizing, regulatory, and disciplinary apparatus that exacerbates the psychological and physical trauma working-class women of color experience in the United States. Consequently, any analysis of gang girls still should attend to the heteropatriarchal politics in male-dominated gangs and how women negotiate these sometimes oppressive subcultures.

Released in 1997, Yxta Maya Murray's first novel, *Locas*, represents how gang girls experience and resist sexist hierarchies and maltreatment in gangs to achieve agency, decolonization, and positions of power in these subcultures. Murray sets the novel in Echo Park, Los Angeles (a predominantly Chicana/o area) and in three eras: 1980-1985, 1985-1990, and

1997. The story centers on two young Chicanas in this neighborhood in these time periods: Cecilia, a birthright citizen of the United States whose undocumented mother migrated from Mexico, and Lucía, an undocumented immigrant who accompanied her mother in her own migration from Mexico. The two Chicanas struggle in poverty for most of their young lives until Cecilia's brother Manny—whom Lucía dates—forms the Echo Park Lobos (perhaps a reference to the actual Echo Park Locos) and creates an organized crime empire that ameliorates his family's and Lucía's penury. Initially, Cecilia and Lucía join Manny in the Lobos, but after Cecilia consistently faces domestic violence from her boyfriend (also a Lobo) to a point where she miscarries, she drops out of the gang and momentarily pursues her queer sexual interests with a rival gang girl, before later reneging on her queer and former gang behaviors (both of which she reads as criminal and immoral) to join the Church and adhere to *marianismo*. Lucía, on the other hand, perseveres against the emotional and physical abuse and marginal status she faces in the Lobos to eventually seize power and a "*patrón*" status, create a girl gang called the Fire Girls, and rule the Lobos, Fire Girls, and Echo Park by the end of the novel.

Although *Locas* remains one of the more frequently-addressed gang narratives in Chicana/o and Latina/o literary studies, several reviewers panned the novel as exploitational for featuring many of the gang girl stereotypes explained above. For example, Ramón García and María Martínez-Gutiérez lambaste Murray for writing a novel about "the pathetic lives of gangster girls" and a "ghetto ventriloquism that sounds off all the most damaging and unpleasant stereotypes about Mexican men and women" (113). In this same vein, Manuel David Hernández argues, "*Locas* reads like a fanciful dream in which the author manipulates stereotypes to please a readership unfamiliar with this complex community" (153).[27] In response to these censures, Murray has said, "If the women in *Locas* for example, Lucía, an undocumented immigrant and

would-be gang boss who feverishly wants power and control and who thrives on capitalism, competition and struggle—are stereotypes, they are no kind of Latina stereotype that I've ever seen before" (Letter 10). For Murray, the representations of Latinas in *Locas* are not stereotypical because the novel does not portray them as undocumented immigrants birthing children at uncontrollable rates, as delinquents engaging in criminal activity for *no* reason and who toil in white capitalist-induced poverty, and as relying on government "handouts" to drain taxpayers' dollars. Instead, because Lucía appropriates and excels in black-market capitalist economies and circumvents heteropatriarchy, the characters in *Locas* are non-stereotypical, though Murray remains quiet about Cecilia epitomizing the *Virgen/puta* stereotype about Chicanas and Latinas.

In addition to denouncing *Locas* as stereotypical and exploitative, others have decried its ostensible inauthenticity. As Lorena Galván says, "According to some critics of *Locas,* her [Murray's] reflection of the lived realities of *la vida loca* is viewed as inauthentic, characterizing Murray as a *hocicona* (women who talk too much)" (48). Indeed, some have condemned Murray for talking badly, such as Hernández who claims that the Caló Murray writes her novel in does not resemble "Murray's natural speaking voice" (153). As Hernández hints at, these critiques about inauthenticity arise because, unlike Ana Castillo and *My Father Was a Toltec,* Murray—by her own admission—is not, nor has she ever been, a gang member, and *Locas* is fiction.

Although *Locas* is fiction and Murray has never gangbanged, scholars should not dismiss the novel as unrealistic because the book does contain biographical components in incorporating the experiences of actual gang members, enabling *Locas* to, as Pérez says, "depict gang life . . . in a realistic fashion" (149). After graduating with a J.D. from Stanford in 1993, Murray clerked for judges Harry Hupp and Ferdinand Fernandez in the Central District of California and Ninth

Circuit Court of Appeals in Pasadena. During this time, she met many defendants who were gang members and heard their stories about gang life through courtroom proceedings, as well as learned about "what 'really' goes on in the judicial process" for gang members (Galván 22). For Murray, this period provided the knowledge she needed to inform *Locas*: the lived experiences of gang members and how the U.S. nation-state and its judicial system view and treat working-class persons of color. While autobiographical gang narratives like Castillo's *My Father Was a Toltec*, Luis J. Rodriguez's *Always Running*, and Piri Thomas' *Down These Mean Streets* carry an authenticity that only actual gang members will likely generate, scholars and critics should not disregard *Locas*, as the lives and testimonies of gang member defendants infuse the novel.

Additionally, jettisoning *Locas* because of alleged inauthenticity engages in a misogyny that further silences the voices of working-class women of color. As I will later discuss in this chapter, the U.S. nation-state and its ideological and repressive state apparatuses attempt to silence working-class women of color's voices to maintain the violability and vulnerability of their bodies. Worsening this erasure, cultural production also often overlooks (except when fetishizing and sensationalizing) working-class women of color, a phenomenon that, as Chapter 1 explains, Rosa Linda Fregoso and Catherine Ramírez observe with la Pachuca and that continues contemporaneously with her successor: la Chola, la Loca, the gang girl. This muzzling renders *Locas*, even if fiction, all the more crucial, as *Locas* remains one of the few cultural products to attend to women gang members in a complex, nuanced, and in-depth manner.

Arguments to discount fictional narratives written by those who have not lived the experiences of their characters also neglect the capability of cultural production to produce material consequences and influence how humans interact with the world and perceive others. U.S. media, film, and television, for instance, constantly feature images of Black men as hooded,

masked, and violent criminals who threaten the safety of white institutions, citizens, and property. These representations are stereotypical, homogenizing, and almost always fictional, yet these images that often appear in gangxploitation films, like *Training Day* (2001) and *Gang Related* (1997), have palpable ramifications for Black men. For example, on February 26, 2012, George Zimmerman, a former volunteer neighborhood watchman, shot 17-year-old Trayvon Martin after suspecting Martin—walking alone, in a hood, and through a predominantly white suburban area at night—of committing (or preparing to commit) a violent crime. Martin died that night, unarmed, save for a bag of skittles and an Arizona tea that he purchased from a local 7-11, from where he was returning. Despite Martin not committing a crime (violent or non-violent), Martin's Black body and hood signified violent criminality for Zimmerman, and Zimmerman took this signification as authorization to execute Martin. Zimmerman's racist actions and rationale arose not necessarily because of an atavistic hatred for Black persons present since his birth but as a byproduct of cultural interpellation where various ideological state apparatuses inculcated Zimmerman consciously and unconsciously to associate Black men with violence and crime.

While critics who assail Murray for incorporating exploitative stereotypes might argue that *Locas* can contribute to amplifying violence against Latinas in the same way that racist, criminalizing images of Black men helped lead to Martin's death, I partially agree with Murray in her rebuttal against accusations of stereotypical portrayals. Though I admit that *Locas* features sensationalist representations of Chicanas/os and Latinas/os, and I acknowledge the potential for readers to interpret Murray's narrative in a way that reifies racist logics about gang members, Latinas/os, and Chicanas/os, I also, like many other scholars, find interpretations of *Locas* as completely exploitative, stereotypical, and inauthentic too narrow, unnuanced, and uncritical.

Rather, I read *Locas* as appropriating many of the sexist and racist stereotypes about Latinas and Chicanas in gangs to re-envision them as a method for reformulating common conceptions of gang girls as non-agential objects and for giving voice to working-class women of color who suffer physical and psychological trauma from the U.S. nation-state and heteropatriarchal, male-dominated gangs but whom these institutions often silence and erase.

In this way, I align with Galván and Monica Brown in viewing *Locas* as doing "LatCrit" work. Branching out from Critical Race Theory, Latino Critical Race Theory—or LatCrit—"locate[s] and give[s] voice to the marginalized, while challenging systems of power that often are responsible for the improper construction of Latino identity" (Galván 15). According to Richard Delgado, counternarratives are central to LatCrit and crucial for altering the "prevailing mindset by means of which members of the dominant group justify the world as it is, that is, with whites on top and browns and black at the bottom" (2413). George A. Martínez concurs with Delgado in understanding counternarratives' power to reform dominant perceptions about the oppressed by revealing the voices of subaltern persons when hegemonic forces stifle them: "Narrative provides a language for minorities to communicate harms. Without narrative, minorities have no voice to explain how they have been harmed" (686). Delgado and Martínez identify the effect of cultural production on the lives of ethnic and racial minorities and the dominant group's perception of these persons, though, differing from the connection between Martin's death and exploitative imagery of Black men, counternarratives, they suggest, have the potential to intervene more constructively. For those who have analyzed Murray's novel, *Locas*'s imagery and counternarrative also have advantageous effects for gang girls and Chicana/o and Latina/o communities because of how the story fulfills these LatCrit requirements. As Brown says, if the fictional characters of *Locas* "cannot be viewed as straightforwardly revealing 'the

real,' they act as art of resistance, art that grapples with the 'real': that is art that works to resist erasure and oppression, art that tells new stories that complicate received notions of Chicanos/as and Latinos/as, rather than confirming simplistic and degrading stereotypes" (85).

As briefly mentioned earlier, part of the "new stories" and resistance to "erasure and oppression" of *Locas* centers on appropriating predominant stereotypes and discourses about gang girls to create a counternarrative that reveals women in male-dominated gangs and hypermasculine subcultures not as non-agential sex objects but as relatively autonomous subjects who attain power, decolonization, and citizenship. But *Locas*'s representation of gang girls reaches further than merely reconceptualizing women as full citizen-subjects of the gang. In revising this popular misconception about gang girls, the novel reveals many academically-unaddressed avenues for theorizing racialized female masculinity, femininity in male-dominated and hypermasculine subcultures, and the relations between physical, emotional, and psychological trauma and toxic masculinity.

In my reading of *Locas*, I argue that the performance of female masculinity operates in Murray's novel as a method of decolonization for working-class women of color that grants these women citizenship, agency, and power in heteropatriarchal, male-dominated gangs. In doing so, this chapter not only intervenes in and advances many multidisciplinary discussions on gang girls but also broader queer, gender, and women's studies conversations. While Jack Halberstam's *Female Masculinity*, for example, has provided a critical examination of gender fluidity and performativity, Halberstam and others addressing female masculinity—even while not using Halberstam's term—have idealized and romanticized the performance as completely emancipatory for women and struggled to supply an adequate analysis of how class and race intersect with the performance of female masculinity or address the potential "toxification" of

female masculinity and the U.S. nation-state's and heteropatriarchy's roles in rendering various female masculinities toxic. This chapter furthers this overarching dialogue of female masculinity by theorizing the female masculinity that women gang members perform in *Locas* as a toxic racialized female masculinity that predicates itself upon the violent abuse and devaluation of other working-class women of color. In offering a theory of the production and performance of toxic racialized female masculinities, this chapter understands *Locas* as identifying the toxicity of this type of racialized female masculinity as arising from the psychological, emotional, and physical trauma besetting many working-class women of color because of the ways that the U.S. nation-state and heteropatriarchy perceive and render their bodies perennially vulnerable and violable. In this way, I read *Locas* not as exploiting gang girls by portraying them as pathologically violent. Rather, I regard the novel as appropriating common stereotypes to engender a counternarrative that underscores the trauma of working-class women of color and reveals their voices and lives when various repressive and ideological forces attempt to occlude and dismiss them.

This chapter also refuses the frequent assertion that femininity automatically results in marginalization and ineligibility for citizenship in hypermasculine and male-dominated gangs. Departing from this perception, this chapter contributes to the scant dialogue between African American and Latina/o studies when studying racialized subcultures by building from the work of African American studies scholar Justin Gifford. Gifford's *Pimping Fictions* argues that femininity carries agential capacity in male-dominated subcultures, such as in underground drug markets or pimping enterprises, as represented in Black urban street fiction. Applying Gifford's observations to Latina/o gang narratives, I analyze the performance of female femininity in *Locas* to unveil femininity's agential and decolonial potential in male-dominated gangs. In close

reading *Locas*, I argue that its female gang members deploy femininity to manipulate male gang members and heterosexual masculinity so that these women may secure avenues for citizenship and power in a gang that can provide women decolonization against the family, private sphere, U.S. nation-state, and heteropatriarchy overall.

Female Masculinity, *Machismo*, and Femininity's Decolonial Potential

Any analysis of female masculinity begins with Jack Halberstam. In 1998, Halberstam resisted the tendency to read masculinity as "a synonym for men or maleness" in *Female Masculinity*, the influential study of butches in film, literature, and culture (13). In this book, Halberstam defines masculinity not as limited to men but as a cultural performance available to and performed by any gender. As Halberstam writes, "masculinity in the 1990s has finally been recognized as, at least in part, a construction by female—as well as male—born people" (*Female Masculinity* 13). Taking this premise as an organizing principle, Halberstam analyzes "the topic of female masculinity to explore a queer subject position that can successfully challenge hegemonic models of gender conformity" (*Female Masculinity* 9). While scrutinizing how performances of female masculinity challenge traditional gender models, social conformity, and hegemonic masculinity advances understandings of gender and sexuality and the ideologies that regulate and construct these models, many have critiqued Halberstam for romanticizing female masculinity as a bastion of resistance and not accounting for how female masculinity may replicate structures of oppression for women and genderqueer persons.

Halberstam defines "dominant masculinity" as "conjur[ing] up notions of power and legitimacy and privilege; it often symbolically refers to the power of the state and to uneven distributions of wealth" (*Female Masculinity* 2). This masculinity, for Halberstam, "seems to extend outward into patriarchy and inward into the home; masculinity represents the power of

inheritance, the consequences of the traffic in women, and the promise of social privilege" (*Female Masculinity* 2). Halberstam convincingly illuminates how female masculinity deconstructs the logic and rule of heteropatriarchy and heteronormativity, but if women as well as men can perform masculinity, then how can female performances also reproduce and reinforce masculine hegemony and its "notions of power and legitimacy and privilege" that suppress those not desiring or performing a masculine identity? What are the consequences of female masculinity when women perform masculinity in a manner that also relies on "the traffic in women?" In what circumstances would women perform troubling versions of masculinity for other women and genderqueer persons and why? These are questions that Halberstam's seminal book does not attend to but that *Locas* directly engages, specifically at the intersection of gender, race, and class, which remains another dynamic that Halberstam's book does not sufficiently tease out when theorizing female masculinity.

Though incredibly nuanced, Halberstam's analysis of butches and female masculinity favors class-privileged white persons, scarcely accounting for masculine performances by working-class women of color and how female masculinity may change in various racial and class contexts and why. In fact, when addressing the visibility of female masculinity, Halberstam offers a questionable rationale about the need to *not* analyze race. Halberstam writes, "lesbians of color tend to be stereotyped along racial, as well as sexual, lines: the black lesbian, for example, is often stereotyped as the butch bulldagger or as sexually voracious, and so it makes no sense to talk about such a construction in terms of visibility and spectrality" (*Female Masculinity* 114). Because the gender performances, sexualities, and sexual practices of lesbians of color are "often stereotyped"—or, in other words, exoticized and fetishized, such as in BDSM pornography or prison television shows—Halberstam deems racialized female masculinity and lesbians of

color's sexualities as visible in a way that the "sexual scenes and sexual practices and pleasurable identifications" of white lesbians are not, leading to an "inarticulateness of white lesbian sexuality" (*Female Masculinity* 117, 115).[28] In this reasoning, Halberstam overlooks how fetishization and stereotypes also function as a form of invisibility as much as they make visible racialized masculinity and sexuality—*and* how they operate as disciplinary control that silences the stereotyped group's voice and, in this specific case, masks the violent and criminal "sexual scenes and sexual practices" women of color experience, such as the high frequency of rape and sexual assault against them and the low prosecution rates of their abusers. As Halberstam's rationale ironically discloses, stereotypes and fetishization enable persons to *not* discuss, hear, and view the trauma, voice, and gender and sexual performances of the stereotyped person because they believe they already have. The opening section of this chapter reveals as much in citing how gang girls' lives often differ from the images normally appearing in popular culture and in academic scholarship.

One of the few instances where Halberstam attempts to analyze racialized female masculinity transpires in her discussion of Queen Latifah's butch, bank robber character Cleo in the film *Set It Off* (1996). In the final paragraph of her chapter on butches on film, Halberstam writes, "the black female masculinity that Latifah portrays is convincing precisely because it is infused with racial and class dynamics that render the masculinity part and parcel of a particular form of abjected female identity. . . . Cleo's masculinity is as much a product of her life in the hood as it is about her lesbianism; it is a masculinity learned in poverty" (*Female Masculinity* 229). Despite recognizing that Cleo's racialized female masculinity arises in part from her life in a working-class, racialized space, Halberstam never grapples with this thread to examine how Cleo's masculinity differs from the surplus of white and class-privileged masculinities *Female*

Masculinity discusses. Because Halberstam does not allocate more than two paragraphs to Cleo or racialized female masculinity in this chapter, readers never learn why—beyond a blanket "poverty"—Cleo's masculinity differs, what the performance affords and denies her, its effects on other women, how Cleo's masculinity may model itself after subaltern (as opposed to dominant) masculinities, and how or if her masculinity that relies on lethal violence and crime becomes toxic.

On the other hand, Richard T. Rodríguez remains one of the few scholars to theorize racialized female masculinity, primarily in Chicana/o contexts.[29] Rodríguez defines *machismo* as "a term most frequently used within Chicano and Latino contexts to imply manhood, or masculinity" and as "virtually wedded to studies on gender and the family" (*Next of Kin* 43). In Chapter 2, I noted the tendency of many inside and outside academia to essentialize *machismo* to racialize sexism and criminalize Latina/o and Chicana/o culture, but these conceptions disregard (perhaps purposely) the intricacies and varieties of *machismo*. Bernice Rincón's essay, "La Chicana: Her Role in the Past and Her Search for a New Role in the Future," delineates the manifold versions of and characteristics that comprise *machismo*:

> Positive: 1) Bravery, loyalty; 2) Pride in self as an individual; 3) Responsibility of leadership in the family; 4) Sacredness of the family (La Raza); 5) Human values: Love of fellows: compassion, suffering, liberty for all; 6) Lack of concern for money; 7) Love of music, dancing (joy of life); 8) Love of children; 9) Respect for religion; 10) Respect for elders; 11) Modesty and reserve; 12) Liberal political orientation; 13) Good manners; 14) Willingness to fight when needed.

> Negative: 1) Absolute power: a) Exploitation, b) Self centeredness, c) Violence used to maintain power through fear, d) Closed aloofness; 2) Women seen as a subordinate creature created to make man's lot more comfortable and pleasurable; 3) Too much pride; 4) Absolute power-inclination to strong man politics; Hero-worship-dictatorships; 5) There is sharing of the joys of life only as man sees fit. Woman's place is home; 6) Large families (here the church has also contributed); 7) Too much responsibility placed on the male to maintain his "position"; 8) Drinking, wenching, etc. seen as a sign of manhood; 9) Fighting seen as proof of masculinity; 10) Too modest and reserved for survival in today's society. (17-18)[30]

Whether reading the positive or negative aspects of *machismo*, many have categorized the performance as a subaltern masculinity that arises in response to legacies of colonial conquest, evident in the philandering or "wenching" by the Toltec father in the previous chapter. As Micael Tapia insists, "*Machismo* is not in itself a cultural ethic for Latinos, but more so a product of imperialism and colonialism" (20). Tapia regards *machismo* as "an act of overt power over Latinas and less *macho* or effeminate men, but it is power coming from the powerlessness" (20). If *machismo* constitutes a subaltern masculinity that arises from colonialism, then we must consider racialized female masculinities—and all female masculinities, if we understand heteropatriarchy and men as in hegemonic positions in the U.S. nation-state—as subaltern masculinities. But just as with the Toltec father, even if subaltern masculinities are resistant and represent "power coming from the powerlessness," subaltern masculinities may also have detrimental and colonizing effects on other subaltern persons. In this case, if any gender can perform masculinity—and, by extent, the Chicana/o and Latina/o term for masculinity,

machismo—then these negative components of *machismo* that Rincón outlines are available for women to perform as much as the positive ones.

In focusing more specifically on the positive features of *machismo,* Rodríguez notes that these characteristics still "hinge on a necessarily normative la familia/la raza arrangement" and that if "women are invited to adopt machismo to exemplify their dignity and pride, they must do it as mothers, as faithful members of la familia" (*Next of Kin* 46, 47). As such, for Rodríguez, "even if a macho woman were to defend her family [a positive aspect of *machismo*], she ultimately cannot take the test to prove that she can protect and defend 'herself' *and* 'her' family" because both positive and negative components of *machismo* rely on the heteropatriarchal, reproductive family and a sexist ideology that considers women subordinate to the male patriarch (*Next of Kin* 47, emphasis in original). Because of these regulations in encouraged performances of racialized female masculinity (always within a heteronormative and reproductive context), Rodríguez concludes his analysis with a series of questions: "How might masculinity exist in light of feminist and queer critique? In what ways and forms? What precisely do positive aspects of machismo lend to social equality? Do reconfigurations of masculinity in nonheterosexual contexts (say by gay men) necessarily entail a break from heterosexual contexts? If so, in what ways are these reconfigured masculinities useful?" (52).

In my theorization of racialized female masculinity in *Locas*, I build from many of these questions Rodríguez poses, as well as the threads Halberstam's discussion of female masculinity leaves dangling. In doing so, I consider how racialized female masculinity as a subaltern masculinity may not only afford working-class women of color citizenship in gangs that enable them to resist white capitalism, heteropatriarchy, and racial hegemony (as discussed in Chapter 2), but also how certain racialized female masculinities may incorporate negative characteristics

of *machismo* that, like the Toltec's, contribute to the colonization and exploitation of other subaltern persons. I pursue how and why negative components of *machismo* materialize in racialized female masculinities and how these processes and reasons may differ from male performances of subaltern masculinity, given the varying colonial forces structuring subaltern women's and men's lives in different ways. I also consider the possibility of negative aspects of *machismo* according competing possibilities when performed by working-class women of color. How might performances of negative *machismo* deconstruct various heteropatriarchal ideologies of *machismo* and reify others? Finally, I contemplate how girl gangs in *Locas* may offer answers to Rodríguez's questions about how masculinity functions in non-heterosexual and non-reproductive spaces and if these masculinities in alternative conditions entail a "break from heterosexual contexts," leading to productive reconfigured masculinities.

As I mentioned earlier, my analysis of *Locas* does not end with masculinity but considers the efficacy of femininity in hypermasculine and male-dominated gangs. Because the majority of studies of gangs favor hypermasculine male gang members and not women or feminine men as their objects of analyses, femininity in these subcultures rarely receives serious attention. Furthermore, the few scholars who concentrate on women and femininity in gangs usually view femininity as a frailty that leads to violent assault and marginalization and as a performance that female gang members must shed to attain citizenship in gangs. For example, in his study of abuse that women in gangs suffer, Mark Totten writes that in subcultures operating within heteropatriarchal capitalism, like gangs, masculinity signifies "power" and "aggression, dominance, independence, and violence" and femininity conveys "powerlessness" and "passivity, dependence, nurturance, and non-violence" (31). Similarly, Halberstam theorizes cultural production's representation of femininity in hypermasculine subcultures, such as in the

prison film *Caged Heat* (1974), and suggests that femininity, in these spaces, "is simply a luxury women cannot afford" (*Female Masculinity* 201). In sum, whether analyzing actual hypermasculine subcultures or their representation in literature and film, scholars normatively regard femininity as a deficiency devoid of agency and that compromises a person's ability to earn citizenship, instead attracting mistreatment.

Although the majority of scholarship has disregarded, or viewed negatively, femininity in gangs, a few academics have departed from this tendency. In analyzing *Locas*, Galván, for instance, contemplates how Lucía and some of the Lobos women perform their genders in ways that are both masculine and feminine, which, for her, amounts to the gang girls having queer gender identities. As a result of these queer subject positions, Galván reads certain female Lobos as "destabiliz[ing] [the] binary gender system in gang subculture" and "dominant patriarchal ideologies in an experimental way" (163). Because heterosexuality and heteronormativity typically structure hypermasculine, mixed-gender gangs, femininity becomes a crucial part of a queer gender performance that has agential and decolonial capacities in the gang.[31] While I agree with Galván's insightful and compelling reading, her interpretation ultimately perceives femininity only as an element contributing to the true agential and decolonial force in gangs. For Galván, genderqueerness enables agency for female gang members and effects decolonialization against heteropatriarchy.

On the other hand, Justin Gifford, in studying the representation of hypermasculine and male-dominated subcultures in African American literature, considers femininity in those spaces not a weakness but an asset. In *Pimping Fictions*, Gifford appraises movements in what he terms African American urban street literature. Dominated and popularized in the 1960s and 1970s by Iceberg Slim and Donald Goines, urban street fiction "can be understood as black-authored crime

narratives of pimps, hustlers, drug cartels, and con artists and their struggles with inner-city life and crime. . . . [S]treet literature highlights the stories of black criminals who attempt to escape the ubiquitous spaces of white containment—the ghettos, prisons, and projects" (Gifford 154). In street literature, Black men are traditionally antiheroes who use crime to co-opt capitalist markets and circumvent "white containment," and women are relegated to marginal, object, and "ho" statuses where their juxtaposed alterity heightens the Black antihero's masculinity and power. In this way, street literature approximates many of the gendered stereotypes about women in male-dominated and hypermasculine gangs that this chapter's opening evokes.

But Gifford also argues that African American women writers overtook this genre in the late 1990s and have since maintained their reign over street literature. Though writing paradigmatic narratives that feature Black male antiheroes like their 1960s and 1970s predecessors, authors like Teri Woods, Sister Souljah, Vickie Stringer, and Nikki Turner re-envision this genre and write marginalized female characters in hypermasculine and male-dominated subcultures who profit from their marginality, particularly their femininity and sexuality.[32] As Gifford contends, in this genre's evolution, the working-class Black woman's "expression of sexuality illustrates her agency within the very limiting confines of society defined by patriarchal capitalism" (158). For Gifford, this female politicization of femininity and sexuality allows women to "subvert the aims of would-be pimps, hustlers, and gangsters and reverse the power dynamics in those misogynist relationships" (153). Building from Gifford's observations in African American street literature, I place his findings in conversation with Latina/o "street literature" to resist the scholarly dismissal and demonization of femininity in gangs. Scrutinizing the place, role, and efficacy of femininity in these subcultures, I ponder how gang girls mobilize their femininity and sexuality not only to attain agency in these spaces but

also to reveal the decolonial potentiality of femininity in hypermasculine, male-dominated gangs and its connections to subcultural citizenship.

"What It Is to Become a Man"

To understand how Chicanas in *Locas* perform racialized female masculinity, we must first comprehend the subaltern masculinity in the Lobos and how its gang members perform this masculinity. As the founder and initial leader of the Lobos, Manny, whom the majority of the gang's male members model themselves after, exemplifies Lobos masculinity. Once more, Manny forms the Lobos to amass power and financial wealth after he and most of his fellow Chicanas/os struggle in the poverty that accompanies their abject statuses in the United States. To shed the sense of inadequacy and debility that often arises with alterity, Manny begins enlarging and strengthening his body. Cecilia says, "I saw with my brother what it is to become a man. And I wanted to be a man like that. He got stronger, his skinny body moving up and curves coming out of his arms. His belly hardened into muscle and even the points of his eyes got sharper and sparked like black diamonds" (7). Not only does Manny's development signal to Cecilia that physical strength and power are requisites for this masculinity and citizenship in the Lobos, but Cecilia also reads this masculinity as a pathway towards economic upward mobility. In perceiving "black diamonds" in Manny's emerging masculinity, Cecilia sutures Lobos masculinity to the amelioration of the poverty that structures the lives of the Chicanas/os of *Locas*.

Indeed, this masculinity contributes to altering the financial conditions that afflict Manny and his Chicana/o *barrio* by requiring participation in violent crime and underground economies, which Manny's new, chiseled body prepares him for. As Cecilia continues, "He starts moving from picking pockets to stealing cars, and then sees how that money can *fly* in specials. Locals

with a little rainy-weather cash start coming to him looking for a piece, and he'd reach into the back seat of his chopshop car and pull it out. . . . He'd charge a hundred even, and I know he'd grin when he'd slip the bills in his pocket" (7, emphasis in original). After committing robberies, Manny organizes his own black-market capitalist ventures to earn money and improve his and his family's quality of life. As Cecilia says, Manny begins "leaving five hundred dollars on the table and he's not even seventeen" so that his mother will not have to wash "up after rich *rubia* ladies with smooth blond helmet hair who'd call her Maria even though her real name's Corazón" (7). In this manner, Manny's masculinity encompasses the responsibility for family that Rincón identifies as a positive characteristic of *machismo*. Manny does not just improve his mother's indigence. His actions also alleviate her exploitation and abject invisibility in working menial labor for white bourgeois employers.

Though Manny's subaltern masculinity may feature a few positive aspects of *machismo*, he must rely almost entirely on its negative characteristics to eradicate his family's poverty, many of which harm the same members of his *barrio* that he initially essays to assist, rendering his masculinity toxic. First, although Manny later cultivates a crime syndicate that sells drugs to white people not of Echo Park, his fellow neighborhood Chicanas/os—as well as his family—are the majority of his victims. He assaults other Chicanos who participate in the black-market and jeopardize the Lobos's income, such as "Gato" whom "Manny chopped . . . up into raw meat with those fast fists of his" (9), and he even insinuates violence against his mother when she orders him around. Since "[n]o boss man listens to an old lady, and no patrón lets his mama tell him what to do," Manny cautions his mother not to infringe on his authority, with "his left hand quivering down by his hip like a wild animal" to show her that "he would hit her just like she was just any other woman" (9). Because heteropatriarchy informs the subaltern masculinity that

Manny and the male Lobos perform and value, any woman that oversteps her position in the sexist social stratum threatens these men's masculinity, which they must police and uphold through violence against them.[33]

In addition to the masculinity of the Lobos including the negative *machismo* trait of using violence "to maintain power through fear," this masculinity also emphasizes exorbitant pride. Cecilia notes that, as much as he adores the money he gains from his masculinity, Manny esteems the *patrón* status that his masculinity creates. Cecilia says, "gangsters would treat you like a *patrón* if you flashed them a fifty and showed them the pistol you had packed under your belt. *Señor* Manny, that's what he wanted to be called" (8). In maintaining a hypermasculine exterior and broadcasting wealth and his penchant for violence, Manny attains a social standing that leads others in his *barrio* to treat him with respect, referring to him as *señor*. This deference that accompanies his *patrón* ranking contrasts with Manny's and his family's previous social positions in the United States as working-class persons of color living in an ethnic *barrio*. Though still neglected by and a second-class citizen in the U.S. nation-state, Manny can compensate for his marginal status by performing a subaltern masculinity that garners respect and intersubjective recognition from his community.

