Doom Patterns: The Aesthetics of Violence in Contemporary Latinx Literature

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A Dissertation submitted to

The Faculty of
The Columbian College of Arts and Sciences
of The George Washington University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

August 31, 2018

Dissertation directed by

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The Columbian College of Arts and Sciences of The George Washington University certifies that Maia Gil'Adí has passed the Final Examination for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy as of May 14, 2018. This is the final and approved form of the dissertation.

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Acknowledgements

Writing is a lonely enterprise and can, even on the best of days, make you feel like an incompetent transcriber in need of a good thesaurus. Sayings by authors about their hatred of writing are a dime-a-dozen. Kurt Vonnegut, for example, said that when writing he felt like "an armless, legless man with a crayon in his mouth," and Joyce Carol Oates said that finishing a first draft is like "pushing a very dirty peanut across the floor with your nose." So, here is my dirty peanut. I am fortunate to have had a floor to push it across and people who would pick it up when it reached the other end of the room.

This project is indebted to the many incredible people—teachers, friends, and mentors—whom I've been lucky enough to know in over three decades of being a student, people who have encouraged me and pushed me to read, think, and write. In tenth grade, after a terrible rendition of Mark Anthony's *Julius Caesar* soliloquy, Mr. Parsons said to me, "Maia, stop being such a hippie and get your shit together." I'd like to think that I have done so and for his urgency I will always be grateful. As an undergraduate student at the George Washington University, it was Jim Miller's Introduction to African American literature that made me want to be an English major.

His guidance in and outside the classroom has been invaluable: he introduced me to books that continue to surprise me, taught me to ask good questions of the text, and take risks in my writing. Aside from Tony López, Jim is probably the most important teacher I will ever have, and his presence is terribly missed.

My time at American University was crucial for my current focus on aesthetics in Latinx literature. Denise Orenstein and Richard McCann supported my exploration of form and story, always asking the right questions of my work, forcing me to pay attention

to, as Richard always said, “where the heat of the story lies.” I will always be grateful for the mentorship and friendship of Faye Moskowitz, who has read every single page of fiction I ever produced, from my terrible short stories at GW to my novel at American. Her questions about my fiction helped me think deeply about structure, motivation, and word choice—questions I continually return to in my writing. My analysis of aesthetics is better because of them. At AU, I also had the fortune to take many classes with Erik Dussere, and it was our conversations about aesthetics and representation that gave me the determination to pursue a doctorate in English.

Throughout my time at GW, I have been keenly aware that having the space and time for contemplation, reading, and writing is a luxury and privilege, one that I have been lucky to share with an amazing and supportive group of friends and readers. I am grateful for the many conversations with Lori Brister, Elizabeth Pittman, Julie Chamberlain, Sam Yates, and K. Tyler Christensen. Molly Lewis has been compassionate and reassuring in a way only a friend can be. My life and work is better because of the countless hours of discussions with D. Gilson and Justin Mann. They have read almost every single word of this dissertation, probably more than once, and have pushed me to think harder, work harder. D. has urged me to block out the noise and focus on my work, to find the fun in writing, the beauty in words. I am grateful for Justin’s intellectual generosity. His difficult questions always pushed me to better places, and he has been able to decipher things in my writing before I have been able to do so myself. He has been a true friend with whom I am lucky to have shared this process. Both D. and Justin have left an indelible mark on my work and I am better because of them.

At GW I have had the honor of learning from exceptional professors including Holly Duggan, Robert McRuer, Ayanna Thompson, Patty Chu, Jennifer James, Jonathan Hsy, Jennifer Chang, Daniel DeWispelare, and David McAleavey, who were particularly supportive when I was on the job market. I am also eternally grateful for the support of professors in and outside GW, including Kavita Daiya, Daniel, Jung Yun, Josh Guzman, Manuel Cuellar, Sergio Weismann, Sam Pinto, Renee Hudson, Holly, and Sreyoshi Sarkar, who generously gave of their time and advice by reading my job materials, preparing me for interviews, and talking with me about campus visits.

I could not have asked for a better dissertation committee. Ricardo Ortíz's work is inspiring and his encouragement to think expansively about the field has been instrumental. Working with Gayle Wald has been an honor. Achieving her presence and command in the classroom is one my goals, and I'm so grateful for her support, generosity, and kind spirit. I am also indebted to Daniel DeWispelare and John Alba Cutler, who have come in as my outside readers. I am lucky to have a new friend in Daniel, who has been incredibly giving during this process and during the job market. John has been supportive of me and my work since we met through the Latina Latino Literature MLA forum, and it's a privilege to have someone whose scholarship you admire comment on your work.

I've heard many times that a dissertation is supposed to be the worst thing one writes, and its purpose is simply to get a job. This dissertation has served its purpose, but *none* of it would have been possible—I mean *nothing*: imagining, drafting, and finishing the dissertation, getting interviews, getting a job—without the support and feedback of Tony López. His generosity and enthusiasm are unparalleled, and there is nothing I can

say or do that can repay the time, generosity, kindness, and dedication that he has showed me and my work.

I have been fortunate to have an incredible support system outside of academia. Jenny Molberg's friendship has been the most important of my life. I am thankful for the hours of phone calls, texts, beach trips, and drunken poetry readings; in short, everything that has made life good. Elliott Wrenn, thank you for the many meals, glasses of wine, and conversations about movies and books that allowed for a little respite from the stress. My cat Steve, albeit neurotic, has been the best writing cuddler, perhaps why I wrote "doom patters" instead of "doom patterns" so many times thinking of his little paws.

Finally, my family has been very annoying throughout this whole process, but I guess I should thank them to be polite. Mentira, just a joke. Mis padres, Patricia Dressler y Daniel Gil'Adí, me han demostrado lo importante que es ser resistente, flexible, optimista, lo crucial que es la voz de una mujer fuerte, especialmente ahora. Siempre puedo contar con mi hermana Yael para sentirme mejor, con un chiste, un chisme, una llorada. Es la mejor amiga que cualquiera se pudiera imaginar. Finally, thank you mami for dubbing my many writing spaces "*la prigione di Silvio Pelico*," you were able to give my writing a little more pizzazz and drama, fun when I needed it most. Los quiero, esto es para ustedes.

Abstract of Dissertation

Doom Patterns: The Aesthetics of Violence in Contemporary Latinx Literature

Contemporary Latinx speculative fiction—stories of monsters, time travel, and the otherworldly, among other things—conquered the academy, the literary market, and popular culture beginning in the 1990s. Scholarly criticism typically argues that reimaginations of conquest, colonialism, and racial discrimination promote social justice and cultural transformation. By contrast, "Doom Patterns: The Aesthetics of Violence in Contemporary Latinx Literature" troubles political remedy as the approach to such works since the 1960s era of Latinx and other social movements. Instead, I argue that representations of destruction and pain foreground the effects of pleasure in reading and rereading representations of the end of the world. Indeed, I demonstrate that contemporary Latinx and multiethnic speculative fiction exhumes destruction through what I term narrative "doom patterns," devices such as thematic repetition, non-linear narration, character fragmentation, and unresolved plots that consistently return the reader to instances of apocalyptic destruction. The powerful appeal of such doom patterns and the unregenerative destruction they describe establish in stories of colonization, slavery, and the trauma of migration alternative worlds: "elsewheres" where imperial, racial, and ethno-national violence upends stereotypical accounts of minority literature that emphasize upward mobility and the celebration of hybridity. "Doom Patterns" moves beyond the critical consensus on Latinx narrative by revealing how texts typically read as "realist" harbor the speculative. Examining works by established Latinx authors such as Junot Díaz and implementing the tools of Latinx literary and cultural studies to analyze

novels by multiethnic writers such as Colson Whitehead, my dissertation also reinterprets what is understood as Latinx literature and *latinidad*.

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INTRODUCTION
DOOM-PATTERNING LATINX LITERATURE

"Trauma is a time traveller, an ouroboros that reaches back and devours everything that came before. Only fragments remain."
—Junot Díaz, "The Silence"

In the April 16, 2018 issue of *The New Yorker*, Junot Díaz published "The Silence," a nonfiction account of his experience of sexual abuse as a child and the lingering effects of that trauma in his life and fiction. "The Silence" begins by addressing an unknown reader, "X—," who approached him at a signing to ask about the sexual abuse "alluded to" in his books and if "it had happened to me." As with most of Díaz's writing that has appeared in *The New Yorker*, "The Silence" was widely circulated on social media and was trending on Twitter even a week before its publication in print. Popular culture writers and figures like Brent Staples and Gabrielle Union and academics like Tananarive Due and William Orchard commented on and re-tweeted the story. Arlene Dávila, for example, tweeted, "A brave must read for addressing head on the taboo & fear that keeps abuse under wraps in our communities;" Nikole Hannah-Jones wrote, "This personal piece by Junot Díaz is wrenching and incredibly brave:' and Rosemary G. Feal, the executive director emirita of the Modern Language Association, tweeted, "I hope @achylandia translates this essay by @junotdiaz so it can be read widely in the D.R. and elsewhere. So brave." She then called on writer Achy Obejas to translate Díaz work into Spanish.[1]

Díaz's personal narrative of rape, depression, and suicidal ideation is imbued with the same language of speculation, failure, and repetition with which this dissertation engages. As in all his writing, Díaz turns to the speculative to describe violence: "That violación. Not enough pages in the world to describe what it did to me. The whole planet

could be my inkstand and it still wouldn't be enough. That shit cracked the planet of me in half, threw me completely out of orbit, into the lightless regions of space where life is not possible." Importantly, trauma is rendered as excessive, mythological, and otherworldly, as that which cannot be encapsulated in language. Trauma shatters the self: "Trauma is a time traveller, an ouroboros that reaches back and devours everything that came before. Only fragments remain." As I argue in this project, representing personal and public experiences of violence in Latinx literature necessitates speculative languages and fragmented aesthetics that often paradoxically contain elements of "pleasure" in reading and rereading about the end of the world. By "speculative language," I identify narrative practices that point to the otherworldly, be it through the implementation of monsters such as the zombie or Aztec time travel, and I also signal the necessity of excess and deviation from realist fiction for telling stories about various Latinx violences. Further, the aesthetics of fragmentation mean to recognize the multiple breakages in Latinx speculative fiction, moments of excessive violence that lead to fragmented description, character fragmentation, and plot irresolution.

"Doom Patterns: The Aesthetics of Violence in Contemporary Latinx Literature" examines the connection between representations of violence and speculative narrative forms. Latinx speculative fiction—stories of monsters, time travel, and the otherworldly—conquered the academy, the literary market, and popular culture beginning in the 1990s. Scholarly criticism about these works typically argues that reimaginations of conquest, colonialism, and racial discrimination promote social justice and cultural transformation. "Doom Patterns" troubles the systemic and epistemological approach in Latinx Studies since the 1960s era of Latinx and other social movements that

upheld political remedy as the "natural" and ultimate methodological approach, praxis, and interpretive political reading practice. I challenge the terms of this school of remedy and the literary history it supposes on the grounds that archives and texts themselves tell another story: that representations of destruction and pain foreground, as I argue, the pleasure in humor, narrative beauty, and the grotesque in reading about cataclysm and destruction.

This project demonstrates how contemporary Latinx speculative fiction exhumes destruction through what I term narrative "doom patterns," devices such as thematic repetition, non-linear narration, character fragmentation, and unresolved plots that consistently return the reader to instances of apocalyptic destruction. The powerful appeal of such doom patterns and the unregenerative destruction they describe establish in stories of colonization, slavery, and the trauma of migration alternative worlds: "elsewheres" where imperial, racial, and ethno-national violence upends stereotypical accounts of minority literature that emphasize upward mobility and the celebration of hybridity. Unlike recent scholarship that argues that re-imaginations of the Latinx past promote social justice, I explore how this archive troubles the notion that political remedy is the ultimate aesthetic or social aim of multiethnic literature writ large. Instead, I suggest that these elsewheres re-imagine stories of colonization, slavery, and the trauma of migration and demonstrate the possible pleasurable effects in reading and rereading about the end of the world.

Examining works by established Latinx authors such as Junot Díaz and implementing the tools of Latinx literary and cultural studies to analyze novels by multiethnic writers such as Colson Whitehead, my dissertation also reinterprets what is

understood as Latinx literature and *latinidad*. This project calls attention to the networks of cataclysm that exist when we read intra-ethnically, transnationally, and across ethno-racial boundaries. This illustrates new avenues for discussing race, ethnicity, and literary representation. Further, "Doom Patterns" moves beyond the critical consensus on Latinx narrative fiction by revealing how texts that typically read as "realist" harbor something else within themselves: the speculative.

In using "social justice," I refer to an array of positions from liberal to radical that aim at correcting injustice as a legacy of colonial, white supremacist violence in and beyond the nation state as expressed in the "identity disciplines" of Latinx Studies. The speculative fiction I examine provide ancillary possibilities beyond social justice that should be read against the typical "ethical" reading practices in Latinx literary and cultural studies in particular, practices which provide epistemic possibilities for justice even as they uphold the status quo in American culture. These texts demonstrate a desire to inquire into the meaning of justice itself: what are the methods through which we desire to achieve social justice? Why do we desire this in the first place? How do authors present these desires and to what ends? What alternatives exist beyond notions of social justice and what do they look like?

In this way, "Doom Patterns" sees in narrative fiction by Latinx authors as well as Latinx-adjacent Latin American, African-American, and Asian-American authors elements that challenge the notion of Latinx literary and cultural devices as ethical and educational products that champion moral responsibilities. In challenging the instrumentalization of Latinx literature that argues for "social justice" I also suggest that all literature is used with particular goals in mind and that some instrumentalizations are

better than others. I argue that the violence presented in the literature examined in this project exemplifies better answers to the superficial "solutions" put forth by all camps of social justice. Latinx Studies has a long tradition of focusing on violence in literature, culture, and the archive, primarily presenting a reparative approach, which I argue against even as I consider this work significant.[2]

Lastly, the link between literary form and representations of un-redemptive violence is crucial. I consider doom patterns in Latinx speculative fiction primarily through the novel, whose length and complexity chronicle sequential events and in-depth characterization, even in the postmodern moment. The Latinx novels I examine exhibit a textual anxiety that counters the narrative linearity and wholeness usually ascribed to the form. Through narrative "failures" such as fragmentation, multiple beginnings and endings, and multivocal and multilingual prose, Latinx speculative fiction demonstrates its inability to contain violence within traditional narrative forms. Indeed, I argue that Latinx and multiethnic writers implement speculative tropes such as the zombie, time travel, and the corpse to trigger breakages in the text that mirror apocalypse, taking us away from conventional notions of story resolution in Latinx literature.[3]

This project tracks the rise of Latinx literature in the marketplace alongside the growing number of race and ethnic studies programs in the university and later their bifurcation into African-American Studies, Chicanx Studies, and Asian-American Studies. I situate contemporary Latinx literature after the 1960s movements and in memory of nineteenth-century Spanish-language periodical cultures and other pre-1960, proto-Latinx texts such as *The Squatter and the Don* (1885). Contributing to the growing critical focus on multiethnic speculative fiction (and countering academic attitudes

toward "genre fiction" as low-brow), I illustrate how the genre-fiction aspects of Latinx and multiethnic literatures offer important new avenues for discussing race, ethnicity, and national identities.

Latino, Latina/o, Latin@, Latinx Academic Traditions

Like the literature of the Movement period, Latinx literary and cultural studies is plagued by the burden of its ethical use value. The field properly came into its own in the 1980s as a product of the U.S. identity movements of the 1960s and 1970s, and consolidated further as an academic discipline in the 1990s. During this decade, the field saw a surge in literary and scholarly publications, with critics highlighting the tensions between cultural nationalism, historical fluctuations, and pan-Latinx collectivity. The emergence of authors like Piri Thomas, Sandra Cisneros, and Cristina García enabled a new generation of scholars to explore questions of race, gender, migration, and national belonging through an aesthetic archive that was imaginative and experimental, but above all, profoundly political. My project recognizes how, in recent years, this multidisciplinary area has emerged from the work accomplished by scholars and activists in Chicanx, Cuban-American, and mainland Puerto Rican Studies. These fields have offered invaluable contributions in the recovery of pre-1960s writings and studying gendered, diasporic, and border subjectivities. Yet the field also investigates how these areas require reexamination and reorganization. As such, Latinx Studies is currently in a moment of tension between looking to the future yet expressing the need to reassess the archive.

The field also facilitates the rethinking of a cultural and political space on a transamerican and transatlantic scale. Articulating no single ethnic essence or racial category, speaking in a multiplicity of voices and languages, *latinidad* has always depended on the comparative to illuminate itself. Latinx Studies has offered key concepts and contributions for theorizing racial formations, gender and sexuality, postcoloniality, border subjects, and the border, or *la frontera*, itself. Latinx texts and Latinx literary and cultural studies provide crucial entry points to these discussions, problematizing monolingual and mono-national perspectives and modes of reading.

The growth and diversification of U.S. Latinx populations has also altered the landscape of the field that was predominantly composed of Mexican-American, mainland Puerto Rican, and Cuban-American writers. Consequentially, criticism that emerged in the early, post-1970 stages of Latinx literary and cultural studies demonstrated the field's particular scope. Early texts within this field sought to not only present Latinxes as significant social, literary, and cultural contributors to American culture, but to substantiate their research within this field. Héctor Calderón and José David Saldívar's *Criticism in the Borderland: Studies in Chicano Literature, Culture, and Ideology* (1991), for example, theorizes the cultural features that emerge out of geographical and geopolitical conflicts that make Chicanx culture fundamental to the cultural formations of California and the Southwest. While celebratory, this work is not as extreme as Gustavo Pérez Firmat's seminal *Life on the Hyphen: The Cuban-American Way* (1994), which uncritically celebrates cultural and linguistic hybridity as transculturation in the U.S.

Like the research supported by the Recovering the U.S. Hispanic Literary Heritage Project, much of the work of this period attempts to unearth and reconstruct

Latinx history, literature and culture, repairing what Juan Flores terms in *From Bomba to Hip-Hop: Puerto Rican Culture and Latino Identity* (2000) as "broken memories." Similarly, Kristen Silva Gruesz's *Ambassadors of Culture: The Transamerican Origin of Latino Writing* (2002) demonstrates the significance of reconstructing a suppressed literary history for a historical understanding of Latinx subjectivity. Like the Spain and Spanishness that María DeGuzman presents in *Spain's Long Shadow: The Black Legend, Off-Whiteness, and Anglo-American Empire* (2005), the Latin-American/Latinx cultural presence and influence Gruesz unearths is simultaneously desired and rejected by Anglo-Americans. Their work presents a strong revision of literary and historical narratives in the U.S. national traditions that have rendered Latinx presences as ghostly and marginal.[4]

Following this trajectory, the work by Latinx scholars such as Emma Perez, Chela Sandoval, and writer-activist Gloria Anzaldúa have been foundational for my thinking of the field and my analysis of this project's texts. Yet, the past two decades have seen a rapid shift in Latinx literature and Latinx Studies. Recent anthologies such as *The Norton Anthology of Latino/a Literature* (2010), *Routledge Companion to Latino/a Literature* (2010), and *The Cambridge Companion to Latina/o Literature* (2016) function as important sites of canon formation through their determination of the categories of analysis by which Latinx literature is read and interpreted. The inclusion of Latinx Studies within New York University Press' *Keywords* series reveals not only the expansiveness of the field, but also the places of tension surrounding issues central to the study of *latinidad*.[5]

Moreover, critics have recently noted the importance of imagining *latinidad* outside the national borders of the United State. Limiting it to this artificial enclosure

hypothesizes its eventual recognition and assimilation, while Latinx writing, especially the works I examine here, either critically position themselves outside the possibility of assimilation or actively envision a world outside this option. The introduction of hemispheric studies invites us to account for the broad system of exchange, movement, and influence across the Americas that call into question the overlapping geographies, movements, and cross-filiations between and among people, regions, diasporas, and nations. As the field moves toward a pan-Latinx analytical methodology and as new subjects of examination arise, Latinx Studies demonstrates the challenges of acknowledging ethno-national differences while underscoring pan-Latinx similarities.

"Doom Patterns" contributes to these energies in the field by drawing from an eclectic archive of novels from 1992 to the present, focusing on the relationship between violence and literary forms in a largely neglected body of contemporary Latinx speculative fiction. This project challenges the field's normative definitions in terms of geographical networks, its investment in the English language as cultural capital, and its eschewing of genre fiction from scholarly consideration. The field's normative definitions of Latinx literature and *latinidad* have maintained certain writers as central (Junot Díaz, Sandra Cisneros) while relegating others to its peripheries (Ismael Calban, Erika Lopez). Moreover, this dissertation demonstrates the necessity of putting texts into new and strange relations to one other, respatializing geography and demonstrating new points of connectivity and alliances. Finally, "Doom Patterns" challenges the tendency within Latinx literary and cultural studies to define minority literature in ethical terms and as demonstrating oppositional consciousness towards an ultimate goal of progress and social justice.

SPECULATIVE TRADITIONS

The Latinx speculative literary tradition emerges and diverges in significant ways from the Latin-American literary tradition. In his Nobel Prize acceptance speech, "La soledad de América latina," Gabriel García Márquez delineates the supernatural reality of Latin America, from the "discovery" and travel narratives of the "Columbian Encounter" to the dictatorships of Mexico, Ecuador, and Chile, and the atrocities that have taken place throughout South and Central America. This "realidad desforada" (outsized reality) has been rendered literarily and faithfully, according to García Marquez, by himself and others following in this tradition:

> I dare to think that it is this outsized reality, and not just its literary expression, that has deserved the attention of the Swedish Academy of Letters. A reality not of paper, but one that lives within us and determines each instant of our countless daily deaths, and that nourishes a source of insatiable creativity, full of sorrow and beauty.[6]

Here history is depicted as more fictional than fiction itself, yet according to sociologist José Joaquín Brunner, this perspective creates a *macondista*[7] tendency of reading Latin America, taking these texts to be constitutive of its reality, essentializing this geographic space, and ossifying it as "magical."

Although some critics have argued that magical realism has its birth in Europe (in Franz Kafka and André Breton), scholars such as Irene Guenther consider it as coming to fruition within Latin America: "Conjecture aside, it is in Latin America that [magical realism] was primarily seized by literary criticism and was, through translation and literary appropriation transformed" (61). Others, however, have voiced their opposition to

this genre, especially in the way it sustains Latin American exclusivity, as well as racial (read white) and class hierarchies. In fact, I would argue that Latinx authors have been yoked to the magical realist mode of reading and the market demands that stem from it. In effect, Latinx literature has often been misread and miscategorized as Latin American in ways that do not forward progressive notions of transnational and hemispheric connections between Latinx and Latin American "homelands." Instead, these accounts elide the difference between these two demarcations and reify notions of foreignness to "Latinx" (i.e., "not of the U.S."). Most famously, Alberto Fuguet states in "Magical Neoliberalism" that "Latin America is quite literary, yet, almost a work of fiction, but it's not a folk tale. It is a volatile place where the 19th century mingles with the 21st. More than magical, this place is weird. Magical realism reduces a much too complex situation and just makes it cute" (69). Fuguet's point is well taken, bitter as he is about his marginalization within Latin American letters.

While Latinx authors take deploy elements of magical realism, the texts examined in this dissertation offer a critique of how Latinx speculative literature is often dismissed as a replication of magical realism, now written by Latinx authors in the post-1990s. The authors examined here are aware of this essentialist construction and its Latin American orientation, the baggage left by authors such as García Márquez. These authors create U.S. counter-narratives by juxtaposing supernatural and historical explanations for their violent realities. For example, Junot Díaz's Pulitzer Prize-winning novel, *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* (2007), presents a seemingly magical realist view of the Caribbean that echoes García Márquez's claims. Having been beaten by Trujillo's secret police, Belicia, Oscar's mother, is rescued from the cane fields by a talking mongoose,

about which the narrator states: “But no matter the truth: Dominicans are Caribbean and therefore have extraordinary tolerance for extreme phenomena. How else could we have survived what we have survived?” (149). Like García Márquez, the narrator of *Oscar Wao* equates the historical reality of the Antilles with the supernatural. However, the novel’s use of footnotes to incorporate Dominican history and nerd culture, the multiple beginnings and endings of the novel, and the text’s metafictional voice all write against this magical realist view of Latin American and Latinx history. Further, Díaz’s sarcastic, tongue-in-cheek tone (which resonates with other writers in this dissertation) offers another way in which U.S. Latinx writers demonstrate a departure from canonical Latin American magical realism. Here the narrative spills over, and a traditional magical realist mode of storytelling cannot contain it. Furthermore, U.S. Latinx speculative writers are also working as racialized and ethnicized minorities, a contrasting position from canonical Latin-American writers who experienced elite status within their homelands and great success in the national and international literary market.

As such, the texts examined in “Doom Patterns” insert themselves into and transform the long tradition of hemispheric American, Anglo-U.S., Latinx, and African-American fantasy, science fiction, utopian and apocalyptic narratives, thus contributing to discussions of canon formation and literary networks. The novels of this project use stylistic devices and themes from the Gothic tradition, pulp and hardboiled fiction, British speculative fiction, and American speculative fiction. Like the authors that came before them, these writers engage with notions of citizenship, anti-colonialism, nationhood, and anxieties about race and “Otherness.” However, like speculative fiction by African-American writers, Latinx authors underscore notions central to Latinx peoples such as the

history of colonization in the Americas, the transatlantic slave trade, imperial violence, and the U.S.-Mexico border. Engaging with these various traditions, these works contribute to discussions of canon formation and literary networks, yet push this argument further by exhuming the pain, vengeance, and violent possibilities that complicate our notions of progress and incorporation by positing the paradoxical condition of residing in a space of violence, pleasure, and undoing without the possibility for resolution.

Speculative fiction is a term used to designate a genre that includes fantasy, science fiction, post/apocalyptic fiction, and horror. The term ranges from ancient works to those of Shakespeare, J.R.R Tolkien, Ray Bradbury, and Kurt Vonnegut.[8] Some have argued that the rise of the novel in the eighteenth century spawned the genre with Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818), although Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* (1726) and Johannes Kepler's *Somnium* (1620-1630) can be seen as earlier models.[9] American speculative fiction is influenced by Shelley's work, as well as other nineteenth-century British texts, such as Robert Louis Stevenson's *Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1886), Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897), and works by H.G. Wells such as *The Time Machine* (1895), *The Invisible Man* (1897), and *The War of the Worlds* (1898). Edgar Allan Poe was the earliest American experimenter within this field, combining the Gothic with science-fictional elements and frameworks for futuristic speculations in his lunar voyage story "Hans Phaal" (1835; revised in 1840 as "The Unparalleled Adventure of One Hans Pfaal"). Although critics regard the works of Nathaniel Hawthorne to be outside the scope of science fiction, "The Birthmark" (1843) and "Rappaccini's Daughter" (1844) are clearly influential for contemporary speculative fiction writers.[10] In

the early twentieth century, pulp magazines enabled the development of American speculative-fiction writers. From the 1930s to the present, science fiction in particular has had a variety of subgenres, including the New York school of Futurians (Asimov), Beat generation speculative writers (Burroughs), the New Wave (Ballard and Delany), cyberpunk (Dick), and utopian and post/apocalyptic fiction.

The writers and movements discussed here are foundational to the works in this dissertation, as can be seen, for example, in how Roberto Bolaño reimagines the U.S.-Mexico border through tropes of magical realism, horror, fantasy, and the crime novel, or, through how Colson Whitehead re-writes the typical zombie narrative in *Zone One*. However, this project aims to challenge how "speculative" is typically defined, while also highlighting the centrality of violence to "speculative fiction," especially as it intersects with ethnicity and race.

Scholarly work on speculative fiction as well as speculative fiction itself has traditionally overlooked the role of race and ethnicity. Works by non-white, English-language writers are usually spoken of in terms of their magical realist or ethnic elements and not in terms of speculative fiction. For example, Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (1987), which centers on the return of a baby ghost, is not usually discussed for its speculative elements, and scholarship about the novel focuses on issues of slavery, gender, and race, while often ignoring the centrality of the fantasy and horror for the representation of these themes. African-American authors such as Samuel Delany, Octavia Butler, and Walter Mosley have written about how their work has been overlooked in American letters. Sheree Thomas' *Dark Matter: A Century of Speculative Fiction from the African Diaspora* (2000), Madhu Dubey's "Speculative Fictions of Slavery" (2010), and Sandra

Jackson and Julie Moody Freeman's *The Black Imagination, Science Fiction and the Speculative* (2011) have attempted to rectify the inequality they observe within scholarship about speculative fiction. More recently, Isiah Lavender's *Race in American Science Fiction* (2011), andré carrington's *Speculative Blackness: The Future of Race in Science Fiction* (2016), Mark Jerng's *Racial Worldmaking: The Power of Popular Fiction* (2018), and Samantha Schalk's *Bodyminds Reimagined: (Dis)ability, Race, and Gender in Black Women's Speculative Fiction* (2018) have continued to examine the centrality of race (particularly blackness) in speculative narratives.

Conversely, recent discussions have acknowledged the growing centrality of speculative fiction in the Latinx tradition. Anthologies such as *Altermundos: Latin@ Speculative Literature, Film, and Popular Culture* (2017) and *Latin@ Rising: An Anthology of Latin@ Science Fiction and Fantasy* foreground the contributions of Latinx writers that challenges the view of speculative fiction as a mostly white, male, and Anglo-centric field. Yet, most Latinx speculative fiction scholarship, albeit fruitful, predominantly focuses on Chicanx and Mexican-American culture and border subjects. This is both significant and problematic: it signals how Latinx literary and cultural studies itself has narrowly focused on compartmentalizing geographical regions (primarily the U.S.-Mexico border and the Caribbean), placing these at the apex of literary study in ways that affect literary markets and reception.[11] Scholarship on Latinx speculative fiction, furthermore, emphasizes the act of speculation and world-building projects as didactic tools for cultural transformation. "Doom Patterns" challenges political remedy as the approach to such works since the 1960s era of Latinx and other social movements and instead argues that representations of destruction and pain

foreground the effects of pleasure in reading and rereading representations of the end of the world.

A central concern in this project is to define and position the U.S.-Mexico border and the Caribbean as post-apocalyptic spaces that create monstrous and sci-fi bodies. The inscription of the New World into modernity, its contact with the Old, and its long history of slavery and colonialism define this space as post-apocalyptic. This type of depiction is not foreign in American letters. For example, William Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom!* (1936) depicts the Caribbean and the U.S. as a space of death and as a postapocalyptic landscape. The communal retelling of Henry Sutpen's story continually depicts him not only as a haunting entity, but as part of a cursed and dead landscape that is itself replete with haunting memory. Our first vision of him is as an apparition, emerging from the landscape, man-beast-ghost, with his band of "wild niggers" that put front and center the Caribbean, slavery, and zombie belief. Describing his arrival from Martinique, we can see not only the fear of contamination from Africanness, but how Sutpen has brought death and a history of oppression that cries out for vengeance. Sutpen himself has been infected by this history: arriving in Mississippi, he plants his Cadmus teeth, and his children, like the warriors of the myth, destroy each other. Through the continual telling of the Sutpen saga, *Absalom, Absalom!* raises the question of whether the past ever dies and makes Quentin (and through him, the South) part of the commonwealth of the dead.

Similarly, the texts examined in this project portray the trauma of history as an inescapable violence that continually is exhumed. Yet, the novels in "Doom Patterns" displace the racist implications found in Faulkner's "wild niggers" and makes of them otherworldly protagonists, and further, shifts the loci of analysis from the U.S. nation to

the hemisphere. Within the spaces of the Dominican Republic, Cuba, New York, Ciudad Juárez, and Los Angeles, different types of "monsters" emerge: "science-fiction" bodies, haunts, hauntings, and zombies. "Monster" is thus used in this project as an all-embracing term for these other "creatures" but which specifically indicates Othering, processes of racialization, and the power to elate, frighten, and create horror. The zombie, more specifically, embodies the violent histories of colonialism, African slavery, and black bodies in capitalist labor. Through the zombie, race and the human are reimagined and disrupted, reconfiguring established racial orders and conceptions of difference. This leads to the primary reaffirmation of the zombie as an always black body covered in the violent history of sugar production and consumption whose Caribbean history should not be whitewashed as it has been done in American popular culture and scholarship. The female corpse, by extension, functions in texts such as *2666* as a monstrous symbol of illegality that haunts the border and threatens the inviolate humanity of the pre-apocalypse and the temporal progress of the nation. The fragmented presentation of women's corpses in *2666* demonstrates how history and the horror of femicide cannot be contained in a linear narrative style. Finally, science-fiction bodies are those that are produced from the contact between Old and New Worlds and particularly through forms of knowledge and technology that, imagined as the "future," are inseparable from coloniality. Emerging in the Caribbean like the zombie and moving to the rest of the American hemisphere, these bodies signify otherworldliness, the horrific, and the fantastic that emerge from the creation of the hemispheric Americas as the U.S. "America." For example, the "fukú americanus," the "doom of the New World" in Junot Diaz's *The Brief and Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*, marks the American hemisphere and

remains as a constant haunting. This in turn creates bodies that are products of sci-fi living conditions, cursed and living in a post-temporal and post-apocalyptic landscape.

My work demonstrates the significance of the speculative in pan-Latinx and multiethnic literatures. The doom patterns I map in my project also show how the speculative reveals textual anxiety that counters the narrative linearity and wholeness usually ascribed to the novel. This textual anxiety can also be called "narrative failure," like a novel's multiple thwarted beginnings and endings, fragmentations of plot, and indecisive, multi-vocal narration. Through these "failures," Latinx fiction speculates an inability to contain violence within traditional narrative forms. In *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (2009), José Esteban Muñoz usefully identifies within aesthetic productions a "surplus" that allows us to see and grasp the "not-yet-conscious" (3), the utopian. I follow in Muñoz's vein of identifying within the texts I examine a potentiality, an element that is not existent in the present moment but can be felt through its excess, in this case the monstrous and violent. Much like Muñoz, Fredric Jameson describes utopian imaginaries as illuminating "historical conditions of possibility" and suggests that in their impossible nature utopias, as desire and fantasy of for the future, illuminate our present condition while ambitiously presenting a "not-yet-being of the future with a textural existence in the present" (*Archaeologies of the Future* xv-xvi).[12] However, unlike Muñoz and Jameson's optimistic and regenerative notion of utopian potentiality, I see within the works examined in this project a promise of monstrosity, undoing, and violence.[13] The texts examined in this project consistently return readers in form and content to moments of destruction and violence without looking to a generative future. In effect, Latinx and multiethnic writers implement speculative tropes such as

zombies, time travel, and hauntings to trigger breakages in the text that mirror historical-political apocalypse in the Americas. These breakages in the text take us away from conventional notions of story resolution in Latinx literature and, what's more, challenge literary canon formation and the designation of the "American" in American literature.

Yet, critics have faulted late twentieth-century and contemporary Latinx literature for being apolitical, especially in light of the success of Latinx authors (such as Cristina García and Junot Díaz) in the American literary market and in comparison to the literature that arose out of the movements in the 1960s and 1970s. As Raphael Dalleo and Elena Machado Sáez argue in *The Latino(a) Canon and the Emergence of Post-Sixties Literature* (2007), however, the literature written in the post-sixties moment is also greatly involved in political questions of social equality, politics, race, Latinx subjectivity, racial embodiment: "rather than turning away from politics, contemporary Latino/a writers are renewing that political tradition by engaging with the triumphs and defeats of the past, formulating political projects that will mark our future horizon in substantial and creative ways" (7).[14]

While I agree with Dalleo and Sáez's basic premise, I find their investment in historical modes of reading, by which I mean periodization, to be counterproductive. Historical modes of reading consider violence and injustice as exceptional occurrences that can be ameliorated. The texts explored in this dissertation draw on narrative structures and elisions to expose, rethink, and reenact violence in order to demonstrate how such violence is quotidian, systemic, and fundamental in American culture.[15] The texts in this dissertation demonstrate their continued involvement in the questions raised by the political movements of the 1960s and 1970s, yet think beyond them. No longer are

these texts solely concerned, for example, with the creation of ethnic studies departments within the university or upward mobility. Instead, they look at the negation of social justice and notions of cultural visibility and think toward a space in which destruction and violence are an end onto themselves. The works examined here should not be subsumed within the whitewashing power of multiculturalism and the ethical drive within Latinx literary and cultural studies. As a critical objective, social justice becomes a mechanism through which to normalize and conceal the tumultuous histories that lead us to seek this justice in the first place.

In "Imagining Cultures: The Transnational Imaginary in Postrace America," for example, Ramón Saldívar examines what he considers to be a new trend by authors of color who, compelled by the "relationship between race and social justice, race and identity, and indeed, race and history" in the twenty-first century, "invent a new 'imaginary' for thinking about the nature of a just society" ("Imagining Cultures" 1). The texts examined in this project demonstrate how literature exceeds any affirmation of "the just" and counters historical ways of knowing and, indeed, counters history itself. Speculative fiction as a genre attempts to understand and re-write the past as a thing other and more than history. It refuses to place specific cultural moments as teleological, culminating with the end of racial struggle and post-raciality. In fact, the texts of this project actively address the desire for a post-racial U.S. while upholding the impossibility of existing within any such post-racial society, all the while presenting spaces in which violence is an end-in-itself and destruction is a pleasurable medium. As Neil Badmington reminds us, the "post" is always intrinsically tied and haunted by that which it is post-ing. Therefore, texts such as *Zone One* repeatedly point us to the inaccessibility of a post-

racial time: in the postapocalypse, racial inequality persists and transforms; in the sci-fi future, inequalities and injustices based on race, class, and ethnic background continue unabated.

Moreover, the texts examined here necessitate unsettling modes and styles of presenting these narratives of the end-of-the-world, the post-apocalypse, violent histories and futures, and sci-fi living conditions. The colonial, imperial, and ethno-racial violences depicted in these texts cannot be contained within typical narrative forms and therefore resort to the excessive: atemporal narration, genre-mixing, metafictional style, footnotes, endnotes, fragments, and multiple narrators (futilely) attempt to portray or encapsulate a story that is not only fleeting, but has a variety of perspectives and by definition struggles to be conveyed in language. The novels explored in "Doom Patterns" necessitate fragmented, multi-voiced, multiple perspectives, self-referentiality, and, most importantly, mysterious, otherworldly horror and speculation precisely because linear history and a "normal" narrative cannot contain them.

These novels point us to the complicated relationship between remembering and imagining that which has yet to occur. The regenerative drive in Latinx literary scholarship on speculative fiction that seeks in the past for ways in which to imagine and create (literarily or literally) socially just futures for Latinxes and others of color is compelling. Latinx Studies and other disciplines engaged in the study of identity are particularly invested in a self-defining critical obligation to social justice and social and political change. However, this desire for cultural visibility and social justice is limiting and the texts examined in this project disturb social justice and "equality," highlighting

instead the pleasures of reading about violence, destruction, and the impossibility of regeneration.

eXCESSIVELY LATINX: SOLVING THE VARIABLE

I use the term "Latinx" throughout this project. The substitution of the "X" for the a/o, o/a, and @ in recent years has caused a great deal of debate both within and outside academia. Online articles with tiles such as "Why I Chose to Not Be Latinx" (Hugo Marín González), "Why I embrace the term Latinx" (Ed Morales), and "How do You Pronounce Latinx?" (Fausto Fernós) demonstrate the anxiety and confusion the "X" brings with it.[16] Yet, the uneasiness and difficulty the term Latinx presents is precisely why I incorporate it in this project, implementing it as praxis for reading speculative fiction.

The recent special issue of *Cultural Dynamics* on "Theorizing LatinX" included contributions by scholars such as Claudia Milian, Richard T. Rodríguez, Nicole Guidotti-Hernández, María DeGuzman, and Antonio Viego, all of whom addressed the possibilities and complications presented by the "X." Milian's essay, "Extremely Latin, XOXO: Notes on LatinX," for example, addresses the "X" as that which is lost in translation,[17] presents difficulty for pronunciation and pluralization, and is always unstable: the X is "restive, hard to pin down and pushes against those things we thought we knew and understood" (124).[18] The X offers a possibility for redefining the self, such as a return to the indigenous or the underscoring of that which has been eternally lost (such as Malcolm X's use of the letter to demarcate his "slave" name). In the use of Latinx throughout this project, I recognize the term's disruption of gender binaries and

heteronormative definitions—which Rodríguez's essay, "X marks the spot," underscores—even in those texts that precede the pervasiveness in use of the term or those that do not necessarily highlight what is commonly conceived as "queer topics."

In this project, Latinx serves as more than a queering term and, in effect, points to the excessiveness and the speculative in being Latina/o, Latino/a, Latin@, Latino/a/x, Latinx. The addition of the letter "X" to "Latin" gives it the sound and look of the inhuman, post-human, the robotic, and the otherworldly. As the mathematical symbol for the unknown variable—that which must be solved for—Latinx describes a condition of being more than, unknown, extreme. Viego, for example, ties the use of the "X" to violence and trauma, stating that the letter "cannot be made to make sense and it dissembles attempts at fixed meaning; it is the trauma that cannot be delivered in speech" ("LatinX and the Neurologization of the Self" 162). Like Díaz's continued address to an unknown "X—" in "The Silence," the use of Latinx defies fixity "even in the very attempt to do so" (Viego, "LatinX" 164).

Returning to Díaz's April 2018 *New Yorker* story, it is essential to notice how "The Silence" situates violence as that which is unsayable, recursive, and most importantly, intimately tied in the Latinx imaginary with the speculative language of the otherworldly. "X—" "And yet—" demarcate an attempt to capture the power of violence through language that always falls short of doing so. The novels in "Doom Patterns," like the X in Latinx, turn "toward a void, an unknown, a wrestling with plurality, vectors of multi-intentionality" (Gómez-Barris and Fiol-Matta 504): like Díaz's semi-obsessive return to Yunior as a narrator, the novels I study in this dissertation—*The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*, *Dreaming in Cuban*, *Zone One*, *2666*, and *Atomik Aztex*—implement

speculative fiction and its tropes and continually return readers in form and content to moments of destruction, violence, and the end of the world.

Chapter Outline

Deemed the most renowned contemporary Latinx author, Junot Díaz epitomizes to many an "authentic" depiction of Afro-Latinx life in the U.S., literary excellence, and fiction's ethico-political imperatives. The recipient of numerous prestigious awards, Díaz's fiction navigates the unstable line between the worlds of "high art" and popular mass-market fiction. Chapter one, "*Fukú Americanus*: Haunting the Post-Colony and the New Caribbean Mythology," considers *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* (2007) alongside the story collection *This is How You Lose Her* (2012) to argue that Díaz's notion of "*fukú americanus*"—a curse generated by Columbus' arrival in the New World and defining the American hemisphere ever since—organizes his entire body of work. I expand common readings of *fukú* to argue that this special curse defines the Caribbean as a postapocalyptic landscape that creates and emits monstrous, otherworldly bodies. Commentary on *fukú* usually contends with this term as a metaphorical framework for thinking about the inheritance of coloniality in the Americas, specifically with regard to Rafael Trujillo, the Dominican Republic's dictator, who personifies the curse. I engage *fukú* as a tangible narrative entity that animates chronic hauntings in the Americas and affects Afro-Latinx bodies in pain and more: In *Oscar Wao* and stories like "The Sun, the Moon, the Stars," and "Cheaters Guide to Love," the styles of comic books, fantasy fiction, and humor animate the speculative and exhibit pleasure in the reading of literary

fiction disguised as mass-market "trash," thereby opening my study with the juxtaposition of enjoyment in the monstrous and violent that animates my work.

Chapter two, "Azúcarpocalypse Now: Consumption at the End of the World," reveals how sugar functions as a physical agent of sweetness and—in keeping with the major focus of this project—destruction in Cristina García's novel *Dreaming in Cuban* (1992), and Colson Whitehead's *Zone One* (2011). Sugar activates apocalyptic destruction in these novels: Its consumption creates zombies, monsters always coated in the history of sugar production, transatlantic slavery, and the fear of the colonial master's return. Sugar also spawns monstrous bodies such as the Cuban Americans of *Dreaming in Cuban* who compulsively ingest sugar, becoming grotesque, inhuman figures that upset formulaic representations of Latinas in literature. Through their performance of sugar, *Dreaming in Cuban* and *Zone One* unearth sugar's ironic paradox: sweet and seemingly innocent, sugar instigates addictive pathologies that revisit colonial, imperial, and racial violence without employing aesthetic remedy; instead of celebratory homecomings, in other words, *Dreaming in Cuban* and *Zone One* exhibit the unrelenting violence of Caribbean histories and the pleasure of sweet ingestion and destruction. Finally, this chapter's comparative analysis of Latinx and African-American novels reveals an otherwise unexplored thematic relationship between García's post Cold-War novel, on the threshold of a derelict Cuba after the collapse of the Soviet Union, and Whitehead's post-9/11 novel, invested in the wreckage of New York City after the fall of the Towers.

Considered the heir to magical realism and the tradition of the Latin American "Boom"—the 1960s and 1970s literary movement recognized for experimentation,

political commitment, and literary-marketplace success—Chilean-born Roberto Bolaño exemplifies celebrity status in English-language "world literature." My third chapter, "Like a Puzzle: Fragmentation, Horror, and the Grotesque on the U.S.-Mexico Border," argues that Bolaño's posthumous novel, *2666* (Spanish 2004; English 2009), implements conventions of genre fiction such as horror and crime to represent as otherworldly a particular historical destruction: the sexual assault and murder of hundreds of women in Ciudad Juárez, Mexico, known as the femicides. *2666* deploys figures of female corpses on the U.S.-Mexico border to produce the grotesque excitement of repeated sexual violence. Thus in tension with the redemptive politics of Chicanx border studies and feminism like those of Gloria Anzaldúa and Chela Sandoval, the novel, I argue, imagines this difficult subject through literary fragmentation—for example, the repeated use of interrupted similes—to underscore its desire, but also inability, to describe the horror of the female corpse and the borderlands that produce it. My analysis underscores how brutality on the borderlands is found at once in the insidiously mundane representation of routinized women's death and the temporary engagement by a bestselling "world novel" in ongoing discussions of the border without belonging to the border itself.

My attention to U.S.-Mexico border narratives shifts toward "Greater Mexico"—the idea that Mexican nations have always continued to exist in U.S. territorial space—in chapter four, "Rekonkista: Brown-Face, Time Travel, and Cyber-Fascism." I consider how Sesshu Foster's novel *Atomik Aztex* (2005) reimagines the historical cataclysm of Spanish conquest in the Americas. In particular, *Atomik* plays with speculative tropes such as time travel by exhibiting a "Latinx-face" performance that revises both minstrelsy traditions and notions of a justice-imagining work of art. I show how this Asian-

American novel unsettles key Chicanx concepts like indigenous identity, ancestry, and nationhood to reveal that Los Angeles never stopped being Mexican. In razing sanguine equity, this novel mirrors my project's overarching argument: collapsing the Chicano Movement's employment of a pre-Columbian homeland (Aztlán), *Atomik Aztex*, I show, presents an alternate history where Aztecs defeat the Spanish, only to become a cyber-fascistic force that attempts to occupy the rest of Europe in a fashion similar to 1940s Nazism.

Moving across Latinx and multiethnic spaces, my dissertation calls attention to networks of cataclysm across contemporary Latinx and multiethnic literary-novelistic geographies and, as such, proposes an important shift in Latinx literary and cultural studies: that we read this tradition intra-ethnically, transnationally, and across ethno-racial boundaries.

CHAPTER 1
Fukú Americanus: Haunting the Post-Colony and the New Caribbean Mythology[1]

"Utopia is an impossible luxury for him: he greatly doubts that tomorrow's truths will be the exact reverse of today's lies."
—Roland Barthes, "Myth Today"

Yunior de Las Casas is crying as he emerges from the "Cave of Jagua" (Díaz, *This Is How You Lose Her* 24). Inside, he has seen the dissolution of his relationship with his girlfriend Magdalena with whom he is on vacation in the Dominican Republic, the country of his birth. The cave—what his guides, the "Vice-President" and Bárbaro, call "the birthplace of our nation" (22)—elicits for Yunior a memory of meeting Magda for the first time.[2] This memory, in turn, predicts the dissolution of their relationship: "And that's when I know it's over. As soon as you start thinking of the beginning, it's the end" (24). I begin with Yunior's experience in the Cave of Jagua to reflect on how the cave signals the Caribbean as a space that produces and reproduces itself as apocalyptic and the violence it recreates on the body of the Afro-Caribbean subject.

The overwhelming effects of the cave, as Yunior's tears signal, are also evident in his memory of Magda and the statement this memory provokes. Yet memory is not staged as a healing mechanism for "decolonial love" (a term that will be explored in detail below), but a medium through which violence is unearthed, repeated on the self and other, and through which apocalyptic thinking is occasioned. Following his memory of Magda, Yunior's grammatically ambiguous statement allows the possibility of reading his insight, "And that's when I know it's over," as occurring within the present action of being inside the cave ("that's" read as "that is") or by projecting this realization into the past and within the memory of their first encounter ("that's" read as "that was"). The

conflation in tenses is followed by another grammatical shift from first to second person point-of-view. The confusing of the grammatical "I" alters what should be read as Yunior's own analysis; instead, this realization ("As soon as you start thinking of the beginning, it's the end") is projected onto a second-person subject, which further enables the statement to become a generalization for other beginnings that exceed Yunior's relationship with women or relationships writ large. Moreover, this present progressive statement ("you start thinking of the beginning") is conditional in nature. The "As soon" that qualifies it inflicts the same outcome for all thinkers of beginnings, and insists on the impossibility of invoking any creation without also inciting its destruction. As such, Yunior's statement denotes all beginnings as signifying their inevitable end.[3]

The cave confuses the grammatical "I," tenses, and points of view to signal the ominous destruction of worlds. What is staged as "the birthplace of our nation" and termed by the "Vice-President" as the mythical origin of the Taíno Indians, also signals the violence that succeeds them: citing the source of the Caribbean inevitably calls forth the violence enacted onto indigenous populations through European conquest and genocidal violence. Additionally, the grammatical structure of Yunior's statement (the present progressive tense of "thinking" and "beginning") suggests incipient action, which further marks this space as continually "discovered" and conquered, created and destroyed. Therefore, Caribbean constructions, birthplaces, and origins—Caribbean history, in fact—are always apocalyptic in nature.[4]

Yunior's experience and affective reaction inside the cave—to which I return later in this chapter—further indicates the impossibility of breaking the cycles of violence in their personal and communal forms. As the "birthplace of our nation" and the mythical

origin of the Taíno, the cave signals the confluence of colonial conquest and expansion, genocidal violence, and the construction of "race" as a classificatory system. These culminate in state-sponsored violence, American imperialism, neoliberalism, Yunior's personal experience of lost love, and the fictional narrative mode of the story itself. The confluence of racial markers and the histories they expose alongside signifiers of state-sponsored violence is staged as the space in which Yunior literally penetrates and returns to the construction of racial categories. In effect, Yunior's experience of return from within the mythological origin of the Caribbean exhumes not only personal trauma but national violence as well.

This chapter considers Junot Díaz's oeuvre and the mythical, speculative world that the "birthplace of our nation" invokes. Reading the 2007 Pulitzer Prize winning novel, *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*, alongside the 2012 collection, *This Is How You Lose Her*, I argue that Díaz's notion of a "*fukú americanus*" serves as a lens through which to read his entire body of work. I expand the common reading of fukú as a metaphorical framework for *Oscar Wao* to argue that this concept stages the Caribbean as a postapocalyptic landscape that creates and emits monstrous and science fiction bodies.[5] The postapocalyptic in Díaz's is a cataclysmic event—the arrival of "the Admiral" (Díaz, *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* 1) Christopher Columbus in the Dominican Republic—that results in the instigation and repetition of violence from the fifteenth through the twenty-first centuries. Literary postapocalyptic bodies are metaphorical representations that explore historical violence; cyclical and inescapable, such violence continually returns and recreates racial violence in its colonial and postcolonial forms.

I argue that Díaz's works execute doom patterns that present communal and individual pasts as mythic, continually exhume violent Caribbean histories, and curse Dominican national and transnational subjects.[6] The doom pattern of Díaz's work consistently returns readers in form and content to the violent history of the Americas' instantiation into modernity in the fifteenth century, the ways in which this violence continues into the twenty-first, and the effect this history had and continues to have on postcolonial subjects in the Caribbean and its diaspora. Díaz's short story collections, *Drown* and *This is How You Lose Her*, and novel, *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*, are organized around repeating absences and failures, such as the poverty experienced by Yunior on and off the island, the figure of abusive and absentee fathers, the inability to contain or retain love, and excessive or deformed bodies, all of which are staged as byproducts of colonial and postcolonial violence.[7] Importantly, these failures are stylistically modeled within the structure of the texts, which through various forms of textual excess such as fragmentation, multivocal and multilingual prose, and metafictional literary devices demonstrate textual anxiety and an inability to contain the violence of the colonial and postcolonial experience within traditional narrative forms. I would also argue that the form and content of Díaz's oeuvre function as interlocking dual forces that compel readers (and the characters of the works themselves) to unremittingly navigate between a plot that centers on violence and a narrative structure that accentuates it.

The doom pattern of Díaz's work is an essential element of what I designate as a "new Caribbean mythology": doom patterns *are* and *perform* the present time of the narrative and enable, among other things, a re-mythologizing of the official archives of

the Americas.[8] This new Caribbean mythology holds fukú at its center: as the foundation of the American continent it is also a remainder of the violence that created the Americas, acting as a challenging force to "official" histories that, instead of displacing Eurocentric narratives (as most scholars writing about Díaz claim),[9] foregrounds and propagates violence. It is through fukú that Díaz's oeuvre patterns itself. Following the work of Roland Barthes's in "Myth Today," I demonstrate how Yunior's narrative strategies in *Oscar Wao* and the novel's doom pattern create a system that holds the curse of colonialism and the violence of colonial modernity at its center.

My analysis of fukú demonstrates how the novel stages the American continent as created through anathema: the novel's "Ground Zero of the New World" (1) creates a lens through which to read the Caribbean as an entry point—indeed, an entry port—and pathway to continental conquest.[10] The literary depiction of fukú stages time and space in the Caribbean as originating from a cataclysmic event, the arrival of Christopher Columbus. Structured around fukú, the novel foregrounds this space of death as the creator of monstrous bodies: in particular, the fat-embodied, the hyper-feminine, the disfigured, and the "sucio" (dirty).

Finally, this chapter argues that the form of Díaz's writing is both an *effect* of apocalyptic violence and *affects* the apocalyptic. The linguistic heterogeneity of Díaz's texts (African-American vernacular, Spanish, Spanglish, in addition to the languages of "nerd" culture, "high" literature, and science fiction) as well as his literary heterogeneity (testimonio, Bildungsroman, horror, and sf/f) force readers to engage with and infuse the text with different bodies of knowledge (or lack thereof), to contextualize the narrative's information by performing as archivists and researchers, and, most importantly, to

actively participate in the construction of the text. The discursive heterogeneity of these and the rest of Díaz's work challenges any encompassing understanding of a subject as violent and difficult as the post/apocalypse and, in fact, proves the impossibility of doing so. In writing the post/apocalypse, *Oscar Wao* and *This is How You Lose Her* underscore the difficulty of representation, not only of the violent history of the Caribbean, but of depicting the Afro-Latinx body itself. Fragmentation, beginnings that re-begin, endings that re-end, and voices, perspectives, and languages that multiply all demonstrate a textual anxiety in the face of retelling the Caribbean's post/apocalyptic, science fiction condition.[11] I argue that, moreover, these narratives produce a form of textual failure that is continually in-process with each re-reading that in turn re-creates apocalyptic violence. Therefore, Díaz's work should be reexamined for its contributions to speculative fiction.[12]

My analysis of Díaz's work contributes to a large and growing body of scholarship focused on his literary contributions, academic work, and activism. The majority of this scholarship emphasizes his important contributions to Latinx literature; moreover, it sees his oeuvre engaging with an active and progressive political project. Díaz is also regarded as the most important contemporary Latinx writer, drawing incredible attention from both academic and popular media critics regard his work as exceptional in aesthetic and didactic terms.[13] *Junot Díaz and the Decolonial Imagination*, for example, considers Díaz's position as crucial within the literary market and his works as having transformed American letters, giving Latinx writing unprecedented visibility, and actively engaging in an aesthetic project deeply rooted in liberal and liberating politics.[14] Examinations of Díaz usually contend that his work engages with and stages

the violent histories of the Caribbean in order to present an oppositional voice that imagines an alterative world and future.[15] This chapter challenges this common reading of Díaz's work, arguing instead that beyond doing resistance and imagining the decolonial, Díaz's texts not only recreate the apocalypse in aesthetic and historical-archival ways but also allow their characters (and readers alongside them) to recreate in textual relations such colonial violence both on the self and on one other. This is to say, the art of Díaz's work seeks no socio-political resolution, real or imagined, to the designs of colonial modernity like racial and political injustice; rather, they offer a narrative experience (and re-experience) of the process of violence itself.

Through a reading of Díaz's work, I challenge the tendency of mobilizing and reading ethnic literature as didactic instruments for social change—a challenge that, as an analytical lens, shapes this entire project. Here and throughout the following chapters, I emphasize the whitewashing tendency and ethical drive within Latinx literary and cultural studies, and as a critical objective, I challenge the impulse to normalize and conceal the violent histories that lead us to seek social justice in the first place. My readings of Díaz's work and the other texts of this project highlight the importance of unearthing and performing violence without an eye for resolution. Central to this analysis are the implications in centering any discussion of Latinx literature and culture or *latinidad* on one authorial figure. As the "Latinx du jour," Díaz's work has been praised for its ethical political imperative, "authentic" depiction of Latinx and diasporic life in the U.S., and praised for its literariness and the aesthetic expertise in his prose.[16] The recipient of numerous prestigious awards, Díaz navigates the unstable line between the worlds of "high" art—someone who loves genre but surpasses it to write Literature—and

ethnic literature. My analysis of his work delves into the predicament of essentialist typecasting within the literary market. Through Díaz, this chapter emphasizes the necessity of questioning the formations of literary canons and the false confirmation of diversity within and without the literary market that the publication of writers such as Díaz provides. This importantly lays the foundation for my analysis of Latinx texts outside the canon, such as Sesshu Foster's *Atomik Aztex* (2005). Focusing on these underrepresented texts, this project questions the reading practices, accessibility, and political focus of the literary market and canon formation within Latinx literary studies and American letters. I turn now to the concept of fukú and Yunior's new Caribbean mythology in order to examine apocalyptic violence—and, as we will see, apocalyptic pleasure—in Díaz's oeuvre.

DOOM-PATTERNS, *FUKÚ AMERICANUS*, AND THE NEW CARIBBEAN MYTHOLOGY

As the site of the original "Columbian Encounter" (or "Columbian rape"),[17] the Caribbean is the nexus of the "coloniality of power," which is defined by Anibal Quijano as that "specific basic element of the new patterns of world power that was based on the idea of 'race' and the 'racial' social classification of world population [sic]" whose "most significant implication is the emergence of a Eurocentered capitalist/modern world power that is still with us" (218). "Race" and "racism," Quijano notes, "have been the most visible expression of the coloniality of power during the last 500 years" (218). Quijano's *patrón de poder*, with race and racism at its center, has engendered what some scholars have termed the "Atlantic imaginary" (Mignolo 3) and the "quasi-mythological

proportions of […] the European Ideal" (Buscaglia-Salgado xiv), but which I designate in this chapter as the Anglo-American myth.[18] As these scholars have noted, the coloniality of power—with 1492 as its inauguration—organized a series of worldviews and institutions according to Eurocentric epistemologies that transformed "differences into values" (Mignolo 13).[19]

The use of "imaginary" and "quasi-mythological" provides a useful point of departure for my thinking about the effects of the coloniality of power in relation to Yunior's world-building project and the construction of a new Caribbean mythology that re-writes the Anglo-American one. Unlike "imaginary" or even "quasi-mythological," however, myth and mythology underscore the motivations of Eurocentrist structures of power and knowledge; indeed, myth articulates how historically specific forms endure as truths.[20] Using myth as a central framework, moreover, reveals how a group curates and expresses a collective identity, thinks about origins, and makes a strong emotional appeal that "derives from and affirms fundamental values, hierarchies, and taxonomies that are the preconditions of that identity" (Wald 9).

When I claim that the United States functions through an Anglo-American myth, I expand upon the work of previous scholars such as Walter Mignolo, José Buscaglia-Salgado, and José David Saldívar by signaling the conventions within myth-making of transforming and deforming historical specificity into "natural" depoliticized speech, in which "political" denotes "the whole of human relations in their real, social structure, in their power of making the world" (Barthes 255). Thus, an Anglo-American myth transforms the historically specific classification of populations through the idea of race and reinforces a racist Eurocentrist lens of history and knowledge by deforming them into

what Roland Barthes calls a "harmonious display of essences" (255). As Barthes posits in "Myth Today," myth is a historically specific, limited, and changing semiological system, or "metalanguage" (217),[21] whose function is to deform full meaning, emptying the signifier of individual memory and history and, thus, turning specificity into gesture solely at the service of the concept (231).[22]

The distortion and erasure of historical specificity of the subaltern knowledges of diverse and violent experiences of colonial domination and its aftermath are the foundation of the Anglo-American myth. It is constituted, in fact, through the Barthean metalanguage that hijacks the cleaving of pre-Columbian Americas by Europe and ossifies its history into a depoliticized discourse of progress and modernity.[23] What the continent and its "discovery" becomes in the Anglo-American myth, then, is a vessel through which to naturalize and opaque the many and diverging violent histories that include, but are not limited to, genocide, environmental exploitation, European and American expansionism and imperialism, racism and racial violence, and the upholding of Eurocentric knowledges.[24]

Central to the Anglo-American myth (like Yunior's new Caribbean mythology, as I will explore below) is Christopher Columbus, a figure who in the nineteenth century was co-opted by an emerging Anglo-American empire by severing the Columbian myth from Europe and used to forge a rhetoric centered on the U.S. as a "civilizing" force contrary to a racially and religiously sinister Spain.[25] Therefore, the Columbian encounter and the Eurocentrist capitalist/modern world power it established are foundational to the Anglo-American myth's construction—and which has endured to our current neoliberal moment—that institutionalizes the discourse of "discovery" and the classification of its

populations along racial lines into a depoliticized and natural event safely held within the past.

The Anglo-American myth presents itself as a natural and eternal force that insidiously resists vanquishing because, as Barthes suggests, myth has the potential to "signify the resistance which is brought to bear against it" (246). However, Yunior's narrative strategies create a third semiological chain from myth's metalanguage that becomes what Barthes terms an "*artificial myth*" that robs Anglo-American myth, taking its signification for its own system (247). In effect, Yunior's narrations throughout all three works make it impossible to dissociate the Caribbean from the message of fukú, becoming, if one follows Barthes's mode of analysis, *the meaning* of the Caribbean: fukú becomes the sign for the Caribbean's "discovery" by Europe and the colonial and postcolonial bodies that "discovery" engendered.

Yunior's focus on "*Fukú americanus*" appropriates the Anglo-American myth and forces it to be signified through the curse, redefining the Columbian Encounter and its aftermath through violence. The new Caribbean mythology that opens *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* defines the Caribbean, and the rest of the Americas, through fukú, foregrounding the violence of encounter, colonialism and its aftermath in all its valences. Yunior's use of fukú functions in the vein of Mignolo's "border gnosis" (Mignolo 9),[26] providing a "new loci of enunciation" (13) that unearths how the coloniality of power suppresses and erases non-Western forms of knowledge. However, the new Caribbean mythology, with fukú at its center, is not part of a decolonial project of redress in social justice.[27] In fact, the new Caribbean mythology of Díaz's work does not undo the Anglo-American myth but highlights it: the curse defines the Antilles and

Antilleans as existing within an always already dead space and postapocalyptic environment. Unlike the Anglo-American myth, the new Caribbean mythology of Díaz's oeuvre substantiates the curse's enduring presence from 1492 to the present and places apocalyptic violence as the foundation of the continent.

Before turning to the text and my exploration of how doom patterns and myth-making function in Díaz's oeuvre, I offer a brief synopsis of *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*. This novel tells the multi-generational story of Oscar de León, a fat-embodied Afro-Dominican American, and his family in the Dominican Republic and their New Jersey diaspora. The story centers on Oscar's "nerdish-ness" and inability to get a girlfriend—inability that precludes him from "authentic" Dominicanness—and is told by a seemingly omniscient narrator who eventually reveals himself to be Yunior, Oscar's roommate in college and a "closeted nerd" but notorious "player." By the novel's conclusion Oscar is able to find a girlfriend, which leads to his murder, but is an act that allows Yunior to become a writer and, presumably, our narrator. Of course, the story he tells is also the history of violence in the Dominican Republic, beginning with Columbus, moving back and forth in time to account for the mid-twentieth-century dictatorship of Rafael Trujillo.

Before the narrative of Oscar's life begins, the reader receives a *first beginning* through an exposition on "fukú," its meaning, origin, and impact on the Americas. This first beginning, like the novel's three endings and many subsections (or textual interruptions), points to the text's inability to encapsulate its story—the horror, humor, science fiction strangeness, and history of the Americas—and continual writing and re-writing itself as a form of self-correction and addendum. This type of fragmentation and

textual excess will be examined below, but I point to it here for its display of the byproducts instantiated by the Caribbean postapocalyptic condition, itself organized around fukú and the Columbian encounter.

The novel's first beginning, which has been wrongfully labeled a "prologue" by some,[28] then, organizes the novel's plot around the concept of "*Fukú americanus,*" "the Curse and the Doom of the New World" (Díaz, *Oscar Wao* 1). The novel thus begins through an undesignated section—unlike the clearly demarcated (numbered and titled) sections that follow—and an even more enigmatic opening, "They said" (1), that structures the novel around a doom pattern that continually returns readers to the creation of the Caribbean and the rest of the Americas through this curse. *Oscar Wao*'s first beginning centralizes the Columbian encounter as foundational and traumatic for the Caribbean and the rest of the Americas, staging 1492 as an apocalyptic year that marks the colonial and postcolonial periods as postapocalyptic eras, and Afro-Caribbean people as science fictional forms. Formed through anathema, the novel stages the Caribbean and Afro-Latinxes[29] as reproductions and reproducers of apocalypse, and history as a haunting presence that produces the body and remains as a physical marker.

Oscar Wao begins with an apocalyptic origin for the Antilles and the De León and Cabral family:

> They say it came from Africa, carried in the screams of the enslaved; that it was the death bane of the Tainos, uttered just as one world perished and another began; that it was a demon drawn into Creation through the nightmare door that was cracked open in the Antilles. *Fukú americanus*, or more colloquially, fukú—generally a curse or a doom of some kind; specifically the Curse and the Doom of the New World. Also called the fukú of the Admiral because the Admiral was both its midwife and one of its great European victims; despite "discovering" the New World the Admiral died miserable and syphilitic, hearing (dique) divine voices. In Santo Domingo, the Land He Loved Best (what Oscar, at the end, would

> call the Ground Zero of the New World), the Admiral's very name has become synonymous with both kinds of fukú, little and large; to say his name aloud or even to hear it is to invite calamity on the heads of you and yours. (1)

This opening structures the novel through the lens of 1492 and, moreover, inextricability involves the creation of the modern/colonial encounter with the protagonist and narrator's Afro-Caribbean postcolonial diasporic condition. The novel's opening paragraph synchronously binds the histories of the transatlantic slave trade, indigeneity and indigenous genocide, and the European presence in the Americas. Moreover, it is their merger through the violent seizure and transportation of Africans to the Antilles ("screams of the enslaved") and the genocide of indigenous populations ("death bane of the Tainos") that instigates the end of the world and the creation of the postapocalyptic modern/colonial moment. Fukú, thus, encompasses syncretic religiosity and racial miscegenation—the result of African, Native American, and European presences in the Americas—and signifies a geosocially specific Antillean condition of postapocalyptic embodiment and belief. Furthermore, the novel upholds the construction of race as a curse with tangible and material consequences, particularly through physical violence such as the screams of the African slaves and Tainos in the colonial period, but also through the forms of embodiment suffered by Oscar and Beli, his mother, in the postcolonial era. The text also grounds itself in the tradition of the post-9/11 novel, presenting its scope of analysis as one that underscores fukú's remaining presence by equating the Columbian encounter and colonialism with contemporary terrorism, and the Caribbean as analogous to the deep crevasses that remain in the wake of World Trade Center's destruction.[30]

The terrorist act that established the modern/colonial divide in the Antilles is presented by the text as reverberating in the rest of the Americas and as creating a repeating a doom pattern of conquest throughout the continent. Through his narration, Yunior establishes a network between Santo Domingo and Paterson, New Jersey, of violence throughout the centuries. The novel thus defines fukú as a constant spectral presence that creates bodies—those who live in the Caribbean and its diasporic communities—that are the result of what Yunior and Oscar (as retold through Yunior's narration) term sci-fi living conditions. In fact, Yunior designates the novel a "Fukú story" and wonders if Oscar would have accepted this terminology for a narration of his life. However, in designating the novel as a retelling of a curse, Yunior presages fukú's effects on the life of the novel's characters and upholds the Caribbean as a postapocalyptic and cursed space: "He was a hardcore sci-fi and fantasy man, believes that that was the kind of story we were all living in. He'd ask: What more sci-fi than the Santo Domingo? What more fantasy that the Antilles?" (6). To these questions, Yunior offers his own revision: "But now that I know how it all turns out, I have to ask, in turn: What more fukú?" (6). His revision of Oscar's questions seams Oscar's love for science and speculative fiction (s/sf) with the curse, making the novel and the lives of its characters inextricable from fukú's history and impact. In drawing these connections, the novel stages the Americas, race, colonial, postcolonial, and dictatorial violence, and diaspora as byproducts of the apocalypse and as elements of s/sf.

