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Decolonial resistance in latinx writings from Peru to the United States: a portfolio

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DECOLONIAL RESISTANCE IN LATINX WRITINGS FROM PERU TO THE UNITED STATES: A PORTFOLIO

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ABSTRACT

This collection begins with the premise that colonial relationships manifest in ways beyond exploitation of one nation by another. It relies on the decolonial theory of Walter D. Mignolo in its assumption that imbalances of power in the realms of race, gender, sexuality, and class are fundamentally colonial. With this more expansive understanding of coloniality in mind, I examine resistance to colonial exploitation in a range of texts from across the Americas. The first essay in this collection explores the role of the guinea pig in Andean food culture, arguing that the continued consumption of guinea pig represents a form of decolonial resistance. The second paper examines the allegory of US imperialism within María Amparo Ruiz de Burton's novel, *Who Would Have Thought It?*. The third essay scrutinizes solidarity-building in Alfonso Cuarón's 2019 film *Roma*. Ultimately this collection argues that an expanded definition of decolonial work is necessary to challenge the expansiveness of colonial thinking.

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INTRODUCTION

A borderland is a vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary. It is in a constant state of transition. The prohibited and forbidden are its inhabitants. Los atravesados *live here: the squint-eyed, the perverse, the queer, the troublesome, the mongrel, the mulato, the half-breed, the half dead; in short, those who cross over, pass over, or go through the confines of the "normal."*
~Gloria Anzaldúa

Gloria Anzaldúa paints her homeland of south Texas in monstrous terms in her opening essay from *Borderlands/La Frontera*. Though *Borderlands* has become something of an urtext for discussions of Chicanx identity in the years since its publication, her descriptions of the ills of a region where "the Third World grates against the first and bleeds" (25) remain fresh and shocking. She delves into the mythic history of three cultures: indigenous, Anglo, and Mexican, to give voice to the people who live on the "thin edge of barbwire" (35) that is the U.S.-Mexico border. Ultimately, she reveals that the hideous aspects of this contact zone create the potential to reimagine gender, sexuality, and history in radically new and liberating terms.

Anzaldúa is understandably critical in her examination of her homeland, telling a history of the southwestern United States that highlights the savagery of the US imperialist mission. She does not limit her critiques to the Anglo side of the border, however. As a lesbian woman, Anzaldúa recognizes the violence that Mexican culture enacts on women and the limits it places on sexuality: "Though I'll defend my race and culture when they are attacked by non-*mexicanos*, *conozco el malestar de mi cultura*. I abhor some of my culture's ways, how it cripples its women, *como burras*, our strengths used against us, lowly *burras* bearing humility with dignity"

(43). Turning to indigenous culture, she recounts a history of Aztec religion in which a balance between the genders had already given way to a patriarchal order in the pre-Colombian era (27). None of the cultures under her lens are without fault.

These critiques make Anzaldúa's collection an ideal place to begin an examination of decolonial resistance in the Americas. She exposes the myriad ways that colonialism is enacted, beginning with the United States' efforts to interfere in the affairs of its neighbors, but expanding to include the psychological colonization of those who deviate from patriarchal expectations. Within each of the colonial acts she recounts, she also finds examples of rebellion: professors supporting their queer students (42); a goddess reinventing herself in Catholic garb to find new life (51); the act of coming out, since "for the lesbian of color, the ultimate rebellion she can make against her native culture is through her sexual behavior" (41). For every atrocity committed in Anzaldúa's borderland, there is an act of resistance, an effort by the monstrous denizens to assert their own power, and perhaps carve out a little space for themselves to inhabit.

The series of essays that follows charts decolonial resistance through a range of texts from across the Western Hemisphere. While the goal of that resistance is not always inclusion, as it is for Anzaldúa, the essays explore the ways that colonization has been subverted, rebelled against, delinked from, throughout the region that the English-speaking world calls "the Americas" (though which Spanish-speakers might more simply refer to as "America"). Anzaldúa provides an important entry point into my analysis because she is so explicit; her collection examines the zone of contact between colonizer and colonized, boring into the obvious and the more veiled consequences of that relationship. The dynamics that she explores are often subtler in the works to come, but *Borderlands* provides a blueprint of how to read them. Perhaps more importantly, *Borderlands* displays one of the most imaginative visions of decoloniality, not

limited by the ongoing struggle between oppressor and oppressed, but able to kick free into uncharted territory.

In a preface to *Borderlands* written in 2007, Anzaldúa's editor, Joan Pinkvoss, comments on her inventiveness. Pinkvoss notes the non-dialectical nature of Anzaldúa's work, even though the premise of the collection would seemingly encourage just such a confrontation between two cultures:

> Raised on dialectic materialism, I was left speechless by Gloria's destruction of that way of understanding. Gloria was *not* saying: well here are these two opposites and out of this contradiction comes a new, third way. No, *no*...she was saying that these opposites had to be kicked out from under—they were not a foundation but only got in the way of creating what she was after. There was no linear combination of two contradictions to create a third; rather, Gloria saw that between the contradictions was a place of untethered possibility. (15)

Anzaldúa observed that, rather than create a singular, third culture, the borderlands produced a space of ambiguity where unforeseen possibilities could flourish. Though she does at times claim that, "the convergence has created a shock culture, a border culture, a third country, a closed country" (33) between the United States and Mexico, the uniqueness of that border space leads to creative artistic production.

Part of that creativity stems from the queerness of the border, certainly in a sexual sense, but also because of the border's connection to mysticism and otherworldliness. In one essay, Anzaldúa recounts a warning that her mother offered: "Don't go to the outhouse at night, Prieta...a snake will crawl into your *nalgas*, make you pregnant" (47). The notes on the chapter translate "*nalgas*" as both "vagina" and "buttocks" (115), signaling an ambivalence about who

can be impregnated. Anzaldúa's border is one of transformation. In one poem, a young speaker shifts into the snake that had bitten her: "In the morning I saw through snake eyes, felt snake blood course through my body. The serpent, *mi tono*, my animal counterpart. I was immune to its venom" (48). The speaker takes on the power of her attacker, resisting its control through her transformative ability.

A passage titled "Half and Half" perhaps best expresses the radical openness that Anzaldúa discovers by resisting the dialectic. Rather than two forces struggling against one another, she allows both to exist simultaneously:

> There was a *muchacha* who lived near my house. *La gente del pueblo* talked about her being *una de las otras*, "of the Others." They said that for six months she was a woman who had a vagina that bled once a month, and that for the other six months she was a man, had a penis, and she peed standing up. They called her half and half, *mita' y mita'*, neither one nor the other but a strange doubling, a deviation of nature that horrified, a work of nature inverted. But there is a magic aspect in abnormality and so-called deformity. Maimed, mad, and sexually different people were believed to possess supernatural powers by primal cultures' magico-religious thinking. For them, abnormality was the price a person had to pay for his or her inborn extraordinary gift. (41)

As this legend reveals, a dual existence is more than a struggle between two halves. It carries with it both the curse of exclusion as well as supernatural gifts. It is in every sense, extraordinary. The U.S.-Mexico border can be read in a similar light. It is more than the sum of the nations it divides, but a new region of both unrestrained potential and supreme danger.

Despite the risks of growing up in such a place, Anzaldúa recognizes the beauty of her homeland. The ambivalence of the border mirrors her own experiences as a person split between languages, cultures, and genders. In her final essay, titled "*La conciencia de la mestiza*/ Towards a New Consciousness," she most clearly expresses the problems with dialectical thinking, demonstrating her appreciation of the opportunities available in the borderland:

> It is not enough to stand on the opposite river bank, shouting questions, challenging patriarchal, white conventions. A counterstance locks one into a duel of oppressor and oppressed; locked in mortal combat, like the cop and the criminal, both are reduced to a common denominator of violence. The counterstance refutes the dominant culture's views and beliefs, and for this, it is proudly defiant. All reaction is limited by, and dependent on, what it is reacting against. (100)

For Anzaldúa, the ultimate problem with "despot duality" (41) is that it never produces anything new. The challengers are forever locked in each other's grasp. This helps to explain failed efforts to decolonize the Americas through rebellion, since this always requires a colonizer to be rebelled against. Instead, Anzaldúa offers a genuinely liberating option in a "tolerance for ambiguity" (101). Her border politics point to new forms of resistance that are not trapped in a cycle of mutual dependence.

I view Anzaldúa's openness towards ambiguity as a guide in the essays that follow. Though I examine several texts that are not explicitly colonial, many address power in ways that reflect a colonial relationship. I argue that when this power is resisted or subverted, that is also a form of decolonial work. Just as Anzaldúa is tolerant, even welcoming of the monstrous inhabitants of the borderland, those she describes as "perverse," "queer," and "troublesome" (25), I embrace the variety of the texts that follow, which range from 18th century painting to 21st

century film. The most modern of these works underscore Anzaldúa's thesis that a dialectical approach has not been successful in delinking Latinx peoples from neocolonial exploitation, since they portray contemporary colonial relationships. In many ways, little has changed from the earliest texts to the latest, with the mistreatment of indigenous people playing a central role in each essay. I suggest that by directing our attention to the "untethered possibility" (Pinkvoss 15) of Anzaldúa's work, we can imagine new ways that colonialism might be confronted.

My use of the term "decolonial" thus far requires some further explanation. Though I have recently come to see it invoked in a general anti-colonial sense, its appearance in this collection follows the definition of Walter D. Mignolo in *The Darker Side of Western Modernity*. Mignolo describes decolonialism as an effort to dismantle what he terms "the logic of coloniality" (2). Decolonial theory has several important distinctions from the better-known postcolonial theory, though Mignolo makes a point that the two are not in competition (xxvii). One difference between the two is that decolonialism grew out of the Latinx experience in the Western Hemisphere, with the Peruvian thinker Aníbal Quijano as one of its first theorists. Because the colonial relationships in Latin America are distinct in many ways from those in Africa or the Middle East, where postcolonial theory originated, decolonialism is a natural fit for this project.

Decolonialism is also helpful because, as Anzaldúa cautions, it avoids dialectical thinking. Rather than pit rightist against leftist thought, it seeks to "delink" from coloniality. This approach avoids the mutual dependence that Anzaldúa describes in her metaphor of the cop and the criminal. Most importantly, decolonialism is expansive and flexible in a way that makes it useful for an examination of diverse texts. This flexibility stems from its goal of addressing the equally expansive logic of coloniality, which Mignolo describes as "the underlying logic of the

foundation and unfolding of Western civilization from the Renaissance to today" (2). For Mignolo, the very fabric of modernity is colonial: "coloniality, in other words, is constitutive of modernity—there is no modernity without coloniality" (3). This view explains why colonialism touches so many facets of life beyond the exploitation of one nation by another. When Anzaldúa claims that the machismo of Mexican men is "actually an Anglo invention...an adaptation to oppression and poverty and low self-esteem" (105), she illustrates how a colonial relationship transforms into a sexist one. If coloniality impacts virtually all aspects of modern life, it demands an equally expansive mode of thinking to dismantle it.

Though Mignolo's work guides each of the essays in this collection, it appears most explicitly in the first, titled "Bien Comer: Consuming Guinea Pig as a Decolonial Option." There, I explore the ways that the unassuming figure of the guinea pig offers an option for delinking from the logic of coloniality. By tracing the historical role of the guinea pig within indigenous Andean communities, I illustrate that its malleability can be understood as a means of resisting colonial domination. An 18th century Peruvian painting of the last supper featuring a guinea pig in the center of the table typifies the way that the animal explodes expectations about humans' relationships to their food and their gods. It offers an example of how colonial efforts to limit indigenous epistemologies can, in fact, multiply those very ways of knowing. The guinea pig therefore reveals how expanding the terms of decolonial resistance can produce creative strategies for confronting coloniality.

As I was working with Mignolo's theories in that first essay, I found that one of the helpful insights he offered was that decolonial work need not take the form of open rebellion. If a guinea pig can serve as an example of resistance, then the definition of that resistance is broader than one might imagine. This led me to the conclusions of my second essay, which examines the

politics around race, class, and victimization in the first novel written by a Latinx writer in English in the United States. The novel is titled *Who Would Have Thought It?* and was written by a Mexican-American woman named María Amparo Ruiz de Burton in 1872. Ruiz de Burton occupied a unique space of both privilege and marginalization during her life, and her novel reflects that positioning. Born to a wealthy Mexican family in Baja California, Ruiz de Burton immigrated to San Francisco after the Mexican American War. There she married a Union officer and moved through the upper echelons of Washington society. She befriended Mary Todd Lincoln as well as Varina Davis, illustrating her detachment from Anglo values. Despite her relatively comfortable life, she experienced discrimination as a minority in the United States and ultimately died in poverty. Her novel examines issues of colonialism in ways that do not fit comfortably into contemporary narratives of Chicanx resistance. She venerates white skin and good breeding while critiquing the hypocrisy of U.S. expansionism. Her novel reveals the complexities of decolonial work and the fluctuating ambitions of that work across time. Still, within the context of decolonial theory, Ruiz de Burton can be understood as critiquing the logic of coloniality.

Just as the expansiveness of decolonial criticism allows for a rethinking of Ruiz de Burton's work, it also provides a framework with which to consider the final text in this collection. In my third essay, I explore moments of solidarity-building in Alfonso Cuarón's 2018 film, *Roma*. *Roma* portrays the life of an indigenous woman named Cleo who works as a nanny and maid for a middle-class white family in Mexico City in the 1970s. Despite the undeniably close relationship that Cleo has with the family, a driving question of the film is to what extent they can recognize her humanity. I explore these dynamics through the lens of solidarity, examining whether the moments of connection are reflective and purposeful or simply flashes of

passing intimacy. As with Ruiz de Burton's work, *Roma* portrays a more convoluted colonial relationship than, for example, Anzaldúa does. The family's European heritage contrasts with Cleo's Mixtec background, and Cleo is clearly limited by her economic situation in a way that the children never will be. While the relationship is colonial in many ways, the love between the characters complicates the idea that this is entirely exploitative. Decolonial theory can be a helpful lens through which to process these complexities and approach the ambiguities of the film.

As I have moved from a more explicit use of decolonial criticism in the first of these essays to a more general incorporation of its premises in the later ones, I have come to appreciate how smoothly decolonialism articulates with other forms of critique. Many of the questions that Mignolo raises have their counterparts in feminist, Marxist, and critical race theory. For instance, when Mignolo explains that, "the initial moment of the colonial revolution was to implant the Western concept of nature and to rule out the Aymara and Quechua concept of Pachamama" (11), this shares elements with the feminist view that female forms of knowing are often subsumed within a patriarchal worldview. The questions that guide all three of these essays, in fact, revolve around power dynamics that can be understood as colonial. Though it may appear overly general to claim that sexism, racism, homophobia, and many other forms of prejudice are fundamentally grounded in colonial power relationships, decolonial theory helps us to understand why that is true.