This subaltern masculinity also encompasses creating and regulating heteropatriarchal gender dynamics *within* the Lobos, not solely relations between mothers and their gangbanging sons. Within his gang, Manny and his Lobos treat female gang members similarly to how Manny treats his mother, an obstacle that *la Heredera* does not have to overcome and the reason for many of the caustic critiques of *Locas*. The male Lobos subordinate the women of the gang by relegating them to inferior statuses and granting them only nominal membership, replicating the same heteropatriarchal family dynamics that *la Heredera* escapes in *My Father Was a Toltec* and

suggesting that gangs are not always or entirely decolonial for women. According to Lucía, women in the Lobos hold a "sheep" ranking, which means that "girls wasn't doing shit in the clicka" because men reduce them to sex objects and reproductive hosts, domestic servants, and second-class citizens (19). Invoking exploitational stereotypes about gang girls, *Locas* initially portrays male gang members as envisioning female gang members as only "'good for fucking'" and "squeezing out kiddies" (31). As Lucía remarks after pondering how a fellow Lobo named Paco views her, "He just saw some girl, a *chavala* good-for-nothing, a piece of ass" (20).

Part of the reason that male Lobos reduce women to "piece[s] of ass" that are only around for "squeezing out kiddies" stems from how children (specifically boys) supposedly increase their masculinity in the gang and *barrio*. As Manny says to Lucía after haranguing her for not getting pregnant, "'I'm looking bad being the only one with a vieja who can't squeeze out no little doggies'" (40). Without a woman to birth Manny's "seed," Manny appears sterile and effeminate. But, as Brown notes, reducing women to reproductive hosts accomplishes two goals: "Pregnancy and child bearing . . . prove the 'manhood' of male members but" take "female members out of commission" (84). While pregnant, women cannot reasonably participate in gang violence and the gang's social bonding activities, like rumbles, drive-bys, and partying where drinking, smoking, and huffing consistently occur in the book. Consequently, pregnancy becomes a strategy for men to excommunicate Lobos women, who are already denied full citizenship, once women have served their "purpose." This "purpose" coincides with many hypermasculine, male-dominated counternationalist movements where men only envision women's participation for maternal and reproductive reasons. Similar to the gender politics of the Chicano Movement, the men of the Lobos perceive women (and value them insofar) as a means to multiply and care for the counternation.[34]

Beyond sex objects and reproductive hosts, Lobos sheep also fulfill the domestic needs of the gang, similar to the traditional, heteropatriarchal Chicana/o family that the previous chapter delineates. Lucía comments that, at home, Manny aggressively forces her into domestic labor, saying to her, "'Chingada, I'm only gonna tell you once, hear? Clean up this fucking floor, I ain't living like a pig just cause you're lazy'" (32). Within gang meetups as well, Manny and the Lobos men mandate that Lucía and all Lobos women continue the domestic work they perform in the home. Lucía says:

> Sometimes we'd all get together and have a barbecue at the park. There's me and the other girlfriends running around making sure the food's good, the tacos and chicken all steamy and spicy just perfect. And then the men standing around swigging beer and talking business. . . . I didn't always wanna be doing the food, though, all that stirring and wrapping and putting out the plates. I wanted to be over there on the vatos' side of the line and listen to them talk about clika deals. But any time I tried to cross over, when I walked up to Manny and his homeboys and listened in to what they're saying, Manny would slam me. 'Hey, chavala. This is man business now, go on over there.' He'd put his hand up and then look at me, giving me his stop sign, and I didn't press it. (29)

While the gang holds social outings or conducts meetings to deliberate about their black-market business, Lucía and other women must wait on the men, preparing their food and the table. When they are not serving the men, the men segregate the Lobos women. The Lobos men force women to reside on the sidelines because the men's masculinity requires that women not learn of the gang's business operations so that the men may remain the "breadwinners" and in independent and superior positions in the Lobos, an ideology that recurrently manifests when the Lobos men also bar women from joining them in gang fights and rival hits. Because Lobos women cannot

access the black-market economy of the gang and must rely on the men to care for them financially and alleviate their poverty, they are *almost* powerless to amend their precarious, dependent, exploited, and subordinate "sheep" statuses in the Lobos. As such, in performing a subaltern, heterosexual masculinity that predominantly incorporates the negative characteristics of *machismo* and reduces women to their bodies and to domestic servants, the men of the Lobos reproduce the hegemony of heteropatriarchy, compulsory heterosexuality, and reproductive futurism that women often seek out gangs to escape, such as with *la Heredera*.

After reading this overview of masculinity in the Lobos and how male gang members treat women in the novel, one can understand why many of the critiques of *Locas* arise. As much as I agree with Murray about her novel featuring alternative representations of Latinas, the book *does* incorporate popular and exploitational stereotypes about gang girls, but *Locas* does so in a way that refashions these stereotypes to reveal how spurious they usually are. When Cecilia observes Manny's nascent subaltern, heterosexual masculinity in response to his poverty, invisibility, and alterity within the U.S. nation-state, she mentions that, after witnessing her brother grow stronger and seeing diamonds in his eyes, she saw "what it is to become a man" and "wanted to be a man like that" (7). Though Manny's masculinity requires the subordination of women, misogyny, violence, and crime, his masculinity initiates economic, material, and social decolonization that he and his male Lobos profit from. Cecilia learns that, while troublesome, the masculinity available in the Lobos offers strength, power, and money for working-class persons of color whom the U.S. nation-state relegates to a subaltern position. But Cecilia also knows that "woman" means "sheep," so, at this point in the novel, these decolonial rewards are attainable only for men, leaving Chicanas to rely on men's "charity." Thus, the working-class Chicanas of *Locas* are doubly marginalized and subaltern, both by the U.S. nation-

state and the heteropatriarchal Chicano men that rule and dictate their lives. While Cecilia elects to remain in this subordinate position through most of the novel (replacing the heteropatriarchal hegemony of the Lobos with the Catholic church), Lucía perceives the decolonization in Lobos masculinity. As a result, Lucía chooses to appropriate the masculinity that she learns from Manny to earn cultural citizenship and power within the gang and transform the Lobos into a space where she may access the decolonial benefits that gangs potentially offer working-class women of color.

And So the Sheep Donned Her Pendleton

To perform the racialized female masculinity necessary for this Chicana to acquire citizenship, power, and decolonization in the Lobos, Lucía begins crossdressing. She says, "I wasn't gonna be a whorehouse sheep wearing them spiky heels and sticking my melons out of slut dresses the rest of my life" (94). The "sheep" status women in the Lobos hold demands that they dress in a sexualized manner that accentuates their bodies for the voyeuristic pleasure of straight men, epitomizing their positions as sex objects and reproductive hosts. For Lucía, altering her sheep standing to claim subcultural citizenship means attiring herself in a style that signifies a different ideology. No longer wearing lascivious clothing, she replicates Manny's fashion: "I'd dress chola with my girls, button up my Pendleton, wear them black jeans, tough jacket, put on a dark mean mouth. . . . I knew that no sheep could look like I did right then" (95). In adopting what Rodríguez terms the "homeboy aesthetic," Lucía's appearance conveys masculine intimidation and de-emphasizes her prior sexualization. A fashion style popular among Chicano and Latino gang members, the "homeboy aesthetic," for Rodríguez, includes "an assemblage of key signifiers: clothing (baggy pants and undershirts are perhaps the most significant), hair (or, in the current moment of the aesthetic, lack of hair), bold stance, and

distinct language (think caló mixed with hip-hop parlance)" ("Queering the Homeboy Aesthetic" 127-28). While oversized pants and undershirts are foundational pieces of this aesthetic, so, too, are fully-buttoned, baggy, long sleeve, flannel Pendleton shirts. When Lucía dons this traditionally-male style, her buttoned, baggy Pendleton covers up her "melons" that her previous "slut dresses" revealed, as her billowing pants mask her legs and rear that her dresses may accentuate. In doing so, her new aesthetic occludes body parts that signal for her undesired connotations of "woman"—either frailty (small arms, tiny frame, etc.) or sex object and reproductive host (breasts, legs, rear)—to instead connote terrifying aggression. Although Lucía maintains some femininity in wearing lipstick ("put[ting] on a dark mean mouth"), the dark color synchronizes with her de-sexualized and menacing, masculine appearance. Likewise, Lucía not only undertakes measures that exteriorly resist the maternal and sexual evocations of her body; she also begins taking birth control pills "nice and quick and didn't tell a soul" (41). In taking birth control, Lucía further distances herself from the "woman/sheep" status in the gang by nullifying biological capacities that mark her as a nominal gang member whose primary purpose centers on reproducing the counternation. Instead, she bypasses the requirements of reproductive futurism in the Lobos and ensures that pregnancy cannot expel her from the gang she desires to earn full citizenship in.

Rodríguez's definition of the "homeboy aesthetic" involves more than clothing, such as performance and language: the "bold stance" and "caló mixed with hip-hop parlance." In appropriating the "homeboy aesthetic" to masculinize herself, Lucía speaks Caló like Manny and the other male Lobos, consistently skirting the grammar of standard English, frequently cussing, and saying words like *ésa, vato, chola,* and *órale*. While the "homeboy aesthetic" as a whole codes as a masculine appearance, Caló has a crucial part in masculinizing the style. Ramírez

argues that pachuco slang—a colloquially interchangeable term for Caló—connotes masculinity and men: "Like black jive, pachuco slang's origins are in activities and realms generally associated with men and masculinity, such as the criminal underworld, androcentric jazz subculture, and the working class, which, in and of itself, is often configured as male and masculine. Consequently, it has been widely regarded as a 'male-dominated, intragroup form of communication'" (90-91). Chiefly appearing in "male-dominated" spaces and institutions, Caló exemplifies talking "manly." Thus, by speaking Caló like the rest of the male Lobos, Lucía rejects gendered expectations of linguistic propriety, such as talking softly, meekly, modestly, and without curse words.

Lucía also walks like a man as much as she talks and dresses like one. Performing the "bold stance" of the "homeboy aesthetic," Lucía says that she "started walking straight like a man does, taking them long-legged roomy steps so people start getting out of my way. Watch it, ése, that's the look I had on my face" (39). Whereas in the past Manny and the other Lobos could command Lucía's ability to move through space with a straightened palm and halt her from crossing boundary lines that segregate women from Lobos meetings—a regulation that no longer applies to her and that I will address soon—Lucía now adopts the "bold stance" of the "homeboy aesthetic," standing tall and confident and taking "long-legged roomy steps," to claim and navigate space. She sheds the passive ideology of "sheep" that mandates women yield to men as they walk throughout the world and, rather, claims that her strut and face dictate that men defer to her, as she uses the Caló word *ése* that refers to men—as opposed to the feminine *ésa*. By declaring that her face and stance force men to "watch it" so that they move out of her path, she demonstrates how racialized female masculinity has begun to grant her power over men and their actions.

Her masculinity in the form of the "homeboy aesthetic" coincides with her masculine behavior in the streets. During her sheep days, Lucía implores Manny to teach her how to drive so that she "wouldn't have to take no RTD every place I go" (32). But since "[s]heep don't drive" and instead "walk or bus or wait for their men to get behind the wheel" (32), Manny tells her to "sit your ass down" because "[y]ou don't see no other woman driving round here'" (33). Manny and the male Lobos' rationale for keeping women from driving centers on attempting to imprison them in the private sphere, furthering their financial and social dependence on the male Lobos, and excluding women from gang life. Accessing the public sphere only through public transportation, walking, or their male partners' "generosity" limits women's ability to work and earn economic independence, purchase food and clothing, or attend gang meetings or activities without male Lobos' approval and helps ensure that women remain in the home to raise the children of Lobos gang members and perform their domestic duties. But once Lucía begins dressing, talking, and walking like a man, she also refuses to remain in the private sphere like a sheep. Rather, like a man, she starts driving to enter the streets and public sphere more easily. Lucía says:

> I even got myself driving. You can't be a real grouper if you ain't behind your own wheel. . . . I learned how to drive out in empty parking lots after dark, squealing around and pumping up the gas like some crazy-ass. Park, Neutral, Drive, Reverse. But once I got out on that road, *wacha* out! The wind coming through the rolled-down window playing my hair and the AM radio blasting some good song, my wheels driving me where I wanna go. (95)

Refusing to wait for a Lobo to teach her to drive, which will never happen, Lucía collects enough money to purchase her own "banged-out old Ford Maverick" so that she may go wherever she

pleases (95). In taking birth control, Lucía circumvents the maternal expectations of the private sphere for women, but by learning to drive, she obtains the ability to reject and forego the private sphere entirely.

In fact, once Lucía owns her own vehicle and can drive, she spends the majority of her time on the streets, an area that also contributes to her racialized female masculinity. Marie "Keta" Miranda defines the streets as "a particular kind of space—urban space—through which the citizen navigates to reach other institutions and places of production" (80). Although the streets facilitate re-entrance into the private sphere (the home) after leaving, they are also necessary for persons to access the various "institutions and places of production" that comprise public life. For this reason and because the private sphere traditionally reads as feminine and the public as masculine, many scholars understand the streets as a marker of masculinity. As Raewyn Connell says, "the street then is a zone of occupation by men" (133). Lucía's occupation of the streets, thus, not only becomes an integral component to her racialized female masculinity because they enable her to vacate the private sphere, but, also, because the majority of Lobos gang life transpires on the streets or in other sites of the public sphere, the streets facilitate entrance for Lucía into the Lobos gang in a way not available to other Lobos women who must rely on men to bring them to gang events. As such, the streets are paramount for Lucía to become a full citizen-subject in the Lobos, especially because of the actions she displays on the streets once she finally accesses them.

When in the streets, Lucía performs the violent (negative) aspects of the masculinity/*machismo* that she learns from Manny. Like Manny committing robberies in public spaces during the emergence of the Lobos, Lucía, too, organizes robberies on the streets. After jumping in other women to form her Fire Girls (which I will address later in this chapter), Lucía

and her crew start hunting white people in public. She says, "You've got to go to the whitefolks for the real money. Before I got my hands on drug deals, the best jobs was stealing them sweet credit cards. . . . Órale, all them richie folks, you can spot them from a mile away. They wear clean-pressed suits and fancy shoes, silk ties, and you know they've got a square of pretty VISA plastic in their wallets" (52). By orchestrating crimes against middle- and upper-class white persons to obtain money, Lucía ameliorates her poverty as a working-class Chicana, potential invisibility that would arise if she worked menial labor for *rubias* like Cecilia's mother Corazón, sense of powerlessness and inadequacy that her second-class citizenship in the Lobos and in the U.S. nation-state produces, and partially severs her financial dependence on male Lobos. In doing so, Lucía also augments her racialized female masculinity, as the masculinity she learns from Manny predicates itself on violence, power, money, and crime. Though Lucía's reasons for performing this masculinity are more complicated and nuanced than Manny's because her racialized female masculinity facilitates decolonization along racial, class, and gendered lines to earn citizenship in the Lobos, she, nonetheless, like Manny, relies on the negative characteristics of *machismo*, especially because she does not limit her violent attacks to bourgeois whites but targets working-class Chicanas as well, a complex topic that I tackle later in this chapter.[35]

Because the Lobos valorize a violent and aggressive hypermasculinity, Lucía's toxic racialized female masculinity, in part, enables her to alter her standing in the Lobos from a sheep to a ruling leader who exerts power over all Lobos members and who controls the gang's operations. Although some male Lobos still resist Lucía's presence in the gang, most come to view her as their equal and, for many others, their superior. After Lucía earns citizenship in the Lobos, Manny now invites her to come along with him in attacks against rival gang members, and Lucía also participates in gang meetings. As she says, "The sheep are supposed to stay put

during the meeting. . . . But not this chica. Those days were over. I was dressed just like a gangster in my hard-assed jeans and red bandana, and I walked right into the Big Room like I belong" (150). Cross-dressing and taking bold steps into the "Big Room," Lucía deliberates with the other gang members about how to handle their current gang war. Though one Lobo protests to Manny, "'No bitches in the Big Room'," Manny responds, "'Shut the FUCK up! Shut up!'" to defend Lucía's right to remain, which she does (151).

Eventually, Lucía attains so much power in the gang that she announces to Manny, "'I gotta cock on me now, Manny. I'm the one making the money go round and round. I'm the one making sure we're not getting fucked by these lowlifes and mama's boys" (107). Because Lucía has obtained control of the gang's drug and gun economy, and no longer behaves like a sheep, even rival gang members recognize her as the Lobos's true leader. For instance, during the Lobos's war with the C-4, a gang that a defecting Lobos member establishes, the C-4 leader, Chico, visits Lucía, not Manny or other male Lobos competing for leadership of the gang, to discuss terms, leading Lucía to remark, "I was feeling loca high cause the main C-4 boss man comes looking to *me*" (161, emphasis in original). By the end of the novel, Lucía has evolved from a sheep to the monarch of the Lobos, Fire Girls, and streets of Echo Park. As she says in the final chapter of *Locas*, "See that street? Alvarado Street, the straight black road lined with the bodega stores and the little cholas hanging by the corner? It belongs to me. And Elsinor, Benton, Reservoir streets with the old peel-paint houses and the rusted chain-link and the pickups by the curb? All mine. If you say my name out loud there every Mexican walking by is gonna stop and look at you careful. They all know who I am" (239).

As is the case with the Toltec, the entire *barrio* knows of Lucía, as she has shed her prior invisibility and abject status within the Lobos, as well as the poverty afflicting her as a working-

class Chicana. While she remains a second-class citizen in the eyes of the U.S. nation-state, this "veritably-created new woman" can offset this alterity by participating in and ruling her own counternation and city because of how her performance of racialized female masculinity has granted her citizenship in the Lobos. In this way, Lucía strategically works within the confines of *machismo* that regulate her life to circumvent its heteropatriarchal ideologies. By co-opting and performing the negative characteristics of *machismo,* Lucía nullifies its power to relegate her to domesticity, sexual objectivity, motherhood, and the private sphere and, instead, earns citizenship, power, and decolonization against Chicano heteropatriarchy and the U.S. nation-state. Although, I acknowledge that this appropriation of *machismo* does not preclude Lucía from simultaneously reproducing its oppressive hegemony for other women, an imperative issue that I broach later.

I also admit that part of the reason why Lucía can secure the gun and drug trade and a ruling status in the Lobos stems from her position as the male leader's girlfriend. At times, this arrangement means dating Manny, but at other times, Lucía must orchestrate a mutiny and install another *patrón* whom she can manipulate. Nevertheless, while Lucía must stand alongside a man as the Lobos queen, she refashions the sheep/man dynamic in the Lobos to demote male leaders to nominal ruling statuses. A man may remain the "face" of the gang, but Echo Park, the Lobos, and gang rivals realize that Lucía controls and oversees the gang, indicated by "every Mexican walking by" who stops once he or she hears Lucía's name and by Chico visiting Lucía to negotiate a gang war. But this "behind-the-scenes" power that requires a man's presence brings me to my next point.

Most criticism analyzing *Locas* concludes by finding Lucía performing female masculinity to obtain citizenship in and rule the Lobos. As Brown writes, in most male-authored

gang narratives, women "are objectified and denied agency, reduced at times to capital to be shared between men, their bodies receptacles of violence, territories upon which acts of war are played out. . . . Trapped within private, domestic spaces, these women do not experience in gang membership the form of alternative nation building and 'delinquent citizenship'" (82-83). Brown observes that for a portion of the novel, the male Lobos burden the gang girls with domestic labor and cast them to the private sphere, inhibiting the women's ability to attain decolonization—or what she terms "delinquent citizenship—in the gang. But Brown recognizes that by the end of the novel, "Lucía and her Fire Girls transform the sexual economy of the Lobos gang; where they once had value as 'good for fucking,' they now have more choices and agency" (106). For Brown, this agency and choice that some women now have emerges from their female masculinity. Similarly, Pérez says that some of the Lobos women "decide to transform their identities from docile young women to powerful entities that do not only participate fully in a gang but also control other gang members. To do this, they are required to not only gain power (i.e., a phallus) but also to exert it over others, including male gang members" (152). According to Pérez, Lucía's transformation in the gang requires a symbolic metamorphosis where she adopts a phallus and deploys its power over other gang members and civilians in the *barrio*.[36]

I do not disagree with any of these readings, and, as I have shown in tracing out aspects of Lucía's masculinity (most of which these previous analyses have not accounted for), I also believe that racialized female masculinity enables Lucía to obtain "delinquent citizenship" and power in the Lobos. But I also build from the insights of many of these scholars in my commitment to examining Lucía's toxic racialized female masculinity, how and why her masculinity becomes toxic, its effects on other women, and what this toxicity reveals about

Lucia's vulnerability and violability as an undocumented, working-class woman of color in the United States. In addition, I reject deeming Lucía's rise to power *solely* a result of her female masculinity and the outright dismissal of her femininity, which, for me, has a critical role in her ascendance. As I mentioned earlier, Lucía achieves a monarchical status at the end of the novel, but to hold this standing, she must stand alongside a man at all times, even if she thoroughly dictates and manipulates him. While Lucía's masculinity and relations with these men introduce the possibility of reading queerness in the Lobos gang, Lucía does not *always* perform masculinity once she attains power. Sometimes, she reverts to performing femininity, though not necessarily to a sheep status, because of the agential capacity femininity has in the gang and in her relations with Lobos leaders. Consequently, in the following section, I break from the norm of perceiving femininity in gangs as a deficiency and examine its neglected decolonial potential and its effects for women and on men in *Locas*. In doing so, I aim to broaden the understanding of the connections across femininity, decolonization, and citizenship in counterhegemonic, hypermasculine, and male-dominated gangs and movements.

Perhaps that Slut Dress Ain't So Impotent After All

As outlined earlier, because of the "powerlessness" and "passivity" affiliated with femininity, many envision femininity, either in a woman or man, as antithetical to—or, at best, subordinate in—hypermasculine, decolonial subcultures and/or projects, including for gangs and past counternationalist movements, like the Civil Rights Movement or Chicano Movement, which espoused male, hypermasculine, and heterosexual leadership.[37] Even in revisionist gang narratives that feature women as full citizen-subjects or in analyses that locate women's agency in these hypermasculine and male-dominated spaces, women gang members, both for scholars and literary authors, can only participate in gangs—beyond maternalism and as sexual objects—

through jettisoning their femininity to become "men" because femininity ostensibly impedes, rather than facilitates, citizenship. Once more, as Halberstam says, femininity, in these subcultures, "is simply a luxury women cannot afford" (*Female Masculinity* 201). *Locas*, in my interpretation, clashes with these presumptions and depictions of femininity as impotent. Instead, in working from Gifford's discovery of African American street literature portraying women as using femininity and sexuality to destabilize power dynamics in male-dominated urban enterprises, like pimping and drug dealing, I argue that Lucía in *Locas* performs femininity to manage her precarious and indigent life chances in the U.S. nation-state and to generate opportunities for earning citizenship in a hypermasculine, heterosexual, and male-dominated gang that can afford her the decolonial rewards working-class women of color may find in gangs.

Prior to her entering the Lobos, femininity enables Lucía to combat the economic inequality that accompanies her subaltern status in the United States. In the beginning of the novel, Lucía sits on the porch outside the house that her undocumented mother cleans for work, and Manny, who at this point has already established the Lobos and started their participation in the black-market, drives by in a luxury vehicle and introduces himself. During this initial meeting between the two, Lucía says to herself, "He was the ticket. . . . I didn't even stop to think. I ran right into them arms of his like they was gonna save my life" (22). In Manny, Lucía, also an undocumented woman, identifies an opportunity for evading the perils she watches her mother succumb to. Rather than resigning herself to cleaning bourgeois people's homes on her hands and knees or "hooking from the gutter" to persist financially because her undocumented status inhibits her from obtaining more prosperous and less exploitational employment, Lucía recognizes that Manny can rescue her from this future (23). To pursue this (somewhat) improved outcome—perhaps, for her, a more preferable and profitable type of "hooking"—Lucía

politicizes her sexuality while maintaining a feminine gender appearance to manipulate Manny and his heterosexual masculinity. She says, "I spent all my time putting on lip gloss, pumping up my hair so I'm looking like Charo, squeezing into skin-tights and five-inch heels. I knew I had to flirt and swing and show off my best parts to keep my man happy" (23-24). Whereas in later adopting the "homeboy aesthetic" Lucía obscures her "best parts," here she wears clothing that sexualizes her body because letting Manny pull "on [her] bow like he was opening up a birthday present" accords her economic upward mobility (23). As Lucía says, as Manny's girlfriend, she no longer toils in penury but achieves an enriched class status. Manny "set me up in my own apartment, got me food, everything, a rabbit-fur jacket so I was strutting around the park" (23). Not only does she garner food and housing through femininity, but, like *la Heredera* with her suede coat, Lucía temporarily approximates feelings of a lavish life by wearing a "rabbit-fur jacket" and "strutting around the park." Refusing the social invisibility and abject status of her undocumented and exploited mother or Corazón, whose name her white employers cannot remember—though, because of the threat of deportation, these two mothers may desire invisibility—Lucía's femininity, like her masculinity at the conclusion of the novel (though less grandly), enables the achievement of intersubjective recognition from her *barrio* when she swaggers throughout the park.

Admittedly, Manny may only desire Lucía because she heightens his masculinity and *patrón* status, as she says that Manny "showed me off to his homies" and routinely asked them, "'See my beautiful girl?'" (23). Although Manny handles Lucía like a sexual possession to flaunt amongst his male friends, Lucía claims that she "didn't care how his homies didn't call me by my name" because "I thought I'd won the sheep lotto" (23). Furthermore, though Lucía's sexuality has an integral role in manipulating Manny and other male Lobos, the efficacy of her

sexuality hinges upon her feminine aesthetic. While Manny remains her partner once Lucía begins performing female masculinity, her success in exploiting male heterosexual masculinity to achieve upward mobility in the abovementioned scenes and in others I momentarily discuss only happens when keeping a feminine appearance. In short, although Manny in many instances reduces her to sexual objectification, Lucía sutures femininity to her sexuality to improve her economic conditions and devise alternative life chances beyond the ones she believes available to her as an undocumented, working-class Chicana, which contain only menial labor, societal invisibility, and prostitution. In that context, in the early pages of its narrative, *Locas* begins to disclose the agential capacity of femininity, its power to dictate and exploit heterosexual masculinity, and its ability to facilitate economic and intersubjective decolonization.

Of course, because of her race and gender, Lucía experiences multiple marginalization, and while her femininity enables her to evade the poverty and invisibility that she encounters from the U.S. nation-state, she also, as explained earlier, faces oppression and invisibility from Manny and the Lobos. Quickly growing unsatisfied with these conditions, Lucía says, "I'm not gonna look to no vato forever. . . . Maybe someday a man's gonna be looking up to *me*" (26, emphasis in original). Although Lucía no longer finds her situation with Manny mutually agreeable, she does not suddenly perform racialized female masculinity to secure citizenship in the Lobos and to dismantle the heteropatriarchal structures that render her a second-class subject to Manny and in the gang. At this stage, racialized female masculinity would not afford her the decolonial consequences and full citizenship that the performance ultimately precipitates because Lucía must first acquire a power in the gang that, in this novel, only femininity's invisibility and capability to manipulate heterosexual masculinity can grant.

Lucía first establishes an avenue for attaining citizenship, power, and leadership in the Lobos by exploiting her position as Manny's sexual possession. After the police arrest Manny for selling guns and drugs, he spends seven months in prison, and the Lobos' black-market income stalls. As a result, Lucía, cognizant that Manny struggles to have sexual intercourse with women in prison, performs a sexualized femininity to manipulate his heterosexual masculinity. When visiting Manny in prison, Lucía dresses "*linda* looking with that red hair all done up, curled and sprayed, and . . . wearing purple eyeshadow and a pink dress" (15). Lucía's femininity has an advantageous effect on Manny, as her appearance beguiles him into disclosing where he stashes the Lobos' weapons that they sell. Later, Cecilia says men "were too stupid," "that it wouldn't even dawn on their dumb heads that a woman can do some thinking for herself, that she could know some things they don't" (59). Because Lobos men regard feminine women as incompetent, Manny trusts Lucía with the location of the guns, as he does not believe she has the intellect to supplant Manny's leadership by stealing these weapons to head the Lobos' black-market business. Instead, Manny charges Lucía with acting as a mule, ordering her to deliver the guns to his fellow Lobo Paco, whom he surmises will not betray him. But when Lucía uncovers the guns, she realizes that she has the means for ending her status as a sheep in the Lobos. Observing Lucía in this moment, Cecilia says, "I could see how her brain started going tick-tock and working overtime" (16) because "she got an idea of how she could earn it [money] for herself" (17). With access to the Lobos' weapons, Lucía begins to formulate strategies for ending her economic dependence on Manny, and femininity's ability to manipulate and profit from heterosexual masculinity has created the opportunity for her to do so.

Lucía does not pilfer the guns, however, but delivers them to Paco and deploys similar manipulative tactics to gain information about how the Lobos run their gun and drug trade and

which Lobo snitched on Manny to send him to prison. She reasons that, with the knowledge of the culprit's identity, she can secure the further confidence from Manny that will help her learn and access more of the Lobos' weapon and drug enterprise. After Paco smokes marijuana, Lucía instrumentalizes her feminine and sexualized status to seduce him:

> He'd taken a couple of hits already and the boy opened like a door as soon as I cuddles up to him. . . . I get braver and start to blink and coo and even paw him a little, stroking his shoulder with my finger just once, like a light tickle on top of his thin white t-shirt. . . . Paco talked on, his mouth moving just cause I touched him like that. . . . and he's bragging now. He's got a load of front-page news stuffed in his head and why not tell the sexy thing with the tickle finger a thing or two? (27)

Lucía profits from her objectified status to entice Paco to talk so that she can alter the power dynamic between her and Manny. After obtaining the information she seeks, she says, "I knew enough so that it's Manny who's gonna have to come to *me* with questions" (28, emphasis in original). In enabling her to learn about the operations of the Lobos' black-market economy and which Lobos member sent Manny to prison, Lucía's femininity allows her to, for the first time in their relationship, relegate Manny to a dependent state in forcing him to come to *her* to satisfy his wants.

