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Feminist Borderland Aesthetics in Three North American U.S. Women's Novels

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FEMINIST BORDERLAND AESTHETICS
IN THREE NORTH AMERICAN U.S. WOMEN'S NOVELS

A Dissertation

Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies and Research

in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

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May 2013

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This study examines feminist borderland literary aesthetic patterns in three North American U.S. novels: *So Far from God*, *Tracks*, and *Daughters of the Dust*. I argue that a feminist border narrative theory is needed for critiquing U.S. women's border novels. Though contemporary narrative theory is often associated with poststructuralist or postmodernist practices, there is a plurality of approaches, such as: feminist, queer, postcolonial, borderlands, and hypertext. In addition, many scholars combine classical, structuralist, poststructuralist, and postmodernist theories when developing models for narrative critique. Most approaches, however, focus on Western aesthetic philosophies and Western cultural codes (Richardson 168-69). My study diverges from traditional narrative theories. I combine narrative theories originating in Western philosophy (e.g. feminist, queer, postmodern, postcolonial) with narrative theories originating in Gloria Anzaldúa's borderlands feminist and queer theories and theories by Native American, African American/Gullah, and indigenous scholars. In doing so, my model critiques U.S. women's border novels by grounding my theoretical foundations in the historical, cultural, and politic boundaries of border zones.

In my dissertation, U.S. women's novels reconfigure cultural codes that have historically positioned women living in border zones as doubly subaltern, which means their voices have been silenced and/or left out of communal and nation-state discourses; their bodies have been defined by prescriptive, heteronormative definitions and

expectations for women; their ability to move freely, without harm, in and across border locations has been limited and controlled by patriarchal, male-centered worldviews; and their economic advancement has been limited by these encoded forms of oppression.

Drawing on feminist theory, semiotic analysis, literary theory, border theories, and theories of race, gender, and class, this study's model frames each novel's encoded narratives around themes of land, language, and cultural practices. All three novels are critiqued for their paradigmatic shifts from traditional Western and non-Western referents: the female self is resignified as a site of knowledge, self-enunciation, and agency. I also introduce the terms direct and indirect translation to define bilingual, multilingual, and monolingual English as aesthetic functions. I also introduce the term reverse transculturation to define readers' experiences when actively interpreting the cultural, historical, geographical, and political woman-centered meanings expressed.

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INTRODUCTION:
FEMINIST BORDERLAND AESTHETICS
IN THREE NORTH AMERICAN U.S. WOMEN'S NOVELS

My dissertation, “Feminist Borderland Aesthetics in Three North American U.S. Women’s Novels,” is a cross-cultural, comparative study of Mexican American, Native American, and African American (Gullah) women’s contemporary novels set in border locations in the U.S. José David Saldívar notes that contemporary scholarship on North American border cultures began in 1958 with Américo Paredes’ *With His Pistol in His Hand*, an ethnographic study of *corridos* (Mexican folk ballads) produced between 1836 and the late 1930s (*Border* 40). Paredes’ work is also autoethnographic, chronicling changes that occurred between the 1750s, when Paredes’ ancestors settled in Greater Mexico in the Rio Grande Valley, to U.S. military aggression in the 1800s, and finally to the mid-1900s, when segregation began between Mexicans and European American settlers (39-40). Paredes’ work, along with subsequent scholarship and literary production on border culture, focuses on reoccurring conquests, marginalizations, and forced migrations¹ of Mexicans and Mexican Americans living in the U.S. Southwest.

Following Paredes, and the work of Tomás Rivera, Rolando Hinojosa, and José Limón, to note a few, Chicana/o scholarship and literary production has been articulated from south Texas by multiple genres (scholarly criticism, theory, autobiography, fiction) in what Saldívar refers to as “Chicano oppositional thinking in south Texas” (*Criticism*

¹Migration is defined following Linda McDowell and Joanne P. Sharp’s 1999 definition in *A Feminist Glossary of Human Geography*, which states that “[m]igration is the semi-permanent or permanent movement of individuals or groups from their usual place of residence (166).

179). The most influential text, Anzaldúa's *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, developed the paradigmatic concept of *la frontera*, which she theorized from the south Texas/Mexico border. Anzaldúa's work in *Borderlands/La Frontera* has provided Chicana/o studies, from the 1980s to the 21st century, with theoretical foundations for U.S. Southwest border studies scholarship.

Anzaldúa's theory of *la frontera* posits that borderlands are physical, material, and conceptual sites of migrations, crossings, and struggles experienced by people living in and across U.S./Mexico border locations. She grounds U.S. Southwest border theories, methods, and praxes in south Texas/Mexico geographic, material, and metaphoric borders, defining the south Texas borderlands - and subsequently all borderlands - as *la frontera*,

a dividing line, a narrow strip along a steep edge. A borderland is a vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary. It is in a constant state of transition. The prohibited and forbidden are its inhabitants. *Los atravesados* live here: the squint-eyed, the perverse, the queer, the troublesome, the mongrel, the *mulato*, the half-breed, the half dead; in short, those who cross over, pass over, or go through the confines of the 'normal'. (25)

In this passage, Anzaldúa poetically inscribes the physical and geographic barriers found in U.S. Southwest borderlands as non-heteronormative subjects, "*los atravesados*" (those that cross); yet she always returns to her south Texas roots. Her prose and poetry is an assemblage of subjective and intersubjective border experiences. For example, her poem, opening "The Homeland, *Aztlán: El Otro México*," vividly describes her life in the south

Texas borderlands as disconcerting, an emotionally barren border (“I press my hand to the steel curtain--”), and as culturally specific, with “this ‘Tortilla Curtain’ turning into *el río Grande*” (24). Like her scholarly and literary predecessors, she articulates her experiences in mixed-genre, interdisciplinary, and, transdisciplinary ways. The interplay between her subjectivity, the intersubjectivity of “*los atravesados*” and her scholarship in *Borderlands/La Frontera* became the foundations of my dissertation’s methodology, which frames border woman’s subjectivity as in interplay with the physical, geographic landscapes and boundaries and philosophical discourses that converge within borderland locations. racial, cultural, and linguistic hierarchies are determined. My comparative methods select, analyze, and explicate all three novels for similar thematic choices, i.e., lands/landscapes, language, oral traditions, storytelling, and cultural practices. My methods mark spatial-temporal distinctions between each novel’s culturally-specific elements, and analyze the texts’ semiotic signs for their epistemical, hermeneutical, and metaphysical functions.

Since Anzaldúa’s *Borderlands/La Frontera*, U.S. border studies scholars expanded theoretical, critical, and creative articulations of U.S. Southwest borderlands. Like Anzaldúa, they articulate their work, not only from south Texas, but also from other parts of the U.S. Southwest (New Mexico, Arizona, California, Colorado, Nevada, Utah, and Oklahoma). In fact, U.S. border studies expanded its disciplinary scope: it is now more prevalent in disciplines such a gender studies, sociology, anthropology, history, and political geography. In addition, border studies evolved from the U.S. Southwest to the U.S./Canada border. My study expands U.S. Southwest border studies scholarship further, not only to the U.S. Northern Plains/Canada border, but also to the U.S.

Southeast/Gullah Sea Islands. I provide U.S. border cultural studies with defining characteristics for feminist borderland aesthetics, a model for analysis and interpretation of the poetics found in women's borderland novels, and terminology for examining reader responses to these narratives.

U.S. border studies scholarship problematizes the scope of contemporary American cultural studies. Case in point is Saldívar's *Border Matters*, which aligns U.S. Southwest cultural studies with national American and British cultural studies by "bringing cultural studies into dialogue with the complex black British diaspora culture orbits theorized by Stuart Hall, Paul Gilroy, and Kobena Mercer...at the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies" (19). Thus, Saldívar's *Border Matters* establishes a shift from U.S. Southwest/Mexico to comparative cultural studies research agendas between Chicana/o border studies and black diaspora cultural studies. It also reframes cultural studies' debates in American studies by shifting the focus from national cultural studies paradigms to regional, geographically-situated paradigms. The study of U.S. border narratives, then, offers a critical framework defining "American" outside of U.S., North American monolithic discourses. It also widens the scope of critiques that reframe debates over "race", nationality, and national culture by asserting that an "oppositional thinking" occurs for border subjects in the U.S. and its nation-state borders.

Scott Michaelson and David E. Johnson's 1998 collection of essays, *Border Theory: The Limits of Cultural Politics*, diverges from Saldívar's scholarship by asserting broad critiques of U.S. border definitions. Michaelson and Johnson's collection includes studies of the U.S./Mexico border, but it also includes studies that claim borders are "'soft borders', produced within a broadly liberal discourse: benevolent nationalisms,

cultural essentialisms, multiculturalisms” (1). In addition, the editors note that border studies now encompasses “nearly every psychic or geographic space about which one can thematize problems of boundary or limit” (1-2). *Border Theory* provides a helpful differentiation between border studies and multiethnic studies. It also prevents the field of border studies from becoming limited in its critical applications. Yet Michaelson and Johnson’s arguments against established border critiques are disconcerting. The editors claim that Anzaldúa practices a “Spanish American” form of colonialism to replace European colonialism. They see *Borderlands/La Frontera* as an attempt to universalize and localize U.S. Southwest borderlands, and they conclude that Anzaldúa’s goals were to make Chicana/o texts unique yet prescriptive for all world texts (12).

My critique of Anzaldúa’s *Borderlands/La Frontera* differs greatly from Michaelson and Johnson. The editors fail to examine Anzaldúa’s *Borderlands/La Frontera* as an intellectual and creative text seeking to free her subjectivity from physical, material, and metaphorical barriers she experienced while living in the south Texas borderlands. When her text opens up to all *mujeres en el mundo* (women in the world), she expresses a desire for healing and transformation of all “Third World” women’s subjectivities, but specifically for those *mujeres* who experience a corporeal interaction within a borderland location: one that exists to define nation-states and to exclude immigrants and migrants from its borders. Despite Johnson and Michaelson’s claims, Anzaldúa’s concept of borderlands does not invert colonialisms, i.e., Spanish American replacing European, which would be redundant. To be sure, Anzaldúa’s *Borderlands/La Frontera* becomes caught in a “Third World versus First World”

dichotomy, but the text's overarching theoretical, critical, and creative force prevents such dichotomies from becoming the main point of her argument.

I also disagree with Michaelson and Johnson's contention that Anzaldúa stereotypes indigeneity as premodern, or New Age, creating a "bland universal humanism." In addition, they claim that Anzaldúa attempts to theorize "a new *mestiza* consciousness," by demonizing white, Anglo culture (13). Though Michaelson and Johnson have clearly researched the history of Chicana/o and border studies in the 20th century, they fail to contextualize Anzaldúa's work within the broader Chicana/o border studies tradition. Furthermore, in *Borderlands/La Frontera*, Anzaldúa develops a theory and praxis for *mestiza* transformation to occur: by their reclamation of woman-centered indigeneity, which is an indigeneous² worldview reconfigured from male patriarchal

² There are many definitions for the term indigenous. Indigenous has been defined by the United Nations using José Martínez Cobo's definition, in order for indigenous groups globally to have agency within different nation-state political systems. But the U.N. definition is problematic because the definition states indigeneous peoples globally are *victims* of nation-state colonizing practices. While there has been a long history of predominantly European and European American exploration, colonialism, usurpation of indigeneous lands and resources, resettlements of indigeneous communities, residential schooling, boarding schools, diseases, genocide, and loss of language and language extinctions, defining indigenous peoples based on victimization perpetuates the above-mentioned histories related to colonization and nation-state formations. It also continues to define indigeneous peoples, at least in the Americas, as either "Noble Savages" or "child-like." The preferred defining characteristics of indigeneous peoples are taken from Coates' 2004 *A Global History of Indigeneous Peoples*. Coates definition is comprehensive and will be applied to all instances where I use the term when referencing indigenous peoples and indigeneity in my dissertation. The definition has nine characteristics spanning two pages, so I will not include Coates' entire reference. However, some key characteristics from Coates' text should be included here. For example, the author states: "Indigeneous peoples...lack political power and autonomy and exist under the control of immigrant or ethnic group-dominated states"; "they live in small scale societies and derive a profound sense of identity from place, and are strongly connected to their traditional territories and resources"; "...they are mobile peoples, ranging fairly widely over ancestral territories"; "Indigenous peoples are historical

Footnote continued on next page

discourses. This process toward “a new *mestiza* consciousness” occurs when Chicanas reclaim their “indianness” by integrating indigeneity into their subjectivities. However, woman-centered indigeneity is not premodern, as Michaelson and Johnson claim; rather, it is a suppressed subjectivity. As Ken S. Coates states in *A Global History of Indigenous Peoples: Struggle and Survival*, “Indigenous peoples are not socially static or unchanging, but they have tended to be conservative, in the sense that they did not respond quickly to social trends and cultural influences” (13). Michaelson and Johnson’s claim that indigeneity is a pre-modern worldview fails to take into account indigeneity as an evolving, modern identity. Indigenous peoples’ interaction with social trends and cultural influences outside their worldviews is part of maintaining their traditional belief systems.

Since the publication of *Borderlands/La Frontera*, scholars and artists reconfigured border studies with feminist scholarship and artistic works. Notable feminist works published in the late twentieth century include: Anzaldúa’s *Making Face, Making Soul: Haciendo Caras: Creative and Critical Perspectives by Women of Color*, and with Cherrie Moraga, *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color*; Ana Castillo’s *Massacre of the Dreamers* and her literary oeuvre; and Norma Alarcón’s “Chicana Feminism: In the Tracks of ‘the’ Native Woman” and “*Traddutora, Traditora: A Paradigmatic Figure of Chicana Feminism.*” U.S. Southwest feminist border studies focuses on critiques of indigeneity from an interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary framework. Furthermore, Chicana scholars, since the 1980s, identify *mestiza*

societies with a strong understanding of the past, often passed on through oral testimony, ceremonies, and cultural activities”; Most indigenous societies are engaged in decolonization and reindigenization processes.” See Coates. 13-14.

consciousness as part of the Chicano reclamation of a Mesoamerican historical imaginary and cultural nationalism, and a point of departure from it. In fact, Chicana scholarship and creativity has been reconfiguring patriarchal, male-centered discourses into woman-centered discourses. Similarly, there has been a post-Civil Rights trajectory of feminist African American women's texts, including examinations of Gullah women's identities; while Native American women's research and creativity focuses on inter-tribal and pan-tribal nationalism³ through the reclamation of matrilineal communal narratives, some centering on reservation life on the U.S. Northern Plains.

Since the beginning of the 21st century, border studies scholars continue to extend the theoretical and methodological work of their predecessors, both for the U.S. Southwest border zone, and for other border zones in North America. Two border studies texts, Sheila Marie Contreras's 2008 *Blood Lines: Myth, Indigenism, and Chicana/o Literature* and Marissa K. López's 2011 *Chicano Nations: The Hemispheric Origins of Mexican American Literature*, reassert the hemispheric, inter-American, New World studies paradigms of previous scholarship, but focus on feminist border cultural productions. Such inter- and transdisciplinary frameworks conceptualize feminist border cultural productions as intra-, inter-, and transnational geographic, material, conceptual

³ Inter-tribal nationalism refers to the contemporary social ethics of a specific clan and/or tribe of indigenous people north of the Rio Grande, and their mediation and negotiation of specific clan/tribe ethical views regarding their claims to the lands, which overlap and conflict with United States claims to the land. Inter-tribal nationalism emphasizes, through social ethical analyses, the clan/tribe within specified locations as a past, present, and future analysis of their sovereignty in certain lands. Pan-tribal nationalism still refers to the contemporary social ethics of indigenous peoples north of the Rio Grande, and it still refers to their mediation and negotiation of social ethical views regarding claims to lands, but it is more broadly conceived, referring to all clans, tribes, and nations in the land of the people of the eagle, which is also called the Great Turtle Island, and North America. See Deloria and Lytle. 232-243.

and metaphorical spatial-temporal zones. In Contreras's *Blood Lines*, Chicana/o subjectivity is in conflict with indigeneity, as a result of hemispheric, transnational influences Spain has had on Mexico and Mexico and the United States have had on Chicana/o identities. As Contreras makes clear, racial, cultural, and linguistic hierarchies in the U.S. and Mexico occur when Mexican and Mexican American's engage with a linguistically pure spoken and written Spanish. Hierarchies are also established by physical appearances of Mexicans and Mexican Americans (i.e., bodily comportment valued as an identity marker, casting them as Spanish, indigenous, creole, etc.) and historical ties Chicanas/os have to Native Americans (1). Contreras states that racial, cultural, and linguistic hierarchies produce Mexican ambivalence toward indigenous historical roots, encouraging the propensity Mexicans and Mexican Americans have for emphasizing their European ancestry (1-2). Most importantly, Contreras illuminates the source of Chicanas/os experience with indigeneity: they learn about their ancestral indigenous roots through familial and communal oral traditions; however, stories of "*abuelas indigenas*" (indigenous grandmothers) are recounted "with pride," yet are also met with "fierce denials of Indianness that elevate European ancestral ties" (2). Hence the continuous cycle of remembering and suppressing their indigeneity, creating a veil between dominant, European-derived knowledges and subalternized indigenous-derived knowledges, and also a felt sense of cultural oppression.

Contreras provides a space for Chicanas/os to undermine these hierarchies of experience by providing them with a frame of reference: David Carrasco's concept of "Aztec moments," which are moments when Chicanas/os reflect on their indigenous roots and begin "reassembling" their identities (Carrasco 175). "Aztec moments," when

recognized by *mestizas*, potentially create imaginary spaces for Chicanas/os to transform their subjectivities from European-centered to indigenous-centered, allowing Chicana pre-Columbian, pre-Conquest histories and ancestries to be reclaimed in the present (Contreras 2-3). Contreras aligns “Aztec moments” with Anzaldúa’s syncretic application of the snake and the goddess *Coatlicue* in *Borderlands/La Frontera*, as an entry into transformative spaces in the Chicana imaginary. Thus, the assembling of “Aztec moments” and Anzaldúa’s *Coatlicue* state re-center *mestiza* consciousness to an altered worldview in which pre-Conquest mythologies are made salient and European-derived discourses are made compatible with indigeneity.

While Contreras’s *Blood Lines* addresses Mexican and U.S. racialized discourses, dialectically reconfigured by Chicanas/os, López’s *Chicano Nations: The Hemispheric Origins of Mexican American Literature* situates Chicana/o identity and *chicanismo* hemispherically through an examination of 19th century Mexican American writers. López’s research focuses on finding global and hemispheric contexts for Chicana/o literature. Her work also reveals how literary texts are “invested in the nation as both political reality and abstract imaginary” (13). For López, then, Chicana/o research needs to be situated in-between two conflicting theoretical strands in U.S. Southwest border studies: the U.S. Southwest borderlands as the site of oppositional struggles and transdisciplinary discourses that overcome such opposition (12-13). Contreras’s and López’s scholarship underscore the importance of critiquing Chicana/o cultural productions that emphasize sociopolitical and historical convergences in the Americas, which, I argue, are foundational premises for developing aesthetic values for U.S. women’s border novels.

Historians in Benjamin H. Johnson and Andrew R. Graybill's *Bridging National Borders in North America* focus on an "integrated and comparative history of North American border-making." Their scholarship reinforces border studies' emphasis on the intersections of indigenous and non-indigenous peoples, cross-border migrations, and the impact of natural topography and biodiversity within nation-state borders in the development of national identities (15-16). As such, Johnson and Graybill's work reinforces the need for scholarship that expands the scope of border studies from the U.S. Southwest to the U.S./Canada border. Their work provides another regional, yet transnational focus on U.S./North American borders. In Johnson and Graybill's collection, Michel Hogue's study, "Between Race and Nation: The Creation of a *Métis* Borderland on the Northern Plains," discusses the *Métis* community's historical plight in the U.S./Canadian borderlands. Hogue's essay discusses effects of U.S./Canadian regulations, particularly *Métis* assimilation to a white identity, and its effect on *Métis* communities (81-82). Hogue's work is helpful for developing methods for critiquing Louise Erdrich's *Tracks*, a narrative that characterizes the tragic effects of *Métis* assimilation to white culture.

Claudia Sadowski-Smith's 2008 *Border Fictions: Globalization, Empire, and Writing at the Boundaries of the United States* expands border studies scholarship from U.S./Mexico to U.S./Canada border fictions, in hemispheric, inter-American, and transnational contexts. Similarly to Johnson and Graybill's historical scholarship, Sadowski-Smith historicizes the effects of U.S. imperialism, colonialism, and globalization on two U.S. nation-state borders. Her study also aligns border studies with the work of cultural geographers, noting that "a particular place is as much affected by

human projection and representation as people and communities are affected by the landscape,” while also noting the distinct value of fiction to provide alternative visions of border life for the past, present, and future (2-3). In addition, Sadowski-Smith’s research aligns with previously mentioned scholars by emphasizing border zones for their diversity of communities, including: Mexican, Mexican American, Native American, Canadian, as well as Asian American. She also provides transnational, comparative analyses of novels, short stories, autobiographies, and dramas, emphasizing the deep impacts that borders’ transnational relationships have on border crossers (3). Her work is one of the first to critique border fictions from both nation-state borders, and it points the way toward expanding the scope of literary critique to other border contact zones in the North American U.S.

Contemporary scholarship on border cultural studies reminds us that cultural codes found in U.S. border locations are diverse in their origins. They also remind us that indigenism, cultural nationalisms, and white assimilationist practices are in constant conflict, not only in terms of U.S. nation-state boundaries, but also within border communities. My study’s critical framework aligns U.S. border research methodologies with “two largely unconnected versions of inter-American and hemispheric studies: the linguistically and geographically comparative New World studies,” and a “Literature of the Americas,” which “foregrounds the Southwest and its ties with Latin America through a focus on Latino-Chicana/ populations” (Sadowski-Smith 16-17). My methodology creates a critical intersection between inter-American and hemispheric fields, while also identifying cross-cultural resemblances between poetic functions found in Chicana/o, Native American, and African (Gullah) American, border novels.

The model I propose needs to be implemented in several stages. The first stage for identifying and examining U.S. women's border narratives involves the researcher's familiarization with Western narrative theories and their contributions to our understandings of narrative poetic functions in the creation of meaning in contemporary U.S. border narratives. Then, researchers need to familiarize themselves with U.S. border and non-Western (i.e., indigenous) narrative theories, in order to understand the role(s) of border and non-Western narrative theories when critiquing contemporary U.S. border narratives. After these two stages, a comparative analysis needs to be performed between narrative paradigms, analyzing approaches to subjectivity (male and female), lands/landscapes, language(s), and cultural practices. In this stage of the methodology, researchers need to consider the narrative's role as a form of cultural production that represents U.S. modernity's periphery, not just in terms of the effects of hegemony, capitalism, and colonization practices on border women's lives, but also in terms of how the literature is an enunciation of a border worldview, which is the expression of modernity from its most exterior locus. At this point, an examination of the function of different theoretical paradigms within U.S. border narratives should take place. This, of course, involves close readings of border narratives, explicating each narrative's forms, and typical literary elements (theme, setting, characterizations, plot, tone, voice, etc.) for instances in which Western aesthetic principles and border/non-Western aesthetic principles are applied. The next stage in my methodology involves a thorough examination of literary criticisms that already have been applied to U.S. *women's* border narratives. Here, research should focus on how border narrative poetics define female characterizations and settings. So, a pertinent question during this stage would be: in

what ways do the narrative theories studied inform the development of female characters?

In what ways do the literary criticisms aid in supporting a border narrative as woman-centered? Is the woman-centered border narrative developing a narrative trajectory that concludes with a decolonized (partly or completely) female character? And, how do narrative poetics that develop setting affect the development of female characterizations? Once the narrative's poetic functions have been addressed, the next stage is to frame the inquiry into the following overarching themes: female characterizations developed by geographic setting(s), language(s), oral traditions, storytelling, and cultural practices. At this point, each narrative should be examined with culturally-specific criticisms, regardless of whether they are based on Western models or border/non-Western models. The approach should now involve locating, in each critique, the claims that address the apparent turn from Western narrative theories to border/non-Western narrative theories, and the relationship between border culture(s) and female characterizations and settings. The goal, during this stage, is to organize these theories and critiques within the above-mentioned themes, looking for categories of poetics that lean toward, or directly connect to, the culturally-specific development of female characters in relationships with setting. The final stage of my methodology involves performing cross-border comparisons that indicate how the processes of imperialism and colonizations (whether the narrative is referring to all historical stages of colonization or only one) are similar and how they differ. Once these stages are complete, the methodology will enable researchers to effectively engage with U.S. women's border narratives from modernity's exteriority, i.e., from the periphery of U.S. metropolitan centers. There are many complex theoretical rationales for undertaking this form of research, as I will discuss next.

Studies, such as Sadowski-Smith's, apply models of inquiry limited to texts written in English. However, my study's model of inquiry is based on multilingual literary texts (18). I include bilinguality and multilinguality as components of U.S. women's border novels that are intrinsic to female identity and subjectivity. Similarly to previous scholars, I argue that characters' ethnic identities are defined by the geographic, topological, linguistic, material, and cultural contexts from which the narratives arise. And, as I will discuss, the U.S. Southeast/Sea Islands introduces yet another geopolitical and geohistorical location – an exterior region of the U.S. South.

In fact, the U.S. South is a creolized region, similar to the *mestizaje* of the U.S. Southwest. Charles Joyner, in "A Single Southern Culture: Cultural Interaction in the Old South," observes that "Not only were African and European cultures converging and modifying each other, but a variety of European cultures - English, Scottish, Scotch-Irish, Welsh, French, German, and Spanish, in particular - were converging and modifying one another in various ways in the Old South" (11). Joyner argues that the creolization of the Old South was occurring within white culture similarly to Southern slave communities, such as the Gullah communities of Georgia and South Carolina, which Joyner notes share similar lexical and grammatical forms with Caribbean creole languages, e.g., the languages of Jamaica and Barbados (12-13). Joyner's arguments emphasize the hemispheric affinities between various ethnic groups in the Old South, which continue to define communities as either black or white; even today, when in actuality, there has always been a variety of ethnic and cultural mixing.

From Joyner's analysis it can be inferred that the U.S. South developed as a creolized region from processes of colonization, similarly to the ways that the U.S.

Southwest formed a *mestizaje*: from European exploration, imperialism, colonization, and Anglo American settlement. For the U.S. South (and Caribbean) this process involved the U.S., European, and African slave trade, and forced migrations of indigenous peoples from their territories. For the U.S. Southwest, this process involved Spain's colonization of Mexico's territories, slavery, and forced migrations of indigenous peoples, followed by the U.S. invasion and colonization of northern Mexico, and Anglo settlement on Mexican and Native American territories.

First, it is important to define the U.S. South as a boundary that marks the northernmost point of the circum-Atlantic economic trade for Europe and the United States, with Africa as the southernmost point from which forced labor was obtained as a means for Europe and the U.S., to amass immense capital from Caribbean and U.S. Southern plantations. The in-between nature of the U.S. South, as constitutive of both Old World and New World ideologies, is prominent in many Southern narratives critiqued for their aesthetic of remembering, yet also acknowledging, a veiled historical past. George B. Handley, in "A New World Poetics of Oblivion," discusses Southern textual representations of New World histories, as in the case of Dash's narrative. Specifically, Handley makes reference to the genocide and forced migrations of Amerindians and the brutal forced migrations of Africans during and after the Middle Passage, which are often "beyond representation because the lived realities were either initially understated or erased in historical documentation" (26). Handley refers to New World narratives for their "poetics of oblivion," which is similar conceptually to Toni

Morrison's "unspeakable things unspoken."⁴ Dash too claims her artistic work is a form of "speculative fiction,"⁵ which is a theorizing of historical events and a representation of ancestral stories passed down through generations. U.S. Sea Island cultural productions, such as Dash's *Daughters of the Dust*, then, provide an historical record of subaltern African American Gullahs who retain memories of ancestor's lives during the European and U.S. slave trade and post-Reconstruction life in the U.S. South and Caribbean.

Jon Smith and Deborah Cohn, in their Introduction to *Look Away!: The U.S. South in New World Studies*, distinguish the U.S. South as a hemispheric territory. For Smith and Cohn, borders (physical, material, imaginative, and metaphorical) are signified by the in-betweenness that has resulted from the discourses and practices that developed with plantation slavery. Smith and Cohn assert that "The plantation - more than anything else - ties the South both to the rest of the United States and to the rest of the New World" (6). Even further still, Smith and Cohn recognize the South for its border-like attributes. The region "comes to occupy a space unique within modernity: a space simultaneously (or alternately) center and margin, victor and defeated, empire and colony, essentialist and hybrid, northern and southern (both in the global sense)" (9). As I will make apparent in my dissertation, Dash's narrative is indicative of, like Castillo's Chicana/o U.S. Southwest narrative, an inter-American and hemispheric "contact zone,"⁶ a geohistorical location where women-of-color decolonizations are aesthetically rendered.

⁴ See Morrison's essay, "Unspeakable Things Unspoken: The Afro-American Presence in American Literature."

⁵ See Erhart's essay, "Picturing 'What If': Julie Dash's Speculative Fiction."

⁶ See Pratt, "Introduction: Criticism in the Contact Zone." *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*.

U.S. narratives, hemispherically linked with nation-state and border locations, expand on the traditional definitions of modernity, and, in doing so they widen the scope of categories of American literature. By including *Daughters of the Dust*, I demarcate the U.S. Southeast coastal Sea Islands as a site where creolized border narratives arise, while distinguishing the cultural syncretism found within Dash's Gullah narrative from other U.S. Southern narratives. As a result, my study widens the field of U.S. border studies from the U.S. Southwest and U.S./Canada borders to the U.S. Southeast. It also provides New World and inter-American studies with defining characteristics of narrative poetics formed from the cultures of the exterior U.S. South, while it examines how Southern Gullah subjectivity is expressed from their spatial-temporal relationship to modernity.

In the last ten years, dissertation research on women's border narratives has also expanded the scope of U.S. border studies by centering on women's subjectivities in the U.S. Southwest/Mexico borderlands, such as the work of the following researchers: Vivian Garcia Lopez's "Forging a Path of Action Toward Liberation: How Indigenous Research Provides Opportunities for *Conscientización* in a Group of *Mexicanas* Along the U.S./Mexico Border;" Cordelia E. Barrera's "Border Places, Frontier Spaces: Deconstructing Ideologies of the Southwest;" Lori Beth Rodriguez's "Mapping *Tejana* Epistemologies: Contemporary (Re)Constructions of *Tejana* Identity in Literature, Film, and Popular Culture;" Yanya YukLing Kam's "Women on the Edge: Autobiographical Selves and the Lure of the Boundary in Twentieth-Century United States Literature;" Susan T. Gomez's "Contemporary Chicana Feminist Discourse: Negotiating the Boundaries, Borders, and '*Brujos*' Among and Between Critical Counter Discourses;" and Margaret G. Frohlich's "Framing the Margin: Nationality and Sexuality across

Borders.” Others have focused on women’s subjectivities that are defined spatially and temporally in geographic, physical, material, and metaphorical terms, yet are centered within the U.S. Southwest/Mexico border, such as Paul F. Fallon’s “Borderline Tactics: Negotiations of Community, Subjectivity, Nation, and Agency in Temporal Representations of Northern Mexican Border Narratives” and Sarah B. Anderson’s “On the Border: Women’s Writing from the Margins of the Mexican Nation.”

More recently, researchers have explored the transnational aspects of border crossing on women’s subjectivities, including: Melissa Dee Birkhofer’s “Bordering Borders: Gender Politics and Contemporary Latina Literature;” Maria-Theresia Holub’s “Beyond Boundaries: Transnational and Transcultural Literature and Practice;” Ellie Diana Hernandez’s “Irreconcilable Histories: Postnationality in Chicana/o Literature and Culture” and Robin P. Cohen’s “Leslie Marmon Silko: Beyond Borders.” Two dissertations of note research U.S./Canada and U.S. Southern literatures in terms of borders, border crossings, and borderlands, “Kerry Louane Fast’s “But What a Strange Commixture Am I: Borders of Self and Religion in the Making of Women’s Lives” and Lynette D. Myles’s “Beyond Borders: Black Women, Space, and Female Subjectivity in African American Women’s Narratives of Enslavement.” Combined, the above referenced dissertations help shift theoretical and critical discussions of U.S. borders to context-specific geographical analyses of women’s border narratives. They also help focus future research on inter-American, hemispheric, inter- and transdisciplinary paradigms that, I claim, inform U.S. border women’s narrative poetics.

Thus far, contemporary U.S. border research has traced the historical, political, cultural, and geographic conflicts between U.S. nation-state borders and Mexico’s and

Canada's nation-state borders. Anzaldúa's paradigmatic *Borderlands/La Frontera* has become a catalyst for scholars and writers to examine and represent *mestiza* reclamations of mythological and historical cultural codes, while stressing the need for *mestiza*'s to realign their subjectivities with their indigenous ancestral roots. During the last ten years, research has focused on geographies and women's spatial-temporal positionality. But principles are needed for critiquing the poetic function of language in women's border novels. D. Emily Hicks' 1991 *Border Writing: The Multidimensional Text* attempts to apply a new narrative theory for Latin American fiction by applying a holographic model on narratives that focus on the theme of deterritorialization. Hicks argues that the holographic model is preferred to Western Eurocentric models of narrative theory that fail to properly address the multiplicity of languages and the problems of translation (xxvii). U.S. women's border narratives, like Latin American narratives, address the multiplicity of languages and problems with translation. However, in my study, U.S. women's border narratives represent territorialization, not deterritorialization. They also represent phenomenological experiences that are context-specific to North America, and, therefore, are dissimilar to Latin American paradigms: her model does not transfer theoretically from Latin American narratives to North American narratives. Instead, my model fills a gap in knowledge missing from narrative theories of U.S. border fiction. It aligns with Anzaldúa's radical feminist poetics and emancipatory project for *mestiza* consciousness, combining her paradigm with the current focus on poetics that emphasize the centralities of geographies and topographies in defining women's subjectivity in borderlands. In addition, I perform a cross-border, cross-cultural, comparative analysis of aesthetic patterns in U.S. women's border narratives, in order to critique U.S. women's

border narratives for similarities and distinctions between their representations of the conflict between U.S. and European imperial, colonial, and settler practices and ethnic women's attempts at decolonization. It examines ethnic women's decolonization in each novel as a plot development formed by language moves that reconfigure male patriarchal codes to woman-centered codes, and, as a result, position female characters at the center of geohistorical epistemologies, linguistics, and cultural practices.

By border model I refer to the development of aesthetic categories based on the following: female characters' interactions within border lands, their enunciation of border linguistics, the inclusion of woman-centered storytelling and the oral tradition within the Western novel form, and their emphasis on incorporating women's cultural practices as vital knowledges for character development. My objective is to define North American U.S. women's border novels as comparative in poetics, thematics, and characterizations, due to similar processes of colonization. In addition, my comparative methodology reveals similar dialectic and dialogic tensions across U.S. border cultural production, tensions which are linked to the interplay between U.S. Western philosophical discourses of modernity and non-Western philosophical discourses.

My methods highlight the interdependent relationships between border subjectivities and communities. They also confirm the narratives' goals of repositioning indigeneity as central to female characters' consciousness. It is a model of inquiry that reveals the importance of subaltern women's voices in the production of literary meanings. As a result, my study shows the relationship between character transformations and feminist decolonizations: from colonization and neo-colonization to a decolonized state that enables them to develop self-determination through an altered

identity, subjectivity, and consciousness. My study is interdisciplinary because my methods apply border concepts from history, geography, anthropology, linguistics, literature, political science, and philosophy. It is transdisciplinary because it seeks to create a new disciplinary model for examining U.S. women's border narratives from multiple U.S. border locations.

At stake is the representation of U.S. border women as “co-producers” of U.S. discourses through the cultural production of border narratives. In effect, the literary representation of U.S. border women emphasizes their role in defining the hidden side of modernity: its periphery. This is important to note because cultural production of U.S. women's border novels aids in the articulation of Walter Mignolo's concept of modernity's “exterior” (*Local Histories* 11). In other words, the border woman becomes the speaking subject, and representations of border women are indicative of the voice of the periphery⁷ in relation to U.S. metropolitan centers; as such they contribute to an understanding of modernity as it manifests in peripheral locations.

The focus on literary representations of subaltern border women, leads to the following topics of inquiry: How can Castillo's, Erdrich's, and Dash's novels be categorized as border narratives? What are the consistencies in their aesthetic patterns? In what ways do these women's border novels exemplify a feminist reading and critique? In what ways do these women's border novels express race, ethnicity, gender, culture, and economics in geohistorical exteriors, i.e., U.S. borders? What are the characteristics of

⁷ In my dissertation, periphery refers to locales where forced labor secured and continues to secure resources and capital gains for the “center” of the modern world system. The periphery is typically remote from modernity's centers because of socio-economic stratifications that produce relative poverty in peripheral locations and lack of resources due to the center's removal of these resources for profit.

U.S. women's border novel aesthetics, and how do they differ from national and/or regional multiethnic women's narratives? and what challenges do these aesthetic modes present to traditional U.S. American literary aesthetic modes? Finally, Why is the novel well-suited for the examination of the aesthetic properties of women's border novels?

The novel is best suited for examining narrative poetics found in border fiction. This is due to the novel's ability to express multiple forms of border knowledge, identity and subjectivity, and cultural practices, i.e., the totality of border worldviews, into one reading experience. As I stated earlier, women's border narratives express a representation of a lived reality that is an expression of modernity's exteriority – the borderlands and women's experiences in such locations. This involves rehistoricizing the borderlands from definitions rendered by the U.S. nation-state; creating alter-narratives depicting a worldview in dialectical relationship to Western Eurocentrism; and rendering woman-centered subjectivities that recenter their position in the body politics of male patriarchal, heteronormative constructions of the female self.

According to Karen-Margrethe Simonsen, Marianne Ping Huang, and Mads Rosedahl Thomsen in *Reinventions of the Novel*, the novel has always developed specific traits from its historical contexts. Its language has always been tied to a vernacular and has always relied on the culture of printing and publishing, which also affect the themes, styles, forms, and aesthetics that novel writers employ. The novel also tends to be open-ended and inclusive in its interaction with other genres (3-4). Furthermore, Simonsen, Huang, and Thomsen claim the following: the novel always has been a modern genre rooted in realism, or verisimilitude; the narrative poetics novelists employ to convey realism have not always been in relation to scientific objectivity or journalistic prose; the

fantastic, gothic, and imaginative have all been incorporated into the novel genre in the U.S. and globally, affecting the degree and modes of realism within the novel genre, and the fantastic, gothic, and imaginative are themselves dependent on the author's subject position, the novel's prose elements (plot, themes, characterizations, tone, point of view, and setting), and its ontological and fictive purposes (4). Therefore, U.S. women's border narratives should be defined by applying the same criteria as other novels: they develop their specific traits in relation to histories contextualized by contact with European explorers and settlers and by the oral histories that continue to be told in their communities. The language of women's border novels is dependent on their ancestral location, and their culturally-specific ethnic identities. The publication of border novels in the U.S. marketplace often dictates the use of English as the dominant language, though it doesn't dictate the re-expression of semiotic signs associated with the languages spoken in each contact zone. And finally, the mixed-genre approach of many border novels is indicative of the cultural forms found in the lived realities of ethnically and linguistically diverse communities.

The U.S. border novel also constitutes a contemporary form of realism. It challenges U.S. national "American" literature and the literary canon in similar ways as its broader counterpart, the multiethnic novel, partly because of its challenge to more traditional forms of novelistic realism, e.g., in the ways U.S. women's border novels convey verisimilitude, mimesis, and diegesis from "the underside of modernity" (*Underside* 1). Likewise, U.S. women's border novels articulate a realism that is in-between Western and non-Western philosophical discourses. It is a realism that Linda

Hutcheon calls “the eccentric”⁸ and what J. Saldívar refers to as “postmodern realism.”⁹ However, the category of “postmodern realism,” which Saldívar refers to, mainly magic realism, *lo real maravilloso*, and historiographic metafiction, is merely one aspect of feminist border novel’s narrative goals. The main thread that weaves the plot lines together in feminist borderland novels is, rather, a dialectic and dialogic performativity of women-of-color identities expressed as a process from colonization and neo-colonization to decolonization.

As I mentioned previously, Chicana, African American (Gullah), and *Ojibwe* in border zones became subjects of the modern world system, and are therefore co-contributors to modernity and its philosophical discourses. Even so, as Dussel observes, Eurocentrism would come to dominate not only the modern world system, but also the discourses which rationalized imperialism, capitalism, colonization, forced migrations, and hegemony over marginalized groups (13). Thus, what has occurred since first contact with Europeans is the formation of creole, *mestizaje*, and otherwise bilingual/multilingual discourses, which are especially apparent in border locations.

Mignolo, in *Local Histories, Global Designs*, theorizes border thinking as “knowledge from a subaltern perspective...knowledge conceived from the exterior borders of the modern/colonial world system.” In addition, Mignolo defines “border gnoseology as a discourse about colonial knowledge” which is “conceived at the conflictive intersection of the knowledge produced from the perspective of modern colonialisms (rhetoric, philosophy, science) and knowledge produced from the

⁸ See Hutcheon, *A Poetics*. “Decentering the Postmodern: The Ex-Centric.”

⁹ See J. Saldívar, “Postmodern Realism.”

perspective of colonial modernities in Asia, Africa, and the Americas/Caribbean” (11). For Mignolo, subaltern knowledges are connected to dominant knowledges by the bridging of sensibilities between two different cultures. Mignolo writes, “linguaging is the moment in which ‘a living language’ ...describes itself as a way of life (*‘un modo de vivir’*) at the intersection of two (or more) languages” (“Linguistic” 264). Mignolo extends his theories of border thinking, border semiotics and border languages further, by stating that border language, as an act of enunciation in literary form, is actually “bilanguaging” or “multilanguaging,” which occurs when a writer of literature maintains the aesthetic perspectives and ways of living from their own geo-historical sense of self, even while the writer appropriates a dominant language, such as American English, when writing (264-65). Mignolo’s theory of border languaging provides a helpful entrance to a study of U.S. women’s border narratives. Erdrich’s Ojibwe genealogy confirms Mignolo’s assertion of border writer’s aesthetic sensibilities. And, even though Castillo and Dash write from another geo-historical sense of self than the border settings they create, they are still creating an *affect* of the aesthetic sensibilities of border zones. All three authors achieve affects of border thinking, semiotics, and languaging: their narratives inscribe border worldviews within texts predominantly written in English.