To help elucidate the modern, and therefore colonial worldview, Mignolo turns to its historical origins in the 17th and 18th centuries. He explains that modernity is based on a European epistemology that was originally theological. When this transitioned to a secular

outlook during the Enlightenment, many beliefs changed, but the individuals constructing those beliefs did not:

> The agents and institutions that embodied secular ego-politics of knowledge were, like those who embodied theo-politics of knowledge, mostly white European males...Proponents of both were Christian, white, and male, and assumed heterosexual relations as the norm—consequently they also classified gender distinctions and sexual normativity. (9)

Because the construction of modern epistemology was carried out by such a small fraction of the world's population, many of the assumptions held by that group were taken as the norm. Consequently, beliefs about white supremacy, patriarchy, and heteronormativity were embedded in the modern worldview, all while the process of that embedding was hidden from view. With this historical background in mind, it is not unreasonable to claim that colonialism forms the basis of many other forms of inequality.

When one begins to comprehend the expansiveness of colonialism within modern life, it is easy to feel defeated. But a broadened view of coloniality can carry with it a broadened view of decolonial work. This portfolio embraces the expansiveness of decolonial resistance through the range of texts and forms of rebellion that it considers. As Anzaldúa reveals, rather than be frustrated by the abuses that colonialism produces, particularly in the borderland where colonizer and colonized meet, these encounters can produce an ambiguity that leads to new ways of challenging the violence of coloniality.

CHAPTER I

BIEN COMER: CONSUMING GUINEA PIG AS A DECOLONIAL OPTION

In 1905, an American author named Ellis Parker Butler published a short, humorous tale about a pair of rapidly-procreating guinea pigs. “Pigs is Pigs” recounts the non-adventure of two animals who are detained in a post office for months because of a disagreement over their shipping cost. The debate arises when a zealously rule-following shipping agent insists that they are not pets, but livestock. His rulebook states that pigs cost 30 cents to ship, and that, “Th' nationality of the pig creates no differentiality in the rate” (Butler). To this, the enraged customer declares, “Why, you poor ignorant foreigner, that rule means common pigs, domestic pigs, not guinea pigs!” (Butler). The humor of the story arises from the glacial pace of bureaucratic decision-making. As the price of the animals is verified, the two become eight, who then become 160, then 800, until thousands of guinea pigs fill crates and pens in the back of the post office. The situation is finally resolved when they are packed onto cattle cars and shipped out of the town.

Though the original confusion over the guinea pigs’ price stems from their name, Butler further highlights the animal’s ambiguous nature in an exchange between two government officials: “‘But are guinea-pigs, pigs? Aren't they rabbits?’ ‘Come to think of it,’ said the president, “I believe they are more like rabbits. Sort of half-way station between pig and rabbit” (Butler). Whether it is a clarification of their species or their origin, the guinea pigs seem to defy

the categories that the human characters attempt to place them in. Their travel in “cattle cars” also complicates the question of whether they are pets, not to be eaten, or a potential meal. At first glance, “Pigs is Pigs” appears to be a story of modest scope, offering an amusing commentary on the follies of government. However, by writing about guinea pigs, Butler identifies a species uniquely able to wriggle through the boundaries humans have constructed to think about animals. Ultimately, “Pigs is Pigs” raises questions at the heart of animal theory, interrogating categories such as “pet” and “livestock” that humans use to organize and hierarchize their relationships with animals.

“Pigs is Pigs” provides insight into several ways that guinea pigs resist labels. Another example of how they defy categorization is that they occupy a relatively unique position as both a commonly kept pet and a widely raised food source. In the Andean regions of South America to which they are native, human beings have raised and eaten them for millennia. While they gained the status of pet almost immediately after Spanish colonists imported them to Europe in the sixteenth century, Andeans have continued to eat guinea pig into the modern day. This fact is significant because of what it reveals about colonial pressures and resistance. Despite centuries of Spanish occupation that attempted to shape indigenous culture into a European mold, the position of the guinea pig remained flexible, its categories multiplying rather than narrowing. In other words, this small, familiar rodent represents a unique form of colonial resistance, making it an intriguing subject of study for cultural critics, particularly decolonial theorists. Through a decolonial lens, the multiplying positions of the guinea might even be understood as a modest example of how colonized peoples can delink from ongoing colonial exploitation.

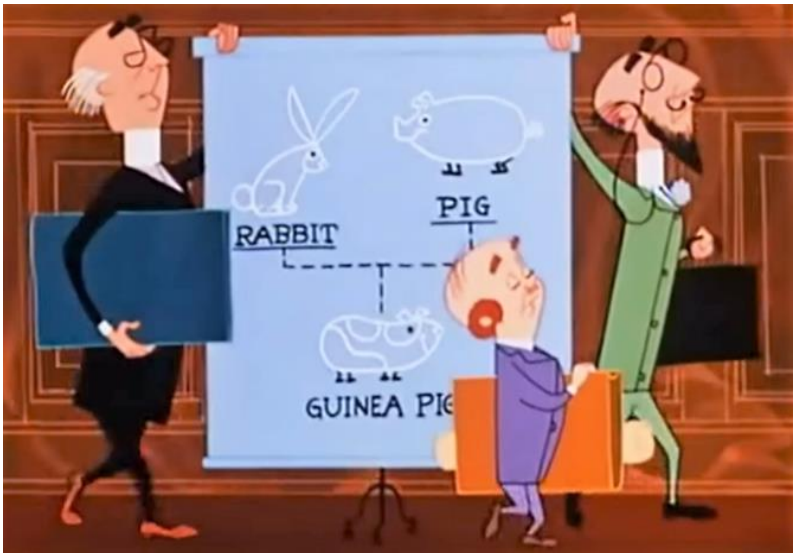

Figure 1: Image from the 1954 Disney adaptation of "Pigs is Pigs" illustrating the "half-way station between pig and rabbit" that the guinea pig inhabits.

The Decolonial Worldview

It may seem unlikely to claim that something as trivial as the consumption of guinea pig could provide a way for colonized peoples to assert their independence in the globalized and therefore colonial economy of the 21st century. It can even be argued that the slaughter of helpless animals only reinscribes hierarchies of power mirrored in a colonial relationship. What the guinea pig offers, however, is a means of subverting Eurocentric assumptions about the animals we eat and those we love. The Andean relationship to the guinea pig provides another model of interaction with this animal, challenging the premise that these relationships are innate or predetermined. Instead, it reveals them to be cultural constructions, opening the door to a plethora of ways humans might rethink our relationships with animals and other people.

The work of decolonial critics such as Aníbal Quijano and Walter D. Mignolo can help us understand how the destabilization of accepted attitudes can lead to a reimaging of the future that is free of colonial exploitation. Decolonialism is a parallel field of study to postcolonialism that arose from the Bandung Conference of 1955 and the Conference of Non-Aligned Countries in

Belgrade in 1961 (Mignolo xxiii). Whereas postcolonialism emerged largely from the British imperial experience and is focused in the English-speaking world, decolonialism's roots lie in Central and South America and the Caribbean. Mignolo claims, for instance, that French Caribbean thinkers such as Frantz Fanon and Aimé Césaire participate in the "long tradition of decolonial thought" (xxvi). A central feature of decolonialism is an abundance of options. Mignolo specifically contrasts these with "alternatives," saying, "If you look for alternatives, you accept a point of reference...if you argue for 'alternative modernity or modernitites' or 'alternative development,' you are already accepting that there is *a* modernity and *a* development to which nothing but alternatives could exist" (xxviii-xxix). Decolonialism therefore attempts to reimagine modernity in a more expansive way than the dialectical approach of leftist (Marxist) versus rightist (neo-liberal) development theories allow.

Mignolo acknowledges that postcolonial and decolonial thinkers are working towards many of the same goals, and he recognizes the validity of both approaches. He never insists on the superiority of decolonialism, pointing out that to do so would run counter to his proposed multiplying options:

> Unless you believe that consolidating and eliminating options (which is one feature of neo-liberal politics) is preferable to multiplying options, and you would like to subsume (or merge) the decolonial into the postcolonial or vice versa, there is nothing wrong with having several approaches as guides for action to confronting the historical legacies of colonialism and the logic of coloniality. (xxvii)

Still, there are several tenets of decolonialism that do distinguish it from postcolonialism, such as the privileging of regionality and the distrust of "modernity" because of its implicit coloniality.

The most important notion that decolonialism offers with regard to guinea pigs, however, is the embrace of coexisting options.

One frustrating aspect of decolonialism is the lack of concrete examples that theorists offer for enacting decolonial change. As opposed to the reliance on dialectical evolution that Marxism proposes, for instance, decolonialism is specifically nondialectical. It eschews a confrontation of two alternatives, envisioning instead a "pluriversal" global order of "cosmopolitan localism" (Mignolo 23). In this way, it proposes a peaceful "delinking" from what Quijano described as the colonial matrix of power. However, Mignolo rarely provides examples of "cosmopolitan localisms," leaving a significant gap in how to enact this vision. Though decolonialism can be attractive for proposing a pathway towards a decolonial future, that pathway often has a number of holes. This paper will attempt to fill those holes, as I propose that guinea pig consumption (alongside the continued raising of guinea pigs as pets) is precisely the type of localism that Mignolo suggests. While this may not fully resolve the problem of missing steps towards a decolonial future, it hopefully offers a sample of how those gaps might be filled.

As mentioned above, the multiple positions of the guinea pig may not appear significant enough to make claims about colonial delinking. However, the role of the animal is in fact central to colonial thinking. It can be argued that much of the European worldview at the time of European contact with the Americas was structured on the belief that humans occupied the top tier in a hierarchy of living creatures. This was best exemplified in Descartes' "Cogito ergo sum" "I think therefore I am," which took the power of thought away from nonhuman animals, establishing it as a uniquely human trait. While this attitude may seem obvious or inevitable to contemporary readers, it was not a given for medieval thinkers, for instance, who had a less fixed vision of human/animal relationships.

This is not to say that Enlightenment thinkers were the first to proclaim a superiority over the animals. Aristotle observed that man is "in a higher degree than bees or other gregarious animals...man alone among the animals is furnished with the faculty of language" (qtd. in Ryann 5). Still, 17th century philosophy took major steps towards the modern conception that humans are uniquely positioned at the apex of a hierarchy of beings. Baruch Spinoza, despite challenging Descartes on many of his beliefs, writes that, "men have a far greater right against animals than they have against men. Not that I deny that the lower animals have sensations. But I do deny that we are therefore not permitted to consider our own advantage, use them at our pleasure, and treat them as is most convenient for us" (qtd in Ryan 10). This mode of thought, that beings of higher intellect had the right to utilize others, was then mirrored in racial pseudoscience that proposed that whiteness was linked to intellectual superiority and therefore conferred a prerogative to rule.

Although the Andean understanding of the guinea pig was hierarchical in some respects, at other times, Andeans elevated the animal to a holy position. The guinea pig was a conduit to the gods, often consumed during religious festivals. It therefore disrupted the European understanding of the animal as an object of use. The multiple positions that the guinea pig maintained after colonization therefore represent a powerful means of subverting the colonial European worldview that attempted to sublimate both animals and non-white peoples. The disruption of this Cartesian episteme is central to colonial resistance. The varied visions of the guinea pig as pet, livestock, and object of worship therefore represent an entrance to the pluriversal order that decolonial theorists imagine.

Good to Eat

Many writers have theorized vegetarianism as a response to the unethical treatment of animals, as well as of marginalized groups of human beings, but comparatively few conclusions have been drawn in the critical literature about the taboos surrounding the types of animals that are eaten. Jacques Derrida's "Eating Well" reflects this lacuna on species-specific taboos. While Derrida illustrates that it is possible to consume meat ethically, he sidesteps the question of types, saying, "The question is no longer one of knowing whether it is 'good' to eat the other or if the other is 'good' to eat, *nor of knowing which other* (114, emphasis mine). His question is therefore one of "if," rather than "which."

One commonly-held idea about food restrictions is that proximity to humanity, in whatever capacity that is conceived, influences attitudes about consuming that animal. This has been corroborated by scientific studies on the "meat paradox," or the idea that people enjoy eating meat but do not like to consider the suffering of the animal that goes into meat production, therefore producing cognitive dissonance. Experimentation indicates that numerous factors, such as the language with which people discuss meat, or the perception of an animal's "faciality," to borrow a term from Emmanuel Levinas, influences whether an animal is, in Derrida's words, "good to eat." For instance, one study found that, "the more processed meat is, the easier it is to dissociate it from an animal being, and that this produces a drop in empathy for the animal that was killed" (Kunst and Hohle 770). This same study found that subjects shown a beheaded pig as opposed to an entire carcass were more willing to eat the animal. This validates Levinas' claim that, "One cannot entirely refuse the face of an animal" (49). In certain capacities, it makes sense that after identifying with an animal, humans are less likely to want to eat it.

Peter Stallybrass and Allon White explore this possibility in a historical context in *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression*. They turn to Edmund Leach's "Anthropological Aspects of Language: Animal Categories and Verbal Abuse" to examine the uncertain position of the pig in European food customs:

> Not only did the pink pigmentation and apparent nakedness of the pig disturbingly resemble the flesh of human babies (thereby transgressing the man-animal opposition), but pigs were usually kept in peculiarly close proximity to the house and fed from the household's leftovers. In other words, pigs were almost, but not quite members of the household, and they almost, but not quite, followed the dietary regimes of humans (Stallybrass and White 47).

Here, Leach suggests that pigs were taboo in certain European cultures because people recognized a similarity between the animal and themselves. However, in many cases, for example, that of the guinea pig, this is a dubious claim. By this reasoning, European cultures must observe some likeness between themselves and guinea pigs that Andean cultures do not, a proposal that is far-fetched.

What remains unanswered here is why cultures develop *differing* taboos around meat eating. Another set of studies may help answer that by illustrating that preconceived ideas about an animal's "edibility" influence whether people view the animal as similar to themselves. In other words, rather than the animal's proximity to humans dictating its edibility, its edibility dictates its perceived proximity to humans. In one 2011 study, participants were presented with a species with which they were unfamiliar, a tree kangaroo. Subjects who were told that the species was frequently eaten in Papua New Guinea were less likely to ascribe the animal the capacity to suffer or to be worthy of moral concern (Bratanova, et al.). In a related experiment,

participants were shown images of digitally-blended human/ape faces. Brain scans revealed that the group that was told the animals were eaten in their native country were less likely to recognize the image "as a face" (Bilewics, et al. 542). This illustrates that even brief conditioning about an animal's edibility has an effect on the extent to which people recognize themselves in the animal. These studies engage with questions of cultural difference because, rather than showing that taboos are determined by some natural phenomena, such as Leach explains with pigs' diets, the opposite appears to be true, that cultural attitudes create a perception of biological resemblance. Taboos may therefore have no origin in nature whatsoever.