Moreover, through profiting from feminine women's invisibility in the Lobos, Lucía continues to amplify Manny's dependency to the point where he must relinquish control of the Lobos to her. Lucía claims that "sheep" are "invisible to men. If a chica stands round quiet long enough, a man just forgets her" (214). But though the men usually forget about feminine women because they deem women incompetent, domestic maids, or sexual objects, this invisibility of femininity, contrary to previous scholars' and gang narratives' suggestions, does not necessarily

render women powerless. Rather, as Ralph Ellison's narrator in *Invisible Man* claims, "It is sometimes advantageous to be unseen" (3). In *Locas*, invisibility's advantages entail opportunities for femininity to exude agency and initiate decolonial projects in the gang. For example, although, with Paco and Manny, Lucía performs femininity to manipulate heterosexual masculinity to cajole these men into releasing crucial information, at other times Lucía achieves knowledge of the Lobos' black-market operations through going unnoticed. She says that once a man forgets about a woman's presence, "He'll let forty cats out of their bags before he turns around and sees her watching him, her ears as big as jugs" (214). Lucía uses these "ears as big as jugs" multiple times to learn of the gang's economic operations and politics, primarily in gang meetings where women must serve men food and beer. As she says, "They'd all hang around in a bunch getting drunker and drunker, eating our food with their big mouths chewing open and sloppy, and pretty soon they're grinning and hollering. . . . I got eyes and ears" (29). Because of the Lobos' drunkenness and their misogyny that regards women as incompetent servants, the men unwittingly contribute to their own demise.

Lucía further profits from femininity's invisibility and domestic status so that she may orchestrate her plan to overthrow Manny, which culminates in her, once again, manipulating his heterosexual masculinity to the point where he cedes to her the financial management of their underground business, which she now has a sufficient understanding of to run on her own. Again in an invisible state when serving Manny breakfast, Lucía observes that Manny has trouble with math and can no longer balance the Lobos's accounts after the Lobos's black-market business has flourished. She says, "I'm feeding him breakfast but his face is just hanging like a drape. He's drumming his fingers on the table, tapping his pencil. I see there's nothing but scribbles on the page, doodles, cuss words, a couple numbers jumbled together. And I move like a hungry

bird" (38). Lucía pounces on Manny's vulnerability by using her femininity's invisible and domestic state to manipulate his heterosexual masculinity and effect his downfall as the true Lobos leader and as the authoritative half in their relationship. She begins coaxing Manny and taking advantage of his perception of women as too stupid to threaten his rule, inquiring about Manny's scribbles while talking "nice and sweet" and "putting fat rolls of *pan dulce* on his plate" (38). She sits beside him and says, "'Honey, I can do the maths for you. I just do it for a minute, while you eat up'" (38). Lucía politicizes her femininity and incorrectly pluralizes "math," fostering Manny's belief that she cannot subvert him because of her supposed ineptitude. Manny acquiesces, allowing Lucía to manage the gang's finances, but he "didn't let any of his vatos find out that a woman's doing Lobos money business" (39). If the gang were to discover that Manny has permitted a woman to handle the Lobos's funds, then Manny's masculinity and *patrón* status would dissipate because of the Lobos's heteronormative foundation. Therefore, he must keep his reliance on Lucía secret, a dilemma that Lucía uses to blackmail Manny and obtain control of the gang.

After Lucía works as the gang's bookkeeper, she begins performing racialized female masculinity to establish cultural citizenship in the Lobos and reap the decolonial rewards the gang, in her newly-empowered and masculine status, would offer her as a working-class, undocumented Chicana. Because Manny remains the nominal *patrón*, Lucía not only demands that Manny recognize and endorse her citizenship, power, and leadership in the gang, which will cause the gang to accept and treat her as such, but also that he finance her Fire Girls gang. If he doesn't, Lucía threatens to leave and run the gun and drug business on her own, saying, "ain't nobody gonna help you like I can. So think about it hard, honey, cause I'll walk right out that door and leave you all alone" (107). Because Manny now depends on Lucía to keep the Lobos's

gun and drug trade operating (and must keep this arrangement quiet) and because Lucía now understands how to appropriate and reproduce black-market operations, Manny has no choice but to grant whatever wish Lucía asks for.

Lucía also reproduces this same arrangement with another *patrón* she installs after recognizing that Manny's weakening masculinity will lead to a mutiny and compromise Lucía's new position in the gang. Because Manny fails to kill a Lobos gang member who disrespects and fights him and cannot murder the leader of rival gang who shot a Lobo, many Lobos begin questioning Manny's capability to lead them. Foreseeing how an alternate and more capable leader may cause Lucía to regress to a sheep standing within the gang (even if she continues to perform racialized female masculinity), she replaces Manny with another Lobo whom she can order and manipulate like Manny. Momentarily shedding her "homeboy aesthetic," Lucía reverts to femininity and deploys the same machinations against another Lobo, Beto, that she did with Manny to convince him to supplant Manny. Lucía says that after Manny "blows that hit on Chico," the rival gang member who shot a Lobo, she visited Beto "fancied up in my best pink skirt, the one they like grabbing under, and my hair teased high, my lips as red and glossy as ripe cherries" (148). Unlike the dark lipstick she wears with her "homeboy aesthetic" that intensifies her aggressive and intimidating demeanor, Lucía dons red lipstick and a short skirt to perform femininity and profit from the sexualization of her body. As a feminine woman in this encounter with Beto, she "makes doe eyes" at him and whispers "in his ear like a honeydripper. 'Beto, you're the special man, ése. . . . Manny's getting soft, right? He's a loser, honey, and the Lobos need a leader now. They need a tough-guy patrón just like you'" (148). After politicizing her femininity to manipulate Beto's heterosexual masculinity, Lucía has him "eating out of my hand

like a bird" so much that he acts on Lucía's desires, overthrows Manny, and maintains a nominal *patrón* standing that Lucía manipulates because, as she says, "men are too easy" (148).

Consequently, although, in the Lobos, femininity invites marginality, oppression, sexualization, and domesticity, femininity also has decolonial potentiality because of the effects the performance of femininity has on heterosexual masculinity and because of misogynist male gang members' perception of the performance as invisible and domestic. While racialized female masculinity may solidify Lucía's citizenship, status, and power in the gang and allow her to circumvent the logic of *machismo*, femininity also has a seminal role in facilitating decolonization and generating the avenue for Lucía to refashion and co-opt the heteropatriarchal social and gender stratum in the gang. In this way, although *Locas* features exploitational Latina/Chicana stereotypes present in films like *Havoc* or many male-authored gang narratives, the novel appropriates these stereotypes of gang girls as sexual objects and second-class citizens in gangs to refashion them and present alternative representations of women who gangbang. In these disparate depictions, Murray's novel becomes one of the few cultural products available that enables readers to conceive of gang girls as agential citizen-subjects who use crime and violence to resist their subaltern statuses that arise from the systemic racism of the U.S. nation-state and the heteropatriarchy of their racial/ethnic communities. More broadly, *Locas* also reveals female femininity's potential for decolonial capacity in hypermasculine, male-dominated, and heterosexual subcultures and movements.

White Lives Matter, Brown Women's Don't

Up until this point, I have focused on uncovering and analyzing the decolonial potentiality of femininity and racialized female masculinity for women in hypermasculine, male-dominated, and heterosexual gangs, but I have also discussed how femininity in these contexts

can lead to oppression as much as create avenues for resistance. On the other hand, I have remained reticent about the tyrannical ramifications of racialized female masculinity in *Locas* by only briefly mentioning Lucía's violence against other Chicanas and her attacks on innocent bourgeois bystanders. While I recognize that Lucía's robberies are a byproduct of her second-class citizenship in the U.S. nation-state and are decolonial for her, I do not romanticize or idealize her racialized female male masculinity as entirely emancipatory for women and as unproblematic. But rather than criminalize this instance of racialized female masculinity, I am interested in examining how and why this masculinity manifests as toxic, as well as the LatCrit work *Locas* accomplishes by creating a counternarrative that tells the stories of silenced working-class women of color.

To reiterate, Rodríguez, in theorizing masculinity, observes that even when counternationalist movements encourage women to perform positive versions of *machismo*, they must do so in a manner that always returns masculinity to "a heterosexual and reproductive kinship matrix" (53). Accordingly, in envisioning future alternative masculinities, Rodríguez asks, "Do reconfigurations of masculinity in nonheterosexual contexts (say by gay men) necessarily entail a break from heterosexual contexts? If so, in what ways are these reconfigured masculinities useful?" (52). *Locas* provides an occasion for pursuing these questions because the novel represents Lucía's Fire Girls as a non-heterosexual and non-reproductive girl gang. Although none of the Fire Girls ever discloses themselves as non-heterosexual (though this possibility exists), I regard the gang as queer, nonetheless, because the Fire Girls outlaw heterosexual sex and pregnancy and are, thus, antithetical to heteronormativity. In forming the Fire Girls, Lucía requires that her "girls didn't have no babies"—either as a result of rape or consensual sex—by having them take birth control (41). While no men participate in the Fire

Girls, Lucía understands that pregnant women in *Locas* represent "sheep" because of how men use pregnancy to reproduce their counternation, aggrandize their masculinity, and exclude women from gang life. Because Lucía, in part, forges the Fire Girls to provide women with a method for shedding their sheep statuses in the *barrio*, she requires that her gang members never revert to behaving as sheep when with men. This dictum means banning pregnancy and banning consensual heterosexual sex altogether. For example, when Star Girl, a member of the Fire Girls, flirts with a man named Chavez to sell him drugs, Chavez says, "'I'll buy some if I get a taste of you" and "mov[es] his hand" to "give her a little pinch on the ass" (113). Witnessing this event and how, in her mind, Chavez attempts to make Star Girl "beg him like she's some whore," Lucía interjects, yelling "'Get the fuck outta here, Chavez," and "push[es] him rough so he ain't touching my Girl no more" (113). Though Star Girl uses the same tactics as Lucía to manipulate heterosexual masculinity for economic gains, Lucía demands that Fire Girls do not replicate this behavior because only "sheep" allow men to use their bodies for sexual pleasure and treat them like "some whore." Of course, Lucía participates in the Lobos and the Fire Girls, and, though she bans heterosexual sex in the Fire Girls, she continues to have sex with men in the Lobos to maintain her authoritative position. In this way, Lucía views herself as an ironic, sacrificial savior for girl gang members, whom she regards as "a new family" and protects as its matriarch (51).

In many ways, transforming the Fire Girls into a non-heterosexual and non-reproductive space for racialized female masculinity means Lucía mimics—even as she queers—the Lobos's heterosexual masculinity in that she polices women's sexualities similarly to how the Lobos men regulate women's sexualities by pressuring them to bear their children, even if, in Lucía's mind, her actions protect gang girls and resist heteropatriarchy. But Lucía's disciplinary actions

illustrate how, just as racialized female masculinity may co-opt the negative qualities of *machismo* to challenge its heteropatriarchal ideologies, so, too, can positive versions of *machismo* (defending the family and loved ones) reproduce a patriarchal (if not, in this case, hetero) hegemony that regulates women's bodies and sexualities. Ergo, this sexual dynamic suggests how Lucía's racialized female masculinity, even if decolonial and agential, materializes as toxic for other working-class Chicanas.

This toxicity reaches its acme when the Fire Girls orchestrate violent attacks on unsuspecting, possibly undocumented (though definitively migrant) "sheep" in the streets and rob them. After jumping-in Chique and Star Girl, Lucía prowls the neighborhood for "easy" victims. Before graduating to robbing middle- and upper-class white people, Lucía says:

> At first we was doing mamas, them poor-ass Salvadoran and Oaxaca mamas who dig around here, doing their little shopping and carrying all them babies on the hips. These women are weak as lambs but they always got a couple dollars on them. . . . We'd run up to a lady, circle her like Indian fighters, and I'd poke her some and laugh. . . . We'd push down and get us the bitty cash they had, sweep it up and run down the street smoking like a train.
>
> I loved seeing them mamas squirm and watching them faces getting wrinkled and red. (51-52)

Like the Lobos, Lucía dubs women who were pregnant at one point "sheep" (calling them "lambs"), and she and her Fire Girls prey on these ladies because sheep are effortless targets who do not resist violent robbery and battery, which I will explain why later. In fact, Lucía claims that she enjoys watching these women's faces "getting wrinkled and red" (from crying or physical assault or both) when she robs them. Although the racialized female masculinity of the Fire Girls

enables them to reject sheep statuses and amass economic independence through violent crime, this toxic behavior contradicts and complicates the decolonial possibilities that the Fire Girls purportedly offer for working-class women of color. If racialized female masculinity in this queer girl gang accords decolonial rewards, this decolonization relies on a toxicity that victimizes and reproduces trauma for other working-class women of color.

Although many scholars have romanticized the racialized female masculinity in *Locas* for its resistance to the heteropatriarchal hegemony of the Lobos and its capability to generate citizenship in this hypermasculine and male-dominated gang, a few still acknowledge this masculinity as unsettling. For instance, Bigalondo recognizes that Lucía's "shift towards criminality is clearly vengeful and full of hatred" and "reproduces the most violent and vicious features of" gangs like the Lobos ("Chicano Gangs/Chicana Girls" 50, 52). Likewise, even though Brown views Lucía's racialized female masculinity and the Fire Girls as "about belonging, community, and a sense of personal agency," she notes that these gang girls "mirror abusive practices by men" (90). Though a few critics acknowledge the toxicity to this decolonial female masculinity, none of them pursues *why* Lucía and the Fire Girls contradict their decolonial aims for women; the relation between toxicity and Lucía's traumatic history, vulnerability, and violability; and what toxic racialized female masculinities accomplish for the Fire Girls (beyond economic rewards) when they abuse other women. I am not condoning or excusing this (or any) violence against women, but I am suggesting that *Locas*'s representation of toxic racialized female masculinity demands much more critical analysis.

When Brown discusses male-authored gang narratives and their common depiction of male violence against women, she says that subaltern men's "rape, abuse, and mistreatment [of women] must be understood in relation to a history of oppression—shaped by and reflective of

dominant ideologies about women—as well as internalized racism and self-hatred" (22). Like Brown, I have also pointed towards the connection between violence against women and subaltern masculinity in analyzing womanizing and sexual assault in Chapter 2. Working from Brown's recognition that a legacy of colonial conquest influences how subaltern men interact with subaltern women, I propose that just as scholars studying violence against women in male performances of subaltern masculinity must account for "a history of oppression," so, too, must analyses of the gendered violence and misogyny of (at times, queer) toxic racialized female masculinities attend to the racial, class, and gendered oppression subaltern women face. Not acknowledging the impact of this intersectional maltreatment risks pathologizing working-class women of color, girl gangs, queerness, and racialized female masculinity.

Locas suggests that this toxicity to racialized female masculinity arises because of the long-lasting psychological, emotional, and physical trauma of working-class women of color, the U.S. nation-state and heteropatriarchy's perception and treatment of these women's bodies as violable, and the U.S. justice system's refusal to adequately address, but instead maintain, subaltern women's vulnerability, thus rendering them ineligible for personhood. For this reason, I interpret *Locas* as answering Rodríguez's question regarding masculinity in non-heterosexual, non-reproductive contexts with a yes and no. As I will soon show, although the racialized female masculinity in the Fire Girls breaks from subaltern masculinity in heterosexual and reproductive contexts by not depending on compulsory heterosexuality, reproductive futurism, and heteropatriarchy, because racialized female masculinity also responds to a legacy of colonial conquest across gender, sexual, race, and class lines, various toxic components of certain heterosexual and reproductive subaltern masculinities still materialize, like the regulation of women's sexualities, violence against women, and misogyny. Nevertheless, although *Locas* does

not feature the emancipating masculinity that Rodríguez hopes for, the novel's representation of racialized female masculinity in a non-heterosexual and non-reproductive girl gang also answers Rodríguez's second inquiry: "in what ways are these reconfigured masculinities useful?" While Murray's novel portrays racialized female masculinity as toxic in the Fire Girls, its representation reveals the potential psychological, emotional, and physical effects of vulnerability, violability, and ineligibility for personhood on subaltern women's masculinities. *Locas*'s depiction of racialized female masculinity also discloses the need to address the conditions of systemic racism, white supremacy, and heteropatriarchy that structure subaltern women's lives for masculinity in queer, non-heterosexual/normative, and non-reproductive spaces to manifest as equitable, liberational, and devoid of toxicity.

The novel suggests as much by making vulnerability and violability constant in most women's lives (gang girl or not) in *Locas*. At the end of the novel, Lucía essentially claims that, in the U.S. nation-state's eyes, white lives matter, but Brown women's do not:

> [M]y biggest pain is the cops now, la LAPD. All of these gabachos started moving back into the Park. Take a look around and you'll see them blondies with their full pockets walking around here. . . . Some C-4s opened up on them and killed a rubia. Made it all over the TV. And even though we got a hundred dead brown babies in these parts and there ain't nobody crying about them, after the gabacha girl got hit there was black-and-whites driving down my streets thick as locusts. (243)

In the novel's final era (1997), Echo Park has succumbed to gentrification, and the Fire Girls, Lobos, and C-4 are not only killing each other anymore but white people as well.[38] Although the police flood her neighborhood after a white woman dies, Lucía notes that Latinas/os and Chicanas/os in Echo Park have been dying for decades, and the state has never taken action to

inhibit these deaths because, in its eyes, Brown people's lives are meaningless and violable (and, thus, always vulnerable).

This status of Chicanas and Latinas manifests continually throughout the novel, first with Cecilia's mother Corazón in the book's opening pages. An undocumented immigrant from Oaxaca, Corazón never visits the hospital while pregnant with Cecilia (until she must deliver her) because she fears deportation. As Cecilia says, "Mama was so afraid of what the INS would do when they caught her without her green card that she wouldn't go to the doctor until she was screaming with those labor pains and I was pushing out of her, small and wet and trying to be alive" (4). Although monthly visits to a doctor are crucial for pregnant women, Corazón never seeks out medical care and risks jeopardizing her and Cecilia's lives because she fears that the INS will deport her to Mexico.[39] Corazón's anxiety underscores the omnipresent fear that undocumented immigrants in the United States suffer and its effects on their wellbeing. Because the U.S. nation-state dehumanizes and criminalizes undocumented immigrants, their bodies are in a constant state of vulnerability and violability. These persons often cannot pursue the state's protection should a violent crime befall them (such as by contacting the police) and fear seeking out medical care because many believe (sometimes correctly) that doing so will result in deportation.[40] Additionally, because the United States regards undocumented person's bodies as violable, the state often does not adequately (if at all) enforce laws to protect them from future violent crimes, even if not deporting them, thus perpetuating their state of vulnerability and violability.

For example, in analyzing social death, Lisa Marie Cacho writes of a hate crime on July 5, 2000 in San Diego, when six affluent teenagers went "hunting" for undocumented immigrants, attacking 64-year-old Andres Roman Díaz with pellet guns and chasing Díaz back to the migrant

labor camp where he lived. The teenagers later returned with more weapons and robbed and beat other migrants (ages 64-69) at this camp (one almost to death), many of whom were citizens, but all of whom the teenagers perceived as undocumented. Cacho argues that these teenagers targeted those they thought were undocumented immigrants because the undocumented "are a category of persons who they imagined did not carry enough social and human value to compel others to fight on their behalf" (36). Indeed, marked as socially dead, these victims (whether documented or not) did not have the social and human value required for the state to protect their lives. A few months prior to these teenagers' arrests, California passed Proposition 21, which mandated the state try juvenile perpetrators (especially gang members) of violent crime as adults and initiated more draconian sentences for gang-related crime. Although these teenagers and their actions fell under California's definition of a gang and gang-related crime, none of them spent time in state prison, and four of the five convicted assailants served sentences under a year in a California Youth Authority facility (Cacho 35-37). The state's refusal to adequately punish these teenagers reified undocumented persons' statuses as violable and vulnerable and, thus, consistently subject to violence. In doing so, the state also confirmed the fears of many undocumented persons like Corazón. If undocumented persons seek aid and care for their bodies, they risk deportation, but if the state does not deport them, then the state and its institutions normatively disregard their lives and deem them valueless. In short, as Lucía says, "'Illegal' don't mean nothing but a fucked-up life. Baby gets sick? Don't got no food? Hard to get those food stamps, man. Can't find a job? Who are you gonna talk to? Nobody" (146).

This violability, vulnerability, and lack of confidence in the state to protect both documented and undocumented working-class women of color materializes with *Locas*'s theme of domestic violence. Several main and minor female characters in *Locas* suffer from domestic

violence, including women in the Lobos. Lucía, for instance, encounters domestic violence in her home as a young child, noting that her father routinely beat her mother in front of her. Reminiscing about one of the more vicious attacks, Lucía says, "He slammed down on my mami like she was a punching bag and he's Roberto Duran, giving her an uppercut so that she's bleeding from the mouth, and he wouldn't stop for Dios or the devil. She got broke up so that she can't even open up her eyes and I can't breathe there in the corner, where I stayed quiet and learned my lesson" (145). Lucía's father assaults her mother so savagely that Lucía compares his punches and their damage to those of former Panamanian boxing champion Roberto Durán. Furthermore, Lucía divulges the traumatic effects this abuse has on her. Though she was not the direct recipient of her father's punches, his fists nevertheless harm her emotionally, psychologically, and physically, as she panics to the point where she struggles to breathe. She also remarks that, at this moment, she "learned my lesson." While she never discloses the content of this lesson, this incident, as well as the numerous other instances of domestic violence she witnesses in her house, portend to Lucía what her future life as an undocumented, working-class woman of color might entail. These moments reveal to her how working-class women of color are consistently subject to men's violence and how little assistance and resources these battered women have for halting these events or keeping them from worsening, especially for undocumented women. Just as Cecilia's undocumented mother must accept Manny's insinuations of domestic violence and can only squeeze "back into her skin like she wants to hide" because she depends on Manny's financial contributions, Lucía's mother encounters economic pressure to endure these attacks because of the limited opportunities for upward mobility available to undocumented immigrants and the consequential need for multiple income providers in the home (11). Moreover, as with Corazón's refusal to visit a doctor while pregnant,

the fear of deportation implicates battered undocumented women's ability to stop domestic violence as well.

This refusal to pursue aid when suffering from domestic violence occurs with every other victim in the story also, even the U.S. citizens. In the Lobos, for example, a woman named Laurita dates Chevy and has his son. Despite the fact that Laurita meets Lobos men's expectations of reproducing the counternation by birthing and raising a Lobo's child, Cecilia says that, when Laurita does not obey Chevy, the "[v]ato put her in line, maybe slapping her around a little and giving her a piece of his mind" (64). Likewise, Cecilia also suffers from domestic violence while a Lobo and pregnant. After her Lobos boyfriend beats her for the first time, domestic violence becomes a daily routine in their relationship. Cecilia says, "Men, they get that taste for beating on their lady. It's like whiskey, worse maybe, they take a drink then they get more thirsty so it doesn't ever stop. It only gets harder" (79). Cecilia claims that domestic violence resembles an addiction that provides men sadistic pleasure, leading them to batter women more viciously to satisfy themselves. Indeed, the severity of Cecilia's beatings increases, and she eventually miscarries her baby because of her boyfriend's violence.

Like Corazón and Lucía's mother, neither Laurita nor Cecilia ever attempt to end this violence by calling the police or seeking out a battered women's shelter, even though they are both citizens. In part, as for the two mothers, economic factors influence their decisions not to abandon their partners by pursuing a shelter, but Cecilia also reveals a sense of hopelessness and lack of confidence in others' willingness to protect women of color's lives. While Lucía claims that battered women "don't win a prize if you just hang on and take it" (145), Cecilia says that battered women "hang on and take it" because "they'll say it's her fault. That she doesn't deserve a man and that's why she gets hit" (81). Cecilia's comments are not without reason. For

instance, in her autobiographical gang narrative that explains her transition from a gang member to a police officer, Mona Ruiz, a Chicana from Santa Ana, admits that she frequently suffered from domestic violence before she became a cop. Unlike the women of *Locas*, however, Ruiz sought the state's aid by calling the police on her abusive boyfriend, Frank, specifically during an attack when he threatened to murder her. But when the police arrive, they refuse to arrest Frank or allow Ruiz to press charges. Instead, the cops tell Ruiz, "for the last time, there is no crime here. So your husband had a few drinks and got mad because you burned dinner or said the wrong thing, whatever. So he hit you. Get over it" (164). When Ruiz protests in disbelief over the police's unwillingness to arrest Frank, they say to her, "'If you don't want to be here, then you leave when we walk out'" (164). The cops even threaten to arrest Ruiz for harming Frank. One police officer points to scratches on Frank's arm and says, "'with these scratches here, I could take you in for assault'" (164). By not arresting Frank, dismissing Ruiz's battered body, and victim-blaming her for not leaving, the police reified Ruiz's violability and vulnerability. Likewise, the women of *Locas* never contact the police to halt domestic violence because the police are not an option for bodies the U.S. nation-state does not protect but, instead, "mark[s] as disposable and violable, as legitimate targets of state and vigilante violence" (Cacho 40). As Lucía says, the police were never around Echo Park when "brown babies" were dying, but even if the cops were there, Ruiz suggests that their presence does not sufficiently defend women of color's lives anyway.

Although these two texts accent women of color's hopelessness (and, often, the pointlessness) in contacting the police to defend their lives against violence, the U.S. court system also reinforces their violability and vulnerability when the police arrest their assailants, which bears relevance not only because of Murray's history in the courtroom but also because of

how *Locas* hints at the epidemic of rape against documented and undocumented women of color. Although the streets contain decolonial rewards for women in *Locas* in granting them an escape from the private sphere and access to economic independence in the black-market economy, Miranda writes that the streets are also dangerous and colonial because they are "a setting for intimidation of women, from low-level harassment to assault and rape" (80). As much as *Locas* addresses violence against women that materializes behind closed doors in the home, the novel also insinuates this sexual violence against women that transpires on the streets.[41] For instance, while Lucía walks down the streets alone one night, two men catcall her, with one saying, "'Come over here, chavala, I'll show you what a real man's like'" (105). Lucía says that when "Buzzboy was throwing them words down nasty to me there on his eastside bench," she "felt that cold up on my neck all over" (105). Lucía's "cold" fear at these men's words indicates her awareness of her violable and vulnerable body as an undocumented, working-class woman of color and how this status attracts sexual assault.

But related to women who suffer from domestic violence and their lack of confidence in the state, if Lucía were to contact the police when threatened with or experiencing rape, the U.S. court system may disregard her victimhood. As Janice Joseph says, though women of color are more vulnerable to violent crime, "[H]ow society responds to the victimization of women is based on that woman's status. . . . [P]rosecutors, and the courts often ignore or lightly punish rape, sexual abuse, and assaults against black women" (304). Similarly, Abby L. Ferber argues, women of color "are less likely to have a rape case brought to trial or to see their attackers convicted" (13). As such, the U.S. court system, police, and other agents and institutions of the state responsible for protecting people are—unless to punish Chicanas/os—absent from *Locas* for a reason. As documented and undocumented working-class women of color, female

characters do not pursue state aid when facing or threatened with domestic violence and sexual assault because they recognize that they are invisible, abject, and inferior in the eyes of the U.S. nation-state.

The state's perception and treatment of women like the characters in *Locas* influences the novel's LatCrit work. Again, Latino Critical Race theorist Martínez argues that counternarratives are crucial for LatCrit because they provide "a language for minorities to communicate harms. Without narrative, minorities have no voice to explain how they have been harmed" (686). Having clerked for multiple judges where she heard the testimonies of many Southern California gang members (both men and women) and witnessed how the state perceives and interacts with working-class women of color, Murray observed how, in the United States and its judiciary, women like Lucía, Cecilia, and their mothers are ineligible for personhood. Cacho explains ineligibility for personhood as a "form of social death" that "defines who does not matter" (6). As Cacho says, populations ineligible for personhood are "legally recognized as rightless" but simultaneously "subjected to laws . . . and denied the political legitimacy and moral credibility necessary to question them" (7, 6). Those whom the U.S. nation-state regards as ineligible for personhood must abide by the law when the law can exploit, oppress, dehumanize, police, and incarcerate them (such as laws criminalizing undocumented immigrants or the use of drugs) but often cannot seek the protection of the law when others violate their bodies because these people do "not matter"; perpetually vulnerable and violable, they are the socially dead. *Locas* responds to this ineligibility for personhood and silencing of women of color's voices by telling a counternarrative that fulfills Martínez's goals for LatCrit. In offering a "language for minorities to communicate harms," the novel discloses the atrocities undocumented and documented

working-class women of color suffer and that the state, popular culture, and U.S. media (with their stereotypical, exploitative representations) often subsume.

To Slaughter the Sheep, or the Trauma of My Perennial Violability

Because the state does not sufficiently protect working-class women of color, racialized female masculinity becomes women's only method in the novel to defend themselves against the violence that plagues them—short of vacating the *barrio* for a nunnery, which Cecilia opts for. After adopting racialized female masculinity, Lucía says, "take a hard look at me. You see any bruises? You see any shitty diamond ring? No. I don't need no one. This chica knows qué pasa. No man touches me like that now" (144). In perhaps the most urgent consequence of the performance that I have not yet addressed, racialized female masculinity combats the violability and vulnerability that haunts Lucía's life as an undocumented, working-class Chicana. In her aggressive and intimidating aesthetic, Lucía declares that no man beats on her anymore. In referring to the absence of a wedding ring, Lucía also alludes to the threat of sexual assault that she encounters from men, suggesting that no man touches her sexually anymore without her consent. In this way, Lucía resembles *la Heredera* of *My Father Was a Toltec* who violently responds to the Italian Americans' murder of a Chicana prostitute, but unlike *la Heredera*, Lucía—through her racialized female masculinity and gang life—simultaneously defends against and reproduces violence against women of color.[42]

A few critics of gang girls and *Locas* have documented the relations among the tough demeanor of racialized female masculinity, gang participation, and domestic violence. In analyzing Northern Californian gang girls, Miranda, for example, writes, "Affecting toughness is thus not merely a public image; it is also an enabling ethos—a disposition, character, or fundamental value. Toughness displays that one is not accessible; it may project impenetrability"

(83). Although not analyzing how "toughness" figures into the "homeboy aesthetic," Miranda argues that performing toughness "projects impenetrability." This projection has sexual connotations as well, as "impenetrability" implies a defense against multiple forms of violence against women, including rape. Relatedly, López-González remains the lone academic analyzing *Locas* to identify the connection between Lucía's history with domestic violence and her violent participation in gangs. As López-González says, Lucía's "transición a la vida de violencia que se vive en el barrio está interrelacionada al núcleo familiar. . . . Los protagonistas [Cecilia y Lucía] crecieron en familias emocional y económicamente inestables, en donde la violencia doméstica aunada a la imposibilidad de conseguir empleo permanente fueron los causantes del deterioro de los valores sociales de los jóvenes" (70).[43] Because domestic violence fractures Lucía's and Cecilia's families, López-González argues that these two women join the Lobos to achieve "apoyo emocional y social entre amigos del vecindario" (López-González 70).[44] Although López-González recognizes that domestic violence contributes to Lucía's gang life, he never considers the links between domestic violence, vulnerability, and violability and Lucía's toxic racialized female masculinity that targets documented and undocumented working-class women of color—or "sheep." Why attack and rob women whose precarity she and her mother can identify with? Are Lucía's deplorable actions solely an attempt to mimic the Lobos' subaltern masculinity that oppresses "sheep" so that she may earn subcultural citizenship? In what other ways are her attacks against women an effort to resist, repress, and negotiate her psychological, emotional, and physical trauma? Likewise, although Miranda acknowledges toughness as a defense against violent assault, how might we understand gang girls' toughness that exerts violence against vulnerable and violable women?