Mignolo’s concept of border languaging is also indicative of transculturation processes, which he defines in a similar fashion to Mary Louise Pratt’s understanding of transculturation. Pratt’s definition in *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*, is taken from ethnographers who describe it as the influx of dominant languages to subordinated or marginal groups, and their process of selection and invention of cultural materials from these dominant group(s) (7). Mignolo understands these transculturation

processes via “linguaging” and “multilinguaging,” in which performances of language, acts of speaking and writing “orient and manipulate social domains of interaction” (188). Mignolo, however, contends that in literary linguaging and multilinguaging, i.e., the expression of a subaltern language occurs in its transliteration into a dominant language, e.g., American English. Mignolo writes that the colonial narrative employs folklore and myth as “linguaging moves” that are often dismissed or “viewed as inferior when confronted with the practice defined and exemplified by the metropolitan literary canon” (188). I would like to add to Mignolo’s discussion of metropolitan transculturation, literary texts, and linguaging/multilinguaging by asserting that decolonial narratives also employ linguaging/multilinguaging in similar ways, and with similar Eurocentric reactions, as the colonial narrative. Decolonial narratives resist, even as they comply with, metropolitan literary hegemony produced by our institutions. However, U.S. women’s border novels in this study are created, in part, to challenge the literary hegemony of American English by incorporating linguaging/multilinguaging moves that result in a “reverse transculturation” experience between the reader and the text. The result is an effect of experiencing coloniality, and then decoloniality, from the site of their enunciation: the U.S. borderlands.

Bodily discourses produced by modernity, i.e., Eurocentric philosophies of the self, have defined concepts of race and gender in the modern world system, and these concepts have systematically subjugated African diasporic, Native American, and Chicana/o peoples. Western philosophies, such as Rene Descartes’ concept of a mechanistic mind, in which mind and body exist independently of each other, have lead modern science, according to Linda Martín Alcoff, to supersede classical discourses of a

“mastery of the self” for a “mastery of the world” (53). In addition, classical liberal political theory conceptualized the self as abstract, “without, or prior to, group allegiance,” while in the modern period, Kant would refine this idea, stating that “an abstract or disengaged self is...necessary for full personhood” (21-22). Alcoff leads this philosophy to its logical conclusion, noting that “The norm of rational maturity, then, required a core self-stripped of its identity.” Alcoff continues,

Groups too immature to practice this kind of abstract thought or to transcend their ascribed cultural identities were deemed incapable of full autonomy, and their lack of maturity was often ‘explained’ via racist theories of the innate inferiority of non-European peoples. But, liberal social theorists attempted to develop nonracist explanations for the inability or unwillingness of some to let go of their identities. (22)

This is part of what Dussel, Mignolo, and Alcoff, among others, call the modern, colonial Eurocentric worldview: a majority of European philosophical discourses after 1492 concluded that the rational mind could only be obtained by the process of freeing oneself from one’s identity. However, borderland subjectivities are predicated on an ideology that only subsumes rationality when it can be incorporated with modes of knowledge that inform their indigeneity. Indeed, in Homi Bhabha’s *Location of Culture*, the border subject lives in an “interstitial passage between fixed identifications,” which have the capacity for “a cultural hybridity that entertains difference without an assumed or imposed hierarchy” (5). When literary critics refer to “the anxiety of influence,” they are referring, at least partially, to the modern Western philosophical discourses that present anxieties of influence in regards to the intersubjective integration of self with Other, an

anxiety in Western philosophy, which, according to Alcoff, continues today (67). This last quote by Alcoff holds true for the literary expression of border subjectivities: female characters are often involved in the process of transforming their subjectivities from Western anxieties of influence to indigenous knowing.

For example, female characters in Castillo's, Erdrich's, and Dash's novels become aware of restrictive, gendered identities in their communities and in the U.S. nation-state, often by conflicts with exploitative environments and violence, which are effects of a prescribed Western body politic. Judith Butler, in *Gender Trouble*, theorizes the performance of identity within a hegemonic body politic. Her scholarship on gendered performativities combines Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalysis and Foucaultian power structures in order to delineate how gender is constructed on the internal self and the external body in a systematic series of false dichotomies. For Butler, gender is a socially constructed act: one's identity is inscribed on the body and is regulated by extrinsic, dominating structures. Butler writes:

The redescription of intrapsychic processes in terms of the surface politics of the body implies a corollary redescription of gender as the disciplinary production of the figures of fantasy through the play of presence and absence on the body's surface, the construction of the gendered body through a series of exclusions and denials, signifying absences. (172)

Butler concludes that the effects of these external structures on gender creates a "false stabilization" of gender identity, and that gendered identities which are not prescribed by normative discourses eventually diffuse the descriptive power relegated to heteronormative identity constructions (173). Her theory holds true for pivotal female

characters in Castillo's, Erdrich's, and Dash's texts: Caridad, Fleur, and Toady's identities are either already developed outside of heteronormative definitions, or are eventually self-defined as non-heteronormative through a process of emancipating themselves from heteronormative identity constructions.

In addition, Butler's theories in "Subversive Bodily Acts" are important for my claim that female characters in Castillo's, Erdrich's, and Dash's texts perform gender acts when crossing between borderlands and European American dominated locations. Butler defines the body politic as rendering corporeal definitions of self, which are given to us by the public/social worlds we live in, and are inscribed on the external surface of one's body where gender becomes a socially constructed identity formed by the cultural practices one performs. For Butler, this publicly-prescribed gendered identity is always already heteronormative and hegemonic in its external and internal psychic manifestations (172-73). Thus, Butler's theories of gender performativity aid my claim that female characters redefine their gendered identity as not solely constituted by definitions rendered by the U.S. nation state; and even at times, they are redefined when a feminist border subject position defies the nation state body politic altogether.

In summary, key Western philosophical concepts of subjectivity, and the legacy of racism and sexism found in early modern philosophical discourses of Western philosophy, have evolved in the modern world system as discourses that have fractured subjectivity, alienated self and Other, and defined and categorized the Other as a source of oppression and control.¹⁰ Though more contemporary philosophers, such as Derrida,

¹⁰ See Alcoff, *Visible*. 47-83.

would attempt to undo these discourses, they would do so from within the very linguistic sources from which these hegemonic discourses arose. Instead, concepts of self-other identity and subjectivity developed by Western philosophers are challenged in U.S. women's border novels, but the narratives also move beyond challenging Western philosophical discourses and patriarchal discourses. Women border characters attempt to transcend these discourses.

Borderland gendered identities are felt experiences, based not only on discursive power structures, be they from ethnic and cultural communities or the white, Anglo-European communities they encounter; but also from their material, perspectival locations within and across contact zones. This means that in order to precisely critique the U.S. women's borderland novel, scholars must acknowledge that a gendered identity (heterosexual or LGBTQ) is constructed through Western discursive models, e.g., Butler, *and* it is constructed by one's material and cultural interactions within contact zones, via Anzaldúa.

The question then is: how do women in borderlands achieve a lived subjectivity? Further still, how is their lived subjectivity represented in women's border novels? In my study, I define lived subjectivity as the female border subject's ability to know herself as an autonomous individual through her direct relationship with her community and their social and material environments. In other words, it is the ability to develop a subjective self that is determined by one's own processes of interacting with their surroundings, and is also indeterminate in the body politic. When approaching Castillo's, Erdrich's, and Dash's border novels, readers need to consider how female characters embody a lived subjectivity while interacting within contact zones.

Here it is helpful to discuss Hans Gadamer's theory of interpretive horizons, and Alcoff's concepts of situated reasoning and substantive perspectival location. Gadamer's and Alcoff's theories are starting points for understanding female characters' processes of subjective formation/reformation in relation to racialized and gendered plot developments. Gadamer notes in *Truth and Method* that consciousness is "affected by history" and, therefore, is a consciousness of "the hermeneutical *situation*" (Gadamer's emphasis 301). Also, for Gadamer, an interpretive horizon is "the range of vision that includes everything that can be seen from a particular vantage point" (302). Gadamer understands this interpretive perspective as the point from which we understand our metaphysical and material conditions. Consciousness, then, is tied to historical periods, and is concomitantly tied to context-specific interpretations and understanding. Alcoff elucidates Gadamer's concept by using the term "situated reasoning," which is a process that allows a "historically situated person" to live and experience the world around them (94-95). Based on Gadamer's and Alcoff's claims, it is logical to assert that border women experience multiple interpretations and understandings from diverse racial, ethnic, cultural, and gendered perspectives. It is also fair to assert, then, that their processes of reason are also situated in complex racial, ethnic, cultural, and gendered subject positions. But not only do border women perform these processes of interpretative framing and situated reasoning for the sake of her self autonomy, but they also perform them for the sake of their community. Gadamer states: "*Understanding is to be thought of less as a subjective act than as participating in an event of tradition*" (Gadamer's emphasis 290). Thus, interpretations of metaphysical and material locations, as well as reasoning, all help determine border subjectivity. When Gadamer's

hermeneutical theory is applied to a border woman's self-autonomy, it is not a self-autonomy mutually exclusive to community self-determination. The identities of self and community are intersubjective processes working together, and they are performed differently than the self-autonomy and subjectivity defined by Western philosophical discourses.

This leads to the conclusion that Gadamer's interpretive horizon can also be perceived from multiple interpretive horizons: culture, home life, community, national border(s), male-centered, patriarchal discourses, and European discourses, communities, and geographic boundaries, etc. Mignolo takes the concept of multiple interpretive horizons one step further, stating that the border subject perceives their metaphysical and material location during pluritopic hermeneutic engagements with the varied interpretive cultural codes they confront. This pluritopic hermeneutic is reliant on border semiosis, which is a signifying system of discourses enunciated from border locations. This, in turn, produces border thinking, as mentioned previously. I argue then, that U.S. women's border narratives aesthetically inscribe border linguistics within the Western novel as a method of articulating a complex subjectivity, one in which female characters perform border thinking and languaging from intersecting knowledges and interpretations.

I will now consider how each novel in my study narrates corporeal and material interactions in borderlands, and how these interactions create female characters' transformed subjectivity. Unlike Western philosophies of object and subject dialectics, that, according to Ramón Saldivar, "negate the possibility of an ultimate synthesis of subject and object," Chicana narratives, even apart from their Chicano texts, work "to undo not only the presumptive permanence and sovereignty of abstract binary

oppositions, but of decidedly material bodily forms as well” (173). Chicana narratives, according to Saldívar, “bear witness to the ‘dialectics of difference,’ to subjectivity in process attempting to resist the absolutizing tendencies of a racist, sexist, classist, patriarchal bourgeois world that founds itself on the notion of a fixed and positive identity and on specified gender roles based on this positive fixation” (175). Even further still, I would argue that the Chicana border novel, articulates the resistance to cohesion and synthesis, if by cohesion and synthesis we mean a final, fixed, essentialist category of self. Rather, the representation of female subjectivity in *So Far from God*, *Tracks*, and *Daughters of the Dust* signifies the existence of an “always in process” state.

According to Paula Gunn Allen, Native American literary texts create an interaction between the oral tradition and Western fiction and its antecedents. For Allen, these forms “interact, as wings of a bird in flight interact. They give shape to our experience. They signify” (*Voice* 7). Allen’s metaphor for contemporary Native American literature can also be applied to Louise Erdrich’s *Tracks*. Erdrich’s text is a feminist rendering of Native American border life. It evokes the struggles, resistance, survival, and epistemological amalgamation that occurs when Native Americans subsume aspects of Western ideological and philosophical worldviews into indigenous thought and language. As I will discuss shortly, Erdrich’s narrative aligns with tribal authenticity, identity, and national sovereignty.¹¹

¹¹ The idea of an authentic ethnic self can be referenced to the intellectual critiques of black authenticity that arose during the Black Power Movement of the 1960s; however, black authenticity is a concept that is ever-evolving in scholarly discourse. For example, E. Patrick Johnson’s 2003 *Appropriating Blackness: Performance and the Politics of Authenticity* directly addresses black authenticity as an elusive concept that necessarily involves continuous defining, because “the mutual constructing/deconstructing,
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Native American (Acoma) poet Simon Ortiz defines tribal authenticity in Native American life and literature as “the struggle against colonialism – which has given substance to what is authentic” (256). The goals of tribal authenticity, as defined by Ortiz in his essay “Towards a National Indian Literature,” are “the creative ability of Indian people gather [sic] in many forms of the socio-political colonizing force [whether this force is Spanish, French, and/or English] which beset them and to make these forms meaningful in their own terms” (254). Thus, Native American literary tribal authenticity and national sovereignty is evident in the writer’s imaginative depictions of lands and their distinct evoking of indigenous consciousness. It is also evident in characterizations developed by mythologic, linguistic, and geographic signs, which are largely expressed through American English.

In African American women novels, such as Toni Morrison’s, the concept of Du Boisian “double consciousness” is reconfigured to formal thematic levels that evoke place as a dominant theme (9). According to Marilyn Mobley McKenzie, Morrison’s novels are, broadly speaking, about African American spaces that are aesthetically rendered by the development of linguistic and cultural practices that create “racialized spaces” that are then simultaneously “unracialized.” The African American woman’s novel often defines identities and subjectivities within spaces, including the house, the

avowing/disavowing, and expanding/delimiting dynamic that occurs in the production of blackness is the very thing that constitutes black culture”[³] (2). Johnson’s definition of black authenticity as “overdetermined,” because it is “contingent on the historical, social, and political terms of its production” is as precise and astute an observation of living, articulating black identity as one could hope for (3). When discussing Ortiz’s definition of Native American tribal authenticity, then, one should also note that Ortiz is similarly referencing tribal authenticity as an ever-evolving, highly context-specific, and always already overdetermined once it is defined; and therefore, its undefinability is what makes its authentic.

neighborhood, the city, the island, and island setting (221-32). Maryemma Graham refers to Morrison's narrative aesthetic as "returning African American literature to its 'village' origins." Yet, according to Graham, Alice Walker prefers a "womanist" approach to African American women's novels, replacing the "parochialism of the village...for the unity of a broader world" (11). Morrison's and Walker's divergent paradigms for the African American woman's novel converge in Julie Dash's novel *Daughters of the Dust*: the concept of the African American "village" (Dawtuh Island) and the "broader world" (New York City and their homelands of origin) are both rendered from the "territorialized" Sea Island location from which Gullah Americans materials, linguistics, and cultural practices are integrated.

In the U.S. border novels in this study, female characters are closely connected to land and landscapes, whether they are farmers, ranchers, and/or *curanderas*, shamans, and medicine women. Female characters are also responsible for continuing their community's oral traditions and storytelling practices. They may also be the subject of stories, such as Caridad in *So Far from God* and Fleur in *Tracks*. Female characters are also involved in cultural practices that are vital for survival, i.e., nourishment and sustenance. They are also responsible for passing these cultural practices on to future generations. These cultural practices include food practices, communal rituals, and bodily practices that maintain sisterhood and female bonding.

As I mentioned previously, U.S. women's border novels are cultural representations of subaltern¹² border subjects. U.S. women's border narratives share

¹² Subaltern is defined in my study following Gaytri Spivak's definition in her essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?" Spivak states that the subaltern are "men and women among the
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characteristics that define them as coproducers of modernity. They have distinct forms, and themes that differ from U.S. women's multiethnic novels. One major distinction is that border narrative settings represent "territorialized" social constructions of female identities. In contrast, U.S. women's multiethnic novels are often characterized by metaphorical, material, and geographic "deterritorializations"¹³ due to the *dominant* presence of European Americans in the narratives' settings. In addition, U.S. women's multiethnic novels tend to develop plots that narrate geographic and material resources as already usurped by European Americans, subsequently causing ethnic women and their communities to lose their cultural cohesiveness or struggle to maintain it. There are also distinctions between categories of border novels. First, there are border narratives that narrate geographic, material, and metaphorical relationships between ethnic minority characters and the borderlands, whether through male-centered or feminist characterizations, e.g., the novels in my dissertation. Second, there are border narratives which are less focused on the border as a material construct that directly alters ethnic

illiterate peasantry, the tribals, the lowest strata of the urban subproletariat." Spivak also discusses the woman subaltern as "doubly oppressed" and that "collectivity itself is persistently foreclosed through the manipulation of female agency" (78).

¹³ Deterritorialization stems from Deleuze and Guattari's *Anti-Oedipus*. In Deleuze and Guattari's conceptualization, it refers to poststructuralist decentering of the subject; it also relates to the means through which an individual develops a certain level of detachment from oppressive geographical territories (265). I use the term to explain the narratological process by which the geographical setting represents the usurpation of indigenous and/or ethnic minority-established territories by a dominant cultural group. In the case of U.S. women's borderland novels, and multiethnic women's narratives more generally, deterritorialization means that the literary setting is such that minority women and their communities no longer control or can subjectively center themselves within their ancestral cultural belief systems because the territories they inhabit are no longer in their sovereignty. Territorialization, in this study, means that the lands in the narrative's setting, have been reclaimed, or are already sovereign and/or owned through land grants, allotment acts, and treaties.

minority characters' perceptions of themselves. These narratives focus on the border as an abstraction. In these narratives, characters may be involved in border crossings, immigration, immigration/border patrol altercations, and life in or across borders, but the characters are unable to effectively achieve self-determination in their environment, whether rural or urban, such as Helena María Viramontes' *Their Dogs Came with Them*.

In contrast to border novels, multiethnic novels develop characters that leave socially and economically restrictive locations to improve their living conditions. In these narratives, characters do not live in borderlands; instead they move from rural or urban locations. Characters in multiethnic narratives attempt to reclaim their new location as a space for the formation of individual and communal identities and subjectivities, such as Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*. There are also multiethnic narratives in which characters are part of a larger diaspora who have been either dislocated from their homelands outside of the U.S., its nation-state borders, or its other topographical boundaries, such as bodies of water. Characters in these narratives may enter rural or urban settings as individuals or as families, and may or may not be able to make trips back to their homeland of origin. One example is Bharati Mukherjee's *Jasmine*. There are, of course, other multiethnic narratives situated in the U.S. in which the above criteria do not apply, such as third and fourth generation immigrant narratives.

By performing this research, I proceed with the premise that my comparative methods of selecting, analyzing, and explicating all three novels for similar thematic choices, i.e., lands/landscapes, language, oral traditions, storytelling, and cultural practices, mark spatial-temporal distinctions between each novel's culturally-specific elements. I also proceed with the premise that analyzing the texts' semiotic signs for their

epistemological, hermeneutical, and metaphysical functions will lead to improved understandings of cross-cultural similarities between border women's struggles to obtain female agency and to define their subjectivities. I also engage in this research with the premise that a specific model for critiquing the functions of language in U.S. border women's novels will lead to more informed, wider debates on what constitutes U.S. narrative poetics. In addition, this research study is performed with the premise that these narratives, at least Castillo's and Erdrich's, are already considered part of the American literary canon, which means that they are already widely taught in post-secondary educational institutions. Therefore, the approach in my study can be readily incorporated into curriculums, especially where U.S. border studies programs and interdisciplinary American literary and cultural studies programs exist. But I also hope to expand the definition of American literature for inter-American studies, border studies, and New World studies, without limiting the range of what can be considered U.S. women's border narratives. Furthermore, my study operates on the premise that bilingual and multilingual literary texts should be included in U.S. colleges and universities because they represent the lives of women who populate U.S. border locations and who are often excluded from representation in the educational curriculum of the U.S.

In Chapter Two, "*O si no, ¿qué, hija?*" / "If not, then what, daughter?": New Mexico's *Fronterista* in Ana Castillo's *So Far from God*," I examine Castillo's U.S. Southwest border novel for how it is simultaneously influenced by, yet diverges from, previous Chicano literature of the U.S. Southwest. I then examine the ways that Castillo poetically articulates her own feminist theory of *Xicanisma* and Anzaldúa's theory of "mestiza consciousness" by developing female characters in the New Mexico borderlands

that are both defined by their homelands and redefined by their recalcitrant subjectivities. *Xicanisma* and a “mestiza consciousness” are also found in Castillo’s characters’ linguistic enunciations, in which two main characters, La Loca and La Caridad, self-identify with Chicano, Nahuatl, and variants of Spanish; while the character Fe is revealed to readers through an absence of language. In addition, I examine La Loca and *Doña Felicia*’s recipes and remedies for representations of Chicana *curanderismo*, female solidarity, and communal, shared knowledges specific to New Mexican borderlands.

In Chapter Three, “‘The Power to Cure and Kill’: Fleur and Pauline at the Intersections of Northern Plains Borderlands in Louise Erdrich’s *Tracks*,” I examine Erdrich’s *Ojibwe* reservation novel, set on the border of North Dakota and Saskatchewan, Canada. Erdrich’s *Tracks*, while it can still be considered a Native American nation-building narrative, is firmly rooted in *Ojibwe* historical and cultural traditions. It is a novel that represents *Ojibwe* consciousness through its main character, Fleur, whose life is retold by two tribal characters, Nanapush and Pauline. Erdrich includes Nanapush’s and Pauline’s narrations to emphasize the often contradictory perspectives within her fictional *Ojibwe* reservation. In doing so, she reveals the conflicts and tensions that occur in border locations (both reservation borders and nation-state borders) for both full blood *Ojibwes* and mixed blood *Métis* tribal members. *Tracks* is also examined for the prevalence of *Ojibwe* mythologies and the interspersing of *Anishinaabemowin* as ways of expressing *Ojibwe* consciousness and mixed-blood consciousness. The character Fleur, in fact, is a composite character, formed by myth, oral tradition, and storytelling; yet she is ultimately the novel’s protagonist; while the novel’s two narrators, Nanapush and Pauline, come to identify themselves primarily through Fleur’s actions.

In Chapter Four, ““Dis lie begin at de beginning of dis world’: Gullah Sea Island Stories, Spaces, and the Recentering of the Self in Julie Dash’s *Daughters of the Dust*,” I examine Dash’s representation of Gullah culture, enunciated by Gullah women through a polyphony of voices. I focus on how matriarchal authority is represented in the character Miss Emma Julia, the community’s elder and spiritual leader. I also address the “de-urbanization” and cultural transformation of Amelia Varnes, the Harlem, New York cousin of the Peazant’s, and researcher who ultimately chooses to live on Dawtuh Island instead of the mainland. The character Toady is considered for the ways she represents the emancipation of one’s gender and sexuality, which occurs when she crosses borders from Atlanta, Georgia to Dawtuh Island. In addition, I examine the novel’s problematic use of phonetic transcriptions to represent the Gullah’s indigenous language in English, and how that renders a simulated Gullah “languaging” for Dash’s fictional Dawtuh Island. Finally, I explore the familial bonds that occur during intimate practices between relatives and the bonds that are broken when these practices become commodified outside of Dawtuh Island territory.

CHAPTER TWO

“*O si no, ¿qué, hija?*”/If not, then what, daughter?: NEW MEXICO’S *FRONTERISTA* IN ANA CASTILLO’S *SO FAR FROM GOD*

The articulation of *Chicanismo* (Chicana/o consciousness) and the desire to express a Chicana/o subjectivity are distinct aspects of Chicana/o literature. Chicana/o literature is also characterized by themes such as: landscapes, native/indigenous beliefs, both oral and written history, and the Chicana/o *mestizaje* of languages formed from English, Spanish, *caló* (dialect), and Nahuatl, Maya, and Yaqui (Anzaldúa, *Borderlands* 75-86). Furthermore, while Latin American writers have been influenced by continental European literary, cultural, and indigenous discourses, Chicana/o literature is influenced by U.S., Mexican, and Latin American literary and cultural discourses, while seeking to develop a distinct literary form within the larger U.S. national culture (Leal 558). Thus when examining Ana Castillo’s novel *So Far from God*, it is not only important to acknowledge the influence of Latin American literary impulses, which arose in the 18th century, but also it is important to acknowledge the influence of Mexican American literature post 1848, and the burgeoning Chicana/o literary production since the 1960’s Chicano Movement.

Mexican American literature began with writers concerned with the concept of a unique identity and culture formed by both U.S. and Mexico national discourses, but also informed by their indigeneity. Shortly after 1841, the folk drama *Los Tejanos* (The Texans) was anonymously written (Espinosa 292). It chronicles the conflicts that occurred between northern Mexican territories of Texas and New Mexico: two territories which would soon be annexed to the U.S. Following *Los Tejanos*, Mexican American

writers began exploring the cultural conflicts occurring in newly claimed U.S. Southwest territories. Themes of cultural conflicts are also evident in their choices of language use: Mexican American authors wrote either entirely in English, in both English and Spanish, or entirely in Spanish (Leal and Martín-Rodríguez 558).¹⁴

In 1885, María Amparo Ruiz de Burton wrote *The Squatter and the Don*, the first, and perhaps most widely known Chicana/o work written in English. Ruiz de Burton's novel is critiqued as part romance novel/part protest novel. José Saldívar states that Ruiz de Burton's authorial voice "functions as a subaltern mediator who is simultaneously an insurgent critic of monopoly capitalism and a radical critic of Anglocentric historiography" (*Border* 480). Burton's narrative reveals California's legal injustices involving Mexican American land ownership and social status. As Ana Castillo points out, in her 2004 "Introduction" to Ruiz de Burton's novel, "Power – social, political, economic – was of constant concern to Ruiz de Burton; she deeply felt, and resisted, the lack of esteem held for individuals of Spanish and Mexican descent, as well as for women" (vi). Ruiz de Burton is one of the first Mexican American women to give voice to the Chicana experience in the U.S. Southwest. Her legacy is witnessed by the Chicana Renaissance of artistic and intellectual production since the late 1970s.

Besides Ruiz de Burton's legacy, though, there are many Mexican American women's memoirs, interviews, and oral histories recovered by historicists between the late 1800s to the 1960s.¹⁵ During the 1930s and 1940s, the Federal Writers' Project¹⁶

¹⁴ For more information on how the Spanish language is perceived by Mexicans and Mexican Americans, see Contreras, 1-2.

¹⁵ For example, in 1877 Donya Eulalia Pérez wrote a narrative, "*Una vieja y sus recuerdos*" ("A Woman and Her Memories") describing her experiences being hired as a

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helped record many Chicana/o oral histories from New Mexico, Arizona, and Texas.¹⁷

The New Mexico Federal Writers Project is a compilation of stories told by Mexican American women. Their stories include heroines from New Mexico folklore, such as the *curandera* (folk healer), the *bruja* (witch), and mythic female ghost figures such as *La Larga* and *La Llorona* (Rebolledo 16). These stories preserve and continue the practice of Chicana/o oral traditions in New Mexico. Mexican American women storytellers who aided the NMFWP were also acknowledged for their subversive recalcitrance toward dominant Anglo American discourses, because their stories orient listeners/readers to indigenous forms of thinking, rather than Eurocentric ones.

The twentieth century transition to post-1950 contemporary Chicana/o literature is evident in Paredes' seminal study *With a Pistol in His Hand* in 1958 and José Antonio Villarreal's novel *Pocho* in 1959. Paredes' study historicizes the cultural and socially transformative value of *corridos* (folk ballads) written and performed between 1836 and 1930. *Corridos* often chronicle conflicts between Mexican Americans and Anglo Europeans in the U.S. Southwest. Even more importantly, Paredes' "ethnographic and anti-imperialist" work ushered in a "Chicano artistic and intellectual response to nativist

cook for a mission. In 1878, Doña María Inocencia Pico wrote her memoirs, "Reminiscences of California." Also, in 1878, Apolonia Lorenzana in her "*Memorias*" rendered a Chicana woman's voice to the destructive social and cultural effects on Chicanos/as due to the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo of 1848. See Rebolledo, 12.

¹⁶ The Federal Writer's Project was part of Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal program in the 1930s. See Rebolledo, 211.

¹⁷ These oral histories, passed down from one generation to the next, especially those from New Mexico ("*estorias*"), were popular recollections of real-life events, along with folk tales, which often were told with drama and humor, and were "stories with a moral or describing some punishment if the female steps outside prescribed boundaries;" though Rebolledo contends that they also may have been "used by women to question the roles assigned to them by their culture," perhaps expressing dissent and encouraging the exercise of power. See Rebolledo, 14-16.

modernist scholars of the 1930s and 1940s...who represented a popular, romanticized history” of U.S.-Mexico border culture as Mexican immigrants were being deported (*Border* 36, 40). Paredes’ influence as an intellectual and artist is evident in 1960s Chicana/o social movements and literary production. Indeed, José Limón describes Paredes’ *With a Pistol in His Hand* as containing “multiple voices, inversions, humor and irony,” which are stylistic choices apparent in Ana Castillo’s novel *So Far from God*, written thirty-five years later (76).

After the 1950s, though, Chicana/o students, according to Manuel G. Gonzales in *Mexicanos: A History of Mexicans in the United States*, aligned themselves with the Black freedom struggles of the Civil Rights Movement, and formed *La Raza, El Movimiento*: the Chicano Movement. The Chicano Movement’s main goals were racial equality and/or cultural nationalism. They included uprisings on high school and college campuses to demand their right to an education. In addition, Chicana/o racial consciousness increased with the desire to put an end to Anglo domination (191). All of this is important to point out because, as stated previously, Mexican American literature since the 1830s has been influenced by the need to articulate a Chicana/o identity, both individual and communal, and the need to articulate the felt experiences of social uprisings and movements that directly and indirectly impact their daily lives. Hence the 1960s’ call for the artistic conceptualization of *Aztlán*, the idea of a Chicana/o nation largely concerned with the construction of a Chicana/o collective consciousness garnering power from the historical/mythological significance of the U.S. Southwest

(192).¹⁸ Castillo's *So Far from God* is a feminist response to Chicano articulations of a nation-building *Aztlán* within the U.S. Southwest, as much as it is a response to a Chicano racial consciousness.

Estela Portillo Trambley's 1975 *Rain of Scorpions and Other Writings* is perhaps one of the first major Chicana literary productions post Chicano Movement. Her work is followed by an abundant growth in Chicana literary production since the 1980s, in what has been called the "Chicana Renaissance" (Madsen 1-40).¹⁹ Writers such as Cherrie Moraga, Pat Mora, Gloria Anzaldúa, Ana Castillo, Sandra Cisneros, Denise Chávez, Lorna Dee Cervantes, and Helena María Viramontes are part of the "Chicana Renaissance," which focuses on intellectual and creative expressions of Chicana subjectivity. The creative work of Chicana writers, post 1960s and 1970s Chicano Movement, expresses Chicana sexuality, spirituality, languages, and knowledges. It is an intellectual and artistic response to historical oppressions from patriarchal systems of dominance, from Chicano and Western cultures and the colonizing and imperialist forces of Latin American and Anglo European nation states.

Chicana narratives, then, are both artistic and political expressions. They often include and are informed by popular culture, oral traditions, and folklore as methods of rehistoricizing Chicana/o culture, language, and identity. Chicana narratives retell traditional stories, songs, *dichos* (sayings), mythologies, and life experiences. They tell the unofficial histories of Chicana women's experiences to give voice to the subaltern. In

¹⁸ Aztlán is an Aztec word that means "the land to the north" – presumably the U.S. Southwest, north of Mexico. See Anaya and Lomeli. 191, 232.

¹⁹ Also, see Rebolledo, 100.

doing so, Diana Tey Rebolledo notes that they seize their subjectivity from colonizing and hegemonic social and cultural subjection and violence (4-5). Thus, Chicana novels' complex narrative forms reflect the goals of recovery and continuance of cultural traditions while defining multiple Chicana subjectivities.

Like *Daughters of the Dust*, *So Far from God* attempts to define Chicana women's subjectivities with border discourses that are, at times, peripheral to and in-between dominant national and community discourses of patriarchy and race, yet within and across geographical, political, and cultural borders. All three novels, *So Far from God*, *Tracks*, and *Daughters of the Dust* create poetics that alter the Western novel by entering into a dialectic and dialogic textual engagement between indigenous, Latin American, Native American, African American and Anglo-American discourses.

So Far from God's multiple Chicana subjectivities, and as Alarcón notes "multiple registers of existence," are in a dialectic engagement with "competing notions for...allegiance or self-identification." Chicana consciousness, according to Alarcón, is "a site of multiple voicings," and is always "originating with the subject, but as discourses that transverse consciousness and which the subject must struggle with constantly" ("Theoretical" 365-66). Chicana texts attempt to recreate the polyvocalities felt externally and internally in daily life. They attempt to reposition Chicana identities and subjectivities away from externally defining forces, i.e., from Chicano, Latin American, and Anglo-European cultures.

The need to challenge these dominant cultural models helped forge Chicana writers' efforts to create literary texts that adequately portrayed Chicana self-representation, which Alvina Quintana notes enabled "new aesthetic opportunities," and

ushered in the Chicana Renaissance in the 1980s (259). The Chicana Renaissance, which Ana Castillo's oeuvre is part of, offers characteristic models of Chicana memoirs, such as Fabiola Cabeza de Baca's New Mexico autoethnographic narrative, *We Fed Them Cactus* (Rebolledo 42-47). Besides the presence of oral traditions, mythological figures such as *La Virgen de Guadalupe*, *La Llorona*, and *La Malinche* are reconfigured in Chicana narratives through feminist revisions of their cultural, historical, and political referents. Not only do Chicana border narratives contain folklore, mythology, and a multiplicity of voices and languages, but they also are concerned with reconfiguring the landscape(s) as central to the development of Chicana subjectivity.

Some scholars refer to magical realism as a dominant form in Chicana literature, including Castillo's *So Far from God*.²⁰ For example, Frederick Luis Aldama, in *Postethnic Narrative Criticism: Magicorealism in Oscar "Zeta" Acosta, Ana Castillo, Julie Dash, Hanif Kureishi, and Salman Rushdie*, considers Castillo's *So Far from God* as a novel that applies what he calls the magicorealist mode to invent "a story where the 'unreal' and the 'real' coexist within the storyworld but do so as filtered through the parodic voice of the Chicana-identified narrator and characters." Aldama also adds that this "rebellious mimetic" mode "self-reflexively engenders her magicorealism to write within and against its primitivist and masculinist identifications" (76-77). While Aldama is correct in his analysis of *So Far from God* as a narrative that fuses the literary and ethnographic, upon closer analysis, *So Far from God*'s thematic and aesthetic elements do not conform to the *genre* of magical realism. There are some elements of magical

²⁰ See Walter, Mermann-Jozwiak, Morrow, Spurgeon, Sirias and McGarry, to name a few. Most label the narrative as having magical realist tendencies, or state that it is an ironic form of the genre, with little support for these claims.

realism found in *So Far from God*, but not enough to declare the novel's entire form as magical realist. Rather, *So Far from God's* poetics are in-between the postcolonial and the postmodern, and they are in-between Western and non-Western cultural codes.

However, there is one instance of magical realism in the novel: the folktale of the Acoma Pueblo deity *Tsichtinako*, reconfigured into contemporary literary periodization through Caridad and Esmeralda's jump off of an Acoma Pueblo mesa cliff. Yet, this is a minor foray into magical realism. To identify magic realism as representative of a much larger aesthetic project in *So Far from God* would not do the novel justice, nor would it suffice as an adequate critique.

Instead, *So Far from God* articulates the "re-expression" of Mexican American oral traditions, including those recorded and preserved by the New Mexico Federal Writer's Project. Also, many events in *So Far from God*, according to Gail Pérez in "Ana Castillo as *Santera*: Reconstructing Popular Religious Praxis," are not magical realist, but are reconstructions of Catholic miracles (61). Alma Rose Alvarez also asserts that Castillo's *So Far from God* "retrieves women's religious narratives" by a narrative process that "reinscribes and reinterprets the mystical nun narratives by contextualizing them in contemporary times" from the seventeenth century mystical nuns of New Spain (66). I agree with Pérez and Alvarez's critiques. The events in *So Far from God*, directly associated with Catholicism, are treated as miracles by the narrator and characters, who elicit responses of amazement, shock, and even horror when the miraculous events occur.

Manuel M. Martín-Rodríguez also observes, in *Life in Search of Readers: Reading (in) Chicana/o Literature*, that "Blurbs and review quotes seem obsessed with referring to Latin American magical realism and affiliating Chicana/o texts to that (by

now old, tried, and tired) literary trend as belated by-products of the Latin American imagination...this response is not only misleading from a literary history point of view but also politically charged, as it works to make a national (i.e., U.S.) literature appear foreign” (125).

Furthermore, Castillo, from her own perspective, is not juxtaposing the magical with the real. But rather, she is “representing the *real*” (author’s emphasis, Acampora 24). To be sure, when examining noted magical realist scholar Wendy Faris’ key definition of the magical real mode, she states that

In the light of reversals of logic and irreducible elements of magic, the real as we know it may be made to seem amazing or even ridiculous” and also the notion that “Wonders are recounted largely without comment, in a matter-of-fact way, accepted – presumably – as a child would accept them, without undue questioning or reflection... (168, 177)

One does not find evidence of these narrative elements in Castillo’s novel. In fact, as Marta Caminero-Santangelo notes, Castillo’s *So Far from God* “forcefully highlights the chasm between the magic and the real” (84). One event Caminero-Santangelo makes reference to, which does include stylistic elements of magical realism, is in the novel’s conclusion when M.O.M.A.S becomes an international Latin American movement. But even here, Castillo parodies the magical real events she narrates, which not only complicates the trace of magical realism found in *So Far from God*, but also serves to place an ironic distancing, following Hutcheon, between the application of magical realism and the narrative point of view toward its inclusion. Therefore, this study does not adhere to the critiques of *So Far from God* as magical realist. There are too many

diverse influences in the novel that point away from a magical realist aesthetic and point toward a geohistorical gathering of aesthetic tendencies: a borderland aesthetic.

The Chicana/o experience is similar to the Native American experience due to the nature of their originary homelands and failed treaties with the U.S., as R. Saldívar points out (*Chicano Narrative* 13). Yet, it could also be said that both Chicana and Native American novels in this study are similar to Gullah American literature because all three distinct ethnic groups are narrated within the confines and restrictions of racial, economic, and gendered contact zones within the U.S. The close relationship between the Chicana felt experience and their originary lands is the focus of this chapter's analysis of Castillo's *So Far from God*, a Chicana narrative that falls within R. Saldívar's critical conception of a Chicana/o narrative "dialectics of difference," which he states is a "dual tendency" toward a

paradoxical impulse toward revolutionary deconstruction and toward the production of meaning...It [the 'dialectics of difference' as critique] uses a dialectical conception that determines the semantic space of Chicano literature as that intersection of the cultural-historical reality appropriated by the text to produce itself, and of the aesthetic reality produced by the text. (7-8)

Therefore, my critical methods seek, in part, to trace and define Saldívar's concept of dialogic and dialectic aesthetic renderings of interstitial spaces of language and aesthetics in *So Far from God*.

Similarly to *Tracks* and *Daughters of the Dust*, *So Far from God* acknowledges and defends social and literary histories of difference and opposition to white, male

patriarchal systems of dominance. At the same time, *So Far from God* creates a Chicana feminist aesthetic that acknowledges women's identities and consciousness as inherent in these histories, yet in opposition to the social and literary referents that are embedded within and enacted through Western and Mexican/Chicano discourses. In fact, Ana Castillo's *Massacre of the Dreamers* elucidates the process of Chicanas' recovery of their cultural histories, mythologies, and languages in what she calls *Xicanista*, a Chicana feminist politics that struggles against racism, sexism, homophobia, imperialism, and colonialism, as well as the material conditions and locations from which these struggles arise (1-17). In effect, Castillo's narrative is part of the Chicana literary production of writing Chicana women out of the double bind of white and brown patriarchy.

So Far from God, like *Tracks* and *Daughters of the Dust*, is also a communal narrative, concerned with repudiating the "I" subject of Western narrative forms and the repressive, confining binary oppositions of Cartesian dualism. As such the novel dialectically and dialogically engages with, then calls into question, Western, European American and Mexican discourses ingrained in Christianity, education, language, culture, economics, and gender. Pratt remarks in *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* that "subjugated peoples cannot readily control what emanates from the dominant culture" however, "they do determine to varying extents what they absorb into their own, and what they use it for" (6). Indeed, despite some scholars' claims that Castillo's oeuvre, including *So Far from God*, is utopian, I argue instead that *So Far from God* is neither utopian nor anti-utopian. Its narrative does not romanticize the New Mexican borderlands, nor does it present an idealized version of Chicana identity and

subjectivity.²¹ Rather, *So Far from God* is an ethnographic narrative that *theorizes* a transformative Chicana subjectivity as a decolonizing process in which Chicana characters attempt to liberate themselves from dominant economic, political, and cultural ideologies. Specifically, La Loca and Caridad make conscious choices in defining their subjectivities by selecting only those aspects of Western, European American, Mexican, and Latin American discourses that prove to be beneficial and complementary to the cultural position of the Mexic Amerindian. This process toward a *mestiza* consciousness, is what Anzaldúa references in “*La Herencia de Coatlicue/The Coatlicue State*.” It is also a process that Alarcón refers to as a Chicana “unification” whereas the Chicana’s “position, previously ‘empty’ of meanings, emerges as one who has to ‘make sense’ of it all from the bottom through the recodification of the native woman” (“Chicana” 376). It is also what Ana Castillo asserts as “*Moyocoyotzin: She Who Creates Herself*,” which is the Chicanas’ “task as *Xicanistas*, to not only reclaim our indigenismo – but also to reinsert the forsaken feminine into our consciousness,” by a process of “creating a synthesis of inherited beliefs with her [a Chicana’s] own instinctive motivations (*Massacre* 11-12). Furthermore, in an interview with Bryce Milligan, Castillo reinforces

²¹ Sara Spurgeon identifies Castillo’s oeuvre as utopian, 120-144; Roland Walter calls Castillo’s literary texts “socially symbolic acts” in reference to F. Jameson, while also stating that she writes a narrative “dialectic of difference,” referencing R. Saldivar. Castillo’s artistry, according to Walter, is combined “with an ideological utopian function, 82. Ellen McCracken also refers to *So Far from God* as “a feminist utopian gesture,” 38; both Spurgeon and Walter identify Anzaldúa’s concept of a *mestiza* consciousness as inherently utopian; if this were the case, all theories, which are inherently ideological in nature, following Walter’s logic, would be utopian; that is, until they are brought into a praxis through the act of creating literature, pedagogy, art, music, etc., as methods of reclaiming a Chicana identity and subjectivity from all dominant political, economic, and social structures within the geohistorical locations in which they live; which is, in effect, what Castillo is attempting to achieve in *So Far from God*.

this process of transforming Chicana subjectivity as “taking from, rather than going toward – taking from Anglo culture what we need and what feels right for us, and adding that to what we already are” (21).²² This narrative process is meant to lead to a Chicana *conscientización* (consciousness) centered in indigeneity.²³

Indeed, Castillo’s poetic vision in *So Far from God* is bound by these principles, despite Benjamin D. Carson’s claims in, “The Chicana Subject in Ana Castillo’s Fiction and the Discursive Zone of Chicana/o Theory,” that Castillo’s theories in *Massacre of the Dreamers* are inconsistent with the narrative form and content of her fiction (110). In fact, *So Far from God* is a literary work aimed at transforming the New Mexico Chicana. It is a complex, dialectic and dialogic engagement between Western mythologies (e.g., Greek), Christianity, indigeneity, Spanish and English linguistic traditions, and the oral traditions of Mexican Americans. As Castillo notes in “*Un Tapiz: A Poetics of Conscientización*,” Chicana writers “have become excavators of our common culture, mining legends, folklore, and myths for our own metaphors” (166). *So Far from God* is, in effect, a process from recovery, survival, and transformation to a *mestiza conscientización*.

Moreover, *So Far from God* aims to allow Chicana characters to transform themselves through her poetically inscribed landscape, which is initially centered in Tomé, New Mexico. As Sara L. Spurgeon remarks in “Necessary Difference: The

²² See Alarcón, “In the Tracks,” 248-256. Also, see Castillo, *Massacre*, particularly “Un Tapiz.” This is similar to Simon Ortiz’s contention regarding Native American knowledges. See Ch. 2.

