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MAPPING BORDERLANDS HORROR: TALES IN TERROR, TRAUMA, AND LATINX IMMIGRANT EXERIENCES IN RECENT FICTION

A Thesis

by

CYNTHIA SALDIVAR

Submitted to the Graduate College of
The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley
In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS IN INTERDISCIPLINARY STUDIES

May 2016

Major Subject: Mexican American Studies

MAPPING BORDERLANDS HORROR: TALES IN TERROR, TRAUMA, AND

LATINX IMMIGRANT EXERIENCES IN

RECENT FICTION

A Thesis
by
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May, 2016

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ABSTRACT

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This thesis explores how Chicanx cultural producers redeploy conventions of horror in order to explore the lived experiences of Latinx, particularly in South Texas. More specifically, I examine texts such as Sandra Cisneros's classic 1992 short story "Woman Hollering Creek," Christopher Carmona's award-winning 2015 short story "Strange Leaves," and Josefina López's 2011 play *Detained in the Desert* through the lens of domestic horror. I argue that these texts variously redefine the generic parameters of domestic horror to capture the intersectional experiences of horror and terror in the U.S.-Mexico borderlands. In doing so, this thesis demonstrates how the horrific is "differential," that is, how what we consider horrific is thoroughly racialized, gendered, classed, sexualized, and spatial. Further, this thesis illustrates how Chicanx fiction challenges the dominant narrative and redeploys horror as a tool for collective action against the systematic oppression of Latinx immigrants.

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my father who first sparked my love of horror.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Though there are many people I am grateful for supporting me through this journey, I would like to first thank my mentor and advisor, Dr. Cathryn Merla-Watson. You singlehandedly changed the course of my graduate studies and are the main reason this thesis was conceived. I will forever be grateful for you reigniting my curiosity and reminding me of my love of horror. There is not a day that goes by that I am not awed by your wisdom. I would also like to my committee members Dr. Marci McMahon, Dr. Amy Cummins, and Dr. Diana Noreen Rivera for their valuable input and expertise. I am honored to be in the presence of such brilliance.

Thank you to my family who have provided me with the inspiration to follow my dreams. To my brothers, Cesar and Estevan Saldivar, had it not been for your belief in me I would never have found the courage to continue my education. Mom, you have always been my rock and I thank you for your patience and support. Sofia, you are my heart and baby girl this is all for you.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Drops of blood form a trail on the hardwood floor. A small whisper begging, "stop, please stop." Fists hitting flesh, stopped only by the horrific cry of the onlooker. For a brief second the monster turns his anger toward the interruption, discovering a frightened child who is now begging for this to end. This scenario has the makings of a horror movie trailer, camera fades out and the audience is left to wonder what will become of that frightened child who has now witnessed the brutal beating of her mother. Unfortunately for me this is not a movie; it is one of the few vivid memories I have as a young, working class Mexican American child living in south Texas, the borderlands. The monster who turned his rage toward me was my father. And the tragic irony of it all: he is my hero, my world. This was also not a lone incident; it was a typical weekend when he was on a drinking binge. I learned at a young age how to view my father as two separate beings, the loving and adoring sober man, and the alcoholic abusive monster he became. My Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde.

Perhaps surprisingly, the genre of horror has always resonated with me. It was not until recently that I examined my fascination with the genre I came to realize it provided an outlet to reflect upon my real life horrors. It was my father who first exposed me to Stephen King's *The Eye of the Dragon*, a novel written for King's children. Throughout my life King's work has always been a way to connect with my father, a tie that binds. It was also a means for my father

to deflect his monstrous actions onto the fictional realm where he could distance himself from the familiar evil that lurked inside one of King's novels. Unlike real life, King's fiction prompted me to identify a clear monster and showed how good always prevailed. My life was not so neat. The demon I faced was my father's addiction and the monster it created was my father. It is through my previous, real-life encounters with the horrific and monstrous that I am able to identify the horror in narratives that are not traditionally categorized as horror. It is also through my life experience that I am able to connect with the daily and intimate terror that Latinx immigrants and other Latinx face collectively. Our shared experiences of physical and sexual threat has been documented in Chicanx literature; however, it is not typically viewed through the generic lens of domestic horror. In this thesis, I draw upon Gloria Anzaldúa's theorization of the borderlands as a unique prism for understanding domestic horror in fictional works engaging Mexican immigrant women and Chicanx's experiences. I argue that doing so, provides a critical vista for understanding the systemic oppression that Chicanxs and Latinx immigrants endure.

Gloria Anzuldúa, Dalia Kandiyoti, Sonia Saldivar-Hull, and Mary Pat Brady all use spatial theories to analyze Chicana literature, which I will use as a platform for redefining domestic horror as inherently spatial. Gloria Anzaldúa's theory of the borderlands is useful for recognizing that space and borders are socially constructed, that this space becomes an enclosure for immigrant woman facing abuse, and that domestic horror encompasses more than just a physical dwelling. The isolation and lack of resources available to immigrant women creates a sense of claustrophobia within their communities. While Anzaldúa is not usually recognized as a theorist of horror, the first chapter of *Borderlands La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (1999) conceptualizes the unique space of the border and exposes the horrific experiences that Mexican immigrant women face in this particular socio-historical space. Anzaldúa (1999) conceives of

the borderlands in horrifying terms: "The U.S. – Mexican border *es una herida abierta* where the Third World grates against the first and bleeds. And before a scab forms it hemorrhages again, the lifeblood of two worlds merging to form a third country – a border culture" (25). Her bloody description of the border calls forth a graphic image that places it as the perfect setting for a horror story. She goes on further, calling upon monstrous images, to describe the inhabitants as "*Los atravesados* live here: the squint-eyed, the perverse, the queer, the troublesome, the mongrel, the mulato, the half-breed, the half dead" (Anzaldúa 1999, 25). Yet, unlike the aliens of dominant popular film the inhabitants of the borderlands are the ones who oftentimes fall victim to systematic oppression. Anzaldúa's description serves to challenge the manner in which borderland inhabitants are viewed as monstrous and to give voice to the horrors they encounter. In fact, in this chapter Anzaldúa (1999) stresses the horrible experiences of those who live on the border especially that of the Mexican woman, "The world is not a safe place to live in. We shiver in separate cells in enclosed cities, shoulders hunched, barely keeping the panic below the surface of the skin, daily drinking shock with our morning coffee, fearing the torches being set to our buildings, the attacks in the streets" (42). This description is a snapshot of the realities of the terrors that Chicanas and Mexican immigrant women face daily. Although Anzaldúa describes the borderlands in bloody and horrific terms, she also figures it as a vital site of bridging and healing which is not usually found within the horror genre.

This state of constant fear has become the norm for many Mexican women who find themselves in a foreign land trying to make a better life. Anzaldúa identifies this relentless terror as "intimate terrorism," which Megan Sibbert (2013) further defines as the residual fallout that stems from the constant threat of violence. A close reading of each of the literary texts reveals the horrific experiences, including those experienced by women, such as rape and physical

abuse, subjects further disenfranchised from the state, more often confront daily, perpetual violence that tries to control their reproductive bodies (Sibbett 2013, 244). It is through Anzaldúa's theory of the borderlands that exposes this daily threat brings horror to life and will be the means through which I redefine domestic horror to expand this concept outside of the confines of the home. Anzaldúa refers to the borderlands as her home yet intimate terrorism does not allow her to feel safe in this space. Furthermore, when analyzing Chicanx fiction through the horror lens it is critical to recognize the hybridity of the literary works that collapse the traditional horror classifications. In *Borderlands/La Frontera,* Gloria Anzaldúa conceptualizes a new mestiza consciousness that is born from a "lifeblood of two worlds merging to form a third country – a border culture." (25) Merla-Watson (2013) argues that using mestiza conscious as a theoretical frame allows for a holistic interpretation that examines the materiality of history and the lived experiences of Latina immigrants on the borderlands that does not depend upon binary logic and creates "healing and surviving through re-membering" (231). By examining Chicanx fiction through the lens of mestiza consciousness it restructures the horror genre by blending domestic and body horror and reconfigures the relation between terror and horror. It reframes the literature to exemplify the hybridity within the borderlands.

By reengaging Anzaldúa's *Borderlands/La Frontera* through the lens of domestic horror, I expose the differential experiences of Latinx immigrants and bring new monsters to the forefront. In doing so, I contribute to and extend a new, but growing, body of scholarship on the Chican@ and Latin@ speculative arts, as recently codified by Cathryn Merla-Watson and B.V. Olguín in the fall 2015 and spring 2016 dossiers of the journal *Aztlán.* In the critical introductions to these dossiers, Merla-Watson and Olguín (2015) not only define the Latin@ speculative arts, but also examine how Chicanx cultural producers integrate aspects of sci-fi,

fantasy, and horror into works that are not traditionally classified as such. They assert that the "Latin@ speculative arts also makes space for texts not normally included within the discrete generic bounds of sci-fi and fantasy, effectively questioning the constitutive parameters of these genres and remapping them" (Merla-Watson and Olguin 2015, 135). Building on this assertion, I examine literature that exposes the "intimate terror" that Latinx immigrants and Chicanxs encounter on a daily basis through the lens of domestic horror, which examines the borderlands as a domestic sphere. In the same manner, Chicanx cultural producers deploy the genre of horror to illustrate "conceptions of—or what is *perceived* as—the monstrous, horrific, and fantastic are striated by difference, that is, culturally, socially, and historically constructed as well as geographically specific" (Merla-Watson and Olguín 2016). My thesis interrogates how horror is subjective, which, in turn, illustrates the unique experiences and daily terrors that Latina immigrants and Chicanas face. I further analyze how three Chicana/o authors utilize horror devices to expose the horrific experiences of Latinx immigrants.

To that end, I examine Sandra Cisneros' classic 1992 short story "Woman Hollering Creek" and Josefina López's 2010 play *Detained in the Desert* through the lens of domestic horror in conjunction with Anzaldua's theorization of the Borderlands as a domestic sphere for Latinx immigrants as well as examine how each of these works engages with monstrosities. I also analyze Christopher Carmona's 2014 award-winning short story "Strange Leaves" through the lens of domestic and body horror. Utilizing Anzaldùa's mestiza consciousness as a theoretical framework to analyze "Strange Leaves" indexes how horror classifications intertwine. Each of the works examined incorporate horror subgenres to create a new mestizo genre that is not merely an amalgamation. I assert that these fictional works also rewrite domestic horror insofar as the domestic is no longer just the space of the home but also encompasses the nation-

state and the space of the borderlands. Collapsing generic and spatial distinctions enables us to interpret the terror that Chicanx and Latinx immigrants encounter daily on the borderlands and voice a collective call to action and social transformation. Pursuant to this objective, I argue that Chicanx cultural producers redeploy conventions of horror to explore the lived experiences of Latina immigrants and Chicanxs. Chicanx authors redefine what is considered horrific according to the violent intersections of race, class, gender, sexuality, and citizenship to reveal how horror, and specifically domestic horror is a subjective mode of knowledge production. Furthermore, I argue that Chicanx authors utilize domestic horror in a way that departs from the white middle class woman perspective to illustrate the collective experience of Latinx immigrants and Chicanxs.

Borderlands Horror: A Holistic Genre

Gloria Anzaldúa's mestiza consciousness is born contesting binaries, "in attempting to work out a synthesis, the self has added a third element which is greater than the sum of its severed parts" (80). Examining Chicanx fiction through the lens of mestiza consciousness restructures the horror genre by blending subgenres, such as, monstrosity, domestic and body horror and reconfigures the temporal relation between terror and horror. Each of the works analyzed here are borderlands hybrids that challenge colonial binary modes of the horror genre. Reframing these works exemplifies the hybridity within the borderlands and contributes to a larger project of decolonizing knowledge production.