Though *Locas* indicates that racialized female masculinity protects women from violence, the novel also discloses how the psychological, emotional, and physical trauma of vulnerability and violability toxifies racialized female masculinities that target women. In reflecting on witnessing her father beat her mother, Lucía says, "My mami and papi would scream at each other in our little house, the sounds bouncing hard off the walls so that you couldn't get away from it no matter where you ran, he's hitting on her like she's a punching bag, making blood-red and dark blue marks over her little eyes and wet mouth, and there was those *rancheras* on the radio over his yelling making me crazy" (18). Lucía admits that these persistent assaults on her mother that she witnesses, which she could not escape "no matter where you ran," negatively affect her mental health, making her "crazy." These violent encounters that damage her psyche—and which she cannot stop recalling throughout her adult life—shame and embarrass her, and she consistently attempts to forget them. For instance, even when Lucía's father later abandons her mother, Lucía says she would deny her mother's existence and refuse to visit her because of the traumatic history she recalls for Lucía. As Lucía says about her mother, "I used to tell people lies about her, to help me forget. 'She's dead,' I'd say, and I wouldn't even blink. 'Died when I was a baby.' It wasn't true, though. She didn't even live that far" (35). Even though her mother stays a few streets away from her, Lucía avoids visiting her or revealing to people that she lives because recognizing her mother's existence also means acknowledging her past experience with domestic violence and the possibility of her replicating her mother's life.

As such, I read Lucía's denial of her mother, as well as her violence against (possibly undocumented) migrant women of color, as acts of repression that arise from her traumatic history and the violability and vulnerability that haunt her. Sigmund Freud writes that "*the essence of repression lies simply in the function of rejecting and keeping something out of*

consciousness" (97, emphasis in original). Moreover, in using a metaphor to explain how repression removes "something out of consciousness," Freud compares repression to a process where "an external stimulus becomes internal . . . by eating into and destroying a bodily organ" (96). For Freud, the ingestion of this "external stimulus" causes "*physical pain*" and "the only things which can subdue it are the effect of some toxic agent in removing it and the influence of mental distraction" (96, emphasis in original). In applying this metaphor to Lucía to understand how her actions indicate repression, I view her history with domestic violence and women of color's ineligibility for personhood as representing the consumed external stimuli that cause psychological, emotional, *and* physical pain—because of domestic violence's effects on the body and psyche. Toxic racialized female masculinity, as the "toxic agent," attempts to subdue the pain and trauma of violability, vulnerability, and domestic violence by "removing" this "external stimulus." The women Lucía attacks in the streets represent, for her, "sheep" who succumb to their violability and vulnerability in not performing racialized female masculinity as a defense and in fulfilling heteropatriarchal expectations by having children whom they will raise and care for in the private sphere, a space where, in *Locas*, domestic violence habitually happens. As such, these women signify and recall her mother who, to use Lucía's words once more, "just hang[s] on and take[s] it," and the violability and vulnerability that threaten to overtake Lucía's life (145). In moving to repress this history and possibility of becoming a "sheep," Lucía attempts, psychologically and physically, to "kill off" sheep and the trauma, vulnerability, and violability they symbolize by ridding the *barrio* of them. To accomplish this agenda, she either recruits women who suffer from domestic violence into the Fire Girls as a method for defending themselves and shedding their "sheep" statuses, or she physically beats "sheep" out of the streets and out of her view, as she does when she assaults women on the street.

Cecilia, who also suffers from domestic violence (though she has U.S. citizenship, unlike Lucía), further suggests this connection between attacking "sheep" and the repression of vulnerability, violability, and domestic violence. While trying to integrate Cecilia into the Fire Girls after discovering that Cecilia's boyfriend beats her, Lucía urges Cecilia to batter and rob a "Lincoln mamacita" walking with her daughter (86). Initially, Cecilia vehemently declines, but after admiring how the Fire Girls are "acting so tough, wearing their man-looking clothes" and reminiscing about her partner "beating on me and my mama yelling," she says, "I wanted to break off loose the same as Lucía and her cholas. I wanted to scream and sing and run away and fight dirty, steal money, hit somebody else real hard" (86). Not only does Cecilia desire the decolonial potentiality of racialized female masculinity when thinking about her status as a domestic violence victim, but she also reveals that, when Lucía presents her with a "sheep," these traumatic memories re-surface, leading her to want to "hit somebody else real hard." Whether Cecilia attacks her boyfriend, the "sheep," or "somebody else" does not matter to her, so long as she can repress and resist her vulnerability, violability, and trauma through violence. Thus, Cecilia's and Lucía's histories with domestic violence, statuses as working-class women of color, and desires to assault others disclose the connection across the toxicity of certain racialized female masculinities, the psychological and emotional trauma of vulnerability and violability, and repression.

Again, in constructing this argument about Lucía's, Cecilia's, and the Fire Girls' violent actions and thoughts, I am not excusing or defending violence against women, but I am endeavoring to understand the effects of trauma, violability, and vulnerability on masculinity and gang violence for documented and undocumented working-class women of color. The heteropatriarchy, white supremacy, and systemic racism that render these women ineligible for

personhood toxifies their masculinity in a way that leads to the victimization of other women. In this way, these types of racialized female masculinities in *Locas* in queer (non-heterosexual/normative and non-reproductive) contexts will struggle to achieve the emancipatory ideals that Rodríguez envisions. Because these masculinities are subaltern masculinities that respond to colonizing apparatuses, these reconfigured masculinities may still contain toxic elements that oppressive hegemonies and empires produce and cultivate.

Ultimately, this chapter has revealed how *Locas* appropriates and refashions exploitative gang girl stereotypes and, in the process, furthers our understanding of how the systemic impetus to gang violence and crime intersects with race, class, gender, and sexuality. Gang girls' racialized female masculinities use violence and crime to resist the violability, vulnerability, and ineligibility for personhood that the U.S. nation-state and heteropatriarchy relegate undocumented and documented working-class women of color to. Yet these masculinities are not always emancipatory for all women. In accounting for how race, class, gender, and sexuality coagulate to shape female masculinity, this chapter has advanced the theorization of female masculinity by considering toxicity in certain racialized female masculinities and how and why colonizing apparatuses render them toxic. I have also reconceptualized how scholarship regards femininity in hypermasculine, heterosexual, and male-dominated subcultures. Rejecting the tendency to dismiss femininity as a deficiency devoid of agency in these spaces, this chapter has disclosed femininity's decolonial potential in gangs in its ability to manipulate heterosexual masculinity.

Collectively, Chapters 2 and 3 have advanced the scholarly discussion of women's participation in gangs and how these subcultures accord decolonial and colonial ramifications for them. Now, I shift to Dino Dinco's *Homeboy* to consider other multiply marginalized figures

who traditionally encounter trauma in hypermasculine, heterosexual, and predominantly male gangs but who also devise strategies for transforming these subcultures into spaces that accord them decolonization: queer *locos*.

CHAPTER 4: *ENTRE MARICONES Y LOCOS*: DISIDENTIFICATIONS, COUNTERPUBLICS, AND DINO DINCO'S *HOMEBOY*

In Dino Dinco's documentary *Homeboy* (2012), which details the presence of gay Latino men in gangs, Richard Avila, a former gang member originating from Bell Gardens, says gay men "are disgusting, and they ought to be shot and killed"; we should "beat the fuck out of them." Similarly, Cisco Rios, also a former gang member, says, "All the gays and lesbians should be in San Francisco with the gate and be shot." Despite the ease with which Avila and Rios speak these threats, neither of the two is the original author of these bigoted statements. Rather, Avila and Rios are gay men who formerly participated in heterosexual gangs and are underscoring the violently-homophobic intimidation they encountered in gang life. Because of this vicious homophobia, neither Avila nor Rios ever came out to their gangs. In fact, this bigotry caused the two to recede further into the closet and reproduce homophobia as a means of safeguarding their lives. As Avila says, "I think I even said it—[gay men] ought to be shot and killed—and then just hearing shit like that, it was like okay, I'm going way deeper into the closet. I'm hiding under all the dirty clothes down there, and I'm never coming out." Rios, on the other hand, says that at one point he considered coming out to his "homeboys," but on hearing their rigid stances that demanded death for gay men, said, "Fuck that. Shit, I'm straight. . . . Coming out at that time? No, no, can't do it."

Attempting to intervene in the lethally-homophobic gang space that Avila and Rios detail, *Homeboy* features several gay current and former gang members who candidly voice their stories of how and why they initially joined heterosexual gangs, regardless of an environment that refuses to openly tolerate gay men: Larry Apodaca, Sergio Romero, Robert Jaramillo, Cisco

Rios, Richard Avila, Juan Verdi, and Phillip Garcia. On meeting these men on screen, the viewer notices that, in spite of the deluge of mainstream cultural representations that associate gang members with violent, heterosexual hypermasculinity and preempt the conception of gay gang members because of the feminizing connotations affiliated with gay sexuality, these men are equally as intimidating and hypermasculine as their straight gang counterparts.

In presenting these simultaneously hypermasculine and gay-identified gang members, *Homeboy* participates in a recent cinematic trend that has migrated away from the steadfast heterosexuality and homophobia in numerous gangxploitation films of the late 1980s and early 1990s, such as *Colors* (1988), *American Me* (1992), and *Blood In, Blood Out* (1993). Instead, recent fictional movies, such as *On the Downlow* (2004), *Quinceañera* (2006), *La Mission* (2010), and *Moonlight* (2016), have insinuated the presence of gay gang members or homeboys and critiqued sexual intolerance in gangs, *barrios*, and the United States. Yet none of these contemporary films approaches the harshness of gang homophobia, the existence of gay gang members, or gay men's capacity to attain subcultural citizenship in heterosexual, homophobic gangs with the severity of Dinco's documentary. As one of the only films to feature actual former or current gang members avowing gay sexuality's presence in homophobic and violent, hypermasculine gangs, *Homeboy* distinguishes itself from earlier Latina/o gangxploitation movies that earnestly reject the possibility of gang members identifying as gay and even contemporary films that queer the gangxploitation genre but whose fictional narratives—even if potentially producing material consequences—cannot affirm, but only suggest, the presence of gay gang members.

In this distinction, *Homeboy* provides a rare avenue for theorizing the presence of hypermasculinity and homophobia permeating Latina/o gangs; why and how subaltern, violent,

and heterosexual masculinity targets gay men; how gay gang members appropriate and transform hypermasculinity and violence in gangs to obtain decolonial rewards; and the ways that gay gang members physically and psychologically survive in spaces that penalize gay sexuality with death. In pursuing *Homeboy*'s engagements with these subjects, I respond to Vanessa R. Panfil's observation that "there is virtually no research that has documented the lived experiences of gay gang members" (2). While Panfil has recently attended to this scholarly shortcoming with the first book-length study of gay gang members *The Gang's All Queer*, her superb ethnography focuses primarily on gay men in gay gangs and the trauma gay men encounter in straight gangs.[45] Her work does not address the potential agency of gay men in heterosexual, homophobic gangs and the possibility of them succeeding in these gangs to achieve decolonization, nor does the book theorize why subaltern, heterosexual hypermasculinities in gangs often entail violence against gay men.

In addressing these topics in my interpretation of *Homeboy*, I draw from José Esteban Muñoz's theory of disidentification, which he defines as "descriptive of the survival strategies the minority subject practices in order to negotiate a phobic majoritarian public sphere that continuously elides or punishes the existence of subjects who do not conform to the phantasm of normative citizenship" (*Disidentifications* 4). In this same vein, Muñoz also contends that "disidentification is a strategy that works on and against the dominant ideology. . . . [T]his 'working on and against' is a strategy that tries to transform cultural logics from within" (*Disidentifications* 11). In positioning gay gang members in disidentificatory roles, I regard the gay current and former gang members in *Homeboy* as identifying with gang life for various familial, psychological, or socioeconomic reasons and whose actions and consciousness of their contradictory positions constitute disidentifications. Disidentifying with gang life enables the

queer men to succeed at their gangs' idealizations of violent hypermasculinity so that they may initiate decolonial projects that, ironically, challenge the sexual intolerance, hate crimes, and social and familial ostracism they encounter *outside* their gangs. Moreover, the documentary's publication of these gay men's disidentifications with gang life enable the film to rearticulate queerness in men into a signifier for violent hypermasculinity (as opposed to stereotypes of femininity), destabilizing normative gang gender, sexuality, and ideology and potentially altering gang culture to create a space for gay men in heterosexual gangs. While I acknowledge the limits of *Homeboy* in its partial reification of negative characteristics of gangxploitation film, I also read the public dissemination of *Homeboy* as a decolonial performance that makes use of the interpellating and transformative potential of visual culture to create a counterpublic aimed at ameliorating the unforgiving politics to which gay men who gangbang too often find themselves subjected. In this way, this chapter discloses how cultural products espousing violent hypermasculinity in gangs—even when queering this masculinity and violence—may initiate decolonial projects for viewers and queer men.

The History and Conventions of Gangxploitation Film

Despite the abundance of gangxploitation films arising in American cinema, the genre has seldom received critical attention in Latina/o studies and film scholarship, with B. V. Olguín remaining one of the relative few to produce an acute history of the formation of gangxploitation film. Olguín locates the gangxploitation genre in the origins of blaxploitation filmmaking (154). Blaxploitation film arose in the 1970s from the rising social consciousness that the Civil Rights and Black Arts Movements engendered in the 1960s. According to Ed Guerrero, these social movements left "a large black audience thirsting to see their full humanity depicted on the commercial cinema screen. This surge in African American identity politics led also to an

outspoken, critical dissatisfaction with Hollywood's persistent degradation of African Americans in films among black leaders, entertainers, and intellectuals" (69-70). In addition to Black audiences desiring a cinema that broke with the racist, stereotypical images of Black people commonly appearing in Hollywood film, the political consciousness of the civil rights era led Black viewers to reject Black Hollywood film stars, such as Sidney Poitier. As Donald Bogle notes, Poitier transcended racial barriers in Hollywood and in the United States because he was "the model integrationist hero. . . . When insulted or badgered, the Poitier character stood by and took it. He differed from the old servants only in that he was governed by a code of decency, duty, and moral intelligence" (175, 176). While Bogle recognizes Poitier's acting talent, he also contends that Poitier's success in Hollywood largely arises from him playing versions of "uncle Tom" characters.

On the other hand, blaxploitation film departed from Hollywood's erasure of Blackness and its demand for Black actors and actresses to play "uncle Tom" derivations. Instead, blaxploitation film, directed by both Black and white people, featured a predominantly Black cast and a socially conscious and resistant Black (anti) hero or heroine. In these films, Black actors were not limited to hackneyed roles where they played servants or plantation hands. Rather, blaxploitation film housed a range of Black characters, such as vigilantes, police, or pimps. Although blaxploitation movies like Melvin Van Peebles's *Sweet Sweetback's Baadasssss Song* (1971) or Jack Hill's *Foxy Brown* (1974) often depicted a surplus of crime and violence in Black urban neighborhoods, Novotny Lawrence observes that "the motive [for violence and crime] is always justified by the protagonists' standard of living" (19). Because blaxploitation films normatively cast whites as villains perpetuating and profiting from systems of racialized inequality and racial exploitation, this cinema depicts Black violence as decolonial

in its resistance to white hegemony and empire. As Lawrence elaborates, whites' "defeat at the hands of the African American protagonists is symbolic of blacks overcoming racism perpetuated by the machine" (19).

Despite the anti-racist, pro-black countercultural movement generated in blaxploitation film, Hollywood eventually co-opted this cinema, giving rise to the now almost ubiquitous gangxploitation movies, which remove the representation and discussion of the systemic impetus for decolonial violence and regurgitate and transform past cops-and-robbers, Mafia, and *bandido* paradigms into narratives that homogenize Black and Brown men as pathologically violent, overly salacious, and vastly homophobic and misogynistic gang members. In Olguín's view, even potentially anti-gangxploitation films that explain the institutional and structural causes to crime and violence in Black and Brown communities, such as *Boyz n the Hood* (1991) or *Menace II Society* (1993), "have been eclipsed by the Hollywood fetish for the presumed minority predisposition to pathological conduct" (155). According to Colin Gunckel, the abstraction of systemic racism's and the U.S. nation-state's roles in gang violence and *barrio* crime remains the central characteristic of the gangxploitation genre that includes major Hollywood motion pictures, as well as low-budget "straight-to-DVD" films. As Gunckel explains, Hollywood and independent cinemas that produce gangxploitation film rely on "sensationalistic imagery and emphasiz[e] intensified enforcement rather than structural causes or proposing a broader range of solutions" (38). Because gangxploitation films pathologize communities of color, these films "corroborate" the need for over-policing in Black and Brown neighborhoods and for harsher and mandatory prison sentences that disproportionately target people of color.

As blaxploitation films demonstrate, however, images of violent and criminalized gang members and people of color are not always or intrinsically sensationalist, but the refusal to couch this violence and crime as a response to, and cultivated by, systemic racism, internal colonialism, and social death render these images exploitative. This qualification to violence and crime separates *barrio*, "hood," and/or gang films like *LA 92* (2017) from popular movies like *End of Watch* (2012). The former features a surplus of violent footage of the 1992 Los Angeles Riots but clarifies this violence as a decolonial reaction to the acquittal of four white police officers who beat Rodney King at a traffic stop, as well as to the Korean woman Soon Ja Du murdering Latasha Harlins and judge Joyce Karlin excusing Du for this killing by not sentencing her to prison, despite the jury finding Du guilty of voluntary manslaughter, a felony that carries a maximum sentence of 16 years in prison. The latter film represents Black and Brown men as unrepentant gang members committing crime and murder in communities of color and against the police for no reason other than ostensible cultural pathologies.

Of the many films that pervade the gangxploitation genre, Edward James Olmos's *American Me* persists as the one Latina/o movie to receive a large amount of scholarly recognition. Various scholars have adopted divergent positions on *American Me*, with many critiquing the film for its "savage," unvaried depiction of Chicana/os and its male-centric narrative. Although Olmos claims that the film attempts to represent Chicanas as the *barrio*'s "glimmer of hope" and the character "Julie" (the love interest of the film's gangster protagonist) as "the only hero of the film," Rosa Linda Fregoso critiques the direct elision of the film's ostensible savior: "Who is this new subject, this Chicana whom Olmos claims is the heroine of *American Me*, the hope in our barrios? His story [Olmos's film] ends before hers can begin" (*The Bronze Screen* 133). Along with this gendered omission, Fregoso argues that *American Me*'s

gangxploitation portrayal of Chicanas/os affirms racist stereotypes, as "the film's focus normalizes dominant culture's view of Chicanos as poverty-infested 'gangs'" (*The Bronze Screen* 126). At the other end of this discussion, Olguín, while he acknowledges the film's male-centrism, has offered an insightful reading grounded in alternative spectatorship. As Olguín contends, *American Me* "begins by undoing its apparent filiation with one of Hollywood's most racist genres [gangxploitation] through perspective shots that enable us to recast the gaze at the cultural, historical, and material arenas in which Chicana/os are figured and treated as one of America's abject populations" (161). In incorporating Chicana/o aesthetics, specifically the film's representation of Chicana/o tattoos, Caló, and *pinto* gait, Olguín submits that "underclass minority spectators" may identify with the film and read its portrayals as affirmations of "barrio-rooted agency" rather than the usual "conditioned resistant spectatorship" that they adopt when viewing Hollywood stereotypes of Chicana/o culture (158).

Despite their opposing positions, Fregoso and Olguín agree that *American Me* epitomizes the gangxploitation genre when refusing to contextualize gang membership socioeconomically and, instead, rendering Chicana/o culture as pathological. Fregoso writes that during a screening in San Francisco, "the major objection . . . had to do with the film's simplistic account of the gang phenomenon in the barrios. Eliding the economic roots of youth violence, *American Me* emphasizes instead the dysfunctional relationship between Santana and his father" (*The Bronze Screen* 126). In its neglect of the structural roots to gang membership, *American Me* potentially reifies culture-of-poverty hypotheses that stigmatize working-class communities of color as epicenters of familial dysfunction and pathology. This "ideological closure," as Olguín terms it, on the dynamic between structural and institutional marginalization and gang membership renders the film derivative of the gangxploitation genre (170).

Homophobic Latina/o "Culture"

While *Homeboy* deviates from traditional gangxploitation film in positioning gangs as spaces harboring gay identities, the documentary subscribes to this genre's attributes in representing a series of past and current gang members as participants in violent crime and in remaining silent about the potential structural causes behind criminality, hypermasculinity, and homophobia in gangs. For this reason, and in keeping with this project's overarching theorization of how and why decolonial but at times toxic masculinities in gangs entail the colonization of women and queers of color, I will follow Teresa Córdova's call for scholars to engage the "economic and political dynamics that cause unnecessary suffering in Latino communities" (56). In this section, I first preface *Homeboy* by scrutinizing the interwoven relationship among the socioeconomic position of Latino men in the United States, the performance of gender and sexuality, and the homophobia in many Latino gangs. In brief reiteration of Chapter 2's discussion of the structural causes to the violent hypermasculinities that subaltern male gang members perform, working-class men of color struggle to perform American hegemonic masculinity (the most dominant, idealized, and romanticized masculinity in the U.S.) because, as Anthony C. Ocampo says, "the masculinity that they deploy cannot be exchanged for the most dominant forms of power and capital" (451). Because men must first obtain nationally-valued forms of wealth, power, and capital (high-ranking employment positions, a six figure salary, home ownership, luxury vehicles, etc.) before they can even acquire the opportunity to perform American hegemonic masculinity, usually only those in privileged socioeconomic positions (normatively white men) can perform American hegemonic masculinity.

Yet because working-class men of color traditionally struggle to access sites or appointments enabling this wealth, power, and capital as a result of educational, economic,

social, governmental, and political disparities, these men may often rebound with hypermasculine performances as a means of protecting their unstable masculinity, masking their own socioeconomic emasculation, attempting to mimic hegemonic masculinity, or, as explained throughout this project, mobilizing a subaltern masculinity as a method for enacting decolonization. For instance, in a sociological study on the conception and enactment of Latino *machismo*, Alfredo Mirandé finds "the cult of virility and the Mexican male's obsession with power and domination as futile attempts to mask feelings of inferiority, powerlessness, and failure" (*Hombres y Machos* 77). Additionally, Richard Mora argues that "some young men of color, especially those who are working class or poor," choose to adopt a "masculinity that often emphasizes toughness, male superiority, heterosexuality, physical dominance, and both the ability and willingness to use violence" (126). In all fairness, Mora credits this hypermasculinity not to an endemic cultural defect but to the second-class citizenship status to which the United States relegates these men and, as Judith Kegan Gardiner says, the "dominant U.S. masculinity [that] invites men to attack weakness in others and ridicule those already shamed" (1259). In short, as these scholars suggest, the systematic denial of working-class men of color's access to capital and power may partially lead these men to overly perform derivations of the American hegemonic masculinity that already depends upon violence and power.

While Chapters 2 and 3 examined how subaltern, heterosexual hypermasculinity in gangs may afflict women through philandering or relegating them to the private sphere, this masculinity also often encompasses a homophobia that partially stems from American hegemonic masculinity's basis in systemic, racialized inequality; power, wealth, and capital; and sexuality. Judith Butler draws from Sigmund Freud's conception of melancholia, which he defines as a process where "an object which was lost has been set up again inside the ego—that

is, that an object-cathexis has been replaced by an identification," to rethink Freud's hypothesis on the human's choice of an initial love object, which, he contends, occurs during the oedipal stage (qtd. in Butler, "Melancholy Gender" 166). Butler, in turn, posits that "the prohibition on incest [in the oedipal conflict] presupposes the prohibition on sexuality" ("Melancholy Gender" 168). In this Freudian melancholic approach, Butler suggests that because the preemption of a same-sex love object transpires at such a young age—and continues to persist in the dominant culture throughout adulthood (at least, during the time Butler published her essay on Freudian melancholia)—the dominant heterosexual culture enters a state of melancholia where persons grieve for, and identify with, the homosexual love object that heterosexual society has denied them since their childhoods. In this rationale, heterosexuals produce both their sexuality and their gender through rejecting homosexual love. As Butler says, "Becoming a 'man' within this logic requires not only a repudiation of femininity, but also a repudiation that becomes a precondition for the heterosexualization of sexual desire" ("Melancholy Gender" 169). As a consequence of this repudiation, gender and heterosexuality remain haunted by their melancholic identifications with their homosexual love objects, allowing for threats to heterosexuality to compromise gender. For, as Butler argues, "in a man, the terror over homosexual desire may well lead to terror over being constructed as feminine, feminized, of no longer being properly a man or of being a 'failed' man" ("Melancholy Gender" 168).

While Butler supplied a valuable contribution to the politics of gender and sexuality in her 1995 essay, she focused her analysis on a single, dominant culture that foreclosed the possibility of attaining a homosexual love object. If we were to similarly limit our theoretical scope to the boundaries of one authoritative culture, we would logically deduce that an emerging space for homosexual mourning within the United States offers opportunities for mourning for

all queer persons, regardless of class, race, or ethnicity. On the contrary, although it may appear as if the United States has progressed in loosening its heterosexual and heteronormative social standards to enable this space for mourning to develop, the nation's growing acceptance of LGBTQ people hinges upon homonormative ideals. This burgeoning tolerance of the LGBTQ population often does not apply to persons of color of non-normative sexualities and lifestyles and criminalized spaces. Therefore, because working-class men of color struggle to procure the power, wealth, and capital required to perform hegemonic masculinity, and because the favorable reception of LGBTQ homonormative advancements has not sufficiently produced spaces for homosexual mourning in working-class communities of color, Butler's contention that men must foreclose the possibility of homosexuality to establish their gender and that homosexuality possibly threatens, panics, and feminizes masculinity remains relevant to working-class men of color whose masculinity the United States already reduces to a hypercritical state. While I am not intending to conflate working-class men of color and LGBTQ issues, I am suggesting that Butler's postulation that, within heterocentric, homophobic spaces, gay sexuality's threats to heterosexual gender identities have important implications for working-class men of color. Because establishing a hegemonic masculine male gender identity relies on possessing power, wealth, and capital, working-class men of color may routinely find themselves in emasculated and feminized positions and, thus, their masculine male gender identities in a precarious state. As a result, heterosexual working-class men of color may exhibit homophobia and emphatically distance themselves from homosexuality to protect their unsecure masculine male gender identities since, as Butler says, homosexuality for many heterosexual men leads to "terror over being constructed as feminine" (168).

We can witness the pertinence of Butler's argument materializing in Juan Verdi's and Phillip Garcia's comments in *Homeboy* on sexuality's relation to gender identity. Verdi says that gay means "that you're less than a man. That's why you'll see a boy tell another boy, 'Oh man, you're acting like a faggot.' What he's telling him is that you're acting less than a man." Additionally, Garcia says that, in many heterosexual gangs, "being a homosexual is a sissy." As Verdi and Garcia show, certain working-class men of color who cannot perform American hegemonic masculinity and who succumb to U.S. socioeconomic emasculation, such as many Latino gang members, may refuse to tolerate gay sexuality and may perform hypermasculinity and an overt homophobia because of the ways that gay sexuality threatens their unstable masculinities and gender identities.

Certain scholars have contested forms of this postulation on the relationship between socioeconomic marginalization and the performance of gender and sexuality, such as Lionel Cantú, who has critiqued these types of arguments that insinuate that "macho performances of masculinity are a response to feelings of inferiority" because "such arguments are deterministic and maintain a static conception of Latino culture" (150). However, despite this claim, Cantú, in theorizing a more optimal method for analyzing working-class Latino masculinity, later cites Matthew Gutmann, whom Cantú paraphrases as saying, "gender identities must be understood as historical constructs . . . that are shaped by changing political, social, cultural, and economic conditions" (150). Furthermore, Cantú draws from Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo and Michael A. Messner's arguments, which, according to Cantù, claim that

> varying displays of masculinity are shaped by . . . the power relationships of some men over other men, so that 'marginalized and subordinated men tend to overtly display

exaggerated embodiments and verbalizations of masculinity that can be read as a desire to express power over others within a context of relative powerlessness.' (150)

Despite Cantú's denunciation that explaining violent, hypermasculine, and homophobic performances as byproducts of feelings of inferiority only maintains a static conception of Latina/o culture, Hondagneu-Sotelo and Messner's contentions speak to the intersection of the political, social, cultural, and economic conditions that Gutmann argues scholars account for when theorizing Latino masculinity. Because this theorization depends on socioeconomic and sociopolitical conditions, conceptions of violent Latino hypermasculinity and homophobia as responses to socioeconomic marginalization are not static arguments but, rather, conditional on the current social, cultural, political, and economic positions of working-class Latinos in the United States. As such, they maintain the possibility of commensurate change, should dominant idealizations of American hegemonic masculinity or working-class Latino's socioeconomic marginality change.

In unraveling the connections across violent hypermasculinity, sexual intolerance, race, and class, I am not attempting to justify or explain away Latino gang homophobia and hate crimes, but I am aiming to resist passively neglecting the pitfalls of cultural production that may—despite critiques of Latino gang homophobia that potentially create emerging spaces for homosexual mourning—inadvertently contribute to, or reinforce, conceptions of gang and Latina/o *culture* as endemically homophobic and bigoted. In studying *Homeboy*, my role as a critic and scholar demands that, while I acknowledge the documentary's limits in its partial commitments to the gangxploitation genre, I accentuate its critical lacunas to impede the reification of stereotypes and take these apertures as opportunities to accent how the United

States' socioeconomic marginalization of men of color contributes to the production of an environment that persecutes gay men.

If we take Latino gang homophobia and violent hypermasculinity as partly arising from national structural inequalities, as opposed to a congenital cultural bigotry, providing a convincing answer to questions such as the following that viewers might propose after watching *Homeboy* becomes increasingly challenging: why would gay men continue to participate in gangs, or even join a gang, if their sexual orientations jeopardize their lives? How could these bigoted subcultures accord decolonial rewards from gay men? How could gay gang members manage the psychological trauma of coming to terms with their sexuality in one of the more violent, hypermasculine, and homophobic spaces a gay man can find himself? If we understand homophobic gang environments as arising from socioeconomic structural inequalities, then altering bigotry in primarily heterosexual, male-dominated gangs does not seem easily feasible without amending working-class men of color's positions on the margins of social value. Thus, gay men's presences in these gangs generate connotations of exponential psychological and physically-lethal trauma devoid of any possibility of immediate alleviation—short of abandoning the gang—rendering any attempts to comprehend gay men's willing participation in these spaces or the decolonial rewards available in them incredibly difficult. But I suggest that because these men of color precisely *do* find themselves suffering from the structural marginalization of internal colonialism they choose to gangbang, in spite of gang homophobia, because violence and crime potentially enable gay men to resist systemic racism, bigotry, and social and familial ostracism *outside* of their gangs. I also contend that spaces that prohibit gay sexuality do not necessarily always translate to psychological trauma for gay men. I am not arguing that gang homophobia never engenders trauma for gay gang members. Often, these types of milieus where

homophobia flourishes do destructively traumatize gay men—perhaps even routinely. But the gang members of *Homeboy* also allow viewers to conceive of how gay men who gangbang may use disidentification as a means of surviving both a homophobic gang space and nation that renders working-class men of color socially dead to initiate decolonial projects.

