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RECLAIMING THE DARK: DEFINING DARKESS AS FEMINIST AGENCY WITHIN *THE GARDEN OF EDEN*, "NEVER MARRY A MEXICAN," AND SELECTED SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS

A Thesis

by

TERESA HERNÁNDEZ

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

May 2017

Major Subject: English

RECLAIMING THE DARK: DEFINING DARKESS AS FEMINIST AGENCY WITHIN *THE GARDEN OF EDEN,* “NEVER MARRY A MEXICAN,” AND SELECTED SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS

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by
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May 2017

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ABSTRACT

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My thesis explores Ernest Hemingway's *The Garden of Eden* (1986), Sandra Cisneros' "Never Marry a Mexican" (1991), and the social media platforms of Tomi Lahren, *The Root*, and *Xicanisma* on *Facebook* and *Instagram*. In my exploration of these texts and platforms, I define darkness within its multiple definitions primarily via the theme of destruction, sexuality, and/or a literal racial, physical darkness. Furthermore, in this project I challenged the traditionally pejorative analysis of darkness within American literature and provided a chronological presentation of the transformative function darkness imparts on these two texts and selected social media platforms. Ultimately, reclaiming darkness as a feminist agency for women of color.

DEDICATION

For Auden,

Who saw in me

what I considered flaws

and redefined them as magic.

(After reading Alice Walker's *In Search of Our Mother's Gardens*)

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

To my daughter, Auden, this project, the sacrificed hours, and this journey has been for you through and through. *Chiquita*, I am honored by the universe to be your mother.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Within Chicana theorist Gloria E. Anzaldúa's posthumous work, *Light in the Dark/Luz en lo oscuro* (2015), the scholar writes the following introduction that situates much of the work I aim to do in this chapter:

> My dilemma, and that of other Chicana and women-of-color writers, is two-fold: how to write (produce) without being inscribed (reproduced) in the dominant white structure and how to write without reinscribing and reproducing what we rebel against. Our task is to write against the edict that women should fear their own darkness, that we not broach it in our writings. Nuestra tarea is to envision Coyolxauhqui, not dead or decapitated, but with eyes wide open. Our task is to light up the darkness. (7-8)

For Anzaldúa the tarea, the homework, is for the reader to reach into "the nepantla state" and reconfigure our identity and our relationship with the world. For the author, *nepantla* is both a metaphorical point of collision between the real world and the imaginary world as well as a tangible place where "spiritual transformation or rebirth occurs during visionary states of consciousness" (29). However, in my personal reading of Anzaldúa's writings, I was troubled by her final line that defines our task as a lighting up of darkness. While this body of work was largely inspired by the 9/11 terrorist attack against the United States (which is also the focus of her first chapter, "Let Us Be the Healing of the Wound") and can be read as a way of guiding

ourselves out of a social darkness imposed by warfare, this imagery still invokes an unsettling message within racial and feminist discourse. For even as Anzaldúa recognizes darkness as our "own"—an intimate part of our identity as both women of color[1] and feminists—she also instructs us to eliminate this same darkness with light. If our work as WOC and feminists is to resist a fear of our darkness (by others and by ourselves) should we not then also reclaim it as we move towards *conocimiento*?

Perhaps a greater understanding of what Anzaldúa defined as *conocimiento* bears significance in the situating of my work. The theorist describes it as "ese saber[2]" within ourselves that "questions conventional knowledge's current categories, classifications, and contents" (119). Even Anzaldúa's utilization of the term *conocimiento* throughout her career is significant, because while it literally translates into "knowledge," it also can be defined as "consciousness," "understanding," and "awareness." This makes our attainment of *conocimiento* an arrival at a heightened sense of knowing—an ability to look beyond our current codes of culture, history, gender, and class and create something new. Thus, I return to my previous question and try to make sense of the troubling image put forth by Anzaldúa: How do we "light up the darkness" without reinforcing a traditional conflation of darkness with deficiency, perversion, and racialized "Otherness?"

This conflation of darkness with "Otherness" is laboriously explored in *Playing in the Dark* (1995) by Black feminist, author, and theorist Toni Morrison. Morrison writes:

---

[1] Throughout the length of this project I often interchange women of color with the abbreviation WOC. This is inclusive of any part of the LGBTQ+ community that may identify themselves as women or womxn.
[2] My translation: "that knowing"

> Yes, I wanted to identify those moments when American Literature was complicit in the fabrication of racism, but equally important I wanted to see when literature exploded and undermined it. (16)

Morrison, with an understanding (*conocimiento*) of literature as both reader and creator, facilitates discussions on the often-subconscious presence of race within critical texts in the canon including *The Adventure of Huckleberry Finn* and *The Garden of Eden* (which I also include as a part of my own exploration in Chapter One). She extracts race from these texts, along with others by Edgar Allan Poe and Herman Melville, to reveal the way our literature has used race as a "metaphorical way of referring to and disguising forces, events, classes, and expressions of social decay and economic division far more threatening to the body politic than 'race' ever was (63)." For her, these images of blackness carry a significant duality as suppressions of larger conversations regarding our cultural understanding of the Africanist presence. In her own summation of *Playing in the Dark*, Morrison writes that she aims to locate "the sources of [black] images and the effect they have on the literary imagination and its product" (x). Even as her title suggests, her exploration largely engages with the "permission" the Africanist presence allows through both the subconscious and conscious state of writing. While Morrison never imparts responsibility on the writer, we as readers also realize the responsibility imparted on the text itself to shape and shift our acknowledgment of race and blackness. And it is this responsibility on the text, which situates my following chapters.

As an overall project, my writing is strongly motivated by Gloria Anzaldúa's and Toni Morrison's writings—their efforts have prompted me to explore the employment of darkness alongside its multiple definitions and manifestations within our literature and culture. However, I also aim to expand our preconceived affiliation of darkness with blackness, which I believe

threatens our ability to provide an inclusive space for feminists of color to process, reconfigure, and challenge their own identities within this collective discourse of race. Ultimately, this inclusiveness allows other marginalized voices and brown bodies to engage in this dialogue of darkness and participate in its reclamation. This is what truly shifts our *conocimiento* into one that welcomes the intersectionality vital to feminism.

Like Anzaldúa and Morrison, I also explore the positioning of WOC against white women. Throughout the length of this thesis I often engage the brown-versus-white female dialectic that scholar Maythee G. Rojas articulates about Sandra Cisneros' short story, "Never Marry a Mexican." For Rojas, the Chicana heroine's "racist" feelings towards the white heroine reveal an unimportant opposition of cultural and racial codes. However, this nuance is at the center of our contemporary feminist issues. It is these tensions between WOC and white women that are hauntingly reminiscent of the aftermath of second wave feminism. The writings of prominent feminist figures like Audre Lorde and Cherríe Moraga are no longer a mere insight into the feminist unrest of the 1960s through the 1980s. Rather, these writings echo the very feminist unrest we are currently facing today—specifically within the Trump era—and which continues to wound the feminist sisterhood. Anzaldúa wrote, within *Borderlands/La Frontera* (1987), that the U.S. Mexican border was an open wound and imagined it as the third world grating against the first and bleeding (25). However, I reimagine feminism as that same open wound that had been sutured and healed by the collective efforts of feminists, both of color and white, being pulled and strained open. This split has forced open the wound and it has agitated the bleeding once again.

This divide between women of color and white women inflicts pain through a lack of *conocimiento*. While this pain can ultimately be healing and productive to our progress as

women, we first need to acknowledge its existence. We need to validate the experiences of WOC—the darkness—through dialogue. And these conversations must include those who have historically participated in our erasure as women and people of color. This is what will lead to an understanding, but instead we fear it further polarizing feminism. As a character within "Never Marry a Mexican" states, "You know what [we] have to say isn't always pleasant" (83). I do not claim it is either easy or comfortable, but I do claim that it is necessary. Specifically, as we have continued to reinforce "darkness" as Other in American culture through not only internalized racism and colorism, but through our relations with one another. By discussing it and finding it within these texts—acknowledging the presence of darkness through its multiple traditional forms including destruction, sexual deviousness, and subversion of gender, we can release it from such traditional readings that merely hold back our understanding of that which we cannot necessarily understand or define.

Furthermore, in this acknowledgement of darkness and my consequent exploration of it (within the literary works and cultural objects in the following chapters), I want to reclaim darkness as magic and feminist agency. Morrison writes that her "vulnerability would lie in romanticizing blackness rather than demonizing it; vilifying whiteness rather than reifying it" (xi). However, I do wish to romanticize darkness—whose beauty and power we have traditionally denied within American literature and culture. I do not wish to resist darkness, but instead embrace it. For how can we wish to control darkness, obliterate it, and obscure it with light if we ourselves are darkness? I also utilize the critical work of Toni Morrison, Leslie Fiedler, Gloria Anzaldúa, Judith Butler, and many others throughout my exploration of the feminist narrative.

My first chapter, "Defining Darkness as Feminist Agency in Ernest Hemingway's *The Garden of Eden*," consists of identifying the multiple manifestations of darkness within the novel. Specifically, I explore the function of destruction in the text as well as the positioning of whiteness against darkness, appropriated darkness against natural darkness, and rupture of the feminist narrative.

The second chapter, "Brown Girl Magic: Darkness and Destruction in Sandra Cisneros' "Never Marry a Mexican," explores a similar reclamation of darkness as feminist agency through physical darkness, the Chicana feminist narrative, and the "destructive woman" trope. Additionally, I also extend Maythee G. Rojas' nuance of the brown-versus-white female dialectic to explore the volatile relationship between Chicana heroine, Clemencia, and white heroine, Megan, in the short story.

The third chapter, "At a Digital Crossroads: Creating Intersectional Feminisms via Social Media Platforms," explores darkness as a literal, racial discourse through social media alongside performative activism and "white feminism." I look at the work by political commentator Tomi Lahren, a Black activist multi-media platform known as *The Root*, and the Chicana feminist blogger known as *Xicanisma* as expansions of feminist and racial discourse outside of the academy. Additionally, I argue that such creations of feminist spaces (on *Facebook* and *Instagram*) encourage women traditionally excluded from these discussions to participate in the creation of a truly intersectional feminism.

CHAPTER II

DEFINING DARKNESS AS FEMINIST AGENCY IN ERNEST HEMINGWAY'S *THE GARDEN OF EDEN*

Within the discussion of gender and race that follows, it may be surprising to include Ernest Hemingway as a creator of space for female agency. After all, many of Hemingway's most prominent texts have consistently featured women as minor characters or seemingly as mere objects of affection for the hypermasculine hero. However, this is what makes the author's posthumous novel, *The Garden of Eden* (1986), a valuable inclusion in our contemporary discourse of gender, race, and sexuality. This text situates women at the forefront of the narrative and gives both heroines an opportunity to gain agency through "darkness" and the subversion of gender. While "darkness" may be typically associated, in this novel, with Catherine who presents a troubling fixation on making herself darker, it can also bear meaning in relation to the understanding of Catherine's destructive personality and transgressive sexuality. While this chapter will examine the resonances and functions of darkness within the novel, it will also explore the distinctions between "natural" and "artificial" darkness and femininity as posed through the relationship between the two Hemingway heroines. Even as Hemingway scholars and readers may be inclined to principally explore Catherine's relationship to her husband, David, Catherine's relationship to the dark-skinned lover Marita also merits exploration. Both Catherine and David initially welcome Marita as a lover resulting in a complicated love triangle and strained feminist sisterhood between both women thereby presenting "darkness" and

"whiteness" as oppositional tensions. Furthermore, Catherine's self-destruction at the end of the novel reveals her inability to control darkness in the text while Marita, the "naturally" dark-skinned force in the text, can thrive and replace Catherine's position in the novel. This ultimately not only emphasizes the antagonistic sisterhood, but also the divisions between natural and artificial darkness that persists in the text.

Catherine as 'The Destructive Type'

At the center of the novel are American newlyweds, Catherine and David Bourne, who are vacationing in the French Riviera. After the couple has finished making love, Catherine immediately establishes a troubling presence in the text through what initially appears to be a playful conversation:

> 'I'm the destructive type,' she said. 'And I'm going to destroy you. They'll put up a plaque up on the wall of the building outside the room. I'm going to wake up in the night and do something to you that you've never even heard or imagined. I was going to last night but I was too sleepy.'
>
> 'You're too sleepy to be dangerous.'
>
> 'Don't lull yourself into any false security.' (5-6)

Despite previous readings by Carl Eby, a prominent Hemingway scholar, Catherine's cruel and damaging characterization as a femme fatale precedes her developing a fixation on darkening her skin. This is particularly significant in separating the presence of "darkness," as a skin color or signifier of racial identity, from wickedness and powerlessness in literature. Catherine's character is not presented as "the destructive type" by the narrative primarily, but is rather asserted by Catherine herself. Even as David attempts to downplay her seriousness, she reaffirms it and seems to take pleasure in acknowledging this power to her husband. This

presents both a warning and foreshadowing of Catherine's ultimate destruction of herself and her relationships with others in the text. Even as Catherine is unable to ultimately free herself of the sociological constraints she faces later in the text, this self-awareness provides Catherine with a critical sense of agency for a Hemingway heroine.

Carl Eby's "Who is 'the Destructive Type?': Re-Reading Literary Jealousy and Destruction in *The Garden of Eden*" (2014) argues that Catherine is "Eve and serpent rolled into one—jealous of her husband's masculinity, independent identity, and writing" (99). However, such an analysis merely reinforces the conflation of destruction with evil rather than as a source of agency for Catherine as a heroine. Eby's psychoanalytic criticism is also largely motivated by reading *The Garden of Eden* as deriving from Hemingway's own biographical relationship to gender. However, such a perspective suffers from the "authorial" and "intentional" fallacies spelled out by the New Critics, and challenged persuasively by critics such as Roland Barthes in his essay, "Death of an Author." Freudian critic Peter Brooks also persuasively centers psychoanalysis on texts and receptions not psychoanalyzing the author.

Perhaps most importantly, we lose the critical discourse that frees us to rethink how we conceptualize Catherine's destructive nature that plays out completely through her sexuality and creation of a physical darkness. Such readings undermine and close off space in surprisingly traditional ways. To characterize Catherine's actions as a fit of jealousy or a mere mirroring of David's, or Hemingway's, psyche ignores the ambiguous affirmation and persistence of glimmers of darkness within the novel.

Margaret Atwood, the famous writer and critic, poses a question in a 1994 lecture, included in *The Bitch is Back: Wicked Women in Literature* (2001), concerning the politics of the presence of "malicious" women in literature:

> But is it not, today—well, somehow *unfeminist*—to somehow depict a woman behaving badly?...When bad women get into literature, what are they doing there, and are they permissible, and what, if anything, do we need them for? (1)

For Atwood, and other feminist scholars, a reclamation of wickedness may merely reinforce the troubling association of women with Eve. However, this trope of the destructive woman can provide agency by granting "permission" to the woman to subvert the traditional, masculine power dynamic in the text, which is evident from Catherine's role in *The Garden of Eden*. Ultimately, "her" purpose as the destructive type is to shatter the perception of women as static and submissive characters.

While Catherine's destructiveness is often illustrated metaphorically—Eby also notes that she participates in a literal destruction of David's most prized writings about Africa. Arguably, this the most forceful emasculation of David by Catherine's damaging personality:

> 'All I want to do is kill you,' David said. 'And the only reason I don't do it is because you are crazy.
>
> 'You can't talk to me like that, David…I won't stand for it. I'll divorce you…I'll do anything I want to you.'
>
> 'You have.'
>
> 'I'll kill you.' (223)

Catherine burns David's manuscripts to subvert David's masculinity. While not the only example of Catherine deriving power from David, as discussed in the following section of darkness as a sexual magic, it illustrates Catherine's most literal use of destruction in the novel. For Catherine once again establishes her power over David by reaffirming that she can do whatever she desires with him as lover, husband, and man.