This reality would explain the heterogenous state of meat restrictions across cultures. An oft-cited example is the consumption of dog in Korea, an animal that is largely considered off-limits in the rest of the world. The case of Korea makes it difficult to attribute taboos on dog meat to some "natural" relationship between human beings and dogs. Consider, as well, religious taboos on certain animals, such as cattle in Hinduism or pigs in Islam and Judaism. The explanations of these prohibitions vary widely, ranging from veneration of the animal to disgust at its habits. In each case, cultural preconditioning dictated through the powerful medium of religion plausibly explains the source of these taboos. In some cases, even an animal's status as pet within the culture need not disqualify it as food. Rabbits are one example, appearing both in pet stores and on menus in the United States. In a sense then, the disgust felt by eating "taboo" animals is self-inflicted, by no means a marker of biological realities.

The fact that taboos are constructed does not, of course, mean that feelings of revulsion are imagined. The experiments above registered bodily responses. Nor are people able to simply choose which meats disgust them, these preferences having been formed by years of cultural conditioning. Still, it is important to acknowledge the cultural basis of these aversions in our

discussion of guinea pigs because of the way human populations have historically distinguished themselves based on their culinary practices. Quite often, cultures point to the differing taboos of another group as a marker of inhumanity or primitivism, or they celebrate their own food customs as a marker of civilization. The Andean practice of consuming guinea pig goes beyond simple sustenance, representing instead a vital source of humanity for those who consume it. When a Quechua family eats roasted guinea pig during a baptismal celebration, they connect with a spirituality that harkens back to a pre-Colombian era, resisting colonial histories.

More than Meat

To understand the way that the guinea pig figures as more than meat in Andean culture, one must first know something about the history of guinea pig consumption. The authoritative ethnology on the subject comes from Edmundo Morales, an indigenous Peruvian anthropologist who, from 1991 to 1994, conducted an exhaustive study of guinea pig cultivation and consumption throughout the Andes. Though Morales' text is now dated, his facility with the local language, Quechua, and familiarity with indigenous practices have ensured that his study has remained the relevant text on guinea pig cultivation. According to Morales, guinea pigs, also known as *cuy* (pl. *cuyes*) in Spanish, were domesticated as early as 5000 B.C.E. (3). In the pre-Colombian era, they were a key figure in religious worship. Indeed, Morales emphasizes that, "During the time of the Incas before the Spanish conquest, the cuy had a remarkable ceremonial position in religious celebrations" (99). Though many contemporary anthropologists explain guinea pig cultivation as simply a source of protein for indigenous communities, Morales insists that, "Traditionally, the cuy was raised exclusively as a source of meat for consumption on special ceremonial occasions or events, not as daily or even weekly sources of meat. It is only

recently that households have begun giving the cuy exchange value" (Morales 13). It appears, therefore, that it is largely a 20th and 21st century phenomenon to eat guinea pig regularly. Despite globalizing pressures that encourage assimilation, the consumption of guinea pigs on special occasions is widely practiced today. This is true across socioeconomic and racial boundaries, though it is limited to Andean regions.[1]

Guinea pig consumption in the Andes today maintains many links to the past. Morales recounts a story about how the construction of a road to his community in the 1960s made it possible to visit a dentist, whereas before, "dental hygiene was a matter of self-treatment" (xix). One would imagine that a similar shift has occurred in medicine, that as Western treatments have become more accessible, traditional healing practices have fallen by the wayside. However, when Morales conducted his study in the early 1990s, it was relatively common for indigenous people to visit traditional healers, called *curanderos*, who used guinea pigs in their practice. Morales cites a study from 1982 that found that at least 25 percent of people in the Andes utilize traditional methods of healing (76). The nature of the specific help that *curanderos* provide varies, but the guinea pig often serves as an aid in diagnosis. Morales recounts witnessing a *curandero* diagnose an illness by rubbing a patient's body with the animal, then killing it and examining its inner organs (82). Signs observed in the guinea pig such as "clotted blood in the neck," may indicate a sore throat in the patient, while "red, bloody intestines" reveal intestinal fever (89). Morales points out that people may choose to visit traditional healers in addition to, or after seeing a doctor. Of course, even in 2019, access to Western medicine is not guaranteed, as

[1] In my own travels in the Ecuadoran Andes, young people of varied backgrounds all explained that they eat guinea pig on Christmas Day. These included the children of the country's elite who attended prep school in Ecuador's most highly-educated city, Cuenca, as well the children of subsistence farmers who spoke Quichua as their first language. In contrast, young people from coastal provinces who I spoke to said that they ate other dishes on special occasions.

winding mountain roads may be poorly maintained, and people may not have a vehicle readily available. Therefore, “in many places where health professionals refuse to live, curanderos are the hope for the indigenous people” (Morales 77). That the guinea pig still plays an important medicinal role is a testament to the value of decolonial options.

One important shift that has occurred since the 1990s is the increased commodification of guinea pig meat. Though many communities maintain the traditional practice of raising the animals for personal consumption, it has become increasingly common to sell them to urban centers as well as internationally. A recent NPR article explains that a growing number of restaurants in the US serve the delicacy to Andean expats and Americans alike. Rather than slaughter the animals themselves, most restaurants purchase their guinea pigs “from Peru as whole, frozen, hairless rodents in plastic bags” (Bland). The irony of shipping the animals from South America when they are plentiful in the US reveals the deep-seated nature of the guinea pig taboo in the American psyche. The American consumer must reason with themselves that the Peruvian guinea pig is edible, while its siblings at PetSmart are off limits. This fact complicates the narrative of unidirectional colonialism, illustrating that if multiple attitudes about an animal are allowed to coexist, they may cross-pollinate. Still, within the US, guinea pigs are dominantly understood as pets. How they gained this protection has to do with their journey to Europe in the 16th century.

Almost immediately following the Spanish conquest of South America, guinea pigs were exported to Europe, where they lost their designation as a food source. A 2007 discovery of a guinea pig skeleton in Belgium suggests that the animal was likely born and died there in the late 16th or early 17th century. The skeleton shows no evidence that it was processed as food, indicating that it gained its status as a pet quickly (Pigière, et al.). Interestingly, it was also

during this time that the guinea pig gained its misleading name in English, possibly because it was believed to have come from the West African coast of Guinea, or because they were sold for a guinea each in England (Morales 3). Either way, guinea pigs became popular pets in England, and even Queen Elizabeth I was an early owner (Morales 3). From Europe, they were transported back the United States as pets, creating the present dichotomy between their status in North and South America. Importantly, unlike the rabbit in North America, the guinea pig has resisted a double existence in its native Andes. There, it is rare to keep the animal as a pet.

It is difficult to understand with certainty the role that guinea pigs played in pre-Columbian religious or culinary practices since our sources are always mediated through a colonial Spanish lens, but one of the best accounts comes from the *mestizo* writer "El Inca" Garcilaso de la Vega. De la Vega was born in 1539 in Cuzco, Peru to a Spanish father and Peruvian mother of royal Inca lineage. He spoke Quechua natively and later travelled to Spain, where he composed his *Royal Commentaries*. In them, he describes many aspects of Peruvian life, such as ceremonies honoring the gods that included the sacrifice of guinea pigs: "they burnt a little tallow nearby as a sacrifice to the Sun. The richer and nobler people burnt the tame rabbits called *coy*, as a thanksgiving for his having provided bread to eat during the year" (416). A similar account comes from the Jesuit priest, Pablo José de Arriaga, who reported in 1602 that, "The usual sacrifice is of cuys, which they use to no good end, not only for sacrifices, but also for divining and curing" (qtd. in Palmer 71). Though brief, these narratives illustrate that the role of the guinea pig in spiritual practices remains relatively unchanged into the present day.

Whether it is due to the limited number of surviving accounts, or the complexity of the role that the guinea pig played, it is difficult to identify exactly what beliefs the Inca associated with the guinea pig. One of the roles that Morales identifies in contemporary beliefs is that of

mediator between the human and spiritual realms: “To many Andean people eating cuy is something like coming into contact with earth, fire, wind, and water that turned a living thing into a nutrient to maintain human life and growth” (46). Rather than represent a certain god or ritual, the guinea pig has a somewhat nebulous role, though it is often viewed as a lens with which to see hidden realms, demonstrated by its use in diagnosing patients.

Though Morales emphasizes that guinea pig consumption is often ceremonial, the animals were also an important food source for the inhabitants of the Andes. During the early colonial period, Europeans had to fit the guinea pig into their existing food categories, which were based on humoral theory. The guinea pig was not the only animal that had to be accounted for, as the Spanish encountered a huge range of new biodiversity with which they had to contend. Critical theorist Zilkia Janer discusses this process in the case of the cacao bean: “Before chocolate could become fully incorporated into Spanish and Creole food culture a few theoretical questions had to be sorted out. How does chocolate fit into humoral theory? Is it hot or cold? Is it healthy? Is chocolate appropriate for fasting?” (390). Religious doctrine was sometimes shifted to accommodate new ingredients, for instance, when the Church granted permission to eat capybara during Lent. Though the giant rodent would normally be prohibited, the Spanish complained that local fish was “either of bad quality or too expensive and that other traditional Lenten foods like chestnuts, almonds and raisins were totally unavailable” (Janer 391). Capybara is still eaten during Lent in Venezuela, indicating that colonial adjustments were not purely extractive, but influence moved in both directions. This again reflects the possibilities that abound when colonizing influence is not strong enough to homogenize attitudes towards animals.

It is not entirely clear how guinea pig fit into humoral theory originally, but anthropologist Eduardo Archetti explains some of the ideas about the flavor of guinea pig meat today:

> It is common in rural Ecuador to think that smoke is not "dry" and thus preserves the "humidity" of the meat...In the logic of hot and cold, the guinea pig is ranked higher than pork, lamb, beef and goat meat. The idea of "heat" is firstly associated with the generation of energy, and secondly with other qualities; it is considered, for instance, to be "pure" and "nutritious." (55)

Archetti explains that sometimes these designations are inconsistent or contradictory, but without a doubt, guinea pig is considered the best meat available, both the most flavorful and the most nutritious. Just as the Spaniards attempted to fit new ingredients into their humoral theory, native Ecuadorans have adopted humoral theory to understand their ingredients. Clearly, the legacy of an idea now extinct in its place of origin, humoral theory, can have long-lasting influence if assimilated into a new culture. This bears out one of Mignolo's premises, that history does not move in a teleological path towards "progress," but can take a circular or multidirectional route.

If the guinea pig occupied a varied and somewhat mysterious role in Andean culture before the arrival of the Spanish, that position became doubly complex when layered with the Catholicism that the conquistadors preached. Beliefs about the guinea pigs' ability to mediate between the supernatural and human world had their counterparts in European religious practice. This made the guinea pig an important symbol in the spread of Catholic doctrine, both mirroring and destabilizing the most important Catholic ritual of consumption, the miracle of transubstantiation.

A Last Supper

The challenge and the opportunity that the guinea pig posed for Catholic teachings in the Americas is revealed in a painting by Marcos Zapata, completed circa 1753, that hangs in the central cathedral in Cuzco, Peru. The painting depicts the last supper in the style of the Cuzco school, or *escuela cuzqueña,* an 18th century group made up of mostly *mestizo* painters who followed the fashions of Europe but incorporated local elements.[2] Zapata's *Last Supper* is largely unremarkable, except for the unusual inclusion of a platter at the center of the table, upon which lies a guinea pig, skinned and prepared to be eaten. The meal also includes other local ingredients such as potatoes and what some believe to be *chicha,* a mildly-fermented drink made from grains. Visitors to the cathedral are often told that Judas, seen in the foreground holding his bag of silver, resembles Francisco Pizarro, the Spanish conquistador who instituted colonial rule in Peru. The decision to include a Pizarro-like figure, as well as the local dishes, illustrates a political awareness that was "very specific to its time and place in Cuzco" (Palmer 73).

[2] For a more detailed analysis of the Cuzco school, see Allison Lee Palmer's article, "The Last Supper by Marcos Zapata (c. 1753): A Meal of Bread, Wine, and Guinea Pig."

Figure 2: *The Last Supper* by Marcos Zapata (image from Zendt 9).

Though the most famous examples of last supper paintings include only bread and wine on the table, Palmer explains that earlier versions also included meat such as fish and lamb:

> Thus, we see with these examples that while many later Last Supper scenes focus on the bread and wine, which implies the institution of the Eucharist and follows the Gospel of John, earlier images sometimes featured a platter of fish, which was an early Christian symbol as well as a food staple in Galilee. Later examples show a roasted lamb resting on a platter in the center of the table, which refers to the Passover meal and is consistent with descriptions of the last meal found in the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke. (66)

The inclusion of the lamb in these scenes follows from the synoptic Gospels, wherein the last supper may have been a Passover Seder: "And the first day of unleavened bread, when they

killed the passover, his disciples said unto him, Where wilt thou that we go and prepare that thou mayest eat the passover?" (*King James* Mark 14:12). There is some theological debate surrounding whether the last supper could have been a Seder and would have therefore included lamb. This has implications for our conversation because, as Palmer explains, "the Last Supper anticipated Jesus' role as the 'true' Pascal Lamb" (61). Therefore, not only does the bread of communion become Christ's body through the miracle of transubstantiation, but the lamb also stands in as a symbol of Christ, one to be consumed and incorporated into the body. When the lamb is replaced by a guinea pig, does it take on the same significance? Has Marcos Zapata turned the guinea pig into a Christ figure? Stranger still, has he turned Christ into a guinea pig?

All indications point to yes when considering the guinea pig's role in indigenous beliefs. As Morales described, animals were often seen as mediators between the supernatural and human worlds:

> Sacrificing animals and offering food and plants are attempts to appease and be reconciled with supernatural forces. Reconciliation cannot, however, be accomplished by a direct communication between man and the supernatural. Creatures that men have received from the [gods] mediate in the Andean man's communication with the supernatural. The cuy is one of these creatures that has the power to appease the supernatural. (97)

It seems plausible to claim that the sacrificial position of the guinea pig would have reminded indigenous viewers of Christ's sacrifice. Similarly, the mediating influence of these animals can be said to reflect the way Christ mediated between Heaven and Earth by becoming human.

While it may seem contradictory for Christ to simultaneously occupy the position of the guinea pig and his place at the center of the table, this is unproblematic in Catholic imagery.