Familia **and Gay** ***Chingasos***

When asked why he originally chose to gangbang, Juan Verdi says, "It comes from dysfunctional families. My mother and father didn't have enough time to spend with me, so I found somebody who did have enough time to spend with me." Comparably, Luis J. Rodriguez, who also appears in *Homeboy*, attributes gang activity to "something inadequate in their [gang members'] life [that] the gang fills." Phillip Garcia adds: "It's [his gang] more like a family, a close-knit family. . . . I seen it as a bunch of outsiders, you know, knit together, and trying to become as one." Verdi's, Rodriguez's, and Garcia's comments on the impetus for and communal benefits of gang membership appear to tread close to an affirmation of regurgitative culture-of-poverty hypotheses that stigmatize families of color as systematically and culturally dysfunctional, but we should take note of how the psychological and material trauma of racialized economic inequality contributes to a lack of nuclear, familial support for people who choose to join gangs. In his autobiographical gang narrative *Always Running*, Rodriguez writes, "'family' is a farce among the propertyless and disenfranchised. Too many families are wrenched apart, as even children are forced to supplement meager incomes. Family can only really exist among those who can afford one" (250). Rodriguez credits the economic disparities handicapping working-class communities of color as party responsible for the destruction of nuclear families, as often children must take on jobs or parents must take on additional

employment—such as the mother of the "Toltec poems"—to house, clothe, and feed their families, which positions parenting and familial bonding as secondary to survival.

Similar to how socioeconomic emasculation of working-class men of color can lead to violent, hypermasculine, and homophobic performances as coping mechanisms that essay to compensate for denied American hegemonic masculinity, racialized social and economic inequality also foments a hostile atmosphere that contributes to the dismantling of family. Because many parents of at-risk gang youth may encounter feelings of inferiority or stress affiliated with working menial labor or an inability to financially provide for their families—in addition to acts of racism, discrimination, or prejudice that they may encounter daily—parents may abuse their children as a way of managing their own detrimental emotions. For instance, in her study on Latina/o gangs, Joan W. Moore interviews several gang members on past and current instances of abuse in their homes, finding that "[m]ost of the descriptions of 'grouchy' fathers (and even some 'happy' ones) reflect . . . the pressures and insecurities of hard manual labor" (90). More specifically, a young gang member in Moore's study notes the pattern connecting financial instability and her father beating his wife: "If things were going all right, they'd get along good. If things were bad financially, there was problems" (90). Ultimately, the frustrations of socioeconomic marginality may lead to familial violence as a coping method, which contributes to the destruction of families and often compels persons, such as Verdi, Rodriguez, or Garcia, to seek gang membership with the intent of finding family, community, and belonging. In partially subscribing to the gangxploitation genre, *Homeboy*'s refusal to contextualize the statements of many of the gay former and current gang members in the documentary may, similar to *American Me*, reinforce perceptions of Latina/o culture as endemically dysfunctional, violent, homophobic, and pathological. But I want to focus on

Homeboy's more beneficial and useful characteristics for the Latino gay gang community: its capacity to divulge disidentification as a survival strategy, engender a decolonial counterpublic for gay gang members, and reveal how violent hypermasculinity and crime may accord decolonization for gay men who gangbang.

For many gang members, gang life—despite its dangers—serves as a means of financially, emotionally, and psychologically alleviating the conditions of social death and internal colonialism that plague working-class communities of color. As mentioned in Chapter 1, James Diego Vigil argues that "[g]roup identification is a key aspect of gang life and plays an important role for street children bereft of home and school moorings. Because of their self-esteem and fragile and fragmented egos, the street group or gang . . . helps make these youth feel complete" ("Streets and Schools" 275). As Rodriguez, Garcia, and Verdi note, they partially joined gangs because of the sense of belonging their families could not provide, viewing their gangs as counternations where the marginalized attain belonging and personal and social value. In the cases of Verdi and Garcia and for many of the other gay gang members of *Homeboy*, their sexualities amplify the ostracism and alienation they experience from their families and in society, potentially resulting in them feeling the need for even more communal support than heterosexual gang members. For instance, Cisco Rios hints at the bigotry in his family when discussing his response to family members who may learn of him publicizing his gay sexuality in *Homeboy*, saying that he "doesn't give a fuck if his cousin hears this shit." Rios's hostility towards his cousin and his need to not "give a fuck" implies that his cousin exhibits antagonism towards Rios because of his sexual orientation. As such, gang life for Rios ironically provides a decolonial avenue that enables him to compensate for the social and familial ostracism he

encounters *outside* of his gang because of his sexuality, even if having to closet himself in his gang because of the subculture's own sexual intolerance.

In many gangs, violent hypermasculinity and crime are crucial for generating the community, social and personal value, intersubjective recognition, and sense of belonging that the men of *Homeboy* and many scholars cite. In her study of gay gang members, Panfil asks her participants why they engage in violence. One man named Casper responds, "Respect too, because a lot of 'em would try to disrespect. Like I said, we would be on the bus or somewhere, anywhere, and someone would disrespect us, and all it take is for one (snaps fingers), and then we're all up, stuff like that" (Panfil 87). Similarly, Panfil writes that another gay gang member named Aga says that "[w]e don't be playin' about our brothers and sisters and my gay kids" and that a man named Jeremy "added that his group was 'real close' and they 'take up for each other,' especially 'if somebody was to disrespect one of us in public'" (87). For these gang members, violence strengthens the gang's communal support system by protecting the social dignity and honor of fellow gang members whom they refer to in familial terms: "brothers," "sisters," and "kids." While Panfil focuses on the dynamics in gay gangs, violence as tool for generating decolonial community and support operates in heterosexual, mixed-gender, and girl gangs as well. In Murray's *Locas,* for instance, Lucía and her Fire Girls' attacks against working-class women of color help form a familial subculture that, albeit in a toxic manner, compensates for their initial alienation in the Lobos and the psychological and material trauma they experience from their vulnerability and violability in the United States. Conversely, women's absence from violence in the Lobos (participating in drive-bys or rumbles) preempts their subcultural citizenship in the gang.

Because many of the men in *Homeboy* note the community and belonging they obtain in gangs—which, for men like Rios, rectifies the alienation they feel from their homophobic families—and, as I will soon elaborate on, disclose their history of idealizing violence (stabbing people, rival gang members pulling guns on them, participating in fist fights), violence for these gay men functions in a decolonial manner. Violence figures as a precursor to attaining the communal attributes of gang life that challenge the ostracism the men suffer outside of their gangs because of their sexualities. In this way, the gay gang members of *Homeboy* queer decolonial violence through benefitting from its intersubjective ramifications. Similar to the Toltec's and Lucía's violent reputations generating intersubjective recognition from their Chicago and Echo Park *barrios*, the men of *Homeboy*'s decolonial violence that targets their oppressors (a subject I broach momentarily) and potentially innocent victims (the men never reveal if they harm civilians like Lucía does) provides from their fellow gang members an intersubjective recognition central to the familial and communal dynamics in their gangs.

The gay men in *Homeboy*, however, do not only cite the need for familial support as the impetus for gang membership. These gay former and current gang members also discuss how the gang enables violent resistance against the sexual intolerance and hate crimes they incur outside their gangs. In one of the opening scenes of the documentary, Sergio Romero says he joined a gang because of those who would question his sexuality, label him a *maricon* (an epithet for gay men), and physically assault him (Figure 4.1). As Romero remarks, "I was raised as a kid to defend myself, and the only group of kids that I knew that fight to defend themselves are gangbangers." Oddly enough, despite the homophobia pervading his gang, Romero joined—though he remained closeted—because the gang provided him with protection from those who considered his sexual orientation justification for verbal and physical assault. Romero's

conception of the gang as a vehicle for resistance coincides with many gang scholars and gang members who view gang life as a decolonial ideology that leads to the veritable creation of new men and women as much as a space for community-building. Again, as former gang member and now university professor Robert J. Durán explains, "Joining a gang means shifting one's image from that of a victim who weakly tolerates affronts to that of a strong and courageous warrior who reacts quickly to perceived disrespect" (110). In addition to having to live in a country imbued with racism and consistent national and state attempts to police and regulate their bodies, the working-class men of color in *Homeboy* must tolerate epithets and physical assault because of their sexuality, denying them personal sovereignty over their own subjectivity. As a result, this decolonial ideology also provides the avenue that allows these gay gang members—similar to *la Heredera* and Lucía who use gang violence as a defense against sexual assault—to use violence to demonstrate symbolically "that they are not inferior or controlled by others," combat bigotry and hate crime outside their gangs, and to attain feelings of, and prove, personal sovereignty, even if these gang members in many ways must still submit to the state's regulation of their bodies and closet their sexualities in their gangs (Durán 114). Indeed, as Rios says of his experience stabbing a person, "It felt *weird*. . . . Blood just flowing, stabbing that person, and seeing the expression on their damn face cause *you have the power* for their ass" (emphasis added). For Rios, the appeal in committing acts of violence in gang membership stems from altering a dynamic from one where he, a gay, working-class, and socioeconomically emasculated man succumbs to sexual intolerance and state disempowerment to a position where he may resist structural emasculation and gay sexuality's "subservience" in a heterocentric, homophobic environment by attaining "power" over another, possibly heterosexual, person.

Figure 4.1: Sergio Romero elucidates how gang life enables him to resist the sexual intolerance he encounters from those outside of his gang.

To Disidentify with *la Vida Loca*

In *Homeboy*, many of the gay current and former gang members who delineate their reasons for joining gangs outline, whether they are cognizant of the process or not, a personal strategy that minoritarian people deploy for interacting with and surviving in spaces hostile toward their existences. Muñoz's theory of disidentification supplies a way for understanding why gay men choose to participate in homophobic gangs and how they exercise agency and manage an intolerant and hypermasculine space antagonistic toward their sexual orientations. To ingeminate, Muñoz defines disidentification as "a mode of dealing with a dominant ideology, one that neither opts to assimilate within such a structure nor strictly opposes it. Rather, disidentification is a strategy that works on and against the dominant ideology" (*Disidentifications* 11). As Verdi, Garcia, Rios, and Rodriguez help explain, gangs may provide a path for gay men to resist social death, internal colonialism, and sexual bigotry outside their gangs and towards achieving a sense of belonging and personal sovereignty. The gay current and former gang members in *Homeboy*—and perhaps many across the nation, as well—also

understand many heterosexual, male-dominated gangs as homophobic and violently-hypermasculine spaces that possibly endanger their lives (both because of their sexualities and the violent activities of gang members), but they refuse to set gang life against their sexual orientations and abandon gang membership because of the advantages that gangs offer for working-class persons of color who inhabit spaces of social death. As Bill Johnson González says in his analysis of a gay Latino gang member in the film *On the Downlow*, "[E]ven if continued existence in the gang would require the suppression of his sexuality, the gang itself nevertheless would also continue to provide him with the sense of family, community, and masculine power that he craves" (31). Just as in *On the Downlow*, the men of *Homeboy* identify—or formerly identified—with gangs and as gang members because doing so allows them to achieve the community-building and decolonial resistance they desire.

Identifying with an ideology intolerant toward their sexuality does not equate to these men fomenting a type of internalized self-hatred or homophobia either. Rather, disidentification as an agential survival strategy allows these men to identify selectively with an ideology that ameliorates their positions as second-class citizens in their *barrios* and the U.S. nation-state while disidentifying with the aspects of that same ideology that demand death for gay men. As many of the men of *Homeboy* suggest—particularly Larry Apodaca—this disidentificatory process, which to some may appear as unsettling and contradictory confusion, remains a relatively satisfactory way of negotiating gang life. Apodaca, for instance, whom the documentary codes as the "hardest" of the men in *Homeboy*, refuses to allow homophobic gang ideologies to impede his sexual and romantic pursuits. In his own words, "all I do is date [male] gang members."

I am not suggesting that disidentification serves as a pan-emancipatory survival strategy that can negate the psychological trauma and physical danger gay men who gangbang consistently encounter. As Muñoz claims, "[D]isidentification is *not always* an adequate strategy of resistance or survival for all minority subjects. . . . [O]n other occasions, queers of color and other minority subjects need to follow a conformist path if they hope to survive a hostile public sphere" (*Disidentifications* 5). Although, for Apodaca, disidentifying with gang life allows him to acquire decolonial rewards while simultaneously positioning himself outside the gang sphere that criminalizes gay sexuality, the ability to disidentify with a gang may not serve as a feasible or easily attainable option for many gay men. Many gay gang members might find—and rightfully so—the homophobia within gangs so psychologically traumatic that they may view disidentifying with gang culture as a mentally and an emotionally unbearable option. Nonetheless, while disidentification might not prove viable for some gay gang members, the survival strategy does contain agential and decolonial possibilities for others and provides a hermeneutic for conceiving of the possibility of gay men who partake in homophobic, hypermasculine, and violent gangs.

To some, disidentification may eerily resemble passing, and the gay gang members in *Homeboy* might not necessarily appear as gay men who disidentify with gangs as much as they appear as passing as "straight-acting" gay gang members. But as Muñoz makes clear, passing and disidentification are not diametrically opposed and can transpire simultaneously. According to Muñoz, passing "implicates elements of the disidentificatory process. . . . Like disidentification itself, passing can be a third modality where a dominant structure is co-opted, worked on and against. The subject who passes can be simultaneously identifying with and rejecting a dominant form" (*Disidentifications* 108). As Muñoz insinuates, passing often

encompasses disidentification, featuring a subject who both identifies with and rejects a dominant ideology. In many ways, then, acts of disidentification almost always feature some form of passing, though passing itself does not always constitute disidentification. For a subject to disidentify, the subject must consciously choose to identify with the majoritarian sphere and make use of its attributes while rejecting the notion that certain aspects of their identity compromise their ability to participate in that sphere. Because disidentification works as a *personal* survival strategy, disidentification is often private and includes passing. However, strictly passing for the sake of passing, while a personal survival strategy, does not require a subject to identify with the majoritarian sphere and reject its characteristics that preempt a subject's participation in that space. Conversely, the gay current and former gang members of *Homeboy* have all chosen to join gang life and identify as gang members because of the community, resistance, and sovereignty that gangs offer them, and many of them reject the presumption that their sexualities foreclose the possibility of claiming gang membership.

Documenting the Rearticulation of *el Loco*

Homeboy presents subjects who maintain the status quo images, aesthetics, and norms that construct and regulate normative gang masculinity, gender performance, and sexuality. But in publicly suturing gay sexuality to these same images, aesthetics, and norms, which, outside of queer homeboy/gang cultural production—which I will address soon—code as heterosexual, the documentary destabilizes restrictive gang ideologies that classify gay sexuality as incompatible with gang life and violent hypermasculinity. Butler writes: "[T]he reconceptualization of identity as an *effect*, that is, as *produced* or *generated*, opens up possibilities of 'agency' that are insidiously foreclosed by positions that take identity categories as foundational and fixed" (*Gender Trouble* 201, emphasis in original). For Butler, an identity, such as the genders man and

woman, reifies itself through the repetitive performance of identity, meaning that an identity and the identity norms through which persons who perform an identity operate under maintain the capability to continuously shift and change. As a result, within the performative and arbitrary facets of identity, Butler locates possibilities for reconfiguring norms and identities: "The critical task is, rather, to locate strategies of subversive repetition enabled by those constructions, to affirm the local possibilities of intervention through participating in precisely those practices of repetition that constitute identity, and, therefore, present the immanent possibility of contesting them" (*Gender Trouble* 201). By appropriating the normative performances that compose an identity and re-performing them in manners ostensibly contradictory to that identity, the performer eventually destabilizes the ideology that precludes the possibility of non-normativity inhabiting that identity, eventually reshaping that identity and its norms entirely. In featuring men who conspicuously (via publicly declaring their statuses or histories as gay gang members in Dinco's film) disidentify with and perform—or have previously performed—a Latino gang member identity, *Homeboy* operates as a decolonial cultural product that destabilizes and refashions the idea of a male gang member to enable alternative conceptions where gay sexuality does not negate a man's ability to gangbang as a hypermasculine, intimidating *loco*. As Apodaca resolutely says, "The only thing I did was switch . . . from [pursuing] female to male. That's all. The *only* thing different from me. *That's it*" (emphasis in original, Figure 4.2). Apodaca, like many of the gay men of *Homeboy*, maintains a violent and hypermasculine life in gangs because of the decolonial rewards his subculture affords him. In publicizing his sexual orientation, violent behavior, and intimidating aesthetic in the documentary, he, along with the other men, enable the film to rearticulate gay sexuality away from evocations of weakness, passivity, and femininity into a signifier for aggressive, violent hypermasculinity.

Figure 4.2: Larry Apodaca discusses how his sexuality has not compromised his hypermasculine gender identity and violent lifestyle.

In addition to destabilizing gang ideologies that preempt the possibility of gay gang members, as well as stereotypes that code gay sexuality as feminine, *Homeboy* simultaneously joins with past fictional cultural production in reconfiguring the homeboy aesthetic from one of "admiration and fear" to one of attraction (Rodríguez, "Queering the Homeboy Aesthetic" 128). While admiration and attraction resemble each other—and attraction may often encompass admiration, perhaps as the basis for attraction—admiration denotes a sense of esteem, whereas attraction conveys a magnetic allure possibly arousing sexual or romantic interest. Before *Homeboy*, previous cultural products had partaken in this reshaping of the homeboy aesthetic, such as the film *Quinceañera*, which depicts two white men who sexually desire their young Latino neighbor *because* of his homeboy aesthetic, or the videopoem *El Abuelo* (2009), featuring Joe Jimenez reciting verse expressing his affinity for *planchando* so that he may "throw down a rowdy crease" (starch creases in Ben Davis pants and white t-shirts) and "captivate a Southside homeboy's wandering eye."

Homeboy participates in this same metamorphosing movement, as the men of the documentary relay that, for them, the homeboy aesthetic does not invoke feelings of fear as much as the style manufactures romantic and sexual arousal. Garcia, for instance, says, "The one that turns my head in the beginning is . . . the bald guy or the shaved-head look with the tattoos. . . . That's the one that always catches my eye." Avila, to an even broader extent, distinguishes between men who adopt a homeboy aesthetic and actual gang members when communicating his dating interests. Whereas Apodaca maintains that he only pursues gang members, Avila says, "They really don't have to be gang members. They just have to have that look, bald head, straight-looking [read masculine], tattoos . . . just that machoism. . . . I don't care how good-looking the guy is. If he's got plucked eyebrows or he has any little femininity to him . . . it just totally turns me off. " As such, *Homeboy* not only detaches gay sexuality from homophobic connotations of femininity, frailty, and passivity but also participates in the cultural reconfiguration of the homeboy aesthetic from an appearance whose intimidating hypermasculinity generates "admiration and fear" to one that also arouses sexual and romantic attraction.

Homeboy, *El Abuelo*, and *Quinceañera* are not alone in rearticulating *el Loco*. Gang/homeboy films like *On the Downlow*, *La Mission*, and *Moonlight* and artists Alex Donis and Héctor Silva, whose work both Richard T. Rodríguez and Daniel Enrique Pérez have analyzed, have also re-conceptualized normative gang gender, sexuality, and ideology by producing queer representations of the homeboy aesthetic (Figure 4.3). Pérez writes that Donis and Silva use art to "assign effeminate roles to stereotypical macho men. In essence, they queer the macho." which ultimately "destabilizes the straight/gay and *macho*/*maricón* binary" (Pérez 29, 12). Rodríguez, similarly, contends that Silva's "art is centrally known for queering the

Figure 4.3: One of several of Héctor Silva's pencil sketches featured in Dinco's *Homeboy*.

homeboy aesthetic in sexually explicit ways, positioning masculine Latino men in homoerotic fantasy scenarios that provoke visceral responses" ("Queering the Homeboy Aesthetic" 132). Both scholars postulate that the relation between these queer images and fantasy may destabilize "gender norms that commonly frame Chicano/Latino masculinity and crucially [alter] the ways in which the homeboy aesthetic has been made always already heterosexual or rendered antithetical to homosexuality" (Rodríguez, "Queering the Homeboy Aesthetic" 131). Rodríguez asserts that Silva's art produces potential fantasies where "a gay man may situate himself as the desiring subject in the symbolic mirror held up in Silva's work" ("Queering the Homeboy Aesthetic" 133). Furthermore, according to Rodríguez, "there are many ways to be caught up in the sequence of [Silva's] images. . . . The subject also has the ability to try out alternative identities and desires . . . imagining himself as part of a lustful brotherhood . . . that departs from the heteronormative premise of the homeboy aesthetic" ("Queering the Homeboy Aesthetic" 133). According to this psychoanalytic hermeneutic, when viewing Donis's or Silva's queer homeboy artwork—or, as a corollary, any cultural product that features non-normative characters with a homeboy aesthetic—subjects may construct fantasies where they adopt various identities and enact multiple possibilities to obtain a *jouissance* that normative gang culture preempts, and, through these films and images, cultural producers ultimately revision gang gender and sexuality and assist in the creation of a decolonial counterpublic geared toward providing a space for gay gang members.

However, while fantasy, fictional films, and artwork definitely carry the potential to destabilize and metamorphose normative gang gender and sexuality and create decolonial counterpublics, fantasy and cinematic and artistic representations are not devoid of limitations. Rather, these types of cultural products are hindered in accomplishing their transformative

endeavors because those threatened by the suggestion that gay men might gangbang—namely, rigidly heterosexual, homophobic, and predominantly male gangs—may seek recourse in the fact that these films and art pieces are, after all, fictitious insinuations. Moreover, while subjects digesting this cultural production might satisfy their desires through fantasies, this satiation also lacks the materiality and immediacy necessary for more palpable forms of satisfaction of a desire for actual gay gang members, which, in all fairness, may also concurrently prove beneficial and detrimental because an actual gay gang member may not measure up to an idealized fantasy. We should also note that the adoption of a homeboy aesthetic, whether in cultural production or reality, does not automatically translate to gang membership, as Avila makes clear in explaining his willingness to pursue men other than gang members as long as they maintain the homeboy aesthetic. Although the homeboy aesthetic chiefly arises from gang culture, any person can maintain the appearance without participating in a gang and having to encounter daily the lethal consequences of homophobic gang life. So although Donis's and Silva's homeboys may resemble gang members, cultural production that solely queers the homeboy aesthetic lacks an actuality, ability to destabilize and transform heterocentric conceptions of gang members, and a counterpublicity that only actual gay gang members can generate.

On the other hand, because *Homeboy* features gay men who currently—or, at one point, did—gangbang, the documentary queers, destabilizes, and refashions normative gang gender, sexuality, and ideology in an even more acute manner than past cultural products that portray fictional gay gang members or depict images of gay men maintaining a homeboy aesthetic who may not participate in gang life. While I am suggesting a type of veracity to *Homeboy* because of its documentary form and inclusion of actual past and present gang members, I also acknowledge that documentary does not entirely remove the veil between fiction and reality and also contains

its own limits and elements of construction. In shaping the mise-en-scène of a shot, directors manipulate objects and actors within a particular three-dimensional space, but once the camera films or photographs this setup, this three-dimensional presentation transforms into a *representation* of reality. Despite Dinco using documentary to erect a heightened proximity and realism, *Homeboy* and the documentary form still subject themselves to a calculated doctoring that produces a representational image of the real; they do not provide an unadulterated window, and they still contain fictional components. As Paula Rabinowitz says, "[D]ocumentary rhetoric—despite being overlaid with a gloss of objectivity gleaned from its assignation as nonfiction . . . also derives from agitprop. Its function is to induce feeling, thought, and action. As such, it seems to me that documentary presents itself as much more performative than even fictional forms" (8-9). Despite the perception that documentary maintains a fact-based neutrality and non-performative "reality" more than any other genre of visual culture, documentary, on the contrary, usually harbors a political partisanship that erases any presumption of objectivity.

Specifically, in *Homeboy*, the viewer can identify several instances of mise-en-scène and propagandist construction that color *Homeboy*'s claims to undiluted impartiality. For example, in every instance that Rios speaks before the camera, the shot also includes background posters pinned to the wall that advocate gay pride or advertise gay homeboy websites or nightclubs (Figure 4.4). Additionally, Dinco divides *Homeboy* into separate sections, with the first chapter detailing how and why the men entered gang life, the second focusing on their identities as current or former gay gang members, and the last detailing the reasons why some of them chose to leave their gangs. Yet before each segment commences, the camera spends several seconds zooming in and pausing on various pieces of Silva's artwork that queer the homeboy aesthetic. Within these moments that convey *Homeboy*'s political agenda, we can negate its presumed

objectivity and locate its ties to fictional representation. But as Rabinowitz argues, since traditional fictional performances "efface their constructions through naturalizing gestures, the response within the audience is contained; but in shifting the site of documentary from the object of vision to the subject of action by insisting on the dynamic relationship of viewer to view, documentary forms invoke performance within their audiences as much as within their objects" (9). Although documentary contains elements of fiction, the form still insists on the "dynamic relationship of viewer to view" and uses the same agitprop that negates its neutrality to stimulate action in ways that traditional fiction cannot. As such, despite *Homeboy*'s inability to detach itself completely from its fictional predecessors, its distinct qualities as documentary—whether they draw from fiction or not—produce a *sense* of immediacy and affect within the viewer that possibly reaches gay gang members and impels audiences to participate in and further the creation of a gay gang counterpublic to a degree that Donis's and Silva's artwork and films such as *Quinceañera* cannot.

Figure 4.4: The mise-en-scéne framing Rios emphasizes the documentary's partisanship and its queering of the homeboy aesthetic.

Despite the galvanizing qualities of the documentary form, documentary also possesses a deplorable history rooted in colonialism. As Chandan C. Reddy elucidates, documentary arises from a colonial and anthropological past where the genre served as a pivotal tool in "'racializing' and exoticizing its objects, separating them from their historical context and the filmmaker and distancing the viewer from the locations depicted on screen, no matter how 'nearby' that ethnography might take place" (368). Because of documentary's "racializing" and "exoticizing" characteristics, documentary justified "egregious acts of White violence by rendering people as exotic others that require 'western' cultural development" (368). Admittedly, *Homeboy* may inadvertently adopt this historical tendency of documentary, as its gangxploitation poetics inhibit the film from socioeconomically contextualizing its objects. Consequently, for non-targeted audiences, the documentary may potentially legitimize "White violence" against Latinas/os and the need for the colonial "development" of Latina/o cultures because of how *Homeboy* features violent Latino gang members and identifies homophobia in Latina/o spaces. Furthermore, *Homeboy* may participate in fetishizing, exoticizing, and objectifying gay gang members for a non-gang or non-Latina/o audience, but we should not abandon *Homeboy* or the documentary form because of these detriments. Rather, documentary's flaws are precisely why critics continue to remain key in cultural analysis. Not only do critics assist in impeding those who would, for example, use a documentary such as *Homeboy* against gang members and the Latina/o community. Critics also reveal the value in certain documentaries rife with exoticizing and objectifying characteristics, for in spite of *Homeboy*'s disadvantages, Dinco's documentary still holds value in offering an avenue to theorize violent, heterosexual hypermasculinity in gangs and its reliance on sexual intolerance; how and why gay men persist in these often bigoted spaces; and its capacity to engender a decolonial counterpublic. As Rabinowitz implies, agency may

reside in objectification as well: "[W]hat is so bad about objectification? Objects can speak also—listen to the commodities in *Capital*—and what they say perhaps undoes the subject itself" (6).

With Rabinowitz's suggestion of agency in objectification in mind, I read the gay current and former gang members' use of *Homeboy*'s documentary form in a fashion similar to the way Muñoz reads Pedro Zamora's presence on MTV's *The Real World* (1994).[46] Noting the objectifying and mediated traits of not only reality television but also *The Real World*'s application process, Muñoz contends that Zamora disidentified with both the show and its application protocols to gain entrance to a public stage where he could import a political intervention (*Disidentifications* 150). In disidentifying with *The Real World*, Zamora used the "televisual dissemination of such performances [to allow] for the *possibility of counterpublics*—communities and relational chains of resistance that contest the dominant public sphere" (Muñoz, *Disidentifications* 146, emphasis in original). Similarly, I submit that the men of *Homeboy* disidentify with the colonial history and exoticizing traits of documentary to access a medium where their presence in the film enables *Homeboy* to function as a decolonial cultural product that publicly avows the presence of former and current gay gang members and critically destabilizes and refashions normative hypermasculinity, violence, sexuality, and ideology in gangs to create a gay gang counterpublic.

Toward the Future of Gang Life

The gay men of *Homeboy*'s incessant insistence on foregrounding their sexuality and identity as violently hypermasculine and on lauding hypermasculine aesthetics as sexually titillating also means that they are not entirely virtuous, revolutionary, or decolonial. While these men's appearances in *Homeboy* invaluably enable the documentary to contribute to the

assemblage of a gay gang counterpublic, the value they place on and their persistence in maintaining violent hypermasculinity casts them as purveyors of other adverse qualities associated with hypermasculinity, such as with the Toltec and Lucía. Pérez writes that, in Donis's and Sílva's artwork, "as the macho approximates a queer identity, he is freed from some of the negative traits associated with his image: misogyny, violence, stoicism" (29). Yet the men of *Homeboy* who do not feminize themselves but adopt a pointed hypermasculinity as gay Latino gang members do not shed the colonial traits affiliated with hypermasculinity. The majority of them maintain a stoic attitude—although I hesitate to label stoicism as "negative"—and boast about their violent lives or actions, even when these reactions are not always in response to sexual and racial bigotry. For example, in underscoring his violent hypermasculinity, Apodaca brags about how shortly before interviewing for *Homeboy* a rival gang member pulled a gun on him. At the end of the day, these men either are or were violently-aggressive gang members troubled by the same (and further) social marginality that plagues straight, working-class men of color and engenders hypermasculine performances that sometimes manifest in toxic ways, even if decolonial. While many of the men reveal how they queer gang violence and crime to initiate decolonization against hate crimes and sexual intolerance outside their gangs, gang citizenship—as demonstrated in my analysis of *Locas* and *My Father Was a Toltec*—regularly entails delinquent behavior that may directly or indirectly colonize other innocent, multiply marginalized persons in the *barrio*, and none of the men ever deny partaking in this type of harmful activity.

