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“We developed solidarity”: Family, Race, Identity, and Space-Time in Recent Multiethnic U.S. American Fiction

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“We developed solidarity”:

Family, Race, Identity, and Space-Time in Recent Multiethnic U.S. American Fiction

by

Kimber L. Wiggs

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
Department of English
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ABSTRACT

In *Diversity in Families*, sociologists Maxine Baca Zinn, D. Stanley Eitzen, and Barbara Wells assert, “At a very personal level, families are crucial shapers of who we are and what our opportunities have been and will be” (xvii). The novels in this dissertation—Octavia Butler’s *Kindred* (1979), Karen Tei Yamashita’s *Tropic of Orange* (1997), and Rosaura Sánchez and Beatrice Pita’s *Lunar Braceros 2125-2148* (2009)—examine the role of family in the development of individual identity and the practice of social justice. These authors foreground characters from various ethnic backgrounds and depict how the characters form new, multiethnic families. My dissertation explores the following questions: How do contemporary multiethnic U.S. American novelists conceptualize ‘family’? How does family shape individual identity? How have conceptions of family changed over time, as portrayed in literature?

Contemporary literature by multiethnic U.S. Americans often reveals common topics of concern, especially acculturation to life within the continental United States. By offering a comparative analysis of texts by African American, Japanese American, and Mexican American (Chicana) authors, I illustrate how multiethnic conceptions of family have evolved. Investigating the effects of time and space on the families in these novels reveals these authors’ efforts to liberate their characters from oppressive constructs of space-time.

This work is important and timely for several reasons. First, the historic and continuing publication of multiethnic literature offers significant opportunities for building upon critical discussions started in the post-1960s Civil Rights and multiculturalism eras. Though scholarship exists on the literature of these ethnic groups, it is uneven and has limited foci. Of these three

novels, the most scholarship appears on *Kindred*; however, the specific links between family, time, and trauma in the novel require more critical attention. Fewer articles have examined *Tropic of Orange* and *Lunar Braceros*. I have found no critical research directly comparing all three novels—despite their marked similarities—which makes uniting them in analysis such a rewarding project. Building upon the foundational work previous scholars have performed will contribute to readers’ understanding of others and increase empathy for difference. This is especially important in a time when our country feels particularly divided. A few days after I defended this dissertation, the 46th President and Vice President-Elect of the United States were announced. The excitement and historical significance of the election of Kamala Harris, a Black Asian woman of immigrant descent cannot be overestimated. Nonetheless, novels whose themes include social justice, family creation, and coalition-building are urgently relevant, if not more important, for the understanding of how the United States arrived at this terrific moment.

Because questions of family, racialization, and space-time are inherently interdisciplinary, this dissertation engages the methodologies of multiple disciplines including literature, sociology, history, and political science. I also employ several critical theories, including Afrofuturism and Chicana feminism. This comparative, interdisciplinary study of the novels demonstrates similarities between the authors’ concerns and narrative strategies. Ultimately, I show that all three novels challenge the conception of family as biological; these novels emphasize the formation of ‘chosen’ families made up of people with a shared purpose.

INTRODUCTION

To begin, we need to be aware that the family is as much a cultural symbol as it is a social form—as much idea as thing.

Maxine Baca Zinn, D. Stanley Eitzen, and Barbara Wells, *Diversity in Families*

In the first chapter of *Time Machines: Time Travel in Physics, Metaphysics, and Science Fiction* (1999), engineer Paul J. Nahin describes the historical fascination with time travel in the popular imagination. Though the book's aim is to provide a scientific approach to the possibilities and limits of time machines, Nahin's first chapter articulates the near-universal interest humans seem to have with traveling through time by citing scientific studies, works of fiction, and other meditations on visiting the past or the future. Nahin includes an "intriguing 1974 study" that found, if given the opportunity, nearly all participants would choose to travel back to their personal or historical pasts (3). He also quotes Terri Paul, who wrote, "Time travel [is] the ultimate fantasy, the scientific addition to the human quest for immortality" (qtd. in Nahin 3). Time travel and time distortion are important to this study, so I begin with Nahin's book in order to posit my overarching thesis: family membership is a form of time travel. Our families connect us to the past by their histories and their DNA. The creation of families—biological and emotional—illustrates the human desire to live on after death in the memories of those we leave behind.

This dissertation analyzes family creation in contemporary U.S. multiethnic literature in three novels: Octavia Butler's *Kindred* (1979), Karen Tei Yamashita's *Tropic of Orange* (1997),

and Rosaura Sánchez and Beatrice Pita's *Lunar Braceros 2125-2148* (2009). Contemporary multiethnic fiction often reveals common topics of concern, especially acculturation in the United States. Butler, Yamashita, and Sánchez and Pita examine the role of family in relation to individual identity and social justice. They also foreground characters from diverse ethnic backgrounds and present ways these characters form new, multiethnic families. Furthermore, their novels engage with time, space, and genre in compelling ways, which reveals the authors' efforts to liberate their characters from oppressive constructs of space-time privileging Western epistemologies. Representing three decades and three different ethnic literary traditions, the novels allow me to chart the evolution of family and to analyze the ways the authors' races and ethnicities impact their portrayals of families.

American literature scholar Lisa A. Long writes, "American history is family history" (462). The microcosm of the family is the starting point for understanding social construction. Sociologists Maxine Baca Zinn, D. Stanley Eitzen, and Barbara Wells argue, "When we understand that families are embedded in larger social structures and growing economic inequalities, we have a better frame of vision for understanding the many different family forms that coexist in our society today" (2). These larger social structures have far-reaching and often traumatic effects on individuals and families, as the novels in this dissertation illustrate. Historical and spatial social injustices define the environments the characters must navigate. The writers also present nonnormative ways of perceiving families in the contemporary United States; rather than representing outliers, the novels actually represent a diverse reality that narrow representation of American families tends to elide: "Many images surrounding the U.S. family limit our understanding of family life. They distort the real character of life within families" (Zinn et al. 4).

The links between family, personal identities, and racialization in literature can help us better understand those links outside the texts.

Although male identifying authors write about these issues, I have selected texts written exclusively by female authors for several reasons. First, society often dubs books authored by women that deal with families ‘women’s literature,’ a category implying niche interest and, in turn, inferiority to ‘universal’ literature. When a male author writes about family, readers and critics assume his perspective to be universal; this is not the case for women, especially women of color. Second, the U.S. remains a patriarchal society; within it women receive praise and social capital for performing certain roles within families. Women are lauded as mothers and daughters, and women play significant roles in the families of the novels I have selected, though they do not always conform to patriarchal expectations. This valuation, however, highlights the nature of unpaid care work often required of women, especially women of color. Authored by women of color, the novels studied here address the intersections of race and gender. They explore how exploitation of female care work affects characters acutely as individuals and family members.

Genre is a major focus throughout this study because it highlights the novels’ experimentation with time and movement. Each of these novels utilizes experimental or metanarrative techniques in its examination of the contemporary American family to imagine the fluidity of their characters’ relationships and identities. While *Kindred* fits into the neo-slave narrative tradition of the 1970s and 1980s, the novel can be considered a ground-breaking example of science fiction by a black woman author. In U.S. American publishing, the number of black women authors remains disproportionate to the number of white men authors. As a neo-slave novel with science fiction elements, *Kindred* engages with the effects of time travel on its protagonist. Published 18 years after *Kindred* and in response to the 1994 passage of NAFTA,

Tropic of Orange represents a dramatic shift in both structure and thematic focus, while sharing Butler's concerns with marginalized identity, family, and interconnectivity. Using Magical Realism, *Tropic of Orange* demonstrates how globalization distorts of time and space. Unlike *Kindred* or *Tropic of Orange*, the co-authored novel *Lunar Braceros* is a nonlinear story. It emphasizes the effects of migration on a family and, like *Kindred*, uses speculative fictional techniques to emphasize movement through time. *Lunar Braceros* is set over 100 years in the future and challenges readers to imagine the current direction of the world's economies and ecologies. Each novel's use of genre highlights its focuses on history and storytelling, which in turn, emphasizes the links between individuals' present experiences and their personal and collective pasts. Thus, form and metatextual elements help these authors to emphasize their broader themes of collectivity and resistance.

Both involuntary and voluntary migration impacts the novels' characters. In *Kindred*, protagonist Dana is kidnapped and escapes across time and space, a form of movement invoking the Middle Passage and the kidnapping of African peoples into slavery. Most characters migrate in *Tropic of Orange* for economic reasons. Some of these migrations may be voluntary, but the desperation with which many of these characters migrate complicates the voluntary aspects of the movement. *Lunar Braceros* portrays forced migration as a form of slave labor when prisoners must choose between prison and labor on the Moon. These patterns of movement demonstrate labor exploitation is integral to each of the selected texts. As families become increasingly transnational, literature reflects the decisions individuals make when they are separated from loved ones by fences, borders, and other forms of space containment.

Kindred, *Tropic of Orange*, and *Lunar Braceros* interrogate collectivity, time, space, and genre in order to make powerful statements about social justice and agency. Using family as a

microcosm, the authors portray larger social forces at work in the world. As Zinn et al. write, “Family diversity is produced by the same structures that organize society as a whole” (22). Families are powerful shapers of individual identity, but they do not exist in a vacuum and are, themselves, shaped by the social circumstances in which they form. These novels grapple with that dichotomy, portraying the ways individual characters define themselves, are defined by others, and attempt to reform the oppressive worlds they inhabit. “There is no universal definition of the family,” but by analyzing how literature represents families, we may better understand perceptions surrounding family creation in the contemporary United States (Zinn et al. 22).

Theoretical Framework

In her address 2001 address to the MELUS conference, pioneering scholar Bonnie TuSmith called for the crossing of the “color line” by students of multiethnic literature. She argued scholars writing only about their own ethnicity risk augmenting racial stratification within the field. To make anti-racist progress, TuSmith asserts, we must be willing to engage with one another about race, and we must “insist on professionally valid appraisals of ethnic texts” (10). As an Anglo-American woman writing about three distinct ethnic traditions, none of which is my own, I hope to do as TuSmith suggests. To perform responsible, nuanced scholarship, I draw on several related disciplines, including literature, sociology, history, and political science. To pay attention to the differences of the authors’ origins and concerns, I use the theories of Afrofuturism, Chicanafuturism, and Woman of Color feminism. I will elaborate on many of these theoretical frameworks in the body chapters, but in this introduction, I briefly discuss the overarching topics for the dissertation: multiethnic literature and multiculturalism, space-time, and sociology and family structure. The chapter closes with a discussion of the genre of *Testimonio*.

Multiethnic Literature and Multiculturalism

The mainstream academic study of multiethnic literature parallels the emergence of multiculturalism in the United States. Between 1994 and 2012, at least four volumes entitled *Multiculturalism* were published. In his 1994 essay, “The Politics of Recognition,” Charles Taylor defines a central issue of multiculturalism as a struggle for recognition. He argues, “nonrecognition or misrecognition can inflict harm...imprisoning someone in a false, distorted, and reduced mode of being” (C. Taylor 25). Similarly, in the introduction to *Multiculturalism: A Critical Reader* (1994), David Theo Goldberg suggests that the assimilationist melting pot of the United States erases the uniqueness of diverse cultures, undermining their specific value in service to the monocultural ‘ideal’ as it is perceived by the dominant culture. Goldberg’s assertion is especially important to this study because African American, Asian American, and Chicana families have never been monolithic,¹ as these three novels demonstrate. My aim is to extend the argument for heterogeneity in the study of multiethnic literature.

Space-Time

In his introduction to a 2016 issue of *MELUS*, Gary Totten, the current editor of the journal, articulates the importance of spatiality and temporality in U.S. multiethnic literature. The multiethnic literature of the United States, Totten asserts, often grapples with the links between space and time and identity formation. He quotes Elisabeth Windle saying, “When such identities are imagined across both geographical and temporal spaces, we are able to recognize, as Windle writes, that ‘the past and present can exist in a relationship of mutual creation that is sympathetic, reparative, and loving, and perhaps preferable to the ways that the present might imagine itself on

¹ See also “Introduction,” in Ylce Irizarry’s *Chicana/o and Latina/o Fiction: The New Memory of Latinidad* (2016).

its own terms” (Totten 5). The relationships between space, place, time, and history are constitutive of these novels and will emerge in each of the following chapters.

Sociology and Family Structure

Zinn, Eitzen, and Wells, whose sociology work in *Diversity in Families* informs much of my discussion of family, explore the many factors creating diversity in families. They begin from the premise “we all consider ourselves experts on own families, yet we are too close to our families to see them dispassionately” (Zinn et al. 2). Family culture impacts individuals’ attitudes and behaviors, but because not all families are the same, it is reductive and unproductive to treat them as if they are. In their chapter on class, race, and gender, they emphasize the role of the family in creating or limiting opportunities for individuals due to the social structural inequalities that different families experience. Families, Zinn et al. argue, are embedded in a larger society, so we must understand those macro structures in order to understand their impact on specific families. Similarly, historian Stephanie Coontz defines ‘culture’ as a set of values that are impacted by race, gender, and class, as well as nationality, and asserts that homogenizing theories do not work in family scholarship.

Testimonio

Each of the novels uses narrative forms suggestive of *testimonio*. *Testimonio* grew out of the need to document and expose human rights violations in Latin America and elsewhere globally; it is frequently associated with the dictatorships of Trujillo in Dominican Republic, Castro in Cuba, and Pinochet in Chile. In her 2005 article “The Ethics of Writing the Caribbean: Latina Narrative as *Testimonio*,” Latinx studies scholar Ylce Irizarry defines *testimonio* as “a narrative explicitly

concerned with articulating a process of recognition and resistance of oppression” (“Ethics of Writing” 264). She argues, “*testimonio* is a narrative form that not only calls for the awareness of brutality, but also documents survival and self-determination” (“Ethics of Writing” 264). In *Telling Identities: The Californio Testimonios* (1995), *Lunar Braceros* co-author and Latinx and Chicana literary scholar Rosaura Sánchez examines the testimonials of a group of native Californians (Californios), dictated to Hubert Howe Bancroft in the 1870s. Sánchez identifies several common elements of the *testimonio*; she writes, “In all testimonials, the subaltern seizes the liminal space of mediated representation to ‘write’ or narrate identity...Second, testimonials are counter narratives...Third, testimonials represent a shift of the struggle to a war of position...launched often from exile or outside the immediate battlefield” (Sánchez, *Telling Identities* 12-13). I will return to these definitions of *testimonio* to demonstrate how these novels parallel the aims of *testimonio*, despite their not being written or marketed as *testimonios*.

Definitions of *testimonio* vary, and there has been debate regarding the relationship between ‘truth’ and ‘fiction’ within them. Irizarry discusses the role of ‘truth’ in *testimonio* narratives following David Stoll’s accusations of falsehood in the *testimonios* of Nobel Peace Prize recipient Rigoberta Menchú Tum. Irizarry observes that when *testimonio* articulates government or state sponsored oppression, the distinction between truth and falsehood often relies on “who is an acceptable supplier of truth” and what evidence they can provide (266). Most definitions seem to agree that *testimonio* is rarely an individual narrative. The project of revealing injustice and brutality is a collective project with the goal of asserting group identity. The collective importance of giving testimony, as well as the tension between fact and fiction, is a key element of each of the novels I analyze here.

Chapter Summaries

To demonstrate the similarities and connections amongst the texts while offering readings specific to each novel and its unique context, I perform close readings of each text. Every chapter will make an argument about a single novel, referencing the other novels where appropriate. The Conclusion offers readers an explicit synthesis of the texts.