As social geographers such as Henri Lefebvre, Cindi Katz, and Laura Pulido have amply demonstrated, space is produced; it is not organic. The production of space is a social process. Various scholars have examined the way that Sandra Cisneros uses space in her 1992 short story "Woman Hollering Creek." By recognizing the social processes used to define space, Mary Pat

Brady (2002) identifies how Cisneros' mapping of Seguin reinforces patriarchal systems by leaving out vital resources that would aid domestic abuse victims, such as crisis centers or ESL schools (2002, 134). Through this mapping Cisneros creates a sense of isolation and confinement of her main character Cleófilas. In *Migrant Sites: America, Place, and Diaspora Literature,* Dalia Kandiyoti (2009) examines how physical confinement and isolation become an enclosure for migrants. Though Brady, Kandiyoti, and others explore how the use of space illustrates the claustrophobic feel of domestic violence in "Woman Hollering Creek," yet it has never been analyzed through the lens of domestic horror.

The horror device of the claustrophobic space is often portrayed through the genre of domestic horror to create a sense of isolation. Domestic horror focuses on space to illustrate the constrictions of family life therefore "domestic horror is frequently gendered, as are spaces" (Wisker 153). Female authors have utilized the domestic horror genre to illustrate an oppressive patriarchal culture where the home is transformed from a place of protection to "an image of male power in its sinister aspect, threatening and oppressive" (Figes 74). Two prominent examples of this are Charlotte Perkins Gilman's canonized "The Yellow Wallpaper" (1892) and Susan Glaspell's one act play "Trifles" (1916).

"The Yellow Wallpaper" tells the story of a middle-class white woman who is driven to madness by being confided to her summer home by her physician husband. Gilman's story chronicles the isolation of the narrator and how her husband has complete control of her daily activities. "Trifles" incorporates isolation to highlight domestic abuse. "Trifles" is set in a rural community where Minnie Wright has just been arrested for the murder of her husband. Although Minnie never makes it onstage, her story is revealed through the two women who have been charged with collecting her belongings from her isolated farmhouse. Through their

collection, they are able to piece together the motive behind Minnie's action. Both of these works shows "the "potentially nightmarish, "dark side" of the dreamlike ideals of marriage and motherhood" (Davidson 2004, 54). Each is set in locations that cutoff the protagonists from the outside world, one in an isolated estate and the other in a rural farmhouse. Through this isolation the home becomes a prison. The physical confinement of the female protagonist is a critique of patriarchal institutions. Both of these examples illustrate how domestic horror is used as a vehicle to unveil the monstrous in heteronormative patriarchal ideals. Furthermore, domestic horror occurs in the home where these characters should feel the safest. The threat of the spaces that are supposed to be secure is a horror trope that attacks all that is familial. Yet, analyzing the experiences of Latinx immigrants in the fraught space of the U.S.-Mexico borderlands demands new interpretive lenses that recognize the borderlands as a unique space that exemplifies domesticity. Throughout *Borderlands/La Frontera,* Anzaldúa refers to the borderlands as her "home," creating a visual boundary where its residents experience brutal violence and systemic oppression stemming from colonialism. Marci R. McMahon examines the ways in which Chicana authors "enact *domestic negotiations* that both challenge and reinforce geographical, racial, gendered, and national borders. (3). When applied to Anzaldúa, domestic negotiation transcends transnational borders to illustrate how Latinx immigrants negotiate the space of the borderlands. By utilizing Anzaldúa's theory of the borderlands, I will redefine domestic horror to include the transnational space of the borderlands.

I suggest that Latinx cultural producers have been utilizing the genre of horror and the gothic as a means of social critique for over a century. In her dissertation "Murders, Madness, Monsters: Latina/o Gothic in the U.S.A.", Tanya Gonzalez (2004) explores how Latinx cultural producers have incorporated gothic tropes to draw attention to the complexities of Latinx cultural

production.   From corridos to romance novels, Chicana/o authors have been documenting the historical violence that Mexicanxs and Mexican Americans have faced. Corridos gained popularity during the Mexican American War and were used to document events, folk tales, and horrific atrocities such as murder and rape committed by the Texas Rangers. Co-authored during the 1930s by Jovita González and Eve Raliegh, *Caballero* is a historical novel that examines the tensions and brutal violence that manifested when Texas became annexed by the United States. Written in 1885, *The Squatter and the Don* by Maria Amparo Ruiz de Burton is a romance novel that infuses politics, race, and class to highlight the injustices that our nation has allowed. Each of these works documents the atrocities Mexican/Mexican Americans endured and illustrate how the horror genre has always been an apt lens to articulate the myriad violence, terrorism, and horrors that have part of our history and current life experiences. As Gonzalez states, "if we refuse to look at the gothic within these texts, much of their cultural meaning ad political significance is lost." (15). Our violent and bloody history serve as the perfect setting for a horror plot. The vivid and bloody imagery and the violent themes all situate these literary works in the horror genre. Latinx authors have historically utilized the gothic to depict the daily horrors that occur on the borderlands from a Latinx perspective.

Latinx text is not the only cultural production that incorporates horror to shed light on the Latinx experience. Latinx film as long deployed the horror genre as a means of social critique. The most notable filmic example of how Latinx have redefined horror is George A. Romero's 1968 film *Night of the Living Dead*. Released in the midst of the Chicano movement, this film revolutionized the horror genre by providing an alternative narrative to the horrors of white supremacy.   *Night of the Living Dead* uses the horror genre to closely examine the social climate of the time. In "Days of the (Un)Dead: Vampires, Zombies, and Other Forms of Chicana/o

Horror in Film," Jesse Alemán (2013) chronicles the emergence of modern horror and how Romero's film transformed the horror genre from "its special effects… to its critique of middle-class America, religion, domesticity, news media, race, science, and the nuclear family" (50). The most significant element of *Night of the Living Dead* is how the film refuses to redeem mainstream Anglo-America during when America was experiencing civil unrest (Alemán 50). *Night of the Living Dead* becomes an important precursor in which other Latinx cultural producers will utilize the horror genre to illustrate social injustice, systematic oppression, and as a means of social critique.

Like other literary and filmic genres, horror deploys particular conventions or narrative strategies in order to evoke terror or horror. In his introduction to "The Philosophy of Horror" Thomas Fahy (2010) explains that horror promises, "the anticipation of terror, the mixture of fear and exhalation as events unfold, the opportunity to confront the unpredictable and dangerous, the promise of relative safety (both in the context of a darkened theatre and through a narrative structure that lasts for a finite amount of time and/or number of pages), and the feeling of relief and regained control when it's over" (2). It is a prescribed formula that can be applied to a variety of works, some of which may not be normally considered horror. It also allows for authors to redeploy certain aspects to of the formula to reexamine what is horrific and monstrous in our society. By recognizing this formula in works that are not typically considered a part of the horror genre, the subjective experiences of marginalized people are exposed.

It is also crucial to examine how the horror genre traditionally distinguishes the difference between terror and horror. In his nonfiction novel *Danse Macabre* (1981) Stephen King distinguishes the two terms by describing terror as the anticipation of what might be without actually witnessing anything monstrous, "the imagination alone is stimulated" (23).

Horror, on the other hand, is the moment where the reader comes face to face with the monstrous. It is no longer in the mind but instead it shows us "something that is physically wrong" (22). As a white middle-class man, King is the epitome of the dominant narrative. Therefore, his definitions of terror and horror are not representative of the Latinx immigrant experience. King use of terror and horror are temporal yet I argue that for Latinx terror and horror are daily emotions. Throughout, my thesis I will use these terms and at moments they may seem interchangeable so as to more fully examine the lived experiences of Chicanx and Latinx immigrant it is impossible to separate the two emotions.

Monstrosity is subjective by nature and is not confined to supernatural. Noël Carroll (1990) takes a narrower view of horror and claims that it represents the unnatural. He contends, "The pleasure and interest that many horror fictions sustain… derive from the disclosure of unknown and impossible beings" (184). Yet, this definition has been contested because it leaves no space for "realistic" monsters such as the psychotic killer Norman Bates whose delusions lead him to murder. In his chapter, "Horror and the Idea of Everyday Life," Phillip J. Nickel (2010) uses Bates to challenge Carroll's notion and in doing so broadens the genre to include everyday life, "the "everyday" encompasses those tacit assumptions of reliability that allow us to negotiate the world from one moment to the next" (27). This concept of the everyday illustrates that horror is a social construct. It allows for us to identify the monsters in our realities and it also illustrates that horror is subjective. It is precisely this subjectivity that illustrates how horror is directly related to lived experiences; it is a structure of feeling. Intimate terrorism, as coined by Gloria Anzaldúa, is the lived experiences of Chicana and Mexican immigrant women, and therefore their definitions of horror are reflective of the constant fear they face.

Monsters are the embodiment of a society's collective fear and as such the same creature may come to represent different anxieties. In *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination,* sociologist Avery F. Gordon (1997) approaches ghosts and monsters through systematic hauntings. Gordon explains, "In haunting, organized forces and systematic structures that appear removed from us make from us make their impact felt in everyday life in a way that confounds our analytic separations and confounds the social separations themselves (19). It is through these systematic structures that individuals confront the seething presence of the past. Ghosts and monsters in the United States are cultural productions that signal collective trauma. Taking seriously Gordon's argument that historical and systemic structures haunt our present day life experiences requires a new mode of redefining Chicanx borderlands horror these ethnic cultural productions must be taken into consideration.

William A. Calvo-Quirós' (2014) has similarly demonstrated with Latinx studies how the monstrous is socially situated and culturally produced. In "Sucking Vulnerability: Neoliberalism, the Chupacabras, and the Post-Cold War Years," he explores the manifestation of the Chupacabras and connects its creation to the socio-politics of that time. He argues that "the Chupacabras is more than just a naïve livestock-blood-sucking creature" (212) but instead the Chupacabras "turns into flesh the monstrous atrocities and unnatural violence inflicted on Latina/o communities in both sides of the border" (213). The Chupacabras became a representative of how NAFTA was draining the resources of Mexican farmers. Calvo-Quirós (2014) goes on to analyze two case studies wherein the Chapacabras becomes a representation of anti-immigrant sentiments in the United States. He writes, "the Chapacabras is used as a mirror to reflect American fears about the evident Latina/o growing demographic presence, materializing a demonized alien… primitive and incapable of assimilating into American

culture" (219). His analysis of the Chapacabras shows how monstrosity becomes a social construct reflective of late capitalism. While Mexican farmers were fearful of capitalistic exploitation, Anglo-America was fearful of the Latina/o other that was crossing the border, yet both of these fears manifested in the same blood sucking creature. In this way, monstrosity is subjective and complexly constituted, as well as shows how Chicana/o authors can therefore redefine monstrosity to demonstrate the horrific experiences of immigrants. Monstrosity does not only manifest in the creation of beasts but monsters can take human form. When monsters become human it blurs the lines of what is considered true evil and illustrates the subjective nature of monstrosity. What seems monstrous therefore to one may seem mundane to another based on their lived experiences.

Anzaldúa's description of intimate terrorism and theorization of the borderlands highlights the unique experiences of horror of those who live on the border. By defining the space of the borderlands, Anzaldúa sheds light on a culture that shares a collective experience concerning a history of terror and trauma in addition to healing. Further, in conveying the terrors of the borderlands, Anzaldua calls upon a familiar horror trope of monstrosity. Phillip Tallon (2010) states that "The key element is a sense of *violation*. Thus horror is often rooted in what feels secure: the home (*The Haunting* or *The Sixth Sense*), the family (*The Exorcist* or *The Shining*), or innocent and mundane activities such as checking into a hotel or babysitting (*Psycho* or *Halloween*). He goes on further to explain that for horror to be successful there must be a general sense of order in the world. He describes watching a screening of Alfred Hitchcock's 1960 classic film *Psycho*, "I was struck with how the audience all startled at the same moment of surprising violence. The experience was communal in a way that few other experiences are: we all jumped together at the sudden appearance of "Mother" wielding a butcher knife" (39). This

description again plays on the notion that horror is a collective experience based on universal definitions of what is considered unnatural. These universal definitions are defined by those in power, it is the heteronormative white male perspective that decides what is horrific. Yet, the collective experience of those who live in the borderlands create a new perspective on what is horrific. Anzaldúa brings this to light when she describes the manner in which the borderlands inhabitants are viewed while highlighting that monstrosity does not lie in the inhabitants but rather in the historical and systematic oppression of the region.