²³ Delgadillo discusses Chicana/o literary and theoretical discourses in which the *mestiza* subject is central to the representation of historical hybridity, brought about by colonization, cultural mixing, and Western/U.S. imperialism. See Delgadillo, 893.

Creation of a Chicana Utopia in Ana Castillo's *So Far from God*," the narrative is "essentially concerned with space – geographic, metaphysical, cultural, and spiritual" (120). One major example of Castillo's reconfiguring of Chicana space in *So Far from God* is the crossings and journeys undertaken by the character Caridad. Caridad's crossings and journeys help develop her agency, though it is not complete. As Kelli Lyon Johnson notes in "Violence in the Borderlands: Crossing to the Home Space in the Novels of Ana Castillo," Castillo "uses crossing as a metaphor for female agency, and constructs between and among the many borders that constrain mestiza existence a home space of political involvement" (40). Initially, Caridad is the main character that is aware of the political agency she needs; however, the development of Chicana political consciousness also occurs with the political activism of Sofia. By the novel's conclusion, however, all female characters become aware of the political, economic, and cultural restraints and barriers of living in the borderlands of New Mexico.

Laura Gillman and Stacey M. Floyd-Thomas in "*Con un Pie a Cada Lado/With a Foot in Each Place: Mestizaje as Transnational Feminisms in Ana Castillo's So Far from God*" go further, analyzing the representation of metaphorical and material crossings in the novel. They make the claim that it is "The task of the reader...to fill in the pieces that will connect the politics of social location with the seemingly capricious and bizarre tragicomic turn of events that lead to the demise of Sofi's family" (161). Indeed, despite the female characters' budding political, social, and cultural awareness, their experience of the Chicana double-bind is evident in all of their stories. As Gillman and Floyd-Thomas observe, "location is problematized in relation to the positionality of the Mexican-American woman." I agree with their analyses. In *So Far from God*, like Louise

Erdrich's *Tracks*, the female characters all experience tragedy. But I will also add that, despite what these critics see as the settings' "lost, de-centered, godforsaken, dispossessed" location, there are significant transformations occurring in *So Far from God*'s characters (161). These transformations, though limited and measured by Castillo's cautionary narrative, are vital to the Chicana reader's own transformative potentiality to acquire *mestiza* consciousness through their active role in developing narrative meaning.

Like *Tracks* and *Daughters of the Dust*, *So Far from God* includes crossings that traverse sexual orientation. Fiona Mills in "Creating a Resistant Chicana Aesthetic: The Queer Performativity of Ana Castillo's *So Far from God*" argues that critics should examine Castillo's novel as a "text that queers narrative expectations" and by doing so the critic "renders a greater understanding of its creation as a Chicana aesthetic" (314). I agree with Mills' assessment. I will also add that the queering of *So Far from God* develops predominantly through Caridad, whose sexuality transforms from heterosexual desire to lesbian desire when she journeys to *El Santuario* in Chimayo with Doña Felicia.

Not all scholars agree with these claims. Ellen McCracken, in *New Latina Narrative: The Feminine Space of Postmodern Ethnicity*, sees Castillo's framing of lesbian desire in *So Far from God* as "increasingly muddled, hidden, and 'closeted' as the book progresses" (37). I disagree with McCracken's assessment. Caridad's lesbian desire is, for the most part, articulated and maintained in Castillo's narrative through her inner subjective emotions, her bodily felt experiences, and her increasing love interest for Maria and eventually Esmeralda. The character Caridad expresses a lesbian inner consciousness brought about by her intuitive responses to meeting and relating to Maria

and Esmeralda. Her heightened intuition, while developed from a traumatic circumstance, allows Caridad to also discover her budding lesbian desires when she embarks on a spiritual pilgrimage with Doña Felicia, the *curandera*, in order to heal her body, mind, and spirit. As Colette Morrow in “Queering Chicana/o Narratives: Lesbian as Healer, Saint and Warrior in Ana Castillo’s *So Far from God*” aptly puts it, Caridad’s characterization creates a “lesbianization of traditional discourses” where the “setting and circumstances of this moment [of lesbian desire] clearly foreground it in multiple spiritual and religious traditions” (67-68). Thus, Caridad’s sexual and spiritual self-definitions are intertwined in an almost cause and effect fashion. Her budding lesbian and spiritual identities become integrated in her cultural knowledges and practices.

However, it is important to note Carmela Delia Lanza’s analysis in “Hearing the Voices: Women and Home and Ana Castillo’s *So Far from God*,” that while Caridad experiences her greatest transformations outside of the home sphere, “it is through the rituals of the home that Caridad enters into a spiritual life.” Here Lanza refers to Caridad’s recovery (through La Loca’s prayers) at home after men rape her near a local bar. Lanza sees these events as the catalyst for Caridad’s growing interest in *curanderismo* and indigenous spiritual beliefs (73). Aldama also notes in *Brown on Brown: Chicana/o Representations of Gender, Sexuality, and Ethnicity* that “Caridad must pass through death to be reborn as a mestiza lesbian” (97).²⁴ However, as Ana Castillo states in “*La Macha: Toward a Beautiful Whole Self*,” “The Mexican-Catholic lesbian, rejected by family and ostracized by her immediate community, may find it

²⁴ Aldama critiques the character Caridad’s transformation from heterosexual to lesbian consciousness in great detail. See *Brown on Brown*, 94-100.

painful and even impossible to acknowledge a direct connection with her faith to the rejection she suffers as a woman who loves women, since her Catholicism is so much a part of her sense of self.” This political, economic, cultural, and gendered bind that Castillo is attempting to write the Chicana out of is conjointly tied to the double bind the lesbian Chicana lives in by default of her gender (43). Therefore, while Lanza’s analysis is accurate in terms of Caridad’s home life experiences with Catholicism, through metaphorical and material acts of crossings and journeys, she ultimately discovers her true *mestiza* consciousness: centered in indigeneity and a “queer *mestizaje*” (73).²⁵

All four female characters in *So Far from God*, Sofi, Esperanza, Fe, Caridad, and La Loca, develop their Chicana identities and subjectivities by close interactions with the lands they inhabit. They also gain a socio-politically aware consciousness. Some critics draw upon the ecofeminist themes in *So Far from God* to indicate the material and geohistorical determinants that inform Chicana subjectivities in Castillo’s narrative. Mayumi Toyosato in “Grounding Self and Action: Land, Community, and Survival in *I, Rigoberta Menchu*, *No Telephone to Heaven*, and *So Far from God*” notes that the “land functions as a place for the formulation of consciousness and action,” but from an ecofeminist, environmental perspective (305-6). Indeed, Sofi and La Loca eventually become environmental activists, perhaps due to Fe’s death from exposure to harmful chemicals at work. Benay Blend states in “Intersections of Nature and the Self in Chicana Writing,” the borderlands are a “literal and figurative terrain that by its very nature encourages a relationship with the land that continues tradition yet introduces change”

²⁵ Anzaldúa preferred queer over lesbian, viewing the word “lesbian” as “cerebral...white and middle class, representing an English-only dominant culture, derived from the Greek word *lesbos*.” See “To the Queer Writer – *Loca, escritora y chicana*,” 249.

(56). In Castillo's *So Far from God*, the literal and figurative terrain Blend describes is identified within the home space, communal lands, and attempts at crossing and journeying from the safety of one's ancestral lands to dangerous spaces where "the Third World grates against the First and bleeds" as Anzaldúa poetically writes (25).

So Far from God articulates a world that, as Theresa Delgadillo states in "Forms of Chicana Feminist Resistance: Hybrid Spirituality in Ana Castillo's *So Far from God*," is a hybrid, rather than syncretic, "acceptance of Christianity and native beliefs" which "allows for the incorporation of diverse ways of knowing and interpreting the world" (890). Delgadillo's assertions are evident in Castillo's female characters, who embody mythic Christian and indigenous figures (*La Virgen de Guadalupe*, *La Llorona*) and historical and mythologized ones (*La Malinche*, *bruja/curandera*). Bhabha sees this process, in *The Location of Culture*, as "redefining a past whose iterative *value as sign* reinscribes the 'lessons of the past' into the very textuality of the present" (247). Bhabha's repeating signs are illustrated in *So Far from God* by its revaluing of Mexican/Chicano mythic and historical signifiers, by way of introducing paradigmatic figures such as *La Virgen de Guadalupe*, *La Llorona*, and *La Malinche* who are recast from historically demonizing representations to symbols of Chicana agency. The characters' resignification, in turn, gives them enunciative and healing powers in the community of Tomé, which is the fictional embodiment of Mexican/Chicano historical, ancestral lands in confrontation with the repeating signs of U.S. and European (i.e., Spain) colonization practices and imperialism.

As mentioned previously, Sofi, Esperanza, Fe, Caridad, and La Loca all embody at one point, aspects of Mexican/Chicano female mythic paradigms. But, as Delgadillo

notes, Castillo, similarly to Erdrich, rehistoricizes the mythic lives of these cultural figures by creating “new versions of old stories” (891). Thus, Castillo’s poetics are meant to recast *La Llorona*, *La Malinche*, and the *curandera* as contemporary Chicana feminine figures that embody Castillo’s characters with a degree of female agency. In this way, Castillo’s model is similar to Erdrich’s and Dash’s. For example, in *Tracks*, the *Ojibwe* medicine woman’s powers are derived from knowledge quests by seeking council with *Nanaboozhoo*. In *Daughters of the Dust*, Miz Emma Julia, the African American (Gullah) medicine woman and *griot* (storyteller), shapes knowledges on Dawtuh Island. The historical traces in U.S. women’s border novels are intertwined with mythologies and the oral traditions, enunciated by female characters with powerful communicative agency.

In addition to localized histories and mythologies voiced and embodied by Castillo’s female characters, the text includes historiographic metafiction, intertextuality, self-reflexivity, and ironic parody. These elements in *So Far from God* are postmodern poetics, following Hutcheon’s critiques.²⁶ Moreover, some of Castillo’s themes and plot lines intersect with what Frederic Jameson has termed “the cultural logic of late capitalism” in which “every position on postmodernism in culture...is also at one and the same time...an implicitly or explicitly political stance on the nature of multinational capitalism today” (3). Hence scholars’ claims that Castillo’s novel is a narrative with a postmodernist aesthetic.²⁷ Yet, aesthetic principles develop, not from trace elements of particular forms and themes, but from a preponderance of language features. Postmodern poetics in *So Far from God* are, indeed, evident; and this makes sense: though

²⁶ See *A Poetics*; You may also want to review Hutcheon’s *A Theory of Parody*.

²⁷ See Mermann-Jozwiak, McCracken.

borderlands are exterior, geographically and culturally, they are not external to Western modes of expression. In fact, in the U.S., border narratives express modernity from loci of tension between many referential codes. However, *So Far from God*'s forms and thematics express this state of interstitiality by addressing it, and then recentering its poetics to align with Mexican/Chicano historical and mythological codes, and indigenous knowledges, in order to represent the decolonization of women who are in the constant state of struggle between the periphery and center of modernity. In effect, women's border novels convey this ambiguity and then systematically redefine female characters and plot as centered in indigeneity.

Castillo's narrative contains other elements that could also be considered postmodern or poststructural. Her text is heteroglossic because it is multilingual and includes mixed-genres such as: songs, *dichos* (sayings), and recipe language. *So Far from God*'s textual performativity, in its dialogue, narration, and missing linguistic referents (Fe's skipped words when speaking), is often critiqued as postmodern and/or poststructural. Despite the presence of elements often associated with postmodernism or poststructuralism, I argue that these theories are not the dominant poetic models. First, it is helpful to remember that Mexican and Latin American narratives are literary influences that inform Chicana/o narrative, but they too are aspects informing U.S. Southwest border narratives, and are not always evident in Chicana/o texts. In addition, Mexican and Latin American literary impulses are not synonymous. For example, J. Saldívar discusses, in his essay "Postmodern Realism," that there is an "uneven postmodernism" in Latin America (521). Not all Latin American locations adopted modernity and its evolving incarnations at the same time historically. Furthermore, some Latin American

locations embraced modernity and subsequently postmodernity; while other Latin American locations adopted a postcolonial position toward the effects of modernity, e.g., Mesoamerica (Mexico and Guatemala) (Mignolo, *Local Histories* 186). Therefore, when analyzing literature such as *So Far from God*, it is important to be able to recognize the various literary influences that inspire formal and thematic tendencies. Though Castillo's text derives some of its style, content, forms, and themes from Western, Latin American, and Mexican narratives, these narratives are not synonymous, and they also are not dominant textual preferences. They coexist with other poetic elements.

Also, Hector A. Torres argues, in "Story, Telling, Voice: Narrative Authority in Ana Castillo's *The Mixquiahuala Letters*," that "Chicano literary discourse will not easily or comfortably assume the postmodern values informing Anglo American literature and criticism" (127).²⁸ Indeed, R. Saldívar argues, in *Chicano Narrative: The Dialectics of Difference*, that Chicano narratives are "oppositional ideological forms" that

signify the imaginary ways in which historical men and women live out their lives in a class society, and how the values, concepts, and ideas purveyed by the mainstream, hegemonic American culture that tie them to their social functions seek to prevent them from attaining a true knowledge of society as a whole...Chicano narratives, individually as texts and together as a genre, confront and circumscribe the limiting ideologies imposed upon them [and sometimes created within Mexican

²⁸ Ralph E. Rodriguez also remarks on postmodernism in relation to Chicano narratives. See 69.

American culture itself] and how they have in complex ways determined the horizons within which their history has emerged. (6)

Saldívar's analysis of Chicana/o narratives in the above passage is especially relevant to my claims. His argument states that Chicana/o narratives, both individual efforts and as a collective genre, should not be classified under "limiting ideologies," because they are, in effect, determining the limits of the extent that these competing ideologies influence or manifest themselves in their texts.

While *So Far from God* does engage with postmodern thematic concerns, such as Caridad's Raiders' cap worn while on her pilgrimage to *el Santuario* in Chimayo, it does so from a Western "ex-centric" position, as Hutcheon has defined it.²⁹ However, Hutcheon's postmodernism, like Jameson's, is firmly rooted in Anglo-European critiques of modernity; therefore, Hutcheon's postmodern "ex-centric" is an aesthetic that critiques the periphery of the center. Thus, as Mignolo claims, it is a "Eurocentric critique of Eurocentrism" (314). Conversely, *So Far from God*'s inclusion of postmodern culture is a critique of the "Eurocentric critique of Eurocentrism" because the narrative positions itself from a space that attempts to create a new tradition – a Chicana tradition. Similarly, Ralph E. Rodriguez states that "*So Far from God* then, must be situated in a series of interlocking aesthetic, political, and cultural discussions," and it is the interlocking, mediation and negotiation of several discourses that defines the category of feminist borderland narratives in my study (72).

²⁹ See Hutcheon, *Poetics*, "Decentering the Postmodern: The Ex-Centric."

When examining *So Far from God*'s expression of recipes and remedies, it is also important to identify these elements as aspects of New Mexican border narrative poetics. Castillo's portrayal of New Mexico's culturally hybrid practices is informed by Chicanas' experiential practice of dialectic and dialogic engagement with competing ideologies. In "A Brief Sampling of Doña Felicia's Remedies" and "Three of La Loca's Favorite Recipes Just to Whet Your Appetite," the narrative invokes the importance Mexican and Chicana women place on food knowledges. They are also acts of Chicana subjectivity, informed healing and food practices that nourish not only the body, but the mind and spirit as well. As Melissa Pabón notes, though, in "The Representation of *Curanderismo* in Selected Mexican American Works," it is necessary to keep in mind that Castillo's novel represents the *curanderismo*'s healing practices as closely associated with Christian faith in God, while also depicting the indigeneity of the *curandera*'s belief in the interconnectedness of humans, animals, plants, and the earth (267-68). Thus, remedies and recipes narrated in *So Far from God* are important signifiers of the intersectionality between divergent religious belief systems, and how they inform Chicana subjectivity which begins in the home space.

In *So Far from God*, Sofi, a Mexican American mother, raises her four daughters, La Esperanza, Fe, Caridad, and La Loca. She raises them by herself on her ancestral lands in Tomé, New Mexico. The novel spans twenty years in the lives of all five women, narrating their triumphs, struggles, and tragedies, in Tomé, El Chimayo, Albuquerque, Washington, D.C., Saudi Arabia, and the Sangre de Cristo Mountains. Caridad and La Loca are Sofi's two daughters who closely interact with their ancestral lands, helping themselves, their siblings, and their communities to heal their minds, bodies, and spirits

in the harsh political, ideological, cultural, economic, racialized, sexualized and gendered New Mexican borderlands.

So Far from God tells the story of Sofi, “who lived alone with her four little girls by the ditch at the end of the road” (20). Her estranged husband, Domingo, briefly returns to Sofi, but spends most of his time gambling and living off of Sofi’s earnings. Sofi provides for her family by managing her inherited butcher shop, *Carne Buena Carneceria*. She owns and tends livestock on her *rancheria* for her butcher shop, with the help of her youngest daughter La Loca. Sofi’s other daughters leave home, but return when they or other family members are in crises. Esperanza, the eldest, gets a B.A. in Chicano Studies and an M.A. in Communications and becomes a reporter who eventually gets sent to Saudi Arabia to report on the first Gulf War. Fe chases after the American dream by working at a local bank and surrounding herself with *gabachos* (white people). Caridad goes to college but quits. She socializes at local bars and is promiscuous until men brutally rape, beat, and stab her. She then becomes a healer under the tutelage of a local *curandera*, Doña Felicia. Sofi’s youngest daughter La Loca has epilepsy and is at first presumed dead at three, but recovers and becomes a healer and sage, yet she refuses to leave home and only comes into human contact when she decides it is safe to do so. All five female characters in *So Far from God* have close ties to their home space, though some of them willfully leave home to chase their dreams or develop their innate abilities. Despite leaving their familial home, all of Sofi’s daughters meet fates closely connected to lands, whether these lands are in New Mexico or Saudi Arabia.

Similarly to Erdrich and Dash’s poetic inscriptions, Castillo’s *So Far from God* inscribes a Chicana female subjectivity through memory as a physical process of

interaction with lands and landscapes in New Mexico. By introducing scholarship on memory, the body, and geography, we can have an improved understanding of how memory of lands alters Sofi, La Loca and Caridad's subjectivities. As I discuss in Chapters Two and Three of my dissertation, Catriona Mortimer-Sandilands in *Material Feminisms* notes that memory is a physical process that elicits a "sensory experience" on the body, which allows us to engage with the world around us with "greater physical ease" (272-73). Our bodies hold memories of experiences we have within places; and, as a result, the body is actively engaged with other memories formed by mental processes such as human interactions that are physical, mental, and emotional. What this means is that landscapes hold memories for people, just as human interactions do. Sandilands' concept of the female body and memory can help explain Sofi, La Loca and Caridad's character development as it relates to their physical interactions with the land. For Sofi, and her community of *comadres*, land holds an historical and immediate significance. Inherited lands have been given to her to cultivate and sustain her family; though for Sofi, her inherited lands were tragically sold by her husband to pay off gambling debts. Regardless of her losses, Sofi is inspired to solve the decades old problem of land loss and depreciation experienced by the original land grant families of Tomé, New Mexico. As Toyosato remarks, "Working on the land, people connect not only to one another but also to their ancestors and their history. Their spiritual history is grounded on the land as a material entity, through their actual labor on the land" (306). Sofi does this by electing herself as first time mayor of Tomé, forming a cooperative with all the land grant families, stating that she was "starting to like the thought of being able to engender some new spirit back into Tomé" (*So Far* 140). Thus, land is not separate from experience. In

fact, land in *So Far from God* provide Sofi and Tomé as a community with more than physical comforts and sustenance. Land also creates emotional responses that are central to communal well-being, or distress.

In addition, Mark Johnson, in his introduction to *The Body in the Mind: The Bodily Basis of Meaning, Imagination, and Reason*, states that “reality is shaped by the patterns of our bodily movement, the contours of our spatial and temporal orientation, and the forms of our interactions with objects. It is never merely a matter of abstract conceptualization and propositional judgments” (xix). To be sure, Sofi’s youngest daughter, La Loca, is deeply connected to the ground in front of the Catholic church near her home in Tomé, New Mexico. Her experiences, once she is placed on the ground, signify the recovery of indigeneity. Anzaldúa describes this process of interaction with ancestral lands in this way: “By grounding in the earth of our native spiritual identity, we can build up our personal and tribal identity” (“Denial and Betrayal” 147). In order for this process to occur in narrative form, female characters must be defined as recalcitrant toward dominant ideologies; and, as I will make clear next, this definition necessarily involves ideology as it manifests itself culturally through languages, knowledges, and physically, as it manifests itself geographically and in one’s bodily embodiment.

In *So Far from God*’s first chapter, the narrator recounts how Sofi’s youngest daughter, La Loca, is pronounced dead by a local doctor due to an epileptic seizure. Sofi, wanting the “little baby’s Mass to be held before they lay her in the cold ground,” is accompanied to the church by her family, friends, and the local community. La Loca awakens inside her coffin when placed on the ground in front of the local Catholic church. As soon as Sofi throws herself on the ground, “pounding it with her rough fists”

La Loca's coffin opens and she flies up to the roof of the Catholic church and reveals "where she had gone...from the rooftop...within the limited ability of a three-year-old's vocabulary, in Spanish and English" (20-23). La Loca also reveals to her family and community that "I went to three places: hell...*pulgatorio* and to heaven. God sent me back to help you all, to pray for you all, *o si no, o si no* (or if not, or if not)..." and Father Jerome begged, "*O si no, ¿qué, hija?* (or if not, what daughter?)" to which La Loca replies, "*O si no*, you and others who doubt just like you, will never see our Father in heaven!" followed later by "No, *Padre*...Remember, it is *I* who am here to pray for you" (24). The story of La Loca's recovery signifies a radical Chicana subjectivity: she is able to regain consciousness (physically, culturally, and spiritually), to assert her Chicana identity by speaking both English and Spanish, and she proclaims new spiritual knowledge to Father Jerome, her family, and the community of Tomé, New Mexico.

La Loca's presence on the Catholic church rooftop is a paradigmatic shift from male spiritual dominance in her community to female authority.³⁰ Also, her physical and mental presence on the church rooftop supersedes the local priest's position as an authority figure in the church – and in the community. Furthermore, La Loca's ability to voice her self-knowledge and spiritual knowledge as an infant is also an articulation of Castillo's political goals of defining a Chicana female's inherent and natural potentiality for transcending patriarchal oppressions and dominations in a border location. As Jacqueline M. Martinez observes in *Phenomenology of Chicana Experience and Identity*, "contested lands thus become more than merely soil on which we have set our feet but

³⁰ Lanza makes a similar claim, 67.

also constitute the very terrain of conscious experience that links people together across generational time and space” (65). La Loca, then, by regaining consciousness, symbolizes the awakening of all Chicana women’s consciousness, spiritually, physically, and mentally.

In another paradigmatic shift in Chicana consciousness, La Loca’s subjectivity is defined in the home space and surrounding property. While the community and people all over New Mexico begin viewing La Loca’s behavior as a miracle, even calling her “La Loca *Santa*,” she “grew up at home away from strangers who might be witnesses to her astonishing behavior.” Everyone outside of her family, though, stops calling her “La Loca *Santa*” when they realize that she avoids human contact and refuses to leave home. In fact, by the time she turns twenty-one, no one remembers her Christian name. Despite the narrative’s suggestion of La Loca’s breach with Christianity and humanity, though, as Lanza notes, Sofi and La Loca

look to their home space as a source for spiritual growth and as a reconnection between their own culture and the outside dominating culture. Neither Sofi nor Loca desire the objects, the static role or the sterile, domestic environment of mainstream white culture. They are rooted in their own history and at the same time, they accept their world in its playful state of constant change, and contradictions. (75)

In fact, La Loca’s grounding in the *mestiza* home space and ancestral lands allows her to maintain a high level of empathy for her family members. She heals Fe and Caridad through prayer. She spends a lot of time outdoors with the ranch animals, and is often found in or near the *acequia* (ditch) on her family’s property; it is also where she makes

contact with the mythical *La Llorona*, who informs La Loca of her sister La Esperanza's death in Saudi Arabia. Here too, La Loca uses "the home space as a source of spiritual nourishment and a source of strength" (Lanza 77). Her ability to exert a powerful Chicana subjectivity is an act of liberation from internal and external patriarchal and Western colonization practices because, as Lanza notes, her character foregoes capitalist and imperialist notions of the accumulation of wealth and consumer cultural fetishism, remaining recalcitrant to the desire for "objects, the static role or the sterile, domestic environment of mainstream white culture" (77). Instead, La Loca's identity and subjectivity are inextricably tied to her acts of prayer and healing, which are hybrid spiritual and religious acts of Christian and indigenous belief systems. Her willful dedication to her familial and ancestral home space and propertied lands, is an act of self-definition that Castillo refers to as a "rejection of colonization" (*Massacre* 12). However, La Loca's self-confinement to the home space suggests that a Chicana's efforts to leave the home space for the public space can be met with violence, as in the case of Caridad.

While La Loca embodies a radical Chicana subjectivity within the home space and *ranchería*, Caridad represents a radical Chicana subjectivity outside the home space, within and across the lands and landscapes of New Mexico. Like La Loca, Caridad is on a quest for self-definition outside of the patriarchal Christian belief system of her family. She rejects patriarchy as it presents itself in the Chicano community as well. And as Gillman and Floyd-Thomas discuss, Caridad, like La Loca (except in the instance of close family ties), relinquishes "material concerns, family, material ties, comfort, and marital possibilities," but, I will add, not romantic ones (165). Caridad's transformations begin once she experiences a miraculous healing after unknown assailants brutally rape

and mutilate her near Rio Abajo (27). Initially, Caridad's characterization begins with men raping her. This signifies the physical and emotional boundaries placed on Chicanas in restrictive public spaces which enforce male-dominance over women and strict boundaries for women's social movement external to the home place. Once Caridad leaves home, she is taught healing practices by her new landlord, Doña Felicia, a local *curandera*. Doña Felicia teaches Caridad how to locate healing remedies, "found in our natural surroundings," such as "herbs, tobacco smoke, or a live black hen, herbal baths, or sweeping the body with certain branches and incense" (62-63). Thus, Caridad's transformation, similarly to La Loca's, occurs first through trauma, and then through the reclamation of female spirituality, which is predominantly indigenous.

Caridad's turn toward indigeneity takes several stages, but it is clear the first stage is spiritual, prompting Gillman and Floyd-Thomas to assert that she is the "incarnation of *Xicanisma*" (165). Indeed, Caridad's internal search for her true self is in part determined by her rejection of Christian orthodoxy and her search for indigenous spirituality. This quest is indicative of Castillo's *Xicanista* theory, which is at work in her novel. Castillo states that "inasmuch as woman's religiosity directs her life, *la Xicanista* is creating a synthesis of inherited beliefs with her own distinctive motivations" (*Massacre* 13). Indeed, Caridad transforms her identity and subjectivity from a Catholic, heterosexual female to Castillo's vision of a lesbian *Xicanista*. She develops *curandera* skills and close physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual connections to New Mexico's lands. *Xicanista* in *So Far from God* occurs, not only by Caridad's break from past traumatic experiences, but also by her break from heteronormativity: she begins experiencing sexual desires for a woman she meets while on pilgrimage to *el Santuario* in Chimayo with Doña Felicia.

After Caridad learns how to heal Chicanas with remedies found in her natural surroundings, her *Xicanisma* develops further when she embarks on a yearly pilgrimage with Doña Felicia; a pilgrimage on foot to *el Santuario* in Chimayo during Christian Easter Holy Week. *El Santuario* originates in Catholic, Spanish, and indigenous legends that the narrator states began with “*Nuestro Señor de Esquipúlas*...the black Christ of the far-off land of the converted Indians of Esquipúlas, Guatemala” (72-73).³¹ Her pilgrimage to *el Santuario* is transformative: Caridad begins to recognize the hybrid spirituality that defines her consciousness, a hybridity that Delgadillo asserts is a concrete “connection between the spiritual and the material...between the personal and the public.” Delgadillo explains:

In the Americas, a sense of abiding validity of native beliefs and practices springs both from existence in the materiality (topography, landscape) of these continents and their human communities, as well as from the uninterrupted insistence of native populations on defining the world and themselves, that is, from their history of resistance to oppression. (890)

Thus, Caridad’s pilgrimage is a spiritual liberation from culturally syncretic Catholicism to the hybrid spirituality of indigenous religious practices. Morrow concludes that “Caridad embodies a pre-Columbian model of female identity while participating in a Mexican Catholic ritual at a site considered holy by Mexican and Roman Catholics and Native Americans” (68). Her pilgrimage also leads her to the realization that she embodies multiple subjectivities: spiritual, religious, and sexual.

³¹ See Delgadillo. Also see Morrow, 70-71.

The pilgrimage to *el Santuario* also represents her increasing awareness that the lands and landscapes of New Mexico ultimately shape her Chicana lived subjectivity; which means, following Sandilands, that what she learns, remembers, and feels internally is closely tied to her direct material experiences. The fact that Doña Felicia insists they take this journey by foot reveals the importance placed on spiritual traditions closely tied to the lands; the spiritual, religious, and material thus become aspects of Caridad's self-definition, and as such they become interconnected with other aspects of her subjectivity.

Caridad discovers a radical sexuality after leaving behind past experiences in her home and community environment, which were characterized by her heterosexual, promiscuous identity. As Butler notes, "gender requires a performance that is *repeated*," whereas one's gender identity "ought not to be construed as a stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts follow; rather, gender is an identity tenuously constituted in time, instituted in an exterior space through the stylized repetition of acts" ("Subversive" 179). Butler's claims hold true for Caridad's performed gender identity prior to her *el Santuario* pilgrimage: she married Memo, had three abortions, then he leaves her. Subsequently, she becomes sexually involved with various male partners who, the narrator tells us, remind her of her husband Memo. Therefore, Caridad's performance of a gendered identity, i.e., a Chicana heterosexual female, which is followed by local men raping her and mutilating her body, are acts that signify the dangerous boundaries that exist between a Chicana's expression of her sexuality and the prescribed patriarchal limits placed on female reproductivity. These boundaries indicate the presence of cultural codes enforced in one's community that ultimately restrict Chicana sexuality, and is, in its most violent extent, life-threatening.

Indeed, as Butler claims, “disciplinary production of gender effects a false stabilization of gender in the interests of the heterosexual construction and regulation of sexuality within the reproductive domain” (“Subversive” 172). Caridad’s body becomes a battleground, a site for the enforcement of a narrowly-defined Chicana sexual identity. As a result, Caridad’s body symbolizes the border as a physical space between the already prescribed “surface politics of the body” that Butler states is enforced “through a series of exclusions and denials, signifying absences” and the mestiza desire for physical, emotional, and spiritual liberation (172). Thus, when Caridad is raped and mutilated, there are disciplinary measures made to curtail her ability to define her own sexuality in the body politic. As María Herrera-Sobek states, the rape scene in Chicana fiction traces “the socialization process visited upon the female sex which indoctrinates them into accepting a subordinate position in the socio-political landscape of a system” (“Politics” 249).³² Caridad subverts the oppressive standards placed on Chicanas while performing a heterosexual gendered identity, which results in local men raping her as a form of reinforcing patriarchal norms that impose restrictive behavior and movement, not just from Anglo-European patriarchy, but also from Chicano forms of patriarchy.

However, between leaving her home and her pilgrimage to *el Santuario*, Caridad’s gendered identity is transformed: her sexual identity shifts from a heterosexual, promiscuous one, to an asexual identity: she willfully disregards her previous sexual identity, foregoes dating, and focuses completely on her spiritual identity and subjectivity. In addition, her subjectivity is altered at the holy site in Chimayo, when she

³² Herrera-Sobek discusses rape in Chicana fiction at length. See “The Politics of Rape,” 245-56. You may also want to consult Torres’ “Desire on the Line,” 99-128.

discovers she has fallen in love with another female taking the same pilgrimage (*So Far* 79). However, as a *curandera* in training, she knows she must heal herself, spiritually, physically, emotionally, and psychologically before she can learn to love again. Upon returning home to her trailer, she begins relating her transformed inner world to aspects of her natural surroundings, stating that her “inner being [was] blooming bright red like the flowers on a prickly pear cactus” (80). Yet, she becomes doubtful of her abilities as a *curandera*, informing Doña Felicia that she couldn’t sleep and was found by Doña Felicia, exhausted after praying and felt she was a “lousy student.” Doña Felicia advises her to go to *Ojo Caliente*, in northern New Mexico, to bathe in its hot mineral springs. Upon embarking on this trip, Caridad loses her way. A year later, she was found “in a cave in the Sangre de Cristo Mountains” (88). This plot development marks a turning point in her process toward a liberated subjectivity. She secludes herself inside the cave in order to negotiate the spiritual, emotional, and sexual experiences shaped by her interactions in the New Mexico landscape.

Doña Felicia’s godson, the ascetic Francisco el Penitente, and his *penitente* “*hermanos* from his *morada* (brothers from his abode/religious order)” unsuccessfully try to forcefully remove her from the cave, leading Francisco to announce, “It is not for us to bring this handmaiden of Christ back to her family...It is not our Lord’s will.” At the same time,

hundreds of people made their way up the mountain to la Caridad’s cave, in hopes of obtaining her blessing and just as many with hopes of being cured of some ailment or another...Not only the Nuevo *mejicano*-style Spanish Catholics went to see her but also Natives from the pueblo, some

who were Christian and some who were not...The word had even gotten as far as Sonora to Yaqui land. The stories grew until some began to say that she was the ghost of *Lozen*, Warm Springs Apache mystic woman warrior, sister of the great chief Victorio who had vowed to make war against the white man forever. (87-88)

Despite the public display of coterminous spiritual belief systems by the crowd outside of Caridad's cave, she refuses to be defined by their perceptions of her seclusion. Caridad's time spent in the cave, then, is an act of subjective redefinition of her spirituality and sexuality. Her isolation in this historically and culturally defined space is her "response to her desire for a woman and, in turn, the community's response to Caridad," which "lends a lesbian inflection to these traditions and their discourses" (Morrow 68). Because Caridad spends a year in the cave in self-reflection, she is able to render internal felt experiences of her body, mind, and soul – including definitions of gender identity and sexuality – as self-created and self-inscribed definitions of her body and her psyche.

The cave, therefore, signifies the type of radical claiming of geographical space needed for a lesbian Chicana subjectivity to develop, liberated from externally prescribed notions of Chicana gender constructions and sexuality. Martinez discusses this process of lesbian self-identification for Chicanas in borderlands by noting that

Because consciousness does not exist separate from the social and cultural world, a reflexive interrogation of it necessarily involves the specification of the relationship between one's location and one's very apprehension of consciousness. The location from which the self comes to adopt the label

of Chicana lesbian is an inherently contradictory one that creates a radically and ontologically contingent ambiguity. (76)

The location where Caridad self-reflexively defines her lesbian Chicana identity and subjectivity is multi-culturally coded by Spanish, Mexican, Yaqui, and Pueblo knowledges and belief systems. The act of dwelling in this space allows Caridad to accept the multiple subjectivities that have come to define her, while also developing a new consciousness, what Anzaldúa calls “a *mestiza* consciousness,” one that accepts and embraces her new identities as a *curandera* and Chicana lesbian.

From a cultural perspective, Caridad’s final act of jumping off of a mesa cliff with her love interest Esmeralda at Acoma Pueblo, Sky City becomes a radically ambiguous act. It is an equally radical, conclusive, self-defining moment for her and Esmeralda. *So Far from God*, in denying Caridad a complete fulfillment of her new gender and sexual identity, offers instead a cautionary tale of the restrictions placed on Chicana lesbians in the New Mexican borderlands. Some scholars disagree, such as McCracken in *New Latina Narrative: The Feminine Space of Postmodern Ethnicity*, who remarks that Caridad’s lesbian desire “becomes increasingly muddled, hidden, and ‘closeted’ as the book progresses” noting too that “readers must search diligently to find the hidden pieces of the narrative of lesbian love” (37). I disagree with McCracken’s assessment. I argue instead that Caridad’s failed transformation, (she never actually consummates her lesbian desires for either Maria or Esmeralda), is indicative of the harsh restrictions placed on Chicana lesbians in New Mexico. Furthermore, McCracken’s claims that “readers must search diligently to find the hidden pieces of the narrative of lesbian love” fail to mention the chapter devoted to Maria and Helena’s relationship and their journey to recover

Maria's ancestral roots in Truces, New Mexico, stalked as they were by Francisco el Penitente. Despite the fact that Caridad does not consummate her desires for Esmeralda, their final act of jumping off of the mesa cliff, where Esmeralda's ancestral home is located, represents a powerful image of a final corporeal act of separation from the body politic, which is a threat to the Chicana lesbian identity.³³

The first stage toward Caridad's and Esmeralda's impending jump off of a mesa cliff is when they are threatened by the physical presence of Francisco el Penitente. He represents the oppressive patriarchal codes of conduct sanctioned by a Catholic religiosity that subsumes indigenous beliefs in order to subsume the indigenous self into its domain of public domination and regulation. In the case of Caridad and Esmeralda, Francisco's alarming presence reminds them that their bodies cannot be liberated from the cultural and historical colonizing practices that permeate Spanish Catholicism, even in its culturally hybrid form. However, Caridad and Esmeralda do exert a spiritual agency by performing their final corporeal act on the indigenous lands of Acoma Pueblo, a mesa cliff in Sky City.

Second, while the tourists, presumably European American tourists, and Francisco el Penitente, with his "Andalusian roots," panic and are shocked by Caridad's and Esmeralda's suicides, the indigenous community of Acoma Pueblo understood their final acts as harmonious with the Acoma origin myth of *Tsichtinako*. Hence, "*Tsichtinako was calling!*" signifies the Acoma interpretation of their jump. If *Tsichtinako* was calling

³³ Gillman & Floyd-Thomas make a similar point, stating that "Caridad's demise is more of a physical than a spiritual one," 166. I will go further and say it is the point where the physical self, resisting the definitions of the body politic, severs its connections to the binary discourses that restrict their Chicana lesbian subjectivities.

them, they were meant to follow, since “the spirit deity *Tsichtinako*” was “calling loudly with a voice like wind, guiding the two women back, not out toward the sun’s rays or up to the clouds but down, deep within the soft, moist dark earth where Esmeralda and Caridad would be safe and live forever” (*So Far* 211).³⁴ Gillman and Floyd-Thomas note, that Caridad’s act represents “restoring the original idea of woman as a sacred being” and in doing so she “reclaims these lost parts of indigenous culture in order to recover a more complete identity.” Though as Gillman and Floyd-Thomas assert, this act of recovery is limited to her transformation, and not a recovery for the Chicana community as a whole (166). Still, the act of releasing herself from the corporeal world at a location where indigenous knowledges prevail is indicative of a form of Aztec/Nahuatl reverence for shape-shifting, which as Suzanne Bost contends, “figures as a powerful means of deceiving potential conquerors and eluding conquest” (158). Thus, Caridad’s and Esmeralda’s shape-shifting acts, defined as such by the Acoma Pueblo indigenous community, are meant to thwart the threatening form of conquest that Francisco el Penitente represents.

The Chicana characters in *So Far from God* are also defined by a language aesthetic that permeates itself within the traditional Western novel. Ana Castillo’s language aesthetic in *So Far from God* is similar to both Louise Erdrich’s *Tracks* and Julie Dash’s *Daughters of the Dust*. This is due to the presence of a heteroglossia of discourses: *remedios* and recipes, *cuentos*, *estorias*, *dichos* (sayings and proverbs) mythologies, *caló*, Chicano English/Spanish; Spanish with English transliterations, local

³⁴ For more information on *Tsichtinako*, see Weigle. 10.

Mexican American vernacular, and the “presence of absence” in dialogue that contains interspersed, underlined breaks in thought.

In each chapter, the narrative enters into both diegetic and mimetic modes, and as McCracken observes, it ventures into the folkloric (32). According to McCracken, the narrator’s voice is “never anchored either as an intra- or extradiegetic figure, and therefore remains an amorphous, almost folkloric element” (32). To be sure, the narrator’s role can be critiqued as indeterminant. However, upon closer analysis, the narrative thread is heteroglossic and polyglossic. It is part heteroglot: *cuentos/estorias* and folklore are interwoven in *So Far from God* in a diegesis. Allegory and mythology are also mimetically inscribed. It is also a polyglot: infused with multilingual texts and performative, graphically-ambiguous sentence constructions.

In an interview with Bryce Milligan, Castillo intimates that *So Far from God* took shape as a collection of stories she “heard from other Chicanas – very typical stories in some cases” (26). Considering that Castillo also lived in New Mexico on an NEA grant during the creation of her novel, it will be argued in this chapter that the narrative poetics are designed as acts of recovery, through the inclusion of the “simulation” of orality. I argue that Ana Castillo’s narrative is influenced by stories she heard from other Chicanas, and by the oral traditions of New Mexican Hispanic women.

The narrator performs the role of storyteller, recounting Sofi’s attempts to prepare for a dance with her estranged husband Domingo. In the following passage, the narrator provides commentary on Sofi’s hard life raising four daughters on her own, without the help of her husband, and at the neglect of a social life:

You know, *la pobre*, [poor woman] Sofi had never had one moment of fun all those years while she was alone, no birthday or New Year's Eve *fiestas*, [parties] no Christmas *posadas* [celebrations]. She did not attend one wedding reception, baptismal party, First Holy Communion, Confirmation, or high school graduation *fiestas* neither. No *quinceañeras* [coming-out ball] for none of the girls fifteenth birthdays. *Nada* [Nothing]. Well, she hardly had been able to attend even a *velorio* [funeral wake] or a funeral for that matter, although she always tried, out of respect for the *defuncto* [var. of *difunto*, deceased] family. But everyone understood. She was alone with four children. What could people expect? (133)

As I will discuss in Chapter Three in relation to Louise Erdrich's representation of orality in the Western novel, the narrator in *So Far from God* directly addresses a listener with "You know," followed by "*la pobre*." The direct address "You know" cues readers to a reading engagement in which they sense their own presence is in the role of listener, and the narrator is assuming the role of Chicana community storyteller. Similarly to Erdrich's *Tracks*, this direct address serves to remind readers that the narrative is engaging in a representation of what occurs during moments of Mexican American *cuentos* or *memorates*, a narrative device that ultimately serves the purpose of intimating a sense of orality in the Western novel.

But beyond the narrator's direct address to readers, English is interspersed with *caló*, Spanish, and Spanish double negatives transliterated into English. This is attributable to the formation of a New Mexican borderland Chicana subjectivity that arises from the presence of multilingual discursive patterns in the narrative, because, as

Alfred Arteaga notes in *An Other Tongue: Nation and Ethnicity in the Linguistic Borderlands*, “the language that we speak both reflects and determines our position in relation to the two nations (U.S. and Mexico)” (4). By extension, it follows that the written form of language, especially one attempting to represent orality, will also become a marker of Chicana New Mexican and Mexican borderland geographic positionality.