Even a third body of Christ can be seen in the upper left-hand corner of the painting (more fully visible below), showing Christ on the cross, flanked by the Virgin and Mary Magdalene. Indeed, this pairing "follows the traditional Catholic references to the doctrine of Transubstantiation and Christ's sacrifice by bringing together two scenes—the Crucifixion and the Last Supper—that are traditionally linked in refectory imagery" (Palmer 68-69). It is therefore clear that Zapata had no qualms about representing multiple stages of the cross in this single image.

The appearance of the naked animal, stretched in the center of the table, does suggest a crucified body. Indeed, guinea pigs in other Andean last supper paintings, of which there are possibly five,[3] are shown laying on their stomachs, while the supine posture of Zapata's animal more clearly evokes the body of Christ. The Cuzco school followed European trends, where the depiction of Christ as a slaughtered animal was familiar territory. This was particularly common in 17th century Dutch still life painting, and though Dutch influence would have been relatively limited in Peru, *cuzqueño* painters could have seen models of slaughtered animals representing Christ. Indeed, the leap from butchured animal to butchered god is not so great. Robert Watson, in a provocative analysis of Dutch object painting, explains:

> There is a significant congruence between the way Christians were supposed to identify piteously with the Christ who at once does and does not share their nature as mortal animals, and the way they began to identify piteously with prey animals on the same

[3] Three of the other paintings come from the Quito school and are located in Ecuador. Palmer asserts that though these paintings have been described as depicting guinea pigs (Morales makes this claim), "The animal seen in each of these paintings is clearly a lamb resting face down on the platter as if sleeping" (58-59). The other two paintings in question are located in Peru, and while Palmer allows that one of them "reveals a less defined animal" (59), she insists that Zapata's painting is unique in portraying a guinea pig. While it is difficult to determine in each case, I would argue that it is possible that some of these images also depict guinea pigs due to the small size and dark coloration of the animal. See below for examples.

basis. The sympathetic imagination seized on a shared mortality—its struggles and its sufferings. (201)

There are some important differences between the Dutch and Peruvian cases that may pose problems for comparison. For one, Watson posits that Dutch painting, in responding to Reformation denunciation of iconography makes material objects holy: "the effort to look at nature instead of its holy symbols...eventually conferred on nature itself the attributes of traditional holiness (168). Many of the paintings that Watson analyzes, such as Rembrandt's *Slaughtered Ox*, are ostensibly secular, set in quotidian locations such as a barn or kitchen. It is through a process of decoding that viewers arrive at religious symbology. This differs from Zapata's painting which is explicitly religious, depicting one of the most holy scenes in scripture. Additionally, Catholicism did not fear idolatry to the extent that Protestantism did, and viewers were encouraged to read religious symbolism into paintings. All of this provides further evidence that Zapata's guinea pig is undeniably Christlike.

In another way, though, Zapata's painting may uphold the subversion of doctrine that Dutch animal painting explored. Watson observes that, "While these works seem intended partly as reminders of the omnipresence of Christ's sacrifice...others seem to appropriate the crucifixion on behalf of the stilled lives they primarily depict" (208). Though it is unlikely that the guinea pig was intended as the primary focus of the *Last Supper*, its prominence on the table and its bright illumination quickly attract the eye. Perhaps Zapata, like the Dutch protestants, hoped to reorient the crucifixion back towards the animal itself. In this reading, one would observe a rebellion against a single Catholic interpretation of Christ's death to incorporate a mourning for the death of indigenous gods.

Figure 3: Anonymous last supper painting from the Quito school that hangs in the convent of Santa Clara in Quito. Palmer claims that the animal represented is a lamb.

Figure 4: Anonymous last supper painting from the Cuzco school that hangs in the National Archaeological Museum in Lima. Palmer describes this animal as "too large and plump to be a *cuy* (59).

Figure 5: Upward-facing view of Zapata's *Last Supper*, depicting the crucifixion scene in the upper left.

Figure 6: *The Slaughtered Ox*, 1655 by Rembrandt.

Finally, the depiction of the guinea pig as a Christ figure seems especially likely in light of the ubiquitous practice in colonial Latin America of blending Catholic and indigenous imagery. Early evangelists viewed the coopting of existing symbols as a useful tool for converting the local population. Art historian Christina Zendt explains that the construction of the Cuzco cathedral took this approach:

> By building the cathedral that houses Zapata's painting on the same soil that once supported the sacred Inca palace of Viraccha (a king named after the Inca creator god), the Spaniards essentially replaced the trappings of Inca religion with their own. That the roots of Inca culture remained beneath the surface of the cathedral facilitated the process of conversion. (11)

A similar strategy was practiced all throughout the Spanish colonies. The central cathedral in Mexico City was constructed on the site of the razed *templo mayor*, or high temple of the Aztec city of Tenochtitlan. Indigenous religious beliefs therefore form the literal base of Catholicism in Latin America.

Towards a Decolonial Future

It may seem counterintuitive that a practice used to convert indigenous peoples, and therefore to more completely subjugate them within in the colonial matrix of power should be viewed as a form of resistance. But we must bear in mind that the blended nature of artwork like Zapata's *Last Supper* reflects the survival of pre-Columbian beliefs. It is true that the majority of Latin Americans today are Catholic, but it is also true that indigenous beliefs persist, as evidenced by the continued use of guinea pigs in healing practices. It seems, therefore, that despite the best efforts by the Spanish to stamp out pagan beliefs, they actually strengthened

some of them. This indicates that a pluriversal future might emerge because of, rather than in spite of, globalizing trends. The guinea pig, which has maintained its flexibility despite colonial pressures, suggests that a future in which cosmopolitan localisms thrive is not only possible, but perhaps inevitable.

CHAPTER II

THE POLITICS OF VICTIMIZATION IN MARÍA AMPARO RUIZ DE BURTON'S *WHO WOULD HAVE THOUGHT IT?*

In 1872, María Amparo Ruiz de Burton became the first Mexican-American author to publish a novel in English in the United States. This feat positioned her at the head of a long line of Chicana writers, many of whom wrote against the dominant Anglo, patriarchal society. Ruiz de Burton's first novel, titled *Who Would Have Thought It?* fits this mold in many ways. It portrays the life of a young Mexican girl brought to the United States and mistreated at the hands of her adopted family, satirizing the holier-than-thou attitude held by the New England bourgeoisie. Still, Ruiz de Burton often defies the standards that contemporary readers might expect from Chicanx fiction. *Who Would Have Thought It?* establishes alliances between characters based on identities that do not fit contemporary political contours and meditates on topics such as skin pigmentation that give modern readers pause. This raises questions about how Ruiz de Burton fits into the tradition of Chicanx resistance writing. To fully comprehend the history of Chicanx writing, however, one must acknowledge the contradictions of its earliest examples. By considering Ruiz de Burton within the context of Reconstruction, positioned at the early stages of American imperialism, one gains an understanding not only of this single pioneering author, but the roots from which the rest of Chicanx fiction eventually grew.

It is telling that Lola Medina, the mistreated protagonist of *Who Would Have Thought It?*, spends the first night in her new home in Boston curled on the floor with nothing but a blanket and the family dog to keep her warm. The descriptions of her suffering verge on the pathetic, as she is shown to be completely at the mercy of her new family: "Suppressing her sobs, Lola lay down on the mat, quietly wrapping her shawl around her shivering body. Jack was lying at Miss Lavinia's door, and kindly came to nestle at her side, wagging his tail apologetically, as if not sure that Lola would appreciate his feelings" (24). So begins Lola's life among the New England bourgeoisie, a victim in the hands of her adopted family. Ruiz de Burton's satire of the Civil War-era North is rarely subtle, as she lampoons the hypocrisies of a society that claims to wage war to end slavery, yet fails to show compassion to a well-born Mexican girl.

Despite her harsh treatment, Lola does find love within her new family, illustrating that not every New Englander is unredeemable. One reason that it is difficult to read Ruiz de Burton in a proto-Chicanx resistance context is that she does not show the type of broadly anti-Anglo critique that one might expect. In fact, though Ruiz de Burton held personal resentment about the Mexican-American War, the division between sympathetic and unsympathetic characters does not lie on an axis of race. And though Ruiz de Burton displays a distaste for the "railroad kings and other princes of monopolies" (267) who grew rich off the backs of the working poor in the late nineteenth century, her characterizations do not depend on wealth. Rather, the heroes of the novel are those who are mistreated, victimized either by the US government, a capitalist economy designed to exploit, or scheming neighbors who take advantage of the weak. *Who Would Have Thought It?* proposes that it is not necessarily poverty or low breeding that afflicts the young United States. Rather, America's original sin is its willingness to victimize the powerless, including its neighbor to the South. Like many Mexicans, Ruiz de Burton viewed the

Mexican-American War as little more than an opportunity for the US to expand its borders, and the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo which ended the conflict, as theft. Through an extended allegory of victimization, Ruiz de Burton illustrates that US expansionist impulses threaten its geopolitical neighbors, as well as its own long-suffering citizens.

Intersecting Identities

In writing *Who Would Have Thought It?,* Ruiz de Burton drew on many of the experiences of her own life. Scholars José Aranda and Jesse Alemán point out that one must be careful about the balance one strikes between biography and textual analysis in the works of recovered authors since biographical information often feeds off of itself when there are limited primary resources. Indeed, I argue below that the canon of Ruiz de Burton criticism has overly privileged her biography at the expense of close attention to her texts. Still, the connection between Ruiz de Burton's life and work makes it worthwhile to review the major events of her biography. [4] Born in Baja California in 1832 to wealthy Mexican parents (their properties in Alta California included modern day Riverside and Orange Counties), Ruiz de Burton received a Catholic education and was well-read by the time she was a teenager. When the Mexican-American war broke out in 1846, American troops occupied the town of La Paz where the Ruiz family lived. It was during this occupation that the teenage María met her future husband, Lieutenant Colonel Henry Stanton Burton, a member of a prominent New England family not unlike that which she would satirize in her first novel.

[4] For bibliographical information I draw on the introduction to the Penguin edition of *Who Would Have Thought It?,* the introduction of the Arte Público edition, and Aranda's "Contradictory Impulses."

During the occupation of La Paz, the American troops met little resistance. Many of the occupants, frustrated at Mexico's neglect of its northern provinces, hoped that the region would be annexed by the United States. Contrary to their expectations, when the war closed in 1848, Baja California remained part of Mexico. Fearing retribution from the Mexican government, the Ruiz family requested asylum in the United States and soon moved to Monterrey, California. This was possible in part because the treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo allowed for residents of the newly acquired Mexican territories to be granted US citizenship. However, the nature of that citizenship was fraught as many Mexicans faced discrimination when they suddenly became members of a minority community in the United States. Ruiz de Burton experienced feelings of alienation in the US despite her prosperous upbringing, as evidenced by the fact that she originally published under a pen name for fear that readers would be more critical of her text if they knew English was not her native language.

Despite the prejudice she faced, the young María made a life for herself in California, marrying Henry soon after her arrival. In 1853, the couple purchased the Rancho Jamul outside of San Diego. There they had two children and lived peacefully until 1859, when Burton was called to Washington D.C., bringing his family with him. It was here that Ruiz de Burton became acquainted with elite Anglo society, socializing with prominent military and political families, including Mary Todd Lincoln, whom she befriended. José Aranda writes that a record in the collected works of Abraham Lincoln confirms a meeting between the President and Ruiz de Burton in 1861 where she requested a promotion for Henry. As Aranda points out, "Lincoln admits that he does not even know the captain. He makes the recommendation on the strength of his faith in María Amparo Ruiz de Burton...Lincoln's memo demonstrates that Ruiz de Burton was formidable in person and that she was at the center of US history" (131).

Despite her connections, Ruiz de Burton faced years of hardship when, in 1869, Henry died from malaria he had contracted during the Civil War, leaving her saddled with debt. Though she had begun writing *Who Would Have Thought It?* in the early 1860s, it was not until the 1870s that she negotiated a publishing career in order to support herself. She published her first novel, *Who Would Have Thought It?* in 1872. She later published a second novel, *The Squatter and the Don*, and a play about Don Quixote, all to mixed reviews. Through her literary output and several business endeavors, she was able to stay mostly above her debts. Still, when she died in 1895, she was penniless, and her books soon went out of print.

The works of Ruiz de Burton and the legacy of her life would have been lost to history if it had not been for the recovery efforts of Beatriz Pita and Rosaura Sánchez, who in 1992 republished *The Squatter and the Don* as part of a scholarly venture known as the Recovering the United States Hispanic Literary Heritage Project. In 1995, they followed with *Who Would Have Thought It?*, published by Arte Público Press. As Ruiz de Burton's connections to the President and aristocratic Washington society reveal, she has a complicated legacy as the first Mexican-American author to publish in the United States in English.

Ruiz de Burton occupied a unique position in the history of US imperialism as both colonizer and colonized, and literary critic Anne McClintock explores the ways that colonization affected people of different backgrounds. McClintock explains that, "colonized women, before the intrusions of imperial rule, were invariably disadvantaged within their societies in ways that gave the colonial reordering of their sexual and economic labor very different outcomes from those of colonized men" (6). At the same time, she points out that, "colonial women were also ambiguously placed within this process. Barred from the corridors of formal power, they experienced the privileges and social contradictions of imperialism very differently from colonial

men" (6). Both of these characterizations apply to Ruiz de Burton. As a member of the white, wealthy elite in Mexico, she occupied the position of "colonial woman," though her gender barred her from the greatest advantages of colonial rule. Upon her entrance into Anglo society, she became a member of a colonized Mexican minority, though her wealth and education protected her from the greatest privations of that position. This unique intersection of identities played out in concrete ways in her life and her fiction, leading to disagreement among literary critics about her politics.

Recovering Ruiz de Burton

At the time of her recovery, a moment of burgeoning political Chicanx consciousness, many scholars saw Ruiz de Burton as an important figure for the future of Chicanx literary and historical studies. Sanchéz and Pita read her in that vein. Since the 1990s, that view has evolved, particularly as scholars have attempted to address the ways that her fiction stereotypes characters of color. Critic José Aranda gives an overview of that evolution:

> In recovering the nineteenth century for Chicano/a studies, the Recovery Project has inadvertently reactivated a long-standing debate about the heterogeneity of Mexican American culture and history and its relation to left-activist politics, and questioned anew the idea that Mexican Americans have always been proletarian in character. To date, treatment of recovered texts has mapped out an uneasy alliance between the traditional working-class paradigms of Chicano/a Studies and the liberal, bourgeois leanings of the individuals who wrote after 1848. Early attempts to identify a writer like Ruiz de Burton as "subaltern" were premature, I argue, because Chicano/a studies had yet to

> conceptualize adequately the inclusion of writers and texts that uphold racial and colonialist discourses that contradict the ethos of the Chicano movement. (123)

In fairness to Ruiz de Burton's early recoverers, much of her writing does offer critiques of the dominant society. *Who Would Have Thought It?* ruthlessly satirizes a range of topics held dear to the Reconstruction-era white population in the North, from religion, to culture, to military prowess. Taking into consideration the environment in which she was recovered, it is understandable that this criticism was read as "a 'resistance' narrative" (Aranda 124). However, I follow Aranda's lead in arguing that early analyses of this satire attempted to force Ruiz de Burton into a box that did not fit. Often this was because critics were overly-reliant on sources external to the text itself.