Each work analyzed in my thesis reveals the monstrous in the everyday lives of their central characters, highlighting the intimate terrorisms experienced by Chicanas and Latina immigrants. By examining the "everyday" lives of Latinx, particularly the immigrant experience, these Chicanx authors illustrate how the reality of the immigrant differs from mainstream white America and how this reality then shapes what they consider to be monstrous. These works point to the subjective and intersectional nature of horror. When announcing his 2016 bid for the Republican presidential nomination, Donald Trump stated,

> When Mexico send its people, they're not sending the best. They're sending people that have lots of problems and they're bringing those problems. They're bringing drugs, they're bringing crime. They're rapists and some, I assume, are good people, but I speak to border guards and they're telling us what we're getting (Here's Donald Trump 2015).

As such comments indicate, Trump is running a campaign that fuels bigotry and hate. His anti-immigrant sentiment feeds on the fear of the racialized "Other." When examining police brutality directed at minority populations Aldama (2003) asserts, "these desecrated bodies serve to appease middle-class panic about the surging color or crime" (3). The middle-class panic

views colored bodies as deserving of excessive force because colored bodies are the embodiment of what is monstrous. However, for those that have been criminalized the desecrated bodies become semiotic of the fear of law enforcement (Aldama 2003). Their monsters stand behind the blue wall of silence. Each literary work being analyzed shows the subjectivity of monstrosity in the space of the borderlands. "Latinas/os manipulating the gothic mode to represent monstrosity are adding yet another layer to the already contradictory rupture of the monster as political critique, and shifting the ways we can understand Latina/o cultural production in more complex ways." (González 2004, 4). Each of the texts being analyzed shifts the perspective of the monstrous to that of the Latinx immigrant as a means to critique the systematic violence that is occurring on the borderlands.

The literary texts being analyzed are centered around the U.S.-Mexico border and this location is key throughout these works. A common element of the horror genre is the notion of the "terrible place" (Clover 1993, 78). This terrible place serves as the center of the plot and is typically a house or some other space where characters "may at first seem a safe haven, but the same walls that promise to keep the killer out quickly become, once the killer penetrates them, the walls that hold the victim in" (Clover 78). This is also an apt description for the U.S.-Mexico border. The United States has become the symbol of hope for a better life for many immigrants yet the atrocities that are found along the border prove to be the opposite. In her article, "Women Hollering Transfronteriza Feminism," Sonia Saldívar-Hull examines "Woman Hollering Creek" and states through Cleòfilas migrations "the material and gendered conditions of domination and exploitation imposed on subaltern Mexican women in the United States are connected to the exploitation and domination from which they seek to escape the *pueblos*/towns of Mexico" (252). It is due to this domination and exploitation that the border becomes a terrible

place for many. Sandra Cisneros, Josefina López, and Christopher Carmona use their literary works as a means to not only highlight the injustices that are currently occurring along the borderlands but each of their works is a call for change.

Overview

Chapter One

Chapter One analyzes the Sandra Cisneros' 1992 short story, "Woman Hollering Creek" through the lens of domestic horror and examines its theme of claustrophobia. It is through domestic horror that Cisneros utilizes physical space both privately and publically to draw attention to social issues that are plaguing the Mexican American community. This analysis demonstrates how what we consider horrific is "differential," that is, how what we consider horrific is thoroughly racialized, gendered, classed, and sexualized. More specifically, this chapter argues that by reading "Woman Hollering Creek" through the domestic horror genre lends insight into the affective—and horrific—experience of gendered oppression.

Chapter Two

Chapter Two analyzes how Josefina López utilizes the conventions of horror, and more specifically the genres of domestic horror and monstrosity, to redefine what is monstrous in her play, *Detained in the Desert*. I argue that López redefines domestic horror by drawing attention to the systematic oppression of Chicanx and Latinx immigrants in the borderlands. The analysis also demonstrates how bigotry and hatred can lead some to unjust—and even horrific—laws, such as Arizona's SB1070. López's characters are haunted by the violence, prejudices, and social injustices that Latinx continue to endure in the United States. By uncurtaining the various contributors to this anti-immigrant sentiment (the shock jockey, his listeners, the police officer that enforces SB1070, etc.) López demonstrates that to right this wrong, it cannot be done on an

individual level, such as seen in the traditional horror story; instead this play is a collective call for action to address the bias legal structures that systematically oppress Latinx immigrants.

Chapter Three

Chapter Three continues to provide insight on how Chicanx authors challenge the colonial binary epistemologies in horror to expose the complexities of the lived experience of the borderlands and calls for mestiza consciousness of interpretation, which includes what Catherine Ramirez calls "Chicanafuturism." I interrogate here how Christopher Carmona's short story "Strange Leaves" calls upon a mestiza conscious and restructures the horror genre. The mestiza conscious challenges binary modes of interpretation giving way to a more complex understanding of horror and terror in the borderlands. "Strange Leaves" utilizes the concept of Chicanafuturism through the use of old and modern technologies as a means of connecting the past to the present to reimagine the future.

The conclusion briefly explores how each work is a collective call to the reader to take responsibility and action and underscores the ways in which the horror genre may be deployed toward activist and material ends. Here I primarily draw upon the work of Avery F. Gordon, Tiffany A. López and William A. Calvo-Quirós. Each of these works provides an alternative narrative to confronting and overcoming the hauntings in our society.

CHAPTER II

RECONFIGURING THE SPACES OF DOMESTIC HORROR

Horror at its core invokes fear. It is a feeling that haunts you even after the story ends. Although there is not an all-inclusive formula to creating the perfect horror story, certain conventions are utilized. In an effort to describe the essential elements of horror, Linda Holland-Toll (2001) defines horror fiction as "any text which has extreme or supernatural elements induces (as its primary intention and/or effect) strong feeling of terror, horror, or revulsion in the reader, and generates a significant degree of unresolved dis/ease within society" (6). While Sandra Cisneros' 1992 short story "Woman Hollering Creek" has been commonly approached through its themes of space and claustrophobia, no one to date has interpreted the short story through the lens of horror. To do so, I argue, gives new insight by revealing the daily horrors faced by Mexican immigrant women. Furthermore, I suggest that Cisneros redefines domestic horror to expand outside of the home and encompass the space of the borderlands to reveal how patriarchal structures are reinforced by the geographical mapping of Seguín, Texas.

Home. It is such a simple word, yet it evokes strong emotions. For some it is "where the heart is." For theorist Gloria Anzaldúa (1999), it is where terror resides. Anzaldúa describes homophobia as the "fear of going home" (41). It is a fear that manifests from her gender and sexuality since she identified as a queer Chicana. Domestic horror is rooted in the American gothic. Ever since Edgar Allen Poe's 1839 short story "The Fall of the House of Usher," the haunted house motif has become an American tradition (Robinson 1961, 6). The haunted house

calls on themes of isolation and confinement, much of which is spatially produced. The domestic horror genre plays on these fears of the familiar when the spaces that are meant to protect become the walls that confine. Female authors, such as Charlotte Perkins Gilman's canonized "The Yellow Wallpaper" (1892) and Susan Glaspell's one act play "Trifles" (1916), have utilized the conventions of domestic horror to expose the patriarchal systems that confine them in the private sphere. Anzaldúa, though, extends the space of domestic horror to venture outside the private sphere and into the communities that geographically seclude victims of domestic abuse. Through these spatial configurations, patriarchal structures are upheld that bind women to domesticity. Cisneros challenges these structures by exposing the terrors of domestic abuse and redefining monstrosity.

Numerous scholars have examined "Woman Hollering Creek" through spatial theories that highlight domestic violence and patriarchy. Dalia Kandiyoti (2009) explores how the spatial enclosures of the small town curtails women's mobility are heightened for migrants (141-142). Mary Pat Brady (2002) examines how domestic violence is sanctioned by the arrangement of public space (133). Brady also examines how the public spatial organization paired with social isolation further creates a sense of claustrophobia as if the "violence is closing in" (134). Each of these scholars demonstrate how space shapes domesticity both in the private and public sphere. This chapter extends this research to explore how Cisneros uses spatial configurations to redefine domestic horror.

Remapping Domestic Horror In The Borderlands

"Woman Hollering Creek" centers on Cleófilas, a Mexican woman who dreams of finding the type of romance she sees in *telenovelas*. With these romantic ideals in mind, she leaves her father and six brothers to follow her husband, Juan Pedro, to a "town en el otro lado"

(Cisneros 1991, 43). Juan Pedro brings his bride to Seguin, Texas where she is separated from her family and is isolated from the outside world. In this isolation, he begins to physically abuse Cleófilas. Cleófilas finds herself alone and fearful of her life as well as that of her son and her unborn child.

Cleófilas romanticizes the United States as a place that will save her from "chores that never ended, six good-for-nothing brothers, and one old man's complaints" (43). She envisions her American dream, "*Seguín, Texas.* A nice sterling ring to it. The tinkle of money. She would get to wear outfits like the women on the *tele*, like Lucía Méndez. And have a lovely house, and wouldn't Chela be jealous" (45). Cleófilas' ideal life is centered around the domestic. She yearns for the "lovely house." There is no mention of her seeking a life outside of her home, no mention of her working or furthering her education. Cleófilas has no place in the public sphere and has faith that she will find all she needs in the safe space of the home. Instead Cleófilas encounters isolation and violence, a violence she has never experienced as "her parents never raised a hand to each other or to their children" (47). Cleófilas finds herself alone and in constant fear of the one person who vowed to love and protect her.

Cisneros uses domestic horror to not only expose the horrors of domestic violence in the private sphere but to also expose the patriarchal systems that condone it in the public sphere. In a pivotal scene, Cisneros uses horror imagery to describe the multiple incidents involving domestic violence in the community:

> Was Cleófilas just exaggerating as her husband always said? It seemed the newspapers were full of such stories. This woman found on the side of the road. This one's cadaver, this one unconscious, this one beaten blue. Her ex-husband, her husband, her lover, her father, her brother, her uncle, her friend, her co-

> worker. Always. The same grisly news in the page of the dailies. She dunked a glass under the soapy water for a moment – shivered. (52)

By listing the various men that become monsters, Cisneros is creating a sense that domestic abuse is a collective experience. Cleófilas is reciting this list much as one would recite a grocery list and, by placing it in the context of the daily chore of washing dishes, Cisneros is again highlighting the commonality of abuse. By doing this, Cisneros is emphasizing the helplessness that Cleófilas feels. She is not only trapped by her geography, but she is also trapped by her community's acceptance of domestic abuse; there is nowhere for her to run. This creates a feeling of claustrophobia which gives Cleófilas "a sense that violence in closing in on her" (Brady 2002, 134). Cleófilas' situation redefines domestic horror, as her terror is not merely confined to the walls of her home but extends to the community.

Another example of claustrophobia includes a scene where Cisneros foreshadows the despair of the "town en el otro lado" when Cleófilas' father tells her "I am your father, I will never abandon you" (43). These words serve as hope to Cleófilas and remind her that she is not alone. Yet, her father is a world away. Cisneros paints a picture of hopelessness and seclusion. "Her husband guarantees her isolation and dependence on him by refusing to allow her to write to or phone her family in Mexico. Her sense of isolation appears heightened by the spatial design of Seguin" (Brady 2002, 133). Seguin is a "town of dust, despair" whose geographical location physically secludes residents from each other.

Seguin, Texas in itself is rural and geographically isolated which reinforces the horror trope of seclusion. Cisneros illustrates this seclusion by describing Seguin as a town that has "nothing one could walk to…There is no place to go. Unless one counts the neighbor ladies. Soledad one side and Dolores on the other. Or the creek" (50). By having nowhere to walk or

run, Cleófilas is trapped in her abusive marriage. Cisneros further describes this isolation, "because the towns here are built so that you have to depend on husbands" (50). This is a powerful illustration of how Cleófilas is solely reliant on the one person who abuses her. Through this dependency, Cisneros is highlighting the helpless situations that domestic abuse victims live in. Brady notes, "In mapping the city, Cleófilas effectively shows how spatial structure reinforces the patriarchal systems that leaves her bleeding and bruised. Absent from this map are the battered woman's shelters, crisis care centers, or ESL schools that might help her respond to abuse" (Brady 134). It is through this mapping that Cleófilas evaluates her limited options. By not having in place the spaces that could ultimately educate and save domestic abuse victims, this mapping also exposes how the community systematically grants men authority over the female body.