Kindred serves as a foundational example of how family shapes individual identity as mediated by distortions of time and space. Chapter One, “Genre, Identity, and Family in Octavia Butler’s *Kindred*,” analyzes protagonist Dana Franklin’s hybridity.² As a black woman confronting her white slave-owning ancestry for the first time, Dana grapples with divided loyalties and the deadly consequences of black female agency in antebellum Maryland. The novel’s hybrid genre, which is both neo-slave narrative and science fiction, reflects Dana’s divided loyalties. Examining conventions of genre and theories of race construction, I show that Butler uses Dana’s biracialism to scrutinize contemporary constructions of identity in the United States. Using American studies scholar Alondra Nelson’s work on racial DNA coding, I suggest trauma is encoded in Dana’s DNA through epigenetic memory, and I argue Butler uses trauma as the novel’s primary mechanism of time travel. Dana must confront and overcome the trauma inherent in her familial past in order to return to the present and construct a hopeful future.

Chapter Two, “Globalism, Assimilation, and Labor in Karen Tei Yamashita’s *Tropic of Orange*,” shows how the oppressive structures of globalism and late capitalism affect individuals and how these effects are compounded by the characters’ family relationships. I focus on the

² The term *hybridity* originates in scientific discourse that was later problematically applied to the children of interracial couples. The terms *miscegenation* and *mixed-race* derive from this racist application of *hybridity*. Where possible, I will attempt to use current, appropriate terminology such as *biracial* or *multiracial*. It is important to note, though, that Butler herself used the term *hybridity* in discussions of her own work; this is possibly due to her positive reception within the science fiction world.

biological families in the text: Emi and her grandfather Manzanar; and the family unit of Rafaela, Sol, Bobby, and Bobby's cousin. Bobby Ngu and Rafaela Cortes, both individually and as a couple, embody many of the common struggles of immigrants to the United States. They work tirelessly to build a life for themselves and their son, but they feel consistently ostracized and undervalued by the Anglo-Americans. Emi and Manzanar are not immigrants, but through them, Yamashita examines the nature of Asian American ethno-national identity. The trauma of Japanese American internment during World War II persists for their family, causing a rift they cannot repair. Both families highlight Yamashita's critique of globalization, but the novel's end suggests an empowered multiethnic community is possible.

The third chapter, "Navigating Space and Creating Families in Rosaura Sánchez and Beatriz Pita's *Lunar Braceros* 2125-2148," projects the negative impacts of globalism into the future, examining nonnormative family creation as a strategy for social justice activism. Though the story of the novel portrays the desperate struggle of a group of "lunar braceros" to escape death on the Moon, the plot includes history lessons, memories, images, and narratives of multiple characters. Time and historicity are the novel's major concerns, but space is also a recurring theme, particularly in the novel's post-NAFTA context. Literary scholar Lysa Rivera argues the novel invites a reading of late capitalism as an enduring result of colonial relationships between the U.S. and Mexico. Speculative fictional narration in *Lunar Braceros* recalls the colonial past, highlights negative aspects of present-day capitalism, and imagines a dystopian future. Sánchez and Pita engage a variety of definitions of space and express an ambivalent view of humanity and technology. The visions of family that emerge throughout these chapters demonstrate the diversity of experience that characterizes the contemporary United States.

CHAPTER ONE:
GENRE, IDENTITY, AND FAMILY IN *KINDRED*

The trouble began long before June 9, 1976, when I became aware of it, but June 9 is the day I remember.

Octavia Butler, *Kindred*

Octavia Butler's 1979 novel *Kindred* begins *in media res*. Protagonist Dana Franklin has lost her arm in a cryptic accident. Lacking an explanation, the reader is left feeling as confused about what has happened as Dana herself likely does. We do not begin to learn what has led to the loss of Dana's arm until the beginning of the second section, "The River," as she takes us back in time. The first line of this section establishes temporality as a recurring theme in the novel. By saying "the trouble began long before" the moment of her first time-travel experience, Dana asserts the past and its ability to haunt her play a major role in her current predicament. The "trouble" dates to Dana's antebellum family history of the 1800s and even further, to the very beginning of the transatlantic slave trade. Dana is unaware of her family's history of enslavement prior to June 9, 1976, but ignorance of the trouble does not stop it from having the power to hurt her. Though the novel technically begins at the end of Dana's story, she has been 'in the midst of' this trouble her whole life.

Kindred tells the story of twenty-six-year old Dana, an African American woman living with her Anglo-American husband Kevin in 1976 California. Dana's sudden and inexplicable

movement from her contemporary home to the world of antebellum Maryland irreparably disrupts the couple's lives. During the novel, Dana travels between the past and present six times; each time, she saves the life of her white slave-owning ancestor, Rufus Weylin. Because her own future existence depends on keeping Rufus alive long enough to father her ancestor, Hagar, Dana must continually rescue him. She does this at great risk to herself and with the knowledge that he is steadily growing into a man she may not want to save. Rufus's treatment of the slaves on his plantation, especially Dana's matrilineal ancestor, Alice, challenges Dana's sense of loyalty to herself and her family. This, in turn, forces Dana to question the construction of her social ties and her racial identity.³

As the novel unfolds, several factors, including genre, identity, and family, define Dana's trouble. By thrusting her protagonist into the antebellum period, Octavia Butler forces readers to consider the impact of family history on personal identity. Family history is not something relegated or confined to the past for Dana; it is her own present reality. Like her enslaved ancestors, Dana is kidnapped across space in movement that recalls the Middle Passage and the kidnapping of African peoples into slavery. Indeed, the endpoint of Dana's forced migration is a slave plantation. Science fiction scholar Sherryl Vint notes, "it is a journey taken to serve someone else's needs, at the end of which she finds herself in a new, dangerous, alien world" ("Only by Experience" 249). This spatio-temporal kidnapping affects Dana's conception of her individual and collective identities, compounding the trauma caused by experiencing her family's violent past.

³ Though Dana is almost always referred to as *black* and Kevin as *white*, I will use current ethnonational terminology to describe their cultural identity. In some instances, I will use *black* or *white* to be consistent with the language use of the time (1976) and/or the language used in the novel or scholarship.

Dana's identity, including her racial identity, largely depends on her various family connections. These familial bonds comprise distant ancestors, such as Rufus and Alice; closer relatives, such as her mother, aunt, and uncle; and her spouse, Kevin. All of these relationships impact Dana's individual self-definition. In this chapter, I argue Dana Franklin should be read as a multiracial character for two reasons. First, the social aspects of race construction that Butler's weaves into the text situate Dana as having both black and white ancestry. Second, the novel's genre represents Butler's multigenre work, a combination of neo-slave narrative and science fiction, which also asserts a multiracial view of her protagonist. Butler uses Dana's multiracial identity as a challenge to essentialist understandings of race and as a representation of the contradictions and divided racial loyalties African American women are often forced to embody. In *Ain't I a Woman: Black Women and Feminism*, bell hooks gives the example of the black and female suffrage movements in the United States; black women, hooks explains, were often asked to choose sides, fighting either for the voting rights of black men or for the rights of white women (3). Being both black and female meant having to choose one of those identities over the other. By crafting Dana as a conflicted, multi-raced character, Butler's novel was early, if not foundational, in highlighting the importance of intersectional approaches to identity. Intersectionality has become central to ethnic studies and remains vital in understanding social constructions and power in the contemporary United States.

I am not suggesting, however, Dana's blackness is unimportant in the text, nor that Dana is unique for her multiracial ancestry. Many African Americans recognize their multiracial history and DNA. Conversely, many Anglo-Americans ignore or deny their own multiracial ancestry, relying on the rhetoric of racial purity to exclude non-white individuals from the privileges associated with whiteness. By emphasizing this history in the novel, Butler establishes Dana as representative of many black American women. Butler challenges readers to consider how both

blackness and whiteness are constructed and depend on each other for definition through Dana's biracial identity.

The first way Butler constructs Dana as a biracial woman in the novel is by having the other characters—both black and white—tell her, “You think you’re white” (Butler 164). This rhetoric marks Dana’s otherness on the plantation, where she encounters the distrust of both the Weylins and many of the slaves. Dana’s conception of her own race is consistently questioned, even while it remains fixed as black due to the power structures of the antebellum plantation. This perceived whiteness defines and is defined by her relationships with the other characters, complicating her identity as she navigates the world of the plantation. Dana’s skin is physiologically black, and her blackness is integral to the way she is perceived and treated in both the current and the antebellum worlds; yet, her proximity to whiteness—via Kevin and Rufus—enables Dana to perform a kind of ‘social passing’⁴ on the plantation that highlights the sometimes-fluid nature of race in the United States. Of course, gender and colorism play a key role in this potential fluidity. As a woman, Dana is not as much of a threat to the Weylins’ status quo than she might be if Butler had cast her as a black man. In fact, Butler considered altering Dana’s gender but rejected the idea because a black man with twentieth-century “self-possession” would be killed too quickly in the antebellum South (Canavan 66). Also, as the history of passing narratives demonstrates, lighter skinned people of color have traditionally been more successful penetrating spaces marked as accessible to whites only. The kind of passing Dana can perform, therefore, illustrates her relational identity formation in the text.

⁴ Because the novel implies that Dana is not light-skinned—“Tall, slender and dark, [Alice] was. A little like me. Maybe a lot like me”—when I say ‘social passing,’ I refer to the social connections to Rufus and Kevin that allow her to access some privileges of whiteness, including exemption from hard labor, freedom of movement on the plantation, and visible performance of reading and writing (Butler 119).

In their important 1988 articulation of racial formation theory, sociologists Michael Omi and Howard Winant assert, “race-making can also be understood as a process of ‘othering’” (105). Dana’s race-making is certainly a process of othering in *Kindred*; characters telling Dana she ‘thinks she is white’ is one way she is established as an other, but racial construction in the text also reflects how Dana’s relationship to other characters establish them as other or acting outside their expected social roles. Building on their work, in his 1994 essay “The Social Construction of Race,” law professor Ian F. Haney López argues, “races are constructed relationally, against one another, rather than in isolation” (28). This aspect of racial fabrication is essential to Butler’s project. Both black and white characters are integral to Dana’s racial positioning and serve to define her racial identity. In one way, she is clearly raced as black in opposition to whites; in another way, her proximity to whiteness mitigates the white slave owners’ negative response to her blackness. The novel’s relational construction of race facilitates understanding Dana as a multiracial character.

Two areas of focus have consistently dominated academic conversation about *Kindred*: Dana’s racial identity and the novel’s genre. As several critics have noted, Dana’s racial identity resists easy interpretation. Angelyn Mitchell (2001) argues Dana has a propensity to be “misread” by other characters due to her race and gender (58). Similarly, Benjamin Robertson (2010) highlights Dana’s racial fluidity as the descendant of a white slave owner, and Florian Bast (2012) has argued for foregrounding Dana’s androgyny due to the mobility and agency she exhibits. In “Essentialism and the Complexities of Racial Identity” (1997), Michael Eric Dyson argues black identity is not neatly consolidated and to understand blackness as an essentialized identity is to “ignore black culture’s relentless evolutions and metamorphoses” (218). Dana, therefore, represents Butler’s nuanced definition of blackness in the United States. Because family is such

an essential shaper of individual identity, exploration of the link between Dana's familial relationships and her multiracialism is also vital. Sandra Govan (1984), Ashraf Rushdy (1993), Lisa A. Long (2002), and Nancy Jesser (2002) have written on the importance of family in *Kindred*, drawing links between family and history, but I see space to expand upon these analyses.

Rushdy (1993), Christine Levecq (2000), and Madhu Dubey (2013) have written about *Kindred* as a neo-slave narrative. These critics have drawn apt comparisons with traditional slave narratives, while highlighting Butler's revisions of the form. Butler herself has rejected the classification of *Kindred* as a science fiction novel⁵; however, scholars such as Raffaella Baccolini (2000), Marc Steinberg (2004), and Eileen Donaldson (2014) make compelling arguments for a science fiction reading. Other critics, most notably Lisa Yaszek (2003) and Vint (2007), argue for a genre reading that combines the neo-slave and science fiction traditions. Yaszek writes, Butler uses "science fiction devices [...] to engage with and reconstruct African-American women's history" (1063). Further asserting the value of a multigenre reading, Vint writes, "combining the fantastic and the realist modes enables past and present to be mixed in such a way that the reader cannot simply treat the story as happening in a reality ontologically distinct from our own" ("Only by Experience" 243). Yaszek's and Vint's readings of the genre as "mixed" demonstrates Butler's use of form to facilitate multiply themed content.

These complex readings of Dana's identity suggest the need for genre readings of the novel illustrating Butler's departures from traditional neo-slave narrative conventions, which include her use of time travel, her suggestion that history can be changed, and her emphasis on the role of whiteness in shaping Dana's individual and collective identities. Using these departures, I demonstrate how Butler uses Dana's performance of racial and gender fluidity to subvert

⁵ See Canavan (62). I will examine Butler's categorization of the novel later in this chapter.

conventional genre forms and to show how she uses genre to explore identity construction. My reading of the text as both a neo-slave narrative and science fiction foregrounds Dana's fluid racial and sexual identities, allowing for an examination of Butler's parallel use of form and content. The next section of this chapter will outline my methodology. Then, I will discuss the novel's genre, which I argue is a blend of neo-slave narrative and science fiction that also departs from both genres. I will then analyze Dana's family as a shaper of her identity and the ways she rejects imposed identities in favor of self-identification. Finally, I will examine the role of trauma in the novel, arguing that trauma itself is the primary time-travel mechanism in this novel.

Critical Frameworks: Racial Construction, Afrofuturism, Trauma

Hybridity in literary analysis is usually associated with postcolonial theorist Homi Bhabha. In *The Location of Culture* (1994), Bhabha argues hybridity “unsettles the mimetic or narcissistic demands of colonial power but reimplicates its identifications in strategies of subversion that turn the gaze of the discriminated back upon the eye of power” (159-160). Asserting that the colonial subject exists in a liminal space between cultures, Bhabha viewed the process of creating a hybrid identity as one that challenged the fixed relationships between colonizer and colonized. The use of hybridity theory has been criticized, however, for becoming a new kind of anti-essentialist essentialized identity, one that contributes to the rhetoric of color blindness in contemporary discourse. Literary critic Samira Kawash opens *Dislocating the Color Line* (1997) asserting, “One stakes one's claim in hybridity and points one's finger at ‘those bad essentialists,’ secure in the knowledge that having discovered hybridity is and for oneself, essentialism has been effectively banished” (4). Latinx Studies political science scholar Cristina Beltrán similarly writes, “Hybridity becomes a kind of foundational or ‘fixed’ identity that forecloses more creative and productively defiant approaches to identity and subjectivity” (596). Addressing these critiques,

Kawash concludes her book by suggesting, “the individual is not hybrid; rather, hybridity constantly traverses the boundaries of the individual” (217). Hybridity, then, is not a fixed identity but a “condition to learn to inhabit” (Kawash 218).

For Gloria Anzaldúa, hybridity is fluid identity construction used as a strategy to combat marginalization and liminality.⁶ Of the *mestiza*, or multi-raced woman, Anzaldúa writes, “not only does she sustain contradictions, she turns the ambivalence into something else” (101). Anzaldúa’s theory rejects the rigid either/or of traditional dualism to create a new, more powerful consciousness. Anzaldúa wrote from a specifically Chicana subject position, but her body of work shaped women of color feminism and has applications across ethnic identities making her an essential figure to include when discussing intersectionality in *Kindred*. For Dana, as for many of Butler’s other protagonists, embracing a multiracial or other form of complex identity means embracing wholeness of being: both/and rather than either/or. Unfortunately, for many African American women, hybridity can be a disempowering identity when imposed; in Morrison’s *Beloved*, for example, the Schoolteacher uses his perception of Sethe human and animal to violate her physically, sexually, and emotionally. Scholar Hortense Spillers writes about the “ungendering” of enslaved men and women as they were forced to serve the same labor functions (Spillers 72). This kind of “hybridity,” clearly exploiting the structural racism of Enlightenment discourse, is to stereotype and oppress. This kind of hybridity exists in *Kindred*; it begins with identities that are forced on Dana—being told she looks like a man and thinks she is white—but Dana evolves these into strategies for self-identification and empowerment.