Language in *So Far from God* is also shaped graphically as a “presence in absence” in order to performatively reproduce an incongruous moment of verbal exchange between Sofi and her daughter Fe, who has “severely damaged her vocal cords during the days when she had so violently and ceaselessly screamed.” When La Loca asks Fe what she thought happened to Caridad during her miraculous recovery from being raped and mutilated, Sofi, who is also listening to Fe, hears “Which _____?” (*So Far* 85). From this point forward, when Fe is in dialogue with another character, there are underlined spaces where words should appear; at times this pattern of graphic absence of words continues for several sentences. The visual effect of missing words is intended to mimic what Fe’s interlocutor, in this case her mother Sofi, cannot hear due to Fe’s damaged vocal cords; and for the reader this becomes a highly performative moment in the narrative. The reader is now Fe’s interlocutor as well, and must attempt to piece together Fe’s speech based on the context of the surrounding text.

Though the narrative includes references to American literary and popular culture, as Elisabeth Mermann-Jozwiak observes, it is a predominantly ethnographic one (102). Similarly to Julie Dash’s *Daughters of the Dust*, it incorporates traditional folklore and mythologies derived from two national, geographic, material, and imaginary borders:

New Mexico and Mexico.³⁵ Just as the term Chicano was appropriated and recodified from the oral culture, which “unsettled all the identities conferred by previous historical accounts,” the term Chicana “serves as a point of redeparture for dismantling historical conjunctures of crisis, confusion, political and ideological conflict, and contradictions” (Alarcón, “Chicana” 63, 65). Part of this redeparture for Chicanas is the pluralization of the “racialized body by redefining part of their experience through the reappropriation of ‘the’ native woman on Chicana feminist terms” which “marked one of the first assaults on male-centered cultural nationalism on the one hand [Alarcón 1989], and patriarchal political economy on the other” (66). Following Alarcón, part of the redefinition of the Chicana experience in *So Far from God*, then, is the reappropriation and recodification of folkloric and mythological figures who have historically been adapted and codified to conform to male-centered and patriarchal systems of control and oppression, including: the Christian legend of the four martyrs, *La Virgen de Guadalupe*, *La Llorona*, *malogra*, *Lozen*, *Malinche*, and *Tsichtinako*. In *So Far from God*, these folkloric and mythological figures define La Loca and Caridad’s subjectivities.

Castillo’s novel includes a Christian allegory based on the legend of the four martyrs found in the Christian text, *The Lives of Saints*. Four major female characters, Sofia, Esperanza, Fe, and Caridad, thus become archetypes, except for La Loca. The naming of these characters, Sophia (Wisdom), Fe (Faith), Esperanza (Hope), and Caridad (Charity), symbolizes the influence of Christianity, e.g., Catholicism, in the collective

³⁵ Imaginary is defined as a conceptualization of a particular geographic location, e.g., “America” as representative of the United States, rather than hemispherically. For more information, see Campa. 273-74.

Chicana consciousness.³⁶ There is one point in the narrative where Caridad embodies all of these characteristics, suggesting she has developed a far more complex, internalized mythological perspective than one single attribute given to each Christian mythological figure. The narrator remarks that she had “always been charitable. She had faith and hope. Soon, she would have wisdom from which she had sprung, and sooner still her own healing gifts would be revealed” (*So Far* 56). Despite the archetypes assigned to Caridad and her mother and sisters, the allegory is subverted by Esperanza, Fe, and Caridad’s tragic fates. The allegorical power of their names and their intentions, when recodified in to the context of the northern New Mexico borderlands, reflects not only a modernization of the Christian myth, but also a contradiction of its cultural, ideological, and spiritual tenets. Spurgeon explains that

At the end of the original myth, Sophia/Wisdom stands weeping over the graves of her three allegorical daughters, hopelessly resigned to the stubborn, unchanging sinfulness of human nature. In *So Far from God*, Castillo revises this myth, creolizes it like the revised Mexican *dicho* of her title, mixing it with traditional Mexican and Indian myths and recrafting it into an allegory of the borderlands, a lesson for learning from and living with the differences constructing modern borderlands space. The result, like the borderlands itself, is both tragic and utopic, earthly and spiritual, a complex and contradictory mythic vision. (128)

³⁶ Castillo discusses the influence of Catholicism on her life personally and as a writer in interviews with Milligan and Saeta; in addition, she discusses Catholicism’s role in Chicana identity and consciousness in *Massacre*.

Here, Spurgeon suggests that the Christian mythological allegory is the major narrative thread that subsumes the Chicana/o and Native American folkloric and mythological figures. However, I disagree with this critique. Because the Christian allegory is subverted and the Chicana/o and Native American folklores and mythologies are reappropriated and recodified, *So Far from God's* forms and thematics are focused on indigenous hybrid spiritualities and mythologies, suggesting, especially for La Loca and Caridad, their survival and transformation is reliant on the recovery of indigeneity as the center of their consciousness.

Instead of Christian allegory as the predominant codification of Chicana consciousness, it is the Chicana character's development into what Alarcón calls a "contemporary subject-in-process," which is tenuously viewed not solely from Hegelian or postmodern lenses, but is also viewed as an "understanding of all past negations as communitarian subjects in a doubled relation to cultural recollection, and remembrance, and to our contemporary presence and non/presence in the sociopolitical and cultural milieu" ("Chicana" 67). In other words, Alarcón is stating that the Chicana consciousness is developed not solely from the center of modernity as expressed through its ideological and political discourses, but more importantly, it is developed by the articulation of the *mestiza's* indigeneity through its recovery and survival; it is also predominantly aligned with the "the *Coatlicue* state" Anzaldúa expresses in *Borderlands/La Frontera*.

The Chicana's process from recovery to survival, and to the potential for transformation, then, is a process of decentering the colonized subject, internally and externally. This process occurs as a language aesthetic that defines Sofi's daughters. One such example involves New Mexican folklore. For example, Fe's character longs to leave

her family and community in Tomé for what she perceives will be a better life. She represents the Mexican American woman who attempts to assimilate into white society and culture for economic advancement, which she assumes will also procure her social and cultural advancement. Shortly before the story of Fe's demise, as a result of working at a chemical manufacturer, the narrator recounts the story of when Fe and her sisters listened to their grandfather Cresencio tell them a common New Mexican cautionary folktale involving greedy gold miners. Cresencio informs his granddaughters that the soldier, Juan Soldado, kept the entrance to a gold mine secret so no one would take the gold, but eventually he was trapped and killed there (*So Far* 154). Fe's quest for "the American Dream," which begins with her pursuit of a suitable husband and banking job, becomes a modern cautionary folktale of its own when her desire to assimilate into white society and culture, in order for her to obtain economic advancement, turns tragic by her desire for a higher income through a promotion at the chemical manufacturer where she works. The narrator also warns readers, prior to Fe's tragic death from cancer, that New Mexico itself is environmentally contaminated, remarking that it was the "Land of Entrapment," rather than the "Land of Enchantment," which was a common claim made by New Mexico's governors and settlers, and was part of the New Mexico imaginary.

Indigeneity as the center of consciousness, however, is expressed through the characters La Loca and Caridad. Both La Loca and Caridad are given the moniker of saint, which is later removed from their names after they fail to meet the expectations of the communities who bestow this title on them. La Loca is characterized by her miraculous recovery from an epileptic seizure while in her coffin. This event is followed by her enunciation of spiritual authority at the community's Catholic church. She also

lives a very secluded life, confining herself to her family's home, where she prays for her family, heals them through prayer, and is cognizantly aware of her family and community's social lives. This is regardless of the fact that she never leaves home and refuses physical contact with humans, unless she consents to their touch.

Indeed, La Loca's character symbolizes the reappropriation and recodification of the Mexican *La Virgen de Guadalupe/Tonantzin* goddess myth, which Alarcón states, "evokes the Catholic and meek Virgin Mother and the prepatriarchal and powerful earth goddess" ("*Traddutora*" 60). La Loca represents the Chicana/o need to "revalue the survival of native female power in this figure" (Delgadillo 898). She emulates the *La Virgen de Guadalupe*'s bodily sanctity and ability to enunciate spiritual knowledge to her Mexican American community; yet like *Tonantzin*, she also controls the domain of the family lands, and fosters friendships with her family's yard animals. She is also highly empathetic, healing Fe's bout of screaming, Caridad's physical wounds, and facilitating Caridad's three abortions. La Loca also maintains complete knowledge of the lives of her family members and community with her close interactions with another folkloric and mythological figure, *La Llorona*, whom she meets while spending time at the *acequia* (ditch) on her family's property. In summary, La Loca is a character assumes some traits of both the *La Virgen de Guadalupe* and *Tonantzin*, but Castillo's text subverts the patriarchal, male-centered codifications of these binary myths by giving La Loca the agency to enunciate spiritual knowledges and insights that supercede Father Jerome's knowledge. La Loca's healings are not only through traditional prayer. She also heals Caridad by providing her with reproductive freedom, making La Loca, as stated previously, a representation of radical Chicana subjectivity.

Caridad's character is expressed in Castillo's narrative through the codification of three woman-centered figures of *mestiza* folklore and mythology: *La Malinche*, the Acoma Pueblo creation myth of *Tsichtinako*, and *Lozen*, "Warm Springs Apache mystic woman warrior, sister of the great chief Victorio who had vowed 'to make war against the white man forever'" (*So Far* 88). Early on in the narrative, men rape and mutilate Caridad while she is socializing at a local bar. Her "nipples had been bitten off," she was "scourged with something, branded like a cattle," and "she had been stabbed in the throat." The sheriff and local police did not investigate the crime, so her "attacker or attackers were never found" and the "media, police, neighbors, and the church people" soon forgot her assault (33). Shortly afterwards, Caridad drifts off into trances with "her mouth still open," predicting the future for Esperanza and eventually for other Chicanas (45). The act of violence against Caridad, and the subsequent indifference of the public, signifies the scapegoating and violence enacted in the name of *La Malinche*. As Alarcón points out,

Malintzin became the receptacle of human rage and passion, of the very real hostilities 'all the members of the community feel for one another.' In the context of a religiously organized society, one can observe in the scapegoating of Cortés and Malintzin 'the very real metamorphosis of reciprocal violence into restraining violence through the agency of unanimity. The unanimity is elicited by the chosen scapegoats, and violence is displaced onto them...Among people of Mexican descent, from this perspective, anyone who has transgressed the boundaries of perceived

group interests and values often has been called a *malinche* or *malinchista*.

(“Chicana” 60)

Caridad, as a “young woman who has enjoyed life, so to speak,” is scapegoated as a *Malinche* in her community, ignored by the police and media, and eventually churchgoers (*So Far* 33). Caridad’s rape and mutilation symbolizes the violence enacted upon the Chicana *Malinche* figure who becomes a scapegoat “who has transgressed the boundaries of group interests and values” (60). Her complete recovery, followed by trances and long stretches of silence that eventually lead to predictions, signifies the female agency that the narrative attempts to reappropriate and recodify for Chicana’s, in order to give voice to their thoughts, intuitions, and knowledges by reconfiguring the *Malinche* mythology to liberated and healed enunciator, rather than cursed and maligned scapegoat.

The narrative also reconfigures the Acoma Pueblo creation myth of *Tsichtinako*. When Caridad and Esmeralda jump off of the Acoma Pueblo mesa cliff holding hands, Esmeralda’s grandmother, the Pueblo tour guide, the church priest, and the Acoma villagers all heard “the voice of the Invisible One who had nourished the first two humans, who were also both female, although no one had heard it in a long time and some had never heard it before” (*So Far* 211). The folklore of *Tsichtinako* in Castillo’s narrative is developed as a variation of Chicano magical realism. However, Castillo’s inclusion of Acoma Pueblo folklore is not “recounted largely without comment, in a matter-of-fact way, accepted – presumably – as a child would accept them, without undue questioning or reflection” (Faris 177). It doesn’t juxtapose conflicting worldviews, either, as Roland Walter defines it in *Chicano Magic Realism*. The narrator concludes the story by stating that “much to all their surprise, there were no morbid remains of splintered

bodies tossed to the ground...There was nothing...Just the spirit deity *Tsichtinako*” calling Caridad and Esmeralda “back,...down, deep within the soft, moist dark earth where Esmeralda and Caridad would be safe and live forever” (*So Far* 211). Therefore, the narrative intends to cast doubts on readers, challenging them to examine the mixed genre of folklore and literary prose, and the multiple interpretations that arise when differing worldviews exist in one location.

Caridad and Esmeralda become literary figures that serve to “reexpress” Acoma Pueblo folklore in the Western novel. The imagery produced by their final act alludes to Caridad and Esmeralda’s sense of self, which has become rooted in indigeneity. Delgadillo states that their worldview “stands in stark contrast to the Western view of earth as surface, as female body to be exploited.” Hence, the claim I make, that their subjectivities transform as part of the process of decolonization. Their close connections to the land are evidence that “The two women share a perspective that helps them understand their world, a spirituality consistently grounded in the landscape and people around them, a religious practice that values their selves and their bodies,” which is in sharp contrast to Francisco el Penitente’s worldview, which, shattered by Caridad’s jump, leads him to hang himself (900-01).

So Far from God also presupposes a Chicana readership. Castillo’s narrative is written more for a Chicana readership than it is for a European American readership, due to the sustained multilinguality of the texts and its folkloric and mythologic signifiers. Despite its focus on a Chicana readership,³⁷ it is published as a national novel, meaning it

³⁷ Castillo states that Chicanas are her audience for her fiction. See Milligan and Saeta.

is intended to be read by a wide readership. What this means, then, is that as a multilingual text, with the visual linguistic “presence in absence” of words during Fe’s dialogue, what needs to be considered are the ways that multilinguality and linguistic gaps create meaning and produce an effect on readers, whether the reader is Chicana/o or European American.

For the European American reader, then, the instances of Chicano knowledges in a Western novel form results in a form of indirect translation because the transcriptions are signifying on New Mexican Chicana consciousness partly through the use of the English language, and partly through the linguistic hybridity found in New Mexico. It is a “Chicana/o-ization” of the English language like *Tracks*’ “Ojibwe-ization” of the English language. It is not, however, a form of phonetic transcription which is found in *Daughters of the Dust*, although Chicana dialect and vernacular are found in the novel. It is however, an experience for readers which can elicit a particular reader response. Like *Tracks*, in *So Far from God*, symbols from folklore and mythology present a translatable code for readers that does not code switch linguistically, except for when readers gather symbolic meanings from the surrounding contexts of the narrative. Rather, it code switches hermeneutically, which means that readers’ interpretations of the linguistic signifiers are developed from their own relationship with the narrative content of the text, which is a result of the interdependency between Chicana and European American codes.

I refer to this effect on readers, whose dominant language is English, and possibly is their only language, as a reverse transculturation experience. However this is a limited readerly engagement for them, unless they become active participants in a multilingual, cross-culturally coded narrative. During the reading process, a reverse transculturation

experience occurs when a reader accepts and begins to interpret the cultural codes of the non-dominant language – in this case Chicana/o Spanish, *caló*, Spanish and parsings of Nahuatl. By transculturation I make reference, as I do in Chapters Three and Four, to ethnographers' use of the term to “describe how subordinated or marginal groups select and invent from materials transmitted to them by a dominant or metropolitan culture” (Pratt 7). I refer to the Western reader's active engagement with *So Far from God* as a reverse transculturation experience because they must transculturate to the non-English, multiple linguistic referents found in the narrative.

In *So Far from God* there are very few literal translations from non-English words to English. Therefore, the reverse transculturation experience readers have with *So Far from God* is a different type of readerly engagement than the one they may have with *Tracks* or *Daughters of the Dust*. While *Tracks* and *Daughters of the Dust* include non-English words and stories that refer to mythological figures, where English is still the dominant language in all three novels, *So Far from God* is more extensively committed to the inscription of Chicana identity and subjectivity through the languages that define them; and this, in turn, produces an effect on reader reception.

Catherine Rainwater comments on the effect that conflicts with referential codes have on readers of Erdrich's *Tracks*, and I would also like to apply her arguments to the application of referential codes in *So Far from God*. Rainwater claims that in *Tracks*, referential codes are in a state of conflict with each other, the product of two opposing philosophical discourses, *Ojibwe* and Western/English; and that these discourses produce an effect of liminality and marginality for the non-native reader (406). In the case of *So Far from God*, the “effect of liminality and marginality” is for the non-Chicana/o reader.

However, as Gerald Vizenor notes, in reference to his Native American narratives, “the reader not only participates in literary co-creation but [he or she] also expands his [or her] personal horizons, learns to think in new ways, achieves deeper self-knowledge and imagines or creates himself [or herself]” (*Narrative Chance* 43). Therefore, the reader, who is not versed in the non-English languages presented in *So Far from God*, if they actively participate with the text, also experience moments of engagement that renders the narrative a cross-cultural moment of thinking from a Chicana worldview.

So Far from God’s narrative shares similarities with *Daughters of the Dust* in terms of its attention to culturally-specific remedies and recipes. In *So Far from God*, though, these practices are even more pronounced. There is a complete titled sub-section dedicated to Doña Felicia’s instructions on healing *remedios*. The narrative takes the form of strict dialogue, and a *canto* (song, verse) which is visually separated from the prose and in bilingual translation. In the section titled, “A Brief Sampling of Doña Felicia’s Remedies,” Doña Felicia speaks directly to an audience. It is assumed that Doña Felicia is instructing Caridad on how to perform these healing remedies, since the narrator chronicles Caridad and Doña Felicia’s morning schedules directly prior to this section; however, the title also suggests that she is speaking directly to readers, who may also want to learn to be a *curandera*. This part of the novel, like Fe’s skipped words when speaking, is highly performative. Doña Felicia’s constant dialogue is in the imperative mood, which is typical for processes, that when written, are meant to be repeated using the same steps as dictated by the instructions. For example, Doña Felicia, in speaking to her audience, says

First you must determine that it is *empacho* (indigestion) and not *bilis* (bile), which is related to the bladder and kidneys and not the intestines.

You can do this in various ways. A gentle massage of the person's belly is usually the fastest way. You feel around carefully, like this, using the index finger of each hand and when the patient feels a little pain, you usually will also feel something like a *bolita* (small ball) inside and there you will know is the obstruction. (65)

This passage includes "like this" which indicates Doña Felicia is speaking directly to Caridad. What is most important here is the reader's sense that as a *curandera*, Doña Felicia's knowledge of these practices is extensive. As an elderly woman in the community, her expertise can and should be trusted not only for her ability to understand different ailments and the organs they are associated with, but also her experience in performing this practice to determine their cause.

Similarly to *cuentos* found in the NMFWP, Doña Felicia's age is uncertain, and it is suggested that she is so old that their memories fail them. In a previous passage, the narrator describes Doña Felicia as a woman who "looked like she was at least ninety years old." However, "Sofia suspected that the old woman was much older than that" due to her recollections of "fighting in the Mexican Civil War," though in typical Castillo fashion, the narrator sardonically, and in an authorial moment of self-reflexivity, notes that Sofia "finally decided that Doña Felicia must have picked up the memories of her own mother and incorporated them into her storytelling (44). Doña Felicia is also presented in *So Far from God* as a mysterious woman of an uncertain age, who becomes Caridad's mentor, a description which is similar in some ways to Rudolfo Anaya's *Bless*

Me, Ultima, which describes Ultima and her relationship with Antonio. What is important to note here, though, is that the practices of the *curandera* are to be revered and rendered as vital knowledges to be passed down to Caridad in the hopes that she will continue this healing practice in the community. Rather than narrate a healing ceremony, such as in Anaya's narrative, *So Far from God* presents a moment of Chicana praxis, an instructional section devoted to learning how to perform folk healing.

Recipes are another example of cultural practices in *So Far from God*. In the chapter sub-section titled, "Three of La Loca's Favorite Recipes Just to Whet Your Appetite," La Loca instructs her sister Fe on how to prepare and cook certain Mexican American dishes. Unlike Doña Felicia's instructions on *curandera remedios*, La Loca's section for preparing and cooking meals is a mix of narrator commentary, La Loca's dialogue, and the narrator's voice in the imperative mood, providing instructions on how La Loca prepares and cooks these meals. It does not allow La Loca to speak for herself through most of the instructions, and therefore, it does not give La Loca direct authority and expertise over her practices. Instead, the narrator provides us with their point of view of La Loca's skills and talents, and then proceeds to give readers the necessary instructions for completing the recipes.

The narration of recipes in *So Far from God* is similar to Laura Esquivel's narration in *Como Agua para Chocolate* in that the recipes do not consistently allow a direct address through dialogue between the character performing the process and their intended audience/readers. Most importantly, though La Loca, Fe, and Sofi, all gather in the kitchen to prepare and cook these meals, and "while they kneaded and baked they all talked as if they were old *comadres* and laughed at the flour that got on their noses and

the dough that somehow stuck itself to their hair” (167-68). As I remark elsewhere in reference to Esquivel’s novel, “These aspects of the kitchen space inform readers from all backgrounds about the significance of the kitchen space as a vital location of contact between women’s knowledges and cultural production, including the struggle between patriarchal views of women’s roles in society and woman-centered views.”³⁸

Chapter Conclusion

Chicana female characters’ struggles to define themselves in Castillo’s *So Far from God* are a process of recovery, survival, and transformation. It is a process of learning to recover traditions of Mexican American women, who are voices in their communities, and who also heal their communities and themselves. It is also a process of self-definition, despite the harsh political, economic, and cultural restrictions that threaten their ability to sustain their homes and communities, and potentially remove them from their lands. And, as represented by Caridad, it is a process of surviving a life-threatening, traumatic experience. It is also a process of transformation. Though Esperanza, Fe, Caridad, and La Loca all meet tragic deaths, Sofi, Caridad and La Loca are transformed by their heartaches and traumas and exert a gendered female agency in the home space, the community, and the lands of northern New Mexico.

Castillo’s narrative imagines these threats and traumas from a Chicana’s multiple subjectivities: spiritual, religious, sexual, and cultural. Her narrative theorizes the power inherent in Chicana discourses to define and assert women’s multiple subjectivities by creating aesthetic values through lands and border crossings, multilingual texts, and

³⁸ Taken from “Malinche at War and at Home in Laura Esquivel’s *Como Agua para Chocolate*,” currently under review.

cultural practices, which, together, create a model for a New Mexican Chicana worldview. But this worldview is in the process of transformation, predominantly represented by the female characters La Loca and Caridad. Both characters mediate and negotiate the material and metaphorical borderlands they live in and cross. Their transformations, along with Sofi's, represent the individual external and internal contestations that form a critical mass at the intersections of gender and class. Fe, though, represents the Mexican American female who contests a *mestiza* identity and subjectivity. Fe attempts to assimilate into white society and culture as a means of acquiring perceived economic, social, and cultural advancement, though ultimately her life tragically ends in the pursuit of these goals.

Despite and because of, male-centered, patriarchal discourses, Castillo's female characters La Loca, Caridad, and Sofi, create self-definitions that are woman-centered, asserting their ethnic, racial, and cultural identities with the goals of aiding their individual, familial, and communal lives. At times this is narrated as the continuity of traditions rooted in orality. At other times it is the continuance of traditions rooted in healing practices, which occurs through the narrative's emphasis on Doña Felicia's woman-centered *curandera* practices. It is also reflected in the ways that women can learn to be *comadres* by coming together to learn and practice vital knowledges of food preparation and cooking. What occurs in the borderlands setting of *So Far from God*, then, is an ongoing mediation and negotiation of a culturally hybridized border life between families and communities, and the cultures, races, genders, politics and economics they engage, dismantle, and rebuild, hoping for a more equitable future.

The feminist border aesthetic in *So Far from God* is rooted in imagery that is geographically situated because the setting itself becomes both a protagonist and antagonist in the novel, creating subjectivities while it simultaneously can deride the very subjectivities it forms. The interactions between lands and Chicana characters are thus supportive and combative, as the beauty and love that emanate from the lands can also become ambiguous, emanating beauty and love and pollution and tragedy. The feminist border aesthetic in *So Far from God* is also a metaphor in which female characters define themselves in-between harshly enforced categories of race, gender, and class. It reflects the complexities of identity and subjectivity in northern New Mexico borderlands. It also signifies on the meanings created in the interstices of conflicting ideological and philosophical discourses – Chicana/o, Mexican, and European American. Similarly to *Daughters of the Dust* and *Tracks*, an interpretive framework for Castillo’s novel leads to the realization that women’s subjectivities are a complex composite of “identities of interpretive horizons” by which one’s identity is embodied in particular locations, engaged in an interpretive process that requires a type of interpretive horizon (Alcoff 94). Put more precisely though, what occurs in *So Far from God*, *Tracks*, and *Daughters of the Dust*, is the process of creating a transformative interpretive horizon.

As I discuss in Chapters Three and Four, Gadamer’s concept of a horizon is a “substantive perspectival location from which the interpreter looks out at the world, a perspective that is always present but that is open and dynamic, with a temporal as well as physical dimension, moving into the future and into new spaces as the subject moves” (304). The transformative interpretive horizon, then, is the ability the female borderland character has to effectively straddle two or more interpretive horizons, causing an

emergent horizon to develop; in fact, readers engaged with a feminist borderland narrative, actively participating in the creation of meaning, make this interpretive leap as well.

Both La Loca and Caridad experience a shift in their “identities as interpretive horizons” as a result of physical trauma. Both female characters are recalcitrant in the presence of colonizing and patriarchal ideological and philosophical discourses. La Loca and Caridad’s identities shift from a patriarchal, male-centered Catholicism to a renewal of indigenous, woman-centered spirituality. These forms of consciousness develop with their close connections to the lands of Tomé, Chimayo, the Sangre de Cristo Mountains, and Acoma Sky City. However, Fe’s identity shifts due to the external influences of white society and culture. For La Loca and Caridad, interpretive shifts occur both in their identities and subjectivities through a process of dialectic and dialogic encounters with European American culture. For La Loca and Caridad, the interpretive shifts occur spiritually in their encounters with Catholicism and indigenous spiritualities. For Fe, the interpretive shift occurs growing up listening to her grandfather tell stories of hidden gold mines, though she misses the important cautionary tale for its warnings.

Though some scholars contend that Castillo’s novel is utopic in its rendering of northern New Mexico borderlands, this study critiques her narrative as a theoretical and political critique of New Mexico borderland life, offering a praxis for Chicana women’s liberation from external and internal colonization and oppression. In this sense, it does offer a form of *Atztlán* for Chicanas, but it also retreats from an idealized vision of women’s attainment of liberation from white supremacy and patriarchal definitions of womanhood. Other Chicana narratives, such as Alma Luz Villanueva’s *The Ultraviolet*

Sky, Helena María Viramontes' "The Cariboo Café," and Sandra Cisneros' *Woman Hollering Creek* are also concerned with a Chicana aesthetic that seeks to define Chicana subjectivity outside of prescribed definitions from Chicano patriarchal discourses and U.S. nation-state discourses, patriarchal or otherwise. However, while Villanueva's poetry often evokes lands and landscapes and women's interconnections with geography, *The Ultraviolet Sky* focuses on the metaphorical, abstract processes of Chicanas' subjective transformations. In similar ways, Viramontes' "The Cariboo Café" evokes borders metaphorically by reconfiguring the mythic *La Llorona* into modern urban life for Chicanas/os. "The Cariboo Café" evokes the internalized racism and sexism experienced by immigrants entering Los Angeles, California. Border crossings are thematically and aesthetically rendered in Viramontes' short story, but are not representative of the material borderlands of ancestral homelands or reclaimed territories. In fact, all of the main characters in "The Cariboo Café" experience an increased fragmentation as the story progresses because they internalize the restrictive external environment that denies them political, cultural, and economic acceptance, while at the same time their neighborhood feels the collective cultural losses from leaving their homelands for the U.S. In Cisneros' *Woman Hollering Creek*, perhaps more than Villanueva's and Viramontes' work, the narrative configures the physical geography and spatial restrictions and transformations that can occur in U.S. border locations; and, therefore, though Castillo's *So Far from God* falls within the thematic and stylistic fiction of her contemporaries, Cisneros' collection of stories is perhaps the work that can be comparatively analyzed with the most thematic and stylistic attributes of feminist borderland writing.

CHAPTER THREE

“THE POWER TO CURE AND KILL”: FLEUR AND PAULINE AT THE INTERSECTIONS OF NORTHERN PLAINS BORDERLANDS IN LOUISE ERDRICH’S *TRACKS*

In 1814, Walter Channing wrote that “In the oral literature of the Indian, even when rendered in a language enfeebled by excessive cultivation, everyone has found genuine originality” (Blackbird 6). Channing’s contention was that American literature was impeded by the adoption of English as its national language, which was not indigenous to the Americas and that the source of our national identity could be found in indigenous artistic expression. Over one hundred years later in 1917, during the period of high modernism in literature, Mary Austin proclaimed that the literary art of the “river and prairie” which was expressed by American writers had been “already worked in the native Amerind” (138). Similarly to Channing, Mary Austin argued for an American literature that was derived from the indigenous literatures of Native Americans. In fact, William Carlos Williams in *In the American Grain* wrote that it was “Not for himself surely to be an Indian...but the reverse: to be himself in a new world, Indianlike” (137). But as Kenneth Lincoln reminds us, the urge to create literatures from ancient mythologies, and the pastoral as a theme and a poetic source, have been goals of Western literary artists since the Renaissance (5-6).³⁹ Which leads to the questions: If American writers have been writing in these traditions since the Renaissance, what defines Native

³⁹ For example, besides the avant-garde poets of the early 20th century, writers such as Christopher Marlowe, William Shakespeare, John Milton, Walt Whitman, Henry David Thoreau, and Willa Cather applied ancient mythology and pastoral influences to their works.

American literature as a distinct American literature with its own aesthetic tendencies? What defines Native American aesthetics in U.S. contemporary literature? And finally, How can we situate Louise Erdrich's North Dakota novel *Tracks* as a Native American borderland novel that is both indigenous and Western (of the European American literary tradition), and can be identified as having a distinct borderland aesthetic of its own?

First, it is helpful to discuss the history of Native American literary production. Native American literature has been in written form since 1772. Their foray into written literature began with sermons, poetry, letters, treatises, biographies, and autobiographies and included themes of captivity, genocide, alcohol use, treaties, cosmologies, and whiteness as perceived through an indigenous lens.⁴⁰ It wasn't until after the Red Power Movement and Native American Renaissance of the 1960s that Native American scholars and creative writers began theorizing and attempting to define and tabulate Native American literary texts (Lincoln 60-81).

In addition, according to Louis Owens, the novel became an emerging literary form for many Native American writers, since prior to 1968 only nine novels were written by Native American authors (24). After 1968, an abundance of intellectual and creative work was produced by Native American authors in the form of poetry, autobiography, drama, and fiction. The novel became an especially prodigious source for Native American creative expression. One such novelist, N. Scott Momaday, with his Pulitzer Prize winning novel *House Made of Dawn*, followed by his critically acclaimed *The Way to Rainy Mountain*, would help establish a point of artistic departure for

⁴⁰ For more on the history of Native American literature, two sources are helpful: Ruoff and Weaver, ix.

novelists such as Leslie Marmon Silko, James Welch, Simon Ortiz, and Louise Erdrich, among others.

In order to define a feminist borderland aesthetic for Native American literature, it is important to review aesthetic theories of Native American literary texts that address identity, authenticity, and literary nationalism. In Momaday's essay, "The Man Made of Words," he remarks that an Indian identity, through words spoken and written, "is an idea which a given man has of himself. And it is a moral idea, for it accounts for the way in which he reacts to other men and to the world in general" (97). Moreover, Momaday stressed that it was "possible to formulate an ethical idea of the land – a notion of what it is and must be in our daily lives" (101). Though lands and landscapes, in modern literary expression, have been poetically inscribed by writers since the Renaissance, there is a distinct departure in the aesthetic renderings of Native American literature. Momaday's focus on language and land is derived from the formation of a Native American identity. His artistic work is focused on contemporary pan-Indian values and worldviews held by indigenous tribal communities through shared struggles. Though contemporary Native American writers would also address themes of intertribal disputes over territories, livestock, and political differences, like pre-twentieth century writers, the contemporary Native American novel addresses intertribal struggles against colonialism, whether they were in conflict with Spanish, French, or English governments and settlers. Momaday was concerned with ancestral inheritance of oral traditions that inform not only his worldview, but also his sense of embodiment within the lands he inhabited, none of which are separate points in terms of literary value, but rather they are intrinsically tied to each other to form meanings that are context specific to his Kiowa tribal community.

In Weaver's book, *That the People Might Live*, he underscores the importance of a tribal communal identity. The literary impulse to write about sacred and communal lands, oral traditions, cosmologies, and mythologies within indigenous texts are foremost about communal identity, authenticity, and struggles of resistance to colonialist systems of domination and how these themes define pan-tribal and intra-tribal characters and families (36-38). Thus, after 1968, Native American writers became more focused on creating language, characterization, and setting as commingled aspects of narrative form and content, with place and discourse as the foundations of identity, authenticity, nationalism, and community. As Louise Erdrich observes, community for Native Americans is "a place that has been inhabited for generations" where "the landscape becomes enlivened by a sense of group and family history" (King xiv). Thus, poetics in contemporary Native American literature are representing acts of remembering as a practice of recovering spiritual bonds with ancestors, continuing as a form of survival and resistance to colonialist oppression and destruction, and retelling stories of their inherited, ancestral epistemologies in a locus of communal cultural experience.

For an explanation of authenticity⁴¹ and literary nationalism, I turn to Simon Ortiz, who defines tribal authenticity in the context of Native American life and literature as "the struggle against colonialism – which has given substance to what is authentic" (256). Ortiz's explanation is widely accepted as a foundational text for thinking about contemporary Native American literatures.⁴² The goal of tribal authenticity, as defined by Ortiz in his essay, "Towards a National Indian Literature," is "the creative ability of

⁴¹ See footnote 11.

⁴² See Weaver, et.al, and Owens, Lincoln, and Allen.

Indian people gather [sic] in many forms of the socio-political colonizing force [whether this force is Spanish, French, and/or English] which beset them and to make these forms meaningful in their own terms” (254). Tribal authenticity and national sovereignty is evident in the writer’s imaginative depictions of lands and their distinct evoking of an inter-tribal and intra-tribal indigenous consciousness, expressed through language(s). The characters are developed by mythology, language, and topographic signs. Characters are embodied linguistically and culturally in settings by being in an *embodied state of relation* with the lands they inhabit. The characters become “speaking subjects” in a written text, which means they give voice to intertribal and intratribal identities, experiences, knowledges, and worldviews. When characters in Native American literature become “speaking subjects” for authenticity, identity, and national sovereignty, they form what Henry Louis Gates refers to as “speakerly texts” because Native American “speaking subjects” in fiction often attempt to represent, through Standard English, indigenous language, with at times varying forms of diction, to express the embodiment of a tribal community consciousness within a specific location (Gates 129).

As a distinct form of artistic expression, the novel genre, according to Owens, in *Other Destinies: Understanding the American Indian Novel*, “represents a process of reconstruction, of self-discovery and cultural recovery” for Native American authors” (5). In addition, authenticity within Native American fiction is not essentializing, rather it is, as stated previously, a process of recovery and remembering; and, at times, it recovers what is valued, yet left unacknowledged by characters, either by unforeseen circumstances, neglect within communities, or even willful denial such as in the character

Lulu, Fleur's daughter in *Tracks*. The language of borderlands novels, such as Erdrich's *Tracks*, forms dialectic and dialogic engagements between the text and the reader.

It is also a matter of thematic concern, in which plot development occurs as a result of negotiating meanings between more than one culture and language, inclusion in tribal communities or banishment from them, and as stated previously, resistance to colonialist systems of domination. Ortiz stresses the "creative ability" "to make this form (the written form of the dominant language) "meaningful in their own terms" which in turn is one part of the "nationalistic impulse to make use of foreign ritual, ideas, and material in their own – Indian – terms" (254). As Allen states, the Western novel form, and Native American literary engagements with tribal oral traditions, is an interaction between the oral tradition and Western fiction and its antecedents, these forms "interact, as wings of a bird in flight interact. They give shape to our experience. They signify" (*Voice* 7). For Allen and Ortiz, these literary strategies are what make narratives "indigenous American."

The focus on translation presents Native American writers with complex artistic struggles. Not only is the Native American novel typically written in English, but it is also typically read by a mainstream society whose first language is English. Though it has been remarked by scholarly critics that in contemporary times English is the dominant language for most Native Americans, the aesthetic goals of many Native American writers focus on the tribal languages that they either have secondary knowledge of or are attempting to recover. As Owens remarks, "the very questions of identity and authenticity the new literature attempts to resolve" present artistic challenges in the development of narratives that engage with Native American subjectivity and tribal

values.⁴³ One of the main challenges the novel presents for Native American authors is resolving conflicts between European American and culturally-specific discursive patterns. Another challenge is creating narrative poetics that represent Ojibwe subjectivity as a localized experience that informs tribal community knowledges, while maintaining affinities with other Native American tribes, and the U.S. national mainstream culture (11). Native American women's literature, such as Erdrich's *Tracks*, is involved in these Native American literary challenges of cultural production: *Tracks* is in a mediation and negotiation of its own, between the aesthetic conflicts that arise between tribal authenticity and U.S./Western non-indigenous textual representations.

Previous translations of Native American literature from oral traditions, prior to the publication of contemporary literature, posed problems with translation from original face to face storytelling, songs, and chants. In Lincoln's *Native American Renaissance*, he discusses Black Elk's memories relayed by his son's spoken English, which was then transcribed by John Neihardt, and finally interpreted by readers over one hundred years later. Lincoln summarizes this process to underscore his claim that "literal translations may flat-footedly betray the original, failing to regenerate music, structural pattern, clarity, or depth of perception" (29). For Lincoln, what is absent from written translations is the experience of the real time oral performance of tribal languages. In addition, Lincoln asserts that even careful translation, which would involve collaborative tribal group and translator writing, "would seek 'the power to move' a literary reader in the second language, culture, mind-set, and textual experience" in which they were engaged

⁴³ Kroeber and Kroemer make similar remarks.

(28). Because of the complex problems posed by translations of Native American languages, traditional methods of translating Native American oral literature have been foregone by contemporary Native American writers, including Louise Erdrich.

There are many reasons for the absence of monolingual or bilingual transcriptions of Native American languages, which are not the result of experiences with translations such as Black Elk's. In the U.S., government policies and laws, influenced by the philosophy of "manifest destiny", created Indian boarding schools, managed by the U.S. Bureau of Indian Affairs as early as the 1860s (Fixico 72-73). At Indian boarding schools, Native American languages were forbidden, and their use was punished by verbal and physical abuse (Littlefield 17). Many Native American tribes lost their languages, thus their cultures and identities, from over a century of U.S. Indian school practices. Many tribal languages are now extinct. However, since the Red Power Movement and Native American Civil Rights Act of 1968, there have been a growing number of North American tribal nations, and writers and intellectuals, who have been revitalizing tribal languages, including *Anishinaabemowin* (the language of the *Anishinaabe/Ojibwe*), which is the language found in Erdrich's *Tracks*, and many other *Ojibwe* authors' works⁴⁴. Universities such as the University of Minnesota and the University of Toronto offer classes in *Anishinaabemowin*, both in post-secondary and secondary school settings. The minimal use of tribal languages in literary narratives written by established authors published since the 1970s, is a complex subject because of the above-mentioned problems with the transference of orality to written text, U.S. legal

⁴⁴ Gerald Vizenor, Kimberley Blaeser, and David Treuer are three Ojibwe authors of prominent stature.

and educational policies, cultural genocide, and the slow process of language recovery. Instead, I argue that contemporary Native American writers employ a language aesthetic, which is a narrative poetics of bilingual translations, mythologies, and humor and teasing dialogue written predominantly in English. When it is written in *Anishinaabemowin* (*Ojibwe*), the poetic function is what Vizenor refers to as the shadow text (*Manifest* 72-73), seen by readers visually, interpretable on the level of transcription, but understood superficially by most Western readers. In other words, *Anishinaabemowin* words in narratives are signs without a reliable signifier: the word is translatable, but without readily apparent, or context-specific meanings.

Contemporary Native American articulate hybrid identities within the localized geographic spaces of reservations, which represent forced boundaries and restricted living spaces due to U.S. government policies of marginalization and exclusion. Tribal identities in Native American novels are created by polysemic referents, bilingual and/or multilingual texts, heteroglossic narrative forms, and the invocation of the oral tradition and storytelling (Owens 14). The complexity of Native American novels though, should not be confused with a high modernist reading, or a postmodernist one, because the Native American novel is attempting to grapple with the dialogic and dialectic expressions necessary to include Native American hybrid identities within a Western novel form, which is suited for an individualistic expression, based on tenets found in Enlightenment discourses, rather than in indigenous philosophical discourses. However, a methodologically-sound critique of Native American novels must account for both Western and non-Western critical lenses: those of orality and the text as oral performance, and philosophical discourses derived from indigeneity. This form of critical

engagement harks back to Allen's metaphor of the Native American narrative as a bird with two separate wings. Proper critical analysis then, entails engaging with more than one critical model, thereby allowing critiques that focus on the process of mediating and negotiating often conflicting discourses.

So, the question arises: how does a borderland aesthetic for tribal narratives situate itself within these primary points of departure? I argue in this chapter that Louise Erdrich's *Tracks* is a borderland narrative within Native American literature, which is identified by its geographic setting of containment and restricted movement, and by a poetics that underscores a close proximity to national borders. For this chapter, then, a borderland Native American novel employs a setting that is between the U.S. and Canada, in addition to being a border/boundary between the U.S. nation-state and the reservation. The border setting imposes marginalization, colonization practices, and physical, material and metaphorical barriers between tribal communities and white, European American settler populations. The setting, like language and cultural practices, becomes paramount to tribal authenticity, identity, an intertribal and intratribal group cohesiveness by way of a common struggle, survival, and resistance toward colonization.

The borderlands model I propose in this dissertation could also be applied to Erdrich's *Love Medicine* and *The Last Report of the Miracles at Little No Horse*, among others. However, not all Native American reservation narratives, and not all women's Native American reservation narratives, are border narratives; so a distinction needs to be made. Case in point is Linda Hogan's novel *Mean Spirit*. Though *Mean Spirit* is set within Chickasaw territory, Hogan's narrative focuses on the effects of tribal deterritorialization due to white settler encroachments on their lands, in order to

appropriate their lands to obtain oil rights. However, deterritorialization is only one of the deleterious effects of white settler encroachment. White settlers in *Mean Spirit* are all but charged with the murders of several tribal members, who directly or indirectly, are connected with the ownership of oil-filled lands. Thus, in *Mean Spirit*, the Chickasaw become disconnected from their lands, and their identities are fractured. It isn't until the final chapters of *Mean Spirit*, when tribal members slowly begin to arrive at a tribal outpost outside the reservation, that they reclaim their tribal identities as deeply connected to the lands, and, in turn, begin to "reassemble" their Chickasaw identities.

