

**LOS FANTASMAS SOLLOZAN: GHOSTS, BORDERMAKING, AND CULTURAL
HAUNTINGS IN THE U.S./MEXICO BORDERLANDS**

by

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DEDICATION

For my ancestors who, without them, I am nothing.

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In the last centuries, feeling like “neither from here nor there” and like “we didn’t cross the border, the border crossed us” has generated an abundance of culturally rich narratives, ones that represent and humanize the complexities of Borderland experiences. These proverbs derive from histories of (im)migration, forced migration, shifting political landscapes, and the liminality that accompany these experiences. Ghosts, spirits, and hauntings were born from these collective and individual experiences, contributing to the aforementioned cultural narratives. Ghost stories and folklore are living remnants of these haunting histories, and they traverse intergenerationally.

This thesis delves into the Chicana works of Rudolfo Anaya and Helena Maria Viramontes to analyze how U.S./Mexico Borderlands ghost stories unearth the deep-seated scars of bordermaking on racial and cultural identity. This corpus analyzes Anaya’s *Bless Me, Ultima* and Viramontes’s *Under the Feet of Jesus* using a combination of spectral theory, Chicana and women-of-color feminism, decolonial theory, border studies, and these theories’ entanglements. As stories of cultural haunting, *Bless* and *Under’s* hauntings/ghosts are vehicles for shaping identity amidst bordermaking and histories of (im)migration. Characters like Antonio Márez and Estrella become the spokespeople for the ghosts and hauntings. In learning and studying cultural identity through haunting narratives, we as readers gain a better understanding of the nuance within identity. Shaped by ethnicity, race, history, class, and many other factors—these stories of

cultural haunting contribute to forming empathy and potential coalitional bonds between people of different backgrounds.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTERTWINED HISTORIES

“Fantasmas

Sollozan.

Inundados en la certeza.

Entran en el aliento,

las palabras.”

– Susana Chávez, a Juarensé poet and activist

Preface

I am a product of the U.S./Mexico Borderlands. I lived in Ciudad Juárez for fourteen years and would cross the border every day to go to school in El Paso, Texas. In 2010, my mixed-status family moved to El Paso, yet we continuously crossed back into Juárez to visit family and buy groceries. Despite being young during these years crossing the border, I recognized injustices within the U.S. immigration system entangled between the two countries’ gender, racial, and geo-political systems. I witnessed injustice in the U.S. immigration system and remember Juárez’s militarization and cartel violence. Most of all, I remember the impunity. I wondered why Marisela Escobedo Ortiz’s daughter, Rubí, did not receive justice for her murder—and I will never forget the day I heard that Marisela was assassinated for her activism. I grew up witnessing these interlinked forms of oppression, but I had not fully processed these events as a child. As an adult and researcher, I recognize how the injustices on one side of the border are not isolated issues of one nation-state; rather, they are entangled.

I preface my thesis with a testimonio because my lived experiences sowed the seeds of my academic work and specifically informed the theoretical conception of this corpus. To me, hauntings are not fictional; they represent the very real acts of immigration injustice, impunity, gender violence, and colonial oppression rendered invisible. These hauntings created chasms within our personal lives, affecting the core of our identities. As time passed, I started wondering more about my own identity amid this transnational environment, recalling memories of my U.S. elementary school discouraging students like me from speaking Spanish or why I felt too American for my Mexican family but not sufficiently ‘American’ in the United States. Leaving the Borderlands only left me with more questions, and as the years went by, the questions only got more complicated.

In this thesis, I explore how shifting nation-state border(s), immigration, migration, and our inherent colonial complicity have historically impacted and haunted Latinx and Chicanx cultural identities for centuries. Our collective Borderland identities are complex and nuanced due to our mixed backgrounds and are essentially paradoxical—but not monoliths. Reading Rudolfo Anaya’s *Bless Me, Ultima* and Helena Maria Viramontes’s *Under the Feet of Jesus* with this focus explores the nature of this paradox, noting the historical and social contextual similarities but also the lack of a seamless solution to understanding Latinx and Chicanx cultural identity. Our cultural, literary, and folkloric ghosts exist in this liminal, paradoxical space.

I included a poem by Susana Chavez as my epigraph to illustrate the connections between lived experiences and analytical methodologies. Chavez was a scholar-poet-activist in the Juárez feminicidio movement, coining the slogan “Ni una mujer menos, ni una muerta más,” and was murdered in 2011. The poem translates to, “Ghosts weep. Overcome by certainty. The words enter our breath.” This poem represents not just a lived experience and testimonio, but it also

provides a powerful methodological approach: ghost stories and hauntings are calls to action and demand collective responsibility. Scholars like Jacques Derrida, Avery Gordon, and Kathleen Brogan also postulate this methodology, which I discuss at length. We, the living, become the spokespeople for the ghosts who cannot rest because injustice remains.

The Borderlands

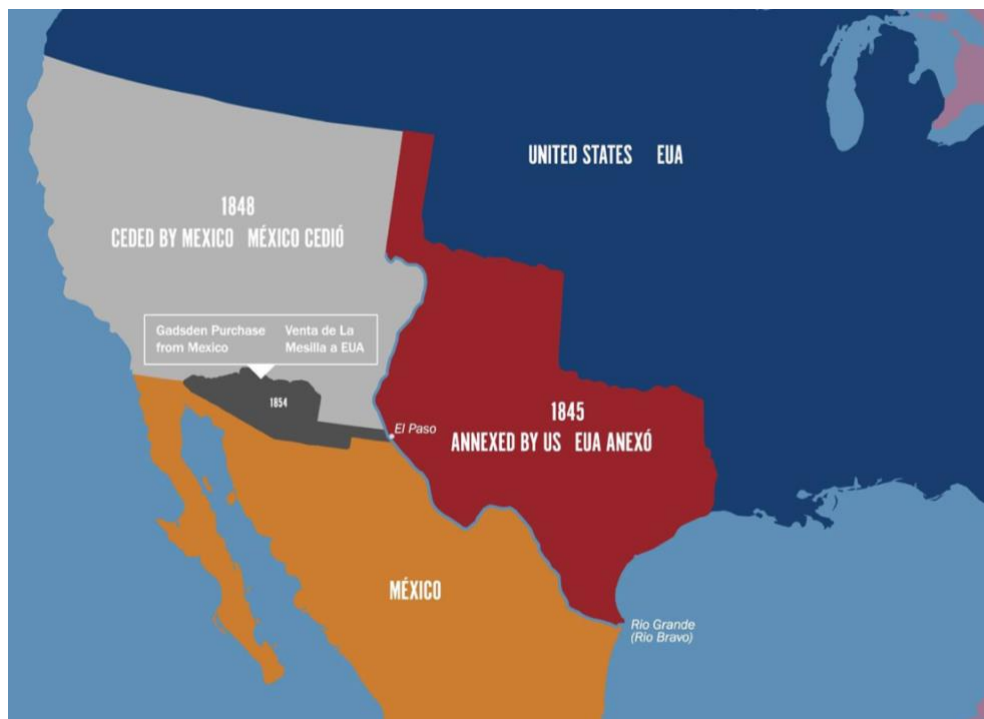


Figure 1: Drawing the Boundary (Chamizal National Monument, 2021)

There is a common proverb among inhabitants of the U.S./Mexico Borderlands that goes something like, “We didn’t cross the border, the border crossed us” and it reflects the myriad of cultural, geographical, and socio-historical paradoxes that the border created and continues to perpetuate. Borders are “fictions of material consequence, created by empires and fortified with the invention of the modern nation-state” (Guidotti-Hernández 21). From the Spanish colonization and missionization of Indigenous nations, to the creation of the Republic of Mexico,

and followed by the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in 1848—the boundary between these two nation-states has been violently fickle, fraught with bordermaking narratives. This colloquial proverb encompasses the meaning and paradoxical experience of bordermaking, referring to the experiences shaped by the historical, political, and social processes that create(d) both nation-state borders and psychological borders for the U.S./Mexico Borderlands. In Latinx Studies, borders are about geography, “the cutting up of lands,” but it is also about the cutting up of “bodies and psyches” (Guidotti-Hernández 24). Through Borderland¹ studies and theory, we develop a more nuanced understanding of communities and subject-formation. Although I focus on the U.S./Mexico border, it is essential to acknowledge that Borderlands are multi-sited. Geographically, the present-day Borderlands comprise California, Arizona, New Mexico, and Texas; however, the concept of Borderlands is not exclusively geographic. In fact, other places such as Colorado, Kansas, Florida, and Louisiana can also be considered Borderlands. Territories like Colorado, Kansas, and Florida were once part of New Spain and maintain Indigenous reservation borders. Florida continues to be a port of entry for many people in the Caribbean. Louisiana was once part of France’s colonial empire, and this is evident in their naming of cities, architecture, and culture. There are even Borderlands within cities like New York City, which exist between historical ethnic enclaves such as Harlem, Washington Heights, Chinatown, and Little Italy, to name a few.