These elements have been under analyzed in scholarship on Junot Díaz's work and *Oscar Wao.* Such scholarship generally centers on fukú as a didactic tool and a metafictional device for the education of the novel's readers, and while this work

importantly considers the effects of fukú's political implications (how it engenders figures like Trujillo) within the text, it also myopically champions the novel's message, thus ignoring fukú's literary effects within the novel. For example, José David Saldívar states that "Yunior's and Oscar's lives have experienced their tragic 'destinies' within the matrix of fukú and the coloniality of power" ("Conjectures of 'Americanity'" 126), and Jennifer Harford Vargas terms fukú a "symbolic chronotrope," a "foundational fiction," and "local folk hermeneutic for reading relations of domination in the Americas more generally and in the novel specifically" ("Dictating a Zafa" 203).[31] While I find these readings to be productive sites of discussion surrounding the novel's use of fukú and its effects on the literary text and its characters, I push against the notion of fukú or *Oscar Wao* as a productive space for the revision of history or as a decolonial didactic tool.

Instead, my reading of fukú asks: how is our reading affected through taking fukú at face-value, by which I mean, how does reading fukú not as a symbolic device but as a textual creation with real effects within the plot alter the story and its characters? How do we read Oscar and Yunior if we take his statement, "who more sci-fi than us?" as an actual condition and form of embodiment? How does the novel become affected by redefining it as a work of sf/f and its characters as the cursed products of apocalyptic, science-fictional violence?

My reading of fukú is contingent on the narrative practices in Díaz's oeuvre and the world-making project undertaken by Yunior as the narrator throughout the author's major publications beginning with *Drown*. This world-building project constructs the Caribbean as a postapocalyptic space created through anathema that reproduces colonial violence on the body of the Afro-Caribbean subject.

Oration and narration, writing and retelling, therefore, bear enormous weight in *Oscar Wao* and Díaz's work generally. Although Yunior poses them as potential exorcising actions, these narrative practices are proven to be mechanisms through which apocalyptic violence is repeated and reproduced. I use "weight" intentionally here (as I will explore below) to demonstrate how writing and narrating in the novel create its monstrous bodies (Oscar's fat-embodiment and Belicia's disfigured back) as byproducts of fukú and bodies on which colonial violence is performed.

As a concept, fukú is an all-encompassing force that is both the Curse and a tool used by those byproducts of fukú itself, such as Rafael Trujillo and Christopher Columbus. Trujillo, who ruled the Dominican Republic from 1930 until his death in 1961, replicates Columbus's midwifery of fukú, enacting colonial apocalyptic violence through postcolonial technologies, while simultaneously (like Columbus) being one of the fukú's victims. By focusing on these two historical figures, the novel portrays fukú as a continuing presence in the Americas, from the Columbian encounter in 1492, through the Trujillato, Reaganomics, and culminating in Oscar's death during Clinton's first administration.

Moreover, global politics acts as the crux for the propagation and verification of fukú, presenting the curse's continental scope of influence on events such as the Kennedy assassination and the Vietnam War, moments in U.S. history that not only had national and international effects, but which illustrate a trans-American network outside "official" historical archives. This is also a moment of humorous disdain towards U.S. foreign policy, foregrounding the importance of exposing and analyzing the consequences of American international actions in a way that simultaneously stages Trujillo as a

consequence of fukú but also as its custodian. Most importantly, the centrality of the dictator in world politics is felt even after his assassination in 1961, casting Trujillo much like Columbus and fukú itself, whose effects hauntingly linger and reverberate violently. For example, in speaking about Trujillo's "*tight*" relationship with fukú, Yunior states:

> If you even thought a bad thing about Trujillo, *fuá*, a hurricane would sweep your family out to sea, *fuá*, a boulder would fall out of the clear sky and squash you […] Which explains why everyone who tried to assassinate him always got done, why those dudes who finally did buck him down all died so horrifically. And what about fucking Kennedy? He was the one who green-lighted that assassination of Trujillo in 1961, who ordered the CIA to deliver arms to the Island (3).

Fuá, interrupts the string of fukúisms and accentuates the text in a Spanish that emphasizes the curse's foreignness and enacts a roadblock for English-only readers. *Fúa* further highlights the various access-points and exclusions to the text that depend on the reader's language acquisition and ethnic background. The repetition of *fuá*, however, also marks the results of fukú with a swiftness that disallows the curse's denial: *fuá* enables the enactment of fukú within the text before the reader has a chance to question the authenticity of these outcomes. The onomatopoeia acts like the acute accent in the word itself, which powerfully accents the end of each fukúism with the Spanish sound that precludes its contestation. Although the text upholds the veracity of fukú with these textual markers, it also mocks its own superstitious belief, presenting fantastical outcomes such as destructive acts of nature and food poisoning as the result of evil thoughts against Trujillo. The novel, however, mostly jeers at the Anglo-American myth, which upholds its own centrality and expertise in foreign affairs while obtusely ignoring other forms of knowledge such as fukú. Kennedy's "intelligence experts failed" (3) at intelligence itself, having limited access to Dominican culture or understanding of the

consequences of American involvement in the Caribbean, unlike the "richest jabao in Mao to the poorest güey in El Buey," the "oldest anciano sanmacorisano" or the "littlest carajito in San Francisco" (3). This rhythmic play in the enumeration of a diverse population (socioeconomically and in age) on the island functions much as *fuá* by creating a string of examples that, while tongue-in-cheek, create a dizzying soundscape that could be confusing to readers and therefore foreclose the possibility of questioning the textual examples Yunior provides.

The use of *fuá*, much like Yunior's list, moreover, upholds non-Western forms of knowledge as crucial to understanding global forces and histories. While the italicized Spanish of *fuá* highlights the foreignness and mysticism of the word in relation to fukú, the un-italicized Spanish slang and place-names of Yunior's list force English readers to alter their reading practices and receive Spanish and English on the same terms without editorial markers to differentiate them. The text also asks readers to actively participate in the novel's plot by researching unknown terms and geographies. Simultaneously, however, the novel enacts its own inaccessibility. *Oscar Wao* is a novel with multiple access points and an equal amount of barricades that make the text accessibly inaccessible: Spanish, Spanglish, and Spanish slang, knowledge of s/sf (literature, film, and video games), depth of knowledge and understanding of Latin American history, African American slang, 1980s pop culture, Dominican history, and Dominican vernacular, to name a few. The multiplicity of access points and extra-textual breaks, by which I mean those moments when a reader pauses to investigate words or references unfamiliar to her, regardless of the depth of inquiry, presents the "true" story as

encapsulated through these various forms of knowledge and therefore defines the fictional story, Oscar, and Yunior himself as always close but also out of reach.

The play with language and sound in the presentation of fukú, then, defines the curse as a challenging force against Western epistemology and "expertise" in the Anglo-American myth that maintains its superiority through interventionist foreign policy such as the toppling of dictators in Latin America through the 1960s and 1970s; a renowned and dangerous force that surpasses socioeconomic demarcations, age groups, or geography but that positions the Dominican Republic as central to global politics and networks of violence; and a haunting curse that has persisted since its instantiation in the fifteenth century and that has reproduced its apocalyptic violence through a doom pattern of conquest in the Americas. The novel, furthermore, demonstrate the excessive nature of the curse and the violence it engenders, making the act of writing and narrating fukú an impossible performance: writing and narrating the new Caribbean mythology, therefore, necessitate multiplicity and excess—of languages, histories, genres, archives, times periods—that parallel the characters within the narrative itself.

Indeed, the novel rewrites the historical archive by providing an alternative history of the Kennedy assassination and the Warren Commission, debunking various conspiracy theories by introducing a new one: fukú. The novel's introduction of alternative forms of knowledge that do not conform to Western scientific logic is presented as a force that leads to a global chain reaction of violent proportions, resulting in, among other events, the Vietnam War and the U.S. invasion of the Dominican Republic in 1965. Yunior ascribes this invasion a precise date, although in a parenthetical aside—"(April 28, 1965)" (4)—that introduces into the text alternative histories that

amplify, illuminate, and challenge the "official" archive while also serving as a catalyst for the novel's commentary on global political issues important during its publication (2007)—"(Santo Domingo was Iraq before Iraq was Iraq)" (4)—which imbricates the past within the present.[32]

Yunior's parenthetical asides position the Dominican Republic as central to global politics and, furthermore, create a global network that includes Santo Domingo, Saigon, and Baghdad as fatally influenced by specious American involvement in foreign policy. As José David Saldívar argues, the novel creates a wider spatio-temporal matrix that extends beyond its "local circum-Caribbean particularity" and "stands for Americanity's spatio-temporal matrix of the patrón de poder" (*Trans-Americanity* 209). The network of violence established through the origin story in *Oscar Wao*'s first beginning rewrites the Anglo-American myth in order to centralize the production and propagation of violence itself. Importantly, however, irony and humor play important roles in the construction of Yunior's new Caribbean mythology. Such narrative pleasures, I argue in this project, are fundamental narrative devices for the staging of speculative fiction.

The curse's name, for example, highlights the humor that will be experienced throughout the novel. As Lyn Di Iorio examines in "Laughing Through a Broken Mouth in *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*," fukú exemplifies the Bakhtinian carnivalesque[33] and the exoticization of foreign and seemingly unintelligible terms. Focusing on the humor in Díaz's novel, Di Iorio examines how fukú's phonetic similarity to "Fuck You" (Di Iorio 73) becomes a tool for the novel's propagation of humor in which readers laugh with anxiety and incongruity "between what appears to be an apparently exotic, foreign, or unintelligible word and the quotidian curse that an English-

language reader immediately hears and that has colonized the world" (73).[34] The history the novel creates for fukú in conjunction with its aural qualities is, in fact, humorous. In addition, the binomial nomenclature ("*fukú americanus*") lends the term and its definition an air of sardonic mockery of Western epistemology, which holds scientific logic at its center. This ironic tone further challenges the possibility of knowing anything concretely, even those "facts" Yunior presents within the novel and the seeming first-hand accounts by Lola in the novel's second section.[35] In effect, this mockery asks readers to question not only "official" archives and histories—as Yunior does through his narrative practices such as footnotes and textual asides—but the novel's information itself.[36] Like Di Iorio, Elena Machado Saez also reads fukú as "a thinly disguised obscenity directed at the reader of *Oscar Wao*" (*Market Aesthetics* 175) that launches its narrative in a cycle of "'fucking' (with) the reader" (175).[37] This "'fucking' (with)" highlights the inability of accessing "Truth" in the novel and how Yunior plays with, distorts, and withholds information from the reader. For example, *Oscar Wao*'s new Caribbean mythology centered on "fukú" is a site through which the text raises questions of accessibility and reliability. Carlos Esteban Deive's *Diccionario de dominicanismos* defines "fucú" as "mala suerte, fatalidad […] Se trata de un africanismo" ("bad luck, fatality…It concerns an Africanism" 95).[38] Yunior adopts the Dominican term "fucú" and alternates a "c" for a "k" while creating a substantive history for its origin. Expanding upon the simple definition and etymology, Yunior maps the terms precise lineage and effects on the Americas and its peoples, embellishing it with detail and backstory. Moreover, by switching the "c" with a "k," Yunior mocks the act of naming itself and through this "fucks" with the reader.[39]

In fact, fukú is introduced and repeated as a rumor. Much as readers will learn that they are unable to determine a precise origin to "fucú," Yunior fabricates a foundational history for the curse and its history within the Americas. The gossipy and ambiguous "They say" sets the tone for the rest of the novel, defining everything that is written after the first line as slippery, undetermined, and questionable.[40] For example, the statement of supposed fact within the novel's first page, "the Admiral died miserable and syphilitic, hearing (dique) divine voices" (Díaz, *Oscar Wao* 1), is interrupted by the parenthetical "(dique)" that challenges the account itself. From the Spanish "dizque" (a form of "dice que"),[41] the parenthetical reaffirms the opening's "They say" and makes a seemingly historical statement into an unconfirmed rumor. The opening pages are, indeed, littered with rumor-like intimations such as, "it *is* believed" (my emphasis 1) and "It *was* believed" (my emphasis 3), placing equivocality within the present and the past, and therefore projecting it into the future.

Concurrently, however, the novel yokes the curse to the American continent through its name, *fukú americanus*, making the curse and its reverberating doom-patterns of violence an inextricable invention and function of American geography. Its designation as "americanus" defines fukú as the crux of the continent even while it mocks its own nomenclature within Western epistemology. The sense of play within the term's spelling and definition becomes a mechanism for destabilizing our conceptions of knowledge and the ability to know while also rooting the term linguistically and historically within the Antilles.

Yunior's new Caribbean mythology and world-building project, anticipated in Díaz's first collection, *Drown*, becomes nuanced and amplified in *Oscar Wao* and *This is*

How You Lose Her, staging science fiction and the apocalyptic as central elements to the writing of these various narratives, global politics, and Caribbean history. The historical and personal events Yunior highlights (verifiable or superstitious in nature) are written through the lens of sf/f and the apocalypse, comparing fukú, for example, to "Darkseid's Omega Effect" and "Morgoth's bane" (5).[42]

The multiplicity of references to science fiction throughout *Oscar Wao* and *This Is How You Lose Her* are unquestionably significant, especially in the development of Yunior's narrative focus that culminates in what T.S. Miller terms *Oscar Wao*'s "nerdfest" (94). Yunior's heightened engagement with genre is evident in the multiplicity of references throughout the novel in which he repeatedly compares Trujillo to "a creature from another world" (*Oscar Wao* 245), *Fantastic Four*'s Galactus (97), *The Lord of Rings*' Sauron (2), and a force "so outlandish, so perverse, so dreadful that not even a sci-fi writer could have made him up" (2). The references to science fiction and fantasy continue through the novel in which Oscar compares himself to a "Morlock" (30), a fictional species from H.G. Wells' *The Time Machine*, and where Belicia's love is described as atomic (126). Díaz's second short story collection continues its emphasis on genre, describing a letter hitting Yunior "like a *Star Trek* grenade" (*This Is How* 4). The title of the collection's opening story, "The Sun, the Moon, the Stars," in fact, gives it a galactic scope that befits a science fiction text.

Yunior uses the lens of science fiction as a mechanism through which to examine the sociopolitical condition of the Antilles and its diaspora. For example, he describes living in Santo Domingo during the Trujillato as a *Twilight Zone* episode (*Oscar Wao* 224) and the Vice-President's influence in "The Sun, the Moon, the Stars" as comparable

to science fiction itself: "The Vice-President waves his hand and shots of Braceló appear so fast you'd think it's science fiction" (*This Is How* 18). Many critics have focused on the centrality of genre in Yunior's narrative practice, generally arguing that genre fiction is how Yunior demonstrates his capacious literary knowledge and positions himself within a literary and cultural tradition.[43] His placement of classical allusions and "high" literary texts such as Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, Homer's *Odyssey*, and Herman Melville's "Bartleby: the Scrivener" alongside genre texts and popular cultural references such as Frank Herbert's *Dune*, Stan Lee and Jack Kirby's *The X-Men* and *Fantastic Four*, and Katsuhiro Otomo's *Akira* functions as a mechanism through which to challenge the Western literary canon. And while many scholars have importantly addressed the influence of the Western canon and Latin American magical realism in Díaz's texts—and the author's homage to and expansion of these archives—this chapter examines Díaz's oeuvre as works of sf/f, its characters as creations of genre and formations through which the text demonstrates itself as sf/f. [44] This reading practice expands upon Díaz scholarship that considers the use of genre as a metaphorical device through which to examine sociopolitical conditions and the historical repercussions of the Columbian encounter.

I argue that the constant return to science fiction, genre, and apocalyptic references enable a particular enactment of violence and destruction in Díaz's work that defines the Caribbean in Yunior's various fictions as science fictional. Yunior presents readers with various worlds in which violence predominates and through which to consider the Caribbean and the Afro-Caribbean diaspora in his works.

After spending various pages introducing the effects of fukú while synchronously using ironic humor that challenges the curse's legitimacy, the novel's first beginning

concludes that personal belief in the curse is irrelevant because "no matter what you believe, fukú believes in you" (*Oscar Wao* 5). The text returns to the conventions of science fiction and uses it as a lens through which to create and define its textual world, equating fukú's supremacy to that of comic book and science fiction villains; "it" (fukú), like sf/f villains, "always—and I mean always—gets its man" (5). The repetition of "always" situates fukú as a timeless entity, a force that is always happening extraneous to individual belief in its power. Moreover, while the text challenges its own apocalyptic origin story through a tongue-in-cheek tone, science-fiction lens, and scientific naming, the text simultaneously maintains the curse's centrality and veracity (as belief and materially experienced) as the haunting afterlife of the modern/colonial divide.

In effect, Yunior attempts to place his performance as writer and narrator within the scope of science fiction.[45] Centralizing the importance of the written word in the novel's plot and legacy of the curse, Yunior importantly designates himself the novel's "Watcher" (3, 92, 149). As such, Yunior aligns himself with Uatu the Watcher, who first appeared in Marvel's *Fantastic Four* #13 (April 1963) and is the member of an extraterrestrial species assigned to observe (but not interfere with) Earth and its solar system. Residing in the "Blue Area" of the Moon, Uatu is unable to remain an inactive observer and becomes an active participant and aid to the Fantastic Four.[46] As "Watcher," Yunior writes himself as an objective observer and uses multiple academic footnotes to reinforce the novel's credibility as a well researched and verifiable narrative. Machado Saez argues, for example, that the novel opens with a "promise of fulfilling readership expectations (for a 'true' story)" and that Yunior's namelessness for the majority of the text depends on being, "1) distanced enough to be objective, 2) familiar enough to be able

to provide access to unmitigated and unmediated truth" (*Market Aesthetics* 166). While I agree that Yunior presents a "guise of objectivity" (166), I argue that he simultaneously undermines the possibility of objectivity and demonstrates the impossibility of encapsulating the violent history of the Caribbean without defaulting to unreliability and multiplicity. Like Uatu the Watcher, Yunior the Watcher is an active participant and editor of the De León and Cabral narrative and the history that accompanies it.

Revealing his name more than halfway through the novel on page 169, Yunior nonetheless repeatedly uses the narrative "I" to contextualize Oscar's narrative. Appearing in the novel's first footnote, Yunior uses the first person to challenge not only the historical archive but also to question his own narrative limitations and the necessity of using science fiction as a lens through which to imagine the Antilles and its history. While the use of footnotes suggests academic language and research, Yunior's ironic tone—"For those of you who missed your mandatory two seconds of Dominican history" (*Oscar Wao* 2), for example—parodies the presentation of "expert" knowledge. Moreover, Yunior places himself at the center of the narrative and maintains sf/f as an essential lens for this narrative as an alternative corrective to the historical archive: "At first glance, he was just your prototypical Latin American caudillo, but his power was terminal in ways that few historians or writers have ever truly captured or, I would argue, imagined. He was our Sauron, our Arawn, our Darkseid" (2).[47]

The footnotes perform as a parallel narrative to the novel.[48] As such, the footnotes also maintain the necessity of including sf/f within reputable archives of analysis in order to construct fuller, well-rounded narratives of the Antilles. The footnote presented above, for example, echoes the notable statements by writers such as Alejo Carpentier who asks

in *El reino de este mundo*, "¿Pero qué es la historia de América toda sino una crónica de lo real maravilloso?" (After all, what is the history of the Americas if not the chronicle of the marvelous real?) (16). Indeed, the novel stages the impossibility of narrating the Antilles's outsized and unbridled violence; Yunior's recurrent citation of sf/f not only creates a more complete narrative of this geography and its history, but also contextualizes it by demonstrating its fantastical qualities.

Accordingly, writing and narration assume a fantastical role in *Oscar Wao*. Concluding the novel's first beginning, the written word is envisioned as central to the novel's plot and to the legacy of the curse: "traditionally in Santo Domingo anytime you mentioned or overheard the Admiral's name or anytime a fukú reared its many heads there was only one way to prevent disaster from coiling around you, only one surefire counterspell that would keep you and your family safe. Not surprisingly, it was a word" (7).[49] The word, "zafa," is another neologism in Yunior's Dominican-American lexicon that reemphasizes the centrality of Columbus in the creation and propagation of the modern/colonial divide, while also demonstrating the importance of Dominican and Caribbean traditions and language in the potential futures of the continent. As "antiphonal counterpoints" (J. Saldívar, "Americanity," 131), Yunior positions zafa as a response to fukú's "many heads," its infinite capacity for propagating violence, and the potential of expelling the curse on personal and continental levels through the act of writing and narrating: "Even now as I write these words I wonder if this book ain't a zafa of sorts. My very own counterspell" (*Oscar Wao* 7). Ascribing exorcising potential to his finished manuscript further reminds readers of Yunior's predominant position as writer, narrator, and curator (Watcher) of *Oscar Wao* and Oscar de León's histories and

archives, which challenges any notion of objective truth within writing, narrating, or history for that matter, while simultaneously foregrounding the novel as the ultimate arbiter of truth.[50]

Similar to the rhetoric surrounding fukú, most scholars address zafa in the novel as a metaphorical tool used to analyze archives and histories hidden by the Anglo-American myth and Díaz's own desire, through the novel, of shedding light upon and writing against the violence engendered through colonialism in the Americas.[51] These are intriguing and productive scopes of inquiry for this novel (and Díaz's work and authorial figure generally). My reading demonstrates, however, how fukú, *fúa*, and zafa act as literary performances of Yunior's narrative doom-patterns that enact violence on Oscar's body and that of his mother, Belicia. Yunior's narrative practices reproduce apocalyptic violence and enable the recreation of colonial and dictatorial violence on the bodies of other Afro-Caribbean subjects, a subject to which I now turn.

"GORDO ASQUEROSO!": EXCESSIVE BODIES AND MONSTROUS FLESH[52]

The novel's second beginning spans the years 1974–1987 and centers on Oscar's initiation into fukú. What begins with the "blessed days of his youth" in which Oscar is "(still) a 'normal' Dominican boy" (11) quickly becomes a metamorphosis into monstrosity and rejection from his diasporic community. Yunior posits this shift through the lens of heterosexual inadequacy, a lack that transforms Oscar from what the novel defines as a "typical" Dominican "Casanova" (11) to the "neighborhood parigüayo" (19).[53] Yunior, therefore, explains Oscar's non-normative practices as markers of Dominican inauthenticity that become, as Machado Saez states, a threat to Yunior's self-

characterization and historical narrative, what she terms Yunior's "fascist tendencies via his sexual excess" (*Market Aesthetics* 170). Machado Saez further argues that Yunior "identifies hypersexuality as the primary source of his authority," which enables him to "tame" the threat presented by Oscar's non-conformity (170) and erase the homosocial romance between them, their "página en blanco" (blank page). The "novel's pedagogical imperative," according to Machado Saez, requires Yunior as the "more authentic" Dominican subject to violently "de-Other" Oscar (to turn him into a heterosexual non-virgin) in order to conform him to the historical narrative (162). Machado Saez's argument, that the novel's conclusion positions Oscar as fulfilling heterosexual desire while simultaneously hinting at a homosocial romance that cannot be transparently written as part of a Dominican diasporic narrative, is intriguing and convincing. In effect, Yunior *does* posit Oscar's induction into the curse as an effect of his heterosexual failures.

However, in this section, I explore how the novel stages excessive embodiment and monstrosity as inexorable byproducts of fukú that are part of an Afro-Caribbean inheritance that manifests itself on the Afro-Caribbean body. Following the novel's first beginning, the Cabral and De León family history is organized through the "Great American Doom" (*Oscar Wao* 5) that shapes not only the lives and deaths of the novel's characters but also Yunior's narrative practices, which themselves mirror the despotic violence of the Trujillato.[54] Through the description of physical excessiveness and monstrosity the novel reenacts the violence of colonialism, models the new Caribbean mythology with fukú at its center, and demonstrates the impossibility of overcoming the curse.

For example, Oscar's fat body is staged as the terrestrial landscape on which the novel reenacts the colonial violence instantiated by fukú: "The fat! The miles of stretch marks! The tumescent horribleness of his proportions!" (29). The high volume and exaggeration the exclamation points lent to each statement mark Oscar's body with excess and melodrama. The joking and jeering tone of Yunior's description, moreover, likens Oscar's physical excess to bodies only possibly rendered in comic books, such as in the works of Daniel Clowes and Gilbert Hernandez (29), an association that makes Oscar's fat-embodiment that much more extreme. Importantly, the use of a metaphor that likens Oscar's stretch marks to units of distance and length returns readers to the novel's opening and the origin of fukú in which Santo Domingo is defined as the "Ground Zero of the New World" (1) and "fukú's Kilometer Zero" (2). As such, Oscar's Afro-Caribbean body becomes the space onto which the novel maps and replicates the curse.

In *The Queen of America Goes to Washington City*, Lauren Berlant argues that "fat is always fundamentally a thing, a thing of excess. But as a thing that denotes an unquantified substance, its very fixity accrues to itself an unshakable stability of identity" (91). Berlant continues her investigation of fat a decade later in "Slow Death (Sovereignty, Obesity, Lateral Agency)," where she argues that eating and becoming fat are a form of "lateral agency," a "kind of self-medication through self-interruption" that disrupts an overwhelming capitalist present in which the subject is "called to consciousness, intentionality, and effective will" (777, 779). Eating and fatness are, moreover, "a form of ballast against wearing out," but also a "counterdissipation" in that they produce the experience of "self-abeyance, of floating sideways" (778-779).[55]

Fat, then, is a constant interrupting presence in the novel that marks the Afro-Caribbean body as the reproducer of fukú. The tumescent horribleness of his proportions positions Oscar as at once a shape that defies the human through its unquantified substance and defines him as monstrous and demonstrating his "monstro-ness" (*Oscar Wao* 176). Like fat, Oscar's physicality is both a signifier for fukú and the byproduct of fukú, which exceeds the flesh and spills over onto all aspects of his life, becoming the medium through which his national allegiance and Dominicanidad are called into question. Oscar has "no knack for music or business or dance, no hustle, no rap, no G" (20); he has "no looks[,]" which are overtly highlighted by "his semi-kinky hair in a Puerto Rican afro," "unappealing trace of a mustache[,]" "close-set eyes that made him look somewhat retarded" and "enormous Section 8 glasses" which his friends call "anti-pussy devices" (20). The novel, thus, describes Oscar through a series of individual characteristics that amassed onto a single body become excessive and which, moreover, collate physical unattractiveness with elements of hipness and cool, national identity, poverty, disability, and heteronormativity.

Obesity, then, interrupts the expectations of the "fly bachatero" (11) and replaces it with a highly visible and grotesque body that must plangently reiterate (à la Quentin Compson) his ethnic identity: "The kids of color, upon hearing him speak and seeing him move his body, shook their heads. You're not Dominican. And he said, over and over again, But I am. Soy dominicano. Dominicano soy" (49). Oscar's proclamation of Dominicanidad "over and over again" attempts to bilingually assert his ethnic identity, which has been put into question by the extremeness and violence through which the text defines him. In fact, the novel forces Oscar to assert his national identity in English ("But

I am"), Spanish ("Soy dominicano"), and by inverting the word order ("Dominicano soy"), itself a surfeit that interchanges the nation of origin for the subjective "I" in a failed attempt to assert belonging.

In short, the novel defines the violence of fukú as a pervasive and inescapable force that maps itself on the Afro-Caribbean body and which the novel constantly and unflinchingly repeats. The scholarly work that focuses on Díaz's novel primarily contends that the violence suffusing its pages is done with authorial intent as part of a decolonial imaginary that challenges the racial and political injustice that is historically too common in the Caribbean. This position correctly holds Oscar's physicality and death (which I will examine shortly) as instantiated by and as a byproduct of fukú. However, it also conceives of his death as one of the many didactic tools the novel employs for its ultimate decolonial message. I propose, however, that the novel's unrelenting violence and return to fukú creates a space through which to examine the pleasures of apocalyptic violence and the possibility of perpetrating colonial violence onto self and other without the expectation of amelioration in social justice.

Oscar Wao, therefore, is a world-building project in which violence and monstrosity are pervasive. In fact, the novel even defines Oscar's taste as excessive and inauthentic. His love for genre literature and film is defined by Yunior as "outsized" (21), but importantly yoked to Antillean history, identity, and the trauma of diasporic migration: "It might have been a consequence of being Antillean (who more sci-fi than us?) or of living in the DR for the first couple years of his life and then abruptly wrenchingly relocating to New Jersey—a single green card shifting not only worlds (from Third to First) but centuries" (21-22).[56]Oscar's love for genre literature, therefore,

cements him as authentically Antillean and inhabiting a space that is defined by its extremeness as science fictional. Immigration—and the conditions that produce its necessity—is staged as an extreme rift only genre can portray; the movement from the Dominican Republic to New Jersey is analogous to time travel, a depiction that defines diasporic movement as science fictional in nature. The movement from the Caribbean to the U.S. is not simply a geographical relocation but a transition between worlds and centuries. As such, the novel derogatorily defines the Caribbean as politically, socially, culturally, and economically retrograde, and Oscar's immigration to the U.S. as a positive movement into "First" world modernity.[57]

Through his analysis of Oscar's excessive tastes, Yunior raises an important question that binds fukú's origin to the love of science fiction and the novel's new Caribbean mythology. While positing various possibilities for the cause of Oscar's love of genre, Yunior finally asks, "Or was it something deeper, something ancestral?" (22) that, while unanswered, yokes Afro-Caribbean enfleshment to the fantastical instantiation of fukú in the Americas and the apocalyptic space it created in its wake.[58]

Although never explicitly answered, the narrative's doom pattern organizes the novel around various forms of violence with ancestral and national inheritances that manifest itself on the body. Obesity and "outsized" taste, then, are Oscar's birthright as a son of the Antilles and fukú. The novel demonstrates the inevitable propagation of fukú through his mother, Belicia Cabral, who is also a victim of Caribbean monstrosity, writing her body, femininity, rage, and even desire to dance as excessive.[59] The novel, thus, presents monstrosity and excessiveness as foundational elements in the Caribbean

and its diaspora and, moreover, a legacy of fukú and its inevitable propagation through the generations.

Much like Oscar's body is associated with "fukú's Kilometer Zero," Belicia's back becomes a landscape that mirrors the violence of the curse. In fact, Belicia's trajectory from the daughter of a reputable doctor to working as a "criada, a restavek" (253)[60] is also excessive with violence. La Inca, Abelard's cousin and Belicia's adoptive mother, finds Belicia after she has been burned with hot oil as punishment for leaving work to attend school, describing the burns as "unbelievably savage" (257). However, the text overindulgently extends its description of Belicia's body, mirroring the cruelty seen on her back with the playful language of role-playing games: "(One hundred and ten points minimum.) A monsterglove of festering ruination extending from the back of her neck to the base of her spine" (247). In an attempt to depict the violence within the act of burning itself (and the desire to burn),[61] the novel fails to encapsulate it through language and resorts instead to numerical precision, identifying the total sum of places on her back the oil touched, but also placing this violence within the fantasy world of games such as Dungeons and Dragons. The novel, moreover, finds this mathematical parenthetical insufficient in encompassing the violence of the oil burn and resorts to metaphorical comparisons through the language of disease and decayed landscapes. Indeed, Belicia's scars are so monstrous that the narrative invents a new term in an attempt to visually represent her back—"monsterglove"—and the scale of the violence her body suffered. The novel crucially equates her scars to a "bomb crater, a world-scar" that resembles "those of a hibakusha" (257). In this way the novel once again equates the Afro-Caribbean body to mutilated terrestrial spaces and disease, in this case Hiroshima and

Nagasaki after the atomic bomb attacks of 1945. Translated as "bombed person" (*hibaku*, "bombed," and *sha*, "person"), the origin of the Japanese term holds within it grotesque language denoting "to suffer" and "burst open."[62] Like Oscar's stretch marks, Belicia's back becomes the geography through which the text stages a global network of atomic and apocalyptic violence that reestablishes the curse as central to the Americas and which, moreover, emblematically characterizes the unrelenting violence that runs throughout *Oscar Wao*.[63]

Much like Oscar's all-encompassing excessiveness that surpasses the body, Belicia's sexual desire and the sexual violence she suffers on the island is analogous to a disease that is passed-on through the generations. Sexual violence in *Oscar Wao* is depicted as inherent to Antillean history and one of the many byproducts of fukú. I will explore this further in the section on decolonial love below but point to it here to illustrate how the novel defines the Caribbean as a cursed space that oppressively continues to reproduce violence on the Afro-Caribbean body. The sexual violence Belicia experiences at the hands of the Gangster (a member of the Trujillo regime and Belicia's lover) becomes in the novel a medium through which to explore the history of violence instantiated in 1492, but also how the novel organizes its doom pattern through the Afro-Caribbean body.

Yunior's narrative once again transforms Belicia's body into a landscape through which sociopolitical violence is mediated. Her waist is transformed into the "sexy isthmus" that "could have launched a thousand yolas" (123),[64] becoming the medium through which the Gangster enacts dictatorial violence and through which he imagines the undoing of political movements in the Americas: "What he wanted was to suck Beli's

enormous breasts, to fuck her pussy until it was mango-juice swamp, to spoil her senseless so that Cuba and his failure there disappeared" (124). In its depiction of Belicia, the novel not only sexually objectifies the Afro-Caribbean female body but also transforms her into the earthy arena on which past historical events such as the Cuban Revolution are explored.[65] The novel considers the hemispheric turbulence caused by the Cuban Revolution through its individual effects and its repercussions on the female body, presenting sexual intercourse as an extension of dictatorial violence. The Gangster's future after the Revolution appears "cloudy" (123), and the act of "fuck[ing]" Belicia enables the transformation of her vagina into a stereotypically natural (and tropical) space of danger, stagnation, and death that erases entire political movements.

Many scholars have rightly explored the role women play in *Oscar Wao* and Díaz's work generally, arguing the gamut from progressive feminist critique to its propagating anti-woman violence.[66] While I do not engage with these critiques or feminist theory in regard to the novel here, I acknowledge the importance of these discussions and the troubling representation of women in this particular text and Díaz's other writing. I do, however, engage with Belicia's representation in the novel as an indication of a larger systemic project in Díaz's oeuvre.[67] By this I mean that the novel, much as *Drown* and *This Is How You Lose Her*, presents the Afro-Caribbean woman as an earthy arena through which male figures imagine and explore their sociopolitical position and the role of national power in global politics. Yunior, then, writes Belicia as a telluric space suffused with continental history and the violent landscape on which it is mapped.

The novel continues with its apocalyptic world building through its narration of Belicia's physical assault. As the Secret Police drive her out into the sugarcane fields, the novel makes a clear demarcation between the natural world seen out the window and the violence occurring inside the car. The division between the urban and the rural fields is, moreover, presented in such stark contrast it becomes analogous to science-fictional time travel, "some real-time machine-type shit": "In those days the cities hadn't yet metastasized into kaiju, menacing one another with smoking, teeming tendrils of shanties; in those days their limits were a Corbusian dream […] one second you were deep in the twentieth century […] and the next you'd find yourself plunged 180 years into rolling fields of cane" (145-146). Yunior mobilizes the world of "high" and "low" cultural productions as a referential system for the landscape of the Dominican Republic. The overwhelming and monstrous (albeit campy) representation of urbanity seen in kaiju film is contrasted with the ordered and utilitarian creations of Le Corbusier.[68] It is crucial that Yunior uses the aesthetic world to signify the movement the car makes from city to field: the text uses these substitutions as a way to express a landscape and a history that surpasses language. By this I mean that the text must resort to external points of references in order to portray the landscape and the violence it denotes—that of colonial conquest, slavery, racial violence, and the production of sugar. As in the rest of the novel, Yunior returns to the language of sf/f in order to explicate the Afro-Caribbean condition.

Crucially, the Special Police take her into the sugarcane fields. The production of sugar in the Caribbean from the sixteenth through the nineteenth centuries was essential in the construction and development of European and American empires. The violent labor requirements this commodity necessitated, furthermore, profited from the

transatlantic slave trade and the millions of bodies trafficked from Africa to the Caribbean and the rest of the Americas in order to satisfy the increased desire and necessity for sugar and its byproducts. As I explore in chapter two, sugarcane and sugar are intimately tied to slave labor, the rhetoric of monstrosity, and the creation of "blackness" as a racial category. There, as in this chapter, I argue that as a significant metaphor for these texts, sugarcane envelops the past and its histories of slave labor, racism, and colonial violence within the present of the texts and, indeed, drives one 180 years into the colonial past. Sugarcane opens a space in which death and monstrosity become visible and through which this violence can be explored and recreated onto the self and the other.[69]

Sugarcane, then, enacts the apocalyptic violence of fukú and demonstrates the inescapable violence it unleashes on the Afro-Caribbean body. Moreover, the novel's narrative doom-patterns propagate this violence, world-building a space through which pain is repeatedly recreated. For example, the violence Belicia is expected to experience is delayed by the lush description of the natural world outside the car, a strategy that exacerbates the violence itself once it actually arrives: "The moon, it had been reported, was full, and the light that rained down cast the leaves of the eucalyptuses into spectral coin. The world outside so beautiful, but inside the car…" (146). The lyric beauty of Yunior's language, which precedes Belicia's brutalization, indeed highlights it, as does the brief silence of the ellipsis, which hints at the inability of language to encapsulate the horrors of the assault itself. The initial silence of the ellipsis is, as Elaine Scarry stipulates, a demonstration of pain's unsharability and resistance to language.[70] Pain does not "simply resist language but actively destroys it, bringing about an immediate

reversion to a state anterior to language, to the sounds and cries a human being makes before language is learned" (Scarry 4), and, as such, its resistance to language is not simply a byproduct of pain, but essential to pain itself (5). The ellipsis is reminiscent here of the em dash (—), a punctuation mark prominently used by Victorian writers, but most importantly implemented in slave narratives to indicate excessive violence or suffering that surpasses language.[71]

The silence of Yunior's ellipsis is brief, however. While readings of this work suggests that the explicit depiction of Belicia's suffering body is done "under the pressure of the desire to eliminate pain" using the "verbal strategies" of "the language of 'agency'" (Scarry 13), I contend that the detailed description of Belicia's assault makes her pain wholly unknowable and, in fact, recreates the violence perpetrated on her body. If, as Scarry stipulates, pain is "incontestably and unnegotiably present" for the sufferer and therefore the "most vibrant example of what it is to 'have certainty'" (4), then Belicia only exists in the novel as a body defined through violence. In this way the novel re-creates the Caribbean as an apocalyptic space of violence that continues to manifest itself on the body of the Afro-Caribbean subject.

Although he initially cannot find the language to depict the violence perpetrated onto Belicia's body, Yunior plunges into a detailed description of her assault and its effects. The scene is long and intensely violent, the text adopting the gruesomeness and monstrosity of the acts themselves:

> They'd been punching her and her right eye had puffed into a malignant slit, her right breast so preposterously swollen that it looked like it would burst, her lip was split and something was wrong with her jaw, she couldn't swallow without causing herself excruciating shocks of pain. She cried out each time they struck her but she did not cry, entiendes? Her fierceness astounds me. She would not give them the pleasure. There was such fear,

> the sickening blood-draining fear of a drawn pistol, of waking up to find a man standing over your bed, but held, a note sustained indefinitely. Such fear, and yet she refused to show it […] Anyone else would have turned her face from the blows, but Beli offered hers up. (*Oscar Wao* 146)

Beginning with "They'd been" consequently leaves Belicia in a progressive state of being punched. The repeated asides such as "entiendes?" and moments of self-referential introspection such as "Her fierceness astounds *me*" (emphasis added) not only stand in stark contrast to Yunior's unwillingness to let Belicia speak for herself, but also define her pain through narcissistic moments of self-reflection and edification. What is more, the text stages Belicia's reaction to the beating as an act of defiance that invites more violence—"Anyone else would have turned her face from the blows, but Beli offered hers up."

"What does the exposure of the violated body yield?" Saidiya Hartman asks in *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America* (3). Her question is a crucial once for this novel. In her work, Hartman argues that the frequent reproduction of "ravaged" bodies "immure[s] us to pain by virtue of their familiarity—the oft-repeated or restored character of these accounts and our distance from them are signaled by the theatrical language usually resorted to in describing these instances—and especially because they reinforce the spectacular character of black suffering" (3). She further asks if the repeated depiction of the suffering black body corroborates the veracity of violence and attempts, in spite of the unsharability of pain, to provide it and the violated body, with a form of expression? Or, does it reveal our own titillation and voyeurism; do we use the suffering body as a narcissistic medium of self-reflection? (3-4). Not overtly asked but implied in Hartman's work is the additional

burden placed on the suffering body to become exposed and used as an evidentiary didactic tool.[72]

The novel's repeated return to Belicia's body and the damage done to it can be read as a desire to expose and utter the unsharable and unspeakable. Indeed, the novel's lingering description of the scene and its effects is an attempt to depict a violence that it always falls short of representing. However, in its return to the violence performed on her body, the novel proves the incommunicability of pain and instead relishes, through bombastic language ("malignants lit", "preposterously swollen", "excruciating shocks", "sickening blood-draining", "vortex of rage") and exacting detail, in the recreation of fukú-violence on the body. Moreover, the text reverts to external referential points in order to illuminate Belicia's beaten body, instead of describing the pain of the body itself: "There was such fear, the sickening blood-draining fear of a drawn pistol" (*Oscar Wao* 146); "They beat her like she was a slave. Like she was a dog" (147). Certainly, the text's enumeration of injuries in medical terminology is reminiscent of the narrative's failed attempts to encapsulate the violence of Belicia's burnt back. Again, the text resorts to the numerical and nerd language of role-playing—"About 167 points of damage" (147)—that, although providing a detailed account of the assault's physical effects, provide little information of Belicia's affective response. Thus, Belicia's body is employed through "*analogical substantiation*" (Scarry 14)[73] as proof not only of the power of the state, but that of the Watcher and his narrative's veracity, upholding the Trujillato's authority and in turn fucking Belicia into mango-juice swamp once again.[74]

Again, sugarcane plays a crucial role in this text and, as I demonstrate in the following chapter, in trans- or greater-Caribbean literature generally. It is the landscape in

which Belicia is almost killed and the space in which her son, Oscar, will unavoidably repeat history. In effect, *Oscar Wao* underscores the sugarcane field as a sentient space that does not "want her to leave, of course" (150),[75] overtaking Belicia's body with its vegetal violence. The addition of "of course" to the sugarcane's pull further cements the inevitability of the sugarcane and the history of the production of sugar as one of death and violence.[76]

Just as his mother was forced into the cane fields and violently assaulted, the novel stages Oscar's first beating within the sugarcane and ultimate death in the field as an inevitable outcome of fukú and "the Fall" (familial and continental). As such, *Oscar Wao* defines the history of the Americas as one of Nietzschean fatalism: "Where did they take him. Where else. The canefields" (296). Oscar's death in the sugarcane yokes the history of the production of sugar and the violence it engendered with the consumption of the commodity onto the fat-monstrous body. Sugar is metaphorized as a colonial tool that, in the novel's present, develops—through the enduring presence of fukú—into the postcolonial violence of the nation state and its constant enforcement of pain onto Afro-Caribbean flesh. Oscar's fatness is a modern-day extension of the colonial violence of sugar production and, much like his two encounters in the field, his death is both a repetition of familial history—an end to his mother's unfinished violence—and American kismet. Therefore, the exhibition of Belicia's beaten body and Oscar's dead one, through the language of pain and violence, are employed as methods to take readers out of the body-in-pain and into the social and historical circumstances that caused it.[77]

The cane field patterns doom by staging Oscar's beating and then his murder as an exemplification of the inescapability of fukú. The field initiates the Antilles in the

colonial/modern world system through the violence of fukú and science fiction. Walking into the cane, the space is evocative of supernatural film and presented as holding science-fictional energy, the sounds "so loud and alien, the susurration, the cackling, the flashes of motion underfoot" (298), revealing the space, most importantly, as the vessel of history and memory. The uncanny sensation Oscar experiences in the cane, "strangely familiar to" him (298), returns us not only to Belicia's assault within the field three decades earlier, but also the establishment of colonial power on the island. In fact, this first encounter in the field convinces Oscar of the inevitable repetition of the curse. In the hospital, for example, Oscar not only speaks the word, fukú, but puts it into writing. At first rolling "the word experimentally in his mouth," fukú is translated, through his injuries, into "*Fuck you*" (304). The humor that accompanies the curse's name is erased in the face of the violence perpetrated on the body and in its concretization through the written word. What begins as an assessment in sound (and feeling?) becomes materially explicit in writing—"He wrote out the word for me: *fukú*" (306)—an act that cements fukú in the text and on the body.[78]

Perhaps this is why Oscar's second encounter in the field is a tearless one (320), but one no less filled with violence. The cane patterns apocalyptic violence in the novel, forcing Oscar once again within this space, as one of the final enactment of cataclysm. I would like to extend Machado Saez's reading of Yunior's normalization of Oscar through heterosexual sex and propose that Oscar's courage in the cane (his soliloquy on love) is another moment of normalizing violence perpetrated onto the monstrous body. What I read as another moment of instability and fantasy in the text (one that discloses Yunior's editorial hand in the fabrication of the De León and Cabral saga) and imagines Oscar's

courageous speech against the injustice of the state, in fact, betrays itself through the image of the broken mouth.

Di Iorio, for example, reads this moment—"Oscar laughed a little too through his broken mouth" (321)—as a triumphant one in which his laughter becomes a symbol of defiance "in the face of those who laugh through their sense of dominance and privilege" (84). While she rightly points to the cruelty of the joke through which Oscar is killed, Di Iorio reads his translation of "fuego" and participation in his own execution as an insignificant aside, achieving "what he wanted, even if the price is death" (84). Yet Di Iorio overlooks the broken mouth itself and the symbolic weight of staging laughter, orations on love, and self-annihilating language through it. Indeed, Oscar's broken mouth in the sugarcane is a symbol of violent silence and silencing, the Afro-Caribbean subject once again injured through that with which he could verbalize dissent. By translating "fuego," Oscar becomes not only an active participant in his own death, but his mouth is made analogous to the gun, a colonial tool and technology of violence.[79] Therefore, in breaking his mouth and transforming it into a vessel of self-destruction, the text executes what was an experimental rolling of the curse in his mouth into a reality, breaking Oscar's mouth once again and re-silencing its protagonist.

Lastly, while Oscar verbalizes his own death and his presence comes to an end, the novel is unable to contend with the violence it has extended onto his body, reverting once again to the brief silence of the em dash. The chapter, "The Final Voyage," concludes not only with Oscar's murder, but with Yunior's own inability to speak: "Oscar—" (322). This evocative silence leads to the various endings of the novel, and it is to these which I now turn, reading them as a fragmentation caused by the violence of

its subject. Such silence and, indeed, Oscar's death are illustrative of the impossibility of attaining decolonial love and, in more general terms, of the apocalyptic narration that is *Oscar Wao* itself.

THE CAVE OF JAGUA: NARRATING THE APOCALYPSE

I return to the Cave of Jagua to explore how Yunior's various narrative tendencies recreate Caribbean apocalypse and foreclose the notion of "decolonial love" posited by Díaz when speaking about his work with Paula M.L. Moya. I do so to consider Yunior's apocalyptic narrative tendencies, which reveal the mythological investments and parameters of apocalypse in Díaz's oeuvre and the construction of a new Caribbean mythology in his work. As he leads Yunior to the "birthplace," the Vice-President speaks in a "deep, respectful voice" that designates what appears to be a "hole in the ground" as "the Cave of Jagua…[t]he birthplace of the Taínos" (*This Is How* 24).[80] Yunior stands over it but cannot see inside. The hole is too deep and too black. He also questions the Vice-President's representation of the hole as a vessel of Dominican national heritage: "I raise my eyebrow. I thought they were South American" (24), Yunior says of the Taíno. Although anthropologically correct, Yunior positions himself outside ("they") Dominican communal national history and rejects the Vice-President's inclusive narrative of a national origin ("our nation").[81] The Vice-President's account, moreover, lies outside official history and archeology, and it is Yunior in this instance who, in contrast to his inclinations otherwise in *Oscar Wao*, seeks "official" historicity. The invocation of Taíno mythology within the confines of the Dominican Republic—and Yunior's doubt—presents a resistance to authorized forms of knowledge, archives, and history, and creates

a trans-American network that expands the Vice-President's "our" to include not only the Dominican nation and diaspora, but the rest of the Americas as well. To Yunior's challenge, the Vice-President answers: "We're speaking mythically here" (24). Defining trans-American and pan-Latinx origins "mythically" (24) defines the hole and its surrounding island as a denunciation of accepted historiography that positions the trans-American Latinx as a descendant of the fantastic. In underscoring the mythical origins of the Americas, the Vice-President reminds Yunior of the alternate archives that exist in the spaces erased by coloniality.

However, the Vice-President's demarcation of this space as the nation's origin, in conjunction with his governmental or corporate moniker, foregrounds and underscores the continent's violent history, from the migration of the Taíno onto the island of Hispaniola, the "discovery" and colonization of the Americas, the extermination of native populations, and the Trujillato to the post-dictatorship present. The hole's mythical aspects, moreover, ties the island's violent history with the fantastical and science-fictional curse of fukú.

Unable to see inside the hole, Yunior describes its surrounding landscape with sensory phrases that veer on the reverential and mysterious: "The earth is red. Bauxite. And the hole is blacker than any of us" (24). These terse statements and their attentiveness to color gesture toward astonishment and wonder, which render Yunior almost speechless. Faced with the "birthplace," Yunior loses all interiority and is only able to reflect on his surroundings. Following his illustration of the earth as "red," Yunior corrects himself by using the more precise "Bauxite," which acts as a modifying addendum and clarifying addition to his initial depiction of the land. The specificity of

his description designates the earth not only as red but also as a rock, an ore, a stone that suggests the passage of time and the accumulation of history within it. Bauxite's earthy luster, moreover, reveals and magnifies the blackness of the hole. As Jeffrey Jerome Cohen maintains in "Stories of Stone," rock is never inert, it "loves nothing more than story" (60), and it challenges humans' notion of time and desire to remain separate from the environment.[82] Challenging the separation between human and nonhuman, bauxite reminds Yunior, the Vice-President, and Bárbaro of their origin and its history. It remains impossible for Yunior to uphold the separation between him and the "birthplace" within language, such as in using "they were" to extricate himself from the Taíno, and enters the hole.

In essence, Yunior's journey, from his encounter with the Vice-President and Bárbaro to the mysterious birthplace and his experience within it, suggests the mythological hero-quest surveyed by Joseph Campbell in *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*[83]—a quest that has been a leitmotif in sf/f literature and film.[84] In his examination of global mythological figures, Campbell concludes that a "hero ventures forth from the world of common day into a region of supernatural wonder (x): fabulous forces are there encountered and a decisive victory is won (y): the hero comes back from this mysterious adventure with power to bestow boons on his fellow man (z)" (23). While Yunior seems to follow the formula postulated by Campbell's "monomyth," his experience of "separation—initiation—return" (23) diverges in significant ways. Yunior *does* receive a call to adventure, is led by spiritual guides, and crosses a "magical threshold" (76). However, his "transit into a sphere of rebirth" (76)[85] does not provide the boons necessary for the "renewing of the community, the nation, the planet" (167). Instead, his

experience inside the hole reveals the space to be the instigator of apocalyptic thinking and feeling.

Like Campbell's belly of the whale, the "womb image" of the birthplace is staged by the short story as a magical and transformative space. Yunior's experience takes-on the qualities of a transformative ritual as he is lowered upside-down into the cave by his spiritual guides (the Vice-President and Bárbaro) and he makes an offering to it. Losing the coins in his pockets, Yunior calls them "Bendiciones" ("blessings"; *This Is How* 24), which not only imply a religious offering (such as tithes), but also a desire for recompense for his monetary "blessings" to the cave. In fact, the cave presents the possibility for transformation: inside, Yunior states, "This is the perfect place for insight, for a person to become somebody better" (24). Yet, surrounded by red earth, the bauxite tells a different story, one of "disturbance and rupture[,]" its pigment narrating of "fiery destruction and the violent breaching of boundary" (Menely and Ronda 24).[86] The red earth that renders the chasm as a vagina, leading to "our nation['s]" womb, marks this space as created in violence through its pigmentation.

Lowered into the hole, Yunior not only enters a mythic and metaphorical space, but also demonstrates a desire to return within the motherland. Inside the hole, Yunior yokes the mythical aspects of this space as origin for the nation and its deep blackness to the body. His association of the hole's depth to the racial markers of the Caribbean in his observation, "And the hole is blacker than any of us," marks not only his body as black, but also the Vice-President's, Bárbaro's, and, through the previous association of "our nation," the rest of the Americas. The fabulous elements of the hole in association with "blackness," furthermore, position "blackness" as an unstable and fluctuating theoretical

construction produced through the effects of history and colonial modernity. Blackness here is also, and perhaps more importantly, a foundation and communal form of lived experience that is both the result of its historical construction and a reminder of its own forging.[87]

Furthermore, the cleaving of the black body to the red earth of the hole acts as an intertextual moment in the short story that also returns readers to Yunior's previous act of narration in *Oscar Wao*. After recovering Oscar's notebook from his trip to the Dominican Republic, Yunior dubs Oscar's work "The Condensed Notebook of a Return to a Nativeland."[88] Through the invocation of the red earth in association to the black body, Yunior revisits Aimé Césaire's important poem, "Notebook of a Return to a Native Land," in which Césaire writes of négritude, "my négritude is not a stone, its deafness hurled against the/clamor of the day/[…]/my négritude is neither tower nor cathedral/it takes root in the red flesh of the soil" (35). As if torn from the pages of Césaire, Yunior also formulates Antillean blackness through the land's materiality, rooting it within the motherland's "flesh of the soil" that further imbricates the physicality of the black body within the histories of colonialism and violence in the Caribbean.

Unlike Césaire's "négritude," however, blackness in Díaz's work is an extra-ordinary element of the Antillean science-fiction condition that forecloses any possibility of renewal. Inside the "perfect place for insight," Yunior extricates himself from the subject of his sentence ("for a person to become"), presenting rebirth as a general possibility for others but not for himself. In fact, Yunior is able to imagine the Vice-President's and Bárbaros's experiences within the hole as transformative ones: "The Vice-President probably saw his future self hanging in this darkness, bulldozing the poor

out of their shanties, and Bárbaro, too—buying a concrete house for his mother, showing her how to work the air-conditioner" (24). On the other hand, he can only remember his past with Magda: "but, me, all I can manage is a memory of the first time me and Magda talked" (24). Yunior's use of "all I can manage" to describe his experience designates his imaginative potentials as a lack or shortcoming and, moreover, an inability of the ritual within the motherland to provide transformation. Yet his experience within the cave also generates an affective transtemporal moment that defies linear definition. By "transtermporal moment" I mean how Yunior stages the collapse between past and present that, through the formulation of a memory, returns us to a creation that is simultaneously its own ruin. This collapsing of time cyclically reproduces emotional violence that undercuts the potential for transformation. Even the desire (although disembodied) to "become somebody better" demonstrates a longing to return to a beginning before birth, before time and history, before the construction of myths. However, as the apocalyptic articulation that opened this chapter demonstrates—"And that's when I know it's over. As soon as you start thinking of the beginning, it's the end"—the possibility of return is always foreclosed.

Emerging from the cave crying, the Vice-President "indignantly" tells Yunior, "you don't have to be a pussy about it" (24). Instead of becoming "somebody better," the ritual turns Yunior into a replica of that which he has entered, the "pussy" that created the nation, and which he pathologically pursues in *Drown*, *Oscar Wao*, and *This is How You Lose Her*.[89]

As Stuart Hall proposes in "Cultural Identity and Diaspora," the experience of displacement that constructed the "New World" as a "place" also "gives rise to a certain

imaginary plenitude, recreating the endless desire to return to 'lost origins,' to be one again with the mother, to go back to the beginning" (236). Not a psychoanalytic theorist per se, Hall's analysis of Caribbean identity and culture, however, responds particularly to the writings of Jacques Lacan's Neo-Freudian theories, which notably theorize the individual "I" as founded on an original lack-of-being (*manque-à-être*), experienced through being ripped from the original object—the mother. In *Seminar VII: The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*, for example, Lacan puts forward the figure of the mother as the archaic Real other, a fixed vanishing point which he calls (in dialogue with Freud) "*das Ding*" (the Thing): "I mean that the whole development at the level of the mother/child interpsychology […] is nothing more than an immense development of the essential character of the maternal thing, of the mother, insofar as she occupies the place of the thing, of *das Ding*" (67). By entering into the symbolic order, therefore, the "I" can never return to its original wholeness and, thus, all desires thereafter are attempts to come to terms with our *manque-à-être*. For Lacan, then, all desire is comprised of metaphors that substitute the initial absent mother with an Object of desire, in which the "O" signifies objects within the Symbolic Order. Because no Object can embody the mother-object, the "I" is condemned to slide along a metonymic chain of signifiers which always stand-in for the whole we miss.[90]

My methodological investments do not lie specifically within psychoanalytic theory and I do not wish to fall into the trap of writing about Yunior's experience through the lens of social psychology, with its focus on "wholeness, completeness, and transparency" that does not contain the language to speak about ethnic-racialized subjectivity (Viego, *Dead Subjects* 4). I follow Antonio Viego when he proposes that

"that the undisturbed dream of ego mastery, wholeness, and completeness not only threatens to inform how ethnic-racialized subjects craft a politics of recognition and redistribution" but also provides racist discourse with what Viego argues is one of its most "generative principles: the undivided, obscenely full and complete ethnic-racialized subject" (6). In fact, this excursion into psychoanalytic theory is not one that wishes to psychoanalyze Yunior's character, but focuses on how the text stages the Dominican Republic as the unreachable mother-object that instigates apocalyptic thinking and apocalyptic violence that Yunior narrates within the "birthplace." Yunior's immersion in the "birthplace" is presented precisely as a desire to return to the original mother-object. Demarcating it as "our nation," however, makes the experience within the hole a communal symbolic desire for return within the motherland before it became coopted within American hegemonic mythologies. The confluences of temporal markers within the hole as Yunior imagines past, present, and future within a variety of perspectives, seeing as the Vice-President, Bárbaro, and himself, evoke a desire to return within and undo the significations that make time, history, the "birthplace," and "blacker"—those elements the hole denotes—readable.

Effectively, Yunior's experience within the hole is apocalyptic in nature. The ritual inside the "birthplace" could mollify the trauma of diaspora, undo the histories the space signals, and be an inquiry into Yunior's "sucio" ways, his "pussy" chasing.[91] However, as Hall reminds us via Lacan, the "return to the beginning" remains unfulfilled (236). As a subject of the "New World," the Afro-Caribbean subject always suggests his/her creation within the place of the "fateful/fatal encounter" that was staged between Africa and the West; the place of continuous, violent displacements (234). As such, Afro-

Caribbean people are "already people of a diaspora" (235) whose impossibility of return becomes the beginning of "representation, the infinite renewable source of desire, memory, myth, search, discovery" (235).

Therefore, surrounded by the signifiers of Caribbean history, language proves to be an ineffective exorcising tool. After his experience in the hole, for example, Yunior returns to Magda and tells her in an attempt to reconcile, "All we have to do is try" (*This Is How* 25). These words function as emblematic of Yunior's narrative practice through *Oscar Wao* and *This Is How You Lose Her*. Following Hall's ascription of Afro-Caribbean cultural production as occurring because of and through the experience of loss, we can see Yunior's repeated narrative attempts and "pussy" chasing as they slide through a metonymic chain of signifiers which always stand in for the desire to return to the imaginary motherland. Yunior narrates language and storytelling as potential exorcizing and healing tools, the "zafa" that will counter-spell fukú.[92] Yet, surrounded within the signifiers of Caribbean history, language proves an ineffective tool for exorcizing the Admiral's curse, or as a form of communication with another racialized subject. As his memory of Magda reveals, the search for the mother-object, the return to "lost origins," will always signal its foreclosure, the end of the beginning: language will always fall-short of encapsulating the violence of the Caribbean or in freeing the body of History. The racialized body becomes "a historical archive for both individuals and communities, one that is excavated through the very act of desiring the racial other" (Gopinath 1).[93] As such, Yunior's desire for Magda exhumes and replicates violence through the act of writing and narration.[94] In fact, the act of narration and the construction of a narrative text in Díaz's oeuvre become methods for repeating violence. Tasked with

illustrating the past, Yunior's re-telling demonstrates the impossible task of encapsulating History, which becomes a way of performing colonial and postcolonial violence on the self and other. Yunior's attempts at narration and the failings of language in the face of the birthplace demonstrate the impossibility of "decolonial love" for postcolonial racialized subjects.

In an interview for the *Boston Review*, "The Search for Decolonial Love," Díaz defines "decolonial love" as "the kind of love that could liberate them [his characters] from the horrible legacy of colonial violence" (Moya "The Search"). Various literary critics have engaged this concept as an important leitmotif in Díaz work,[95] answering his question—"Is it possible to overcome the horror legacy of slavery and find decolonial love? Is it possible to love one's broken-by-the-coloniality-of-power self in another broken-by-the-coloniality-of-power person?" (Moya)—[96] in the affirmative. Furthermore, these scholars sustain that Díaz's work, and Yunior's narratives in particular, act as decolonial tools. I read against the grain and ask instead: In its fulfillment, is decolonial love another narrative doom pattern that instigates masochistic self-harm?

In attempting to answer this question I examine how "the search for decolonial love" patterns doom in Díaz writing and intimately ties writing and narrating to the apocalyptic. Writing and narrating in Díaz's oeuvre act as forces that ultimately demonstrate apocalyptic violence. Illegible to the colonial eye, the fulfillment of decolonial love signals world-destroying potentials that ultimately annihilate the lovers. Therefore, the search for and narration of de/colonial love becomes an investment in sadomasochistic harm.

Díaz's definition of "decolonial love" invokes Emma Perez's "decolonial imaginary" which she describes as a "theoretical tool for uncovering the hidden voices of the past that have been relegated to silences, passivity" (xvi), and Chela Sandoval's "hermeneutics of love" which redefines "love" as a political technology for social activism and generating "a cosmopolitics of dissidence in the postmodern world" (157).[97] Literary scholars José David Saldívar and Paula Moya and sociologist Deborah Vargas have written about what they see as Díaz's investment in the search for and, in some instances, the accomplishment of decolonial love in his texts; these thinkers posit that through narrating himself in *Drown*, *Oscar Wao*, and *This Is How You Lose Her*, Yunior "begins to explore his sucio love and his masculinist self-formation and enters a critical self-analysis, [and] might also be entering a scene of decolonial love" (J. Saldívar, "Junot Díaz's Search" 343). Paula Moya, for example, argues that although Yunior might never achieve decolonial love itself, he invites readers to think about the possibility of "a love that might emerge only in the wake of the radical acceptance and welcoming home of the formerly racially and sexually denigrated non-European self" ("Dismantling the Master's House" 248).

Saldívar and Moya's qualifying "mights," as well as Saldívar's repeated parentheticals such as "search for a (doubting) decolonial love" ("Junot Díaz's Search" 340), crucially demonstrate how Díaz's texts foreclose the possibility of decolonial love and, in fact, narrate an apocalyptic space. While scholars present Yunior's narrations as a search for alternative futures, I argue instead that the search for decolonial love emulates the apocalyptic violence evident in Yunior's statement, "As soon as you start thinking of the beginning it's the end." Of mythological significance, love structures the world-

destroying potentials within Yunior's statement. As such, to narrate an alternative beginning such as decolonial love or to write a "counterspell" against fukú is also to begin an apocalyptic narrative of mythical proportions. In fact, love is staged throughout Yunior's various narrations, from the first collection through the last, as excessive and apocalyptic, a propagation of violence, a disease passed through the generations, and an "unattainable" (apocalyptic) that exceeds language. For example, remembering his failed relationship with Lola, Yunior cannot find the language with which to express himself: "and I'd finally try to say the words that could have saved us._____" (Díaz, *Oscar Wao* 327). Love, then, patterns national and historical violence in the text, further replicates this violence on the bodies of Belicia and Oscar, and actively destroys language. As "the daughter of the Fall, Belicia is the recipient of its 'heaviest radiations' and is described as loving 'atomically'" (126). Her atomic love is a byproduct of the Fall, a personal and familial curse that is itself the byproduct of a continental catastrophe. As such, it forecloses the possibility of the zafa with which the novel begins. Moreover, this atomic love and the Fall that proliferates the "heaviest radiations" is replicated in *This Is How You Lose Her*. The collection of interrelated short stories ends with "The Cheater's Guide to Love," a narrative of Yunior's failed engagement with a nameless fiancé, which concludes as follows:

> And then one June night you scribble the ex's name and: *The half-life of love is forever*.
> You bust out a couple more things. Then you put your head down.
> The next day you look at the new pages. For once you don't want to burn them or give up writing forever.
> It's a start, you say to the room.
> That's about it. In the months that follow you bend to the work, because it feels like hope, like grace—and because you know in your lying cheater's heart that sometimes a start is all we ever get. (213)

Although "bust[ing] out a couple more things," Yunior does not disclose them for the reader and, therefore, places his radioactive statement in the foreground.[98] It seems that for Yunior the only possibility of hope is within the act of writing itself. However, as Yunior's statement inside the birthplace of the nation demonstrates, the writing of the beginning is already its foreclosure, and therefore, the half-life of love promises its lingering effects but never the thing itself, much like fukú and its counterspell. A term used in nuclear physics that describes how quickly unstable atoms undergo or survive radioactive decay "half-life" refers to the time required for a quantity to reduce its value to half. Therefore, if the half-life of love is forever, the text not only defines love for postcolonial subjects as an unstable particle that has been exposed to radioactive forces, but also as continuing, like fukú, as a remainder and reminder of loss while never being the thing (love) itself.

A temporal exploration into the radioactive decay of postcolonial kinships, the "guide" spans "Year 0" to "Year 5" and simulates the half-life of love itself. Although the story "ends" in the fifth year of Yunior's failed engagement, the text suggests the continued decay of love and Yunior himself. The narrative's beginning in Year 0 returns us to *Oscar Wao*'s "Ground Zero of the New World," the apocalyptic birth of the modern/colonial world system, and the inescapable violence of fukú that inextricably accompanies this creation.[99] José David Saldívar reads "The Cheater's Guide to Love" as the central story in the collection, where Yunior "wants to leave it all out in the open" in order to "show" his reader the "fool" he has been ("Junot Díaz's Search" 337). However, this concluding story needs to be examined through "The Sun, the Moon, the Stars" which opens the collection. These two narratives act as bookmarks that organize the

interlinked stories that stand between them. Thus, the lines that open and conclude the text, "I'm not a bad guy" (*This Is How* 3) and "a start is all you ever get" (213), respectively, act as the literary parameters of apocalypse which Yunior's "thinking of the beginning" suggests, something that points to the possibility of "a start" that simultaneously calls for its destruction: a start that contradicts the possibility of decolonial love.

The interlinked stories that follow Yunior's "I'm not a bad guy" proceed to disprove his statement: the interlinked stories, the women whom he "loves" and loses, his deteriorating body, and creative writing return us to the collection's beginning in "The Moon, the Stars, the Sun" and his infidelity to Magdalena and experience within the "birthplace of the nation." Therefore, the opening story presents a lens through which to read everything that follows as an interconnected narrative of failure and apocalyptic love lost.

José David Saldívar poignantly asks of "The Cheater's Guide to Love" and *This Is How You Lose Her*, "Can U.S. men of color like Yunior be wise in the moment of love? Or is it part of the point…to make the claim that love is unreliable under systems of the coloniality of power and gender?" ("Junot Díaz's Search" 342). Scholars like Saldívar optimistically read the Guide and Díaz's oeuvre as "journeys through heartbreak" in which Yunior "emerges possessing something approximating" decolonial love (338). I suggest that Yunior's journeys continually doom-pattern readers back to the Cave of Jagua and the modern/colonial world system through the unleashing of fukú. The linked stories of *Drown*, *Oscar Wao*, and *This is How You Lose Her* fragment, fall silent, and return to the doom pattern of fukú in order to encapsulate this excess. As such, Yunior is

always narrating from the Cave's space of death through which language fails him, where it is never enough to narrate the violence of Caribbean history.

NARRATION IS FRAGMENTATION: FORM IN *THE BRIEF WONDROUS LIFE OF OSCAR WAO*

In various interviews about his work, Junot Díaz has repeated what García Márquez famously stipulated during his 1982 Nobel Prize acceptance speech. Both authors position Caribbean and Latin American history, respectively, as too extreme to be translated and rendered in realist prose. Díaz, for example, states: "I come from an area of the world that has been blown up so many times, that has suffered so many damn apocalypses, where literally all sorts of weird science-fiction stuff happens […] and I think the only way for me to get at them is to reimagine them among genre lines" (Ch'ien). His statement repositions Gacía Márquez's "realidad descomunal" and Alejo Carpentier's "lo real maravilloso" from a Latin American tradition to an expansive incorporation of the Caribbean and its U.S. diaspora that broadens Latin American and Anglo-American literary traditions and geographies.[100] Díaz defines genre fiction, moreover, as the only literary form capable of narrating the extreme violence of the Caribbean and its diaspora.