⁶ Like the term *hybridity*, Anzaldúa’s concept of *mestizaje* has origins in Iberian colonial racism. Anzaldúa’s use of the adjective “new” in her text suggests that while it is difficult to escape the origins of a term, one can revise the current understandings or use of it. For a review of Latinx scholarship on *mestizaje*, see Irizarry, *Chicana/o and Latina/o Fiction*, especially pages 51-54. I discuss *mestizaje* in more detail in Chapter 3.

Because notions of multiplicity, multiracialism, and *mestizaje*, all bring seemingly disparate identity elements together, Butler's rich text demands an interdisciplinary framework. Approaching this chapter from a Black feminist theoretical position allows readers to consider the role of the many discourses in the novel: race, history, gender, sexuality. Black feminism emphasizes the importance of intersectionality when discussing identity and oppression; one subject position is insufficient, so we must look at the intersections of race, gender, class, and sexuality to understand where and how black women can access power or are oppressed by power. The long history of forcing black women to choose between their race and gender subject positions also informs my claim of identity contradictions and divided loyalties. Similarly, an intersectional approach to scholarship that includes Afrofuturist theory, sociology, trauma studies, Critical Race Theory, and an understanding of the *chronotope* enriches the study of African American literature. As Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham notes, the application of interdisciplinary approaches is essential when studying the history of African American women: "the very process of borrowing and blending speaks to the tradition of syncretism that has characterized the Afro-American experience" (253). In the context of *Kindred*, my uses of Afrofuturist theory and space-time allow me to discuss the novel's spatial and temporal experimentation and Butler's use of multiple genres. Sociology and trauma studies provide unique insight into the structure of African American families affected by the institution of slavery, and Critical Race Theory offers readers historical and legal approaches to the construction of race in the United States.

As Toni Morrison's seminal 1992 critical text *Playing in the Dark* asserts, the role of constructed whiteness as an organizing principle in the literature of the United States has traditionally been overlooked. This remains true of *Kindred* criticism. Because critics read Butler's text as a neo-slave narrative, the question of Dana's biracial identity is an area demanding

additional scholarly consideration. Emerging primarily in the 1990s, contributors to whiteness studies seek to address the social construction of the ‘white race’ and white identity. In *White Women, Race Matters: The Social Construction of Whiteness*, Ruth Frankenberg, for example, looks at white racial identity in relation to culture, observing that many of the white women she interviewed saw their whiteness as “apparently empty cultural space” in comparison to the cultures of non-white peoples (Frankenberg 192).

Similarly, in *The Invention of the White Race*, Theodore W. Allen describes the self-defined ‘white’ identity of Anglo fathers of biracial children in the antebellum period as an identity formed by negation: “the maintenance of ‘white’ identity was equivalent to rejection of the ‘mulatto’” (Allen 12). Paul Kivel defines whiteness as “a constantly shifting boundary separating those who are entitled to certain benefits from those whose exploitation and vulnerability to violence is justified by their not being white” (19). These investigations of white identity highlight a prevailing belief in whiteness as a non-culture or a culture that lacks race. In these instances, whiteness is defined by what it is not and is linked to the racialized ‘other.’

The conversation about race as a social construct is not new; W.E.B. DuBois wrote about the social construction of race before the turn of the twentieth century, and support for eugenics was disturbingly prevalent in the United States before and during World War II. Despite these early discussions, the conversation achieved mainstream academic prominence in the 1980s and 1990s, alongside the rise of whiteness studies. Omi and Winant note, “racialization occurs in large-scale and small-scale ways, macro- and micro-socially” (111).⁷ Haney López writes, “Race is neither an essence nor an illusion, but rather an ongoing, contradictory, self-reinforcing, plastic process subject to the macro forces of social and political struggle and the micro effects of daily

⁷ Stuart Hall precedes Bhabha (1994) in espousing ideas about identity as a process. See his 1991 essay, “Ethnicity: Identity and Difference,” in which he argues identity is changeable, fluid, and dependent on collective positioning.

decisions” (Haney López 7). Drawing on earlier texts, Haney López further expresses the understanding that race is not ‘real’ in the sense that humans of different races are distinct species, but race has very real social consequences.

Hortense Spillers’ “Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe: An American Grammar Book,” examines the links between race, gender, and family structure in the history of slavery in the U.S. For an American black woman to deconstruct the present, she must travel back in time. Spillers invokes the Middle Passage in the essay as the point where flesh began to accrue a particular discursive meaning. She also illustrates slavery was not just dehumanizing: it was a form of meaning construction. Furthermore, Spillers links the ideas of legitimacy and family to American conceptions of race and humanity. The forms of meaning construction Spillers identifies in her essay directly apply to Dana’s experiences in the text. By reliving her family’s antebellum past, Dana can deconstruct her own present and begin to reconstruct meaning in her life.

Cultural critic Mark Dery coined the term *Afrofuturism* in 1994 and defined it as “speculative fiction that treats African-American themes and addresses African-American concerns in the context of twentieth-century technoculture” (180).⁸ Since then, scholars have offered definitions that focus on an array of themes, including embodiment, space, and time. This array highlights the flexibility and complexity of the Afrofuturist framework. In her 2000 article in *Colorlines*, Alondra Nelson defines Afrofuturism as “a past-future vision” that intersects “technoculture and black diasporic histories” to “transform spaces of alienation into novel forms of creative potential...[which] reclaims theorizing about the future” (34). Central to this definition is the importance of time to Afrofuturist theory. As a “past-future vision,” Afrofuturism invites

⁸ The term and its academic use arose in 1994, but Afrofuturism has circulated outside academia since the 1950s at the latest, with the music of Sun Ra. It continues to thrive in contemporary popular culture through literature, film, music, and fashion, including Marvel’s *Black Panther* (2018) and Beyoncé’s visual album *Black is King* (2020).

readers to consider how time may be collapsed, bringing past and future together, to examine a black diasporic tradition. Quoting D. Denenge Akpem in 2013, author Ytasha Womack notes, “[Time travel is] about empowerment; you’re reshaping yourself, reshaping reality” (154). These ideas of reshaping and reclaiming the past suggest time and time travel within Afrofuturism can be quite liberating; however, the need for liberation in these definitions underscores a memory of bondage, oppression, and trauma. What Nelson terms “spaces of alienation” is part of a violent, traumatic past Afrofuturism yearns to reframe.

Many Afrofuturist theorists highlight the importance of time and recuperating the past. Afrofuturism aims to imagine new, emancipatory futures for African people in diaspora, but to do so, we must examine the way trauma imprints itself on the collective consciousness across both time and space. Though trauma is implicit in Afrofuturist examinations of the past, Afrofuturist theorists tend not to explore trauma’s role in creating the past-future vision Nelson describes. The 2016 collection *Afrofuturism 2.0: The Rise of Astro-Blackness* includes several texts that examine the past-future nature of Afrofuturist theorizing. In his chapter, tobias c. van Veen examines the Transatlantic Slave Trade as a traumatic “alien abduction” that led to the creation of an “Alien Nation” of black peoples in diaspora; he then explores the ways musicians such as Sun Ra and Public Enemy look to the far past or the near future, respectively, to contend with that initial trauma. van Veen draws heavily on Kodwo Eshun’s 2003 article “Further Considerations on Afrofuturism,” which uses the term *chronopolitics* to examine the way Afrofuturists rewrite the past to reimagine the future.

In their chapter from *Afrofuturism 2.0*, “Rewriting the Narrative,” David DeJuliis and Jeff Lohr, like Alondra Nelson, emphasize the need to reimagine the past to form liberatory visions of the future; however, the past that takes precedence in many of these Afrofuturist contexts often

predates the “alien abduction” from Africa, such as Sun Ra’s fictive Egypt. American Afrofuturistic visions often elide the centuries of slavery as an institution in the United States. For the writers, artists, and musicians trying to create more liberating futures, recouping the past frequently means looking beyond slavery to find a more hopeful ‘before’ period. As Womack points out, “No one wants to revisit the atrocities of slavery in the antebellum South” (156). Thus, while some Afrofuturist theorists recognize the role of slavery in African American creative production and consciousness, many do not explore it in-depth.

Moreover, when authors mention slavery in Afrofuturist theory, often there is little explicit focus on the trauma inherent to this institution. Certainly, when we talk about “transforming spaces of alienation” and reimagining the past in the context of Afrofuturism, slavery and trauma are implied. As I have noted, both Eshun and van Veen discuss slavery as the central trauma that underscores Afrofuturist imagination. But, according to DeJuliis and Lohr, in order to envision a liberated future, Afrofuturists seek to recreate history by producing counter-narratives “unencumbered by the master/slave framework” (DeJuliis and Lohr 178). The act of becoming “unencumbered,” while potentially curative, might have the unintended consequence of suggesting erasure of the traumatic past. Butler’s work urges readers not to ignore or try to erase the trauma but to confront it directly.

To explore trauma and time travel, I engage several non-Afrofuturist/non-literary interpretations of trauma and time. First, I employ a sociological theory of trauma and cultural memory as articulated by sociologist Elżbieta Hałas (2010). Hałas’s study links time, memory, and trauma, noting how intense societal trauma becomes engrained in the cultural memory in ways that bring the past, present, and future closer together. This trauma spans hundreds of years: “The cultural process of trauma shows the temporality of collective memory, which encompasses not

only the past, but also the future” (Hałas 320). I also draw upon psychologists Ines Blix and Tim Brennen’s 2011 study on the way trauma affects memory recall and the ability to imagine the future and discuss what they term “mental time travel” (957). In *Kindred*, Butler has taken the concept of mental time travel much further, allowing Dana and Kevin to move physically through time and space. Thus, Butler’s text challenges us to look directly at the trauma of slavery, using time travel to both confront and recover from it. These interpretations allow me to examine trauma in the broader cultural and scientific context informing the novel.

These diverse interdisciplinary strategies emphasize the complexity of Butler’s novel. By casting Dana as a black woman whom other characters read as ‘thinking she is white,’ Butler asks readers to consider how and why Dana’s racial identity relies on external definition. Through the neo-slave narrative form, Butler juxtaposes nineteenth-century conceptions of race with supposedly ‘modern’ 1970s conceptions to reveal the imperfections in post-Civil Rights race relations.⁹ The ways we view ourselves and are viewed by society serve to define our ‘race,’ which, in turn, shapes our access to social, educational, and legal systems. Though this may seem like a truism in 2020, the idea that race is a social construct is crucial to understanding Dana’s 1976 racial identity in *Kindred*. The concept of social race becomes a matter of life and death for Dana. Struggling against the broad social forces of slavery and antebellum racism as well as the consequences of her own decisions, Dana must construct an identity that will enable her to survive encounters unthinkable in post-Civil Rights America.

⁹ One such imperfection is the persistence of antiquated notions of white racial purity. The one-drop rule of the 19th century posited that even a single drop of non-white blood made a person non-white. While this is no longer legal precedent, it still affects the way multiracial Americans are perceived; for example, Barack Obama was and is read as the United States’ first black president, not its first biracial president. For more on multiracial identity, see Michele Elam’s *The Souls of Mixed Race Folk*.

As Dana navigates this identity construction, family relationships remain integral. For Dana, family is key, but family also means pain, alienation, and trauma; in short, her “trouble.” As Lisa A. Long writes, “American history is family history” (462). The microcosm of the family is the starting point for understanding broad social construction. Living in an age where migrant families are routinely separated at the United States border, it is not difficult to see how family trauma can affect future generations. The links between family, personal identities, and racialization in literature can help us better understand those links outside the texts.

Dana’s experiences, though fictional, also serve as a reminder of how much anti-racist progress is still needed in the supposedly ‘post-race’ United States of today.¹⁰ Dana’s story is fantastic in form but not *unreal*. Dana’s divided loyalties echo the imposed hybridity that was and is placed on contemporary African American women. She is many things to many people and must reconcile her disparate identities through a personal strategy of hybridization. Dana’s traversing of boundaries, to use Kawash’s phrase, gives her power in the novel, ultimately freeing her from her family’s oppressive history. Through Dana’s biracial identity, Butler develops a process of identity construction that allows for resistance, healing, and self-identification despite collective, centuries-long trauma.

The Case for Genre Fluidity

Because *Kindred* exhibits characteristics and subversions of both neo-slave narrative and science fiction, there has been scholarly debate over how best to classify the novel. As articulated

¹⁰ One of the first appearances of the term *post-racial* was in a 1971 *New York Times* article: “Compact Set Up for ‘Post-Racial’ South” by James T. Wooten. In this context, the term refers to a post-Civil Rights era idea that racial discrimination and bias no longer exist in the United States, an idea that is frequently debunked, yet continues to persist in contemporary discourse on racial ‘color blindness.’ For a different use of the term *postrace*, see Ramón Saldívar’s “Historical Fantasy, Speculative Realism, and Postrace Aesthetics in Contemporary American Fiction” (2011). For more on ‘color-blind racism,’ see Eduardo Bonilla-Silva’s *Racism Without Racists* (2003).

in the *Encyclopedia of Science Fiction*, the term *science fiction* has no universally agreed-upon definition. Common definitions, including the one to which Butler herself seems to subscribe, stipulate that science fiction should have some specific discussion of hard science. Other definitions, such as science fiction scholar Darko Suvin's, are broader, focusing on alienation and estrangement in alternative environments, without an explicit need for science.¹¹ The *Oxford English Dictionary*'s definition offers insight into the common usage of the term: "Fiction in which the setting and story feature hypothetical scientific or technological advances, the existence of alien life, space or time travel, etc." ("Science fiction"). If 'science fiction,' then, can be any text that includes time travel, my concern is in showing which time travel motifs Butler uses and subverts. 1980s films including *Back to the Future* and *Terminator* revise the powerful return to the past to save the future that *Kindred* so powerfully models: to preserve history, the protagonist must go back in time to ensure her own birth. Yet, at the same time, Dana entertains the idea of changing history, which could result in a time travel paradox. In his exploration of Butler's work, Gerry Canavan notes time-travel stories often end with the protagonist reconciling his or her original circumstances, making the traveller's own era more attractive and less conflicted than before. Butler subverts the 'happy ending' expectation by creating more ambiguity than certainty for Dana.

If calling *Kindred* science fiction is imperfect, so is classifying the text purely as a neo-slave narrative. Bernard Bell defined the term "neoslave narratives"¹² in 1987 as "residually oral, modern narratives of escape from bondage to freedom" (Bell 289). Ashraf Rushdy expanded on

¹¹ Suvin's full definition of science fiction is "a literary genre whose necessary and sufficient conditions are the presence and interaction of estrangement and cognition, and whose main formal device is an imaginative framework alternative to the author's empirical environment" (qtd. in Stableford et al. par. 11).

¹² Bell did not hyphenate the term in his definition; however, most later scholars add the hyphen, as I have chosen to do elsewhere.

the definition in 1999, calling “neo-slave narratives” “contemporary novels that assume the form, adopt the conventions, and take on the first-person voice of the antebellum slave narrative” (*Neo-slave Narratives* 3). *Kindred* does include a sort of escape narrative and adopts the conventions of form Rushdy points to, but Philip Miletic argues *Kindred* is not “about slavery” in the same way other neo-slave narratives are (Miletic 269). In addition, the novel seems to depart from some of the goals shared by neo-slave narratives. Rushdy suggests neo-slave narratives seek to give voice to the slave experience; *Kindred* does that, to an extent, but the first-person narrator of the novel is Dana, who is not enslaved in the same way characters such as Alice and Sarah are. Miletic has also linked the neo-slave narrative to the Black Arts Movement, which promoted “the cultural wholeness of an *African* black identity” (267). The idea of cultural wholeness has valuable political applications, but it runs the risk of asserting an essentialist definition of blackness. As Dana’s biracialism shows, Butler seems to reject the idea of racial wholeness, as she emphasizes the value of personal wholeness and self-identification.