The efforts to understand Ruiz de Burton have often drawn on a variety of sources besides her books. Some critics make claims about *Who Would Have Thought It?* based on her other works, principally *The Squatter and the Don*. More commonly, writers point to Ruiz de Burton's biography as evidence of her resistance tendencies. Certain moments in her life do reveal a woman who was frustrated with the hypocrisy of Northern society. In 1869 she wrote a letter to a lifelong friend in California decrying manifest destiny as "Manifest Yankee trash" (qtd. in Jiron-King 23). As Jesse Alemán has argued, she sometimes "collapse[d] the regional borders between the South-west, the South, the Northeast, and Mexico to generate a critique of Northeastern colonial culture and provincial jingoism" (95). For instance, in 1865 when Burton was tasked with overseeing Jefferson Davis' captivity at Fort Monroe, Virginia, Ruiz de Burton met with Davis's wife, Varina. About the encounter, Mrs. Davis wrote the following to a family friend:

> Since Genl Burton came into position here, he has been very civil and kind to me and to [Jefferson Davis]. His wife is a sympathetic warm-hearted talented Mexican woman who is very angry with the Yankees about Mexican affairs, and we get together quietly and abuse them. (qtd. in Aranda 131)

Besides what this reveals about Ruiz de Burton's frustrations with the "Yankees," this excerpt is intriguing for the way Varina Davis writes about Ruiz de Burton's nationality. It raises questions about how this "Mexican woman" navigated her ethnicity and nationality during her life in the United States.

Another incident from Ruiz de Burton's life sheds further light on this. In 1871, she relied on her Mexican identity to lay claim to her ranch in San Diego with the Mexican courts. In the face of competing claims from US investors, her identity was important because, as historian Lisbeth Haas writes, "Women's sense of entitlement rested, in part, on the fact that Spanish and Mexican law gave them the right to control their property and wealth and to litigate on questions related to their person, their families, and their holdings...social practices unfamiliar to many Anglo-Americans" (81, 85). She won her claim in 1871, only to have it reversed in 1889, adding to her financial burdens. Still, the episode is enlightening for the way it reveals her continued identification with her Mexican heritage. Parts of her biography, then, do lend themselves to a proto-Chicanx interpretation that sometimes contradicts her writing.

These contradictions form the central debate in Ruiz de Burton studies, as her readers are often left wondering who she was and what she believed. Her writing defies easy answers, particularly as *Who Would Have Thought It?* repeats colonialist discourses about race and wealth. Alemán explains that, "the novel's emphasis on Mexican whiteness itself comes at the expense of Native, Irish, and African Americans, who all remain on the racialized margins of

white Mexican privilege" (99). One interpretation of the emphasis on Lola's "pure Spanish blood" (20), as Dr. Norval describes it to his wife, is that it reflects a defensive posture that many Mexicans took in order to protect themselves from American policies that would have disenfranchised them if they were perceived as Native. Martha Menacha says as much when she claims, "the conquered Mexican population learned that it was politically expedient to assert their Spanish ancestry; otherwise they were susceptible to being treated as American Indians" (qtd. in Alemán 97). However, I would argue that the uneasiness about *mestizo* heritage can be traced further back in Latin American history.

James Wood and Charles Chasteen give a good summary of the racial anxieties that plagued Latin America in the 19th century. They argue that many Latin American leaders adopted the "intellectually prestigious doctrines of 'scientific racism' emanating from Europe and the United States" (107), particularly the writings of French thinker Gustave Le Bon, who "taught that the racial traits of a population determined the character of a country" (107-108). Much like his American predecessors J.C. Nott and George R. Gliddon, Le Bon viewed race as a hierarchy, with Europeans at the top and Native Americans and Africans at the bottom. Most importantly, "Le Bon argued that race mixing always leads to degeneration" (108). Mixed-race individuals were understood to take on the worst traits of their parent races. When Dr. Norval emphasizes that "the blood of that child is as good as, or better than, yours or mine; that she is neither an Indian nor a negro child" (17), Ruiz de Burton is likely responding to anxieties about miscegenation that were common not just to Mexico, but much of Latin America.

By reading Ruiz de Burton's writing in combination with her biography and other historical documents, critics have arrived at numerous conclusions about "who she really was." Alemán argues that the answer lies in her positioning of Mexican whiteness as superior to Anglo

whiteness (108). Critic Shimberlee Jirón-King claims that manifest destiny is the ultimate target of her critiques (21). Ruiz de Burton's writing is admittedly contradictory. To give just one example from *Who Would Have Thought It?*, she critiques American monopolists, but valorizes the wealth of Lola's family in Mexico, which was also likely gained on the backs of indigenous laborers. Still, by paying close attention to the text of *Who Would Have Thought It?*, we can identify patterns within these contradictions. I argue that studies of Ruiz de Burton are still too invested in biography at the expense of close reading. This produces misreadings, such as María de la Luz Montes' claim in the introduction to the Penguin edition that "few of [Ruiz de Burton's] Anglo-American characters are rendered with any sign of honor and humility" (xii). As I will illustrate, this is untrue, and the real object of her critique is not Anglos, but victimizers.

To demonstrate this, I turn now to the text of *Who Would Have Thought It?*, analyzing characters who are often overlooked in the critical corpus thus far. Many of these characters play large roles in the novel yet have received little secondary attention. The experience of reading the critical literature next to the book therefore feels disjointed. By asking why Ruiz de Burton wrote about a scheming minister, a prisoner of war, or a mulatto mistress, we can meet the text on its own level. In doing so, we see that *Who Would Have Thought It?* rarely functions as a work of proto-Chicanx resistance literature that envisions Mexican Americans as *mestizo* and proletarian. Instead, its critique takes on an imperial scale, as an allegory for the victimization of aristocratic Mexico by the expansionist United States.

Characterizing Victimization

Although it may at first seem reductive to claim that the characters in *Who Would Have Thought It?* fall into just two groups, this organization serves Ruiz de Burton's satirical purpose.

She chooses clarity over subtlety, painting her villains as truly villainous and her heroes as, if not perfect, then overwhelmingly good. That is not to say that she does not satirize some characters who fall into the heroic category, but by the close of the novel, she is unmistakable about who is redeemed and who is forsaken. How, then, does Ruiz de Burton sort her characters?

This is essentially the same question raised above about what Ruiz de Burton believed. The two most commonly offered explanations are that she valued whiteness at the expense of characters of color, and that she valued, not money, but good breeding. Convincing arguments have been put forward by proponents of both theories, and they do explain important moments in the novel. The whiteness of Lola's skin, for instance, operates as a universal currency valued by even her tormenters. When Mattie, Lola's stepsister exclaims, "Talk of Spanish women being dark! Can anything be whiter than Lola's neck and shoulders?" Hackwell's sister Emma responds, "I think Lola might teach us the secret of that Indian paint that kept her white skin under cover, making it whiter by bleaching it" (233). The paint that had been seen first as a marker of Lola's ethnic inferiority, and later as a "cutaneous disease" (95) is reversed as a bestower of unprecedented whiteness. Another possibility, that Ruiz de Burton values gentility above all else, is evidenced by the fact that Lola's father does not wait to receive her fortune, preferring instead to return to Mexico with his daughter at the first opportunity.

Race and class do map onto the characters of *Who Would Have Thought It?* in important ways, but they fail to completely explain Ruiz de Burton's final categories. She provides the clearest demarcation between heroes and villains in the final scene, where some characters attempt to entrap Lola into a marriage with Hackwell, while others help her escape. To make her point unmistakable, Ruiz de Burton ends the novel in a sort of yacht race where the two camps are divided between two competing vessels. Hackwell's accomplices occupy the aptly named

Giant, representative of the monolithic threat of the United States. Lola's rescuers sail on the *Dove*, presumably an alternative to the war that subordinated Mexico.

Although not everyone finds a place on one of these two vessels, by the novel's conclusion, virtually every named character falls into one camp or another. Those camps break down in the following way: among her unsympathetic characters we find political schemers such as the Cackles and Le Grand Gunn, the hateful Mrs. Jemima Norval who torments Lola, and the grand antagonist, the Reverend Hackwell, as well as some more minor characters such as Hackwell's sister Emma and the elder Norval daughter, Ruth; the list of sympathetic characters is actually longer, including Dr. James Norval and his son Julian, the adventurous Isaac Sprig, President Lincoln, Lola Medina and her family, and perhaps most surprisingly, a mulatto "lady of the demimonde" (51) named Lucinda, as well as the more minor Lavinia Sprig, the younger Norval daughter Mattie, and Lola's French maidservant, Mina.

What divides these characters ultimately is not their race or class, but whether they use their position to exploit their friends and neighbors, or whether it is they that end up exploited. This division is unconventional, especially in the romantic novels that Ruiz de Burton was emulating. While some of her sympathetic characters do take on agency, it is not a prerequisite. More important for her is that they understand what it means to be persecuted. When they find themselves in a position of power, they then protect those who are in need. The admonition against cruelty clearly aligns with the politics of Ruiz de Burton. She was skeptical of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo and characterized manifest destiny as "trash," so it follow that she valued the responsible use of power, imbuing her heroes with that most important quality.

Rogues are Useful

Ruiz de Burton opens *Who Would Have Thought It?* with the following self-conscious commentary from the Reverend Hackwell:

> What would the good and proper people of this world do if there were no rogues in it, —no social delinquents? The good and proper, I fear, would perish of sheer inanity, —of hypochondriac lassitude, —or, to say the least, would grow very dull for want of convenient whetstones to sharpen their wits. Rogues are useful. (1)

On one level, this reveals Ruiz de Burton's conception of the transparent role that her villains will play; more importantly, perhaps, it shows Hackwell's recognition of his own role. He has no qualms about playing the part of a rogue, joking that it is a necessary part of the ecosystem of small town life.

Among the rogues of *Who Would Have Thought It?*, we find social and political climbers like the Cackle family and Le Grand Gunn. The Cackles begin the novel as humble occupants of the same village outside Boston where the Norvals live, and their ascension through society will mirror that of the Norvals. The family consists of the parents and four ludicrously-named brothers, Mark Antony, Julius Caesar, Mirabeau Demosthenes, and Marcus Tullius Cicero. Mark Antony and Julius Caesar gain distinction in the Civil War through lucky accidents rather than bravery. At the first battle of Bull Run, Mark Antony is captured within hours, and then "immediately exchanged and made colonel" (66). Julius Caesar beats a hasty retreat from the battle, and as "one of the foremost leaders of the flight" (64), stumbles upon the congressman Le Grand Gunn who lies prostrate on the ground. Gunn explains that he "came to see the battle from the distance. We thought it would be such as splendid sight. So three or four of us Representatives, and two or three Senators, got together to have some fun coming over to see the

fight" (65). Here, Ruiz de Burton alludes to actual events from the war, as civilians did come to watch the first major battle. Montes explains that Ruiz de Burton, "may have been familiar with H.R. Tracy's poem 'Civilians at Bull Run,' which appeared in the *Boston Herald* in 1861" (xi). After rescuing Gunn, Julius Caesar is also promoted. Several months later he rises even further when his horse recognizes a potential mate behind enemy lines. The horse charges forward, and "the staff, seeing the general charging the enemy so gallantly and heroically" (69) follow and rout the enemy. Ruiz de Burton mocks the false heroics of the Cackle brothers, creating a military where the least competent rise the highest. This can be read as a thinly-veiled critique of the American military as a whole, an institution in which men ascend not through valor, but through coincidence and influence peddling. Most condemnable, the military rewards those who victimize their enemies, demonstrated by the Cackle brothers' treatment of Isaac Sprig.

Isaac was also captured immediately at the Battle of Bull Run, and when the two brothers attempt to use their influence to have him traded, they are dissuaded by their other brothers in Congress: "Leave Isaac to his fate. Never undertake to lift a fallen man; never associate your fortunes with an unlucky dog like Isaac, by trying to help him when luck is set against him. Bad luck is contagious, I tell you" (68). This, rather than any military bumbling, is the Cackle brothers' greatest flaw. To help Isaac would cost them nothing, but they are either too malicious or too timid to act. Le Grand Gunn similarly refuses to help because of an altercation that he had with Isaac over Gunn's mistress, Lucinda. Gunn even goes out of his way to remove Isaac's name from the list of prisoners, guaranteeing that he remains a prisoner of war for years. With these choices, the political climbers guarantee themselves an ignominious fate. The novel concludes on a view of the Cackles struggling to maintain their prominence in the face of growing support for a genuine war hero, General Grant.

If the Cackles and Gunn represent the public face of exploitation, exerting power on a national scale, Mrs. Norval reflects its domestic sphere. Though she is described as having been "a fine girl" (50) in her youth, one who "put up pickles, and made butter and apple-sauce" (49) in a "Yankee Arcadia" (49), by the time the events of the novel begin, she has transformed into a bitter and judgmental woman. She is deeply prejudiced, and, upon seeing Lola for the first time, she exclaims "How black she is!" with "a slight shiver of disgust" (9). Her hatred is profound, almost uncontrollable, and she does not have a good understanding of it herself. Her motivations are described as "unbottled imps" (131) that rush out "pell mell" (131) and wreak havoc on her emotions. Her most damning attribute for Ruiz de Burton, however, is her measured decision to rob Lola of her fortune, even convincing herself that she deserves the money: "She had always hated and despised the black creature ever since she had appeared before her eyes encircled so tenderly by her husband's arm. But Lola was rich, and for her money's sake the matron had concealed the throbbings of aversion of her mercenary heart" (85). Her lust for wealth defies even her own explanation, and it is worth paying close attention to Ruiz de Burton's specific critique here. Though the narrator repeatedly laments the power that monopolists hold on American society, capitalism writ large is not the object of critique. In fact, when Mrs. Norval gives in to her passions and consumes conspicuously after years of Puritanical self-restraint, she is described as looking much younger and more beautiful than before (169). Instead, Mrs. Norval's sin is her theft from Lola. When she is placed in a position of power over the girl, she works for years to take as much from the child as possible. Ultimately, Ruiz de Burton punishes her for these wrongs by leaving her in a bed, suffering from hysteric fits at the conclusion of the novel. It is a vision, perhaps, of what Ruiz de Burton hopes might befall Mexico's victimizers.