Moreover, if we understand misogyny as not solely limited to the hatred of women but entailing the hatred of femininity, then several of the men of *Homeboy* do reveal they hold misogynist attitudes, such as Avila who claims that he refuses to romantically or sexually pursue

any man who has "plucked eyebrows or . . . any little femininity to him" because "it just totally turns me off." Despite some of these men's disgust for femininity in men, none of the men provides any indication that they hate actual women. Yet this absence may partially stem from the fact that no meaningful discussion of women ever materializes in *Homeboy*, which is yet another of the film's problematic subscriptions to the gangxploitation genre. As *Decolonial Delinquency* has explained, when cultural producers and academics represent or discuss gangs, they too often eclipse gang girls. Only a sparing number of books, whether fictional or autobiographical, have critically recognized female gang members, such as such as Gini Sikes's *8 Ball Chicks: A Year in the Violent World of Girl Gangs*, Sonia Rodriguez and Reymundo Sanchez's *Lady Q: The Rise and Fall of a Latin Queen*, Mona Ruiz's *Two Badges: The Lives of Mona Ruiz*, and the subjects of the last two chapters Ana Castillo's *My Father Was a Toltec* and Yxta May Murray's *Locas*.

In the end, eliding Latina gang members furthers the homogenizing conception of gangs as comprehensively male spaces and deprives these women of benefitting from a decolonial counterpublic and subculture that they may crave in the same—or vastly different—ways that gay male gang members do. Fregoso, for instance, writes that when witnessing one of the closing scenes of *American Me* where the camera (for the first time in the film) focuses on the pachuca/o cross tattooed on Julie's hand, revealing her participation in *la vida loca*,

> the history of Chicana membership in gangs . . . unfolds not on the screen, but in my mind. The final weathered look in Julie's eyes sparks the painful silent memory of the female gang members I have known: Chicanas surviving and resisting *la vida dura* (the hard life). I often wonder why the story of Julie's oppression and resistance, why the pain of her rape, is not up there, on the Hollywood screen, looking at me. (134-135)

As Fregoso's comments imply, while this emerging creation of a gay gang counterpublic may materialize, cultural products have worked to create a male-centric counterpublic at the expense of gang girls. So while *Homeboy*'s incorporation and avowal of gay gang members may differ from previous gangxploitation films that feature same-sex intercourse only within a rape paradigm that demonstrates "power used by whites to subordinate Chicana/os, as well as real sexual violence by Chicanos to lay claim to authority within racialized gendered hierarchies," the movie follows past homophobic gangxploitation films in overlooking an opportunity to intervene in a gang culture that sorely requires more nuanced and diverse attention to sexuality *and* gender (Olguín 167). Nevertheless, despite *Homeboy*'s limitations in its many subscriptions to gangxploitation film, such as its lack of socioeconomic contextualization, its exoticization of Latinos, its valorization of and refusal to critique violent hypermasculinity, and its omission of women, the documentary still proves invaluable because of its contribution to the construction of a potential counterpublic for a select population of multiply marginalized men who struggle to find a receptive space where they may understand and negotiate the multiplicity of their identities.

Gauging *Homeboy*'s Decolonial Counterpublic

In disclosing their disidentifications that reconfigure dominant conceptions of violent hypermasculinity, the men enable the documentary to function as a cultural product that espouses violent hypermasculinity in gangs—even if in a revisionary manner—to generate decolonization at the intersection of race, class, gender, and sexuality. By destabilizing normative gender, sexuality, and ideology in predominantly male, heterosexual gangs, the documentary creates a decolonial counterpublic for gay men who cannot—or may not elect to—disidentify with gangs and aimed at dismantling sexual intolerance in homophobic gangs. Nancy Fraser suggests that, in

forming counterpublics, subaltern people "invent and circulate counter discourse, so as to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests, and needs" (123). In the circulation of this counter discourse, which may materialize via countercultural social movements or cultural production, subaltern persons oppose and potentially reconfigure the "exclusionary norms of the 'official public sphere,' elaborating alternative styles of political behaviors and alternative norms of public speech" (Fraser 116). As I will now demonstrate, *Homeboy* formulates a gay gang counterpublic in its dissemination of alternative imagery that challenges predominant conceptions of gang identities by featuring gay men who maintain the homeboy aesthetic and perform a violent hypermasculinity that many deem antithetical to gay sexuality.

Of course, in contributing to the formation of a gay gang counterpublic, *Homeboy* has not matched the scale of visibility or consumption of many previous Hollywood gangxploitation films that homogenize gangs as comprehensively heterosexual spaces incompatible with, and devoid of, gay sexuality. For instance, when *American Me* premiered in 1992, the film opened with a wide release (playing in 830 theaters across the United States), received praise from famed movie critic Roger Ebert, who compared the film to the American classic *The Godfather* (1972), and benefitted from the emerging star power of Olmos, who had previously co-starred in *Blade Runner* (1982) ("American"). On the other hand, recent queer gang/homeboy films such as *On the Downlow*, *Quinceañera*, and *La Mission* premiered with limited releases at independent film festivals and generally remain acknowledged only inside of gay or Latina/o circles. But these limited releases, which *Homeboy* also opened with, do not mean we should dismiss *Homeboy*'s destabilization and refashioning of normative gang gender, sexuality, and ideology and its counterpublic potentiality for multiply marginalized gay men of color, especially because

of *Homeboy*'s propensity for generating meaningful interventions and discussions in Latina/o gay and gang communities.

Homeboy premiered in 2012 at Outfest in Los Angeles, a queer film festival that began in 1982 (Martinez). Since screening at Outfest, *Homeboy* has played at several Latina/o and queer film festivals, primarily in California, the U.S. state with the largest Latina/o population. These screenings include Cine+Mas, a San Francisco-based Latina/o film festival; the Latin Quaker Queer Film Festival in Whittier; the Long Beach Q Films Festival; The Q-Sides (a San Francisco Bay Area lowrider and Latina/o art exhibition); the Santa Clara Annual Queer Film Festival; Out Like That! in New York City; and foreign festivals, such as the Belgium film festival Cine Zuid and EuroPride in Oslo, Norway. In addition to various independent queer and Latina/o film festivals, *Homeboy* also often screens at colleges, universities, and cultural centers across the United States, such as San Diego State University, the University of Southern California, and the Cathedral Center of St. Paul in Echo Park.[47] During these screenings, Dinco usually holds question and answer sessions and orchestrates panels featuring former gang members or other cultural producers that queer Latino gangs and homeboys, constructing an environment designed to invite critical discussion on, and a reimagining of, the place of gay sexuality in gangs and homophobic connotations of queer men (Dinco).

In these national and international screenings, *Homeboy* has garnered a respectable amount of coverage in the United States, producing a discourse on the intersectional identities of the men *Homeboy* portrays and the importance of dismantling racial and sexual intolerance to create a space for these men (and those like them) to find belonging and love. The film has also led to other gay gang members participating in this emerging counterpublic through contributing their own histories as gay men who gangbang. *Homeboy* attained coverage, reviews, and

recommendations in many local and national news outlets, such as *Silver Lake Star*, *Huffington Post*, *Queerty*, and *Big Gay Picture Show*.[48] Additionally, *Univision*, the New York-based, Spanish-language broadcast television and news network, interviewed Dinco, Rios, and Romero for an article recognizing the trauma of gay men in gangs and promoting *Homeboy* for heterosexual and Spanish-speaking audiences. As Dinco says in this interview, "Creo que el documental no solo ayuda . . . hombres gay, sino también a los heterosexuals, para que los puedan entender."[49] Along with attempting to further *Homeboy*'s heterosexual viewership, many of these articles incorporate discussion of *Homeboy*'s ability to destabilize and refashion stereotypes surrounding gay men and gangs and its capacity to enable multiple audiences to identify with the men of *Homeboy*, even when some audiences are not gay, Latina/o, or gang members. According to Brian Addison of the *Long Beach Post*, for instance, *Homeboy* not only "sho[o]ts down . . . images that have proliferated since the 90s in showcasing gay men—loud, bitchy, and exclusively white" but also demonstrates "that gang membership isn't as crazy as it is human. These men, much like the feeling I held when being taunted as a kid growing up in the mountains, just want someone to care about them." Not only does the film succeed in underscoring the need for sexual inclusivity, but as this reviewer's comments suggest, *Homeboy*—even if not attending to the structural impetuses to gang membership, violent hypermasculinity, and homophobia—also excels in sentimentalizing gang membership to humanize people who gangbang.

This warm reception of *Homeboy* has resulted in other gay gang members joining the men of Dinco's film in publicizing their presences and experiences as gay gang members. For example, the *Press Telegram* featured an article promoting the documentary that incorporated an interview from a man named Manuel, who, after viewing the film, decided to share his past

difficulties with accepting his gay sexuality, which he believed antithetical to his gang member identity: “I kept saying to myself that I wasn’t gay because I had a girlfriend and was only doing it because I was in prison” (Valenzuela). According to Manuel, restrictive prison conditions explained away his sex with other men and assisted him in denying what he has now accepted: his gay sexual orientation. Ultimately, Manuel’s story, and the other aforementioned commentary on *Homeboy*, testify to the consequence of, and *Homeboy*’s success in, creating a decolonial counterpublic for gay gang members to participate in and contribute to as a strategy for surviving the homophobia and whiteness pervading Latino and gay spaces, which may result in, as in Manuel’s case, the denial or suppression of sexual identity.

While this review of *Homeboy*’s exhibition and reception establishes the documentary’s resonance with Latina/o, gay, and specifically *gay* gang audiences, one of *Homeboy*’s most noteworthy interventions lies in its capability to precipitate critical discussion and reassessment among the lethal site that necessitates disidentification for the men of *Homeboy*: the predominantly heterosexual, male, homophobic gang. Although Dinco has exhibited the film across the United States and in other countries, screening *Homeboy* alongside discussion panels with former gang members and primarily in California cities such as Los Angeles, Long Beach, and Echo Park points toward an attempt to target heterosexual gang audiences and challenge gang ideologies that view gay sexuality as incompatible with gang life. Echo Park, for example, famously houses the long-standing Chicana/o gangs Diamond Street, Frogtown, and Echo Park Locos. Although measuring viewership of *Homeboy* among active gang members and the documentary’s effects on these spaces remains an exceedingly difficult venture, because doing so requires persons to out themselves as participants in highly-criminalized activity, evidence of

Homeboy's capacity to intervene in and influence gangs does exist, primarily online where the internet affords at least some anonymity.

One of the most notable locales where gang members' discussions of *Homeboy* materializes is on *Streetgangs.com*, a popular website among gang members that not only houses news and information on current policing, racial, political, and legal matters pertaining to gangs but also provides a forum for gang members of many races and ethnicities across the United States to engage in dialogue. Often, these conversations range from topics such as tagging, emerging gangs, and recent robberies to gang politics, deceased gang members, and growing policing hotspots. After learning of *Homeboy* and watching its trailer, one user created a discussion thread critically analyzing the presence of gay sexuality in gangs and gay gang members' abilities to remain hypermasculine, violent, productive gang members while gay. Although some persons engaging in this discussion subscribe to homophobic ideologies that foreclose the possibility of gay men gangbanging because of the violent hypermasculinity associated with gang life and the stereotypes of femininity and weakness affecting gay men, *Homeboy* sparked a conversation that led many to not only affirm the existence of gay gang members but also to rethink any rationale that understands gay sexuality as jeopardizing a gang member's violent hypermasculinity, gang productivity, and intimidating reputation. For example, one person operating under the handle "TomTom" writes, "[W]ell-known riders [pull] gay shit like that and still being well respected." Another user writing under the handle "Cliffard" cites Kody Scott, who refers to a Hoover Crip Gangster named "Fat Rat" as "a hood star, a hood legend," despite Fat Rat's participation in gay sex.[50] As such, while *Homeboy* has not duplicated the reception and canonicity of traditional gangxploitation films, *Homeboy* has contributed to the formation of a decolonial counterpublic where persons in and out of gangs have re-envisioned

homophobic stereotypes and ideologies that read a gang identity as almost always heterosexual and antithetical to gay sexuality, critically recognized the importance of creating a receptive space for multiply marginalized men such as those of Dinco's documentary, and further encouraged gay gang members to participate in and extend this counterpublic's decolonial possibilities through sharing their own histories in gangs.

When viewing Pedro Zamora's presence on *The Real World*, Muñoz says,

> I imagined countless other living rooms within the range of this broadcast and I thought about the queer children who might be watching this program at home with their parents. This is the point where I locate something other than the concrete interventions in the public sphere. Here is where I see the televisual spectacle leading to the possibility of new counterpublics, new spheres of possibility, and the potential for the reinvention of the world from A to Z. (*Disidentifications* 160)

In this same vein, while I acknowledge that *Homeboy* can neither replicate the scale nor range of Zamora's counterpublic because of its lack of access to a national cable and satellite television channel, I, too, imagine Dinco screening *Homeboy* at numerous sites across the United States, with many gay and straight Latino men as audience members, some of them having gangbanged and some of them having not, but, perhaps, having friends or family members currently participating in *la vida loca*. And I imagine them either witnessing or relating to others the stories of these men in *Homeboy*. In this vision, I glimpse gay gang members across the United States identifying with and participating in this counterpublic, discerning in this space not only a community to call their own but also strategies for subverting and transforming bigoted gang ideologies that would dare to brand a *loco* a *maricón*.

CHAPTER 5: SUCCESS IS NOT AN OPTION: DECOLONIAL FAILURE, THE EMERGENT *MALINCHISTA*, AND UTOPIAN FUTURITY IN *ON THE DOWNLOW*

In the final scene of Tadeo García's 2004 film *On the Downlow*, the Two Six gang of Little Village and Pilsen (neighborhoods in Chicago) holds a former Latin King, Angel, hostage in a basement. A Two Six named Isaac steadies a pistol before Angel's face, as Isaac prepares to murder this rival gang member. Fearing his death, Angel, on his knees, cries, "Isaac, man. Isaac, you can't do this, man. We're supposed to be together, man, please! You and me, man, forever, man. Isaac, me and you man! You can't do this, man, please! Isaac, I love y—." Unbeknownst to the rest of the Two Six crew, Isaac and Angel love each other and are in a romantic relationship, compromising Isaac's ability to murder this ex-Latin King. In begging for his life, Angel nearly openly proclaims his queer relationship with Isaac, supplicating his partner not to shoot him with homoerotic appeals in front of Isaac's gang leader, Reaper, and other members of the Two Six. The film suggests, however, that the Two Six leader deduces the implications of Angel's entreaties, for before Angel can finish the word "you" and publicize his love for Isaac, Reaper kills him. Reaper's choice to shoot Angel at this precise moment implies that the gang leader pulls the trigger not only because of Angel's prior affiliation with the Latin Kings but also (and implicitly primarily) because his relationship with Isaac demolishes Isaac's capacity to succeed at the Two Six's expectations of violent, heterosexual masculinity. In response to the murder of his partner, Isaac kills Reaper and later puts a gun to his own head to commit suicide and die alongside Angel.

In this film, the men of *Homeboy*'s statements ring true: queer men in heterosexual, male-dominated gangs face deathly punishment. There is no disidentifying. Angel and Isaac fail in

their gangs and *barrio*, in part because of the rivalry between the Two Six and the Latin Kings, but also—and perhaps more—because of their inability to rearticulate queerness into a signifier for violent hypermasculinity in a manner and to a degree that the Two Six leader finds sufficient.

As documented throughout *Decolonial Delinquency*, violent hypermasculinities have a crucial role in gang members achieving subcultural citizenship and decolonization in gangs. Although many male-dominated, heterosexual gangs deem violent hypermasculinity inaccessible to women and queer men because they regard the production of hypermasculinity as requiring the rejection of a queer love object and femininity, this project has revealed how these "non-normative" gang members appropriate and refashion, queer, and gender gang violence, crime, and hypermasculinity to claim citizenship in these gangs and achieve decolonization, even if doing so means reproducing a toxicity that harms other multiply marginalized persons. Of course, not every "non-normative" gang member succeeds in male-dominated, heterosexual gangs that espouse violent hypermasculinity and adopt misogynist and homophobic ideologies. Nevertheless, this volume does not presume that failing in these gangs forecloses the possibility of these subcultures precipitating decolonialization for "non-normative" gang members, even if this decolonization ironically entails liberation from the gendered and sexual bigotry women and queers may encounter in some gangs.

Consequently, this chapter re-envisions how male-dominated, heterosexual, and homophobic gangs that idealize violent hypermasculinity can initiate decolonization. In doing so, I shift toward queer gang members in *On the Downlow* who, unlike *la Heredera*, Lucía, and the men of *Homeboy*, do not co-opt and/or succeed in gangs and their *barrios* but instead fail in them. In theorizing their failure, I distinguish failure from refusal, as failure bespeaks an attempt that ultimately does not succeed or does not satisfactorily meet expectations. As readers will see

throughout this chapter, the queer gang members of *On the Downlow* attempt to fulfill expectations of a successful gang member in the *barrio* through maintaining the homeboy aesthetic, participating in and bragging about violence, and closeting their sexuality. Although their efforts are futile, I read an antinomy in these men's failures in their gangs and *barrio*, contending that queer failure generates alternative types of decolonization different from the normative models available in gangs but perhaps just as rewarding.

In particular, I argue that *On the Downlow* imagines how failing in male-dominated, heterosexual gangs and the non-inclusive, working-class *barrio* may facilitate the construction of a decolonial utopian futurity.[51] In their utopian futurity, the queer gang members of *On the Downlow* accomplish temporary psychological and material decolonization through fantasizing about a world outside their present financial and sexual restrictions in their gangs and *barrios*. In this way, Chapter 5 proves how decolonization need not always entail conventional notions of success for liberation and shows how male-dominated, heterosexual gangs that glamorize hypermasculinity, violence, and crime might precipitate decolonization through failure.

But in picturing the possibility of gang life and culture catalyzing a rewarding decolonial failure, *On the Downlow* refashions the Latina/o and Chicana/o gang cultural practice of associating gang membership with anti-assimilationist decolonization. In envisioning how decolonial failure precipitates queer utopian futurity, *On the Downlow* reproduces prior gangxploitation film and Chicana/o Malinche poetics—meaning narratives of ethnic and cultural betrayal—that deleteriously reify white supremacy, inform alternative threads of homophobia towards working-class queer men of color, and substantiate racial contracts that deem Latina/o and Chicana/o culture as endemically bigoted and whiteness as the "civilizing" savior required to "advance" working-class people and cultures of color. As a result, *On the Downlow*

accomplishes decolonial work in revealing the emancipating potential of failure in gangs but, like several of the other texts this project has interpreted, does so in a manner not entirely anticolonial. Rather, by incorporating a Malinche narrative, *On the Downlow* propagates, even while censuring, homophobic environments that may compel queer men of color to participate in gang membership, violence, and crime as a decolonial strategy.

Forging Utopian Futurity Through Queer Present Failure

In analyzing how *On the Downlow* reveals how failing in male-dominated, heterosexual gangs and sexually-intolerant *barrios* may paradoxically provoke the creation of decolonial utopian futurities, I draw from Jack Halberstam's, José Muñoz's, and Lee Edelman's conceptions of queerness, failure, success, utopian futurity, and (no) future. Muñoz claims that, for queer persons, the "present is not enough. It is impoverished and toxic for queers and other people who do not feel the privilege of majoritarian belonging, normative tastes, and 'rational' expectations" (*Cruising Utopia* 27). Part of the reason the present remains "impoverished and toxic for queers" centers on their failure. For Muñoz, "Queer failure is often deemed or understood as failure because it rejects normative ideas of value" (*Cruising Utopia* 173). Adhering to the normative values that Muñoz references establishes success in a heteronormative present. For Halberstam, these "normative ideas of value" in heteronormative societies lead "to the equation of success with advancement, capital accumulation, family, ethical conduct, and hope" (*Queer Art* 89). Although working-class *barrios* may have standards of success both distinct from and similar to the model Halberstam proposes, participating in the present as a docile subject entails abiding by a pertinent society's definition of success, which may require not only ethical behavior and the acquisition of capital but also the creation of family. This

familial prerequisite, however, mandates a heterosexual, reproductive, and nuclear family, which, for many queer studies theorists, epitomizes the fulcrum of queer failure.

In his foundational polemic *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive*, Edelman proclaims that queers have no future because of their inability to partake in traditional forms of reproductive futurism, a term that describes heterosexual reproduction that "preserves the absolute privilege of heteronormativity" and conserves the child as "the perpetual horizon of every acknowledged politics" (2, 3). For Edelman, the child represents the future, and success in heteronormative societies demands the advancement of the cult of the child. For this reason, Edelman defines queerness by its rejection of reproductive futurism and regards the child as the future, rendering people (regardless of their sexuality) who choose not to or cannot participate in conventional modes of heteronormative reproductive futurism queer. In Edelman's words, "*queerness* names the side of those *not* 'fighting for the children'" (3, emphasis in original). Because queerness does not "fight for the children" and, by extent, the future, Edelman links queerness to the death drive: "a place, to be sure, of abjection expressed in the stigma, sometimes fatal, that follows from reading that figure literally" (3). The realm of habitually lethal persecution, the death drive structures the road towards the queer's "no future."

Edelman's statements on queerness, reproductive futurism, and the child as the future have substantially shaped how academics conduct queer studies scholarship, but many have also critiqued Edelman for subsuming the intersection between race and the future. For instance, Muñoz takes issue with Edelman's diatribe against an op-ed that Sylvia Ann Hewlett and Cornel West published in the *Boston Globe* in 1998 that argues for "creating the conditions that allow parents to cherish their children" to "ensure our collective future" (qtd. in Edelman 112). Edelman lambastes Hewlett and West for a "self-serving" and "redundant" politics that will

mortgage the present "to a *fantasmatic* future in the name of the political 'capital' that those children will thus have become" (111, 112, emphasis in original). Despite West's extensive scholarship on race, racism, and white supremacy in the United States and, as Muñoz says, "the topic of race that is central to the actual editorial" that West and Hewlett write, Edelman, either in disingenuity or a severe moment of colorblindness, neglects how Hewlett and West's propositions reply to a U.S. nation-state that curtails children of color's, particularly Blacks' and Latina/os', futures (*Cruising Utopia* 94). As Muñoz points out, Edelman's critique "is flawed insofar as it decontextualizes West's work from the topic that has been so central to his critical intervention: blackness" (*Cruising Utopia* 94).

Edelman's oversight accents Muñoz's larger concerns with *No Future*: its theories "of queer temporality that fail to factor in the relational relevance of race and class" and "merely reproduce a crypto-universal white gay subject that is weirdly atemporal" (*Cruising Utopia* 94). In other words, though Edelman posits that the future belongs to the child, his argument disregards how the "future is only the stuff of some kids. Racialized kids, queer kids, are not the sovereign princes of futurity" (Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia* 95).[52] Joining with Muñoz in bristling at the lack of intersectionality in his polemic, Halberstam contends that *No Future* reads as misogynist in its ramifications for women. As Halberstam asserts, "Edelman always runs the risk of linking heteronormativity in some essential way to women, and perhaps, unwittingly, woman becomes the site of the unqueer: she offers life, while queerness links up with the death drive; she is aligned sentimentally with the child and with 'goodness,' while the gay man in particular leads the way to 'something better' while 'promising absolutely nothing'" (*Queer Art* 118). For Halberstam, *No Future* situates the woman as colonizing the queer man and maintaining the hegemony of the future and the child through her capacity to bear children.

These critiques of Edelman are worth mentioning because of their relevance to my argument about *On the Downlow* and on the connection between utopian futurity and decolonial failure in gangs. *On the Downlow* does not just picture the possibility of *a* future for queers that Edelman views as non-existent. More specifically, this movie imagines a utopian futurity for queers of color, one that responds to a death drive that operates along racial and class lines, as much as sexual. In this way, this chapter interprets *On the Downlow* to trouble Edelman's postulations on the antagonism between the future and queerness and to expand on Muñoz's theorization of how queers and queers of color construct utopian futurities out of present failure.

Muñoz repudiates regarding queer failure pessimistically or foreclosing the future for queers. Differing from Edelman, Muñoz sees the future not as the realm of the child but as "queerness's domain" because queerness "is a structuring and educated mode of desiring that allows us to see and feel beyond the quagmire of the present" (*Cruising Utopia* 1). Because queerness hinges on the desire for futurity (possibilities beyond those in the present) queerness "is a longing that propels us onward" as an "ideality that can be distilled from the past and used to imagine a future" (Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia* 1). Thus, since queerness "is primarily about futurity and hope" and "essentially about the rejection of a here and now and an insistence on potentiality or concrete possibility for another world," queerness appropriates failure to erect utopian futurities, the Edenic and *affective* moments in the present that envision an array of idyllic, future possibilities (Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia* 11, 1). In this way, according to Muñoz, the "politics of failure are about doing something else" and accord "escape and a certain kind of virtuosity" (*Cruising Utopia* 174, 173). For Muñoz, the redeployment of failure in pursuit of "escape" and "virtuosity" forms utopian futurities unencumbered by the disciplinary regulations of heteronormative hegemony. These utopian futurities permit queers to "conceptualize new

worlds and realities that are not irrevocably constrained by the HIV/AIDS pandemic and institutionalized state homophobia" (Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia* 35). Likewise, Halberstam regards queer failure as subversive to hegemonic systems, ideologies, and ontologies, even if recognizing that failure may also entail a "host of negative affects, such as disappointment, disillusionment, and despair" (*Queer Art* 3). As Halberstam says, failure "allows us to escape the punishing norms that discipline behavior and manage human development" and "can be used to recategorize what looks like inaction, passivity, and lack of resistance in terms of the practice of stalling the business of the dominant" (*Queer Art* 3, 88). Oppositional and emancipating in the construction of a utopian futurity—even if this utopian futurity eventually dissipates—queer failure "recognizes that alternatives are embedded already in the dominant and that power is never total or consistent" (Halberstam, *Queer Art* 88).

Applying Muñoz's and Halberstam's theories about failure as subversive and liberating as much as overbearing to *On the Downlow* discloses how queer gang members are not "irrevocably constrained" by the heteronormative and heterosexual precepts of certain *barrios* and gangs and their definitions of success. In the context of this film, *barrio* and gang member success for men predominantly centers on violent, heterosexual hypermasculinity, one of the primary components to the decolonization available in male-dominated, heterosexual gangs that the previous chapters of this project outline. But differing from the other texts explicated here so far, in this movie the gang and *barrio* that idealize violent, heterosexual masculinity orchestrate decolonization for queer men not through success but, paradoxically, through failure. Failing in the heterosexual, hypermasculine, and violent gang and *barrio* initiates the construction of a utopian futurity where queer men may, if sometimes only temporarily, escape psychologically and physically abusive homophobia, white capitalist-induced poverty, and the pressure to

perform violent hypermasculinity. Although, as mentioned earlier, this utopian futurity requires meticulous attention because of its affiliation with whiteness, a connection that casts the queer gang member as a Malinche and potentially informs alternate threads of homophobia.

Past, Present, and Future *Malinchistas*

On the Downlow refashions the gang cultural practice of embracing anti-assimilation politics, as Chapter 2 documents, by evoking a Malinche narrative. Malinche—also known as Doña Marina, Malinalli Tenepal, Malintzin, *la Chingada* (the Fucked One), and *la Gran Puta* (the Great Whore)—was an Aztec princess who, following her father's death, was to inherit his estate as the eldest of his children. Her mother, however, wanted her son from a previous marriage to acquire her late husband's wealth and status. To achieve this wish, she sold her daughter into slavery to remove her claim to her father's riches.[53] A noblewoman turned slave to the Aztec nation, Malinche sought to free herself when the Spanish conquistador Hernán Cortés arrived on Aztec soil. Malinche betrayed the Aztecs and became Cortés's concubine, translator, and travel guide, aiding him in the colonization of the Aztec Empire. During the colonial process, Malinche re-encountered her mother, but instead of offering her protection from the Spanish, she forsook her, leaving her to toil under Spanish rule. Later, in 1522, Malinche bore Cortés's son and, shortly afterwards, married another Spanish man, whom she had a daughter with. By this time, Malinche had converted to Catholicism and adopted the name Doña Marina.[54]

Malinche's sexual, religious, and cultural relations with the European colonizer have led to many (especially men) blaming her for the Aztec genocide and Spanish arrogation of their lands. According to Moraga, "Upon her shoulders rests the full blame for the 'bastardization' of the indigenous people of México. To put it in its most base terms: Malintzin, also called Malinche, fucked the white man who conquered the Indian peoples of México and destroyed

their culture. Ever since, brown men have been accusing her of betraying her race" (99-100). Moraga's claims about Chicano and Mexican men singling out Malinche are not an overstatement. For instance, the prominent Mexican poet and essayist Octavio Paz famously says of Malinche, "Her passivity is abject: she does not resist violence, but is an inert heap of bones, blood and dust. . . . [S]he is the *Chingada*. She loses her name; she is no one; she disappears into nothingness; she *is* Nothingness" (85-86, emphasis in original).

Despite characterizations like Paz's, Malinche may not have had traitorous intentions in mind, as an alternative history argues that she acted out of religious and cultural loyalty to the Aztecs, in spite of her enslavement. As Norma Alarcón maintains, Malinche originally believed Cortés was Quetzalcóatl reincarnated, a messianic Mexica (the ruling tribe of the Aztec nation) god who would one day return to the Mexica and Aztec people, similar to Jesus Christ ("Traddutora, Traditora" 57-58). Malinche soon realized her mistake once Cortés began slaughtering Aztecs, but, because of the similarities in the messiah narratives, she identified Quetzalcóatl in the Catholic figure of Christ, justifying her religious conversion and continued allegiance to Cortés (Alarcón, "Taddutora, Traditora" 75).

Despite a possible misinterpretation of Malinche's motives, many have invoked Malinche to criminalize Chicana, Mexican, and other Latina and Latin American women, similar to how white EuroAmerican cultures cite Eve and the Fall of Man to deprecate women. In Rita Cano Alcalá's words, "La Malinche epitomizes woman's inherent unreliability, through her religious conversion, cultural assimilation, political collaboration, and most important her sexual liaison with the enemy" (34). For many misogynists, Malinche validates the belief that Chicana, Latina, and Latin American women are inherently untrustworthy, susceptible to temptation, infatuated with assimilation, and willing to weaponize sexuality to catalyze colonization. This hatred of

Malinche and women has spawned the epithet *malinchista*, a term not limited to a single gender and that denotes a "person who 'sells out,' who adopts the value system of the dominant culture, implicitly accepting the terms of his/her own subordination" (Alcalá 54).