Kindred’s genre offers a way to understand Dana as an extension of her story’s form. Butler herself was ambivalent about the novel’s genre, as indicated by her notes and by interview comments about the novel. Canavan and other scholars have noted “Butler didn’t think of *Kindred* as science fiction: she repeatedly referred to it instead as a ‘grim fantasy’ and asked her publisher to do the same” (Canavan 62). In a 1991 interview, Butler is adamant there is no science in *Kindred*: “With *Kindred* there’s absolutely no science involved. Not even the time travel. I don’t use a time machine or anything like that. Time travel is just a device for getting the character back to confront where she came from” (Kenan 496). *Kindred* does not offer a scientific explanation for Dana’s time travel, but Yaszek identifies time travel and “the encounter with the alien other” as science fiction devices used in the novel (1063). Canavan further notes Butler “was convinced

that the genre label was killing her sales” and limiting her potential audience (Canavan 67). In an interview, Butler asserted, “[Labels] are also inhibiting factors; you wind up not getting read by certain people, or not getting sold to certain people because they think they know what you write” (Kenan 495).

Because science fiction has historically attracted a niche readership of young, Anglo- and Euro-American males, Butler preferred to classify her work as mainstream literature. Furthermore, encountering such a real issue as racism in a science fictional way, some young, white-identifying male readers could mistakenly believe racial discrimination now exists only in fiction. At one point, Butler considered removing the time travel aspect of the novel altogether and writing a traditional, linear historical narrative set entirely in the antebellum past. Writing a historical novel, however, also intimidated her. Her notes show she worried “such work had already been done better by others, including by many of the slaves and former slaves themselves” (Canavan 63). In reconciling these concerns, Butler’s use of time travel seems unique among then-contemporary neo-slave narratives. Rushdy classifies *Kindred* as a “novel of remembered generations,” similar to Gayl Jones’s *Corregidora* (1974) (“The Neo-Slave Narrative” 95). Yet by infusing the narrative with a science fictional trope, Butler blends past and present more completely than her predecessors: Dana does not learn about her family’s past through stories passed down; she learns about the past through her own lived experience, which she must integrate with a contemporary context.¹³

¹³ Dana is, in essence, forced to adopt a phenomenological approach to her family history through “radical empiricism” (qtd. in Johnson ix). Meanwhile, Butler, who does not have direct experience of slavery, grounds the text in her own lived experience of 1970s California, while using literary imagination to project her protagonist and readers into the unfamiliar world of the plantation. (See Charles Johnson’s *Being and Race* for more on phenomenology and African American fiction.)

With foundations primarily in the 1960s and 1970s, neo-slave narratives focus on the experience and effects of slavery from a contemporary authorial position. These narratives attempt a variety of goals, including consolidating black identity and recasting the African American past in a liberating manner. The impulse to define racial identity through genre is problematized, however, when considering the question of Dana's biracial identity within the text. Dubey contends Dana's racial history does more to complicate racial identity than to consolidate it: "Far from grounding present-day black identity, as is the case when Haley discovers his West African ancestor [in *Roots*], Dana's genealogical mission forces her to confront the murkiness of her racial origins" (Dubey 347). Though whiteness is inevitably present in a neo-slave context, writers often use whiteness in these texts as the antithesis and antagonist to blackness. Yet, to read whiteness only as opposition to blackness is not fruitful in analyzing Butler's text. The "murkiness" of Dana's racial identity within the novel subverts a traditional function of neo-slave narratives by foregrounding a different kind of black female identity. Rather than focusing only on Dana's blackness, Butler asks readers to consider how whiteness is essential to Dana, in her own biological and familial history as well as within her marriage and social present.

The January 2017 publication of a graphic novel adaptation of *Kindred* demonstrates the continuing relevance of Butler's work and reinforces the value of examining genre in connection with racial construction in the novel. Encountering the novel in graphic form, new readers will literally see racial identity; thus, they might interpret the novel's racial construction differently than readers of the original text. In a graphic novel, visual representations are impossible to ignore; they are eminently present, so a reader will not be able to forget whether Dana is white or black or some combination of the two constructs. Additionally, in the original text, everything is filtered through Dana's first-person account; the reader 'sees' what Dana reports or what the other

characters say to her. In the graphic novel, the reader ‘sees’ what the artist chooses to depict. Those depictions are ever-present, deliberately affecting how we experience Dana’s story. Damian Duffy and John Jennings work hard to stay true to Butler’s original vision, but the shift in genre necessarily changes the way the story is told and read.

Though the story changes somewhat in the adaptation, the shift to a new form forty years later also speaks to *Kindred*’s ability to transcend the time and physical space of the original text. If science fiction novels have historically been the domain of white-identifying men, I would argue comic books are even more so. The trope of the nerdy white boy reading comics is ingrained in the cultural imagination of the United States. Adapting *Kindred* into that form seems to take Butler’s project of opening science fiction to a black female audience a step further, while also introducing graphic novel readers to a story they may not have encountered otherwise.

The experience of reading a graphic novel is quite different from a conventional novel, not only in terms of the differences between textual and visual representation, but even more particularly on a spatial level. The story unfolds in panels that contain images and words; however, ‘story’ can also exist in the space between the boxes (the gutters). This is a visual symbolic of how silence can tell stories and how some things are too unspeakable to include; or rather, they are included but only in visual form: seen, not spoken. Depending on the layout, specialized knowledge might also be necessary to understand the reading strategy. For readers unfamiliar with graphic novels, reading *Kindred* is a dual reading process. First, readers must learn how to move through the pages, especially when the panels are laid out irregularly or inconsistently. Then, they must grapple with color—colors within the illustrations as well as the skin colors of Dana and the other characters. This process might seem exclusive, encouraging some readers while discouraging others, but this complex engagement with the text is an extension of Butler’s original

revision of the slave narrative. The movement of the text to a new visual context extends Butler's multivalent narrative space to a new, even more diverse readership.

As Womack attests, black female readers of sci-fi have always existed, but it took writers like Butler to carve out a place where “the black geek” could live (11). Dana herself must live in that same space. Like the readers of science fiction Womack describes, Dana is black and intellectual but also exists on the fringes of her own society because she does not conform to others' expectations of her. To fully understand Dana's liminality, we must examine the perceptions of her that pervade the text, as well as the ways Dana resists these perceptions.

Identity With and Against the Family

Dana's most formative relationship pertaining to her hybrid identity is with her white husband, Kevin. Butler portrays Kevin as an enlightened white person, who defies his family's racist objections by marrying Dana. Kevin also helps enslaved Africans escape to the North during his own travel to the past. Even so, no one exists outside the racial structures dominating society, and Kevin finds himself experiencing his own race in manners that seem to surprise him, such as when he confronts his sister's bigotry for the first time. In the text, his racial identity helps to situate Dana's in two distinct ways. First, his whiteness throws Dana's blackness into contrast in the present day; however, it also allows Dana to 'pass' as a black woman when they return to the Weylin plantation in the past. Her blackness makes the fiction that she is Kevin's slave believable to the Weylins and makes the truth that she and Kevin are married impossible for them to believe. The lie helps obscure other troublesome details, such as Dana's clothing. Rather than try to explain why she wear pants, Dana suggests her “master” will not buy her a dress: “Let it be Kevin's fault that I was ‘dressed like a man’” (Butler 71).

Her association with Kevin must be presented to the Weylins as a master-slave relationship in order to obscure the truth of their time-traveling origins, yet at the same time, the lie gives Dana freedom from harsh manual slave labor and the ability to move about the house as she pleases. Despite these advantages, Dana's 'freedom' is complicated; it is based on her proximity to Kevin's whiteness, but it is also predicated on the understanding that Dana, as a black woman, is subject to the power of white men.

As important as Dana's and Kevin's races are to the narrative and to the construction of their relationship, Butler obscures information about their racial identities until pages 24 and 51, respectively. Until that point, it is up to the reader to decide how to 'classify' Dana and her husband and whether or not to classify them in the same way. By withholding their racial identities until a few chapters into the novel, Butler tests her reader's positional bias. She particularly exposes the reality of U.S. American literature that if race is not explicitly denoted as non-white, then it is implicitly coded as white.¹⁴ George Lipsitz has argued, "whiteness never has to speak its name, never has to acknowledge its role as an organizing principle in social and cultural relations" (qtd. in Fishkin 976). Similarly, Guy Mark Foster suggests Butler's omission of the characters' races reflects a national silence about race at the time of *Kindred*'s publication (G. Foster 144). Butler lays the foundation for thinking about how race and relationships will be constructed later in the novel and how they could be constructed in a future America by introducing her characters to the reader without a racial framework. She invites readers to consider how and why racial coding is used or not used within American literary production.

¹⁴ Published four years after *Kindred*, Toni Morrison's short story "Recitatif" takes Butler's experiment a step further. Race is a central concern in the story, but nowhere in the text does Morrison reveal the races of the protagonists, Twyla and Roberta. The story, then, forces readers to examine their own stereotypes, much as Butler does in the early chapters of *Kindred*.

Perhaps Butler does not racially code Dana at the novel's opening to forestall reader assumptions based on her race. In *Playing in the Dark*, Morrison discusses the ways whiteness and blackness come to signify particular readings of American literature: "I use the term [Africanism] for the denotative and connotative blackness that African peoples have come to signify, as well as the entire range of views, assumptions, readings, and misreadings that accompany Eurocentric learning about these people" (7). As soon as a character is raced, the reader's understanding of that character becomes informed by the myriad views to which Morrison refers. Depending on the race, gender, and other aspects of the reader's identity, those views can take many different forms, which Butler asks us to reconsider by withholding those designations at the beginning of the novel. Butler's use of genre subverts audience expectations as well. A reader who approaches *Kindred* as science fiction might assume both Kevin and Dana are white, whereas a reader who approaches the text as a neo-slave narrative might assume they are black. The interplay between Butler's withholding of racial signifiers and her blending of genres is essential to understanding the multiple areas of hybridity in the novel.¹⁵

When Butler finally reveals Kevin's race, the moment accentuates both his and Dana's fears that his whiteness will eventually affect her love for him because of the racial association between Kevin and the white men who abuse Dana. After a white patroller almost rapes Dana during her second trip to the past, Kevin asks, "Do I look like someone you can come home to from where you may be going?" (Butler 51). This is the first indication Kevin is white, and it is underscored by his concern that Dana's experiences with time travel will warp his racial identity—and by extension, their relationship. Though Dana herself never questions her love for Kevin, she

¹⁵ Looking at Butler's other work, it is clear she views hybridity as strategy and survival mechanism, but she does so with ambivalence. See Canavan's analysis of the Oankali in the *Xenogenesis* trilogy. As Canavan has noted, the ambivalent nature of the Oankali as both saviors and executioners makes protagonist Lilith's consent with their hybridization plan the subject of sustained critical debate (Canavan 97-98).

does worry his whiteness will endanger him in different ways than Dana's blackness endangers her: "If he was stranded here for years, some part of this place would rub off on him... [If] he survived here, it would be because he managed to tolerate the life here" (Butler 77). Dana experiences bodily harm in the 1800s, but she worries the lifestyle and mentality of a slave plantation economy will harm Kevin's soul in the 1900s.¹⁶

Though Dana and Kevin's anxieties about Kevin's whiteness are ostensibly rooted in their fear of what they will experience in the past, racial anxiety actually impacts Kevin and Dana's life together in 1976 well before they begin time-travelling. In the contemporary period, Kevin must contend with the racism that persists in 1970s California. Other novels published around the same time as *Kindred* reflect this concern with race. The 1960s and 1970s were important decades for the neo-slave narrative; Margaret Walker's *Jubilee* (1966), Styron's *The Confessions of Nat Turner* (1967),¹⁷ Jones's *Corregidora* (1975), Reed's *Flight to Canada* (1976), and Morrison's *Beloved* (1977) were all published in a short time span. The publication of these novels also correlates with the founding of the Black Arts and the Black Aesthetic movements. Novels such as Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* (1970), Reed's *Mumbo Jumbo* (1972), Baldwin's *If Beale Street Could Talk* (1974), Alice Walker's *Meridian* (1976), and Haley's *Roots* (1977) all demonstrate an investment in black artistic production which explores black identity in the later years of the Black Power and Civil Rights movements. In many ways, *Kindred* fits easily into these groups; however, Butler's

¹⁶ I will discuss trauma more fully later in the chapter, but in her 2013 book *Embodying American Slavery in Contemporary Culture*, Lisa Woolfork notes trauma theory has embraced a Freudian understanding of trauma as purely mental, while the traditional Greek definition of trauma is physical (5). Therefore, Woolfork calls for a bodily understanding of trauma that privileges the physical. Perhaps by having a white man evince primarily mental trauma, Butler is critiquing the Cartesian split of mind and body that frequently emerges in Western epistemology.

¹⁷ I hesitate to include Styron. His novel has been strongly criticized for offensive portrayals of both black and white characters, and Styron himself is a white man. I include the novel here primarily to show the popularity of the neo-slave narrative form during this time and to show how *Kindred* fits within the larger continuum of publication.

interests in multiracial identity, interracial romance, and ethical compromise demonstrate resistance to the essentialized blackness that Black Arts and the Black Aesthetic seem to champion.

Forcing Kevin, a white man, to contend with racism seems to be one of Butler's most significant departures from her contemporaries. Dana and Kevin bond through their collective experiences of and responses to racism. In Dana's flashbacks, her white coworker Buz, her aunt and uncle, and Kevin's sister all exhibit racist attitudes toward her and Kevin's romance. He does not speak much about it in the text, but through these characters, Kevin experiences racism because of his relationship with Dana. Writing about this "rebound racism," Foster highlights Kevin's desire to distance himself from white people who hold racist views, including his sister, for fear Dana will think he shares those views (G. Foster 151). This anxiety exists for Kevin before he and Dana begin time-travelling, but that experience amplifies his fear she will no longer view him as her ally. Within the neo-slave narrative context, Butler uses Kevin's anxiety to show that racism is not an issue of the past. The racial prejudices and hatred associated with slavery are very much alive in the present—a reality Dana and Kevin will undoubtedly encounter even if their mission to save Rufus is successful. Interestingly, however, Kevin is the only character in the novel whom Dana directly refers to as "kindred" (Butler 57). While there is evidence to suggest Dana also considers Rufus to be kindred, Kevin's explicit status as a "kindred spirit" elevates his significance in the novel. Though they are not biologically related, Dana and Kevin have a spiritual connection that binds them together. They choose to become 'kin' through marriage because they are already the same 'kind' in a spiritual sense.

Like Kevin, Rufus significantly complicates Dana's racial self-perception. As the novel progresses, their relationship becomes increasingly ambivalent, leaving Dana unable to articulate exactly what Rufus means to her. Rufus is literally Dana's kin as a blood relative, but like Kevin

and Dana, Rufus and Dana have something beyond familial relation that makes them similar. While the text never explains the mechanism that allows Dana to travel through time to save Rufus, Dana speculates, “What we had was something new, something that didn’t even have a name. Some matching strangeness in us that may or may not have come from our being related” (Butler 29). This “matching strangeness” may explain why Dana develops an affection for Rufus that extends beyond her need to save him for her own survival. Thus, Dana begins to see Rufus as a friend and brother, though he also constitutes a very real threat to her safety and the safety of those around her. The threat Rufus represents is also hinted in the novel’s title: looking at the word kindred differently, as Canavan suggests, we see that Dana’s relationship with Rufus embodies ‘kin-dread,’ not only her fear of Rufus himself—her kin—but also a fear that she might be like him—his kind.