Although not speaking specifically about s/sf or genre literature, Derek Walcott similarly positions the Caribbean's creation as excessive in violence, correlating the Antilles to a whole object—"the sum of history"—that has been shattered:

> Break a vase, and the love that reassembles the fragments is stronger than that love which took its symmetry for granted when it was whole […] It is such a love that reassembles our African and Asiatic fragments, the cracked heirlooms whose restoration shows its white scars. This gathering of broken pieces is the care and pain of the Antilles, and if the pieces are disparate, ill-fitting, they contain more pain than their original sculpture,

> those icons and sacred vessels taken for granted in their ancestral places. Antillean art is this restoration of our shattered histories, our shards of vocabulary, our archipelago becoming synonym for pieces broken off from the original continent. ("The Antilles: Fragments of Epic Memory")

Central to Walcott's and Díaz's definition of the Caribbean is its fragmentation through violence, and the attempt through writing to put the pieces back together. As Walcott states above, however, any attempt at narrating the Antilles will continue to reveal the "white scars" and the contour of those places where the pieces are broken. The Antilles is envisioned as "an effort of memory" that culminates in "amnesia and fog" (Walcott). While not refuting the possibility of rebuilding through the act of imagination the Antilles will always reveal the violence that broke it into pieces. As such, Díaz's oeuvre recreates Antillean fragmentation and demonstrates that narrating the Caribbean will always lead to fragmentation itself. In effect, Yunior's desire to tell stories of colonial, diasporic, and racial violence creates instead narrative doom patterns that return us again and again to the apocalyptic.

The fragmentation evident not only in *Oscar Wao* but in all of Díaz's work is a central narrative tool for the representation of the Caribbean and its apocalyptic history. Before the plot of *Oscar Wao* truly "begins," readers are confronted not only with a mysterious title with antiquated language ("Wondrous"), but with a multiplicity of epigraphs—starts and stops—and references from "high" and "low" culture that stilt the reading process and define the novel as a fusion of textual references and histories.

The first epigraph—"Of what import are brief, nameless lives…to Galactus"—is carefully referenced, providing the volume and issue number of the *Fantastic Four* comic, along with the precise date of its publication, "(Vol. I, No. 49, April 1966)." On the following page, readers find an eighteen-line stanza by the Saint-Lucian-Trinidadian

poet Derek Walcott. Without contextualization, readers might mistake this excerpt as a complete work, not realizing it to be the second stanza of an eleven-sectioned and twenty-five-stanza poem, "The Schooner Flight." The hyper-nerd and academic-archival treatment lent the comic book is elided the Nobel Prize winning poet's work, and thus, before the novel "begins," readers are advised on the text's values and how to read its pages.[101] The epigraphs, moreover, serve as indicators for the novel's hierarchical weight of "low" popular culture over "high" art, for its own re-creation of Dominican and American history over official historiography, and for the textual excess that will be experienced by readers through its pages. By textual excess, as I have shown, I mean the "spilling over" of information into footnotes, the proliferation of myths and counter-myths, asides by the narrator, the weaving of inside or private and outside or public histories with the lives of specific protagonists and minor characters, and the excessive forms of embodiment of Oscar's fat-embodiment and Belicia's scarred flesh: everything, in short, that Díaz's fictional narratives doom-pattern into contemporary Latinx literature.

The "high" and "low" citations of *Oscar Wao* function as points of reference for and challenging and rewriting one another, forcing readers to question which sources and information to trust and uphold as reliable or important.[102] Significantly, the foregrounding of the *Fantastic Four* and Walcott and the blending of "high" and "low" (sometimes without points of reference) shifts the loci of analysis from accepted Euro-American forms of representation to a Caribbean and science-fiction literary tradition. The pairing of the comic book with Walcott's stanza also positions the Caribbean and its diaspora as a central element within a larger American narrative of violence, racial constructions, exile, and dislocation, which is continued through the examination of

fukú's origin in the narrative that follows the epigraphs, or what I have defined as the novel's first beginning. This multiplicity of starts, the literary and cultural references, and even the blank spaces (those found not only within the novel's "páginas en blanco" but also on the blank page itself) enact the excessiveness of the story they are attempting to narrate.

Effectively, Yunior's narratives foreclose the possibility of encapsulating the violence of Caribbean history or presenting a decolonial alternative toward social justice through their use of fragmentation. Therefore, while I agree with readings that position Yunior's narrative as "being in competition with modern Dominican history" and seeking to "replace a Trujillian historical model founded on silences with one based on recovered, multiple 'ordinary voices" (Hanna, "Portrait of the Artist" 95), I underscore instead that the novel's repeated dependence and employment of fragmentation, multiplicity of voices and metafictional references establishes pastiche as the natural response and only literary form available in narrating the violence of the Caribbean. The use of pastiche and fragmentation recreates violence, silence, and the impossibility of ascertaining the truth. Moreover, as this project demonstrates, the narration of apocalyptic violence necessitates literary fragmentation.

As Yunior demonstrates throughout *Oscar Wao*, fukú acts as an impediment to narration itself and, regardless of whether the impediments, silences, and gaps are created by the Trujillato or Yunior's imitation of dictatorial violence, the act of narrating the Caribbean becomes an impossibility. In fact, as I argue in this section, what Yunior exposes throughout the novel is the repetition of apocalyptic violence initiated by fukú. For example, describing Abelard's death and the Cabral's family Fall, Yunior collides

with repeated silences that signal the unreliability of history and Yunior's narration, while also demonstrating the impossibility of narrating the excessive violence of Caribbean history. In prison, Abelard "trie[s] to tell [Socorro] all that had happened to him" (*Oscar Wao* 242) but is unable to, a narrative gap caused by the excessive violence he has experienced.

The novel, crucially, mirrors the silences of Abelard's story; a section with excessive silences and gaps where Yunior reverts to the rhetoric of speculation and rumor, introducing repeated questions that are left unanswered. "There would always be speculation[,]" Yunior states of the cause for Abelard's imprisonment and death. The language of rumor and local gossip leads the text in a series of questions that are left unanswered: "So which was it? An accident, a conspiracy, or a fukú? The only answer I can give you is the least satisfying: you'll have to decide for yourself. What's certain is that nothing's certain" (243). Importantly, the text locates fukú as central factor in a familial curse that, moreover, becomes representative of the national and continental creation through apocalyptic violence. As Yunior asserts, "We are trawling in silences here. Trujillo and Company didn't leave a paper trail […] And it's not like the fukú itself would leave a memoir or anything" (243). Silence, then, becomes a symptom of apocalyptic violence and fukú's curse which becomes analogous to the blank page, making all silences in the novel signifiers for the original anathema of the Columbian encounter and all attempts to reconstruct Dominican history (individual and national) or write an alternative one becomes an unearthing process of return to the original apocalypse, and therefore a recreation of its violence.

Yunior writes Oscar's violent death in the cane field as a frustrated attempt to fill-in one of the silences in the narrative: "Which is to say if you're looking for a full story, I don't have it. Oscar searched for it too, in his last days, and its not certain whether he found it either" (243). The novel's multiple endings, much like its various beginnings and numerous subsections within each chapter, demonstrate the text's inability to encapsulate the excessive violence within the narrative it is attempting to narrate. Moreover, it demonstrates the impossibility of narrating the apocalyptic violence of fukú and Caribbean history within a linear narrative.

In effect, the novel fastens the act of writing and narrating to fukú's doom-pattern and apocalyptic violence, which notably centers sf/f as an intrinsic element in the history of the Caribbean and its literary representation in Díaz's oeuvre. Writing becomes in the novel that which leads the Cabral family to the Fall, and Abelard's rumored yet unfound book is importantly paralleled in Oscar's lost writing at the end of the novel. Here the repetition of history is staged as atomic fallout of fukú and the impossibility of encompassing its violence through writing. Furthermore, writing national history necessitates the literary form of the genres in order to represent it: "This version contends that he got into trouble because of a book […] A book about the Dark Powers of the President, a book in which Abelard argued that the tales the common people told about the president—that he was supernatural, that he was not human—may in some way have been *true*. That it was possible that Trujillo was, if not in fact, in principle, a creature from another world!" (245). Once again the text returns us to the opening lines of the novel by using language typical of rumors and echoing "the tales" told by "common people" about Trujillo with the rumors ("They say") of fukú's origin. The staging of

Trujillo as a byproduct of fukú is also associated with the fantastical and otherworldly language of science fiction and fantasy.

The disappearance of Abelard and Oscar's writing becomes an extension of colonial and dictatorial violence, but its description through the lens of sf/f depicts it as an element of fukú's doom-pattern. As such, the novel underscores the impossibility of recreating Caribbean history (individual, national, or continental) in writing. The Cabral's "Fallout" is, moreover, results in Belicia's black-skinned birth; the "first sign" of the family's downfall is Belicia being "born black. And not just any kind of black. But *black* black—kongoblack, shangoblack, kaliblack, zapoteblack, rekhablack—" her complexion "an ill omen" (248). Belicia's excessive blackness—one that necessitates not only its italicized repetition ("*black* black") but the creation of portmanteaus that allocate blackness geographically and culturally—returns us to the Cave of Jagua and the creation of blackness as a curse intrinsic to the Caribbean and its creation as a byproduct of fukú and science-fictional apocalyptic violence. Yunior's act of narrating Belicia's blackness, much as the text's disappearance of Abelard's and Oscar's writing, becomes an element of silencing and violence that reenacts colonial and dictatorial violence on the subjects of the novel.

As the multiple racial compounds Yunior used to describe Belicia's blackness—each one an addition that modifies the one it follows—the narrative does not seem to know how to conclude, starting and stopping repeatedly in order to (impossibly) encapsulate its violence. Chapter eight, "The End of the Story," for example, is not an end at all; containing five subsections titled respectively, "As For Us," "On a Super Final Note," "The Dreams," "As For Me," and "As For Us." What is clear from these subtitles

is that each one rewrites the one that preceded it, acting as a corrective addition that demonstrates that a "Final Note" is impossible when writing the Caribbean's violent legacy. The untitled section that follows "The End of the Story" reveals the "End" to have been a penultimate attempt to conclude, and fukú as a force that obligates the continuation of violence and the attempt to (impossibly) answer the silences introduced by the novel. The text, in fact, utilizes the language of science fiction and fantasy to conclude the untitled section that succeeds chapter eight, placing the unending violence of the Caribbean within the matrix of genre: "In the end? Nothing ends…Nothing ever ends" (331).

Taken from Alan Moore's graphic novel, *Watchmen*, this final line spoken by Doctor Manhattan underscores the eternal reverberations of violence, especially that perpetuated in the name of social justice and progress. Set in 1985, *Watchmen* centers on a group of superheroes and the murder of The Comedian, a costumed hero employed by the U.S. government. Believing that by creating an extraterrestrial threat the U.S. and U.S.S.R will abandon their arms race of Mutual Assured Destruction (MAD) and unite in an effort of global defense, Ozymandias (Adrian Veidt) creates a monster which he unleashes on New York City, killing millions. Doctor Manhattan (Jon Osterman), a nuclear physicist-turned-blue-skinned-radiated-superhuman, confronts the cataclysmic effects as he watches the destruction and is unable to reassure Ozymandias that he made the right decision in unleashing the monster. In fact, after speaking the lines cited above Doctor Manhattan disappears from earth, which is pictorially depicted in the comic book as an echo of an atomic mushroom cloud. Doctor Manhattan's words as well as his

atomic earthly exit frames Ozymandias's decision as unambiguously erroneous in ending and/or preventing the violence of MAD.

The metafictional use of *Watchmen* in the context of Oscar's death and the possibility of writing a counterpsell against fukú, therefore, maintains the impossibility of ending violence's aftershocks. Indeed, this last section which begins with "It's almost done. Almost over" (329) is concluded with Doctor Manhattan's words to Ozymandias insisting on the impossibility of an end and is followed by "The Final Letter" in *Oscar Wao*. The concluding section that includes a letter to Lola does not have, however, the promised "cure to what ails us"—the lost package that never arrives from the Dominican Republic.

Eight months after Oscar's death in the Dominican Republic, a package arrives in New Jersey with two manuscripts, one a book of science fiction, the other a long letter to his sister, Lola. In the letter, Oscar asks her to look out for a second package that will contain a book about his investigations of the Dominican Republic, which he calls "the cure to what ails us" (334). His book, therefore, promises a counter-spell to the curse, an undoing of fukú. Yet, the book never arrives. Instead, the novel concludes with another fragment that calls forth not only the literary canon, but also the history of colonization and racism: "The beauty! The beauty!" (335), Oscar writes of sex with Ybón, rewriting Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*.

Oscar's (via Yunior) strange reference to a canonical colonial narrative undercuts Conrad's seriousness by equating Ybon's vagina, much like Beli's "mango juice swamp," with a space of colonial exploration. Once again, this literary reference exposes the excessive violence the novel is attempting but unable to enclose within its pages. As

such, the novel's "end" is, like the ones that came before it, a brief repose that signals through the white space on the page that follows that the narrative *must* continue in its doom patterning of apocalyptic violence.

Ultimately, the silences and blank pages that continually appear in the novel coalesce the cyclical nature of doom, the effect of violence on the body, and, returning to the "X—" that opened this project, the speculative condition of Latinx. Oscar's death and his missing book allow Yunior to become our narrator. However, Yunior is always reminding us of his writerly shortcomings. After Oscar's death, Yunior keeps all of Oscar's books—games, manuscripts, comic books, papers—in "four refrigerators" that are in his own words, "the best proof against fire, against earthquake, against *almost anything*" (330). These refrigerators act as makeshift archives for the reconstruction of the family's, the nation's, and the diaspora's history. Yet, the missing book is crucial. The archive—the refrigerator—protects against "*almost anything,*" but it cannot safeguard text, body of work, physical body, or nation against the cyclical violence of history.

The missing text is archetypal for Latinx and of the Latinx literary and cultural studies field. As a field, we look to the future while contending with the impossible task of reconstructing the silences of the archive. We search in the refrigerator for future-looking sustenance, yet are confronted with silences, blank pages. Indeed, faced with the silences himself, Yunior's historical counter-narrative will by definition be incomplete. Trying to manage the silences and the blank page, Yunior writes and re-writes beginnings and endings as a self-correction and addendum. These self-corrections are themselves excessive forms of narration that signal writing and archival research in *Oscar Wao* as a

byproduct of the Caribbean apocalyptic condition. The missing text, therefore, and Yunior's recursive fragmentation and excess in writing are another way readers encounter doom patterns in *Oscar Wao*.

Chapter 2
Azúcapocalypse Now: Consumption at the End of the World

"¡Azúcar!"
—Celia Cruz

On December 17, 2014, filmmaker and producer Luis Trelles of Radio Ambulante and producer Tim Howard of NPR's Radiolab conducted a phone interview with Vladimir Ceballos, a Cuban exile and filmmaker, as part of an exposé on a sub-cultural group of punk rockers in Cuba during the waning years of the Cold War. Their interview coincidentally followed the announcement minutes earlier by the Obama administration regarding the reestablishment of economic and diplomatic ties between the U.S. and Cuba after their fifty-three years severance—a policy suspended by Donald Trump in 2017. During their conversation, Ceballos states that after the U.S. terminated its diplomatic relationship with Cuba, "nothing happened in Cuba. Everything is the same. Now everything will change."[1] Ceballos's use of the past and present tense in describing the geopolitical position of Cuba marks him as an outsider within English (his "incorrect" or "inconsistent" grammar marks him as an exile), but his tense confusion—describing the island within the past while simultaneously within the present—also creates a Cuba that is syntactically unmoored from the rest of the continent and becomes dependent on the U.S. for its reinstatement into global progress.

In what Radiolab's host, Jad Abumrad, describes as a "dark preamble" to the current political situation between the U.S. and Cuba, Trelles and Ceballos speak about the cultural phenomenon of *los frikis*, a mass movement of Cuban youth: punk rockers, musicians, and dissidents who, as the Radiolab host explains, "decided to opt out." Ceballos describes the possibilities of cultural consumption and expression as constrained

and fearful in Cuba during the 1970s, and he recalls discovering the music of Led Zeppelin, The Rolling Stones, and even Barry Manilow through the airwaves captured from the Florida coast through a Russian radio. Through the radio *frikis* were able to create transnational cultural connections and aesthetic kinships through sound, a countercultural youth movement with subversive counter-narratives to the Revolution. However, in the waning years of the Cold War, Ceballos describes how the Castro regime became increasingly exacting, famously stating in 1989 "*socialismo o muerte*" (socialism or death)—a statement that structured Cuban existence as dichotomous and assumed the preclusion of choice in the face of death.

Listening to music in the post-1959 era became an ideological and revolutionary act, especially in the Special Period as Cuba attempted to maintain its ideological reputation as the communist bloc disintegrated. During this same period, the fear of HIV/AIDS was overwhelming the island (as it was the rest of the world), and the Castro government began testing "high risk" populations. Ceballos describes how *los frikis* reacted to the disease and used it is a form of physical and cultural protest. In the interview with Trelles, Ceballos invokes Papo la Bala as one of the major representatives of this movement in making an active and extreme choice in direct relation to Casto's statement: "Papo said, 'Look, *al carajo, yo no quiero vivir aquí en este sistema que me está llevando a lo que me está llevando*. I want to live free.'" Injecting himself with HIV, Papo la Bala states, "death is a door. When you don't have any more doors to open, death is a door" (statement by Ceballos).

This chapter inquires into representations of embodied Caribbean monstrosity and the aesthetic pleasures of death and violence that Papo la Bala's *al carajo* ("fuck it")

invokes.[2] Reading Cristina García's *Dreaming in Cuban* (1992) alongside Colson Whitehead's *Zone One* (2011), this chapter examines the literary depictions of embodied monstrosity within both narratives—such as the zombie of Whitehead's novel and the fat body of García's—and how they serve as fictional representations of historical trauma, and mediums through which to explore the violent histories of the Caribbean. Moreover, the figures of monstrosity imagined in these narratives present Caribbean history as an implacable force that cyclically and continually re-returns to haunt the present. Instead of participating in the critical consensus in Latinx and multiethnic fiction that typically defines reimaginations of conquest, colonialism, and slavery as promoting social justice and cultural transformation, this comparative analysis demonstrates that representations of destruction enact problematic textual "pleasures" unto themselves. Sugar triggers the recreation of unregenerative imperial, racial, and ethno-national violence, challenging stereotypical accounts of minority literature and hegemonic cultures of remedy in all their liberal and radical guises.

The material weight of sugar functions in the novels as a physical agent of sweetness and destruction. A narrative doom-pattern driving both plots, sugar is an apocalyptic literary element that creates the zombie in *Zone One* and marks the Caribbean as a post-apocalyptic space in *Dreaming in Cuban*. As a unifying literary trope, sugar serves within both novels as a metaphorical agent that uncovers the violent histories of exchange between the Caribbean and the United States, and highlights how the commodity itself enabled the construction of an American empire, capitalist system, and the monstrous bodies depicted in both novels. The representations of sugar in these novels imagine the Caribbean—and specifically, the island of Cuba—in geographically

and symbolically adjacent ways to the island of Manhattan, enabling the reading of *Zone One* as not only an African-American text but also an Afro-Caribbean one. Through the production and consumption of sugar, a fetishistic desire for violence is presented as textual retribution against the histories of enslavement, forced labor, and extracted capital from the Caribbean. The fat body in García's novel and the zombie in Whitehead's doggedly remind readers of the violence demanded by the production of sugar, and the violence that is exhumed in its consumption.

Finally, this chapter examines how *Dreaming in Cuban* and *Zone One* imagine the zombie as an acute evocation of Caribbean monstrosity that should be understood as always lurking dangerously close to the postcolonial Afro-Caribbean subject, and which can be heard in the *frikis* refutation. The grotesque signs of the zombie peek through the body of characters such as Lourdes in García's novel. Therefore, *Dreaming in Cuban* should be reexamined for its potential contributions to speculative fiction and horror. The novel creates excessive and monstrous bodies that call forth its investment in the Latin American magical realist tradition, while simultaneously surpassing the genre. The re-imagination of Cuban history, its multiplicity of voices and points of view, and its rejection of linear narrative forms place the novel within the speculative fiction tradition. Importantly, the consumption of sugar and the evocation of the monstrous body in *Dreaming in Cuban* becomes the medium through which colonial, imperial, and ethnic-racial violence can be revisited and enacted on the self and on the other, a literary mode I read as specifically speculative.

In the decision to "opt-out" *los frikis* embrace a living death that is crucially manifested through aesthetic choices. Music and art become media through which

knowingly temporary kinships are formed. Importantly, Papo la Bala's *al carajo* is an active moment of violence, disavowal, and undoing. Sent to sanatoria as a mode of isolation and confinement by the government, *los frikis* found a utopian space of death and freedom. *Al carajo* presents an embodied form of protest and refusal mirrored within the last moments of *Zone One*, as Mark Spitz walks into the sea of the dead, while their diseased bodies evince an excessive form of embodied monstrosity which can be seen in Lourdes's obesity—forms of excess and undoing that reveal the violent histories of the Caribbean. In the sanatoria *los frikis* were paradoxically able to create a safe-haven outside of the state's control, and they instigated a mass movement of resistance. By opting-out, *los frikis* adopt a post-apocalyptic condition that demonstrates pleasure in violence and a denial of social justice.

In particular, *Dreaming* and *Zone One* expose the violent foundation hidden underneath sugar's sweet façade, a foundation that exceeds "normal" forms of representation and necessitates extreme and otherworldly staging such as zombies and "fat" female bodies.[3] Fatness in García and the zombie in Whitehead, I contend, remind us of the supernatural brutality in the production of sugar and the violence necessarily shown in its consumption. Evocations of the otherworldly in García and Whitehead revisit colonial, imperial, and ethno-racial violence and add an element of the specifically speculative to literary-historical understandings of these novels. That is, *Zone One*'s determinedly "literary" realism is strained by spectral racial meanings it does not overtly foreground, while *Dreaming in Cuban* explicitly overwrites its sugar-addicted "horrors" with themes of national identity, Cuban-American hybridity, and female kinship.

Such aesthetic and thematic practices attest to the two-decade gap between the publication of these novels and the role of the U.S. ethnic-fiction book market during that time in leveraging discussions surrounding multiculturalism, the changing canon, and writing by people of color. The early 1990s saw the waning of the Latin American Boom and the increasing centrality of multiethnic and U.S. Latinx fiction in the English-speaking literary market. More recently, the literary academy has demonstrated increased scholarly interest in speculative fiction by and about people of color, attending to a long tradition of speculative and science fiction in African American and Latinx fiction previously elided in the academy.[4] An exemplar of post Cold-War Cuban-American fiction, *Dreaming in Cuban* circulates Cuban-exile nostalgia for a lost homeland that sits on the threshold of dereliction after the collapse of the Soviet Union. García's novel negotiates desires typical of fiction for this period, hoping that the end of the Soviet Union would lead to the dismantling of the Castro government.[5] Framed around impossible returns, *Dreaming in Cuban* benefits from the growing popularity of U.S. Latinx fiction and particularly Caribbean-American fiction in the early and mid-1990s, a period that saw the publication of works by Julia Alvarez, Achy Obejas, and Junot Díaz. The publication of *Zone One* in 2011, on the other hand, and the novel's setting in postapocalyptic lower-Manhattan, defines it as post-9/11 fiction that also profits from the significantly increased presence of multiethnic fiction in the literary market and academy.[6] Holding questions of security and terrorism at its center and invested in the city's wreckage after the fall of the Towers, *Zone One* reimagines the anathema of September 11th through the zombie, a figure coopted and divested of its Caribbean

origins in contemporary representations, yet who always signals the threat of racial infection and the terror of colonial domination.

In short, *Zone One* and *Dreaming in Cuban* explore the production and consumption of sugar in order to create haunted Caribbean spaces that (re)produce monstrous bodies and highlight the histories of violence within this geography. They do this through particularly literary figures, the zombie and the fat body, creating textual spaces of undoing and destruction that become frightening and violent while simultaneously pleasurable for the characters within these fictions and the readers of these works. I turn now to a brief history of the zombie and the history of sugar as an entryway to my analysis of these novels.

SUGAR, THE WALKING DEAD, AND CONSUMING THE CARIBBEAN

Brought to the New World by Columbus on his second voyage in 1493, sugar cane, from which the Spanish, Portuguese, French, and British empires measured their expansion and imperial success, is not an indigenous plant in the Caribbean or in the rest of the Americas.[7] Importantly, the first slaves to arrive in Santo Domingo were brought soon after the crop, and were the primary source of labor in its growth, infusing not only the plant, but also the commodity derived from it with the violence of the system of slavery. Consumer culture, therefore, occurs through transatlantic trade that depended on the enslavement of black bodies in the Americas.[8] Furthermore, the body of the slave—and the zombie as a monster that embodies the violent history and abjection of slavery—is always coated with this substance.

What began as a luxury of the wealthy—used as decoration and medicine in the seventeenth century as a display of rank—became by the nineteenth century a necessity and addiction of the masses. As Sidney W. Mintz details in his seminal work, *Sweetness and Power: The Place of Sugar in Modern History*, by 1900 sugar was supplying one-fifth of the calories in the English diet (6), the transformation of sugar from a luxury for the elite to a product of mass consumption having a profound effect on the construction of European empires.[9] This shift toward mass consumption of sugar not only necessitated a large slave-labor force to harvest and process it, but also mirrored the commercially oriented expansionist desires of Europe (30).

The fateful change from mercantilist political economies to unregulated "free markets" of consumption began with the production of sugar,[10] and became central to rituals of respectability that ultimately shaped the pattern of consumer demand. Sugar, then, is not a byproduct of the needs and demands of an emerging industrialized economy, but a product central to the active construction of European markets in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.[11] As Mintz has demonstrated, and as others have reiterated, the eighteenth century British Atlantic world was connected "not simply by ties of language or administration, but also by a shared material culture which was constantly nourished by flows of commodities" (Styles 527). The mass consumption of sugar and other products derived from the Caribbean enabled the construction of a new capitalist system fashioned by an international slave labor force, but importantly, demonstrates that in ingesting these Caribbean products, Europe and the rest of the Americas were transformed.[12]

Sugar defines this geographical region and is not an innocent substance. Indissoluble at the core of this sweet, crystalline, and ubiquitous commodity lies the violent history of slavery and the Caribbean (Plasa 2). The zombie embodies this history of sugar. Associated with the figure of the cannibal upon its "discovery," Haiti and the Caribbean were transformed into a space of atemporally uninterrupted slavery by supplanting the threat of the cannibal with that of the malleable mindless zombie.

The folkloric zombie of Haitian origin was neither an "infected" nor anthropophagus monster.[13] One of the earliest predecessors of the zombie, the "nzambi"—an invisible being with origins in the Bantu and Bankongo tribes of the lower Congo River area—became in Saint-Domingue a spirit that could possess a human body.[14] In Haiti, this ability of the revenant disappeared, and the zombie came to signify a person who had lost consciousness and volition.[15] A victim of *vodou* (voodoo) spells, the zombie was forced into slave labor by a zombie master.[16] The "zombie" is popularly believed to be unknown in the U.S. until 1929, when it enters American culture through the publication of William Seabrook's *The Magic Island*,[17] in which he describes the zombie as "a soulless human corpse, still dead, but taken from the grave and endowed by sorcery with a mechanical semblance of life" (93).

Narratives about zombies within the United States arise primarily through the fear of Haitian independence, and by the late 1930s stories about this figure—and the fear it engendered—spread to include other foreign "brown" nations such as Cambodia, Cuba, and other Caribbean islands. In the Americas and Europe, stories of *vodou* circulated from the time of the Haitian Revolution and were primarily linked to cannibalism within the U.S. popular press in order to underscore Haitian primitivism and savagery.[18]

Through these depictions, Haiti came to represent a form of self-destruction that could spill-over into the rest of the Americas, and the belief that the island had to be saved—and through its salvation, contained—was prominent during the nineteenth century.[19] After the American occupation of Haiti (1915-1934), cannibalism began to disappear from the discourse surrounding *vodou* in favor of the figure of the zombie, thus trading the notion of an overt threat—cannibalism—for a "fantasy marking the entire country as a nation of eternal slaves" (Kee 14). During the Great Depression, the zombie undergoes a further transformation. As an entire nation suffered economic dispossession, many Americans comprehended their powerless position within the capitalist system, and identification with the zombie may have been particularly significant "as zombies became an ideological critique of modernity in the form of capitalist exploitation" (14).[20]

Various scholars have theorized the zombie as a manifestation of general anxieties surrounding the contemporary neoliberal capitalist system, fears of disability, trauma, our abjectness and ensuing physical decay and death.[21] However, while the zombie has been assigned these properties and its Haitian roots have dissolved over time—coming to represent any racialized ethnic group, a symbol of the dissolution between self and Other, human and post-human, and a critique of capitalism writ large—this monster should not be divested of its Caribbean origin.

The zombie's burgeoning in the midst of the Caribbean through the rhetoric of (slave) labor in the sugarcane fields and the sugar mill demonstrates the monster's symbolic embodiment of these histories and is inextricably linked to the creation of "blackness" as a racial category. Recent works of fiction and popular culture have returned to the zombie with great fanfare in books, television, and film such as *The*

Walking Dead, *World War Z*, *Shaun of the Dead*, and *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies*, among many others. The desire for the zombie demonstrates its particular use in literature and popular culture as an empty, unspeaking, unthinking canvas onto which contemporary anxieties and desires can be projected, such as the southern revisionist (white nationalist) project in AMC's *The Walking Dead*. Further, the zombie is the abject Other that reminds us of our own mortality while allowing readers and viewers to participate in violent acts usually forbidden, such as in the killing of women and children. Yet to divest the zombie of its origins in the Caribbean is to ignore the important histories of exchange between the Caribbean, the rest of the Americas, and Europe that created this monster. The zombie always embodies the fear of the return of the colonial master, offering a critique of slavery, the black body in capitalist labor, while simultaneously enabling the reenactment of empire and its power structures.

Moreover, the zombie is always coated in the violence of sugar. Describing his experiences in Haiti, William Seabrook's popular travelogue (unknowingly) yokes together the zombie and the production of sugar, affixing the production of sugar in Haiti with American consumption that overlays this Caribbean space onto American geography.[22] Seabrook's popular depiction of Haiti places the zombie in the cane field and the sugar factory, surprising readers by associating an American commercial space with the use of sorcery and the walking-dead: "Hasco is the perhaps the last name anybody would think of connecting with either sorcery or superstition. The word is American-commercial-synthetic […] It stands for the Haitian-American Sugar Company—an immense factory plant, dominated by a huge chimney, with clanging machinery, steam whistles, freight cars. It is like a chunk of Hoboken" (95). In his

depiction, Seabrook points to how the zombie has been created for the sole purpose of producing sugar, and most importantly, juxtaposes the Haitian factory with the port-city of Hoboken, New Jersey.

This geography plays a central role in the construction of the Caribbean as a post-apocalyptic space, the sugar market, and the figure of the zombie. New Amsterdam—what was to become modern-day New York City—was a space unlike other American colonies, where European imperial ambitions continuously manifested themselves.[23] First settled by the Dutch in 1624, the city became a highly contested space between European powers, and a "microcosm of what the nation would become" (Reitano 8).[24] The first slaves to the colony were brought during its founding year by a Portuguese ship and became laborers for the Dutch West India Company.[25] The British understood, as the Dutch West India Company had previously, that the plantation economies of the West Indies needed an entrepôt—New York was the only city of its size between Boston and Havana—from which they could acquire slaves in exchange for goods, primarily sugar and molasses.[26] During the opening years of the eighteenth century, the Caribbean became a cornerstone of New York's economy, and by the second and third decades of the century the city became even more closely tied to the plantation colonies of the islands and the slave trade that these plantations necessitated.[27] New York City's history is central to this chapter's examination of *Zone One* and *Dreaming in Cuban*. The city and its ties to the plantation economies of the Caribbean implicate the rest of the nation in its bloody history, and is staged by these novels as an archetypal space that converges the island's colonial past with its present and future.

FAT, SUGAR, AND THE POST-APOCALYPTIC BODY IN *DREAMING IN CUBAN*

Nominated for a National Book Award, included in many anthologies, and thus almost immediately canonized, *Dreaming in Cuban* has been, since its publication, the focus of a great deal of scholarly attention. Most of this scholarship has centered on notions of identity politics, hybridity, exile, ethnic nostalgia, and forms of female kinship.[28] While not refuting the importance of these themes in the novel, I would like to contend, however, that García's work should be read as speculative fiction which depicts the Latina as monstrous and the Caribbean as an atemporal post-apocalyptic space. The novel, moreover, stages the monstrous embodiment of the three generations of del Pino women as markers for the overwhelming, recurring, and haunting violence of the Caribbean. Within this work, a fetishistic desire for violence is presented as textual retribution against these spaces and histories. *Dreaming in Cuban* also elaborates the connection between New York and the Caribbean (geographically and symbolically) as post-apocalyptic spaces that are re/producers of material and metaphorical death through their long histories of exchange, including the transatlantic slave trade, the production of sugar, and imperial power. Finally, in the novel's multiple and conflicting points of view, imbricated endings, and non-linear rendering, I read a state of refusal that, like *los frikis*, creates an aesthetic space of undoing and violence.

Dreaming in Cuban tells the multigenerational story of Celia del Pino, her daughters Lourdes and Felicia, and her granddaughter Pilar, moving back and forth in time between the years before the Cuban Revolution and into the 1990s. The narrative also follows Lourdes's immigration to the United States with her husband Rufino Puente and her eventual return to the island with her daughter, Pilar. Recent work on the novel

by scholars such as Elena Machado Saez and Ricardo Ortíz, has focused on the cultural economies and investment in globalization that the work and its author demonstrate. Machado Saez's work on *Dreaming in Cuban* complicates the predictable readings of the novel by arguing that the characters' relationship to globalization and Pilar's nostalgia to a lost *cubanidad* foreclose the usual positive readings of identity recuperation. [29] Ortíz also underscores the novel's investment and dependency on globalization, and extends his reading of García's first three novels as sites of production, in terms of novelistic form and the several types of "values" that it is accorded (commercial, political, ethical).[30] While I find these readings to be productive sites of discussion about the novel as literary text, as marketable product, as representative of *latinidad*, and the process of canonization, I would like to push against the notion of *Dreaming in Cuban* as a productive space of Latinx inscription or progressive politics. Instead, I focus on how the novel continually reverts to representations of monstrous female embodiment and affect, foreclosing any space of regeneration, utopian possibilities of recognition, or edification. Focusing on how sugar and sugarcane cultivation function as driving metaphors in the novel—as the possibility for return to the motherland or the formation of lasting familial kinships—I argue that, instead, this commodity reveals the loss of possibilities for kinship, and instead opens a space of death and monstrosity.

Dreaming in Cuban stages Cuba as a space outside history, sitting atemporally adjacent to the rest of the continent.[31] Visiting Cuba with her mother, Pilar says she feels "like we're back in time, in a kind of Cuban version of an earlier America" (García 220). Cuba is rendered as an "island-colony" relegated to the past, one that can be reached in a "thirty-minute charter flight from Miami, yet never reach it at all" (219). The novel,

moreover, stages the Revolution as the cause for Cuba's geographical and geopolitical status, thus producing postcolonial subjects who are conceived through a painful instantiation into history.[32] Lourdes, for example, is created through geographic and temporal shifts that render human speech and time unutterable: "The continents strain to unloose themselves, to drift reckless and heavy in the seas. Explosions tear and scar the land, spitting out black oaks and coal mines, street lamps and scorpions. Men lose the power of speech. The clocks stop. Lourdes Puente awakens" (17). Lourdes's textual introduction is created in relation to violent geographic and temporal rifts that mark her body and the land into being. This accelerated and transtemporal depiction of modernity in which trees are created simultaneously with their bi-products, street lamps and scorpions emerge together, imagines a monstrous space in which language and time are unavailable and insufficient to describe this vision.

The novel, therefore, marks Lourdes as coming-into-being through violence and absence. Moreover, through this violent creation Lourdes's body is rendered excessive and unruly:

> The flesh amassed rapidly on her hips and buttocks, muting the angles of her bones. It collected on her thighs, fusing them above the knees. It hung from her arms like hammocks. She dreamt continually of bread, of grainy ryes and pumpernickels, whole wheat and challah in woven straw baskets. They multiplied prodigiously, hung abundantly from the trees, crowded the skies until they were redolent of yeast. (20)

Lourdes is defined solely by her hunger and excessive "flesh," its massification depicted as an inactive process outside her control. Whereas in *Zone One* the zombie appears as a doom-patterning force in literary terms and signals the remnants of slavery's history in cultural terms, in *Dreaming in Cuban* consumption defines Lourdes as all body and insatiable appetite, her food fantasies and ingestion so voracious that they plague both

consciousness and unconsciousness, and present her in monstrous terms. Hunger, therefore, becomes associated with disease: her body's internal framework is altered by the flesh's softening, changes even the positioning of her skeleton, and correlates her weight with disability. Furthermore, following the violent image of her awakening, Lourdes's physical rendering stages her excessive hunger and body as symptoms of the violent histories of colonialism, slavery, and the Revolution itself. Lourdes's corporeality becomes analogous to the natural world and symbols of indigeneity—hammocks, woven straw baskets, trees, and skies. The novel thus inscribes Lourdes's post-Revolution exile within a space that on the one hand provides her access to limitless quantities (and fantasies) of food, while on the other hand representing this space as burdensome, simultaneously writing her body within "nature" and the Caribbean, from which she is unable to escape. The fat that accumulates onto her body and the dreams of bread take on magical-realist traits that script Lourdes and the novel itself into the Latin American novelistic tradition.

Lourdes's physical descriptions are never far from notions of hunger and monstrous appetite, which I read as Caribbean embodiment and a direct comparison to the rhetoric of scarcity associated with post-Revolution Cuba. In the abundance of food fantasies and her participation in American capitalism, Lourdes is able to distance herself physically, psychically, and ideologically from her motherland. Lourdes relishes the possibility of participating in an American nation-building project, one that propagates patriotism and aspirations for American upward mobility. These desires are mediated through the consumption and dissemination of sugar and its confectionary products.

At the behest of her father's ghost, Lourdes envisions opening a second bakery, which the ghost claims will demonstrate "what we Cubans are up to, that we're not all Puerto Ricans" (170). The ghost's denigrating comment and Lourdes's sugar-visions enable a divisionary Latinx position and reenactment of colonial violence both toward the Latinx-self and the Anglo-U.S. other. As Antonio López explains in *Unbecoming Blackness: The Diaspora Cultures of Afro-Cuban America*, various U.S. state-sponsored programs enabled the Cuban exile experience to be defined as "different," particularly in relation to that of the Puerto Rican.[33] The disassociation from Puerto Ricanness, through the ownership and naming of private property, becomes a mechanism through which to cleave herself from ethnicized racialization and blackness, a move that enables Lourdes's avoidance of the "menacing possibility of a 'blackening' in the Anglo-U.S. gaze" (López 12). Through the ownership of the bakery, the peddling of sugar and sugar by-products, Lourdes repositions herself as a white (off-white)[34] landowner who reproduces the violent histories of the plantation system on the streets of Brooklyn (and in her fantasy, the rest of the country):

> Lourdes ordered custom-made signs for her bakeries in red, white, and blue with her name printed at the bottom right-hand corner: LOURDES PUENTE, PROPRIETOR. She particularly liked the sound of the last word, the way the 'r''s rolled in her mouth, the explosion of 'p''s. Lourdes felt a spiritual link to American moguls, to the immortality of men like Irénée du Pont, whose Varadero Beach mansion on the north of the coast of Cuba she had once visited. She envisioned a chain of Yankee Doodle bakeries stretching across America to St. Louis, Dallas, Los Angeles, her apple pies and cupcakes on main streets and in suburban shopping malls everywhere.
>
> Each store would bear her name, her legacy: LOURDES PUENTE, PROPRIETOR." (García 170-171)

The novel stages the bakery as a symbol of apocalyptic violence. As Lourdes imagines the Yankee Doodle bakery overtaking the landscape of the United States, she is able to

recreate imperial conquest. The spread of sugar from coast-to-coast maps the history of enslavement and zombification necessary in the production of sugar onto Lourdes's Brooklyn, and through her fantasy, the rest of the nation. This history of plantation slavery is carried into the U.S. through her bakeries, and the spread of sugar is much like the spread of disease. The contagion and addiction through sugar that overtakes cities across the U.S.—the archetypal American movement West—creates a geography that is associated with progress and nourishment.

However, "her legacy" is no longer in Cuba, and the nation she is building and feeding is the one of her exile.

Sugar functions here as a metaphor for Lourdes's ambivalent positioning toward her *cubanidad* and investment in her adopted home. Through the commodification and circulation of sugar, Lourdes performs a self-disruption of her Latina identity, associating herself with "American moguls" who consumed the Caribbean as a space of leisure. The quintessentially Anglo-American treats she envisions creating, "apple pies" and "cupcakes" (and not *pastelitos de guayaba* or *flan*), become agents of addiction and violence in Anglo-U.S. spaces such as "main streets" and "shopping malls." Simultaneously, Lourdes's vision is one that asserts her power over the landscape and allows her to insert herself as a Latina into an Anglo-American narrative, a move that is a negation of her Cuban identity, an assertion of her Latinx abilities, and a revenge fantasy. Through the appropriation of symbols of Anglo-American patriotism such as Yankee Doodle and the colors of the American flag, Lourdes envisions the spread of colonial disease—sugar—and inflicts it on an American population from coast-to-coast. Effectively, the pleasure Lourdes derives from the letters in her name, the feeling in her

mouth, shows us how the monster is always lurking close at hand in relation to sugar production and consumption. As such, the fantasy of the Yankee Doodle bakeries underscores the centrality of sugar dissemination in the construction of Caribbean monstrosity in *Dreaming in Cuban*, one that once again points to the commodity's violent history.

These sugar-visions, moreover, allow Lourdes to participate in American notions of upward mobility. A property owner in a space of sugar (re)production, Lourdes repudiates the nationalization of private property on the island and her mother's leftist politics. Proprietorship and the dissemination of sugar are the devices through which Lourdes demonstrates her "chronic and aporetic addiction" (R. Ortíz 144) to the nostalgia of return that in her "stubborn, compulsive refusal to surrender [her] claim to lost property and lost capital," (155) forecloses the "fantasy of linear time that feeds [her] congruent fantasies of return, reunification, and restitution" (144).

Sugarcane, a driving metaphor for the im/possibility of return to the island (physically and metaphorically), produces grotesque forms of embodiment and monstrous forms of familial kinship. The Yankee Doodle bakery becomes a space in which Cuban exiles gather to conspire and discuss potential anti-Castro actions in the hope of an eventual return. However, Lourdes's insistent re-remembering of an inaccessible Cuban past—one in which she and her husband, Rufino, are still landowners of the Puente estate—prohibits this return and makes her eventual visit with Pilar a predeterminedly transitory one. The bakery becomes the vehicle through which Lourdes can express an ethnic, politically tinged yearning for Cuba while also demonstrating her affiliation to a nation-building project and patriotism in the U.S. Through "tricolor cupcakes and Uncle

Sam marzipan," Lourdes believes that "she can fight communism from behind her bakery counter" (García 136). The sugary treats of Lourdes's bakery are encoded as symbols of American nationalism that through her capitalist endeavors disseminate addiction and infection, while engulfing twentieth-century American landscapes with the commodity's violent history.

Unlike Lourdes's American ideals and Pilar's ambivalence and duality, Celia del Pino is deeply invested in the nation-building project of post-1959 communist Cuba. Her narrative bookends the novel, and as such not only sets its tone, but defines the possibilities for all the Caribbean bodies that emanate from this space, on the island and as exiles. From her coastal home she guards the nation, superimposing the island's colonial history onto it as she names the fishing boats in the distance "the *Niña*, the *Pinta*, and the *Santa María*" (4). This, and the novel's constant return to Celia's letters to her lost Spanish lover—an epistolary structure that drives the narrative forward while also stalling it in the past—define the del Pino family history and the island itself as formed through this colonial encounter, compelling them (and it) to its eternal return.

Sugarcane is also presented as a fundamental commodity within the island's present. Celia's focus on the "rumors" that "*yanquis*" will drop "germ bombs to wither the sugarcane fields" (4) underscores the centrality of sugar as a literary trope, how it doom patterns the otherworldly throughout the novel, and exposes the fear of global violence and cataclysm. Through the proximity to symbols of the island's colonial past (in Columbus's caravels), the novel's opening pages collapse past and present into each other, creating a friction in the text that is further articulated through the various movements between narrative perspectives, points of view, and temporal shifts. This

temporal collapse also serves as an overt gesture to the island's slavery past, its reliance on sugar production since the eighteenth century and the constrictions suffered after the 1959 Revolution.

Unlike the opportunities that sugar provides Lourdes in the U.S., the novel stages sugar production in post-Revolution Cuba as ideologically corrupt and violent. The physical labor required for its cultivation becomes the vehicle through which Celia can become the perfect *compañera* for the Revolution. Celia "consigns her body to the sugarcane" (44), abnegating her own form and submitting to the physical toil of cutting. The metaphorical significance of the sugarcane becomes transmogrified onto the Cuban body, and through her association with the crop and the production of the commodity, Celia becomes temporarily racialized. *Dreaming in Cuban*, therefore, presents the Cuban cane field as a space of racial tension and physical violence that unearths the nation's colonial past. When a *machetero* slashes a volunteer, his blood mingling with the stalks, the fear espoused by abolitionists and sugar-boycotters of the nineteenth-century becomes incarnated in one violent movement of the machete, engulfing the Cuban cane field of the 1970s with the history of slavery and American and European dependence on the commodity.[35]

The violence of this moment further underscores Celia's class privilege. It is one of the only moments of the novel in which race, ethnicity, and class difference are specified, identifying "worker" and "*machetero*" in opposition to "worker" and "volunteer"; and the curse the Creole "spits out" (44) in reaction to the violence becomes a moment of ambiguity and misrecognition that further displaces her. The language of the field is temporary for Celia, performing as a potential yet unfulfilled space of exchange

through which she imagines a transnational communist network. The fantasy of communism's global success is mediated through violence in the cane field. Celia imagines sugarcane traveling in "three-hundred-pound sacks of refined white sugar deep in the hulls of ships" reaching people "in Mexico and Russia and Poland" (45). While her fantasy promises economic growth, national participation in geopolitical exchange, and global relevance, it is also marked with the threat of apocalyptic violence. As international communities "spoon out her sugar for coffee, or to bake their birthday cakes" (45), the *machetero*'s violence perverts the commodities sweetness, flavoring it once again with violence, as the slave trade did centuries before. Significantly, the national project Celia imagines is diametrically opposed to Lourdes's vision in the Yankee Doodle bakery. Sugarcane, therefore, serves as a literary trope that yokes Cuba and the U.S., and performs within the novel as a device through which the impossibility of transnational communication is explored. Moreover, the repeated representation of sugar and sugarcane places Cuba within a space of arrested development, as I explore below.

Sugar enacts in literary terms the political and economic tensions between the United States and Cuba, nationally and individually. Lourdes's involvement in sugar trafficking does not create a moment of familial kinship, but temporarily transports the U.S. bakery onto the shores of Cuba. Transformed into pictorial methodologies of violence, each photograph Lourdes sends Celia of a "glistening éclair" and "strawberry shortcake" become "grenade[s] aimed at Celia's political beliefs[,]" and "reminder[s] of the ongoing shortages" on the island (117). The language of war, the violence it performs on the body and ideology of the individual, further implants sugarcane as a crop and

commodity with apocalyptic power. The explosive and atomic possibilities literarily ascribed to sugarcane enact the fantasy of violence promised by mutually assured destruction while simultaneously relegating Cuba to a racialized space outside of temporal progress.

Indeed, the return of Lourdes and Pilar to the island mark it and its population into a space of racialized "blackness" and outside linear progress, demonstrating the text's "anxiety regarding the 'blackening' of Cuban America after Mariel" (López 157). Antonio López's analysis of 1990s Cuban American autobiographical return narratives and his concept of a "*cosa de blancos*" serve as an entry-point into a discussion of the mother/daughter return to the homeland and their ultimate inability to access Cuba. López defines "*cosa de blancos*" as the representation of Afro-Cuban identity in white Cuban culture, a "displacement, through Afro-Cuban figures, of the way Cuban American whiteness, as an articulation of privilege, might shame and hamper its very own subjects, white Cubans" (189). While the characters that return to the island and those they encounter once they arrive are not Afro-Cuban, I read Pilar's and Lourdes's "homecoming," the encounter with the maternal grandmother and home, as displaying what López describes as "confirming the ideas in the Cuban American imaginary of a static, ruined island" (185). Moreover, memory signals, as it does in López's analysis, an excessive repetition that demonstrates Lourdes and Pilar's privilege, and through which the text expresses racial anxieties.[36]

Celia's imperative for Pilar to "remember everything" (García 245), and the repetition of memory through the epistolary, become a medium through which to express white privilege. As such, Pilar's centrality in scholarship about *Dreaming in Cuban* is

worth mentioning. Most analyses of Pilar's narrative arc maintain that her return to Cuba is an achievement of recuperative hybridity, as mentioned previously. Elena Machado Saez's work on this novel revises these analyses, arguing instead that the novel must be read beyond the positive recuperation of a hybrid identity, but though the implications "regarding the possibilities of cultural production and creativity within a global market" (Machado Saez, "The Global Baggage of Nostalgia 131). In the lack of accessibility to an "authentic" Cuban history, Machado Saez argues, Pilar's nostalgia is exemplified as a product of her imagination and the global market (133). Wishing yet unable to be outside the process of commercialization, Pilar "begins to ponder the limitations set on art and other forms of cultural production in a globalized context" and, further, uses the global market to reconnect to her Cuban past (134). In a record store, for example, Pilar reconnects to her past through the purchase of a Benny Moré album and becomes part of a larger Latinx community through the figure of Celia Cruz. Machado Saez argues that in this moment Pilar firstly participates in the commodification of Cuban culture, and secondly ascribes Celia Cruz—who importantly shares the same first name as her grandmother—a "certain timelessness" and "authenticity" that "defy all historical changes brought about by colonialism as well as the Cuban Revolution" (134).

Countering this reading of Pilar's relation to Cuban cultural productions and Cuba itself, especially in relation to Celia Cruz and ideas of a regenerative achievement of identity and a cultural past, I offer Pilar's return to Cuba as another example of monstrosity. Commenting of Celia Cruz's appearance—"she hasn't changed a hair or a vocal note in forty years. She's been fiftyish, it seems, since the Spanish-American War" (197-198)—Pilar not only locates Cruz in a "timeless" space, but zombifies her,

relegating her body into an ancient colonial past in which progress is impossible. Arresting her development within 1898 further commits an act of violence upon Cruz's physical appearance and vocal development. Trapped within this space, Cruz is forced to exist within a colonial and violent past. Sugar again plays a central role with Pilar's entrapment of the singer within the past. Cruz's trademark "¡Azúcar!"—the epigraph to this chapter—has become synecdochal of her Afro-Cuban body through its repetition, and La Reina de la Salsa a symbol of Afro-Cubanness. The reiteration of "azúcar" (sugar) insists on affixing the commodity to the black Caribbean body and, as Frances Aparicio states, "carries within it the history of Cuba's plantation culture, the economics of slavery," "reaffirm[ing] the role of Celia Cruz's voice and body as an icon of Cuba's African-based heritage and *mestizaje*" (226). Aparicio also affirms the importance of Cruz's utterance in reminding us of the "US-dominated capitalist economy that was transformed by socialism" and which is made all the more important by her position as a Cuban exile (226). In committing Cruz to the island's colonial past, Pilar performs una "*cosa de blancos*"—Cruz becomes the Afro-Cuban subject through which Pilar can explore her Cuban heritage and experience nostalgia for an unrecoverable past. She simultaneously constrains the island into a space outside of temporal progress that endlessly produces azúcar.

I turn to Jennine Capó Crucet to show how a budding tradition of zombie Celia Cruz appears in full view, showing how Latinx fiction doom patterns monstrosity across genres and time periods. Set primarily in the Miami-Dade county city of Hialeah, a Cuban and Cuban American cultural center, her first collection of short stories, *How to Leave Hialeah* (2009), was the winner of various prizes including the Iowa Short Fiction

Prize and the John Gardner Book Award.[37] The collection's first story, "Resurrection, or: The Story behind the Failure of the 2003 Radio Salsa 98.1 Semi-Annual Cuban and/or Puerto Rican Heritage Festival," centers on Jesenia who, after "clubbing" on South Beach, visits a santera in order to resurrect the recently deceased Celia Cruz. Set two months after Cruz's death in 2003, as thousands still mourned her, Jesenia desires to resurrect her body "for work, to get a promotion" (3). Inspired by the "DGs" she and her boyfriend take at Shadow Lounge and the remix of Cruz's "La Negra Tiene Tumbao," Jesenia fulfills Pilar's etching of the singer into a space of the island's colonial past and further zombification.

Signifying the rhythm of the congas and bass in Afro-Cuban music, *tumbao* also refers to a type of physical swagger, especially when it relates to the female body in Cruz's song lyrics: "Esa negrita que va caminando/Esa negrita tiene eso tumbao" (That black girl walking/That black girl has swagger). The song stimulates Jesenia's idea to revive the dead singer for commercial gain, and confirms the racial and geopolitical aspects of what I am calling the "Latinx zombification" of literary form, yoking the rhythm exemplary of Afro-Cuban music to the Afro-Cuban body. In Cruz's typical repetition of "azúcar" throughout the song, we are reminded once again of the labor performed by black bodies in the production of the commodity. The various interruptions by Cruz in each rendering serve as constant *aides-mémoires* of the island's dependence on sugar production and its economic decay because of the U.S. embargo. With each "*azúcar*," Cruz sings the history of slavery into the present.

The desire to resurrect Cruz's corpse injects the narrative with santería and voodoo, transforming Jesenia from a drugged-out club-goer into a potential zombie-

slave-master, a position that allows her to reproduce colonial violence upon the body of an Afro-Cuban woman. In its reproduction, Jesenia is able to remove, although temporarily, this type of oppression from her own body and use Cruz's zombified figure for her personal capitalist gain, as zombie masters were imagined to do.

Burdened with the task of "remembering everything," Pilar desires to write and record an alternative form of history which places global female kinship and female accomplishments at its center, such as the women from the Congo who take a "freak hailstorm […] as a sign that they should rule" or the "life stories of prostitutes in Bombay" (García 28). Recording female history and family memory becomes for Celia and Pilar a medium through which to ascertain that the del Pino history will be passed on, scripted into archives that otherwise ignore the role of women in history, and will serve as proof against their post-apocalyptic condition. However, Pilar is unable to transcend the violent history of the Caribbean or to become the repository for her familial memories. Pilar's return to Cuba proves to be another example of undoing for herself and the rest of the del Pinos. Instead of the comfortable hybridity most scholars read in Pilar's statement, "I know it's where I belong [New York]—not *instead* of here, but *more* than here" (236), I see a psychic excess rooted in the violent past of the Americas, and her position as the product of exile. In fact, Celia's suicide severs Pilar's access to the island, shattering the possibility of remembering the del Pino family history (of that of Cuba itself).

The novel's formal qualities, additionally, point to Pilar's inability to retain the family's memories. Vacillating between various narrative perspectives and points of view, the novel's structure itself does not allow Pilar to be the sole retainer of the del

Pinos's doomed history.[38] The text's friction becomes a marker of excessive embodiment: the violence of the island's experience, the violence of the del Pino undergo, cannot be retained within a singular narrative and spills-over into a multi-vocal and multi-temporal narrative.

Dreaming in Cuban circulates this excess through images of sugar, which further demonstrate the text's investment in the commodity's violence and the history it continually replicates in its production and consumption. From her home in Brooklyn, Pilar can hear the whistles of ships as they sail "past Ellis Island and the Statue of Liberty" toward the Atlantic. Although she "wants to go with them" (31), the description of their maritime journey provides no final destination and depicts the Atlantic as a mirror to the "cement plot" of her Brooklyn home near the East River. Her hearing, while directed toward Cuba and a desire to return to the island, cannot follow the ships to their final destinations. Instead, she can only imagine the ships in association to place names near her shores, "Bayonne, New Jersey, and the Bay Ridge Channel" (30-31). Unable to follow the ships to the object of her desire, Pilar's vision is a moment of self-entombment, as the Atlantic echoes the city back onto itself, magnifying the coldness of her lived environment. Pilar also calls forth the trade routes that enabled the creation of the city, the millions of immigrants who crossed through Ellis Island, the maritime journey undertaken by exiles in the diaspora, and the mercantile routes that traded sugar for black bodies and black bodies for sugar.

Remembering a ferry ride taken years earlier, the novel transforms their outing into an image of consumption by the city. Climbing to the top of the Statue of Liberty and observing the city through its eyes, Pilar sees "the beginning of things" (140), here both

the beginning of her life within the U.S., but also the nascent stages of the world, the nascent stages of the apocalypse. It is not a coincidence, then, that the novel presents this moment of seeing "the beginning of things" in association with sugar, describing the city as "optimistic as a wedding cake" (140). The Puentes arrival in the U.S., then, is grounded in the capitalist sugar system and trade, the monsters produced by it, and the disease, addiction, and violence that both that system and its zombies signify.

The optimism Pilar reads on the city's icing is one that promises a generative future (as weddings connote progeny and the continuation of a national legacy) and foreshadows the apocalyptic birthday cake found in *Zone One*. However, unlike in that novel, where apocalyptic destruction and zombies emerge from the cake, behind the sugary façade of *Dreaming in Cuban*'s Manhattan lies the violence of diaspora in the colonial space that created the American nation. Pilar's association further recalls Celia's vision of global communism achieved through the consumption of Cuban sugar and tinges the shores of the U.S. with such a threat; indeed, it tinges the optimism of the cake with another form of disease and zombification: in particular, the saccharine vision I revealed above exposes the speculative that lurks within *Dreaming in Cuban*'s seemingly realist text. Through its return to sugar, the novel reveals monstrosity that is intimately tied to the production and consumption of sugar, and which further creates a network of death from Cuba to New York City.

Finally, *Dreaming in Cuban* assigns material weight to sugar as a central trope that doom patterns the Caribbean as a postapocalyptic space of monstrous forms and embodiment. In effect, representations of sugar production and consumption become the mechanism through which the novel returns readers to the violent histories of exchange

between the Caribbean and the U.S. and reproduces colonial, imperial, and dictatorial violence. Celia's oceanic submersion at the outset of the novel foretells her final one. In fact, the novel's final moments become Celia's as well, which I argue are an active refusal by herself and the novel. Her final submersion is a surrender to her monstrous condition that through the novel's aesthetic rendition becomes immortalized and revisited in its pages. Her final letter to Gustavo, her long-lost Spanish lover, foretells the impossibility of Pilar's ability to "remember everything" (245). Celia's first immersion, wading in after her husband's ghost, renders the ocean as a medium through which to imagine a personal and national past, and like the ocean itself, the past as a force that encloses everything. Her initial temptation to "relax and drop" (8), although delayed, is finally fulfilled, reminding us that the swim that opened the novel defined Celia as always already dead. This final moment of the novel dismembers Celia. It is not her body underwater but pieces of her—"It submerges her throat and her nose, her open eyes that do not perceive salt" (244). While in *Zone One* readers are confronted with Spitz's racially marked refusal of optimistic futurism, in Celia's drowning, readers are forced to struggle with the blank space left by her repudiation of the island's violent history of colonial and dictatorial violence (a violence that leads to the dissolution of the family unit through immigration). The 1959 letter that closes the novel corroborates the fears she expressed in a letter years earlier, that she and the rest of Cuba are living with "the illusion of change" (99). Only the ocean, the element to which she relinquishes herself, is able to "rearrange the borders" of the island and provide an artifice of transformation. In this letter, written to her Spanish lover in 1945, she also states that "[t]o survive is an act of hope" (99). "Surviving" for another thirty-five years, Celia demonstrates optimism in

the future of post-1959 Cuba. However, in her final moments, we can read a final renunciation as well as an opting-out.

Zone One, Opting Out, and the Sea of the Dead

Colson Whitehead has been the recipient of numerous awards, most notably the MacArthur "Genius" Fellowship in 2002, the National Book Award in 2016, and the Carnegie Medal for Excellence in Fiction in 2017 for his latest novel, *The Underground Railroad*. *Zone One* is Whitehead's sixth novel. It received particular attention as a departure from his previously admired "literary" fiction, and most reviews have tended to apologize for the novel's genre premise. For example, Glen Duncan's review in *The New York Times* condescendingly stated that "[a] literary novelist writing a genre novel is like an intellectual dating a porn star." Duncan's sarcastic simile positions genre fiction as a subpar literary category while expressing gratitude for the novel's use of "high literary" form Whitehead is known for, or what Duncan calls "the intellectual half of the couple." Other reviews of the novel also note Whitehead's genre slumming, calling *Zone One* "the thinking person's zombie book" (Sky) and "a serious novel" unlike previous zombie fiction and film (Chiarella). This critical anxiety over the novel's investment in pulp fails to note the centrality of genre to the novel's narration.

It is no coincidence that *Zone One* has received little scholarly attention, a dearth that demonstrates the demeaning yet changing position of genre fiction within the academy. The scholarship about this novel that does exist smartly highlights its mordant view of futurity: while the reconstruction of the nation is an optimistic act of survival, the postapocalypse is not a *tabula rasa* to begin anew but rather a revival and continuation of

the racist past which ultimately leads to the inevitable collapse of the Zone's barricades.[39] Such readings of *Zone One* typically separate the novel's use of genre from its treatment of race and, moreover, present the zombie novel as a didactic tool to address the anthropocene (Marshall), "postracial" America (Saldívar), futurity (Sorensen), and biopower (Hurley).

Such arguments, while attuned to the novel's investment in monstrosity, fail to recognize horror's centrality to *Zone One*'s Caribbean origins, zombie poetics, and significations of blackness. The consumption of sugar instigates apocalyptic violence in the novel, exhuming the undead and the violent histories they carry on their bodies: those of slavery and sugar production in the Caribbean. The zombie's presence in the text scripts New York City's influence within these histories and presents the city as a devouring entity analogous to the zombie's own mouth. This, in turn, exposes the central role that sugar, the Caribbean, and the transatlantic slave trade have played in the construction of U.S. empire. The novel's closing moments emphasize the precariousness of inhabiting a racialized body and the inability to escape racial models, even in the postapocalypse. Through literary representations of the consumption of sugar, *Zone One* is able to examine the history of the commodity's production and its reliance on the slave trade. It is these elements that call on readers to locate it in the tradition of the Afro-Caribbean novel with works such as Martin Delany's *Blake; or the Huts of America* (1859), Piri Tomas' *Down These Mean Streets* (1967), and Junot Díaz's *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* (2007), among others.

The post-apocalyptic Manhattan of Colson Whitehead's *Zone One* (2011) is a ravaged wasteland. An unidentified plague has reconfigured the population into a binary

of dead/living. The novel's protagonist, known by his post-plague moniker, "Mark Spitz"—a tongue in cheek reference to the American Olympic champion and former world record-holder in multiple swimming events, and the racist stereotype of African-Americans inability to swim[40]—is one of three members of the Omega Unit sweeper team of the "American Phoenix" (the operation organized by the reformed U.S. government with its new seat in Buffalo, New York[41]) who has volunteered to clear Zone One of the remaining zombies. It is unclear how the plague began or how many years have passed since its decimation. The Zone—running the breadth of Canal Street in lower Manhattan to the tip of the island in Battery Park—has been blocked through a newly erected wall; the area of the island the American Phoenix hopes to completely eradicate of the walking dead, and one that will serve as a model for the rest of the country.

In this chapter, I argue that the overwhelming and excessive textual forces of the city and zombie mirror the novel's style—the claustrophobic coiling of the past—and present postapocalyptic violence and the history it has unearthed as inescapable. Although the narration is third-person-limited, the novel follows the movements and thoughts of Mark Spitz so closely that at times it can be mistaken for a first-person narration, a device that creates a sense of claustrophobia, heightened tension, and urgency, and that forces readers to embody the narrative's point-of-view. These elements are further sharpened by the intercalated use of the past and past-perfect tenses, a technique that creates a dizzying effect and accentuates the overpowering nature of the apocalypse within the text. The majority of the novel takes place through memory, both in the years before the apocalypse and in those after the end-of-the-world. As book critics have noted, *Zone One* does not have linear plot. For example, Duncan notes that "A plot

summary is impossible: there isn't a plot." As I discussed in the introduction, this element of the text is crucial: the violent histories of slavery, labor, and racialization cannot be contained in a linear fictional mode and therefore exceeds this mode, much as in *Dreaming in Cuban* the character of Lourdes's excessive body is a demonstration of *fukú*.

My analysis of *Zone One* argues that the novel depicts the figure of the zombie as an embodiment of the history of plantation slavery and the production of sugar in the Caribbean during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The novel stages their presence in New York City as a way to explore the city's influence within this history: as a model for the rest of the nation, the city implicates the country in this violent history, exposing the central role sugar, the Caribbean, and the transatlantic slave trade have played in the construction of the American capitalist empire. I conclude my enquiry by contending that the novel's closing moments—in which the zombies overtake the Zone and Mark Spitz walks into the horde—foregrounds the pleasure experienced in the production and reproduction of destruction, and as one that demonstrates the impossibility of suppressing this violent history, or the nation's involvement within it. Through literary representations of the consumption of sugar—primarily the birthday cake—*Zone One* is able to examine the history of the commodity's production and its reliance on the slave trade. Additionally, through an interpretation of the zombie as a literary device of the speculative fiction genre, the novel investigates how the U.S. was able to become an imperial nation through the production and consumption of sugar, highlighting how New York City was central to this achievement, and continues to be a focal point in the American imaginary.

The process of reconstruction within Zone One is, for the American Phoenix, a symbolic act of optimism that, while geographically specific, is also national and speculative in scope. [42] Imagined as "the biggest version of everywhere" (Whitehead 42), the text stages New York City and its reconstruction as an emblem of hope for the rest of the country, an element also satirized by the novel. The New York City imagined by the novel is allegorized through the zombie's presence as a pinnacle of mindless consumerism, and thus the archetypal space in which to confront its monster-double. The zombie's unrelenting presence and ultimate invasion of the city, additionally, trusses New York City's history with that of the sugar producing Caribbean, underscoring how the Dutch colony's success in the seventeenth-century—as the British one that followed—was due to the mercantile investment in sugar and the slave trade that was needed for success in the market. The postapocalypse performed within this space and the monsters exhumed by the narrative also draw attention to national and transnational economic institutions within the Zone, whose origins are to be found in the European colonization of the hemisphere, and the establishment of the U.S. as a capitalist empire.

Following the literary conventions of postapocalyptic fiction, *Zone One*'s Manhattan is depicted as a wasteland. However, unlike typical postapocalyptic novels, the narrative reveals New York City not as transformed by the end-of-the-world, but as a truer, more perfect, mirror image of itself. Similarly, the end-of-the-world reveals Spitz as unchanged by this cataclysmic event and, like the city, as a perfect version of his pre-apocalyptic self. This trope satirizes notions such as "success," "achievement," and upward mobility; transforms the conventions of postapocalyptic fiction; and unites representations of the city and Spitz himself with that of the zombie. New York City is

throughout the narrative a dangerously sibylline space, unchanged by the end-of-the-world. This same mindless and trudging continuation is evidenced in Spitz, who, because of his mediocre condition, becomes the perfect postapocalyptic subject, paralleling the zombie horde's mindless presence—both figures (Spitz and the zombie) become ideal subjects for the novel's postapocalyptic narrative. New York, from the novel's outset, forewarns us of the dismembering nature of the plague, and, importantly, evidences within its architectural make-up the zombie's devouring power.

In short, the city performs a central function for the text. From the outset of the novel, Manhattan becomes a key character in the plot, rivaling Spitz himself for textual space and attention. *Zone One*, in fact, is as much about the city—as a symbol of progress and empire—as it is about Mark Spitz's blackness or the zombie horde's embodiment of violent histories.