Cleófilas' isolation is not merely geographical but also in the suffocating confinement that she feels imprisoned inside her house. It is within the walls of this house that she feels the most withdrawn as she lies "on her side of the bed listening to the hollow roar of the interstate" (Cisneros 47). The hollowness of the roar indicates that even though within earshot it is muffled by Cleófilas' remoteness. The interstate is typically a symbol for mobility. It is tragic how Cleófilas is so close to an interstate that has the power to free her but due to her isolation, lack of access to a vehicle or even the means to drive, and dependency on her husband, she is stuck inside her home with no means of escape. Cisneros continues to paint this horrifying isolation by continuing to list the sounds Cleófilas hears, "a distant dog barking, the pecan trees rustling like ladies in stiff petticoats – shh-shh-shh, shh-shh-shh-soothing her to sleep" (47). Again the sound of the dog barking is a means to illustrate that even though there are signs of life outside her home, Cleófilas is alone. It is like a scene from a horror story where the victim can hear

others yet is unable to cry for help. It creates a sense of despair. Cisneros use of a petticoat serves as a metaphor for confinement. Petticoats are symbolic of restriction particularly in regard to the women that wear them.

Patriarchal Monstrosity

Cleófilas is encircled by the town, which represents the public space that sanctions the abuse she receives privately. Her two neighbors Soledad and Dolores are symbols for the devoted woman, and the creek behind her house may be haunted by the ghost of La Llorona. All of her surroundings symbolize the suffocation that Cleófilas is experiencing. The neighbors and the reference to La Llorona illustrate the virgin, mother, whore trinity of the Chicana. Alicia Gaspar de Alba (2014) coins the Tres Marias Syndrome which offers three roles for Chicanas to inhibit, virgins, mothers, or whores. Whores embody the "bad woman" and challenge the patriarchy. It is this cultural imaginary of the virgin, mother, and whore that Cisneros is contesting through her female characters.

Cisneros uses the names of her characters as a means to exemplify the isolation that Cleófilas faces. Literally translated, Dolores means pain, and Soledad means solitude. The deliberate use of these names immediately highlights how Cleófilas finds herself literally stuck in between solitude on her left and pain on her right where her isolation leaves her to depend on an abusive husband. Cisneros also explains that the sadness the neighbor ladies face stems from men. Soledad calls herself a widow through it is never explained what actually happened to her husband as she "didn't mention him" (46). Dolores, on the other hand, is in constant mourning for "two sons who had died in the last war and one husband who died shortly after from grief" (47). Each woman embodies the community belief that a woman could not find happiness

without a man. They are the representations of the patriarchal ideal of the suffering mother and wife and serve as a model for Cleófilas of what the community expects a woman to be.

As if solitude and pain were not terrifying enough, Cleófilas' only other option is the creek behind her. The creek serves as another means to trap her inside her home and heightens her sense of claustrophobia. Cleófilas is warned, "don't go out there after dark, mijita. Stay near the house. No es bueno para la salud" (51). However, one could argue that the true horror is in the confinement of her home where "fists try to speak" (48). This truth the town may very well know, for it is full of gossips (Cisneros 50), yet its willingness to ignore what is visible is what makes domestic violence an apparition. Women are silenced into continuing the charade that society expects. Cleófilas "wonders if something as quiet as this drives a woman to the darkness of the trees" (51). It is in this quiet that Cleófilas swears that La Llorona is calling to her from the creek.

The first mention of La Llorona initially seems to uphold the terrifying folklore of the bad mother who murdered her children by drowning them. Although there are multiple variations of the folktale, the reason La Llorona murders her children revolves around a man who she yearns for or who has left her. La Llorona is the embodiment of the "bad woman" and is typically portrayed as a monster by the Chicano patriarchy. Furthermore, La Llorona is a monster that transcends borders and the "bad woman" image she represents is replicated "transnationally, transculturally, and transhistorically" (Gaspar de Alba 25). As La Llorona calls to the creek, she appears to be asking Cleófilas to repeat her same fate of being demonized and cast into the virgin, mother, whore trinity. However, La Llorona is not the only monster in this story. As Cleófilas' abuse is revealed it becomes apparent that her true monster is her husband and the systems that allow domestic abuse. "Maximiliano who was said to have killed

his wife in an ice-house brawl when she came at him with a mop. I had to shoot, he had said – she was armed" (51). This example illustrates that the community condones violence against women by the judicial system's unwillingness to prosecute Maximiliano for murdering his wife. This creates state-sanctioned terrorism that "grants male impunity in the exercise of violence against women" (Fregoso 17). By exposing this terror, Cisneros is reframing the bad mother image and illustrating how a woman may be drawn to the creek as the only means of escape.

Reimagining La Llorona As A Symbol of Hope

Through the character of Cleófilas, Cisneros is able to negotiate the domestic space to ultimately find assistance in the public sphere. Cisneros continues to challenge the virgin, mother, whore trinity by shifting the monster of the story from La Llorona to the abusive men. Cleófilas finds her salvation in neither her neighbors or the creek behind. Instead she finds help in Graciela, the lady who administers her sonogram, and her friend Felice. Again the names of the characters symbolize their significance. Graciela translates to grace and Felice to happiness. These two women are the complete opposite of their counterparts, solitude and pain. By finding an alternative, Cleófilas escapes the cultural imaginings of the virgin, mother, whore trinity. Graciela and Felice defy the cultural stereotypes and even make pointed comments to contest these stereotypes. When telling Felice Cleófilas' name, Graciela states, "I don't know. One of those Mexican saints, I guess. A martyr or something" (54). Although Graciela and Felice have escaped these binaries, Graciela is still able to recognize and reinforce the stereotypes when applied to a Mexican immigrant. Cisneros also juxtaposes Cleófilas' vision of the telenovela to the United States version when Graciela states, "A regular soap opera. *Qué vida*" (55). These two examples illustrate how women have been rewriting their roles and are no longer confined to the domestic sphere.

Felice is unlike any woman that Cleófilas has ever met. She breaks all gender roles which is illustrated by her driving a truck and using profanity. Most importantly, Felice becomes an alternative narrative for the wailing women. Felice does not fit into the Tres Marias As she crosses Woman Hollering Creek, she lets out a "yell as loud as any mariachi" (55). She does this because she is inspired by the name of the creek. Again Felice acknowledges the "good girl" ideal that women are supposed to live up to as she notes that nothing is named after a woman, "unless she's the Virgin. I guess you're only famous if you're a virgin" (55). Throughout the story, Cleófilas wonders who or what Woman Hollering Creek is named after, but in the end, Felice becomes the embodiment of the creek's name. By incorporating the folktale of La Llorona and using Felice to reimagine the folktale, Cisneros is transforming the monstrous wailing women into a symbol of hope.

Domestic horror is traditionally confined to the private sphere, the place that are most familiar whose walls are supposed to protect not suffocate. However, by reconfiguring the spaces of domestic horror to include the public sphere it exposes the systematic and legal structures that regulate a woman's body to her husband. Cleófilas found herself isolated not only by the walls of her abuser but also by the communities that geographically provided no safe haven for her. It was only through the collective actions of Graciela and Felice that Cleófilas is able to escape.

CHAPTER III

REDEFINING MONSTROSITY

Detained in the Desert is a fictional play written by Chicana feminist Josefina López as a response to the passing of SB 1070 in Arizona in 2010. SB 1070 is the controversial law that requires police to determine the immigration status of someone who is arrested or detained when there is "reasonable suspicion" that they are not in the United States of America legally. Unable to attend the protest that immediately followed the passing of SB 1070, López decided that the best way to combat the anti-immigrant sentiment was to write *Detained in the Desert*. Written in the genre of cineteatro, the play illustrates how the seemingly unrelated lives of three individuals intersect through the spread of hate. This chapter argues that López redefines domestic horror by drawing attention to the systematic oppression of Chicanx and Latinx immigrants in the borderlands. López also incorporates elements of the torture-horror genre to expose the complexities of monstrosity. López's characters are haunted by the violence, social injustices, and prejudices that plague the Latinx community in the United States. By focusing on the Latinx experience, López reveals the subjectivity of monstrosity. Furthermore, this chapter demonstrates how viewing *Detained in the Desert* through the lens of horror lends insight into the horrific experience of immigrants and redeploys horror as a tool for collective action against the systematic oppression of immigrants.

Detained in the Desert parallels the lives of Sandi Belen and Lou Becker who find themselves lost in the Arizona desert. After refusing to show proof of her citizen, Sandi is sent

to a detention center and is ultimately deported to Mexico. On her way to Mexico, her bus crashes and she is stranded in the desert. Meanwhile, Lou Becker is kidnapped by three assailants seeking vengeance for their brother who was murdered during a violent attack fueled by the hateful rhetoric Lou Becker preaches on his radio program, "Take Back America." Lou is taken to the desert and is eventually freed by one of his kidnappers. Lou meets Sandi in the desert as they are both searching for the way home. Sandi and Lou discover the hardships that undocumented immigrants endure on their journey to the United States.

Revealing The Subjectivity Of Monstrosity

Monsters typically represent our fears and are usually representative of the "other." In his introduction to *Modernity and Ambivalence,* sociologist Zygmunt Bauman (1991) describes societies as possessing dichotomies "crucial for the practice and the vision of social order the differentiating power hides as a rule behind one of the members of opposition. The second member is but *the* other of the first, the opposite (degraded, suppressed, exiled) side of the first and its creation" (16). Monsters become the marginalized, the vile, the foreign. In the *Philosophy of Horror, or, Paradoxes of the Heart,* Noel Carroll (1990) describes horror as a feeling of revolt from the monstrous:

> the characters shrink from the monsters, contracting themselves in order to find the grip of the creature but also to avert an accidental brushing against this unclean being. This does not mean that we believe in the existence of fictional monsters, as the characters in horror stories do, but that we regard the description or depiction of them as unsettling virtue. (17)

Monsters reflect the fears and tensions of particular time periods. Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* is emblematic of this, "Created at the cusp of the modern scientific age, Shelley's work captures

something of the spirit of the time, especially with regard to the sense that science would soon unlock the very secrets of life" (Tallon 2010, 36). Through this collective fear of science, Shelley utilizes horror to mirror the anxieties of her time. Shelley also exposes the monster that lies within. When one pictures the creature in Shelley's novel, one cannot help but connect that monster to Frankenstein, yet, Frankenstein is not the creature but the creator. Shelley's novel illustrates the complexities of determining what and who is monstrous. Both Frankenstein and the creature he produced exhibit monstrous traits, yet each also demonstrates the humanity within while exposing the collective fears of the times.

Monsters are shaped by the rhetoric uses to describe them. Otto Santa Ana (2002) studies the significance of discourse and how it shapes the national sentiment. By closely examining the negative ways in which Chicanx are described in national media, Santa Ana reveals how figures of speech, such as metaphors that equate immigrants to animals, impact public sentiment and ultimately lead to the passing of anti-immigrant laws (99-103). *Detained in the Desert* begins with Lou Becker, a white supremacist shock disc jockey, using such language on his show "Take Back America." Lou is praising Arizona SB1070 and states, "I am so proud of us for finally taking the correct measures to keep all the illegals out…This is not racism or racial profiling. We are just sick of paying for all those illegals that come to our country and state to live and breed like cockroaches" (135). Lou utilizes discourse of monstrosity and dehumanization by describing immigrants as "illegal" and cockroaches" yet he, in fact, is the monster.

Monstrosities Masked In A Shade of Blue

Monsters continue to be the embodiment of a society's collective fears, and as such the same creature may come to represent different anxieties. *Detained in the Desert* reveals the monstrous in the everyday lives of Sandi Belen, a U.S. citizen that is detained under SB1070.