Benjamin Robertson argues their “strangeness” denotes the difference Dana and Rufus find in one another: “Dana, black, finds whiteness in her past. Rufus, white, finds blackness in his future” (Robertson 375). Robertson links this difference to Americanness: “This split between competing forces within one's own body conditions what it means to be American” (Robertson 375). Yet Robertson’s claim about “what it means to be American” does not fully address the question of how race impacts the American experience. As Morrison contends, Americanness has been constructed to be synonymous with whiteness: “American means white, and Africanist people struggle to make the term applicable to themselves with ethnicity and hyphen after hyphen after hyphen” (47). Strangeness, she asserts, is specifically associated with blackness, “with taboo” (Morrison, *Playing in the Dark* 87). Thus, if the neo-slave narrative seeks to consolidate African American identity, Dana’s association with Rufus’s whiteness undermines that goal: “Dana’s acceptance of Rufus acknowledges that she is not ‘culturally whole’ in Baraka’s sense,

recognizing Rufus, a white slave owner, as her ancestor, her brother, as her *family*” (Miletic 266). Dana cannot be ‘purely black’ because her biological and social connections to whiteness prevent her from being so, but neither can she be ‘purely white’ and, therefore, she is unable to access Americanness. Once again, Butler rejects the essentialism of the Black Arts Movement while also suggesting blackness in the United States is predicated upon *mestiza* consciousness.

Dana’s interpretation of her own race becomes increasingly confused because of this complicated relationship. When she first travels to the past, Rufus is just a small child. With each successive trip, Rufus gets years older, while Dana remains approximately the same age. Dana observes, “The boy was literally growing up as I watched—growing up *because* I watched and because I helped to keep him safe” (Butler 68, emphasis added). When they first meet, then, Dana knows Rufus has the potential to grow into a racist slave owner, but she believes she can influence his ideas about race. As he grows, however, Dana’s impact on him cannot prevent him from behaving like a typical white slave owner, nor can she stop him from raping the woman who will give birth to her all-important ancestor Hagar. Rather than fashioning Rufus into a non-racist abolitionist, Dana’s relationship with him causes her to question her own loyalties on the plantation.

Just as Dana’s black identity is socially constructed, Rufus’s identity as a white man relies on his dominance over Dana and his ownership of the slaves on the plantation. He increasingly asserts this power as he grows, culminating in acts such as his serial rape of Alice and the sale of Dana’s friends, including Tess. When Dana confronts him about these actions, he counters with “They’re my property!” (Butler 222). More than anything else, this master-slave dynamic characterizes Rufus’s conception of his own whiteness. Morrison argues blackness serves to situate whiteness in the United States: “Africanism is the vehicle by which the American self

knows itself as not enslaved, but free; not repulsive, but desirable; not helpless, but licensed and powerful; not history-less, but historical” (*Playing in the Dark* 52). Rufus knows he is white, in part, because he is ‘not black,’ and much as whiteness has the distinction of being ‘not black,’ he defines his freedom through his ability to enslave others. This understanding of enslavement further develops Dana’s socially constructed concepts of blackness and whiteness; she does not have a true sense of what ‘freedom’ means to her until she loses it. Similarly, Rufus has no understanding of the dehumanizing effects of slavery because he has never experienced them, nor does he allow himself to empathize with his ‘property’ in a way that might foster such an understanding.

Despite Rufus’s inability to empathize with the enslaved men and women on the plantation, Dana’s feelings toward him underscore his inherent humanity. On her final trip to the past, Dana discovers Alice has committed suicide—the tragic result of one of Rufus’s cruel tricks—and before she returns to the present, Rufus tries to rape her, and she kills him. Despite the deplorable things Rufus does (or attempts to do) in this chapter and throughout the novel, Dana still finds she cannot hate him and is inclined to forgive: “Somehow I always seem to forgive him for what he does to me. I can’t hate him the way I should” (223). Donaldson reads Dana’s ambivalence here as a failure of agency: “Where scholars focus on Dana’s act of androicide as one of resistance and liberation, I find that her confusion saturates this episode with uncomfortable ambiguity and a peculiar pathos” (104). Dana’s feelings toward Rufus belie his complexity, as well as her ambiguity. Through Dana’s connection to Rufus, Butler demands we look at him not just as a racist, rapist abuser but as a complex human character. For Dana to identify with Rufus in this way speaks to the humanity of both the abused and the abuser.¹⁸ Through time travel and her

¹⁸ This may also be a warning that only monsters commit monstrous acts. Humans do terrible things to each other; remembering the humanity in abusers is not only ‘hopeful’ but also a warning about the potential banality of evil.

ability to face him directly, this identification and recognition are possible. And while Rufus is certainly undeserving of Dana's friendship, Butler suggests here and elsewhere that interracial friendship is both possible and important to contemporary race relations.

On another level, Dana and Rufus's strange relationship demonstrates the power of affect to forge collective ties. Affect theory deals with the social effect of emotions. As feminist scholar Sara Ahmed argues, "emotions *do things*, and work to align individuals with collectives...through the very intensity of their attachments" (Ahmed 26). Emotions create attachments that often defy reason, and illogical attachment to someone does not constitute a character flaw. An understanding of the affective relationship between Dana and Rufus helps explain why Dana cannot hate Rufus even if she should. Theirs is reminiscent of an emotionally abusive romantic relationship, where hurt, love, hate, and affection are all tied together. His emotional and material reliance on her—which is compounded by their gender difference—highlights the psychological slavery to which Dana is subjected in the text.

Because of her closeness to both Rufus and Kevin, the slaves on the Weylin plantation also question Dana's blackness. The slaves' perception that Dana is 'white' first emerges due to the way she talks. On her third trip, Nigel asks her, "Why you try to talk like white folks?" and elaborates, "You talk too educated" (Butler 74). Later, when she tries to help born-free Alice and her enslaved husband Isaac escape slavery, Isaac exhibits his distrust by noting she "talks like she been mighty close with white folks—for a long time" (Butler 119). Dana's manner of speech, her affection for Kevin, and her camaraderie with Rufus—in sum, her proximity to whiteness—indicate to the slaves she is not 'one of them.' For the slaves laboring in the fields who do not know her, she represents a dangerous variable: a black person who could be spying and reporting

on them to the white master.¹⁹ Dana's apparent choice to be friendly with Rufus—and by extension, his mother and father—indicates a micro effect of her daily decisions, to use Haney López's phrase. From the slaves' perspective, Dana's tacit condoning of the Weylins' lifestyle makes her more white than black. For the other black characters in the novel, Dana's 'whiteness' hinges on her apparent maintenance of the "racially constructed status quo" (Haney López 9). From their perspective, Dana's closeness to Rufus demonstrates her submission to and collusion with the institution of slavery. Dana perpetuates the racial hierarchy by protecting Rufus and allowing him to reach adulthood.

While many of the slaves in the novel read Dana's association with whiteness as a betrayal of blackness, *Kindred* illustrates that slavery puts people in impossible circumstances. Dana's vulnerability as a black woman makes her tacit agreement with Rufus her only option; her physical safety in the past often relies on Rufus's protection, and her existence in the future depends on his continued survival in the past. This tenuous position reflects one of the goals of the neo-slave narrative. Dubey contends neo-slave narratives serve to help contemporary black readers rethink how they perceive their enslaved ancestors. As both Dubey and Miletic note, young black Civil Rights activists often expressed disdain for parents and ancestors that seemed to submit to white supremacy by becoming *mammies* and *Uncle Toms*. Butler credits an encounter with one such young black activist for providing the "germ of the idea for *Kindred*" (qtd. in Canavan 59). Dana expresses this disdain through her initial contempt of Sarah: "She had done the safe thing—had accepted a life of slavery because she was afraid...She was the kind of woman who would be held

¹⁹ In a 1978 article entitled "House Servants and Field Hands: Fragmentation in the Antebellum Slave Community," C. W. Harper notes the division between field hands and house servants that was often fostered on plantations. According to Harper, each group looked down and distrusted the other. Frequently receiving better treatment than their field working counterparts, house servants were perceived to be more loyal to their masters, informing on runaways and other misbehavers. Living in the house and being "close with white folks," as Isaac puts it in *Kindred*, refers not just to physical proximity but to a perceived emotional and ideological closeness.

in contempt during the militant nineteen sixties” (Butler 145). The thought of Sarah doing “the safe thing” gives Dana a sense of “moral superiority” (Butler 145). Over time, however, she realizes Sarah does what she must to survive: “The hardest lesson Dana learns from her journey back to slavery is that no subject is entirely self-invented and no agency free of historical exigency, which leads not only to her eventual rehabilitation of mammies and Uncle Toms but also to the gradual erosion of her late twentieth-century ideals of political resistance” (Dubey 348). Dubey refers to Sarah’s actions in the text as an “ethics of compromise” (348). Sarah’s apparent lack of agency is not a character flaw nor a moral lapse but rather, a result of the historical context that prevents enslaved men and women from claiming their subjectivity. Furthermore, these enslaved men and women must survive for future generations—including Dana and Butler—to exist. In this context, survival is “the only choice,...itself a kind of resistance, a triumph” (Canavan 60).²⁰ Coming to terms with this ethics of compromise is an important objective of neo-slave narratives and a recurring theme in Butler’s work.

Unlike Sarah’s ethics of compromise, Dana’s loyalty requires compromises that may not be hers to make. Many of the slaves, particularly Alice, interpret Dana’s protection of and friendship with Rufus as a betrayal. Dana believes Alice understands her position—“Alice accusing me was ridiculous, and she knew it”—but Dana’s trust that Alice understands why she cooperates with Rufus is perhaps misplaced (Butler 220). Dana justifies her decision to allow Rufus to rape Alice because it protects Alice from additional pain and death, but she knows her decision is also selfish because it ensures her own future birth. The inevitability of history is a common motif in traditionally white male-authored science fiction; in order to secure his or her own birth, the protagonist of the time travel novel must accept the “‘proper’ order of history”

²⁰ Audre Lorde’s poem “A Litany for Survival” (1978) expresses a similar idea.

(Canavan 62). Butler uses this motif in the text, but Dana remains uncomfortable with the forced complicity of history. In some ways, Butler maintains a traditional aspect of science fiction, but Lisa Woolfork argues Butler does so because a “malleable history would not permit *Kindred* to stage a return to the traumatic past” (23). If the history could be changed, Dana’s trip would not allow Butler to explore the ambivalent and changing nature of race relations in the contemporary U.S. through the antebellum lens. The tension between loyalty to her friends and self-preservation, in turn, affects Dana’s own understanding of her racial identity insofar as it constitutes her social identity with the other black characters in the novel. She articulates this social identity when she tells Carrie she can see why other characters think she is more white than black (Butler 223). Though she does not directly identify herself as white in this confession, she does acknowledge her own actions have led others to form that conclusion, and she feels the guilt associated with race betrayal.

Dana’s family and collective identities have a powerful influence on her throughout the novel, but Dana asserts her self-defined identity most notably near the end of the novel, when her relationship with Rufus begins to shift in the wake of Alice’s suicide. Rufus has always seen Dana as a black woman, but their closeness has lulled him into the belief she is more sympathetic to his whiteness than she really is, much like the slaves mistakenly believe her to be more loyal to the Weylins than to them. When Rufus asks if he can trust Dana to continue saving his life, she asserts “I’m black... And when you sell a black man away from his family just because he talked to me, you can’t expect me to have any good feelings toward you” (Butler 255-256). Here, Dana aligns herself with chosen family, rather than with Rufus: “Her sympathies do not follow the contours of blood relations; they flow towards the community to which she belongs” (Rushdy, “Families of Orphans” 147). Like the mixed-race identities that humanities scholar Michele Elam explores in

The Souls of Mixed Folk (2011), Dana's is a "capacious racial [identity] fully consistent with heterogeneity, postmodernity, and self-examination" (21).

Dana's assertive claim of black subjectivity does not negate the fact that her bond with Rufus is deep and complicated. That bond only ruptures when he oversteps the bounds of the relationship they have established: "I could accept him as my ancestor, my younger brother, my friend, but not as my master, and not as my lover" (Butler 260). Dana can accept a relationship with Rufus based on the familial ties they do share, but when he tries to step into the sexual realm reserved for her husband, she cannot accept this new positioning and must kill him, regardless of the impact such an act might have on herself, her enslaved friends, or her ability to return to her own time. Rather than remain bound by an immutable past, Dana risks her own destruction by identifying as a non-enslaved woman.

In conceptualizing Dana's racial identity, it is important to acknowledge how often identities are ascribed to her that she may not apply to herself. In addition to being 'misread' as white, Dana is frequently mistaken for male, generally because she wears pants. Miletic suggests these frequent mistakes "[call] into question the 1960s' and '70s' constructions of black womanhood as 'submissive,' 'weak,' and restricted to mothering a pure black generation" (Miletic 272). To explain further why the characters misread Dana, Angelyn Mitchell writes "Dana bears the burden of misreading because she is a black woman without power in the system of white patriarchy" (Mitchell 58). As these two critics note, the assumptions surrounding Dana are based on stereotypes of femininity and blackness in both the antebellum and contemporary periods. The same stereotypes that make Dana an outsider on the plantation also impact her in the 1970s as she interacts with coworkers and family members who try to define appropriate love relationships, educational pursuits, and career decisions on her behalf.

Because women, especially black women, are expected to be submissive to white males, a consideration of agency may also help to conceptualize Dana's misreadings. In his analysis of the novel, Florian Bast writes that the liberal humanist subject "is the autonomous, rational, disembodied, self-determining and -defining individual, clearly distinct from the world around him and conceptualized as a white, heterosexual man with a coherent and stable identity" (Bast 153). Since agency is attributed to white males, Dana's efforts to assert her agency distinguish her from the other black women in the text and from the way black women are expected to behave.²¹ Understandings of agency can also show how the other characters define themselves in relation to Dana. Born free, Alice must adjust to the loss of her agency because her position in this society does not offer her any other choice. Dana, on the other hand, never viewed herself as enslaved or subject to slavery. She has a sense of self-possession that allows her to assert her desires and reject abuses in ways Alice cannot.

I should note, despite her general lack of agency in the text, Alice practices her own politics of resistance through the naming of her children. The four names Alice chooses for her children—including the two who died in infancy—are Joseph, Hagar, Miriam, and Aaron.²² Observing that all of these names are freed slaves in the Bible, Dana comments, "Someday Rufus is going to get religion and read enough of the Bible to wonder about those children's names" (Butler 233). Rather than being concerned, Alice shrugs and asserts, "If Hagar had been a boy, I would have called her Ishmael. In the Bible, people might be slaves for a while, but they didn't have to stay

²¹ Dana's interracial marriage also seems to subvert the black community's expectations of her, as represented by her aunt and uncle. Mitchell argues Butler uses Dana and Kevin's marriage not to offer "miscegenation as a solution to race relations" but to emphasize "the necessity of integrated collective engagement and coalition building across the color line as a way of solving some of our contemporary race problems" (Mitchell 71).

²² Hagar is a slave woman in *Genesis* who bears a son, Ishmael, to Abraham when his wife, Sarah, is unable to conceive; she is freed when Sarah conceives her own son, Isaac. Joseph, also in *Genesis*, is the son of Jacob and Rachel, whose brothers sell him into slavery in Egypt out of jealousy. Aaron and Miriam are the siblings of Moses in *Exodus*, who are born into slavery and emancipated when Moses leads the Hebrew people out of Egypt.

slaves” (Butler 233-234). Alice herself does not live to see her children emancipated, but by giving them the names of former slaves, she projects her hopes onto them and plants seeds of resistance and escape.