Catherine's Dark Magic

Establishing the white heroine's destructive nature is particularly important to situate as something that exists prior to her skin darkening, as it presents her damaging nature as separate from the artificial relationship to a dark skin tone she later creates in the novel. For Catherine, her skin color, along with her resistance to a socially imposed femininity[3], becomes performativity (as understood in relation to Judith Butler's theoretical work on gender as performance) producing, in turn, the psychological changes happening inside of her. As the novel progresses, Catherine also wishes to subvert the traditional ideologies, of the masculine and the feminine typically prescribed to women by adopting traditionally masculine features and characteristics typically associated with males, in this case with David as the Hemingway hero. Catherine reinforces the feminist narrative by removing David's phallus, or at least by reimagining herself with an equal phallic power, which results in her attainment of darkness, power, and masculinity:

> In the room it was dark with only a little light from outside…
>
> 'Dave, you don't mind if we've gone to the devil, do you?'
>
> 'No, girl,' he said.
>
> 'Don't call me girl.'
>
> 'Where I'm holding you you are a girl,' he said. He held her tight around her breasts…

[3] While "femininity" and "masculinity" can be argued to be mere social constructs, the presentation of the feminine and the masculine is an undeniably significant element in the literature of Ernest Hemingway. When analyzing the feminine or masculine, it will be within the confines of the text and not mere generalizations of womanhood and manhood in the public sphere.

'They're just my dowry,' she said. 'The new is my surprise. Feel. No leave them…Oh it feels so wonderful and good and clean and new. Please love me David the way I am. Please understand and love me.'

'…Now you can't tell who is who can you?'

'No.'

…He held her close and hard and kissed her on her dear mouth. He held her close and hard and inside himself he said goodbye and then goodbye and goodbye. (17-18)

This dark magic is not limited to equality with David's masculinity, but subverts it entirely and damages him physically and psychologically. For Catherine is not merely presented as the traditional crone[4], but rather as possessor of her dark, sexual magic. The magic continues to unfold before the reader as her destructive power is asserted over David Bourne first and foremost in the novel.

Catherine does this by invoking darkness as a magical property. As Catherine begins to affirm darkness through its multiple meanings, it inflicts the most damage on her husband:

During the night [David] had felt her hands touching him. And when he woke it was in the moonlight and she had made the dark magic of the change again and he did not say no when she spoke to him and asked the questions and he felt the change so that it hurt him all through and when it was finished after they were

[4] Sarah Appleton Aguiar's *The Bitch is Back: Wicked Women in Literature* (2001) includes a subchapter on the archetype of The Witch to explore the wickedness typically associated with women in literary examples such as the *Odyssey* and *Great Expectations* among others (38-43). However, my view of magic properties in this thesis is defined as a mysticism positively associated with something that cannot be understood as good or evil.

> both exhausted she was shaking and she whispered to him, 'Now we have done it. Now we have really done it.' (20)

The narrator describes the pain David feels in experiencing Catherine's creation of "dark magic" as if David's own masculinity is threatened by its introduction into the text. This creation, which is coincidently referred to as "it" numerous times within the paragraph, first manifests in the darkness (the moonlight) and continues to spread over both characters in this scene. This consequently also presents David's symbolic castration as can be interpreted by the physical pain that is inflicted upon the husband at feeling Catherine's changed hands on his body. Catherine's dark magic ultimately leaves David unable to speak and unable to reject her changes.

How exactly we define this dark magic is important as it both gives and takes away agency as the novel progresses. In scholar Valerie Rohy's "Hemingway, Literalism, and Transgender Reading (2011)," the application of a transgender reading allows for Hemingway's biography and characters, specifically Catherine, to be explored through "the expansion of gender possibilities" (172). By allowing Catherine to be neither male or female, it translates "a better understanding of female masculinity and male femininity" (173) in our search of the feminist narrative within *The Garden of Eden.* Rohy's significant addition to Hemingway scholarship allows me to conclude that Catherine's dark magic is her subversion of the heteronormative and "gender-normative ideology" (162) that may persist with traditional readings of this text. However, such a reading must also work alongside the exploration of color as a literal, physical darkness, which also establishes a feminist agency throughout the novel.

Initially Catherine pacifies David's concerns by reassuring him that she is trying to be "a very good girl" and that he need not worry until nighttime because they "won't let the night things come in the day" (22). However, Catherine's dark magic continues to gain force as not

only something she creates, but also as something that ultimately controls her. These symbolic absences of light surround and consume the heroine and her husband throughout the text:

> ‘Let’s first lie very quiet in the dark,’ David said and lowered the latticed shade and they lay side by side on the bed in the big room in The Palace in Madrid where Catherine had walked in the Museo de Prado in the light of day as a boy and now she would show the dark things in the light and there would, it seemed to him, be no end to the change. (67)

David does not reject their inverted gender roles, but rather acknowledges Catherine’s dark magic as a growing force that will permeate into the daylight. Catherine’s darkness, as an extension of her sexualized Otherness, only continues through her sexual exploration with her lover, Marita. Catherine explains this to David:

> I kissed her and she kissed me and we sat in the car and I felt very strange and then we drove into Nice and I don’t know whether people could tell it or not. I didn’t care by then…Then we stopped on the way home and she said it was better if I was her girl and I said I didn’t care either way and really I was glad because I am a girl now anyways and I didn’t know what to do….I only kissed her but I know it happened with me….and I liked it and I still like it.
>
> ‘So now you’ve done it,’ David said carefully, ‘and you’re through with it.’
>
> ‘But I’m not. I like it and I’m going to really do it.’
>
> ‘No. You don’t have to.’
>
> ‘I do and I’m going to do it until I’m through with it and I’m over it…I have to.’ (113-114)

Even as David attempts to convince her that she should not pursue this “change,” which he alludes to earlier, Catherine insists on proceeding with her sexual experience with Marita. For Catherine, there is something to be gained in this initiation—another way of altering herself from what she used to be early on in her marriage with David. As she tells her husband, it is only on the isolated road to Nice that she felt free to explore this new sexual territory and soon felt free of social stigma once she had kissed Marita. This continues to build Catherine’s destructive personality as she manipulates not only David, but also Marita for no other purpose other than her own enjoyment. Most importantly, it allows Catherine to continue creating her dark magic as sexual Other.

After the heroine has finished with Marita she returns to her room and examines herself in the mirror as the narrator notes that “the light was nearly gone when she went into the bathroom and shut the door behind her” (115). This final absence of light around Catherine allows the reader to understand the death of Catherine’s heteronormative performance in the text as she has now allowed darkness to take over her. For Catherine is aware that this darkness is already inside of her and only now fully developed and exposed in the public sphere.

Catherine’s Appropriated Darkness

Additionally, Catherine’s darkness is also present through the literal darkening of her skin color. While Toni Morrison, in *Playing in the Dark*, understandably argues that this is another way of fetishizing blackness in American literature, it is not Catherine’s physical “blackness” in the text which leads to “the power of illicit sexuality, chaos, madness, impropriety, anarchy, strangeness, and helpless, hapless desire” (Morrison 81). Rather, her darkening features mirror the destructiveness which is already present inside of her. Her obsession with darkening her skin can be explicated as an external manifestation of the

psychological disarray within the heroine. Thus, her darkness, “brownness” if taken directly from text in *The Garden of Eden*, is merely a way of mirroring her own suppressed desires of creativity and femininity, which present themselves throughout the novel.

However, Morrison’s reading of darkness does reveal the problematic presence of this artificial, physical darkness within the novel. Carl Eby extends Morrison’s exploration through his 1995 article, “‘Come Back to the Beach Ag’in, David Honey!’” with a psychoanalytic reading of the “insistent and ever-present racial and sexual otherness” (100) in the novel. I want to take Eby’s claim, which reveals Hemingway’s fetishization of darkness, one step further by arguing that this illustrates Catherine’s fixation on darkening her skin as an example of her cultural appropriation.

Eby writes that “the fact that all of the major characters in *The Garden of Eden* are well-tanned, [and] that brown skin is one of the most pervasive images in the manuscripts” reveals the “[metamorphosis]…is racial as well as sexual (101).” However, unlike Morrison and Eby, I wish to affirm Catherine appropriating both “black and white” as well as both “male and female.” For even as I perceive Rohy’s transgender reading of *The Garden of Eden* to be accurate as well as my own reading of Catherine’s destructive darkness and sexual darkness as agency, I also believe that Catherine problematically uses her physical darkness to appropriate a racial identity that is not her own. In the following conversation with the Colonel, Catherine attempts to claim this “Othered” racial identity:

> ‘Tell me where you got so dark,’ the colonel said. ‘Do you know how dark you are?’

> 'That was from le Grau du Roi and then not far from la Napoule. There was a cove there with a trail that went down to it through the pines. You couldn't see it from the road.
>
> 'How long did it take to get so dark?'
>
> 'About three months.'
>
> 'And what are you going to do with it.'
>
> 'Wear it,' she said. 'It's very becoming in bed…I don't really wear it. It's me. I really am this dark. The sun just develops it. I wish I was darker.' (64)

While Catherine first regards to "wearing" this darkness, which can be interpreted as a literal reference to her appropriation of another racial identity, she then corrects herself by defending this darkness as a natural feature. This poses her physical darkness in a complicated position of agency. No longer is Catherine merely allowing herself to be true to her fluid sexual identity and destructive personality, but she is now using tanning as a mask to grant her this mobility; thus, perpetuating the conflation of physical darkness with "Otherness" instead of freeing it from such a limited and stereotypical understanding.

When Catherine and David return to their room she discusses the Colonel's comments about her dark skin:

> The light was reflected from the building across the street. The curtain was not pulled high enough to show the sky.
>
> 'The Colonel liked me being so dark,' Catherine said. 'We must get to the sea again. I have to keep it.' (66)

Even though Catherine had established agency by not returning to her role as "girl" during her lunch with David and the Colonel (66-67), she also dissolves it by merely appropriating it

through this physical change. She enjoys the Colonel's praise of her darkness even if it is not her natural identity. However, because she "develops" this darkness, and creates it artificially, it distorts the other forms of agency she has created within the text.

Catherine realizes the value of assuming this "Othered" identity. Under this dark racial identity, she realizes she can remove herself from her current identity as a white woman:

> 'You can't swim in Spain the way we do here. You'd get arrested.'
>
> 'What a bore. Let's wait to go there then because I want us to get darker.'
>
> 'Why do you want to be so dark?'
>
> 'I don't know. Why do you want anything? Right now it's the thing that I want most. That we don't have I mean. Doesn't it make you excited to have me getting so dark?...and it's getting that way and you'll be darker than an Indian and that takes us further away from other people. You see why it's so important.' (30-31)

Darker skin, brown skin, is the organic magic that Catherine is denied access to in the text, but the heroine can only hope to attain it artificially as her principal conquest in her journey. However, even as she clearly references the indigenous, the Indian, in her dialogue, she also wishes to manipulate it as another way of distancing herself from the ideological and sociological constraints represented by the culture which surrounds her even outside of the United States. As a white woman, Catherine can manipulate the dark magic to recreate her identity free of social stigmas as the narrator presents early in the novel:

> People came by the café without being rude to see the girl because they had been the only foreigners in the village and had been there now nearly three weeks and she was a great beauty and they liked her. There had been the big fish today and ordinarily there would have been much talk about that but this other was a big

> thing in the village too. No decent girls had ever had their hair cut short like that in this part of the country and even in Paris it was rare and strange and could be beautiful or could be very bad. It could mean too much or it could only mean showing the beautiful shape of a head that could never be shown as well. (16)

This narration reveals Catherine's access to privilege based on her white, American identity. Long before Catherine has darkened her skin, which I define here as an appropriation of racial darkness, she also has already been recognized in the village as a white woman. Later in the novel, she still wishes to possess both whiteness and darkness by lightening her hair to contrast against her darkening skin. She says to David, "Do you remember when all I wanted was to be so dark and now I'm the darkest white girl in the world" (169). This mask of dark skin "permits" Catherine to have access to darkness and "masculinity" as "beauty," which would have otherwise been defined as "rude" by the villagers. However, because Catherine is white, an American, she can appropriate darkness without social ramifications. Catherine's posing of darkness contrasts most significantly against the naturally dark-skinned heroine, Marita, and ultimately, this leads to Catherine's betrayal of Marita's love and feminist sisterhood.

Marita's Darkness

In *Love and Death in the American Novel* (1960), literary critic Leslie Fiedler writes that "all through the history of our novel there had appeared side by side with the Fair Maiden, the Dark Lady" (296). This presents not only a traditional understanding of the dichotomy between good/evil, but also the racial dichotomy that functions in Hemingway's novel. Next to Catherine, the naturally "Fair Maiden," is the "Dark Lady" Marita. Less importance is placed on Marita within Hemingway scholarship despite her significant role as co-creator of the destructive dark magic present in the text. Marita is inherently dark-skinned and does not have to "develop" her

darkness like Catherine. Thus, the introduction of Marita also introduces the dichotomy of an artificial darkness versus organic darkness, which collides with the dichotomy of "Fair Maiden" and "Dark Lady" in *The Garden of Eden.* However, even as the text lends itself to reading Catherine as "Fair Lady," it also presents complications of this trope as Catherine is mostly associated with darkness in the text. While Catherine's darkness is presented as a natural feature of her overall character, its "authenticity" is also conflicted through the introduction of Marita.

The "Dark Lady" makes her first appearance in Chapter Ten, at a café where the Bournes take an immediate interest in Marita and her "handsome" (91) beauty[5]. Even as Marita is initially welcomed into their marriage, both heroines consequently develop a destructive relationship. Later, her natural darkness and ambiguous femininity are also emphasized against Catherine's natural whiteness and newly-found masculinity. Perhaps the most problematic aspect of Catherine and Marita's relationship is that Catherine seems to hold a dominating power over Marita, the archetypical "Dark Lady." This initially limits Marita's access to agency in the text as she becomes Catherine's property. Catherine tells David:

> 'Look at her David. Aren't you glad I brought her?...She was going back to Paris and I said why not stay here if Aurol has a room? Come on up to lunch and see if David likes you and if you like the place. [David,] do you like her?' (96-97)

Catherine presses on about her bringing Marita to David and adds:

> 'I brought you a dark girl for a present. Don't you like your present?'
>
> 'I like my present very much.'
>
> 'How do you like your future?'

[5] While Marita is initially described androgynously within the *GOE*, Marita immediately reclaims her femininity. For Marita, the feminine is what subverts Catherine's position in the novel, and, therefore, Marita must remain in control of it at whatever the cost.

> 'I don't know about my future.'
>
> 'It isn't a dark future is it?' the girl asked…Aren't you pleased with what I brought you?' (103)

Catherine's presentation of Marita to David is not merely a troublesome wedding offering. Rather it presents Marita and her dark body as property for the mere pleasure of both white figures in the text. Her body is racialized, perhaps not surprisingly by Catherine who is posing as a "dark girl" herself. This consequently establishes Catherine's betrayal of Marita as feminist sister. For in Catherine's own acquisition of agency she sacrifices any potential alliance to Marita.