Another work of fiction, Diane Glancy's *Pushing the Bear*, offers a middle ground between deterritorialization and border subjectivity. In *Pushing the Bear*, Glancy narrates the lives of Cherokee tribal members who walk the Trail of Tears from the U.S. Southeast to parts of Oklahoma due to the 1830 Indian Removal Act. Glancy's *Pushing the Bear*, poetically inscribes Native American women's subjectivity as a process of interaction with their geographic surroundings. *Pushing the Bear* contains words from the Sequioan syllabary (e.g. ᏊᏃᏅᏍᏔᏅ [di-da-nv-s-gi]) alongside Roman alphabetized text as James MacKay notes in "Ghosts in the Gaps." Glancy's goals, according to MacKay, are to present readers with "holes in the text so the original can show through" in order to point out the irrevocable difference that occurs in the process of transliteration, which Mackay argues is part of Glancy's trope of fragmentation (248-50). However, I consider Glancy's inclusion of the Sequioan syllabary in *Pushing the Bear* not as a symbol of fragmentation, but as a symbol of linguistic border subjectivity; the state in which the Cherokee internalize tribal authenticity while mediating and negotiating with the oppressive, hostile U.S. nation-state legal system. In summary, Native American

women's narratives are concerned with inter-tribal and pan-tribal processes of survival, authenticity, continuance, and sovereignty, much like their Native American male literary counterparts. However, Native American women writers are also deeply concerned with tribal women's internal, subjective experiences as these experiences develop in the interstices of two or more competing languages, and deeply contested geographies.

In *Tracks*, though, *Ojibwe* tribal sovereignty is a central theme, as noted by Nanapush's continuing ambivalence toward his engagement with the *Ojibwe* tribal council, because it entails closer contact with European American government and settlers. Another important theme is resisting engagement with American English, which evolves in *Tracks* from the "exile in a storm of government papers" in the novel's introduction to Nanapush's election to tribal chairman in the conclusion, when he states that "To become a bureaucrat myself was the only way that I could wade through the letters, the reports" (1, 225). Nanapush's eventual involvement with the tribal council situates *Tracks* within the body of Native American works that address themes of tribal sovereignty. Such narratives often narrate the very difficult task of forging relations between indigenous, Native Americans and the U.S. legal system, whether this involves local towns, states, regions, or Washington, D.C.

The border narrative within Native American literature is one that presupposes lines drawn between indigenous consciousness and Western consciousness and is aware of these border relationships in its language, form, and content. Therefore, a feminist borderland narrative in Native American literature seeks to assert a feminizing tribal communal worldview in dialectic and dialogic tension with patriarchal worldviews. As Allen remarks in *The Sacred Hoop*, "American Indians have based their social systems,

however diverse, on ritual, spirit-centered, woman-focused worldviews” (2). But what occurs in a borderland narrative is a confrontation of this tribal worldview with a Western worldview that presupposes patriarchy as the dominant social structure, and with it all of its philosophical belief systems that in the modern world system seek to rationalize race, gender, and class along hierarchical, dualistic lines between people.

Louise Erdrich’s *Tracks* is a discursive, feminizing text that evokes the struggles, resistance, survival, and epistemological synthesis when Native Americans subsume both ideological and philosophical worldviews into indigenous thought and language, to make sense of forms, content, and structures in indigenous ways that are woman-centered. Thus, women’s subjectivity is aligned with tribal authenticity, identity, and national sovereignty expressed in the narrative. Their subjectivity is defined by poetics that articulate women’s communicative power in the borderland setting, women’s interconnectedness with the lands they inhabit, and women’s knowledges obtained through cultural practices within the lands. And finally, the feminist borderland aesthetic in Louise Erdrich’s *Tracks* mirrors the heterogeneous subjectivities of tribal life, which Allen classifies as the recognizable system of indigenous consciousness in which people are given the latitude of “a wide-ranging field of allowable styles” which “encourages variety of personal expression for the good of the group” (*Sacred* 2). In addition, *Tracks*’ borderland aesthetic evokes the material, physical, and metaphorical boundaries that restrict characters’ autonomy and subjectivity, while also providing moments when transformative healing can occur.

Female characters’ subjectivity in *Tracks* is also defined through the process of immersion in, or alienation from, *Ojibwe* practices that foster tribal authenticity and

nationalism. The process of developing *Ojibwe* tribal authenticity and nationalism occurs through Nanapush and Pauline's stories of Fleur, while Pauline's subjectivity is defined by her struggles as a mixed-blood tribal member caught between her *Métis* tribal identity and the desire to assimilate to white society and culture. There is a great deal of criticism that focuses on Fleur and Pauline's diametrically opposed subjectivities. However, my dissertation introduces a critical framework developed from border theories that presuppose the geographic, material, and metaphorical intersectional constrictions imposed on the female body and mind by race, gender, and class identities, which are, in turn, influenced by the hegemony of the European American body politic. By doing so, my study reframes the critical debates on women's Native American reservation narratives to encompass reservation *and* nation-state borders, shifting the focus a dominant Western-derived critical framework to an indigenous-centered critical framework in which lands become the point of entry into analyses and interpretations of identity, culture, and discourses. Thus, Ortiz's contention that Native American indigeneity survives by taking Western forms and making these forms their own becomes a call for researchers to recenter their critical lens. And in the case of women's Native American reservation/border narratives, Ortiz's argument, still holds true. In other words, the critical lens moves out to a wider scope, a wider point of entry: lands and the ways characters mediate and negotiate their identities in lands that define the Native American experience: physically, mentally, and spiritually; and how lands within reservation and/or nation-state borders can integrate or disintegrate women's tribal identity.

Erdrich's character Pauline, then, would be an example of the disintegration of tribal identity based on her subject position within and across *Ojibwe* reservation lands

and her disintegration from her *Métis* Canadian identity. Though most criticism of Pauline's character focuses on her aberrant behavior upon accepting Christianity as her belief system, Daniel Cornell in "Woman Looking: Re-visioning Pauline's Subject Position in Louise Erdrich's *Tracks*" takes an alternative approach. Cornell concludes that the character Pauline's attempt to gain equality among men, in both the reservation and the white town of Argus, is achieved by maintaining a controlling gaze on them and exerting power of her own by asserting her right to look and report (52). Cornell critiques Pauline's developing character as limited, only if readers consider her feelings of invisibility in Argus, along with her apparent gradual madness, without also considering that this madness is a pivotal point towards the creation of her own female subjectivity. Pauline may indeed be developing her own subjectivity through this difficult process of transformation, but as Susan Friedman points out in "Identity Politics, Syncretism, Catholicism and *Anishnaabe* Religion in Louise Erdrich's *Tracks*," Pauline's psychopathology is induced by the white male colonizing gaze Franz Fanon recognized as "the self-hatred of the colonized subject" (100). For Pauline to develop a healthy subjectivity, which I assume is what Cornell is referring to, then her characterization in *Tracks* would have had to develop with a realization of the detrimental effects of white colonization; in other words, Pauline would have needed to first go through a process of decolonization before assimilation, which is not how the plot develops.

However, Fleur's subjectivity is formed by an *Ojibwe*-centered relationship to her tribal community, so both Pauline and Fleur's experiences should be analyzed from what Nicholas Sloboda states, in "Beyond the Iconic Subject: Re-Visioning Louise Erdrich's *Tracks*," is the bridging of differing worlds as a result of the narrative's formal concerns

with *Ojibwe* oral tradition and storytelling modes (69). Female subjectivity is reliant on “the bridging of differing worlds,” which is shown by Fleur’s mediation and negotiation of the white male workers’ verbal and physical attacks on her while she worked at the butcher shop in Argus. However, it is also reliant on her ability to gender cross. Julie Barak in “Blurs, Blends, and *Berdaches*: Gender Mixing in the Novels of Louise Erdrich” discusses Fleur’s identity as an *Ojibwe berdache*, which offers valuable insights into gender constructs in *Tracks*. Barak’s discussion of Fleur’s gender and border crossings, from Lake Matchimanito reservation to the white town of Argus, aids my argument that Fleur’s gender mixing is a result of her *Ojibwe* identity, which is challenged by patriarchal norms established in the white town of Argus.

In contrast, Pauline’s racialized and gendered identity is a result of her attempts to alienate herself from *Ojibwe* reservation life and her ancestral *Métis* heritage. In addition, Pauline suppresses her sexuality and accepts a repressive gendered role in both the reservation and Argus. In addition, Kristan Sarvé-Gorham, Dennis Walsh, and Michelle R. Hessler, make vital connections between the cosmological and ontological identities of the characters Fleur and Pauline, noting how both female characters represent the dialectics of religious belief systems (*Ojibwe* and Christian) that form competing knowledges, resulting in both character’s inner struggles with self-definition in *Tracks*. Indeed, it is the tension between racialized and gendered bodily and psychic discourses, felt by living in the body politics set between two disparate cultures (*Ojibwe* and European American), that provides *Tracks*’ narrative with its most significant, heart-wrenching plot developments: three white men rape Fleur and Pauline becomes increasingly disturbed by her self-inflicted physical and emotional wounds.

In addition, Fleur and Pauline experience the in-betweenness of gender constructs, while the narrative develops from the interstices of material and metaphorical spaces. Caroline Rosenthal's *Narrative Deconstructions of Gender in Works by Audrey Thomas, Daphne Marlatt, and Louise Erdrich* delineates the interconnectedness of gender and narrative style in *Tracks*. For Rosenthal, Erdrich casts the character Fleur "as the leitmotif that keeps the narrative as well as the community together" (126). She sees Fleur's role as one of "transgenderation," a term Rosenthal uses in reference to Pratt's application of transculturation within contact zones. For Rosenthal, Fleur's gender mixing is produced by "subordinate or marginal groups" that "select and invent from materials transmitted to them by a dominant or metropolitan culture" (110). Rosenthal's concept of "transgenderation" in the context of "contact zones" is illuminating in the description of Fleur's apparent gender crossings in *Tracks*, but it must be weighed against the indigenous acceptance of the *berdache*, or two-spirit worldview that arises organically from an individual's self-expression in geographic locations where they live. I take a different approach from Rosenthal's and Barak's assessments. Instead, I argue that Fleur's gender mixing and sexuality and Pauline's aberrant behavior toward her gender and sexuality are aspects of living within materially and ideologically divergent borderlands: the European American worldview that restricts gendered social constructs by reinforcing the binary of male or female; and the *Ojibwe* worldview, which allows fluid, gendered performativities due to *Ojibwe* cultural acceptance of the *berdache*.

In addition, Fleur's crossing to Argus for work does not change her internalized gender identity, but rather it changes her in relation to the body politic, the external gender norms forced upon her by white male workers who rape her at the butcher shop.

As Jeanne Armstrong contends in her book *Demythologizing the Romance of Conquest*, Fleur redefines the bodily act of rape and the rape of her family lands by acts of vengeance; I argue that Fleur's perceived vengeance (it is Pauline who locks the men in the freezer, not Fleur) is part of Fleur's mythology, meant to assert her subjectivity and voice within locations where white supremacy is enforced, both discursively and physically (17). Jennifer Shaddock, like Caroline Rosenthal, casts Fleur as a major metaphor of Native American culture (109). Shaddock, in "Mixed Blood Women: The Dynamic of Women's Relations in the Novels of Louise Erdrich and Leslie Silko" argues that Erdrich's writing retheorizes oppression and that her language remythologizes woman's cultural identity in terms of empowered and recalcitrant subjectivity, thus making Erdrich's language transformative rather than mimetic (108). I agree with Shaddock, but I will also add that this transformation through language occurs from more than one interpretive framework, which is a representation of linguistic border crossings that occur in locations where one or more geopolitical borders meet. This occurs in *Tracks* with the presence of the *Ojibwe* language, and with translations from orality to written text, from *Ojibwe* language to English, and from cross-cultural codes such as humor and trickster discourse.

Gloria Bird in "Searching for Colonialism at Work: A Reading of Louise Erdrich's *Tracks*" complicates these arguments by noting that readers are not offered a view into Fleur's consciousness because her life is depicted through Nanapush and Pauline. It is true that Fleur's internal thoughts are defined by Nanapush and Pauline's stories of what Fleur said and did, but Bird does not acknowledge the ways that their stories inform readers understanding of Fleur's inner sense of *Ojibwe* subjectivity.

Nanapush and Pauline inform readers of Fleur's identity and subjectivity by mythologizing her life. Also, Erdrich's inclusion of bilingual texts aids in defining Fleur's sense of self.

Prima Tagore's analysis in "Testimonial Remembrance and Historical Narration: Louise Erdrich's *Tracks* and M.K. Indira's Phaniyamma" solidifies my contention that *Tracks* is not a static representation of Native American identity, but is, rather, an addendum in a novel tetralogy that narrates *Ojibwe* survivance and continuance, and as such provides a complex sketch of Fleur's sense of self within her community and across borders. Hsinya Huang's research further cements Tagore's assessment in "Disease, Empire, and (Alter)Native Medicine in Louise Erdrich's *Tracks* and Winona La Duke's *Last Standing Woman*." Huang argues that the disease and "dis-ease" from U.S. colonization practices in *Tracks* is an amalgamation of cultural, racial, and physical annihilation that is transformed into the remembering of healing practices and traditional *Ojibwe* practices (38-39). Huang's research supports my critical framework by underscoring the claim that subjectivity is rendered in *Tracks* as painful and traumatic, and therefore similar to other narrative accounts of life in and across one or more borders, but the narrative is eventually rendered as healing and transformative; therefore, the narrative is "decolonizing" in its representations of indigenous-centered characters.

Tracks' discourses define women's subjectivity within borderland locations, similarly to Ana Castillo's *So Far From God* and Julie Dash's *Daughters of the Dust*. As borderlands novels, they position women's communicative powers in polysemic engagements between the narrators, text, and readers. The novels' linguistic practices are meant to assert identity and subjectivity as both individual and collective experiences.

Connie A. Jacobs' *The Novels of Louise Erdrich: Stories of Her People* discusses the oral literature in *Tracks* for its achronological, circular pattern in relation to myths, legends and ontology, especially in relation to the characters Fleur, Pauline, and Margaret. Jacobs also examines Erdrich's emphasis of story over novel form and spoken language over written form. In doing so, Jacobs points toward Erdrich's overarching narrative goal: to write from an *Ojibwe*-centered worldview while writing within a Western/European American novel genre predominantly focused on English linguistic codes. Her arguments help support my claims that *Tracks*' female characters, while their identities vary, they are all still engaging with *Ojibwe*-centered discourses; and in fact, readers, while reading a predominantly English language text, are also engaging in *Ojibwe*-centered discourses.

A helpful framework for analyzing Erdrich's inclusion of bilingual texts, mythologies, and humor and teasing dialogue is the designation of narratological direct and indirect translations. However, hybrid hermeneutic coding within a narrative requires a reader's active participation in the creation of meaning. This occurs in *Tracks* due to the novel's performativity. James Flavin in "The Novel as Performance: Communication in Louise Erdrich's *Tracks*" reminds us that *Tracks* engages readers with performances between speaker and listener in specific contexts, even as he provides scholarly evidence to suggest authentic Native American performance cannot be realized in the American novel form (1). Flavin delineates *Tracks* for its performative qualities, discussing the role the character Nanapush plays in developing a "relationship between narrator and narratee," (Lulu), which Flavin states "mirrors the performance situation of traditional Native American songs and poems to capture in written form a sense of oral performance" (2). I agree with Flavin's discussions of *Tracks*' performativity and

dialectic tensions; but while Flavin sees the novel genre as precluding Native American literary aesthetic and narrative authenticity, I argue instead that the novel asserts an *Ojibwe* borderland narrative with the ability to become a *narrative process* in tribal literary authenticity and nationalism.

There is a tendency for scholars to position *Tracks* as either modernist or postmodernist, but these two critical schools of thought have limited ability to properly critique *Tracks*. *Tracks* focuses on identity and subjectivity as a process and therefore any claims of character fragmentation are limiting, since transformations occur until a fully formed subjectivity is attained for both Pauline and Fleur. E. Shelley Reid's analysis in "The Stories We Tell: Louise Erdrich's Identity Narratives" is helpful in supporting my contentions. Reid notes that Erdrich's *Tracks* is a revision of European American identity narratives that focus on individualism and self-actualization. For Reid, Erdrich's *Tracks* is a revision of European American identity narratives in order to authentically represent the tribal community by rendering the oral tradition and the polyphony of voices as formal modes (69). As mentioned previously, Rainwater addresses these concerns in "Reading between Worlds: Narrativity in the Fiction of Louise Erdrich." In her essay, Rainwater examines the non-indigenous reader's felt experience of liminality and marginality, not just as an "outsider" reading an *Ojibwe*-centered text, but also as someone who experiences philosophical tensions due to two antithetical cultural backgrounds encoded within Roland Barthes' concept of "associative fields" that are simultaneously self-reliant and hinged upon difference (Barthes 288). For Rainwater, the stylistic and rhetorical effects of liminality and marginality result from code conflicts such as shamanic and Christian codes, nuclear family and tribal codes, individuation and

community (406). Although I agree with Rainwater's analysis, I move beyond her contentions of liminality and marginality to the possibilities of a reader's reverse transculturation while reading *Tracks* and to thinking from an *Ojibwe* worldview.⁴⁵

Lawrence Gross's reading of Erdrich's *Tracks* notes one of the novel's main messages is that "those individuals best survive who adapt mainstream culture to *Anishinaabe* culture and their own personal interests. By the same token, they also adhere to traditional culture while adjusting themselves to [sic] broader society" (49). Gross's analysis is a reminder that *Tracks* is committed to *Ojibwe* tribal authenticity, a helpful nod to Ortiz's contention that modern indigenous literature in North America is a practice of joining Western worldviews with indigenous worldviews. It is clear then that what enables *Tracks* to create a sense of intertribal and intratribal authenticity lies in its ability to create a process of character transformation that involves the mediation and negotiation of conflicting codes and discourses. Sheila Hassell Hughes' "Tongue-Tied: Rhetoric and Relation in Louise Erdrich's *Tracks*" examines these narrative goals, as a "dialectical negotiation of the conflict" of *Ojibwe* and white cultures, allowing both traditions to be in a dialogically woven relationship in which they are "inextricably bound to each other:" in other words, "identity, community, and meaning...are relational, rhetorical, and contingent constructions" (88). Hughes offers insight into conflicting cultural constructs that border subjects mediate and negotiate in quotidian adaptations of languages, knowledges, and practices.

⁴⁵ This is borrowed from Alcoff and Mendieta, *Thinking from the Underside of Modernity*, 1.

Erdrich's novel, *Tracks*, is an historical novel set between 1912 and 1924. It chronicles the lives of *Ojibwe* tribal members who have been forced onto the fictional reservation, Matchimanito Lake. Their migration is part of the U.S. government's policies following the 1887 General Allotment Act and and Indian Allotment Act of 1904,⁴⁶ legal policies that one of the novel's narrators, Nanapush, an elder tribal member, describes as "a wind from the east, bringing exile in a storm of government papers" (1). Historically, the 1887 and 1904 U.S. Allotment Acts were two of the most cited U.S. government policies, but there were scores of other laws put in place to actualize the principle of manifest destiny in U.S. northern territories. Canada also enacted laws that forcibly removed indigenous populations, including *Métis* populations. These laws in U.S. and Canadian legal systems created indian reservations along their borders. However, most tribal communities, rather than flee these restrictive borders, defended their lands. Some tribes, Northern Plains Indians, defined them on their own terms, most notably as the Montana/Saskatchewan "medicine line" (LaDow 3). Erdrich defines the North Dakota/Saskatchewan border largely vis a vis *Ojibwe* and *Métis* women's interactions within and across tribal territory, mainly through Fleur's and Pauline's characterizations.

⁴⁶ Senator Henry Dawes was the primary proponent in the passing of the General Allotment Act of 1887, also known as the Dawes Act. This act provided Native American families with one-quarter section (160 acres); each single person over eighteen was given 80 acres; and all other single persons under eighteen were given 40 acres. This law reduced the total amount of Native American land by sixty-five percent. After reservation lands were allotted, surplus lands were opened for white homesteaders. See Bennett. 779.

The novel centers on stories told by Nanapush and the *Métis* mixed-blood tribal member Pauline Puyat.⁴⁷ Nanapush and Pauline retell their struggles with the changes brought about by U.S. government land policies. They also focus on the life of Fleur Pillager, who, along with Moses Pillager, is the last surviving member of the historical Pillager band of *Ojibwe*. The Pillager band of *Ojibwe* are feared and highly regarded in *Tracks*; therefore, Fleur's life is mythologized based on her ancestral heritage and her family's cultural continuity in the region. She symbolizes the embodiment of *Ojibwe* cultural beliefs and practices, and serves a vehicle for the novel's transmission of *Ojibwe* oral traditions. Also, because Fleur is cast as a Pillager, she is a paradigmatic figure of *Ojibwe* tribal authenticity, nationalism, survivance, and continuance between North Dakota and Saskatchewan territories.

In the novel's introduction, Nanapush retells the stories of Fleur's life to her daughter, his adopted granddaughter, Lulu Nanapush. Nanapush's stories of Fleur provide Lulu with her familial history and his stories are meant to encourage Lulu to carry *Ojibwe* tribal traditions and the Pillager heritage into the future. Pauline's narration of Fleur, however, is influenced by her *Métis* mixed-blood identity on the reservation. She is at odds with tribal life due to her heritage, her longing to obtain power and control of her surroundings, and her need to experience whiteness as a means of overcoming her internal struggles with the *Ojibwe* community's perceptions of mixed blood tribal members, specifically their perceptions of her Puyat family. Like *So Far From God's* La Caridad and Doña Felicia, and *Daughters of the Dust's* Miz Emma Julia, Lucy, and

⁴⁷ *Métis* is a term for mixed-blood tribal members in Canada. They are predominantly of European (Scottish and French), Cree, and *Ojibwe* ancestry. See Foster, 14.

Elizabeth, *Tracks*' female character Fleur embodies an indigenous female identity and subjectivity that is recalcitrant toward European American culture, while Pauline embodies the mixed-blood tribal member who is unsuccessful at claiming a healthy identity and subjectivity.

Similarly to Dash's poetic inscription of black female subjectivities on Dawtuh Island, Erdrich's *Tracks* poetically inscribes an *Ojibwe* female subjectivity through memory as a physical process of interaction with Matchimanito Lake. By introducing scholarship on memory, the body, and geography, we can begin to understand how memory of lands alters Fleur's identity and subjectivity on the reservation. Catriona Sandilands in *Material Feminisms* notes that memory is a physical process that elicits a "sensory experience" on the body, which allows us to engage with the world around us with "greater physical ease" (272-73). Our bodies hold memories of places we experience, and as a result the body is actively engaged with other memories formed by mental processes such as human interactions that are physical and mental. What this means is that lands and landscapes hold memories for people, just as human interactions do. Sandilands' concept of the female body and memory can help explain Fleur's character development in *Tracks* as it relates to her physical interactions with the land. It will also aid in making transparent the historical and cultural realities of *Ojibwe*-centered worldviews, since lands and landscapes in *Tracks* are central to Fleur's understandings of her identity and subjectivity. As Allen observes, "Our physicality – which always and everywhere includes our spirituality, mentality, emotionality, social institutions, and processes – is a microform of all physicality" (*Off the Reservation* 118). Allen's observation is relevant because for Fleur, the "spirit lands" surrounding her Pillager

family cabin are deeply connected to the waters of Matchimanito Lake, where she reaffirms herself as an *Ojibwe* woman.

Before discussing land poetics formed by *Misshepeshu* and Matchimanito Lake, it is important to establish Fleur's close connection with her Pillager family, their land, and her power to protect this land. In the first chapter of *Tracks* we learn that Fleur is sick with tuberculosis and her entire family has died from the disease. Nanapush reveals that "the sickness" occurred as a result of the tribe's move west and their close contact with Jesuit missionaries. Nanapush buries Fleur's Pillager family, heals Fleur's tuberculosis, and then urges her to stay with him where the rest of the tribal community lived, because he said "The land will go...The land will be sold and measured" (1-8). Nanapush also fears for her because in *Ojibwe* culture it is dangerous to live among the spirits of the dead, since as Jill Jepson reminds us in "Dimensions of Homing and Displacement in Louise Erdrich's *Tracks*," "The lake near Fleur's house is perilous, the land is haunted, and the woods are inhabited by the ghosts of dead Pillagers, 'moving lights and lamps of people,' who refuse to speak to the living and laugh among themselves (9). Nanapush's attempt to persuade Fleur is partly due to his desire for her to become part of the tribal community on the other side of Matchimanito Lake. However, Fleur's willful persistence that she stay on Pillager lands is an expression of her inter-tribal desire for Native sovereignty and self-determination.

Instead of staying with Nanapush, Fleur travels across Matchimanito Lake, back to her Pillager family cabin and lands, isolated from the rest of the tribal community, alone with little to eat. Despite the threats of land removal by federal agents requesting fees for land allotments as part of the General Land Allotment Act of 1887, Fleur

remained unharmed and her family's lands were not removed by agents, who would get lost in the woods trying to locate her cabin and were never found again (9). Eventually by the novel's conclusion, we learn that the federal agents take over Fleur's lands for development. But what is important to *Tracks*' narrative, prior to its conclusion, is that Fleur's sense of self develops from these early experiences between her ancestor's imparted knowledges, and her bodily self in relation to the lands, especially Matchimanito Lake.⁴⁸

Matchimanito Lake is first described in *Tracks* by Nanapush as the dwelling of "the lake monster, *Misshepesu*" who "hid himself [there] and waited" (8). However, in Pauline's narrations, the relationship between Matchimanito Lake, *Misshepesu*, and Fleur is told in greater detail. Pauline describes the lake as "cold and glassy," with waves (10). Pauline's account of Fleur's drownings in Matchimanito Lake casts the lake as uninviting, harsh, yet translucent, which helps develop the physical conditions typical of lakes found in locations where *Ojibwe* tribes inhabit.⁴⁹ The lake is therefore a geographical element central to northern North Dakota *Ojibwe* life; and, therefore, representative of an aspect of the material borderlands that inform *Ojibwe* history, memory, and identity.

Fleur almost drowns twice in Matchimanito Lake, but the first time she is rescued by men, who later end up lost or dead. The second time she drowns, Fleur hisses at the man who tries to revive her, urging him to take her place, and later we learn he avoids the water and other tribal members, and eventually drowns in his bathtub (11-12). Pauline's

⁴⁸ *Matchimanito* means evil spirit.

⁴⁹ Especially in the border regions of North Dakota, Minnesota, and Canada. See Smith.

accounts of Fleur's survival after submerging her body in the lake, and the subsequent tragic endings of the men who attempt to save her, inform readers that the act of attempting to remove or revive Fleur is a curse; something to be avoided. Fleur's acts may at first seem to be accidental, but as the narrative progresses, readers come to understand that her drownings have purpose. Her drownings connect storytelling to *Ojibwe*-centered topography and bodily comportment. Therefore her drownings represent the intersection between culturally-situated geographies and the physical embodiment necessary to align oneself with *Ojibwe* tribal authenticity. Fleur's relationship to Lake Matchimanito, then, is integral to not only her "resemblance" of Pillager tribal practices that risk being forgotten, but also to the community's awareness that they are at an historical, and geographic point where these practices risk being lost.

The water monster, *Misshepesu*, is introduced in Erdrich's narrative as an antagonist to Fleur's protagonist. Fleur submerges her body in Lake Matchimanito to summon *Misshepesu* and attempt to reclaim the lake for *Ojibwe* tribal members. The water monster also signifies the importance placed on living near water in *Ojibwe* cosmology. According to Theresa Smith in *The Island of the Anishnaabeg*, *Misshepesu*, the water monster, is an *Ojibwe manitou* (spirit), who is often depicted as "horned and always of immense size" (98). *Misshepesu* typically lives in the deep parts of bodies of water in northern U.S. states and Canada, but is found wherever *Ojibwe* clans approach water. The *Ojibwe* have a deep fear of *Misshepesu*, and either refuse to speak his name, or are reluctant to do so, especially during warm months of the year when the waters of the Great Lakes and other bodies of water in northern U.S. and southern Canada thaw, allowing *Misshepesu* to freely swim. He is also associated with causing boaters and

swimmers to drown (99-100). In addition, as Victoria Brehm notes in “The Metamorphosis of an Ojibwa *Manitou*,” the myth of *Misshepeshu* can be traced to either pre-contact customs that reinforced traditional hunting practices, or post-contact cultural limitations on hunting as a result of “refugee problems or to fur company policies that were forcing hunters to preserve peltries to ensure a constant harvest of furs in the future.” In either case, *Misshepeshu* has evolved as “an enforcer of hunting practices – the game boss who decides who hunts and how much game is taken. The price of ignoring him is the destruction of the known world, symbolically the culture” (684-85).

Thus, Fleur’s bodily submersion in Lake Matchimanito is an act she must perform to save her community. Pauline’s account of Fleur’s drownings, and her account of the fates of the men who try to save her, is a story firmly rooted in *Ojibwe* culture. Fleur allows her body to be offered to *Misshepeshu*, as an *Ojibwe mide* shaman would do in order to create a balance; in *Tracks* this balance is between *Ojibwe* food sustenance and external forces that impinge on tribal abilities to find food, such as U.S. government land allotment policies, fur traders, and the impending presence of the lumber company who wants to take their lands. As Michael Dorris states, “the water and the water god” remain potent distinguishing features of *Ojibwe* identity, which helps differentiate them from other rural North Dakota people (45). Thus Fleur’s interactions with the lake are indicative of the physical, material, and metaphorical lines between *Ojibwe* traditions and European American cultural influences.

It is also important to point out that as a female *Ojibwe*, interactions with the water monster *Misshepeshu* were not as common as interactions between male *Ojibwe* tribal members and *Misshepeshu*. If a female *Ojibwe* shaman does attempt this

confrontation, and successfully resists the power of the water monster, it “reinforces women’s cultural power in a patrilineal, patriarchal society” which is typical of *Ojibwe* tribal cultures (Brehm 686). Perhaps the most important aspect of Fleur’s interactions with Matchimanito Lake and the water monster *Misshepeshu* is that she is attempting these traditional *Ojibwe* rituals on her own. As a woman, her bodily submersions in the lake become powerful symbols of an *Ojibwe* woman’s identity and subjectivity.

As Ruth Frankenberg observes, women’s conceptualization of place, once they are located there, “is in a landscape structured by racism, a conceptual mapping of race, self, and others takes shape, following from and feeding the physical context” (69). Undoubtedly, the development of Fleur’s female subjectivity, and Pauline’s, while a manifestation of bodily interchanges with the physical reservation, also occurs at the intersections between *Ojibwe* and European American conceptions of race, gender, cultures, and lands. In one of Pauline’s accounts of life in the North Dakota border region of Lake Matchimanito, Fleur and Pauline border cross from Matchimanito Lake reservation south to the white settler town of Argus for work. Pauline arrives in Argus almost a year and a half prior to Fleur, and is able to form her own impressions about Argus, while she attempts to bond with her sister (Beidler 23). She sees Argus as her opportunity to “be like my mother, who showed her half-white” and “to be like my grandfather, a pure Canadian.” For Pauline, Argus represents progress and survival. Living on the reservation meant physical, spiritual, and emotional annihilation because she felt that “to hang back was to perish.” Pauline’s observations are telling. She perceives reservation life as part of a tribal world that will soon vanish. Indeed, when Pauline states that it was important to see “through the eyes of the world outside of us”

she is alluding to her view that the European American worldview, since it was the dominant culture, should compel her and her tribal community to assimilate. She is, in many ways, compelled by her desire for a white identity (14). Here, Pauline reveals the discordancy between her felt sense of mixed-blood tribal identity and her desire to be accepted into white society. Hence, “the world outside of us” is indicative of the impending spatial dominance of European Americans in *Ojibwe* territory, a space felt both mentally and physically, which causes Pauline and Fleur’s subjectivities to either be repressed and conformed to whiteness, as in the case of Pauline, or reasserted and confirmed as *Ojibwe*, as in the case of Fleur.

Unlike Pauline, Fleur crosses to Argus and asks the Catholic church for a job, not to assimilate to white society and culture, but as a means to acquire money to pay the U.S. federal agents for her land allotment. Fleur’s sense of survival is rooted in her *Ojibwe* culture and her sense of self depends on securing her Pillager family lands. What is curious, though, is that even though Pauline and Fleur’s identities and subjectivities take vastly different turns, they are in direct tension with each other and this tension is a major aspect of plot development. By comparing their reservation border crossing experiences, I will show how race, gender and class are shaped and altered depending on the female character’s subject position in the reservation and by their crossings to and from Matchimanito Lake reservation to the town of Argus.

As mentioned previously, Pauline longs to assimilate into white society, mainly to gain power and agency since she feels like an outsider and alienated in her *Ojibwe* reservation community. This is partly due to Pauline losing her mother and father. The Puyat family were “skinnners in the clan for which the name was lost.” About a year and a

half prior to Fleur's crossing to Argus (Beidler 25), Pauline arrives there with plans "to learn the lace-making trade from nuns," but instead she was made to sweep the floors in the butcher shop (14). Her lack of economic success after crossing to Argus is a catalyst toward her growing interest in Christianity, which she feels is a means for her to garner the power and agency she desires, but lacks due to her mixed-blood status and the loss of her Puyat family name in the tribal community. Sidner Larson in "The Fragmentation of a Tribal People in Louise Erdrich's *Tracks*" remarks that mixed-blood tribal members were considered "peripheral to tribal government by traditional members." In addition, "traditional members were consistently opposed to giving up tribal land and to the process of assimilation into white culture" (4). Larson's claims make sense when Pauline is examined as a "peripheral" tribal member within the *Ojibwe* reservation. She is already cast into the outermost spatial and existential barriers of the reservation community because she is *Métis*, a mixed-blood indigenous and European Canadian tribal member. Thus, Larson's account of Pauline's mixed-blood status provides the background context for reading Pauline's desire to cross to the white town of Argus. Pauline assumes her light skin and mixed-blood status will help her accilimate to the white town of Argus and improve her socioeconomic status – whether or not she returns to Lake Matchimanito.

As Friedman argues in "Identity Politics, Syncretism, Catholicism, and Anishinabe Religion in Louise Erdrich's *Tracks*," Pauline's crossing to Argus and her felt experiences before and after crossing reveal "the self-hatred of the colonized subject" who "rejects *Chippewa* culture as uncivilized and embraces everything white" (112). Friedman's analysis emphasizes the underlying causes behind Pauline's ambitions, which follow a similar trajectory as Nella Larson's character Clare in *Passing*. Pauline's stay in

Argus, her unsuccessful attempts to forge a friendship with Fleur, and her subsequent behavior through the rest of *Tracks*, follows patterns similar to Larson's novel. Pauline, like Clare in *Passing*, shows signs of disillusionment with white society and attempts at reentry into her culture of origin. This is followed by a total loss of her former identity, shed in the name of an aspect of the dominant culture (for Clare it is marriage to a successful white man, for Pauline it is complete devotion to Christianity). In both cases, these female characters eventually display an aberrant behavior toward and in the midst of, their former culture. In Pauline's case this is brought on by religious zealotry, which the narrative suggests is due to a psychological breakdown, but not a murder/suicide as in the case of Clare in *Passing*. To be sure, Pauline's stay in Argus is unsuccessful. In fact, her identity became even more oppressed in Argus. She did not learn a new trade, nor did she cultivate the former trades of her Puyat family. While there, she noticed her aunt Regina's status in her family was as a second-rate family member. She also felt that at fifteen she was "alone, and so poor looking I was invisible to most customers and to the men in the shop" until they needed her. Otherwise she "blended in to the stained brown walls, a skinny big-nosed girl with staring eyes (15-16). Pauline's growing internalization of white consciousness, as she perceived it, manifested itself as her felt sense of bodily lack; she attacked her body as not conforming to her definitions of white Anglo conceptions of economic and aesthetic value.

Cornell in "Woman Looking: Revisioning Pauline's Subject Position in Louise Erdrich's *Tracks*" sees Pauline's developing character as limited if readers only consider her feelings of invisibility in Argus and her apparent gradual madness without also considering that this madness is a pivotal point towards the creation of her own female

subjectivity. But what Cornell is not considering is that Pauline narrates her own story using logic and reason – through a white, male patriarchal lens. In addition, Pauline’s first chapter describes her acceptance of Western, capitalist notions of class by her self-described “poor looking” appearance in Argus. As a mixed-blood, Pauline is in a geographic and philosophical bind. She can neither accept her tribal heritage because her tribal community itself views mixed-bloods, especially the Puyats who have lost their known skills, as marginal within *Ojibwe* reservation life; and she experiences marginality in the white town of Argus, because she is poor and mixed-blood like her aunt Regina who is given second-class status in her own family. Unlike Lucy and Toady in *Daughters of the Dust*, Pauline’s border crossing experience is the beginning of her unsuccessful transformation to either reservation life or to life in Argus.

Fleur’s *Ojibwe* comportment and features place her at a different disadvantage than Pauline. Similarly to Pauline, Fleur is motivated to border cross from Matchimanito Lake reservation to the white town of Argus for socioeconomic reasons. However, as stated previously, Fleur travels to Argus to earn the money she needs to secure her Pillager family land allotment, while Pauline travels to Argus to create a new identity for herself. Unlike Pauline, Fleur’s identity and subjectivity are well-defined already. In fact, Fleur is the most *Ojibwe*-centered character in *Tracks*, even more so than Nanapush, who often narrates his gradual involvement with tribal government and U.S. government bureaucracy. Through Pauline’s narration of Fleur’s stay in Argus, readers are made aware of Fleur’s visible identity. Pauline describes Fleur’s physical features in both literal terms and figuratively by claiming in the following passage that

Her cheeks were wide and flat, her hands large, chapped, muscular. Fleur's shoulders were broad and curved as a yoke, her hips fishlike, slippery, narrow. An old green dress clung to her waist, worn thin where she sat. Her glossy braids were like the tails of animals, and swung against her when she moved, deliberately, slowly in her work, held in and half-tamed. But only half. I could tell, but the others never noticed. They never looked into her sly brown eyes or noticed her teeth, strong and sharp and very white. Her legs were bare, and since she padded in beadworked mocassins they never saw that her fifth toes were missing. They never knew she drowned. They were blinded, they were stupid, they only saw her in the flesh. (18)

Pauline's descriptions of Fleur are informed by her experiences both in Matchimanito Lake reservation and in Argus. She has deep knowledge of *Ojibwe* culture, language, and practices; but, since she is a peripheral tribal member, she also is equally informed of European American culture, language, and practices. Therefore, Pauline's account of Fleur's appearance needs to be weighed by her fluctuating contextual embodiments as both an outsider and insider – in both Lake Matchimanito and Argus.

In fact, Pauline's own subject position is formed, in part, by how she views Fleur. Pauline's subjectivity, according to Friedman is really "Pauline's projection onto Fleur of her hatred of her own gendered racial body" which "extends [Franz Fanon's] analysis of race into an exploration of the intersections of racial and sexual colonizations and their

attendant psychopathologies” (113).⁵⁰ Indeed, Pauline’s descriptions of Fleur contradict her new Christian beliefs, acknowledging *Ojibwe* mythologies, even while she tries to distance herself from them. Pauline also describes Fleur as uncivilized, while belittling the white men at the butcher shop for being drawn to her. Armstrong likens Pauline’s descriptions of Fleur in the above passage as reminiscent of the “discourse of savagery versus civilization used by the Puritan settlers of America to justify their appropriation of land from the native inhabitants” (26). In fact, Pauline attempts to gain agency in white society partly through the colonizing gaze she directs at Fleur. Pauline is deeply aware of her own *Métis* mixed-blood identity in Argus and this knowledge leads her to distance herself from Fleur and the *Ojibwe* culture Fleur represents.

Despite her attempts, Pauline is instead recasting herself as not only deeply knowledgeable of *Ojibwe* culture, but in full belief of its discourses. Despite what readers learn about Fleur’s identity and experiences in Argus, Pauline is revealing more about her own subjectivity through her descriptions of Fleur (Tagore 72). By denigrating Fleur, Pauline is also revealing her jealousy of Fleur, which compounds Pauline’s apparent conflicted sense of identity and her unease in both tribal and white cultures, as several scholars have noted.⁵¹ Therefore, what is at play in Pauline’s account of her and Fleur’s border crossing experiences is a complex matrix of Pauline’s mixed-blood racial identity, her socioeconomic status, and her awareness and knowledge of two cultures in conflict, along with the barriers to acceptance and assimilation with being “mixed” racially, and therefore not completely accepted in either location.

⁵⁰ See Fanon, 100.

⁵¹ See Walker, Potter, Van Dyke, Hessler, Sarve-Gorham, M. Anderson, and Walsh.

Pauline's narration of Fleur also casts her as an indigenous *berdache*, which is defined as a person who was anatomically male or female, but often "assumed the dress, occupations, and behavior of the opposite sex to effect a change in their gender status," a role that held a powerful status in indigenous tribes in North America (Callendar 443). Barak describes Fleur's character in the following passage as

The quintessential *berdache*... She is a good hunter, better than most men on the reservation. She is big and strong, capable of lifting sides of beef and pork by herself... She has great luck in cards, winning enough in her stay in Argus to pay taxes on her land for two or three years... She lives alone, until Eli falls in love with her and comes to join her. Then their sexual exploits give the reservation plenty to talk about. She is also a healer, collecting medicines and distributing them. (56)

Through the lens of the *Ojibwe berdache*, Fleur also becomes representative of a peripheral tribal member. However, for Fleur, her peripheral status is one of *Ojibwe* tribal authenticity. Therefore, while tribal members fear her and, at times, gossip cruelly about her and ostracize her, Fleur represents what they either have lost already, or are near losing – their own tribal identities. What Pauline's descriptions of Fleur also reveal are that as an *Ojibwe* woman, Fleur's attitudes and behavior after crossing to Argus are informed by her *Ojibwe* heritage, which is in opposition to white social norms. For example, only men played cards after work in the butcher shop, but Fleur asks the men if she can be dealt in to play (18). In Argus, as in the reservation, Fleur breaks with established social norms. In the butcher shop where she was given work, she becomes a threat to the men's skills at card playing and gambling. But beyond Fleur's gender-

mixing qualities, she also engenders the role of trickster, which Barak states is often associated with *berdaches* (57-58). Fleur's trickster and *berdache* qualities represent *Ojibwe*-centered consciousness, but within the white town of Argus, these aspects of *Ojibwe* tribal identity, especially from a *Ojibwe* woman's surface politics of the body, become physical and metaphorical manifestations of the border line between two conflicting racialized and gendered worldviews. The ideology of U.S. nation-state manifest destiny and its usurpation of indigenous lands, occurred in northern U.S. borders with Canada as a primacy of dominant Anglo settler's bodily positions over *Ojibwe* presence outside of reservation territories. The white men's rape of Fleur at the butcher shop is, therefore, a symbol of the historical racial and gendered violence between *Ojibwe* and Anglo settlers.