Though the political climbers and Mrs. Norval draw ire from the reader, the most detestable antagonist is undoubtedly Reverend Hackwell. Hackwell is a mustache-twirling archetype of a villain. He is handsome and charming and unbound by any moral code, acknowledging his own roguishness at the start of the novel (1). From the pulpit he preaches temperance but drinks whiskey with his friend. When his wife dies, he quickly seduces Mrs. Norval and begins a clandestine relationship with her in order to manipulate Lola. What begins as a desire to acquire Lola's wealth turns to lust that he cannot control. He ultimately devises a scheme to trap Lola into marriage, and although the text treats this as just one of many outrages, it is worth quoting at length:

> "Why will you not try to give me a little love in return for all I have given you ever since you were a mere child? See how patiently I have borne your indifference, and even dislike, hoping that sooner or later you would appreciate my devotion."
>
> "Indeed, major, if it was to tell me this you called me here, I must go. You know how I feel about this—this—matter; it is very disagreeable."
>
> "You spurn me then? Take care!"
>
> "Do you threaten me?"
>
> "No, but I caution you."
>
> "I can't imagine why you should caution me because I can't love you," said Lola, moving towards the window to return to the library.
>
> The major caught her hand to detain her, and immediately lost his calmness and self-control. His wild beasts began to toss, and leap, and howl, and in an instant the whole menagerie was in a tumult, —all, all, —the slimy crawling things as well as the unruly, ferocious beasts. The touch of that pure hand did it all, —the little, soft palm, which sent

through his whole being an electric thrill, and made him feel that he could commit murder, theft, perjury, or anything else to which his menagerie prompted. (259-260).

To read Hackwell's crimes in the broader scope of victimization, we see that Ruiz de Burton was thinking about Lola's body, not just her money, as an object that could be exploited. Indeed, she directly compares the two when the law firm serving Hackwell hopes to profit from Lola's wealth, and Hackwell hopes to profit off her marriage to him (218). While we cannot be certain, it is possible that Ruiz de Burton was considering the ways that women, particularly women marginalized by their nationality or race were commodified within the capitalist economy of the United States. Either way, Hackwell occupies the top rung on the villainous ladder because of his unbridled willingness to exploit Lola and others around him for personal gain.

Pity for the Little Thing

When Dr. Norval arrives at his home with the young Lola, he summarizes the principle that guides the sympathetic figures throughout the novel: "I—a good for nothing Democrat, who don't believe in Sambo, but believe in Christian charity and human mercy, —I feel pity for the little thing" (10). Charity and mercy are traits that guide the heroes of the novel, often because they have suffered from persecution themselves.

Dr. Norval is the first of these, as he exhibits mercy towards the less fortunate and suffers at the hands of his own abusers. When he first returns to New England with Lola in tow, Hackwell points out that "our good and proper people have made a temporary whetstone of Dr. Norval's back," (1) gesturing towards the abuse he receives for his "Confederate sympathies." Dr. Norval is a Democrat, as he admits above, though he donates money to raise troops for the Union. Still, his wife observes that "All your throwing money away to raise troops won't help

you. You are put down as a rebel sympathizer on account of your treasonable letters and your treasonable words" (61). In the letters that she references, Dr. Norval mentioned his misgivings at the suspension of habeas corpus, a comment that follows both him and his son throughout the war. This is thanks in large part to the town gossip, Mrs. Cackle, spreading the belief that "the doctor is a friend of the Habeas Corpuses (I don't know who they are)" (88). It is largely misunderstandings that lead to Dr. Norval's abuse, yet that persecution forces him to flee to Europe for the remainder of the war. Some might argue that his decision to leave is a sign of weakness or decrepitude, but in the context of Ruiz de Burton's views on victimization, she likely intends it instead as a sign of humility, imbuing him with an understanding of personal suffering. Dr. Norval is Lola's only real friend in her early years, as even Julian shows her little kindness until he falls in love with her upon closer inspection of the ink on her skin. By forcing one of the most upstanding characters into hiding, Ruiz de Burton reveals the hypocrisy of New England society, which claims to hold freedom of opinion in such high regard.

When his father leaves, Dr. Norval's son Julian takes on the mantle of Lola's guardianship, and he possesses many traditionally heroic traits: Julian is unrelentingly good yet suffers at the hands of his government. He participates in seemingly every major battle of the Civil War (I exaggerate only slightly) and is wounded at both Bull Run and Chancellorsville. He is described as "a great manly beauty" (211) whose appearance only improves with agitation. Fortunately for Julian, he is agitated often, especially when he is accused of his father's crimes of Southern sympathies and must visit the President to clear his name. Rather than an individual, his persecutor is the faceless bureaucracy that makes it difficult to see the President in time. When he does finally meet Lincoln and the President asks him his name, the narrator waxes, "What bitter philosophy he was learning from the leading men of his country; from the Cackles;

from the First Magistrate! American citizens as *individuals*, then, had lost the importance, the sacredness of old" (215). While it seems perfectly reasonable that the President would not know the name of every one of his officers, this outrage is perhaps more revelatory of the levels of access that Ruiz de Burton experienced in Washington.

Either way, the victimization that Julian suffers does not turn him bitter or cynical. He fights for the Union all the way to "the Appomattox tree" (292). Nor, more importantly, does it turn him into an abuser. Julian displays the control of a consummate gentleman. When he gets into an altercation with Hackwell and Hackwell fires his pistol, the "ball passed close by Julian's head" (280). Still, Julian responds by wresting the pistol from Hackwell and declaring "Arise, viper! I won't kill you" (280). It is this gentility that makes Julian the superb match for Lola. As Jirón-King explains, "Julian allegorically represents the potential for genuine justice as well as the appropriate incorporation of the Californiana into the U.S. ruling elite" (26). His good breeding, as well as his victimization, allows him an empathic understanding of Lola's situation, making the two fitting partners.

Though there can be little argument that the Norval men fall on the side of the heroes in this novel, I would like to turn now to two characters for whom that is less clear. Though they have received little attention in the critical literature, they illuminate how Ruiz de Burton divided her characters. The first of these is the President, Abraham Lincoln, whose portrayal is particularly intriguing considering Ruiz de Burton's personal contact with him. At first glance, one might suppose that Lincoln falls on the side of the victimizers, as he represents the United States government that stripped Mexico of its land and tortured Julian with its slow-moving bureaucracy. On the contrary, Ruiz de Burton portrays Lincoln as a somewhat ineffectual, overly-pleasing figure who suffers his own abuse. When Julian returns to the White House a

second time because the order to clear his name has not been sent in the previous week (a possible sign of the President's impotence), the President "looks toward the *high officials,* as if anxious to ascertain their opinion" (241). When the President attempts to assure Julian that, "I don't think the order will be published tomorrow; and we shall see about your case leisurely on Monday," Julian bursts out, "No, Mr. President! Now or never!" (242). Though Julian recognizes that his speech is "injudicious" (243) the text validates his anger, as it forces Lincoln to make the right decision. To be clear, Lincoln does not act in the traditionally heroic way that the Norval men do. Things seem to happen to him, rather than him playing an active role in the war. Still, Ruiz de Burton gives voice to his motivations, calling him "good-natured" (241) and "lamented" (214), and "always glad when he had finished a disagreeable job" (216). His motivations are his desire to avoid conflict, making his tenure as a wartime President more poignant. What this sympathetic view of Lincoln reveals is that, not only was Ruiz de Burton possibly more open to Anglo culture than previous literature has suggested, but she likely even recognized the challenges faced by the U.S. government.

From Lincoln we turn to another character who has received little if any critical attention, the mulatto mistress of Le Grand Gunn, Lucinda, a woman who Isaac also "admires" (51), though it is not clear the extent of their relationship. Though Lucinda is given little of her own voice in the few scenes where she appears, she is nonetheless aligned more closely with Isaac than Le Grand Gunn. When we first meet her in the boarding house where Isaac is staying, she is lavishing Isaac with "attention, smiles, and sweet glances" and even "[laughs] aloud while the Hon. [Gunn] was yet within hearing" (52), causing Gunn to lose his temper and strike Isaac. This leads to "a most ignominious fist-fight in the presence of the quadroon belle" (52) where Gunn's nose is "lacerated to a large size [giving] Lucinda great desire to laugh" (52). After Isaac's

imprisonment in the Confederacy, this same scene repeats when Isaac returns to take vengeance on Gunn for removing his name from the list of prisoners. This time, however, "Lucinda, in her fright, instead of running to the front door to call for help, ran up-stairs to her room, leaving her devoted ex-congressman in the hands of the infuriated Sprig" (192). Although Isaac chastises Lucinda, accusing her of loving Gunn, he eventually calms and writes "a very kind letter to Lucinda, begging her pardon for his parting words" (204).

Though Lucinda can never marry Isaac, her working-class history and race preventing her from entering aristocratic society, she does challenge assumptions about Ruiz de Burton's racial attitudes. Alemán writes that "blackness...is the prevailing anxiety of Ruiz de Burton's narrative about whiteness" (105), citing as evidence that "Mrs. Norval, as with many of the book's Northerners, hates Lola because she looks black" (105). Ruiz de Burton does not avoid stereotyped portrayals of black characters, such as the dialect-heavy accent of a slave who helps set Isaac free. Indeed, Lola hates her own black skin when it is dyed by her native American captors. Alemán comments that this is "a peculiar Mexican racial anxiety for being categorized as Indian or black" (105). Still, Ruiz de Burton seems to sympathize with Lucinda's predicament, perhaps signaling some solidarity between the commodification of her body and of Lola's, mentioned above. While this could be said to lend credence to the resistance reading that I have been contesting, it might also be viewed as a proto-feminist critique of women's limited autonomy. Either way, Lucinda's sympathetic portrayal complicates claims that Ruiz de Burton's anxiety about blackness is overriding.

Though Lola's position has come up in discussions of other characters, I would be remiss to not give her further attention in my reading of victimized characters. Lola is, after all, the most consistently mistreated figure in the novel. She is captured by Native Americans at the start of

the Mexican American War, an abuse by the United States because it left wealthy Mexicans vulnerable to the Natives. As Aranda points out, "The year of Doña Theresa de Medina's captivity coincides with the outbreak of the war between the United States and Mexico. This is undoubtedly a very deliberate use of irony to mark the disruption of regional power that enabled Native American groups to take action against Mexican settlers" (146). Besides her abuse at the hands of the U.S. government, she is mistreated by members of her new family, a fact that is not lost on her: "I saw that your mother detested me, and Ruth had a sort of repugnance for me, and Miss Lavvy and Mattie, though they didn't dislike me, never took any interest in me" (94). Finally, she is the object of Hackwell's dastardly plot to force her into marriage. Much like the impassive Lincoln, this series of events happens to Lola while eliciting little response on her part beyond sobbing or writing to Julian for support.

On the one hand, Lola as the central heroine may seem an odd choice for Ruiz de Burton, a woman who actively exerted her own will on the society around her. The novel also features women who move pointedly out of the domestic sphere, illustrating that Lola is not entirely limited by her gender. For instance, Lavinia works as a hospital nurse, which Anne Goldman reads as a mark of Lavinia's privilege:

> Ruiz de Burton's experiments with transgressive feminine authority are sustained at the cost of her Mexican heroine, whose behavior she restrains, lest it risk the censure even the reformable Yankee women are treated to. Where Lavvy can work in a hospital with relative impunity, Lola's own nursing service remains restricted at home. (70)

Lola does enact her will within certain confines. When she first arrives in the Norval household, she refuses to speak, prompting the response from Ruth that "she doesn't understand" (12). Jirón-King describes this choice as a way to not "engage the violent discourse that can have no

other result than her permanent erasure in the world that she has entered" (27). Finally, Lola does introduce herself, revealing her knowledge of English: "'My name is Maria Dolores Medina; but I have always been called Lola or Lolita,' she answered in the plainest English" (13). Jirón-King reads this as "a baptismal moment—a moment where the Mexican American sustains her identity even in the face of hostile doctrines intended to deteriorate the legitimacy of her faith" (28). Lola's victimization translates into a subtle form of agency that she uses to navigate her new country, illustrating that heroism may take unconventional forms in the works of Ruiz de Burton.

Victimization, Reconciliation, and Resistance

Shimberlee Jirón-King observes that, "Ruiz de Burton locates herself and her heroic figurations as conquered, persecuted people who are in the process of being displaced and who are suffering injustice" (34). As we have seen, this is true for some of her characters, most notably Lola and her family, but does not apply to the full range of heroes in *Who Would Have Thought It?* Rather, Ruiz de Burton reveals a solidarity between even the President and a "quadroon belle" (52) in their similar experiences of victimization. She believes that in order to be the moral authority in a country that unapologetically steals from its neighbors, one must have suffered oneself. In her final rendering, her concern is ethical, so her resistance takes the form not of anti-Anglo satire, but the creation of characters who are good enough to uphold her moral standards. The marriage between Julian and Lola is important because it represents a reconciliation between the U.S. and Mexico that that can correct the moral failings of both countries. It is true that Ruiz de Burton paints the future leaders as white, aristocratic, and wealthy, and I do not mean to offer a proletarian reading in the final moments. However, I do

want to expand the understanding of *Who Would Have Thought It?* beyond readings of race and class to include the morality of characters, a morality that is determined in large part by their experiences as victims.

CHAPTER III

SOLIDARITY AND ITS SHORTCOMINGS IN ALFONSO CUARÓN'S *ROMA*

Alfonso Cuarón's 2001 film *Y Tu Mamá También* reveals a curiosity on the part of the director about relationships that cross identity boundaries. In the film, two teenage friends from opposite backgrounds, one wealthy and one working-class, take a road trip with an older woman in an effort to exert their independence. The journey culminates in a homosexual encounter between the boys and the ultimate dissolution of their friendship, ostensibly because the socioeconomic barriers were too great, but in reality because neither boy could face the shame he felt. Cuarón dangles before his audience the possibility that a deep connection can overcome identity barriers such as class, only to dash that hope and reify the boundaries that made their relationship unlikely in the first place.

Y Tu can be read as a political allegory about *mestizaje,* or the mixing that is central to Mexican national identity. Though it is achieved through a queer relationship in this film, *mestizaje* typically refers to interracial mixing that "has come to play an important role in the recognition of the plurality of cultural identities in [Latin America]" (Martinez-Echazábal 21). However, it can also be understood as a strategy for European-descended elites to announce an inclusive "latino" identity that erases black and indigenous histories. Cuarón plays with the double-edged nature of *mestizaje* in the union of Julio and Tenoch that concludes *Y Tu*. Though the film presents moments of hope that such a blending is possible, it ultimately argues that this

dream is unsustainable, even damaging to the characters who attempt it, demonstrated by the collapse of the boys' friendship. In his 2018 film *Roma*, Cuarón again examines the possibility for connection across boundaries, though in this more complex and contemplative project, the barriers multiply to include race, language, age, and gender.