Toni Morrison remarks, in *Playing in the Dark*, that Catherine's gift to David merely illustrates the distinction of Marita's role as "the 'real' nurse, with dedicated, normal nursing functions" and positioning as a "healing balm" (88) between husband and wife. For Morrison, this provides a break in the traditional view of the dark-skinned woman as the source of bad or evil in American literature—instead it replaces it with a nurturing view of the dark-skinned by using her tenderness as a contrast to the Catherine's white destructiveness. However, Marita is not such a placid character. What complicates the narrative further is Marita's desire to be *lighter*, which she equates with agency and femininity. Marita uses her own organic femininity against Catherine's posed femininity and masculinity in a conversation with David:

> 'Would you rather I was not so deeply brown?'
>
> 'You're a nice color. Get that color all over if you like.'
>
> 'I thought perhaps you'd like one of your girls lighter than the other.'
>
> 'You're not my girl.'
>
> 'I am,' she said. 'I told you before.' (101-102)

In this early conversation with David, Marita asserts not only her femininity, but also her role in the Bournes marriage. She affirms her role as his property, but also as distinct from Catherine as wife. Much like in Catherine's earlier betrayal of sisterhood to Marita, Marita here also acts on her destructiveness against Catherine. She wants to distinguish herself from Catherine, but also claim superiority in her own positioning through her ability to be "lighter" than her white, American sister. In fact, Marita resists getting darker like Catherine because she realizes that her skin color is already naturally darker than Catherine's. When the three lovers are out swimming at sea, Catherine suggests, "Let Heiress darken now. Let me put some oil on her." To which Marita responds, "Not too much" (137). This only emphasizes Marita's organic agency that is contrasted against Catherine's appropriated darkness.

However, this is not to dismiss Marita's initial loyalty to Catherine in the novel. Marita's love for her white sister keeps her from initially taking on David as her lover:

> 'I love to kiss you…I love it so very much. But I can't do the other.'
>
> 'No?'
>
> 'No, I can't.'
>
> Then she said, 'Isn't there anything I can do for you now? I'm so ashamed about the other but you know how it could make trouble….[Let us] do what we can.' (126)

Her resistance is explained only through her own consideration of it causing trouble with Catherine. Marita, at least momentarily, remains in an alliance of sisterhood with Catherine and refuses to betray that relationship. For Marita, the betrayal has always been of the subconscious feminist sisterhood underlined in the relationship between herself and Catherine. First Catherine

destroys the alliance by gifting Marita to David as well as a final time after destroying David's writings about Africa. Catherine states:

> 'Don't worry about your dark girl. She's not my type at all. She's yours. She's what you like and very nice it is but not for me. I'm not attracted to the gamin type.'
>
> 'Perhaps I am a gamin,' Marita said.
>
> 'That's a very polite word for that part.'
>
> 'But I'm also more of a woman than you are Catherine.'
>
> 'Go ahead and show David what sort of gamin you are. He'd like it.'
>
> 'He knows what sort of woman I am.'
>
> 'That's splendid,' Catherine said. 'I'm glad you both found your tongues finally. I do prefer conversation.'
>
> 'You really aren't a woman at all,' Marita said.
>
> 'I know it,' Catherine said. 'I've tried to explain it to David often enough… (192)

Catherine's response continues to flesh out her destructive role by claiming that she has no sexual interest in Marita. She emphasizes this in saying she is not attracted to *her* type of woman—a street stray. In this short conversation, Catherine stresses how Marita is an expendable part of her own identity and life. Furthermore, Catherine complicates her own use of physical darkness by implying that Marita is beneath her in class because of *her* physical darkness. Catherine uses Marita's skin color against her by calling her "dark girl" to ultimately distinguish their social class. For Catherine, her dark skin color is merely an appropriation—she knows she is still white beneath her brown skin. However, Marita cannot escape her natural darkness—a reflection of her own positioning as Other and inferior in comparison with

Catherine's natural whiteness—according to the racial hierarchy operating within the text. For Catherine to belittle her brown sister/lover is to reassert her positioning as a white woman. As they invoke the dichotomy of the "Fair Maiden/Dark Lady", Catherine and Marita also participate in the divide of their roles in the novel.

Perhaps surprisingly, Catherine's superiority is ultimately undermined by Marita's own dark agency. At the close of the novel, when David and Marita are left alone together, the narrator writes:

> They slept well and naturally through the late afternoon and when the sun was low Marita woke and saw David lying in the bed by her side….She went over to the door of the bathroom and looked at herself in the full length mirror. Then she smiled at the mirror. (244)

The use of the word "natural" by the narrator is also problematic. As readers, we are unsure if the reference is being made to Marita's femininity to subvert Catherine's dark, sexual magic as a transgender character. Such an implication would only pose further complications to the feminist narrative and fluid sexual identity I perceive to be critical to our reading of Catherine. However, the reference is presented alongside the lighting inside the room, the sunlight awakening Marita in the bedroom. Thus, the word "naturally" can also be used to contrast Marita's natural darkness to Catherine's appropriated and self-altered physical darkness, which ultimately destroys Catherine's agency in the novel. While Catherine gains temporary agency through a metaphorical darkness by reclaiming her dark, sexual magic and through her self-affirmation as a destructive character that challenges David's male power, it is Catherine's posing and appropriation of physical darkness against Marita's own dark agency, which ultimately disrupts her feminist narrative.

Furthermore, in betraying her dark-skinned sister, Marita, she also emphasizes her own disingenuous use of darkness to merely conceal and grant her mobility to exercise a truly feminist identity. A similar criticism is applicable to Marita who betrays Catherine by taking her place as wife. Even as the text presents its challenges to a truly feminist narrative, it is certainly valuable to see such dialogue unfolding within a novel written by a male author who focused most of his prolific career on upholding masculinity, heterosexuality, and whiteness as essential to their identity as writer. This allows darkness to operate dynamically throughout the text, which creates a critical feminist space within my exploration of race and gender within *The Garden of Eden*.

CHAPTER III

BROWN GIRL MAGIC: DARKNESS AS FEMINIST AGENCY IN SANDRA CISNEROS' "NEVER MARRY A MEXICAN"

As I continue my exploration of the multiple forms of feminist agency accessible through "darkness," Sandra Cisneros' short story "Never Marry a Mexican," included within collection *Woman Hollering Creek and Other Stories* (1991), provides a contemporary progression through this feminist and racial discourse. The story, constructed through a first-person narrative, details an adulterous relationship between the Mexican American heroine, Clemencia, and her white lover, Drew. The plot of "Never Marry a Mexican" principally focuses on Clemencia's series of destructive relationships with other characters—including that with herself, her lover, her family, and an additional affair with Drew's son. Clemencia reflects on many of these relationships, which allows her to initiate self-exploration and self-understanding as an arguably unredeemable character. However, less scholarship has focused on Clemencia's relationship to Drew's white wife, Megan, which precipitates much of Clemencia's most destructive behavior in the text. This critical relationship between heroines largely prompts my analysis of what scholar Maythee G. Rojas nuances as the "brown-versus-white-female dialectic" in her analysis of this text[6]. Through close readings of this short story, I aim to explore the positioning of brown-versus-white feminisms in "Never Marry a Mexican" along with the use of "darkness" within the text and

[6] While scholar Maythee G. Rojas states that "Never Marry a Mexican" functions beyond this dialectic, my thesis aims to examine the relationship between the white/brown women, and the significant presence of their catastrophic relationship within this text. (145)

what this prompts within a Chicana feminist reading. Furthermore, while "Never Marry a Mexican" presents the archetypical Malinche, the text also complicates this trope through a multi-dimensional characterization and narrative that reinforces Clemencia as a truly feminist character. While Clemencia initially appears to have no feminist agency by subordinating herself to Drew, I aim to challenge this criticism and illustrate how Clemencia reclaims herself through these otherwise dark and destructive characteristics.

La Malinche's Dark Magic

Leslie Fiedler's dichotomy of the "Fair Maiden/Dark Lady" (296) situates itself through Megan's and Clemencia's characters and presents a gendered power struggle between the white and dark-skinned heroine. This short story present skin color (darkness) in two registers—both as a literal reference to Clemencia's brown skin tone as well as to her damaging behavior in the text. Aside from assessing the dynamic between both heroines, my reading aims to reassess La Malinche's dark, sexual magic which provides undeniable agency for Clemencia in the text. Since its publication, a significant amount of scholarship on "Never Marry a Mexican" has focused on the relationship between Clemencia and Drew and how they parallel the archetypes of La Malinche and Hernán Cortés[7]. These connections made between Clemencia and La Malinche pose troubling critiques of the Chicana heroine as she must operate under the threat of being equated with this controversial mother within Mexican American literature and culture. While many scholars have explored this figure within this short story—such as Laura Paz's

[7] La Malinche, who is claimed and recognized by theorist Gloria Anzaldúa as one of the three symbolic mothers of Chicanas/os (she bore a son to Cortés—the first Spanish/Indigenous child), functions as both a historical and mythical figure within Chicana/o culture. As a Nahua woman, Malinalli was given to Spanish conquistador Hernán Cortés as a gift by her people. Malinalli was multilingual and acted as a translator for Cortés—she is most often referred to as a cultural traitor for assisting Cortés in the colonization of her community. Cortés, while Spanish, is mostly associated with fair skin/fair features.

"'Nobody's Mother and Nobody's Wife'" in 2008—they have also developed problematic readings of Clemencia as an unrecoverable traitor.

Thus, Clemencia's darkness, as both a signifier of her destructive behavior and dark skin, must also filter into our understanding of the racial discourse at work within Cisneros' text or we risk completely negating Clemencia's agency. She makes clear allusions to the mythical figures as she writes: "Drew, remember when you used to call me your Malinalli? It was a joke, a private game between us, because you looked like a [Cortés] with that beard of yours. My skin dark against yours" (74). A traditional reading, such as scholar Jean Wyatt's in "On Not Being La Malinche: Border Negotiations of Gender in Sandra Cisneros's 'Never Marry a Mexican' and 'Woman Hollering Creek' (1995)," would conclude that the text merely positions Drew as the colonizer and Clemencia as his colonized property. While Drew is justly presented as oppressor, this reading also limits Clemencia's ability to (re)gain agency as a "dark" character. Given her racial and symbolic "darkness," a simple conflation of darkness as evil or sexual "Otherness" compromises a reclamation of this "darkness" within the Chicana feminist narrative.

Wyatt concludes in her work that a reading of Clemencia as La Malinche only further reinforces Clemencia's subjugation and dependency on Drew, which ultimately leaves the heroine "abandoned…after the conquest" (253). Yet while Wyatt certainly makes a valid claim regarding the limits such an archetype imposes on the heroine, Wyatt also implies Clemencia cannot reclaim La Malinche's dark magic and power. Noticing Clemencia's own fixation on her physical darkness and the way in which she values her desirability and appearance allows "darkness" to operate on a separate and distinct register than as a feature of destruction or negative racial characteristic. Ultimately, this allows Clemencia to emerge as a dynamic character—rather than as a static, stereotypical femme fatale or powerless entity—which helps

us reject a traditional reading of the archetypical La Malinche. Such rejection results in both a liberation and reconstruction of Chicana sexuality and a resistance to “color-based” oppression.

Clemencia’s darkness is the most literal external signifier of her ethnic identity as a Chicana, which is central in understanding Clemencia’s cultural references in the text. We should remember, as discussed previously by prominent black writer and feminist, Toni Morrison, in her critical work *Playing in the Dark* (1992), the importance of recognizing the presence of blackness in American literature. However, the construction of darkness in Cisneros’ short story not only lends itself to be read through Morrison’s theory, but it can also alter the way in which we approach Chicana feminist literature given the specificity of Mexican American culture and language. Whereas Morrison’s framework may limit a reading to a white and black racial positioning, Cisneros’s short story probes the reader to explore the white and brown binary that persists in her text. This positioning of brown-versus-white in Chicanx literature operates in many modes—not only as reference to the Anglo-versus-Chicanx tensions present throughout social, political, and historical issues—but also as an indicator of the social and political tensions present *internally* within the Mexican American community.

This understanding of “darkness” illustrates the “colorism” which is deeply ingrained into Mexican American culture and plays out via Clemencia’s romantic life in “Never Marry a Mexican.” “Colorism,” which can be defined as a subconscious or often-conscious prejudice that favors light-skin over dark-skin is also present within a class-based and cultural reading of Cisneros’ short story. While this topic has often been discussed within the paradigm of Black feminist literature, including within the prolific writings of scholars like Alice Walker and Zora Neale Hurston, it is Margaret L. Hunter’s *Race, Gender, and the Politics of Skin Tone* that ultimately situates colorism within the Latina community in 2005. Hunter’s work while

meaningful in documenting and validating the difficult relationship between Latinas/Chicanas and colorism, also primarily focuses on a sociological-based study as opposed to its function within literature, which this project partially intends to analyze through a close reading of "Never Marry a Mexican."

However, returning to Morrison's critical work on the presence of blackness and the bridge I aim to create between Chicana feminist literature and Black feminist literature, we must first expand Morrison's theory to include the Chicana feminist experience. The Chicana, like the Black feminist, also faces a simultaneous displacement based on skin color, culture, racial identity, and language. Thus, we must approach Clemencia's narrative as first and foremost a Chicana experience, then consequently assess the function of "darkness" and skin color as presented by Cisneros in the text. As Morrison argues, "darkness," whether approached from question of white and black people, (or instead as a binary of white and brown, which I take as my primary subject in this chapter) still presents the subconscious positioning of the dark-skinned as the sexualized Other and dismisses the agency that can be attained from its reclamation.

Given Clemencia's destructive characterization in this text, this heroine initially invokes little feelings of empathy with readers. In fact, throughout her character development within the short story, Clemencia makes minimal efforts to reject such stereotypes of her role as La Malinche. Rather, Clemencia appears to only reinforce writer Octavio Paz's view of the figure as mother and whore within his work *El Laberinto de la Soledad* (1950) in the chapter "Los Hijos de la Malinche." Clemencia presents a rather conflicting narrative as she consistently describes herself from Drew's sexualized and "masculine" gaze. Such self-descriptions are problematic as

they are deeply rooted in Drew's fetishization of her brown skin. Clemencia recalls an intimate scene between both lovers:

> Beautiful, you said. You said I was beautiful, and when you said it, Drew, I was… Your skin pale, but your hair blacker than a pirate's. Malinalli, you called me, remember? *Mi doradita*. I liked when you spoke to me in my language. I could love myself and think myself worth loving. (74)

Through Clemencia's allusions to La Malinche and Cortés, the heroine also emphasizes the contrast of her brown skin against Drew's whiteness. This consciousness of darkness by Clemencia reaffirms color, darkness, as an essential part of her identity. Clemencia's ethnicity is clearly defined through numerous cultural references including code switching to Spanish and family anecdotes that assert her father's Mexican and mother's Mexican American heritage. As the text develops, Clemencia's relationship to "darkness" changes as it spreads over her entire experience and relationship with the world around her. Therefore, establishing "darkness" as a tangible power and energy for Clemencia is urgent to her access to agency within the text.

Clemencia continues to create this physical darkness for the reader by drawing attention to her own dark features–especially her dark eyes which Drew kissed "as if they were capable of miracles" (75). The heroine adds that she "wanted to scoop [her eyes] out with a spoon, place them on a plate under [the] blue blue skies, food for the blackbirds" (75) as a kind of cultural performance of her love and devotion to Drew. Not only does this emphasize Clemencia's complete devotion to her lover, but it also reasserts her darkness and the language of magic which affirms her power—establishing darkness as a complicated form of agency regardless of its complications. Clemencia's cultural reference to Santa Lucía is meaningful because this patron saint functions as both a religious, Catholic icon and myth within Chicanx culture. Lucía

is a young woman with beautiful eyes who had numerous, unwelcomed suitors and is incessantly pursued by one courter, which leads her to remove her eyes. Lucía then delivers them on a plate to her suitor as a way of warding him off. Thus, Lucía can protect her sacred virginity by destroying her beauty through what she perceives as the pinnacle of her desirability (her beautiful eyes). This myth functions much like la Virgen de Guadalupe to sustain the virgin/whore dichotomy ingrained into Mexican American culture. However, when Clemencia uses this cultural reference, she almost seems to delight in her positioning as a prized attraction, which complicates the myth. The heroine never rejects Drew's conceptions of her, but rather derives pleasure from being Othered through her sexuality and physical darkness. Even as Drew seems to create many of her self-perceptions, he is also under the control and magic of her dark agency, which ultimately subverts his own presence in the text.