While some black characters punish Dana for her socially constructed identity, performing whiteness is not always advantageous to her. To Tom Weylin, having a slave who ‘thinks she is white’ is grounds for fear and suspicion. As the character Luke demonstrates, ‘thinking white’ can lead to trouble for a slave. Of Luke, Rufus notes, “he would just go ahead and do what he wanted to no matter what Daddy said. Daddy always said he thought he was white” (Butler 138). This behavior leads to Tom Weylin selling Luke and replacing him with a series of cruel white overseers; Luke’s fate signals to Dana that she must be cautious in expressing her racial consciousness and identification. Rufus articulates this concern when he tells Dana, “You sound too white to the field hands—like some kind of traitor, I guess... Daddy always thought you were dangerous because you knew too many white ways, but you were black. Too black, he said. The kind of black who watches and thinks and makes trouble” (Butler 255). Dana’s voice ‘sounds white’ largely because it reveals she is educated. Her diction and enunciation have to do with class, not race, but in the antebellum South, the dominant white supremacist mentality considers blackness to have no class. Slaves were property, not people. By ‘sounding white,’ Dana threatens the established class hierarchy on the Weylin plantation. This, in turn, indicates another problem with Dana: she “knows white ways” but is not white; she is “too black.” According to Tom Weylin, this combination of whiteness and blackness causes trouble for slave owners because it can instigate others to escape or rise up. He sees Dana’s knowledge and her ability to think as forms of espionage that she could potentially use against him and other white people. His concern is not unjustified; as Govan writes, “Dana has the same acute sense of social responsibility that

[Butler's other] heroines exhibit" (87). Using her education and knowledge, she tries to influence the slaves in small ways, such as educating the children and swaying Rufus's decisions to benefit the other blacks on the plantation.

Dana forms her own politics of resistance against Rufus and his family through these subversive acts. At first, she bases that politics on the assumption she will get to go home soon. For a long time, she does not fully commit to life on the plantation because she is simply acting a part: "We never really got into our roles. We never forgot that we were acting" (Butler 98). In this context, catering to Margaret Weylin's whims and appearing docile ensure Dana remains safe and unharmed until the next time she can return to her 'real' life. As the novel progresses, however, Dana's ideas of resistance begin to shift. Though Kevin tries to convince her "we're in the middle of history. We surely can't change it," she begins to wonder if she can change history in small ways, even if the impact never reaches beyond this particular plantation (Butler 100).

Incorporating a distinctly science fiction trope, Butler explores black female agency here in a way no other neo-slave narrative had previously done. Neo-slave narratives often seek to reframe history, but they rarely showcase characters who actually attempt to change it. Dana's ability to move through time gives her control over her own destiny because it gives her power over the past. The possibility that the future could be changed is a departure from the neo-slave narrative genre, yet in some ways, it is also a departure from the science fiction norm. Such a change would introduce the so-called *Grandfather Paradox* that has concerned writers of time travel fiction since 1931 at the latest (Nahin 255). The idea that changing the past will create a paradox in the present—by killing one's own grandfather, for example—is frequently addressed in time travel narratives. Butler's relative unconcern with this paradox and Dana's refusal to accept

the inevitability of history also demonstrate that *Kindred* does not neatly conform to science fiction, once again demonstrating Butler's revision of the two genres.

Time and Trauma

Another way Butler constructs collective identity in the novel and establishes the novel's science fictional elements is through the motifs of trauma and time. Dana's final journey home results in the worst physical trauma she experiences at any point in the text: the loss of her left arm. As he is dying, Rufus grabs Dana's arm and continues to hold onto it after his death. When she begins to be pulled back to her own time, Dana describes "something harder and stronger than Rufus's hand clamped down on [her] arm," and when she arrives in her living room, she discovers that same arm fused to the wall, "flesh joined with plaster," at "the exact spot Rufus's fingers had grasped" (Butler 261). Previously, when Kevin had been touching Dana at the moment of time travel, he traveled with her, but this final time, rather than bringing Rufus to the present, Dana must leave a piece of herself in the past. Mitchell provides insight into this loss: "One must conclude from this highly symbolic occurrence that leaving the past behind is simply impossible because history has lingering effect on the present and the future" (70). Thus, Butler indicates through Dana's physical mutilation the symbolic way the trauma of slavery has scarred the American consciousness. Trauma, then, is both an individual experience and a way of forging collective consciousness.

The amputation will be a reminder of the trauma for the remainder of Dana's life; she cannot be allowed to forget the trauma, but in the epilogue, she can begin to recover. She can maintain complex feelings toward Rufus but also look ahead at a life free from the bondage of time travel. Dana must live the trauma; it must be inscribed on her body so she can move past and

through it. A term Woolfork uses frequently is “bodily epistemology,” emphasizing the role corporeality plays in how we understand trauma. Scars and wounds are a major aspect of embodied trauma and serve as evidence of the traumatic experience. She writes, “Scars and wounds are significant markers or evidence of physical trauma, testifying to both bodily integrity and its loss” (Woolfork 59). Dana’s arm, then, comes to symbolize the many physical and psychological traumas that impact her personal and collective identities in the novel.

In addition to drawing attention to Dana’s racial ambiguity, Dubey’s discussion of *Roots* highlights two other important aspects of *Kindred*. First, it underscores the traumatic nature of the collective memory of slavery, highlighting its “murkiness.” Second, it emphasizes that, in the novel, Dana must live through slavery. As a modern black woman, it is not enough for her simply to ‘know’ about slavery or to ‘remember,’ culturally; it is not enough for her to read *Roots*. Instead, through the mechanism of time travel, Dana must experience the trauma of U.S. slavery directly, reflecting that trauma in her own body. The loss of Dana’s arm serves as tangible proof that slavery occurred and caused lasting damage, despite society’s efforts to pretend racism is no longer a problem. Only by facing the trauma of the past can she grasp its extent and begin the process of healing in the present-day. In the following discussion, I will show how Butler uses the trauma of slavery as a vehicle to bring the past and present into immediate proximity and, in turn, how she uses this compression of time to begin the healing of that same trauma.

A major conflict in the novel is the rate of time passage between the antebellum past and the 1976 present; time moves much more slowly in the past than it does in the present. Butler makes the reader aware of this disparity immediately after Dana’s first trip. When Kevin and Dana compare notes on the length of that trip, Dana believes she was gone for “A few minutes. Not long,” while Kevin reports, “There were no more than ten or fifteen seconds between the time you

went and the time you called my name” (Butler 16). Initially, the difference in their shared experience leads to Kevin doubting Dana’s account of the trip. He insists, “It happened. I saw it. You vanished and you reappeared. Facts” (Butler 16). Dana responds with her own reality: “I know what I saw, and what I did—my facts. They’re no crazier than yours” (Butler 16). Here, Butler illustrates a key idea regarding trauma and memory. For Dana, the experience of being kidnapped into the past results in a distorted relationship to time. Just as time seems to slow down when one experiences pain, Dana’s time literally slowed when she was in the past, such that she and Kevin experience the length of time differently.²³

Butler uses this disparity to show how the trauma of slavery distorts time and to show how the collective memory of slavery has resulted in conflicting narratives from black and white America. The white male narrative and the black female narrative, as expressed by Kevin and Dana, are different, but his “facts” are “no crazier” than hers. This conflict between facts can also be seen outside African American literature. As I alluded to in the Introduction, *testimonio*, “the telling of a communal story of oppression and empowerment,” has been challenged by the difficulty of presenting objective ‘truth’ (Irizarry, *Chicana/o and Latina/o Fiction* 164). Ylce Irizarry has articulated that eyewitness accounts are accepted or denied based on how trustworthy the eyewitness is perceived to be (“Ethics of Writing” 266). In *Kindred*, Dana and Kevin each have their own firsthand experience as evidence. Kevin’s acceptance or denial of Dana’s initial account depends on whether he considers her “an acceptable supplier of truth” (Irizarry, “Ethics of Writing” 266). Their search in the epilogue for corroborative documentation is ultimately fruitless, leaving them with just their testimonies, which they can only share with each other.

²³ A 2018 study by Piovesan et al. found a positive correlation between pain stimuli and the subjects’ perceptions of the duration of that stimuli, where high intensity pain was perceived to last longer than low-intensity pain.

On Dana's second trip to the past, Kevin reports a similar time discrepancy, but here, he begins to understand the lengthening of time created by the trauma of Dana's disappearance. He tells Dana she was gone "Almost three minutes. I watched the clock. But it seemed to be longer" (Butler 44). Indeed, for Dana it was longer—several hours, in fact. That Kevin also begins to feel the lengthening speaks to his own traumatic experience of her disappearance. His experience also supports Halas's assertion that "cultural memory of trauma involves both...the witnesses and those who participate" (316). In his theory of trauma, sociologist Jeffrey Alexander emphasizes the role of storytelling to construct collective trauma. He argues individual suffering fuels the meaning-making process but collective trauma is "a matter of symbolic construction and framing" (3). Likewise, *testimonio* contributes to the creation of collective memory as individual writers "always [depict] communal experience" (Irizarry, "Ethics of Writing" 268). Therefore, although Kevin has not yet experienced the trauma directly, he still feels the effects of it as a witness and as a contributor to the framing of Dana's ordeal. Later in the novel, Kevin experiences the traumatic time slippage firsthand, as he is left behind in 1819 when Dana returns home. Though Dana spends only eight days in the 1976 present, by the time she returns to the past, five years have passed. These five years have a significant impact on Kevin and strain his relationship with Dana.

Butler never reveals to the reader—or to Dana—everything Kevin experiences in the 1800s; however, some trauma is evident on his flesh: he has a scar on his forehead—"the remnant of what must have been a bad wound" (Butler 184). He also tells Dana he was run out of Maryland for helping slaves escape, but beyond that, Butler does not reveal much of the trauma he experienced personally. Instead, she reveals a bit of what he saw. He tells Dana, "I saw a woman die in childbirth once... This woman's master strung her up by her wrists and beat her until the baby came out of her—dropped onto the ground" (Butler 191). The horror and grotesqueness of

this account is one of the most explicit in the novel, and based on the way he responds to his return home, this and other experiences have clearly left a mark on Kevin, even as a white man, in ways much more significant than the scar on his face. Literary scholar Diana Paulin has suggested Kevin's scar is on his head to signify that he has undergone an "intellectual experience" (189). Certainly, his experience was as much physical as it was intellectual, but Paulin's framing of the injury highlights that Kevin must reconfigure how he understands slavery and racial discrimination in the wake of his travels.

Hinting at additional distortion of time after their reunion, Dana notes Kevin "looked old now; the young face had changed more than could be accounted for" by scars or a beard or even the passage of five years (Butler 195). Kevin himself acknowledges that "Five years is longer than it sounds. So much longer" (Butler 193). Once again, time has warped, not only due to the disparity of its passage between the past and present, but also through the lengthening of time that trauma creates. When Kevin first arrives in the past with Dana, she expresses fear of what the experience of "tolerating the life" there might do to him (Butler 77). After his return, she worries her earlier fears have come to pass. Kevin spends much more time in the 1800s than Dana does. Overall, her trips add up to a little over a year; while Kevin must spend five times as long in the past, their trauma is comparable. Anne Donadey argues Kevin, as a white man, must spend more time in the past to fully grasp its atrocities (68). Dana's time is much shorter, comparatively, but she bears more literal and figurative scars of the experience. Indeed, without the ability to "touch solid evidence" of the Weylin plantation, Dana and Kevin's scars are the only tangible testimony to their experience (Butler 264).

Kevin's silence regarding his experience also demonstrates both the necessity and the difficulty of articulating trauma. Donadey describes this as "the central paradox at the heart of

trauma literature”: “the impossibility of fully accounting for the horrors of the trauma with words and yet the necessity of trying to articulate the grueling experience as part of a process of healing and surviving” (70). Kevin and Dana both need to speak (or write) their pain to begin the healing process, but they find it too painful to do so. Adding to this paradox, Dana links time and healing: “I didn’t know what else to do—or even whether there was anything I could do. Maybe this was something he had to work out for himself. Maybe it was something that only *time* could help” (Butler 195, emphasis added). Dana’s meditation here appears a bit ironic; she thinks time will help Kevin, even while time seems to be the root of his problems. Within this irony lies Butler’s message about time and trauma. Time travel creates the trauma, but time passage may help it to heal.

Given the way trauma distorts time, trauma itself should be understood as the time-travel mechanism in the novel. Rufus’s fear of death summons Dana to save him, and her fear of her own death sends her home. Blix and Brennen support this conjecture when they note “our episodic memory system provides us, in some limited sense, with the ability to travel both backwards and forwards in time, and thereby to relive episodes from our past as well as to imagine episodes that plausibly lie ahead in time” (957). This understanding of memory and time travel corresponds well to Butler’s use of trauma in the text and links both memory and time in an Afrofuturist framework. The ability to “imagine episodes that lie ahead in time” is central to the work of *Afrofuturism* as Butler and her peers seek to envision emancipatory futures.

The impact of time on healing also describes the way time is used in ethical debates. The idea that ‘the ends justify the means’ suggests at some point in the future the atrocities of the present will be ‘worth it.’ Anthropologist Elizabeth Povinelli addresses this concept in the introduction to *Economies of Abandonment*. Paraphrasing William James, Povinelli describes a

“future anterior” moment when the means of oppression will become justified: “The future anterior is what will have been the ultimate truth, good, and justice of this existing action, event and experience, after every last man has had his experience and his say” (2). As Rufus’s descendant, Dana would seem to be the future anterior proof that justifies Rufus’s continued existence and the terrible things he does, such as raping Alice. Yet those atrocities still exist in both Alice’s and Dana’s present. The promise of Hagar’s—and by extension, Dana’s—birth does not make Alice’s lived experience any better. In this ethical construct, the promise of the future serves as a form of appeasement to delay beneficial change.

Conclusion

The growing field of epigenetics offers a biological window into the physical impact of trauma by examining the way environmental conditions can be expressed in the genes of the offspring of organisms that experience those conditions. A 2017 study published in *Science* found that a temperature-induced change in the genes of a particular species of nematode was passed down through fourteen generations (Klosin et al. 320). Trauma, then, can be traced through DNA. Though research into transgenerational trauma is ongoing, studies of the descendants of Holocaust survivors have suggested that trauma inflicted on individuals can have a lasting psychological, and possibly biological, impact on their offspring (Lehrner and Yehuda 23). In their 2018 article, psychologist Amy Lehrner and neurochemist Rachel Yehuda articulate some of the challenges of studying cultural trauma, but they also emphasize the value of this research to the communities in question.

Similarly, in their 2012 volume, *Genetics and the Unsettled Past*, Keith Wailoo, Alondra Nelson, and Catherine Lee examine the burgeoning role of DNA testing for uncovering familial

and historical identity. As Nelson explains in her chapter from the book, “Reconciliation Projects: From Kinship to Justice,” DNA has increasingly been used as a vehicle for “reparative justice” for descendants of oppressed peoples in the U.S. and around the world (21). These “reconciliation projects” are predicated on the belief that if a genetic link can be established between contemporary individuals and their enslaved ancestors, then reconciliation and reparation can occur. While this strategy has not been especially successful in obtaining reparations for U.S. slavery, Nelson’s examination of these efforts highlights the growing potential for DNA to reveal and reconcile historical and familial trauma. A broader symbolic implication of this discussion, as it pertains to my study, is that trauma is encoded in individuals’ DNA, and by creating a genetic link to the past, present-day trauma can begin to heal. Perhaps Dana’s ability to time travel is also genetically coded, a biological link to her family’s traumatic past. The ‘science’ in *Kindred* may not be explicated, but these developments offer contemporary readers new ways to understand the complex genetic and emotional links Dana shares with her past and present kin.