Roma is a semi-autobiographical film that follows the lives of an affluent family in the Roma neighborhood of Mexico City in the 1970s. Its protagonist is the family's maid and nanny, Cleo, an indigenous woman in her 20s who plays an integral role in the functioning of the white family. The film is concerned with how connections are made and shattered in this context, asking how close Cleo can ever really be to the members of the family she works for. *Roma* is not as concerned with *mestizaje* as *Y Tu* was, perhaps because it is clear from the start that the challenges Cleo faces are virtually incomprehensible to the family, particularly the children whom she is helping to raise. The myth of m*estizaje* is dispelled within the opening frames of the film, as the audience sees the reflection of an airplane in the wet tiles of a garage where Cleo works to clean the excrement of the family dog. We soon come to understand that an airplane flight, and the connection to the larger world that it represents, is out of reach for Cleo. She is earthbound, trapped a cycle of ever more dog shit.

What then is the dream for Mexico, if not *mestizaje*? *Roma* picks up where *Y Tu* left off, making a more modest proposal about national identity. If a true mixing is not possible, perhaps some other form of connection still is. Indeed, the emotional core of *Roma* is the love that Cleo and the family share, rooted in Cuarón's own experience with his real-life nanny, Liboria "Libo" Rodríguez. One way to identify this connection might be to call it solidarity, a term that conjures ideas of shared humanity and struggle. The film is certainly curious about the extent to which Cleo's humanity can be recognized by those around her, not only within in the family, but also

by the father of her child. This paper will explore three sets of relationships to determine whether they can be understood as examples of solidarity. These include the relationship between Cleo and the children of the family, between Cleo and Sra. Sofía, and between Cleo and her lover, Fermín. Throughout *Roma*, Cuarón seems to propose that certain types of connection are possible, even across identity boundaries. It is the nature of that connection that is the focus of this inquiry, as I explore whether the characters' relationships represent solidarity, or whether they are better characterized in some other capacity.

The Demands of Solidarity

To proceed with an analysis of the relationships within *Roma*, it is important to establish a more technical definition of solidarity. For this I rely on several theorists, including Jodi Dean, Chandra Mohanty, and Anne Garland Mahler, all of whom have written about solidarity and political and social movement building. Dean provides an important starting point, as she establishes the relationships between parties involved in an act of solidarity. In her 1996 book, *Solidarity of Strangers*, she describes that relationship in the following way:

> I define reflective solidarity as the mutual expectation of a responsible orientation to relationship. This conception of solidarity relies on the intuition that the risk of disagreement which accompanies diversity must be rationally transformed to provide a basis for our intersubjective ties and commitments. This means that the expression "we" must be interpreted not as a given, but as "in process," as the discursive achievement of individuated "I's." (3)

Let us pause for a moment on several key elements within this definition. First, Dean specifies the type of solidarity on which she is focusing, calling it "reflective solidarity." This not only

identifies a particular type of solidarity, separating it from a more casual or expansive use of the term, but it highlights "reflection" as a central demand. An accidental connection does not qualify as solidarity under this framework. Rather, a thoughtfulness about that connection is crucial.

Secondly, Dean observes that "the risk of disagreement which accompanies diversity must be rationally transformed..." This is significant because it recognizes that solidarity can only exist between actors whose experience is sufficiently distinct. While in reality, no two people experience their subjectivity identically, in the context of *Roma,* this means that solidarity is a moot point between Cleo and her friend Adela, another indigenous worker in the family. Adela mirrors Cleo's position too closely, so there can be no "disagreement" between them. The above point is also noteworthy because it implies that a "risk of disagreement" is virtually *guaranteed* between two groups who are sufficiently different that they qualify as "diverse." Dean reveals that this disagreement need not be feared but should be viewed as an opportunity for transformation. Later, she emphasizes that, "dissent, questioning, and disagreement no longer have to be seen as tearing us apart but instead can be viewed as characteristic of the bonds holding us together" (8). Again, in the context of *Roma,* this means that the barriers between characters might serve as the very basis of a fruitful relationship.

Dean provides another helpful way to visualize the relationships between actors when she explains it as a positioning of three people:

> Simply put, solidarity can be modeled as an interaction involving at least three persons: I ask you to stand by me over and against a third. But rather than presuming the exclusion and opposition of the third, the ideal of reflective solidarity thematizes the voice of the

> third to reconstruct solidarity as an inclusionary ideal for contemporary politics and societies. (3)

Again, this definition makes two points. The first is that through an act of solidarity, a third person or group will, by definition, be excluded. In *Roma*, this is not only a positioning of individuals but of identity groups, so when Cleo and Sofía stand together, they stand against the men who abandoned them. Their parallel positions as women opposite these men is what brings them together, rather than any affinity between the characters. This positioning might at first be viewed as destructive because each instance of solidarity requires an "other" that stands outside. Equally important, however, is Dean's observation that the voice of the third is not ignored. Indeed, the perspectives of both Dr. Antonio and Fermín are given significant attention in the film. This allows for a productive space to open so that progress might be made. For instance, the male children might not repeat the same act of abandonment with their own families. Dean's definition is therefore hopeful and remains focused on progress.

Chandra Mohanty builds on Dean's definition in her 2003 book, *Feminism Without Borders*. Like Dean, she emphasizes the work of solidarity, saying, "A formulation of decolonization in which autonomy and self-determination are central to the process of liberation and can only be achieved through self-reflexive collective practice" (8). The idea of self-reflection mirrors Dean's use of the term "reflective solidarity," emphasizing the need for contemplation. For both theorists, liberating change cannot be stumbled into, but requires collective practice and reflection. Mohanty also highlights the importance of practice, or repeated efforts to create change in the face of adversity: "Rather than assuming an enforced commonality of oppression, the practice of solidarity foregrounds communities of people who have chosen to *work and fight* together" (7 emphasis mine). Returning to Cleo and Sofía's relationship, there is

very little evidence of "practice." As I will examine later, their moments of connection, though striking, are often coincidental. They also show little evidence of reflection, especially on Sofía's part, as she fails to consider the parallels between her own and Cleo's positions. Indeed, as each of the relationships in *Roma* is scrutinized through this lens, it becomes clear that the type of attention necessary to meet Mohanty's definition is conspicuously absent from Cuarón's film.

Anne Garland Mahler provides a third definition of solidarity, this time grounded in the political realm, though it is informed by affect theory. Her book examines the Tricontinental movement of the 1960s and 70s, a political and intellectual alliance among nations from Asia, Africa, and the Americas that pushed back against the "military and economic imperialism" (3) of the Global North. In her analysis, Mahler defines "trans-affective solidarity" as "a radical openness facilitated by affective relation," and explains that "The means and the ends of Tricontinentalist politics are the same: the repetitive and persistent proclaiming of affective relation and community across national, linguistic, and ethnic borders" (11). On the one hand, this definition does seem to apply to at least some of the characters in *Roma*. The children repeatedly proclaim their love for Cleo, and she for them. Yet, Mahler's argument is focused on the political, rather than the interpersonal; she is concerned with masses more than individuals. Her definition will therefore prove useful when examining Cuarón's portrayal of political movements, as well as the film's own efforts to mobilize affect on behalf of indigenous workers.

To bring these three theorists together, I would like to offer a unified definition of what I am calling "solidarity work." This can be understood as a relationship between diverse actors to overcome adversity that demands practice and reflection. It is true that some of these requirements are met some of the time in the relationships throughout *Roma*. However, as seen in Cleo and Sofía's relationship, they are virtually never all fulfilled, blocked instead by

characters' myopic vision or their self-interest. The inability of Cuarón's characters to meet these requirements highlights the difficulty of solidarity work. Equally important, it reveals Cuarón's beliefs about the persistence of racial and class boundaries.

The outlook is not entirely bleak, however, as Cuarón does explore moments of connection between characters of different backgrounds. Even if they fail to meet the definition of solidarity work, these relationships represent the emotional core of the film. Perhaps if solidarity does not accurately describe them, another term can. Shaka McGlotten provides an alternate way to think through these moments of attachment in his book *Virtual Intimacies*. McGlotten examines queer relationships in virtual spaces to come to a definition of intimacy that emphasizes its potentiality: "Intimacy is not a form of affect; rather it is more like affect's own immanence—proximity, connection—a necessary precondition for certain affective states to bloom, especially those that have to do with other people. Affect happens in and through intimacy" (8-9). For McGlotten, then, intimacy represents the possibility of affective connection, a crucial component for that connection to occur. It can therefore perhaps be understood as a precursor to Mahler's trans-affective solidarity, with that solidarity just one step away.

A second theorist who examines the role of potentiality is Jorge Muñoz. His *Cruising Utopia* is concerned with utopias of queerness, a topic that at first glance has much to do with *Y Tu Mamá También*, but not so much with *Roma*. On closer examination, however, Cuarón's vision of connection is not so distant from Muñoz's utopias. Muñoz begins by exploring the ways that everyday occurrences can open pathways to utopias. He performs a reading of an Andy Warhol painting and a poem by Frank O'Hara, both of which create a sense of utopia in the quotidian object of a Coca-Cola bottle: "Both queer cultural workers are able to detect an opening and indeterminacy in what for many people is a locked-down dead commodity" (9). For

Muñoz, utopias can be envisioned through small, everyday incidences, much like what Cuarón portrays in *Roma*.

Muñoz goes on to explain how these quotidian openings lead to moments of "potentiality":

> Agamben's reading of Aristotle's *De Anima* makes the crucial point that the opposition between potentiality and actuality is a structuring binarism in Western metaphysics. Unlike a possibility, a thing that simply might happen, a potentiality is a certain mode of nonbeing that is eminent, a thing that is present but not actually existing in the present tense. (9)

The important point here is that potentiality signifies something concrete, even if it does not exist in the present moment. Because these moments of connection are always delayed, always just out of reach, they are hopeful in tone, in their unfulfilled form.

Regarding utopias, Muñoz points out that they "can and regularly will be disappointed," yet are "indispensable to the act of imaging transformation" (9). This sounds much like the relationships in the film. Even if Cuarón's characters might not achieve total identification in the form of *mestizaje*, or meet the lesser demands of solidarity work, intimacy and potentiality are equally important for envisioning a transformative future. Cuarón is able to rely on these forms of connection in his work of paying homage to Libo and to domestic workers throughout Mexico.

The Intimacy of Motherhood

Because Cuarón's relationship with his own nanny provided the impetus for the making of *Roma*, it makes sense that a central focus of the film is the attachment between Cleo and the

children, particularly the youngest boy, Pepe, who stands in for Cuarón. In an interview, Cuarón acknowledged his motivations for making the film, saying that it was in part guilt that drove him:

> It was probably my own guilt about social dynamics, class dynamics, racial dynamics. I was a white, middle-class, Mexican kid living in this bubble. I didn't have an awareness. I [had] what your parents tell you — that you have to be nice to people who are less privileged than you and all of that — but you're in your childhood universe. (Tapley)

The reasons for such feelings are on clear display in the film. Though Pepe does not antagonize Cleo to the same extent his older brothers do (at one point, Paco throws a ball through a glass window in an effort to hit his brother Toño), an unending burden of demands, both emotional and physical, fall on Cleo as a part of her work as the children's nanny.

Take for instance an establishing scene that occurs early in the film. While Cleo does laundry on the roof, Pepe and his brother Paco chase each other with a pair of fake guns. Though they are not normally allowed to play on the roof, Cleo does not have the heart to force them back inside, instead simply warning them to stay away from the ledge. When Paco becomes angry that Pepe didn't pretend to die like he was supposed to, he declares the game finished and goes inside. At this point, Pepe lies down on a concrete block, imagining what it would be like to be dead. Cleo joins him, explaining that she too is dead, then commenting, "Me gusta estar muerta," "I like being dead."[5] Pepe responds with a sigh of acknowledgement, and the two lie there, head to head. The camera then pans across the roof, revealing a handful of other women washing laundry on identical roofs across the neighborhood.

This scene is revealing because of the way it contrasts intimacy with a more complete identification (I avoid calling it solidarity because Cleo shares the position of the other workers

[5] Translations come from the Netflix subtitles.

too closely). Cleo and Pepe undeniably share a connection. Pepe is an imaginative child, at times telling Cleo about the ways he has died in past lives. Rather than dismiss Pepe's ideas as childish, she recognizes a creative impulse in him, even indulging that creativity by playing Pepe's game with him. This can be considered an example of McGlotten's intimacy because it represents a moment of connection that is meaningful, and yet mutual understanding is still withheld. As the camera portrays the other women working on matching rooves, not only does Cuarón comment on the fact that Cleo's story is just one of many, but it reveals how little Pepe sees of Cleo and her world. She must travel the full distance to meet him, while he does very little to understand her.

Of course, this is in part because Pepe is so young, perhaps seven years old in the film. His worldview is necessarily limited. Still, the older children do not show much of an interest in Cleo's family or history, except perhaps for the sister, Sofí, who learns some songs in the indigenous Mixtec language. A scene in *Y Tu Mamá También* makes a similar comment on Tenoch's obliviousness, revealing that Cuarón was processing guilt during the making of that earlier film. When the boys are in the middle of their journey, they pass the village where Tenoch says his nanny was born. He then reflects on how little he knows about her, despite the important role she has played in his life. Cuarón is concerned with the way that the personal lives of domestic workers are invisible to their employers, and the making of *Roma* can be seen as an effort to correct that error.

A second scene that parallels the lack of understanding on the rooftop occurs when the family is watching television together. Cleo makes her way around the room, quietly picking up the dishes from dinner. For a brief moment, she kneels on a cushion to watch with the family, and Paco places his arm on her shoulder in another moment of intimacy. After a few moments,

Sra. Sofía asks Cleo to make her husband a tea, at which point Pepe protests, "No, porque está conmigo!," "No, she is with me!" With this comment, Paco's arm suddenly takes on a different significance, shifting from a gesture of affection to one of possession. The children need Cleo in a desperate way, and that need sometimes manifests as a violence against her.