The "everyday" life of Sandi is not the same as mainstream America because of their ethnicity. Sandi confronts a monster in the police officer who enforces SB1070. Law enforcement officers are supposed to serve and protect. Yet for many they are symbols of fear. Chicanx have been historically victimized by those entrusted to protect. Arturo J. Aldama (2003) chronicles the historical atrocities committed by state and federal agencies, such as the Texas Rangers and United States Border Patrol as well as county agencies, such as police forces and sheriff departments. The systematic violence that Latinx immigrants face stems from the fear of the "Other," and Aldama examines how the brutality justified by this fear in turns creates a fear of law enforcement in marginalized communities. Furthermore, Jason De León (2015) categories the structural violence of immigration enforcement practices that produce brutal trauma on immigrants by geographically forcing immigrants to come into the United States through the desert. Through the historical and systematic violence a new monster is brought to the forefront. As a young Mexican American, she is seen as "Other" and as such becomes racialized and sexualized. This is illustrated in the following scene of the play where Sandi and her undocumented Canadian boyfriend Matt are questioned by an Arizona Policeman:

ARIZONA POLICEMAN. How long have you known her? Or do you even know her?

MATT. Excuse me.

ARIZONA POLICEMAN. Where did you pick her up?

SANDI. Hey!

MATT shoots SANDI a look that communicates, "Let me handle this."

MATT. Officer, this is my girlfriend of six months. We met in college and –

ARIZONA POLICEMAN. Let me see her documents.

MATT. Documents?

ARIZONA POLICEMAN. Son, it is a crime to transport an illegal alien in exchange for sexual favors. (López 148)

The Arizona Policeman assumes that Sandi is a prostitute. He has categorized her as a monster, an illegal alien, that is no longer entitled to civic rights of U.S. citizens. He refuses to listen to what either Sandi or Matt have to say. It does not matter that she herself is a United States citizen.

SANDI. I'm speaking to you in English. Do you notice I don't have an accent, and I'm not afraid of you? Doesn't that tip you off that I am an over-entitled American who went to college and is exercising her right to civil disobedience?

ARIZONA POLICEMAN. Lady, I don't care what you think you are. (149-150)

SB1070 gives this policeman the legal standing to detain Sandi based solely on his perception. Arizona Policeman deems Sandi as "illegal" due his racialization of her brown body (McMahon 2016). It is this perception that finally brings Sandi to the realization that her reality is very different from that of her boyfriend. "No, Matt, you will never know what it's like to me. You don't have dark skin. Nobody ever questions your right to exist or succeed. You have no clue how hard it is to be an American when you look like me!" (López 164). Arizona Policemen represents the dominant white patriarchal narrative that plays on the fear of the "other," shifting monstrosity to immigrants. However, in this moment of clarity, Sandi realizes that her brown body marks her as "other" regardless of her citizenship. Sandi finds herself countering the dominant narrative, and this different life experience turns policemen into monsters who can detain her at their whim. It does not matter that she is clearly a United States citizen because all the policeman needs is a suspicion that she may not be, and this gives him the authority to question, harass, and ultimately detain her. Sandi's defiance is the only resistance she has to an

unjust system, yet her defiance only gets her deported, illustrating that pen to paper citizenship does not matter.

Torture-Horror: An Individualist Means Of Rectification

Detained in the Desert uses torture as a means to shock her audience. In the "Justification of Torture-Horror," Jeremy Morris (2010) uses certain criteria to define torture-horror. "It must include depictions of noninterrogrational torture that are realistic, accusatory, and essential to the narrative" (43). López's play can be viewed through this lens. Morris also discusses how torture-horror in many cases becomes a form of retribution. The retribution element in torture-horror serves as a means to connect the audience with the torturer. As Morris states, "by putting the audience on the side of the torturer in some way or other, the audience is disturbed in a way that goes beyond the fear generated by the bare depictions of torture" (55). The torture scene then becomes a means to right a wrong and to question if the reasons for the torture are justified.

Morris (2010) uses the film *Last House on the Left* as the classic example of torture as retribution. In this film, two teenage girls (Mari and Phyllis) are kidnapped by a gang of criminals on the run and are tortured, raped, and killed. After these violent acts, the criminals disguise themselves as traveling salesmen and coincidentally end up in Mari's parents' home. Her parents soon realize what the criminals have done to their daughter and enact their revenge becoming torturers. The film illustrates how two ordinary, functional individuals become driven to torture. It is a singular act that becomes resolved once the criminals are subject to the violence and death they, themselves, are guilty of inflicting.

López utilizes the conventions of torture-horror in *Detained in the Desert* but redeploys the genre to illustrate the systematic oppression of Latinx especially of the immigrant. It is not a

singular act that drives the characters in the play to resort to torture. Instead, it is a series of actions stemming from anti-immigrant sentiment cemented by law with the passing of SB1070 that leads to this horrendous act. By showing the various contributors to this anti-immigrant sentiment (the shock jockey, his listeners, the police officer that enforces SB1070), López is demonstrating that in order to right this wrong, it cannot be done on an individual level, such as with the *Last House on the Left*; instead this play is a call for action. Scene 3 of *Detained in the Desert* begins with a young Mexican man leaving a voicemail for his brother, "Paco, I'm calling you to ask you to please send money to my mother this week because I have to buy clothes for my daughter and with the rent…" (151). This message tells the audience that Raul is struggling to provide not only for his children but also for his mother. He is a family man. Suddenly he is approached by three young white men:

> YOUNG WHITE MAN #1 (*voice over*). You fucking wetback, go back to your own country!
>
> *We hear the sound of a baseball bat making contact with flesh and then a bloodcurdling scream.*
>
> YOUNG MAN #2 (*voice over*). Take that you scum of the earth! You fucking criminal!
>
> YOUNG MEXICAN MAN (*voice over).* Auxilio! Ayudenme! (Help! Help me!)
>
> YOUNG MAN #3 (*voice over).* You piece of shit alien! Bringing leprosy and tuberculosis – you deserve to die!
>
> YOUNG MAN #2 (*voice over)*. Die cockroach! Die!

The use of violent sound helps to highlight the brutality of this scene, "*We hear the sound of a baseball bat making contact with flesh and then a bloodcurdling scream"* (López 152). It ends with "*The sounds of the attack subside. A final blow is heard as it smashes the cell phone, and*

after that nothing else is heard" (López 152). The silence is deafening. Language also speaks volumes in this scene. The derogatory words that the young men use while beating Raul are filled with hatred and are the exact sentiments heard on Lou's radio talk show. By comparing Raul to a "cockroach," the young men are reducing him to vermin, an "unclean being" and in doing so demonstrate the monster that they see. López is again using discourses of monstrosity. However, this scene is a clear example of how the "other" becomes the victim, not the monstrous. Although Raul is killed by young white males, his true monster is Lou, the disc jockey who provides these young men with the justification to commit their atrocities.

Immediately following this scene, Lou is tied to a chair and gagged. He has been kidnapped by three figures who humiliate and torture him. It becomes apparent that the reason for this torture stems from Lou's talk show.

> MEDIUM FIGURE. Shut the fuck, pendejo! This isn't your racist radio show where you can say whatever bullshit comes out of your caca brain. You are our special guest, and we are going to give you the royal treatment. (*He turns to SHORT figure.*) Did you get the dildo and the rope?
>
> SHORT FIGURE. I sure did.
>
> MEDIUM FIGURE. Just sit back and relax. Yeah, it's better if you relax. It will go easier for you.
>
> LOU. No, you can't do this to me! This is not right!
>
> *LIGHTS FADE OUT. LOU screams.* (López 156)

Although this scene is graphic in nature, the audience soon learns that the kidnappers are Raul's siblings. Again sound plays a vital role in Scene 5 as the stage direction states:

As the tall figure goes to press the play back button to launch the voicemail recording, LOU yells.

LOU (*begging*). No, don't play that again! Please don't play that again!

At this moment the audience is reminded of the brutality of Raul's murder. Lou becomes tortured by the sound of the torture he has perpetuated. The recorded death combined with Scene 1 help the audience sympathize with Lou's kidnappers. As Morris states, "by putting the audience on the side of the torturer in some way or other, the audience is disturbed in a way that goes beyond the fear generated by the bare depictions of torture" (Morris 55). The torture scene then becomes a means to right a wrong and to question if the reasons for the torture are justified. It is a singular act and follows the same conventions of torture-horror where the plot is resolved once the criminals are subjected to the violence and death they, themselves, are guilty of inflicting.

It is also during this scene that the Figures remove their masks and reveal their faces. The scene ends when "*The SHORT FIGURE takes off her mask to reveal a young woman with long hair"* (López 163). This is yet another shocking revelation as it seems unimaginable that a young woman would take part is such cruelty. It is also in this revelation that Lou places his trust in the Short Figure. In Scene 8, Lou is left alone with the Short Figure and begins to plea for his life. "I know you don't want to kill me… I can tell by your kind eyes that you are different from the others" (López 169). However, the Short Figure is quick to challenge Lou's perceptions, "So, just because I'm the only female in the group, you think I'm stupid enough to believe you" (López 169). She could have easily said that femininity makes her less likely to be a killer. Short Figure engages Lou in conversation and earns his trust by telling him of their plans to kill him. "Well, we debated all the ways we wanted to kill you. We researched all the ways people have committed crimes against Latinos, and they thought setting you on fire was

poetic." (López 170). Lou places his misguided trust in her and believes that she will aid in his escape. Instead her real plan is to release Lou into the desert to die.

Short Figure becomes the embodiment of the "female killer," and as such shows no mercy or remorse. Carol J. Clover (1992) examines the motives of the female killer, "Nor is their motive psychosexual; their anger derives in most cases not from childhood experience but from specific moments in their adult lives in which they have been abandoned or cheated on by men" (29). Short Figure is much like the female killers Clover describes her anger seems to be derived from the murder of her brother. However, Short Figure's anger stems from more that this singular event. She has become hardened by a society that allows for her brother's murderers to go free and accepts anti-immigrant laws. She rages against the systemic injustice. In her attempt to gain control she becomes the dominant leader amongst her siblings. She transforms into this monstrous feminine or as one of her brother calls her, "you are one evil bitch" (López 2011, 182). The Short Figure begins to exhibit masculine qualities which is demonstrated in her speech, "He's as good as dead! Now grow some balls and help me pack up this place so we can get the hell out of town" (López 2011, 182). In order to assert her power over her brothers, she emasculates Medium Figure who is concerned with the consequences of their actions. In her fury, she has become the monster she despises. Her actions are mirror images to the young white males who took the life of her brother. It is her brother Medium Figure that comes to this realization.

MEDIUM FIGURE. I'm starting to feel bad about this.

SHORT FIGURE. Feel bad about those white teenage boys getting away with killing our brother. Feel bad about that!

MEDIUM FIGURE. Yeah, but what did we accomplish? We humiliated that guy, then he goes to the desert to die. That doesn't change anything. He is just one of the many who keep spreading hate talk and–

TALL FIGURE. Hey, let's go kidnap another one. I really enjoyed this.

SHORT FIGURE. Me too. It won't bring our brother back, but it keeps me from going insane.

MEDIUM FIGURE. You are insane. We are all insane for doing this. (López 183)

The only thing accomplished by this act was the characters' transformation into the monstrous. Their attempt to right a systemic wrong by an individual act did not produce any societal change. Instead, it made them into the criminals that society always deemed them to be.

Ghostly Reminders Of The Past

Hauntings play a key role in *Detained in the Desert*. Much like torture-horror, typical hauntings occur in a singular place. "The Terrible Place, most often a house or tunnel in which the victims sooner or later find themselves, is a venerable element of horror" (Clover 78). Much like torture-horror, the Terrible Place is conquered by a single act. Such examples include *The Amityville Horror*, *The Conjuring,* and *Poltergeist.* Each of these films focuses on a family that must confront the evils in their Terrible Place, there is a showdown and good prevails. It is an individual fight, not a collective one. In *Ghostly Matters,* sociologist Avery F. Gordon approaches ghosts through systematic hauntings. "In haunting, organized forces and systematic structures that appear removed from us make from us make their impact felt in everyday life in a way that confounds our analytic separations and confounds the social separations themselves" (Gordon 19). Individuals confront the seething presence of the past through these systematic

structures. The two hauntings in *Detained in the Desert* serve to expose the prejudices and inhumanities that exist in our society.