To better visualize bordermaking and its creation of geographic/psychological borders, I draw from Gloria Anzaldúa’s reference to the U.S./Mexico Borderlands as “una herida abierta” (an open wound), a “vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary” (3). Centuries of tumultuous bordermaking via invasion, annexation,

¹ My use of Borderland(s), capitalized, refers to the study of the cultural, geographical, socio-historical, and other bordermaking conditions that affect(ed) the communities living there.

segregation, and neoliberal colonization have eroded, shaped, and violently enforced this unnatural nation-state boundary. “The border crossed us” is a powerful phrase, mainly because the word “cross” has various interpretations. The Borderlands have been part of different Indigenous societies and colonial regimes, so the nation-state border has indeed shifted, morphed, and crossed into different societies throughout those years. Since the border shifted, the word “cross” also represents how the border betrayed and crossed its inhabitants. As *Bless Me, Ultima* illustrates, many lost their land, livelihoods, and ways of life due to these changes. A final interpretation of “cross” stems from U.S. xenophobic rhetoric, where “cross” is used as a synonym for “invade” when referring to immigrants crossing the border. Consequently, “the border crossed us” is inclusive of these diverse (im)migration experiences and the generations of families who have always belonged, despite being told otherwise by government enforced nation-state borders. Although this proverb is mostly heard within Mexican American and Latinx circles, it also definitely applies to the Indigenous nations, communities, and people who are survivors of U.S. colonial genocide and ethnic cleansing.² As a result of bordermaking and (im)migration, the Borderlands have become a paradox because they represent a perpetual liminality. A liminal space is representative of a position on both sides of a boundary, but through a decolonial lens, liminality embodies the experience of “in-between [spaces] where those who have been denied humanity and voice have a diminished agency...and exercise resistance” (Lugones 43). California, Arizona, New Mexico, and Texas are all named after Spanish and Indigenous words, and cities like San Antonio, Santa Fe, and Los Angeles were built on Indigenous nations, Spanish missions, and/or Mexican cities; many of these places still

² These categorizations are not mutually exclusive. I separate them because they need to be recognized individually since ethnic and cultural experiences vary depending on race. See Eileen Luna-Firebaugh’s “The Border Crossed Us: Border Crossing Issues of the Indigenous Peoples of the Americas.”

have architectural influence from those times. Even though the states themselves are ‘American’ politically and legally, they perpetually embody pieces of their culture—much like their inhabitants.

In the last centuries, feeling like “neither from here nor there” and like “we didn’t cross the border, the border crossed us” has generated an abundance of culturally rich narratives, ones that represent and humanize the complexities of Borderland experiences. These proverbs derive from histories of (im)migration³, forced migration⁴, shifting political landscapes, and the liminality that accompany these experiences. Liminality reflects the haunted nature of being a *nepantlera*, Anzaldúa’s Nahuatl-Spanish term for a person “torn between ways” (78). She notes that “for racialized people managing losses, the trauma of racism, and other colonial abuses affect our self-conceptions, our very identity,” which “[fragment] our psyches and [pitch] us into states of *nepantla*...into a state of *susto*” (Anzaldúa 87). A *susto*, or scare, is a common manner to describe out-of-body sensation, a scare so intense that it pervades your person. Anzaldúa’s description of *susto* is related to “soul loss,” an “individual/collective trauma, fragmentation, and other wounds caused by sexism, homophobia, racism, and other acts of violation” (246).

Ghosts, spirits, and hauntings were born from these collective and individual *sustos*, contributing to the aforementioned cultural narratives. Throughout Indigenous, Spanish, Mexican, and Chicana histories in the United States, there have always been stories, oral and written, and most especially ghost stories. How can there not? “Betrayed for generations, traumatized by racial denigration and exclusion, we are almost buried by grief’s heavy pall. We never forget our wounds,” Anzaldúa reminds us, especially considering that our most iconic

³(Im)migration is inclusive of migration, immigration, and the complex nuance that lives in between these terms.

⁴ Migration and race are historically linked; the U.S. government and enslavers directly controlled the enslaved and managed indigenous peoples through forced movement and migration (Mayblin and Turner 67).

haunting figure, la Llorona, “has haunted us for five hundred years—our symbol of unresolved grief, an ever present specter in the psyches” of people of Latinx and/or Indigenous descent that (im)migrate within the nation-state border of the U.S., forcibly migrated, or have been inhabiting Borderlands for generations (88). Ghost stories and folklore are living remnants of these haunting histories, and they traverse intergenerationally.

Inspired by the haunting works of Leslie Marmon Silko, Louise Erdrich, Toni Morrison, and Natalia Sylvester, among many others, this thesis delves into the Chicanx works of Rudolfo Anaya and Helena Maria Viramontes to analyze how Borderland ghost stories unearth the deep-seated scars of bordermaking on racial and cultural identity. This corpus analyzes Anaya’s *Bless Me, Ultima* and Viramontes’s *Under the Feet of Jesus* using a combination of spectral theory, Chicana and women-of-color feminism, decolonial theory, border studies, and these theories’ entanglements. As stories of cultural haunting, *Bless* and *Under*’s hauntings/ghosts are vehicles for shaping identity amidst bordermaking and histories of (im)migration. Characters like Antonio Márez and Estrella become the spokespeople for the ghosts and hauntings.

Chapter two traverses through theory of the flesh, a powerful methodology that considers lived experience when writing about the paradoxical natures of Chicanx and Latinx identities. This section is followed by spectral theories, which define ghosts and hauntings in more analytical detail in preparation for the literary analysis. Chapter three is dedicated to analyzing *Bless Me, Ultima*’s ghosts, and chapter four works through *Under the Feet of Jesus*’s hauntings. Finally, chapter five is the denouement, tying in all the different elements from the literature and the theory to highlight the paradoxical and rich nature that Borderland ghost stories have on Latinx racial and cultural identity.

CHAPTER TWO: THE THEORETICAL JOURNEY

This thesis employs a vast array of theories and engages them in a complex conversation. This chapter starts with reintroducing testimonio and theory of the flesh as a methodology, followed by what I call spectral theories, which are the various theoretical approaches to ghosts and specters across mediums. Ghosts exist in our stories, conversations, and folklore—that is enough to manifest them in our reality. These theories are not about proving ghosts’ existence or analyzing supernatural phenomena; rather these theories focus on the psychological and social implications of specters living in our collective imaginaries.

Theory of the Flesh

I opened my thesis with a testimonio because theory of the flesh is a powerful methodology. I look to Cherrie Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa’s theory of the flesh, “where the physical realities of our lives—our skin color, the land or concrete we grew up on, our sexual longings—all fuse to create a politic born out of necessity” (xix). I understand the longing for objectivism in research, but I push back against this notion in certain regards. We all come from complex backgrounds, and it is a fallacy to assume our positionalities will not touch our methodologies or analyses. Like Sonia Saldívar-Hull, I recognize the dangers of “conflating the personal lived experience with detached studies” but ultimately agree that as Chicanas, our specific experiences “undergird our theories” (12). As a Mexicana Americana, a Latina, and a Chicana who grew up on the Border, I too experience(d) the effects of bordermaking on my identity. Despite being shaped by similar forces, Latinx and Chicanx identities are not monoliths—this is why it is important to read different literary representations to explore the diversity of Chicanx and Latinx identities.

Both Rudolfo Anaya and Helena Maria Viramontes's personal experiences undergird their theories and their works. *Bless Me, Ultima* and *Under the Feet of Jesus* are influenced by the authors' personal and deeply cultural experiences living in the Borderlands. Stories of cultural haunting, like *Bless* and *Under*, forge cultural identity through their transmission (18). Their writing contributes to our nuanced understanding of identity and the plights of identity formation. Through their use of haunting, these two authors elucidate the intergenerational scars associated with histories of bordermaking and (im)migration. Anaya explicitly talks about the responsibility of the writer to use group cultural memory "to analyze the past, explore the present, and anticipate the future," seeking "new visions and symbols to chart the future" while being "bound to mythologies and symbols of our past" ("An American Chicano in King Arthur's Court" 297). Like Estrella and her family in *Under*, Viramontes's parents and siblings were piscadores, harvesters, in the Californian grape fields (Carballo and Giles 333). Viramontes wrote *Under* to reflect not just the Chicano identity in general, but as a direct response to the Chicana identity itself. With this intersectional goal, Viramontes noted in a personal interview how the novel began as a response to "female prohibitions in Latino culture," leading her to write Estrella, who questions "why such rules had been made and what a woman might do about them" (Carballo and Giles 336).