In confirmation of Fleur's trickster qualities Pauline observes that "it wasn't just that she was a *Chippewa*, or even that she was a woman, it wasn't that she was good-looking or even that she was alone that made their brains hum. It was how she played cards" (18). Pauline later remarks, after Fleur leaves Argus, that "Power travels in the bloodlines, handed out before birth...It comes down through the hands...good at dealing cards" (31). But she also learned to play cards from Nanapush. In fact one of the first things she does upon returning to the reservation is play cards with him. Her knowledge of gambling is *Ojibwe*-centered, meaning that Nanapush has taught her the French card game, *vingt-un*, poker, "or variations" through the cultural lens of *Ojibwe* spiritual teachings (21). The act of card playing for Fleur is also a trickster game of chance. In Vizenor's *The People Named the Chippewa*, he recounts the story of the "great gambler" of *Ojibwe* oral tradition. In Vizenor's tale the "great gambler" who was "round in shape,

smooth and white” was met by *Naanabozho*, the trickster figure of *Ojibwe* mythology. *Naanabozho* plays “the four ages of man” with the gambler, a game that relies on four figures staying upright in a dish when they are shaken. In Vizenor’s tale, *Naanabozho* makes a teasing whistle sound just as the gambler shakes the dish and wins, ensuring that the woodland tribal people would not lose their spirits (4-6).

Like Vizenor’s story of the *Ojibwe* game of chance, Erdrich’s novel *Tracks* retells the *Ojibwe* myth of the great gambler and the woodland trickster, but instead of a male trickster, Fleur symbolizes the female *Ojibwe* trickster. Kristan Sarve-Gorham helps situate Fleur’s card playing in a familiar trope of Western frontier gambling over lands, aiding in my argument that Fleur’s crossing to Argus reaffirms her subjectivity as *Ojibwe* and land-focused, rather than a loss of healthy subjectivity, as in the case of Pauline. Sarve-Gorham states that “poker becomes a signifier of the Indian/white frontier since land is directly or indirectly the prize of the game” (280). Indeed, the notion of “the Western Frontier” is scrutinized for its European American hegemonic definitions when Fleur wins at poker against three white male settlers and takes the money she wins to pay for her Pillager family land allotments.

However, Fleur’s presence at the card table in Argus represents the colonized woman’s body “out of place”: she is playing with white men in a white town, and the other players, Lily, Tor, and Dutch, are accustomed to card playing and gambling on their terms, which causes a cultural conflict between *Ojibwe* trickster concepts of games of chance and European-centered concepts of card playing. Pauline also provides a reminder to readers that gambling is a male-centered card game in Argus, noting that “Lily couldn’t believe...that a woman could be smart enough to play cards.” In addition, Fleur

is called a disparaging term when she plays well then loses, prompting Tor to remark “the squaw can’t bluff” (20). The white male card players, as Pauline pointed out earlier, can only perceive Fleur through the racialized and sexualized lenses of colonialist discourses. To Lily, Tor, and Dutch, it is customary to bluff when playing poker, but Fleur is playing an *Ojibwe* game of chance in the role of the trickster.

Pauline provides readers with the *Ojibwe* cultural perspective on Fleur’s card playing, stating that her repeated win of one dollar each game was “too consistent for luck,” adding that “she never had a freak deal or anything above a straight. She only took on her low cards...she beat with pairs and never bluffed” and after a month she still “ended each night with exactly one dollar” (21-22). Then Fleur plays one last time, playing as if “chance were all she had.” All of the men put their full summer’s pay into the game and Fleur, pulling the last card, “drew a long breath...the card shook” and she wins, just like *Naanabozho* the trickster does when playing the “great gambler” in Vizenor’s tale. Though they wanted to play again, Fleur yawned and left the table. Shortly afterwards, Lily, Tor, and Dutch rape Fleur. It can be surmised that they raped her as retribution for losing all of their summer’s pay. This would have hurt them a great deal economically, but it also hurt their white male masculinity, since losing to a woman, let alone an *Ojibwe* woman, would have appeared as a threat to their white male superiority, which is the dominant cultural discourse and it is also the material, socio-economic reality for white settlers in Argus. As Andrea Smith explains in her essay “Not an Indian Tradition: The Sexual Colonization of Native Peoples,” incidents of violence, such as the rape of Fleur, are part of the system of racism and sexism of a white patriarchal society and when “a Native woman suffers abuse, this abuse is not just an

attack on her identity as a woman, but on her identity as Native” (71). The boundaries between Argus and Lake Matchimanito are represented through the presence of Fleur, as phenomenological borders created by colonialist discourses and practices. The boundaries are felt materially through economic hardship and gain, and the geohistorical presence of colonialism is then transposed onto Fleur’s body as a violent act that refuses her very identity.

Fleur leaves right afterwards and crosses back to Matchimanito Lake reservation, while Pauline reveals that a tornado strikes Argus at the same time, locking Lily, Tor, and Dutch in the butcher’s freezer locker, freezing them to death. Upon Fleur’s trip back from Argus, Nanapush noticed that “the lake man retreated to the deepest rocks. The fish struck hungrily dawn and dusk, and no boats were lost...she kept the lake thing controlled,” confirming that Fleur’s power as a female *Ojibwe* shaman has been strengthened by her crossings to and from Argus (35). Fleur’s act of crossing from Argus to Lake Matchimanito alters tribal members’ perceptions of Fleur, because upon her return they are able to reengage in *Ojibwe* culture and practices more easily and abundantly; hence, their ability to fish in the waters of *Lake Matchimanito* without the fear of the water monster *Misshepeshu*, and with less choppy waters that would unsettle their boats (35).

In summary, Fleur’s visible identity is a detriment to her successful experience in Argus. Her visible identity is racialized and sexualized by the white male workers at the butcher shop in Argus. However, Fleur’s subjectivity is deeply rooted in an *Ojibwe* worldview, linking her sense of self with her ancestors, her Pillager family lands, and traditional *Ojibwe* spirituality. Thus, Fleur’s inner sense of power and agency is

strengthened from her experience in Argus, despite being raped. She reaffirms her *Ojibwe* and Pillager family ties to the lands, telling Nanapush that “I shouldn’t have left this place” (38). However, Nanapush provides readers with the knowledge that her mythic powers to “control the lake thing” have increased since she returned to the reservation. Her identity therefore, is re-established upon her return, and she regains her inner powers and publicly perceived powers over water and land.

As Mishuana Goeman notes, “Engaging both historic attachments to particular geographies and imperial histories that undermine such attachments, Native conceptions of space defy a dominant, Cartesian model of imperial subjectivity in which consciousness emerges out of itself (‘I think; therefore I am’), and in abstraction from the particularities of history and geography” (295). Following Goeman, a critique of Erdrich’s character Fleur reveals that her consciousness is derived from a rootedness in the lands, which provides her with the histories, memories, and knowledges she needs to be a fully realized female *Ojibwe* shaman. It is also helpful to examine Fleur’s identity and subjectivity by what Jepson refers to as narrative constructions of “homing and displacement” in which “homing energies emerge in natural landscapes and in characters’ intimacy with the land, while displacement is reflected in indifference toward and destruction of the land” (26-27). Crossings to and from borderland locations in *Tracks*, therefore, symbolize material and metaphorical crossings that female characters undertake. Border crossings in *Tracks*, then, signify on the permeable constructions of race, gender, and class in which cohesive female identities are either reasserted as in the case of Fleur, or are denied, as in the case of Pauline. It is in this in-between space,

between tribal consciousness and impending forces of Western patriarchy, that Pauline and Fleur make pivotal transformations toward their final acts in the novel.

While Fleur's subjectivity is defined by land and border crossings, her character development is also defined by a language aesthetic resulting from the presence of *Anishinaabemowin* (*Ojibwe* language) within the Western novel. As Mignolo makes clear, "languages are not something human beings *have* but they are part of what human beings *are*. As such, languages are embedded in the body and in the memories (geo-historically located) of each person" (author's emphasis "Theorizing" 207). In the next paragraphs, I will examine the presence of *Anishinaabemowin* in *Tracks*, both as a signifier of border language and as a signifier of Fleur's subjectivity. I will also examine *Anishinaabemowin* for its linguistic and hermeneutic codes, which render the narrative as a moment of transcultural readerly engagement.

In the first chapter titled "Winter 1912/*Manitou-geezisohns*/Little Spirit Sun,"⁵² Nanapush recounts his rescue of Fleur from the illness (tuberculosis) that was spread by white settlers into tribal communities. Nanapush is telling Fleur's life story to her daughter, Lulu, in order to mend their relationship and provide Lulu with a familial heritage and cultural bond that she has lost from being sent, by Fleur, to a U.S. government boarding school. The bilingual chapter title at the opening pages of *Tracks* establishes a cultural continuity from pre-contact *Anishinaabe* identity to reservation era life, as Nanapush speaks both English and *Anishinabemowin*⁵³ to Lulu and introduces the

⁵² All chapter titles contain the season, year, *Anishinaabe* text, and the English direct translation.

⁵³ *Anishinaabemowin* is the language of the *Anishinaabe*, who are also known by their European names: *Ojibwe* or *Chippewa*.

oral tradition through storytelling. In the following section, I will analyze what I refer to as narratological direct and indirect translations of *Ojibwe* discourse found in *Tracks*' inclusion of *Anishinaabemowin*, mythologies, and humor and teasing dialogue. I will then examine how direct and indirect translations of *Ojibwe* discourses define Fleur's subjectivity, which, I argue, develops from grouping *Ojibwe*-centered linguistic codes.

In the chapter title, the words "*Manitou-geezisohns*" are semiotic signs, but as language markers they have no readily available meaning for non-native readers other than its differentiation from the English language – it refers back to itself. The words "*Manitou-geezisohns*" function as both sign and signifier of histories, memories, and knowledges that are individual and communal referents in *Tracks*, but are not revealed to readers except for the translated words in English "Little Spirit Sun," which do not lend themselves to any relative code in U.S. national culture. The signification of *manitou-geezisohns* then, is external to the language of the narrative because the direct translation of "*Manitou-geezisohns*" to "Little Spirit Sun" does not get resolved by the text, unless the reader understands that it refers to the point in time when the story was told, which would be sometime during daylight in December.

In addition to bilingual chapter titles, the narrator Nanapush provides bilingual names of Fleur's deceased family members for her daughter Lulu, who acts as a silent character listening to him tell her the story of Fleur's life. During the opening to Nanapush's story, he tells Lulu the reasons Fleur abandoned her, and quickly his story turns to Lulu's understanding of her Pillager family genealogy, noting that

All she [Fleur] had was raw power, and the names of the dead that filled her. I can speak them now. They have no more interest in any of us. Old

Pillager. *Ogimaakwe*, Boss Woman, his wife. *Asasaweminikwesens*, Chokecherry Girl. *Bineshii*, Small Bird, also known as Josette. And the last boy *Ombaashi*, He is Lifted by Wind. (7)

Nanapush's bilingual storytelling represents two cultural presences within Matchimanito Lake reservation: *Ojibwe* and English. It also provides direct translations of *Ojibwe* names into English. The names of Fleur's family members are visual and textual signs that signify *Ojibwe* identity. However, their names act as interpretive undercurrents to their associated English signifiers, making their presence known to readers, but without a traceable referent. If non-native readers attempt to interpret the English translations literally, the *Ojibwe* names would still not be understood for their histories, memories, and identities, which were shaped by thinking from *Anishinaabeg* (*Ojibwe* plural) felt experiences.

Vizenor describes this experience within native literature as a play of Jacques Derrida's trace by using the metaphor of the shadow. Vizenor observes that "The shadows are the silence in heard stories, the silence that bears a referent of tribal memories and experience...The shadow is the unsaid presence in names, the memories in silence, and the imagination of tribal experiences" (*Manifest* 72-73). Also, Mackay notes that "the shadow...like difference, like the trace, represents the unsayable, the unwritable, and thus the extralinguistic" (257). Vizenor and Mackay address the point where referents become untraceable back to their original signs and signifiers. The extralinguistic is the interstitial point where an aesthetic value arises when readers are introduced to moments of linguistic translations (direct/indirect and indirect without an original *Anishinaabe* trace) within *Tracks*. At this point in the reading process, the reader

recognizes the extralinguistic shadow signs for what they are, but reconciles the “unsayable, unwritable” experiences within the context surrounding these signs by negotiating meaning through the narrative’s performativity, which requires the reader’s active participation in the creation of meaning.

Nanapush directly addresses a presupposed listener, Lulu, stating, “Granddaughter, you are the child of the invisible, the ones who disappeared” and “Listen well” (1, 34). It is at this moment that readers sense their own presence is in the role of listening in on an act of orality between an elder tribal storyteller and his kin, which as Flavin notes, serves to remind readers that the novel is engaging in a representation of what occurs during “traditional Native American songs and poems to capture in written form a sense of oral performance” (2). Hence, Erdrich’s narrative engages readers in a performativity reserved for orality, but expressed textually in her novel; therefore, the performative moment in the text is *Ojibwe*-centered and marks a shift from thinking *in* English to thinking *in Ojibwe*.

In this passage, a type of readerly transformation occurs. Vizenor claims that this transformation occurs within active readers, during the process of reading trickster discourses; but, I contend, it also occurs through the act of reading bilingual texts in *Tracks*. Thus, “Old Pillager. *Ogimaakwe*, Boss Woman, his wife. *Asasweminikwesens*, Chokecherry Girl. *Bineshii*, Small Bird, also known as Josette. And the last boy *Ombaashi*, He is Lifted by Wind,” are untraceable back to orality in the phenomenological sense of its performance, because they are visual and textual signs without clear signifying capabilities. To Lulu, and to readers, the named Pillagers in Nanapush’s story are silent, withheld from both native and non-native

audience/listener/reader experience, and can only be imagined within the context of the narrative's textual goals. It should also be noted that the Pillager family names are names of the deceased, and as Nanapush points out, he can "speak them now," though explaining their lives is left silent.

This silence in Erdrich's text is what Kimberly Blaeser asserts as the "dead voices," taken from Vizenor's novel by the same name, and they are associated with names in isolation from their original tribal contexts (20). Yet, in the reader's process of active participation while reading *Tracks*, these *Ojibwe* language signifiers aid in the creation of Fleur's subjectivity; and refer to a specific border location: the fictional reservation, Lake Matchimanito. Fleur's story, as told by Nanapush in the first chapter of *Tracks*, is infused with *Ojibwe* signifiers which give root to her *Ojibwe* identity. In addition, Nanapush's naming of Fleur's family members provides readers with linguistic signifiers that reveal Fleur as an *Ojibwe* woman who becomes the sole survivor of disease and illness. What also occurs is a silence in the narrative, created by the extralinguistic gaps in translation and the missing stories of Fleur's deceased family members. As Blaeser reminds us, silence is a powerful element of tribal communication or connection, maintaining a power of its own (20). When silence is introduced in *Tracks*, though, it becomes an ambiguous referent, holding multiple meanings depending on the reader's subject position – native or non-native. Thus silence in the context of *Tracks* is full of potential interpretations and meanings, and is an untraceable element in the narrative. Yet, this silence, this gap, becomes dissonance, which then becomes an invitation to understanding "*Ojibwe*-ness." The direct translations of chapter titles and familial names within *Tracks* would pose an unresolvable problem if not for the fact that these textual

signs are not solely reliant on their own presence in order for readers to create meaning and value from them. These direct translations are intertwined with indirect translations produced by mythologies associated with animal spirits, clan totems, and anthropomorphic shapeshiftings that appear in both Nanapush and Pauline's narrations.

Fleur's transformation to, and affinities with, animals create a trickster discourse in the novel. In both Nanapush and Pauline's narrations, animal imagery aids in the development of the border linguistic codes established already through bilinguality. For example, Pauline describes Fleur's teeth as "strong and sharp and very white" (18). She also describes Fleur as wolf-like, claiming that "I saw the wolf those men met down in Argus, the one who laughed and stuffed their money in her dress," while also describing Fleur's physical appearance as having the "skin of lakeweed" (22). In addition, Nanapush describes Fleur's vocal sounds during the birthing process by drawing analogies to various animals. Nanapush recalls Fleur's sounds as if "the *Manitous* all through the woods spoke through Fleur, loose, arguing...Turtle's quavering scratch, the Eagle's high shriek, Loon's crazy bitterness, Otter, the howl of Wolf, Bear's low rasp" (59). These figurative descriptions of Fleur's physical features and birthing vocalizations create a sense of Fleur's embodiment as anthropomorphic, casting Fleur as a trickster figure.

As a Pillager, Fleur is a member of the bear clan, but the narration also gives Fleur the qualities of wolf and the water monster *Misshepeshe*, as well as several other animals in the woods near Matchimanito Lake. Thus Fleur's anthropomorphic traits shape how she sees herself, giving her the power to successfully give birth to Lulu at the sight of an actual bear that storms into her cabin (60). Her own sense of inner strength is derived from her acceptance of these spirit guides as characteristics she embodies. Fleur

is courageous when almost drowning the Matchimanito Lake twice. She also voluntarily submerges herself in its waters to connect with the mythological *Misshepeshu*. And like the mythological wolf in *Ojibwe* mythology, she also knows how to mediate between the powers associated with *Misshepeshu* and the ability for her and her tribal community to hunt and fish in and around the lake. This imagery in Erdrich's novel aids in the reader's immersion in border linguistic codes, and can be classified as a type of border thinking, which Mignolo states is thinking from modernity's exteriority (*Local* 18).

These *Ojibwe* mythologies, though are written in English, the dominant language of the Western novel. But because they are signifying on *Ojibwe*-derived knowledges, they are narrative transcriptions. The transcription of *Ojibwe*-derived knowledges in a Western novel form is what I will refer to as indirect translation because the transcriptions are signifying on *Anishinaabemowin* and *Ojibwe* consciousness through the use of the English language, or what could be called the "*Ojibwe*-ization" of the English language in *Tracks*.⁵⁴ It is a different type of shadow than the shadow left by bilingual textuality in Erdrich's novel. It presents a translatable code that does not code switch linguistically, but rather it code switches hermeneutically due to readers interpretative positions: they grapple with the interdependency between *Ojibwe* and Western codes.⁵⁵ This effect on readers, the presence of a border language and the moment of invitation to engage in border thinking, can be referred to as a reverse transculturation experience, especially for non-native readers. Reverse transculturation is an experience for readers whose dominant language is typically English. It defines the type of readerly engagement

⁵⁴ I borrow from N'Zengou-Tayo's use of the phrase "creolization of English" in "Rewriting Folklore." 136.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

readers begin to have with Erdrich's novel *Tracks* when they become active participants in a bilingual, cross-culturally coded narrative. During the reading process, a reverse transculturation experience occurs when a reader accepts and begins to interpret the cultural codes of the non-dominant language – in this case *Ojibwe*. In *Tracks*, however, reverse transculturation as a reading experience is similar to the experience of reading *So Far from God*, yet differs from the experience of reading *Daughters of the Dust*. This is because *Daughters of the Dust*, according to Faloshade Alao, contains “phonetic transcriptions and syntactic idiosyncrasies” (238). *Tracks*, instead, contains literal translations from *Ojibwe* to English. While *Daughters of the Dust* does include stories referring to African mythological figures, characters and events, they do not mirror the thoughts, emotions, and actions garnered from non-Western mythologies like Erdrich's narrative.

As Rainwater reminds us when reading *Tracks*, referential codes are in a state of conflict with each other, the product of two opposing philosophical discourses, *Ojibwe* and Western/English. Rainwater borrows from Barthes when she notes that these conflicting codes become “anti-thetical strands within associative fields” (Barthes 288). Rainwater claims these “anti-thetical strands” cause an effect of liminality and marginality for the non-native reader (406). However, I would like to deepen Rainwater's analysis of conflicting coding systems in *Tracks* by continuing the discussion of Barthes' “associative fields.” Barthes remarked that the associative fields found within cultural codes in a narrative are represented by certain “social rules of speaking: encoded forms of narrative, encoded forms of discourse...” (289). *Tracks*' mythological codes are representative of *Ojibwe* knowledges within an *Ojibwe* cultural worldview. Yet, the

encoded form of narrative in which Barthes speaks is still rendered in a Western cultural narrative model. In other words, though the knowledges are *Ojibwe*, the narrative form is Western, and therefore *Ojibwe* knowledges are encoded twice: once through mythological, and therefore socio-cultural codes derived from *Ojibwe* discourse, and once through the English language, and therefore part of the linguistic coding of Western discourse. This pluritopic hermeneutic encourages a reader's active participation with *Tracks*, crossing cultural codes from English to *Ojibwe*, and potentially making cognitive leaps from liminality and marginality to thinking from an *Ojibwe* worldview.

The inclusion of humorous and teasing dialogue in *Tracks* is also the indirect translation of *Ojibwe* discourses. For example, Fleur is skinning a deer that her future lover Eli has been hunting. When Eli approaches her, she ignores him until he makes his presence known. Busy at the task of skinning the deer, Fleur remarks, "Little fly...Quit buzzing" (43). On a separate occasion when she is preparing to bathe Pauline, who has an offensive body odor due to her unorthodox Christian beliefs, Fleur asks her to undress. Pauline holds her clothes over herself in order to hide her body. Fleur interprets Pauline's behavior as shame because she is so thin, leading Fleur to remark "We're all skinny this year" (153). In the first example, "Little fly...Quit buzzing" is a remark meant to deflect "hostility into a lesson" (Spielman 110). Also Vine Deloria notes that in daily *Ojibwe* discourse the act of teasing serves to gently remind tribal members of customary practices they may have been ignoring (263). In the exchange between Fleur and Eli, Fleur found the deer first and was already skinning it when Eli came up to her. Knowing that he felt this was his deer that he had been hunting, Fleur teased him in order to point out that the deer had already been killed and if he wanted to share the meat with her then

that would be the customary thing to do instead of making accusations. In the second example, “We’re all skinny this year,” the humor spoken by Fleur to Pauline is meant to create a sense of solidarity in a common struggle with food shortages, which Joseph Bruchac states is part of Native American communication for the purpose of conveying “the importance of humility and the affirmation that laughter leads to learning and survival” (26-29). However, these aspects of humor also help define Fleur as an *Ojibwe* woman who understands life based not only on tribal knowledge conventions, but also on tribal experiences due to forced migrations and geographic containment on a reservation and how this shapes daily life, especially during the search for food.

When non-native readers experience *Ojibwe* humor and teasing, yet another space opens, another invitation to perform border thinking while reading *Tracks*. Non-native readers may not readily know that the remarks are meant to be lighthearted. In addition, readers may not understand that these lighthearted comments are meant to bond families and tribal members together and to politely keep people in line with *Ojibwe* conventional behavior without shaming them. Yet, non-native readers can only successfully negotiate the intended meanings in *Tracks* through a combination of active participation and by contextualizing the importance of humor and teasing dialogue in the surrounding texts.

As Vizenor notes “the reader not only participates in literary co-creation but [he or she] also expands his [or her] personal horizons, learns to think in new ways, achieves deeper self-knowledge and imagines or creates himself [or herself]” (*Narrative Chance* 43). I will also add that the reader’s interpretive horizons (to borrow from Gadamer’s concept), the subject position from which they interpret others, and in this case a narrative, expand and shift through direct translations and indirect translations that occur

between *Ojibwe* and English in Erdrich's novel *Tracks*. For Gadamer, an interpretive horizon occurs when one physically and mentally perceives their surroundings, their worldview, from a spatio-temporal location, in which their perspective shifts when their spatio-temporal surroundings change (304). Thus, a reader's interpretive horizon, their worldview, may shift while reading *Tracks*, because of the active engagement with another worldview, a border worldview, that readers can become immersed in, through the narrative's textual performativity.

At first readers may experience moments of cognitive dissonance, and as Rainwater discusses, they may experience a sense of liminality and marginality, but if they become active readers in the process of meaning making, they also experience moments of engagement that renders the narrative a cross-cultural moment of thinking from an *Ojibwe* worldview. In addition, Fleur's voice, and also her communicative powers, are created through the simulation of orality in *Tracks*, through Nanapush and Pauline's stories, especially through Nanapush who directly addresses an audience – Lulu. Through the effect of orality in *Tracks*, readers can position themselves in Nanapush's audience, like Lulu; and to a lesser extent in Pauline's "world." By doing so, Fleur becomes a powerful symbol of *Ojibwe* cultural survivance through the enunciation of *Ojibwe* discourses.

In Louise Erdrich's interview with Jan George, she remarks in reference to her poem "Jacklight" that "If our relationships are going to be human...men have to follow women into the woods, and women likewise. There must be an exchange, a transformation, a power shared between them" (243). In Erdrich's *Tracks*, the characters are in constant search for food, involved in food preparations, and in the consumption of

foods; or alternately struggling through starvation. Hunting is a primary source of traditional *Ojibwe* food sustenance. It is also a tie that binds tribal members together. Erdrich's *Tracks* also suggests that the woods are a source of love and passion which develops there during hunting practices between Fleur and Eli. Similarly to Iona Peasant and Julien Last Child's relationship in *Daughters of the Dust*, Fleur and Eli develop a passionate love affair and maintain an intimate relationship in part through their shared knowledge of cultural practices, which for *Tracks* involves hunting, preparing, and sharing food with others. Like Iona and Julien, Fleur and Eli live isolated from their community and when tribal members visit, they share their home with them. Here, again, Mignolo's conceptualization of border thinking is important, for, he states,

de-colonization, instead of working toward the accumulation of knowledge and imperial management, works toward the empowerment and liberation of different layers (racial, sexual, gender, class, linguistic, epistemic, religious, etc.) from oppression, and toward the undermining of the assumption upon which imperial power is naturalized, enacted and corrupted. ("Theorizing" 208-09)

Fleur's practices in *Tracks* then, like land and language poetics, are representations of an *Ojibwe* woman's process of decolonization. Her knowledges, learned by thinking from *Anishinaabe*, and practiced within her Pillager family lands, not only help define her as an embodiment of decolonization practices, they also help define other tribal members' identities; and ultimately, they become aware of their own *Ojibwe* authenticity.

Fleur's skills at hunting game and fishing are directly related to her community identity as a powerful female shaman. Fleur acquires her skills from her Pillager family

“who knew the secret ways to cure or kill, until their art deserted them” (3). Nanapush’s story of Fleur’s Pillager family hunting and healing practices is a reflection on the Pillager family’s past, a reminder of Fleur’s present circumstances, and a foreshadowing of her future actions: In the novel’s conclusion, Fleur loses her ability to fend off federal agents and the lumber company, and in a final act of defiance, she sets a trap for the lumberjacks and leaves the reservation.

In *Tracks*, cultural practices, such as hunting for food, are traditional *Ojibwe* forms of food sustenance. Individual knowledges of hunting practices, predominantly characterized by Fleur and Eli’s relationship, cannot survive the onslaught of the dominant cultural, political, and economic pressures toward assimilation, forced containment, and loss of resources. Hunting practices also inform tribal families of the delicate balance that is uprooted by the influence of European American cultural practices, such as U.S. government land policies and capitalist forms of food sustenance, trading, and land resource development, which cause the tribal community in *Tracks* to splinter. Brehm observes that traditional *Ojibwe* practices of food sharing were maintained and kept in balance with nature by hunting with restraint, which were practices learned primarily by the mythologies that helped create their worldview (683-84).⁵⁶ In *Tracks*, these knowledges have been stripped down to traces of tribal memory, which Fleur attempts to recover, despite the loss of her family and the fact that she was “too young and had no stories or depth of life to rely upon. All she had was raw power, and the names of the dead that filled her (19). Fleur’s hunting and food sharing abilities

⁵⁶ Ruppert discusses the role of the reader in engaging with linguistic, epistemological, and sociopolitical contexts and fields of discourses, and the expectations placed on them. See *Mediation*, ix-x.

are a knowledge that not only helps her survive on her own, and with Eli and Lulu, but they also remind her and her tribal community of what they have lost.

Fleur's knowledge of healing is directly connected with her role as a mother to two children: her unnamed newborn son and her daughter Lulu. While Fleur's powers as a medicine woman are frequently used to harm or kill her perceived enemies, Fleur's healing practices in *Tracks* are directed toward her children's survival. Fleur risks having a miscarriage with her second child and notices the first signs of bleeding and lies down on her bed, asking Pauline to find alder root in the storage shed. Fleur goes to the stove to "scrape the root, where she dripped water over the shavings with an awful patience, and added a crumbling powder of bees dried and crushed (158). Shortly after that, Pauline recites Christian prayers for Fleur's healing and then Pauline falls asleep and dreams that she and Fleur journey to "*Ojibwe* heaven" where "there is gambling with spears of wood and rounded stones" (160). Here Fleur plays cards with deceased members of the tribe (Lily, Tor, and Dutch), and Pauline identifies herself as the murderer of these men after they raped Fleur in Argus. Pauline awakens when Margaret enters the cabin and, noticing Fleur's condition, finishes the healing medicine Fleur began preparing on the stove, reviving Fleur in the process (162-63). In these passages, there is a direct association between tribal knowledges as decolonial moments which empower two female characters: Fleur and Margaret. There is also a direct association between colonizing practices, performed by Pauline when she attempts to "save" Fleur and her baby through Christian prayer.

There is a dream sequence in *Tracks*, which represent the indigenous woman's identity as reliant on the physical and spiritual worlds. Allen remarks that "Women return

from spirit lands to the crossroads over and over; [...]We know it is there – the nothing that bears all signifying, all tropes, all love medicine, all stories, all constructions and deconstructions” (*Off the Reservation* 166). The fact that both Fleur and Pauline “cross-over” to the *Ojibwe* spirit world in order to save Fleur’s newborn child reflects the divergent worldviews that both female characters construct for themselves. First, Fleur’s attempt at a healing cure for her and her baby informs readers of Fleur (and Margaret’s) knowledge of traditional *Ojibwe* medicines and remedies. Second, it chronicles Pauline’s assimilation, and as a result, her loss of traditional *Ojibwe* knowledges, which prevent her from playing a positive role in Fleur’s recovery and the baby’s survival. When Pauline rushes to find the alder root in the storage shed, she has forgotten what alder root looks like, and then stumbles feebly at the stove, delaying the urgent medicine Fleur was preparing (156-57). Pauline blames her inability to help prepare Fleur’s medicine on “His terrible will” but what has occurred instead is her lost memory of traditional *Ojibwe* healing remedies.

Pauline wants to prove that Christianity and white culture are the best ways to survive on the reservation and find power and agency. Thus, for Pauline, Fleur represents a challenge to her new found Christian cultural practices and spirituality. When Pauline utters Christian prayer to save Fleur’s baby and her life, she assumes Fleur’s recovery is from the help of the Christian God. However, Fleur understands her recovery as the result of following a traditional *Ojibwe* remedy for premature birth. Through Pauline’s narration of Fleur’s healing remedy and their journey to the spirit world, a dialectic engagement between two competing worldviews occurs. Sarve-Gorham likens Fleur and Pauline’s interactions in this passage as the “twinning” of both characters where “As one

of two twins [Fleur] represents the old Indian world of animism, community, and affinity with nature. In contrast, Pauline rejects tradition and identifies herself with the European American world” (177). Sarve-Gorham’s analysis sheds light on more than the interactions between Fleur and Pauline during Fleur’s healing remedy and subsequent journey to the spirit world. Sarve-Gorham’s application of “the twin motif” between Fleur and Pauline provides a helpful entry into an examination of both characters’ subjectivities during these sequences.

As mentioned previously, Pauline’s subjectivity relies heavily on her attitudes and descriptions of Fleur. One of the dominant threads in the weaving together of Pauline and Fleur’s subjectivities is their developing worldviews. Opposing religious belief systems are evident in each character’s behavior throughout the novel. Furthermore, the tension between these opposing belief systems aid in Pauline’s harsh and tragic assimilation practices. The further Fleur develops her *Ojibwe*-centered powers, skills, sexuality, and ability to love, the further Pauline attempts to create an ascetic form of Christianity, which she hopes will give her agency, albeit with unhealthy behaviors and attitudes toward her own body.⁵⁷

In conclusion, Fleur begins a long struggle to assert her *Ojibwe* identity and subjectivity throughout the novel by claiming and defending her Pillager family lands, by practicing *Ojibwe* traditions faithfully, and by healing others and by harming those who stand in her way. Fleur represents *Ojibwe* authenticity as a powerful female voice representing the tribal community, and as a medium for expressing *Ojibwe* discourses in

⁵⁷ See M. Anderson and Cornell.

a Western novel. Fleur's subjectivity is also defined by the dialectic tensions between tribal members' knowledge of traditional *Ojibwe* heritage and their growing acculturation into the white dominant society. It is revealing that when Nanapush, Pauline, Margaret, and Eli interact with Fleur, they do so mainly from an *Ojibwe*-centered perspective. This is shown in *Tracks* by Pauline's acknowledgement of *Misshepeshu* and Fleur's growing association with the water monster through bodily acts of submersion in Matchimanito Lake. In other parts of *Tracks*, Pauline attempts to apply her Christian beliefs during meetings with Fleur, but is always eventually in compliance with *Ojibwe* practices while in her presence. The same can be said for Nanapush, Eli, and Margaret. When all four of these main characters interact with the tribal community in Fleur's absence, and on the other side of the reservation, away from Fleur's family lands, they all begin to acquiesce with the community's progression toward white assimilationist beliefs and practices. During this process, a dialectic tension arises between Fleur's identity and the tribe's, due to material, philosophical, and experiential conflicts that arise while living in a borderlands location such as Matchimanito Lake reservation.

Chapter Conclusion

Ojibwe and mixed-blood female characters' struggle to define themselves in Erdrich's historical novel *Tracks* is reliant on their tribal community's ability to remain cohesive despite U.S. government policies designed to gradually appropriate their lands for capitalist ventures and resource development. However, Erdrich's narrative imagines these threats predominantly through an *Ojibwe*-centered worldview and proceeds to theorize an historical process of tribal authenticity, survival and continuance, though the threats imposed on tribal members eventually alter their way of life in the novel's

conclusion. The process towards tribal authenticity, survival, and continuance is portrayed by the female character Fleur Pillager, who, as the novel's protagonist, is given voice through two narrators: Nanapush and Pauline. Fleur represents the tribal community's voice of tribal resistance to U.S. government and capitalist business' interventions and encroachments on their lands. Throughout *Tracks*, Erdrich theorizes the power of *Ojibwe* discourses to assert tribal authenticity by creating aesthetic values through land and border crossings, bilingual translations, mythologies, humor and teasing dialogue, and cultural practices, which together create an *Ojibwe* worldview.

But this worldview is in the process of transformation, represented by the female characters Fleur and Pauline. Both characters mediate and negotiate the material and metaphorical borderlands they live in and cross over to, and their transformations represent the community's external and internal contestations that form a critical mass at the intersections of race, gender, and class. What occurs in *Tracks* is an ongoing mediation and negotiation of reservation life as a border between cultures, races, genders, and economic leverage, which is predominantly about the ability to hold onto land and maintain a steady food supply.

The feminist border aesthetic in *Tracks* is, then, material because it is situated in a geographic location where these socio-economic struggles occur. The feminist border aesthetic is also a metaphor in which female characters define themselves in-between enforced categories of race, gender, and class. The feminist border aesthetic goes beyond a simplification of identity and subjectivity. It signifies on the meanings created in the interstices of conflicting ideological and philosophical discourses – *Ojibwe* and European American. Similarly to *So Far from God* and *Daughters of the Dust*, *Tracks*' interpretive

framework is a complex composite of “identities of interpretive horizons” by which one’s identity and subjectivity is embodied in particular locations, engaged in an interpretive process that requires a type of interpretive horizon (Alcoff 94). Put more precisely though, what occurs in *Tracks*, *So Far from God*, and *Daughters of the Dust*, is the process of creating a transformative interpretive horizon. Gadamer’s concept of the horizon is a “substantive perspectival location from which the interpreter looks out at the world, a perspective that is always present but that is open and dynamic, with a temporal as well as physical dimension, moving into the future and into new spaces as the subject moves” (304). The transformative interpretive horizon then is the ability the female borderland character has to effectively bridge two or more interpretive horizons and, by doing so, an emergent horizon develops; in fact, the reader engaged with a feminist borderland narrative, when actively participating in meaning making, makes this interpretive leap as well.

Like *So Far from God* and *Daughters of the Dust*, land is a crucial antagonist of its own. It becomes a catalyst for the formation and change a female character makes in their self-definitions, whether the changes are, for the most part, healthy, as seen in the character Fleur, or unhealthy as seen in the character Pauline. In addition, the female characters in *Tracks* experience a shift in their “identities as interpretive horizons” as a result of disparate ideological and philosophical discourses. Fleur’s identity shifts from within an *Ojibwe* worldview, which is deeply connected to her familial lands in Matchimanito Lake reservation. Pauline’s identity shifts, however, from the external influences of white society and culture. Both female characters experience these interpretive shifts through a process of dialectic and dialogic encounters with European

American culture, especially during their crossings to the white town of Argus.

Fundamentally, Fleur's authentic *Ojibwe* female subjectivity – albeit a subjectivity that acquires tribal authenticity through the “creative ability of Indian people gather [sic] in many forms of the socio-political colonizing force...and to make these forms meaningful in their own terms” – becomes the quintessential heroine in *Tracks* (Ortiz 254).

Erdrich's aesthetic goals are designed to place both *Ojibwe* and mixed-blood women at the center of a historical, geographical, and cultural moment. Unlike *Daughters of the Dust* though, *Tracks* does not commit to an idealized vision of women's attainment of liberation from white supremacy and patriarchal definitions of womanhood. Nor does *Tracks* allude to their liberation from false dichotomies, oppressive hierarchies, and harmful self-definitions. *Tracks'* narrative leaves readers with an undetermined outcome for both Pauline and Fleur.

Still, and most importantly, Fleur is a subaltern female character who is given a powerful voice and identity, even at the novel's conclusion. In Fleur, Erdrich has created an *Ojibwe* heroine who has a significant role in the author's North Dakota tetralogy (*Love Medicine*, *The Beet Queen*, *Tracks*). Her roles in all three novels helps represent *Ojibwe* women as great medicine women whose life stories impart vital knowledges to future generations in their communities, whose actions become legend, and whose voices challenge the dominant culture's discourses.

CHAPTER FOUR

“DIS LIE BEGIN AT DE BEGINNING OF THIS WORLD”: GULLAH SEA ISLAND STORIES, SPACES, AND THE RECENTERING OF THE SELF IN JULIE DASH’S *DAUGHTERS OF THE DUST*

I begin this chapter with a quote from bell hooks who describes aesthetics as “more than a philosophy or theory of art and beauty; it is a way of inhabiting space, a particular location, a way of looking and becoming” (*Belonging* 122). hooks’ quote captures the crux of my critical discussion on Julie Dash’s narrative aesthetic practices. Dash’s narrative renders a Gullah feminist paradigm: her novel establishes cultural codes meant to define female characterizations as reliant on the divergent and permeable geo-historical location of the U.S. Sea Islands. Her narrative evokes a “borderline existence,” one “that creates the discursive ‘image’ at the crossroads of history and literature, bridging the home and the world” (Bhabha 13). Dash’s rendering of a borderline existence establishes the U.S. Sea Islands as an exterior borderland within the wider regional boundaries of the U.S. South. Her text signifies Gullah women’s subjectivities in the process of transformations. She does this by recentering the culturally syncretic codes found in Sea Islands home places, while also configuring these codes in an amalgamation with codes from an “elsewhere”⁵⁸ - their ancestral homelands of origin. Her novel illuminates Gullah women’s subjectivity as a process of mediation and negotiation within

⁵⁸ In this study, I use the term “elsewhere” to define a diasporic woman’s state of dislocation as more than a physical dislocation, similarly defined in Davies’ *Black Women, Writing, and Identity: Migrations of the Subject*, which Davies states is “oriented to articulating presences and histories across a variety of boundaries imposed by colonizers, but also by the men, the elders and other authorized figures in their various societies” (89).

disparate and fluctuating communities. It theorizes Gullah women's process of altering social and political barriers that prohibit individual and communal liberation from physical, mental, and emotional harm, and oppressive ideologies originating in the U.S. nation state. Put more concisely, Julie Dash's *Daughters of the Dust* redefines black Gullah women in the U.S. Sea Islands with a borderland aesthetic framed around themes of lands, languages, and cultural practices which run counter to dominant cultural, political, and historical definitions of their community and homelands.

First, it is helpful to contextualize Dash's narrative paradigm within the broader field of Black literary aesthetic theory. In the 1920s, a great deal of intellectual and creative work was produced by and for black people in the United States. As Houston A. Baker states "Afro-American modernists" were "concerned preeminently with removing the majority of the black population from the poverty, illiteracy, and degradation that marked southern, black, agrarian existence in the United States at the turn of the nineteenth century" (4). The articulation of a black aesthetic in the United States began with fin de siècle economic, political, and cultural crises in black communities. As Baker argues, the recovery and re-expression of Harlem Renaissance inventiveness occurred during the 1960s as black intellectuals and creative artists advanced aesthetic paradigms under the umbrella of the Black Arts Movement (6). During the 1960s, the political and ideological goals for intellectuals and artists were to secure civil rights in their communities and the larger U.S. social sphere. One of the movement's main proponents, Larry Neal, proposed a radical rethinking of black artistic production, stressing the need for an articulation of consciousness "from the viewpoint of the oppressed." Neal envisioned an aesthetics that would include "most of the useable elements of Third World

culture,” including representations of the folk and orality, and, as a result, there would be an assertion of a black vision of America in opposition to a western cultural aesthetic that Neal felt debased the human spirit (29-30). Thus intellectuals and artists such as Amiri Baraka, Ed Bullins, Sonia Sanchez, and Harold Cruse asserted a new cultural front⁵⁹ in reaction to the continued overt and subtle prevalence of racism in America, as seen in the nation’s legal system and in its socio-economic stratifications.

While black aesthetics on the American mainland tend to be nation-building, Gullah aesthetics reflect their localized customs and traditional belief systems. Since the 1930s academic studies and folktale collections have been published on the Gullah (or Geechee as they are known outside of the Sea Islands), who live on the U.S. Southeast coastal Sea Islands.⁶⁰ Their craftwork has been studied and is sold in markets, and their artwork has been on display in museums. The Gullah culture is also defined by their distinctive dialect or creole, and according to Marquetta L. Goodwine, by the “spirit of resistance to domination which marked their heritage” (7). In fact, it is the Gullah’s recalcitrance toward colonization and neocolonization, along with their steadfast presence on the U.S. Sea Islands, which has helped in their cultural survival and continuance, despite the increasing encroachment of real estate developers.

Paulla Ebron notes that since the 1970s there has been an increase in the amount of artistic and intellectual work on Gullah life and the Sea Islands as a distinct location (94). Part of this creative and intellectual growth is encouraged by the Gullah community

⁵⁹ A helpful examination of Harold Cruse’s arguments in *The Crisis of the Negro Intellectual*; most notably, his discussions of culture, politics, and economics, can be found in Sell.