Gordon identifies that in order to make changes in our social life, we must "learn to identify hauntings and reckon with ghosts, must learn how to make contact with what is without a doubt often painful, difficult, and unsettling" (23). While in the detention center, Sandi meets a Milagros, an immigrant woman who reminds Sandi of a painful childhood memory in which she took part in the racial teasing of an immigrant classmate also named Milagros. Sandi becomes part of the abusive group in hopes that by taking part in the teasing she will be accepted. She is successful and is able to assimilate into the dominant culture but confuses

> One day at lunchtime, some kids were picking on her and calling her a "Beaner." She looked to me for help. I saw that she needed me to say something or step in front of her and protect her. But all those white kids… well, I was scared. I couldn't stand up to all of them, and I was afraid they would hurt me… So I started calling her a "Beaner," too and joined in the name calling… After that day I was accepted, and nobody ever called me a "Beaner" or a "Wetback." I stopped speaking Spanish and stopped calling myself Sandra and started calling myself "Sandi." As Sandi, I would fit in better… I was treated different and I liked that... (176-177)

This recollection is pivotal in defining Sandi's past. She chose to "fit in" and in doing so rejects a part of herself. This is a key moment in her life, and she acknowledges, "I have never forgotten Milagros. I always wondered what happened to her" (López 177). After her confession, that Sandi perceives she is sharing her cell with the same immigrant child she teased. "I am so ashamed of myself, and I have never forgotten you or that awful day, and I am haunted by you and…" (López 178). The truth is that Sandi is not haunted by Milagros; she is haunted by

her conscious effort to distance herself from cultural identity. Garcia Bedolla defines this as the "process of selective dissociation: they are maintaining their identification with their ethnic group, but instead of dissociating with the entire group they are excluding from their definitions of their identity those groups they see as perpetuating the negative image of their group, namely immigrants" (276). It is this dissociation that Sandi chooses when she joins the group that is taunting Milagros. Sandi soon learns that Milagros is never physically present.

FEMALE GUARD. Hey, you won't be the first person to have seen a ghost around here.

SANDI. I don't believe in ghosts… She was real. Her name was Milagros.

FEMALE GUARD. We don't have any Milagros booked here today. (López 179)

Sandi's belief that Milagros was present, in the flesh, illustrates how powerful her need is to rectify the past. Sandi has now learned that she can never truly distance herself from her ethnicity. Her education, language, and place of birth do not save her from deportation.

In Scene 11, Sandi and Lou are confronted by the ghost of Artemio Hernandez. Artemio is an immigrant who gets killed crossing the desert. He represents all those who lose their lives in search for a better future. Ironically, he becomes a savior for Sandi and Lou as they are about to give up and literally just lie down and die.

LOU. I want to die. I just want to get this over with.

SANDI. No. We can't die. We have to live to return the bones to his wife and find out who murdered this man. (López 189)

Artemio gives them a new purpose to continue moving. This is also the first step where Sandi realizes that she must aid others. Her survival is no longer just about her needs. This is where she truly transforms into a political activist. Her time in the detention center aided in this transformation, but she was still working on her own self-interest and wounded pride. It is a

powerful scene that illustrates the lengths people will go through in search of a better life for themselves and their families. The fact that two United States citizens are having the same shared experience of the journey of an undocumented immigrant is a means to have the audience relate to the horrific experiences that undocumented immigrants face. This shared experience transforms Sandi and Lou.

A Collective Call To Rectify

Josefina López uses *Detained in the Desert* as a collective call to action against the anti-immigration laws that are plaguing U.S. society. Sandi's migration throughout the play is significant because it maps out the various roads that immigrants travel on. Sandi begins the play driving through the deserts of Arizona on her way home from the University of Texas at Austin. Each road exposes a horror or monster that the immigrant must confront, law enforcement, the ghosts of those before them, and the deadly desert. It is because of this migration that Sandi transforms into a political activist. Sonia Saldivar-Hull defines this activism as transfronteriza feminism:

> This brand of 'border feminism' is a practice of feminism that moves abstractions to practices, that engages Chicana feminist theories with social and cultural productions in multiple Chicana and Mexicana locations and that also breaks with Euro-American feminisms' geopolitical racist and elitist mappings" (252).

Her introduction into the play foreshadows the horrors she will soon face, "Yeah, it's kind of scary. This reminds me of a horror film I saw once… I would hate to have a tire blow out and get stuck here" (López 141). From this dark road, she is sent to a detention center where she refuses to produce her birth certificate. Even though she is detained, she refuses to relate to the undocumented immigrant woman with her protesting, "But I'm a U.S. citizen! I don't belong

here. I'm not like those people" (López 158). It is not until she comes to terms with her past that Sandi becomes willing to connect with immigrants. When she realizes that she is actually going to be deported, she tries to produce proof of her citizenship. Her detention officer tells her, "Well your mother can go get you in Nogales, then" (López 180). On her way to Nogales, her bus driver loses control of the bus. Gunshots ensue, and Sandi gets lost in the dark. She ends up in the same desert she had previously compared to a horror film. She is eventually found by Ernesto and ends the play on the road back home, committed to continue the fight against anti-immigrant legislation. Ultimately Sandi's journey provides the means to overcoming the horror presented in this play.

The fight against hatred and bigotry cannot be fought with violence. In doing so, we will only become monsters ourselves, much like Raul's siblings. We must also not be like Lou, who is transformed yet takes no action to right the wrongs he now sees. By merely fading into the sunset we leave the door open for the next conservative shock disc jockey to take the reins. The final scene shows a transformed Sandi who joins Ernesto in his calling to aid those in most need. Sandi becomes vocal in her protest and calls in to the radio show to say, "Ernesto Martinez wants me to remind you… that if you create laws that are unfair, we will protest, and we will stop them, and we will continue to fight! Immigration reform now!" (López 195). Showing us all the alternatives, López challenges her audiences to become Sandi.

In *Detained in the Desert,* Josefina López utilizes the conventions of horror, more specifically the genres of torture-horror and ghostly hauntings, to redefine what is monstrous. By redeploying the horror genre López illustrates the systematic oppression of Latinx especially of immigrants. López also demonstrates how bigotry and hatred can lead some to violence. It is not a singular act that drives the characters in the play to resort to torture. Instead it is a series of

actions stemming from anti-immigrant sentiment cemented by law with the passing of SB1070 that leads to this horrendous act. By showing the various contributors to this anti-immigrant sentiment (the shock jockey, his listeners, the police officer that enforces SB1070, etc.) López is demonstrating that in order to right this wrong, it cannot be done on an individual level, such as seen in the traditional horror story, instead this play is a collective call for action.

CHAPTER IV

REDEFINING HORROR IN “STRANGE LEAVES”

Throughout the United States/Mexico border there have been reports of women’s undergarments have been sighted on trees. Commonly referred to as “rape trees,” these sites are where immigrant smugglers sexually assault migrant women and adorn the surrounding trees with their victim’s undergarments. The stark contrast of the delicate garments against the harsh Texas sun exemplifies the unnatural setting where the intimate sphere collides with the public. It is a horrific reminder of the terrifying experiences that Central American migrant women endure in hopes of crossing into the United States. Rape trees have been used by various media outlets as an example of the brutal nature of the smugglers. The national narrative surrounding rape trees has completely ignored the victims. However, recent media attention has centered on the influx of Central American immigration into South Texas when in actuality this immigration has a much longer history.

In his award winning 2014 short story, “Strange Leaves,” Christopher Carmona hybridizes elements of domestic and body horror in order to fully convey the horrific experiences migrant woman face when attempting to enter the United States. In their introduction to their dossier published in the journal *Aztlán*, Cathryn Merla-Watson and B.V. Olguín speak to how horror “is a mode of reading that enables us to access nuances in established genres” (2016). Thus, elements of both domestic and body horror becomes the lens of understanding that illustrates the borderland culture production hybridity that “Strange Leaves” projects. “Strange

Leaves" centers around the experience of a Guatemalan immigrant, Shī. Shī's story is told in a series of recollections and communications that are fractured and nonlinear, leaving us to piece together a series of events that leads to Shī's rape. The fractured writing style symbolized the trauma that Shī has endured. Carmona incorporates hashtags as a collective call to acknowledge the existence of rape trees; however, by centering the story on Shī, Carmona highlights the systemic oppression that leaves Latinx immigrants helpless. Carmona infuses elements of domestic and body horror to illustrate the horrific experiences Latinx immigrants face on their journey to the United States. Carmona does not follow the traditional conventions of horror, but rather he creates a new subgenre that speaks to the materiality of this text.

Anzaldúa's *Borderlands/La Frontera* describes how combining two cultures creates a synthesis that is more than a sum of its parts, "the lifeblood of two worlds merging to form a third country – a border culture" (25). This description makes Anzaldúa's theory of the borderlands the most appropriate lens for examining "Strange Leaves" because her concept of intimate terrorism is both domestic and body horror. Applying Anzaldúa's definition of the "new mestiza" breaks the binary classifications of the horror genre; thus, a new genre is born, one that merges domestic and body horror and eradicates the temporal lines of terror and horror to expose the intimate terror that Latinas face every day on the borderlands. This fusion of domestic, body, terror, and horror synthesis creates a new genre of borderlands horror. Borderlands horror is not rooted in spiritual hauntings; on the contrary, borderlands horror sheds light on the historical atrocities that shape the present.

"Strange Leaves" also incorporates Chicanafuturism which fuses old and modern technologies to connect the past with the present to envision a future for Latinx that is centered on healing. Anzaldúa's mestiza consciousness is born contesting binaries, "in attempting to

work out a synthesis, the self has added a third element which is greater than the sum of its severed parts" (80). Similarly, Chicanafuturism is a synthesis of colonial and postcolonial histories and it disrupts "age-old racist and sexist binaries that exclude Chicanas and Chicanos from the vision of the future" (Ramirez 181). Carmona utilizes elements of mestiza consciousness and Chicanafuturism to "defamiliarize the familiar" (190) to expose the daily horrors of the borderlands.

Chicanx redeployment of horror does not merely mimic conventional white dominant narratives. Chicanx literature collapses mainstream genre classifications in a matter that combines and retools genre categories such as body and domestic horror. It also forces us to examine the relationship between terror and horror. Each of these classifications is based on spatial and temporal boundaries that converge in the lived experiences of migrant women. I argue that borderlands horror stories force us to collapse these common definitions, and in doing so provide new interpretive lenses to understand the horrific and terrific experiences of migrant women in the United States/Mexico borderlands. I propose that to fully understand the unique experiences of Latinxs, we use Gloria Anzaldúa's theory of the borderlands as well as her concept of mestiza consciousness as a theoretical framework for holistically approaching the horror genre.

A Fusion Of Horror

Gloria Anzaldúa's concept of mestiza consciousness breaks down the colonial binary modes of interpretation, allowing for a fusion of horror subgenres that do not merely merge but create a new horror genre. In his *Danse Macabre* (1981), Stephen King defines horror as the moment where the reader comes face to face with the monstrous. It is no longer in the mind but instead it shows us "something that is physically wrong" (22). He distinguishes terror as the

anticipation of what might be without actually witnessing anything monstrous, “the imagination alone is stimulated” (23). Each definition is temporal, yet in the lived experiences of Latinx in the borderlands these definitions merge to form a new genre where horror, terror, and other classifications, such as domestic and body horror, become intertwined, erasing the boundaries. Anzaldúa identifies the relentless terror as “intimate terrorism,” which Megan Sibbert (2013) defines as the residual fallout that stems from the constant threat of violence. Terror and horror are temporal, yet intimate terrorism reveals that in the lived experiences of Latinas in the borderlands, these definitions collapse. A close reading of “Strange Leaves” reveals the horrific experiences of Latinas, such as rape, and how as subjects further disenfranchised from the state, they more often confront daily, perpetual violence that tries to control their reproductive bodies (Sibbett 2013, 244). This constant fear creates “the idea that space ‘just is,’ and the illusion that the external world is readily knowable and not in need of evaluation” (McKittrick, xv). Carmona illustrates that intimate terrorism erases the temporal lines between terror and horror to challenge the normalcy that allows systematic oppression to continuously allow the sexual attacks on Latinx immigrants to be ignored.