Theory of the flesh is forged through our race, geography, sexuality, among other intersectional aspects of our identities. It is through these narratives of pain, intergenerational bordermaking scars, and (im)migration hauntings that we learn about the formation racial and cultural identity along the Borderlands alongside its inherent paradoxes.

Unearthing Spectral Theories

When tracing spectral theories, many roads lead to Jacques Derrida's *Specters of Marx* and Avery Gordon's *Ghostly Matters*. *Specters*' Exordium ('from the beginning') centers on the phrase 'learning to live' and what that could entail. Derrida interrogates several instances, mainly the ways one lives and how it is passed down either through teaching or genealogically (nurture vs. nature). The other way to 'learn to live' is by yourself in the practice of living, "taught by life" (xvii). Yet, Derrida focuses on the seemingly contradictory nature of learning to live while still alive. So, learning to live can only be done in the space between life and death, and "can only maintain itself with some ghost, can only talk with or about some ghosts. So, it would be necessary to learn spirits. Even and especially if this spectral, is not. Even and especially if this, which is neither substance, nor essence, nor existence, is never present as such"—essentially stating that it does not matter whether these ghosts are literally ghosts, supernatural, spirits, ancestors, etc. because it is about what we are meant to learn from them regardless (xvii). We 'learn to live' from these specters. Thus, we must learn to live with ghosts, "this being-with specters would also be, not only but also, a politics of memory, of inheritance, and of generations" (xvii); meaning, that the ghosts we live with engage in the politics of memory (how we remember and experience), inheritance (how we internalize these experiences in our lifetime), and generations (the systems of power that are put into practice through time on account of these experiences). Who are the ghosts? And what do we owe them? Derrida answers that they are "the ghosts of those who are not yet born or who are already dead, be they victims of wars, political or other kinds of violence, nationalist, racist, colonialist, sexist, or other kinds of exterminations, victims of the oppressions of capitalist imperialism or any of the forms of totalitarianism" (xvii). Thus, these ghosts demand justice and we are responsible for that justice

because otherwise, there is no justice without responsibility—echoing the Susana Chavez’s poem from the epigraph, “Fantasmas Sollozan.” One must reckon with this responsibility of enacting justice (and its elements of spectrality). So, when deconstructing the word ‘ghost,’ we unearth a concept that is neither dead nor alive, a liminal space that involves the past, present, and future through an eternally transient entity.

Gordan’s approach to ghosts stems from a sociological perspective, one tied closer to reexamining social scientific approaches to what one can only ‘see’ versus what one can only ‘know’ through lived experiences. Essentially, Gordan posits that sociology “does not well attend, then, to the living traces, the memories of the lost and the disappeared.... those memories...must be honored because they provide a different sort of knowledge, a knowledge of ‘the things behind the things’ (ix). It is important to note that Gordan differentiates haunting from trauma, since haunting “registers the harm inflicted or the loss sustained by a social violence done in the past or in the present.... haunting, unlike trauma, is distinctive for producing a something-to-be-done” (Gordon). In putting both Derrida and Gordan in conversation, ghosts become more than a mere scare in a story. The term “something-to-be-done” rings as a representative of action—the ghost pleading that something *needs* to be done. Regardless of whether the ghost is a central character or not, by using Derrida and Gordan’s theories, the ghost’s role shifts to one of an active agent in the greater scheme of the work. Their presence becomes dynamic and complicated because they now have efficacy. For example, la Llorona, a pervasive ghostly figure in Latin American folklore, often represents fears and anxieties related to women’s gender roles. She appears in both novels and challenges cultural norms through her efficacy.

Thus, when literary works assign the ghost as a conduit for “something-to-be-done” and a catalyst for enacting justice through responsibility—the ghost thus becomes a figure for social activism and historicism (Derrida; Gordon). Gordon best classifies hauntings in their present form and has specific criteria in establishing them (e.g. haunting is not the trauma but rather the effect caused by the trauma). Derrida, on the other hand, focuses on the intergenerational aspects of haunting that transcend time, demanding not just a remedy for the past but also for the future. To specifically address the shaping of cultural and racial identity amidst bordermaking and (im)migration histories, I will be expanding elements of Kathleen Brogan’s cultural haunting to the Borderlands. Stories of cultural haunting argue that ghosts in literature help “re-create ethnic identity through an imaginative recuperation of the past, and to press this new version of the past into the service of the present” (4). Cultural haunting aims to situate each ghost story within its cultural setting and geography, its specific American “local context,” and usually encompass the following three related aspects: (1) a focus on storytelling and the “narrative construction of experience,” (2) “the performance of ethnicity through rituals of cultural ‘mourning,’” and (3) analyzes the idiosyncratic position of multiethnic writers as “both ‘heirs’ and ‘ethnographers’” (Brogan 17). Thus, cultural haunting adds a final layer to Derrida and Gordon’s analyses: the transmission of racial and/or cultural identity. In delegating cultural haunting as a cultural vehicle, local contexts and histories are of utmost importance, especially because the treatment and experiences among Borderland inhabitants vary immensely depending on race, gender, ethnicity, etc.

In Anaya’s bildungsroman *Bless*, Antonio Márez encounters many ghosts and spirits, often against his will, which catalyzes his search for personal and cultural identity in post-World War II New Mexico. Tony explores various forms of cultural mourning, often seeking the one

that will best suit his own hybrid identity. Through each ghost he meets, Tony explores past and present forms of cultural mourning, electing which parts of his own identity he wishes to preserve, and with which elements expected of his identity he will part. Tony is also faced with the consequences of colonialism, specifically, colonialism inadvertently enacted by Mexican Americans in New Mexico. In exploring these histories between the Comanche and Tony's Mexican American community through Indigenous ghosts, Tony explores the meanings of this colonial complicity. Viramontes's *Under* explores the (im)migrant farmworker experience in California. Unlike *Bless*, *Under's* ghosts are not explicit and require a decolonial Gothic close reading of the setting. Through understanding the hidden secrets of the land via haunting, Estrella explores themes of identity, disposability, rememory, and mourning rituals.

CHAPTER THREE: HYBRIDITY IN *BLESS ME, ULTIMA*

There are four instances in Anaya's *Ultima* where ghosts appear. These ghosts are deeply connected to New Mexican bordermaking histories, cultural identity, and thereby, adhere to some aspects of cultural haunting. As mentioned previously, a notable element of Tony Márez's coming-of-age journey is contemplating which parts of his racial and cultural identities to conserve and which to leave behind. This journey is an act of survival, one highly steeped in notions of racial and cultural hybridity.

Roman Leal and Alex Hunt's "Border Conflicts in Rudolfo Anaya's *Bless Me, Ultima*" recounts New Mexico's shifting borders within the natural landscape due to its precarious bordermaking histories. Leal and Hunt note that *Ultima* is a post-second World War novel, which means its setting is heavily affected by pastoral lands "shifting to a modern era" (7). This modernizing shift was specifically brought on by another bordermaking element: the Tejano (in *Ultima*, Tejano refers to the Anglo-American (im)migrants from Texas) who came to New Mexico to expand their ranching prospects. The Tejano did not recognize the type of land ownership the Mexican vaqueros in New Mexico cultivated—it was one not legally documented and based on communal ownership, which the Tejanos did not honor; instead, "Tejano cattle companies enjoyed de facto legal immunity" (Leal and Hunt 10). Thus, in each of these four haunting instances, Tony is confronted with different elements of his own culture, namely his ancestral identities and the way he needs to adapt them—creating a hybrid form of self. The changes happening on Tony's periphery all stem from scars of (im)migration and bordermaking—whether it be from the colonization of the Comanche by the Spanish Mexicans who were awarded land grants by the Spanish or the Anglo-American ranchers who migrated and began displacing Mexican American communities and vaqueros.