The novel's investment in the particular geographic location of the Zone, its repeated allusions to the city's history as an immigration center, locus of capitalism and economic trade, imagines the city as an analogue for the body of the zombie and Spitz himself. Spitz's boyhood memory of Manhattan is tinged by his childhood fear of the city, but also with the mocking disdain he experienced as an adult before the end-of-the-world, and the exacting view of a post-plague survivor. Standing at a window, Spitz remembers seeing not entire buildings and moving bodies, but the mutilating effect the city has on the human body:

> Blinds and curtains were open, half open, shut, voids in a punch card decipherable only by defunct mainframes lodged in the crust of unmarked landfills. Pieces of citizens were on display in the windows, arranged by a curator with a taste for non sequitur: the splayed pinstriped legs of an urban golfer putting into a colander; half a lady's torso, wrapped in a turquoise blazer, as glimpsed through a trapezoid; a fist trembling on a

> titanium desk. A shadow bobbed behind a bathroom's bumpy glass, steam slithering through the slit. (6)

Spitz's grotesque depiction disembodies those in the tableau and fragments the landscape. In this description, New York becomes a zombified force that threatens its inhabitants with its biting presence and, moreover, foreshadows the coming end-of-the-world and the physical ripping-apart the zombie mouth will perform. [43] In this memory, Spitz is able to become temporarily the postmodern "curator with a taste for non sequitur," and perform a revenge fantasy upon the island, remembering/imagining the dismemberment of the successful few able to inhabit the city, reducing them to pieces, breaking apart their wholeness, and putting them on "display in the windows"—in this moment, Spitz recreates the city's savagery, becoming an agent of destruction himself. The invocation of the city's mutilating force couples Spitz's unfilled desires to live in New York and pleasure in imaging the city's destructive force with the zombie's carnage. As with the rest of the novel, this memory/fantasy is also suffused with humorous derision. In this memory, Spitz not only lampoons pre-apocalyptic systems ("defunct mainframes") and symbols of power ("a fist trembling on a titanium desk"), but equates the city itself with these technologies: the windows become metaphorical representations of the dead system ("voids in a punch card"), the disembodied forms they hold only understood ("read") by archaic and discarded apparatuses ("defunct mainframes"). Moreover, Spitz's memory mocks the notion of success within the city and citizenship itself. "Citizenship" in the pre-apocalypse carries with it the protective mantle of the State, and while the apocalypse seemingly expunges demarcations of belonging such as "citizen," rendering their use unnecessary, Spitz's image of the city points to the term's absurd use before the end-of-the-world. In effect, the city breaks apart bodies indiscriminately and arranges the pieces

illogically, creating a violence that is chaotic and eclipses definitions such as citizen, immigrant, New Yorker, survivor, and "pheenie." [44]

These overlapping expressions of the city's maiming violence and disavowal of pre-apocalyptic conception also recreate the city as one that always points to the inevitable zombie horde, while ridiculing long-held stereotypes of New York City as a welcoming home for global immigrants; a bustling hub of diversity and culture; and an ever-growing center of progress, possibility, and financial capital. In Spitz's memory, a sense of awe can be discerned as he thinks about the millions of individuals who "tended to this magnificent contraption […] lived and sweated and toiled in it, serving the mechanism of metropolis and making it bigger, better, story by glorious story and idea by unlikely idea" (5). Simultaneously, however, the novel parodies this naïve representation of the city and mocks the celebratory depictions in American literature and popular culture of the city's magnanimity.[45] Evoking the preapocalyptic city in a postapocalyptic future reveals its essentially absurd and unchanging nature. The tending and toil Spitz imagines does not construct a space of utopian progress, but instead exhibits a metropolis built of unbridled accumulation—"bigger, better"; "story by glorious story"; "idea by unlikely idea"—that enables the occupancy, not by the unwashed masses or the "millions" of the past, but the zombie swarm. This intemperate consumption is also evident in the zombie's body and its association with the consumption of sugar, as I show below.

What is significant in these representations of New York City is how they reveal it as violent and monstrous since its establishment, where even visions of the city's future residents, in a tenuous post-reconstruction era, are imagined as edible and disposable. In

Spitz's future-vision, the new residents of the island become concomitant with the city's first immigrants: "When the sweepers finished their mission, who would be the new residents of the island, bellies up on the boat rail, gaping expectantly as those other immigrants who had come to the harbor, that first fodder?" (73). The association of the immigrant and immigration as consumable goods undermines the seemingly hopeful image: the city's past and future perform as ferocious spaces of ingestion that call forth the novel's present devouring force, the zombie. It also suggests New York's constant violence on the body.

The association of the city's post-reconstruction future with the present condition of the city deviates from the conventions of postapocalyptic fiction. The customs of the genre regularly imagine the future as an achievable (although sometimes vague) endpoint. Here, however, the future is envisioned as a cyclical return to the past, in which the eager visions of new arrivals are transformed upon the shores of the city into comestibles for the city's hungry expansion. Defined as food for livestock, "fodder" further positions New York as a bestial presence. Additionally, this serves as an analogy to the consumption of sugar, the ingestion of the slave's labor and body through its intake, and the zombie's presence in the novel.

The textual association of past and future immigrants with food exposes the city's landscape as a postapocalyptic consumer of flesh with origins in the seventeenth century. New York is portrayed as an environment that one must survive, further suggesting that its new immigrants, members of the American Phoenix, will inevitably become "fodder" for the zombies of the text. Spitz's question is both a textual flashback and foreshadowing that remind us of the city's recurring violence: the city has always

maimed its citizens, will become (has always been) postapocalyptic, and will turn (has already turned) its citizen into pieces of themselves and a mindless horde. This moment returns us to the novel's opening and Spitz's memory of New York as a child, in which the city is textually transformed into a human-like mouth that should be read as analogous to the zombie's: a parallel is written in the novel in which neither space nor monster cannot be read without invoking the other.

In effect, *Zone One* stages the city as an inescapable devouring force harnessed with the gnawing threat of the zombie horde. Teeth serve as a leitmotif that reveals the impossibility of reconstruction in the postapocalyptic era of the American Phoenix. In the novel's opening pages and Spitz's invocation of the city's past and future "fodder," the inhabitants of New York are not only turned into consumable goods on which the city subsists, but into the pieces of obsolete technologies. Spitz importantly positions himself among the toiling "millions of individuals" who become consumables for the city: "He was a mote cycling in the wheels of a giant clock […] How small he was, tumbling between the teeth" (5). The violent effect associates Spitz's body with a piece of obsolete technology and fuel for the city and zombie alike. The tumbling he imagines serves as a textual indicator for the novel's closing pages in which Spitz will walk into the zombie horde and presumably be enveloped by the monsters' teeth. With the visualization of his own consumption by the city, Spitz also demonstrates an ironic form of pleasure in being part of the city's mechanism; within this fantasy, Spitz is able to enact violence upon his own body, preempting the one that will be performed by the city and zombie in the postapocalypse while fulfilling his desire to inhabit the city. Indeed, his body's consumption is posited by the text as a form of pleasure—for readers and protagonist—

and accomplishment, but also as an argument about Spitz's racial expendability. His uncontrollable tumbling in the city's teeth during the novel's opening is transformed in the narrative's conclusion into an active choice of personal disavowal; these moments of ingestion (both in the imagined past and textual present-time) are presented as cyclical inevitabilities, which further position Spitz's anti-identitarian opting-out in the final moments of *Zone One*, as I will show in this section's conclusion.

Looking across the Hudson River during his sweeper duties, the novel once again displays the landscape as a monstrous mouth, invoking the history of trade conducted in the city's past, and returning us to the novel's opening pages: "On the other side of the Hudson, the old piling stuck up abjectly, rotten teeth in a monstrous jaw. Revolting water sloshed around them like saliva. Teeth everywhere" (72). Like a spiral, the image of the Hudson lapping onto the shores of New Jersey advances the representation of New York as a "ghost ship" and as a symbolic and literal representation of the zombie's mouth. By presenting the island's enclosing waters as "revolting" saliva and the shores' architectural landmarks as "rotten teeth," the text incarnates the American landscape with the zombie's monstrous characteristics, and floods this space with the history of slavery, labor, and trade between the Caribbean and the U.S. Importantly, both textual moments construct the American landscape as analogous to the repugnant body of the zombie, which continually cites the history of slavery in the Caribbean through its presence: the distinction between monster and city becomes elusive and fungible, used in the novel as synonymous allusions to each other, their interchangeability become textual excesses which overwhelm the narrative, pointing to the impossibility of overcoming their monstrosity.

The mouth, then, is a central space through which the novel examines the larger political implications of the zombie in New York City. In *Racial Indigestion: Eating Bodies in the 19th Century*, Kayla Wazana Tompkins, through nineteenth-century material culture, examines how notions of racial difference were informed by social practices of eating and food production, asserting that the consumption of food is central to the production of racial and gendered bodies during this century. Tompkins argues that "eating culture" produces political subjects and is the medium through which racial formations and racist ideologies are consolidated in the body politic. The American Phoenix similarly also establishes its own postapocalyptic ideology through the consumption (and refusal) of food, projecting its anxieties, desires, and national identity onto the mouth of the zombie and the fear it creates through its cannibalism.[46]

The mouth is *the* site in which and to which political beliefs adhere, and "*through which* food as mediated experience imperfectly bonds with the political to form the fictions that are too often understood within everyday life as racial truths" (Tompkins 5).[47] The mouth is the space through which the progress of the nation and futurity is measured by American Phoenix. The consumption of food sanctioned by Buffalo and its corporate partners designates those individuals who believe in the reconstruction effort as law-abiding citizen subjects. The mouth becomes, then, as David Panagia theorizes in *The Political Life of Sensation*, "a complex organ of political reflection" (19), and the vehicle through which the human and post/human are differentiated.

The novel shapes the zombie's mouth and its imprint into the loci through which to access the history of violence and colonialism in the Caribbean, the history of sugar production and consumption, and the impossibility of reconstruction in *Zone One*/Zone

One. Looking into the zombie's chomp on a straggler's neck, for example, Spitz coalesces the bite with the urban space they inhabit: "A hunk of the fortune-teller's neck beneath her right ear was absent. The exposed meat resembled torn-up pavement tinted crimson, a scabbed hollow of gaping gristle, tubes, and pipes: the city's skin ripped back" (Whitehead 280). Occurring at the novel's culmination, the missing space beneath the zombie's ear returns readers to earlier performances of New York in the novel, staging monster and city as mirror images of each other. The zombie's wound also creates a dizzying effect in which both bite and wound refer back and forth from city to zombie, staging the postapocalypse as an inescapable, chronic violence. The zombie's chomp, then, becomes a textual marker for the city itself, and the impossibility of reconstruction. The zombie's "torn-up" flesh invokes New York's own violent composition, rendering its foundational structure as marked by violence, one that has always been hidden under the surface. Organized as Janus-like literary elements, the zombie's mouth exposes the city's bloody infrastructure. Following the colon, "the city's skin ripped back" carries grammatical and visual import. The "[s]cabbed hollow" reveals the "crimson" sinews of New York and presents the American Phoenix's restoration efforts as equivalent to the scab itself, a thin ornamental endeavor. Moreover, the scab cannot heal the diseased history that the zombie's body signifies and which the monster's maw implacably protests.

The advent of the plague and the zombie's violence are notably produced through the consumption of sugar. As Spitz and his sweeper team walk to their next assignment, he imagines how the end of the world occurred at the hands of his team leader, Kaitlyn. Although Spitz does not know her full life story, he imagines her upbringing in the

"upper-middle class Kingdom of Bruislessness," "bioengineered in the birthing vats of a sanctified midwestern principality" (57), a twice-elected member of the Student Council braiding her sorority sister's hair. In Spitz's imagining, the plague and the post-apocalyptic world it created did not begin in the conventional fashion of postapocalyptic fiction—i.e., through government laboratories, the bite of an African monkey, nuclear gas explosions, environmental catastrophes, or religious rapture—but through Kaitlyn's parents' desire to provide her with the "perfect" birthday celebration. Spitz sees it clearly: "Kaitlyn's implacable march through a series of imaginative and considered birthday parties […] each birthday party transcending the last and approaching a kind of birthday-party perfection that once accomplished would usher in an exquisite new age of bourgeois utopia" (58). In the pursuit and accomplishment of perfection, through the observance and fulfillment in their roles as progenitors and capitalist consumers, Kaitlyn and her family instigate the end-of-the-world: their striving and plotting, their ability to procure the "new magician in town, with his nouveau prestidigitations" (58), the exigency of currency—the cultural capital of economic viability and "hipness" combined—does not, as desired, create a utopian world of bourgeois perfection, but instead creates the apocalypse. The pursuit and attainment of the perfect birthday cake and perfect participation in the responsibilities of the modern-day neoliberal capitalist consumer reveal the impossibility of history's progression after this moment: "Maybe, he thought one night, it wasn't utopia that they had worked toward after all, and it was Kaitlyn herself who had summoned the plague: as she cut into the first slice of cake at her final, perfect birthday party, history had come to an end" (58).

As explored earlier in this chapter, the exchange of commodities—particularly sugar and chattel slavery—between the Caribbean, the Americas, and Europe in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, nourished a burgeoning middle-class of consumers who desired to exhibit their access to emerging notions of sophistication. The pursuit of "birthday-party perfection" and the "nouveau prestidigitations" of in-vogue entertainers are here the purchase of refinement and cosmopolitan tastes. Yet, while Kaitlyn's family demonstrates their upper-middle class accomplishments through birthday celebrations, the text's tone satirizes their achievements. The novel parodies the American concern for lineage, ancestral citizenship, and bourgeois values: Part of a "native herd" that fed on the "sweet berries of gentility[,]" Kaitlyn is "bioengineered" within the "birthing vats of a sanctified midwestern principality" and "Kingdom of Bruislessness" (57), thus describing her background as sterile, cosseted, and contrived, while requiring a relentless advancement measured in mediocre milestones such as the birthday celebration. The perfect birthday cake ironically destroys Kaitlyn's upper-middle-class achievement, mocking not only bourgeois values but also their palpable benefits. Faced with postapocalyptic violence the text defines bourgeois accomplishments as deficient tools for survival, performing instead as apocalyptic instigators.

The birthday cake, in fact, performs as a vessel through which bourgeois and capitalist values are undermined and through which the text explores the history of exchange between the Caribbean and the Americas: the cake is the quintessential object of the zombie apocalypse. A staple of celebrations, the cake is a marker of time's passage and a commemoration of achievement. Yet the fulfillment of "birthday-party perfection," which signals larger notions of bourgeois accomplishment, razes linear progression in the

text: “She had blown out the candles of the old era, blotted out the dinosaurs’ heavens, sent the great ice sheet scraping forth, the blood counts zooming up into madness” (58). Cake’s reliance on sugar for its constitutional make-up also functions as an ironic parody of success and wealth. Sugar scripts Kaitlyn’s affluence while simultaneously triggering its destruction. The cake’s celebration of futurity antithetically ushers in a mediocre postapocalyptic world, which *Zone One* defines as a more-perfect and clearer manifestation of its pre-apocalyptic self. The cake performs as the novel’s “apocalyptic zero-point” (Žižek, *Living in the End Times* x) that writes the zombie’s presence in the text. Originating through the cake, the zombies perform a revenge fantasy upon the colonizer and the capitalist system that engendered them.[48]

The textual pairing of the birthday cake and the zombie introduces the history of sugar production into the novel. Cutting into the birthday cake, then, is the pinnacle of capitalist consumerism, generating the monster that embodies not only sugar’s history but also consumerism at its apex: the zombie. “Capitalism is not just a historical epoch among others[,]” writes Slavoj Žižek, noting that “Francis Fukuyama was right: global capital is ‘the end of history’” (Žižek, “Have Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri” 190). Achieving consumerist perfection is demarcated by the text as a form of excess, which cannot be contained and surpassed. Thus, the cake determines the culmination of time’s progression, while also performing its spooling back to a pre-time time: dinosaurs are obliterated, ice ages advanced, and notions of the “human” hurtled into distortion. The cake, in short, inscribes the zombie’s insatiable hunger in the novel—Kaitlyn’s pre-apocalyptic taste for sugar serves as a textual reminder of the voracious desire for sugar

during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and the history the zombie carries on its body.

Spitz's imaginative speculation stages the cake, and its dependence on sugar, as the lens through which to consider the implications of the apocalypse and its monsters. In biting back, the zombies in *Zone One* perform a revenge fantasy upon the colonizer and the history of primitive accumulation that created them.[49] The plague is the "perfect vehicle for spreading copies of itself" (120) and thus becomes in the postapocalypse the means through which the zombie performs as a textual symbol for the capitalist system and as a violent revenge upon it.

Zone One presents New York City's monstrous personification and the consumption of sugar as contiguous with the zombie's presence in the postapocalypse—textual foils working in tandem to thwart the American Phoenix's reconstruction efforts. Together, the literary representation of New York as a consuming landscape and the zombie's mouth demonstrate how the violent history the zombie embodies cannot be quelled, but constantly re-returns to enact its vengeance. The novel's "skel" follows the conventions of the zombie in popular culture, revolutionized by George Romero's trilogy.[50] The text's introduction of a secondary zombie classification, the "straggler," reimagines the monster and raises important questions for posthuman theory, conceptions of national narratives, citizenry, and racial formations, and narrative.[51]

While the skel is the typical threatening, flesh-eating monster, the straggler defies the genre's conventions: a zombified posthuman subject that attaches itself to a specific location and remains within it, the straggler does not move, attack, or feed, and therefore this "aberrant one percent" (121) is unreadable to the reconstruction effort. The

straggler's attachment to specific landscapes and spaces presents an argument about the exhumed histories their bodies allude to. The skel, conversely, is all mouth and seemingly mindless ingestion. The novel represents this monster as concomitant solely by the actions it takes as a consumer of human flesh. Therefore, the anxiety that surrounds the zombie's presence in the novel is associated with the act of eating; the zombie's mouth holds within it the threat of racial infection and the deadly articulation and spread of the histories of slavery and production of sugar their bodies cite.

The straggler, on the other hand, introduces a paradoxical threat for the reconstruction of the Zone. While it carries the visible markers of zombification and monstrosity, it does not perform (perhaps refuses) its cannibalistic role. Anomalies of the plague, stragglers are depicted by the text as "a succession of imponderable tableaux […] An army of mannequins, limbs adjusted by an inscrutable hand" (60). The enigmatic nature of the straggler creates in the novel a sense of uncertainty for the American Phoenix, whose members attempt to categorize and decipher the straggler's presence in the postapocalyptic landscape. Yet, the novel stages this monster's insistent presence throughout the landscape and the text as a challenge and protest to the American Phoenix's definitions of humanity, memory, and citizenship.

The American Phoenix's "general theory contended that stragglers haunted what they knew" (64), raising further questions such as "How they can walk around for so long just feeding off their own bodies. Why they don't bleed out" (121), to which Spitz imagines his own question about the straggler: "How come, rain or shine, the stragglers stand at their posts?" (121). Brushing-over the "general theory" regarding the straggler is at once dismissive and a parody of knowledge and its pursuit.[52] The Lieutenant's and

Spitz's questions about the straggler emulate those posed by other postapocalyptic survivors in genre literature, in which characters are disposed to exhibit a sense of wonder—and superficially incisive inquiries, especially in light of their postapocalyptic realities—when confronted with a new and undefined world. While the "general theory" wants to translate the zombie and construct a readable narrative that makes sense of the postapocalyptic present, the novel parodies the limited curiosity of the American Phoenix, which whitewashes the straggler's presence into a generality. [53]

The naïve wonder demonstrated in Spitz's questions is also not unlike the awe and mystery described in colonial narratives of the "New World." Venetian explorer Antonio Pigafetta, for example, wrote of seeing in the Americas "swine which have their navel on their back, and large birds with spoon-shaped beak and no tongue" (44). The otherworldly figures and excessive geographies described in fifteenth-century exploration narratives are ones to be deciphered and tamed. The bestial encounters of the New World also construct unearthly and strange worlds for Europeans to enjoy and gawk at, while also establishing clearly defined hierarchies and divisions. Christopher Columbus famously states in his first log: "I also understand that, a long distance from here, there are men with one eye and others with dogs' snouts who eat men. On taking a man they behead him and drink his blood and cut off his genitals" (102). As in the questions posed to and by Spitz about the straggler in *Zone One*, these narratives demonstrate a sense of wonder commingled with fear and anticipation. The anxiety produced by unknowable peoples and traditions are exciting for their conquerable potential—and, I would argue, their invitation to vicarious participation—while forming a world that needs to be understood and tamed.

However, the straggler frustrates all attempts at definition. Its seemingly persistent anchoring to topography ("rain or shine"), defies the American Phoenix's attempts to reclaim the land for Buffalo. The straggler, in fact, is a challenging force against definitions of "other" and "monster," becoming throughout *Zone One* an obstruction to the reconstruction process. As the Omega Sweeper team walks their grid, they play "Solve the Straggler," a game consisting of creating stories about the stragglers they encounter throughout the Zone. The narrative they invent about each zombie enables them to have "mastery over a small corner of the disaster, the cruel enigma that had decimated their lives" (Whitehead 101). However, once again the novel parodies the enactment of knowledge or the possibility of "mastery" in postapocalyptic conditions. Like Pigafetta's spoon-shaped beaks and Columbus's snouted men, "Solve the Straggler" defines the human against monstrous representations, creating a division between themselves and the undead that simultaneously mocks the explorer's comprehension of the bodies they see. Indeed, as with Buffalo's corporate slogan, "We Make Tomorrow!"[54] "Solve the Straggler" acts as an obstacle to knowledge. The sweeper's game positions the zombie as a necessary monster within a larger postapocalyptic narrative of reconstruction and progress: "solving" the monster provides "mastery" over a portion of the apocalypse and provides a sense of purpose to the mundane labor performed by the sweeper and is endowed with the potential to think beyond the postapocalypse. However, the straggler, like the postapocalypse, remains a "cruel enigma" in the text.

In fact, "Solve the Straggler" is contradictory to postapocalyptic categorizations such as "human" and "zombie" and, moreover, as an impediment to reconstruction. *Zone One*, moreover, parodies the desire for cohesive narrative structure in the wake of the

apocalypse: while creating biographical narratives and explanations for the straggler's presence does momentarily eclipse postapocalyptic chaos, the inactive zombie remains an endless mystery. Their transformation in the novel's final moments from straggler to skel once again upends fixed definitions of the monster and parodies possibilities of "knowing" in the post-world. The ethnocentrism seen in exploration and colonial narratives is mirrored in the postapocalypse yet staged as an absurd enterprise. It is precisely games such as "Solve the Straggler" that make it impossible for postapocalyptic survivors to differentiate themselves from the zombie. Cohesive narratives about the straggler and skel within the American Phoenix are ameliorations for the uncertainty experienced in postapocalyptic life[55] yet sabotage the rigid boundaries between the human and monster.

Sweeping the Human Resources[56] office of a downtown law firm, Spitz projects a human countenance onto the zombie: "It happened every so often that he recognized something in these monsters, they looked like someone he had known or loved […] He had learned to get on with the business at hand, but on occasion Mark Spitz fixed on eyes or a mouth that belonged to someone lost, actively seeking concordance" (19). The novel, of course, stages "recognition" as a fictional danger for Spitz and the reconstruction of the Zone[57]—the "someone he had known or loved" is projected onto the zombie and Spitz fabricates a shared history and kinship with it, challenging the easy disassociation recommended by the Lieutenant. What is more, the novel grammatically challenges the notion of the zombie as mindless monster, as "actively seeking concordance" modifies "someone lost." What should be a clear grammatical structure becomes an ambiguous one. The modifier—"actively seeking concordance"—that should describe Spitz "fixed

on eyes or a mouth" slips to modify the zombie instead. Thus, Spitz's desire *to recognize* is confused with the zombie's desire *to be* recognized, ascribing both equal human agency.

The recognition of the human within the monster is further a futile mitigation of postapocalyptic angst and creation of purpose within postapocalyptic chaos. Human semblance permits Spitz to imagine he is "performing an act of mercy" (19) by killing the zombie and assigns purpose to his occupation as a sweeper. Yet, "Solve the Straggler" and Spitz's "recognition" are media through which postapocalyptic survivors imagine the monster within larger systemic networks and in relation to themselves, their labor, and ultimately, the reconstruction project. In these narratives the citizen-subject of the pre-apocalypse performs as an anthropophagus enemy-of-the-state that threatens the inviolate humanity of postapocalyptic American citizenry. Therefore, the zombie is institutionalized as a paradoxically necessary, centrally marginal figure through which future-oriented optimism is envisioned.[58] Recognizing the human within the zombie while simultaneously rejecting its place within narratives of the nation's future establishes the zombie of *Zone One* as mercurial. In effect, the transformation of the fortune-teller-straggler in the final moments of the novel further evidences this point.

By the closing of "Friday," Spitz comes to ridicule the American Phoenix's investment in the city as a vessel of optimism, foreshadowing his understanding that all postapocalyptic survivors will repeatedly become the city's "first fodder." The physical barricades erected by the American Phoenix to create the Zone, as well as the conceptual barricades created in the post-world—notions such as "them" and "zombie"—are fallible objects that cannot withstand the zombie's force or the history it embodies. The façade of

normalcy that the barricades provide are in fact their downfall: the archaic technologies of the pre-apocalypse are replicated in the post-world, underscoring the inanity of reconstruction.

In effect, optimism and violence synchronically circulate throughout *Zone One* and define New York's reconstruction as dependent on the erection of barricades, the definition of the zombie as "monster," and their physical eradication from the Zone. The novel thus stages the zombie's presence as a threat to the reconstruction effort for their metaphorical import. As fictional symbols of the history of sugar and slavery in the construction of the American nation, the destruction of the zombie performs within *Zone One* as the essential mechanism through which the erasure of this history—which the apocalypse has unearthed—will be achieved. The reconstruction of New York—and therefore the nation—depends on this eradication.

Envisioning the elements needed after the clearing of Zone One and those that follow it, Spitz concludes that the reconstruction will need "a lot of new windows in the days to come" and "plenty of bleach" (103). The windows and bleach in the post-reconstruction era are imagined as "thriving industries" that will "[e]rase the stains" (103) of the zombie's gruesome presence. While providing an opening in an otherwise closed structure, the window also demarcates separation and enclosure. The reconstruction effort in the text, therefore, is organized through a desire to reestablish the past—envisioned through the construction of structures of exclusion—and defines reconstruction as dependent on the removal of the zombie's visible markers, which signal the history of sugar and slavery in the Caribbean. The bleaching-out and reconstruction of pre-apocalyptic structures will, according to the American Phoenix, enable the unseeing of

the monsters created by the violent histories of colonization, slavery, and commercial exchange. This moment also parodies the corporatization of the reconstruction, reducing survival and futurity to commercial gain, while also mocking the sterile desires of the American Phoenix, which attempts to whitewash difference and markers of violence.

In fact, the reconstruction effort is presented throughout the novel as looking back to a utopian American past, defined by the personal and national barricades that formed it: barricades are, Spitz states, "what this country was built on," walls that "keep other people out and our madness in so we can continue to live" (127). Notions such as "home" and "country" are ones that the novel defines as upheld through tenuous models of security and, most importantly, exclusion. Following the narrative conventions of apocalyptic narratives, *Zone One* also stages the focus of the reconstruction as a renewal of the status quo. Apocalyptic narratives of the end-of-the-world typically lead "unwary spectators to focus solely on the restoration of the human status quo rather than considering the potential for advancement in both mind and body that are often the focus of post-humanist considerations" (Badmington 11). However, the novel challenges the status quo's restitution by presenting how the nation-state has always been constructed through illusory notions of containment that reveal the weakness of national sovereignty and foreshadow the reconstruction's failure.

The "new meaning of normal" in *Zone One* signifies a "resemblance to the time before the flood" (Whitehead 81), staging the postapocalyptic government as a replica to the system the plague had presumably destroyed. Its blandishment of survivors into invested participants in the reconstruction becomes, however, a source of parody for the text. As with "Solve the Straggler," the rules and order that Buffalo instills as a new

government also present a temporary sense of security against the chaos of the postapocalypse, and although the postapocalypse would seem to invoke the erasure of history through the destruction of the known world, the novel satirically presents the American Phoenix's efforts as a way to explore how the violent history of the Americas cannot be contained, but continually doom patterns the present time of the text.

There are various barricades throughout *Zone One*, metaphorical and physical: the settlement camps; the wall that demarcates the physical border of Zone One; the narratives constructed by the Omega team about zombies; the reorganization of language which transforms survivors into "pheenies"; the sea. These barricades are illusory sources of containment against the chaos that the plague has revealed.[59] The barricades become the "only vessel[s] strong enough to contain our faith" (127), Spitz states, yet the barricades' inevitably collapse and expose the frivolity of reconstruction and investments in notions such as "social justice" or a time outside the zombie.

The Zone's concrete barrier acts as a textual reminder of the city's colonial past, which circulates in conjunction with notions of hopeful yet violent imagery and foreshadows its eventual breach by the zombie horde. Examining the future location of survivor residences, Ms. Macy, a representative of Buffalo, orders a "crude map of old Dutch New York" (205) and photographs of the city on fire replaced with images of children in various states of play. The original images permeate the text and the postapocalyptic landscape with the city's colonial and violent history that present an impediment to the reconstruction effort and the "thriving industries" of windows and bleach. The images' replacement is an attempt by the government to dismiss this history and replace it with innocuous images of hope, purity, and self-sacrificing toil.[60] However,

the novel ridicules Ms. Macy's efforts and the postapocalyptic gentrification she proposes. "The future required many things," Spitz states, "but it had not occurred to [him] that it needed interior decorating" (206): his flippant comment parodies the effort to make a postapocalyptic, zombie-infested space a desirable living environment, while simultaneously equating the gentrification of postapocalyptic Manhattan with the same process before the-end-of-the-world. Neoliberal urbanism's displacement of minorities, the homeless, and the working class is echoed in the postapocalypse, writing the zombie as the new ethnic minority that must be excised in a reconstruction analogous to ethnic cleansing.[61]

The barricade, furthermore, is the American Phoenix's "monstrous tribute" to both the preapocalyptic and emerging nation's sovereignty, even as it points to the future's ungovernability and acts as an emblem of its own corrosion.[62] Performing as a desperate attempt by the American Phoenix to replicate the city's colonial past, the barricade is marked by its inexorable failure. Naming the reconstruction project "American Phoenix" euphemistically creates a barricade against the terrifying reality of the zombie-plague and the chaos it unleashes.[63] The text, moreover, parodies the buoyant image the American Phoenix's name invokes: the cleansing and destructive force of fire denotes the reconstruction's title with optimism and violence, while simultaneously corporatizing the future with another slogan such as "We Make Tomorrow!" Optimism does not achieve the expected affective stance that bolsters survival in the novel—as is the case in other postapocalyptic fiction—but instead functions as a hindrance to it and the reconstruction of the city: "pheenie optimism" is, in fact, as a disease—"a contagion in its own right" (16).[64] This parody, however, also suggests that the American Phoenix

will inevitably self-immolate and the barricade will inevitably be breached. The reconstruction's name points to the essence of the phoenix itself. In classical mythology, this bird is of sumptuous plumage, living between five and six centuries, burning itself to ashes on a funeral pyre ignited by the sun and fanned by its own wings, and rising from these ashes in order to repeat the cycle.[65] Thus, the novel defines the reconstruction project by its eventual failure, repeatedly equating New York's reconstruction with violence. The desire to reinstate a lost temporality (to "bring back" New York) becomes overshadowed by the language and imagery of force and violence which contaminates the grammar of renewal:

> The city could be restored. When they were finished it could be something of what it had been. They would force a resemblance upon it, these new citizens come to fire up the metropolis. Their new lights pricking the old skyline again, ingenious and defiant. The new lights seeping through the black veil like beads of blood pushing through gauze until it was suffused. (128)

Equating the city with an oozing wound, the novel portrays reconstruction as a violent and bloody endeavor. The "new citizens" are monsters themselves who in their effort to restore New York must inflict a pre-apocalyptic semblance onto the city, enacting such forceful violence that the city is metaphorically transformed into an injured body part. What would seem like a healing renewal of the city is instead a continuation of violence, and in the determination to "fire up the metropolis" the American Phoenix defiantly generates its own destruction, lighting their own funeral pyre. The new citizen's "pricking" and bleeding of the city contradicts the passage's opening line, undermining the self-assured statement of restoration.

Indeed, the novel's revelation of Spitz's "race" also acts an impediment to the reconstruction and foretells the barricade's collapse. Disclosed at the end of the novel,

Spitz's blackness upends conceptions of race, much as the fortuneteller-straggler-cum-skel upends definitions of the zombie. Moreover, both revelations perform as vehicles through which to examine the violence and the re-destruction of the world. Importantly, Spitz's race is revealed through the straggler's transformation. The fortuneteller's bite is the medium through which Spitz exposes his race to readers, a plot twist, I argue, that cements his position as parallel to the zombie's threatening presence. Withholding Spitz's race from the outset of the novel becomes a method through which the text challenges the reader's assumptions: Spitz is camouflaged through this omission, textually "passing" until the explicit articulation exposes his position as a black man.[66] The lack of racial signifiers throughout the novel is purposefully excluded in order to question conventional definitions of race and challenge literary standards—the lack of race markers in the novel reads Spitz as "white," making him a more legible protagonist. However, his name, known from the outset to be a parody of ambition and success, is further exposed to have been assigned to him through a stereotype, which racially marks him with "the black-people-can't-swim thing," as he describes it (231). [67] Named as a "joke," Spitz's assumed lack of ability marks him throughout the novel, defining him through racist stereotypes upheld in the preapocalyptic world. Spitz's race, in other words, is a device through which to explore the haunting of the past: a method through which the text doom patterns the past's engulfment of the present. Spitz's postapocalyptic moniker inscribes him as an elusive and subversive presence, much as the straggler's transformation remains a source of confusion and destabilization in the novel. As readers, we are never told his "real" name and are forced to read him through the stereotype. Organized in conjunction with the straggler's transformation and the collapse of the Zone's wall, Spitz's race forces us

to reevaluate the novel and his position in it. His illegibility performs as a driving force in *Zone One* and stages him as analogous to the zombie horde. The novel's exposure of Spitz's "blackness" presents him as an ontological impossibility.

My analysis of Spitz's race follows in the vein of African-American critics such as Abdul JanMohamed, Frank Wilderson, and Calvin Warren, who theorize Black being as always already dead.[68] JanMohamed's notion of the "dead-bound-subject" is useful in thinking about Spitz's characterization and final renunciation. The "death-bound-subject" is, according to JanMohamed, defined by a "deeply aporetic structure to the extent that he is 'bound,' and hence produced as a subject, by the process of 'unbinding'" (2). The black subject, then, is defined by a constant threat of death, upon whom violence has always been enacted. Black, moreover, is the target of violence that "serves as the vestibule for the Democracy that is to come[,]" and whose suffering "is necessary to achieve the American dream and its promise of coherence, progress, and equality" (Warren 217).

Therefore, the "politics of hope" disseminated by the American Phoenix is foreclosed to Spitz as his access to the political.[69] By racially marking him, the novel establishes Spitz as analogous to the zombie and the history it embodies, performing synchronously as defiant figures that disrupt the political hope mobilized by the American Phoenix. The hope circulated by the American Phoenix defines progress as a continuation of the past, which defined black suffering as a necessary condition to national progress. His blackness, then, becomes a marker within the novel for his walking-deadness, excluding him from the fantasy of political "life." Thus, the "post" of the postapocalypse is a categorical fiction for Spitz: apocalyptic terror continues to

destroy black being; there is nothing "post" about anti-black terror. Political hope acts as a retention wall in the postapocalypse, and committing suicide "in the age of the American Phoenix" is defined by the novel as "a rebuke to its principles" (Whitehead 251). *Zone One*, therefore, narrates Spitz's final moments, walking into "the sea of the dead" (322), as an active moment of undoing and renunciation of political hope.

The novel describes the infiltration of the island by the zombie horde as a flood, replete with aquatic imagery. The inundation of the Zone by the walking dead—zombies "bubbled and frothed" down the avenue—returns the novel to the violent history of slavery and sugar production. The language of water and the metaphorical transformation of the zombie horde into an ocean "refers us to the middle passage, to the half-remembered micro-politics of the slave trade and its relationship to both industrialisation and modernisation" (Gilroy 17). Carrying this history onto the streets of New York, the zombie-ocean threatens the American landscape with blackness:

> All the misery of the world channeled through this concrete canyon, the lament into which the human race was being transformed person by person. Every race, color, and creed was represented in this congregation that funneled down the avenue…The city did not care for your story…Nor did this plague discriminate; your blood fell instantly or your blood held out longer, but your blood always failed in the end. (Whitehead 303)

The "first fodder" Spitz imagines gaping expectantly from the boat rail become a murderous mass seeking vengeance from the dehumanizing city, presenting no possibility of escape. The novel's final moments present a revenge fantasy in which the zombie is able to force the history of slavery, colonization, and the labor of sugar production—which they continually carry within their body—onto the human, blackening the nation. Furthermore, the novel revisits its thematic concerns in its opening pages, unifying the city's violent and consuming presence with the zombie's. "[C]hanneled" through the

"concrete canyon," the zombie's lament threatens the nation with its indiscriminate infection. In fact, the zombie-ocean, as the city, assumes a textual form: the plague becomes a language to be deciphered and learned in order to be survived.[70] However, within the "sea of the dead" is a clear textual message that acts as a final corrective narrative. In the walking dead Spitz sees "an inhuman scroll as an argument, 'I was here, I am here now, I have existed. I exist still. This is our town" (307). In the zombie's narrative, Spitz reads a grammar that writes itself against the American Phoenix's politics of hope, a violent articulation that insists on unearthing the history of violence, slavery, and black suffering. Moreover, the repetition of "I am" and "I have" in both the past and present tenses demands that their presence be acknowledged, underscoring the importance of geography—"here"—in their recognition. Invading New York City, the zombies demand to take-back the nation by bringing the past into the present. What is more, Spitz's ability to "read" the zombie horde as an "inhuman scroll" and understand their "argument" demands the reader also understand both the zombie's resistance and Spitz's analogous position to the zombie.

In effect, Spitz's final thought, "Fuck it" (322), is a rejection not only of the American Phoenix's reconstruction but also linear temporality, futurity, and progress. The zombie's "I was here, I am here now" demonstrates the impossibility of reconstruction for Spitz, the haunting nature of history, and his own position within the nation. Walking into the zombie horde, the novel demands for us to contend with the blank space that follows Spitz's opting-out. While no death is described within the text, the fact that the narrative follows Spitz perspective alone makes it clear that he is speaking to us from the dead, or from a space of no-death/walking-death. The novel is

reflective in nature, promising readers a before and after in which the narrator will still exist in language.[71] When Spitz walks "into the sea of the dead" we are left with the uncertainty of his human life, but his actions are decisive and his renunciation clear. "What would it be, deeper still, what is it, to think from no standpoint; to think outside the desire for a standpoint?" Fred Moten asks in "Blackness and Nothingness" (738). The novel, in fact, attempts to answer this question through Spitz's active decision to walk into the zombie horde. Moten describes this "no standpoint" as having "the potential to end the world" ("Blackness and Nothingness" 745), and Spitz's final decision does in fact end one: his walking into the "sea of the dead" ends the narrative, leaving the reader with no language outside of violence, outside of the zombie's mouth, outside of the violence and vengeance they embody.

CODA: KARA WALKER'S *A SUBTLETY*

I conclude this chapter with a brief discussion of Kara Walker's art installation, *A Subtlety*, to show how sugar continues to be a crucial commodity that in visual art, as in Whitehead and García's novels, patterns doom into the lived environment. Walker's installation was exhibited in the now nonoperational Domino Sugar Refinery in Williamsburg, Brooklyn during the summer of 2014.[72] Measuring over seventy-five feet in length, thirty-five feet in height, and twenty-five feet in width, this mammy-cum-sphinx sat, naked and covered in white granulated sugar, in the middle of the factory.[73]

The construction of the mammy-sphinx within the refinery, and using sugar donated by the Domino corporation, poignantly registers in the sculpture's body the long and complicated history of the construction of wealth and empire through the

consumption of sugar and the black bodies that produced it; the pleasure of sweetness itself—the euphoria and addiction it creates; the racialization and enslavement of bodies needed to produce the commodity; and the fetishization of "black female form."[74]

A Subtlety indicts the built environment in which "she" is housed and those who come to observe her, implicating spectators within the history of sugar production and consumption past and present.[75] Building the sphinx within the remains of the Refinery mocks our desire to forget this violence and extricate ourselves from its continuation. The Refinery is now the site of a $1.5 billion redevelopment plan, a re/construction that concretizes the desire to un-see the long history of violence in the consumption and production of sugar.

Yet, we can see that in the factory lies apocalyptic potential. The silent presence of the sphinx is challenging and aggressive. Behind her stoic façade viewers can peek at the zombie's maw: She "bite[s] back" (Tompkins 8). That she is covered in the sweetness of sugar is as ironic as the title's description of her body and the history that encompasses it. We must be reminded, here, of Pilar's use of Celia Cruz as a mode of entry into Cuban culture and Jesenia's zombification of the singer in *How to Leave Hialeah*. As with "La Negra Tiene Tumbao," Cruz's "Azúcar Negra" emulates the contradictory modes of defiance and objectification proper to the sphinx. Cruz's opening lines affix the sweetness of sugar and the Afro-Cuban rhythm with the body: "Soy dulce como el melao'/Alegre como el tambor/Llevo el rítmico tumbao" (I am sweet as molasses/Happy like the drum/I carry the rhythmic swagger). *Melao* (molasses), a viscous by-product of refining sugarcane into sugar, is dark in color and becomes associated with the Afro-Cuban female body in "Azúcar Negra." In the song, as in the sphinx, the association with

black womanhood and sugar is a mode of objectification, but also a mode through which to articulate joy and challenge objectification: "Mi sangre es azúcar negra/Es amor y es música/Azúcar azúcar negra/Hay cuanto me gusta y me alegra" (My blood is black sugar/It is love and music/Black sugar/Oh, how much I like it and enjoy it). Making sugar a part of the body's life source places sugar as a central element of the black body, but simultaneously makes it a source of exultation and through it an exultation of the black female form. Like the molasses of Cruz's lyrics, *A Subtlety* does not lack agency. The black body of the mammy-sphinx and Cruz's song "stick in the throat of the (white) body politic, refusing to be consumed as part of the capitalistic logic of racism and slavery as well as the cultural and literary matter that they produced" (Tompkins 8).

A Subtlety is grounded in the history of sugar production and consumption and of slavery in the Americas. As such, the sculpture, "grotesque," "fantastic and overbearing" (Walker, "Sweet Talk"), becomes overwhelming and resists the possibility of its own description in language. The piece's subtitle, for example, (*or the Marvelous Sugar Baby, an Homage to the unpaid and overworked Artisans who have refined our Sweet tastes from the cane fields to the Kitchens of the New World on the Occasion of the demolition of the Domino Sugar Refining Plant*), while pointing to the sentimental novels and slave narratives of the eighteenth and nineteenth century, also speaks to its excess and indescribability.

Ultimately, *A Subtlety* resists its conscription as a didactic object. An ephemeral construction, the sphinx was created for its eventual destruction (the refinery itself is a transitory space). Indeed, the sphinx's embodiment of the violent histories of slavery and sugar production and consumption, although fleeting, haunts us with its reminder of

apocalyptic violence. In effect, as this chapter has attempted to demonstrate, representations of sugar activate various forms of monstrous bodies such as the zombie in a Caribbean novel by an African-American author, and the fat-embodied and sugar-addicted Latina who challenges notions of upward mobility and ethnic hybridity in Latinx literature.

Chapter 3.
Like a puzzle: Fragmentation and the Aesthetics of the Grotesque on the U.S.-Mexico Border

"la historia, que es una puta sencilla, no tiene momentos determinantes sino que es una proliferación de instantes, de brevedades que compiten entre sí en monstruosidad"
—Roberto Bolaño, *2666*

Conducting an interview for *BOMB* Magazine shortly before Roberto Bolaño's death, Mexican writer, Carmen Boullosa, asks the author whether he considers his fiction to be "realist" or "fantastic." Boullosa contextualizes her question through a general history of Latin American literary traditions: "Hallowed tradition tells us that the southern part of Latin America is home to the fantastic, while the northern part is the center of realism. In my opinion, you reap the benefits of both […] I would add that this is because you have lived on the two geographic edges of Latin America, Chile and Mexico […] Do you object to this idea, or does it appeal to you?"[1] Boullosa also importantly asserts that the English-speaking North has the "tendency to pigeonhole Latin-American literature within only one tradition." Bolaño answers these questions by firstly asserting that one should never pay attention to compartmentalization in literature, an important assertion for this chapter, as *2666* demonstrates how various literary tropes are incorporated into one novel. Secondly, Bolaño claims that because, among other reasons, "economic underdevelopment doesn't allow subgenres to flourish[,]" Latin America has not developed writers of the fantastic "in the strictest sense[.]" In this way, he yokes the creation of speculative fiction and the fantastic to the Global North, an assertion his work (particularly *2666*) rejects, and which problematically formulates wealth with possibilities of imagination. Lastly, he answers Boullosa by invoking the work of Philip K. Dick, renown science fiction writer: "I'd like to be a writer of the fantastic, like Philip K. Dick, although as time passes and I get older, Dick seems more

and more realist to me. Deep down […] the question doesn't lie in the distinction of realist/fantastic but in language and structures, in ways of seeing."[2]

The importance of Bolaño's reference to Dick's fiction cannot be overstated. The author of such famous texts as *Do Androids Dreams of Electric Sheep?* (1968) (adapted to the 1982 motion picture *Blade Runner*[3]), Dick is not technically a writer of the "fantastic" such as J.R.R. Tolkien, C.S. Lewis, or Ursula K. Le Guin, but one of realist science fiction.[4] Although, Bolaño's reference to Dick as an author of the fantastic is a misnomer, it illuminates what he considers to fall within this literary tradition and, more importantly, demonstrates the limitations of translation. His exchange with Boullosa is in Spanish and demonstrates how Bolaño's Latin American literary training informs conceptions such as "realist," "fantasy," or "genre." His invocation of Dick, however, points to the limitations of describing the "language and structures" required to write about the U.S.-Mexico border. Bolaño's desire to write "like Philip K. Dick" states an approximation, an appeal to figures of speech and representational language that circles around an object without being able to represent the object itself.

In effect, the simile organizes this chapter and my examination of Bolaño's posthumous novel, *2666* (2004). The simile, a literary tool and figure of speech that explicitly compares unlike things to each other, acts as a narrative doom pattern that enacts apocalyptic violence and textual excess in *2666*. By apocalyptic violence and its elucidation through the simile I mean to examine how the novel attempts yet ultimately fails to represent the horror of the border and resorts to figures of speech in order to make this space legible. The simile points to how representations of gendered violence in the novel are productive, even against but not despite its problematic eroticization of horror.

Further, the simile allows *2666* to participate in the discourses of the borderland while never being able to be of the border itself.

I begin this chapter with the understanding that *2666* is a work of speculative fiction that implements the literary tropes of various forms of genre fiction for its world-building project, a form of textual excess that I will demonstrate illustrates the novel's attempt to encapsulate the horror of the U.S.-Mexico border yet ultimately remaining unable to do so. As such, *2666* continually resorts to the language of approximation and the grotesque. Specifically, the novel implements the tropes of horror and detective fiction to reconstruct a space of excessive violence and monstrous bodies on the U.S.-Mexico borderlands. As Bolaño's invocation of Dick and the fantastic demonstrates, to write the American continent requires "ways of seeing" and the "language and structures" of the fantastic: science fiction, horror, and the speculative. His statement, furthermore, echoes García Márquez's "realidad desaforada," addressed earlier.[5] Latin American reality—outsized, excessive, without proportion—is, according to García Márquez, one that cannot be faithfully depicted through the historical archive or Realist fiction.

The "ways of seeing" that reimagine literary structures are evident in *2666*. Reviewers of the novel, for example, recognized the novel as having speculative elements, comparing moments in the novel to the work of Dick, H.P. Lovecraft, and David Lynch.[6] This chapter, however, examines how *2666* narrates the "realidad desaforada" of the borderlands, its monstrous spaces and bodies, which require the literary tropes of genre fiction and particularly the literary devices of horror (apocalyptic horror) and the crime novel. Through aesthetics of the grotesque, *2666* considers the excessive violence of the U.S.-Mexico border and, importantly, reproduces the violence

performed on the female body in the semi-publicized femicide murders of the mid-1990s. While historically many, if not most, of femicide crimes have not been solved, *2666* does not participate in the aesthetics of hope and social justice championed by Latinx literature about this topic. Alicia Gaspar de Alba's *Desert Blood: The Juárez Murders* (2005) and Estella Pope Duarte's *If I Die in Juárez* (2006) are two predominant models of this type of literary project. Published shortly after *2666*'s release, these novels attempt to answer the incomprehensible, and with their melodramatic tone implement the text as didactic tools for social justice.[7]

In this chapter, "aesthetics of the grotesque" functions as an analytical tool for examining the novel's literary depiction of horror on the U.S.-Mexico border and the implementation of representation devices that stage this geopolitical space and its postcolonial subjects as fantastical, excessive, unnatural, and monstrous. Taken as a whole, the repeated depictions of grotesquerie, especially associated with the female body and the border landscape, form an overwhelming textual force of horrific violence I read as apocalyptic.

By reading Bolaño's *2666*, this chapter argues that literary depictions of the brutalized female body in the novel's infamous fourth section, "The Part About the Crimes," in conjunction with the violent imaginaries of the borderlands, presents this space as postapocalyptic, the re/producer of material and psychic death that interminably (has/will) excretes dead bodies. I use "excrete" intentionally to evoke the novel's treatment of the murdered women as unnecessary excess that, while easily discarded, are the axis around which the novel revolves. Santa Teresa—the fictionalized Ciudad Juárez in *2666*—and its femicides, stage the border as the haunting black hole that lures

everything and everyone to its dark center. The violent space where all stories of the novel converge, Santa Teresa epitomizes the metaphorical "*herida abierta*" (open wound) of Gloria Anzaldúa's groundbreaking work, *Borderlands/La Frontera* (1987). *2666*, however, abandons Anzaldúa's metaphorical theorization of the body, and instead stages the female corpse as the fleshly embodiment and mirror image that physically manifests the borderlands' violence in the text. As such, landscape and body enact cyclical forms of textual representations that continually point to each other and that, more importantly, demonstrate the impossibility of staging this geopolitical location outside excessive and horrific violence.

Indeed, *2666* persistently returns readers in form and content to the violent history of the U.S.-Mexico border, from settler colonialism to the neocolonial enterprise of the contemporary moment, and the effects of this history on postcolonial subjects. The world-destroying excess performed in the novel is not limited to the borderlands or the neoliberal globalization of the 1990s, however, and the novel considers many cataclysms across nation states and time periods. Through the character of Benno von Archimboldi, for example, *2666* creates an intricate yet mysteriously unresolvable network of enduring violence, which fixes European genocides to the violence of the borderlands. Archimboldi, the sought author that opens and closes the novel is explored in biographical detail in the final section of the novel: a German soldier during WWII, his presence in the text exposes the "single catastrophe" of history, "which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage" and which "progress" cannot rectify (Benjamin 260). As Walter Benjamin's "angel of history" illustrates, the "storm" of progress is itself a perpetrator of history's wreckage, propelling the angel forward and forbidding him to

"make whole what has been smashed" (260). While *2666* does not equate the violence of WWII with that of this quintessentially American space,[8] it does stage them as systemically linked through an interminable march through history that yokes Nazi Europe to twentieth-century Mexico: a long, global history of violence mediated through extermination.

The novel exposes the excessive violence and horror of the U.S.-Mexico borderland while paradoxically demonstrating how the excessive histories of violence cannot be represented through language. *2666*, therefore, resorts not only to the literary tropes of genre fiction, but to multiplicity, fragmentation, and the language of approximation (the simile) in its attempt at representation. The text exposes the limitations of textual renditions, not only exposing the failure of representing the world through language, but also the failure of literary translation: as this chapter will make clear, meaning is doubly lost when translating the novel from its original Spanish and the possibility of understanding/seeing the violence becomes further opaqued.[9] Effectively, the text demonstrates the impossibility of representing the object itself and resorts to the language of approximation, simile, and fragmentation in order to stage the violence of the borderlands.[10] This form of narrative failure should also be applied to *2666* itself—as literary and market product—as it attempts to tap-into Chicanx, border rhetorics, and Latinx literary traditions, while continually revealing how it is always at odds with its border object.

Therefore, this chapter maintains the impossibility of representing the excessive violence performed on the gendered and racialized body, or the violence of the export processing system, through traditional narrative forms—a narrative failure patterned

within the novel's structure and style. *2666*'s repeated fragmentation, labyrinthine and nested stories, multiplicity of protagonists, metafictional literary devices, and unanswered questions, demonstrate a textual anxiety at the inability to enclose the violence of the U.S.-Mexico border within its pages. As shown in chapter one through an analysis of *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*'s multiple beginnings and endings, throughout its 1126 pages *2666* continually attempts (yet fails) to contain the excessive violence of the borderland.[11] As this project demonstrates, and as I will explore in more detail below, while not identical, the excessive violence across Latinx ethno-racial and national histories cannot be confined or depicted fully in traditional narrative forms and resorts to multiple doom patterns to return readers to moments of textual apocalypse.

Unable to describe the excessive violence of the border through its narrative, most palpably evident in the literary reinterpretation of the femicide victims, the text reproduces borderland violence through the novel's form and content. The novel's style, therefore, replicates the violence performed on the racialized and gendered body, and which is evident in the landscape itself. Through its investment in aesthetics of the grotesque, *2666* establishes an opening where readers become voyeuristic participants in the reproduction of ethno-racial and colonial violence through the reading and enjoyment of the art object. The dedication it takes to read a novel of this size and its difficulty, also establishes readers as ones with a stake in the "sadistic, voyeuristic side of horror—the pleasure he may take in watching, from a safe vantage or other, women screaming, crying, cringing, and dying, or indeed the pleasure he may take in the thought of himself as the cause of their torment" (Clover 18-19).

Beyond the representation of excessive violence through the figure of the female corpse, this chapter argues that *2666* mobilizes representations of blackness, particularly black memory and mourning in juxtaposition to the violated gendered body. I argue that Oscar Fate, an African American journalist and the protagonist of the novel's third section, which has been largely elided from scholarship about the novel, opens a crucial aperture for the exploration of the text, and further demonstrates the sweeping, comprehensive nature of violence on the U.S.-Mexico borderlands. I use "aperture" to signal the narrative's continual opening and redirection of reader's gaze: the text opens and closes on various scenes that foreground the limited legibility of the borderlands and its subjects. "The Part About Fate" is also another evocation of the novel's foray into "black discourse" that, much like its attempt at being of the border, always exposes its narrative failure. While the narrative continually points to various enactments of violence (individual corpses, Archimboldi, the critics searching for him in Mexico, and Fate), the novel's many fragments, shifts in time, multiplicity of characters, and geographies, demonstrate the inability of *2666* to expose the object itself, the whole of violence that creates this geopolitical space, to enclose the entirety of horror that makes the border legible.

Entering the U.S.-Mexico borderlands, as an "American" Fate benefits from some of the privileges as a member of the global North, yet carries with him the symbolic weight of blackness into this space. Fate's blackness is magnified within this geopolitical space and forces him to constantly consider the unstable position he inhabits, and specifically his precarity within the U.S. Although *2666* advances overtly grotesque and violent aesthetics onto the racialized and gendered body, this chapter follows in Saidiya

Hartman's work in *Scenes of Subjection*, where she illuminates the "terror of the mundane and quotidian" (4). Hartman's work is devoted to an analysis of black suffering during and after Atlantic slavery, and while there are no easy semblances to be made between slavery and the violence on the border, her work is particularly useful in its analysis of often undetected forms of terror and domination, which informs my reading of Fate's seemingly placid flashbacks. While Hartman's *Scenes of Subjection* explores the terror in the mundane, the horror of *2666* reifies monstrosity by transforming the mundane into the horrific. Taken alongside the brutal descriptions of the violated Mexican female body, Fate's memories enable an understanding of the voracious and extensive reach of violence on the U.S.-Mexican border. His blackness is thus a textual lens through which to examine the female corpse and, while the novel attempts to establish Black-Brown kinships between them, *2666* reinforces alliances of illegibility that instead relish the violence and excess of fragmentation produced by the border.

This chapter shifts attention from the Caribbean to the U.S.-Mexico border, and in so doing accomplishes three tasks. Firstly, building from the analysis performed in chapters one and two that defined the Caribbean as a postapocalyptic space, this chapter draws attention to the violent histories particular to the border that mark it as postapocalyptic as well, histories that include but are not limited to Spanish colonial domination, imperial expansionism, American annexation, and the advent of globalization, export processing, and governmental policies (i.e.: NAFTA) that continue to affect this region. This chapter's geographic relocation demonstrates the networks of violence and monstrosity that reach across territories and ethno-national demarcations: the horrific violence of the U.S.-Mexico borderlands underscore the literary patterns and

leitmotifs held in common with other Latinx texts such as Junot Díaz's *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*, Colson Whitehead's *Zone One*, and Cristina García's *Dreaming in Cuban*, while not presenting them as equivalent.

Secondly, through the various examinations of literary production from and about Caribbean, U.S., and Latin American spaces (Cuba, Dominican Republic, U.S.-Mexico border, Los Angeles, New York), this project participates in a growing and important shift in Latinx literary and cultural studies. While this field has tended to examine authors through strict national and ethnic lines, this project demonstrates the importance of reading intra-ethnically, transnationally, and across ethno-racial demarcations. This project shows that juxtaposing texts that are not usually read together provides an opening for discussing narrative strategies, literary patters, and literary networks previously ignored. Moreover, this project illustrates the need to redefine what we mean by "Latinx" and *latinidad*, while still upholding the particularities of each tradition and ethno-racial-national histories. Consequentially, this practice unsurprisingly exposes the histories of violence across the American hemisphere, literarily rendered in late-twentieth century and contemporary Latinx literature.

Particularly significant for this chapter is the history of U.S.-Mexican entanglements, which have always been marked by violence.[12] As Nicole Guidotti-Hernández states in *Unspeakable Violence: Remapping U.S. and Mexican National Imaginaries* (2011), the U.S. and Mexico "need to be defined and historicized in relation to each other" (27): the movement of people, ideas, and capital between the U.S. and Mexico establish the long history of violent association and exchange that make it impossible to read one place without the other. Therefore, my reading of *2666* stresses

the importance of reading this novel as a speculative exploration of this history, while demonstrating a clear investment in Spanish language. As a matter of fact, this chapter examines the novel through a detailed reading of the novel in its original Spanish and, as such, all translations unless otherwise noted are my own. The choice of using the Spanish text here intentionally challenges the authority presumed of English language texts and works in translation in the literary market and the academy.

Lastly, the move to the U.S.-Mexico border continues ongoing discussions in this project about the definition of the literary canon, the effects of celebrity on authorship, and implementation of Latinx literature as a didactic tool for social change. As in chapter one, which explored the figure of Junot Díaz as the Latinx author "du jour" and chapter two's exploration of *Dreaming in Cuban*'s canonicity, this chapter reviews Bolaño's semi-mythological status within the literary market, the academy, and popular culture. Bolaño has drawn extraordinary attention from academic critics, national media, and popular culture, his popularity growing even after his death in 2003. This literary eminence was aided by the translation of *Los detectives salvajes*, *2666*, and *Los sinsabores del verdadero policía* by Natasha Wimmer, published by Farrar, Straus and Giroux in 2007, 2008, and 2012 respectively. Through a focus on the role of authorship and narration, specifically the metanarrative that dominates "The Part About Archimboldi," this chapter challenges the propensity of using ethnic literature as tools for social justice and the issues in centering discussions about Latin American or U.S. Latinx literature on one authorial figure. As the "literary heir" or "successor" of the 1960s Latin American Boom generation, Bolaño's work has created a space where Latin American literature is not solely assessed through the standards and expectations created by the

influence of Magical Realism. *2666*, like Bolaño's previous fiction, presents a clear aesthetic opposition to Boom literature, which ossified Magical Realism as the only desirable style of literature coming from Latin America and, in fact, advanced these aesthetics within U.S. Latinx literature as well. This chapter explores the role of the market in producing Bolaño and his dominance in the U.S., a dominance predicated on the replication of horror and cataclysmic violence in the U.S.-Mexico borderlands. The commodification of the novel uses translation as a tool for re-interpreting Latin American culture for U.S. readers and further reifies the American Global South as a space of horror, chaos, and death.

My analysis of Bolaño's *2666* contributes to a large and growing body of scholarship about this novel, which primarily emphasizes "The Part About the Crimes" and the implementation of the female corpse as objects of representation that alert readers to the social inequality suffered by maquiladora workers and the brutality of the neoliberal export processing system. While this work acknowledges "lyrical bursts of the irreal" (Deckard 367) in the text and the tone of horror throughout the novel, academic scholarship about *2666* fails to identify the novel's deep investment in the generic conventions of speculative fiction, particularly horror, apocalyptic literature, and the hardboiled crime novel. In its efforts to reconstruct the U.S.-Mexico borderlands, the novel resorts to speculative tropes of horror, crime, and apocalyptic fiction. The novel's implementation of these tropes, such as the world-destroying devastation seen in apocalyptic and dystopian fiction, the shocking horror, disgust, and terror of horror fiction, and the mysterious clues and grit of pulp or detective fiction, exposes the pleasure of violence in re/producing ethno-racial and colonial violence through analogy, excess,

and fragmentation. As such, this novel demonstrates the potential of speculative fiction beyond theories about the genre.

Furthermore, scholarship about *2666* tends to catalog the novel, and Bolaño generally, strictly within Latin American literature or as a "world" writer, a categorization I reject in this chapter as a paternalizing strategy of the literary market. Effectively, Bolaño's *2666*, besides being a Latin-American novel, should be reexamined as a Latinx work of speculative fiction as it demonstrates a deep investment in the porosity of the U.S.-Mexico borderlands and the violence created in this space because of the two country's long history of associations and exchange.

Therefore, my reading of *2666* expands common analyses of the text, which tend to impart it and its author with ethical intent. Most scholarship surrounding this work argues that through his fiction Bolaño condemns the patriarchal, neoliberal, necropolitical globalized capitalist systems of violence portrayed in his work.[13] Andrew McCann, for example, ascribes the text political motivation that can "shape" and inspire the world toward progressive action and change, while Ángeles Donoso Macaya proposes that Bolaño makes unspeakable violence visible in *2666*, a move she reads as an ethical question ("cuestión ética") translated through aesthetics (126). These politics of visibility assume that narrating violence—making it legible—demonstrates a political effort to "shape" the world outside the text and influence its readership. However, as Sergio Villalobos-Ruminott and Sol Peláez demonstrate, literature implicates the critic/reader within the practice of violence in the novel, destabilizing any notion of an innocent position through which to read the text; the critic/reader is always implicated in the violence presented by the novel.[14] While these readings of *2666* are generative for their

investigation of the novel's enactment of horror and violence within the space of the border and its effects on the critic/reader, my examination of the novel redefines it as an important contribution with the speculative and Latinx fiction fields that, through its continued description of apocalyptic violence and the monstrous bodies emerging from the U.S.-Mexico borderlands, enact a cyclical and inescapable history that enables the replication of ethno-racial and imperial violence on the self and other.

Finally, the corpse, seen and unseen, functions as a monstrous symbol of illegality that continually threatens the border and challenges any concrete notion of national sovereignty, citizenship, and legality/illegality. In fact, the novel relegates Mexico to an atemporal state of death; a hellish landscape of post-NAFTA factories littered with female bodies as easily replaceable as they are disposed. The apocalyptic violence enacted in the novel, therefore, persistently reminds us that the economic configuration of the borderlands has effects on the body, particularly the female body, and the language of violence creates a psychic space of death that is replicated on the body and the U.S.-Mexico borderlands. Apocalyptic language and aesthetics of the grotesque structure the narrative plot of *2666* and are repeated onto the female body and the borderlands terrain. Before turning to these forms of representation, I would like to provide a brief overview of this complicated novel and of the city in which it is set.

CIUDAD JUÁREZ, MAQUILADORAS, AND *2666*

Between 1993 and 2014 more than 1,500 women were violently killed in Ciudad Juárez.[15] Over a third of the victims suffered some form of sexual assault. While the number of murdered women is exorbitant in itself, the underwhelming police and societal

response frames the femicides as a "natural" occurrence within this geopolitical space (Cave).[16] It is important that the femicides take place around the export processing system, and the majority of victims are associated through their employment in the maquiladoras of the city. Maquiladoras are manufacturing facilities that rely on the movement of global capital and constant influx of employees. Ciudad Juárez is considered to be the "birthplace" of the maquiladora in Mexico (Wright, *Disposable Women* 7), and as such, the city has a long history with export processing that precedes the 1990s femicides.

As of 2006 there were more than three thousand maquiladoras in Mexico, employing over one million workers. Of these maquiladoras, one fourth of them were located in Ciudad Juárez and approximately sixty percent of their employees were women (79).[17] The centrality of Ciudad Juárez on the global stage is crucial, as it became the "leader in low-cost, high-quality, labor-intensive manufacturing process. Its adjacency to the United States and the constant inflow of migrants from the Mexican interior contributes to the city's popularity among corporate executives seeking to cut factory costs while maintaining quality standards and easy access to the US market" (72). The large number of female employees in these maquiladoras produces, as Melissa Wright's ethnographic research demonstrates, young women who are made disposable bodies essential for the cheap labor market.[18]

Wright's research also demonstrates how violence is performed on human lives through discursive and structural acts, and how the free market depends on the "myth of the disposable third world woman." This discursive violence holds paradoxical logic at its center: whereas the disposable woman is transformed into a "form of industrial

waste…discarded and replaced[,]" she simultaneously possesses traits that "make her labor particularly valuable" (2). As such, the disposable woman is considered as waste yet "embodies a form of labor crucial for the materialization of global capitalism around the world" (3).[19] Wright's research underscores the central role of gender in the maquiladora system. Her work in Ciudad Juárez explores how managers and engineers in a car production factory "carefully monitor the wrists, fingers, backs, eyes and other body parts of women workers to extract valuable labor from them while determining that these women are worth little of value in an of themselves" (17). Through this account, Wright argues that these practices produce a workforce "built on assorted body parts" that, while not resembling the human, is expected to function as a working body on the assembly line (17). More importantly, factory managers also perform "surveillance of their reproductive cycles" and women are expected to undergo pregnancy tests and prove they are menstruating to company medical examiners (85).

2666 is set against this industrial backdrop. The novel opens with "The Part About the Critics," whose plot revolves around four European scholars of a predominantly unknown and reclusive German author with a peculiar Italian name, Benno von Archimboldi.[20] "The Part About the Critics" narrates each scholar's discovery of the German author, their various meetings at academic conferences, and final decision to search for Archimboldi in Santa Teresa, Mexico. Their desire to find Archimboldi is grounded in a solipsistic vision of the academic critic as discoverer of great art and exposer of artistic genius. Among other nested (Borgesian) stories such as a self-mutilating painter, a jealous ex-lover, and hearsay tales about Archimboldi, "The Part About the Critics" concludes in Santa Teresa, where the critics believe the author resides.

There, instead of finding the object of their desire and ushering him (and them) into literary fame, the critics plunge deeper and deeper into individual forms of narcissistic despondency that remain unresolved by the novel.

2666's following section, "The Part About Amalfitano," focuses on the titular character, Óscar Amalfitano and the slow decay of his mental health. A Chilean exile teaching literature in Santa Teresa (via Barcelona), Amalfitano is also an Archimboldian, yet does not become obsessed with the German author. Instead, he slowly becomes unhinged because of a geometric treatise and a nightmarish voice (perhaps his father's) that appears throughout this section. Like the bifurcating labyrinthine tales of "The Part About the Critics," Amalfitano's section narrates his abandonment by his wife, Lola, her search for a beloved poet in a sanatorium, her death due to HIV/AIDS, and Amalfitano's reflection on the geometric treatise (discussed further below).

Following Amalfitano is "The Part About Fate," which will be explored in detail, but centers on an African American journalist sent to Santa Teresa to cover a boxing match shortly after his mother's death. In Santa Teresa, Fate becomes gripped with the femicides and wishes to write about them for his periodical, an idea his editor rejects. During Fate's stay in Santa Teresa, he meets Rosa, Amalfitano's daughter. On their way out of the city to the United States, Fate and Rosa visit the Santa Teresan prison at the behest of Mexican journalist, Guadalupe Roncal, in order to see a German man accused of committing the femicides. "The Part About Fate" is interspersed with Fate's memories of his mother, her neighbor, and various subjects of his newspaper articles.

2666's fourth section, "The Part About the Crimes," much like the rest of the novel is maze-like: focusing on the description of female corpses, the text diverges into

brief descriptions of police corruption, the investigation of a church desecrator by inspector Juan de Dios Martínez, his sexual relationship with the director of the city's mental institution, and the various television appearances by "seer" Florita Almada, among various other incidents. Unlike the sections that precede it, "The Part About the Crimes" has no linear plot, but confusingly moves from month to month, between 1993 and 1997, through the description of female corpses.

The novel "concludes" with "The Part About Archimboldi." This last section acts as a type of bookend to *2666*'s first, and explores the life of the mysterious author coveted by the critics. Hans Reiter (later Benno von Archimboldi) is a Prussian born WWII soldier that after the war travels to various European centers writing fiction. "The Part About Archimboldi" ends with a description of Lotte, Archimboldi's sister, and her traveling to Santa Teresa where her son, Klaus Haas, has been accused as the femicide killer.

2666 cannot be said to conclude in expected literary fashion. Instead, the book ends abruptly, leaving various unanswered questions that continue and magnify the sense of ominous foreboding that organizes the novel. Essentially, the final section of *2666* highlights the novel's aesthetic investment in fragmentation, mystery, and grotesquerie in order to create the landscape of transnational and transtemporal horror that sees its apex in Santa Teresa and the femicide, to which I now turn.