Domestic horror confronts the fears of the familial turning against us. It uses the horror tropes of confined spaces and seclusion to turn the home into a terrifying place. Domestic horror is spatial. Anzaldúa’s theory of the borderlands recognizes that space and borders are socially constructed and that this space becomes an enclosure for migrant woman facing abuse therefore redefining domestic horror to encompass more than just a physical dwelling. Furthermore, when Anzaldúa’s theorization of the borderlands as home is paired with Katherine McKittrick’s *Demonic Grounds: Black Women and the Cartographies of Struggle* (2006), it becomes clear that geography is not only socially constructed but that these constructs are “accentuated by

racist paradigms of the past and their ongoing hierarchical patterns" (xii). McKittrick states that just as space is a social construct through mappings and borders, concealment and marginalization are social processes. Therefore, when examining the space that is the borderlands, it is essential to examine the connections among geography, history, and concealment that shape the present day lives of immigrant women.

Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza (1999) conceptualizes the unique space of the border and exposes the horrific experiences that Mexican immigrant women face in this particular socio-historical space. Adam Lowenstein examines the manner in which historical trauma shapes popular culture production in *Shocking Representation: Historical Trauma, National Cinema, and the Modern Horror Story* (2005). Lowenstein states, "Auschwitz. Hiroshima, Vietnam. These are names associated with specific places and occurrences, but they are also wounds in the fabric of culture and history that bleed through conventional confines of time and space" (1). The Mexican/American border could aptly be added to his list as Anzaldúa (1999) conceives of the borderlands in similarly horrifying terms: "The U.S. – Mexican border *es una herida abierta* where the Third World grates against the first and bleeds. And before a scab forms it hemorrhages again, the lifeblood of two worlds merging to form a third country – a border culture" (25). Her bloody description of the border calls forth the bloody history of the region. It is a space where historical traumas continue to shape the lives of its residents. Furthermore, Jason Deleon (2015) describes the borderlands as a *space of exemption* where human and constitutional rights are suspended in the name of national security (68). Borderlands horror sheds light on the systematic violence that is condoned within this space of exemption.

Body horror, on the other hand, is used to classify texts that illustrate a transformation or attack upon the body which are typically graphic depictions. In his monograph *Body Gothic:*

Corporeal Transgression in Contemporary Literate and Horror Film, Xavier Aldana Reyes (2014) acknowledges the difficulty and looseness when defining body horror. Body horror ranges from texts that "generates fear from abnormal states of corporeality, or from an attack upon the body" (52). Reyes examines visceral forms of corporeal transgression to analyze how the horror genre "has largely left the spiritual world behind and prioritized the material reality of the body" (27). Although Carmona does not incorporate graphic forms of body horror, he uses an attack on the body to illustrate the materiality of the violence that is presently occurring on the borderlands.

Christopher Carmona utilizes the genre of body horror to expose the horrific experiences of Latina immigrant women in his short story, "Strange Leaves." More specifically, Carmona rewrites the horror subgenre of rape-revenge. Rape has become so common in our national narrative that it appears to go unnoticed. "Given the ubiquity of representations of rape, even someone who is a moderate consumer of mass media would have difficulty spending a week (possibly even an entire day) without coming across the subject. The existence of rape is thus naturalized in U.S. life, perhaps seemingly so natural that many people are unaware of the frequency with which they encounter these representations" (Projansky 2001, 2). Bradley Kaye (2014) defines the rape-revenge genre as rape being central to the plot. The rape catapults the victim to become a remorseless killer who seeks revenge (33-36). The protagonists in these narratives are white females. Furthermore, Projansky (2001) examines how rape is defined in particular ways, mainly that the central figure is trying to achieve the "sameness" as males particularly through economic success, and the central figure is a white heterosexual, middle-class woman (12). It partly due to their place in society that these women are able to assert their power. Violence is a means to find retribution but also illustrates that this is the only form of

justice that the women will find. The women feel powerless in a male dominated society and in a judicial system that places the rape victim on trial. In an effort to rectify the trauma they have encountered, “the avenger or self-defender will become as directly or indirectly violent as her assailant… these films are in some measure *about* the transformation” (Clover 1993, 123) In doing so the victims become the monsters. Carmona redeploys these conventions by showing another degree to the powerlessness that Latina immigrants face. Having no knowledge, these women learn to accept their rape as a part of everyday life. Carmona reimagines the traditional ending of the rape-horror plot by criticizing how rape has become the price for migrating into the United States.

Throughout “Strange Leaves,” Carmona fuses old and modern technologies as a means of connecting the past with the present. By using an old form of technology, Carmona demonstrates how the past shapes the lived experiences of Latinx bodies on the borderlands. Donna Haraway (1991) redefines the term “cyborg” as “a cybernetic organism, a hybrid of machine and organism, a creature of social reality as well as a creature of fiction” (7). Haraway extends the cyborg to propose a new theoretical framework, *cyborg feminism*. Catherine S. Ramirez (2002) connects Haraway’s cyborg feminism with Anzaldúa’s mestiza consciousness because both celebrate hybridity and pluralism. Each represent a synthesis of binaries that fuse the past with the future. Carmona reveals how technology, specifically social media sites, have made computers vital to human connection. In doing so, Carmona incorporates the Ramirez’s concept of Chicanafuturism. Chicanafuturism explores the ways that technology, both old and modern, transforms Mexican/Mexican American identity (Ramirez 2008). Chicanofuturism “articulates colonial and postcolonial histories of indigenismo, mestizaje, hegemony and survival.” (187) by using the tools of the present to remember the past. Chicanafuturism is the

new 21st century mestizaje as it combines old and modern technologies to bridge the past and the present to ultimately reimagine Latinx identity.

Horror, History, And Hashtags

"Strange Leaves" is a nonlinear, fractured account of Shī's, a Guatemalan immigrant, journey to the United States told through various perspectives. Carmona incorporates new and old technology through the utilization of hashtags, cellphones, and an iTelegram. The indigenous name Shī is itself a connection to the past and is a stark contrast to the modern technology present throughout the story. Each section is separated by a hashtag that serves as both a title and a call to action, immediately signaling that this is a modern story. The first section of the story is titled #immigrationshuffle to highlight the systematic handling of immigrants and is told through the perspective of Shī. The story begins in the middle of her journey as she arrives at the Sacred Heart Catholic Shelter in McAllen, Texas.

Hashtags are a means to connect people from various locations, backgrounds, ethnicities, and gender for a collective cause. Twitter (2016) defines hashtags as a means to mark topics in a tweet and states that it was organically created by Twitter users to categorize messages. The use of hashtags throughout the story contributes to the complex hybridity and brings multiple identities, histories and peoples together. One such way is as a means to connect people from various nationalities, races, gender, socioeconomic backgrounds, to come together to create collective action. In this manner, hashtags have infiltrated US politics such as #feelthebern to spark social movements such as #blacklivesmatter. Carmona utilizes a hashtag at the beginning of each section not only as a title but as a means to illustrate the two main ways in which people have incorporated hashtags throughout social media.

However, hashtags have also become overused by social media users as a means for self-promotion or to verbalize the mundane. Hootsuite.com has created a blog explaining the do's and don'ts of using hashtags. The blog makes it clear that hashtags are not supposed to be too specific as hashtags are a means to connect and engage social media users to a common theme. When social media users incorporate hashtags that are too specific and individualistic they are essentially disengaging with fellow social media users. By incorporating these types of individualized hashtags into the story, Carmona is highlighting the unique experience that Latinx immigrants face.

The hashtag #refugeegirlatmydoorstep is an example of one instance in which Carmona utilizes a very unique hashtag to illustrate how technology also serves as a means to disconnect us. The section is formatted as a phone call illustrating Holden's need to reach out. He has just taken Shi in and needs support and reaches out to the same person he initially contacted when he first found Shi. Throughout the conversation it is apparent that Ronnie is hesitant about Holden taking Shi in stating "because you're a 35-year-old man. Recently divorced. With an underage immigrant girl in your apartment." Ronnie is pointing out the societal judgment that would stem from Holden's decision, the assumption that Holden's willingness to help will have ulterior motives. However, at the end of the conversation, Ronnie asks Holden to "Hit me up on Facebook. Give me progress report pics." Although Facebook is a social media platform with the goal of connecting people from various backgrounds and locations it is also a way to highlight the best of your life, thus creating the appearance that life is perfect. Facebook has become a platform for narcissistic behavior such as selfies and constant postings. Yet, it is also a way to show support of various causes, for example the Ice Bucket Challenge in 2014 began as a way to raise money for ALS which began as a dare. The Ice Bucket Challenge was a social

media sensation as it allowed people to star in videos while supporting a cause. Thus the Ice Bucket Challenge is hugely problematic as it becomes a means to reinforce narcissist behaviors prevalent throughout social media networks. By asking Holden to send progress pictures, Ronnie is promoting this social media culture of hybridity that allows one to help others while highlighting their individual sacrifice. Shī is an immigrant that has been abandoned by a system that does not have the means to adequately provide for her physical and mental needs. The "progress report pics" serve to connect Shī to the world via Facebook but will not foster the support she needs to overcome her trauma. It serves as another means of exploitation.

Collective movements have invaded social media platforms. One of the most marketable of these is the breast cancer awareness movement which has been branded with its pink ribbon. Sulik (2012) defines the pink ribbon culture as a marketplace that unites sentimentality, support, self-transformation while promising medical technological advances and the denigration between death and dying. Sulik argues that it has impeded the fight against cancer because it has become a multi-billion-dollar industry that disconnects the realities of breast cancer. The pink ribbon culture reinforces gender norms by the image that "the she-ro is a feminine hero with attitude, style, and verve to kick cancer's butt while wearing 6-inch heels and pink lipstick" (16). The she-ro is a stark contrast to the young Guatemalan immigrant Haldon finds wearing nothing: "no pants, no panties, just a pair of sandals and a white shirt with a pink ribbon on it." The fact that a shirt reading "Help End Breast Cancer" has found its way onto Shī is commentary on the multi-billion-dollar breast cancer industry has infiltrated all aspects of American life. The mass paraphernalia of the breast cancer movement floods American culture and can be found everywhere, from the National Football League's football fields to a Yoplait yogurt lid. However, the movement that was sparked as a means to connect, unite, and support breast cancer

survivors has now created a disconnect between "participants who walk or run for the cure donning smiling faces and pink paraphernalia" (12) and the harsh realities of those who have been diagnosed and are fighting breast cancer. Furthermore, the hyper visibility of the breast cancer movement perpetrates the invisibility of both the reality of breast cancer and the multiple forms of exploitation and abuse that women face. Carmona is making visible these lived experiences by juxtaposing the image of the pink ribbon against the exploited and abused body of Shī.

The other way in which hashtags are incorporated through social media is as a means for collective action. #rapetreesarereal is call for the creation of a new social movement that will bring to light the reality of Latinx exploitation on the Borderlands. The #rapetreesarereal section is written in the form of an iTelegram. iTelegrams are a fusion of old technology with a modern twist. By infusing the old with the new, Carmona is connecting the past with the present. The iTelegram is being sent by Haldon, the man who finds Shī and ultimately takes her to the Border Patrol station. The telegraph entered the United States in 1844 when Samuel Morse sent Alfred Vail the first message. It became instantly popular as people where were eager for a faster way to communicate. Thus the telegram was popular in the same decade that the United States adopted the notion of Manifest Destiny, the belief that Anglo America had the right to take over lands from coast to coast. It was also the decade of the Mexican American War and the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe. These historical moments are significant because they marked the turning point of the bloody and brutal history of the borderlands. Carmona incorporates the telegram as a means to connect this time period of extreme border violence to the present day. The form of the iTelegram allows for ten words to be communicated before creating a break. The use of caesura creates a suspenseful tone that is reminiscent of a horror tale being shared

around the camp fire. This tension is further amplified by the use of language, “I heard a strange sound when I was on the road {stop}…heard a woman scream {stop}… but deep down I knew it was something horrible {stop}” (82). Each line incorporates descriptive text that generates a sense of anticipation of the horrors that are about to be confronted. Carmona continues by including a haunting element: “At first I thought I saw the shadow of three people run across the darkened brush {stop} Maybe it was the ghosts of immigrants that never quite made it {stop}” Ghosts are usually the cause of terror in domestic horror but as the story continues it becomes evident that this is more than a spiritual haunting, “But I knew better {stop}.” This statement brings to light that what Haldon is about to confront is not spiritual but is material.