All along the U.S./Mexico Borderlands, many stories like the one recounted above exist. These bordermaking conflicts have opened spaces of liminality where both oppression and resistance exist. Within this historical background, hybrid racial and cultural identities form. Hybridity is used by many postcolonial⁵ and decolonial theorists, and the term *mestizaje* tends to be used in conversations of Latinx hybridity. The use of *mestizaje* is highly contested. Scholars like Virginia Tilley argue that although it was meant to celebrate all facets of our racial identities in Latin America, it was originally a “strategic discursive maneuver by governments seeking to mitigate the political tensions associated with racial politics” (53). *Mestizaje* refers to the ethnicization of race in Latin America. Argued both scientifically and ideologically, *mestizaje* implies that Latinx countries’ racial mixture has reached the point where “any racial distinction has become meaningless” (Tilley 54). A belief in complete racial mixture essentially erases any claims of enduring racism, especially from those with Indigenous descent, among Latinx people. Yet for many, *mestizaje* serves as an inclusive and self-empowering methodology that combats colonial paradigms. It is no wonder that *mestizaje* as an identity marker contributes to the identity paradox.

Although Anzaldúa initially correlates hybridity with *mestizaje* in *Borderlands*, she eventually redefined hybridity as an identity that pushes against boundaries, specifically ones that “prevent us from extending *beyond* ourselves” (Anzaldúa and Keating 75); meaning, hybridity also encourages us to extend beyond inhibiting cultural norms (e.g. homophobia, etc.). Anzaldúa theorizes that our own culture as well as the oppressive U.S. forces that sought to subdue Mexican identities, has confined people (Anzaldúa, *Borderlands: The New Mestiza*). To survive, we adapt our identity. All this to say—Tony feels helpless because he feels torn between

⁵ Homi Bhabha originally coined the term hybridity in *The Location of Culture* (1994), and it has now been employed by other postcolonial and decolonial theorists.

mysterious forces against his will. He is essentially trying to survive the legacies of bordermaking through hybridity. Thus, the ghosts in *Bless* yearn for action, reminiscent of Gordan's "something-to-be-done," in the struggle with hybridity amid histories of bordermaking.

The following sections analyze all four of Tony's interactions with ghosts and hauntings. The chronological order of Tony's interactions with these ghosts is intentional, as each one builds on the next in his journey. I focus on how Tony learns hybridity through each apparition. Each interaction contributes to Tony forming his cultural identity, one that considers all elements of his ancestry (even the ones complicit in colonialism and bordermaking). Ghosts are central to the scars of bordermaking, the same ones that prompt Tony's hybridity, and that of other Borderland inhabitants.

The Winding Wail: Liminality, la Llorona, & Lupito

Tony's ghosts predominantly appear to him via dreams. Although Tony interacts with the ghosts subconsciously, the worries and fears that are manifested in his dreams are topics that concern him consciously. Many of these worries and fears stem from his cultural identity and the changes around him. In his town of Guadalupe, there is a river that Tony claims has an ominous presence. In his first dream, Tony and his brothers hear the presence of the river. The wailing is initially described as a "tormented cry of a lonely goddess.... the winding wail made the blood of men run cold," which the brothers recalled as la Llorona; Tony's "brothers cried in fear, the old witch who cries along the river banks and seeks the blood of boys and men to drink! La Llorona seeks the soul of Antonioooooooooo..." (28). Then, the brothers believe it is the soul of Lupito, a character in the novel who was shot for killing the sheriff while suffering through a post-war post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) episode and is "doomed to wander the river at night

because the waters washed away his soul away! Lupito seeks his blessingggggggggg...” (28). By referencing la Llorona and Lupito, Tony has introduced two ghost characters who have been victims of cultural hybridity. There are some gothic elements here that reference the fears and worries that are suppressed yet manifest as physical haunting. The question then becomes, what is la Llorona trying to say? Is she pleading for justice, a “something-to-be-done”?

Historically, la Llorona has been associated with la Malinche, a Mexica woman who betrayed her people when she began translating for Hernan Cortes during Spanish colonization. To some, she is considered a traitor and mother of the first mestizos. Thus, she is eternally haunted because of her cultural and filial alienation. Another version, which is the most classic, is the story of a woman who drowned her children and spends her afterlife looking for them and willing to abduct any children she sees in her terrorizing ghostly path. Yet, as Anzaldúa, Domino Perez, Sandra Cisneros, and others have noted—la Llorona can also represent a woman not bound by her traditional gender roles. Perhaps, changing the ghost (la Llorona in this instance) and its reason for existing can address Gordan’s “something-to-be-done.” In the former version, it is clear that la Llorona is a product of hybridity because of her ties to Spanish colonization. I find this interpretation of la Llorona in *Ultima* compelling, specifically because Anaya wrote *The Legend of La Llorona* interpreting Llorona as la Malinche. Recently, la Malinche has been reclaimed by Chicana feminism as a figure of resistance and survival. Anaya’s interpretation of la Malinche as la Llorona aptly fits in between these opposing perspectives. In classifying her as a victim of cultural hybridity, I am arguing that la Llorona’s/Maliche’s appearance in Tony’s dream is symbolic as she was the first manifestation of hybridity in Mexico. In fusing her identity with the Spanish conquistadors through the acquisition of language and marriage—she becomes one of the first and main folkloric manifestations of hybridity in Latin America.

As a result, la Malinche is sometimes considered la Virgen de Guadalupe's foil, seeing as la Malinche represents rebellion and unfortunate motherhood vs. la Virgen is the mother of God.⁶ In Tony's dream, his brothers claim that la Llorona "seeks the blood of boys and men to drink." The classification of la Llorona, la Malinche, and la Virgen de Guadalupe as good/bad women stems from patriarchy, and more specifically, machismo. Thus, it is no wonder that she only seeks the blood of boys and men to drink—she is eternally angry at machismo. Tony, unlike his brothers, is growing more in tune with different forms of spiritual healing under Ultima's guidance. La Llorona's yearning for Tony's soul is more related to her identifying Tony as a product of hybridity; foreshadowing his struggles with hybridity.

The dream suddenly shifts the figure to Lupito, which connects with Tony's "performance of ethnicity through rituals of cultural mourning," one of cultural haunting's hallmarks (Brogan 17). Right after Lupito is shot, Tony happens to be hiding nearby and attempts to confess⁷ Lupito, praying over him in his last moments; however, this apparently was not enough since Lupito (according to Tony's dream) is "doomed to wander" the river and the waters "washed away his soul away," which carries connotations of condemnation rather than healing.

Jose Fernandez considers the inclusion of WWII veterans in *Ultima* as a reminder of the discrimination against Black, Indigenous, and Mexican U.S. soldiers during the war in tandem with the continued segregation and systemic inequalities after serving in the military. In the novel, PTSD is called "war sickness," which according to Fernandez, also signifies the inability

⁶ It is essential to note that even la Virgen de Guadalupe has many representations of hybridity, mainly through her ethnic background and the syncretization of cultures.

⁷ In Roman Catholicism, the confession of one's sins to a priest cleanses the soul from sin. Most especially, people should confess their sins on their deathbed so that they may be sufficiently pure to enter heaven. However, confession is traditionally only done by anointed priests.

to reintegrate into their Mexican American community. Although Tony's brothers are alive, they too are struggling with cultural reintegration, and thus—their hybridity. Fernandez argues that the inclusion of WWII soldiers in the novel calls “attention to the contributions of soldiers of color and the war's significance in their struggle for social justice,” especially by highlighting the patriotism and sacrifices made by these soldiers “despite institutionalized racism and their disadvantaged position in the army” (188). Inadvertently, the war accelerated a new social consciousness, one fomented by the veterans who experienced a “world outside their marginalized communities” and accelerated the eventual Civil Rights Movement (Fernandez 188).

Although in *Ultima* Lupito and Tony's brothers are not overtly mentioning the discrimination they faced or talking about systemic racism, it is evident that they are lost and cannot find their place. The brothers keep leaving and coming back, often returning in worse conditions or near death due to their increasingly risky behaviors. Much like Lupito who is doomed to wander in death, the brothers too are wandering in life because they cannot find their place. Even with the discrimination they probably faced while serving, by enlisting as U.S. soldiers they were allowed to enter spaces that were traditionally reserved for white men. They too engage with cultural hybridity, and returning home means they are contemplating what elements of their new identity they get to keep and which they had to leave behind.

Lastly, this dream centers on the presence of Guadalupe's river, acting as a limbo for Lupito and la Llorona as ghosts they are stuck eternally in this liminal space. Using ominous and unsettling gothic elements when describing the river is intentional, even when Tony is not dreaming, he senses this ominous, much alive presence from the river. The river's uncanniness

also contributes to associating the river with the haunting mark the Rio Bravo⁸ has had on the political landscape between Mexico and its bordering U.S. states. Although New Mexico has been part of the United States for about a hundred years at the start of the novel, the river will always play a symbolic role in conversations about U.S./Mexico bordermaking. In *the Haunted Southwest*, Cordelia Barrera asserts that “American Gothic forms are haunted by race relations;” so it is likely that the use of these American Gothic tropes intentionally link to the “threats and anxieties related to race, class, gender, and the historical repression of dispossessed ‘Others’”(89). Thus, if la Llorona’s appearance foreshadows Tony’s struggles with hybridity, this sudden shift to the river also foreshadows his eventual success and survival.