HORROR AND APOCALYPTIC EXCESS: THE BODY IN PAIN, LANDSCAPE AS LANGUAGE

As FBI agent Kessler is taxied through Santa Teresa, he sees a landscape "fragmented or in the constant process of fragmentation, like a puzzle assembled and

disassembled every second" ("paisaje fragmentado o en proceso de fragmentación constante, como un puzzle que se hacía y deshacía a cada segundo"; Bolaño, *2666* 752). Turning down a desolate street, Kessler notes:

> even the brush was covered in a thick layer of dust, as if nearby an atomic bomb had dropped without anyone noticing, except for the victims […] but they didn't count because they'd lost their minds or were dead, even though they walked and stared […] gazes of people living in another dimension and whose stare no longer touches us, we notice them but they don't touch us, they don't adhere to our skin, they pass though us. (752-753)

The novel thus organizes the Mexican landscape and the people within it in a perpetually unfinished process of being ripped apart, violently defining them as walking-dead subjects, haunts that exist within a space they cannot touch or affect. This description, moreover, defines the U.S.-Mexico border as *created* through a cataclysmic event, such as the dropping of an atomic bomb, which establishes the city and its inhabitants in an unending state of formation that is never accomplished.[21] This cruel and all-encompassing "fragmentación constante" suffered by people and land is reproduced by the novel's form and style: told in multiple fragments, ranging in length from one short paragraph to a few pages, the novel attempts to encapsulate the violence of the border and the femicides, yet fails to do so. The repetition, revision, and return in the text to the same spaces shows not a desire to find the killer/s or the coveted author, Archimboldi, but instead forces readers to be simultaneously consumed and consumers of the text, the corpse, the apocalyptic landscape. Observing the assembly and disassembly "every second," readers enact the making and destruction of the text and, within it, the landscape and its people.

The text does not determine exactly when or where this cataclysmic event took place, and therefore defines the event within the language of speculation ("as if"/"como si") and inexactitude ("nearby"/"por aquellos lugares"). The text's inability to locate these "facts" demonstrates another instance in which the novel wavers and necessitates further fragmentation, assembly, and disassembly in order to reach the puzzle's completion. The ambiguity further lends this cataclysmic event, mired in the language of war and transnational nuclear annihilation, an atemporal narratological weight. Like the usage of "fukú" in *Oscar Wao*, which defines the Caribbean as a space created through anathema, the atomic bomb in *2666* defines this space as created through destruction and violence. Unlike *Oscar Wao*, which defines apocalypse as occurring in the modern/colonial encounter, the unfixed language surrounding the bomb here does not anchor the event within a specific space and time, but because of the landscape's constant state of fragmentation (destruction and reassembly), the apocalyptic event can be seen as continually taking place. The text therefore characterizes the U.S.-Mexico borderlands as a space in a never-ending stage of apocalyptic destruction, where even its re/formation is predicated by its ruin.

As a representative of a government agency, Kessler reminds readers not only of the proximity of cataclysm to the U.S. and the porous nature of the borderlands, but also the complicity of American and transnational corporations in the apocalyptic violence occurring within this space and the effects on postcolonial subjects. Consequently, the landscape's fragmentation—mirrored in the text's form—exposes its effects on the human body and defines them as monstrous. The destruction of land does not have simple environmental effects, but is also emulated on the body, disabling the victims'

physical reach by redefining them as walking dead. The text accordingly engenders an alternate creation myth in which the falling of the atomic bomb, unnoticed by those outside the fallout zone, creates "another dimension" replete with monstrous subjects. While scholarship surrounding *2666* argues that the representation of Santa Teresa and its people is a metaphorical investigation of the precarity of populations in the Global South, instead, I ask: how is our reading affected by reading "another dimension" not as a symbolic device but as a narrative invention with real effects within the novel that alters the plot, its character, and the landscape? How does the novel become affected by its redefinition as a work of speculative fiction, and how do we read the hundreds of women that emanate from the ground in "another dimension" as produced through the narrative conventions of horror and grotesquerie?

Presented through a simile, Kessler's observation of Santa Teresa underscores the centrality of figurative language in describing this geopolitical space. Unable to describe the horror of Santa Teresa, the text relies on "as if" to approximate the violence seen by Kessler without defining the thing itself, and highlights the violence of the city by analogizing it as otherworldly. As Bolaño's own use of the simile to describe his writing and the fantastic by desiring to write "like Philip K. Dick," the use of "as if" here demonstrates a weak rhetorical strategy: unable to capture the violence of the borderlands through description, *2666* relies on figures of speech, the grotesque, and the excessive in order to approximate (yet never reach) the thing itself. The novel, moreover, tethers the borderlands' violence, its atomic "as ifness," to the body.

The association of the body, especially the female body, to the landscape has a long history within Latinx literature and Latinx literary and cultural studies. This is

especially true in Chicanx feminism, such as that famously portrayed by Anzaldúa in her now well-worn text, *Borderlands/La Frontera*. In this text, Anzaldúa represents the U.S.-Mexico border as "*una herida abierta* where the Third World grates against the first and bleeds" (25). The unhealable wound "hemorrhages again" before a scab is able to form over the open wound (25) and, as such, the U.S.-Mexico borderlands and the bodies within it are instantiated through recurring violence. Most scholarship that engages Anzaldúa's uses her work as an example of regenerative resistance. For example, in their introduction to the 25th anniversary of *Borderlands/La Frontera*, Norma Elia Cantú and Aída Hurtado state how Anzaldúa's influential text explores a "mestiza consciousness" that enables people to navigate various social contexts and "maintain knowledge of what it means to reside in these different social and political interstices" (8). Anzaldúa's work, as Cantú and Hurtado argue, has been crucial in various academic fields, including Chicana/o studies, Latinx studies, Queer studies, and Women Studies, who have taken her metaphorization of the border as an optimistic view of its possibilities, the mercurial shifts a body can take and the resistance therein.[22] Conversely, I would like to consider taking Anzaldúa at her word, when she states, in the preface to *Borderlands/La Frontera*'s first edition that the border is "not a comfortable territory to live in, this place of contradictions. Hatred, anger, and exploitation are the prominent features of this landscape." In effect, the violence of the borderlands/frontera Anzaldúa describes has a physical effect on the body, to which she constantly returns to describe the terrestrial, a narrative strategy that defines the female borderlands body as the byproduct of violence:

> 1,950 mile-long open wound
> dividing a pueblo, a culture,
> running down the length of my body,
> staking fence rods in my flesh,

splits me splits me
me raja *me raja.* (24)

The body and the land, therefore, continuously signal each other and, like in Kessler's observation of Santa Teresa, necessitate representation that exceed traditional forms of telling. *Borderlands/La Frontera* implements bilingual text to underscore the violence of the border, a form of repetition that magnifies the effect of "fence rod" staked in her "flesh" that through reiteration in Spanish and English augments the violence performed on the female body as well. As in *2666*, the form of the text replicates the violence of this landscape—the division of the border and the duality of bilingualism—on the body. The line breaks and irregular formatting expose a textual incapacity, silences and re-beginnings, enunciation and re-enunciation in order to encapsulate the condition of being a borderlands woman. Anzaldúa's representation of space through the language of the borderlands necessitates the excessive and violent, and declares its textual anxiety at the inability to showcase the effects of the border on the body. The repetition of "splits me splits me/*me raja me raja*" signals a textual stutter: the violence being performed on the body necessitates not only repetition in a single line, translation into English, and a line break between the two, but requires an extra pause within each line as well. This extra pause, a silence, a breath, textually stresses the weight of violence splitting (rajando) the body. Yet the translation "raja" to "split" also proves insufficient in clarifying the violence being performed: splitting connotes the breaking apart of an object, yet "raja"/"rajar" denotes a messier and bloodier act such as "gashing" or "slitting."

The staging of the border in *2666* must be placed within a larger Latinx and Chicanx literary context that hold this geopolitical space at its center and continues forms of representation such as Anzaldúa's. Yet, it is crucial to note how Bolaño and his text,

unlike the feminist Chicanx writers discussed here, are not from the border yet attempt to speak in their border discourse. The Chicanx tradition has a long history that extends beyond Anzaldúa's work and the focus on the U.S.-Mexico borderlands encompasses texts from the nineteenth century to the contemporary period, further demonstrating the importance of this geopolitical space within the Latinx literary imaginary.[23] In effect, these texts underline how the borderlands are translated as a wound that continually performs violence on the body, particularly the female body. As Mary Pat Brady importantly explores in *Extinct Lands, Temporal Geographies: Chicana Literature and the Urgency of Space* (2002), a landscape is more than simply scenery, but a cultural and social formation created through articulation, narrative technique, and grammatical structures.[24]

2666 continues the tradition of translating the U.S.-Mexico borderlands through representations of excessive violence. In effect, the novel marks the passage of time and the change in the landscape through the murder and discovery of women, a textual effect of the atomic bomb that opens this section. The novel, thus, stages the female corpse as an effect of apocalyptic violence, as an oozing byproduct constituent of the landscape. The novel marks the passage of time in "The Part About the Crimes" through the killings, much as the first section marks time through the reading of and search for Archimboldi. While not all sections focus exclusively on the victims of the femicide, they all hold the killings and the atomic violence of the border at its center.

The opening of "The Part About the Crimes"—"The first dead woman of 1994 was found" ("La muerta apareció"; Bolaño, *2666* 443)—foments Santa Teresa and the desert that surrounds it as a space of death, where female corpses suddenly appear.[25]

Therefore, the text produces a landscape that is physically marked by the female corpse and that marks the passage of time through it as well. Yet, the novel repeatedly demonstrates the inability of encapsulating the violence of the border and the horror performed on the female body, especially through "facts" or the historical archive. The section's opening seemingly pinpoints the first victim of the femicides in an official capacity, yet quickly rescinds its authority through ambiguity: "This happened in 1993. January 1993. From then on ("A partir de esta muerta"), the killings of women began to be counted. But it's likely there were others before" ("que antes hubiera otras"; 444). *2666* textually scripts the first female corpse found in Santa Teresa, placing a temporal marker for readers (as it does throughout the section),[26] while also rejecting the certainty of the corpse's "firstness": "Although surely others died in 1992. Others who didn't make it to the list or that no one ever found, buried in mass graves in the desert or whose ashes were scattered in the middle of the night" (444). The uncertainty demonstrated through the various repetitions of "or" and the impossibility of pinpointing the original date of the femicides further defines the borderlands as an unstructured space of death, and points to the impossibility of either locating or translating its violence. Furthermore, *2666* demonstrates its geopolitical specificity through its refusal for translation. While "la muerta" succinctly signifies a gendered corpse for readers, English does not allow for the gendered language of death needed to portray the violence of the border in this section of the novel. In fact, while the tone describing the femicide victims is forensically cold, the translation into English alters the detachment and repetition of gendered violence that occurs throughout this section. For example, a translation into English of "A partir de esta muerta" to "From then on" removes, not only all gendered markers from the text, it also

erases the corpse itself, a textual distortion that showcases the impossibility of capturing the violence of the border through narration and, more importantly, through literary translation.[27]

The repetition of "esta muerta" and variations thereof, such as "otra muerta" and "mujeres muertas," has a numbing effect on the textual violence of *2666* in its original Spanish. While accentuating the violence of the border as pointedly gendered, the recurrence of these phrases, at once overwhelming, becomes constitutive and implicit in the text; the repetition of phrases drives the text forward, drives readers to continue as complicit consumers of "mujeres muertas." Correspondingly, the collection of names that appear throughout "The Part About the Crimes"—one-hundred-and-ten corpses—serve as markers for individual murdered women, a humanizing force that attempts to provide some type of biographical information or ancestry for each woman. Yet, the repeated fragmentation of the text foreclose the possibility of dwelling with each victim, quickly proceeding to the next dead body, the next name that signals a textual anxiety that attempts, yet fails, to capture the brutality performed on each body. The effect of this narrative strategy is not one of emphasizing the individuality of the dead women, but of perpetuating the violence performed on the corpse itself by gathering them all into an overwhelming mass. In addition, "The Part About the Crimes" mobilizes aesthetics of the grotesque that underline the specifically gendered violence performed on the U.S.-Mexico border while, through the use of repetition and fragmentation, demonstrating the excessive and overwhelming nature of this violence and the impossibility of encapsulating it through language.

The phrase "She had been vaginally and anally raped" is repeated approximately

forty times throughout "The Part About the Crimes":[28] a literary tool that, much like a refrain in poetry, pushes the plot forward and emphasizes its importance within the novel. Admittedly, there is no singular plot in this section of the text. Instead, "The Part About the Crimes" is organized around the corpses found in various landscapes of the city and surrounding desert, and a forensic detailing of the violence performed on their bodies. The reiteration of these refrains foregrounds the violence performed on the female body, while nevertheless signaling the incapacity to capture it within language. The text continually resorts to variations and additions to this phrase, including "and strangled" (530), "raped and beaten" (565), and "raped innumerable times" (576). The repetition of violent phrases, much like the multiplicity of victim's names, is at once overwhelming and paradoxically allaying. The violence performed on the women creates an almost indistinguishable product that, rendered in the cold terminology of an autopsy, desensitizes readers to the violence itself and makes it impossible to remember individual cases—technical jargon that amasses all femicide victims and makes singular crimes lose their meaning. In effect, the novel's cold description of the female corpse keeps readers at a safe distance from the act itself; a reading practice that reifies the language of the autopsy and dehumanizes the victim.

Each description of the violated female body and its variation, however, demonstrate the text's desire to encapsulate the horror of the femicides and its incapacity to do so. With each new victim, "The Part About the Crimes" constantly corrects and amends itself, resorting to excessive description that doom patterns violence. For example, within a narrative fragment that spans four pages (575-579), and which depicts the finding of Aurora Muñoz Álvarez, Emilia Escalante Sanjúan, Estrella Ruiz Sandoval,

two unidentified women, and Jacqueline Ríos on the side of different roads of Santa Teresa, and having suffered various types of assault (rape, strangulation, beating, gun wounds), is the brutal description of Mónica Posada's body:

> According to the medical examiner, Mónica had been anally and vaginally raped, although traces of semen were also found in her throat, which lead to talk in police circles of a "three-way" rape ("violación <<por los tres conductos>>"). There was a cop, however, who said that a full rape was one done to all five orifices. Asked what the other two were, he answered the ears. Another cop said he had heard of a guy from Sinaloa who raped seven orifices. That is to say, by the five known orifices plus the eyes. And another cop said that he had heard of a guy from Mexico City who raped through eight orifices, which were the seven already mentioned, plus the navel, where the guy from Mexico City made a small incision with his knife, not very big, and then put his cock in ("le metía allí su verga") […] In the case of Mónica Posadas, the victim had not only been raped "through three orifices" but also had been strangled. The body, which was found half hidden behind some cardboard boxes, was naked from the waist down. The legs were stained with blood. So much blood that if seen from a distance, or seen from a certain height, a stranger (or an angel, since there were no buildings from where to observe her) would have said she was wearing red tights. The vagina was torn ("desgarrada"). The vulva and groin showed clear signs of bites and tares, as if a street dog had tried to eat her. (576-577)[29]

The novel scripts Mónica's corpse through the expected refrain—"anally and vaginally raped"—yet extends the violence to other parts of her body (her mouth and throat) and uses her as a tool for the anecdotes of policemen. While the passage begins in typical forensic fashion, describing her rape through "tres conductos," the text digresses into locker-room talk where policemen use rumors of excessive violence performed on nameless women in order to "best" each other's stories. In this way, the violence performed on the female body is a tool through which characters and readers alike can reproduce gendered and ethno-racial violence on the other that, in turn, reproduces the

history of neo/colonial rule. Presented through the language of a rumor ("el había oído"/"he had heard"), the policemen's anecdotes are a means through which they, and through them readers, can fantasize of further bodily violations; from three to five to seven to eight, readers can imagine other cruelties and orifices through which to perform them. The aesthetics of the grotesque exemplified above becomes almost Rabelaisian and stage the female form as an outlandish spectacle.

The various textual addendums that appear throughout the representation of Mónica's body, such as "had not only been[,]" "but also[,]" and "So much blood," modify the description that came before it, magnify the violence, and deforms the body into an otherworldly site. These textual additions extend the violence done on the corpse and underline the necessity to elaborate further on the violence performed on her body and its visual effects. While excessive description attempts to normalize the violence performed on the female body by comparing the amount of blood on her legs to an article of clothing, the text amends itself again by describing the extreme distortion of Mónica's genitals. After describing her vagina as "torn," the text hones in further to revise and extend its description, turning again to a simile that pushes the narrative's violence outside the human realm and into the bestial: the simile directly addresses the descriptor of Mónica's vagina in the original Spanish, "desgarrar," which denotes the act of ripping or breaking with animal claws. This narrative tool, furthermore, interprets the agent of violence to be an animal, yet creates a mysterious space of speculation in which animal and human are intimately linked through the carnage enacted on a specifically female sex organ. As will be explored below, Mónica's vagina desgarrada also formulates male

sexual desire as abnormal and pathological, while defining the Mexican female sex organ as a space that cannot experience "normal" sexual pleasure and must be abused.

As this passage showcases, the text stages femicide violence as a national phenomenon that inculpates all sectors of society. While the femicides are referenced in places such as Sinaloa, on the west coast of Mexico, and Mexico City, in the country's center, the novel fixes their representation in Santa Teresa.[30] Ultimately, the border is imagined as a postapocalyptic nightmare that radiates horror from its center. In this regard, the novel extends its reproduction of violence beyond the text. The policemen's anecdotes underline how the violence performed on the female body is implemented as a narrative tool of amusement, and ironically forces readers of the novel to be reproducers of gendered violence as well. The success of *2666* in the literary market, which upheld Bolaño as the new beacon of Latin American literature, also described the novel as "compulsively readable" (Kurnick) and, as such, aestheticized the brutality of the U.S.-Mexico border and horrors of the femicides into an art object for the pleasurable consumption of readers. The compulsive desire to read through descriptions of horror and gendered violence acts as an excuse, complicity, and reward for the aestheticization of violence. To regard the novel as "compulsively readable" also connotes a pathological desire in its consumption, analogizing the reader with the perpetrator of femicide violence.

The policemen's outlandish depiction and display of the female corpse satirizes the violence enacted on their body by transforming the repulsive into the monstrously humorous.[31] Discussing the various orifices through which women can be raped, even creating new ones (ears, eyes, navel), makes the female corpse an otherworldly spectacle,

a fantastic site of the grotesque.[32] Textual modifiers of exaggeration enable the excessive continuation of violence that recreates a grotesque amalgamation of violated women for the reader. Each policeman replicates it through the ears, eyes, and bellybutton, fabricating more spaces through which to enter and abuse the corpse. Each new orifice exposes the female body as an empty space through which the text can project its own fantasies of horror. A gaping wound, the female corpse grotesquely personifies Anzaldúa's "herida abierta," continually points to itself as a body, its boundaries as an object, and the ways in which the object can be ruptured.[33]

As in Anzaldúa's work in *Borderlands*, the female corpse also denotes the boundaries and porosities of the landscape in which they are found. Through grotesque representations, the text exposes the body not as a closed system but one that extends beyond its boundaries and creates a relational network with the outside world. The corpse's various "conductos" are textually transformed into spaces through which "the world enters the body or emerges from it, or through which the body itself goes out to meet the world" (Bakhtin 26), generating far-reaching networks of horror and pleasure. Unlike Mikhail Bakhtin's influential definition of the grotesque, however, which reads it as a celebration of inter-connectedness even beyond death, and defines the body as a significant site for the representation of positive community networks, *2666* establishes an aesthetics of the grotesque which forecloses the possibility of establishing affective ties via anything else but violence and horror, and which continually demonstrates the impossibility of representing the violence of the border through language, necessitating fragmentation, silence, and mystery that paradoxically points to its own limitations of representation.

Even in its narrative inadequacy, *2666* continually returns to the female corpse as *the site* of violence, spectacle, and fragmentation on the border. Revisiting the female corpse, the novel attempts (yet fails) to describe the violence of the borderlands through it, an attempt that reproduces the textual violence onto the body. I return to Hartman's emblematic question—"What does the exposure of the violated body yield?" (*Scenes of Subjection* 3)— for its centrality in our consideration of the female corpse in Bolaño's novel, and which leads me to ask my own: what does it mean for the female borderlands body to be inaugurated in the text solely through acts of violation and deadly force, especially in a novel that is like the border and participates in border discourses but is not of the border itself?

Unlike Hartman's refusal to reproduce Aunt Hester's "heart-rending shriek" in her analysis, *2666* exceeds in its representations of the tortured female body. Hartman's decision not to reproduce the scream is, as she explains, a refusal to participate in the titillating voyeurism of racial violence, and instead focuses on the horror of chattel slavery through moments of enjoyment and the quotidian. However, as Fred Moten's reading of Hartman demonstrates, her refusal of reproduction is "illusory": the scream is already present in her reference to it and in her refusal to reproduce it (*In the Break* 4).

I turn to Hartman and Moten to address the textual avoidance in *2666* that leaves representations of rape and murder off the page. The absence of portrayals of rape and murder accomplish three things in the novel. By omitting the brutality of the rape and murder from narration, the text displaces its violence onto the displayed tortured body that Hartman adamantly avoids, which secondly compels readers to imagine and, therefore, individually create the violence the text elides. Lastly, the continual return to

descriptions of the violated female body that with few variations are almost indistinguishable, "immure us to pain" (Hartman *Scenes* 4) while paradoxically creating an overwhelming repetition of violence. Moreover, the textual absence of acts of violence (the rape, murder, and discarding of the corpse) foments a seductive power for the reader.[34] By seduction I follow Hartman in defining it as that which "epitomizes the discursive alchemy that shrouds direct forms of violence" (88).[35] The excessive display of the tortured, silenced corpse in *2666* not only forecloses the possibility of hearing its refusal—the "heart-rending shriek" is always out of reach and/or never took place—but also displaces the weight of violence through its aestheticization. The "theatrical language" usually implemented in accounts of racial violence, according to Hartman, tends to reinforce the spectacular nature of black suffering (4): In *2666*, then, the excessive discursive creations implemented in the staging of the violated female corpse euphemizes the violence performed on it and displaces it.

Formally, the text evidences its inability to reach the source of violence and resorts instead to excessive depictions of violence's after-effects, and implements the female corpse as having no other textual purpose outside of their violation and death. As mentioned previously, "The Part About the Crimes" is organized around the finding of the various female corpses that, without providing previous textual mention, stages each woman as nonexistent before her death. As such, women (Mexican women) exist solely as objects of sexual desire, orifices to be violated, and recipients of deadly violence that defines the female on the borderland as an always already dead body. Their rape, moreover, formulates them as sites of sexual desire that are simultaneously the expression of disgust.[36]

In the case of *2666*, the violated female sex organ is the space where meaning is constructed and through which readers can access the imagined borderlands landscape and its violence. The violence performed on their bodies happens primarily through the vagina, which the text clearly points to throughout this section of the novel through its repetition of "vaginally and anally raped" and variations thereof. The novel, therefore, defines the female body as monstrous because of the excessive violence performed on it, and the repeated acts of penetration reify the conception of the vagina as "sexually insatiable and as animated erotically by a desire for annihilation" (Halley 151). Indeed, the female corpse textually functions as a tool for destruction and discovery through which readers can encounter the savage horror of the borderlands. Moreover, the text tethers male sexual desire to the wasteful, pathological, and violent, while presenting the possibilities for female sexual expression, particularly for poor Mexican women, only through the specter of death.

Finding the women throughout the text in various garbage dumps, surrounding desert, and industrial zones, defines the female body as industrial surplus, dirty, and wasteful. The monstrous excess assigned to the female body in *2666* is also reflected onto the borderlands landscape, which creates a quagmire of violence in which body and landscape relentlessly reflect each other. Ultimately, the women in "The Part About the Crimes" exist solely through their deaths; deaths that underscore the violent system of global export processing on the U.S.-Mexico border that facilitates the horror performed on their body. The employment of the female corpse in the various Santa Teresa maquiladoras is a central element to the text and the horror it narrates. Santa Teresa is staged as a city of death mired within the time of the maquiladora, but which addresses

the long history of violence of the U.S.-Mexico borderland that stages the female body as disposable and which implements gendered violence "as tool for securing the state" (Wright, "Necropolitics, Narcopolitics, and Femicide" 708).[37]

Associated by their employment in the various maquiladoras of the city, the victims in *2666* are analogized as industrial waste and, therefore, attention to the global assembly plants is crucial in this novel. Found throughout the city in dumps, side streets, and the surrounding the desert, the copious numbers of bodies and the frequency of their discovery at such close proximity to transnational export processing corporations not only implicates the maquiladoras in the femicides, but also points to the global consumption of women.

2666 narrates the "myth of the disposable third world woman," theorized by Melissa Wright, through representations of apocalyptic violence and horror, staging the female corpse (and all the women that will inevitably become them) as dismembered and excessively monstrous. For example, Margarita López Santos is found forty days after her disappearance after leaving work at a maquiladora. She "worked at the K&T maquiladora, in the El Progreso industrial park near the Nogales highway […] The day of her disappearance she was working the third shift at the maquiladora, from nine at night to five in the morning […] which meant that her disappearance could be fixed around the time of the shift change and her exit [leaving work]" (Bolaño, *2666* 469). Found near a "shack in Colonial Maytonera," Margarita's body is legible only through her labor and death. Indeed, the movements she takes are solely associated with their relationship to her role at the factory or her movement toward death. The text is unable to describe anything that happens after she leaves the maquiladora and resorts to assumptions ("Perhaps she

saw"/"Tal vez vio" 469; "But she wasn't hungry or knew"/"Pero ella no tenía hambre o sabía" 470) and contrasts them with absolutes reserved for descriptions of the cityscape and the factory: the poor lighting of the streets, the sewer system that ends in colonia Las Rositas (469), and the van that sells foodstuffs to workers at the WS-Inc. maquiladora (470).[38]

Furthermore, the novel presents the corporation each woman works for as inconsequential; the female corpse appears again and again, demonstrating the insatiability of the global market and the centrality of gendered violence for its survival: "The next dead woman appeared in October, at the dump in the Arsenio Farrell industrial park. Her name was Marta Navales Gómez […] The odd thing about the case was that Marta Navales Gómez worked at Aiwo, a Japanese maquiladora located in El Progreso industrial park, but nonetheless her body was found in the Arsenio Farrell industrial park" (489). As the text reminds us the "coming and going of workers was unending" (518) and the novel demonstrates the triviality of company names in relation to the significance and surety of the female corpse's appearance and the violence enabled by the global export processing system. Effectively, the text dismisses how the corpse is transported from the Aiwo maquiladora to the Arsenio Farrell industrial park as an oddity ("lo curioso") that does not require further investigation.

Essentially, the text defines the female corpse as always having been dead or pre-dead, tethering her deadness to their industrial labor. As "waste-in-the-making" (Wright, *Disposable Women* 73), the female corpse's body takes shape in the novel through the language of excess, horror, and grotesquerie. Moreover, *2666* presents women as tautological formations: that which defines them as women makes them always already

dead and in their death they are made women.

Much as the novel reproduces violence on the female body through repetition, fragmentation, and her proximity to industrial zones on the border, the text also signals the violence of the historical archive and the impossibility of translating violence through narrative tools. Throughout "The Part About the Crimes" the text resorts to phrases such as "The case remained open and was soon forgotten" ("y no tardó en olvidarse"; Bolaño 467) and "without success, and soon thereafter the case was closed" (488, 489) to expose the limits of knowing and depicting violence.

2666's world-building demonstrates the capaciousness of ethno-racial and imperial violence, which it reproduces through narrative structures of fragmentation and grotesquerie. As has been addressed throughout this chapter, the novel paradoxically performs the impossibility of narrating this type of borderlands violence, even as it textualizes it. Kessler's observation of Santa Teresa and use of the simile ("like an atomic bomb") that opens this section exemplifies the impossibility of redressing the violence performed on the racialized and gendered subject. Moreover, *2666* underscores how violence is reproduced by the silences of the historical archive and through narration itself. As Hartman's extensive work demonstrates, to write about the racialized body in pain or about those omitted from "history" cannot "exceed the limits of the sayable dictated by the archive" ("Venus in Two Acts" 12). To write about the racialized body in pain is dependent on available records and, as such, the violence inherent in Atlantic slavery, for example, resides within the silences themselves and in their irreproducibility (12). Writing about this type of violence, therefore, is based on an impossible task: replete with inscrutable silences, the "numbers, ciphers, and fragments of discourse" (12)

produced by ethno-racial violence is as close as the author comes to an intact representation of the body in pain.

Similarly, Guidotti-Hernández mines the unspeakable nature of violence and its opposite, the utterance. In the utterance she argues, one can find "the unspeakable qualities of material and representational violence" and proposes that the "utterance and representational violence echo each other as material and historical cognates" (5). For Guidotti-Hernández, the unspeakability of violence elides particular histories that, paradoxically, must be acknowledged in order to deny them, and therefore argues that violence is the foundational force organizing the omission of these histories from the archive (5). As this chapter has argued, the excessive representation of the female corpse, the violence performed on their body, and the repeated fragmentation that lends the novel its structure, creates a dizzying effect that makes the violence of the borderlands unutterable. However, as Hartman and Guidotti-Hernández's work illustrate, in the silences of narration one can still read the unsayable violences performed on racialized and gendered bodies in pain.

Before returning to the apocalyptic violence of the U.S.-Mexico border, I would like to address the largest omission of *2666*: its title. Ominously, the novel's titular number never appears in the text, yet acts as a mysterious and threatening force presiding over the novel from the outset. The enigmatic number does appear, however, in previous works by Bolaño that define the U.S.-Mexico border as a future space of apocalyptic horror. In *Los detectives salvajes* (1998), for example, Arturo Belano and Ulises Lima, members of an avant garde poetics group, the Visceral Realists, reach Santa Teresa in search of the vanished founder, Cesárea Tinajero. There, a witness to Tinajero's presence

in the city tells Belano and Lima that the poet had spent most of her time sketching a cryptic factory. When the witness asked Tinajero the meaning of these drawings, the poet answered "something about days to come […] [she] wrote down a date: sometime around the year 2600. Two thousand six hundred and something" (546). 2666 appears again in *Amuleto* (1999), where Auxilio Lacouture, Uruguayan poet and exile living in Mexico City recounts walking down a street which looked, "above all else, like a cemetery, but not a cemetery in 1974, or a cemetery in 1968, or a cemetery in 1975, but a cemetery in 2666, a forgotten cemetery under the eyelid of a corpse or an unborn child, the dispassionate fluids of an eye that in wanting to forget one thing ended up forgetting it all" (76-77). [39]

Los detectives salvajes, *Amuleto*, and *2666*, taken together, point to the apocalyptic threat that pervades Bolaño's oeuvre, placing his posthumous novel as the apogee of otherworldly violence promised in the texts that precede it. *2666* foregrounds the "cryptic" factory of Tinajero's vision and the "forgotten cemetery" Lacouture sees in the Mexican street. Moreover, the violence of the borderlands and the future industrial cruelty envisioned in *Los detectives salvajes* necessitates expression in numerical and written expression that, however, can only be an approximation. The horror of the borderland is displaced to an estimated date, "Two thousand six hundred and something" ("y pico"), which is itself a repetition ("2600"). Belano and Lima are given this information orally by the witness, yet the repetition of the number and its modification into text is only discernable through its writing/as reading. Therefore, Bolaño's text once again demonstrates how the production of the borderland through literary representation

exceeds conventional forms of narration that necessitate literary forms of repetition, fragmentation, and the grotesque in its attempt to encapsulate it.

This form of textual representation is the organizing narrative style in *2666*. Whereas the female corpse haunts the text before she is textually legible, the Santa Teresan landscape and its apocalyptic horror enact aggregate ominous effects in all its sections, even those that do not take place in the city. As mentioned previously, the U.S.-Mexican borderlands city is the black hole that forces all characters into its dark center and through which all other geographic locations (London, Italy, Spain, New York, Germany) must be read. The novel opens with the search for a reclusive, never-seen-before German author, Benno von Archimboldi, by four European academics, Liz Norton (British), Jean-Claude Pelletier (French), Manuel Espinoza (Spanish), and Piero Morini (Italian). Their section, "The Part About the Critics," follows many of the literary tropes of noir and hardboiled fiction, such as the genre's paired-down prose, its focus on gritty urban spaces and the city's "underbelly," the trope of the antihero (in this case, antiheroes) who crosses ethical lines in their search for answers, the moral breakdown of the protagonist, the centrality of violence, and the prevalence of unresolved endings.[40]

The presence of the Archimboldians in the novel has been rightfully examined by scholars as a biting critique of academia, institutional practices, and the entrenched factions within literary studies, the issues with deifying the Author and scholarship that obsesses on one author, especially mysterious/reclusive ones, such as Thomas Pynchon, Don DeLillo, J.D. Salinger, and even Bolaño himself.[41] More importantly for my own analysis of *2666*, "The Part About the Critics" demonstrates how the text stages the excessive horror of the borderland, its extensive reach, how it writes itself outside the

female corpse while still showcasing its haunting presence, and the need to describe this violence through the language of excess and fragmentation. As in hardboiled fiction and noir, the text presupposes the crimes. Readers enter the text expecting the violence they vividly encounter in "The Part About the Crimes" (300 pages after the novel's start), yet the plot is haunted by the horror of the borderlands from the outset. For example, before arriving in Santa Teresa the novel describes Liz Norton drinking tea in her home in England, where she reflects that the sky looks like "the rictus of a robot or a god made in our likeness" (23). This image makes Norton feel overwhelmed, "as if a voice were repeating a terrible prayer in her ear" (23). The sense of impending doom seen in the most quotidian of British activities is seen throughout the novel and culminates in the portrayal of excessive violence. The horror of the borderlands, therefore, extends beyond this geopolitical space, as if the novel were anticipating the arrival and psychic consumption of the Archimboldians in Santa Teresa.

Again in London, *2666* depicts the physical assault of a Pakistani driver by Pelletier and Espinoza, as Norton watches the beating, after which "they were sunk for a few seconds in the strangest calm of their lives. It was as if they'd finally had the *ménage à trois* they'd so often fantasized of" (103). Indeed, the physical violence they inflict on the Pakistani driver is intimately linked to sexual pleasure: "Pelletier felt as if he'd come. Espinoza, with some nuanced differences, felt the same. Norton, who stared at them without seeing them in the dark, seemed to have experienced multiple orgasms" (103). The text foreshadows the violence performed on the postcolonial subject in Santa Teresa through the contemporary archetypal British Other, a Southeast Asian subject. Moreover, the corporeal violence Pelletier and Espinoza discharge onto the Pakistani driver is

intimately tied to sexual pleasure, as is seen in detail with the femicide victims. The pleasure the Archimboldians experience is also crucial here for how it demonstrates the communal aspects of violence and pleasure in violence, while further underscoring how the novel stages the pleasure generated in turning excessive violence inward in acts of self-harm:

> They talked about what they'd felt as they beat the fallen body. A combination of sleepiness and sexual desire. Desire to fuck the poor bastard? Not at all! More as if they were fucking themselves. As if they were digging into themselves. With long nails and empty hands. Although if you have long fingernails your hands are not necessarily empty. But they, in that dreamlike state, dug and dug, tore fabric and ripped veins and damaged vital organs. What were they looking for? They didn't know. Nor, at that stage, did they care. ("escarbaban y escarbaban, desgajando tejidos y destrozando venas y dañando órganos vitales" 105)

As in Bolaño's invocation of Dick, Kessler's "bomba atomica," and Mónica's "perro callejero," *2666* once again resorts to the figurative language of approximation that demonstrates textual anxiety at its desire to describe horror without being able to do so. The text, therefore, repeatedly turns to the language of approximation ("as if") to describe the object without being able to show it. The sadomasochistic attack Pelletier and Espinosa perform on the Pakistani is not only a vehicle through which they can experience sexual pleasure, but a form of excessive enjoyment that destroys the body. In effect, the text transforms the symbolic physical digging and ripping apart experienced by the critics into the literal violence seen on the female corpse. Implementing the language of excavation, the text yokes the destruction of the body, in this instance self-imagined, to the violence that will be performed on the female Santa Teresan flesh later in the novel. While *2666* implies that at another "stage" the critics will "care" about the reason for the violence ("What were they looking for?"), the novel never provides an answer.

Confronted with information about the crimes, the critics disperse in various individual activities: Norton leaves Santa Teresa, Espinoza becomes involved with a young Santa Teresan and her brother, and Pelletier encloses himself in his hotel room to read and re-read Archimboldi's novels.

During their stay in Mexico, the Archimboldians demonstrate the incomprehension produced by coming face-to-face with violence. For example, a young man tells the critics about the femicides, which makes Espinoza think how the boy had said "there were more than two hundred of them [dead women]" and how "he'd had to repeat it two or three times because neither Espinoza nor Pelletier could believe what they heard" ("no daban crédito a lo que oían"; 181). The repetition of the number of dead women, "two or three times," epitomizes the sense of disbelief created in the Europeans when challenged with the violence and far-reach of the femicides. Repetition also magnifies the number of dead women, returning readers to materializations of border violence that require reiteration, such as Anzaldúa's bilingual "*me raja*," that is in itself a replication. Moreover, the number of dead women provided by the boy's story exceeds that of the women the reader will encounter in "The Part About the Crimes." As such, *2666* underscores the impossible task of making the violence of the borderlands legible or of encapsulating it through conventional literary narration.

2666's textual imaginary, thus, constructs a world in which violence is ubiquitous and which, importantly, always refers back to the aesthetic production it defines as lacking. Amalfitano's obsession with Rafael Dieste's *Testamento geométrico* (1975), for example, becomes another aperture for the novel's consideration of the landscape's extremity and distortion of the text. This "real-life" reference to Dieste's geometric

theory is staged as an object through which the novel discusses the aestheticization of horror on the U.S.-Mexico border. Unpacking in Santa Teresa, Amalfitano is surprised to find *Testamento* among his books. Unsure of how it came to be in his possession, he decides to imitate Marcel Duchamp's readymade, following the instructions the Dadaist gave his sister for the book and hangs the *Testamento* on a clothesline in order for it to be affected by the elements: "*Duchamp told one interviewer in his last years that he enjoyed disparaging 'the seriousness of a book full of principles.' like that one, and suggested to another reporter that, by exposing it to the inclement weather, 'the treatise had understood the facts of life'*" (246).

Exposed to the elements, the book's shadow in Amalfitano's backyard takes on a "coffinlike" appearance ("sombra de ataúd"; 266), becoming a reflection of that to which it has been exposed. "The Part About Amalfitano" narrates the construction of a Dadaist art object and textualizes the aesthetization of violence. After placing the *Testamento* on the clothesline, Amalfitano begins dreaming of a voice that speaks to him about "'history broken down' or 'history broken down and put back together,' although clearly the reassembled history became something else, a comment in the margin, an intelligent footnote […] the American mirror, said the voice, the sad American mirror of wealth and poverty […] the mirror that sails and whose sails are pain" (264). In this way, Amalfitano's art experiment returns readers to the "fragmentación constante" of Kessler's vision of Santa Teresa, which does and undoes—forms and deforms—the landscape and its people. Kessler's atomic vision of terrestrial and corporeal violence is repeated by Amalfitano's dream voice, yet extends the affected space from Santa Teresa and suggests the American hemisphere as a postapocalyptic space defined by pain: the *Testamento*

becomes a reflection itself for the "American mirror" that through its oceanic description returns us to the colonial conquest in the sixteenth century and underscores the long history of horror that ensued after the modern/colonial divide. Significantly, the *Testamento*'s environmental alteration takes place in Santa Teresa. Through the description of the American mirror-as-ship, the novel associates the colonial history of the Americas with the contemporary export processing system on the border and the bodies that it produces. Furthermore, the violence of the landscape transforms the *Testamento* into a dead object, one that is not fulfilling its purpose (i.e.: to be read) as a tool for logic and order. Instead, the book reflects the landscape back to itself: like the Duchampian Dadaist project, which explored the chaos of a post-World War world, Amalfitano's art object is an aperture through which to examine the collapse of history in light of the export processing system and the industrial waste it creates, the woman on the border who is always already dead. Like Kessler's fragmented landscape and the monstrous walking dead subjects it creates, the *Testamento* instigates an apocalyptic textual vision that destroys not only Amalfitano's mental health, but emulates his mental collapse through its narrative structure.

In contrast to the incomprehensibility of the landscape, the *Testamento* becomes "clearer, steadier, more reasonable." The book's exposure to the elements transforms it into an absolute reflection of this geopolitical space and its history: landscape and text cannot be extricated from each other, and the slow destruction of the geometry book exemplifies the incapacity of logic to withstand the horror of the border. *Testamento geométrico*, "history broken down and put back together," the "American mirror," is clearer for Amalfitano than anything he had seen "on the outskirts of Santa

Teresa or in the city itself, images with no handhold, images that contained all the orphanhood in the world, fragments, fragments" (265). The novel, once more, emulates its themes through its narrative structure. Unable to make the ungraspable horror of the landscape, the narrative resorts to the repetition of circumlocutions that signals itself. In effect, "fragments, fragments" is a textual referent that points not only to the landscape it is describing but also to itself as an aesthetic object and to itself as a narrative structure. *2666* attempts through its repeated fragments to construct and deconstruct the American mirror, which it sees collected in the horror and fragmentation of the U.S.-Mexico borderlands.[42]

Tethering the brutal violence of the landscape to the decomposition of the human body has a long history within Latinx literary and cultural production. For example, María Amparo Ruiz de Burton's now-canonical text, *The Squatter and the Don* (1885), foregrounds the decay of Mexican-Californio body as intimately linked to the destruction of the landscape by Anglo settlers and corporate enterprise. *The Squatter*'s "neo-Marxist critique of capital's spatial appetite" (Brady 10) showcases the tradition in Latinx literature of representing and re/producing the U.S.-Mexican borderlands as an apocalyptic wasteland and, moreover, as a space created through violence through its relationship with the U.S.[43] This proto-Chicanx text suggests other cataclysmic events that highlight the invasions and annexations that have taken place in the various borderlands of the Americas, and further equates the history of annexation and landgrabs after the Mexican American war and the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo with the decomposition of the Latinx body.[44] Importantly the novel concludes with an apocalyptic threat to the new "American" nation. In conjunction with the text's

melodramatic sentimentalism (a form of affective excess) and the invocation of godly redemption—"pray for a Redeemer who will emancipate the white slaves of California" (Ruiz de Burton 344)—*The Squatter* insinuates the impact of otherworldly vengeance that will transform the nation. The novel, additionally, leaves readers to contend with the white space that follows this biblical invocation and the textual end the threat enacts.[45]

Jonathan "Swifty" Lang's 2011 graphic novel, *Feeding Ground*, showcases a new generation of Latinx fiction that continues the discussions introduced by novels such as *The Squatter*. Unlike Ruiz de Burton's focus on the threat to white, wealthy masculinity, *Feeding Ground* highlights indigeneity in the borderlands and the violence that produces monstrous bodies, particularly young female ones.[46] Culminating in the transformation of the Flaca, the protagonist, into a werewolf, the text's abrupt and ambiguous ending, which renders the border's threats—"I have eroded nations" (171), "My children will always feed" (174)—reiterates the piecemeal foundation of the genre and the violence it draws/writes. As such, *Feeding Ground* concludes with Flaca's embodiment of the border and its insatiable hunger for violence and vengeance. Lang's graphic novel renews the biblical warning introduced by Ruiz de Burton and produces an overt monstrous presence on the border. Flaca's werewolf transformation at the hands of Blackwell Industries develops the concerns of *The Squatter* and evinces how modern capitalism affects landscapes and bodies, particularly the female body.

Flaca's fleshly representation of the borderlands' monstrosity and violence it perpetrates is echoed in *2666*. For example, Florita Almada, a "seer" who appears on television on various occasions throughout "The Part About the Crimes" talks about femicides and the "visions" they create in her, that she connects to an overwhelming

industrial force. Whereas "an ordinary murder" instills in Florita a "liquid image, a lake or a well that after being disturbed grows calm again," the "serial murders, like the ones in the border city, projected a *heavy* image, metallic or mineral, an image that burned" ("una imagen *pesada*, metálica o mineral, una imagen que quemaba"; Bolaño, *2666* 714). The "*heavy*, metallic or mineral" vision the femicides instill in Florita tethers the industrial backdrop to the monstrous female body, created through excessive violence.

"Rodeado de fantastmas": Blackness, Fragmentation, and Mourning

Quincy Williams, an African American journalist for a black Harlem periodical, *Black Dawn* (*Amanecer Negro*), is known throughout *2666* as Oscar Fate. His "real" name is only encountered once at the start of this section, and as will be demonstrated below, this penname imparts his presence in the novel with portentous weight.[47] Much like Mark Spitz's moniker in *Zone One*, Fate's pseudonym veils him from readers, while the novel's foregrounding of his blackness marks him as signifying body whose race (and the history it connotes) cannot be extricated from the violence on and of the U.S.-Mexico border. Yet, "The Part About Fate" is another reminder of the novel's "as ifness": likening itself to blackness, *2666* delves into black discourse without being able to be black discourse itself.

Fate's presence in Santa Teresa enacts an aperture for the examination of the female corpse as a monstrous symbol of illegality and into discussions surrounding national narratives of belonging and the sovereignty of nation states. Through the femicides, Fate considers not only his own position within the U.S. nation, but also what blackness means in a larger hemispheric context. As such, Fate's blackness is indexed

through the history of racialized and gendered violence in *2666* and staged through the limitations of translation, narration, and international kinship. The continued disruption by the female corpse within his plot forces Fate to imagine the possibilities of exposing the violence performed on the racialized body, while ultimately being unable to make violence legible. Fate's departure (exodus?) from Santa Teresa ultimately exposes the impossibility of narrating the violence of the femicides or of establishing world-changing affective ties.

Much like the sections that precede it, the novel does not introduce the femicides in "The Part About Fate" until late in the section, and while the murdered women linger throughout, Fate's plotline opens instead with the death of his mother and a series of questions that remain unanswered:

> When did it all begin? he thought. When did I go under? A dark, vaguely familiar Aztec lake. The nightmare. How to control the situation? And then other questions: Did he really want to leave everything behind? And he also thought: pain doesn't matter anymore. And also: maybe everything began with the death of my mother. And also: pain doesn't matter, unless it gets worse and becomes unbearable. And also: fuck, it hurts, fuck, it hurts. It doesn't matter, it doesn't matter. Surrounded by ghosts. (295)

Opening Fate's section, this passage and its unanswered questions creates a vertiginous effect that unravels the text from specific temporal demarcations and that, moreover, unmoor Fate himself while inscribing him through the expression of pain and mourning. *2666* additionally introduces Fate through a sense of disorder directly linked to the borderlands and which inscribes Mexico within an ancient (and stereotypical) mythical past. More importantly, the "dark, vaguely familiar Aztec lake" is staged through a general concept of horror, "[t]he nightmare," that also returns us to the black body in pain through a series of overwhelming and rhetorical statements that exceed Fate himself. By

this I mean that the questions that open this section and sentence fragments that follow exceed Fate himself, but perhaps not Fate as a concept. Indeed, "[t]he nightmare" instigates a mysterious vortex of horror signaled by the unanswerable and atemporal (eternal?) questions Fate asks, and which demarcate the black body as equally amorphous—a textual construction that aligns Fate with the monstrous formation of the female corpse. The turn to descriptions of the corpse and the aftermath of physical pain in the following section, "The Part About the Crimes," can be read as an attempt to provide solutions to Fate's questions. He is told by a Mexican reporter, "the secret of the world is hidden" in the femicides (348), a statement that occurs in the final pages of Fate's narrative and that force us to return to the questions that open it. As such, *2666* continually presents the brown and black body as created through the violence of fragmentation and undoing. Once again *2666* presents the violence of the U.S.-Mexico border and the racialized body through violent fragmentation. While the text states that the physical pain the Aztec lake marks "doesn't matter," it amends and extends itself, "unless it gets worse and becomes unbearable." The enigmatic horror of the lake (the border) that makes Fate go under is correlated to the embodiment of horror, and textually marked through the fragmentation unbearable pain produces. Statements such as "fuck, it hurts, fuck, it hurts" and "It doesn't matter, it doesn't matter" remind readers once again of the shattering power of violence. These fragmented statements do not describe the pain that produces them and instead are textual markers of the capacity of language to only ever approximate the cause of pain or of writing about black suffering in particular. The vision of the ancient lake, furthermore, brings Fate back to his mother's death and leads readers to ask, Who are the ghosts surrounding him? Are the ghosts those of the ancient

Aztecs, the Santa Teresan femicide victims, or the African American characters (including his mother) Fate invokes throughout his section? Ultimately, the uncertainty "Surrounded by ghosts" creates in the text stresses the impossibility of extricating the haunting presence of all ghosts and the necessity of reading them in conjunction and through their influence on each other.

In fact, the apocalyptic descriptions of the Mexican landscape and hints of the femicides always lead Fate back to the United States, memories of his mother, specifically black spaces, and the history of blackness in the Americas. For example, his travel to Santa Teresa triggers a long flashback of Fate's visit to Detroit to write an article about Barry Seaman, an ex-Black Panther turned cookbook author. In Detroit, Fate attends a lecture series Seaman gives at a church, where among other topics, he speaks about his time in prison and his friend Marius Newell.[48] In prison, Seaman tells the congregation, he would receive postcards from Newell who told him of dreams of being near the sea, to which Seaman states, "And that's strange, because I haven't met many black people who liked the sea that much […] Well, honestly, I have a theory about this, about why we don't like the sea. We do like it. Just not as much as other folks" (315). Seaman's narrative continues with a vision of Newell and the sea:

> The Black Panthers are young, none older than twenty-five. We're all armed, but we've left our weapons in the car, and you see the deep dissatisfaction on our faces. The sea roars. Then I go up to Marius and I say let's get out of here now. And at that moment Marius turns and he looks at me. He's smiling. He's beyond it all. And he waves his hand toward the sea, because he's incapable of expressing what he feels in words. And then I'm afraid, even though it's my brother there beside me, and I think: the danger is the sea. (316)

Seaman's daydream invokes militant resistance and violence in the face of white supremacy, and a deep frustration that becomes visually marked on the body—the "deep

dissatisfaction" indeed a sign for the weapons the Panthers leave in the car. However, the sea is the central threatening force against their black bodies, even as it causes joy in Newell. Seaman's vision frames the sea and the history it invokes as a force of violence that extends beyond the 1960s and 1970s, to the past and the future. Moreover, remembering this lecture in Santa Teresa, the history of slavery is introduced into the U.S.-Mexico border in order to stage blackness and the black body as always under the threat of death. Seaman's statement—"the danger is the sea"—comes after the congregation is told of Newell's murder, marking the sea as the constant reminder of the original form of violence, which exceeds the gun. The sea thus returns the black body to the history of chattel slavery, while Newell's smile "beyond it all" taps into the longing for homecoming, even while knowing it is impossible. Importantly, the ominous threat the sea invokes in Seaman is framed around notions of utterance and legibility. Newell's physical gesture towards the sea in lieu of verbal expression returns us to the novel's presentation of violence as too excessive for narration and its overt manifestation on the body. These moments remind readers of the inexorable signification of the middle passage in reference to oceans and ships, which, through Fate's presence in Santa Teresa, floods the border with the excessive violence of the history of slavery.

This history haunts "The Part About Fate." Through his various recollections, the text introduces a wide-ranging scope of historical periods of black struggle within the United States. For example, Fate brings the history of Atlantic slavery into the U.S.-Mexico border through the reading of Hugh Thomas's *The Slave Trade* (1997). This real extra textual reference is given to Fate by Antonio Ulises Jones, a black Marxist (perhaps Afro-Latinx) he interviews in Brooklyn years before his trip to Santa Teresa. Fate reads

from this text repeatedly, and the novel reproduces large portions throughout this section. Importantly, the novel stages Fate's turn to *The Slave Trade* through discussions of the femicide and the inability of history, language, and narrative to encapsulate racial and gendered violence.

Inscribed through discussions of the femicides—the female corpse as consumable and disposable—Fate's return to the history of the slave trade, his mother, and other black characters, enacts a network of violence across ethno-racial and national lines. Furthermore, the femicides trigger Fate's reflection into his own racial expendability and the history of violence signaled by his body. Overhearing a conversation about the femicides in a restaurant near the border, where "no one in the entire restaurant was black except for him" (336), Fate is reminded again of the elisions of racialized violence and suffering made by the historical archive. The account is staged through discussions of legibility, language, and the possibility of translating violence into text and/or the utterance. The conversation Fate overhears centers around the possibility of narrating death through language, the filtering of death "through the fabric of words" (337), and the violence that exceeds language or those populations that fall outside definitions of the human that, therefore, are elided from the historical archive. Unlike the "merchandise" on a slave ship, who "weren't part of society" (338), the "plantation owner" killed by his neighbor or the "woman killed in a French provincial capital" are defined as part of society and therefore their deaths become legible: "What happened to them could be written, you might say, it was legible" (339), one of the men says. This conversation affirms the femicide victims as industrial waste, disposable byproducts of export processing capitalist markets, and outside of society; outside the desire for narration or

inclusion within national historical archives; derivatives of excessive violence that brands their bodies monstrously excessive as well, and that therefore eclipses any possibility of translating the violence performed on their bodies through language.

Consequently, invoking French provincial murders, plantation owners' deaths, and the femicides within the same construction activates a transnational and transhistorical network of violence that surpasses and repeats history, from the seventeenth century to the present. Through this conversation Fate is reminded not only about how violence against black and brown bodies is commonly omitted from the historical archive, but also how it is so commonplace and excessive that it forecloses any possibility of telling. As such, the overheard conversation creates a transracial network of violence and pain, which Fate is importantly excluded from participating in, while being reminded about his insecure subjecthood. Ironically, this points to the futility of Fate's role as a journalist. While his occupation and expertise in language presuppose his ability to translate the world into text, to make it legible, *2666* forecloses this possibility. The violence performed on the female body on the U.S.-Mexico border is demonstrated by the text to be so excessive that it surpasses any ability for narration. Confronted with the violence on the border, which elicits memories that extend beyond his own recollection, Fate desires to write about the femicides yet is unable to do so. On the contrary, encountering the excessive violence of the border is translated by the text as a series of fragmented memories that bring the past and present together in a far-reaching web of violence. The violence that makes the femicides illegible also elicits in Fate a reflection about this own position within the American imaginary. After the men finish having their conversation in the restaurant, Fate

> returned to watching the sunset. He thought about his mother, and in his mother's neighbor, about the magazine, and the streets of New York, all with unspeakable silence and weariness. He opened the book by the former Sandhurst professor and read a paragraph at random. *Many captains of slave ships looked on their task as, as a rule, complete when they had delivered their slaves to the West Indies. But it was often impossible to realize the proceeds of the sale of slaves fast enough to provide the ship concerned with a return cargo of sugar* [...] *Planters might take several years to pay for the slaves. Sometimes, the European merchant preferred to have remittances from the West Indies in bills of exchange than to have sugar, indigo, cotton, or ginger in exchange for the slaves, because the prices of these goods in London were either unpredictable or low.* What pretty names, he thought. Indigo, sugar, ginger, cotton. The reddish flowers of the indigo bush. The dark blue paste, with copper waves. A woman painted indigo, washing herself in the shower" (340).[49]

Instigated by the consideration that violence performed on the female corpses exceeds the possibilities of narration, the novel establishes a relationship between Fate and the femicides through racialized violence and mourning. I cite this passage at length to demonstrate how *2666* continually tethers violence (physical, emotional, terrestrial) to aesthetic beauty. While the overheard exchange touches upon the cruelty of history, Fate returns his gaze to the natural beauty of the landscape. However, the sunset cyclically brings the text back to violence and, as such, demonstrates how historical violence and aesthetic pleasure cannot be read without the other. References to historical violence—past and present, national and international—returns Fate to his mother and specifically black spaces that, through the replication of *The Slave Trade* in *2666*, places his memories within a larger historical context of black mourning. Nevertheless, like Fate's turn to the landscape, reading about the purchase of slaves in return for goods, produces not a reflection on the brutality of the system, but one on beauty and source materials for the products themselves. As the text demonstrates, *The Slave Trade* prompts Fate to

consider the "pretty names" and the aesthetic qualities of these materials, expounding on their pleasing details, even speculating their proximity to the carnal. In this way, *2666* juxtaposes the violence of Atlantic slavery with beauty, on and off the page. The text also demonstrates how the aesthetic pleasure these materials denote cannot be extricated from their use as goods of exchange for black bodies. Effectively, "The Part About Fate" demonstrates how *2666* intimately fetters representations of violence through aesthetic beauty, and demonstrates the novel's investment in the pleasures experienced through excessive violence.

Lastly, "The Part About Fate" constantly returns readers to racial identifiers and questions about race, particularly blackness, in order to highlight its centrality in representations of violence within the novel. In effect, Fate continually notices race, and the text presents details that seem inconsequential for the plot but that serve as reminders of racial difference and his own desire to see this difference. On an airplane, for example, Fate notes that the "stewardess was blond, about forty […] The man in the seat next to him was black and was drinking from a bottle of water" (305). The constant noting of racial difference, moreover, denotes a desire to create national, hemispheric, and international alliances. After his mother's death, Fate looks "for porn on the TV. He found a movie in which a German woman was making love with a pair of black men. The German woman was speaking German and the two black men were as well. He wondered if there were black people in Germany too" (326). Fate's constant attention to race underscores his desire to ground himself and others in national and racial specificity, while also attempting to find blackness (himself) visually represented and, moreover, available in potential spaces of representation where none seem to exist, or which the

novel disallows, such as the U.S.-Mexico border and sexual performances. While the pornographic film Fate watches is depicted without titillating or sexual language, Fate's speculation into German blackness also points to his disbelief in seeing two black bodies presumably experiencing pleasure (performing pleasure). His surprise at hearing black German-speaking men is a projection that extends the possibilities of blackness outside his body, outside the U.S., the American hemisphere, and into international terrain. The international blackness Fate considers shows a desire to find racial kinships outside those he knows to be possible and extends the definition of "blackness" itself within the text.

However, his juxtaposition of "German woman" and "two black men" speaking German "as well," points to how black bodies are precluded from national belonging. In fact, Santa Teresa and the femicides elicit a broader ideological meditation on citizenship and the bodies allowed to participate in national cultural imaginaries. Further, this reflection is predicted by the threat of death that constantly haunts the text and that follows Fate into the border city. The femicides and the haunting by the female corpse throughout "The Part About Fate" makes him progressively become undone. Fate's international assignment generates a sense of insecurity and uncertainty, specifically in relation to his race and its symbolic position within the nation. Waiting for "trucks to pass on their way from Santa Teresa to Arizona," Fate considers what he said to a cashier, "I'm American[,]" which leads to further considerations about his national affiliation and his position within the nation state: "Why didn't he say African American? Because I'm in a foreign country? But can I consider myself to be in a foreign country when, if I wanted, I could go walking right now to my own country and it wouldn't take very long? Does that mean that in some places I'm American and in some places I'm African

American and in other places, by logical extension, I'm no one?" (359).

While describing the permeability of the border and the absurdity of its demarcation, especially in light of how Santa Teresa operates within a larger global capitalist system that relies on the concept of the postnational, Fate also illustrates the "un-doing" or the "nobodyness" of the black subject within the hemispheric American imaginary. Fate's contemplation of his Americanness or his beingness contributes to ongoing discussions within African American studies, such as that introduced by W.E.B DuBois in *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903) in which he defines the African American subject as always experiencing "double consciousness."[50]

Seeing the movement from Santa Teresa to Arizona the trucks make—probably carrying goods and merchandise—initiates a set of questions that remain unanswered in the novel. The border creates a sense of discomfort in Fate, which is replicated in the text through the series of questions that follow. Indeed, these questions about national affiliation, demarcation, and association enact Fate's unbecoming, not only a disassociation from the U.S. and his African Americanness, but an unbecoming human. At the end of the series of questions Fate is (hypothetically) "no one." The break in the text after this question leaves Fate not only as "no one," but as an excessive body that can be defined through a multiplicity and potentially conflicting forms of being, and as a series of questions that have no answer in narration. The series of questions ends this fragment in the novel. The following fragment in Fate's narrative opens with "When he woke up" (359). As such, the novel returns us to the questions that open "The Part About Fate" and textually marks his awakening as an ill-defined subject unable to locate the boundaries of his identity or his position within American conceptions of citizenship.

Unable to provide answers to Fate's series of questions, further, evidences its dabbling into African American discourses and rhetorics, an investigation that can never reach the source itself.

The hauntingly beautiful yet violent spaces described in the novel generate a growing sense of ambiguity and insecurity, not only in Fate, but in the novel generally. Making his way out of Santa Teresa with Rosa Amalfitano,[51] Fate is unable to recognize the landmarks he had seen only a few days prior. He assumes that New York is "where everything would take the consistency of reality again" (396). In this ideologically constructed space of death, logic becomes warped and dangerous, yet we never see him reach his desired destination back to sanity.

Instead, "The Part About Fate," returns readers to a moment before his departure, where he visits the presumed killer. As the suspect, Archimboldi's nephew, enters the room, the reporter "raised her hand to her mouth, as if she were inhaling a toxic gas, and she couldn't think what to ask" (440). Fate's invocation of toxic gas foreshadows the atomic violence that created the city and the genocidal violence of WWII introduced in the last section of the novel. These concluding lines of "The Part About Fate" introduces into the narrative the excessive violence of the Holocaust and formulates the victims as a small piece in a larger mechanism of systemic violence. Fate's section hints at the possibility of transnational, transracial, or even intra-ethnic alliances. Yet, "The Part About Fate" and *2666* as a whole, ultimately demonstrates that the borderland's "herida abierta" is not a space that can be translated through language and must resort to the language of approximation, grotesquerie, and the simile specifically to communicate violence. This violence of the U.S.-Mexico border and the femicides, furthermore,

necessitates the overwhelming fragmentation, characters, histories, and races of *2666*, but which ultimately prove insufficient to narrate its horror.

Chapter 4.
Rekonkista: Brownface, Time Travel, and Cyber-Fascism in *Atomik Aztex*

"Somebody played Russian roulette with reality, everything turned out kinda funny,
nobody told us this (One Reed) wuz happening—now it's time to start again."
—Sesshu Foster, *Atomik Aztex*

"Heifer whines could be human cries
Closer comes the screaming knife"
—The Smiths, "Meat is Murder"

"Have you seen the little piggies
Crawling in the dirt
And for all the little piggies
Life is getting worse
Always having dirt to play around in."
—The Beatles, "Piggies"

The murals of the Farmer John slaughterhouse in Vernon, California, are notorious. Covering ten acres, the murals show cartoon pigs in various acts of play and leisure: lying in a pasture alongside dogs and birds, swimming in a creek, eating grass, even flying in the sky with small pig wings (or are they on their way to pig heaven after being made into sausage inside?). These cartoon pigs are creepily human faced and anthropomorphized, wearing baseball caps, flying airplanes, and selling lemonade behind a lemonade stand. The idyllic farm life depicted by the murals is a "jolly" distraction from "the ugly business that goes on just behind it" (Lovell and Maranian 286). Indeed, the authors of *L.A. Bizarro: The All-New Insider's Guide to the Obscure, the Absurd, and the Perverse in Los Angeles* conclude that "[r]arely do art and industry collide in such an effective manner" (286).

Previously owned by Clougherty Packing, LLC and bought by Hormel Foods Corporation in 2016 for $186 million, Farmer John has been the maker of the proprietary "Dodger Dogs" since 1964.[1] Located in the "exquisitely dismal" (286) industrial zone of

Vernon—a city five miles south of Los Angeles—the Farmer John murals were begun by Hollywood set painter Leslie Allen "Les" Grimes in 1957, who fell to his death while completing his work. The murals have been expanded and retouched by various painters including Arno Jordan, an Austrian-born muralist, who enlarged and restored the mural well into the 1980s yet mysteriously disappeared, prompting urban legends about his being made into sausage himself.[2]

Figure 4: Farmer John Slaughterhouse. Photo by Nate Miller

Figure 2: Farmer John Slaughterhouse mural detail. Photo by Jeffrey Sward.

A little over half a mile away from the Farmer John slaughterhouse is the headquarters of The Hundreds, a streetwear brand that pretentiously describes itself as a "2-part project that houses a Classic Californian Streetwear brand and media platform

dedicated to Global Street Culture."[3] After founding The Hundreds in 2013, Bobby Kim and Ben Shenassafar moved their headquarters to Vernon in 2013 and commissioned a mural that revises the story depicted on the walls of Farmer John. As Kim states in his blog for *The Hundreds*, "The [Farmer John] mural, as beautiful and historical as it is, is a lie."[4] Painted by the painters that most recently retouched the mural at Farmer John, the mural at the streetwear company revises the narrative of pigs contently awaiting their execution inside. In this alternate reality, the pigs are the perpetrators of violence,[5] stringing humans by the neck to cut off their limbs, impaling them with thick wooden spears, burning them with a blowtorch, and hacking them to pieces with a chainsaw and Jason Voorhees mask.[6]

Figure 5: The Hundreds mural. Photo by The San Francisco Bay Area Independent Media Center (Indybay)

This chapter examines the pleasures in violent representations of competing, kitschy, and humorous worlds signaled by the dueling pig murals of Vernon. Reading Sesshu Foster's 2005 novel, *Atomik Aztex*, I show how the novel reimagines the historical cataclysm of Spanish conquest in the Americas by using speculative tropes such as time travel and alternate realities, exhibiting a "Latinxface" performance that revises both minstrelsy traditions and notions of multiethnic literature (especially multiethnic s/sf) as

didactic tools of social justice. I use "Latinxface" or "brownface" performance in this chapter to indicate how this novel by an Asian American author assumes the history, culture, and language of Chicanx populations past and present in both generative and problematic ways.[7] In this performance and its re-imagination of the past, *Atomik Aztex* unsettles key Chicanx concepts such as indigenous identity, ancestry, and nationhood while revealing that Los Angeles never stopped being Mexican and is part of what José Limón designates as "Greater Mexico."[8] The idea that Mexican nations have always continued to exist in U.S. territorial space even after the 1848 Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo is central to the novel and its representations of violence. In effect, *Atomik Aztex* underscores the centrality of the borderlands and borderlands literature in the Latinx and American imaginary, and in so doing continually reminds us of the violence of this geopolitical space, something that I explored in detail in chapter three. *Atomik Aztex* upends common representations of a pre-Columbian Chicanx homeland, Aztlán.[9] While the novel presents an alternate history where the Aztecs defeated the Spanish and the American hemisphere was not affected by European colonialism, it also capsizes any potential for sanguine equity by presenting the Aztecs (interchangeably "Aztexs" or "Azteks" in the novel) as a cyber-fascistic force that emulates the bellicosity of European and American imperialism. Overturning the trajectory of European colonial history in the Americas, the novel underscores the spectral Mexican presence in contemporary Southern California—indeed, in North American, generally—and illustrates what Sharon Patricia Holland identifies as the intimate relationship between death and the national body.[10] *Atomik Aztex*, then, disinters constitutive American voices and histories that have been made invisible and peripheral in the national archive.

As Kristen Silva Gruesz explores in *Ambassadors of Culture: The Transamerican Origins of Latino Writing* (2002), a Latinx presence has been invisible in political institutions and in literary history itself and "the national-pedagogical complex that relies on it to produce definitions of what is 'American'" (xi). Gruesz's archival investigation revises the U.S.'s national tradition that renders a Latinx presence as "ghostly and peripheral" (xii) and instead emphasizes the important role of Latinx and Spanish language writing in the United States before the twentieth century. Foster's *Atomik Aztex* similarly emphasizes the foundational importance of Mexican and indigenous peoples and cultures in the U.S. (and hemispherically), yet instead of advancing a revisionist ameliorative project, the novel highlights the loss and violence incurred by Spanish colonialism that remains as a haunting presence. In this way, Foster's novel can be read as a missing archival text from which scholars such as Gruesz could further expand their catalogue of Latinx writing in the U.S.

Concluding my discussion of the representation of violence in twentieth-century and contemporary Latinx speculative fiction with *Atomik Aztex* serves various purposes. Foster's novel epitomizes the central argument made in this project by drawing attention to issues of canonicity, the instability of ethno-racial definitions, and, most importantly, exemplifying my definition of the speculative in Latinx and multiethnic literature. *Atomik Aztex* demonstrates how doom patterns are enacted through excessive narration—description, textual breakages, polyglottal form, multi-lingual prose—that consistently returns readers in form and content to moments of textual catastrophe and the haunting remainders of history. "Doom Patterns" began with an examination of Junot Díaz to highlight the work of what can be considered the most prominent contemporary Latinx

author, yet also to challenge typical readings of his work and raise questions of canonicity and definitions of "high art" versus the "low brow." In following chapters these same questions reappear, calling attention to the importance of reexamining canonical Latinx literature typically read as "realist" alongside an African-American novel, revealing thematic networks across ethno-racial and national boundaries (chapter two), and calling into question the redemptive politics of Chicanx border studies through a "world novel" that participates in discussions of the U.S.-Mexican borderlands without belonging to the border itself (chapter three). Ending with an analysis of *Atomik Aztex* ties together the main questions raised by this project. Participating in representing Chicanx and Mexican American subjects yet not belonging to these ethno-racial categories himself, Foster along with his novel allows for new and expansive definitions of Latinx literature and draws attention to unexplored literary and thematic networks: Foster's novel demonstrates the possibilities and limitations of ethno-racial affiliation while underscoring the pleasures found in reading about excessive violence in a "low brow" text and, further, raises questions about literary marketing and categorization.