Paradoxically, Butler creates a possibly hopeful future through the use of collective trauma. By using trauma itself as a time-travel mechanism, distorting the characters’ perceptions of time, and inscribing the trauma of time travel directly on their bodies, Butler highlights the inherently traumatic nature of slavery. By humanizing her ‘antagonist’ and suggesting Rufus and Dana are ‘kindred,’ however, she also allows time to be the impetus for recovery. Slavery in the United States has imprinted itself on the collective consciousness of the entire country, not just the descendants of former slaves. It is evident in our institutional structures, politics, and daily interactions. In *Kindred*, slavery is the central conflict, distorting Dana and Kevin’s sense of time and causing them deep physical and emotional trauma; however, it also allows them to come to consciousness regarding the invisible effects of slavery that affected their lives before they became

time travelers. By engaging with her family's trauma, Dana can forge a hybrid identity for herself—"nothing rejected, nothing abandoned" (Anzaldúa 101). In "Families of Orphans," Rushdy writes, "the concept of family is something we generate out of shared histories and collective memories" (142). Though the Dana and Kevin's shared history is traumatic, it bonds them together and defines their concept of family moving forward.

Reading *Kindred* within the context of neo-slave narratives reveals how race is constructed in the contemporary imagination; by understanding antebellum conceptions of race and racism, we can better understand how those conceptions affect life in the present. At the novel's close, Kevin and Dana must continue to live in a racialized American context, and though I have suggested there is hope for their future, they do not live in a raceless utopia. Instead, like the multiracial experiences Elam's book explores, the text provides an "[opportunity] for social insight without administering prescriptive morals or promising emancipatory politics" (Elam xvii). Through the experience of time travel, Dana acquires new tools to help her in this struggle, much in the way contemporary authors of neo-slave narratives use these texts to suggest the importance of acknowledging the effects of slavery into the future.

Butler clearly works within this tradition, but by complicating the genre with the conventions of science fiction, she further challenges the stereotypes associated with race and gender in this country. Science fiction had traditionally been the domain of white male authors and white male readers. As a black woman writing in the genre in the 1970s, Butler was a pioneer. She was a recipient of both Hugo and Nebula awards and was the first science fiction writer to receive the MacArthur "Genius" Grant. Despite these major achievements within the genre, her desire to reach a black female audience likely contributed to her desire not to have her work classified as science fiction. Instead, like Dana, Butler strove to define her work, rather than have

it defined by others. *Kindred* demonstrates Butler's attempts to resist constructions that did not fit her. Over forty years since its publication, *Kindred* continues defy labels and to excite new audiences, both popular and academic.

CHAPTER TWO:
GLOBALISM, ACCULTURATION, AND LABOR IN *TROPIC OF ORANGE*

For my immigrant family. For Ronaldo, Jane Tei, and Jon.

Karen Tei Yamashita, *Tropic of Orange*

Karen Tei Yamashita's *Tropic of Orange* (1997) begins with a dedication to her husband and two children, establishing two major concerns for the novel: family and immigration. Yamashita grew up in the United States, met her husband and had both of her children in Brazil, and has lived in Japan and the U.S. with her family. Transnational multiracial identity, then, is part of the make-up of her own life. In a 2008 interview, Yamashita said, "I don't imagine my kids' self-identity as Japanese Brazilian, a much too narrowing definition of who they are, but perhaps my relationship to my family is for me one of the most intimate identities I carry" (Yun 205). Chapter 1 of this dissertation examined the intimacy of family across time; *Tropic of Orange* invites readers to consider the impact of space on that intimacy.

Set primarily in Los Angeles, the novel is about interconnectivity across ethnic, national, and linguistic borders. The way characters interact within and across these borders highlights the themes of individual and collective identity. *Tropic of Orange* is a dense and richly complex novel, portraying a wide range of themes and socio-political issues including NAFTA, immigration, homelessness, technology, government militarism, and environmentalism. The novel's plot spans a single week, with each of its seven sections representing a day of that week. Each section (day)

has seven chapters.²⁴ Yamashita divides the forty-nine total chapters evenly among the novel's seven focal characters: Rafaela Cortes, a Mexican immigrant, who has recently left Los Angeles and returned to Mexico; Bobby Ngu, a Singaporean Chinese immigrant and Rafaela's estranged husband; Emi, a Japanese American TV producer; Buzzworm, an African American amateur social worker; Manzanar Murakami, a homeless Japanese American man, who conducts traffic like an orchestra on an LA overpass and who is Emi's estranged grandfather; Gabriel Balboa, a Chicano print journalist, Emi's boyfriend, and the owner of the house where Rafaela is living and working at the start of the novel; and Arcangel, a Latino performance artist.

Over the course of the week, a massive automobile accident closes one of LA's freeways, resulting in the creation of a homeless camp in the abandoned cars. Meanwhile, other characters investigate a smuggling ring that deals in child organs and drugged oranges. Another major story line follows the mystical Arcangel as he literally pulls the Tropic of Cancer from Mexico to Los Angeles. As these various stories unfold, they intersect and overlap. Many of the characters form bonds resembling family ties, and these new communities emphasize the importance of collective organization. Some of the characters, however, are related biologically or by marriage. As I explored in Chapter 1, the identities associated with family relationships contribute to characters' feelings of belonging within the United States. Yamashita's focus on immigrant stories makes the relationship between ethnicity and 'Americanness' a major concern for these characters. While all seven of the novel's focal characters offer insight into the nature of globalization and Americanness, Rafaela, Bobby, Emi, and Manzanar demonstrate Yamashita's focus on family as a microcosm of globalism and contemporary interconnectivity. Their experiences allow

²⁴ I examine the novel's form in additional detail beginning on page 68.

Yamashita to personalize and individualize the effects of migration, racism, and capitalism on non-white Americans.

As *Tropic of Orange* demonstrates, the fluidity of economic borders creates oppressive socioeconomic structures. Though many of these oppressive structures cannot be reconfigured, the novel's ending with the reunion of Bobby and Rafaela suggests hope for the future. Sue-Im Lee writes compellingly about Yamashita's rejection of globalism: "The global 'we' under critique...is fundamentally a universalist 'we,' and *Tropic's* denunciation of the global village celebration is an indictment of the imperialist nature of the few who presume to speak for all" ("We Are Not" 503). I agree with Lee's assessment on a macro-level, but I contend the ethnically-hybrid Cortes-Ngu family offers an example of "global community" that Yamashita endorses.

Bobby Ngu and Rafaela Cortes are a married couple who have a son, Sol. Bobby and Rafaela, both individually and together, embody many of the common struggles of immigrants to the United States, including language acquisition, racism, and achieving the 'American Dream.' Despite a shared drive to achieve the American Dream, the couple's disagreement on how best to obtain belonging in the U.S causes a rift between them and contributes to much of their familial conflict. Bobby and Rafaela begin the novel apart: after a fight, Rafaela has left Bobby and taken Sol to Mexico, where she is working to renovate the vacation home of Gabriel Balboa. Throughout each of their chapters, Rafaela and Bobby meditate on each other, on the conflicts that exist between them, and on their mutual desire to reconcile, as they do by the novel's end. Brady Harrison writes, "Yamashita suggests that to be an American on the cusp of the twenty-first century is to be inescapably and increasingly hybridized, multi-ethnic, and trans-national" (1). Rafaela and Bobby embody this idea. Yamashita challenges readers to ask what it means to be American, especially as an immigrant and a laborer, through these characters.

The other biological family unit in the novel is comprised of a grandfather and granddaughter: Manzanar Murakami and Emi, whose last name is never explicitly identified.²⁵ Whereas Bobby and Rafaela's family relationship is a central focus of their storylines, Yamashita reveals Emi and Manzanar's relationship late in the text, in Emi's "Friday" chapter. Both characters have interactions with Gabriel and Buzzworm, but the two do not speak to each other, reuniting only after Emi's death when Manzanar accompanies her body away from the scene. Despite their lack of direct interaction, their family history and relationship to each other define these two characters. They are both U.S. citizens by birth, but as Japanese Americans, they struggle with the legacy of internment during World War II and the pressures of being considered a 'model minority.' Furthermore, as Asian American studies scholar Leslie Bow writes, "For Asian Americans the question of nationalism often appears in the form of the paradox of being simultaneously 'American born and foreign'" (12). Thus, Emi and Manzanar reveal the nature of being a "perpetual outsider" in American culture (Bow 12).

Since *Tropic of Orange's* 1997 publication, scholarly attention has addressed several topics, especially globalism and transnationalism. Scholars have also analyzed the novel through ecocriticism, form and metaphor, capitalism and collectivism, and place and migration. Julie Sze (2000) and John Blair Gamber (2012) have performed ecocritical readings of the novel. Sze's article, one of the earliest published on *Tropic of Orange*, uses the novel to illustrate her broader definition of environmental justice studies. Sze argues the migration of women of color reveals the social and political inequities that stem from environmental pollution. Gamber builds on Sze's reading, analyzing pollution and waste to show how Yamashita challenges the idea of purity with regard to space and place. Molly Wallace (2001), Rachel Adams (2007), and Sherryll Vint (2012)

²⁵ Whether this is to conceal her relationship with Manzanar or because Yamashita wants to indicate that Emi lacks the cultural or ethnic identifier of a Japanese last name is not entirely clear.

have performed compelling formal analyses of the text. Wallace traces the use of NAFTA as a metaphor, suggesting metaphor can act as a political intervention against globalization. Adams uses *Tropic of Orange* as an example for a broader argument that contemporary literature has moved from postmodernism to globalism as its dominant mode, while Vint examines Yamashita's use of genre as a blend of speculative fiction, noir, and postmodernism. Vint argues this multi-voicing allows for a more nuanced critique of globalization and suggests the novel provides hope for the reconfiguration of capitalist power structures.

The impact of capitalism infuses many articles about the novel. The links between capitalism and collective coalition-building have emerged notably in work by Claudia Sadowski-Smith (2001), Sue-Im Lee (2007), and Iyko Day (2016). Sadowski-Smith focuses on cross-cultural transnational community building. She compares *Tropic of Orange* to Leslie Marmon Silko's *Almanac of the Dead* to demonstrate the value of Mesoamerican myth for other subaltern groups in the U.S. Lee's article examines Yamashita's rejection of the imperial "global village" trope, arguing the trope excludes marginalized voices. Lee concludes for universalism to be positive, it must be voluntary and reciprocal. In the fourth chapter of *Alien Capital*, Day investigates the dehumanization through capitalism of Asian characters in the novel, demonstrating how Bobby and Emi must achieve political consciousness as they contend with "settler colonial inhospitality" (176).

Finally, because of the novel's transnational nature, critics often discuss borders and movement across them. Caroline Rody (2004), Ruth Y. Hsu (2006), Elizabeth Mermann-Jozwiak (2011), and Sarah Wald (2013) have expanded the critical discussion of immigration, movement, and geography in the text. Rody argues Yamashita's use of movement across borders exemplifies a transnational "paradigm shift" in Asian American literature (132). Hsu analyzes the ways

Yamashita challenges Western epistemologies of cartography by suggesting a multi-layered approach to “map-making” within the novel. This approach includes an analysis of the novel’s HyperContexts, which I will analyze in detail later in this chapter. Mermann-Jozwiak examines immigration-linked injustice through the lenses of cartography and post-nationalism, conducting a “spatial archaeology” to illustrate her claims (1). Wald builds on Mermann-Jozwiak’s argument by looking at transportation geographies in the novel and emphasizing how access to mobility reflects and reinforces economic inequality.

Though many of these critics talk about the novel’s emphasis on connectivity and cross-cultural alliances, the specific role of family relationships has not been fully explored. I see the role of family relationships, including a comparison between the two families, as a place for expansion of the critical body of work on the novel. Brady Harrison writes about the relationship between Bobby and Rafaela, emphasizing the difficulty of “falling in love and forming and sustaining a family” in the face of contemporary violence and “emotional dislocations” (131). Rody talks about the “interethnic consciousness” of Bobby and Rafaela’s family (Rody 146). Chiyo Crawford focuses on the relationship between Manzanar and Emi to talk about the history of internment in the U.S. and the intergenerational trauma it inflicted. In this chapter, I examine Yamashita’s use of form to develop the novel’s themes of interconnectivity, intimacy, and collectivity. Then, I discuss the impacts of immigration and labor on the novel’s families, and finally, I turn to family ethnicity and culture to demonstrate the creation of collective and individual identities in the text. My analysis interweaves the two families to demonstrate the similarities and differences between them.

Critical Frameworks: Asian American Literature, Magical Realism, Place Theory

My analysis in this chapter uses a framework that includes Asian American literary studies, magical realism, and place theory. In attempting to lay out some of the contours and developments of the field, Stephen Hong Sohn, Paul Lai, and Donald C. Goellnicht succinctly articulate the three overlapping phases Asian American literary studies have undergone: the cultural nationalist phase, the feminist phase, and the transnational phase, noting these phases “are neither distinct...nor are they neutral but different temporalities” (Sohn et al. 2-3). In 1974, *Aiiieeee! An Anthology of Asian-American Writers*, edited by Frank Chin, Jeffery Paul Chan, Lawson Fusao Inada, and Shawn Wong, helped establish Asian American literature as a field of study. The preface to the first edition emphasizes the goal of defining Asian American identity, drawing distinctions between different national and cultural histories. The editors attempt to combat the “state of self-contempt, self-rejection, and disintegration” caused by “seven generations of suppression under legislative racism and euphemized white racist love” by amplifying “authentic” Asian American literary voices (Chin et al. xxvi).²⁶

In *A Resource Guide to Asian American Literature* (2001), Sau-ling Cynthia Wong and Stephen H. Sumida write, “Asian American literature is the very process, a vigorously dialogic one, of asking and addressing the question of what it is” (5). This definition points to the problem

²⁶ While the goal of creating space for diverse Asian American writers is undeniably important, Chin tends to dismiss certain writers, especially women, for being too assimilationist and perpetuating negative Asian stereotypes. Chin also excludes Americanized Chinese authors from the anthology because they “have merely adapted to American ways and write about Chinese America as foreigners” (xxxviii). Several female theorists, including Leslie Bow and King-Kok Cheung, critique Chin for being sexist in his dismissal of Asian American women writers and for defining Asian Americanness through an exclusively masculine lens. Addressing this issue, in *Betrayal and Other Acts of Subversion*, Bow “investigates implicit and explicit charges of disloyalty in Asian American women’s writing in order to explore the gendered nature of literary rhetoric” (3). Bow emphasizes the problem for Asian Americans of being seen as either Asian or American but not both, but Bow emphasizes that this problem especially impacts Asian American women, whose sexuality is coded as ethnic or national betrayal. In their preface to *Asian American Literature: An Annotated Bibliography* (1988), King-Kok Cheung and Stan Yogi assert that Americanized immigrant authors should be included alongside American-born authors in the field of Asian American literature, modeling inclusivity.

of reducing or essentializing Asian American literature into a convenient list of characteristics. The evolution of Asian American identity makes definition of the field difficult, but Sohn et al. suggest that concretely defining the field may not be the goal: “Conceptualizing Asian American fiction as a chameleonic body is essential precisely because field organization has rested primarily on the unstable relationship between textual content and the writer’s racial descent” (4).