The Waters are One: Merging Identity Through Ancestry

Although the novel is a bildungsroman, it differs from many of its contemporary white, Anglo-American protagonists’ novels. Tony’s main coming-of-age conflict stems from his inner identity, represented by his parents’ complex ancestry and his own contemplations on cultural hybridity. Tony is often torn apart between his maternal Luna side and his paternal Márez side.⁹ His father describes the Márez men like the sea, vaqueros who roam wild and let nature guide their migrations and wanderings; as Andrew, Tony’s brother says, “[the Márez] were the conquistadors, men whose freedom was unbounded” (27). The Lunas are described as dark farmers, characterized by their silent nature because they are constantly listening and tending to the earth. Antonio’s mother wants him to be a priest, just as the first Luna; but his father wants Antonio to be a man of the llano¹⁰ and roam. The term “conquistadors” is important here, as this

⁸ Rio Grande

⁹ Appropriately, Luna means moon and mares (pronounced the same as Márez) means seas in Spanish.

¹⁰ The llano refers to the eastern New Mexican plains.

signals Tony's paternal lineage as proudly Hispanic,¹¹ predominantly acknowledging their white heritage and erasing their potential Indigenous ancestral links. So, when Andrew uses the term "conquistadors," it associates them as proud descendants of colonizers with "unbounded" freedom. Using the word "unbounded" is intentional, as it indicates a disregard for the already existing Indigenous communities and their lands.

Tony is the vessel for his two ancestral lineages: the proud colonizing Spanish and Hispanic identities, and his Mexican Indigenous identities. Both the Luna and the Márez identities are tied to the natural landscape and being threatened by the incoming Tejano ranchers and modernization (shifting away from agrarian culture). Through Tony, we see these colonial layers, and they are further accentuated through his encounters with ghosts. Tony's interactions with ghosts are connected to constructing his sense of being and identity—one that he must create in parallel with the changes surrounding him.

In another dream, Tony feels so much pain and agony that he sweats blood because he does not know who he is to become (126). In Luke 22, Jesus sweats blood during the "Agony in the Garden" as a physical manifestation of the anguish in His soul. Thus, these questions of identity must be extremely plaguing for Tony if he too, like Jesus, is sweating blood. In using this Catholic allusion, Anaya viscerally shows the painful fissures caused by identity and cultural hybridity. It is not until Ultima appears in the dream to cease Tony's pain and the tempest around him and tell Tony's parents that "the sweet water of the moon which falls as rain is the same water that gathers into rivers and flows to fill the seas. Without the waters of the moon to replenish the oceans there would be no oceans. And the same salt waters of the oceans are drawn by the sun to the heavens, and in turn become again the waters of the moon.... the waters are

¹¹ In using the label Hispanic, I am referring explicitly to Spanish Mexicans who were actively colonizing Indigenous lands, displacing their communities and societies.

one, Antonio” (126). While this dream conversation is happening, Tony, Ultima, and his parents are standing by a lake surrounded by ghosts. Although these ghosts are nameless, they are participants in this conversation, representative of the liminal spaces between identity and hybridity. That is to say that these issues of cultural identity are not just limited to Tony and his family but rather are representative of many people in the Borderlands. It is immensely symbolic that Ultima says “the waters are one” as a natural image configuring cultural hybridity.

In the previous section, the water in the river is washing away Lupito’s soul, and la Llorona is doomed to haunt the water for eternity. These opposing views of water are symbolic of cultural hybridity because not everyone can successfully integrate their identities, as seen in the novel. For some like Lupito and Florence,¹² integrating identities is a painful experience riddled with isolation and feelings of unbelonging (“doomed to wander the river”). Yet with Ultima’s guidance, Tony pushes past the pain and starts shaping his hybrid identity (“the waters are one”).

Tortured Spirits Are Not to Blame: Acknowledging Colonial Layers

The land of enchantment was originally home to the Tiwa (Tigua) Indians, a group of Tanoan Pueblo tribes, among other Indigenous communities throughout the centuries such as the Comanche, Anasazi, Apache, Pueblo, and Navajo. Currently, New Mexico is home to twenty-three federally recognized pueblos, tribes, and nations—namely the nineteen Pueblos, three Apache tribes, and the Navajo Nation (New Mexico True). The state of New Mexico was colonized by the Spanish in the 16th century, eventually became Mexico in 1821, and was ceded to the United States following the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in 1848 (Beck and McNamee).

¹² For context, Florence was one of Tony’s friends who drowns near the end of the novel. Florence was often shunned due to his atheist beliefs and unconventional upbringing.

New Mexico had been a predominantly a Mexican and Indigenous state, which slowly urbanized and most especially after WWII with the influx of Anglo-American migrants. These white (im)migrants shifted the dynamics of the state by establishing the same systemic and legal racial barriers that existed in Texas, the South, and eastern U.S.

Arguably, the most important ghosts in the novel are the Comanche ghosts because they literally embody scars of bordermaking and cultural hybridity. Another curse has been laid (presumably by the Trementina bruja sisters); this time it is on Téllez's Agua Negra¹³ ranch. Ultima explains to Tony and his father, Gabriel, that "this curse was not laid on a person, the curse was put on a bulto, a ghost" (240). Ultima walks them through the colonial layers of the Agua Negra ranch starting with the Comanche natives that used to live on this land, followed by the Comancheros, and then the Mexicans. According to Ultima, "many years ago three Comanche Indians raided the flocks of one man, and this man was the grandfather of Téllez," who then rallied his neighboring Mexicans to lynch the three Comanches. Thus, their souls were left to wander the ranch. However, Ultima makes a key distinction, "the three tortured spirits are not to blame, they are manipulated by brujas" (240). Ultima is a powerful force in the novel, primarily because she embodies cultural hybridity herself. "Tortured spirits are not to blame" is one of her most significant quotes because she is acknowledging and thereby validating Indigenous genocide, colonial complicity, and the painful memories that Native communities still remember and possess. This instance explores the complexity of the colonial layers of the land, and how even after death, these Comanche men are still being used and moved against their will. Movement "was a key tool in the suppression of Indigenous populations under colonialism through enclosure...European rules of private property and contractual law" (Mayblin and

¹³ Agua Negra is Spanish for black waters and refers to the land's brackish waters.

Turner 67). Movement, essentially, prompted colonial expansion and territorial acquisition for the colonizers. To free them, Ultima, Tony, and Gabriel recreate a burial ceremony based on their collective and communal knowledge of the land and its inhabitants. In doing so, Ultima teaches Tony a valuable lesson: Borderland texts are “*necessarily* haunted by Indigenous ways of being in the world to suggest that only when something is appropriately remembered can healing and social progress being made” (Barrera 90-91). Ultima’s recognition and distinction of these colonial layers represent a deep understanding of the complicity of our identities, and this includes the times when we appropriate identities in seeking cultural hybridity. As Barrera reiterates, it is only through the acknowledgement and appropriate remembrance of these colonial histories that progress can ensue.

Stories, historically, have been ones to soothe these social violences. In her chapter “Language and Literature from a Pueblo Indian Perspective,” Leslie Marmon Silko describes storytelling as something that lives inside the listener, rather than the storyteller, and continues through generations—even if each rendition differs from the last (50). It is these origin stories that shape our cultural fabric and contribute to the construction of racial and cultural identities. Silko emphasizes the telling of negative stories, which I associate with some ghost stories, can potentially provide families and communities a blueprint to handle similar hardships. It is a perspective that “brings incidents down to a level we can deal with” with the mentality that “if others have endured, so can we” (Silko). Using haunting figures like the Windigo is an excellent example; it is a monster in the “shape of an outsized man, ten feet tall, with frost-white hair.... arms like tree trunks, feet as big as snowshoes.... yellow fangs hang from its mouth that is raw where it has chewed off its lips from hunger” (Kimmerer 304). This horrendous creature is a human who became a cannibal, and whose bite is contagious and can create more Windigos.

Robin Wall Kimmerer, an Anishinaabe scientist and scholar, explains that the Windigo is born out of fear. Specifically, “Windigo is the name for that within us which cares more for its own survival than for anything else” (305). In other words, the Windigo places the individual’s survival over the collective’s survival. Kimmerer posits that the Windigo is no longer confined to the forests of North America because it lives on through corporations’ greed, man-made environmental disasters, and consumerism, representing individualism versus collectivism.