⁶⁰ For a deeper analysis of Gullah/Geechee cultural practices, see Sengova. You may also want to consult Montgomery, Creel, Goodwine, and Pollitzer.

and advocates for the Gullah, e.g., Goodwine, who states there is a need “for the protection and development of Gullah and Geechee culture” (7). In fact, writers, artists, and photographers during the 1970s and 1980s have created what Tracy Snipe calls a “Gullah Renaissance,” a span of time that witnessed a heightened awareness of the Gullah culture and identity, especially women’s identity, as is the case with writers Paule Marshall’s *Praisesong for the Widow*, Gloria Naylor’s *Mama Day*, and Julie Dash’s *Daughters of the Dust* (276). Critical discussions of these works tend to focus on how black women’s identity is defined by the transmission of Gullah-derived literary “sites of memory”⁶¹ into the broader American consciousness, but it is also important to remember that the Gullah are a distinct group of people who continue to practice traditional African-derived customs to this day. The cultural site of memory is not just historical. It is also contemporary, making the reality of Gullah woman’s lives also a factor in the Gullah American novel’s modes of representation.

In our contemporary period, black women writers have sought to build a feminist aesthetic that is noted less for its adherence to a nationalist discourse and more for its heterogeneity of discourses, woman-centered communal narratives, and concern for issues that align with other women-of-color feminisms such as decolonization practices and emancipation from patriarchal hegemonic discourses and practices.⁶² I argue that

⁶¹ Pierre Nora argues sites of memory, or *lieux de mémoire*, operate “where memory crystallizes and secretes itself at a particular historical moment, a turning point where consciousness of a break with the past is bound up with the sense that memory has been torn – but torn in such a way as to pose the problem of the embodiment of memory in certain sites where a sense of historical continuity persists.” See Fabre and O’Meally, 284-300.

⁶² Writers in this vein include Zora Neale Hurston, Alice Walker, Toni Morrison, Nella Larsen, Ann Petry, Gayl Jones, Paule Marshall, and Gloria Naylor to name a few.

Dash's Gullah literary aesthetics is part of a contemporary urge to forge new imaginative paths for black women writers in the hemispheric borders of what has become known as the Black Atlantic.⁶³

Julie Dash's novel about Gullah American women aids in the building of a black feminist literary tradition which engenders a poetics that includes, to borrow from Heather Smyth, "a feminist politics of difference." Smyth defines "a feminist politics of difference" as a politics that seeks to define black women's identities within the discourses that have historically oppressed them and reclaim women's subjectivities from multiple forms of oppression both within their communities and in the nation (3). My argument, however, is slightly different. Though I do agree with Smyth that women-of-color assert "a feminist politics of difference," women's identities are being defined not solely through the discourses of the oppressor. In Julie Dash's *Daughters of the Dust*, the narrative attempts to define Gullah women's subjectivities with border discourses that are, at times, peripheral to and in-between dominant national and community discourses of patriarchy and race, yet within and across geographical, political, and cultural borders. Dash's poetics define black women's physical, mental, and spiritual experiences in a border location and amid border crossings. Her poetics alter the Western novel genre by entering into a feminist dialogic and dialectic engagement between Western and non-Western philosophical concepts. Examples of these exchanges can be found in the confrontation and exclusion of Cartesian binary dualisms such as male/female and

⁶³ For the historical trace of the term "Black Atlantic," consult Matory. Matory cites Robert Farris Thompson as coining the term in 1983. According to Matory, it generally refers to "the Atlantic perimeter" which "hosts a range of groups profoundly influenced by western African conceptions of personhood and of the divine" (5). Another helpful resource is Gilroy.

black/white with their hierarchical system of classifications. In addition, these dialectic and dialogic exchanges occur when epistemologies derived from non-Western sources are juxtaposed with Western-derived knowledges, and when the Gullah language is the dominant text or is interspersed within American English.

Daughters of the Dust is an artistic and political expression of black women's struggles to experience self-determination and agency in the U.S. Sea Islands, where now more than ever Gullah women's lives depend on the right to voice their own woman-centered identities in the public discourse. Black women's identities in *Daughters of the Dust* call attention to how borders - physical, geographical, psychical, spiritual, and intellectual - can limit their lives, but they also call attention to borders as sites of liberation from material and ideological oppressions. The liberation of female characters from material and ideological oppressions in *Daughters of the Dust* is developed as a process of negotiating the politics between the margin and center.

The novel's ethnographic narrative draws upon Dash's film by the same name, which, according to Ebron's "Enchanted Memories of Regional Difference in African American Culture," draws attention to the "enchantment of Sea Island memories" as "a woman-focused counter narrative that works across, in complement to, and against the powerful popular stories of community narrated by African American men" (95). Indeed, Dash's novel creates a Gullah women's border poetic that signifies the "crossing over" from their historical containment and internal colonization to the potential for a liberated subjectivity, and from the Sea Islands to the mainland. Joel Brouwer in "Repositioning: Center and Margin in Julie Dash's *Daughters of the Dust*" articulates these complex negotiations between colonization, slavery, containment, and transformation as a

recasting of the Sea Islands, where “the Gullahs are the dominant culture, and the white world is at the margin” (6). In fact, as Nancy Wright notes in her essay on Dash’s film, “Property Rights and Possession in *Daughters of the Dust*,” the concept of “talking back” to the center involves Gullah women speaking from the position of propertied Gullah, who define property communally, similar to Native Americans on the Sea Islands (hooks 9). In her analysis, Wright defines “propertied Gullah” as a cultural identity rooted in ancestral burial sites and a deep sense of gratitude to the land as a progenitor of “family identity and culture” (11). However, the term “property” in the context of the novel is polysemic. It refers not only to land rights acquired by Gullahs, post-Reconstruction Era, but also to the historical conditions of slavery which subjugated Gullah women’s bodies as sites of containment, exploitation, and violence. It also alludes to Carrie Mae and Toady’s bodies as a form of property to be sold during their restricted presence on the mainland as sex workers for Yellow Mary’s brothel in Atlanta, Georgia.

However, when female characters border cross, Dash’s narrative attempts to traverse the boundaries of the body politic that socially constructs and subsequently serves to undermine Gullah women’s control over their bodies. The narrative, in its articulation of border crossings, creates a process by which Gullah women define their bodies outside of definitions rendered by the nation state. Angeletta K.M. Gourdine’s discussion of Gullah women’s bodies, as they are represented in the film *Daughters of the Dust*, is helpful for examining the novel’s portrayal of characters’ attempts toward bodily self-definition and their acts of border crossing. In “Fashioning the Body [as] Politic in Julie Dash’s *Daughters of the Dust*,” Gourdine asserts that a black woman’s body in the film represents “the natural bodies of black women, always sexually and/or

economically politicized” in juxtaposition with the politicized bodies of the nation state represented as “North” meaning Harlem, New York (500). This juxtaposition between Dawtuh Island and the nation state is evident in the novel as well. MyOwn becomes physically ill due to the chemicals used by her family’s funeral parlor in Harlem, New York, while Carrie Mae and Toady’s bodies are exploited while working as prostitutes on the mainland. However, in Dash’s novel, Gullah women redefine their bodies outside of the body politics across the border. Toady’s transgression of heteronormativity, after crossing from Atlanta, Georgia to Dawtuh Island, is the novel’s major reference for the process of redefining female corporeality from restrictive of U.S. body politics.

Daughters of the Dust radically reconfigures Gullah women’s identities from subalternity to agents of their own public identities and lived subjectivities, but it is a process that is a change in individual consciousness and in communal consciousness. This occurs in the novel and the film, as Sara Clarke Kaplan contends in “Souls at the Crossroads, Africans on the Water: The Politics of Diasporic Melancholia.” In the film, Kaplan notes that the characters engage in the “invocation of the ceremonies and spirits of black diasporic religions” which “produces a historical geography of diaspora through the performance of a collective cultural memory ... linking contemporary individual and familial struggles... to historic trajectories of imperialism and white supremacy” (511-12). Kaplan’s claims can also apply to the novel’s inclusion of burial practices as an example of Gullah collective memory of ancestral forced migrations, slavery, and dehumanization by European colonizers.

Migrations between Dawtuh Island and the mainland in Dash’s novel also emphasize the need for Gullah women to preserve individual and collective memories

created by close relationships with the land. Though a Gullah woman's subjectivity is transformed by border crossings and migrations, their public identities and lived subjectivities occur during linguistic acts. The novel represents these linguistic markers by a heteroglossia of forms,⁶⁴ an ethnographic mixture of folklore, letters, poems, hymns, and recipes. Alao's dissertation, *Islands of Memory: The Sea Islands, Black Women Artists, and the Promise of Home*, is a helpful starting point for this discussion. Alao argues that the novel's stories, referred to as "telling the lie," are intertwined with character migrations to preserve memories and provide guidance for those who have left Dawtuh Island (225). Though these poetics offer recollections of the Sea Islands' historical past, they also stress the importance of maintaining orality as a communicative practice for understanding contemporary life on the Sea Islands. For example, the character Amelia tells her own story at the novel's conclusion, suggesting that "telling the lie" will continue in the future.

Julie Dash's novel *Daughters of the Dust* narrates the lives of a Gullah community on Dawtuh Island. Dawtuh Island is a fictional island off the coast of Beaufort, South Carolina, which represents one of the U.S. Southeast Sea Islands, a chain of islands that stretch from South Carolina to Florida. The novel is set between 1912 and the 1920s, following the migration of Peazant family members from Dawtuh Island to New York City, which took place in Dash's 1991 film, *Daughters of the Dust*. The novel's protagonist, Amelia Varnes, is the daughter of Myown, who was a teenager in the film's narrative. Amelia Varnes's grandmother is Haager Peazant, the film's most

⁶⁴ Heteroglossia is a term coined by Bakhtin in Holquist, xix-xx.

assimilationist character. She rejects her Gullah culture for New York's cosmopolitan culture, which she perceives as a better place for her family to live (Dash, *Making History* 130-31). In the novel Amelia is studying the Gullah community as part of an anthropology master's thesis while she stays with her cousin Elizabeth.

Dash begins her novel by describing the land when it was populated soon after the Ice Age. Her narrative begins in the voice of a storyteller mythologizing the birth of the Sea Islands: "They appeared along the southeastern coast, a group of shallow islands that rose from the receding waters of the Ice Age" and were "[d]otted with swamps, marshes, and bogs and tempered by the sea breezes and the hot, humid air" (3). Dash's descriptions reveal a narrative distance far removed from the actual physical location, as if the story was being told from a position high above the land. But the point of view soon narrows its focus like a camera lens:

[T]he islands were rich with flora and wildlife. Corn, pumpkins, and beans grew in profusion in the peculiar mixture of sand, silt, clay, and natural matter. Wild grapes hung from the boughs of the great oaks, and walnuts and pecans rained down when the warm breezes blew through. Huge herds of white tailed deer roamed the coastal lands while black bear stalked the swamplands and wild turkeys sounded their warnings from the lush underbrush. The waters, both fresh and salt, abounded with mullet, brim, rock shrimp, spots, oysters, and crab. (3)

Dash's introduction continues by recollecting the Native Americans' forced migrations from the U.S. Northeast to the "warmer climes and gentle breezes" of the Southeast, and the Africans' forced relocations to the Southeast to work as slaves on plantations (3-4).

The forced migrations of Native Americans and Africans to the Sea Islands began a long history of cultural continuity on the islands due to the Sea Islands' barrier formation. As William S. Pollitzer points out in *The Gullah People and Their African Heritage*, "the homeland of the Gullah people is a coastal strip 250 miles long and 40 miles wide where low, flat islands, separated from the mainland by salt-water rivulets" (4). They are known as barrier islands for their distinct geography and geology, but in the process of forced migrations and subsequent survival mechanisms, Native Americans and African Americans developed a Gullah identity from cross-cultural knowledges as co-inhabitants within this harsh environment. But beyond the typographical features and cultural tendencies on the U.S. Sea Islands, historically speaking, these islands are perhaps the most exemplary for Smith and Cohn's in *Look Away! The U.S. South in New World Studies*, in their definition of the U.S. South as a "border crossing, interracial hybridity that white southern nativism has sought to repress" (13). Smith and Cohn, also define the U.S. South beyond the lens of "white southern nativism," describing it as a "peculiar cultural tension" for its position as a "space of degrees of overlap *between*, its simultaneous embodiment of, the Yankee and the plantation" (authors' emphasis 8). In fact, Smith and Cohn claim that "the U.S. South comes to occupy a space unique within modernity: a space simultaneously (or alternately) center and margin, victor and defeated, empire and colony, essentialist and hybrid, northern and southern (both in the global sense)" (9). Viewed from the lens of Smith and Cohn's New World studies paradigm, the fictional Dawtuh Island, as a post-plantation era, post-Reconstruction era setting, becomes representative of U.S. nation-state boundaries and the geographic, material, and

metaphorical border between white southern nativism and border crossing, interracial hybridity.

Native Americans, Africans, and their Gullah descendants have called this land of swamps, marshes, and bogs home. Not only because it is where they have lived, but also because it has defined them in the past, present, and the foreseeable future. It is important to note the ways that black women within and across Dash's fictional Dawtuh Island develop a sense of self that is reconfigured from images presented by dominant historical perspectives that, as Brouwer notes, have cast them as "backward and uncultured, marginal people both figuratively and literally" (6).⁶⁵ Brouwer's observations also can be applied to Dash's novel, in which Gullah female characters define their subjectivities in opposition to imperialist and patriarchal notions of black women. As Brouwer claims, Dash, in her film (and I will also argue, in her novel) "redefines the center" in which "the Gullahs are the dominant culture and the white world is at the margin" (6). Brouwer's argument about the film, supports an important I make about Dash's novel: it evokes Gullah discourses as the center of cultural knowledges, giving voice to subaltern female subjects at the exteriority of U.S. modernity.

Before analyzing Dash's poetic inscription of black female subjectivities, it is important to discuss how the black female body in Dash's novel retains memories of the historical past, which resurface as individual and collectively-felt experiences during moments of immersion in self-reflective, perceptual relationships with the land. Since, according to Mortimer-Sandilands, in "Landscape, Memory, and Forgetting: Thinking

⁶⁵ Brouwer is referencing Ambrose E. Gonzales' "Forward" to *The Black Border: Gullah Stories of the Carolina Coast*. Gretna, LA: Firebird, 1998.

Through (My Mother's) Body and Place," memory is a physical process, which "allows the body to greet the world with greater physical ease the more often we have a particular sensory experience," the individual and communal relationships we keep are in debt to memories held in specific geographic locations and memory as a physical process." As Mortimer-Sandilands notes, though, memories of "dominant social relationships would be, literally, are more clearly inscribed in the brain and more amenable to a strong memory: hegemony is physical" (272-73). If the experience of hegemony is physical, to the extent that memories produce a physical effect on the body, then it can be argued that collective histories in a geographic location are also physically embodied (273). Put another way, the body feels the memories processed by felt experiences as a result of direct contact with one's physical surroundings and shared experiences with others, and, in turn, the body becomes an embodied self, a subjectivity expressed by the physical body. If we combine these insights of the embodied self in connection with lands, this convergence explains how the character, Lucy Peazant, becomes a catalyst of communal memories from her contact with the African slave bones she excavates while farming.

Lucy Peazant buys a piece of land from former slave Trinity Wilkerson's descendants, who have since moved away from Dawtuh Island. Lucy's dream is to farm the land's fertile soil in order to obtain food for her family and to earn money from the sale of produce at markets on the mainland. She is proud of the land she and her fiancé, Charlie, are buying, stating to Amelia, "Ain't it beautiful? I clare it de prettiest bit of land roun here!" (225). Here, Lucy articulates the Gullah love of the earth for what it provides them and their families. In addition, she also understands the traditions and histories of her family and community. Amelia surmises that "Lucy knew exactly what she wanted

and was going after it in her typically determined fashion” noting that Lucy had “old folk sense” like her mother (226). But when Lucy begins to work the soil with the help of Amelia, they discover slave bones and shackles. This traumatizes Lucy. She refuses to leave her bed for days afterwards. The digging up of slave bones and shackles is the narrative climax, as well as a transformative moment for Lucy’s sense of subjectivity.

At first glance, Lucy’s transformation may seem negative, since she had a great love of the land prior to the burial ceremony. But instead, this is a positive transformation for Lucy because now she understands the lands she has farmed for their deeper historical and ancestral meanings, and for the historical trace that can never be recovered. Lucy’s traumatic experience plowing the fields has now become a liberating experience for her because it has given her a direct connection with her ancestors and a more complete sense of her history. Therefore, land in Dash’s novel is a figure for what is beautiful and bountiful, but also what is traumatic and painful. As a signifier, land provides historical memories, that, while painful, are transformative, offering a promising future for Lucy, Amelia, and the Gullah community. Gullah lands also provide Amelia with an altered sense of home. She becomes aware of home as transnational in origin and historically connected to the dislocation, genocide, and dehumanization of her ancestors. Lucy’s embodied self is transformed from her perceived identity as someone who knew exactly what she wanted in life to someone who doubts her love of the land, especially since the land resurfaces as a memory of the historical and cultural dislocation and dehumanization of her ancestors (226). She feels the emotional, psychic, and physical connections between her community and her physical body as she places her hands on the skull.

Lucy's bodily reactions when holding the slave skull signify historical memories being transferred between sight, physical encounter and emotional experience.

The trauma felt by Lucy, if we follow Mortimer-Sandilands' discussion of memory as a physical and social process, is a geographical, ancestral, and communal memory. Lucy's memories, then, are an "unveiling" of the historical past that Morrison calls a "site of memory" (Baker and Zinsser 183-200). The recognition of a "site of memory" is crucial for Lucy's subjectivity, which is transformed in relation to the lands. Lands, therefore, are where self-definition begins. Sara Clarke Kaplan suggests that because of racial genocide there is a "large and long black melancholy rooted in a transnational hegemonic failure to adequately acknowledge, mourn, or testify to the violent processes of dislocation and dehumanization that constituted chattel slavery and the Middle Passage and maintain subsequent forms of black subjugation" (515). In order for Lucy to liberate herself from this "large and long black melancholy" of internalized colonization and racism, she becomes the impetus for remembering ancestral migration experiences. Lucy's life up until this point is socially constructed from her family's folktales, language, sacred traditions, and cultural practices; but the more deeply-rooted specter of colonization, racism, and violence suffered by her ancestors, that she unknowingly internalizes, needs to be acknowledged by her and healed by the community. Farah Jasmine Griffin discusses the acknowledgment of colonization practices, during moments of healing, as aspects of African migration narratives, in which an ancestor aids in a new migrants' urbanization experience (5). But instead of an urbanization experience aided by an ancestor, it is Lucy who becomes the progenitor of

the new migrant's - Amelia's - "de-urbanized" experience, as well as the progenitor of her own transformed subjectivity.

Seen in this light, Griffin's claims align with the novel's strategies: Lucy insists that Amelia help her farm the lands where they both discover the African slave bones and shackles in the ground. Lucy becomes the agent in Amelia's need, as an urbanized Gullah descendent, to remember doubly what her Gullah relatives on the Sea Islands have internalized and repressed. In other words, Amelia, in order to transcend the internal, repressed ancestral memories of colonization and slavery, needs to remember her Gullah identity and her African ancestors who worked as slaves on Sea Island plantations. Thus the bones and shackles represent historical memory, African homelands, and an internalized white supremacy that needs to be reconciled by Lucy, Amelia and the Gullah community.

Therefore, what is occurring in the climax to Dash's novel is a critical point of narrative historicization of events that are ironically outside of history. The female characters' realization of the physical manifestation of slave bones in Gullah-owned soil is a theoretical juncture as much as it is a narrative turning point: it is the juncture between the narrative's geohistorical, racial, and cultural self-referentiality and the desire to reveal to readers the gaps left from subaltern histories that cannot be retrieved. Handley refers to this readerly experience as a "double suspension of disbelief," in which readers experience a two-fold process: "the level of historical experience ('Could this really have happened?') and then again working through the trauma of what they have been asked to *imagine* as real" (author's emphasis 26). Indeed, both the female characters and the readers are meant to engage in this process of reflecting on the untraceable.

Dash frames the novel's climax in a performative, multi-genre burial ceremony, which is meant to signify the Gullah's African-derived matrilineal, cultural and linguistic discourses of folklore, religious ritual, and cosmology. In order for Lucy, Amelia, and the Gullah community to recover their ancestor's memories and reconcile with them in the present, they must give the African slaves a proper burial. The elder, Miz Emma Julia, who is the Gullah community's matriarch, presides over the funeral rites for the slave bones. She performs the ceremony so that those living can "make de journey of de ancestors" (237). In doing so, she creates a transnational memorial for the collective Africans who were displaced from their homes of origin, a narrative move that recalls Morrison's conclusion in *Beloved*.⁶⁶

The burial ceremony at the site of death reestablishes the historical memory of slavery and the Middle Passage as a lived experience felt collectively by Gullah "communal embodied selves" on Dawtuh Island. They become "communal embodied selves" at the moment of Lucy and Amelia's placement of their hands on the slave bones. As Kaplan notes, "diasporic grief and grievances can be read as responses not only to the interrelated losses of body, home, and freedom that date back to the emergence of the African slave trade, but also to the concomitant processes of racialization" (514). As a result of their close proximity and interactions with the lands, and the subsequent removal

⁶⁶ In Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, the identity of Sethe's dead baby is memorialized in the passage: "Disremembered and unaccounted for, she cannot be lost because no one is looking for her, and even if they were, how can they call if they don't know her name: Although she has claim, she is not claimed. In place where long grass opens, the girl who waited to be loved and cry shame erupts into her separate parts, to make it easy for the chewing laughter to swallow her all away" (274). Dash's burial ceremony of African slave bones, who do not have names, are also "disremembered" and are memorialized by Miz Emma Julia's account of the Middle Passage ship *The Sorcerer*. Morrison makes reference to the Middle Passage *Beloved* as well (274).

of the slave bones from the plowed field, Lucy and Amelia are also recovering the Gullah communities' repressed and forgotten memories of colonization, racialization, and slavery. They are also forging new memories of their own, which become catalysts for personal transformation. It is this moment of personal and communal transformation that connects the Gullah to their ancestral past while also, concomitantly, linking them to their lands. Mortimer-Sandilands confirms these conclusions. She writes that reflective, internal experiences are linked to the external landscape by "the act of remembering" which "involves a recognition of a relationship between the body/mind and the external world that is not only determined by internal forces" (274). Therefore, in *Daughters of the Dust*, the Gullah borderlands are given phenomenological and existential values. An intergenerational, communicative flow is then created between Lucy and Amelia, and the Gullah community, between individual, internalized memories and collective communal memories, which aids in their grieving process.

The grieving process begins with the burial ceremony conducted by the Gullah elder, Miz Emma Julia. The Gullah community gathers around the land where the bones and shackles were plowed up. Miz Emma Julia then tells the story of the slave ship called "The Sorcerer" that brought the now deceased Africans over to the Sea Islands during plantation slavery. This story reflects what the character Sethe in Morrison's *Beloved* calls a "rememory," which for Sethe means "Some things you forget. Other things you never do...Places, places are still there" (35). According to Lisa Graves Minor in "'Sweet Home': Spirit of Place, Memory, and Rememory in Morrison's *Beloved*," "rememory" is rooted in place, in which the "power of place is never 'over and done with.' The power of place and what happened there, just as memory cannot be repressed, no matter how hard

Sethe tries” (1248). The act of “rememory” in *Daughters of the Dust* begins with Miz Emma Julia, who recites religious incantations, making Amelia and Lucy hold the bones and skull found in the ground. Kaplan states that this process of communal grieving is a manner of “melancholia...as an embodied individual and collective psychic practice with the political potential to transform grief into the articulation of grievances that traverse continents and cross time” (513). The ritual of burying their African ancestors’ bones is a practice then, of “rememory” in that it requires them to physically, mentally, and spiritually reconnect with the dead to release their collective pain. This is demonstrated in the novel when Miz Emma Julia “grabbed Lucy’s hand, struggling with her, and thrust the skull into it. She hissed at her, ‘Feel deir pain, gal! Feel deir hurt! Only when you feel de pain do de healin begin!’” (241). In transferring memories, histories, and spiritual experiences: “Lucy’s head snapped back as the force (of holding the skull) hit her. She jerked as if her body were receiving invisible blows...she struggled to bring it closer to her. Only when she clasped it to her chest did the force seem to take pity on her. Her head hung low; her body was limp” (241).

The burial ceremony can also be viewed as a narrative reenactment of spiritual practices that Judylyn S. Ryan claims “include[s] the juxtaposition of different time periods, the depiction of intergenerational transfers, journeying and migrations, and ritualized transformations that are central to the deployment of spirituality and the agency it generates” (7). Ryan’s claims are validated in Dash’s narrative by Lucy’s sudden change in life goals. Lucy’s transformation occurs soon after the burial ceremony when she decides that she wants to cross to the mainland to marry her fiancé Charlie and get back to working the land at a later time. To her father, who wanted her to wait to marry,

she replied “I don’t need no more time! Dem ancients in dat fiel didn’t have no time!” (250). For Lucy, then, the experience of working the land, finding African slave bones, and performing their burial rites changed her subjectivity, but not enough to disconnect her from her love of the land.

Black female subjectivity is also defined in the Sea Islands as a non-heteronormative gendered identity that is liberated after border crossings from the U.S. mainland to Dawtuh Island. This gendered transformation occurs in the character Toady, who is Carrie Mae’s lesbian lover. Carrie Mae owns and manages a bar on Dawtuh Island and Toady acts as her bouncer. Before acquiring the bar, Carrie Mae and Toady worked as prostitutes for Yellow Mary (a character that is also in Dash’s film) in an Atlanta, Georgia brothel. For Carrie Mae, the experience of working at Yellow Mary’s brothel lasted only two years, even though “Everybody made good money” she “never like *buckra* [white] mens! An her didn’t have no colored men comin dere” (121). As for Toady, it is unclear whether or not her gender identity changed while working in Yellow Mary’s brothel or when she crossed to Dawtuh Island to work as Carrie Mae’s bouncer. It can only be inferred from Carrie Mae’s reflections of her time in Yellow Mary’s brothel, when she states “My heart wasnt [sic] in it...I aint [sic] never liked *buckra* (white) mens!” Instead, Carrie Mae was attracted to Toady (121).

Toady’s gender is questioned by the character Amelia, who “looked at this slight person, not sure if it was a man or a woman,” because Toady “wore a man’s suit and had close-cropped, curly hair, but also had the tiny features and the low voice of a young woman” (108). In addition, when the narrative voice switches to Amelia’s, she refers to Toady as “he” (122). Amelia’s inability to determine Toady’s gender, though, is a source

of agency for Toady because her gender ambiguity allows her to choose her subject position in relation to place and circumstance. Toady performs male and female gendered identities depending on when and where she is actively engaging with others. Caroline Streeter negatively critiques the narration of Carrie Mae and Toady within Dash's novel as "a simplistic nod to diversity that fails to substantively challenge heteronormative and racist modes of representation" with what Streeter calls Dash's butch-femme stereotypical construction of Carrie Mae and Toady (782-83). However, my argument is that Toady complicates⁶⁷ any fixed notion of identity when she crosses from the mainland to Dawtuh Island. When she worked for Yellow Mary, Toady performed the role of heterosexual or bisexual female for the white men at the brothel. When Toady is working as a bouncer for Carrie Mae, she assumes a masculine role of protector, standing at the entrance, refusing to allow anyone to enter, until they throw their weapons in a barrel near the door. She also makes sure fights do not occur or, if they do, she moves the altercations outside. Inside Carrie Mae's bar, Toady helps prevent potential altercations and fends off men much bigger than her, because as Carrie Mae notes, "Lil woman got big gun" and when a man taunts her with "Aww, lil she-man what you gonna do? Toady replies "What you think I gonna do, man?" (116, 201). Toady's identity changes when the night is over and the day arrives. This is when Toady assumes her role as Carrie Mae's affectionate female lover lying with her on the sand, shedding the role of aggressive bouncer with a weapon (122).

⁶⁷ Gender performativity is discussed in Butler, *Gender Trouble* and "Subversive Bodily Acts."

Toady's changing gender roles are indicative of Butler's theory of gender performativity, which claims that identity is performative, socially constructed, and context-reliant.⁶⁸ Furthermore, Toady's changing gender identities point toward the socially restrictive boundaries placed on gendered identities while living on the U.S. mainland; and, since Toady's gendered identity changes to a masculine construction while living on Dawtuh Island, it can be inferred from the narrative that crossing to Dawtuh Island changes the discursive and physical boundaries imposed on the mainland from a restrictive, white male-centered, heteronormative constructed space, and here I am alluding to Carrie Mae's remarks that she didn't like the "*buckra* mens," to a more fluid, permeable, gendered spatial construction.

E. Patrick Johnson and Mae G. Henderson note that "queer" and "black" are both signifiers of difference where "'queer' challenges notions of heteronormativity and heterosexism" and "'black' resists notions of assimilation and absorption" (7). Toady challenges heteronormativity and assimilation with her metaphorical and literal crossings from a brothel serving white males in Atlanta to a Gullah speakeasy owned by her girlfriend on Dawtuh Island. In addition, Gourdine, in reference to Dash's film, notes that Dash "challenges commonplace notions of black women's place in the body politic (the social, political, and public sphere of the nation state)" with the politicized physical bodies of black women, an argument that can also be applied to the novel (500). Toady's shifting identity constructions coincide with her shifting geo-historical locations. On the South Carolina mainland she is a prostitute working for white male clients, whereas on

⁶⁸ Ibid.

Dawtuh Island she is a bouncer wearing a suit, cropped hair, carrying a gun and an aggressive stance toward male patrons. While on the mainland, Toady represses her true sexuality in order to make a living, and when she crosses to Dawtuh Island she subverts traditional heteronormative discourses of the body politic in order to acquire agency and assert authority while working at Carrie Mae's bar.

Here it is helpful to examine how Toady's behavior on the mainland, and on Dawtuh Island, is regulated and then subverted. Butler, in *Gender Trouble*, notes that the heteronormative discourses inscribed on "the surface politics of the body" define an "idealized and compulsory heterosexuality" which manifests as a "disciplinary production of gender" that "effects a false stabilization of gender in the interests of heterosexual construction and regulation of sexuality" (172). In addition, Alcoff states that gender and race are social constructs that are fluid and depend on historical and social contexts (87-88). Toady defines her black female subjectivity within the social norms of the white male dominant space she inhabited on the mainland and the black male dominated space of Carrie Mae's bar. Thus, border crossings, in the context of socially constructed gender identities, are both literal crossings from one location to another and metaphorical crossings between one gendered identity and another within a socially-constructed, black racialized identity.

At the same time that black women characters in Dash's novel acquire and alter their subjectivities, within and across the U.S. mainland and Dawtuh Island, they are also asserting a powerful communicative agency on Dawtuh Island. In dedicating her novel, Dash cites "the women of the African Diaspora who dare to dream aloud, and especially those not afraid to see their own reflections inside those dreams." Dash's dedication

refers to black women's voices and the courage it takes to communicate their hopes, wishes, and desires when hegemonic discourses from the mainland at times oppose their very being. Dash renders the power of black women's voices and subjectivities in her novel by drawing on the oral traditions of the Gullah community, by using heteroglossic forms to represent the multiplicity of women's subject positions, and by including a linguistic strategy that alternates between phonetic transcriptions and syntactic idiosyncrasies of Gullah creole and Standard American English.

Following the opening section called "The Land," Dash continues the narrative with a new section called "Dawtuh Island, 1912, Telling the Lie." Here Dash introduces the matriarch of the Gullah community, Miz Emma Julia, who is responsible for educating Gullah children on traditional Gullah folklore, religious practices, healing remedies, spells and other practices. Miz Emma Julia assumes the role of storyteller, representing the role of the African *griot* for present generations. Alao points out that the *griot* "provides for the community access to practices, beliefs, and stories which pre-date the enslaved experience or retell it." The *griot* also serves the purpose of "Asserting the importance of family bonds...for communities to access their past and affirm their connection to a particular lineage or genealogy" (221). As a *griot*, Miz Emma Julia tells a West African creation story to the young children in the community, continuing the oral tradition of storytelling as an intergenerational experience of knowledge and learning.

In the introduction, Miz Emma Julia tells the children "Dis lie begin at de beginning of dis world fore we know it. It begin fore de Bible" (12). The "lie" story is about an old woman who is lonely and has "nobody to care bout and nobody to care for."

The old woman seeks the advice of an elephant, who tells her she needs kin. But the old woman does not have kin. The story continues in the following passage:

De elephant thought about it, and den him went back to de other elephants and dey studied on it, and him come back and him say, ‘We hear dat if you take de five nuts from de hickory tree an put dem in a ball of clay and throw dem in de fire and let dem stay for three days, kin will come to you.’ The old woman look at he just so and say, ‘De hickory tree all de way on de other side. I old. I caint walk dat far.’ De elephant say, ‘If you want kin, you walk it.’ ... ‘One thing to remember, kin is fine, but kin can be trouble’. (13)

In this passage, the black oral tradition is represented through the act of storytelling, while also signifying a woman-centered enunciation of black cultural practices. The elder, Miz Emma Julia, provides Gullah children with vital memories and knowledges passed down from previous generations of storytellers. In doing so, she asserts the power of woman’s communicative speech, while also sustaining a sense of cultural continuity for the community. There is also evidence in Miz Emma Julia’s tale of what Gates calls “the speakerly text,” a term he applies to Zora Neale Hurston’s novel *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. Gates refers to Hurston as a writer whose “rhetorical strategy is designed to represent an oral literary tradition, designed to ‘emulate the phonetic, grammatical, and lexical patterns of actual speech and produce the illusion of oral narration.’” He asserts that Hurston’s narrative is “imitating one of the numerous forms of oral narration to be found in classical Afro-American vernacular literature” (181). It can also be said that *Daughters of the Dust* renders a distinct dialect and orality through the voice of Miz

Emma Julia, who becomes a symbol of the Gullah woman's role as a vital source of the black oral tradition in her community.

When Miz Emma Julia tells the children about the African-derived creation myth, one of the children is skeptical of her story, stating, "Want nuttin fore de Bible! Preacher Wilson tole me dat!" In this dialogue the reader experiences an immediate tension between "Telling the Lie" and Christian biblical creation stories. The exchange between Miz Emma Julia and the young character, Pap, results in a dialectic tension in the form of cognitive dissonance between two intersecting knowledges: African-derived religious beliefs and Christian beliefs. While this narrative tension is quickly resolved between the characters, the "lie" story is continued. By including two conflicting belief systems within *Daughters of the Dust*, readers are invited to negotiate meaning within the polyphony of the text. Polyphony in the novel is a term defined by Mikhail Bakhtin, in *The Problem with Dostoevsky's Poetics*, as "A plurality of independent and unmerged voices and consciousnesses...which combine but are not merged in the unity of the event" (6). This plurality of voices occurs when Dash inserts competing ideologies in the dialogue between Miz Emma Julia and Pap as a reminder of the history of Gullah cultural syncretism and cultural hybridity on the islands. But this confrontation is also a form of resistance to the dominant Christian beliefs held by many members of the Gullah community that tend to render Afrocentric knowledges silent.

The epistemological rupture between two differing worldviews is in opposition to the monologic dominant culture within the United States that upholds Christianity as its core religious belief system. From the perspective of the Gullah, and other culturally syncretic groups of people, the mixing of worldviews is quite common. Dash's narrative

strategy proposes cultural syncretism as the dominant worldview over the monologic, monolithic perspectives of Western centers of modernity. In addition, this culturally syncretic worldview is shared within a matriarchal community in *Daughters of the Dust*. As a result, Dash's text inserts a woman-centered perspective that undermines Enlightenment discourses that assume the precedence and authority of Western philosophical discourses in relation to other worldviews.

Dash's stylistic choice, "Telling the Lie," is a signifier with a Bakhtinian double-voiced textual pattern, which means that it has more than one referential meaning. The first meaning is that the "lie" being told to the children suggests the story Miz Emma Julia tells them is not factual, but serves to educate them on their belief systems. But the second meaning of the "lie" refers to the fact that the stories presented in Dash's novel are counter-narratives, the unofficial histories that should be told. The implication is that the real lies are the historical "facts" about Gullah life and traditions told from the mainland (i.e. from a Western perspective).

Besides the Bakhtinian polyphony of voices and the double-voiced connotations of the term "telling the lie," with its more than double but multiple referents, the novel also contains a heteroglossia of languages. Heteroglossia is a term introduced by Bakhtin in *The Dialogic Imagination*. For Bakhtin, heteroglossia is dialogic in that the reader is responsible for maintaining unity among a diverse (hybridized) series of language utterances and worldviews that form from dialects, national languages, and other linguistic forms (272). But when Gullah phonetic transcriptions and American English are included in Dash's novel, the dialogic heteroglossic nature of the reading causes a divergence. Instead of a unifying reading, readers become engaged in a dialectic and

dialogic relationship with the text. This occurs because readers must first adjust to the local Sea Island vernacular and the roles that both Gullah and English play in characterizations. Then readers need to grapple with how these two languages inform the characterizations and plot. Finally, readers either reconcile with the tension produced by a language subset they are unfamiliar with, and unity occurs, or they stop reading. Just as Mae G. Henderson states that black women writers enter into a dialectic and dialogic relationship with the text as part of their subjectivity, so too do readers enter into this relationship when they engage with Dash's narrative (121).

In fact, *Daughters of the Dust* includes a polyvocality similar, again, to Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. Sieglinde Lemke notes that Hurston's novel contains a "vernacular aesthetic" because it "inspires a call-and-response between character and narrator and was written mostly in the vernacular (66). Dash's novel maintains the Gullah dialect as the dominant language appearing in most of the dialogue and "lie" story narrative. Because Gullah dialect, through phonetic inscription, is the dominant language, readers must reconcile with Gullah phonetic inscriptions, dialectically and dialogically. If the linguistic referent is unfamiliar to a reader, then the reader's act of decoding the Gullah phonetic transcriptions, and engaging with this novel, is a sign of the reader's attempts at decoding the complex meanings, forms, and languages expressed. In turn, these readerly engagements lead the reader to begin to accept the multiple subjectivities of culture, race, and gender that are presented. Despite Alao's contention that the literary dialect is rendered less effective by Dash's use of phonetic similarity rather than direct inscription, the potential affects that it may have on the reader are still of importance and will be discussed shortly (238). Alao's additional claim that *Daughters of the Dust* lacks

the inclusion of Gullah metaphors, imagery, and styles to convey cultural meanings is dually noted; however, Dash's narrative, despite its failure to incorporate the specific lexicon of the Gullah, does employ "lie" story: folkloric narrative in collaboration with Gullah phonetic patterns. Her novel also provides ample, culturally-specific imagery, such as hand signaling (*com pe*), basket weaving practices, conjuring, and Gullah food preparation. These culturally-specific images are recalled through the narrative's inclusion of the phonetic mimicry of Gullah dialect.

I call the effect of readerly negotiation with *Daughters of the Dust* a reverse transculturation experience, especially for those readers who are not previously familiar with the Gullah dialect. By transculturation I make reference to ethnographers' use of the term to "describe how subordinated or marginal groups select and invent from materials transmitted to them by a dominant or metropolitan culture" (Pratt 7). But what happens when the novel's text is largely formed by "the phonetic transcription and syntactic idiosyncrasy" of the so-called subordinate group? (Alao 238). How does the reader negotiate the cultural asymmetry of the novel when English is their dominant language? The term reverse transculturation seems fitting for this readerly engagement. In reverse transculturation, the North American reader (whose dominant language is typically English) becomes immersed in the politically and culturally subordinate language; language becomes a form of counter poetics that affects the reader's sense of culture, race, and gender. The result for readers of *Daughters of the Dust* is recognition of African American historical ties to African-derived consciousness and black women's communicative roles in cultural production.

Within Dash's novel there are also a mixture of forms such as "lie" stories, songs, recipes, religious incantations, and letters. Various characters "speak" through these textual forms depending on their role in the Gullah community. For example, Miz Emma Julia begins the "lie" stories with her creation tale, but throughout the novel several characters tell their own "lie" stories as a narrative device that helps to introduce the broader Gullah community into the story line. Also, other characters, such as Amelia who is studying the Gullah people on Dawtuh Island, are given what Henderson calls "interventionist acts." Interventionist acts are those acts in which "The self-inscription of black women requires disruption, rereading and rewriting the conventional and canonical stories, as well as revising the conventional generic forms that convey these stories" (131). Amelia is in the process of researching and writing her master's thesis on the Gullah community. She also writes letters to her mother MyOwn and to her cousin Elizabeth, as well as to her thesis advisor. Also Elizabeth, a healer who is the Unknown Child from Dash's film, is given the space to include her recipes and potions in the text along with her "lie" story. I borrow from Henderson's "interventionist acts" here to make the point that these two female characters are rupturing the narrator's discourse by inserting their own texts, their own voices and in doing so, according to Madhu Dubey, they are providing important "folk cultural models" which "help black women's novels to displace the fictional category of the individual protagonist" and the category of "omniscient narration" (7). As a result, Dash's narrative underscores the importance of community in the creation of meaning. Also, the heterogeneity of black women's discourses, as cultural, historical, and geographical signifiers, stresses their unique subjectivities within a spatially-determined range of communal voices. Moreover, the

dialogic and dialectic nature of Dash's narrative positions multiple subgenres in the text as markers of Gullah women's subjectivities in the apparent polyphony of discourses.

Cultural syncretism, hybridity, and shared knowledges are the basis for an analysis of cultural practices in *Daughters of the Dust*. These practices are exemplified by Iona Peazant's testimony "Dat Julien, He Hold My Heart So Close" and Amelia's reflections and perceptions of hair care while staying with Iona and her family. Iona's testimony is marked by shared knowledges of displacement and forced migration. She recalls the history of African and Native American resistance to white supremacy and the sharing of cross-cultural knowledges when she tells Amelia "De old stories tell bout how de *buckra* (white people) come cross de water wit captives, gonna make de ancient people captives. How de anciens and de captives share what lil dey got, learn each odder ways, take de good from both (173). Iona's testimony defines her relationship with Julien as one of reciprocity, where she learned how "he mama make de basket" and Julien learned "how to raise the sugar tomatoes and de good sweet corn" (176). The cultural practices within Iona's house form a common topos of lived experiences in Dash's literary aesthetics. One example is the Gullah *com pe* or hand signal. When Amelia is introduced to Julien, he gives her the Gullah hand signal (*com pe*), but Amelia is "bewildered, not knowing what to do" because she has lived most of her life in Harlem, New York and is not familiar with this form of greeting. However, Iona and Julien's two children, Shadda and Neeny, understand how to hand signal between a male and female and they show Amelia the process. The *com pe* informs Amelia about a cultural practice that connects Gullah and Native Americans in a relationship building gesture. It also represents Amelia's lack of Gullah-derived cultural knowledges.

The novel positions Iona, Amelia's aunt, as a Gullah woman who understands herself by the cultural practices she performs with her family. It is through these beliefs, actions, and perspectives that she understands herself in relation to place. Iona washes her children's hair with shampoo made by Elizabeth, who is a healer in the novel. Iona says the shampoo smells "like Nana (Peazant). I don't know how Lil Bet do it, but I smell it, an I think Nana passing by" (181). These cultural practices are acts of knowledge production within Gullah home spaces. Patricia Hill Collins claims "[t]he commonplace, taken-for-granted knowledge shared by African American women growing from our everyday thoughts and actions constitutes a first and most fundamental level of knowledge" (34). In fact, Dash's illustration of Gullah hair care asserts African American Gullah women's everyday knowledges as epistemological and phenomenological discourses intrinsic to U.S. Sea Island locations.