This is reinforced again when Clemencia initiates an affair with Drew's and Megan's son, an unnamed character, later in the text. This boy, her student, becomes the collateral damage as she can take revenge upon both mother and father figures through her destruction of the son as lover. However, initially, he serves as a mere channel for her to express her love for his father; she tells him:

> I was your father's student, yes, just like you're mine now. And your father painted and painted me, because he said, I was his *doradita*, all golden and sun-baked, and that's the kind of woman he likes best, the ones brown as river sand, yes... (76)

This not only echoes the presence of darkness in Cisneros' larger body of work, including *Caramelo*, "The Eyes of Zapata," and "*Bien* Pretty," but it also illustrates Clemencia's power

over Drew. He is spellbound to her darkness and dark agency and Clemencia can reaffirm herself in his submissiveness to her power.

Yet this also presents a necessary ambiguity to the Chicana feminist narrative that scholar Suzanne Chávez-Silverman notes in her 1995 article, “Chicanas in Love,” which analyzes Cisneros’ presentation of romance and love within her collection of poetry *Loose Woman* (1994). Chávez-Silverman concludes that Cisneros illustrates in that work despite the “persistent silencing and pathologizing…in both Chicano heterosexual and the dominant Anglo culture, a self-present, vibrant Chicana sexuality” (45), but only does so within the “safe” parameters of heterosexuality. While this may be a valid argument against the “(brown) woman-loving woman” (45) work of Alicia Gaspar de Alba whose work largely surrounds Chicana lesbianism, Chávez-Silverman neglects to consider Clemencia’s own erotic and love narrative. Ignoring that Clemencia *loves* Drew—that she wishes for nothing more than to usurp from Megan her role as Wife-Mother—would be to completely reject the complex characterization of the heroine and her right as a woman/individual to love. This a priori rejection of love imposes limitations to Clemencia’s fluidity as woman and feminist. Thus, Clemencia can conceptualize her feminist identity through Drew’s inadequate love and her troublesome relationship to him. Additionally, this results in Clemencia’s self-exploration, which leads her to love and accept her dark skin. Ultimately, it is not that Clemencia lacks total agency or power, but rather that she can also attain it through Drew’s lust and love in the text.

However, continuing to position Clemencia as La Malinche lends her character to a stigma of criticism as she implies a negative parallel within the Chicana feminist narrative when she appears to allow Drew/Cortés to conquer her and subsequently abandon her. Much like early critics of Cisneros’ novel *The House on Mango Street* (1984) criticized Esperanza for her

departure from, and abandonment of, her own community without acknowledging her own need to escape for survival[8], Clemencia appears to also abandon her ethnic culture and feminist narrative. Clemencia states:

> So, no. I've never married and never will. Not because I couldn't, but because I'm too romantic for marriage. Marriage has failed me, you could say. Not a man exists who hasn't disappointed me, whom I could trust to love the way I've loved. It's because I believe too much in marriage that I don't. Better to not marry than live a lie.
>
> Mexican men, forget it. For a long time the men clearing off the tables or chopping meat behind the butcher counter or driving the bus I rode to school every day, those weren't men. Not men I considered as potential lovers. Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban, Chilean, Colombian, Panamanian, [Salvadorian], Bolivian, Honduran, Argentine, Dominican, Venezuelan, Guatemalan, Ecuadorean, Nicaraguan, Peruvian, Costa Rican, Paraguayan, Uruguayan, I don't care. I never saw them. My mother did this to me. (69)

This presents an undeniably problematic character development for the Mexican American heroine. Not only does Clemencia reinforce stereotypical views of Mexican men of the working-class—whom she identifies in a sweeping generalization as the busboys and bus drivers—but she also temporarily positions herself above them merely because she is an American of Mexican descent. While her distancing from marrying "within" her culture is later explicated to stem from her mother's own negative relationships, Clemencia also reveals an internalized feeling of deficiency for being Mexican American and a woman. Thus, by rejecting all men—but

[8] Early critics included Marxist Juan Rodríguez—editor for *Carta Abierta* (1975-81) (a Chicano newsletter widely known for its sexist content).

emphasizing Latinos as the brown men/dark-skinned men—she is also rejecting her own identity as a brown woman/dark-skinned woman herself. Through her relationship with Drew, Clemencia, perhaps unexpectedly, can restore her self-visibility as a dark-skinned Chicana as he brings attention to her own ethnic identity, which she seems to otherwise repress. Even when it may superficially appear that Drew holds a power over her, Clemencia is also able to restore agency through her acquired ethnic-pride and by valorizing her physical darkness, which can be read as the power which subverts Drew.

This is not to dismiss completely Clemencia's internalized racism and colorism, which she reinforces, in this passage, through class-based stereotypes. However, it helps build Clemencia's self-perception and contrasts with her later valuation of whiteness that functions to highlight her own lack of self-worth which she extends to her community. Later in the short story, the reader can recognize the irony of her rejection of the dark-skinned *Mexicano* or Latino as Drew ultimately rejects Clemencia based on her own darkness and cultural identity. The heroine recognizes that " …besides, he could *never* marry *me*. You didn't think…? *Never marry a Mexican. Never marry a Mexican…*No, of course not. I see. I see" (80). While her love for, even obsession with, Drew limits much of Clemencia's agency within the text, it also proves itself as irreparably damaging to the heroine. For Drew can take Clemencia to bed, play with her emotions, but reject her as wife as he continues to uphold his place as Husband-Father without interruption or consequence. This interjects another meaning of darkness within the short story, as Clemencia must also manage her own disillusion of love and reevaluate her self-worth through Drew's rejection of her. Thus, darkness also defines the emotional dark spaces that Clemencia dwells on at the end of the text.

Darkness continues to manifest itself in other ways other than through physical appearances— including through the external, symbolic and literal absences of light, which are periodically embedded throughout the narrative. At the beginning of Clemencia's narration, the heroine contrasts her past interpretation of love to her current understanding of it and its damaging effects on her as a woman:

> I admit, there was a time when all I wanted was to belong to a man. To wear that gold band on my left hand and be worn on his arm like an expensive jewel brilliant in the light of day. Not the sneaking around I did in the different bars that all looked the same…wooden wagon-wheel light fixtures with hurricane lampshades a sick amber color like the drinking glasses you get for free at gas stations.
>
> Dark bars, dark restaurants then. And if not—my apartment, with his toothbrush firmly planted in the toothbrush holder like a flag on the North Pole. The bed so big because he never stayed the whole night. Of course not. (68-69)

Clemencia here acknowledges the literal darkness of these private spaces, "a sick amber color," that she finds herself in when meeting her lovers. Most importantly, it reinforces the symbolic function of darkness in the short story as the Chicana must navigate her duplicitous actions and behavior in the shadows of these public spaces. Even as she welcomes men into her apartment—her private, feminine space—she is unable to reclaim any power from these men. They still, at least initially, hold a power over her as they abandon her after taking what they desire from her in the dark. The symbolic darkness here overpowers the heroine, and Clemencia only later reclaims her brown girl magic by taking temporary control of her feminist narrative.

Clemencia's allusions to her darkness as magic are situated by exerting control over Drew in numerous ways, which is most apparent through her destructive nature. However, the "destructive woman" trope multiplies as Clemencia must navigate through two destructive, cultural tropes as La Malinche and Eve. As a Chicana, Clemencia must resist the condemnation of her gender as both an embodiment of La Malinche and "Destructive Woman" through her reclamation of her sexual power. As Judith Butler articulates, within *Gender Trouble* (1990), "the body is always under siege, suffering destruction by the very terms of history" (177), and the Chicana body and sexuality sustains dual histories that subject her to multiple social and cultural oppressions. Clemencia writes:

> My Malinalli, Malinche, my courtesan you said, and yanked my head back by the braid. Calling me that name in between little gulps of breath and the raw kisses you gave, laughing from that black beard of yours. (74)

Through Clemencia's reference to her braid in this scene, the protagonist alludes to both the indigenous and the erotic. When Clemencia allows Drew to "yank" her hair during intercourse, Clemencia is not merely surrendering to her white lover, but actively participating in her own sexuality even if feminist critics might see only colonization. For Clemencia does not reject the erotic, but instead enjoys it and derives sexual pleasure from this act.

The erotic in the text not only refers to Clemencia's literal role as mistress as Maythee G. Rojas concludes in her work[9]—but to Clemencia's ability to traverse between the traditional understanding and divisions of the feminine and masculine. Denying Clemencia's sexuality or

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[9] For Rojas in "Cisneros's 'Terrible Women: Recuperating the Erotic as a Feminist Source in 'Never Marry a Mexican' and the 'Eyes of Zapata,'" Clemencia is able to recover the feminist narrative through her sexual identity/"female eroticism" and role as mistress/"terrible women". However, Rojas feels that despite the mistress role and the subversive implications it may present in the text, Clemencia still must yield herself to the constraints of the dominant (male) power. (137-138)

access to the erotic denies women the ability to be both sexual and feminist. Additionally, the heroine's references to her own hair could be contrasted against the presentation of hair in Ernest Hemingway's *For Whom the Bell Tolls* (1940). When Hemingway's young heroine, María, has her long hair violently cut by Fascists to subdue her, the reader understands it as a forceful violation of the heroine's power and femininity. The young María adds that the Fascists then proceeded to gag her with her own braids as if to show ultimate dominance over the young girl. The parallels between these two intense scenes from American literature reinforce the feminist narrative present in Cisneros' short story as Clemencia exercises her sexual power *through* the erotic pull of her indigenous braids.

In Jean Wyatt's exploration of this text, which concludes that Clemencia "[willingly accepts] the white man's sexual domination, even his violence" (253) through her positioning as La Malinche, the heroine not only welcomes it but relishes this erotic intimacy. Not only does Clemencia's braid allude to her possessing the phallic, but it also allows the heroine to not only subvert Drew's power with her own sexual power but a traditional reading of La Malinche as trope as well. This sexual reclamation allows the heroine's sexuality to reclaim La Malinche's sexual energy within her Chicana feminist narrative:

> You're nothing without me. I created you from spit and red dust. And I can snuff you between my finger and thumb if I want to. Blow you to kingdom come. You're just a smudge of paint I chose to birth on canvas. And when I made you over, you were no longer a part of her, you were all mine. The landscape of your body taut as a drum. The heart beneath that hide thrumming and thrumming. Not an inch did I give back.

> I paint and repaint you the way I see fit, even now. After all these years. Did you know that? Little fool. You think I went hobbling along with my life, whimpering and whining like some twangy country-and-western when you went back to her. But I've been waiting. Making the world look at you from my eyes. And if that's not power, what is? (75)

The dark magic at work in Cisneros' short story manifests through Clemencia's reclamation of her sexuality and rejects the role of merely a passive victim as an embodiment of La Malinche. A rigid reading of Clemencia as La Malinche only reinforces the heroine as a passive captive, which is a clear misreading of the protagonist's role within the text. When Clemencia establishes control of Drew by positioning herself as artist, she also establishes control of the narrative and reader of the text. Clemencia can shape the truth and myths at work in the text and transform La Malinche from passive spectator into director. Clemencia's feminist agency only continues to build through her role as artist.

Negotiating Gender, Whiteness, and Darkness

Perhaps one of the most persistent criticisms made of Clemencia is through imposing a view of her sexuality as "masculine." Scholar Jean Wyatt claims that Clemencia is unable to negotiate both her ethnic identity and her gender within "On Not Being La Malinche: Border Negotiations of Gender in Sandra Cisneros's 'Never Marry a Mexican' and 'Woman Hollering Creek' (1995)." In this article, Wyatt contrasts Clemencia against another Cisneros' character, Felice, from the short story "Woman Hollering Creek" whom she believes can straddle both borders of the feminine and masculine while enforcing a feminist narrative. For Wyatt,

Clemencia is unable to find the balance of performing[10] either gender throughout the text. It is ironic that Wyatt seems to ignore Felice's troubling remark at the end of the short story when Felice surprises the protagonist by owning a pickup. Felice responds by telling her that "[she] used to have a Pontiac Sunbird. But those cars are for *viejas*. Pussy cars. Now this here is a *real* car" (55). Felice's character does not mediate the feminine/masculine dichotomy as Wyatt claims, but rather reinforces many of Chicana theorist Gloria Anzaldúa's concerns in her subchapter, "*Que no se nos olviden los hombres*[11]." Anzaldúa writes:

> '*Tú no sirves pa' nada—*
>
> you're good for nothing.
>
> *Eres pura vieja.'*
>
> 'You're nothing but a woman' means you are defective. Its opposite is to be *un macho*. (105)

While Anzaldúa may have written this portion of *Borderlands/La Frontera* as a response to the Chicano's oppression of the Chicana, a similar criticism can be made of other Chicanas like Felice who balances the feminine and masculine at the expense of the feminist sisterhood. To be Mexican American and a woman, a *vieja*, is a thing of derision for Felice as it contrasts against the hypermasculine symbolism of her pickup, in the overall plot.

Wyatt adds that "Clemencia lives out the consequences of adopting a masculine role" (260) in the short story. For the scholar, Clemencia's self-destruction at the end of the novel is a consequence of, and punishment for, her inability to balance the masculine and the feminine. Wyatt presents Clemencia as Cortés, or as she states in her own words, "Clemencia adopts the

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[10] While this invokes Judith Butler's theoretical work on gender performance, it does not necessarily employ the theory as Wyatt argues there should be a balance of both the masculine and feminine within Clemencia.

[11] Translation: "Let us not forget the men"

aggressive, violent sexual stance of the '*chingón*' (245). The word *chingón*, which crudely translates into both one (usually male as the pronoun suggests) who screws another person and someone who is dominant, has a long, controversial history within Chicanx culture. Traditionally it has been used a male noun, but Chicana feminists of the 21st century have reclaimed the term by transforming it into a feminine noun, *chingóna*, to assert their own strong identities within the culture. However, Wyatt's assertion that Clemencia is being punished for adopting a traditionally masculine role is problematic, and reinforced by scholar Jeff Thomson in his work "'What is Called Heaven': Identity in Sandra Cisneros's *Woman Hollering Creek* (1994)." Thomson argues that Clemencia "is a dominant, willful woman who fills out a masculine pattern of power" (420) and behaves "like a stereotypical male" (421) as he regards her sexual nature. Wyatt ultimately claims that Clemencia merely performs masculinity and neither truly possesses it nor redefines womanhood (260-261). However, I argue that Clemencia does recover feminism, paradoxically, through her embodiment of La Malinche. Furthermore, by reclaiming this sexual power, even if ultimately self-destructive, the text adds to the fluidity of sexuality as a non-gender specific human characteristic. To gender sexuality as either feminine or masculine not only confines our readings of La Malinche within Mexican American literature, but also reduces sexuality to a set of troubling gender standards or expectations.