Derrida’s *Specters* came about in the late 1900s, yet what both Kimmerer and Silko are describing are ancestral forms of “learning to live.” In Derrida’s language, the Windigo and other oral stories fall into the categories of “living” with ghosts and the “politics of memory, of inheritance, and of generations.” As in, through storytelling, communities can experience temporality with ghosts—the haunting itself, the internalization of the haunting’s traumas, and the manifestation of the systems that formed around it. I engage Derrida, Gordan, Silko, and Kimmerer to show how ghost and hauntings transcend theory and ownership. All communicate very closely aligned ideas—but they all reached these conclusions through different lenses. Similarly, Tony’s struggle with hybridity will be unique to his path.

It Would Be Necessary to Learn Spirits: The Teachings of Liminality

Even toward the end of the novel, Tony is haunted by the ghosts of Lupito, Narciso, and Florence. Although their deaths happened at different times in the novel, they are similar because Tony watched them die and prayed over them as they passed away. Traditionally, a priest provides death rites, but Lupito and Narcisso both requested that Tony give them. He even attempted to confess Florence, who unlike the other two, decided against Catholicism. Yet, Tony still prayed an Act of Contrition over him. Tony later reflects and considers them dream-

wanderers because these three characters exist in a trapped liminal space, wandering the landscapes of Guadalupe and “live when [Tony] dreams” (258). Now, the spirits of these three men are tethered to Tony, not to haunt him negatively or scare him, but as unresolved figments of hybridity.

Through deconstructing the word ‘ghost’, we unearth a concept that is neither dead nor alive, a liminality that involves the past, present, and future through an eternally transient entity. Hybridity dwells within liminality, which implies that one can never truly overcome hybridity, rather, one learns to live with it. Already by living on the Borderlands and experiencing bordermaking and (im)migration, we “live in spaces/categories that defy gender, race, class, sexual, geographic, and spiritual locations” (82). These liminal sensations reflect the haunting nature of being a *nepantlera*, Anzaldúa’s Nahuatl-Spanish term for a person “torn between ways” (78). Tony’s ghosts are plunged into a state of *nepantla*. They exist within Tony because he has learned to live with hybridity through his experiences with them in both life and death.

All the mentioned spirits, not just Lupito, Narcisso, and Florence, contribute to Tony forming his cultural identity. Tony is even able to learn about his complicit ancestral past, one that partook in bordermaking as conquistadors. Understanding that cultural identity, as shaped by hybridity, is an individual and unique path does not mean it should be an isolating path. Tony through his loved ones, ancestors, mentors, and community members has been learning how to live with his hybrid cultural identity, one shaped to survive the effects of bordermaking. *Bless* is indeed a story of cultural haunting because of this identity formation via ghosts and haunting. These ghosts are central to the scars of bordermaking, and their pleads for “something-to-be-done” prompts Tony’s hybridity, and that of other Borderland inhabitants.

CHAPTER FOUR: RECLAIMING & REDEFINING CULTURAL IDENTITY
IN *UNDER THE FEET OF JESUS*

One of the most fascinating connections between *Bless Me, Ultima* and *Under the Feet of Jesus* is the Californian grape fields. Tony's father, Gabriel, yearns to work in the Californian grape fields. As the llano is no longer sustainable for vaqueros, he wants to migrate elsewhere and hopes his sons follow his lead. However, his sons do not want to work in the grape fields, and that disappoints him deeply. Gabriel hopes that working the land will make him feel as free as being a vaquero made him feel. Yet, as we learn in *Under*, the grass is not always greener on the other side. Indeed, the fields are haunted, too. Helena Maria Viramontes introduces us to these same Californian grape fields in her novel. Like John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath* and Tomás Rivera's ... *y no se lo tragó la tierra*, *Under* depicts the demanding nature of migration and farmwork, illustrating the inhumane toils of U.S. working-class families.

In the first of the three sections, I focus on the decolonial Gothic elements that establish the haunting presence and history within the story's barn. Then, I expand on the text's specters and the barn in relation to the concept of rememory and the responsibility to these ghosts. Lastly, I end with Estrella's mourning ritual, one that acts as a healing process and pseudo-exorcism for the ghosts around her.

Had They Been Heading for the Barn All Along? Foregrounding Cultural Haunting Using the Decolonial Gothic & Histories of (Im)migrant Farmwork

Even without the explicit mention of ghosts, *Under* is still considered a story of cultural haunting. The characters only hint at the possibilities of a ghost and haunting versus the direct acknowledgment of their existence. The haunting environment is developed through Gothic

elements. Traditionally, Gothic literature's traditional characteristics often include an uncanny setting, the haunting, the unconscious fear, and finally the second unconscious fear birthed from "deep-seated social and historical dilemmas" (Hogle 2-4). The Gothic, as Cordelia Barrera and Rebecca Duncan has respectively written, does not belong or center one specific era of history. In decentering the Gothic hegemonic literary connotations, the Gothic can be expanded to include decolonial and postcolonial Gothic narratives. By reading *Under* as a decolonial Gothic work, we center Viramontes's familial background as (im)migrant farmworkers and value her knowledge and experiences from this time. Thus, the decolonial Gothic is also a "narrative form that affirms peripheralized regions and communities as loci of knowledge production" (Duncan 319). Through *Under*, the reader explores cultural identity through a different Chicana experience, one also based heavily on geography, historical circumstances, and the capitalistic migrant farmworker experience. Estrella's journey is "not a matter of 'finding oneself,' but of finding a self. That includes a society, a past, and a place" (Barrera 105).

A Gothic story's setting is so prominent in the narrative that it too is regarded as a character. The Gothic setting is a seemingly antiquated place, like a castle, a crypt, an island—or in the case of the Borderlands, a frontier. What makes the space/setting uncanny and unsettling is the secrets that lie within. These secrets can take many forms, whether they be passageways or hidden physical spaces, or the psychological secrets kept by the characters themselves. As literary scholars like Dennis López have noted, the novel starts and ends with the worn-down barn. While exploring their new temporary bungalow and the surrounding area, Estrella is eager to investigate the adjacent barn. Her sisters Cookie and Perla follow, but Perla becomes "frightened" by the barn (9). Estrella, being the eldest, decides to go through the barn doors first. She notes the "scent of dung and damp hay lingered thick and the motes of dust swirled," which

are expected characteristics of an abandoned building. Her description then quickly shifts to noting how “the barn seemed so strangely vacant; the absence clung heavy.... she noticed a chain suspended from the ceiling. Thick-linked, long and rusty, it swayed like a pendulum, as if someone had just touched it and ran off” (10). The personification of absence and the strangely swinging rusty chain contribute to the uncanny environment. Much like the door of a haunted house, the sudden “squeaking” and “screeching of the [barn door’s] rusted hinge” disturbs the barn’s eerie stillness, prompting the owls and swallows living in the barn to flutter out in a storm, scaring the three girls as they flee “screaming” (Viramontes 10; López 308).

Types of hauntings in Gothic stories are usually categorized as terror Gothic or horror Gothic, and in some cases, they may be a combination of both elements. Terror Gothic is regarded as an anxious suspense, one based on “threats to life, safety, and sanity” (Hogle 3). This type of fear is based on the unknown, haunting in the shadows or trapped in the past. On the other hand, horror Gothic directly confronts the characters with “gross violence of physical or psychological dissolution... shattering the assumed norms (including the repressions) of everyday life with wildly shocking, and even revolting, consequences” (Hogle). The barn’s vivid imagery relies on subtle and uncanny elements in the landscape such as the pendulum chain, the sudden flutter of birds, squeaking and screeching sounds, and the overwhelming feeling of absence. Thus, the barn’s eeriness contributes to that “anxious suspense” and challenges sanity through the terror. The reader, through terror, knows that the barn holds unearthed secrets. To dig into the barn’s history, we apply a historicist, decolonial and postcolonial approach.