Set in two worlds, the novel presents us first with Zenzontli, Keeper of the House of Darkness for the Aztek Socialist Imperium. He is a leading military dignitary in an alternate reality in which the Aztecs defeated the Spanish in the sixteenth century, creating a different course for our conception of European and hemispheric American history. The Aztek Socialist Imperium, following common conceptions of Aztec tradition, generates its power through human sacrifice, offering human hearts of conquered war prisoners to grow their empire. Zenzontli and his Jaguar Unit are sent to Stalingrad to fight against the Nazis in 1942, yet suffers from debilitating headaches and

hallucinatory visions, which his superiors recommend fixing with a dangerous brain surgery. These visions, however, are our entry point into the novel's second world, where we find Zenzón, a worker in the Farmer John slaughterhouse who is attempting to unionize its workers. Both Zenzontli and Zenzón are confronted with similar obstacles, primarily in the form of superiors/elders and bureaucratic power structures. In fact, the two characters act as mirror images of each other, illustrating the long-lasting effects of history and the recursive power of violence.

The competing narratives seen on the façades of Farmer John and The Hundreds headquarters illustrate the tension between rewriting the historical past and the impossibility of illustrating excessive violence through language. While scholars have argued about the veracity of time travel in the novel as well as whether Zenzontli and Zenzón could be the same person, my concern here is with the speculative re-imagination of the Chicanx historical past and the excessive formal qualities of the novel that foreclose any possibility for imagining a regenerative future. *Atomik Aztex* implements, among other elements, a variety of textual styles (shifting between italicized, bolded, and underlined type), languages (English, Spanglish, Caló, Nahuatl, Russian), photographs, prose intermixed with brief moments of verse, infomercial-speak, a haphazard replacement of English's hard-c's for k's, and references to musicology, communist theory, and canonical journals, all of which are academically (mis)cited.[11] Moreover, as has been observed by others, *Atomik Aztex* also draws from a variety of literary traditions, including fantasy, the muckraking novel (particularly Upton Sinclair's 1906 *The Jungle*), *crónicas de Indias*, Spanish accounts of the "discovery" of the Americas, science fiction, the historical novel, and L.A. noir. The novel also implements various types of

performances and self-conscious postmodern references, invoking "high art" and "low-brow" popular culture, Chicanx history, aesthetics, and indigeneity, while challenging accepted notions of ethno-racial identity, the American literary tradition, and canonization.

I argue that in its excessive formal qualities, *Atomik Aztex* emulates the violence of colonial conquest, fascistic occupation, and even that of the slaughterhouse. In other words, much like Farmer John's idyllic mural reminds us of what takes place behind its walls, the tongue-in-cheek premise of *Atomik Aztex* reminds readers throughout the novel of the Spanish victory in 1521 and the subsequent colonization of the region. The gruesome yet playful representations of violence throughout the novel point back to the historical archive, while the overwhelming effect of reading *Atomik Aztex* also indicates a form of excess that verges on the pleasurable. As Susan Salter Reynolds of the *Los Angeles Times* states, "The parallel realities, the lack of warning about shifts in time and place, the characters with multiple personalities can make you dizzy if you struggle too hard to keep all the details in line. Instead, you have to let go and let the writing wash over you."[12] Reynolds' description stands in opposition to usual reading practices that requires us to "keep all the details in line." Instead, this novel demands an immersive experience without particular concern for detail. Letting the words "wash over you" not only speaks to the unfixed, tenuous, and seemingly erratic prose, but also to the generic qualities of Foster's work.[13] The turn to speculative and science fiction in *Atomik Aztex* signals a surplus of violence in the history it is retelling, forcing the novel to spill over itself, turning to a variety of literary traditions and genres, languages, and character and textual fragmentation in order to attempt (yet ultimately fail) to encapsulate the horror of

colonial violence. Failure in narration, as other chapters in this project have demonstrated, is constitutive of the representation of violence in Latinx speculative fiction: stories of colonization, imperialism, and racial discrimination cannot be told in typical forms of narrative and, therefore, narratives resort to fragmentation and excess.

Finally, the extravagant elements of the text and the violence it describes challenge notions of the use value of ethnic literature, especially drawing attention to how it is usually implemented as a tool of social remedy. *Atomik Aztex* presents us with a revenge fantasy that answers enduring questions in speculative and science fiction studies: What does redemption look like when minoritized and racialized subjects speak for themselves and reclaim power? Does the re-imagination of the historical past accomplish social justice? Does the new world look like redemption? The gruesome yet humorous representation of colonial violence undercuts the urgency of reimagining history without the mark of European colonialism, and through its extra- and intra-textual references, the novel continually reminds readers of the very real, lived violences in "our world" and demonstrates the impossibility of looking outside or beyond the anathema of colonialism, returning again and again to its textual emulation.

AZTLÁN IS WHERE THE HEART IS: THE SONGS OF THE MOCKINGBIRD

Unlike previous works explored in this project—novels like *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*, *Dreaming in Cuban*, and even *Zone One*—*Atomik Aztex* is not a canonical text. In fact, Foster is not a household name.[14] Born to an Anglo-American father and Nisei mother, Foster was raised in East Los Angeles and, although relatively unknown, has an impressive "literary pedigree," attending the Iowa Writer's Workshop

to receive his M.F.A.[15] After receiving his degree, Foster returned to L.A. to continue teaching, writing, and community organizing. Known primarily for his poetry, Foster is the author of *City Terrace Field Manual* (Kaya Press, 1996), *American Loneliness: Selected Poems* (Beyond Baroque, 2006), and *World Ball Notebook* (City Lights Press 2009), which won the American Book Award and an Asian American Literary Award for Poetry. *Atomik Aztex*, his only novel, has received favorable (albeit few) reviews.[16] His prose has been compared to the postmodern fiction of Thomas Pynchon and Don DeLillo (Esposito), Ishmael Reed, Philip K. Dick (*The Believer*) and identified with "[p]unk sci-fi and kitchen-sink realism" (*Publishers Weekly*). Reynolds of the *Los Angeles Times* states that a book like *Atomik Aztex* "require[s] slightly different reading skills from more traditional novels[,]" equating its difficulty with aesthetic mastery and literary expertise. The comparison to works of "high art" and literary fiction such as by Pynchon, DeLillo, Reed, and the Beats can be seen in qualifying terms used to describe *Atomik Aztex* like "genre-straddling tour de force" (*Publishers Weekly*; Cutler 158) and "twisting masterpiece of hybrid vigor" (*The Believer*). It is significant that in praising the book's "literariness" most reviewers compare the novel to works by white, "high art," canonical postmodern writers. Yet this type of praise is racially coded and in tension with literary history. As Ursula Heise explains in the *Cambridge History of the American Novel*, understandings of first and second-wave postmodernist writers do not fall as easily in line with notions of white male authors writing antirealist fiction and minority authors returning to realism: "Contrary to the simplistic oppositions that are often drawn into accounts of the 1970s and 1980s fiction between a predominantly white male postmodernism and a return to realism in the writings of women and minority novelists, it

turns out that some of the white males are not as anti-realist and some of the minority writers not as realist as commonly alleged" (978).

Scholarship on Foster's novel typically focuses on its examination of labor rights, neoliberalism, Chicanx history, and indigeneity. All these readings hold in common the tenet of Latinx and multiethnic literature (and in this case, the speculative imagination of the Chicanx past) as a device for cultural edification and transformation. For example, John Alba Cutler briefly addresses *Atomik Aztex* in relation to definitions of the borderlands and borderlands literature, arguing that the novel holds global capitalism, labor activism, immigration, and indigeneity at its center ("Borders and Borderland Literature" 158). Karen Tei Yamashita has called the novel "a scathing satire of revolutionary *machismo*" (Yun 211), while Sarah Pöhlmann explores it as a work of "cosmographic metafiction" (stemming from Hutcheon's definition of "historiographic metafiction" and Brian McHale's "ontological fiction"). For Pöhlmann, *Atomik Aztex* is emblematic of cosmographic metafiction, which self-reflexively draws attention to its narrativization of the historical past, while also pointing to the constructedness of the text itself: "it not only reflects on how history is written and the past is known but also on how the narrative world comes into existence, how it functions, coheres, and how it works in relation to readers and *their* world(s)" (225). The intimate link between history-making and world-making for Pöhlmann and other critics is associated with what they see as the novel's political imperative and an optimistic regenerative drive implicit in the reimagination of the Chicanx past. For example, Ramón Saldívar defines the novel as "social protest" ("The Other Side of History" 157) and upholds it as evidence of a trend in fiction by multiethnic writers toward what he terms "speculative realism" or"historical

fantasy": works that demonstrate a concern with the historical past, race, and "their relationship to a better future" (157).[17]

While Pöhlmann agrees that the novel "holds no romantic views about revolution or uprisings or that their mere imagination is enough to bring about change[,]" she quickly qualifies this statement by arguing that the political value of *Atomik Aztex* "lies in its celebration of potential" (239-240). Similarly, Kristy Ulibarri convincingly argues that the novel "elucidates the structural hegemony of economic exploitation under free-market capitalism" and, moreover, implements the notion of a pre-Columbian indigenous identity to challenge typical representations in Latinx and Chicanx fiction of indigeneity as pre-capitalist. Instead, she argues, indigeneity is itself a style, commodity, and spectacle that shows how Aztlán and pre-Columbian imagery have been used to create a sense of community and resistance by the 1960s and 1970s Movimiento.

Although Foster claims that in *Atomik Aztex* he "wanted to get away from the barely veiled autobiography of his poems, 'to do something that leaned on the imagination, that made it bear the burden of storytelling'" (Ehrenreich), many scholars (and even Foster himself) have used his proximity and involvement in Chicanx communities as a reason for the novel's subject matter.[18] Foster's Asianness haunts the novel and criticism about it. For example, Stephen Hong Sohn echoes Foster's desired departure from the implicit autobiography of the poem in his analysis of *Atomik Aztex*, claiming that Asian American literature is read and marketed as autobiographic and autoethnographic in scope (64), and that in taking on the voice of another ethnic identity, Foster "undermines the assumption that only one racial or ethnic group can claim ownership over the representation of the minority experience" (65).[19]

Sohn argues that *Atomik Aztex* articulates why the Chicanx experience is relevant to Asian American Studies, exposing the inequities manufactured by global capitalism, especially for racialized minorities (65): "Foster's work takes inspiration from an activist model that forges links between ethnoracial groups and explores interrelated histories. This approach dovetails with the author's negotiation of racial identity where the continuum between the Asian American experience and the Chicano experience finds productive 'blurring' within *Atomik Aztex*, both in its content and in how the represented realities blend into each other" (75). Therefore, for Sohn, the "novel can be read as a cautionary critique of world domination" (75). Similarly, Ulibarri challenges how Latinx literature is categorized by an author's descent from a Latin American nation and/or former Spanish colony (216). Using the controversy over Danny Santiago's *Famous All Over Town*, Ulibarri points to previous instances of racial performances in Latinx literature, issues surrounding racial "authenticity" and representation of ethno-racial experience, and how Foster's representation of Chicanx history expands common definitions of Latinx literature. However, Ulibarri undercuts her own challenge to the insularity of Latinx literary and cultural studies by stating that "Foster does not don a Latino surname and, thus, does not hoodwink us with his biological ontology or claim an essential authenticity to his subject matter" (216).[20] Moreover, she, like other critics and scholars, and Foster himself, use his upbringing in East L.A. as one of the novel's *raison d'être*: "And growing up in East LA, Foster is no stranger to the history of Chicano cultural nationalism or East LA's continual working class plights, which makes his satiric narrative on these cultural and labor politics a significant contribution to thinking about Chicana/o and Latina/o representations of indigeneity" (216).[21] Foster himself frames this

"significant contribution" in problematic terms: "This is what I'm going to do because who else is going to do it? […] Even Chicanos who want to do it don't do it. [Representing the community]"—the phrase is Kim's—"is one of my principal tasks" (Kim).

I am committed to the expansion of categories such as "Latinx" that a book like *Atomik Aztex* makes possible. This chapter is also concerned with the politics of accessibility into specific ethno-racial backgrounds and histories an author like Foster can or cannot have. The novel's Latinx performance is itself an element of its spilling over and excess. More than Chicanx, more than Asian American, more than x-fiction (science, speculative, historical, etc.), *Atomik Aztex* exceeds typical modes of representation and in its description of Chicanx and colonial histories, the reader is simultaneously directed to other forms of national and local historical violence, such as the Immigration Act of 1924 and the internment of Japanese Americans after the bombing of Pearl Harbor. We can see this friction in the language used by City Lights Books to market Foster's novel: "A fantastical gonzo Aztlán mythology, where modern Aztecs and immigrant ghosts uncover blood sacrifice in Los Angeles." Using Chicanx and Latinx literary tropes to describe the novel, the press, however, categorizes Foster's work under "Asian American Writing," demonstrating the difficulty of categorizing a work like *Atomik Aztex*. The tension between embodied ethnic identities and representations of Chicanx violence is addressed with metafictional humor in the novel itself: "You are a Party member, full-fledged Aztek warrior (tho there's some rumor about Japanese infiltration of your bloodlines someplace)" (Foster 8). The tongue-in-cheek indication of the author's Japanese-ness takes readers outside of the narrative and draws attention to the limitations of empathy,

the possibility of inhabiting the Other, and the obstacles of identification in reading fiction. All this is done, however, while expanding common definitions of ethno-racial boundaries and the possibility of representing other racial minorities in fiction (as Sohn suggests). Yet Foster's "appropriation" of Latinxness challenges this expansion, even while the novel's excessive qualities redeems this use of brownface. By this I mean that his defensive justification for tapping-into Chicanx history are offset by the novel's form: *Atomik Aztex*'s attempt at Chicanx history effuses onto other histories as well, such as Asian American identities that contradict common perceptions of the model minority in its attempt to become that which is commonly understood as a lesser-than ethnic minority, the Latinx.

There has been some debate about the novel's "plot," especially as it relates to its temporal setting.[22] While the novel clearly sets the Aztek world of Zenzontli primarily in 1942, Scott Esposito claims the second setting of Zenzón and the Farmer John slaughterhouse takes place in 2005, Ulibarri states "this world" takes place in "some undesignated time after 1961" (215), and Sohn reads this "other reality [as] modeled on our now" (74) (Sohn's *Racial Asymmetries* was published in 2014).[23] This type of discrepancy points to the erratic inconsistency of prose that disallows any concrete grip on the text and instead forces readers to plummet into a text organized precisely around confusion without an eye toward resolution. Confusion in *Atomik Aztex*, in fact, establishes violence as inescapable, unintelligible, and persistently reproduced.

The novel's unpredictability, excess, and multiplicity of meaning speak to the tradition of historiographic metafiction as defined by Linda Hutcheon in *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction* (1988). *Atomik Aztex*, then, falls within this

genre, self-consciously defines itself as "high art" yet also as an incomplete source for the representation of history. Hutcheon defines the postmodern as that which is "contradictory, resolutely historical, and inescapably political. Its contradictions may well be those of late capitalist society, but whatever the cause, these contradictions are certainly manifest in the important postmodern concept of 'the presence of the past'" (4). She further theorizes "historiographic metafiction" as a form that is "both intensely self-reflexive and yet paradoxically also lay[s] claims to historical events and personages" (5). Importantly, the reinvestigation of the past is not an act of nostalgia but a critical revision that does not naively "search for transcendent timeless meaning, but rather a re-evaluation of and a dialogue with the past in the light of the present" (19). However, any access to the historical past is only accessible and conditioned by textuality (16) and, in the case of *Atomik Aztex* (as is the case generally in postmodernist fiction), presented to us by an unreliable narrator that is "hard to locate," "resolutely provisional and limited[,]" and "often undermin[es] their own seeming omniscience" (11).[24] The cyclical, contradictory, and confusing narrative in *Atomik Aztex* continually calls attention to the question of "*whose* truth gets told" (123), and through its use of pastiche mocks the historical archive while simultaneously reminding us of violent events within it.[25]

It is essential to address the postmodern and speculative aesthetics of the novel in specific Latinx (and multiethnic) terms. For this, I turn to Antonio Viego, who in *Dead Subjects: Towards a Politics of Loss in Latino Studies* (2007) argues that the notion of the ego in psychoanalytic theory pathologizes ethno-racialized subjects.[26] Although Viego does not explore postmodern aesthetics, Viego's exploration of notions of wholeness and transparency are easily applicable to not only the narrator(s) of *Atomik*, but also the

novel's opaqueness and impenetrability. Indeed, his Lacanian framework of reading the ethno-racialized subject as divided and split in language offers an opening for considering the fragmentary and surplus qualities of the text. As stated previously, the novel implements, among various other elements, fragmentation, multilingual prose, paratextual references, allusions, and excessive description. Concurrently, the text's subject matter—imperial-colonial conquest—makes the novel's implementation of postmodern aesthetics a way to speculatively reimagine the Chicanx past while consistently returning readers to moments of cataclysm formally and thematically. Additionally, Viego's analysis of the "border-queer" in Latinx studies and the hysteric or barred subject in Lacanian psychoanalysis is useful for our understanding of the novel as a whole and the narrator(s) specifically. As Viego explains, the hysteric or barred subject disrupts the notion of a universal subject in ego psychoanalysis, while the border-queer threatens master narratives and even the notion of archives of knowledge (especially in academia).[27] In this way, both the border-queer and the hysteric redefine the parameters of the normal, displaying their assemblages and producing new symptoms in need of interpretation. As such, the border-queer and hysteric affirm their symbolic elusiveness and resistance at the level of language and definition and invite us to cultivate their piecemeal nature and the multiplicity they inspire: "This should be read not as an attempt to do away with symptoms entirely and thus with hysterics […] but rather as an attempt to cultivate new symptoms, new hysterics, new hysterias, and thus new forms of knowledge and new ways of getting off on knowledge" (Viego 113). The hysteric, like the border-queer, produces new symptoms and undermines the "master's discourse" by

producing new symptoms and "by requiring the production of new knowledge, more knowledge, because the hysteric […] gets off on knowledge" (113).[28]

This invitation to find "new ways of getting off on knowledge" is precisely what *Atomik Aztex* and its alternate realities propose. However, the many knowledges introduced by the text create a cacophonous and overwhelming effect that causes various forms of fragmentation and breakages in the narrative. For example, it is important to note that the novel opens with Zenzontli, whose name is derived from "Zenzontle" or "Cenzontle" in Nahuatl, and is translated into English as "mockingbird." From "centzontleh," centzontle means "possessor of four hundred words" (*centzontli*, meaning "four hundred" + *tlahtolli*, meaning "language, word, statement" + *-eh,* meaning "possessor of").[29] The North American mockingbird is a "virtuoso bird," an "open-ended learner" who can add new vocalizations to their repertoires throughout their lives (Gill 230). As its binomial name stipulates (*Mimus polyglottos*), the mockingbird is an imitator of many tongues, known for mimicking the calls of other birds and animal species such as frogs and insects, and even human-made sounds such as car alarms (237).[30]

Zenztonli's name, then, indicates not only how multilingualism is essential and at the foundation of the text, but also the shifts in language and their implementation as a type of forgery. As such, the text indicates the impossibility of reaching an authentic original source for the histories relayed within, and instead creates a cacophony of sound that is excessive, overwhelming, and points readers multi-directionally outside of itself, ad infinitum. Much like the mockingbird, the voices in *Atomik Aztex* demonstrate adaptability and elusiveness, a playful jeering that consistently reminds readers of various forms of violence: historical, lingual, racial, and colonial. Indeed, the novel demonstrates

the necessity to incorporate a multiplicity of vocalizations in order to describe the excessive nature of the violence it is describing.

From the outset of the novel, readers are forewarned of the profusion of voices and literary traditions they will encounter throughout. Yet, before the novel begins, we encounter a preliminary "Note" that like the "first beginning" of Díaz's *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*, instructs us, with all its caveats, on how to read the pages that follow it:

Note

> This is a work of fiction. Readers looking for accurate information on Nahua and Mexica peoples or the Farmer John meat packing plant in the City of Vernon need to *read nonfiction*. (See Michael Coe and Miguel Leon-Portilla.) Persons attempting to find a plot in this book should read Huck Finn. Also, in this book a number of dialects are used, including the extreme form of the South-Western pocho dialect, caló, ordinary inner-city slang, and modified varieties of speech from the Vietnam era. This is no accident. (Foster, bold and italics in original)[31]

With this opening note, the text lays claim to a literary tradition ("work of fiction"), while simultaneously refusing a central element of it, the plot. Additionally, the Note playfully directs readers to Mark Twain's *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1884), whose formal qualities it emulates even as it taunts its attachment to a storyline.[32] However, unlike the "Notice" and "Explanatory" that open Twain's text, the Note in Foster's novel remains unsigned, raising questions as to its origin and author. As Sarah Pöhlmann argues, the citation of *Huck Finn* might seem like "pointing from the high ground of experimental fiction of doubtful ontologies to the solid ground of a classic text," yet *Atomik Aztex* actually references a "similar self-reflexive and plotless text and situates both itself and *Huck Finn* within a textual multiverse in which no world is the real one and every world is an alternative world" (227). Indeed, opening the novel with this extra-

textual reference of canonical American fiction both lays claims to being conversant in "high art" while signaling itself as its opposite. In this way, *Atomik Aztex*'s Note indicates its excessiveness from the outset, referencing elements outside the American historical archive such as the history of "Nahua and Mexica peoples" and various non-English dialects. Placing these histories side-by-side with "ordinary inner-city slang" and "speech from the Vietnam era" creates a hemispheric network of colonial, imperial, and contemporary military violence. The text, thus, writes a new history in which these elements coexist and congeal in Vernon, inciting local Southern California history and the cruelty of the industrial meat complex. Unlike Twain's prefaces, which call forth various nonstandard forms of English—"Missouri negro dialect; the extremest form of backwoods Southwestern dialect; the ordinary 'Pike County' dialect"—the dialects and languages invoked by *Atomik Aztex* introduce a complex hemispheric and global network (Vietnam) and systems of communication that are acquired through warfare or lost because of colonial and imperial histories.

Further, the text invokes the work of Michael D. Coe and Miguel León-Portilla, an American and Mexican anthropologist, respectively, by placing itself in opposition to their work on pre-Columbian Mesoamerica. Yet, as with the various dialects, locations, and peoples introduced in the Note, citing two prominent anthropologists points readers to their work and the centrality of anthropological research in the novel itself. Refusing a linear plot, identifying itself as fiction (versus nonfiction), and invoking multiple extra-textual references, *Atomik Aztex* invites readers to act as archivists themselves. In this way, the text sends us in a seemingly unending and impossible task that unearths the various violences and problematic national, lingual, cultural, and regional histories that

have been erased from accepted American historical archives but that remain as a haunting presence.

Finally, ending the Note with "This is no accident," once again ties the text to the literary canon by invoking Twain's prefaces—"The shadings have not been done in a haphazard fashion, or by guesswork; but painstakingly"—while pointing to itself as a constructed object that expands common conceptions of postmodernist fiction. The mention of unexpected languages, traditions, and histories illustrates the essential role Latinx and hemispheric oral and literary traditions have in the nation's writing. And like Twain, the novel's Note uses humor and irony, paradoxically incorporating and challenging that which it parodies (Hutcheon 11), "forcing a reconsideration of the idea of origin and originality" and traditional notions of perspective (11).

The humor in *Atomik Aztex*'s "Note" is quickly undercut, as it is followed on the same page with an excerpt from Charlotte Delbo's *Auschwitz, et après* (*Auschwitz and After*):[33]

> Step of out history
> to enter life
> try that all of you
> you'll get it then.

The inclusion of Delbo is significant. While these four lines of verse could be labeled an epigraph, and although they're not titled as such, I would like to argue that following the "Note," Delbo's poem is an added explanatory, much like the one in *Huck Finn*. Delbo's work here acts as another extra-textual lesson that both instructs readers on how to approach the text that follows and draws them away from it to Delbo's own work and the violence of World War II. Much like Nazism and World War II in Bolaño's *2666*, the inclusion of this history of genocide creates another transatlantic and transtemporal

network established through violence and that multi-directionally points back and forth between colonial, mid-century fascistic, and contemporary violence. Delbo's verse affirms the fracturing capacities of war and the necessity of atemporal and atypical forms of narration (of experiencing the world) in order to encapsulate the experience of trauma and violence. However, as her memoir demonstrates, her entreaty is impossible. *Atomik Aztex*, then, creates an inescapable system of extra-textual references that organize the novel before it truly begins, and with Delbo's work readers are informed of the limitations of seeing, the limitations of language to convey meaning. Known for her mantra *il faut donner à voir* ("They must be made to see"), Delbo's *Auschwitz and After* repeatedly asks readers to "Essayez de regarder. Essayez pour voir" ("Try to look. Just try to see"). However, these repeated requests, as Michaela Hulstyn argues, become "confrontations in the place of invocations, the phrases call for imagining while at the same time suggesting the reader's inability to fully visualize the scenes" (75). The formal qualities of *Auschwitz and After* indicate as much: Composed of postmodern vignettes, titled and untitled poems, and narrative prose fragments that hold the voices of survivors other than Delbo, the book illustrates how linear narrative and typical forms of narration cannot encapsulate the horror and violence of the experience of Auschwitz.

Accordingly, *Atomik Aztex* is constructed through repeated moments of uncertainty and recursive violence. From the opening of the text, readers are confronted with a reimagined form of colonial violence that is simultaneously shaped by indecision and ambiguity. The novel opens as follows: "I am Zenzontli, Keeper of the House of Darkness of the Aztex and I am getting fucked in the head and I think I like it. Okay sometimes I'm not sure. But my so-called visions are better than aspirin and cheaper"

(Foster 1). The narrative, thus, introduces an unreliable narrator who at first asserts an identity that modifies colonial history through the creation of a fictionalized Aztec figure, yet quickly amends the claim to "I am" with vacillation. The ambiguous "Okay sometimes I'm not sure," sets the tone for the rest of the novel, calling into question not only his "so-called visions" (which lead us to the Farmer John world), but also the novel's premise itself. In effect, the novel establishes "getting fucked in the head" as its modus operandi, and much like the humor inherent in the sound of Díaz's "fukú," *Atomik Aztex* avows to fuck with the reader's head in the pages that follow.

Beginning with this self-conscious contention is jarring for many reasons: readers are presented with a protagonist—who quickly becomes two—with an "exotic" name that is difficult to pronounce for English-speaking readers and/or those with little familiarity with Mesoamerican languages; an alternate reality with uncertain yet official-sounding ranks; and an action being performed on the protagonist's head that wavers between violence and pleasure. *Atomik Aztex*, then, is deeply invested in the reimagination and reproduction of colonial and ethno-racial violence through highly manicured prose that vacillates between high literary fiction and the low-brow tongue-in-cheek.

As stated previously, common readings of *Atomik Aztex* claim its reimagination of the Mexican colonial past as a politically progressive message for conceiving a future of social justice free of colonial-imperial inheritances and contemporary neoliberal inequity. Instead, I would like to argue that within its world building, the novel continually returns readers in form and content to moments of colonial, imperial, fascistic, and contemporary institutional violence as a pleasurable aesthetic practice. Indeed, the dual worlds of 1942 Tenochtitlan and contemporary (?) Vernon, California, indicate the inescapable and

recurring nature of colonial violence which, rendered in an excessively self-referential and tongue-in-cheek fashion, underscores the entertaining and pleasurable act of reading about cataclysms. For example, to establish its alternate reality, Zenzontli addresses the reader directly: "Perhaps you are familiar with some worlds, stupider realities amongst alternate universes offered by the ever expanding-omniverse, in which the Aztek civilization was 'destroyed'" (1). Zenzontli catalogs the "planned genocide" Europeans "*thot*" they would perpetrate and invites readers to act as historians asking us, much like the sardonic footnotes in Díaz's *Oscar Wao*, to consider how much we actually know about the Aztec conquest or hemispheric colonial history, generally. In explaining the Aztek victory, the novel simultaneously enumerates a long list of colonial violence and its victims:

> They planned genocide, to wipe out our civilization, build cathedral on **TOP** of our pyramids, bah, hump our women, not just our women but the Tlaxkalans, the Mixteks, the Zapoteks, the Chichimeks, the Utes, the Triki, the Kahuilla, the Shoshone, the Maidu, the Klickitat, the Mandan, the Chumash, the Yaqui, the Huicholes, the Meskwaki, the Guarani, Seminoles, endless peoples, decimate 'em with smallpox, measles, and shit fits, welfare lines, workaholism, imbecility, enslave 'em in the silver mines of Potosí, the gold mines of El Dorado & Disneylandia, on golf courses & country clubs, *chingados*, all our brothers, you get the picture. (1)

As Cutler states, the collection of indigenous peoples exterminated by European colonialism "resists dominant Mexican and North American conceptions of what it means to be Indian" as the list is missing its "usual suspects" (Incas, Cherokee, Iroquois, etc.) and, thus, "makes strange again the familiar history of the conquest, showing it to be more far-reaching historically and geographically than popularly understood" ("Borders and Borderlands Literature" 169). In addition, the novel once again introduces unfamiliar (sometimes misspelled) proper nouns into the text, this time in a long list that leans

toward the excessive. This list produces an overwhelming effect that can create a pause in reading or even force readers to skip over the text. Yet, as with the novel's opening "Note," the incorporation of these Native American peoples into the world making of destruction once again points readers outside the text and to act as historians and archivists themselves. Moreover, this catalog of genocide leads to an inventory of colonialism's repercussions that, importantly, are not limited to the sixteenth century but continue into the present, from smallpox to the golf course.

However, while the novel asserts the "planned genocide" as a prevented one, in effect the text narrates the events recorded in our historical archive. Invoking a thwarted genocide actuates it in the text, creating an inexorable world system in which the genocide of (unfamiliar) Native American populations continues into our present through modern forms of violence. While the text creates a network of hemispheric genocide that elicits the mythical (El Dorado) in conjunction with the real (Potosí), the text also buoys its violence as specifically Mexican and Mexican American. For example, using the word "*chingado*" introduces the history of Spanish conquest in Mexico into the text. Most famously used by Octavio Paz in *El laberinto de la soledad* (*Labyrinth of Solitude*), *chingar* is translated by the Royal Spanish Academy as to bother, "practice coitus," or to drink alcohol with frequency.[34] Yet, as Paz illustrates in "Los hijos de la Malinche," the verb "denotes violence," it is "to do violence to another. The verb is masculine, active, cruel: it stings, injures, gashes, stains" (97). Further, it denotes excess of feeling (98) that calls back to the Cortés's conquest of Mexico and his "relationship" with La Malinche (Malinalli, Malintzin, or Doña Marina), which defines the Mexican nation as instituted through rape (99, 105).[35] Cataloguing indigenous populations exterminated through

contact with Europeans and, indeed, the byproducts of colonialism into our present, *Atomik Aztex* creates a speculative universe that defines the American hemisphere as constructed through recurring and inescapable violence.

This form of repetition is upheld by the novel as central to its plot as well. As anthropologists and historians of Mesoamerican cultures have established, Aztec culture was characterized by a belief in cyclical time. *Atomik Aztex*'s world-building implements this belief system as a tool for the depiction and reproduction of cyclical colonial and ethno-racial violence. Zenzontli describes the Aztek belief of circular time and "cyklikal konceptions of the universe where reality infinitely kurves back upon itself endlessly so all that has existed does exist and will always exist and so forth into infinity. It's the only POV that makes sense in the end. Which is the beginning" (Foster 3). Much as Yunior's statement that opened chapter 1—"As soon as you start thinking of the beginning, it's the end"—Zenzontli's depiction of beginning and endings narrates simultaneous creation and destruction that is inextricably associated with colonial domination and indigenous genocide. Correspondingly, the novel yokes the cyclical repetition of violence with literary representation by using the terminology of the MFA workshop or the English classroom ("POV") while mocking Western conceptions of linear time and the writing of history.

Indeed, cyclical apocalypse lies at the heart of Aztec belief. The Aztec calendar stipulated that the world had been created and destroyed four previous times over the span of 2,028 years, and that our current world would similarly be destroyed. In this cyclical system, past events structured notions of the present and patterns for the future.[36] Similarly, *Atomik Aztex* upholds all conceptions of the future through the expectation of

the destruction, and reconceives the historical archive through the foundational impact the Spanish conquest had on the Americas. Importantly, the cyclical view of time is linked to contemporary southern California highway culture: "The world is some shifty joint where universes intersekt & spin away into new directions like car crashes on the Golden State Freeway and the intersektion with the 101" (200). This transtemporal presentation of time as chaotically intersecting and "spin[nning] away" is analogized to the violence of the car crash and playing "Russian roulette," both unpredictable yet determinedly violent events. "Somebody played Russian roulette with reality," Zenzón states at the end of the novel, "everything turned out kinda funny, nobody told us this (Reed One) wuz happening—now it's time to start again" (200). It is crucial that the text inserts "Reed One" into this conception of time as it exposes the foundational importance of apocalyptic thinking and colonial violence in the text (and in Aztec conceptions of cyclical time).

The common explanation for Cortés's success in conquering Mexico with a small number of Spaniards is based on the idea that the Aztecs thought he was Quetzalcoatl, their returning god. It is generally accepted that in thinking Cortés was their returning god, the Aztecs did not resist the Spanish effectively. This interpretation is based on the fact that Cortés reached Mexico in 1519, year 1 Acatl (Reed 1) in the Aztec calendar that is associated with Quetzalcoatl. However, as Ross Hassig states, this is "a conflation of the god with a historical Toltec ruler and priest of his cult, Ce Acatl Topltzin Queztalcoatl (I Reed, Our Lord Quetzalcoatl)" (58). His birth year was the same named year in the 52-year Aztec cycle as Cortés's arrival (1 Acatl), and therefore the Aztecs surrendered to him (58).[37] Invoking this date inscribes the destruction of worlds in the text and

reproduces the violence of colonialism within it. Spoken at the culmination of the novel, the protagonists' assertion of "start[ing] again" itself introduces histories of violence and destruction in the text—beginnings are once again simultaneous evocations of worlds' end.

SWASTIKAS & PIGS: MEDITATIONS ON BEAUTY

Atomik Aztex provocatively stresses the aesthetic power of violence in the novel. For example, Zenzontli highlights the visual appeal of Nazism and the use value of its aesthetic practices that, however, supersede capital and veer into the affective. His evaluation of German aesthetics consistently returns readers to representations of violence, genocide, and colonial domination, overturning the sentimental view of the indigenous past in the Latinx imaginary. Ulibarri emphasizes this same point in her work in relation to the novel's labor politics and concern with neoliberalism. Yet, unlike Ulibarri's reading, I argue that Zenzontli's consistent return to questions of beauty and pleasure in relation to war, fascism, and human sacrifice underscore the connection between violence and representation and how aesthetic representation recreates various forms of violence.

Zenzontli, for example, calls swastikas a "cute Nazi insignia" (81) and notes how Nazism produces "interesting color coordinations and design graphiks based on German Expressionism or the muted or flat matte color schemes of **Modernism"** (108; bold in original). Importantly, it is not the morality of fascism or its genocidal tendencies that are

highlighted as threats in the text, but the "hard-edged aesthetik concept & color scheme to their ideology that was a definite real threat to the entire globe, that's why their regime had to be destroyed" (108). The novel, thus, challenges accepted notions that aesthetic beauty leads to a greater concern for justice—as stipulated by the work of Immanuel Kant, Elaine Scarry, and Iris Murdoch—even while it participates in aesthetic practices currently upheld as "high art," such as a "**Modernism**" (bold in original) that the text designates as Nazi-esque. This description also defines ideology as an aesthetic endeavor, created and reproduced through writing, visual art, music, etc., and as such defines itself (the novel) as a maker of systems of belief. Further, Zenzontli mocks Western conceptions of "art" and challenges what is considered beautiful, introducing the notion of accepted forms of representation as being inextricably linked to victory in warfare and historical conquest.[38] While *Atomik Aztex* raises important questions about the propagation of aesthetic values and challenges readers to question their own aesthetic choices—through a jeering tone—the novel also stitches together the intimate relationship between aesthetics and violence, demonstrating the long lasting effects of colonialism as seen in language. Zenzón, for example, slips outside a diner as he runs from an armed person inside, describing the fall as "br[eaking] my glottal stop on a slippery diphthong derived from middle English" (130). The novel, then, cements the acquisition of language and its use in writing as the byproduct of violence.

In this way, *Atomik Aztex* yokes aesthetic practices and the dissemination of specific languages, such as English, to conquest, colonialism, immigration, and warfare. As Zenzontli ponders the early success of the Nazis in Europe, he further ties together genocidal violence and territorial occupation to aesthetic choices:

> The Germans, it must be said, did have a highly developed aesthetik sensibility about how to conduct their war—which accounted for their early success—becuz they chose the koolest immaculate uniforms of gray wool, Sam Brown belts with snap-on attachments or accouterments and flared helmets like industrial samurais and stylistik master strokes like zippy emblems such as swastikas (we assume they tok them from the Navajos, cuz Navajos swear they invented the swastikas first by staring at the sun for a long time without sunglasses), which did a lot for their cause, having all those great authentik items and perks of office, and they had kool designs like the iron cross, Death's Head insignia, double lightening bolts for the SS, etc., all that good stuff, *plus the proper attitude (a certain pride in business undertakings, giving it 100%),* which led to enormous success penetrating new markets all across the world from North Afrika to Paris, Amsterdam, Kiev, Smolensk, Prague, etc. *But they were about to meet their match with the Azteks on the scene!* (125)

Ulibarri concludes that Zenzontli uses "aesthetik" as a synonym for "Nazism's market success" and not as "a sensibility about the state of 'art'" (220). Further, she states that his attention to aesthetics in relation to fascism is "purely decorative, much like the novel's replacing most of the hard Cs with *K*s and C*S*s with Xs or the text's random italicizations, bolding, slang and text-speak. These formal elements construct appearance as nothing more than a marketing technique achieved with clothing, accessories and cool branding" (220). Yet the replacement of hard Cs for Ks and the text's seemingly haphazard stylistics exceed the decorative, and demonstrate the impossibility of portraying colonial, imperial, and genocidal violence through linear or "typical" forms of narration. The novel's turn to these narrative styles reveals the weight of aesthetics in creating, reproducing, and disseminating violence. As Zenzontli states, the swastika is a symbol of cultural appropriation[39] that has been emptied of its indigenous origin and transformed into a marker of genocide. Highlighting the swastika's lineage attempts to evacuate the horrific connotations of Nazi symbology—and by extension Western aesthetics—using terms such as "zippy emblems" to describe its paraphernalia. However,

the long list of accouterments once again demonstrates a return to the excessive and inscribes into the text images of violence that cannot be redefined even if described as "kool." Moreover, Zenzontli describes a map of violence that moves from Africa and across Europe, which will be occupied by the Azteks.

In effect, the Azteks do not prove to have social justice on their mind, as representations of the indigenous past would have us believe. Instead, Zenzontli concludes that there is beauty in killing: In "*human rites*, especially in human sakrifices, *aesthetiks* are of prime importance […] It's got to *look good* or otherwise Huizilopochtli, Tezkatlipoka, Coyozaukee, Tlazayotl, or whoever won't even notice; the whole bloody affair won't *accrue* the same economik benefit as you would get from a *fine, graceful, beautiful* sakrifice" (Foster 141). Ulibarri rightly points out the use of the word "*accrue*" here, arguing that Zenzontli is concerned not with the ethos of ritual sacrifice but instead "frets over whether the sacrifice will look good and, thus, make money. In this sense, he may admonish the Neoliberal Ekonimists who want quantity over quality, but he also plays right into the hand of neoliberal desire: maximizing (abstract) profit at the expense of human bodies" (Ulibarri 222).[40] While Ulibarri's reading is useful in expanding our understanding of the novel's concern with labor and capitalism, I would like to argue that *Atomik Aztex* is also foregrounding pleasure in violence. Indeed, as the novel demonstrates through its various styles and tongue-in-cheek narration, there is aesthetic value in descriptions of violence.

Much as it presents Nazism and human sacrifice through an analysis of aesthetic properties, *Atomik Aztex* portrays the slaughtering of pigs through a turn to the emotive. The first-person descriptions of slaughtering pigs throughout the novel are fleshy,

sensual, and intimate: a portrayal that disrupts the boundary between animal and human and, notably, is staged as analogous to the use of human hearts for the propagation of the Aztex Imperium. Zenzón describes killing each pig as a private moment of closeness with the hog, but also the medium through which to reminisce on familial ties:

> I reach my left arm around the hog's shoulders as I lean into its girth, the warm, grizzly skin prickling worse than your old man's two-day stubble, I give it the last firm goodbye hug, pressing the knife into its throat at the same time, drawing it diagonally down, slicing the carotid with one motion, then on out the other side. The blade comes back at me soft as sliced cornbread. It's a one-two movement, that dance step. (Foster 7)[41]

Like the spaces of black memory and mourning that the dismembered corpse elicit for Oscar Fate in *2666*—affective bonds between himself and the victims of femicide that hold potential, but are ultimately short lived—the slaughtering of pigs in *Atomik Aztex* also generate ephemeral moments of emotion that transcend the act of butchering. The labor of slaughtering instigates a memory for Zenzón of his father's "two-day stubble," where animal flesh exceeds itself and enables an exploration of his familial past. The language used to describe the act of killing a pig also defies expected representations of the slaughterhouse and veers into that of affection, redefining not only animal-human relationships but also the act of killing itself. The pig's body is "warm" as Zenzón gives the hog not only a "goodbye hug" but a "firm" one, and finally describes what should be routine procedure as a "dance step." These portrayals invoke notions of pleasure and play, and what should be a gruesome and bloody action—inserting the knife into the pig's carotid—is instead depicted through the inviting language of nourishment; the knife is soft, quiet, the act of killing (and reading about killing) satisfying, pleasurable.[42]

ATOMIK AZTLÁN, ATOMIK LATINX

Aztlán, the mythic homeland mobilized by El Movimiento in the 1960s and 1970s, harkens back to an ancient Aztec utopian space that has been implemented by activists as a political tool of community building and resistance. As Richard Griswold del Castillo and Arnoldo De León explain in *North to Aztlán: A History of Mexican Americans in the United States* (1996), the Aztecs themselves believed their ancestral homeland to be located in the North (1), a spatial fantasy of nostalgia taken-up by Chicano leaders in the 60s and 70s who disregarded the fact that the Aztecs had not lived in the American Southwest, but created Aztlán as a political symbol, "a spiritual and highly romantic endeavor that would lead Chicanos to champion the cause of undocumented immigrants" (127). Most famously introduced by Rodolfo "Corky" Gonzales in 1969 during the First National Chicano Liberation Youth Conference in Denver, Colorado, *El Plan Espiritual de Aztlán* was a pro-indigenist manifesto that emphasized moral and historical ties between Chicanos and Mexicans with particular focus on indigeneity and mestizaje.

However, the search for Aztlán was even a failed endeavor for the Aztecs. Motecuhzoma I, who ruled Tenochtitlan from 1440 to 1469, for example, sent yearly expeditions to search for the homeland. As the empire expanded, Aztec rulers became actively concerned in strengthening a collective sense of identity, and "the notion of finding a place of origin appears to have assumed a special significance" (Townsend 55). Indeed, Aztlán has always held a utopian position within the Aztec and Chicanx imaginary. As such, Aztlán is an "empty signifier" (Pérez-Torres 104) implemented by writers, artists, historians, and social scientists, an imaginary space that foments the connection between land, identity, and (indigenous) experience.[43] Further, in "Refiguring

Aztlán," Rafael Pérez-Torres lays the foundation for thinking of Aztlán as a contested space that is at once the signifier of home and dispossession, a metaphor for connectivity and unity, a site for contesting notions of national identity as defined by hegemonic discourses of culture, and part of exclusionary nationalist projects—as a continually modified space, Aztlán remains relevant in Chicanismo. Most importantly, the centrality of Aztlán in the Chicanx imaginary contests colonial and neo-colonial presences in the Americas by asserting the indigenous, and an affirmation of the significance of native civilizations (104).

El Plan activates a speculative imaginary that looks to a mythical past in order to activate the "spirit of a new people" "conscious not only of its proud historical heritage, but also of the brutal 'Gringo' invasion of our territories: We, the Chicano inhabitants and civilizers of the northern land of Aztlán, from when came our forefathers, reclaiming the land of our birth and consecrating the determination of our people of the sun, declare that the call of our blood is our power, our responsibility, and our inevitable destiny."

As such, Aztlán is a speculative project that looks to the indigenous past in order to imagine a future Chicanx peoples. Similarly, Latinx Studies is currently in a moment of tension between looking to the future yet expressing the need of reassessing the archive, as contemporary conversations surrounding the use of the "X" in Latinx demonstrates, and which I explored in more detail in the introduction to this project.

What does the "x" in Aztex designate? While *Atomik Aztex* precedes the prevalent use of "Latinx," I would like to argue that the title of the novel acts in similar ways to the term. The novel never includes discussions of atoms, atomic energy, or the atom bomb.

Yet the novel does explode all expectations of form and narrative, while demonstrating the constitutive importance of indigenous history in the Americas.

As Claudia Milian and Nicole Guidotti-Hernández detail, the use of the "X" first occurred with "Xicana" and "Xicano" to indicate a reemerging political deportment that highlighted the importance of the Aztec past and the importance of Nahuatl and indigeneity in Chicanx and feminist projects.[44] More recently, there has been heated debates surrounding the use of the "X" to replace Latina/o or Latin@, as my introduction illustrates. Like the destabilizing power of the "X" in Latinx, the use of it in the novel's title implements a similar form of disruption. The title, thus, points readers to the history of indigeneity in the Americas and the ancestry of Mexican, Mexican American, and Chicanx peoples, while also demarcating the "Azteks" in the novel as strange, other, more than, otherworldly. In effect, the use of the "X" makes the novel and its indigenous people inaccessible.

But what makes the Azteks of the novel *Atomik*? Like the "X," the use of atomik similarly destabilizes the narrative and its alternative history of the Spanish conquest. The implementation of the K for the word's hard C not only alerts readers for the spelling system in the novel, but also places an emphasis on the word with its harsh sound. The atom is the smallest constituent unit of ordinary matter, and composes all solids, liquids, gases, and plasmas. As such, the novel's title indicates the foundational importance of indigenous cultures in the histories of the Americas, while pointing readers to notions of violence—atomic energy, the atom bomb—they will not only encounter within the text, but also the violence perpetrated through colonialism and European conquest.

Notes

[1] See @arelenedavila1. "Junot Díaz on The Legacy of Childhood Trauma. A brave must read for addressing head on the taboo & fear that keeps abuse under wraps in our communities." *Twitter*, 9 April 2018, 1:10 p.m., https://twitter.com/arlenedavila1/status/983376693514530816; @nhannahjones. "This personal piece by Junot Diaz is wrenching and incredibly brave." *Twitter*, 9 April 2018, 9:23 a.m., https://twitter.com/nhannahjones/status/983319497636446209; and @rgfeal. "I hope @achylandia translates this essay by @junotdiaz so it can be read widely in the D.R. and elsewhere. So brave." *Twitter*, 9 April 2018, 2:06 p.m., https://twitter.com/rgfeal/status/983390594423771136.

Not all comments about "The Silence" were favorable. Writer Victor LaValle, for example, wrote, "When you might be the only one who thinks that brave confession also reads like an attempt to cover one's ass." This tweet included a GIF of a fat black child giving side-eye (a reference to Oscar Wao himself, perhaps?). See @victorlavalle. "When you might be the only one who thinks that brave confession also reads like an attempt to cover one's ass." *Twitter*, 9 April 2018, 3:09 p.m. https://twitter.com/victorlavalle/status/983406579818123266. Carmen Maria Machado also wrote critically on twitter, to which writer Micah Stack responded: "I was wondering what you'd think about Diaz's NYer piece. I still remember how harrowing your encounter with him at IWW [Iowa Writer's Workshop] was. He was clearly wanting to defend himself/his fictional stand-in against charges of sociopathy, and he invoked Yunior's rape as a justification." See @MicahStack *Twitter*, 9 April 2018, 5:22 p.m. https://twitter.com/MicahStack/status/983440148028317696. The following day Machado also tweeted, "Hi! Today, please meditate on how easily we accept women's pain as collateral damage in men's self-discovery." See @carmenmachado, *Twitter*, 10 April 2018, 10:31 a.m. https://twitter.com/carmenmmachado/status/983698931300360192. It is difficult to comment on a piece of writing that is developing concurrently with the writing of this introduction. However, I am inclined to agree with Lavalle's and Machado's reaction to Díaz's article and his seemingly obsessive need to not only return to Yunior as a character, but also comment on and defend his own work. This article also makes it very difficult to separate author from character, given all the details about Díaz's life that align with Yunior's trajectory. This article also reads as in poor taste, especially with its veiled references to the #MeToo movement—"I could have called after her me too me too"—and his expectation to find salvation in women's bodies, even as he fails to mention the numerous women who have paved the way for these types of confessions; women who are not privileged with his immediate access to print media. "The Silence"

also fails to reflect on his own repetition of the cycle of abuse and the implementation of it in his texts—take, for example, the only description of his high school crush: "this cute-ass girl." I say this all while finding the material significant and Díaz's contribution important.

[2] For example, Chela Sandoval's *Methodology of the Oppressed* (2000) opens a space for oppositional identities ("differential consciousness") and new methods of negotiating national narratives of violence. Emma Perez's archeological project in *The Decolonial Imaginary: Writing Chicanas Into History* (1999) maps new terrains for framing and thinking about Chicana stories; she steps outside preconceived borders and ahistorical thinking. Perez's "decolonial imaginary" has enabled my thinking about Latinx futurity, even as I push against it. The work by these Latinx scholars has served as precursors to the discussion of Mexican, Mexican American, and Anglo-U.S. indigenous populations in Nicole M. Guidotti-Hernández's *Unspeakable Violence: Remapping U.S. and Mexican National Imaginaries* (2011); María Josefina Saldaña-Portillo's *The Revolutionary Imagination in the Americas and the Age of Development* (2003) discussion of mid-century revolutionary violence and how revolutionary challenges have failed to resist; Randy Ontiveros' *In the Spirit of a New People: The Cultural Politics of the Chicano Movement* (2013) discussion of violence in the Chicanx movement serve; and Laura Halperin's investigation of gendered violence in *Intersections of Harm: Narratives of Latina Deviance and Defiance* (2015). This work, among others, serves as a broad framework that underscores the centrality of violence in Latinx literary and cultural productions and has been influential in my investigation of doom patterns.

[3] From the ancient Greek *apokálypsis* (revelation), equivalent to *apockalýp* (to uncover reveal), the apocalypse signifies a revelation of secret knowledge, and has been used in Judeo-Christian doctrine as a way to describe the end of days and the judgment of good and evil. As a subgenre of speculative fiction, the apocalyptic literature I examine here is not concerned with the triumph of good over evil or the "second coming." Instead, the violence depicted within these works aims at destruction itself: to reduce the known, the world, to fragments, to injure beyond repair or renewal. Apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic literature is primarily concerned with the end of human civilization; its typical portrayals include nuclear warfare, environmental collapse, resource depletion, cybernetic revolt, and zombie pandemic. Apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic literature has a variety of ancient predecessors, as can be seen in Genesis (Noah's ark) and most notably the Book of Revelation. Important for my argument is how scholars read this New Testament text as not presenting a monstrous end-of-the-world, but the possibility for something secret for which we do not have the language to decode.

[4] Other important scholarship in Latinx literary and cultural includes, but is not limited to, José David Saldívar's *The Dialectics of Our America: Genealogy, Cultural Critique, and Literary History* (1991); Ilan Stavans, *The Hispanic Condition: Reflections on Culture and Identity in America* (1995); Frances Aparicio, *Tropicalizations: Transcultural Representations of Latinidad* (1997); Walter D. Mignolo, *Local Histories/Global Designs: Coloniality, Subaltern Knowledges, and Border Thinking* (2000); Mary Pat Brady, *Extinct Lands, Temporal Geographies: Chicana Literature and the Urgency of Space* (2002); José F. Buscaglia-Salgado, *Undoing Empire: Race and Nation in the Mulatto Caribbean* (2003); Antonio Viego, *Dead Subjects: Toward a Politics of Loss in Latino Studies* (2007); Ricardo Ortíz, *Cultural Erotics in Cuban*

America (2007); Laura Lomas, *Translating Empire: José Martí, Migrant Latino Subjects and American Modernities* (2008); Juanita Heredia, *Transnational Latina Narratives in the Twenty-First Century: The Politics of Gender, Race and Migrations* (2009); Juan Flores and Miriam Jiménez Román, eds., *The Afro-Latin@ Reader: History and Culture in the United States* (2010); Antonio López, *Unbecoming Blackness: The Diaspora Cultures of Afro-Cuban America* (2012); José David Saldívar, *Trans-Americanity: Subaltern Modernities, Global Coloniality, and the Cultures of Greater Mexico* (2012); John Alba Cutler's *Ends of Assimilation: The Formation of Chicano Literature* (2015); and Ylce Irrizarry's *Chicana/o and Latina/o Fiction: The New Memory of Latinidad* (2016).

[5] These same tensions surrounding issues of canonization, terminology, marketability, and definition are touched upon in Kristen Silva Gruesz's essay, "What Was Latino Literature?" *PMLA* vol. 127 no. 2 (March 2012) pp. 335-341.

[6] García Márquez's ideas about Latin America as "outsized" and its representation in fiction were greatly influenced by Cuban novelist Alejo Carpentier, who originated the term "lo real maravilloso" in the prologue to *El reino de este mundo* (1949), and was one of the first practitioners of magical realism. Other writers participating in the movement include Jorge Luis Borges, Alejandro Carpentier, Isabel Allende, Laura Esquivel, Miguel Angel Asturias, Julio Cortazar, and Juan Rulfo. See Rosemary Jackson, *Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion* (1981); Catherine Brooke-Rose, *A Rhetoric of the Unreal: Studies in Narrative and Structure, Especially of the Fantastic* (1981); Irlemar Chiampi, *El realismo maravilloso: forma e ideología en la novela hispanoamericana* (1983); Angel Flores, *El realismo mágico en el cuento hispanoamericano* (1985); Erik Camayd-Freixas, *Realismo mágico y primtivismo: relecturas de Carpentier, Asturias, Rulfo y García Márquez* (1998); Lois Parkinson Zamora and Wendy B. Faris, Eds., *Magical Realism: Theory, History, Community* (1995); Maggie Ann Bowers, *Magic(al) Realism* (2004); Wendy B. Faris, *Ordinary Enchantments: Magical Realism and the Remystification of Narrative* (2004); and Shannin Schroeder, *Rediscovering Magical Realism in the Americas* (2004).

[7] The term "macondismo" refers to the celebration of magical realism and the analogizing of Latin America with the genre. The term derives from García Márquez's fictional town of Macondo in his canonical novel, *Cien años de soledad* (*One Hundred Years of Solitude*) (1967).

[8] Important scholarship informing this project includes Kingly Amis, *New Maps of Hell: A Survey of Science Fiction* (1960); Brian Aldiss, *Billion Year Spree: The History of Science Fiction* (1973); *This World and Nearer Ones: Essays Exploring the Familiar* (1979); and *The Detached Retina: Aspects of SF and Fantasy* (1995); Samuel R. Delany, *The Jewel-Hinged Jaw: Notes on the Language of Science Fiction* (1977); Brian Attabery, *The Fantasy Tradition in American Literature: From Irving to Le Guin* (1980); N. Katherine Hayes, *The Cosmic Web: Scientific Field Models and Literary Strategies in the Twentieth Century* (1984) and *How We Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernectics, Literature and Informatics* (1999); Brian Stableford, *The Third Millenium: A History of the World AD 2000-3000* (1985) and *Narrative Strategies in Science Fiction and Other Essays on Imaginative Fiction* (2009); Donna Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (1991); Adam Roberts, *Science Fiction* (2000); and

Andrew Milner, ed., *Tenses of Imagination: Raymond Williams on Utopia, Dystopia and Science Fiction* (2010).

[9] Brian Wilson Aldiss, *Billion Year Spree: The True History of Science Fiction* (1973). Other ancestors of the genre include Francis Goodwin's *The Man in the Moon* (1638), John Wilkin's *Discovery of a World in the Moon* (1638), Athanasius Kircher's *Itinerarium Exstacium* (*Ecstatic Journey*) (1656), Cyrano de *Bergerac's L'Autre Monde* (*The Other World*) (1657), Voltaire's *Micromégas* (1752), and sections of *Arabian Nights*.

[10] Poe's work, translated into French by poet Charles Baudelaire, was greatly influential on writers such as Jules Verne and Paschal Grousset.

[11] As mentioned above, there is limited work on speculative fiction by Latinx writers. See Thomas Foster, "Cyber-Aztecs and Cholo Punks: Guillermo Gómez-Peña's Five-Worlds Theory" (2002); Guillermo Gómez-Peña, *Border Clásicos* (2008) and *Conversations Across Borders* (2011); Miguel López-Lozano, "Utopian Dreams, Apocalyptic Nightmares: Rewriting Mexican History in the Times of NAFTA" (2008); Catherine Ramírez, "Afrofuturism/Chicanafuturism: Fictive Kin" (2008); Lysa Rivera, "Future Histories and Cyborg Labor: Reading Borderlands Science Fiction after NAFTA" (2012); Charles Berg, "Immigrants, Aliens and Extraterrestrials: Science Fiction's Alien 'Other' as (Among Other Things) New Hispanic Imaginary" (2012).

[12] Important scholarship on utopia and dystopia that has influenced this project includes Walter Benjamin's "Theses on the Philosophy of History" (1940), which is particularly helpful in thinking against notions of "progress." See also Gloria Anzaldúa's *Borderlands/La Frontera* (1987), Jacques Derrida's *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, The Work of Mourning & the New International* (1994)—this text is particularly helpful in thinking through notions of haunting and "hauntology"— Perez (1999), Sandoval (2000), and Slavoj Zizek's *Living in the End Times* (2011). Timothy Morton's *Hyperobjects: Philosophy and Ecology after the End of the World* (2013) references global warming and environmental catastrophe to provocatively state that the end of the world has already taken place, and aids my thinking on U.S. Latinx apocalyptic narratives. Other scholarship in this field include: Henry Morley Ed. *Ideal Commonwealths* (1901), Ernst Bloch, *The Spirit of Utopia* (1918) and *The Principle of Hope* (1954-1959), Eric S. Rabkin, Martin H. Greenberg, and Joseph D. Olander, eds., *No Place Else: Explorations in Utopian and Dystopian Fiction* (1983), Jean Pfaelzer, *The Utopian Novel in America, 1886-1896* (1984), Jeffrey Knapp, *An Empire Nowhere: England, America, and Literature from Utopia to The Tempest* (1992), Ruth Levitas, *The Concept of Utopia* (1990), Marina Leslie, *Renaissance Utopias and the Problem of History* (1998), and Thomas Peyser, *Utopia and Cosmopolis: Globalization in the Era of American Literary Realism* (1998).

[13] My work has resonance with Muñoz's project in *Cruising Utopia* and *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics* (1999). In *Disidentification*, Muñoz examines the world-making properties by various performances and disidentificatory practices for survival and activism by those who fall outside the racial and sexual mainstream.

[14] See also Arlene Dávila, *Latinos, Inc*.

[15] Juan Flores, especially in *From Bomba to Hip Hop*, attacks contemporary Latinx cultural productions as pale imitations of the ones produced in the "heyday" of

Latinx resistance movements: "The social consciousness and cultural expression of this geopolitical reality burst out in the late 1960s. Inspired by the Civil Rights movement and the Cuban Revolution, countless movement, causes, and organizations rallied thousands of Mexicans and Puerto Ricans to the cries of 'Viva la Raza!' and 'Despierta Boricua!' The political momentum of the Latino imaginary was set in those spirited movements, and found vibrant artistic expression […] By our time, in the 1990s, that heyday is long past, no longer even a living memory for young Latinos" (201-202). As Dalleo and Sáez point out, critics such as Flores are invested in the same type of longing for a lost past where politics were purer and Latinx cultural production was revolutionary.

[16] There have been many articles about the use of "Latinx." See, Fausto Fernós, "How Do You Pronounce Latinx?" *Feast of Fun*, https://feastoffun.com/podcast/2016/10/26/fof-2409-how-do-you-pronounce-latinx/; Hugo Marín González, "Why I Chose to Not Be Latinx." *Latino Rebels*, 20 July 2017, http://www.latinorebels.com/2017/07/20/why-i-chose-to-not-be-latinx/; Daniel Hernandez, "The Case against 'Latinx.'" *Los Angeles Times*, 17 Dec. 2017, http://www.latimes.com/opinion/op-ed/la-oe-hernandez-the-case-against-latinx-20171217-story.html; Pilar Horner and Daniel Vélez Ortiz, "'X-Ing' Out Dissent With LATINX: The Danger of Unexamined Political Maneuvering." *Latino Rebels*, 18 Mar. 2018, http://www.latinorebels.com/2018/03/18/xingoutdissent/; "Latinx: The Ungendering of the Spanish Language." *NPR.Org*, https://www.npr.org/2016/01/29/464886588/latinx-the-ungendering-of-the-spanish-language; Ed Morales, "Why I Embrace the Term Latinx." *The Guardian*, 8 Jan. 2018, http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2018/jan/08/why-i-embrace-the-term-latinx; Katy Steinmetz, "Why 'Latinx' Is Succeeding While Other Gender-Neutral Terms Fail to Catch On." *Time*, http://time.com/5191804/latinx-definition-meaning-latino-hispanic-gender-neutral/.

[17] Milian cites Terry Moore's TED talk "Why Is the 'X' the Unknown?" to trace the use of the X. Medieval Spanish scholars could not translate Arabic sounds such as the letter sheen (or shin), so the "X is a mathematical unknown 'because you can't say "sh" in Spanish'" (123).

[18] While Milian makes the argument for the "X" as that which is unknown and unstable, she also presents a long list of X's in our popular culture, such as the X Games, Xbox, XOXO, the Roman numeral X, the use of "XXXXX" for curse words, X-rays, X Out, XS and XL, X chromosome, SpaceX, *The X Files*, Project X, *The X Factor*.

Chapter 1

[1] I would like to thank my friend, writing group partner, and fellow speculative fiction lover, Justin Mann, for this title. After reading a first draft of this chapter, Justin rightly pointed out how it was in fact about world building and specifically about the Caribbean myth-making in Díaz's work.

[2] It is worth noting the significance of names in this short story and the weight they place on the characters. From the Hebrew, "Magdala" is the Spanish equivalent of Mary Magdalene, who in the canonical gospels of the New Testament is depicted as a follower of Jesus, a repentant prostitute, witness to Jesus's crucifixion and resurrection, and canonized as a saint in the Catholic church. Bárbaro, on the other hand, derives from

the Latin "*barbărus*," which itself comes from the Greek (*βάρβαρος*) term for "foreigner," and was also used to refer to groups of peoples who in the fifth century invaded the Roman Empire. Thus, Bárbaro is reduced to actions that define him as fierce, cruel, ignorant, rude, excessive, and crude. This term is also used in positive situations to indicate admiration or surprise (i.e.: "qué bárbaro"). Yunior's surname, de Las Casas, suggests the writings of the Spanish Dominican friar, whose sixteenth century account, *Brevísima relación de la destrucción de las Indias*, chronicles the atrocities committed in Hispaniola against indigenous populations. As such, it seems that Yunior defines himself, since his first appearance in Díaz's work, as a protector of Antillean indigeneity and as a figure whose main purpose is to reveal injustices to the public. de las Casas, however, initially endorsed African slavery over the use of indigenous populations, a position he later regretted.

[3] Similarly, Colson Whitehead's postapocalyptic novel, *Zone One*, which I discuss in chapter two, presents beginnings as signaling their inevitable end. Specifically, the novel presents barricades in all their forms as denoting their preordained destruction: "When the wall fell, it fell quickly, as if it had been waiting for this moment, as if it had been created for the very instant of its failure" (22). I claim in the introduction to this project, in this chapter, and the ones that follow that this condition of inevitable failure is an element of apocalyptic writing and the thinking it engenders.

[4] I use the term "apocalyptic" to describe how the text stages the "birthplace of our nation," the Caribbean more generally, and Yunior's love relationships as apocalyptic. Because of Yunior's grammar in stating "As soon as you start thinking of the beginning, it's the end," I also suggest that beyond being apocalyptic, the continual action of this statement makes the Caribbean and all Caribbean bodies postapocalyptic as well.

[5] Most scholars determine the section that introduces fukú as the novel's "prologue," although it carries no such designation in the text. For examples of fukú in relation to prologues see, José David Saldívar, "Conjectures on 'Americanity' and Junot Díaz's 'Fuku Americanus' in *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*," *The Global South* vol. 5 no. 1 (Spring 2011), 120-136; Jennifer Harford Vargas, "Dictating a Zafa: The Power of Narrative Form in Junot Díaz's *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*," *MELUS* vol. 39 no. 3 (Fall 2014), 8-30; Daniel Bautista, "Comic Book Realism: Form and Genre in Junot Díaz's *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao.*" *Journal of the Fantastic in the Arts* vol. 21 no. 1 (2010), 41-53; Joshua Jelly-Shapiro, "Ground Zero(es) of the New World: Geographies of Violence in Junot Díaz and Edwidge Danticat," *Transforming Anthropology* vol. 21 no. 2 (October 2013), 172; Katherine Weese, "'Tú No Eres Nada De Dominicano': Unnatural Narration and De-Naturalizing Gender Constructs in Junot Díaz's *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*," *The Journal of Men's Studies* vol. 22 no. 2 (2014), 89-104; See "Artistry, Ancestry, and Americanness in the Works of Junot Díaz," *Junot Díaz and the Decolonial Imagination* (Duke University Press, 2016) 115-146; and Sean P. O'Brien, "Some Assembly Required: Intertextuality, Marginalization, and *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*," *The Journal of the Midwest Modern Language Association* vo. 45 no. 1 (Spring 2012), 75-94. Most writing that centers of Díaz's fukú contends with this term as a metaphorical framework for thinking about the remainder of coloniality within the Americas, and specifically as embodied by Rafael Trujillo—he is the aftermath of the curse. As I explain in this

chapter, I engage fukú as a sincere and tangible entity, which creates science fictional excessive and monstrous subjects.

[6] Ramón Saldívar argues that *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* carries a "recurrent motif of doom which structures the fantasy about this intersection of history, fantasy, and racial otherness[.]" See "Imagining Cultures: The Transnational Imaginary in Postrace America," *Journal of Transnational American Studies* vol. 4 no. 2 (2012), 6. Like Saldívar, I also argue that *Oscar Wao* is organized around this principle. However, unlike Saldívar, I argue here that fukú enacts an inescapable violence that never allows for the possibility of social justice and which, moreover, enables Yunior and the reader to find pleasure in recreating the violence of Caribbean history on the self and other.

[7] *Drown*'s ten interconnected short stories are structured as fragmentary meditations on Yunior's experience as a Dominican immigrant in New Jersey. While "Ysrael" and "Negocios" are told from the perspective of characters other than Yunior, and "How to Date a Browngirl, Blackgirl, Whitegirl, or Halfie" is told in the second person, the interconnected short stories central force is that of absence: missing fathers, brothers, women, friendships, and faces dominate the narrative world of Yunior's youth. Díaz's second collection, *This is How You Lose Her*, organizes itself in a similar fragmentary yet interlinked fashion as *Drown*. As the title suggests, this collection forms itself around different forms of loss seen in Díaz's previous works, and the failure to contain and sustain love. Yunior's absent father, textually present in "Invierno," is excessive in this text, as readers understand his temporary presence in Yunior's life. Lastly, violence and failure guide *The Brief and Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*, which eponymously presupposes the death of its titular character, and as will be explored in this chapter, organizes itself around the desire and failure to produce (write) a counter-spell for the curse (fukú) that opens the novel.

[8] Haunting points to how the past is always present and disrupts any notions of progress or history, but also to the fantastical ways fukú reproduces itself, such as in the creation of monstrous figures like Trujillo and the Trujillato, the "fat" embodiment of Oscar himself, and Yunior's inability to stop being a philanderer—elements which point to the ways in which characters are unable to escape misfortune, the island, and its history.

[9] The following scholars take at face-value Yunior's desire for his own text to be a "zafa." See, J.D. Saldívar, "Conjectures on 'Americanity'"; Harford Vargas. "Dictating a Zafa"; Monica Hanna. "'Reassembling the Fragments': Battling Historiographies, Caribbean Discourse, and Nerd Genres in Junot Díaz's *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*." *Callaloo*, vol. 32, no. 2, 2010, pp. 498–520; Anne Garland Mahler. "The Writer as Superhero: Fighting the Colonial Curse in Junot Díaz's *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*." *Journal of Latin American Cultural Studies: Travesía*, vol. 19, no. 2, pp. 119–40; T.S. Miller. "Preternatural Narration and the Lens of Genre Fiction in Junot Díaz's *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*." *Science Fiction Studies*, vol. 38, no. 1, 2011, pp. 92–114.