Chicana and Mexican feminists have refused to accept the condemnation of Malinche and of women, instead reclaiming her as a feminist prototype. Moraga, for example, explains that accusations that classify Malinche as the reason for the colonization of the Aztec Empire have no merit. In revealing how the Aztecs enacted their own demise, Moraga writes,

> At the time of Cortez's [sic] arrival in México, the Aztecs had subjugated much of the rest of the Indian population, including the Mayans and Tabascans. . . . As slaves and potential sacrificial victims to the Aztecs, then, these other Indian nations, after their own negotiations and sometimes bloody exchanges with the Spanish, were eager to join forces with the Spanish to overthrow the Aztec empire. (100)

Because of their own imperialist agendas and colonial projects in other Indigenous lands, the Aztecs facilitated Spanish-Indigenous alliances, as other Native nations colluded with Cortés as a decolonial strategy.

In further exoneration, Alcalá considers Malinche's betrayal not through an assimilationist lens but through a feminist one. She disputes common assumptions about Malinche's mother's reasons for disowning her daughter: "Malinalli's mother is forever harshly judged for selling her daughter into slavery when, from her perspective, she was properly 'disciplining' her recalcitrant daughter. . . . [T]he principal way in which a young noble woman could end up a slave was for being rebellious and lazy and for not submitting" (Alcalá 51). Because Malinche may have rejected patriarchal ideologies that regulated her life, Alcalá regards Malinche as a *feminista* forbearer and asks: "Did she refuse to perform her female duties of

weaving and working in silence and submission? Could she have rebelled against the repression of individual will and the complete exploitation of feminine labor? Did she refuse to accept her place?" (51). In refusing to "accept her place," Malinche's betrayal of the Aztecs arises not because of a hatred for her race but because of her need to liberate herself from patriarchal life in her indigenous nation. In this way, Malinche figures as Latina gang girls' decolonial progenitor.

While much Chicana and Mexican feminist scholarship conceives of Malinche as a decolonial, rather than a pejorative, archetype for women, Gabriel S. Estrada reclaims the *concept* of Malinche to consider how queer men may figure as "social Malinches." Paraphrasing Inés Hernández-Ávila, Estrada suggests that the invocation of Malinche's reproductive capacity in terming her *la Chingada* should not center on biological births but, instead, on "reproducing ideas, activism, and relationships" (51). Because feminist readings of Malinche view her as an agential woman who sought liberation from slavery through becoming a "path-opener, a guide, a voice, a warrior woman," *hijas/os de la Chingada*, in this context, are persons who reproduce decolonial "ideas, activism, and relationships," such as "Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, the female warriors of the Mexican Revolution, and the campesina activist Dolores Huerta" (Estrada 51). Estrada considers women who engage in this type of activism, thought, and behavior "social Malinches," and because these actions and beliefs are not limited to a single gender, he proposes that "male-bodied two-spirts [queer men] can also seek to embody key aspects of the social Malinches" (51).

Though scholars have reclaimed Malinche for men and women and pointed out the sexist logic and habit of depicting women as *malinchistas* in cultural production, Malinche narratives continue to materialize in Chicana/o and American gangxploitation cinema, most famously in Edward James Olmos's *American Me*. According to Olmos, he produced *American Me* to impart

to Chicanas/os that "there's a cancer in this subculture of gangs" (qtd. in Fregoso, *The Bronze Screen* 123). Indeed, Olmos's film defines gangs, gang culture, and heroin as cancerous leeches infecting Chicana/o *barrios*. But Olmos also argues that *American Me* presents Chicanas as the "glimmer of hope" to the male-centric gang culture contaminating the *barrio*, indicated in the character Julie, whom Olmos dubs as the "only hero of the film" (qtd. Fregoso, *The Bronze Screen* 133). Although Olmos labels Julie the *barrio*'s heroine, her alleged capacity to rescue the *barrio* from gangs rests on a Malinche poetic.

Returning to the previously-discussed scene in Chapter 4, *American Me* concludes with Julie leaving to attend college (the only character in the film to do so) and, in the process, reveals her own history in *la vida loca*. As she dresses for her classes, the camera zooms in on Julie's left hand, which features a pachuca cross tattoo, disclosing that she, too, was once part of a Chicana/o gang. In preparation for class, Julie covers up her cross with makeup, symbolically placing her gang history, *barrio* roots, and Chicana/o culture under erasure for the pursuit of middle-class respectability and the appeasement of white institutions. Not only does this scene belie Olmos's elision of female gang members when he argues that Chicanas shall save the *barrio* from gangs, but the moment also exposes how Olmos's supposed gang solution operates through a gendered lens that situates Chicanas as the purveyors of cultural genocide. While this scene casts Julie as a *malinchista* eager to chase a life outside of the *barrio*, she, of course, may pursue Chicana/o studies in higher education, engage in activism to fight for her *raza*, and return to her Chicana/o neighborhood. But her narrative more so implies that she, as B. V. Olguín acknowledges, "is more likely to become the new conservative 'Hispanic,' or member of the Mexican American bourgeoisie" (172).

Although *On the Downlow* departs from traditional types of homophobia in gangxploitation film and the genre's elision of queer men, this motion picture redeploys *American Me*'s Malinche poetic in rendering queer men who fail in gangs emergent *malinchistas*.[55] In doing so, this movie potentially reifies other stereotypical ideologies about and portrayals of queer men in suturing them to womanhood and femininity via Malinche. While I am not arguing femininity in men as wrong or undesirable, I am suggesting the possibility of *On the Downlow* contributing to the essentialization of queer men as always feminine and not "real" but "failed" men.[56] Moreover, the feminist and queer reclamation of Malinche implicates *On the Downlow*'s association of queer gang members with whiteness. As much as depicting these men as *malinchistas* may read unfavorably, these same images might also raise favorable connotations, signaling *not* racial/cultural betrayal but queer Latinos whose failure to succeed in gangs and the *barrio* organizes decolonial "social Malinche" projects that create and reproduce new relationships for, and ideas about the sexualities of, men in gangs. While I pursue the possibility of this "social Malinche" interpretation later in this chapter, I nonetheless maintain that these Malinche characterizations are still potentially troublesome because, as I argue in Chapter 3, cultural production has material consequences. Though these Malinche narratives may appear liberating for some viewers, they might also inform and cultivate other threads of gang and *barrio* homophobia by associating queer men always with whiteness and with a traitorous assimilation the helps maintain white hegemony and systemic racism.

Making that Shit Illegal

Primarily set in the predominantly Chicana/o Chicago neighborhoods Little Village and Pilsen, *On the Downlow* focuses on Angel and Isaac, the two queer men from the Latin Kings and the Two Six that this chapter opens with.[57] Isaac and Angel develop a romantic relationship

with each other, which they pursue clandestinely not only because of *barrio* and gang homophobia, but because of their gangs' rivalry. To mitigate the risks of dating each other, Angel drops out of the Latin Kings and joins the Two Six, though this new membership does not nullify the dangers of the sexual intolerance that they must navigate. Ultimately, as described previously, the Two Six leader, Reaper, discovers Angel's history in the Latin Kings and charges Isaac to murder him but must resort to killing Angel himself, since Isaac cannot complete this request because he loves Angel, leaving Isaac to commit murder-suicide, shooting Reaper in revenge before putting a pistol to his own head.

Figure 5.1: The working-class congestion of Little Village, Chicago.

At the onset of this narrative, *On the Downlow* opens with a montage of Little Village to establish the film's main setting. Over the first few minutes, the movie displays closeups and extreme long, long, and wide shots of streets and walkways filled with car and pedestrian traffic; littered garbage; Spanish signage; a *taquería*, *paletero* men, and other street vendors selling fruits and vegetables; multiple high-arching churches and a mural of the Virgin Mary; Chicago police cars and officers; run-down apartments; and several men in the homeboy aesthetic, some of them throwing gang signs or cruising in lowriders. These images present Little Village as a

working-class Chicana/o enclave where gangs, the Church, and police have prominent presences (Figure 5.1). As Bill Johnson González says, this montage "suggests that the neighborhoods are also zones of bleak life possibilities, restricted mobility, dead ends, and police surveillance and punishment" (20). Through these images, *On the Downlow* conveys that this *barrio* offers little possibility of upward mobility and only minimal life chances that the U.S. nation-state constricts through what Louis Althusser terms repressive state apparatuses.

Figure 5.2: The white, suburban, middle-class neighborhood that *On the Downlow* juxtaposes with Little Village.

These images contrast with the shots that *On the Downlow* cuts to at the completion of this first montage. In the next montage, the film presents the viewer with shots of open, unpolluted skies and luscious greenery; analogous middle-class homes with crisply-cut lawns and American flags decorating their doors (suggesting the American Dream, suburban uniformity, and equality); SUVs that imply family, an insinuation that later materializes with images of a white (presumably) brother and sister playing basketball; only white people; uncongested, clean sidewalks; and a dog (also white) frolicking in a front yard off-leash (Figure 5.2). Whereas the previous montage emphasized a working-class status in featuring many images

of people working or businesses, in this montage, several images characterize this space as recreational. Although the basketball-playing brother and sister are underage and the dog (a toy breed and not working breed) likely cannot labor for human income, their play renders the neighborhood as free from the burden of work and as a place of pleasures that the police refuse to hamper. The montage contains only one man working (cutting his lawn), though, for many homeowners, this action may evoke leisure rather than labor. In either case, the lawn that he cuts connotes financial wealth and privilege—as do the suburban homes—in a way that the shots of Little Village do not. González observes that these images are "visual metaphors" for an "ideology of a democratic standard of living, a package of material goods, civil rights, and social equality that America ideally was to deliver to *every* citizen" (21, emphasis in original). But the absence of people of color in this second montage conveys the opposite of this ideology, that only white people can obtain this "democratic standard of living." Thus, the juxtaposition of these two montages imparts a filmic critique of systemic racism, which purports that the distribution of wealth accumulation and upward mobility operate racially to enable the prosperous life chances and opportunities of some people and diminish those of others.

Though critiques of economic inequality permeate the film's entire diegesis, *On the Downlow* does not just represent these two neighborhoods as financially disparate but further distinguishes them in suturing violent hypermasculinity and homophobia, which do not appear in the white district, to the *barrio*. *On the Downlow*'s opening references to Catholicism's influence in Little Village appear apt for multiple reasons once the film intimates how the religion engages queer sexuality in a confrontation between Isaac and his mother. Isaac's mother, whom Isaac complains to Angel about for repeatedly "telling me about all the God-almighty sins of the world," argues with Isaac before he leaves the house to attend a gang party. This argument

ensues against a religious backdrop, with an oversized crucifix, altar, and votive candles filling the right third of the frame. His mother yells at him for gangbanging and hanging out with "pandilleros . . . especialmente ese tal Angel." Before the mother invokes Angel's name, she pauses for several seconds at "tal," hinting at her awareness of his relationship with Isaac and insinuating that she does not know what to call Angel—a boyfriend, special friend, lover, maybe even an epithet for queer men. In either case, the mother, afterwards, condemns her son's behavior, yelling, "Qué es un mal muy grande" and claiming that Isaac "tir[a] [su] vida a la basura." But Isaac's mother's speechlessness at Angel renders her words a double entendre, implying that queer sexuality "es un mal muy grande" as much as gangbanging and that Isaac "tir[a] [su] vida a la basura" for sexually-criminal reasons as well. As a result, this religious character and the Catholic props in the scene reinforce the Church's presence in the *barrio*—an element absent from the white middle-class neighborhood—and indicate that Catholicism's stances on queer sexuality contribute to and support homophobia in Little Village and the Two Six.

On the Downlow portrays this homophobia as materializing in the public sphere as well as the private and, because of the racial, class, and sexual spatial dichotomies the film constructs, possibly implies that white persons who enter this predominantly working-class and Chicana/o *barrio* are also susceptible to its ideologies about sexuality and violent hypermasculinity. In one scene, Angel and Isaac visit a grocery store and happen upon a Chicano clerk and white patron discussing queer sexuality. The clerk tells the customer that he and his wife attended a movie theater but that they could not watch the film because "two faggots were sitting right there" and "swapping spit." The Chicano man voices that he wanted to assault them, and the white man concurs, saying that "they ought to make that shit illegal." While the two men speak with each

other, the camera repeatedly cuts to Angel and Isaac who feel disgruntled and decide to leave. Outside, Angel wants to return "to beat his [the clerk's] ass," but Isaac replies that "[i]t ain't worth it" because "it's just words." According to Isaac, Angel needs to "just forget it" and "deal with it" because Isaac can ignore the bigotry.

In this conflict between Isaac and Angel, not only does the movie further divulge how homophobia structures the lives of queer men inside and outside the home, but the scene also expresses that, in the intolerant *barrio* in this film, queer men, even those who gangbang, have limited means of resisting sexual intolerance. Isaac's ambiguous words "[i]t ain't worth it" are not just the pacification adage frequently preceding impending fistfights. Instead, the phrase leaves the viewer wondering why Isaac believes queer men cannot successfully perform violent hypermasculinity in a decolonial way in this space to challenge homophobia, such as with the men of *Homeboy*. Would violent retribution against bigots risk unintentionally outing their sexuality? What does the second "it" in Isaac's statement refer to? Will the possible outing of their sexuality in Angel's resistance to homophobia invite lethal consequences from their fellow gang members and other violent, heterosexual men? In the end, Angel and Isaac's only options are to accept this intolerance as an ordinary part of their lives in the *barrio*, if they are to live in this neighborhood. They cannot perform the violent hypermasculinity of gang life to combat sexual bigotry because, in *On the Downlow*, the *barrio* and the Two Six do not view queer men as a potential signifier for hypermasculinity but instead deem them mutually exclusive and thus demand the rejection of queerness to establish successful gang and *barrio* masculinity.

This scene also possibly blurs the film's dichotomies between white and Chicana/o cultures and spaces. Although the middle-class white vicinity does not feature a single instance of homophobic discourse or, initially, violent hypermasculinity—a topic I will tackle

momentarily—white characters still espouse hatred for queer men in the *barrio*, such as with the patron who bemoans watching queer men kiss in public. In this same vein, Angel encounters a similar event with his white male co-workers at a motorcycle repair shop. Needing to finish fixing a motorbike before joining Isaac at a gang party, Angel beseeches the two men for aid, but when one of the men helps Isaac, he begins grumbling about a "fag" customer who "is always looking at me funny." The man continues, "I hate fags. They're the ones spreading all that AIDS shit. You know, it's getting so that you can't have sex naturally with a girl unless you're wearing a fucking rubber." After an awkward silence, Angel feels compelled to jibe, "Fuck yeah! . . . How do these assholes think that ass-fucking each other is better than fucking a nice hot babe?" For the white man, queer men contaminate heterosexual intercourse through sexually transmitted diseases and, in doing so, hinder heterosexual men from performing their masculinity through having sex with women. On the one hand, this scene coincides with the grocery store conversation in painting queer men as powerless to resist intolerance in the *barrio*. Not only does Angel decide he must accept this language as Isaac recommends to him, but to preempt others from questioning his presumed heterosexuality and violent, hypermasculine exterior, he needs to participate in spreading homophobia in public as well.

This motorcycle shop discourse also dovetails with the white patron's bigotry in the grocery store in problematizing the routine assumption that whites and white culture are devoid of homophobia or are more sexually inclusive than communities of color, as, in these two scenes, whites participate in and initiate homophobia as much as Chicanos. On the other hand, these white characters code as working-class and reside in the *barrio*, the only place in the film where this type of language manifests. As such, the film may propose that only working-class whites or whites in locations of color promote sexual intolerance, and middle- and upper-class whites and

areas are free of this pitfall. If so, the film potentially re-inscribes a colonial rationale that criminalizes people of color and their cultures.

In *The Racial Contract*, Charles Mills argues, "The norming of space is partially done in terms of the *racing* of space, the depiction of space as dominated by individuals (whether persons or subpersons) of a certain race. At the same time, the norming of the individual is partially achieved by *spacing* it [the individual], that is, representing it as imprinting with the characteristics of a certain kind of space" (41-42, emphasis in original). According to Mills, the racial contract—an imperialist narrative that conquering bodies use to rationalize colonialism—roots culture and behavior to spaces and to people. Persons who arrive from a certain region carry with them the culture of their previous location, potentially "racing" other areas they travel to for the "better" (if white settlers) or the "worse" (if settlers of color). At the same time, locales "space" the human, meaning that a person who journeys to another locality will adopt the cultural characteristics of that place that others have "raced." Although this logic theoretically applies to both whites and people of color and their corresponding spaces, the theory of "spacing" the human, in European colonial projects, disproportionally pertained to lands populated by people of color. This disparity stemmed from—and continues to when racial contracts appear in neo-colonial and internal colonial projects—a racist fear that the "savage" culture of people of color would infect the culture, ethics, and standards of living of whites in proximity to people of color or whites who occupy their lands. As a result, the philosophy of spacing and racing exonerates the white colonizer from mobilizing physical and cultural genocide because of the need not only to "advance" subaltern persons but also to protect whites. Because *On the Downlow* limits intolerance to working-class whites living in the *barrio*—or

whom the *barrio* has "spaced"—the film potentially corroborates and aligns with the racist, colonial ideology of the racial contract.[58]

The Gang and *Barrio* as Panopticon

Nonetheless, the movie's bifurcation of the *barrio* as violently hypermasculine and homophobic and the middle-class white space as sexually inclusive does not mean that the *barrio* forecloses queerness. As Richard T. Rodríguez argues, *On the Downlow* "negate[s] a common tendency to conclusively render subjectivity as topographically determined" ("The Architectures" 85). Angel's and Isaac's queer sexualities in Little Village reveal how *barrio* topography does not determine sexuality, though this powerlessness to shape sexual orientation does not equate to freedom from the psychological, emotional, and physical oppressions that certain topographies cultivate. Rodríguez acknowledges as much when he argues that queer persons may inhabit "[m]inor architectures," which he defines as "peripheral locations in which nonnormative sexual practices unfold" ("The Architectures" 83).

In *On the Downlow*, queer sexuality often manifests in "minor architectures" because of the *barrio* and Two Six's intolerance, such as in an onscreen kiss between Angel and Isaac. In an early scene where Isaac returns a cellphone to Angel, the two homeboys kiss outside of Angel's apartment (Figure 5.3). This kiss transpires in public but at night, in front of several dumpsters, which a rotting, wooden fence partially encloses—forming a minor architecture in the *barrio*. The low-key lighting and mise-en-scène of this scene accentuate queer men's position in this neighborhood. This kiss must occur under the protective covering of darkness, in secret, and out of the purview of surveillance because the *barrio* and Two Six regard queer men as unacceptable, criminal, and shameful. Situating the men's kiss against garbage and a decaying fence also connotes that these two men are where the *barrio* and Two Six believe queer sexuality

belongs (in the trash heap), indicating the *barrio* and Two Six's expulsion of their "waste" and portending Angel and Isaac's future embrace of their gang and *barrio* failure, which I will shortly address. Similarly, the debilitated wooden fence also foreshadows Angel and Isaac's inevitable march towards the racial, class, and sexual death drive that they will succumb to.

Figure 5.3: Isaac and Angel embrace and kiss within the safety of the *barrio*'s minor architecture.

Of course, Angel and Isaac do not only limit their time together in the *barrio* to its minor architecture, but their appearances in sites of "major architecture" (non-peripheral locations) underscore how the *barrio* and Two Six's panopticon disciplines and regulates sexuality and violent masculinity to promote gang member and *barrio* success. For example, in one scene, Angel and Isaac visit major architecture in the *barrio* for a lunch date. Contrasting with the mise-en-scène and cinematography of the garbage scene, this meal between the two transpires in an open, outdoor eating area alongside many businesses and a highway full of traffic, the opposite of peripheral, less-populated minor architectures that accord escape from surveillance (Figure 5.4). The scene also features warm, natural daylight and brighter color, joining with the rest of the setting to accent Angel and Isaac's presence in major architecture. Although the two do not

kiss or show physical affection in this scene, intimate acts are not necessary for queer sexuality to materialize onscreen, just as heterosexual characters in literature and film need not exhibit sexual or romantic intimacy for audiences to interpret them as heterosexual. The congestion of the streets and the diner parking lot in this scene, however, insinuate that Angel and Isaac must abide by the *barrio* and Two Six's stipulations for sexuality and hypermasculinity, for the gazes of multiple subjects in the vicinity police them.

Figure 5.4: The restaurant or "major architecture" where Angel and Isaac share their lunch in full purview of the *barrio*.

The film emphasizes this panopticon's regulatory power when Reaper drives by and catches Isaac eating with Angel. Reaper demands to know if Angel was ever a member of the Southside Latin Kings and inquires about Angel's potential "badass" hypermasculinity because he cannot "be rolling with no pussies" in the Two Six. After Angel assuages his concerns about his past gang history and his violent hypermasculinity by informing Reaper of the type of gun he carries, Reaper feels confident about Angel's capability to achieve gang member success, which, in this film, entails a heterosexual orientation, performing violent hypermasculinity, and maintaining the homeboy aesthetic. As such, Reaper offers Angel membership in the Two Six.

Reaper's gaze and subsequent words mark how, when inhabiting major architecture in the *barrio* and in sight of its and the Two Six's panopticon, Angel and Isaac must always abide by normative codes of gender and sexuality or potentially succumb to a death drive that operates across racial, class, and sexual lines and may manifest in Reaper murdering Angel and Isaac for their queer relationship.

Failure Is Your Domain

In truth, though, both Angel and Isaac fail in the *barrio* and as gang members. Although the two maintain the homeboy aesthetic, carry guns, participate in gang fights, and perform hypermasculinity, they violate the *barrio*'s and gang's restrictions on sexuality, nullifying whatever slight measure of success they accrue. While this failure thrusts a perennial paranoia onto the two men that affects their behavior in major architecture, steers them to minor architecture for safety, and leads to psychological and emotional trauma, failing in the Two Six and the *barrio* also facilitates the construction of utopian futurities, paradoxically enabling gang life to initiate non-conventional forms of decolonization not through success but through failure. In their utopian futurities, Angel and Isaac circumvent much of the Two Six's demands of violent hypermasculinity and its and the *barrio*'s governance of sexuality. Failing at the harsh expectations of violent hypermasculinity and heterosexuality frequently impels the two men to leave the *barrio* and visit the white middle-class neighborhood from the second montage. When in this area, they repose in their car, drinking sodas and discussing their gang failure and desire for a world beyond the one they inhabit in Little Village. Once more, Muñoz understands queerness as "primarily about futurity and hope," which, in this hope for a future beyond the disheartening present, generates a utopian futurity that "lets us imagine a space outside of heteronormativity" and other perils, such as those emerging from "the HIV/AIDS pandemic and

institutionalized state homophobia" (*Cruising Utopia* 11, 35). In the time they share with each other in Angel's car in this white middle-class neighborhood, Angel and Isaac satisfy Muñoz's requirements for the construction of queer utopian futurities.

In commenting about his desire for a future in a white, middle-class neighborhood like the one Angel and Isaac presently inhabit, Isaac pinpoints why the two men visit this vicinity to dream of futurity, nodding to how a future in this area would not entail subjection to the *barrio* and Two Six's panopticon that regulates their sexuality and violent hypermasculinity in public. As Isaac says, "Out here, I can relax." The two men can spend time together in broad daylight and open spaces and not, for the most part, fear disciplinary subjects like Reaper, Angel's co-workers, or the grocery clerk and patron who may fatally penalize queer sexuality. In fact, no person in the white neighborhood ever exhibits homophobia or references expectations for sexuality. Removed from the Two Six and *barrio*, the two gang members hope for and visualize a future that abandons the Two Six's constrictions on their sexual desire and its endangering of their lives through requiring violent hypermasculinity.

This Edenic fantasy and environment leads them both to confess their failure as gang members and false bravado. For example, in one scene in the white locale, Angel, who initially brags about his violent, hypermasculine, "thug" mindset and ability to kill people, admits his doubts about whether he could murder someone unless in self-defense, changing his original assurance to "maybe" and later to "I don't know." He even concedes his bogus violent hypermasculinity and the fear he felt during a past gun fight. In relaying this confrontation to Isaac, Angel mocks himself for pulling his "gun out" and "talking shit" when he was not intending to shoot anyone but "was just trying to get away." Likewise, Isaac discloses that he, too, has never killed anyone and that, when he saw Reaper murder a person, he "just stood there,

frozen." Isaac also goes so far as to declare his desire to leave the Two Six, saying "it just doesn't feel right."

In dreaming of an idyllic future and revealing their fear of violence, reservations about killing people, and their struggle to adhere to the ideologies of gang hypermasculinity, the two men create a utopian futurity where expectations of gang member success or fear of failure do not encumber them. Instead, they jettison their gang member facades and laugh off their failures. Should gang members in the *barrio* hear their words, these confessions would likely warrant violence, but in their utopian futurity these revelations only elicit liberatory giggles because these men, at this moment in the diegesis, exist outside the Two Six's control. Failing in gangs and in the *barrio* has ironically precipitated a utopian futurity that, at least temporarily, decolonizes Angel and Isaac from the Two Six and *barrio*'s regulation of their lives.

Angel and Isaac do not just hope for a future free from a sexually-suppressive gang life that mandates violent, heterosexual hypermasculinity. Their utopian futurity also allows them, especially Isaac, to fantasize about and long for life chances that circumvent the racial and class components of the death drive that the U.S. nation-state imposes on them. As Isaac says to Angel's question about why Isaac always wants him to park in front of the same middle-class home,

> Cause we live in a fucking sewer, man, that's why. That neighborhood we live in? It's dirty, bro! . . . Fuck, man. This? This is a fucking neighborhood, bro. I mean, this is nice. I dream of owning a house like that, man, in a neighborhood like this. . . . It's quiet. I can hear fucking birds chirping. There are no birds in our neighborhood, just fucking pigeons, feeding off of everything else.

For Isaac, parking the car in front of this house enables him to obtain a utopian futurity where he can psychologically migrate away from the unhygienic, rowdy living conditions of Little Village (Figure 5.5). In this utopian futurity, he can dream of middle-class home ownership, a white-picket fence, and a freshly-trimmed lawn and enjoy a placid sublime not available to him in the *barrio*, which does not contain chirping birds but pigeons that he deems parasitical, "feathered rats." This utopian futurity that assists Angel and Isaac in temporarily escaping their socioeconomic status eventuates because their failure to succeed in the Two Six and in Little Village drives them, as Muñoz might say, to do "something else": seek out refuge in this white middle-class neighborhood (*Cruising Utopia* 174). By finding a safe haven through failure, the two men negate much of the overwhelming class, racial, and sexual hardships they incur in the Two Six and Little Village. In this way, gang membership, violence, crime, and hypermasculinity contribute to decolonization not through success but through failure.

Figure 5.5: The middle-class house and American flag that Isaac yearns for signal his desire for inclusion in the American body politic and the myth of the "American dream."

Although this utopian futurity does not restrict their sexuality and psychologically alleviates, if ephemerally, much of the systemic racism and economic inequality they encounter

in the *barrio*, Angel and Isaac's utopian futurity cannot *entirely* escape the subaltern racial status or gangs that haunt them. On one occasion when Angel and Isaac loaf in front of the middle-class house, a policeman who knows Angel from Little Village, accosts the two men, despite them not engaging in any criminal activity. The officer asks Angel, "You're not going to roll this house?" Once Angel denies that they intend to commit robbery and a call comes through the cop's radio, the officer drives off but not before uttering to Angel in mockery of Chicana/o Caló, "I'll catch you later, *ése*" (my emphasis). Angel's and Isaac's signifiers of criminality and working-class status (their beatdown car, race/ethnicity, and homeboy aesthetic) cast them as infiltrators in this white middle-class community where they create utopian futurity, attracting disciplinary action from this white location's repressive state apparatuses that enforce its own panopticon. The policeman's harassment of Angel also spotlights the space/race ideology that Mills explains. Because Angel and Isaac are gangbanging trespassers, the cop's behavior may strive to impede them from "racing" the neighborhood, which the film's opening implies that Angel and Isaac have previously done.

In their first sequence together, Angel and Isaac burst into this white space fleeing Latin Kings, not wanting to reveal that Angel conspires with a Two Six or their queer relationship. The Latin Kings invade the middle-class location and shoot at and fistfight with Angel and Isaac, entering the only instance of violent hypermasculinity in this neighborhood and disrupting its tranquility, as homeowners barbequing in their front yards observe in shock. In representing Angel and Isaac as importing crime and violence into this peaceful abode, *On the Downlow* re-inscribes both facets of the space/race portion of the racial contract. In this film, not only might Chicana/o *barrios* "space" white persons harmfully, but Chicanos also "race" white space in a damaging manner.

Regardless of the potential for reading a racial contract, the state's and gang's reaches do not nullify Angel and Isaac's utopian futurity. Rather, much like this utopia permits them to reject and disregard the *barrio*'s and gang's expectations of hypermasculinity and heterosexuality, their utopian futurity also enables Angel and Isaac to evade the gang's and state's extensions into their sanctuary. In this utopian futurity, they laugh about and ridicule the police officer's attempt to regulate them in the same way that they mock their hypermasculine facades. In doing so, they transform police harassment into a joke that generates jovial affects that contribute to the comforting atmosphere of their utopian futurity. Relatedly, because they retreat to a topography that the Latin Kings are unfamiliar with, Angel and Isaac eventually lose them in the winding roads of suburbia, their utopian futurity literally providing them with the avenues to escape gangs' clutches, as the two men never encounter gangs again in the middle-class neighborhood.

The Emergent Malinchista

On the Downlow's insinuation of a Malinche narrative when depicting a utopian futurity aligns the movie with traditional gangxploitation film poetics—despite its sexual and inclusivist departures—and potentially trades in alternative forms of homophobia. Although the film foregrounds and critiques how wealth accumulation operates racially in the U.S. nation-state, *On the Downlow* represents its queer Chicanos as indifferent to or unaware of how the white middle-class neighborhoods that they desire partially secure their financial and social privileges through benefitting from a systemic racism that suppresses people of color economically, such as through employment discrimination, exploitation of undocumented labor, and bussing cuts. Although these white capitalist, socioeconomic privileges constrain their own people, Angel and Isaac are

willing to renounce Chicanas/os and Chicana/o spaces for the manifold advantages of white society.

Indeed, in discussing his hope for a future beyond the working-class *barrio*, Isaac admits that his disaffection stems not just from his economic status but from his proximity to "all these fucking 4x4 Mexicans, crowding up the place, blaring their music and shit." Poverty, homophobia, and expectations of violent hypermasculinity are not the only culprits that cause Isaac to establish utopian futurity in a white space. In this white neighborhood, he can dream of a future where he may escape not only working-class Mexican people but their aesthetic and culture as well. His revulsion at them "blaring their music" lies not with volume, as he attends parties with Chicana/o hip-hop blasting, but with the style, implying that he finds music more common south of the U.S.-Mexico border, such as *norteño* or *corridos*, disgusting, especially since he invokes nationality in using the term Mexican, as opposed to Chicano, Mexican American, or Latino. Qualifying "Mexicans" with "4x4" also signals a demonization of a working-class cultural aesthetic, possibly entailing the attire of manual labor or a rundown work truck. As such, his words signify that he desires a future where he can not only reap the financial and ostensible sexual rewards of white society but also its ethnic exclusions of working-class Mexican culture.