It is challenging to label the U.S./Mexico Borderlands as postcolonial, so many theorists have opted to employ decolonialism in their theorizing; either replacing postcolonialism or synthesizing the two theories. Postcolonialism has often been understood as the demise or

aftermath of colonization; so, expanding its definition allows us to understand it also as a “contestation of colonial domination” (Loomba 32). Jorge de Alva suggests that postcoloniality should “signify not so much subjectivity ‘after’ the colonial experience as a subjectivity of oppositionality to imperializing/colonizing...discourses and practices” (qtd. in Loomba 33). Through Walter Mignolo’s delinking, de Alva de-links the term “‘postcoloniality’ from formal decolonisation,” de Alva posits that postcolonialism can also represent the many people living in both colonized and colonizing countries, as certain people are “still subject to the oppressions put into place by colonialism.” De Alva justifies the term by referencing poststructuralist approaches to history that insist that there is no single version of history but rather a “multiplicity of histories” (qtd. in Loomba 33). In adopting this definition of postcolonialism through decolonialism, we can better analyze a “multiplicity of histories” concerning the U.S.’s treatment of (im)migrant laborers and specifically its farmwork histories with Mexican Americans, Chicanxs, Indigenous peoples, and other Latinx peoples.

Applying this expanded definition allows us to see the opposing depictions of U.S. farmwork. For example, on one hand, Thomas Jefferson conflates “those who labour in the earth.... [the] yeoman farmer [who’s] independent and self-reliant” with “the chosen people of God” in his *Notes on the State of Virginia*; yet Jefferson does not associate these positive characteristics with the people he has enslaved and also do farmwork (qtd. in López 312). Growers in California invested in advertisements that painted California as a land of milk and honey, a “rural idyll;” yet “[obfuscated] and [erased]” the “laboring bodies from the California landscape despite their centrality to the material production of this very same physical territory.” In fetishizing farmwork and creating a façade of California’s agricultural “fixed and stable topography,” this rhetoric conceals the “superexploitative social relations behind it” (López 313).

Indeed, as Viramontes portrays in the text through the physical toils of Estrella and her family, California has a “grim history of racialized and gendered violence, impoverished wage labor, and capitalist exploitation.” Per Lisa Flores *Deportable and Disposable*, Mexican Americans, among other Latinx peoples, although once inhabiting Mexican land in Southwest U.S.—became associated with foreignness or “worse,” Indian¹⁴. During the 1930s repatriation, many Mexican American citizens were deported against their will amidst xenophobic and Anglo-American miscegenetic fears, despite inhabiting the Southwest before Manifest Destiny. In the 1940s, the U.S. introduced the Bracero Program as a wartime emergency measure. Many deported Mexicans returned; this time labeled as foreigners. The braceros were temporary farm laborers who were to return ‘home’ after their labor concluded. The etymology of the word *bracer* stems from the Spanish word for arm, which reduces farmworkers to their material contributions (Flores 80). Though Hispanic and Mexican settlers did indeed colonize Indigenous lands in the Southwest, the U.S. government's legal systems eventually equated both Indigenous and Mexican identities as non-American and non-white, thereby inferior (Flores 81). These attitudes contributed to the abuses, horrid working conditions, and lack of labor regulations in farmwork. (Im)migrant labor, specifically Mexican American and Indigenous labor, was labeled deportable and disposable. Although not colonized like the Indigenous nations were, Mexican Americans still experienced oppression put into place by colonialism via Manifest Destiny and other political measures such as repatriation and the Bracero Program.

Back to the barn—its decayed state thus represents and invokes these histories of abusive labor conditions in the field. The barn *is* a physical representation of the farmworker’s deteriorated bodies. United Farm Workers cofounder Dolores Huerta once commented that

¹⁴ Per “Why Make Mexico an Exception?” Chester Harvey Rowell states “the Mexican peon is not a ‘white’ man. He is an Indian” (qtd. in Flores 40).

“growers view farmworkers as tools” (qtd. in López 329); much like the barn is a tool of the industry. Even Perfecto¹⁵ reflects on his deteriorating body regarding his years as a farmworker, “he had given this country his all, and in this land that used his bones for kindling, in this land that never once in the thirty years he lived and worked, never once said thank you” (Viramontes 155). The “thank you” represents any acknowledgment for his toils, but will never come due to farmworker disposability and commodification. We later learn through Perfecto that someone died in the barn too, that “it’s no secret” and Estrella “should be [scared]” (Viramontes 76). Using a decolonial Gothic lens, we are better able to interpret how hauntings and ghosts emerge from (im)migration’s scars. The barn, through its initial introduction and secret histories, is a living exhibition of farmwork exploitation and abuse—a deep-seated *susto* in Borderland history. Thereby—a story of cultural haunting.

You Must Be Dreaming: Rememories of the Barn, the Harelip Boy Ghost, & la Llorona

The last two elements Hogle classifies as Gothic attributes are the unconscious fear and the second unconscious fear. In fact, the notion of unconscious fears links well with both Derrida’s and Gordan’s spectral theories and interpretations. In considering these two theorists’ explanations of specters and the responsibilities tied to them, we recall Toni Morrison’s *Beloved*, which is sometimes categorized as a work of American Gothic literature and/or cultural haunting (Hogle; Brogan). Sethe from *Beloved* reflects on the concept of “rememory,” specifically regarding places she’s experienced sexual trauma and dehumanization by her enslavers. No matter what happens to the material elements, such as the burning of a house as Sethe suggests, the place and land remain. Alongside the place and the land, the memories live as well. Sethe

¹⁵ Estrella’s stepfather

reflects that even if she dies, that ‘picture,’ or memory, of what she did and experienced will remain “right in the place where it happened” (Morrison 43). Sethe’s traumatic memories and past on the Sweet Home plantation are haunting, they still live in her and she refuses to return to that space because of the haunting ‘pictures’ that are still very much alive there. Denver, Sethe’s surviving daughter, questions whether other people can also see ‘it.’ To which Sethe profoundly responds,

“Yes...someday you’ll be walking down the road and you hear something or see something going on. So clear. And you think it’s you thinking it up. A thought picture. But no. It’s when you bump into a rememory that belongs to someone else. Where I was before I came here, that place is real. It’s never going away. Even if the whole farm—every tree and grass blade of it dies. The picture is still there and what’s more, if you go there—you who never was there—if you go there and stand in the place where it was, it will happen again; it will be there for you, waiting for you. So, Denver, you can’t ever go there. Never. Because even though it’s all over-over and done with—it’s going to always be there waiting for you.” (43-44).

Although both Derrida and Gordan talk about enacting justice for specters or about the haunting representing ‘something-to-be-done’, especially since *Beloved* reflects the dehumanizing nature of chattel slavery, Sethe is still processing her experience in the present. Although her memories at Sweet Home are in the past, much like her infanticide, she is still very much living them through these events in the present. Thus, it is poignant when Sethe claims that some traumas run so deep that even others, like Denver, can feel the overwhelming sensations from these ‘rememories.’ Sethe’s traumas manifest materially, through the spectrality of the land and through her baby ghost in her current home. In lieu of calling them subconscious fears, I will be

employing the concept of rememory because as seen through Sethe's use, rememory signals the importance of geography within subconscious fears (e.g., trauma).

The final analytical bit I would like to contribute about the haunted barn is its connection to rememory. Like Sethe explains, Estrella too sees a "thought picture" when she "bumped" into the barn the first time. There is an absence in the barn, insinuating that at one point it was not vacant. Estrella, although not entirely sure of the barn's past, processes the haunting in the present. Like Sethe explains, Estrella "who never was there" goes there and stands "in the place where it was, it will happen again; it will be there for you, waiting for you" (Morrison 44). Although the barn itself has an ominous, terrorizing presence, it is its past histories that truly haunt. Later learning that someone passed away there, further emphasizes the barn as a site for rememory and haunting. The haunted barn, as thoroughly discussed in the previous section, represents the deteriorating bodies of those who have passed or will pass due to the toils of farmwork.

The final two sources of haunting are the harelip boy ghost and la Llorona. The harelip boy ghost lives near/in the barn. When Petra¹⁶ warns Estrella that women who are out at night are in danger of exposing their unborn children to having harelips. She asks Estrella, "is that what you want...a child born sin labios?" To which, "Estrella looked out into the barn" (Viramontes 69). Estrella recalls him again when Perfecto recruits her to help him take the barn down as well (75). Then at some distance from the barn, Alejo and Gumecindo are harvesting peaches and hear the commotion from the barn when Estrella and her sisters first investigate it. Both Alejo and Gumecindo are spooked, but Gumecindo becomes particularly concerned and thinks the shrieks belong to la Llorona. López makes a connection between a later story

¹⁶ Estrella's mother

recounted in *Under* about the little girl falling into a tar pit and connecting it with that of la Llorona's children. López astutely associates the harelip boy and the young girl who died in the tar pits as “ghosts of [la Llorona's] drowned children,” a representation of the “pesticide poisoning, birth defects, and infant and childhood mortalities in the fields, central concerns for farmworker families to which *Under the Feet of Jesus* returns time and again” (308-309). López interprets la Llorona¹⁷ as a mother to all “‘imprisoned bodies’ of (im)migrant farmworkers” (327). In summoning la Llorona as a mother to the oppressed, we affirm her as “our symbol of unresolved grief, an ever present specter in the psyches of Chicanos and Mexicanos,” as Anzaldúa recounts (88). Through these farmlands and most especially the barn itself, Estrella and other characters feel the rememories of those who have passed. These rememories and the ghosts themselves represent capitalist intentions, ones that deemed their bodies disposable. Derrida reminds us that the ghosts we live with engage in the politics of memory, specifically in the way we remember and thereby attempt to remedy for the next generations (xvii). Who does this responsibility fall upon? In this novel, it falls on Estrella to begin the healing process toward a reinvention of her cultural identity, or as I am calling it here—the mourning ritual.