It is worth noting that, though *Roma* portrays specifically Mexican relationships, the power dynamics at play in the film have analogues in many parts of the world. The United States has a comparable history of African American women working as caretakers for white families, often embodied in the "mammy" figure. Though race relations differ between the US and Mexico, the stereotypical mammy role has much in common with Cleo's position, including an expectation of complete devotion to the white children, with little regard for the way this affects the caretaker's ability to raise her own family. Micki McEleya writes about the demands placed on African American caretakers in her book *Clinging to Mammy*: "When black women's work was appropriated by the white household, their care-giving labor was reframed as motherly instinct and love in the figure of the mammy, thus not as work at all" (82). As McEleya explains, the myth of black maternal instinct allowed for the exploitation of her labor while minimizing guilt on the part of the white family. This same dynamic is at play in *Roma,* for example when Cleo puts the children to bed at night and wakes them up in the morning. These are some of the most tender scenes in the film, revealing Cleo's intimacy with the children. What is left unacknowledged are the physical demands of being the last one to bed and the first one up each morning.

Beyond reframing labor as maternal devotion, Cleo's pregnancy and miscarriage also share characteristics with narratives about mammy figures. The epitome of Cleo's caretaking occurs while the family is on a vacation in Veracruz. Though she had given birth to a stillborn

child only days before, she is encouraged to come on the trip with the family, being told that it will lift her spirits. She is promised that she will not be working, but as we have seen, her work as caretaker is simply reframed as love.

At one point while the family is playing on the beach, Sofí and Paco are pulled out into the water, despite their mother's warnings not to go past the shore. Cleo, who cannot swim, walks into the crashing waves and rescues the children. When they return to shore, the family collapses in a heap, Sofía comes running, and they all hold each other in a moment of relief. Perhaps the fear of a child dying breaks a dam in the usually stoic Cleo, because it is at this moment that she begins to sob: "No la quería," "I didn't want her." At first Sofía responds, "Están bien," "They're alright," assuming that Cleo is crying over Sofí and Paco. Cleo goes on, "Yo no quería que naciera," "I didn't want her to be born," before Sofía gathers that Cleo is mourning her own daughter. Sofía is not able to imagine Cleo with any family other than hers, a commonality shared with black caretakers:

> When celebrating the figure of the black mother, whites never referred to her own family, a deliberate silence that allowed them to ignore the coercion that helped make possible this intimate relationship between black female caretakers and their white charges. It also showed a fundamental lack of concern for black women's private emotions, their families, and the maternal work they performed outside the white domestic sphere. This absence of concern was never nonchalant or careless; instead it revealed an overriding white desire not to perceive black women as belonging to any other family at all. (McElya 81)

With this dynamic in mind, it becomes clear that the possessiveness of Cleo's care is a violence masked as love. Once Sofía realizes that Cleo is crying over her own infant child, she does

respond with an outpouring of affection, kissing the top of her head and declaring, “Te queremos mucho, Cleo,” “We love you so much, Cleo.” Still, this should not be confused for a true acknowledgement of Cleo’s grief, but a reclaiming of her attention for their own family. In the following scene, the family returns to a rearranged household as they begin their lives with no father, but more assuredly than ever, two mothers.

Feminist Solidarity?

The relationship between Sofía and Cleo seemingly provides the greatest chance for solidarity in the film because Sofía is mature enough to recognize Cleo’s humanity, and both women experience parallel forms of abandonment by men. Cuarón has stated that the film is about “the two most influential women in [his] youth” (Ford), putting Cleo and Sofía in direct conversation with one another. It is therefore plausible that when the characters find themselves alone, they might perform the type of reflective practice that qualifies as solidarity work.

From the start of the film we see that significant practice and reflection would be necessary to bridge the divide between the women. Sofía is a hard taskmaster and does not tolerate idleness from her maids. She occasionally lashes out in violent outbursts, for instance when she yells at Cleo for not having cleaned up after the dog. Her eruptions extend beyond Cleo; at one point she slaps her son Toño for attempting to listen in on her phone conversation (she then yells at Cleo for allowing him to do so). The film acknowledges the motivations behind her actions by depicting her own struggle following her husband’s departure. Still, there is no denying that she is at times violent (she vindictively crashes the family car on more than one occasion), verging on abusive.

This abuse often vacillates between moments of tenderness and anger. Sofía is a doting mother, affectionate with her caresses and willing to give her children whatever they ask. She gives up her work as a biochemist to support the family after their father stops sending money. However, she also uses her affection to manipulate, for instance when she asks her children to write letters to their father encouraging him to come home. They do not yet grasp that he has left permanently, and she hopes to use them to lure him back. Similarly, when she announces to her children that their father will not be returning, she does so with a grin that feels out of place in the somber moment. She explains that they went on the trip to give their father time to collect his belongings, a revelation that surely cuts doubly as the children realize she has lied to them. Though Sofía experiences her own suffering, her trauma manifests in unhealthy ways that Cuarón does not flinch from portraying.

Two moments of connection between Sofía and Cleo do complicate the image of an abuser somewhat. The first comes when Cleo tells Sofía that she is pregnant. Cleo asks if she is going to be fired, a question that speaks volumes about the precarity of her status in the family. Even though she is indispensable to the children, that does not necessarily translate into job security. Though Sofía responds that she is of course not fired, that they will take her to see a doctor, Cleo senses the way that Sofía's temperament can swing suddenly. Sofía's response indicates that she might be taking steps towards solidarity work, but it also might be read as an effort of self-preservation now that her husband has left and she needs additional help with the children. In any event, it is still not clear whether Sofía recognizes a commonality between her own and Cleo's predicament. Though they are now both single mothers, Sofía's pregnancies were likely not accidental. Without recognition of their similar circumstances, Sofía still lacks the reflection necessary for solidarity work.

A second interaction gets closer to that recognition, occurring when the family visits the hacienda of some friends for the holidays. Cleo is returning from a small party with the other employees when she witnesses a man drunkenly approach Sofía and try to grope her. Sofía immediately pushes him away, pointing out that she is married. To this he responds, "You're not even that hot, comadre" and walks away. The camera returns to Cleo who tilts her head in acknowledgement of the harassment she just witnessed. Sofía meets her gaze and the women hold eye contact in a moment of mutual recognition. This is perhaps the closest the film comes to solidarity. Sofía knows that Cleo witnessed her moment of vulnerability, and for a brief instant allows Cleo to offer her condolences through her gaze. The two women are suddenly standing together, over and against a third, to return to Dean. Yet the connection only lasts a second before both women must retake their positions within the party as employer and employee. Cleo and Sofía's connection therefore approaches solidarity, but their hierarchy is quickly reestablished when they leave the space of intimacy.

Fermín and the Missing People

Up until this point, the relationships examined have not always fulfilled the demands of solidarity, but they have not resulted in the type of catastrophe that *Y Tu Mamá También* depicts. The relationship in that film reached a point of collapse when the intimacy between the characters moved beyond potentiality and was consummated. Cleo's relationship with her lover and the father of her child, Fermín, also results in disaster, both on the interpersonal level, and on the broader scale of mass violence as the film links her pregnancy to a demonstration that is violently repressed.

When the audience first meets Fermín, he appears to be a good man, a cousin of Adela's boyfriend, Ramón, who treats Cleo respectfully and presents an opportunity for her to live a private life outside of the demands of the family. After just a brief introduction to his character at a movie theater, the viewer is given access to one of the most private moments of intimacy in the film when Cleo accompanies Fermín to a hotel room. There he undresses and performs a series of martial arts routines using a shower rod as a kendo stick. Though he appears adept at the moves, with no opponent, it is difficult to assess how formidable he really is. In his state of undress, and with a shower rod as his prop, he is completely exposed, though he does not seem to recognize his own vulnerability. Cleo, who is charmed by the performance, cannot help but laugh, before Fermín tells Cleo about how martial arts changed his life:

> Yo debo la vida a las artes marciales. ¿Yo crecí con muchas carencias, sabes? Como chamaco, cuando mi mamá se murió, me llevaron a vivir en esa, allá con mi tía...Pero descubrí las artes marciales. Y todo tiene foco.
>
> I owe my life to martial arts. I grew up with nothing. My mother died when I was a kid. I moved with my aunt to the slums...But then I discovered martial arts. And everything came into focus.

Though the speech appears to show a sense of discipline on Fermín's part, it is revealing for the fact that he is not participating in innocent martial arts training. Instead, he is a part of *Los Halcones*, or The Falcons, a secret paramilitary group that the Mexican government trained to counter student protests (Doyle). Fermín's storyline is more than that of a young father who abandons his child, but of a participant in one of the most deadly and detested massacres in Mexican history.

In this way, Cuarón blends his family's history with the history of the country, imagining the psychology of a notorious figure. As the film reveals, Fermín likely did not understand the role he would play in Mexican history. He certainly knew he was being trained for military action, and in the final moment, he commits violence against peaceful protestors. If he were to be asked whether such violence was wrong, his speech above indicates that he would likely deny his complicity, claiming instead that his upbringing was an injustice. Like many of the characters in the film, his error is in his inability to see beyond himself, though that error has larger consequences than it does for other characters. For Cleo then, the moment of consummated intimacy in the hotel room precipitates a crisis because her resultant pregnancy leads to her suffering.

Cleo's relationship with Fermín offers another way to examine solidarity beyond the level of individuals. After the scene in the hotel, Fermín is repeatedly portrayed as part of a crowd. These scenes of mass demonstrations introduce the challenge of organizing masses of people. Whereas intimacy only requires two characters to form a connection, groups demand the type of reflective work that solidarity more typically refers to. Fermín might therefore represent a different approach to solidarity work. Gilles Deleuze analyzed group dynamics in *Cinema 2*, concluding that much political film produced in regions of the Global South is concerned with the fact that, "the people no longer exists, or not yet...*the people are missing*" (216). Film critic David Martin-Jones explains Deleuze's comment, saying:

> In modern political cinema there was no existing, coherent concept of "the people." Often this was because modern political cinema was created in situations where the identity of the people was contested, such as in countries ruled by military dictatorships, or in emergent post-colonial countries. These filmmakers, then, were attempting to imagine, or

> create, a concept of the people that could be politically effective in revolutionizing, rebuilding, or reshaping a country. (225)

This definition of an emergent, postcolonial nation fits Cuarón's Mexico, and the idea that the people represent a different political possibility is intriguing. Cuarón examines what this new possibility might look like in two scenes involving large demonstrations.

The first scene occurs when Cleo seeks out Fermín to explain that she is pregnant with his child. She approaches a field where *Los Halcones* are training, observed by a small cadre of women and young children. For viewers unfamiliar with the history of the group, the scene does offer a possibility of uplift. The presence of a Korean trainer, as well as the ubiquitous airplanes flying overhead hold some promise of a peaceful global order. There are hints of the violence that lies beneath the gathering, however. A CIA officer can be seen briefly among the trainers, nodding to the US support of *Los Halcones,* some of whom were trained in the United States (Ford). The letters LEA are visible on the mountain behind the trainees. These are the initials of Luis Echeverría Álvarez, Mexico's future president, and a man who was already responsible for a 1968 massacre that took place when students protested the authoritarian government days before the Olympics were to open in Mexico City (Torrealba). At one point, Cleo asks Fermín, "¿Es para las Olimpiadas?" "[Are you training] for the Olympics?" He responds, "Algo así," "Something like that." *Los Halcones* were famous for using kendo sticks as well as firearms in their attack, so a viewer familiar with Mexican history will pick up on the foreshadowing.

Even for those who miss these clues, however, the training scene quickly devolves into the ridiculous. A stunt performer, the revered Dr. Zovek, is brought in to train the group. Slightly overweight and wearing a skin-tight spandex outfit, his expertise immediately comes under question. Zovek gives a dramatic speech about the "great potential" of each participant, then

performs a party trick that positions him a ridiculous pose. After inviting the trainees to attempt the feat themselves, they are all made to look absurd. Even the audience succumbs, as there is an impulse to test the trick for oneself. The illusion of political uplift is shattered and Deleuze's "missing people" are humiliated.

Still, the scene maintains a relatively gentle tone until one remembers Fermin's earlier speech about martial arts bringing him out of the slums. After the group finishes training, Cleo attempts to speak to him, and the gravity of her situation is clarified. For all Fermín's talk of self-discipline, he shows his true colors by insulting Cleo and then abandoning her. Rather than embracing the difficult work of empathy, he runs away. Fermín is even taunted by the very crowd who represent the possibility of uplift, revealing Cuarón's doubt in the potential of the masses.

Finally, in one of the largest and most complex scenes of the film, *Los Halcones* do attack student demonstrators in the Corpus Christi Massacre (Ford). This leads to Cleo's greatest crisis, as her fright forces her into labor. Upon seeing Fermín participate in an execution, her water breaks, and she must make her way to the hospital in the chaos of the attack. She gives birth and her child is pronounced dead, raising questions about who is responsible for this devastating outcome. Fermín's actions arguably sent her into labor prematurely, and the inability to get to the hospital quickly might be another cause. Cleo feels guilt over her own role, as the beach scene reveals. When she cries that she didn't want her daughter to be born, she is fearful that these thoughts influenced the eventual outcome. While the fault remains ambiguous, Cuarón is clear about his skepticism of the masses. They do not provide an example of solidarity work, but instead precipitate the greatest disasters of the film.

Roma as Solidarity Work

It appears, then, that solidarity is largely absent from *Roma.* Cleo and Sofía's relationship comes closest, but their connection is too fleeting to truly qualify. I would argue however, that there is one clear example of solidarity work at play here, which is the creation of the film itself. Motivated by his guilt about his own nanny, Cuarón has made a sustained, reflective effort to give voice to domestic workers across Mexico. In his acceptance speech for best director at the Academy Awards, he acknowledged the lack of recognition that many women like Cleo receive: "I want to thank the Academy for recognizing a film centered around an indigenous woman, one of the 70 million domestic workers around the world without work rights, historically relegated to the background of the cinema" (Campbell). The film has spurred efforts to improve the working conditions of domestic workers, including the introduction of a bill in the U.S. Congress that would guarantee them work protections (Campbell).

Some viewers may have contentions about how successful Cuarón is at centering Cleo's voice, and there is an argument that she suffers her injustices in silence (Brody). Still, if we are to return to our definition that solidarity work is "a relationship between diverse actors to overcome adversity that demands practice and reflection," Cuarón meets these demands. With this point, I do not mean to dismiss critiques of the film. What I hope to highlight is the emphasis among each of our guiding theorists on practice and reflection. There is no stipulation that the solidarity work lead to political change (though that is, of course, the goal), and certainly no requirement that it be flawless. Rather, the *work* is what matters, and Cuarón's film does shine as an example of that work.

Roma is therefore a contradiction of sorts. Though Cuarón repeatedly interrupts moments of potential solidarity, highlighting its failures and shortcomings, and though efforts at

connection often lead to catastrophe, the film is a prime sample of solidarity work. Cuarón's desire to overcome identity boundaries may fail on screen, but the film represents an important step towards that goal in the real world.

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