[10] The concept of fukú is not introduced in Díaz's work until the publication of his novel, *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*, in 2007. However, I would like to suggest that all his previous work presages the creation of this term and its centrality in Díaz's future fiction.

[11] See Madhu Dubey, "Speculative Fictions of Slavery," *American Literature* 82. 4 (December 2010), 779-805; Ramón Saldívar, "The Second Elevation of the Novel: Race, Form, and the Postrace Aesthetic in Contemporary Narrative," *Narrative* vol. 21 no. 1 (January 2013), 1-18; R. Saldívar, "Imagining Cultures."

[12] Junot Díaz has been the focus on much debate as an influential contributor to Latinx letters and discussed as a Dominican American Latino author since the publication of his short story collection, *Drown*. Scholars have repeatedly noted the influence genre fiction has had on Díaz as a reader and the multiple references to science-fiction literature and film throughout his work. I do not wish to imply that Díaz's work should not be considered for its contribution to Latina/o literature and culture, but it is crucial that his work also be examined for its contributions to sf/f.

[13] For example, Elena Machado Saez states that *Oscar Wao* is received within the academy as an activist work that challenges the power structures of empire and nation. See *Market Aesthetics: The Purchase of the Past in Caribbean Diasporic Fiction* (University of Virginia Press, 2015), 158.

[14] See "Introduction. Junot Díaz and the Decolonial Imagination: From Island to Empire" in *Junot Díaz and the Decolonial Imagination*. Eds. Monica Hanna, Jennifer Harford Vargas, and José David Saldívar (Duke University Press, 2016), 5.

[15] This is a general and somewhat reductive statement. The recent work of scholars such as Machado Saez contends differently. For example, in her examination of *Oscar Wao* and Edwindge Dandicat's *The Dew Breaker* Machado states, "The novels question the ethical imperative of narration and art in a post-colonial world, where dictatorships have left an indelible mark on public discourses about belonging, nation, and history." See *Market Aesthetics* 154. I address Machado Saez in greater detail below.

[16] Machado Saez, for example, considers the trend in reviews of Díaz's first short story collection, *Drown*, in "the affirmation of its presumed anthropological authenticity, enabling the reader to access the realities of downward mobility experiences in the murky depths of New Jersey." Moreover, she states that the "marketing of *Drown* figures poverty as the representative marker of Latinidad, with the collection providing presumably unmediated access to 'real' Latinos." See *Market Aesthetics* 224. Silvio Torres-Saillant, on the other hand, argues that the "reception accorded by reviewers to *Drown* as a welcome contribution to American letters reveals a critical appreciation of the author's success at the literary craft more than any sort of valuation of the knowledge about Dominicans that may have been available to readers." See "Artistry, Ancestry, and Americanness in the Works of Junot Díaz," *Junot Díaz and the Decolonial Imaginary* 135. Interestingly, Torres-Saillant and Machado Seaz have both argued that Díaz plays a crucial role in the literary market and the academy and that he influences the analysis/readings of his work. Torres-Saillant, for example, states, "A consequence of his inhabiting the republic of letters as a prominent artistic voice in American fiction and as a spokesperson for the national community in the public sphere is that Díaz has reached the point of commanding the discursive power necessary to alter the literary tradition from which he writes" (121).

[17] See Buscaglia-Salgado xviii.

[18] See Mignolo, *Local Histories/Global Designs* 3; 22-24; Buscaglia-Salgado xiv-xv. Mignolo and Buscaglia-Salgado are by no means the only two who have taken up this issue as a focus for their work; I find their use of "imaginary" and "Ideal" particularly

useful in my approach to myth. I do not intend to provide an exhaustive list here, but simply to point to some of the most notable examples of the scholarship that focuses on the coloniality of power in relation to constructions of Anglo-American and/or Eurocentric ideologies: Edward Said, *Orientalism*; José Rabasa, *Inventing America: Spanish Historiography and the Formation of Eurocentrism* (University of Oklahoma Press, 1993); Mignolo's extensive work on this subject in *The Idea of Latin America* (Blackwell Publishing, 2005), *The Darker Side of Western Modernity: Global Futures, Decolonial Options* (Duke University Press, 2011), among others; Enrique Dussel; Leslie Marmon Silko's novel, *Almanac of the Dead*; Anibal Quijano, "Coloniality of Power and Eurocentrism in Latin America," *International Sociology* vol. 15 no. 2, 215-232; Alberto Quijano and Immanuel Wallerstein, "Americanity as a concept, or the Americas in the modern world-system."; Susan Gillman and Kristen Silva Gruesz, "Worlding America: The Hemispheric Text-Network." *Companion to American Literary Studies* (Blackwell Publishing, 2011), pp. 228–47.

[19] Mignolo illustrates this point in *Local Histories/Global Designs* 1-45. For example, Mignolo states, "In the sixteenth century, Spanish missionaries judged and ranked human intelligence and civilization by whether the people were in possession of alphabetic writing. This was an initial moment in the configuration of the colonial difference and the building of the Atlantic imaginary, which will become the imaginary of the modern/colonial world" (3).

[20] Priscilla Wald cites Bruce Lincoln and Joseph Mali in her definition of myth. Wald's *Contagious* and her use of these scholars have been instrumental in my own thinking about and definition of mythology as it pertains to the Americas.

[21] Constrained by language, myth is not eternal: "for it is human history which converts reality into speech, and it alone rules the life and death of mythical language. Ancient or not, mythology can only have a historical foundation, for myth is a type of speech chosen by history: it cannot possibly evolve from the 'nature' of" (218).

[22] Barthes analysis of first and second order semiological systems is extensive. He delineates with great care how the Barthes example of a black soldier saluting (presumably the French flag) is a perfect example of this mechanism (Barthes 225, 228). Using the sign in the first-order semiological system as a signifier in the second-order system and laying meaning on top of meaning while suppressing the first-level sign. See Bathes 219-226

[23] The conception of the Anglo-American myth in this chapter follows Barthe's notion of a second-order semiological system in the following ways: there is a signifier, itself already formed with a previous system (*the Americas pre-1492*) and there is a signified (new world discoveries). As Barthes argues, when the presence of the signified through the signifier (the sign) becomes the signifier in the second-order system, it presents itself ambiguously: as simultaneously meaning and form, the signifier is both empty and full. See "Myth Today," *Mythologies* (New York: Hill and Wang), 215-274. As meaning, *pre-1492 Americas* retains knowledge, memory, "a comparative order of facts, ideas, decisions" (227). As form, the signifier is emptied of its history, obscured, held at a distance. The signifier-as-meaning is not hidden but distorted: emptied of its history, myth's signified (concept) absorbs the signifier's history and deforms it. Unlike form, the concept is "historical and intentional" (228), and as such, myth is always heavy with motivation, transforming the total of linguistic signs of the Americas and drains it of

its history and specificity; a history which the concept absorbs historically and intentionally, implanting meaning into the myth which the form had drained. As Barthes notes of the concept: "Truth to tell, what is invested in the concept is less reality than a certain knowledge of reality; in passing from the meaning to the form, the image loses some knowledge: the better to receive the knowledge in the concept. In actual fact, the knowledge contained in a mythical concept is confused, made of yielding, shapeless associations" (228-229). Through the concept, specificity is reconstituted. However, myth is implanted with "a whole new history" (228) that distorts the full meaning of the signifier and changes it into a gesture deprived of memory.

The Anglo-American myth empties the signifier (*the Americas pre-1492*) of its history, specificity, and memory, which are absorbed by the concept (*new world discoveries*) and implanted with a new "chain of causes and effects, motives and intentions" (228) that distorts full meaning and transforms the continent into a gesture. Indeed, the Anglo-American myth obscures the history and memory of the Americas in order to uphold the Eurocentric worldview that considers the Columbian Encounter (or rape) as a "discovery" and a symbol of global progress and modernity and that, moreover, naturalizes the violence of genocide and human and environmental exploitation.

[24] I do not mean for list to be exhaustive, as that would reaffirm the erasure or brushing over of specificity through mythic speech. My brief list is, however, intended to highlight a few of the violences performed in the Columbian Encounter and in its aftermath, and moreover, is mentioned here as a way to elicit other instances in the readers mind.

[25] Buscaglia-Salgado focuses on the ways in which the U.S. "came to bequeath to itself a civilization pedigree through a process of historical shoplifting directed against the peoples of Spain and of 'Spanish' America" (xviii) by claiming a Columbian legacy. Buscaglia-Salgado explores the construction of a "Usonian national ideology" (xviii) through the figure of Columbus by examining the central role of Washington Irving's work, especially *A Chronicle of the Conquest of Granada*. María DeGuzmán's *Spain's Long Shadow: The Black Legend, Off-Whiteness, and Anglo-American Empire* (University of Minnesota Press, 2005), also explores this issue, although it is not a central concern for her argument as it is for Buscaglia-Salgado.

[26] Mignolo uses "gnosis" in order to free his discussion from the confrontation in Western thought "between epistemology and hermeneutics, between nomothetic and ideographic 'sciences'—and open up the notion of 'knowledge' beyond cultures of scholarships" (9). Importantly, his use of "gnosis" points to the need to decentralize Western configurations of knowledge and rationality.

[27] Part of Mignolo's project in *Local Histories/Global Designs* is, as he states, to expand "the horizon of human knowledge beyond the academy and beyond the Western concept of knowledge and rationality" (7).

[28] For examples of fukú in relation to prologues see footnote 5.

[29] The term Afro-Latina/o refers to people of African descent in Mexico, South and Central America, the greater Caribbean, and people in the U.S. with origins in Latin America and the Caribbean. As such, when I refer to Afro-Caribbean people in this chapter, I signal those people who are classified as belonging to the general Afro-Latina/o group. I do not wish to imply these terms as interchangeable, but because of fukú's origin within the Caribbean I argue that the Caribbean as well as the rest of the Americas and

Afro-Latinas/os generally are implicated in the apocalyptic reproduction of catastrophe. For more on the term Afro-Latina/o see, *The Afro-Latin@ Reader: History and Culture in the United States*, edited by Miriam Jiménez Román and Juan Flores (Duke University Press, 2010).

[30] In *Trans-Americanity: Subaltern Modernities, Global Coloniality, and the Cultures of Greater Mexico*, José David Saldívar argues that "because Oscar is brutally murdered by Trujillo's police in 1995" "the Ground Zero of the New World" does not position the novel within a post-9/11 imaginary and what he terms "Bush's hegemonic state fantasy of September 11, 2001, and victimhood" (209). Instead, Saldívar reads the novel as referring to "Hiroshima and Americanus's nuclear sublime and Cold War state fantasies" (209). While I agree that the novel is clearly invested in the sociopolitical impact of *fukú americanus* on global politics in the Cold War era, especially in relation to the Reagan Administration and its war on the poor, I also think it would be facetious to dismiss *Oscar Wao*'s also clear participation and contribution to the post-9/11 novel by writers of color.

[31] *Fukú americanus* has been the focus of many conference papers, journal articles, and book chapters. This is a non-comprehensive list, as I am sure the list will continue to grow: Lyn Di Iorio, "Laughing through a Broken Mouth in *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*," *Junot Díaz and the Decolonial Imagination* (Duke University Press, 20116), 69-87; See Machado Saez, *Market Aesthetics*; Hanna, "'Reassembling the Fragments'"; J.D. Saldívar, "Conjectures on 'Americanity'"; Daynalí Flores-Rodríguez, "Addressing the Fukú In Us"; Garland Mahler, "The Writer as Superhero"; R. Saldívar, "Imagining Cultures."

[32] It was "one of the longest, most damaging U.S.-backed dictatorships in the Western Hemisphere (and if we Latin types are skillful at anything it's tolerating U.S.-backed dictators, so you know this was a hardearned victory, the chilenos and the argentines are still appealing); the creation of the first modern kleptocracy (Trujillo was Mobutu before Mobutu was Mobutu); the systemic bribing of American senators; and, last but not least, the forging of the Dominican peoples into a modern state (did what his Marine trainers, during the Occupation, were unable to do)" (3n1).

[33] Di Iorio notes the humor in the description of fukú's effects on the Americas putting everyone "in the shit ever since" its instatement (*Oscar Wao* 1). She briefly examines Mikhail Bakhtin's analysis of Rabelais's *Gargantua and Pantagruel*, especially its scatological humor and carnivalesque as creating "if only for a moment, an opening for the beginnings of social change" in order to argue this lens "is also helpful here, as this is one of the first passages in which Díaz's social critique of the imperialistic militarism of the United States in particular is facilitated by the laughter" (75).

[34] Di Iorio problematically defines the novel's reader as an English-only one, a claim disproven by the many translations *Oscar Wao* has undergone from the English (or Spanglish) to languages such as Spanish, German, French, Portuguese, Japanese, Hungarian, and Dutch. The phonetic similarities between fukú and "fuck you" are undeniable, yet while Di Iorio's reading is semantically clever it is ultimately reductive, facetiously transforming the curse into a joke that ultimately dismisses the many Spanish speaking Latina/o (and especially Dominican) readers of the novel.

[35] Most scholars have written about Lola's section of the novel as a first person account given by Lola herself. However, I would argue that Lola's seemingly first person

point of view is another version of Yunior's narration and mediation of the De León family.

[36] In an interview conducted for *The New York Public Library Podcast*, Junot Díaz maintains that the footnote and s/sf references present not only an alternative narrative to Yunior's text, but in fact might allow readers to construct what he terms the "truest" form of the narrative:

> In these two epigraphs, it's the only place in the book where the narrator drops his game and says to you that doing what I did with these quotations will lead you to the real book inside this book. Which is to say, if you take every nerdy reference in *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* and actually treat it like a serious text and look it up, and not just like a piece of ornamentation, and ignore all the official stuff—you ignore all the history—you will have not only a very different book but you'll probably have the *truest* form of the novel as I began to set it out. There is no other place in the book where the economy of how you should read the book is laid out. In the rest of the book, Yunior the narrator asks you to pay attention to the Walcott, to pay attention to the history, and to ignore the comic books. And so in many ways, at least in this context, this is *the key* to reading the book. (my emphasis)

See *Junot Díaz on Intimacy & the Game of Fiction*. *The New York Public Library Podcast* #95. Speaking specifically about the epigraphs from the *Fantastic Four* and Derek Walcott that open *Oscar Wao*, Díaz's statement makes evident the centrality of science and speculative fiction for the novel's narrative. His statement also illustrates a central claim of this chapter: the two epigraphs and opening section about fukú—which has been incorrectly labeled a "prologue"—are intrinsic to the novel's plot, demonstrate its investment in s/sf as a genre, and depict the novel's apocalyptic excessiveness. Finally, Díaz's statement also illustrates one of the main arguments of this project in asserting the importance of genre literature and popular culture, which is usually overlooked and posits "high" art by writers such as Walcott over "low" culture such as the *Fantastic Four*, for example.

[37] Machado Saez expands upon this point by highlighting the use of "Toto" (Dorothy's terrier in *The Wizard of Oz*) and "*toto*" (female genitalia) in the novel's opening section on fukú, which in their conflation defines the "reader as a 'pussy.'" See *Market Aesthetics* 175. Moreover, she uses this analysis to demonstrate how the novel "follows a heteronormative logic of penetration in relation to its audience, and the conclusion entails a voyage home by 'fucking' (with) the reader" (175). I find this reading to be intriguing and convincing, although I would like to give Yunior the benefit of the doubt in expecting more from this readership.

[38] For other sources that define fucú see Emilio Rodríguez Demorizi, *Del vocabulario Dominicano* (Editora Taller, 1983) 118; Alejandro Paulino Ramos and Aquiles Castro, *Diccionario de cultura y folklore Dominicano* (ABC Editorial, 2005); and Max Uribe, *Notas y Apuntes Lexicográficos: Americanismos y Domicanismos* (Editora de Colores, 1996) 190.

[39] The substitution of English hard Cs for Ks is amplified in Sesshu Foster's *Atomik Aztex*, which I discuss in detail in chapter four, and demonstrates a form of playful excess and inability to contain violence in language. This "'fucking' (with)" the reader is caustically amplified in *Zone One*, as I demonstrate in chapter two. Here to "fuck" and "fuck with" is a mechanism through which the text conceals the protagonist's blackness, a mode of renunciation, and through which blackness is presented as always already dead.

[40] Hanna argues that the phrase "They say" "signals the injection of doubt from the beginning of the first sentence, an indicator of the alternative historical narration at play." See "'Reassembling the Fragments'" 502. While I agree that the phrase points to the ambiguous nature of knowledge, Hanna reads Yunior's narration as a more truthful presentation of history than the archives and Trujillo's "truth." However, I read Yunior's attempt at presenting an alternative history as having the same issues as any historical narrative through the narrator's various choices (inclusions, omissions, silences, etc.). Machado Saez similarly points to Yunior's "guise of objectivity" in *Oscar Wao*. See *Market Aesthetics* 166-167.

[41] See "Dizque." *Diccionario de la lengua española*.

[42] Morgoth Bauglir is a character from J.R.R Tolkien's legendarium who appears in *The Silmarillion*, *The Children of Húrin*, and briefly in *The Lorg of the Rings*. He is the principal agent of evil in *The Silmarillion* and also Sauron's leader, who becomes the main adversarial force of *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy. Similar to fukú, Morgoth's influence lingers after his departure from the narrative's universe and serves as a cautionary tale against evil. For more on Morgoth see http://lotr.wikia.com/wiki/Melkor. Darkseid, on the other hand, is a supervillain of the DC Comics universe, created by Jack Kirby and first appearing in *Superman's Pal Jimmy Olsen* #134 (November 1970). Like Morgoth, Darkseid is also a tyrannical ruler. As a staple *Superman* villain, Darkseid is one of the greatest threats to the DC Multiverse who searches for the "Anti-Life Equation" and is fueled by the Omega Effect, a force of entropy from the destructive side of the Source (an energy which feeds the beings of Darkseid's home planet). Darkseid can use the Omega Effect in various ways such as through Omega Beams, telepathy, mind control, and telekinesis. For more on Darkseid see http://comicvine.gamespot.com/darkseid/4005-2349/. This is another moment in which Yunior demonstrates the plethora of science fiction sources from both "high" and "low" culture, pointing to the necessity of both for the narrative while challenging the designation of high and low itself.

[43] See T.S. Miller, "Preternatural Narration"; Daniel Bautista, "Comic Book Realism"; Garland Mahler, "The Writer as Superhero"; and Joy Sanchez-Taylor, "'I was a Ghetto Nerd Supreme': Science Fiction, Fantasy and Latina/o Futurity in Junot Diaz's *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*," *Journal of the Fantastic in the Arts* vol. 25 no. 1 (2014) 93-106.

[44] These scholars have focused on the influence of magical realism and Latin American letters on the literary production and aesthetics of Díaz's work. See R. Saldívar, "Imagining Cultures"; Ramón Saldívar, "'Chiste Apocalyptus': Prospero in the Caribbean and the Art of Power" *Junot Díaz and the Decolonial Imagination* (Duke University Press, 2015) 377-390; Claudia Milian, "Latino/a Deracination and the New Latin American Novel," *Junot Díaz and the Decolonial Imagination* (Duke University

Press, 2015) 173-200; Bautista; Joy Sanchez-Taylor; Silvio Torres-Saillant, "Artistry, Ancestry, and Americanness in the Works of Junot Díaz"; Hanna; Glenda R. Carpio, "Now Check It: Junot Díaz's Wondrous Spanglish," *Junot Díaz and the Decolonial Imagination* (Duke University Press, 2015) 257-290.

[45] It is important to note here that Yunior is himself an effect of *Oscar Wao*'s narration. It is easy for readers (myself included) to be seduced by Yunior's voice, but I am not naturalizing him or his character as a voice beyond the literary text's performance of him—Yunior is also being narrated, even as much of his storytelling is invested in appearing like an unmediated voice.

[46] For more on Uatu, the Watchers, and the *Fantastic Four* see *Marvel Chronicle: A Year by Year History*. Eds. Tom DeFalco, et al. *Marvel Chronicle* (DK, 2008), 92; the community-driven and encyclopedia of the Marvel universe is also useful in finding detailed information on these characters: http://marvel.com/universe/Uatu_the_Watcher. Ramzi Fawaz touches upon the Watchers in his examination of the *Fantastic Four*. See *The New Mutants: Superheroes and the Radical Imagination of American Comics* (New York University Press, 2016).

[47] From *The Lord of the Rings*, Sauron is the main villain in J. R. R. Tolkien's work and appears also in *The Hobbit* and *The Silmarillion*. In Welsh mythology, Arawn is the king of the otherworld.

[48] See endnote 36.

[49] It is interesting that writing assumes such a central role in this novel. I would argue that Yunior's foregrounding of writing as an exorcising force against fukú reinforces colonial violence, in keeping with Mignolo's reminder that the initial classification between modern and non-modern was established through writing: "In the sixteenth century, Spanish missionaries judged and ranked human intelligence and civilization by whether the people were in possession of alphabetical writing. This was an initial moment in the configuration of the colonial difference and the building of the Atlantic imaginary, which will becomes the imaginary of the modern/colonial world." See *Local Hitories/Global Designs* 3.

[50] Scholars such as Jennifer Hardford Vargas, Monica Hanna, and Elena Machado Saez have tackled Yunior's complicated position as narrator within the novel, and his reproduction and simultaneous resistance to the figure of Trujillo.

[51] See Garland Mahler 132-134; Harford Vargas, "Dictating a Zafa."

[52] *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*, 17.

[53] In Footnote 5 (19-20) Yunior defines parigüayo as "a corruption of the English neologism 'party watcher'" that came into usage during the "First American Occupation of the DR" when American forces would attend parties but remain on the outskirts instead of participating (19): "Thereafter, the Marines were parigüayos—a word that in the contemporary usage describes anybody who stands outside and watches while other people scoop up the girls" (20).

[54] Many scholars have explored the ways in which Yunior's writing/narration imitates the violence enacted by the Trujillato and is a consequence of dictatorial violence. For example, Machado Saez states, "Yunior acts as the spokesperson for a disturbing model of diasporic masculinity that the novel figures as a by-product of dictatorship." See *Market Aesthetics* 170. Hartford Vargas also explores this issue in her article "Dictating a Zafa," and in her chapter "Dictating a Zafa: The Power of Narrative

Form as Ruin-Reading" in *Junot Díaz and the Decolonial Imagination* (Duke University Press, 2016), 201-227. Here she argues, "*The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* grapples with how to circumnavigate *aut*horitarianism—that is, the precarious link between authorship, authority, and authoritarianism. The novel plays on the tensions between the two definitions of 'to dictate': on the one hand, to order or command authoritatively and absolutely and, on the other hand, to speak aloud words that are to be written down or transcribed" (202).

[55] See Lauren Berlant, "Slow Death (Sovereignty, Obesity, Lateral Agency)," *Critical Inquiry* 33 (2007): 754–780; Berlant, "America, 'Fat,' the Fetus" in *The Queen of America Goes to Washington City: Essays on Sex and Citizenship* (Duke University Press, 1997), 83-144. In *Cruel Optimism*, Berlant again undertakes fatness and consumption in her analysis of Mary Gaitskill's *Two Girls Fat and Thin*, and argues that for Dorothy (the fat girl) "Eating cuts a swath in the anhedonia she experiences in the normal world by liberating her from the time and space of her sociability, where she is only inadequate. Devouring and its plangent aftereffects engender a lateral, endless present" (136). Much like Dorothy and Justine (the two girls of *Two Girls*), Oscar's obesity is, I argue, a manifestation of his Jamesonian history ("His is what hurts"). Other scholars have explored fatness and the body in relation to other issues such as capitalist production: See David Harvey, "The Body as Accumulation Strategy," in *Spaces of Hope* (University of California Press, 2000), 97-116. Here the body is associated with both too much consumption and not enough movement, and where under capitalism the inability to work is defined as a sickness. Queer theorist Elizabeth Freeman proposes that the fat body "generally signals a transgression of spatial norms (taking up too much space), and emotional ones (failing to control the will)," and that "fat" suggests "the failure to be chrononormative" (92): obesity connotes a form of continuous deterioration "as opposed to suffering an event-centered trauma or achievement event-centered goals" (92). "Fat," therefore, connotes for Freeman a refusal to exist within linear time. See, *Time Binds: Queer Temporalities, Queer Histories* (Duke University Press, 2010).

[56] This statement is made by Yunior through a footnote in reference to Oscar's inability to be "Normal" (21). Importantly, however, this is another moment in which Yunior exposes his shortcomings and errors as narrator, pointing to the difficulty in capturing and archiving history writ large and in particular a story of this magnitude of violence.

[57] This is not the only mention of "First" and "Third" Worlds Yunior makes. Narrating Belicia's violent beating in the sugarcane fields, Yunior describes movement from urban to rural landscape as being "one second…deep in the twentieth century (well, the twentieth century of the Third World) and the next you'd find yourself plunged 180 years into rolling fields of cane." See *Oscar Wao* 146.

[58] There are numerous references through *Oscar Wao* of Oscar's own creative writing practices and preferences. For example, Oscar is obsessed with narratives about the end-of-the-world, daydreams about "nuclear annihilation" (42), and has "apocalyptic daydreams" where "he was always some kind of plátano Doc Savage, a supergenius who combined world-class martial artistry with deadly firearms proficiency" (27). He writes books that center on things such as "mutants at the end of the world" (32), and in which most characters do not survive. Importantly, through these creative writing exercises and daydream obsessions Oscar is able to project himself as the hero of a science fictional

world in an attempt to make sense of his own extreme (science fictional) reality. I would also argue that his continued world building projects with the apocalyptic at its center mirrors not only Yunior's own writing practices in *Oscar Wao*, but also emulate the longing to recreate colonial violence through the pages of his works. The package that never arrives from the Dominican Republic after his death with "everything I've written on this journey" and which promises to be "the cure to what ails us" (333) (the cure—read: zafa—to fukú) remains unanswered through his death, a decolonial message the novel cannot fulfill.

[59] For example, of Belicia's anger: "Her rage filled the house […] It got into everything, into our hair and our food, like the fallout they talked to us about in school that would one day drift down soft as snow" (60). Like the scars on her back which point to other apocalyptic atrocities such as the dropping of the atomic bomb over Japan (see *Oscar Wao* 257), Belicia's rage is also a signifier not only for the destruction caused by nuclear weapons, but also the fear it instills, the threat of atomic annihilation that took hold of all aspects of daily life during the Cold War. This section, narrated by Lola (although I argue that this is Yunior in drag) during the tail-end of the Cold War (Chapter Two, "Wildwood," is set between 1982 and 1985) equates Belicia's rage with the geopolitical danger experienced in this era and, moreover, stages Belicia's rage as both overwhelming and excessive, and a byproduct of fukú. Similarly, Belicia's decision to go dancing, a decision that introduced her to the Gangster, is staged as "the Decision That Changed Everything"—a capitalization that obviously ascribes the choice with significance and as an induction into a new stage and/or text, much like a title lends to the text that follows. Furthermore, Belicia's explanation for wanting to dance is so extreme in nature it is at once a desire to dance while simultaneously the catalyst for entire continents: "All I wanted was to dance. What I got instead was *esto*, she said, opening her arms to encompass the hospital, her children, her cancer, America" (113).

[60] From the Spanish "criar" (to produce, feed, take care of, educate, usually children and/or animals), criada/o is used to refer to a person who is employed in domestic work. See "criado, da" in *Diccionario de la lengua española*. From the French *rester avec* (to stay with) the Creolized "restavek" refers to Haitian children who work as, what some sources call, indentured servitude and slavery. See Corey Adwar, "Why Haiti Is One Of The Worst Countries For Child Slavery." *Business Insider*. 3 Sept. 2014. Web. 26 May 2016 and Jim Loney, "Haiti Restavek Tradition Called Child Slavery." *Reuters*. 18 Feb. 2010. Web. 26 May 2016. The novel, therefore, implies that Belicia's work as a "criada, a restavek" is difficult, demeaning, and was—as her burns demonstrate—the victim of repeated abuse.

[61] Sold as a "criada" (see *Oscar Wao* 253) after her family's death, Belicia evades her duties to attend classes in a rural school built by the Trujillato (255). While the act of burning a girl is horrific—an act the text cannot describe absolutely—I am implying here that because this moment is introduced through various references to Trujillo and the Trujillato, the burning is one of the various acts of violence within a larger system. For example, the account of Belicia's burning is introduced as follows: "And then it was 1955. The Year of the Benefactor" (255) and is followed by various mentions of the dictator and dictatorial violence, rural poverty, and apocalyptic landscapes. 1955 marks the twenty-fifth anniversary of Trujillo's presidency and, moreover, one of the many monikers for the dictator was "El Benefactor" (The Benefactor). Beginning the story in

this way defines what follows as symptomatic of not only dictatorial violence but also the violence that began with fukú.

[62] For more on the hibakusha and the terms origin see "Hibakusha" in www.dictionary.com.

[63] In "'Reassembling the Fragments'" Hanna similarly argues that the description of Belicia's back likens it to "the landscape of war and the scars of the survivors of the Atomic bomb dropped on Japan during World War II. The scar that Belicia suffers as a victim of child abuse is also tangentially tied to larger national violence, reminding the reader that Belicia suffers this fate because she lost her family at the hands of the dictatorial regime." See *Callaloo* vol. 32 no. 2 (2010), 505. While I agree with Hanna's conclusion of Belicia's back-as-landscape, I argue instead that the description of abuse and violence is essential to the novel's world-building project of the novel.

[64] This is another instance in which Yunior demonstrates his literary voraciousness and eclectic tastes. Referring to Helen of Troy, Yunior references the well known phrase "a face that launched a thousand ships" from Christopher Marlow's *The Tragical History of the Life and Death of Doctor Faustus*: "Was this the face that launch'd a thousand ships / And burnt the topless towers of Ilium?/ Sweet Helen, make me immortal with a kiss." See Christopher Marlowe, *Doctor Faustus* (Broadview Press, 2007) 162. Much like Helen is imagined as the instrument for Faustus's desires, Belicia is depicted as the medium through which the Gangster will achieve his.

[65] In January 1959, Fulgencio Batista, the ousted president of Cuba during the Revolution, fled to the Dominican Republic, and the Trujillo regime breaks diplomatic relations with Cuba.

[66] See Yomaira C. Figueroa, "Faithful Witnessing as Practice: Decolonial Readings of *Shadows of Your Black Memory* and *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*," *Hypatia* vol. 30 no. 4 (Fall 2015), 641-656; Weese; Joe Fassler, "How Junot Díaz Wrote a Sexist Character, but Not a Sexist Book," *The Atlantic* 11 Sept. 2012; Machado Saez 159-175; and Deborah R. Vargas, "Sucia Love: Losing, Lying, and Leaving in Junot Díaz's *This Is How You Lose Her*," *Junot Díaz and the Decolonial Imagination* (Duke University Press, 2016), 351-375.

[67] I contend that the representation of monstrosity is part of the world-building project in Díaz's oeuvre. For example, in "Miss Lora" from Díaz's latest collection of short stories, *This Is How You Lose Her*, Yunior describes the older woman with whom he's sleeping as follows: "Miss Lora wasn't nothing exciting […] Miss Lora was too skinny. Had no hips whatsoever. No breasts, either, no ass, even her hair failed to make the grade. She had her eyes, sure, but what she was most famous for in the neighborhood were her muscles. Not that she had huge ones like you—chick was just wiry like a motherfucker, every single fiber standing out in outlandish definition. Bitch made Iggy Pop look chub, and every summer she caused a serious commotion at the pool." See *This Is How You Lose Her* (Riverhead Books, 2012), 153-154. Similarly, in "No Face" from his first collection, *Drown*, Yunior, still living in the Dominican Republic, describes Ysrael as follows: "His left ear was a nub and you could see the thick veined slab of his tongue through a hole in his cheek. He had no lips. His head was tipped back and his eyes had gone white and the cords were out on his neck […] The damage looked old but I still jumped back." See *Drown* (Riverhead Books, 1996), 18-19.

[68] Roughly translated as "rough beast," kaiju is a film genre that features monsters such as Godzilla and usually involve these monsters attacking major Japanese cities. See Jason Barr, *The Kaiju Film: A Critical Study of Cinema's Biggest Monsters*. Unlike the capitalist driven and skyscraper laden landscapes of kaiju film, the architectural productions of Le Corbusier (born Charles-Édouard Jeanneret-Gris) are known for their ordered (in fact, mathematical) aesthetics. The most prominent of the International school, Le Corbusier was known for his populist and purist aesthetics. The novel, thus, mobilizes him as a synecdoche for the clear separation between urban and rural.

[69] Chapter 2 provides a comprehensive (although not exhaustive) history of the production of sugar in the Caribbean (especially in relation to the creation of the figure of the zombie). These seminal sources offer a detailed record and description of the history of sugar: Sidney W. Mintz, *Sweetness and Power: The Place of Sugar in Modern History* (Penguin Books, 1986) and Noel Deerr, *The History of Sugar, Volume 1* (Chapman & Hall, 1949) and *Volume 2* (Chapman & Hall, 1950); Eric Williams, *From Columbus to Castro: The History of the Caribbean* (Vintage Books, 1970).

[70] See Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (Oxford University Press, 1987), 4-5.

[71] For example, in *The History of Mary Prince* the em dash is used to demarcate the inability to put experience into writing: "Oh dear! I cannot bear to think of that day, —it is too much—" (10); "I can't repeat his answer, the words were too wicked—too bad to say" (24). See *The History of Mary Prince* (Penguin Books, 2000). Frederick Douglass also omits from the written words that which is too violent to recount: "Mr. Thomas Lanman, of St. Michael's, killed two slaves, one of whom he killed with a hatchet, by knocking his brains out. He used to boast of the commission of the awful and bloody deed. I have heard him do so laughingly, saying among other things, that he was the only benefactor of his country in the company, and that when others would do as much as he had done, we should be relieved of 'the d—d niggers" (11-12) See *Narrative in the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave, Written by Himself* (W.W. Norton & Company, 1997). Lastly, the author of *Our Nig; or, Sketches in the Life of a Free Black*, Harriet E. Adams Wilson also utilizes the em dash as an indication of that which exceeds language: "Oh dear!' sighed Mag; 'Nobody on earth cares for *me*—" (13). See *Our Nig* (Vintage Books, 2011). Oscar *Wao* repeatedly returns to the em dash to depict that which must remain silent, is too excessive and/or violent to represent, and that that will remain unknowable. For example, the Mongoose's words to Oscar in a dream are represented as follows: "_____, said the Mongoose" (301). Similarly, Yunior is unable to write the words that he stages as having the potential to "save" them: "_____ _____ _____ " (327). As I explored in the introduction to this project, the em dash also signals the Latinx speculative.

[72] Hartman's introduction is particularly useful in thinking about the challenging and problematic decision to represent or exclude the suffering body from analysis. In her work, Hartman decides to look elsewhere or beyond the suffering body in order to examine the violence and brutality of slavery, and as she states, to "defamiliarize the familiar" (4) in order to demonstrate the terror evident in the most mundane aspects of nineteenth-century life.

[73] Scarry argues that "when there is within a society a crisis of belief—that is, when some central idea or ideology or cultural construct has ceased to elicit a

population's belief either because it is manifestly fictitious or because it has for some reason been divested of ordinary forms of substantiation—the sheer material factualness of the human body will be borrowed to lend that cultural construct the aura of 'realness' and 'certainty'" (14).

[74] Yunior's reversion to the rhetoric of rumors and hearsay—"it had been reported"; "I suspect there was, but we shall never know" (147)—haunt this account as it does the rest of the novel. The repeated unknowables of the text mark this long and violent scene, defining it as an authorial creation (Yunior) to authenticate the violence the novel attempts to unearth and the author himself as the bearer of "truth." Most troubling is the texts mocking of Belicia's desires while she is deliriously lying in the field. After it becomes clear that "no rescue was forthcoming," she fantasizes that the Gangster "would visit her at the hospital and there they would be married, he in a suit, she in a body cast, but then that too was revealed to be plepla by the sickening crack of her humerus, and now all that remained was the agony and the foolishness" (147-148)

[75] This same type of representation occurs when Oscar enters the field for the last time. The cane is compared to "triffids" and the stalks making a "clack-clack-clack-claking against each other" (320). The menacing onomatopoeic is a reference to *The Day of the Triffids*, a post-apocalyptic novel by John Wyndham in which plants (triffids) have animal-like behavior, feed on meat, and uprooting themselves move on legs. As such, the novel once again draws connections from itself to other works of s/sf and marks the sugarcane as a living monstrous space of death.

[76] Through the staging of violence in the sugarcane fields, Yunior not only calls forth the literary history of the Latina/o canon, but also demonstrates the enmeshed histories of fukú (and its origin) to colonial violence and the Trujillato. In a footnote about the Mirabal Sisters Yunior, states: "And where were the Mirabal Sisters murdered? In the canefield, of course. And then their bodies were put in a car and a crash was simulated! Talk about two for one!" (157). In this way Yunior reasserts the centrality of sugarcane (and sugar production) in the propagation of violence (both colonial and dictatorial). The lives and death of the Mirabal sisters was most famously fictionalized by Julia Alvarez in *The Time of the Butterflies* (1994) and by Mario Vargas Llosa in *La fiesta del chivo* (2000).

[77] Elaine Scarry reminds us that the act of naming pain itself (the words etymology coming from the Latin *poena* or "penalty") "entails an immediate mental somersault out of the body into the external social circumstances that can be pictured as having caused the hurt" (16). Moreover, the inherent instability of the language to describe pain that "enables us to see *the attributes* of pain" also "permit a break in the identification of the referent and thus a misidentification of the thing to which the attribute belong" (17).

[78] In fact, the line that ends Chapter 2 and signals his return to the Dominican Republic is intimately tied to the sugarcane, the history it signals, and the inevitability of fukú:

> Six weeks after the Colossal Beatdown he dreamed about the cane again. But instead of bolting when the cries began, when the bones started breaking, he summoned all the courage he ever had, would ever have, and forced himself to do the one thing he did not want to do, that he could not bear to do.

He listened. (307)

While this moment *is* one of courage, the novel stages his return to the Dominican Republic and ultimate death as a result of his hearing, by which I mean that what he hears in the cane and the repeated dreams of it is the apocalyptic violence of the Caribbean and the inevitability of its recurrence.

[79] On Wednesday, January 29, 2014 the American Studies Department and Critical Race Reading Group of the George Washington University hosted the roundtable, "On Whose Ground?" which explored the killing of Trayvon Martin, "stand your ground" laws, racial issues surrounding the case, and the implications and aftermath of George Zimmerman's non-guilty verdict. Antonio López of GWU's English Department, spoke on the material and spatial elements of the murder, especially in regards to notions of "public" and "private" spaces and subjects. Moreover, López pointed to the gun and the sidewalk (a public space) as an extension of colonial technologies that blur the line between public and private, citizen and nation, but that reveal varying degrees of racial violence. This point has been recently reaffirmed in connection to mass shootings in school. For example, Walter Johnson writers in "Guns in the Family": "In other words, the defense of gun ownership has always been rooted in anxieties about the need to defend white homesteads and households against a racialized, gendered threat: blacks, Indians, women who threaten their husbands' masculinity, kids who won't obey their fathers." See *Boston Review* 23 March 2018.

[80] This mythological origin of the Taíno derives its name from the jagua tree, whose edible fruit generates a black vegetable dye used for ritual body painting For more information on the Taíno origin myth or the Cave of Jagua see Bill Keegan and Betsy Carlson, "Talking Taino: Caves." *Times of the Islands: Sampling the Soul of the Turks & Caicos Islands.* Winter 2006/2007, and Antonio M. Stevens-Arroyo, *Cave of the Jagua: The Mythological World of the Taínos* (University of Scranton Press, 2006).

[81] The Taíno Indians are thought to have originated from the Orinoco Delta and gradually spread from Venezuela to other parts of the Caribbean such as Jamaica, Puerto Rico, Cuba, the Dominican Republic and Haiti, and the Bahamas around 400 BCE. Yunior's statement demonstrates a desire for facts and official forms of knowledge. For history of the Taíno see, Robert M. Poole, "What Became of the Taíno?" *Smithsonian Magazine*. Oct. 2011; Bill Keegan and Betsy Carlson; Antonio M. Stevens-Arroyo; and Irvin Rouse, *The Tainos: Rise & Decline of the People Who Greeted Columbus* (Yale University Press, 1992).

[82] This is not a project with an ecomaterialist focus. However, I cite Cohen in order to explore the accumulation of history within the "birthplace" in Díaz's short story and the apocalyptic desires the hole reveals. Cohen has written extensively on stone. See "Stories of Stone." *postmedieval: a journal of medieval cultural studies* vol. 1 no. 1/2, 56–63; and *Stone: An Ecology of the Inhuman* (University of Minnesota Press, 2015).

[83] Campbell's notion of the "monomyth" has been rightfully criticized as procrustean and essentializing. However, his work in *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* is still useful in examining the elements of myth, especially in my own consideration of Yunior's attempt at playing the hero, but his ultimate failure in doing so.

[84] This can be seen in quintessential science fiction and fantasy literature and film, such as the *Star Wars* series, Octavia Butler's *Parable of the Sower* (1993), J.R.R. Tolkiens' *The Lord of the Rings* (1937), and *Arrival* (2016).

[85] Campbell focuses on the "belly of the whale" as a leitmotif in his analysis of the passage of magical thresholds. I draw a comparison between Campbell's analysis and Yunior's experience for various reasons, including the fact that "the birthplace of our nation" in "The Sun, the Moon, the Stars" is also a mysterious and magical space in which transformation is sought, and because of it's "womb image," which Campbell draws upon in relation to the belly of the whale and its potential for providing a world of rebirth for the hero (76). See "The Belly of the Whale" in *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (New World Library, 2008), 74-80.

[86] Menely and Ronda also explore the associations of red with political radicalism: "The association of red with political radicalism—whether republic, anarchist, or socialist—is long-standing and pervasive. The Oxford English Dictionary traces the correlation between red and revolution in Europe to the thirteenth century and the use of the red flag as a signal of defiance to the sixteenth century" (24). They explore, moreover, environmental activism in the name of the nonhuman at the Cavel West slaughterhouse in Oregon in terms of what they term "a dialectic of appearance and nonappearance," which they "associate with the sign of red" (23).

[87] Michelle M. Wright's Introduction to *Physics of Blackness: Beyond the Middle Passage Epistemology*, "Many Thousands Still Coming: Theorizing Blackness in the Postwar Moment," is a beautiful examination of the central question, "What is Blackness?" Wright argues that "the only way to produce a definition of Blackness that is wholly inclusive and nonhierarchical is to understand Blackness as the *intersection* of constructs that locate the Black collective in *history* and in the *specific moment* in which Blackness is being imagined—the "now" through which all imaginings of Blackness will be mediated" (14). Stuart Hall's famous essay, "Cultural Identity and Diaspora" (which Wright examines in her introduction), is another example of this type of analysis of blackness. Hall illustrates the difficulties of defining blackness, understanding the construction of a collective identity through a shared history that nonetheless considers this history and its ancestry realities that, as Wright notes, give "Blackness its 'weight'" (5).

[88] This title is not only for Oscar's notebook but also serves as a subtitle for the section of the novel itself. J.D. Saldívar contends that Yunior's invocation of Césaire in *Oscar Wao* acts "suggest Césaire's larger discursive and globally diversalist framework" that enables Yunior to argue that Oscar's journals are about him "finding his poetic voice, about returning from the Global North to the Global South, and, most importantly, creolizing science fiction" ("Conjectures on 'Americanity'" 131). Moreover, Yunior's use of Césaire and the other intertextual moments, Saldívar argues, "point [Oscar] to a new positionality or double register vis à vis Western scientific and disciplinary knowledge" (131).

[89] Throughout Díaz's works Yunior persistently chases "pussy," sometimes if not always against his better judgment. I would also argue that his pursuits, which at times seem compulsive, are intimately linked to the pursuit of national belonging as a subject of diaspora.

[90] See Jacques Lacan, *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis, 1959-1960*. Ed. Jacques-Alain Miller. Trans. Dennis Porter (Routledge, 1992). For Lacan's use of the term *manque-à-être* see, "The Instance of the Letter in the Unconscious," *Écrits.* Trans. Brunce Fink (W.W. Norton & Co., 2002), 151.

[91] In Spanish "sucio" is generally translated as "dirty" and in this instance can be literally translated as "dirty man" or "dirty woman" ("sucia"—a term Yunior uses liberally when referring to the women with whom he sleeps). In Dominican (and other Latin American/Latina/o ethnicities) slang, the term is used to refer to a cheater or sexually promiscuous person. This term can also be equivalent to "playa" or "slut" in American slang (as in: "don't hate the playa, hate the game"), depending on the moral emphasis and viewpoint by the speaker on the actions of the "sucio" in question. Much as the term terms "playa" and "slut" are ascribed unequally to males and females in American culture, and I would venture to stipulate that the same is true of the use of "sucio" in Dominican culture. This is the term Yunior uses for himself in few occasions, and in doing so demonstrates a sense of remorse and loss caused by his cheating. See for example: "Went back to my own life, back to being the ill sucio" (*Oscar Wao* 180), associating being a "sucio" with disease; and "She considers me a typical Dominican man: a sucio, an asshole" (*This is How You Lose Her* 3), in this instance associating his actions with the anus. Interestingly, "sucio" can also be used to derogatorily refer to a homosexual man—a designation Yunior desperately wishes to avoid throughout all three texts. For a convincing analysis of Yunior in relation to homosexual desire see Machado Saez, "Dictating Diaspora." In this chapter, Machado Saez explores Yunior's narrative as a form of violence on Oscar's non-normative Dominican performance as a way to hide his own homosexual and non-normative desires. Ylce Irizarry's chapter, "This Is How You Lose It: Navigating Dominicanidad in Junot Díaz's *Drown*," in *Junot Díaz and the Decolonial Imagination*. Eds. Monica Hanna, Jennifer Harford Vargas, and José David Saldívar (Duke University Press, 2016), 147-171, explores how the titular story of the collection reveals the negotiation of class, race, and constructions of Dominican identity through a (narrowly-defined) homosexual experience. Deborah R. Vargas's "Sucia Love: Losing, Lying, and Leaving in Junot Díaz's *This Is How You Lose Her*" examines the women of Díaz latest collection to argue that they demonstrate a nonnormative form of pleasure and love that act in opposition to the constraining "logics of capitalism's constructions of love" (353). J.D. Saldívar also (beautifully) argues that Oscar's reading practices are positioned by the text as queer ones. Oscar's reading in the closet, Saldívar argues, is an anti-heterosexist decolonial aesthetic that enables Oscar to imagine "other galaxies free from the real razors and the brutal and 'normalized' gendered identifications of the Paterson world outside" the closet. See José David Saldívar, "Junot Díaz's Search for Decolonial Aesthetics and Love," *Junot Díaz and the Decolonial Imagination* (Duke University Press, 2016), 321-349.

Other psychoanalytic theories could arise from Yunior's experience within and in reaction to the "birthplace." For example, a psychoanalytic reading could explain how Yunior's "sucio" ways are an attempt to fulfill the childhood desire experienced in the Oedipal trajectory, which was foreclosed by the absence of the father (therefore, Yunior was never able to relinquish his desire for the mother). Other psychoanalytic readings might include Yunior's projection of the maternal desire for a desire for the Dominican Republic itself, which like the desire for the mother in the Oedipal trajectory must be

relinquished for a like-object substitution. My theoretical methodology is not psychoanalytic in nature. For object relations theories see the work of Melanie Klein and Margaret Mahler.

[92] In the opening pages of *Oscar Wao* Yunior states, for example, "Even now as I write these words I wonder if this book ain't a zafa of sorts. My very own counterspell" (7).

[93] I do not wish to detach the elements of queerness that are entangled in Gopinath's analysis of desire in *Impossible Desires: Queer Diasporas and South Asian Public Cultures* (Duke University Press, 2005). As Machado Saez has argued, Yunior demonstrates non-normative and at times homosexual and/or queer desires. See *Market Aesthetics*. Irizarry also analyzes Yunior's relationship with Beto in the short story "Drown" which takes-on an explicit homosexual (narrowly defined) subject. See "This Is How You Lose It: Navigating Dominicanidad in Junot Díaz's *Drown*." I do not focus on Yunior's homosocial/homosexual desires in this chapter, but would like to briefly point to the fact that his experience in the "birthplace" does create an alternative form of kinship, that between the three men. The lowering of Yunior within the hole can be read as a moment of intimacy and homoeroticism that would metaphorically convert the "birthplace" not into a womb/vagina, but into an anus. This would further prohibit Yunior's access to the motherland or an origin of the nation.

[94] As a creative writer, Yunior's narrations in *Drown*, *Oscar Wao*, and *This Is How You Lose Her*, should be considered written texts, in their majority. *Oscar Wao* opens with the explicit statement of its form: "Even now as I write these words I wonder if this books ain't a zafa of sorts. My very own counterspell" (7). The narrator "Monstro" is unnamed—and we should not assume it is also Yunior, although the voice is similar to his—but in this text, the male narrator is also a creative writer: "I just wanted to write one book that was worth a damn and I would have happily called it a day." As such, the narrative act in Díaz work is significant not only for its telling (in its aural and oral qualities)—and in the case of sections of *Oscar Wao*, its retelling—but also for the act of creating a tangible written record.

[95] Critics who have written about "decolonial love" in relation to Díaz work include J.D. Saldívar, "Junot Díaz's Search for Decolonial Aesthetics and Love"; J.D. Saldívar, "Conjectures on 'Americanity'"; Yomaira C. Figueroa, "Reparation as transformation: Radical literary (re)imaginings of futurities through decolonial love" *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society* vol. 4 no. 1 (2015), 41-58

[96] Although Díaz is speaking about *Oscar Wao* in this instance, I argue that this is the central tenet of his entire oeuvre.

[97] The way in which Junot Díaz references "decolonial love" is clearly indebted to the work of Nelson Maldonado-Torres's "decolonial praxis of love" and Mignolo's influential work on decolonial aesthesis.

[98] "The Cheater's Guide to Love" is the concluding story in *This Is How You Lose Her* and was originally published in the July 23, 2012 issue of *The New Yorker*. Written in the second person point of view, the story centers on the five years following the break up of Yunior from his fiancé. As seen in *Drown*, *Oscar Wao*, and *This Is How You Lose Her*, Yunior's relationship comes to an end after his fiancé discovers his cheating. The story's subsections, divided between "Year 0" and "Year 5," focus on Yunior's following relationships, declining physical condition, teaching and writing in Boston.

[99] In his analysis of "The Cheater's Guide to Love," J.D. Saldívar points to the story's beginning with "Year 0," a "blast off" that is "kind of a ground zero of love where Yunior's knowledge about love has been hidden in the transparency and worldliness of the '0'" ("Junot Díaz's Search" 336). However, he does not make the connection between this "ground zero of love" and the "Ground Zero of the New World" which I examine.

[100] Torres-Saillant states that the cross-national setting of the novel expands the physical territory that "the country's literary imagination can cover to encompass genealogies, places, histories, and people in sites located elsewhere." See "Artistry, Ancestry, and Americanness in the Works of Junot Díaz." Also examining the magical realist elements of the novel, Hanna reads fukú as an element of the novel's intervention in the magical realist tradition and through which Yunior accounts for and connects his narrative to "the reality and history of Latin America, firmly locating the magical realist stories in specific geographic and historical contexts ("'Reassembling the Fragments'" 509). Following the work of Carpentier and his definition of magical realism as a genre that enables a native (Latin American) interpretation of reality, Hanna examines *Oscar Wao* as specifically within Latin American tradition and geography. However, as Torrest-Saillant argues, Díaz inhabits "the republic of letters as a prominent artistic voice" and, moreover, commands "the discursive power necessary to alter the literary tradition from which he writes" (121). Machado Saez echoes this argument in *Market Aesthetics.* Therefore, I would like to argue that Díaz deftly employs the Latin American tradition as a marketing tool through which Latina/o and Latin American writers become legible in the literary (specifically U.S.) market.

[101] I am in no way trying to imply that Walcott's poem deserves the same type (or better) treatment than the *Fantastic Four* reference, but wish to call attention to the value ascribed to the novel's meta-textual references.

[102] For example, throughout *Oscar Wao* Belicia is compared to Homer's Penelope (109) and her obsession with Jack Puhols is compared to Ahab's myopia (95).

CHAPTER 2.

[1] The full interview and story can be heard through Radiolab, "Los Frikis," and Radio Ambulante, "Cuando la Habana era friki" in their respective websites.

[2] "*Carajo*" has multiple meanings, including the male sexual organ, and is used in various connotations. "*Carajo*" can be translated as "hell" (*vete para el carajo*/go to hell), "shit" (*me importa un carajo*/I don't give a shit) and/or "fuck" (*me importa un carajo*/I don't give a fuck). Popular myth places the word's origin to the medieval period and the crow's nest on the topmast of Spanish caravels, to which sailors would be sent as punishment, hence the association to an undesirable location or expression of anger. I translate la Bala's "*al carajo*" as "fuck it" due to his statement's implication of capitulation and defeat.

[3] Against shaming normativity, Berlant (2007) and Freeman (2010) examine the effects of state power on the body, arguing that fatness can be read as a form of agency and refusal.

[4] Although African American and Latinx literary traditions have a long history of the speculative—George Schuyler (1931), Ralph Ellison (1952), Rudolfo Anaya

(1972)—the literary academy has overlooked the role of race in speculative fiction (Lavender 10).

[5] This era was known as the "special period" in Cuba of economic crisis. Ironically, as Esther Whitfield (2008) states, while food scarcity, decreased production, rationing, and austerity measures on the island defined the special period, at this time Cuba was also participating in the capitalist world by increased cultural exports, particularly literature.

[6] Whitehead's novel is one of many that hold questions of security, terrorism, and national uncertainty at its center, participating in post-9/11 aesthetics. See Don DeLillo, *Falling Man* (2007), Joseph O'Neill, *Netherland* (2008), Gary Shteyngart, *Super Sad True Love Story* (2010), and Jonathan Safran Foer, *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* (2011). While not all of these novels overtly depict 9/11 and its aftermath, they are all concerned with notions of insecurity, ambiguity, loss and focus on New York City as a thematic vessel for speculation.

[7] *Saccharum officinarum* (sugar cane; "sugar of the apothecaries") has been the primary source of sucrose for more than a millennium. First domesticated in what is today New Guinea circa 8000 B.C.E., sugar cane was first grown in the Caribbean in Spanish Santo Domingo and shipped back to Europe in 1516. For a detailed record and description of the history of sugar see the seminal works by Mintz (1985) and Deerr (1949, 1950).

[8] For a detailed analysis on the history of transatlantic flows of trade and slavery see Mimi Sheller's *Consuming the Caribbean: From Arawaks to Zombies* (2000) and Barbara L. Solow's *Slavery and the Rise of the Atlantic System* (1991).

[9] On the ways in which sugar production shaped the ways in which Europe "consumed" the Caribbean, see Sheller (2000).

[10] Sheller (83); Mintz; Eric Williams, *Capitalism and Slavery* (1944); Guerra Sánchez, *Azúcar y población en las Antillas* (1927).

[11] See Austen, Ralph and Woodruff Smith, "Private Tooth Decay as Public Economic Virtue: The Slave-Sugar triangle, Consumerism, and European Industrialization." *The Atlantic Slave Trade: Effects on Economies, Societies and Peoples of Africa, the Americas, and Europe.* Eds. Inikori, Joseph E. and Stanley L. Engerman (Duke University Press, 1995).

[12] The ways in which Europe nations envisioned themselves in relation to the Caribbean and their consumption of sugar is not a central concern of this chapter. However, I do wish to demonstrate how this commodity has held a central place within proto/capitalist systems, and how sugar is always inextricably linked to racialized (slave)labor. For a more detailed account of how Europe was transformed by their consumption of sugar see Sheller; Keith A. Sandiford, *The Cultural Politics of Sugar: Caribbean Slavery and Narratives of Colonialism* (2000); and Carl Plasa, *Slaves to Sweetness: British and Caribbean Literature of Sugar* (2009).

[13] The origin of the zombie is crucially tied to the cannibal as conceived by Europeans in the sixteenth century. The term "cannibal" has its origins in the 1500s and derives from *Caníbales*, the Spanish name for the Caribs of the West Indies (this further derives from "caribal," the Spanish word for "a savage"). Both Cristopher Columbus in the accounts of his four voyages and Bartolmé de las Casas in *Historia de Las Indias* mention the presence of native peoples that eat human flesh. In the eighteenth century,

works such as Edward Long, *The History of Jamaica* (1774) and Bryan Edwards, *The History, Civil and Commercial, of the British Colonies in the West Indies* (1793) spoke of cannibals as being African in origin. As such, the notion of savagery, monstrosity, and the bestial are intimately tied to the Caribbean.

[14] Kevin Boon. "The Zombie as Other: Mortality and the Monstrous in the Post-Nuclear Age *Better Off Dead: The Evolution of the Zombie as Post-Human*. Eds. Lauro, Sarah Juliet and Deborah Christie (Fordham University Press, 2011) 53.

[15] See M.L.E. Moreau de Saint-Méry, *Description topographique, physique, civile, politique et historique de la partie française de l'isle Saint- Domingue* (1789). In this text, Moreau de Saint-Méry describes the term as a "Creole word which means spirit, revenant." As Gary D. Rhodes notes, however, Moreau de Saint-Méry's text was not widely read, and had little influence, if any, in the history of English-speaking texts on the subject of zombies or voodoo. Rhodes notes that some volumes published in the early nineteenth century in France and Port-au-Prince discussed the historical figure of Jean Zombi: a slave turned rebel who was instrumental during Haiti's fight for independence.

[16] Kee 9. Zora Neale Hurston also details this type of zombie—and the fear it created—in her anthropological text, *Tell My Horse* (1938): "Think of the fiendishness of the thing. It is not good for a person who has lived all his life surrounded by a degree of fastidious culture, loved to his last breath by family and friends, to contemplate the probability of his resurrected body being dragged from the vault—the best that love and means could provide, and set to toiling ceaselessly in the banana fields, working like a beast, unclothed like a beast, and like a brute crouching in some foul den in the few hours allowed for rest and food" (181).

[17] Kee 13. Charles Najman's *Haiti, Dieu seul me voit* and Gary D. Rhodes's *White Zombie: Anatomy of a Horror Film* mention this text as introducing the zombie to popular culture.

[18] See Spencer St. John's *Hayti, or the Black Republic*. In this text, St. John describes cannibalism, human sacrifice, and grave robbing as a part of voodoo, and as a widely read text during the nineteenth century, influenced many writers and readers. Moreover, St. John claims that cannibalism did not occur under French colonial rule, and inherent in this presentation is the notion that cannibalism appears in voodoo because of Haitian independence. Through this lens, cannibalism is used to critique the Haitian government, and voodoo is seen as a threat not only to civilization, but to Haiti's future (Kee 13).

[19] For example, Joan Dayan states: "it should not surprise us that during the American occupation […] tales of cannibalism, torture, and zombies were published in [the United States]. What better way to justify the 'civilizing' presence of marines in Haiti than to project the phantasm of barbarism?" (Quoted in Annette Trefzer, "Possessing the Self: Caribbean Identities in Zora Neale Hurston's *Tell My Horse*." *African American Review* vol. 34 no. 2 (Summer 2000): 300.

[20] In *The Monster Show: A Cultural History of Horror*, David Skal states of cultural productions during this time period, such as *White Zombie* (1932), the zombie horde in many ways depicted the "nightmare vision of the breadline […] Millions already knew that they were no longer completely in control of their lives; the economic strings were being pulled by faceless, frightening forces" (168-169).

[21] See Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, "Undead (A Zombie Oriented Ontology)" (2012);

Sarah Juliet Lauro and Karen Embry, "A Zombie Manifesto: The Nonhuman Condition in the Era of Advanced Capitalism" (2008); Annalee Newitz. *Pretend We're Dead: Capitalist Monsters in American Pop Culture* (2006).

[22] At the time of *The Magic Island*'s publication, Haiti had been under American occupation for fourteen years. The Haitian American Sugar Company (HASCO) is considered one of the factors of the invasion in 1915, further cementing the importance of the Caribbean and of sugar in American culture and foreign policy in the twentieth century

[23] As Michael Klein delineates in *The Empire State: A History of New York*, "In 1624, the company, or more correctly the Amsterdam Chamber of that company, financed a small-scale settlement of Europeans in New Netherland to protect and provision its fur trade operations" (23). Other historians of New York City and New York State echo this point. For example, Edwin G. Burrows and Mike Wallace's Pulitzer Prize winning history of New York, *Gotham: A History of New York City to 1898*, illustrates that although the Dutch's most prominent architectural construction was a fort, it was never used for military purposes; unlike other North American colonies, New York was not an urban theocracy, and the city was not to become a governmental hub: New York City from its inception was a place in which "Mammon ruled, not God," a "City of Capital" (xvi).

[24] For a detailed historical account about the construction of New York City from the colonial period to the present see Klein, *The Empire State;* Kenneth T. Jackson, *The Encyclopedia of New York City* (2010), and George J. Lankevich, *New York City: A Short History* (1998).

[25] Klein specifies that the exact date of slaves' arrival in New Amsterdam is uncertain, as the only reference to Africans in the colony comes from a document in 1644 that refers to slaves working in the colony for "18 or 19 years." Klein offers a letter of the Reverend Jonas Michaëlius—the first clergyman to lead a congregation of the Dutch Reformed Church in the U.S.—as the most "trustworthy evidence" of Africans in the colony during the 1620s. In this letter the Reverend confirms the "presence of African women slaves when he complained that he could not find women caretakers for his daughters because maid servants were not to be had and 'the Angola slave women are thievish, lazy, and useless trash" (51).

[26] Burrows and Wallace's expansive history of New York City is incredibly detailed, and much like the other histories of this city, presents sugar and the Caribbean as vital elements for the city's expansion and monetary gains. See their chapter, "In the Kingdom of Sugar," for further information on New York's development through the West Indian sugar trade. In this chapter, Burrows and Wallace clearly present the ways in which the acquisition of New Netherlands was an imperialist decision made because of the potential wealth of the sugar market: "to wrest it from the Dutch West India Company [New Netherlands] would be an act of mercantile acumen, not to mention the highest patriotism" (72).

[27] As Burrows and Wallace state, "By 1720 or so half the ships entering or leaving the port were on their way to the Caribbean; another one-quarter to one-third were on their way to or from North American colonies, moving goods often as not destined for reexport to the Caribbean" (120). This increased dependence on the island's foodstuffs' and slave labor increased the number involved in the slave trade: "By 1730 it had become

big business in the countinghouses on Pearl Street and Hanover Square, never representing more than a minor share of the total tonnage involved in overseas commerce yet sufficiently lucrative that few merchants weren't involved at one time or another" (126). In this history of New York City, Burrows and Wallace state that from 1678 to 1745 the number of African slaves in the West Indies increased from 8,500 to 59,000, and between 1700 and 1750 339,000 slaves were brought to the islands.

[28] The scholarship on *Dreaming in Cuban* and García's other works is extensive. Discussions surrounding *Dreaming in Cuban* center most commonly on feminist and postcolonial readings that argue the novel's challenging position in relation to notions of history, nationality, and citizenship. García's representations of exile and migration, especially through the character of Pilar, have been taken up by scholars as demonstrating what Gustavo Pérez Firmat terms "life on the hyphen" or "the one-and-a-half generation" (*Life on the Hyphen*, 3). His gentle representation of being culturally in-between and dual is read by critics of García's novel as a recuperation of cultural authenticity and *latinidad*—while validating cultural hybridity—one that enables fluid forms of communication across geographic lines and generations. See Elena Machado Saez, "The Global Baggage of Nostalgia in Cristina García's Dreaming in Cuban," *MELUS* vol. 30 no. 4 (Winter 2005); Ibis del Carmen Gómez-Vega, "The Journey Home: Defining Identity in Cristina García's *Dreaming in Cuban,*" *Voces: A Journal of Chicana/Latina Studies* vol. 1 no. 2 (1997); and Katherine Payant, "From Alienation to Reconciliation in the Novels of Cristina García," *MELUS* vol. 26 no. 3 (2001) for more recent and nuanced discussions of this novel.

[29] See Machado Saez, "Latino/a Identity and Consumer Citizenship in Cristina Garcia's *Dreaming in* Cuban" in *The Latino/a Canon and the Emergence of Post-Sixties Literature* (Palgrave 2007). In this chapter she also argues that the novel "defines hybridity in relation to a market-enabled Latino/a public sphere" (107), and that Pilar attempts to recapture these losses through an increasing dependency on commodities and an intimate relationship to globalization, limiting her access to any notion of authenticity. By dissociating themselves from literary critics such as Gustavo Pérez Firmat and Ilan Stavans, and turning instead to cultural studies scholars such as Arlene Dávila, Machado Saez examines *Dreaming in Cuban* as a post-sixties political project that presents the market as a space in which the Latina subject (Pilar) can be a creator of culture rather than simply a consumer of culture—leading away from simple Latina/o assimilation within the United States.

[30] See *Cultural Erotics in Cuban America* 197-198. He also extends his readings of these novels to focus on the "larger political and cultural economies shaping the transnational and global scene to which the novelist also clearly hopes to establish a significant relevance to her work" (194). Ortíz reads García's "historical" representations as a "productive and strategic set of economic operations" which "allow García to respond not only to the specific issues relevant to Cuban America and its vexed historical legacy but also to the larger conditions of both political and cultural economy directly shaping those conditions" (196).

[31] Although this is not the focus of my discussion of *Dreaming in Cuban*, we can see within this work a great concern for the possibilities within communist Cuba during the early 1990s.

[32] *Dreaming in Cuban* expands Junot Díaz's notion of "*fukú americanus"* in *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*. Here, as in that novel, the island is cursed by a history of colonialism, but also doomed because of the communist Revolution.

[33] Antonio López, *Unbecoming Blackness: The Diaspora Cultures of Afro-Cuban America*, 191.

[34] María DeGuzmán explores the notion of "off-whiteness" in *Spain's Long Shadow: The Black Legend, Off-Whiteness, and Anglo-American Empire* as a demarcation produced through the "fiction of the hidalgo with *sangre pura* (pure blood), untainted by the blood of *moros* (Moors) or *judíos* (Jews)" which "evolved in the Iberian Peninsula to deny the vast amount of intermixing that had occurred over the centuries" (xxiv). "The Spaniard" (the creole [elsewhere, you write "Creole"; firm that up and have a reason for it] in the Americas) in DeGuzmán's analysis, becomes for the eighteenth and nineteenth century U.S. a figure of "not-right-white or off-white" (4). In his exploration of 1990s Cuban-American return narratives, Antonio Lopéz considers these texts as "aspects of the *blanco criollo* (white creole) condition of Cubans in the United States—a white-Latino condition shaped by nationalism and Spanish coloniality, and in tension with ideologies of U.S. Anglo whiteness, which often cast such Latino whiteness as 'off-white'" (186).

[35] During the nineteenth century, black and white abolitionists constructed their rhetoric around the notion of sugar consumption as cannibalism. Predominantly in Britain but also with traces in the United States' Free Produce Movement, these abolitionists reformulated the trope of the cannibal to describe those who consumed sugar produced by slave labor. In these works, abolitionists painted the gruesome picture of sugar tainted with slave's blood and flesh. In his slave narrative, for example, Olaudah Equiano invests the white subject with the cannibalistic tendencies attributed to African subjects. Reaching Barbados, Equiano fears his consumption at the hands of the slave-master, much as he fears his consumption on the slave ship, and as Carl Plasa has stated, this fear directly correlates with the ways in which Equiano's "sugary fruits of his labour" will directly feed white consumption (*Slaves to Sweetness: British and Caribbean Literature of Sugar* 38). See also William Fox "An Address to the People of Great Britain, on the Propriety of Abstaining from West India Sugar and Rum" (1791); Andrew Burn "A Second Address to the People of Great Britain: Containing a New and Most Powerful Argument to Abstain from the Use of West India Sugar by an Eye Witness to the Facts related" (1792); Richard Ligon, *History of Barbados* (1657); Charles de Rochefort, *Natural and Moral History of the Antilles* (1666).

[36] In his analysis of Román de la Campa's *Cuba on My Mind*, López, via Toni Morrison, explores the significance of memory as a site of privilege, a "characteristic of formal crisis in the racializing texts of the Americas" and device through which de la Campa demonstrates whiteness and white privilege.

[37] The Cuban American focus of Capó Crucet differs from that of García, the first writing about a working-class population while the latter primarily writes about what Ivelisse Rodriguez terms in an interview with Capó Crucet as "Golden Exiles," "wealthy, educated" Cuban and Cuban Americans ("A Place of Longing: Ivelisse Rodriguez Interviews Jennine Capó Crucet." *Kweli* 13 Oct 2011).

[38] The novel shifts between the perspectives of Celia, Lourdes, Felicia, Pilar, Herminia, Ivanito, Luz and Milagro, drifting between third and first person perspectives,

and moves linearly from 1972 to 1980 yet is interjected with Celia's letters, which range from 1935 to 1959.

[39] See R. Saldívar, "The Second Elevation of the Novel."

[40] Mark Spitz is a former American competitor swimmer and nine-time Olympic champion. He is the former world-record holder in seven events, winning seven gold medals at the 1972 Summer Olympics in Munich, Germany. The novel implements his name and reputation in a parody of achievement. Moreover, the Olympic Games in which Spitz excelled were marked by terrorism.