Aside from Clemencia's physical and symbolic darkness as a Mexican American woman in the short story, darkness also lends itself to a different reading through literary critic Leslie Fiedler's binary of the "Fair Maiden" and the "Dark Lady" trope through Clemencia and Megan. As Fiedler establishes in *Love and Death in the American Novel* (1960), the traditional pairing of the "Fair Maiden" and "Dark Lady" has often presented a racialized reading of female characters. Fiedler defines the "Fair Maidens" as the white heroines with distinctively fair

features and fair skin—the "Good Good Girls" (296) of the American novel—that often come from reputable and esteemed families. By contrast, Fiedler describes the "Dark Ladies" as those with dark features and dark skin, which is only intensified by their aggressively sexual nature and often-troubling upbringings. The posing of this binary situates Cisneros' "Never Marry a Mexican" in a unique position with its two opposing characters—Clemencia and Megan—who present singular comparisons and challenges to these traditional ideologies. Clemencia takes on the role as "Dark Lady" by embodying darkness in multiple facets. The Chicana states early on:

> I'll never marry. Not any man. I've known men too intimately. I've witnessed their infidelities, and I've helped them to it. Unzipped and unhooked and agreed to clandestine maneuvers. I've been accomplice, committed premeditated crimes. I'm guilty of having caused deliberate pain to *other* [12] women. I'm vindictive and cruel, and I'm capable of anything. (68)

Clemencia asserts her own destructiveness—emphasizing that she has been a willing and active accomplice in the destruction of "other" women. This allows for a reading of Clemencia's dark personality as separate from her dark-skin as she reveals her pathological darkness. Cisneros' heroine not only deliberately plays out the archetypical Destructive Woman, but affirms it to the reader at every opportunity.

In a later scene, Clemencia shares with the reader that she slept with Drew while Megan was away at the hospital giving birth to their son. This clearly makes our stance to Clemencia more problematic as she establishes her damaging characterization through her betrayal of "other" women. Certainly, this calls into question the feminist narrative that Cisneros is seemingly creating—Clemencia has no loyalties and affirms her role as *chingón* as she takes

[12] My italics.

these men from their wives when the other women are at their most vulnerable—both physically and psychologically. Yet, Clemencia does it without apology and adds:

> …It's not the last time I've slept with a man the night his wife is birthing a baby. Why do I do that, I wonder? Sleep with a man when his wife is giving life, being suckled by a thing with its eyes still shut. Why do I do that? It's always given me a bit of a crazy joy to be able to kill those women like that, without their knowing it. To know I've had their husbands when they were anchored in blue hospital rooms, their guts yanked inside out, the baby sucking their breasts while their husband sucked mine. All this while their ass stitches were still hurting. (77)

Disturbing as this may be to the reader's sympathies, we should notice that Clemencia questions herself and her damaging motives towards these women and mothers which signals self-awareness even if the heroine is unable to reconcile this dangerous characterization. To simply condemn this behavior as masculine or as Jeff Thomson articulates, "a dangerous result of women recapitulating the mistakes of men" (421), would be to ignore the humanness of Clemencia's flawed character.

Clemencia presents a convergence of the traditionally masculine and feminine by presenting a complex understanding of her own disrupted psyche, which Virginia Woolf would label as "the androgynous mind" that "is resonant and porous" (98). However, ultimately her reference is to these unnamed women that she refers to as "other women." For these "other women" do not merely blur into the subconscious as embodiments of the Wife-Mother archetype, with roles she can never replace, but rather are for Clemencia root causes of her treacherous behavior. These dynamics illuminate the brown-versus-white female dialectic. In Rojas' work, Clemencia's pleasure of harming white women is of minimal consequence in

comparison to Drew's betrayal of both women in the text. However, as I emphasize the complex relationship between Clemencia and Megan, it is not to liberate Drew from his harmful manipulation of these women. Drew's parallel to Cortés is clear as he seeks to use Clemencia and then dispose of her once she threatens his responsibilities as husband and father. Drew's destructive behavior sacrifices both Clemencia and Megan as he takes his dark-skinned lover to bed while his own wife labors in another to give birth to their son. As Rojas, Wyatt, and other Cisneros' scholars accurately conclude, Drew perpetuates the harmful oppression of women and ultimate racism against Chicanas and this analysis does not aim to pardon him of either. However, this also deflects from Clemencia's very real feelings of inadequacy, which appears to stem from the presence of white culture and, later, through Megan's presence as the personification of the "Fair Maiden" and Wife-Mother.

Clemencia directs much of her anger towards Megan, her whiteness and her role as Wife-Mother, as she tells the son, her new lover:

> I was sleeping with your father and didn't give a damn about that woman, your mother. If she was a brown woman like me, I might've had a harder time living with myself, but since she's not, I don't care…I don't care what's right anymore. I don't care about his wife. She's not *my* sister. (76)

Clemencia justifies her harmful behavior by creating a cultural space between her narrative and that of the white women/white wives in the text. Alexandra Fitts's literary review, "Sandra Cisneros's Modern Malinche: A Reconsideration of Feminine Archetypes in *Woman Hollering Creek* (2002)," perceives it as a lack of loyalty between Clemencia and these "other" women (4). Clemencia's necessity to reassert her own dominance and control stems from her need to survive psychologically and emotionally within the narrative. Yet, similarly to Felice, it comes at the

expense of breaking the feminist sisterhood between brown and white women. Clemencia here embodies La Malinche on a different level—not just through her rejection of the dark-skinned men (the betrayal of her own ethnic community)—but through her betrayal of her second community as a feminist.

From a 21st century Chicana feminist perspective, a reading of this strenuous relationship between Clemencia and Megan may evoke Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's TED Talk, "We Should All Be Feminists", where Adichie feels that women are traditionally raised to become competitors for the attention of men (TED). While the satisfactory "feminist" position may be that both women should come together and free themselves from Drew's masculine control, the text presents a more complicated dynamic between both women that is worthy of its own close reading. Clemencia *does* compete with Megan, but not merely for Drew's love and attention. Clemencia rather competes to restore her sense of self and role as Wife-Mother, which she perceives to have been taken by Megan. For Clemencia is true to herself despite her flawed character, and we should not dismiss her, but rather attempt to explain what may drive a woman under her conditions to act out so vehemently against her white sister who is not merely her competitor for Drew's love. Furthermore, to highlight the damaging power struggle present in American literature and culture between whiteness and darkness, which is not limited to the white and black binary. Cisneros' text presents a tangible point of analysis for what exists outside of literary discourse between Chicanas and White women—a feminist positioning that unlike "darkness" (which can be redefined as agency within the short story) often leaves Chicanas feeling insufficient or powerless as Clemencia does within "Never Marry a Mexican."

These issues of inadequacy are separate from the discourse of aesthetics, but rather speak to the greater socio-political issues that remind us of the historical oppression permitted and

orchestrated by some white women during second wave feminism and well into the 21st century against women of color. This exploration merely aims to analyze Clemencia's feelings of insufficiency and how she justifies these feelings through her critique of white feminism or white femininity. We may remember that when Clemencia rejects the dark-skinned men, the Hispanics, Latinos, and *Mexicanos*, she does so by displacing blame onto her mother—stating that "[she] did this to [her]" (69). Not only does this emphasize Clemencia's rejection of the maternal figure in her own life, but it also situates the source of Clemencia's lack of self-worth linked to her cultural identity. Early in the short story, the heroine narrates the view that her father's parents had of her Mexican American mother. She describes her own mother's insufficiency in their eyes as authentic *Mexicanos/as*:

> …because she was from *el otro lado*, the other side, and my father had married down by marrying her. If he had married a white woman from *el otro lado*, that would've been different. That would've been marrying up, even if the white girl was poor. But what could be more ridiculous than a Mexican girl who couldn't even speak Spanish, who didn't know enough to set a separate plate for each course at dinner, nor how to fold cloth napkins, nor how to set the silverware. (69)

Clemencia does not defend her mother nor does she reject that her mother is insufficient, which likely results from her own resentment of the mother figure[13]. Furthermore, even if Clemencia's commentary is interpreted as redemptive of the mother figure, she internalizes the mother's perceived inadequacy as her own. First, Clemencia criticizes her mother's inability to perform her gender in accordance with the Mexican socio-cultural expectations. The protagonist states

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[13] Clemencia writes that her mother's role in her life is truly non-existent after the death of her father. She focuses much of her disdain on her mother's betrayal—she remarries the same man she is dating when Clemencia's father is dying. The fact that he is an Anglo male seems only to deepen her resentment towards her mother.

that "in [her] ma's house the plates were always stacked in the center of the table, the knives and forks and spoons standing in a jar, help yourself. All the dishes chipped or cracked and nothing matched. And no tablecloth, ever" (70). The mother is unable to act out her duties as Wife-Mother, which explains why this role is of such value to the dark-skinned heroine later in the text.

Clemencia's second critique is that her mother is insufficient as a woman of color in comparison to a white woman *even* if that woman happened to be poor. Clemencia recognizes not only the significance of class-distinctions, but also articulates that white women navigate society in a distinctly advantageous way over her own Mexican American mother. Clemencia realizes her own mother could never assume a similar privilege as that of a white woman, according to the Mexican family. Thus, this reveals the origins of Clemencia's vengeful attitudes towards white women—for Clemencia realizes that in presenting her mother's inadequacy and subordinate position to whiteness she is also emphasizing her own inadequate and subordinate positioning to whiteness. Critic Laura Paz states that "the narrator's abhorrence of herself and her lover's wife come from the realization that there is a hierarchy of cultures in society in which white women are at the top and brown women, like [Clemencia], are below" (22). Later, when Drew rejects her for her ethnic identity, it only reinforces her anger towards white women, for her own lover chooses to stay with Megan rather than take her, the dark-skinned Chicana, as wife and mother.

Ultimately, it is Megan who positions herself as the primary Wife-Mother and as Clemencia's foil of the feminist narrative alongside an illustration of what Clemencia's own mother could never acquire. Megan's position as Wife-Mother and removal of Clemencia through her enrages the Chicana heroine, because she understands that she cannot subvert

Megan's white femininity as easily as she can Drew's masculinity. While Clemencia attempts to reclaim power from the white heroine by stating that she allowed Drew to let Megan become pregnant (74-75), the heroine must also understand her own second-class status as mistress. Later, during her affair with Drew's son, Clemencia thinks that "[he] could be her son if [he] weren't so light-skinned" (76). Clemencia evokes the maternal continuously throughout the narrative specifically regarding Drew's and Megan's son:

> These mornings, I fix coffee for me, milk for the boy. I think of that woman, and I can't see a trace of my lover in this boy, as if she conceived him by immaculate conception.
>
> I sleep with this boy, their son. To make the boy love me the way I love his father. To make him want me, hunger, twist in his sleep, as if he'd swallowed glass. I put him in my mouth. Here, little piece of my *corazón*…Come here, *mi cariñito*. Come to *mamita*. Here's a bit of toast.
>
> I can tell from the way he looks at me, I have him in my power. Come, sparrow. I have the patience of eternity. Come to *mamita*. My stupid little bird. I don't move. I don't startle him. I let him nibble. All, all for you. Rub his belly. Stroke him. Before I snap my teeth. (82)

Clemencia continues to both assert her destructive power as she manipulates the boy only to avenge her anger at the father. Even as Clemencia wants to nurture the son by making him hunger for her presence, both sexually and maternally, she also wants to destroy him. For Clemencia, the son is merely an extension of his mother—the literal offspring of Megan's femininity and role as Wife-Mother. Later Clemencia inspects him as he lies nude in her bed and she imagines herself saying, "Tell me, baby, which part of you is your mother. I try to imagine

her lips, her jaw, her long long legs that wrapped themselves around this father who took me to his bed" (77). Rojas states that Clemencia can kill Megan by sleeping with her husband and she can then establish herself as "wife, mother, [and] lover" (144). However, I will suggest that Clemencia can also destroy Megan's role by sleeping with and destroying her son. The reference to milk is used once more at the end of the short story when Clemencia imagines Drew and his wife asleep together and Clemencia imagines her as "warm, [and] radiating her own heat, alive under the flannel and down and smelling a bit like milk and hand cream, and that smell familiar and dear" (83). The image of nursing resurfaces again, but this time besides the image of Megan who continues to assert her natural position as Wife-Mother in the text.

After Drew rejects Clemencia midway through the short story, the protagonist feels free to manifest her anger and destructive nature out on the wife. At their final meeting, Clemencia takes a bag of gummy bears and begins to place them only in places Megan will take notice. Clemencia appears drawn to Megan initially as an object of curiosity as she narrates with extraordinary detail given to her possessions. For the Chicana lover, Megan's white femininity functions as a novelty as well as further emphasis of their class, cultural, and feminist distinctions:

> I found myself opening the medicine cabinet, looking at all the things that were hers. Her Estée Lauder lipsticks. Corals and pinks, of course. Her nail polishes—mauve was as brave as she could wear. Her cotton balls and blond hairpins.
> A pair of bone-colored sheepskin slippers, as clean as the day she'd bought them. On the door hook—a white robe with a MADE IN ITALY label, and a silky nightshirt with pearl buttons. I touched the fabrics. *Calidad*. Quality.

> I don't know how to explain what I did next. While [Drew] was busy in the kitchen, I went over to where I'd left my backpack, and took out a bag of gummy bears I'd bought. And while he was banging pots, I went around the house and left a trail of them in places I was sure *she* would find them. One in her lucite makeup organizer. One stuffed inside each bottle of nail polish. I untwisted the expensive lipsticks to their full length and smushed a bear on the top before recapping them. I even put a gummy bear in her diaphragm case in the very center of that luminescent moon. (81)

Clemencia is amused by Megan's possessions, which allow her a momentary access to power by allowing her to present Megan with a subdued and lackluster femininity against her own flourishing and vibrant sexual identity. Unlike Clemencia, Megan is not daring enough to wear bold shades of lipstick and this provides the heroine with a subtle agency. For Clemencia, revealing Megan's inadequacy as woman and wife momentarily allows her to ignore her own feelings of inadequacy. Her rejection of Megan's femininity is two-fold, for Megan mediates the maternal and the domestic spheres that Drew denies Clemencia. The responses consist of child-like reasoning to disrupt this space with gummy bears grants Clemencia further agency. Again, the reference to Megan's diaphragm case is Clemencia's way of trying to subvert Megan's femininity and agency by stripping her of her fertility. However, as the unsubstantial metaphor of this candy suggests, it is nothing but a desperate attempt to recover what has already been taken from the dark-skinned heroine.

This excerpt also helps situate Megan as "Fair Maiden" as her whiteness goes beyond her racial and ethnic identity. Megan symbolically radiates her whiteness through all her possessions which Clemencia describes as "blond," "bone-colored," "white," and "luminescent" with

embedded references to a pearl and the moon. The whiteness of these images only contrasts with Clemencia's own physical darkness and destructive darkness. It also reiterates the class divisions, which exist between the heroines—with Clemencia belonging to the working-class. Even as Clemencia establishes a financial independence, she also realizes that Megan's class status is elevated by her white skin. Clemencia emphasizes this again when she meets Megan for the first time at an art exhibit:

> It was [Drew] I saw first. And in that instant I felt as if everyone in the room, all the sepia-toned photographs, my students, the men in business suits, the high-heeled women, the security guards, everyone, could see me for what I was…
>
> He caught up with us in the coat-check area, arm in arm with a redheaded Barbie doll in a fur coat. One of those scary Dallas types, hair yanked into a ponytail, big shiny face like the women behind the counters at Neiman's. …
>
> And I don't know why, but all of a sudden I looked at my shoes and felt ashamed at how old they looked…
>
> When I got home I had to lie down…I shut the lights and TV and went to get some aspirin, and the cats, who'd been asleep with me on the couch, got up too and followed me into the bathroom as if they knew what's what. And then they followed me into bed, where they aren't allowed, but this time I just let them, fleas and all. (79-80)

Clemencia continues to present Megan's elevated class status against her own working-class identity. She compares Megan to a Barbie doll and stereotypes her as a Dallas-type, which only reinforces Clemencia's cruel behavior and lack of solidarity with Megan.