The iTelegram continues its suspense as Haldon states, “What I saw, bro, was worse than anything I could have imagined {stop} First I saw a tree with strange leaves {stop}” This is the first reference to the rape trees and there is no other description. “The woman was lying on the ground wearing only a shirt {stop} No pants, no panties, just a pair of sandals and a white shirt with a pink ribbon on it {stop}.” Typically body horror relies on the visual and is notorious for its graphic depictions of violent attacks of the body. On the contrary, Carmona merely implies that a rape has occurred. As Sarah Projansky (2001) asserts, “rape culture encourages violence against women where the male gaze and women as objects-to-be-looked at contribute to a culture that accepts rape and in which rape is one experience along a continuum of sexual violence that women confront on a daily basis” (9). This male gaze provides an element of pornography associated with graphic rape scenes and by excluding this element Carmona is choosing to not serve up the Latina body to the male gaze.

As the story continues, the strange leaves are finally revealed, “She hung her bra and panties from a tree… I turned to look one last time {stop} Too many bras, too many panties, too

many strange leaves {stop}." Again, this description is a connection to the past. It is the allegorical moment of the story where the historical traumas of the past collide with the present. For an allegorical moment is "an instant in which an image of the past sparks a flash of unexpected recognition in the present" (Lowenstein, 2005, 14). Strange leaves is a direct reference to "Strange Fruit" a poem written in the 1930's by Abel Meeropol that became famous as a Billie Holiday song. The poem was written after Meeorpol saw a photo of a lynching. Much like "Strange Leaves", lynching is not described in graphic detail, but the implication is impossible to miss:

> Southern trees bear a strange fruit
> Blood on the leaves and blood at the root
> Black bodies swingin' in the Southern breeze
> Strange fruit hangin' from the poplar trees

Angela Y. Davis (1981) documents that during 1865-1895 over ten thousand lynchings had taken place. As aforementioned, this is the time period that the telegram was popular. Carmona continues to connect this moment in history to the present day to highlight the continued horrors being afflicted upon marginalized bodies. Davis states that in order for lynching to become popularly accepted, its violence and savagery had to first be deemed as justifiable. Davis argues that the "myth of the black rapist" was born to as a justification for lynching and as a means to silence the systemic raping of African American women. By demonizing African American men as rapist, white women became virginal, white men become saviors, and thus African American women were seen as harlots (Projansky 6). A similar mentality is being utilized to shape the discourse surrounding the rape trees found along the Mexican/American border. By connecting

a historical African American symbol of fear to that of the Latinx immigrant, Carmona is illustrating the historical materialism that binds the cultural experiences of both.

Rape Trees Are Real

The hashtag #rapetreesarereal is a means of bringing to light the horrific atrocities that are occurring throughout the Mexican/American border. Rape trees are symbolic in the most literal way to connect the histories of African American and Latino lynching. Carmona's choice of the phase "rape trees are real" is also a direct reference to the recent media coverage of rape trees. Rape trees have been used by conservative bloggers to demonize Mexican immigrant men as rapists which resonates with the past. One such blog is titled, "Donald Trump Was Right… Rape Trees Found Along US Southern Border" and cited Latina.com (2009) to validate the outrageous heading quoting "rape trees are places where cartel members and coyotes rape female border crossers and hang their clothes, specifically undergarments, to mark their conquest." This narrative uses the rape tree as a symbol of the brutality of the Mexican male. As one commenter posted "Why not hang the coyotes in the same tree NEXT to the undergarments???" "Vic Mariano Sr." (2015) commentary illustrates how the past is still present as the same justifications are being used to conjure up lynching. This rhetoric is encouraging the anti-immigrant sentiment that is sweeping the nation. In response to these accusations, liberal bloggers have questioned the validity of rape trees claiming that they have been staged by the vigilant ranchers living on the Mexican/American border. What is missing from this discourse is the victim's perspective. This silencing of the victim further ignores the real life trauma that is continuously occurring throughout the Borderlands.

Domestic horror plays on the spaces that we should feel safest, such as the home. However, domestic horror reconfigures these spaces so that the walls that are meant to serve as

protection becomes the walls that confine. Applying domestic horror to the space of the Borderlands exposes how for many immigrants crossing into the United States is symbolic of a "better life." The hardships and exploitation that they endured in their homeland will be eradicated upon crossing border. This dream is immediately shattered when upon crossing the border Shi is raped in a location where she was supposed to find her salvation. The rape tree becomes the embodiment of where domestic horror merges with body horror, exposing the complex hybridity within the two genres.

Implications of body horror permeate "Strange Leaves." Because of the intimate terror that immigrant women face, when they face horror it is the norm not the exception. When Shī arrives at the refugee shelter and explains to a volunteer why she does not have undergarments, her story is met with a "horrified look." However, Shī lets the volunteer know that it is "okay" because she "took pill before. No baby." Shī is indicating that as long as there is no other reproduction that the rape is tolerable. It is the price that she had to pay to cross into the United States, and it was a price that may have been unavoidable. As the story continues, Shī's hometown is described as "no place for indias bonitas. No place for young girls like Shī. Not anymore." It becomes apparent that even if Shī had stayed in Guatemala, she would encounter similar violence at the hands of the townsmen who have begun to notice her "growing breast on chest. Ass being shaped by growing hips. Thinning face and fuller lips." By fragmenting, the description Carmona is criticizing that women are reduced to body parts. What is not being observed is Shī's intelligence or maturity. "Now when body aging fast than mind. Now Shī is woman." Age is not respected in a town that reinforces patriarchal structures that view women as sexual beings. Again body horror fuses with domestic horror as the description illustrates that

Shi is not safe in her hometown. She is forced to leave the one place that she is familiar with in order to keep safe.

Rape is the manner in which the body is assaulted in “Strange Leaves” and occurs in two pivotal scenes. The most obvious is the rape that Shi endures when crossing into the United States. However, much like Shī must pay the price for this admission, so must her mother. The Coyote tells Shī’s mother that he can get Shī into the United States, and she can be free in America but “He also wants $5,000 American and a night with Mama.” Although Shī’s mother ultimately consents to these terms, she is actually coerced into having sex with the same man who will eventually violate her daughter. Furthermore, it is implied that this may not be the only man who exploited Shi’s mother’s desperation to ensure her daughter’s future in the United States. “Don’t know how Mama gets money to pay for coyote. When asked Mama refuses to tell. Has something to do with man who owns restaurant where Mama works.” Both instances of rape center around the patriarchal systems that allow Latina bodies to be sexualized and discarded. Without her husband to protect her and Shī, Mama is reduced to use her body as a means to generate income and a better life for Shī. Carmona further highlights this desperation by pointing out that Mama may very well know what is in store for Shī but does not allow that thought to invade as she truly believes this is the only way out of the misery of her community.

In two key scenes, tears are used to convey a sense of helplessness. It is reminiscent of the Trails of Tears that was endured by Native Americans in the early 1800s. Migrants of today face many of the same hardships that were endured during the Trail of Tears; exhaustion, hunger, disease and violence mark both of these trails. For many who come to the United States, it is also a forced migration. Although Shī clearly does not want to make the journey, “Shī doesn’t want to leave Mama. Mama is all Shī has left,” she has no other choice. “Mama says Guatemala

is no place for indias bonitas. No place for young girls like Shī." Shī is forced to face the hardships of migration along with the sexual assault because this is her only chance to "have a better life."

The tears are shed by the two motherly characters of the story. Benita Gomez-Santander is a woman who is also migrating to the United States with Shī. Benita is the one who prepares Shī for the rape that she is about to endure. "Benita looks at her and smiles again. This time the way a mother looks at daughter knowing that something terrible is coming and she can't stop or protect her." It is at this moment that Benita has forced Shī to think about the horrors that are about to come. Benita holds Shī for the rest of the journey and when the van stops forces her to take the pill that will prevent pregnancy. "Benita hugs one last time and says, "No baby. Not for you. She feels hot tear trickle down Benita's cheek and onto her forehead." This is the only means of protection that Benita has to offer Shī.

Shī's Mama is also doing the only thing she can to protect her daughter and offer her a better life. However, this decision does not come blindly, and it is apparent that Mama realizes what Shī will have to endure on her road to opportunity. "Don't know how Mama will protect when Shī is on the road with him. Don't know if Mama lets that thought invade. Don't think she wants it to. She cries all night before truck showed up, 4 a.m." Tears are shed to mark the start of Shī's journey. Mama tries to remain strong as Shī gets on the truck to depart. "But just before the truck pulls away Shī sees single tear fall from corner of Mama's eye glistening in the moonlight." It is no coincidence that the only tears shed in this story are by the motherly figures. La Llorona is a Mexican folktale about a mother who kills her children and spends eternity crying and desperately searching for them. The mothers in this story are similar to La Llorona in

that they both knowingly see the harm that Shī is going to endure yet are helpless in preventing it from occurring.

Throughout “Strange Leaves,” Carmona infuses the body and domestic horror to create a new Chicanx codex where the atrocities of the past collide with the monstrosities of the present. Examining “Strange Leaves” through the lens of mestiza consciousness exposes the multiple layers of meaning and symbols that give voice to the Latina immigrant experience. Deconstructing the binary mode of analysis it allows for a holistic approach that exposes the materiality of the violence that is both connected in the past and present today. Mestiza consciousness creates an understanding for the subjectivity and lived experiences of Latinas on the Borderlands.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

In *Ghostly Matters,* sociologist Avery F. Gordon (2010) approaches ghosts through systematic hauntings. "In haunting, organized forces and systematic structures that appear removed from us make from us make their impact felt in everyday life in a way that confounds our analytic separations and confounds the social separations themselves" (Gordon 2010, 19). Through these systematic structures, individuals confront the seething presence of the past. Gordon identifies that in order to make changes in our social life, we must "learn to identify hauntings and reckon with ghosts, must learn how to make contact with what is without a doubt often painful, difficult, and unsettling" (23). Unlike the traditional horror genre, *Ghostly Matters* illustrates that the systematic hauntings of society must be exorcised through a collective action.

Ghostly Matters provides an alternative narrative to confronting and overcoming the hauntings in our society. Unlike the traditional horror genre, the systematic hauntings of society must be exorcised through a collective action.

> Because ultimately haunting is about how to transform a shadow of a life into an undiminished life whose shadows touch softly in the spirit of a peaceful reconciliation. In this necessarily collective undertaking, the end, which is not an ending at all, belongs to everyone. (Gordon 208)

Chicanx horror calls for collective action to rectify historical atrocities that still plague the Latinx community. Calvo-Quirós (2016) defines Chican@ Speculative Productions as a means for interpreting the present with history to develop "collective epistemological tactics for survival even as it envisions a future free of oppression" (156). At the core of Chican@ Speculative Productions is the tension of colonial hauntings and the need for change (Calvo-Quirós). Each of the works analyzed share common ghostly and spatial hauntings that demand a reckoning. Furthermore, each literary work analyzed propels the reader critically witnesses the text. Tiffany Ana López (2005) terms critical witnessing as "the process of being so moved by a reading experience as to engage in a specific action intended to forge a path toward change" (64). Through critical witnessing, these texts are demanding collective action against the anti-immigrant sentiment that is currently sweeping the nation.

The 2016 race for the Republican presidential nominee has illustrated that bigotry and hateful rhetoric are still present today. Anti-immigrant legislations, such as Arizona's SB1070, illustrate that systematic oppression and judicial racism are still occurring. Sandra Cisneros, Josefina López, and Christopher Carmona reimagine the future by challenging perceptions of monstrosities. *Ghostly Matters* challenges us to confront the systematic hauntings of the past that demand reckoning. The fictional works of Cisneros, López, and Carmona lend insights to Latinx immigrant experience and demand that we collectively unite to combat the systematic oppression that sustain the atrocities that are presently occurring on the borderland

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