Hair care practices between Iona Peazant, Amelia Varnes, and Iona's daughters also develop the novel's aesthetic focus on daily experiences as central to one's subjectivity. Noliwe M. Rooks notes that, in Dash's film *Daughters of the Dust*, hair is a central theme, making one film reviewer remark that "it's all about hair" (Tate qtd. in Rooks 117). In Dash's novel, hair is still an aesthetic element of note, but less pronounced than it was in the film. When Iona lets Amelia wash her daughter Margaret Anne's hair, Amelia reflects on her life in New York and Haager's opinion that her "fine, crinkly" hair was "good hair." Amelia's reflections on her experiences with hair care in New York point toward the intersections of bodily comportment with social class. She considers how her grandmother Haager views hair and social class, noting Haager's approval of the self-made black woman Madam C.J. Walker in New York who sells hair

products,⁶⁹ yet Haager lacks interest in working with Amelia's hair. Amelia begins to realize by working with Margaret Anne's hair that hair is an important lived experience. Part of her identity becomes shaped by her sensual interactions with hair, and how others react to hair and hair care. For example when she washes Margaret Anne's hair, she notes how Margaret Anne sighed with pleasure when she massaged her scalp. Sensing the bonding that occurs in this process, Amelia longs to have this personal connection through hair care with her mother MyOwn (*Daughters* 183-84). As Rooks notes, "matters attendant to the grade, style, and care of hair do seem to function as symbolic of a character's sense of identity, social status, health and sense of purpose in African American culture" and that "the description of rituals associated with hair and its care often foreshadows the development of the protagonist" (7-8).⁷⁰ When Amelia washes Margaret Anne's hair she realizes that past experiences with hair care in her family were quite different from the practices of hair care shared in Iona's household. The main difference is that Iona places importance on bonding with kin in the process of hair care, while in Amelia's family, Haager links hair to social class and, as a result, has subverted an important bonding practice in the family. Thus, by taking part in the cultural practices performed by Iona's family, Amelia gains knowledge of hair as an important aspect of identity. Furthermore, these cultural practices signify the discordancy between Dawtuh

⁶⁹ Madam C.J. Walker invented the hair strengthening comb. According to Noliwe M. Rooks, Walker was "arguably one of the most influential individuals in visually representing and constructing identities of African American women at the turn of the century." For more information, see Rooks.

⁷⁰ Besides Rooks, Banks, Jacobs-Huey, and Byrd and Tharps are all recommended sources for discussions of the representations of black women's hair.

Island knowledges and practices and New York's, creating a polemic on the importance of sustaining one's culture and community in the quest for material gains.

Chapter Conclusion

Gullah women's internalization of patriarchal codes of conduct and racialized objectification can be insurmountable and at best prohibitive of true self-determination and a self-defined subjectivity. The struggle to decolonize Gullah women's identities is historically and contemporarily captured by Julie Dash in characters' processes of mediating and negotiating metaphorical and physical borderlands. In order to provide a frame of reference for my analysis, I find Alcoff's "identities of interpretive horizons" to be helpful. In Alcoff's discussion of Gadamer's concept of interpretive horizons, one's identity is spatially embodied, engaged in an interpretive process that is likened to a horizon. Gadamer, in *Truth and Method*, states that his metaphor of a perspectival horizon is "a substantive perspectival location from which the interpreter looks out at the world, a perspective that is always present but that is open and dynamic, with a temporal as well as physical dimension, moving into the future and into new spaces as the subject moves" (304). His metaphor of a perspectival horizon is suitable for articulating the physical and internalized acts of border crossing in Dash's narrative: Lucy, Carrie Mae, and Toady perceive economic advancement in their desires to cross Dawtuh Island for work on the mainland, and Carrie Mae and Toady perceive emotional comforts crossing back to Dawtuh Island from Atlanta, Georgia.

Alcoff's "identities as interpretive horizons" aids in an understanding of land as aesthetic imagery in Julie Dash's novel, if we take land as a metaphor that links identities to their interpretive horizons. Land aesthetics are meant to evoke this construction of

subjectivity within geographic horizons, in the case of this study, borderlands. The land acts as an intermediary in the development of an “identity of interpretive horizons.” Land becomes transposed from physical to metaphorical, and vice versa, when characters border cross from their homelands to an “elsewhere” and when they cross back to their home of origin. Thus the land aesthetic informs female characters’ identities when confronted with racialized and gendered definitions of self that are fluid and shifting based on their perceptions and memories. In other words, land is the catalyst for formation and change in one’s identity and self-definition.

The women characters’ “identities as interpretive horizons” also shift due to disparate philosophical and ideological discourses that are mediated and negotiated, from indigenous cultural knowledges deeply connected to lands to the deterritorialized and commodified dominant cultural knowledges learned in New York City. These dialectic and dialogic encounters result in processes of self-reflection and reclamation of former knowledges in the process of border crossings. Dash’s narrative paradigm articulates a method for individual and communal transformation in the process of migration experiences by, following Gadamer, creating a narrative that allow characters to bridge more than one horizon of interpretation. Though in Dash’s narrative, the process of acquiring an “identity of interpretive horizons” is not conclusive for all female characters’ experiences. For instance, Haager Peazant is a female character who migrated to New York City for better living conditions. She prescribes to white supremacist and patriarchal codes of conduct which are linked to the pressures of socio-economic advancement for her and her family. For Haager, a better life is defined by externally prescribed behaviors and appearances that are internalized in her family’s subjectivities,

causing disunity. So it seems that Dash's overarching ideology points toward embracing an authentic Afrocentric female subjectivity and embracing metaphorical and physical lands of origin, while not forgoing economic advancement.

The land aesthetic in Dash's novels also points to lands as "sites of memory" for individual characters and their community. In Julie Dash's *Daughters of the Dust*, Lucy, Amelia, and Toady's interactions with the lands transform their subjectivities in healthy ways prior to or after border crossings. Land locations change their memories and perceptions. Their lived experiences in the lands are catalysts for communal remembering and healing. For Amelia, ancestral histories of forced migration experienced during the Middle Passage connect with present day migration experiences in terms of urbanization, which signifies a loss of intergenerational family and communal memories until she fully embraces her Gullah identity. For Toady, different landscapes and spaces allow shifts in her gendered identity and subjectivity. Where the mainland brothel in Atlanta, Georgia symbolized the white male gaze and was prohibitive of her longed for sexual identity, on the other side of the border, on Dawtuh Island, she found the freedom to assert a powerful transgendered identity that traverses the norm in both locations. Therefore, Dash's ideological and aesthetic goals are designed to place black women at the center of a historical, geographical, and cultural moment when their self-definitions transform from internalized, white supremacy and patriarchal definitions of womanhood to a sense of self that is in a close relationship with the land. Thus, the land aesthetic in Julie Dash in *Daughters of the Dust* liberates black women from false dichotomies, oppressive hierarchies, and harmful self-definitions.

Dash's land aesthetic can be broadly summarized by applying the concept of "third time-space" articulated by Smadar Lavie and Ted Swedenburg with the help of Chandra Mohanty and Minnie Bruce Pratt. A "third time-space" occurs when "opposition is not only reactive but also creative and affirmative...it ruptures categories of race, gender, sexuality, class, nation, and empire in the center as well as the margins." It has a spatial relation to experience that is not rigidly binding because experiences are "too heterogeneous, mobile, and discontinuous" to limit spatial movement yet the "third time-space" is held in place by the lived experience of being in border locations (13-14). In Dash's novel, a "third time-space" is articulated by land poetics for characters that experience the hegemonies of a center of modernity such as New York City, while challenging Western assumptions of black female subjectivity. In summary, land in these narratives is a reminder that colonialism and neocolonialism have usurped these lands and people for centuries and continue to exploit the lands, people, and cultures. Thus Dash has created female characters who become agents of change. Her narrative points the way toward a praxis for avoiding the pitfalls of globalization, deterritorialization, and cultural commodification witnessed by women border crossers who travel outside of their original homelands.

Dash's characters represent women's authorial space in the production of Afrocentric cultural forms in their communities. Women characters evoke ancestral modes of historicizing lived experiences which counter official histories of nation states with subaltern histories. They also build community knowledges for their children and for creating awareness of women's experiences in their community. Dash creates these aesthetic forms as unifying communicative practices for artistic, social, and political

ends, i.e., toward racial and gender equality precipitated by the end of racist and sexist oppressions.⁷¹ In Dash's novel, women characters represent, through orality and languages, the racial and ethnic complexities of Gullah identities. Her narrative engages in performativity in the process of storytelling, which engages readers in the process of creating meaning.

In this study I use the term reverse transculturation to define Dash's incorporation of Gullah phonetic transcriptions as a language aesthetic, which produces the effect of a reader's awareness and immersion in a so-called subordinate language form, introducing the reader to cultural syncretic experiences while reading the novel. The incorporation of more than one language, in Dash's case a creole-derived dialect as the dominant language in the novel, challenges a reader's own identity in relation to the text. The dialogic and dialectic relationship that occurs as a result of including a heteroglossia of languages and forms relies on the reader's reception and ability to form multiple interpretations. This readerly engagement with multiple languages and dialects can be understood as a beginning of pluritopic rather than monotopic readings of border narratives. Alcoff notes "a pluritopic hermeneutics is to situate identity within multiple traditions that are at play in the political contestation over meanings in a postcolonial world" (125). Dash is not only "cross-fertilizing" the Western text with other histories in order to "repossess...a true sense of one's time and identity," to quote Edouard Glissant, in *Caribbean Discourses*, but she is also engaged in cross-fertilization of linguistic histories and identities in to the Western literary canon (93). The goal of a reverse transculturation is to

⁷¹ Mohanty makes these arguments in her discussion of Third World feminism.

allow readers to accept the non-dominant language codes in *Daughters of the Dust*. Through a language aesthetic, the border narrative (U.S. Southeast Sea Islands) also seeks to reclaim a Gullah woman's voice for defining a self that is aware of, and in contestation with, external definitions imposed on them by oppressive racist and sexist forces, whether they come from the nation or their own communities.

Cultural practices in Dash's novels reveal the importance of family and communal sharing in Gullah life. This is exemplified by Iona and Julien Last Child's mutual sharing of food knowledges and the cultural syncretism represented by the Gullah *com pe* (hand signal) that is used by the mixed race Gullah/Choctaw family. Cultural practices call in to question the ways that migration for Amelia has altered these knowledges, causing her to enter into self-reflection brought about by the differences between cultural practices in Dawtuh Island and New York City.

Amelia realizes when performing hair care practices that the worldview of Iona's family is at odds with her life in New York City. When Amelia washes Margaret Anne's hair she realizes the bonding that can occur between mothers, daughters, and siblings. She also ponders her grandmother Haager's socio-economic attitudes about hair and hair care and the sporadic times her own hair was touched and worked on by her mother MyOwn. Therefore, hair practices in Dash's novel are central to women's knowledges of familial and female bonding that can occur between black women. Hair symbolizes physical memories and sense perceptions caused by touching and working with hair, which can create emotional and physical comfort. It can nurture one's soul. Conversely, hair practices can also hurt families and females and bring disunity in the family. Haager views hair practices from a socio-economic lens, while Amelia views these practices as

emotional and physical comforts or discomforts, suggesting that generational changes in attitudes about food practices and hair practices depend on the reasons women decide to migrate. Hence, Haager's migration to New York for improved opportunities and entry into what she perceives as an advanced social and cultural location. Amelia, however, is compelled to migrate to establish ancestral ties and bond with her Gullah relatives.

Julie Dash continues the aesthetic goals of many contemporary black women authors by including the oral tradition, storytelling, and a heteroglossia of languages and forms in her novel. *Daughters of the Dust* continues in the wake of the Gullah Renaissance of the 1970s and 1980s. African American women's novels, such as Gloria Naylor's *Mama Day* and Paule Marshall's *Praisesong for the Widow*, and to some extent Morrison's *Beloved* and *Song of Solomon*, are also involved in some aspects of feminist borderland narratology and aesthetic patterns examined in my dissertation. Marshall's and Morrison's novels engage in African-derived, woman-centered rituals and journeys that can arguably be traced to Gullah cultural and metaphysical knowledges and practices. However, both authors' narratives are situated in other historically Afrocentric locations and communities than the U.S. Sea Islands. Naylor's *Mama Day*, though, is geohistorically situated off of the coast of Georgia, on a Gullah-centric island, Willow Springs. In addition, *Mama Day*'s aesthetics evoke the physical, material, and metaphorical barriers between Georgia coastal islands and Georgia's mainland, while also defining a Gullah female subjectivity through the character Miranda ("Mama" Day). It also narrates the discordancy between George and Cocoa, who live in New York and Willow Springs, in similar ways to Dash's narration of Amelia's discordancy between Harlem, New York and Dawtuh Island. Thus, *Mama Day* contains many similar figures

as *Daughters of the Dust*, but without the bilinguality between Gullah and American English; and therefore, without the additional subjective internalizations of language and direct translative engagements between the reader and the text.

In summary, *Daughters of the Dust* is a novel that can be situated within the wider African American women's literary canon as a borderland narrative. Dash's novel should also be critiqued as a U.S. Southern narrative from New World studies and inter-American studies paradigms, in order to effectively reveal the multiple boundaries, borders, and borderlands that evoke difference while evoking collective hemispheric experiences with U.S. nation-state/Western philosophical discourses and practices stemming from imperialism, colonialism, neocolonialism, and globalization.

CONCLUSION:

U.S. WOMEN'S BORDER NARRATIVES:

A FEMINIST AESTHETIC DESIGN FOR DECOLONIZATION

In this study, I define feminist borderland aesthetic patterns in three women-of-color novels: Ana Castillo's *So Far from God*, Louise Erdrich's *Tracks*, and Julie Dash's *Daughters of the Dust*. I researched each narrative for aesthetic patterns found in themes of lands/landscapes, languages and oral traditions, and cultural practices, which, I argue, are consistent across U.S. border literary works. I conclude that U.S. women's border novels' narrative poetics reconfigure dominant cultural codes in three separate border zones: U.S. Southwest, U.S. Northwest, and U.S. Southeast. In addition, I analyzed and critiqued each novel's forms and content to determine how readers engage with the complex arrangements of language(s); and how readerly engagements, if they are active in the pursuit of meaning, can lead to what I have defined as a "reverse transculturation" experience. I have used the term "reverse transculturation" in my study to define the ways Anglophone readers, whose sole or dominant language is English, accept diverse ethnic and cultural codes while reading each novel, and how they might begin thinking from Western *and* non-Western interpretive horizons.⁷² I conclude that there are moments

⁷² My dissertation defines the main readership of U.S. women's border narratives based on the predominance of acculturation to Western worldviews in the U.S., and also by the extent to which American English is taught in education institutions in the U.S. American English in North America is the dominant, often sole language that is read, written, and spoken. The identification of linguistic diversity in college classrooms, as Ann M. Johns makes clear, poses difficulties in determining readership and reading comprehension of linguistically diverse literatures. For example, in a 2008 essay by Drick Boyd, the author predicts that by 2014, projections of Hispanic, African American and Asian/Pacific Islander college students entering their first year of college will make up approximately 50% of the student population; however, Johns notes that census categories of Hispanic, Footnote continued on next page

in each literary work when readers are compelled to think from a U.S. border location, think in border language(s), and think within a border worldview. These moments of readerly transculturation occur when the narrative engages readers in textual acts of performativity, when language(s) are introduced without readers' direct or indirect knowledge of their meanings, and when language is omitted or is in play with traditional Western novel forms. I have also revealed how each novel represents female border subjects' lives in the process of self-realization and communal realizations of historical and contemporary struggles. My research confirms its theory that border women's struggles are closely connected to the lands they inhabit, and are a direct result of Western histories of colonization and neo-colonial practices. Their struggles are also the result of patriarchal and hegemonic discourses and actions found in their ethnic and cultural communities. Ultimately, by each novel's conclusion, main female characters transform their identities and subjectivities from oppressive spatial, temporal, and discursive body politics to liberating self-definitions that give them the ability to begin healing themselves and their communities.

Feminist borderland aesthetics operate through diegetic (storytelling via the oral tradition) and mimetic (representations of women border subjects) narrative functions, while also representing U.S. border realities through dialectic and dialogic poetics. Cross-cultural, comparative methods have been applied to the conclusion sections of Chapter Two, Three, and Four. These methods will also be applied in this chapter, for the purpose

African American, and Asian/Pacific Islander do not account for the growing population of recent immigrants entering the student body, whose diverse ethnic backgrounds do not necessarily match the historical ethnic origins of, for example, West African descendents in the U.S. For more information, see Johns and Boyd.

of revealing the geohistorical and geopolitical tendencies across each novel, as well as drawing conclusions based on the narratives' divergences in forms, themes, and poetic emphasis. Further still, this chapter will make clear the differences in each novel's cultural specificities, and their differing time and space continuums within each U.S. nation-state border the settings occur.

As I discussed in Chapter One, the U.S. women's border novels in this study are not "postmodern realisms," e.g., narratives that include *lo real maravilloso*, magic realism, the fantastic, and historiographic metafiction. Rather, I refer to Castillo's, Erdrich's, and Dash's novels as "decolonial narratives" because the main narrative thread that weaves their plot lines together is, a dialectic and dialogic performativity of women-of-color subjectivities in the process of decolonization. In decolonial narratives, female characters in U.S. border settings such as New Mexico, North Dakota, and the U.S. Sea Islands, are transformed from the effects of colonization and neo-colonization to a decolonized state that enables them to form an altered identity, subjectivity, and consciousness. To be a voice of and for decolonial border subjects, according to Arturo J. Aldama and Naomi H. Quinonez in *Decolonial Voices: Chicana and Chicano Cultural Studies in the 21st Century*, is to "live... Chicana theory" by celebrating their cultures and interrogating power structures, by recovering histories and knowledges, by critiquing grand narratives of racial, sexual, and patriarchal discourses, and by reclaiming space and a loci of enunciation for Chicana/o cultural discourses (2). I would like to extend the articulation of Chicana/o "living theory" to Native American and African American Gullah women's narratives (3). But my goals are to articulate decolonial border narratives by developing critical methods and terminologies that convey the "living border theory" present in U.S.

women's Chicana, Native American, and African American Gullah border novels. These narratives convey "living border theory" through border poetics that evoke the praxes that radical border women-of-color undergo when in the process of decolonization.

A feminist, decolonial consciousness begins, according to Anzaldúa, when the female border subject, "on their way to a new consciousness," discards their subjugated self by a process of healing, a process that ultimately leads to being "on both shores at once, and at once, [to] see through serpent and eagle eyes" (100-01). The "*mestiza* consciousness," which Anzaldúa refers to in, *Borderlands/La Frontera*, gives the border woman-of-color a tolerance for the ambiguous nature of borderlands. The border woman has mastered the ability to live on her own terms in the borderlands, and to be/become the progenitor of a transformative feminist culture that challenges "the collective cultural/religious male-derived beliefs" of, in the case of this study, Mexican American, African American Gullahs, Native Americans, and European Americans.

Castillo's, Erdrich's, and Dash's novels are also concerned with articulating feminist praxes that serve to describe and define how women borderland subjects can transform their subjectively felt experiences from internalized racism and sexism. They establish praxes for overcoming cultural hegemonies, such as religious orthodoxies and mythological scapegoating of feminine deities, that tend to work with patriarchal, male-centered discourses, thwarting women-of-color in their efforts to emancipate themselves and alter their otherwise oppressed and violently subjugated lives. As a result, these novels convey a U.S. border woman's radical consciousness, one that integrates the body with nature, and subjectivity with lands and landscapes, languages, oral traditions, and cultural practices.

Each novel, though, approaches its subject matter according to border thinking, and border semiotics that signify a culturally-specific ethnic consciousness. Due to divergent semiotic engagements in each novel, the female characters experience borderlands according to the interpretive horizons that manifest in each location, and in turn, the readerly engagements that occur reflect these interpretive horizons. Therefore, the foundation of my research methodology involves the assumption that U.S. border locations are inherently rife with complex intersections of gendered, sexualized, raced identities and subjectivities. My methodology takes into account the colonial, neocolonial, and neoliberal doctrines that often work concomitantly with patriarchal discourses with the effect of rendering border women subaltern and unable to voice their concerns and outrages about the inequalities they are subjected to, such as: harsh living and working conditions, compulsory heteronormativity, enforced gender codes of conduct, the devaluing of their unique skills, qualifications, and abilities and the denigration and objectification of their bodies, whether they are crossing borders, living within the borderlands, or dwelling in the domestic home front.

My main claim is that these realities of border life are expressed through what I call feminist borderland aesthetics. They are feminist because the female subject is the main progenitor of knowledges within the borderland settings of Castillo's, Erdrich's, and Dash's novels. They are also feminist because key female characters in each novel become active agents in the production of knowledge, for themselves and their communities. In addition, female characters central to each novel's plot undergo changes in their gendered and sexualized identities as a direct result of their close contact with their material surroundings. As Meghan Cope makes clear in "Feminist Epistemology in

Geography,” we are always participating in the production and interpretation of knowledges (43). This is also true for the female characters in each narrative, and for women-of-color readers, who are also actively engaged in the act of feminizing the borderlands.

Cope also addressed an important research question for feminist geographers, which begins with: “‘How are gender differences constructed spatially?’” (53). As Cope also notes though, a gendered epistemology that provides the foundations for one’s research methodology, specifically within geography, becomes even more complex when one considers the intersections of gender and race (55). This study also addresses how the gendered, sexualized, and racialized border woman produces knowledge about herself and her community; therefore, the research implications are wide, extending epistemology and geography from gender to the realities of race and culture as well. In all three novels, the gendered borderland subject is always already sexualized and racialized, by Western patriarchy and colonial/neo-colonial discourses and practices, but also by patriarchy and internalized colonialism/neo-colonialism in their communities. Therefore, it is important to examine the spatial epistemologies, expressed aesthetically, that the female characters perform as gendered, sexualized, and racialized border subjects.

Alarcón, in “Anzaldúa’s *Frontera*: Inscribing Gynetics” writes that there is a “need to ‘repossess’ the land...through scenarios of ‘origins’ that emerge in the selfsame territory, be it at the literary, legendary, historical, ideological, critical or theoretical level” (118). She concludes her essay with the directive that Chicanas want to textualize the effects of dislocation (124). In my dissertation, I examine the multiple ways that Castillo, Erdrich, and Dash represent the process of repossession of women-of-color

identities from the dislocation of the self by reclaiming the lands they inhabit. The process of repossession of identities and lands necessarily involves acts of remembering ancestral and indigenous worldviews and histories of contact with modernity's imperialist and colonialist centers. Geopolitical nation-state colonizations that are manifested and inscribed on geohistorical borderlands, border women's bodies, and border women's consciousnesses are, then, transformed to decolonized states of being in a place, similarly to Anzaldúa's third space: the new *mestiza* consciousness. Each novel is involved in feminizing the cultural production of narratives that represent an oppositional thinking, not just in the U.S. Southwest borderlands, which J. Saldívar refers, but also in the reservation borderlands of North Dakota/Canada and the U.S. Southeast Sea Islands.

My cross-cultural, comparative methodology has revealed formal and thematic consistencies in Castillo's, Erdrich's, and Dash's narratives. I have also noted that these are Post Civil Rights era narratives published from the late 1980s to early 1990s; however, as Sadowski observes, the 21st century is experiencing a period of increased border fiction production that depicts the close interactions between borderlands and people. It can be inferred that this increase in border cultural productions is the result of increased ethnic and cultural conflict with geopolitical nation-state militarizations, especially in the U.S. Southwest and U.S./Canada border zones. It also leads to the conclusion that the type of cultural production I examined in my dissertation is part of a larger body of work yet to be critiqued with my methods: 21st century women's border fiction. Further still, the aesthetic patterns and female characterizations analyzed in my dissertation are salient and consistent across multiple border settings; therefore, I claim

there is a late 20th century, early 21st century rise in U.S. women's feminist border narratives.

As I have made clear in my study, the act of writing border women's narratives is an act of attempting to create new imaginary spaces for border women to achieve female agency, since Chicana, *Ojibwe*, and Gullah women have been systematically written out of patriarchal and culturally hegemonic discourses of the U.S. nation-state and, at times, even their own communities. However, the reimagining of border women's spaces requires the inclusion of acts of historical remembering, which is similar to Derridian deconstruction of Western philosophical discourses, but is framed through non-Western, indigenous concepts of transformation and recreation. I also infer from my research that the conditions of living as women-of-color in U.S. border locations are relatively similar, meaning that differing border regions still produce effects of living in the material and metaphorical interstices of historical, ideological, political, patriarchal, and cultural conflicts.

One important finding in my research is that close interactions with lands in the confines of geographical and political borders is vital for the successful transformation of female characters from a colonized subject to a decolonized one. In all three novels, female characters actively resist definitions prescribed by the body politic; instead, they create self-definitions that are, in most cases, non-heteronormative. *La Loca* and *Caridad*, in *So Far from God*, develop their identities from direct contact with their physical surroundings. As a result, all three develop their own unique Chicana voices, they exert influence over male-dominated cultural practices, and they all come to represent the voices of a New Mexican Chicana's awakening sexuality, spirituality, and political

consciousness. In effect, they embody self-definitions that are recalcitrant to the body politic, and are, therefore, models of an Anzaldúan “new *mestiza* consciousness” and Castillo’s definition of *Xicanista*. However, Esperanza and Fe, in their desire to leave their ancestral home and disengage from their ethnic and cultural identities, become tragic victims of U.S. imperialist designs. In *Tracks*, Fleur is transformed from contracting tuberculosis from contact with European settlers, to an *Ojibwe* female legend who is the primary mythic figure of Nanapush’s and Pauline’s stories. Despite, and because of life in the confines of a reservation, Fleur experiences a decolonized sense of *Ojibweness*. However, Pauline, in her harsh assimilation to white culture, and her state of being out of place in both white and *Ojibwe* cultures, becomes a tragic figure of the *Métis* mixed-blood woman living in reservation and white community spaces within U.S./Canada borders. In *Daughters of the Dust*, Amelia and Toady are transformed from crossing from U.S. centers of modernity to Dawtuh Island. Amelia’s consciousness is radically altered from her goals of studying her Gullah relatives to returning to her Gullah roots and abandoning her research. The character Toady is also radically transformed from a female sex worker in Atlantic, Georgia who complies with heteronormative body politics for economic gain, to a lesbian who performs masculinity after crossing from the U.S. mainland to Dawtuh Island.

In some instances, female characters do not undergo transformations because they are presented as already decolonized. For example, Doña Felicia, a *curandera*, illustrates the importance of the *mestiza* matriarch and healer. As a character, her female agency is fully realized in the novel’s introduction. She is representative of a *mestiza* enunciator of the intertwined histories of Mexico and the U.S., and as a woman who defines cross-

border ethnic and cultural mixing. She is also a figure of indigenous, communal knowledges, providing healing remedies and advice to Caridad, so that she too can become a *curandera* and continue healing women in New Mexico's border communities. In *Tracks*, Nanapush represents the wisdom of a great medicine man and patriarch of the *Ojibwe* community. Though he is a male character, he does not provide healing and knowledges to his community through a male-centered, chauvinist perspective. Rather, he leads his community to their historical, ethnic, and cultural roots with oral traditions that cast a female, Fleur, as the most powerful healer. His role in *Tracks* symbolizes the balance between male and female power in traditional Native American communities. Also, Miz Emma Julia, the matriarch of the Gullah community in *Daughters of the Dust*, is given predetermined female agency as the voice of her community and their ancestors. She exerts a strong female voice in the narrative's folktales and rituals of historical remembering and recovery, particularly when slave bones are found on Gullah farmland. I conclude, then, that all three narratives give authority to the inherent power that border locations have to alter border women's identities in ways that are conducive to female agency and a healthy subjectivity, while each narrative also provides cautionary tales depicting the dangers of community members who disconnect physically, spiritually, and emotionally from their ancestral homes of origin.

In addition to the values placed on women's interactions with their ancestral lands, I have demonstrated that the inclusion of folkloric elements, storytelling, and multilinguality in Castillo's, Erdrich's, and Dash's narratives are indicative of the interplay between linguistic identifiers, female subjectivities, and geographies in historical spaces of interstitiality within border contact zones. That is, the textuality of *So*

Far from God, Tracks, and *Daughters of the Dust* is necessarily ethnographic and multilingual because the narratives elicit the conditions of cultural mixing and women-of-color subalternity at geographic and temporal points where differing modes of modernity clash. Mignolo writes, “theorizing languages within social structures of domination is dealing with the ‘natural’ plurilingual conditions of the human world ‘artificially’ suppressed by the monolingual ideology and monotopic hermeneutics of modernity and nationalism” (“Languages” 189). Mignolo’s claims refer to Anzaldúa’s theories of multilingualism, polyvocality, and pluritopic hermeneutics in U.S. Southwest borderlands, but are similar to comments made by Joyner regarding the U.S. South and the creolization of Southern ethnic groups (12-13). The plurilingualism of U.S. Southwest border geographies proposed by Mignolo, and the creolization of the South proposed by Joyner, are evident linguistic signs in Castillo’s and Dash’s novels. These linguistic signifiers operate as contradistinctions to English as a linguistic and cultural hegemonic force. Additionally, they indicate the historical trace of ethnic and cultural convergences in Erdrich’s novel as well. Bilingual and multilingual signifiers also precipitate the shift in linguistic authority, from Eurocentric and monolingual, to creole and *mestizaje* plurilingual constructions. The presence of multiple languages is, finally, an expression of the type of border thinking and border theorizing Mignolo underscores as commensurate with a shift in racial, gendered, and sexual consciousness – from assimilation and/or adaptation to a DuBoisian “double consciousness” or more precisely, the feminist “*mestiza* consciousness” of Anzaldúa, since the narratives studied are representative of racialized, gendered, and sexualized women’s border lives (“Theorizing” 208-09).

Female characters are given agency in their communities largely through bilingual or multilingual textuality. La Loca in *So Far from God* becomes the voice of Chicana spiritual authority when she returns from the dead and enunciates previously oppressed women's religious knowledges in Spanish and Chicana Spanish, which is in opposition to Father Jerome's male-centered Christian doctrine. Caridad's act of becoming an indigenous-centered Chicana occurs when the narrative inscribes Acoma Pueblo, Nahuatl, and Aztec signifiers during pivotal changes to her subject position in New Mexico. Both characters are embodiments of Chicana decolonization, which occurs when the multilinguality of border locations, expressed in identities of race, gender, and sexuality, are evoked on the same interpretive, perspectival plane as hegemonic languages; and, further still, the border subject's experiential axis of race, gender, and sexuality is now evident by its interstitiality, and is redefined through the direct enunciation of subaltern epistemologies formed by the state of being within and of border contact zones. In other words, Mignolo's border thinking, which is a state of being (physical, experiential, subjective, and geographic) that is posited in the fissures of race, gender, and sexuality, as well as location-specific subaltern epistemologies, is fully realized in the evocation of border languages ("Theorizing" 208-09).

In my dissertation, I have provided a semiotic analysis of Castillo's, Erdrich's, and Dash's inclusion of bilingual and multilingual signifiers. In all three novels, female characterizations develop from these signifiers. Indeed, the presence of non-English languages is the most important narrative choice the authors make in defining a decolonized female character. That is because the act of employing multiple languages recalls the state of female subalternity from its obscurity in modernity to its undeniable

presence. Gaps in the literary texts that occur between interpreting more than one language are representative of the historical, political, and epistemological gaps that have occurred since the onset of modernity when Western hegemonic discourses oppressed the voices of the periphery.

Also, I conclude that the incorporation of oral traditions, specifically elements of folklore and storytelling, aids in the narratives' radical repositioning of subordinate discursive modes. Mythologies, ancestral histories, and communal stories that have been historically decentered and occluded by the assimilationist practices of Eurocentrism, imperialism, and colonialism, are, instead, reconfigured. Thus female characterizations help define the methods in which border locations become the center of indigenous, mixed race, gendered, and non-heteronormative performativities. Alarcón, in her analysis of Anzaldúa's *Borderlands/La Frontera*, concludes that the process of awakening an altered sense of self in Chicanas necessarily involves performative acts, such as an Anzaldúan arrival at a *Coatlicue* state, a hybrid consciousness formed by a feminist reinscription of gynetic epistemologies ("Anzaldúa's *Frontera*" 119). Similarly, Toady's queer performativity in *Daughters of the Dust* is a turn toward a feminist reinscription of Gullah women's sexuality in the Sea Islands. Not only is Toady performing black queer masculinity, but she is also asserting non-heteronormativity as a function of Gullah social and cultural behavior. This is just the type of radical narrative re-visioning of peripheral locations that needs to occur for border women to begin to reclaim their bodies as self-sovereign, which necessarily involves the reclamation of physical spaces, internally and on the physical surface of one's body.

Furthermore, the performativity involved in feminist decolonizations occurs in each novel's formal and thematic choices, but it also occurs during the reading process. In my dissertation, I have used the term "reverse transculturation" as a conceptualization of the effects that language aesthetics have on reader interpretations and the level of active engagements readers have with each novel's heterogeneity of forms. The inclusion of multiple languages, mythologies, folklore, and stories, ruptures the traditional form of the novel by presenting readers with the effect of orality and with a realism that breaks with Western novelistic conventions. Readers must come to terms with a narrative mode that initially causes a sense of marginality, especially for those readers, as I have mentioned, who are English-only readers, speakers, and writers. Vizenor's concept of the play of languages as invitations for reader's active engagements with Native American texts, has provided an entry point into my concept of "reverse transculturation" and the type of emergent reader engagements that need to occur with feminist decolonial border realisms (*Narrative Chance* 43). Alarcón also has provided a helpful analysis of what occurs during the reading of decolonial texts in her analysis of Anzaldúa's subjective, theoretical feminist re-centering of indigeneity in *Borderlands/La Frontera*. Alarcón argues that Chicana narratives' textual performance "destabilizes our reading practices" due to their polyvocality and multigenre forms ("Anzaldúa's *Frontera*" 119. In my dissertation, I take these concepts by Vizenor and Alarcón further, and claim that there is a cultural re-centering process that occurs for readers while actively engaged in reading *So Far from God*, *Tracks*, and *Daughters of the Dust*. This process differs for each novel, since there are varying cultural specificities in each narrative, but the effect is relatively the same: it is an act of textual and interpretive performativity – including readers in the

fictional verisimilitude of border narratives. It is a performativity that engages readers in the interpretive acts necessary for comprehending multiple interpretive perspectives found in border locations.

When reexpressions of orality and storytelling are articulated in Castillo's, Erdrich's, and Dash's narratives, they are constitutive of late 20th century border women's roles as purveyors of their cultures and practices. For example, textual performativity occurs during Doña Felicia's healing *remedios* in *So Far from God*, in Nanapush's stories of Fleur in *Tracks*, and in Miz Emma Julia's creation story at the opening of *Daughters of the Dust*, as well as her burial ceremony during the novel's climax. In all three narratives, the character, acting as storyteller, has one or more implied listeners who are young community members in need of guidance. The storyteller's role in each text is representative of that of a communal healer who is responsible for the continuation of ancestral histories, creation stories, healing remedies, and tales of heroic figures. The narrative transference of acts of orality during storytelling performances is meant to create the simulation of face to face interaction. Storytelling, then, within the women's border novels in this study, is an attempt to reassemble acts of orality meant to foster cultural continuity between spoken and written discourse. Following Vizenor, they are acts of cultural survival, but they are also acts that position women as role models and principal voices representing their communities.

Another thematic and aesthetic pattern examined in this study involves characters performing aspects of culturally specific quotidian life: Doña Felicia's healing remedies for Caridad's *curandera* apprenticeship and La Loca's recipes for Fe in *So Far from God*; Fleur's hunting practices and her healing remedy for her birthing maladies in *Tracks*; and

Iona's hair grooming practices that educate Amelia on the importance of female bonding and its emotional comfort in *Daughters of the Dust*. It is clear that cultural practices are sources of knowledge, self-reflection, and bonding among female characters. In *Tracks* and *Daughters of the Dust*, cultural practices are final catalysts for major life decisions, especially for Pauline and Amelia, who are presented to readers as already assimilated to white culture, either by choice, exhibited by the character Pauline in *Tracks*, or by familial upbringing, illustrated by the character Amelia in *Daughters of the Dust*.

However, Pauline and Amelia undergo vastly different changes to their internal sense of self. Pauline mediates between *Ojibwe* and European American cultural practices during self-reflections on her inability to remember *Ojibwe* healing remedies, and in the process she reasserts her allegiances to white culture. Amelia, on the other hand, grows more accepting of her Gullah roots and culture from her experiences with hair practices, and this plot development signals her final resolve to part with her immediate family's assimilationist practices, especially her grandmother Haager's. In reference to African American women's epistemologies, Patricia Hill Collins notes that "[t]he commonplace, taken-for-granted knowledge shared by African American women growing from our everyday thoughts and actions constitutes a first and most fundamental level of knowledge" (34). Similarly, Aldama and Quiñonez's "living border theory," is a Chicana praxis meant to emancipate *mestiza* border subjects from hegemonic discourses. Both Collins and Aldama and Quiñonez stress the importance of everyday knowledges for women-of-color, because such practices are reminders that philosophies of life often occur first and foremost in one's community.

Further still, I conclude that Pauline and Amelia's divergent reflections on cultural practices, and their outcomes, are indicative of the emphasis each author places on sociopolitical manifestations of imperialism, colonialism, and forced assimilations that occur when, to quote Anzaldúa, "the First World grates up against the Third World and bleeds" (25). That is, Erdrich's identity politics are evident in her characterization of Pauline, which is focused on representing U.S. nation-state oppressions of mixed-race women's identities within U.S./Canada Northern Plains territories; whereas Dash's identity politics is centered on a Morrison-esque "rememory" of foregone cultural practices that prove to be important restoratives against the often damaging effects Northern Migration has had on black female subjectivities. Thus, the literary attempts to convey the demarcation between subaltern knowledges and knowledges produced in U.S. centers of modernity (i.e., U.S. government agencies in *Tracks* and cultural and socioeconomic capitalist influences on the mainland of South Carolina and in New York City in *Daughters of the Dust*) are representative of reoccurring acts of imperialism, colonialism, and capitalism. These reoccurring acts resurface under differing relationships between lands and race, ethnicity and women's identities, underscoring the varied methods of Eurocentric discourses and practices to restrict, oppress, denigrate, and silence ethnic groups deemed inferior, doubly so for women-of-color.

Finally, I have discussed Alcoff's concept of "identities as interpretive horizons." Identities as interpretive horizons is a concept that aids my study's framing of the narrative complexities and complex characterizations evident in the production of women's border novels. The literary invention of border novels requires authors to create a sense of verisimilitude that is external to traditional forms of narrative prose, especially

in realist narratives. The literary discourse is made heterogeneous by attempts to recreate the experiences of living in ethnically, culturally, and linguistically hybrid locations. Identities as interpretive horizons, according to Alcoff, is the concept by which one's identity is embodied in particular locations, engaged in an interpretive process that requires a type of interpretive horizon (*Visible Identities* 94). In my dissertation, I extended Alcoff's identities as interpretative horizons to the creation of what I call transformative interpretive horizons, which combines Alcoff's focus on identities, both public and subjective, with Gadamer's concept of an interpretive horizon, which is a "substantive perspectival location from which the interpreter looks out at the world, a perspective that is always present but that is open and dynamic, with a temporal as well as physical dimension, moving into the future and into new spaces as the subject moves" (304). Therefore, I conclude that a transformative interpretive horizon, the cognitive ability female borderland characters have to integrate two or more interpretive horizons in to their sentient lives, allows an emergent perspectival horizon to develop. This emergent horizon is akin to Anzaldúa's *mestiza* consciousness, but its purpose is to frame literary criticisms of border narratives within an interpretive model for U.S. women's border novels, while also serving as a critique of readerly engagements with such novels. Transformative interpretive horizons occur in U.S. women's border novels precisely because these narratives represent processes of becoming "decolonialized." *So Far from God* and *Tracks* are narratives which render the effect of intersecting interpretive horizons similarly, because they are focused on a localized border setting with spatially limited crossings. *Daughters of the Dust*, however, is slightly different in its trajectory

because it narrates from three locations: Dawtuh Island, the mainland of South Carolina, and the U.S. metropolitan center of New York City.

One limitation of this study is the variance in narrative periodization. While *Tracks* and *Daughters of the Dust* are set in the early 1900s, *So Far from God* is set in the 1980s-1990s. Therefore, the novels in this study do not all occur during a specific time period in U.S. history. Even if they were, however, there would still be geohistorically contextual comparisons to be made in which each novel diverges from the other. For example, if all three novels were set in the early 1900s, this study would need to account for the differences in colonial/neocolonial and imperial practices toward each specific ethnic group in relation to wider U.S. colonial and imperial goals. My study still provides this comparative analysis, but with the caveat that all three novels are not historical novels set during the same time period. Therefore I accounted for the inconsistency in narrative historical periodizations when I performed my analyses. The geohistorical contexts of each novel differ for apparent reasons. Though *Tracks* and *Daughters of the Dust* are both set during the early 1900s, the experiences of *Ojibwe* and Gullah border subjects with Western/Anglo American colonialism and neocolonialism are in relation to separate, yet equally catastrophic, discourses and practices.

In conclusion, this study poses several implications for border studies and the American literary canon. First, my methodological framework proves there are overarching aesthetic patterns that are consistent in these novels, which indicates that this model of criticism will be effective for ongoing critical analysis of other women's border narratives. Second, these novels can now be categorized within the scope of border cultural productions. This type of categorization is important because it widens the scope

of border narrative genealogies from their present alignments with U.S. Southwest poetry and prose to all border points of the U.S. In addition, the broadening of the genre will deepen the critical attention given to border cultural productions and border cultural studies, specifically the growing field of feminist border fiction. In doing so, I align my work with J. Saldívar's call for critical work that is comparative and intercultural, aligning with international cultural studies paradigms focused on minority discourses, specifically British cultural studies, American cultural studies, and the growing field of cultural studies elsewhere (*Border* 19).

Furthermore, my critical methods will aid in the development of reader reception theories for border fiction. Beside the apparent ability to foster greater reader appreciations for these works, the development of critical reader reception theories for border fiction will potentially expand the scope of border studies in scholarship, by stressing the need for bilingual and/or multilingual texts to be more fully accepted in to the American literary canon and into educational curriculums across the nation.

Finally, my critical interventions into women's border narratives can inform a wider public on border women's cultural and philosophical contributions to American society writ large. My research also has the potential for deepening national awareness and understanding of the historical and contemporary realities of women's daily lives in border zones and states, which too often involve sexual assault, physical abuse, emotional abuse, forced migrations, separation of family members due to economic hardships and detainments by military and border personnel, the continuing appropriation of their lands, discrimination based on race, gender, and sexuality, and at times death with or without investigation and/or proper burial. It can also educate our society about the complexities

in perspectives and the daily struggles of women in border locations, and how, through heroic acts of courage, they can redefine themselves and begin to heal their communities.

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