Once Clemencia returns to her private space, her apartment, she can accept the shame that she felt in facing Megan. Clemencia's reference to her shoes can be contrasted against Megan's bone-colored slippers that appeared clean and new. Even though Clemencia declares herself as amphibious in the text, she also continues to attempt to reclaim some agency through her role as artist and creator:

> I'm a person who doesn't belong to any class. The rich like to have me around because they envy my creativity; they know they can't buy *that*. The poor don't mind if I live in their neighborhood because they know I'm poor like they are, even if my education and the way I dress keeps us worlds apart. I don't belong to any class. Not to the poor, whose neighborhood I share. Not to the rich, who come to my exhibitions and buy my work. Not to the middle class from which my sister Ximena and I fled. (71-72)

For the dark-skinned heroine, her artistry grants her the ultimate form of agency as this talent is hers alone. Clemencia perceives her art to be undefined by class, ethnicity, or culture, and provides her with the most lasting sense of autonomy in the narrative.

At the close of the short story, Clemencia emphasizes once more her crazy urge to kill. Clemencia reveals that it is not herself that she wants to kill, and "that's when [she gets] on the telephone, dangerous as a terrorist" (83). From a previous scene in the short story, the reader knows that the person she continually calls is her former lover, Drew. In her final interaction with Megan in the text, Clemencia tells the reader of an instance when she phoned Drew at four in the morning:

> Hello, she chirped. I want to talk to Drew. Just a moment, she said in her most polite drawing-room English. Just a moment. I laughed about that for weeks.

> What a stupid ass to pass the phone over to the lug asleep beside her. Excuse me, honey, it's for you. When Drew mumbled hello I was laughing so hard I could hardly talk. Drew? That dumb bitch of a wife of yours, I said, and that's all I could manage. That stupid stupid stupid. No Mexican woman would react like that. Excuse me, honey. It cracked me up. (77)

Clemencia here wishes to depict Megan's inadequacy one final time, through criticism of Megan's role as wife, by claiming that a *Mexicana* would never be so blind and passive to her husband's obvious infidelity. Even though Clemencia's role as mistress is complicated—it liberates her from the traditional role as Wife-Mother and yet binds her to the dark shadows of her nefarious rendezvouses—she also views it as a way of finally stripping Megan of some her white, feminine power. By demeaning her as Wife-Mother, Clemencia derives a disturbingly sinister joy from Megan's pain.

At the short story's conclusion, when Clemencia appears to be stripped of all agency and the role of Wife-Mother is completely removed from her reach, she finds comfort in her ability to use her art to alleviate that feeling of "the whole sky leaning against [her] brain" (83). Clemencia states:

> Sometimes the sky is so big and I feel so little at night. That's the problem with being cloud. The sky so terribly big. Why is it worse at night, when I have such an urge to communicate and no language with which to form the words? Only colors. Pictures. And you know what I have to say isn't always pleasant. (83)

Ultimately, Clemencia's skills are no longer those of La Malinche, the translator, for as the heroine states she has no language with which to communicate. However, the dark-skinned heroine is not altogether powerless—again, her art allows her to articulate her feelings of

displacement. Clemencia reiterates that what she wishes to communicate is not always pleasant—emphasizing a Chicana feminist narrative's complicated dialectic. "Never Marry a Mexican" does not merely pit brown women against white women, but rather reveals an often-ignored aspect of the feminist narrative between white feminists and Chicana feminists, which was established through the limiting exclusiveness of second wave feminism. However, instead of merely ignoring the damaging social, political, economic, racial, and cultural power discrepancies between white and brown women, this text challenges the reader to critically approach Clemencia's flawed, human character. In this sense, the text avoids simplistic, undialectical, and absolute binaries. Her physical and psychological darkness operates in different modes to free her from a simplified reading as the "Destructive Woman" and the one-sided dismissal of La Malinche ultimately allow Clemencia and Chicanas to exist; "*Ni putas, ni santas, soló mujeres*[14].

[14] My translation: "Neither whores, nor saints, only women."

CHAPTER IV

AT A DIGITAL CROSSROADS: CREATING INTERSECTIONAL FEMINISMS VIA SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS

In acknowledging the presence of "darkness" within Ernest Hemingway's *The Garden of Eden* (1986) and Sandra Cisneros' "Never Marry a Mexican," the dark-skinned woman[15] is provided with a standpoint to articulate the "brown-versus-white female dialectic" (Rojas 145) that plays out in American culture. This presents opportunities for open discussions between feminists, as well as opponents of feminism, regarding the socio-political tensions present within the feminist sisterhood[16]. Such tensions are addressed in prominent works like *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color* (1981), a collection of essays and prose by prominent feminist scholars, which articulate these precise issues and forge a dialogue that reflects the feminist struggle after the Civil Rights Movement. However, criticisms that may be made of such efforts, including in my previous chapters, might be that these discussions are most often limited within the academy, limited to examples at the close of the 20th century, and are contained within the genre of American fiction. Thus, the purpose of this chapter is to explore

[15] As in my previous chapters, my use of the term "brown women" refers to dark-skinned Chicanas, Latinas, and Mexican American women. Women here is also inclusive of the experiences of the LGBTQ+ community. However, due to the limitations of the scope of a thesis-length project, I do not delve into the experiences of the Afro-Latina, nor the issues faced by the LGBTQ+ community, in any great detail in this chapter.
[16] When I make numerous references to sisterhood and women in this chapter, it is used to define anyone that identifies themselves as a "woman." This project does not intend to be exclusive of transwomen, femmes, or studs from the LGBTQ+ community, but rather identifies them as women that are essential to the conversation of intersectional feminism.

this dialectic in the 21st century through social media pages and accounts. To be precise, I will explore the multiple platforms of Tomi Lahren (a conservative political commentator), *The Root* (a multi-platform account with Black activism as a focus), and *Xicanisma* (a Chicana feminist blogger) to further understand the white-brown-black conversation or attitudes about feminism through a cultural analysis of their online presence and how they express and further contemporary discussions of identity, gender, culture, and social justice.[17] These accounts operate in the real-world interactive online environment, and further the discourse through a voice that builds upon the foundations set down by white feminists and WOC feminists in the mid-20th century.[18] Because of their Web presence these social media platforms can also create accessible content that allows forms of commentary and response. Ultimately, these social media platforms allow a broad audience to engage with oppositional politics shaped by ethnic and cultural identities and voice the current state of feminist issues by creating a digital crossroads.

In Tara Yosso's "Critical Race Media Literacy: Challenging Deficit Discourse about Chicanas/os (2002)" and Janie Jaramillo Santoy's "Chicana Bloggers: Creating Diversity Online Via Participation (2013)," these scholars look at the impact of digital media on Chicanas as well as what drives Chicanas to produce platforms to articulate their ideas. However, even with Jaramillo Santoy's 2013 article, which is the most current, we see limitations because its focus is on traditional bloggers who use independent websites to host their content. It is necessary to distinguish Tomi Lahren, *The Root*, and *Xicanisma* from these traditional definitions of a "blogger" since users can readily access their content and engage without having to log into a separate, independent platform. This accessibility makes this feminist content, as well as hostility

[17] Within the scope of this chapter, I define "platform(s)" as digital spaces that allow and encourage multiple voices to engage in dialogue based on their own identities and experiences.
[18] WOC is an abbreviation for "women of color," which I will use frequently within this chapter.

towards feminism, content available to divergent communities including users with diverse demographics across the United States and other countries. However, social media also has its limitations because many women may still find this content inaccessible due to financial or geographical restrictions. Thus, while it welcomes a larger group of women to the table to engage with these feminist issues, it is not a platform free of restrictions. Another issue these digital platforms include are potentially hostile environments for dialogue, since while many readers may engage in productive and advantageous discourse others also participate in destructive, harmful, and disadvantageous discourse. However, despite these often-damaging limitations, social media allows working-class women, both WOC and white women, to insert their voices into the dialogue which often excludes them in traditional academia.

Such discourse then distances itself from the traditional highbrow setting of the academy, which can often be prohibitive and dismiss the less-educated, yet just as vital, voice of the working-class woman. Thus, this new media encourages different relationships between WOC and white women that challenge the traditional power dynamic between the academic world and the real world. This ultimately brings into focus the women of color that feminist scholars advocate for in their work. As Chicana scholar Gloria Anzaldúa writes within *Borderlands/La Frontera*, we have "numerous possibilities" on our journey towards a "new consciousness" (101). And social media, in its own novel way, can provide for some previously excluded voices to speak out on issues that affect them directly. Unlike the classroom or the academy at large, the Internet provides a more level-playing field and space for discourse, which is illustrated by the focus of this chapter.

Tomi Lahren, a well-known political commentator, is best known for her former position as host of "Tomi" on *The Blaze*. *The Blaze* is a conservative network founded by Glenn Beck,

which operates on multiple platforms including the Web and radio. Lahren has gained massive visibility on social media due to the "Final Thoughts with Tomi" segment of her program. These clips, which are posted online to Lahren's *Facebook* page, are condensed video and sound bites that often go viral due to their inflammatory nature. While Lahren does not identify herself as feminist, many of her conservative Christian views, which are central to her political posts and commentary, relate to feminist issues, particularly through her condemnation of the label and ideology. Tomi Lahren's social media presence is greater, in terms of viewers, than the other two accounts I will be exploring in this chapter, *Xicanisma* and *The Root.* Her audience includes over 4.2 million *Facebook* likes and page followers, an *Instagram* account (@tomilahren) with more than 750,000 followers, and a *Twitter* account (@TomiLahren) with close to 700,000 followers.[19] Lahren's posts are intentionally reactionary, provocative, and can fairly be labeled as polarizing and confrontational. While Lahren does not engage directly with her followers, many of them engage in discussions, which are at times friendly but often become quite heated via the comments section. At the end of March 2017, Lahren was put on an indefinite suspension by her employer, Glenn Beck, for taking a public stance defending a women's right to choice on a popular daytime talk show. As we shall see, her position intersects with the other platforms that I later discuss.

The Root is a multi-media news platform that focuses on a diverse range of issues that primarily affect the Black community. Founded in 2008 by Henry Louis Gates Jr., *The Root* currently has multiple editors and contributing journalists who produce thoughtful pieces of

[19] On *Facebook,* "like/likes" can be defined as a way of expressing support or agreement with a page, post, etc. Whereas as a *Facebook* "follower" can be defined as someone that is actively engaged with that page. By "following" another user or page you are kept up-to-date with their *content*. These definitions can also be used within other platforms such as *Instagram* and *Twitter.*

writing regarding Black culture and politics.[20] *The Root* has multiple media channels including *Facebook* with over 940,000 page likes and over 920,000 page followers, a *Twitter* account (@TheRoot) with over 314,000 followers, an *Instagram* account (@the.root) with more than 80,000 followers as well as an independent website (www.theroot.com). *The Root,* similar to Tomi Lahren, does not engage directly with users, but does encourage the online community to engage through the comments section. *The Root*'s company overview states its mission is to:

> …[provide] an unflinching examination of political and cultural news through insightful debate and commentary from both established and emerging black thought-leaders. *The Root* features unvarnished analysis of important issues in the black community and engages anyone looking for diverse viewpoints that are provocative, savvy and smart. (Facebook)

While the platform does not label itself as a feminist channel, many contributors which write for *The Root* regularly engage with Black feminist issues and have remained supportive of women of color and the LGBTQ+ community throughout their writings.

Xicanisma is also a multi-platform account that engages with an online community via *Facebook*, *Instagram*, *Twitter*, and most recently through a podcast on *Sound Cloud* titled "1-900-9099-CRY."[21] While the blogger, Cassandra, stated within her first podcast that her account would function under a separate identity than *Xicanisma,* it will be included within my analysis as she has promoted her *Sound Cloud* channel via her official *Facebook* page. The creator holds some anonymity by only using her first name, Cassandra, and withholding her primary city or place of employment. While the blogger focuses on a range of social justice issues, she primarily

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[20] Founder Henry Louis Gates Jr. now also serves as series writer, Executive Producer, and chairman of *The Root*.

[21] The name of the account is a direct allusion to Chicana author Ana Castillo's *Massacre of the Dreamers: Essays on Xicanisma* (1994), which defines "Xicanisma" as another way of identifying as a Chicana feminist.

presents the page as a political blog from a Chicana feminist point of view. Her largest platform, *Facebook*, engages with users by sharing news articles, blog posts, poems, videos, and memes that focus on Mexican American, Latina, and Chicana feminist issues and experience, but also supports the LGBTQ+ community along with WOC feminism. In her sharing of such links, she also often adds personal commentary and encourages her online community to engage with each other through the comments section or engages with other users herself. On *Facebook, Xicanisma* has over 90,000 likes and page followers, an *Instagram* account (@xicanisma_) with over 80,000 followers, and a *Twitter* account (@gringatears) more than 9,000 followers. In many instances both her posts and comments have caused issues for the blogger who often encounters irate readers that strongly disagree with her agenda and feel that she is only further reinforcing divisions between feminists of color, white feminists, and the Chicanx culture/community.

These three selected accounts present diverse projections of what scholar Maythee G. Rojas nuanced as the "brown-versus-white-female dialectic" in her 1999 article regarding Sandra Cisneros' short-story, "Never Marry a Mexican." While Rojas only briefly references this tension between Cisneros' Chicana heroine and white heroine as appropriation of the masculine within this text (145), this overlooks the necessary dialogue on the positioning of whiteness and darkness as agency. Thus, this dialectic, of brown-versus-white, is not only significant in the analysis of Cisneros' short story, but also in a general analysis of the positioning of these voices, black, brown, and white, and what this reveals about current American culture and feminisms. These three sources illustrate the tensions that continue to resurface between the ideals of a feminist sisterhood and the implications of the presidential election of Donald J. Trump in 2016.

While Tomi Lahren resists the label of "feminist" and has largely condemned women that define themselves as feminists, she also has created one of the largest political platforms

currently accessible on social media. On several occasions her segment, “Final Thoughts with Tomi,” has focused on feminist activism including most recently the annual Women’s March in Washington D.C. The march, which took place on January 21, 2017, was particularly momentous as it also functioned as a dual protest of Donald J. Trump’s presidential inauguration alongside its traditional function as a resistance against misogyny. The following day, January 22nd, Lahren posted a video on *Facebook*, captioned “Women’s March on Reality,” from her program on *The Blaze* where the host denounced the march:

> See some, the snowflakes, were so taken aback by the result that they felt they must do something. Something constructive? No, not really. When they finally stopped crying they decided to plan a march in Washington D.C.—for what reason? To show little girls around the country that they too can play the victim card. They too can have their greatest contribution to society be whining about the election…
>
> They believe Donald Trump demeans women, but conveniently ignore the fact that their first choice, [Hillary Clinton], accepted hundreds of thousands of dollars from Middle Eastern nations…stayed married to Bill [Clinton] although he cheated on her and humiliated her…Oh, and [let us] not forget her bimbo-eruption-team, which sought to discredit all of Bill’s accusers…Really? Oh, but [protesters] so purposefully ignore and dismiss any woman that doesn’t hold free abortion or birth control as priority one for the nation. (Facebook)

Lahren’s comments intentionally aim to provoke her critics by labeling the women in attendance as “snowflakes” to attack their efforts at solidarity. Lahren perhaps is most controversial as she labels “snowflakes” all individuals that advocate for “safe spaces,” support the Black Lives

Matter movement, or identify with the Left or as Liberals. Thus, Lahren, who continually defends her positioning as a Constitutionalist, also participates in the silencing of and shaming of the voices of women that feel at odds with the 2016 election results and current political environment.