[41] Although this chapter, and my dissertation, are not focused on the historical collapse of American industrial centers and blue-collar cities in the twentieth century, the choice of Buffalo, NY as the United States' new government capital is aligned with the general humorous and sardonic tone of the novel, and is clearly a reference to the demise of these economic centers. The decision to make Buffalo the new government center for the reconstruction, also demonstrates the impossibility of this effort, as the novel invokes the repetition of history in both this city and the country. The reorganization of the nation's government in Buffalo is a mordant commentary on the economic restructuring of urban centers throughout the United States in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries—deindustrialization, the growth of transnational global markets, the internationalization of American businesses, free-trade agreements, and globalization. A shift from manufacturing to a service sector economic base allowed urban areas such as New York City to develop into crucial nodes of economic global exchange, as can be seen in the prominence of the New York Stock Exchange and multination corporations in downtown Manhattan. With the expansion of post-industrial capitalism and globalized markets, cities such as Buffalo, important manufacturing centers in the Rust Belt until the twentieth century, experienced a deterioration in their urban spaces and economic national and international influence. See Saskia Sassen's "The Global City: Introducing a Concept" (1990).

[42] The reconstruction project in the post-apocalypse is itself a reminder of the Reconstruction Era in the years after the American Civil War. Established as a method for the integration of Southern states back into the Union, most historians agree that Reconstruction was a failure not solely because of the racist and violent environment it engendered through the country, and the failure of racial integration. The "hope" that the Reconstruction Amendments would correct the "arithmetical error" that defined African Americans within the U.S. hierarchy, and provide "an ontological equation, or an existential variable, that would restore fractured and fractioned black being" never occurred, and as noted by various current African American scholars, people of color are waiting this event. See Calvin Warren, "Black Nihilism and the Politics of Hope" *CR: The New Centennial Review* vol. 5 no. 1 (2015), 215.

[43] There are many references to the city as a consuming mouth—more than I can present in the body of this dissertation. However, I would like to present some here as a way to acknowledge not only their presence, but the way in which their continued presence in the text depicts the city itself—pre and post-apocalyptic—as a constant threat. Moreover, this threat is continually associated with New York City as the entry-point to various immigrant communities. For example, remembering his many trips to Chinatown—the headquarters of the American Phoenix operation in the post-apocalypse—Mark Spitz describes a feeling of "vertigo" within this space: "It was the

stereotype of fast-talking, fast-walking, eagerly lacerating New York distilled into a potent half mile. You do not belong. You will be devoured by this monster" (55). In the same way that New York becomes a symbolic representation for the entire nation, Chinatown assumes a microcosm for the city; its noise speaks of a "vanished order" that has the potential to "reassert itself. If you believed in the mission" (56)—the investment in futurity, the belief in hope, converts this space into a vessel for the reconstruction, yet through Mark Spitz's memories, constantly contains an inescapable danger. There is an unremitting threat of consumption through this text: like the city's promise to absorb "your poor, your hungry, your suppurating masses," the masses themselves are "yearning to eat" (71).

[44] In the novel, "pheenie" is a sardonic term used for the survivors of the apocalypse (a term derived from "Phoenix"), who through their toil and investment in the American Phoenix operation, demonstrate a deep investment in the reconstruction process and hope for a future free of zombies.

[45] These types of representations can be seen throughout American literature and popular culture. Consider, for example, Walt Whitman's "Mannahatta": "A million people—manners free and superb—open voice—/hospitality—the most courageous and friendly young/men,/City of hurried and sparkling waters! city of spires and/masts!/City nested in bays!/my city!" A popular example is the "Theme Song for *New York, New York*" performed for the film by Liza Minnelli but now largely associated with Frank Sinatra: "If I can make it there, I'm gonna make it anywhere."

[46] Black and white abolitionists constructed their arguments for the dissolution of the system of slavery through the notion of eating sugar as a form of cannibalism. White abolitionists—predominantly in Britain but with traces in the United States' Free Produce Movement—reformulated the trope of the cannibal to describe those who consumed sugar produced by slave labor. In these works, abolitionists painted the gruesome picture of sugar tainted with slave's blood and flesh. See Richard Ligon, *History of Barbados* (1657); Charles de Rochefort, *Natural and Moral History of the Antilles* (1666); James Grainger, *The Sugar Cane* (1764); Janet Schaw, *Journal of a Lady of Quality* (1774-1776); William Beckford, *Descriptive Account of Jamaica* (1790); Matthew Lewis, *Journal of a West Indian Proprietor* (1834); William Fox's "An Address to the People of Great Britain, on the Propriety of Abstaining from West India Sugar and Rum" (1791); and Andrew Burn's response to Fox, "A Second Address to the People of Great Britain: Containing a New and Most Powerful Argument to Abstain from the Use of West India Sugar by an Eye Witness to the Facts related" (1792). For a detailed analysis of the ways in which Creole writers negotiated the desire for legitimacy from Europe with the moral degeneracy generated from their proximity to slavery, see Carl Plasa, *Slaves to Sweetness: British and Caribbean Literature of Sugar* (2009) and Keith A. Sandiford, *The Cultural Politics of Sugar: Caribbean Slavery and Narratives of Colonialism* (2000).

[47] Tompkins notes that the mouth is also a space with an erotic history, "one that, particularly in the overlapping of dietetic and sexual reform in the antebellum period, offers glimpses of a presexological mapping of desire, appetite, and vice" (5). This presexological mapping onto the mouth, Tompkins specifies, has its effects on the (literal) geographic mapping of the nation, and it is at the intersection of the two—"as a doorway into the consuming body"—that the mouth became the site of "biopolitical intensity" (5).

[48] I use "capitalism" throughout this chapter as a term that refers to primitive accumulation, late capitalism, neoliberalism, and financial capitalism. I contend that the zombie in *Zone One* embodies all of these forms.

[49] In *Capital, Volume One*, Marx states: "The capitalist system presupposes the complete separation of the labourers from all property in the means by which they can realise their labour. As soon as capitalist production is once on its own legs, it not only maintains this separation, but reproduces it on a continually extending scale. The process, therefore, that clears the way for the capitalist system, can be none other than the process which takes away from the labourer the possession of his means of production…The so-called primitive accumulation, therefore, is noting lese than the historical process of divorcing the producer from the means of production" (432).

[50] Romero's zombie films transformed the genre by making the "mindless" zombie-slave into the flesh-eating post-human subject prevalent in late-twentieth century and contemporary film and television. Importantly, Romero is Cuban American, a fact that has been largely ignored. His inspiration for *Night* emanated from a visit to the island as a teenager. Further transformations of this monster took place after Romero's trilogy, such as in the speed with which the zombie moves (the hyper-speed of *28 Days Later* and *I Am Legend*) and their cognizant abilities (*Warm Bodies* and *iZombie*), though Romero's zombie has remained part of filmic tradition. See films such as *Zombie 2* (1979), *Dead Alive* (1992), *Shaun of the Dead* (2004), *Zombieland* (2009), *Juan de los muertos* (2010), and television's rating-breaking series based on the comic *The Walking Dead* (2010-Present).

[51] The introduction of a secondary type of zombie in the text, and even the evolution of the zombie in popular culture, demonstrate the centrality of narrative. For example, the change in the zombie's speed is contingent on visual representations and, in the case of *Zone One*, the speed of the narrative, the story it contains, and readership.

[52] The novel further satirizes twenty-first century culture by staging the straggler's presence in routine locations such as fast food fry-stations, HR offices, and repair shops. The zombie continues (or adopts) pre-apocalyptic routines, not only signaling the continuation of pre-apocalyptic mundaneness in the postapocalypse, but the ways in which the "human" in the pre-apocalypse exhibited zombified qualities: "They were safe in their houses. In front of the televisions, of course, a host of this type biding their time until the electricity came back on, the problem was solved, and the program resumed where it had stopped" (61). The narrative's insertion of "of course" parodies the mindlessness associated with television consumption and the pervasiveness of this medium in the twenty-first century. In fact, I would argue that the straggler exhibits a form of freedom from the burdensome compliance of consumption—in not eating and reproducing itself, the straggler opts-out.

[53] I would argue that the Lieutenant is the only member of the American Phoenix who is truly interested in deciphering the straggler's presence in the postapocalypse and, unable to do so (or discovering the anarchic state of their postapocalyptic existence), commits suicide.

[54] This corporate slogan is also staged and satirized by the text as self-reflexive elements for our current political moment. In many ways Whitehead's novel was timely during the year of its publication as a commentary on New York post-9/11 and during the 2012 presidential campaign (specifically a commentary, which will be explored in this

chapter, of the Barak Obama bid and the "post-racial" time it would bring), and is also relevant during our current political environment. For example, the approved merchandise (corporate sponsored clothing, food, and accessories; government grown and subsidized corn) in the post-apocalypse is reminiscent of the current branding and selling of campaign products by hopefuls in for the 2016 presidential bid. On Thursday, June 25, 2015 *The New York Times* published "Happy Days Are Here for Swag" in which Vanessa Friedman illuminated the ways in which merchandise sold by presidential candidates' stores not only provide financial support for the campaign, but also provide valuable data research about the voters themselves. Moreover, through these donations, merchandise purchasers are also investing in the type of future they would like to see for the country; more than products, buyers are investing in ideology, much like "pheenies" are investing in a post-apocalyptic regenerative future: "Buy an item from a campaign store, and you are not actually purchasing a product; you are making a donation. According to Federal Election Commission regulations, candidates are not allowed to sell items for personal profit, so the product is the 'premium' you get in return for your pledge" (1). Finally, the same ridiculous grandiosity taken by the American Phoenix's motto—"We Make Tomorrow!"—is mirrored in brand logos such as Jeb Brush's bright red "Jeb!"

[55] Critics, philosophers, neuropsychologists, and literary scholars have written extensively about the power of storytelling and narrative structures as a way for the human mind to understand the world and their position in it. Some argue, for example, that humans, as a general practice, organize and represent their identity in narrative form, organizing events and moments with a plot-like structure. See Walter Fisher, *Human Communication as Narration: Toward a Philosophy of Reason, Value, and Action* (1987).

[56] The HR office itself is significant here. Designed to maximize employee performance within an organization, human resources management departments control the recruitment, training, and performance of employees within an organization. The human resources within an organization (employees) are also referred to as "human capital," making the employee's labor analogous with that which it produces. Trapped within the HR office of the law firm, the four zombies amplify the ways in which this monster is the pinnacle of the capitalist system.

[57] In fact, the text stages this moment of "recognition" as a distraction that almost leads to his death, staging optimism and hope for the reconstruction as a dangerous endeavor (19-26).

[58] The zombie holds with the post-apocalyptic national imaginary a similar position as the racialized black and Latino subject. As Hortense Spillers explains in her important essay, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book": "I describe a locus of confounded identities, a meeting ground of investments and privations in the national treasury of rhetorical wealth. My country needs me, and if I were not here, I would have to be invented" (65).

[59] In welcoming Mark Spitz to Zone One's base camp, the Lieutenant correlates the various post-apocalyptic barricades—"The camp. The settlement. The city" (121)—with those erected in the time before the plague: "modern conveniences, the machines at the end of the power strip" (121). Once again we can see the ways in which the plague has not only lifted the veil upon the world, but how the novel demonstrates a critique on

modern constructions of physical and metaphorical barriers. Importantly, the Lieutenant does not wait for the wall along Canal Street to fail, but commits suicide shortly beforehand, revealing the instability and ineffectiveness of constructing these walls.

[60] As Lee Edelman powerfully states in *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (2004), the investment in "the Child" is one of reproductive futurity; *Zone One* is also invested in rejecting the image of the Child and the false hope for the future it carries.

[61] For a more complete discussion of "neoliberal urbanism" see Neil Smith's "New Globalism, New Urbanism: Gentrification as Global Urban Strategy" (*Antipode* no. 34 vol. 3, July 2002). Mark Spitz reflects on the reconstruction effort and necessity of displacing the zombie from downtown buildings: "The future was what formerly had been called a transitional neighborhood. Essential services in short supply […] but if you got in at the right time it didn't matter that the building next door was writing with skels. Eventually they'll be displaced three subway stops away by rising rents and you'll never see them again" (195). Various writers on gentrification have made the analogy to ethnic cleansing. See John Strausbaugh, "From Wise Guys to Woo-Girls" *in New York Calling: From Blackout to Bloomberg* (2007), Ghali Hassan, "'Ethnic Cleansing' in New Orleans" (2006).

[62] Wendy Brown's *Walled States, Waning Sovereignty* has been instrumental in my analysis of barricades and walls in *Zone One*, and I use her theory through my reading of the Zone's ultimate collapse.

[63] Although my chapter does not focus on the city's history, I would like to point to the novel's clear investment in parodying New York's history of gentrification, aggressive law-enforcement offensive, and city "cleanup" in the 1990s under Mayor Giuliani's revanchist policies. Rudolph "Rudy" Giuliani was mayor of New York City from 1994 to 2001, and adopted an aggressive stance on relatively minor offenses such as panhandling, small marijuana possessions, and graffiti, termed a "broken windows" approach. He is also deemed responsible for the zoning-out of pornography and the gentrification of Manhattan, suburbanizing and/or Disnifying the island. See Neil Smith, *New Urban Frontier: Gentrification and the Revanchist City* (1996), Neil Smith, "New Globalism, New Urbanism: Gentrification as Global Urban Strategy" (2002), *The Suburbanization of New York: Is the World's Greatest City Becoming Just Another Town* by Jerilou Hammett and Kingsley Hammett (2007), *New York Calling: From Blackout to Bloomberg* edited by Marshall Berman and Brian Berger, Michael's Tomasky's *New York* magazine article, "The Day Everything Changed" (2008).

[64] This is also the case with PASD, a tongue-in-cheek reference to PTSD (Post Traumatic Stress Disorder), which in the post-apocalyptic world all survivors suffer from: "Everyone suffered from PASD. Herkimer put it at seventy-five percent of the surviving population, with the other twenty-five percent under the sway of preexisting mental conditions that were, of course, exacerbated by the great calamity. In the new reckoning, a hundred percent of the world was mad" (67).

[65] "Phoenix, n.1." *OED Online*, Oxford University Press. *Oxford English Dictionary*, http://www.oed.com.proxygw.wrlc.org/view/Entry/142601.

[66] Jessica Hurley similarly argues that Spitz "passes" in the text. See "History Is What Bites: Zombies, Race, and the Limits of Biopower in Colson Whitehead's *Zone One*," *Extrapolation* vol. 56 no. 3 (2015): 311–33. While I also read Spitz's "blackness"

as the vehicle through which the novel unravels towards the world's re-destruction, I resist the designation by Hurley of this novel as a passing narrative and propose instead that Spitz is strategically camouflaged: The lack of overt racial markers in combination with a nickname that signals a white cultural figure hides Spitz's "blackness," purposefully surprising readers and highlighting established reading practices, prejudices, and assumptions about racial markers.

[67] Clearing I-95, Spitz and his group is attacked by a zombie horde. Being a mediocre swimmer (as he is at all things), Spitz decides not to the jump in the water adjoining the highway, but inexplicably guns down the horde and survives.

[68] See Abdul R. JanMohamed, *The Death-Bound-Subject: Richard Wright's Archaeology of Death* (Duke University Press, 2005); Jared Sexton, "The Social Life of Social Death: On Afro-Pessimism and Black Optimism" *InTensions* vol. 5 (2011); Calvin Warren, "Black Nihilism and the Politics of Hope" *The New Centennial Review* vol. 15 no. 1 (2015). Other useful sources in this discussion include, Frank Wilderson, *Red,White & Black: Cinema and the Structure of U.S. Antagonisms* (Duke University Press, 2010); Fred Moten, "Blackness and Nothingness (Mysticism in the Flesh)," *The South Atlantic Quarterly* vol. 112 no. 4 (2013); and Sharon Patricia Holland, *Raising the Dead: Readings of Death and (black) Subjectivity* (Duke University Press, 2000).

[69] "Political hope" is, as described by Warren, "a discursive and political organization beyond extant structures of violence and destruction" (222). The American Phoenix, therefore, utilizes "political hope" in order to promote the fantasy of reconstruction.

[70] The novel's use of metafictive devices draws attention to itself as a work of fiction (an object/artifact), posing questions about the relationship between fiction and reality.

[71] Sharon Patricia Holland's excellent reading of the film *Menace II Society* (1993) inspired this reading of *Zone One*'s ending and narrative perspective. See *Raising the Dead: Readings of Death and (Black) Subjectivity*, 18-22.

[72] Kara Walker is the winner of a 1997 MacArthur Foundation "Genius Grant," and is best known for her provocative and controversial cut-paper silhouettes and tableaus which unapologetically foreground the unnerving and alluring history of slavery in the American imagination. Built in 1856 by the Havemeyer family and initially called the American Sugar Refinery Company, by 1870 the Domino Sugar Refinery processed more than half the sugar consumed in the United States and by 1882 was the second largest sugar refinery in the world, producing 1,200 tons of sugar per day "Domino Sugar Refinery Buildings." *The Municipal Art Society of New York*. http://saveindustrialbrooklyn.org/domino.html.

[73] As a sphinx-like sculpture, *A Subtlety* brings into the twenty-first century the history of the transatlantic slave trade, sugar production and (over)consumption, but also becomes a medium through which to explore histories outside the Americas, such as the medieval practice of presenting an ornate sugar sculpture during large dinner banquets, which was a sign of wealth and power. What was believed to permit the transmission of power through ingestion becomes an impossible task when faced with *A Subtlety*'s colossal size. The signifier of the sphinx is staged as a medium through which to consider the spectacle of "civilization" and the slavery used in its construction.

[74] The sphinx's large breasts, immense buttocks, and protruding vulva are intended to be offensive. Although silent, the sphinx is imposing. She is larger than life, overwhelming, black. As such, her nakedness is defiant, forcing viewers to account for how the black female body has been created as a site of desire and objectification, lust and exoticization. Moreover, her presence forces us to reckon with how we have been and continue to be dependent on the black female body as a source of labor on the plantation and in the domestic space. Although not central to my argument about Walker's sculpture, the interactions of spectators with the sculpture (of which there was a great deal written) demonstrate the ways in which people are still uncomfortable with female form and in particular the black female body. The suggestive posing around the sculpture's nipples, vulva, and buttocks are a further objectification of the black female body. For further discussion of viewer reactions to Walker's *A Subtlety* see Carolina A. Miranda, "Kara Walker on the Bit of Sugar Sphinx She Saved, Video She's Making," *Los Angeles Times*. 13 Oct 2014; Katherine Brooks, "It Turns Out Kara Walker And Her Sugar Sphinx Were Watching Us The Whole Time." *The Huffington Post*. 20 Nov. 2014; and Alyssa Rosenberg, "Selfie Culture and Kara Walker's 'A Subtlety.'" *The Washington Post*. 30 June 2014.

[75] One observer stated of Walker's sculpture, it is an object that encourages "us to look at things that are so visible in our society we wish they were invisible." See Jay Buim's film, "Kara Walker's *A Subtlety*," for Creative Time.

Chapter 3.

[1] Boullosa's geographically-centered analysis of a writer's influence does not take into account the fact that Bolaño only began writing fiction in Spain, where he resided until his death. The birth of his children, and later his impeding death due to liver failure (which some have presumed was caused by a heroin addiction earlier in life) impelled the author to write at incredible speed beginning in the 1990s, publishing numerous novels and novellas in order to leave his family an inheritance.

[2] See Carmen Boullosa. "Roberto Bolaño." *BOMB*, https://bombmagazine.org/articles/roberto-bola%C3%B1o/.

[3] Dick is author of many important works of science fiction novels and short stories besides *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*, such as *The Man in the High Castle* (1962), *Scanner Darkly* (1977), "We Can Remember It for You Wholesale" (1966), and "The Minority Report" (1956), all which were adapted to major motion pictures or TV shows. Dick's plot of *Do Androids* is particularly important for this chapter: Bounty hunter Rick Deckard becomes part of a police mission that involves tracking a group of rogue Nexus-6 androids who fled Mars for Earth. After "retiring" (i.e.: killing) various of the rogue androids, Deckard ponders various ethical questions about his enterprise and the meaning of being human, questioning his own "humanity" and implementing an empathy test to identify whether he is human or android. Various critics, including Ridley Scott, director of *Blade Runner*, have pointed to the text's ambiguity regarding Deckard's humanity. Moreover, Deckard falls in love with Rachel Rosen, an android who aids his investigation. Much like Dick's plot, *2666* points to the impossibility of fully knowing "the truth." For more on *Blade Runner* and *Do Androids* see Scott Bukatman, *Terminal Identity: The Virtual Subject in Postmodern Science*

Fiction (Duke University Press, 1993); N. Katherine Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature, and Informatics* (University of Chicago Press, 1999).

[4] It is important to note how categorizations such as "science fiction," "realism," or "fantasy" affect production values, readership, marketing, and critical perceptions to literature.

[5] Bolaño's relationship to García Márquez and other Boom writers was overtly contentious, specifically deriding García Márquez as "a man terribly pleased to have met so many presidents and archbishops" (Pérez Salazar). I explore Bolaño's position within the Latin American literary market further in this chapter/ However, it is worth mentioning briefly, that as contentious as his relationship to these writers was, his statement about Dick and the fantastic in Latin American literature falls in-line with definitions of Magical Realism, which defines the Latin American condition as requiring "language and structures […] ways of seeing" that exceed the possibilities presented by realist fiction.

[6] See Jonathan Lethem. "The Departed." *The New York Times*, 12 Nov. 2008. https://www.nytimes.com/2008/11/09/books/review/Lethem-t.html.

[7] *If I Die in Juárez* and *Desert Blood* use an overwrought and sentimental tone as didactic tools and hopeful speculation. *Desert Blood*, for example, fictionalizes the kidnapping of an El Paso teenager in Juárez when the girl goes to a carnival. The text culminates in the teenager's rescue from a sex trafficking and pornography ring—she is one among many women who are freed. Moreover, as in *If I Die in Juárez*, the novel uses exposition to foreground the affective state of the protagonist and the kidnapped teenager, her sister, standing in stark contrast to Bolaño's text. While these books attempt to individualize and humanize the victims by fictionalizing these events and detailing them, these texts erase the magnitude of horror that takes place in the U.S.-Mexican borderlands.

[8] By "American" I mean of the American hemisphere and not solely in reference to the U.S.

[9] As Walter Benjamin explores in "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," the art object loses its "aura" as it becomes reproducible, therefore losing its sensory uniqueness and authenticity. In effect, the various translations and success in the market of Bolaño's work, including *2666*, speaks directly to Benjamin's concerns with art taking-on the form of economic production. For more on Benjamin's concept of "aura" see Mirian Bratu Hansen's "Benjamin's Aura," *Critical Inquiry* vol. 34 no. 2 (Winter 2008), pp. 336-375.

[10] In fact, *2666* rejects not only the "mestiza consciousness" and reparative strength of Anzaldúa text, but also *Borderlands/La Frontera*'s ability of translating the borderland and its culture through multilingual text. I will explore this further in this chapter.

[11] The book's length can also be considered a form of textual anxiety: the inability of capturing the violence of the U.S.-Mexican border's violence forces the text to continue (Would the novel have ended without Bolaño's death?). In turn, the novel's length creates a violent form of readership as well; rigorous and unforgiving, the text forces readers to become dedicated students of violence.

[12] In *Empire's Workshop: Latin America, the United States, and the Rise of the New Imperialism*, Greg Grandin also explores the long history of American expansionism and the centrality of Mexico for the capitalist aspirations for American corporations. As Grandin importantly states, the border was rendered meaningless to U.S. financial institutions (16-20) and Mexico tethered its fortune to the U.S. through trade negotiations, yielding to the NAFTA accord (199-201).

[13] See Stacey Balkan "'City of Clowns': The City as a Performative Space in the Prose of Daniel Alarcón, Junot Diaz, and Roberto Bolaño." *Wretched Refuge: Immigrants and Itinerants in the Postmodern*, edited by Jessica Datema and Diane Krumrey et al., Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2010, pp. 89–107; Sharae Deckard. "Peripheral Realism, Millennial Capitalism, and Roberto Bolaño's 2666." *Modern Language Quarterly*, vol. 73, no. 3, Sept. 2012, pp. 351–372; Grant Farred. "The Impossible Closing: Death, Neoliberalism, and the Postcolonial in Bolaño's 2666." *Modern Fiction Studies*, vol. 56, no. 4, Winter 2010, pp. 689–708; Andrew McCann. "The Eventfulness of Roberto Bolaño." *Overland*, issue 199, Winter 2010, pp. 74; Camelia Raghinaru. "Biopolitics in Roberto Bolaño's 2666, 'The Part About the Crimes.'" *Altre Modernità*, vol. 15, no. Journal Article, 2016, p. 146.

[14] See Sol Peláez. "Counting Violence: Roberto Bolaño and 2666." *Chasqui; Tempe*, vol. 43, no. 2, Nov. 2014, pp. 30–47; Sergio Villalobos-Ruminott. "A Kind of Hell: Roberto Bolaño and The Return of World Literature." *Journal of Latin American Cultural Studies*, vol. 18, no. 2–3, Dec. 2009, pp. 193–205.

[15] As "Femicide Crisis in the State of Mexico" by VICE News makes clear, this type of violence is not singular to Ciudad Juárez. In the State of Mexico (Edomex) between 2005 and 2011 more than 1,900 women were the victims of femicide.

[16] There has been a great deal of work on the Ciudad Juárez femicides. While the novel's third section focuses on these events, my analysis is not on the murders themselves, but on the effect they have on the text. For more on femicides and their relation to Mexican culture and neoliberalism and export processing, see Kathleen Staudt, *Violence and Activism at the Border: Gender, Fear, and Everyday Life in Ciudad Juárez* (University of Texas Press, 2008); Diana Washington Valdez, *The Killing Fields: Harvest of Women* (Peace at the Border, 2006); Alicia Gaspar de Alba and Georgina Guzmán, editors, *Making a Killing: Femicide, Free Trade, and La Frontera* (University of Texas Press, 2010); Melissa W. Wright*, Disposable Woman and Other Myths of Global Capitalism* (Routledge, 2006); Teresa Rodriguez, *Daughters of Juárez* (Atria Books, 2008); Diana Washington Valdez, *Cosecha de mujeres: Safari en el desierto mexicano* (Océano, 2005).

[17] See also Grandin, *Empire's Workshop* 199-200.

[18] Wright examines how the Ciudad Juárez gained a reputation during the years of the U.S. prohibition as a place with "loose sexual mores" where men could find "cheap sex and alcohol, among other tawdry entertainments" ("Necropolitics, Narcopolitics" 712). Consequently, the city became famous for its "public women," which solidified in the 1970s as young women began migrating by the thousands to find work in the industries hiring female workers (712). As Wright states, the association of "*obrera* (worker) with *ramera* (whore) was something that factory workers faced constantly, as women who walked the streets on their way to work and women who walked the streets as part of their work added to the city's fame as a city of public women (713). This,

Wright importantly contrasts to the notion of the public man and how "maleness" carries the connotation of citizen (713).

[19] Teresa Brennan's work on globalization also discusses the disposability of the human body in relation to the market, albeit more generally. The "ruling economy requires the sacrifice of human life in order to feel buoyant" and achieves it through what she terms "bioderegulation," that which erodes the protections of the body and "human time" while privileging economic growth (the market) over sustainability. See *Globalization and its Terrors: Daily Life in the West.* Routledge, 2003.

[20] Benno von Archimboldi is a penname for Hans Reiter and whose name in the novel is based on Mannerist Italian painter, Guiseppe Archimboldo (1527-1593). Archimboldo is most known for his portrait heads made entirely of fruits, vegetables, flowers, fish, and books such as his series *The Four Seasons* and *The Four Elements*. Archimboldo's paintings ironically mirror the novel's formal qualities (or vice versa) in which fragmentation comprises a grotesque whole.

[21] It should be noted that Kessler's depiction of the Santa Teresan landscape as the aftermath of an atomic explosion is similar to that of Eduardo Galeano's writing about Latin America. In *The Open Veins of Latin America: Five Centuries of Pillage of a Continent* (1973), Galeano states that "[t]he human murder by poverty in Latin America is secret; every year, without making a sound, three Hiroshima bombs explode over communities that have become accustomed to suffering with clenched teeth" (5).

[22] It would be difficult to list the vast and always growing scholarship about Anzaldúa and her work, but for example, in *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity*, José Esteban Muñoz describes Anzaldúa's project as a call to resistance by deploying "a narrative of the past to enable better understanding and critiquing of a faltering present" (84). In "Feminism on the Border: From Gender Politics to Geopolitics," Sonia Saldívar-Hull also addresses the progressive politics of her work, stating that Anzaldúa's "feminism on the border" transgresses geographic space; it is a "feminism that resides in a space not acknowledged by hegemonic culture." See *Borderlands: Studies in Chicano Literature, Culture, and Ideology* (Duke University Press, 1991), 203-220. Anzaldúa's "mestiza consciousness" is similar to Mignolo's "border gnosis" and José David Saldívar's "*transfrontera* contact zone." See *Local Histories/Global Design*; Saldívar, *Border Matters: Remapping American Cultural Studies* (University of California Press, 1997).

[23] Anzaldúa's work is incredibly important and dominant in Chicanx scholarship. Other works within this tradition include María Amparo Ruiz de Burton's *The Squatter and the Don* (1885), Daniel Vanegas's *Las Aventuras de Don Chipote, O Cuando los Pericos Mamen* (1928), Beatrice Pita and Rosaura Sanchez's *Lunar Braceros: 2125-2548* (2009), and Swifty Lang's *Feeding Ground* (2011), among others. The U.S.-Mexico border and its surrounding regions have been of great concern for Latinx writers. See for example, Carmen Boullosa's *Texas: The Great Theft* (2013), Rosario Sanmigue's *Under the Bridge: Stories from the Border* (2008), George Washington Gómez's *Américo Paredes* (1990), and Sandra Cisneros' *Woman Hollering Creek* (1991). There have also been many Anglo-American writers who focus on the borderlands and the extreme violence of this geopolitical space, most notably Cormac McCarthy. These texts include *Blood Meridian* (1985), *The Crossing* (1994), and *No Country for Old Men* (2005). The ubiquity of literature focusing on the U.S.-Mexico borderlands demonstrates the importance of this geopolitical space within the American imaginary and the desire to revisit it in literature across the centuries. The focus on this geopolitical space is not singular to literature, and can be seen in various films as well, including Robert Rodriguez's *From Dusk Till Dawn* (1996) and Tommy Lee Jones's *Three Burials of Melquiades Estrada* (2005).

[24] Brady describes space as "the conscious construction of a perspective, a way of seeing the regional that, in concert with policies, laws, and institutions, physically *makes* the land, produces the landscape materially, and sustains it ideologically" (17). Furthermore, as she rightfully demonstrates how language and translation play an essential role in the construction of a landscape.

[25] Natasha Wimmer translates this opening as "The girl's body turned up" (353) in the official Farrar, Straus & Giroux text. However, it is important to note the implications of the Spanish. While "girl" gives the dead body a specific age range and infantilizes her (although no age is given in the novel), "muerta" inscribes her as nothing more than a dead female; a tone that remains clinical through the rest of this section of the novel. Moreover, "turned up" can be interpreted in various ways, carrying the connotation that the woman's body was being looked for and found. "Apareció" (appeared) on the other hand, while an awkward Latinate in English, signals to readers the almost-magical presence of the woman's body in the landscape.

[26] "The Part About the Crimes" is divided temporally as follows: The year 1993 is narrated in pages 443-499, 1994 pages 499-562, 1995 pages 562-625, 1996 pages 625-672, and concludes with the year1997 in pages 672-791. The murders are mentioned in all other sections of the novel, yet never fully narrated. The description of the female corpse is concentrated to "The Part About the Crimes," a focus that taunts the readers throughout the sections that precede it.

[27] "A partir de esta muerta" is literally translated as "From this dead woman" but would be nonsensical in an English text. Moreover, a literal translation would not demonstrate the temporal quality of the phrase, yet it would retain the gendered violence constitutive of the sentence, the novel's section, and the borderlands makeup.

[28] See *2666* pages 444, 450, 488, 489, 490, 500, 506, 512, 516, 517, 530, 531, 532, 533,565, 566, 568, 569, 576, 577, 580, 584, 631, 637, 639, 665, 675, 682, 691, 693, 700, 717, 722, 754, and 770. Other refrains occur throughout this section, such as "One

of her breasts was almost completely severed and the other was missing a nipple" (580, 589, 617, 684, 724).

[29] This is one description of many throughout *2666*. See the description of the body of Esmeralda Gómez Saldaña: "She showed bruising on her chin and left eye. Severe hematomas on her legs and ribcage. She had been rapped vaginally and anally, probably more than once, since both orifices presented tears and abrasions from which she had bled profusely" (444). This type of excessive language also demonstrates the incapacity of the historical archive to encapsulate the horror suffered by the multiple victims. Through the use of "probably" and "or" in "The Part About the Crimes," the novel demonstrates its own inability to document violence. Another example of this type of excessive language of violence can be seen a couple pages after the instance mentioned above: "The forensic report indicated that she was raped, stabbed and burned, without specifying if the cause of death were the stab wounds or the burns, and without specifying either if at the time of the burns Emilia Mena Mena was already dead" (466). I point to these instances not in a morbid attempt to shock or participate in the novel's grotesque aesthetics. However, these are two of many such descriptions that demonstrate the novel's deep investment in representations of violence toward the female body and through which it explores the geopolitical space of the border.

[30] The text fictionalizes various historical elements, changing the city's name to Santa Teresa that of femicide victims. Bolaño's *2666* draws heavily from Sergio González Rodríguez's *Huesos En El Desierto* (Editorial Anagrama, 2002) for "The Part About the Crimes," basing many of the forensic accounts on his testimonies and documents. The character of Klaus Reiter, Archimboldi's nephew, who is accused of killing the women in Santa Teresa is based on an Egyptian chemist and American citizen who worked as a researcher for various U.S. companies before fleeing to Ciudad Juárez after being accused of a second rape (he served five years in prison for rape previously). In Ciudad Juárez, Sharif Sharif was sentences to sixty years where he died of natural causes. The murders continued after his imprisonment. See Hermann Herlinghaus, "From 'Pharmakon' to Femicide: 2666 (Roberto Bolaño)." *Narcoepics: A Global Aesthetics of Sobriety*, Bloomsbury Academic, 2013; Marcela Valdes, "Alone Among the Ghosts: Roberto Bolano's '2666.'" *The Nation*, Nov. 2008. For more on Sharif Sharif see González Rodríguez; Teresa Rodríguez, et al. *The Daughters of Juárez*. Simon & Schuster, 2008.

[31] Policemen throughout the novel make misogynist jokes about women that cannot be read outside of the sexual and physical violence of the femicides. For example, at a restaurant various inspectors take turn exchanging "jokes" about women such as, "In how many parts is a woman's brain divided? Pues, it depends! Depends on what, Gonzáles? Depends on how hard you hit her" (690); "Women's path is from the kitchen to bed, and along the way a beating. Or he said: women are like laws, they were made to be broken ("violadas"). And the laughter was general" (691). The word play in this last joke is related to violating the law, but clearly also speaks to the violation/rape of the female body in Santa Teresa. Importantly, the jokes are framed through the inspectors, representative of the State, and their weapons: "Then the inspector, exhausted after a night's work, thought how much of God's truth lay hidden in ordinary jokes. And he scratched his crotch and put his Smith & Wesson model 686 revolver on top of the plastic

table, which weighed almost one kilo and two-hundred grams, and it made a muffled sound like thunder in the distance when it hit the table's surface" (691).

[32] By "fantastic" I mean that which is conceived through unrestrained imagination and depicted as remarkable, otherworldly, or bizarre, and which can connote monstrousness and deformity.

[33] For more about the grotesque and the limits of the body see Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World* (Indiana University Press, 1984) pp. 26-27, pp. 312-316; Andrew Stott, *Comedy*. Routledge, 2014, pp. 67-69.

[34] I am indebted in this reading to the work of both Saidiya Hartman and Guidotti-Hernández, who in *Unspeakable Violence* turns away from an uncritical response to acts of violence and instead asks "Why is this story awful, and for who and to what end?" (39). Her work offers a critique of sensationalism and examines how representations of extreme violence entice readers away from "the intentionality behind narrative historical construction" (39).

[35] Hartman considers this type of shrouding and displacement of violence to take place "under the 'veil of enchanted relations," which she defines as non-overt forms of violence and seen in every day master/slave interaction (See 42, 88). These "enchanted relations" can also be found in the "jokes" told by policemen about women in *2666* (see footnote 27). However, the anesthetized, forensic description of the female corpse also falls within the realm of quotidian.

[36] My reading of the female corpse and the representation of their violated orifices are indebted to Jennifer Nash's notion of "black anality." In her essay by the same title, Nash examines representations of blackness that are produced through the anus and how black female sexuality is defined through notions of "*spectrality*, *grotesquerie*, and *display*" (441). Furthermore, she argues that black sexuality is imagined as metaphorically and literally dirty, "posited as akin to the ghetto: toxic, filthy, and nonreproductive" (441). Her analysis of black anality demonstrates how black female bodies are tethered to notions of excess that enact representational "vestibules" through which viewers can access imagined black spaces (toxic, excessive, nonreproductive) and through which black spaces become visible (448). See "Black Anality." *GLQ* vol. 20 no. 4 (2014): 439-460.

[37] Wright bases her analysis on Achilles Mbembe's "Necropolitics," whose own analysis is in dialogue with Giorgio Agamben's "state of exception" and Michel Foucault's concept of "biopolitics." Mbembe deviates from Agamben and Foucault by implementing the term "necropolitics" to discuss postcolonial conditions that determine who does or does not die. As in Foucault's biopolitics, which considers the role of life, necropolitics considers the role of death to discuss those bodies that are targeted for death (i.e.: which bodies governments justify the death of in order to protect the lives of others). Mbembe thus asserts how the relationship between politics and death is central for the emergence of States through the reproduction of death. Unlike Agamben, Mbembe does not consider death to be an "exception" but an "ordinary" element of the postcolonial condition. Similarly, Wright considers how the Mexican government states its own sovereignty through the disposability of female factory workers.

[38] *2666* makes this analogy to the factory throughout the novel. In "The Part About Fate," Chucho Flores, a reporter covering the same boxing, tells Fate that the "fucking killing are like a strike, amigo, a brutal fucking strike" (362). Chucho's analogy

of the femicides "like a strike" once again underscores the centrality of the simile in the text and the inability of narrative to encapsulate the violence of the U.S.-Mexico border. Moreover, Chucho tells Fate that the one thing missing from Santa Teresa is "Time…We haven't got any fucking time[,]" which makes Fate think: "Time for what?...Time for this shithole, halfway between a lost cemetery and garbage dump, to turn into a kind of Detroit?" (362). The femicides and their proximity to industrialization invoke in Fate a hemispheric vision of decaying urban centers connected through racialized violence and the disposable bodies it produces.

[39] *Amuleto* centers on Auxilio Lacouture, a Uruguayan exile poet living in Mexico City since the 1960s and dubbed the mother of Mexican poetry. Her recollections take place mostly between 1965 and 1976, where she recounts her resistance to the 1968 invasion of Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (UNAM) and the now infamous Tlatelolco massage two weeks later on October 2, 1968. This novel includes other recurring characters in Bolaño's oeuvre such as Arturo Belano who appears in *Los detectives salvajes* (1998) and is the narrator of *2666*. In the afterword of the first edition of *2666*, Ignacio Echeerría notes that among Bolaño's annotations of the novel was found two isolated notes, the first stating, "The narrator of *2666* is Arturo Belano" and the other, with an indication that it should appear a the novel's end "An this is it, friends. I've done it all, I've lived it all. If I had the strength, I would cry. I bit you all goodbye, Arturo Belano" (1125). It is commonly understood that Belano is Bolaño's alter ego. See Alberto Medina. "Arts of Homelessness: Roberto Bolaño or the Commodification of Exile." *Novel*, vol. 42, no. 3 (Sept. 2009) 546; Sarah Pollack. "Latin America Translated (Again): Roberto Bolaño's The Savage Detectives in the United States." *Comparative Literature; Durham*, vol. 61, no. 3, (Summer 2009) 358; Benjamin Kunkel. "In the Sonora." *London Review of Books*, 6 Sept. 2007, pp. 6; Christopher Tayler. "'Experience at Full Speed.'" *The Guardian*, 16 Jan. 2009. *Los detectives salvajes* is a first person narrative told by several characters and divided in three sections, centering on a group of poets known as the Visceral Realists. The concluding section, "The Deserts of Sonora," narrates the search for the founder of the Visceral Realists, Cesárea Tinajero, by Ulises Lima and Arturo Belano that ends in the Sonoran Desert.

[40] Unlike typical noir and hardboiled fiction, *2666*'s detective elements do not follow the tradition in that it is not a first-person narration. The role of narration will be explored further in this chapter, but it should briefly be mentioned that the novel is narrated through a third person point of view by Arturo Belano, who, as mentioned previously, is understood to be Bolaño's alter ego. Belano inserts himself throughout the text, stating for example, "but we'll talk about that later" ("pero de esto hablaremos más tarde; 21) and "At this point it is necessary to clarify" (Llegados a este punto es necesario aclarar algo"; 80), which lends the text an added level of intimacy between the reader and the text. Moreover, the text does not introduce a typical femme fatal as is common in hardboiled fiction and film noir, but it does develop a love triangle between Norton, Pelletier, and Espinoza that can be read as a sexual disturbance in the same fashion as that seen in detective fiction. Notable examples of hardboiled fiction can be found in the novels of Dashiell Hammet (*The Maltese Falcon*, *The Thin Man*, *Red Harvest*), Raymond Chandler (*The Big Sleep*, *The Long Good-bye*, *The Lady in the Lake*), and James Cain (*The Postman Always Rings Twice, Mildred Pierce*, *Double Indemnity)*. Origins of detective fiction, to which hardboiled and noir are greatly indebted, can be seen in the

works of Charles Dickens (*Bleak House*), Sir Arthur Conan Doyle (Sherlock Holmes), Edgar Allan Poe ("The Black Cat" and "Murders at the Rue Morgue," among others), and G.K. Chesterton (Father Brown series). For more detailed investigations on crime genre, including hardboiled fiction, see Christopher Breu's *Hard-Boiled Masculinities* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005); Leonard Cassuto's *Hard-Boiled Sentimentality: The Secret History of American Crime Stories* (Columbia University Press, 2008); M. Michelle Robinson's *Dreams for Dead Bodies* (University of Michigan Press, 2016).

[41] It should be noted that there seems to be a trend of the white male writers holding literary prestige for their self-imposed isolation and the mystery that surrounds their personal lives.

[42] As in Amalfitano's description of Santa Teresa, fragmentation is a central formal tool for the novel. Its multiplicity of characters, locations, and subjects propagates the landscape's horror, imbricating each description of violence into a fragmented and overwhelming whole. Each description amends the one that comes before it; a fragment that magnifies the mystery and horror of the border and which makes the novel a fatiguing yet pleasurable enterprise. "The Part About the Critics," for example, introduces the border city as a chaotic space likened to language and written text. In Santa Teresa they have the feeling of being in a "hostile environment" (150). The text immediately corrects itself, stating that "hostile wasn't the word, an environment whose language they refused to recognize" and which they liked to a "parallel plane" (150).

[43] Ruiz de Burton's description is complicated by how Californio characters perpetrate violence on indigenous ones in the novel. Moreover, the novel adheres to troubling notions of respectability politics through mobilization of whiteness, the attachment to Europeanness, and claims to racial superiority.

[44] After the death of the titular Don, his sons Gabriel and Victoriano are forced to perform manual labor in order to support their families, through which Gabriel becomes badly injured: "In that hod full of bricks not only his [Gabriel's] own sad experience was represented, but the *entire history* of the native Californians *of Spanish descent* was epitomized. Yes, Gabriel carrying his hod full of bricks up a step ladder was a symbolic representation of his race" (325).

[45] According to Beatriz Sánches and Rosaura Pita, by the novel's end, the victims are seen to be "the entire state population […] who suffer the consequences of the collusion of sate government, congress and monopoly capitalism" (6). See the introduction to *The Squatter.*

[46] The graphic novel focuses on Flaca and her family, who live in Barbecho, Mexico. Her father smuggles Mexicans across the border and his disappearance propels Flaca and the rest of her family to cross into Arizona. On their journey, the family is captured by the president of Blackwell Industries, a werewolf who terrorizes the Arizona-Mexico border with his progeny for unexplored reasons in the text.

[47] Although "Fate" probably carries little meaning for readers of the novel in its original Spanish, I cannot help but think that inquisitive readers will search for the definition of this word in English. As an English-speaking character, moreover, Fate's name is particularly significant. Fate's name ("destino") is reminiscent of Invisible Man's interaction with Mr. Norton, the white, ambiguously incestuous university benefactor in Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* (1952). While IM is acting as Mr. Norton's chauffer, he

asks the benefactor the reason for his interest in the university, to which Mr. Norton answers: "Our of a sense of my destined role,'[…] 'I felt, and I still feel, that your people are in some important manner tied to my destiny'" (94). Similarly, after winning the briefcase in the "Battle Royal" at the opening of the novel, IM is told to "take this prize and keep it well. Consider it a badge of office. Prize it. Keep developing as you are and some day it will be filled with important papers that will help shape the destiny of your people" (32). Through Fate's naming, *2666* taps into not only the African American literary tradition.

[48] Some critics have claimed that Barry Seaman and the other Black Panther invoked in the novel to be modeled on real-life Panthers such as Bobby Seale and Huey Newton. See Ben Ehrenreich, "'2666' by Roberto Bolaño, Translated from the Spanish by Natasha Wimmer." *Los Angeles Times*, 9 Nov. 2008. Annabel Patterson, *The International Novel*. Yale University Press, 2014; Francine Prose, "More Is More." *Harper's Magazine*, Dec. 2008.

[49] This is one of many occasions in which the Mexican landscape and/or the femicides make Fate remember his mother, her apartment, and other specifically black spaces. For example, sitting with Mexican reporters outside the ranch in which the Mexican boxer is training for the fight, Fate "compared the loneliness of the ranch to the loneliness of his mother's apartment. He thought about her ashes, which were still there. He thought about the dead neighbor. He thought about Barry Seaman's neighborhood. And all that his memory illuminated, while the Mexicans ate, seemed bleak" (353). See also 360; 348-349; 382; and 433.

[50] In *The Souls of Black Folk*, DuBois describes double-consciousness as the "sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others" and as the feeling of "two-ness, an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body" (364-365).

[51] It is significant to note that Rosa is not Mexican, but Spanish, a fact that is repeated throughout the text. This leads readers to assume that it is her Europeanness that allows Rosa to exit Santa Teresa unharmed. "I'm not Mexican, I'm Spanish," she tells Fate on their first meeting (401). Again, the text repeats this information, but more importantly, when they entering U.S. territory: "Spanish? Rosa smiled at the officer. A shadow of frustration crossed the officer's face. When they pulled away the flag disappeared and all they could see was the fence and warehouses surrounded by walls" (436). Her escape from the apocalyptic landscape and the violence it promises the female body is organized around her Spanish nationality, and which suggest representations common in horror films of the "final girl." Carol Clover explains how the "final girl" in horror films is that who survives, "the one who encounters the mutilated bodies of her friends and perceives the full extent of the preceding horror and of her own peril" (35). Moreover, Rosa is able to leave the Mexican and American flag (not specified by the text) behind, as well as the border fence and the warehouses, as they are not relevant to her European alliances. As such, the text stages the violence performed on the female body and on the landscape as a particularly American enterprise.

Chapter 4.

[1] Like the "Dodger Dogs" and the patriotic association baseball has in the national imaginary, Farmer John's products have participated in other nation-building projects. According to Farmer John's own company website, during World War II the Clougherty Brothers Packing Co. began supplying meat to local military bases and the Pacific Ocean military effort after the attack on Pearl Harbor.

[2] This is mirrored in *Atomik Aztex* as well, where Max, the slaughterhouse supervisor, is depicted as disappearing but also represented as possibly killed by the novel's protagonist and made into hot dogs. See pp. 196-200. The Farmer John murals have activated a lot of press, both at the local and national level. See David Ferrel, "As Far as Murals Go, This One Really Hams It Up." *Los Angeles Times*, 27 Oct. 1987. *LA Times*, http://articles.latimes.com/1987-10-27/local/me-16946_1_biggest-mural; Hugo Martin, "Sharpening Vision of Pig Paradise." *Los Angeles Times*, 5 July 2000. *LA Times*, http://articles.latimes.com/2000/jul/05/local/me-47938; Mike Pearl, "This Slaughterhouse Mural Is Really, Really Creepy." *Vice*, 8 July 2013, https://www.vice.com/en_us/article/yv5agx/this-farmer-johns-slaughterhouse-mural-is-really-creepy.

[3] See https://thehundreds.com/pages/about

[4] Bobby Hundreds (Bobby Kim), "HOGTIED." *The Hundreds*, https://thehundreds.com/blogs/content/hogtied; Dominique Zamora, "Streetwear Brand 'The Hundreds' Paints a Grisly Picture of Farmer John Hypocrisy." *Huffington Post*, 4 Mar. 2013, https://www.huffingtonpost.com/foodbeast/the-hundreds-farmer-john_b_2784904.html.

[5] Although I have personal opinions about the meat industry and the consumption of meat, this chapter (at the moment) is not particularly concerned with the ethics and economics of the meat industry. I am calling attention to the two murals in Vernon, California, as an entry point for my discussion of time travel, alternate realities, and violence in *Atomik Aztex*.

[6] Jason Voorhees, the protagonist of the *Friday the 13th* series, and although in popular culture he is usually depicted as donning a hockey mask and chainsaw, he in fact used a machete as his primary weapon.

[7] As Antonio López states in *Unbecoming Blackness* regarding Al Pacino's performance in the film, *Scarface*, brownface is "the practice of non-Latino, Anglo-white actors in Hollywood playing characters whose 'white-Latino' or 'mixed-raced' identity signifies 'brown,' a category of Latino identity that has animated both Latino resistance practices […] and their containment" (174). Frances Negrón-Muntaner defines this act of minstrelsy as "a way to get outside of 'white' skin—although not too far—and into the skin of another without risk" (qtd. in López 174).

[8] In the term "Greater Mexico," Limón follows the work of Americo Paredes, who defines it as "all the areas inhabited by people of Mexican culture—not only within the present limits of the Republic of Mexico but in the United States as well—in a cultural rather than a political sense." See *A Texas-Mexican Cancionero: Folksongs of the Lower Border* (University of Texas Press, 1976) xiv. Limón's *American Encounters: Greater Mexico, the United States, and the Erotics of Culture* (Beacon Press, 1998) is an interdisciplinary work that engages literature, visual arts, political discourse, and anthropological studies that highlights the relationships between the U.S. and Greater Mexico.

[9] Aztlán, as will be explored in this chapter, is a fantasy that has was primarily implemented by the 1960s and 1970s Movimiento to mobilize Mexican American and Chicanx peoples in its political project.

[10] See Sharon Patricia Holland, *Raising the Dead: Readings of Death and (Black) Subjectivity* (Duke University Press, 2000).

[11] A few of these references include Donald D. Megill and Richard S. Demory's *Introduction to Jazz History;* Isaac Babel's *1920 Diary*; Karl Marx's *Capital*; and Vladimir Lenin's *Materialism and Empirio-criticism*.

[12] This is not the same type of review given to other postmodernist fiction, such as *Mason Dixon, White Noise,* or *Infinite Jest.* For example, writing for *The Guardian,* Sam Jordison notes the careful attention to language DeLillo demonstrates in his writing, the "quiddity" and "the ebb and flow of language" his work. Similarly, reviews of *Mason Dixon* note the wealth of knowledge and the pleasure in Pynchon's difficult prose, and those addressing *Infinite Jest*, notes that David Foster Wallace's talent precludes a reader from being dissuaded by the novel's length. See "Don DeLillo's *White Noise*: A Novel Way of Dismantling Consumerist Excess." *The Guardian*, 10 May 2016; See Jenny Turner, "When the Sandwich Was Still a New Invention," *London Review of Books* 19.14 (July 1997); Emma-Lee Moss, "Infinite Jest at 20: still a challenge, still brilliant." *The Guardian*, 15 Feb. 2016.

[13] Reynolds comments can also be read as a dismissive statement about how unimportant it is to pay close attention to "all the details" in a work of science fiction and fantasy.

[14] Like I mention in this chapter, Foster is a graduate from the Iowa Writer's Workshop, the most prestigious MFA in the country. He has also received various niche awards such as the 2010 American Book Award fro *World Ball Notebook*, the 2009 Asian American Literary Award for Poetry for *World Ball Notebook*, and the 2005 Believer Book Award for *Atomik Aztex.* As we can see from his writing history, mostly small presses have published his work. Moreover, he holds a semi-cult following within academia and little market prominence. For example, a search in the Modern Language Association's International Bibliography database provides four results, and *Atomik Aztex* holds the #262,000 position in the Amazon Best Seller Rank.

[15] The Iowa Writers' Workshop is considered the most prestigious creative writing program in the U.S., and frequently cited as the best program in the nation. The Workshop has also been a center of debate surrounding the incestuous nature of writing programs and meritocracy in creative writing—both faculty and alumni hold an exorbitant number of writing awards, include about forty Pulitzer Prizes, numerous National Book Awards, and six Poet Laureate positions. For more on the program see Jeff Brown, "Iowa Writers' Workshop, Famous for Training Top Writers, Turns 75." *PBS NewsHour*, 7 Apr. 2011; Edward Delaney, "Where Great Writers Are Made." *The Atlantic*, Fiction Issue 2007. For more on discussions surrounding the industrialization of creative writing and the reproduction of the same type of voice in M.F.A. programs see Maureen Howard, "Can Writing Be Taught in Iowa?" *The New York Times Magazine*, 25 May 1986; and Jorie Graham's op-ed rebuttal: "The Iowa Writers' Workshop." *The New York Times Magazine*, 22 June 1986.

[16] Kaya, Beyond Baroque, and City Lights are all small presses, compared to the "Big Six" publishing conglomerates such as HarperCollins and Random House. Beyond

Baroque Books, for example, describes itself as being "dedicated to emerging, over-looked and out-of-print poetry, especially from Los Angeles-based writers." Kaya Press describes itself as "the premier publisher of cutting-edge Asian and Pacific Islander diasporic writers" and is based in the Department of American Studies and Ethnicity of the University of Southern California. Of these three small presses City Lights might be the best known and has a noteworthy literary history. An independent bookstore-publisher based in San Francisco, City Lights was founded by poet Lawrence Ferlinghetti in 1953, gained national attention during the obscenity trial for the publication of Allen Ginsberg's *Howl and Other Poems* (1956), and is known for its publication of "world literature" and progressive politics. See Gioia Woods, "'Reinvent America and the World': How Lawrence Ferlinghetti and City Lights Books Cultivated an International Literature of Dissent." *European Journal of American Studies*, vol. 12, no. 12–2, July 2017; "Landmark Status Likely for Beatnik-Era Bookstore." *CNN.com*, 27 June 2000; Adair Lara, "Literary Light / City Lights Bookstore, at 50, Is Showing Few Signs of Aging." *SFGate*, 5 June 2003; Dan Levy, "And the Beats Go On / Bookstore Where It Began May Get Soon Landmark Status." *SFGate*, 21 June 2000.

[17] Saldívar raises these points in "The Second Elevation" and "Imagining Cultures," where he argues that "in the twenty-first century, the relationship between race and social justice, race and identity, and indeed, race and history requires the new generation of writers to invent a new 'imaginary' for thinking about the nature of a just society" (1). Saldívar explores how speculative realism and historical fantasies are in dialogue with the aesthetics of postmodern literature and the mixing of genres beyond those accepted by the canon, "but also the outcast, low-brow, vernacular, not to say kitschy varieties of what has come to be known as genre fiction" ("The Other Side of History" 158).

[18] I would go further and argue that the way in which scholars, and Foster himself, have used his ethno-racial background and life in East Los Angeles seems has the tone of justification, pretext, and at times verges on the defensive.

[19] While I agree with Sohn's analysis of Foster's text, I argue here that the novel's brownface performance is about the straining of cross-minority alliances and also demonstrate how these alliances are not always nature. For example, we can see this in texts such as *Neither Friends nor Enemies: Latinos, Blacks, and Afro-Latinos* (2005), which explores the tensions between African Americas and Latinxes; *The Changs Next Door to the Díazes: Remapping Race in Suburban California* (2013), which investigates how racial identity is shaped by place, especially in light of demographic shifts; and novels such as Karen Yamashita's *Tropic of Orange* (1997), and even in Díaz's *Oscar Wao*, which includes two Chinese immigrant restaurant owners in the Dominican Republic. Further, the Wu Tan Clan's attempt to tap into Asianness, or Quentin Tarantino's depiction of Japan and Japanese characters in movies such as *Kill Bill: Volume 1* (2003), for example, attempts to depict an "authentic" or "original" understanding by going directly to the source. *Afro Asia: Revolutionary Political and Cultural Connections Between African Americans and Asian Americans* (2008), *Power to the Poor: Black-Brown Coalition and the Fight for Economic Justice, 1960-1974* (2015), and *Black-Brown Solidarity: Racial Politics in the New Gulf South* (2014), expose the cross-ethnic connections and tensions between black, Latinx, and Asian Americans.

[20] I am not equating the racial performance by Daniel Lewis James ("Danny Santiago") and Sesshu Foster. However, Marcial González makes a compelling case for justifying *Famous All Over Town*. See "Reception and Authenticity: Danny Santiago's *Famous All over Town*" *New Directions in American Reception Study* (Oxford University Press, 2008) 179-194.

[21] Foster explains his background as follows: "I have a background that I often have to simplify for people. When people first meet me, they ask, 'Who are you? What's your background?' I have a white Dad and Nisei mom and grew up in a Chicano barrio. I grew up with Asians, Chicanos and people with mixed heritage—but I've always had to simplify for people who come from outside our experience" (Tabios 229). Ruben Martinez, professor at Loyola Marymount University states, "Sesshu's mixed parentage and geographical weaning in East LA made him, like, post-Mestizo" (Kim).

[22] I am using the term in scare quotes here to signal the tenuous weight this literary terminology holds in Foster's novel. Although events take place in *Atomik Aztex* (i.e., things happen), it would be difficult to argue that the novel has a plot in the way usually described, such as E.M. Forster influentially does in *Aspects of the Novel* (1927). Forster defines a story as a narrative of events arranged in time-sequence, while a plot is also a narrative of events that highlight their causality. He gives the now famous example: "'The king died and then the queen died' is a story. 'The king died, and then the queer died of grief' is a plot" (86). The notion of a plot cannot readily be applied to Foster's novel as it rejects spacio-temporal linearity. Yet the novel is not incoherent but as Sarah Pöhlmann states, "hypercoherent, since its places and times are connected across multiple narrative dimensions, if not necessarily within the initially distinct planes of reality that could still allow for plots to evolve" (234).

[23] Another point of disagreement when it comes to this ambiguous plot is the novel's ending. Sohn, for example, argues that the two worlds of Zenzontli and Zenzón collapse together at the end and that perhaps these characters are the same person (74). This reading of the novel is problematic for many reasons, as it seems to not take seriously the alternate and simultaneous worlds the novel presents as factual elements of its world-making. Sohn's reading of the text also imbues it with a moral or lesson: "By the novel's conclusion, Zenzón has become aware of his Aztek-warrior consciousness, which now inspires him to continue with the mission of advocating for his fellow slaughterhouse workers" (74).

[24] I would also propose that Sarah Pöhlmann's attempt to define *Atomik Aztex* as "cosmographic metafiction" is slightly forced. While Hutcheon's definition of historiographic metafiction does not stipulate how the text points to its own creation of itself as a text outright, I would argue that this element is part of her argument implicitly.

[25] For example, Fredric Jameson sees the use of pastiche and postmodernist aesthetics as an imprisonment of the text within the past: "Here, once again, pastiche: in a world in which stylistic innovation is no longer possible, all that is left is to imitate dead styles, to speak through the masks and with the voices of the styles in the imaginary museum. But this means that contemporary or postmodernist art is going to be about art itself in a new kind of way; even more, it means that one of its essential messages will involve the necessary failure of art and the aesthetic, the failure of the new, the imprisonment in the past" (7). See "Postmodernism and Consumer Culture," *The Cultural Turn: Selected Writings on the Postmodern, 1983-1998* (Verso, 1998). While

Jameson is addressing the ability of postmodernist artists to make something "new," I am taking his claim literally: in its implementation of pastiche and postmodern aesthetics generally, *Atomik Aztex* formally returns readers to moments of violence within the content of the text that metafictionally returns us to the historical archive.

[26] Viego asserts that racism "depends on readings of ethnic-racialized subjects that insist on their transparency; racism also banks on the faith and conceit that these subjects can be exhaustively and fully elucidated through a certain masterful operation of language" (6). We can see how in reviews of Foster's novel his work is compared to the works of high literary fiction, something Díaz's work, for example is not afforded, opting instead to remark on the surprising fact that a Latinx author can write literarily while also addressing issues of race, class, diaspora, and immigration. Indeed, Foster's use of brownface in *Atomik Aztex* demonstrates how specific ethnic minorities have access to "lesser-than" ethno-racial groups such as African Americans and Latinxes, without having to inhabit that ethno-racial space (it is a performance after all). We can see this magnified to a disturbing degree in figures such as Rachel Dolezal, who attempted to pass as African American. This subject is further investigated by Michael Rogin in *Blackface, White Noise: Jewish Immigrants in the Hollywood Melting Pot* (1998).

[27] Lacan introduces the "bar" in reference to Saussure's notion of the "sign." For Lacan the bar is that which separates the signifier from the signified and, as such, represents the division of the subject in language.

[28] In *Ends of Assimilation: The Formation of Chicano Literature* (Oxford University Press, 2015), John Alba Cutler similarly turns to Lacanian theory (and Viego) to discuss the poetry of Lorna de Cervantes and her projection "of *imagined* wholeness, wholeness that has already been interrupted by linguistic homelessness" (2).

[29] See the Nahuatl Dictionary housed at the University of Oregon: http://whp.uoregon.edu/dictionaries/nahuatl/index.lasso

[30] See Frank Gill's *Ornithology;* James Joblin's *Helm Dictionary of Scientific Bird Names*. Further, the North American mockingbird has been known to distinguish one human from thousands of others, identify humans quickly, and identify various levels of threat. See Douglas J. Levey, et al. "Urban Mockingbirds Quickly Learn to Identify Individual Humans." *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America*, vol. 106, no. 22 (June 2009) 8959– 8962.

[31] All variations in formatting, spelling, etc. in my citation of *Atomik Aztex* are original from text, unless otherwise noted.

[32] *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* open as follows:

> Notice
>
> Persons attempting to find a motive in this narrative will be prosecuted; persons attempting to find a moral in it will be banished; persons attempting to find a plot in it will be shot.
>
> By order of the author
> Per G.G., Chief of Ordnance
>
> Explanatory

> In this book a number of dialects are used, to wit: the Missouri negro dialect; the extremest form of backwoods Southwestern dialect; the ordinary "Pike County" dialect; and four modified varieties of this last. The shadings have not bee done in a haphazard fashion, or by guesswork; but painstakingly, and with the trustworthy guidance and support of personal familiarity with these several forms of speech.
>
> I make this explanation for the reason that without it many readers would suppose that all these characters were trying to talk alike and not succeeding.
>
> The Author.

See Mark Twain, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn.* 2015. *Open WorldCat*, http://lib.myilibrary.com?id=993159.

[33] Delbo's memoir is composed of a trilogy, translated from the French and published by Yale University Press in 1995. *Auschwitz and After* began as three separate books published in France by Editions de Minuit: *None of Us Will Return*, *Useless Knowledge*, and *The Measure of Our Days*. Delbo was married to French resistance leader Georges Dudach; both were arrested in March of 1942 for distributing anti-German leaflets in Paris and turned over to the Gestapo. Dudach was executed while Delbo remained in prison until January 1943 and deported to Auschwitz and then Ravensbrück, where she remained until the end of the war. *Auschwitz and After* is composed of various vignettes, using experimental and unconventional techniques of narration.

[34] See "chingar" in *Diccionario de la lengua española* http://dle.rae.es/?id=8pLhBqB.

[35] This reading of Mexican history and the role of Malinche in the Spanish conquest is problematic and sexist. Laura Esquivel's novel, *Malinche* (2006), for example reinterprets Paz's interpretation of women's role in Mexican history and underscores the tongue and language as a source of autonomy for La Malinche. Cherríe Moraga similarly reformulates the notion of women as traitors in *Loving in the War Years* (1983). Other critiques can be found in *Feminism, Nation and Myth: La Malinche*, edited by Rolando Romero and Amanda Nolacea Harris (Arte Público Press, 2005); Mary Louise Pratt, "'Yo Soy La Malinche': Chicana Writers and the Poetics of Ethnonationalism," *Callaloo* vol. 16 no. 4 (Autumn 1993) 859-873.

[36] See Ross Hassig, *Time, History and Belief in Aztec and Colonial Mexico* (University of Texas Press, 2001) 3-7.

[37] Hassig questions this common interpretation of the Spanish conquest of the Aztec people, citing previous encounters with the Spanish, such as with the expedition by Francisco Hernández de Córdoba and Juan de Grijalva, who arrived in Mexico years before Cortes. See *Time, History and Belief in Aztec and Colonial Mexico* 58-60.

[38] Anglo-American writers also raise these types of concerns regarding the reimagination of history's trajectory in relation to Nazism. See Philip K. Dick, *The Man in the High Castle* (162); Philip Roth *The Plot Against America* (2004).

[39] The swastika is an ancient symbol that precedes Hitler by at least 5,000 years. The word swastika comes the Sanskrit *svastika*, which means "good fortune" or "well-being," and continues to be a sacred symbol in Hinduism, Buddhism, and Jainism.

[40] Ulibarri's point is supported by the text. Zenzontli addresses how the fight against the Nazis will enable the Aztek Imperium's financial success: "*Let me say then, sir, for the record, that I voice my objection to the whole strategy, to sending my men and me to die on the Eastern Front for the chance that your portfolio returns may increase a point or two, that the Aztek slave trade be expanded to a few more two-bit ignorant underdeveloped countries"* (19).

[41] Affective ties are suggested yet never fulfilled and instead conclude in further reminders/remainders of violence. As I discussed in chapter 3, the femicides in Bolaño's *2666* act as a vehicle through which Oscar Fate, an African American journalist, can explore black spaces and black mourning in the United States. Similarly, in *Atomik Aztex* killing and eating pigs is a medium for introspection and short-lived moments of kinship between human and pig, and among humans. For example, eating tacos Zenzón states, "I tear off a bite of savory crisp pork flesh, tortilla soft as the skin of a woman's belly in the moonlight" (14), which not only offer a moment of sexual desire but also the possibility of eating/consuming the other. Killing pigs also offer moments of introspection about loss and failure: "as you reconsider behind dripping plastik safety goggles the fakt your wife really left you in spirit a long time before she departed in the flesh (you can see that now, as the saw bites thru the neck of the next hog, bits of skin shredding as you press the ripping business end all the way thru the spine)" (41). Most importantly, killing pigs and their products offer a possibility for Zenzón to demonstrate fatherly love yet that is ultimately frustrated and unfulfilled. For example, he goes to the supermarket and fills "two boxes with every Farmer John product I could find. Bologna, salami, head cheese, foot-long hot dogs, ballpark franks, pepperonis, summer sausage, Polish sausage, breakfast sausage, Italian sausage, hot links, canned ham, sliced ham, honey-baked ham, ham hocks, ground pork, bacon, you name it" (9). Delivering off these boxes for his children, Zenzón notes, "But I could tell neither of them got the message" (9). Zenzón attempts to foment a connection with his children through the byproducts of his daily labor, showing love through butchering, yet these products fall short in communicating his encoded message—much as the novel itself demonstrates the inability of encapsulating violence through typical forms of narration and reverts to the excessive.

[42] The centrality of pigs in literature (as connected to humans) is intriguing—an obvious yet important example being George Orwell's *Animal Farm* (1945)—especially as related to their connection to the human and human memory. See, for example, Yusef Komunyakaa's poem, "The Smokehouse," in which the "slabs of pork" elicit memories of playing "Indian" and in which the sectioned hog elicits the image of "A map scored into skin;/ Opened like love[.]" See also *Charlotte's Web* (1952), *Oryx and Crake* (2003), *Ender's Game* (1985), and *The Lord of the Flies* (1954).

[43] Aztlán is a place and idea that has been discussed by numerous scholars within Latinx Studies. This is by no means a comprehensive list, but one that is indicative of argument trends and those I find not only the most useful in thinking about Aztlán, but the most interesting. See Brady *Extinct Lands/Temporal Geographies*; Saldaña-Portillo (2003) and *Indian Given* (2016); Ontiveros (2014); and Cutler, *Ends of Assimilation*.

[44] See Milian "Extremely Latin, XOXO" 127; Guidotti-Hernández, "Affective Communities and Millennial Desires": Latinx, or Why My Computer Won't Recognize Latina/o" *Cultural Dynamics* vol. 29 no. 3, 142.

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