Isaac lusts for this white world so fervidly that he suggests he prefers a white future more than Angel, hinting that he might forsake him, if necessary, to attain one. When Angel (who lives alone) offers Isaac the chance to abscond from his religious mother by inviting Isaac to move into his apartment, Angel stands before his balcony, opens his arms, and says to Isaac, "What do you think? . . . All this could be yours. . . . Ain't no use in staying in hell when you know where the door to heaven is." Despite having the opportunity to leave his likely homophobic mother

and mitigate the bigotry he faces in the private sphere, Isaac turns in aversion, not thinking much of the "this" that he could have because, as Isaac says, he would only have "a beautiful porch" that, at the end of the day, still overlooks "the hood." Angel's offer does not contain the white world that Isaac yearns for, and, for that reason, Isaac rebuffs his invitation, implying that living with his partner does not entice him, unless he can accomplish this goal in a white space. Isaac even indicates that he would abandon Angel to acquire the white world he romanticizes, if he must. After hearing how passionately Isaac discusses his aspirations for living in a white residential neighborhood like the one they visit together, Angel, concerned Isaac may leave him, asks, "[W]hat happens to me?" In response, Isaac says, "I don't know. What happens to you?" Although Isaac immediately pacifies Angel by telling him, "You know you're my boy," Isaac's refusal to live with Angel in the *barrio* renders his re-assurances dubious. Furthermore, his distaste for "4x4 Mexicans" and his romanticization of whiteness leave the viewer pondering if Angel's race and ethnicity factor into Isaac's threat to forsake him.

Although Isaac's troublesome conversations with Angel corroborate an affinity for white society—even over Chicanos who do not display bigotry or violence towards him and, instead, love him—Isaac and Angel's desire for a future removed from the *barrio* and the Two Six are not without reason. While many criminalize those who adopt Malinche politics, rejecting the *barrio* when the *barrio* treats persons the way the people of Little Village behave towards Angel and Isaac does not warrant condemnation. As Anzaldúa says in her disavowal of the belief that Malinche behavior indicates betrayal, "Not me sold out my people but they me" (44). In a *barrio* and gang so antagonistic to queerness that Angel and Isaac fear for their safety and feel compelled to disseminate homophobia to protect themselves, the two gang members, in many ways, have no choice but to cultivate a relationship with, and inhabit the spaces of, whiteness, for

these are the only places where the movie conveys they may physically and psychologically survive.

Additionally, Angel and Isaac may read as "social Malinches," both in the contexts of the film's narrative and, because of the movie's critiques of gang and *barrio* homophobia, in the queer activism *On the Downlow* engages in. In the film, Angel and Isaac are, to use Estrada's words, "path-opener[s]" who reproduce the liberating "ideas, activism, and relationships" of "social Malinches" (51). Failing in the Two Six and *barrio* induces the men to forge new paths to a location where they may pursue emancipating ideas about gender and sexuality that make queer relationships acceptable for men. *On the Downlow*, much like *Homeboy*, also participates in decolonial, "social Malinche" work in critiquing and combatting "the injustices that our [queer] people suffer" (Estrada 51). As a result, viewers might consider Angel and Isaac's utopian futurity not as disloyal but as acts of decolonial agency.

But because decolonial Malinche politics never escape a colonial implication for other colonized persons, even as these colonized people simultaneously recreate and amplify colonial relations for women and queers, *On the Downlow*'s incorporation of a Malinche narrative also risks encouraging alternative strands of homophobia—even while working to dismantle sexual intolerance—because of the manifold significations to and possible interpretations of its narrative. In doing so, the film potentially propagates cultures of homophobia that compel queer men to profit, both through success and/or failure, from gang membership, violence, crime, and hypermasculinity as a strategy for obtaining decolonization. *On the Downlow*'s Malinche tropes also construct a false dichotomy that situates whiteness as emancipating and devoid of sexual bigotry and communities of color as engulfed in discrimination towards queer men, potentially justifying the racial contract and the need for white saviorism.

Notwithstanding the deleterious ramifications of its narrative, *On the Downlow* does attempt to denounce sexual bigotry to, ideally, beseech viewers to confront sexual intolerance, and the film's most powerful critique appears in the evanescence of Angel and Isaac's utopian futurity and their fall to the death drive. As Muñoz says, utopian futurity "has been prone to disappointment" and "is always destined to fail" (*Cruising Utopia* 9, 173). The potential for the continuation of Angel and Isaac's utopian futurity disintegrates in the film's climax where Reaper murders Angel. Again, because Reaper kills Angel immediately before Angel can finish openly proclaiming his love for Isaac ("You can't do this, man, please! Isaac, I love y—"), the film intimates that Reaper pulls the trigger not only because of Angel's history with the Latin Kings, but also, and likely more so, because Angel will declare his and Isaac's queer sexual orientations, a violation of the Two Six's regulations of sexuality and masculinity that the gang cannot openly tolerate and that warrant death if discovered. As such, Angel and Isaac—after Isaac commits suicide since he cannot live without his queer love object—succumb to a death drive that operates on racial and class lines but that claims their lives for sexual reasons.

In depicting these characters' deaths in this manner, *On the Downlow* accentuates a fatal trauma of *barrio* and gang homophobia and urges viewers to challenge and dismantle sexual intolerance towards queer men. Although this exhortation requires the destruction of utopian futurity, this breakdown does not render utopian futurity worthless for Angel and Isaac. Muñoz argues that despite eventual dissipation, utopian futurity still provides "a certain mode of virtuosity that helps the spectator exit from the stale and static lifeworld" and its "alienation, exploitation, and drudgery" (*Cruising Utopia* 173). Even if temporarily curative, failing in the Two Six and Little Village precipitates Angel and Isaac's "exit" from the economic, racial, and sexual constrictions on their lives, revealing the potential methods queer men may rely on to

escape psychologically from oppressive *barrios* and gangs and how decolonization need not always entail conventional notions of success.

Moreover, the remainder of *On the Downlow*'s final scene suggests, despite Edelman's insistence on no queer future and Angel's and Isaac's deaths, *the* and *a* future for queer men in male-dominated, heterosexual gangs. After Isaac commits suicide, the two remaining Two Six in the basement look over Isaac's, Angel's, and Reaper's dead bodies before locking eyes and holding each other's hands, insinuating another queer relationship amongst men in gangs. The film immediately ends on this shot, intimating not only *the* future that contains queer men in the Two Six but also their futurity, a realm of unknown possibilities that may hold *a* future where Angel's and Isaac's martyred bodies have reshaped for the better how male-dominated, heterosexual gangs conceive of their queer members.

Confronting the "Here and Now" of Gang Life

The first four chapters of this project have unraveled how decolonization in gangs often privileges subaltern but violent, heterosexual masculinities that rely upon the colonization of women and queers. But this project has also considered how women and queer gang members appropriate, refashion, and succeed at gang violence, crime, culture, and hypermasculinity to initiate decolonization against a nexus of colonial forces that converge at race, gender, class, and sexuality. Nevertheless, presuming that male-dominated, heterosexual, and hypermasculine gangs are always welcoming and decolonial for their "non-normative" gang members (like the daughter-speaker of *My Father Was a Toltec*) or that women and queer men always have the capacity to achieve subcultural citizenship and decolonization in these gangs through strategies like racialized female masculinity and disidentification (as with Lucía and the men of *Homeboy*) is overly romantic and idealistic. Studies of gang girls and queer men finding decolonization

through male-dominated, heterosexual gangs must recognize that these subcultures may colonize their female and queer members as much as they may offer decolonial rewards.

On the Downlow discloses the manifold ways that the subaltern masculinities and gangs that *Decolonial Delinquency* theorizes generate decolonization for multiply marginalized subjects. In its representations of queer gang members, *On the Downlow* features an antinomy in suggesting that queer men who fail in heterosexual, male-dominated gangs that idealize violent hypermasculinity and homophobia might achieve decolonization through this failure. Failing at the Two Six's and Little Village's expectations of gender and sexuality for men leads Angel and Isaac to construct utopian futurities that provide a range of psychological and material—even if temporary—liberations. While *On the Downlow* focuses on queer men, the revelation that gangs may facilitate decolonization not only through success but also through failure applies as much to gang girls as to queer men. While *la Heredera* and Lucía may succeed in gangs, the potential for women to accomplish decolonization through failure in gangs and the *barrio* also remains.

The way that *On the Downlow* envisions decolonial failure, however, relies on a gangxploitation Malinche poetic that potentially preserves and informs a *milieu* of antagonism towards queers, possibly contributing to one of the many impetuses that drive queer men to seek out gang violence, crime, and hypermasculinity as a way of achieving (either through success or failure) decolonization against racial, class, and sexual oppression. And, as Chapters 3 and 4 show, even if both women and queers appropriate and transform the violence, crime, and masculinity of male-dominated, heterosexual gangs to initiate decolonial projects, this decolonization may also target other vulnerable, exploited, and tyrannized people, like undocumented women of color.

But rather than pathologize queer and heterosexual men and women in gangs for their decolonial projects that sometimes harm and exacerbate trauma for innocent and already aggrieved people, *Decolonial Delinquency* has attempted to reveal the intersectional catalyst for gang violence, crime, and toxic subaltern masculinities in working-class communities of color. Many scholars across the humanities and social sciences have done excellent work in theorizing the relations among the state, race, and class to uncover the reasons for gang violence in the *barrio*. Still, if academics are ever to adequately help confront gang violence, crime, and toxic masculinity, then our scholarship must also engage how gender and sexuality intersect with race and class in social death to compel gang members to pursue a delinquency that, while not always anticolonial, may for some accord decolonization.

NOTES

[1] By queering the gang member, "Aquellos Vatos" also refashions a subgenre of Chicana/o poetry: the pachuco elegy. Pachuco elegies lionize and memorialize the always heterosexual, male pachuco as a revolutionary figure. Popular examples include José Montoya's "El Louie," Raúl Salinas's "Homenaje al Pachuco," J. L. Navarro's "To a Dead Lowrider," and Villanueva's "Pachuco Remembered." For more on the pachuco elegy, see Bruce-Novoa, Grajeda, and Landeira.

[2] Throughout this project, I invoke the term citizenship and citizen-subject when referring to gang members' participation in their gangs. When using these terms in this way, I refer to the critical race theory concept of "equal citizenship," the principle that "every individual is presumptively entitled to be treated by the organized society as a respected, responsible, and participating member" (Lawrence III 59).

[3] For further histories of Caló, see Catherine S. Ramírez and George R. Alvarez.

[4] "The one who used to bullshit a lot, who tried to get favors through flattery."

[5] "a guy who used to have sex with white women."

[6] For Beauvoir's feminist understanding of the sex/gender binary, see her book *The Second Sex.*

[7] Because of the homophobia and misogyny in Fanon's work—particularly in *Black Skin, White Masks*—many in queer and feminist studies have deemed Fanonian methodologies inappropriate and ineffective for theorizing issues of gender and sexuality. While I concur with several of the queer feminist critiques of Fanon, I depart from scholars who use his bigoted gender and sexual politics as reasoning to reject his contributions to the theorization of race and decolonization. I find that doing so too often acts as an excuse for not accounting for race, class, and white supremacy in queer and feminist studies and, as Keguro Macharia notes, functions as "a practice of racial policing that keeps the status of 'theorist of sexuality' tethered to whiteness" (33). Rather, in placing Fanon in conversation with queer feminist of color studies, I see my project as queering the postcolonial and following Fred Moten's suggestion that "Fanon's texts continually demand that we read them—again or, deeper still, not or against again, but for the first time" (182).

[8] Gregorio Cortez was a Mexican American maize farmer in Texas during the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. On June 12, 1901, sheriff W.T. "Brack" Morris visited Gregorio and his brother Ronaldo's farm, accusing them of stealing a *caballo* (stallion). Gregorio responded that he recently acquired a *yegua* (mare), which Morris did not comprehend and ultimately led to a heated argument that culminated with Morris shooting Ronaldo. Gregorio shot and killed Morris in retribution and later fled the pursuit of the Texas Rangers on foot and on horseback, travelling over 400 miles in ten days in one of the longest manhunts in U.S. history. The Texas Rangers eventually captured Gregorio, whom at trial a jury convicted of second-degree murder, the judge sentencing him to life in prison. In 1913, Governor Oscar Colquitt pardoned him, though, shortly after his release, Gregorio was poisoned to death at dinner. Throughout the

Southwest, many Mexican Americans and Chicanas/os consider Cortez a folk hero, as his legacy prospers throughout a range of cultural forms, most famously in the song "El Corrido de Gregorio Cortez," Americo Parédes's novel *With His Pistol in His Hand*, and Robert Young's film *The Ballad of Gregorio Cortez*.

[9] For an autobiographical discussion of how community leaders recruited Los Angeles gangs into the Chicano Movement to help extend and mobilize a decolonial consciousness, see Luis J. Rodriguez.

[10] Many gangs throughout Central America, such as Marasalvatrucha-13 and Marasalvatrucha-18, notoriously target women who are single, mothers, and business owners through financial extortion payments called *Impuestos de Guerra* (War Tariffs). When these women cannot make payment, the Maras often threaten or enact sexual and reproductive violence, raping them and kidnapping their daughters to keep as concubines who will perform domestic and sexual labor for the gang. Gang violence against women remains one of the primary reasons Central American women migrate to the United States to seek asylum. For more on this subject, see Saldaña-Portillo, Bruneau et al., and Baca.

[11] For a collection of women of color feminism's response to the heteropatriarchy of the civil rights social movements, see Anzaldúa and Moraga's *This Bridge Called My Back* and Chabram-Dernersesian, Blackwell, and Richard T. Rodríguez's *Next of Kin*.

[12] For an extensive history of the zoot suit counterculture and the Zoot Suit Riots, see Shane White and Graham White, Alvarez, Ramírez, and Acuña.

[13] Luis Valdez's 1978 play *Zoot Suit* persists as the apotheosis of Chicana/o cultural production lionizing el Pachuco. In 1979, *Zoot Suit* became the first Chicana/o play to perform at the Broadway Theater. Two years later, Valdez directed a film version of *Zoot Suit*, starring Edward James Olmos as the character el Pachuco.

[14] For more on Malinalli Tenepal or Malinche, see Chapter 5.

[15] For more on the *activo*/*pasivo* ideology and its role in Mexican and Chicana/o cultural systems, see Almaguer.

[16] For a further analysis of homosocialism/eroticism between Santana and J.D., see Newman.

[17] In 2001, Donis debuted his *War* series at the Watts Towers Art Center in Southern California. Because of the display of male police officers in lude and homoerotic positions with gang members, the Watts Community Action Council feared potential protests that would turn violent. Consequently, the Watts Towers Art Center removed Donis's exhibition.

[18] Given the surplus of 1960s and 1970s radical prison literature, many will wonder why prison writers or prison gangs do not receive more attention in this project. Although social revolutionaries like George Jackson, Angela Davis, Eldridge Cleaver, and Jack Henry Abbott are

eminent for their decolonial thought and actions, none of them were gang members when theorizing prison radicalization. Prison gangs, prison coloniality, and the gender/sexual cultural codes of prison—while at times overlapping with—also substantially differ from gangs and gang violence in the *barrio* and, thus, warrant a separate book, rather than a couple of chapters. Though not always (if at all) focusing on prison gangs, for superb scholarship on decolonial prison literature, see Franklin, Olguín, Hames-García, and Dylan Rodríguez.

[19] The limited textual representations of queer men in gangs and their socialities in currently available cultural production lead this chapter to operate through a traditional gender binary and only focus on queer women. Nonetheless, I see my analyses as applicable to and having consequences for queer men in gangs and those in the social sciences studying queer male gang members.

[20] Although *My Father Was a Toltec* has garnered little scholarly consideration, some academics whom I do not draw from in this chapter have studied the book, including Isabel Castelao and Yvonne Yarbro-Bejarano, though both focus on the later poems of *My Father Was a Toltec* and do not address the gang membership that Castillo's book features. Likewise, though Rafael Pérez-Torres's *Movements in Chicano Poetry* attends to one of the collection's gang poems ("The Toltec"), his interpretation centers on cultural memory and the mythologization of the pachuco/gang member in Chicana/o poetry, the same subgenre that Villanueva's "Aquellos Vatos" queers.

[21] The possibility of subaltern women performing and queering subaltern masculinities implicates my argument. I adhere to Jack Halberstam's conception of masculinity as not sutured to a single gender but as an independent cultural phenomenon that any gender may perform. For this reason, I still understand the subaltern masculinities I am discussing, whether performed by subaltern men or women, as potentially entailing the "possession" of women as a method for establishing resistance to a legacy of colonialism. I further explore this topic of subaltern female masculinity later in this chapter in analyzing the Toltec's daughter's transition to *la Heredera*, as well as in much further detail in Chapter 3.

[22] As much as sexual relations with white women may function as a form of decolonization, these activities may also suggest internalized racism and reinforce psychological colonization, though I read the Toltec's philandering with white women as decolonial because of his membership in a gang named after an indigenous nation and his history of warring with whites. For an analysis of the idealization of white beauty and its ramifications for subaltern inferiority complexes, see Fanon's "The Man of Color and The White Woman" in *Black Skin, White Masks*. Moreover, as a consequence of my interpretation of the poem, my theorization may read as "sympathizing" with, "defending," or "excusing" subaltern men who understand rape against both white women and women of color as acts of decolonization, such as Eldridge Cleaver argues in *Soul on Ice*. I do not condone and do condemn these actions. Rather, in writing this argument, I aim to identify the role of a legacy of conquest in subaltern men's violent assaults against women. I also contend that while colonial projects normatively entail raping women as a form of psychological and physical conquest, I do not view subaltern masculinities that provide psychological decolonization as necessitating rape or other forms of sexual violence, though I

understand philandering as containing psychological decolonial consequences for subaltern persons because of the colonial history of realizing conquest through women's bodies.

[23] The poem's title also invokes the Greek mythological figure Elektra (King Agamemnon and Queen Clytemnestra's daughter and princess of Argos) and the Electra complex. Psychoanalyst Carl Jung theorized the Electra complex as the opposite of the Oedipus complex, suggesting that a girl psychosexually competes with her mother for her father. Although the Electra complex does not figure into my analysis, see Zimmerman for a discussion of a potential Electra complex in *My Father Was a Toltec*.

[24] For a discussion of the multiplicity of interpretations and meanings of *machismo* (both positive and negative), see Chapter 3.

[25] In Chapter 3, I provide a more nuanced and comprehensive analysis of the history of domestic violence against working-class women of color and the ways that the U.S. nation-state perceives their bodies as violable. There, I also analyze in further detail how gangs provide working-class women of color an avenue for combatting domestic violence, as well as violence against women of color's part in the formation of racialized female masculinities.

[26] "but not in gangs dominated by women because their participation is considered marginal or passive. . . . Moreover, there was the derogatory characterization of female gang members as sexual objects. . . . This information was mainly propagated by the media that in a sensationalist way exalted the personal history of the female gang member as a 'bad girl'."

[27] For another review critiquing the stereotypes present in *Locas*, see Fremon.

[28] For a discussion of how television shows like *Lockup*, *Cops*, and *60 Days In* constitute pornography for white viewers, see Riofrio. Additionally, see Cruz for a striking analysis of how race play in BDSM culture and pornography fetishes Black sexuality and implicates colonial and slave trade histories.

[29] T. Jackie Cuevas's recent *Post-Borderlandia* has also notably responded to the elision of race and class in previous analyses of female masculinity. While Halberstam and Del Lagrace Volcano have argued a butch-femme identity as disappearing in the 1970s before later re-emerging in the 1990s as a voguish movement, Cuevas reveals how working-class Chicanas "did not necessarily experience the same disappearance or backlash as it did among white lesbians in urban centers" (52). On the other hand, "butchness for some Chicana lesbians is not about riding a stylistic, aesthetic, or political trend" and, consequently, persevered throughout the twentieth century because of how butchness figures as a pedagogical orientation to gender identity and spatial belonging in many working-class communities of color (Cuevas 55).

[30] For further accounts that elaborate on how *machismo* contains positive and not just negative qualities, see Alcalde, Arciniega, and Mirandé's *Hombres y Machos*.

[31] In another reading of *Locas*, Pérez also interprets the female Lobos as demonstrating queer behavior that destabilizes traditional heteropatriarchal logics of gangs. Differing from Galván's

understanding of queerness, Pérez argues that "men and women who are subjected to violence and rape develop queer identities by being forced to engage in nonheteronormative behavior" (147). Pérez also claims that "because the perpetrators of rape also engage in a nonheteronormative act, their identities are also queer" (147). With this theory of queerness in mind, Pérez reads instances of Lucía jumping new members into the Fire Girls as symbolic rapes that satisfy his understanding of both rape victim and rapist embodying queer identities. As Pérez says in his analysis of Lucía and another Fire Girl jumping in a new member named Chique, "This physically charged scene is symbolically the rape of Chique by the two young women. The image of her 'ass' moving up and being forced down while Lucía's 'strong feelings' penetrate her produces an image of a rape scene that includes a form of sodomy" (149).

[32] Notable Black women-authored contemporary street novels include Teri Woods's *True to the Game*, Sister Souljah's *The Coldest Winter Ever*, Shannon Holmes's *B-More Carfeul*, Wahida Clark's *Thugs and the Women Who Love Them*, Nikki Turner's *A Hustler's Wife*, and Vickie Stringer's *Dirty Red*.

[33] Violence against women permeates *Locas* and plays a paramount role in the novel. I allocate more detailed attention to this topic in the later sections of this chapter titled, **"**White Lives Matter, Brown Women's Don't" and "To Slaughter the Sheep, or the Trauma of My Perennial Violability."

[34] For a discussion of how Chicanos conceived of Chicanas within the Chicano Movement in reproductive, nuclear, and maternal terms, see Blackwell and Richard T. Rodríguez's *Next of Kin*.

[35] Racialized female masculinity does not always have to manifest as toxic. In the same way that men can perform *machismo* positively as a response to a subaltern status in the U.S. nation-state, so, too, can women perform racialized female masculinity in a resistant, yet non-toxic, manner that responds to and challenges the hegemony of the United States and heteropatriarchy in their communities. But because *Locas* only features toxic racialized female masculinities and reveals the connection between toxicity and systemic racism and heteropatriarchy, toxic racialized female masculinities are my primary objects of analysis.

[36] For another analysis that traces female masculinity in *Locas* and how Lobos women use the performance to assert citizenship, see Bigalondo's "Chicano Gangs/Chicana Girls" and "Wolves, Sheep, and *Vatos Locos*."

[37] While male femininity also contains agency and potential in various decolonial projects or subcultures, the lack of cultural texts depicting male femininity in hypermasculine, heterosexual, and male-dominated gangs—at least, outside of a rape paradigm—makes analyzing the decolonial potential and efficacy of male femininity in these contexts exceedingly difficult. (Readers interested in how popular culture's refusal to sufficiently recognize male femininity in gangs, "hoods," and *barrios*—even as recent films like *Moonlight* have queered these spaces and subcultures—propagates misogyny and "Negro faggotry" should see Stallings.) I believe the

absence of cultural products representing male femininity in gangs, in part, arises from the distinct significations that femininity connotes when men, rather than women, perform femininity in hypermasculine, heterosexual, and male-dominated subcultures. In gangs populated by heterosexual, male, and often homophobic members, male femininity threatens and panics men's heterosexuality and gender identity in a way that female femininity does not. I tease out this dynamic between connotations of queer sexuality and femininity in men and their effects on homophobic, heterosexual, and hypermasculine gang members in Chapter 4. Female femininity, on the other hand, affords an opportunity to prove and establish a heterosexual male gender identity in ways that female masculinity and male femininity do not, and, again, I acknowledge the possibility of reading queerness in the Lobos gang and between Lucía and her heterosexual male partners. For readers interested in the queer ramifications of female masculinity in the male-dominated, heterosexual gang in *Locas*, see Galván.

[38] For an analysis of how gentrification has affected the citizens of Echo Park and how the gang events in *Locas* reflect this gentrification, see López-González.

[39] For further information about how the state systemically excludes undocumented women and their children access to healthcare, as well as how undocumented persons internalize that they are unworthy of medical care, see Farfán-Santos.

[40] In 1994, California voted to pass Proposition 187, which attempted to revoke health care and education services to undocumented persons. Thus, not only does the threat of deportation halt undocumented immigrants from attaining adequate health care, but many states have also tried to

install laws to deny undocumented persons medical aid, with Proposition 187 as the most famous example.

[41] Because the streets are a site of sexual violence and harassment for women, many have cited this peril to construct misogynist arguments that rationalize the need to relegate women to the private sphere. As Miranda says, "The public/private-sphere split is the concept of the home as a feminine space where patriarchy offers safety" (80). Although some co-opt the sexual assault of women in the streets to support heteropatriarchal ideologies that argue for relegating women to the private sphere, both *My Father Was a Toltec* and *Locas* disclose how the private sphere and heteropatriarchal "protection" are equally dangerous and oppressive for women, leading to domestic violence, the regulation of women's sexuality, and domestic labor—which all manifest inside and outside the home. As a result, while I recognize that the streets are dangerous for women, this danger should not corroborate sexist arguments for "protecting" women in the private sphere because heteropatriarchy operates inside and outside the home and exerts its violence against women in both spaces.

[42] As much as racialized female masculinities and girl gangs can defend against working-class women of color's violability and vulnerability, they can also invite violence against women. Because Lucía's Fire Girls participate in gang fights and mark themselves as gang members, they open themselves up to other forms of violence. In this way, racialized female masculinities and girl gangs are not entirely decolonial. Nonetheless, the performance and girl gang do not encompass the "passive" and "powerless" limits and ideologies of "sheep." While Lucía's girl gang invites different types of violence against her, racialized female masculinity and the Fire

Girls provide the women of *Locas* a method for fighting back and defending against violence in a way not available to the feminine, non-girl gang women in the novel who can only persevere amidst, rather than resist, domestic violence.

[43] "transition to the life of violence that she lives in the *barrio* is interrelated to the nuclear family . . . The protagonists grew up in emotional and economically unstable families, where domestic violence coupled with the inability to obtain permanent employment were the causes of their deterioration of social values."

[44] "emotional and social support among neighborhood friends."

[45] Although this project studies the cultural representations of gay men in heterosexual gangs, the lack of filmic or literary texts portraying gay gangs preempts *Decolonial Delinquency* from attending to gay men in gay gangs. For more on this subject, I direct readers to Panfil.

[46] Pedro Zamora was an openly gay Cuban American with AIDS who appeared on MTV's reality television show *The Real World* in 1994. During his time on this show, Zamora used the televisual platform to bring attention to HIV/AIDS and LGBTQ discrimination.

[47] For a record of these screenings, see "Q-Sides," Flynn, Danny Martinez, and "Screening of *Homeboy*."

[48] See Isaac, Mournian, Raymundo, and Sitz.

[49] "I believe the documentary not only can help . . . gay men, but also heterosexuals, so that they can understand them [gay men in gangs]" (Acevedo).

[50] Kody Scott, also known as Sanyika Shakur and "Monster," is a former member of a Los Angeles Crip gang who was previously incarcerated at San Quentin State Prison and Pelican Bay State Prison and currently resides in the California Institution for Men in Chino, California. In 1993, Scott published an autobiography detailing his experiences as a gang member, *Monster: The Autobiography of an LA Gang Member*.

[51] Many will ponder how other post-2000 films that queer the homeboy or gang member figure in this chapter and relate to my exegesis of *On the Downlow*, such as *Quinceañera*, *La Mission*, and *Moonlight*. All these films queer the homeboy aesthetic and feature protagonists who, at least at one point, fail in the *barrio* or heteropatriarchal family—though, out of all the queer men in these films, Chiron of *Moonlight* perhaps approximates success the best. Still, only *Quinceañera* incorporates a queer protagonist who gangbangs: Carlos, a member of one of the local Echo Park gangs of Los Angeles. But because this film never explores Carlos's history, presence, and success or failure in his gang (or even shows him with other gang members or participating in gang activity), *Quinceañera* does not figure into this project, as this work's two unifying and principal agendas center on revealing how women and queers attain decolonization through male-dominated, heterosexual gangs and how gender and sexuality intersect with race and class in the systemic impetus to gang violence in working-class communities of color.

[52] Although Muñoz at times uses the terms "future" and "futurity" interchangeably, readers should not mistake them as always synonymous. In this chapter's analysis of *On the Downlow*, future accentuates fixity, a time not yet present but sure to occur and that may not meet romanticized expectations of life beyond the present. Futurity accents potentiality, the array of future possibilities that have yet to, and may not, arrive. Moreover, as this chapter later explains, utopian futurity refers to the present, *affective* moments of idealizations, dreams, and visions of an idyllic future that one hopes will transpire.

[53] Several historians have debated the mother's reasons for casting her daughter into slavery. A competing account argues that the mother re-married after her noble husband's death and sold Malinalli into slavery to appease her new husband. For more information on this narrative, see Alarcón's "Chicana's Feminist Literature."

[54] The following inform my understanding and history of Malinche: Norma Alarcón's "Chicana's Feminist Literature" and "Traddutora, Traditora"; Ramírez; Bernal Díaz del Castillo; Alcalá; Paz; Moraga; and Anzaldúa.

[55] Gang films portraying sex between men, let alone queer men, rarely venture out of a prison setting and into the *barrio*. In film, television, and literature about prison gangs, a rape paradigm dominates the representation of sexual relations between men, such as in *Blood In, Blood Out* (1993); *The Shawshank Redemption* (1994); *American History X* (1998); *Harold & Kumar Escape from Guantanamo Bay* (2008); *Oz* (1997-2003); Miguel Piñero's *Short Eyes* and its 1977 motion picture adaptation; Piri Thomas's *7 Long Times*; and Donald Goines's *White Man's*

Justice, Black Man's Grief. In these cultural products, what Tomás Almaguer defines as the *activo*/*pasivo* (penetrator/penetrated) ideology overdetermines sex between men to displace queerness, rendering *activo* characters heterosexual, masculine, and hegemonic and *pasivos* queer, feminine, and subaltern.

[56] While the possibility of *On the Downlow* reifying homophobic ideologies that deem queer men as always feminine manifests through its Malinche poetics, the movie also potentially challenges this presumption by depicting queer men as hypermasculine gang members, such as I discuss in Chapter 4 in my analysis of *Homeboy*.

[57] The Latin Kings and Two Six are real Chicago gangs that arose in the early 1970s and have had conflict with each other since their emergence. Although *On the Downlow* does not explicitly represent Puerto Rican culture and codes Angel as Chicano, the Latin Kings are primarily a Puerto Rican gang and the Two Six a Chicana/o gang.

[58] For many racists, the logic of racing/spacing often pervades prison gang films that feature rape or other delinquent behavior. For instance, proponents of the racial contract might understand whites who rape in prison a result of a primarily Black/Brown prison "spacing" whites.

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