Even as Lahren wishes to discredit Hillary Clinton's competency to govern the United States and emphasizes the candidate's political controversies, she also wishes to accomplish this by deflecting blame from Bill Clinton onto his partner, Hillary Clinton, for his infidelities. In a later interview, on *Comedy Central*'s "The Daily Show with Trevor Noah," Lahren attempts to counter Trump's comments regarding sexual harassment by stating that "Hillary could use some of ["that"] every now and then, [but] Bill's a little busy" (Comedy Central). Lahren's comment is a reference to Donald Trump's odious comments made in 2005 when he refers to making unwelcomed sexual advances on women by "grabbing them by the pussy" and adding "you can do anything [to women when you are famous]" (YouTube). Lahren engages this reference when she adds that this presidential candidate could use some of "that"—again, not engaging with Hillary Clinton's executive ability or inability, but rather in a way that implies a deficiency on her behalf as a woman.

This places Lahren in an unusual dynamic as she does not participate directly in the brown-versus-white female dialectic, but rather in one against all women including white women who have the slightest amount of human compassion for those exploited or harassed. By using her voice to present her opinion, which we might expect to further feminism and respect for women in general, she instead establishes her agency, power, and privilege through the degradation of other women. However, Lahren's condemnation strikes many groups equally as she has also launched numerous verbal and political attacks on the Black Lives Matter

Movement by referring to protestors and activists as "thugs" as well as the Latina(o), Chicana(o), and Middle Eastern communities on issues of immigration. Most recently on March 10, 2017 in her "Final Thoughts" segment, "Illegal Immigrant Sob Stories Glorified," she ridiculed Catalina Velasquez, a trans, undocumented Colombiana graduate from Georgetown University, for voicing her distress at not being able to hug her mother due to her immigration status. Lahren seemed, even by her own confrontational standards, deeply offensive as she literally yelled to the camera:

> Hmm, Catalina. You actually *can*[22] hug your mother if you came back to the country you illegally immigrated from! There's a thought. No one is forcing you to be here, *babe*[23]…It is not your birthright to illegally reside in the United States…Sorry not sorry. Yes, ban. Yes, wall. Yes, law enforcement. Yes, border security. Yes, America first. (Facebook)

Lahren not only establishes her opposition to immigration, but does so while alienating the Latinx community and the LGBTQ+ community when she refers to Velasquez as "babe," which may otherwise have been harmless, but given Velasquez's identification as a transgender woman has oppressive implications.

Further complicating Lahren is the fact that she has engaged in the same tactics against many other women, the "snowflakes," on her programming and social media accounts. On May 7, 2016, Lahren conducted an interview with Canadian-American conservative comedian and political commentator Steven Crowder where he discussed his experience with a white student protestor at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst in April 2016. As Crowder proceeded to attack the student on her views, he nicknamed her "Trigglypuff" and said she was "rotund" and

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[22] My italics.
[23] My italics.

"portly" (Facebook). Instead of attempting to refocus the interview, or challenge the dehumanizing label, both commentators continued referring to the agitated student as "Trigglypuff" to shame her body.[24] Surprisingly, Lahren appears unaware of her own hostility against women—on January 4, 2017, Lahren posted a segment, titled "Restoring the True Intention of Feminism," where the host states:

> You won't catch me mean-mugging another woman out of jealousy. The truly confident don't have to do that, because here's the thing about success, it's not exclusive. If another person, especially another woman, experiences success good for her, right…The true intention of feminism will be restored when women stop bringing each other down out of jealousy, pettiness, and self-righteous B.S…(Facebook)

Ironically, Lahren's video was a response to blogger Jenn Jacques who had critiqued the host for collaborating with and promoting an apparel line, *Bullets & Bombshells*, that objectifies women in the gun industry. Lahren's response, even though hypocritical considering her own commentary towards other women, did make a feminist appeal as she rightfully spoke out against Jacques' comment that women were "[whoring themselves] out in the name of the Second Amendment to make a quick buck" (Bearing Arms). However, Lahren invokes feminism only to protect herself and her choice to use her sexuality to increase her profit through this specific company and ad campaign, which truly presents Lahren as a leading anti-feminist voice within 21st century mediums.

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[24] The name "Trigglypuff" is a play on the pop culture character, Jigglypuff, from the Pokémon series and the term "triggered."

Defining "White Feminism"

The inclusion of Tomi Lahren within this analysis of feminist dialogues in social media calls for an understanding of "white feminism" by contemporary definitions. Lahren has been labeled a "white feminist" by many social media users, including *Xicanisma* whom I discuss in this chapter, but perhaps even conflating Tomi Lahren with feminism can be problematic in our collective movement towards intersectionality. However, this does present an opportunity to assess "white feminism" as a term, label, and set of ideologies which participates, at times subconsciously, in the erasure of POC, the working-class, immigrants, and the LGBTQ+ community.[25] Thus, defining a form of feminism that is often neglectful of individual narratives that are vital in the creation of feminist identities—particularly for WOC.

However, "White feminism" does not simply refer to women who may identify as both white and feminist. Rather, when I use this term throughout this work, it is used to describe a non-intersectional feminism that opposes the marginalized voice trying to reclaim space. We may recall the many marginalized, feminist voices that came together to write *This Bridge Called My Back* including Chicana poet and writer Chrystos, who wrote that she feared white people and backed away from the women's movement because her "dreams of crossing barriers to true understanding were false" and that "most of the white women [she] thought [she] was close to [wanted] nothing to do with [her] now" because "perhaps white women are so rarely loyal because they do not have to be" (73). Or Doris Davenport's, a Black feminist scholar, essay where she writes that black women "[experienced] white feminists and their organizations as elitist, crudely insensitive, and condescending" (91). Perhaps surprisingly, this fear and hesitancy

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[25] People of Color

expressed about white feminists after second wave feminism has reemerged within our 21st century discussions—especially after the 2016 presidential election.

This reemergence produces a necessity for WOC to assert their feminist identities and voices via the social media platforms made available to them in our current age. As digital scholar Mehreen Kasana states, within "Feminisms and the Social Media Sphere (2014)," these channels become not only a way "for marginalized voices in social media spaces [to find an essential] solidarity" (237), but to bring into focus their own survival and resistance against erasure within contemporary feminist discussions. Kasana's work stems from her own experience as a Muslim woman and blogger and writes that social media spaces "[contain] a richness of space and voice for those who wish to reclaim their identities and bodies" that voice "[the] collective discontent and helplessness…which provide women with the encouragement they definitely need in times of isolation and dejection" (244-45) from their current social issues. This is what *The Root*'s and *Xicanisma*'s presence mediates through their platforms—one that unapologetically resists a white feminism that refuses to validate the experience for the WOC.

Performative Activism

After the presidential inauguration of Donald J. Trump, *The Root* published an interview by journalist Brooke Obie titled, "Woman in Viral Photo from Women's March to White Female Allies: 'Listen to a Black Woman'" at the end of January 2017. During the Women's March in Washington D.C. the co-director of *GetEqual* (a LGBTQ equality organization), Angela Peoples, attended the march carrying a sign which read: "Don't forget: White women voted for Trump." Ironically, Peoples was photographed intentionally by her boyfriend, Kevin Banatte, in front of three white women on their cell phones wearing pink "pussy hats" as Peoples appears unaffected and enjoying a lollipop. The intention was to critique such women who only superficially pose as

allies to the feminist movement. Aside from the focus of this interview, which is to highlight the destructive nature of white feminism, the photograph also captures the often-performative nature of white feminism, which was illustrated poignantly by Maiysha Kai, also a journalist for *The* Root. This performative action aims to highlight the false or superficial posing of solidarity with marginalized voices and bodies in the 21st century.

Kai succinctly articulates the issues with the "pussy hat[26]," which is worthy of its own analysis as I engage this brown-versus-white female dialectic within contemporary culture. Maiysha writes in her article, "Ain't I a Woman: Marching Forward—What Now?" that the "pussy hat" was:

> A direct response to Trump's disgusting admissions of sexual assault [and] emerged as the [unifying symbol for the Women's March, however,] several women of color expressed disdain for its being pink, viewing it as a symbol of whiteness rather than of femininity, since, like our skin, our genitalia tends to come in a variety of deeper hues. Similarly, despite the presences and powerful voices of transgender celebrities and activists Janet Mock and Laverne Cox, the marches seemed to center on the notion of biological womanhood, simultaneously ignoring and perpetuating the deeply sexist marginalization and violence that plague trans communities as well. (The Root)

Kai emphasizes the subconscious exclusion and erasure of WOC with these hats that superficially appear to advocate for all feminists. Kai's response echoes Chicana author Sandra Cisneros' essay, "Guadalupe the Sex Goddess," within the collection *Goddess of the Americas*.

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[26] The pussy hat is a pink, knit hat that intentionally resembles the vagina. Created and worn as an act of resistance against Trump's "grab them by the pussy" comment that I explored earlier in this chapter.

For Cisneros, discovering her sexuality was an intimate exploration of the darkness of her sex after seeing a white woman's vagina, "a tidy, elliptical opening, pink and shiny like a rabbit's ear" (51) in a porn film. Cisneros writes, "I think what startled me most was the realization that my own sex has no resemblance to this woman's. My sex, dark as an orchid, rubbery and blue-purple as *pulpo*, an octopus, does not look nice and tidy, but otherworldly" (51). This establishes the erasure of WOC and the trans community through a performative act of resistance and solidarity.

The Trump Era has only exacerbated the deeply offensive nature of performative activism and provided a multitude of opportunities for many to participate in a similar performative alliance. In "Dear White People, Your Safety Pins Are Embarrassing," a political blog post reposted by *The Huffington Post*'s (contributor and self-identified white male) Christopher Keelty, which addresses the post-presidential election trend of wearing safety pins to identify as an ally to marginalized groups. Keelty writes that "white people [made up] 70% of the voters in the 2016 election" and putting on a safety pin will do "little or nothing to reassure the marginalized populations" that they are true allies—for those affected "know full well the long history of white people calling themselves allies while doing nothing to help" (The Huffington Post).

However, this is not the only case since Trump's election that has illustrated this lack of consciousness of the narratives of dark-skinned bodies, and we may remember the recent April 2017 *Pepsi* ad featuring celebrity and supermodel Kendall Jenner, a white woman, who joins a protest and extends a can of soda to an armed police officer as a way of preventing violence between groups. While the company promptly pulled the ad from the air, a swift wave of criticism had already developed online including numerous blogs, tweets, posts, and memes that

critiqued Jenner as another example of "white feminism." The principal criticism was that despite the history of violence against black activists, a white woman's presence and body as an ally would prevent a similar violent result. These brief examples illustrate the harmful effects that can result from performative activism and allyship on the feminist sisterhood and the relationship to WOC and POC in the movement towards true comradeship. Most importantly, they allow readers to understand the damaging effects of Trump's election on both intersectional feminism and the reparations WOC and white women have been so urgently attempting to create.

Black Feminism in the Trump Era

However, I would now like to return to Brooke Obie's informative interview on *The Root* with Angela Peoples regarding the provocative photograph which went viral on social media post-inauguration. *The Root* asked Peoples directly what was the general reaction to her sign the day of the march to which Peoples replied with:

> Most were saying, 'Not this white woman,' or 'No one I know!' I'd say, '[Fifty-three percent] of white women voted for Trump. That means someone you know, someone who is in close community with you, voted for Trump. You need to organize your people.' And some people said, 'Oh, I'm so ashamed.' Don't be ashamed; organize your people.
>
> That's why the photo was such a great moment to capture, because it tells the story of white women in this moment wanting to show up in a very superficial way and not wanting to do the hard work of making change, of challenging their own privilege. You're here protesting, but don't forget: The folks that you live with every single day—and probably some of the women that decided to come to

> the march—voted for Trump, made a decision to vote against self-interests to maintain their white supremacist way of life. (The Root)

Peoples, as a black feminist, makes this point of asking white women to assess their own racial and cultural privilege. For Peoples, as well as most feminists of color, we understand that the dialogue begins with acknowledgement of the privilege that white women, even as allies, can access to mobilize themselves through American society and culture. This is not to reject the feminist sisterhood or solidarity necessary to resolve issues that affect women as a whole, but to first take accountability of the underlying privilege of being white or light-skinned. Nor does this ignore the issues that exist within Black communities—*The Root* has also published articles that reveal the problematic politics of Black celebrities like Kanye West and Lil' Wayne, such as Michael Harriot's article "The 2016 List of People We Don't Mess With Anymore," as a way to expose the internal racism often found within their own community.

The Root followed up by referring to the many black women that have expressed feelings of betrayal and hurt on social media regarding seeing the outpouring of "white women coming together for [the Women's] march, but not showing up when [they] march [for Black Lives Matter]" (The Root) and asking Peoples if she had any words for those women. Peoples responded with:

> The only words I have are, 'I love you and I see you.' When black women expressed those feelings, I saw white women and gay men [say it's divisive]—some of the same shit that people are saying to me about the poster. That also hurts because we're only being seen when we're coming together behind you. When we're speaking about our pain, when we're asking you to show up, then it's

> divisive, then it's somehow detrimental to the broader cause. That's simply not true.
>
> But one thing I do know is black women, we got us; we're continuing to organize our own communities, we're continuing to hold folks accountable across genders, across race. I would actually say to white women, if you want to be part of a powerful movement that's going to get something done, you need to get behind and trust…Listen to a black woman. (The Root)

Again, Peoples response is reminiscent of the messages that WOC had similarly presented in the 1980s. However, Peoples situates this discussion between WOC and white feminists through an easily accessible medium, which allows her message to reach a broader audience. She urges white women, true allies, to both listen and acknowledge the current pain and distrust between white women and WOC that has resurfaced since Trump's 2016 election.

***Xicanisma* on White Feminism**

These tensions, as articulated by my analysis of the content on *The* Root, can also be found between Chicana activists and white women. Where issues with feminist solidarity are often limited to sexual and reproductive justice; other pressing issues, such as immigration, are often not seen as feminist issues, particularly amongst "white feminists." This lack of solidarity on issues that affect the Latina and Chicana community is illustrated by *Xicanisma's* recent critical post of Tomi Lahren on social media. *Xicanisma* responded to a feminist reclamation of the conservative host by blogger and contributor to the *Odyssey*,[27] Megan Mickavicz, for a pro-choice comment by Lahren. Mickavicz's piece, titled "I Owe Tomi Lahren An Apology," was published on March 21st, 2017 after Lahren's appearance on *The View*, a popular daytime TV

[27] *The Odyssey* is an online news platform with contributions from numerous bloggers and independent journalists.

show, where Lahren made a controversial pro-choice comment that conflicted with many of the conservative political views she presents on her platform via *The Blaze*. On *The View*, Lahren stated: "I am pro-choice…and [as] someone that loves the Constitution and is for limited government…[you can] stay out of my guns and you can stay out of my body as well" (The View).