To All Those Who Stayed: The Performance of Culture through Mourning Rituals

The novel ends with the barn, our site of haunting. Although we have traversed through histories of exploitation, it is important to remember that the hauntings themselves are not synonymous with “being exploited, traumatized, or oppressed, although it usually involves these experiences or is produced by them” because unlike trauma, hauntings are “distinctive for

¹⁷ As analyzed in the previous chapter, la Llorona has many faces and is summoned in different spaces/places for different reasons.

producing something-to-be-done” (Gordan xvi), which is similar to Derrida’s assessment that this responsibility must be remedied for future generation (xvii).

The Chicana and Latina (im)migrant farmworker identity was shaped heavily through race (dark skin) and labor. Thus, insinuating that (im)migrant farmworkers have a singular, static identity in the eyes of colonial powers. They are seen as “tools,” as Dolores Huerta reminds, which completely removes any semblance of human qualities and thereby, a cultural identity as well. I argue that this something-to-be-done is a mourning ritual to reshape identity. In the most literal sense, a mourning ritual is a wake for someone who has passed, but I expand on this to mean the mourning of a past self and part of the process of healing/overcoming traumas of (im)migration. At the end when Estrella climbs the barn, she is performing a mourning ritual. Per Brogan’s cultural haunting, the mourning ritual serves to perform and shape cultural identity. Thus, using the barn and knowing its secrets—Estrella performs her ritual. She cements her newfound cultural identity, one that addresses (im)migration as an act of defiance in our collective cultural identity.

Like the beginning of the novel, the barn once again invokes decolonial Gothic elements. Again, the barn invokes this presence because of its history among the migrant farmworkers, a physical representation of migrant farmworkers’ deteriorating bodies and disposability. As “the moonlight paved a worn pathway toward the barn...Estrella knew what to do” (Viramontes 171). Estrella is possessed by an empowering sensation, her “eyes grew like the pupils of a cat to absorb every particle of light,” running amidst coyote howls and “vicious” dog barks. The barn “loomed before her,” its “tall shadows and dented weathervane pointing downward.” As she approached the barn, she heard the vane “barely squeaking in the whispering breeze, then heard the hinges of the door” (171-172). Viramontes utilizes terror through feline appropriations,

howling, barks, shadows, and whispers around the barn entrance to establish the Gothic setting. Once inside, Estrella hears the “ticking of the owls’ claws.” Owls, cats, and looming shadows are all essential elements to a haunting landscape. Estrella begins speaking to herself here, specifically to “her shadows as if she were not alone” and “her other self” (172). This Gothic exposition sets the scene for her mourning ritual, a pseudo-exorcism, in which she begins to climb the barn, intent on getting to the top. Using the physical traits that farmwork has honed, Estrella hoists herself up using the rusty chain, “[pulling] her arms to raise her shoulders up until her feet could brace the chain better.” “Splinter wood and dust” shower her, but she is determined, despite “the biceps in her arms [straining]” and sweat “[soaking] the back of her shirt collar” (173). Once on the loft, she expends her final efforts and pushes the trapdoor open “again and again until whatever resistance...gave way” (174-175). In overcoming the barn, which stands for this novel’s main site of haunting because it represents the toils of (im)migrant farmworkers who came and stayed before her family, Estrella completes this ritual. I used the term pseudo-exorcism earlier because as part of the mourning ritual, she is also expelling intergenerational, (im)migration traumas through this endeavor. There is never an explicit explanation in the text, just imagery of physical exertion and unwavering determination, especially when she notes “there is no turning back now” which further indicates that once a ritual begins, it cannot be interrupted—she must see it to the end (173).

In this mourning ritual, she is not only mourning Alejo, but she is also eulogizing the death of her past self. Whereas Alejo succumbed to the “systemic social devaluing and disposability of his body,” Estrella had replied, “can’t you see they want to take your heart?” (López 334; Viramontes 153). Estrella perhaps at one point would have paid the nurse who insensitively diagnosed Alejo and left, she instead recalled the tar pits, the “energy money” made

from “their bones that kept the air conditioning and cars humming;” here, Estrella decided to threaten her for their refund because “the nurse owed *them* as much as they owed her” (Viramontes 148). Alejo’s death, much like the death of Lupito for Tony in *Bless Me, Ultima*, depicts the deadly nature of not finding a cultural identity, whether it be through hybridity or another healing mechanism. Estrella’s determination is fierce, she has felt too much injustice to stop now and knows the ghosts have too.

Once on the barn’s roof, she feels in control over her body, a privilege for an exploited migrant farmworker. Estrella stands as a “utopian” figure, an “embodiment of political solidarity and community” (López 333). “Like the chiming bells of the great cathedrals,” Estrella “believed her heart powerful enough to summon home all those who stayed” (Viramontes 176). This final line is beautiful. In summoning home “all those who stayed,” Estrella is also encouraging (im)migration as a form of defiance. As Nicholas de Genova has emphasized, “the freedom of movement remains the freedom of life itself, not merely the mundane necessity to make a living but the freedom to truly live” (qtd. in Cintron 70). The act of (im)migration, when it is not violently forced upon people, can be a tool of political defiance because it assumes a sense of political efficacy outside of a nation’s government—which is often considered unsuitable or undesirable for colonial countries (e.g. U.S., France, etc.). Estrella completes her ritual, creating an identity that pushes back against abuse and exploitation. Her farmwork may have rendered her disposable in the eyes of colonial powers, but she has deemed herself worthy. Estrella reclaiming and redefining her cultural identity has exorcised the ghosts and hauntings in *Under*, and achieved their “something-to-be-done.”

CHAPTER FIVE: SOMETHING-TO-BE-DONE

During the writing of this thesis, I often questioned if ghosts and hauntings become epistemological methods for historical alternatives that unravel binaries between fact and fiction—can stories of cultural haunting become an adequate medium for these historical alternatives, ones that placate the ghosts’ “something-to-be-done”? And the answer is yes. There is a quote from Gloria Anzaldúa’s *Light in the Dark*, that is poignant when questioning the value of reading cultural hauntings, most especially ones that are different from our own ethnic and cultural backgrounds,

“As world citizens we learn to move at ease among cultures, countries, and customs. The future belongs to those who cultivate cultural sensitivities to differences and who use these abilities to forge a hybrid consciousness that transcends the “us” versus “them” mentality and will carry us into a nos/otras position bridging the extremes of our cultural realities, a subjectivity that doesn’t polarize potential allies” (81).

When considering nos/otras (us/others), the conversation enters an activist standpoint, one that moves beyond the literary analysis and instead speaks to the value of this analysis outside academic institutional walls. In reading and working through these painful hauntings, regardless of whether we relate to them or not, we situate ourselves in these cracks between worlds, cultures, identities, etc. Nos/otras assumes power struggles and privileges, “by living on that slash between ‘us’ and ‘others,’ ...[cutting] through isolated selfhood’s barbed wire fence” they trouble the division, question privilege, and confront “our own personal desconocimientos, and [challenge] the other’s marginal status.” Most of all nepantleras recognize complicity in the “existing power structures, that we must deal with conflictive as well as connectionist relations

within and among various groups” (82). According to Anzaldúa, nepantleras not just read and listen to multiethnic stories, they create coalitional action through their knowledge.

Both *Under the Feet of Jesus* and *Bless Me, Ultima* use their authors’ lived experiences, and represent the diversity of cultural identities. As readers, regardless of whether we identify with similar cultural identities, we read these novels to better understand other cultural identities alongside our own. Like Gordan and Derrida’s specters who demand “something-to-be-done” or want to enact justice, we as readers of stories of cultural haunting too bear the responsibility of understanding and empathizing with cultural plights other than our own¹⁸.

¹⁸ Also reminiscent of Pablo Ramirez’s “Toward a Borderland Ethics...”

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