As a defensive response to Lahren's comment, journalist Mickavicz crafted an apology to Lahren for showing alliance with sexual reproductive rights by writing:

> Your tone of this comment was no different than the way you express your views on other political issues, the only difference being this time I agreed with you. [Tomi,] you are honest, raw, strong, confident, and overwhelmingly unapologetic in your 'Final Thoughts' on *The Blaze*, something I would praise if the show were hosted by a liberal woman…
>
> Yet, here I have been tearing a strong, confident woman who holds her values close to her heart down simply because we have differing opinions. Tomi, I am sorry for that…Women need to stick together, especially in politics and other male-dominated situations.
>
> I am also sorry that your pro-choice comments got your 'Final Thoughts' [segment] suspended. Nobody should be punished for speaking their minds and owning their opinions. (Odyssey)

Cassandra followed up via her *Xicanisma* account by reposting the article alongside a status which read: "White feminists writing think pieces on their [new-found] bond with Tami over

their white womanhood instead of raising awareness on missing Black girls" (Facebook).[28] This was followed-up with an extended caption via *Instagram*, on March 24, 2017, where *Xicanisma* added:

> But honestly, this is a great example of how white feminists only care about themselves (not that we didn't know). They don't care if Tami is a racist, that's not why they didn't fuck [with] her. They didn't like her because she was going against *them*[29] by taking an anti-feminist/pro-birth stance. BUT NOW that Tami [sic] is 'pro-choice' they are okay with her. They don't care about her racism, xenophobia, homophobic, transphobic, [etc.] narrative. White women gonna white. (Instagram)

Xicanisma's post and comments caused many members of the online community to engage with this issue of "white feminism." For *Xicanisma* this revealed the ability of white women to support Lahren even after her irredeemable comments regarding POC, women, and feminist activism. This single comment by Lahren upheld the importance of sexual reproductive rights and consequently vindicated Lahren in the eyes of Mickavicz, which *Xicanisma* associated with a non-intersectional white feminism.

Many other users, including those who self-identified as white, strongly felt that *Xicanisma*'s post was not conducive to ameliorating racial tensions within the feminist sisterhood. One user, @jbeanstalker, wrote back:

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[28] *Xicanisma*'s reference to the "missing Black girls" is to the lack of mainstream news attention that was given to the disappearance of four young black girls from Washington D.C. For many, the lack of precedence this took in news features highlighted the growing racial divide in American culture where the value of missing black and brown bodies is disproportionate to missing white bodies.

[29] My italics.

> I agree with you about Tami [sic]. She is disgusting on so many levels. HOWEVER, when you say racist shit and group all white women together like we all have the same thoughts and brain, that's fucked up. Any kind and decent human being can agree that she is a piece of shit. Because one woman who happens to be white writes some ridiculous piece about her don't group together a whole bunch of people because of the color of their skin. (Instagram)

What @jbeanstalker does is raise an issue with the last line of *Xicanisma*'s post, "White women gonna white," and how this remark merely divides women. Even as *Xicanisma*'s post may have intended to criticize the journalist for reclaiming Lahren as a feminist figure, her final message only polarizes feminism and spreads an unjustified hatred for white women as though they form a homogenous bloc. While *Xicanisma*'s critique of white women and white feminism is necessary in healing the distrust, and reconstructing the dismantling of decades of work between sisterhoods brought on by Trump's election to presidency and the outpour of support for issues that go against the rights and values of many POC, it must also refrain from this sweeping generalization of white allies.

The post garnered over 300 comments, many insubstantial, but many equally as valuable to the creation of understanding between feminists. Many users responded by trying to define "white feminism" for other users to forge an understanding of the term and how it did not just mean to alienate women with white skin who also identified as feminists. This created new openings to understand the ongoing divisions among feminists and women through the larger conversation *Xicanisma*'s post had attempted to initiate. For many, *Xicanisma*'s post exposed the reality that white feminism often does not align itself with the feminist intersectionality vital for WOC. One user, @sassypinata, wrote:

> Sadly, I think it's all true. And instead of using that (Megan Mickavicz's apology to Lahren) as a platform to bring thoughtful criticism and cultural humility that this is the solitary [self-interested] agenda [which] continues, and people of color are left holding the bag for everyone including white women. Because we all know when a person of color protests and gets things done…it's for everyone from the bottom up. Because that's where they put us. (Instagram)

Xicanisma's social media presence here provides a necessary openness for WOC to discuss these ideas with other WOC, intersectional feminists, and white feminists. Most importantly it addresses the criticism that may arise when addressing the necessity for feminisms associated with certain racial or ethnic identities.

Situating Black Feminism and Chicana Feminism in the 21st Century

This may prompt a questioning of why white feminism is condemnable and Chicana feminism and Black feminism are empowering sources for WOC. In an article by journalist Valentina Zarya, feminist icon Gloria Steinem is quoted as stating, "There is no such thing as white feminism. If you call it white, it's not feminism. It either includes all women, or it's not feminism" (Fortune). However, what Steinem confuses is that the problem is that white, female voices have not been marginalized to the degree of minorities in the United States. As white women fight to close the wage gap or fight for access to birth control, WOC are fighting for access to the education necessary to even apply for those high-level positions or overcome those cultural stigmas that police their bodies within their own communities. It is the history of feminism which produces the need to identify with the culture that has traditionally been a source of stigma and alienation.

Within *Borderlands/La Frontera*, Gloria Anzaldúa's subchapter, "*Somos una gente*,"[30] the scholar addresses the "divided loyalties" between WOC and white individuals (107). While Anzaldúa calls for an alliance between all parties, she also states that:

> …We need to voice our needs. We need to say to a white society: We need you to accept the fact that Chicanos are different, to acknowledge your rejection and negation of us. We need you to own the fact that you look upon us as less than human…We need you to make public restitution. (107-08)

While Anzaldúa speaks to her cultural identity, we can easily interchange this to WOC to validate these narratives in our current political state. Overall, these exchanges illustrate the necessity for healing. This feeling of inadequacy permeates into the social, political, and class existence for WOC, and exists outside of just the literary examples I have explored in previous chapters. For even now in the 21st century, the Chicana feminist and the Black feminist exist in the margins of society and movements that identify themselves as wholly feminist. Thus, for many WOC, social media provides a platform and voice for racial and cultural discourse that may otherwise be suppressed. Allowing women from diverse backgrounds to participate in these discussions and find voice and alliance with other women—not just WOC.

1-900-9099-Cry's (*Xicanisma*) most recent February 2017 podcast on *Sound Cloud*, titled "I Liked You Better before You Were Chicanx On The Internet," makes a clear point to her listeners by stating that when she created *Xicanisma* it was a way to find "space" for the Chicana identity. Furthermore, that when white members of the online community began engaging with her via the comments section on her posts, she realized that many of them were frustrated by her lack of diversity and Mexican-centric/Chicanx nationalist views. As the blogger became more

[30] My translation: "We are one people."

assertive of her identity, she wanted to make it clear that the content was not meant for the white female or male follower, but for the WOC within social media (Sound Cloud). In response to the users that comment frequently on her Chicana feminist political content, the blogger states that many immediately labeled her as “angry” and adding that “women are [often] seen as angry every time they express themselves, like nagging or overly-emotional. But then you add [in the fact] that I’m brown—it’s [perceived as] aggressive, mad, and bitter” (Sound Cloud). This highlights the significance of these digital platforms that allow users to explain where this “anger” stems from and what the feminist sisterhood can do to resolve it.

Many times, *Xicanisma* has also criticized the Chicanx community for perpetuating the silencing of Chicanas, anti-Blackness (colorism) in the community, and lack of acknowledgement of white privilege by white Latinas(os) and Chicanas(os). Even as *Xicanisma* exposed Chicano nationalists that still practice machismo to oppress Chicanas, several men proceeded to post comments that degraded and belittled the blogger based solely on her gender. Most recently, calling out Chicanos for the way they have attacked her on social media, *Xicanisma* posted a photo of herself rolling her eyes with a caption that read:

> Me: *BREATHES*
>
> Cishet[31] ain’t shit Chicanos who think they’re deep: You’re using our Raza to push a feminist agenda! I thought this page was about *my* humanity, not about people who aren’t men. Are you brown or are you a woman!? Pick one, you can’t

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[31] Cishet can be defined as a cisgender and heterosexual individual—male, female, or non-binary gender.

be both. Prove yourself to us. I'm a man from the mountains of [Aztlán; [32]] I am right. Decolonize! (Instagram)

This only reinforced these feelings of resentment towards Chicanos that use their gender to assert their authority and privilege over brown women.

A reasonable criticism that may be made of *Xicanisma* is that she uses provocative and counterproductive discourse. *Xicanisma* addresses this on her *Sound Cloud* channel by saying that often she is not able to fully articulate herself given the space constraints of social media. Unlike an article, blog, video, speech, or similar platform, *Xicanisma* often must present her argument in just 150 characters (depending on her social media platform). This can present logistical issues by making her unable to fully engage with a socio-political issue. Additionally, *Xicanisma* states that she does often interact with her followers on social media—creating moments of teaching and learning for both sides. However, she says that she has often also responded by blocking many users simply for disagreeing with her.[33] While this may appear as a way of reemphasizing the adage, "It is not the job of the oppressed to educate the oppressor," and discouraging trolls,[34] it also closes a vein of discussion with sincere individuals who disagree and want to understand different ideas about racial positioning. In fact, it is my belief that these moments of disagreement can bring about the most fruitful conversations between camps—especially as *Xicanisma* aims to politicize young Chicanas that seek an online platform to engage

[32] Aztlán is believed to be the homeland of the Aztecs. During the Chicano Movement, many Chicano nationalists proclaimed Aztlán as their own to reclaim the land that used to be a part of Mexico.

[33] To block on social media platforms means that you make another user unable to view, comment, respond, or access your content.

[34] A "troll" can be defined as an individual that posts comments or responses within an online discussion for the mere purpose of causing a debate. Much like a reactionary, a "troll" makes inflammatory statements to agitate other users. This can also be used as a verb on social media—also known as "trolling."

with social, political, and cultural issues. This is where *Xicanisma* is most open to criticism, but that likely stems from the resentment she may have towards users that have not approached her content dialectically. Like with academic discourse, these platforms also have room for intellectual, spiritual, and personal growth.

Even while academic discourse can provide agency for feminists of color, it is also important to note the changes happening outside of academia. These digital spaces and voices are as vital to our understanding of feminist issues as the traditional spaces WOC have utilized. While these platforms are often unrefined and continue to pose logistical issues of accessibility, they also provide an outlet for otherwise marginalized voices to produce discourse that may otherwise be overlooked or suppressed.[35] Platforms created by Tomi Lahren, who performs an extreme opposition to causes of *The Root* and *Xicanisma*, also highlight the disparity between different positions within and outside discussions of feminism. Consequently, I am aware that this excludes Asian American, Native American, and other marginalized feminist voices that also need to be heard. However, as social media continues to establish itself as an accessible table for women to come together and communicate, not always in complete agreement, I believe we will arrive at truly intersectional feminism that is necessary for survival, healing, and recovery during this Trump era.

[35] As of April 2017, *Xicanisma* was disabled for posting racialized memes about white feminism and white males for violating terms and conditions set forth by *Facebook*. This presents an undeniable irony as alt-right groups continue to have access to post xenophobic and homophobic content on the same platform.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

The impetus to beginning my thesis with Ernest Hemingway's posthumous novel, *The Garden of Eden* (1986), is to situate the presence of darkness within the writings of a notably canonical writer. Even though Hemingway and his writings have been typically conflated with hypermasculinity, which I believe is also problematic, I do believe there is value in including this text within contemporary racial and feminist discourse. Like Toni Morrison's analysis in *Playing in the Dark* (1992), my exploration of the text did not intend to make biographical claims about the author. In fact, this is what strongly encouraged me to write the chapter without the inhibitions posed by attempting to bridge author to text, particularly Hemingway's relationship with gender in his personal life, as writers like Carl Eby and others have been inclined to do so in past scholarship. This is perhaps what I perceive to be the greatest weakness in the work that surrounds *The Garden of Eden*—for it limits the text and the characters' ability to evolve for the reader independently of Hemingway's life as author.

In my analysis of *The Garden of Eden*, I acknowledge that the presence of darkness does not restore complete feminist agency to either heroine. This presents a limitation, which is significant in our restoration of darkness as power. For Catherine's greatest flaw is not in her reclamation of darkness as sexual magic, which lends the novel to the necessary transgender reading posed by Valerie Rohy; nor is her greatest flaw in the reclamation of her destructive nature which allots her the most power in the novel. Rather, it is Catherine's appropriation of

darkness alongside her betrayal of the feminist sisterhood that ultimately destroys her. This conflicting relationship between Catherine and Marita becomes central in my reading of this novel. Through literary critic Leslie Fiedler's Fair-Lady/Dark-Maiden binary, the text reveals the positioning of both women against each other through a racial analysis that presents a pull between whiteness and darkness. This pull develops as one that contrasts "natural" darkness versus an appropriated and artificial darkness that further establishes "darkness" as a dynamic theme within the novel.

The inclusion of Sandra Cisneros' short story "Never Marry a Mexican" (1991) presents a chronological progression in my work as the text centers on a dark-skinned Chicana heroine. Through Clemencia, the presence of darkness develops as both an empowering physical characteristic through her dark skin as well as through her embodiment of two tropes. Clemencia's Mexican American identity precipitates her dual role as both destructive woman and La Malinche. As Clemencia functions under these two roles and tropes, by reclaiming their dark energy, the heroine can also consequently reclaim the feminist narrative. Even while Clemencia is a problematic character through her affairs and betrayal of other women, she also challenges us to rethink our cultural and social codes for women. Specifically, the text challenges what we "allow" or "permit" brown women and bodies to do within a text.

Furthermore, the exploration of Maythee G. Rojas' brown-versus-white female dialectic allows us to analyze the hostile relationships between Clemencia and the white heroine, Megan, and other Latinos and *Mexicanos* within "Never Marry a Mexican." This expands our understanding of darkness as one that is not limited to a white and black division, but also incorporates the damaging nature of the white and brown and brown-versus-brown binary. As I emphasized in my close readings of both Hemingway's and Cisneros' texts, this is not to

perpetuate the existing harmful divisions between white women and WOC, but rather to engage in meaningful discussions regarding the positioning of color, race, and culture between feminisms. This includes the internalized racism that persists within Mexican American and Chicanx culture through colorism, which I hope to address in a future project.

Additionally, I recognize the restraints imposed on this exploration of darkness by limiting my work to the fictional world of literature. What value, if any, does my academic exploration of darkness have on the "real world" that exists outside of these literary pieces? This is what urged me to include the selected social media platforms of Tomi Lahren, *The Root*, and *Xicanisma* as I continued to show a chronological progression of the presence of darkness as a literal racial discourse. These social media platforms bridge together theory and reality by providing WOC a digital space to facilitate vital discussion with other feminists as well as anti-feminists. I find this particularly necessary in our current political environment where people of color (especially blacks, immigrants, and Muslims) and women have been attacked and alienated by the current presidential administration. Gloria Anzaldúa writes within *Borderlands/La Frontera* (1987):

> But it is not enough to stand on the opposite river bank, shouting questions, challenging patriarchal, white conventions. A counterstance locks one into mortal combat, like the cop and the criminal, both are reduced to a common denominator of violence. The counterstance refutes the dominant culture's views and beliefs, and, for this, it is proudly defiant. All reaction is limited by, and dependent on, what it is reacting again…But it is not a way of life. At some point, on our way to a new consciousness, we will have to leave the opposite bank, the split between

> two mortal combatants somehow healed so that we are on both shores at once… (100)

This imparts social media with an incredible responsibility to allow WOC and white women to stand at both shores.

Ultimately, this is not say that social media does not pose its own constraints of accessibility and even debilitating tendencies to inspire hostility between voices. However, it welcomes darkness in an unorthodox way that is necessary for ultimate healing. A way that no longer conflates darkness with an Otherness that we wish to oppress and conceal, but rather recognizes darkness as an integral part of ourselves, physical and psychological, that seeks validation and reclamation.

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