While recognizing the complex and “chameleonic” nature of Asian American fiction, I refer to a small sampling of major texts from the 1950s until the 1990s to demonstrate some common thematic interests, as well as similarities in style and storytelling technique. For example, Filipino American author Carlos Bulosan’s *America Is in the Heart* (1946), Chinese American author Maxine Hong Kingston’s *The Woman Warrior* (1976), and Korean American author Theresa Hak Kyung Cha’s *Dictee* (1982) are considered autobiographical or semi-autobiographical, drawing on personal experience to depict Asian American identity.²⁷ Though *Dictee* is notable for its experimentation with form, autobiographical texts tend to rely on realism to lend their stories credibility.²⁸ According to Asian American studies scholar Sunn Shelley Wong, “For Asian American writers in the 1970s and 1980s, the choice of realist forms like the autobiography...was determined in part...by the need to provide a corrective to what many viewed as disabling representations of Asian Americans in mainstream literature and culture” (qtd. in Sohn et al. 7). John Okada’s *No-No Boy* (1957) and Louis Chu’s *Eat a Bowl of Tea* (1961) also use realism in depicting the experiences of Japanese and Chinese Americans after World War II, giving

²⁷ See also Monica Sone’s *Nisei Daughter* (1953), Meena Alexander’s *Nampally Road* (1991), and Le Ly Hayslip’s *When Heaven and Earth Changed Places* (1989) and *Child of War, Woman of Peace* (1993).

²⁸ Sue-Im Lee offers a useful analysis of realism in Asian American literature in “Suspicious Characters: Realism, Asian American Identity, and Theresa Hak Kyung Cha’s *Dictee*” (2002). In the article, Lee contends with the “hegemonic complicity” implied in the use of realist narrative form while also acknowledging the value of realism for combating cultural invisibility (“Suspicious Characters” 228). Using Cha’s book, which “has come to be critically lauded...as suggesting a new, post-realist Asian American subject formation,” Lee theorizes a “postmodern realism” to articulate the ambivalence of moving away from realist storytelling toward postmodern incoherence (“Suspicious Characters” 230).

voice to silenced and misrepresented communities. *No-No Boy* also exemplifies a trend in Japanese American fiction of describing the trauma of internment during WWII, as do Monica Sone's *Nisei Daughter* (1953) and Joy Kogawa's *Obasan* (1981).²⁹ The novels cited above often emphasize the struggle for Asian American characters to self-identify as they navigate the tension between Asian and American history, customs, and expectations.³⁰

Tropic of Orange reflects a clear interest in Asian American ethnic identity, Asian immigrant experience, and the trauma of internment, but according to Caroline Rody, Yamashita's work does not fall neatly into the Asian American literary canon. Rody writes, "Yamashita extends these traces [of Asian American history] into extravagant designs, designs unanticipated in Asian American novelistic tradition" (130). Rody also suggests Yamashita's "energies massive, sublime, and grotesque overcome the realist conventions of Asian American and U.S. multicultural fictions" (139). Yamashita's blend of magical realism, noir, disaster fiction, and other genres in *Tropic of Orange* does not conform to the convention that Asian American fiction relies heavily on literary realism, but Yamashita does identify as an Asian American writer and has said, "The designation Asian American for me carries a history of solidarity, struggle, and advocacy" (qtd. in Sheffer 1). *Tropic of Orange* does have Asian American characters exploring the nature of their "Americanness," but these characters are not the exclusive focus of the novel, which also includes Latinx and black characters. Furthermore, Yamashita generally disconnects the Asian American characters' emphases on identity from Asian history and culture, focusing instead on American history and culture.

²⁹ *Obasan* is a Japanese Canadian novel, which reveals that part of the difficulty of defining 'Asian American' literature is in determining what counts as 'America.'

³⁰ In *Racial Asymmetries* (2014), Sohn points out, because these texts are so famous, they "can reinforce an assumption that Asian American literature is defined by the overlaps among ethnoracial authorial identity, narration, narrative perspective, and cultural scripts that direct our understanding and analyses of the fictional world" (2).

Part of Yamashita's departure from "Asian American novelistic tradition" is her use of magical realism in *Tropic of Orange*. Like Butler's rejection of the term *science fiction* to describe *Kindred*, Yamashita has dismissed the use of *magical realism* with regard to her first novel, *Through the Arc of the Rain Forest*. She argues, "It wasn't Asian American feminist literature; it wasn't magic realism; it wasn't science fiction... That was and still is my problem. I think a lot of Asian American authors or authors of color find merchandising their work difficult because bookstores and publishers and publicists are looking for niches for these books" (qtd. in Song 557-558). Like Butler, Yamashita articulates a marketing reason for classifying (or not classifying) her work as "magical realism." This suggests a perception that magical realism acts more as a marketing label than as a useful taxonomic category. Regardless, many critics³¹ have examined *Tropic of Orange's* use of magical realism to critique immigration politics.

German art critic Franz Roh introduced the term *magic realism* into visual arts discourse in 1925 (Simpkins 146). After Cuban novelist Alejo Carpentier brought the term into literary criticism in 1949, *magical realism* primarily began to describe many kinds of Latin American texts.³² In her analysis of *Tropic of Orange*, Anne Mai Yee Jansen effectively describes the issue of overuse of the term when she writes, "This essentializing use of magical realism was perhaps most problematic in its tendency to exoticize Latin American literatures and ignore or, in some cases, undermine the more political aspects of texts" (103). Similar to this problem of exoticizing Latin American literatures, another issue with the way the term *magical realism* has been applied is it creates a binary opposition between 'magic' and 'real,' though many authors of magical realist

³¹ See Wallace (2001), Rody (2004), Adams (2007), Thoma (2010), Tekdemir (2011), Jansen (2017), and Sheffer (2020).

³² Gerald Martin writes, the "problem is that the same term is used...as an ideological stratagem to collapse many different kinds of writing, and many different political perspectives, into one single, usually escapist, concept" (qtd. in Jansen 103).

texts are using ‘magic’ to make their worlds more real: “Gabriel García Márquez insists that he is a social realist, not a magical realist: one of his characters in *One Hundred Years of Solitude* confirms this amplification of the realm of the real by observing, ‘If they believe it in the Bible...I don’t see why they shouldn’t believe it from me’” (Zamora and Faris 4). In their introduction to *Magical Realism: Theory, History, Community*, Lois Parkinson Zamora and Wendy B. Faris acknowledge “Latin Americans have been prime movers in developing the critical concept of magical realism,” but they consider the form “an international commodity,” noting it is “especially alive and well in postcolonial contexts” (2). They view magic in many magical realist texts as “a cultural corrective” that challenges readers to “scrutinize accepted realistic conventions of causality, materiality, motivation” (Zamora and Faris 3). Zamora and Faris also link magical realism to older forms of writing, noting the genre’s “impulse to reestablish contact with traditions temporarily eclipsed by the mimetic constraints of nineteenth- and twentieth-century realism” (2).

Magical realism, then, provides a framework for writers to critique present-day societies while gesturing to the past. Jansen provides further insight, however, into why Yamashita may not want her work to be classified as magical realism: “The perceived bond that developed between problematic implementations of multiculturalism and magical realism led to an aura of taboo around the term in the 1990s and early 2000s, during which many writers—especially writers of color from across the globe—avoided it as descriptor for their work” (104). If readers and critics interpret the term in ways authors find inaccurate or unproductive, then it would make sense they would avoid such terms in defining their work. In *Tropic of Orange*, however, magic offers clarity about the characters’ relationships to each other and their cultural contexts.

Theories of place and space inform the novel’s engagement with belonging within the borders of the United States. In *Extinct Lands, Temporal Geographies* (2002), Chicana studies

scholar Mary Pat Brady writes, “interactions with space are not merely schematic but also highly affective; places are felt and experienced, and the processes producing space therefore also shape feelings and experiences” (8). Brady’s study focuses on Chicana experiences of land along the U.S.-Mexico border; she quotes the phrase “land is becoming extinct,” which suggests “the turn from lived, embodied space to the abstract space of capitalism” (5). The abstraction of space that capitalism causes certainly impacts the ways all the characters in *Tropic of Orange* experience space, particularly as the land begins to shift as the border moves north. Blending ethnic and national contexts, in *The Intimacies of Four Continents*, comparative literature scholar Lisa Lowe examines the links between Europe, Africa, Asia, and the Americas and focuses on the social inequities created by capitalism and liberalism around the world. One of the ways Lowe defines “intimacy” within the book refers to romantic intimacy and genetic mixing. She notes sexual intimacy can lead to political alliances among “enslaved and indentured nonwhite peoples,” which colonial administrators viewed as a threat and, therefore, discouraged through anti-miscegenation laws (35). *Tropic of Orange* also explores the value and possibility of intimacy, and like Lowe, Yamashita “[does] not move immediately toward recovery and recuperation” but uses her characters to reflect on how family intimacy might provide opportunities for the future (Lowe 40).

Connectivity Through Form

Yamashita’s use of form emphasizes many of the novel’s major topics, including the temporal and spatial locations of characters. In this section, I examine the “HyperContexts” table, Yamashita’s author’s note, two scenes of magical realism, and *testimonio* to illustrate Yamashita’s formal experimentation in the text. Each of these elements develops the novel’s themes regarding connectivity, temporality, and identity.

Yamashita establishes her interest in space and time just after the Table of Contents with another table labeled “HyperContexts” (See Figure 1). The columns of the table represent the days of the week, which correspond to the seven sections of the novel and establish the first day of the story as Monday, June 22: The Summer Solstice.³³ The rows represent the seven focal characters. This table demonstrates the novel’s overall structure, establishes major themes, and develops characterization. The overall structure of the text is seven sections, each with seven chapters, one chapter per character. Though the chapters vary in length, the equal distribution of chapters among the characters suggests parity between them: each character will have seven opportunities to be the focus of the story as it shifts through their many perspectives. Next, the table highlights the role of time by showing that the chapters are arranged over the course of a week. As Patrick Lawrence has suggested, however, the implied parity of the characters and regularity of time is something of an illusion. Lawrence writes, “we intuit a unity of time and regularity of chronological movement. This is a false intuition, as the novel’s time does not progress consistently, nor do the sections each character tells comprise the same amount of time or move the story forward at the same rate” (25). I agree with Lawrence’s assessment that the table creates an illusion of regularity to some extent, but the story beginning on the longest day of the year, the Summer Solstice, hints at the temporal distortions that will occur throughout the text. Third, the table establishes the role of place by listing the location of each chapter after its title. For example, the first entry, at the intersection of “Rafaela Cortes” and “Monday: Summer Solstice,” reads, “Midday - Not Too Far from Mazatlán: chapter 1” (Yamashita n.p.). Most of these places are discrete locations in Los Angeles—“Koreatown,” “Hiro’s Sushi”—some are more fluid or general locations—“Manzanar” (i.e. the current location of that character), “America”— and some of the

³³ Even the specific date of the Summer Solstice is somewhat in flux. It always falls around June 20 or 21, but the novel specifically lists the date as June 22 in Rafaela’s first chapter (Yamashita 13).

locations are entirely abstract—“The Other Side,” “The Big Sleep” (Yamashita n.p.). These more abstract locations appear mostly in the latter part of the week, suggesting that place will become less stable over time.

The novel’s general structure of seven sections with seven chapters per section can be ascertained from the table of contents, as can the chapter titles and locations; this table, however, allows readers to compare the themes of the chapter titles for each character. For example, all of Rafaela’s chapter titles refer to times of day (e.g. “Midday,” “Morning,” and “Midnight”). Her week seems to take place over the course of one exceptionally long day, but the moments in that day are out of order: “Dusk” precedes “Dawn,” which is followed immediately by “Nightfall.” Rafaela’s journey to get back to her husband and to save her son from organ traffickers is represented here by both spatial distance and temporal distortion. Rafaela’s husband, Bobby Ngu, on the other hand, has chapter titles that focus on finances (e.g. “Benefits,” “Second Mortgage,” and “Social Security”). As Bobby’s chapters will demonstrate, his focus throughout the text is on achieving economic stability for himself and his family and on reconciling his need for material security with Rafaela’s need for “something more” (Yamashita 80). Before the story has started, these titles suggest a thematic focus or characterization for each narrator.

Yamashita has spoken about the use of the HyperContexts table as an early strategy for organizing the novel. Asked about her writing process in 2006, Yamashita explained, “I was actually trying to learn the program [Lotus] for my work, to do accounting. I liked that you could type into columns and thought it could be useful for structuring a book... Writing a novel is a huge puzzle, and I wanted to create some kind of cohesiveness so that I could get through the puzzle. Also having a structure is a useful way to finish a book” (Shan 135). Her explanation speaks to the practicality of such a structure—it helped her finish the book—as well as to her goal of

cohesion for the story. *Tropic of Orange* has many characters, several of whom never interact directly; presenting them all using the HyperContexts before the story begins establishes their interconnectivity and spatial and temporal relationships with each other. They may never meet again, but they all appear together on this table that sets the stage.

Another metatextual element that appears before the novel begins is a short author's note, in which Yamashita addresses the reader directly. The note begins by establishing when the story occurs: "Gentle reader, what follows may not be about the future, but is perhaps about the recent past; a past that, even as you imagine it, happens" (Yamashita n.p.). The novel's historical touchstones, including NAFTA and the 1992 protests deemed the "LA Riots," place it firmly in the 1990s, but the "may not" and "perhaps" here suggest uncertainty and fluidity of time. Unmoored from a specific historical moment, the novel could exist at any historical moment. The latter part of the first sentence privileges the role of imagination but also suggests the past is unstable, being constantly reimagined in the present. The story of the past, like memory, changes slightly with each retelling of what happened. Later in the note, Yamashita writes, "No single imagination is wild or crass or cheesy enough to compete with the collective mindlessness that propels our fascination forward" (Yamashita n.p.). She emphasizes the collectivity of the novel's story, but by calling the collective "mindless," she suggests a kind of mob mentality in the way the story will proceed. Rather than an intentional, singular consciousness, contemporary life is, perhaps, driven by an unexamined need to be entertained, as evidenced by the final line: "We were all there; we all saw it on TV, screen, and monitor, larger than life" (Yamashita n.p.). Screens imply entertainment, but they also distort reality. The tone of this author's note and its emphasis on imagination, wildness, and distortion set up the magical realist elements that will emerge

throughout the novel and in the next few pages, when Rafaela sweeps unexplainable animals out of Gabriel's house.

Magical realist moments in the novel allow Yamashita to create feelings of estrangement “to represent an alternative reality” (Tekdemir 43). In her 2011 analysis, comparative literature scholar Hande Tekdemir focuses on genre fluidity and how Yamashita uses magical realism to capture the nature of migrant experience. This reflects the broader political goal of magical realism to call for change by imagining how the world could be different. Tekdemir also argues the novel “as do most magical realist texts, [celebrates] community over the individual and [reacts] against the realist novel tradition that tends to only represent Western reality” (Tekdemir 41). I see both elements—celebration of community and reaction against Western reality—in two magical realist moments from Rafaela's chapters in the latter part of the novel.

On Wednesday of her week, Rafaela discovers the baby organ smuggling operation and flees back to Los Angeles to protect Sol. On Friday, however, she is kidnapped, and on Saturday, drug and organ trafficker Hernando attacks and rapes her in a scene that Yamashita transforms into an epic battle between two ancient Mesoamerican symbols. Rafaela turns into “a muscular serpent,” while Hernando becomes a jaguar with “black fur” (Yamashita 220). Hernando's rape of Rafaela is a clear reference to Hernan Cortes's historic rape of La Malintzin.³⁴ Incorporating that reference into the novel, Yamashita creates a historical connection to the raped mother who is a symbol of the colonized Mexican culture. In her analysis of *Tropic of Orange*, Jolie A. Sheffer writes, “Their battle replays centuries of war and sex between Spanish (and later American) colonizers and indigenous peoples in the Americas, but Yamashita reconfigures and distorts those symbols to reflect the globalized confusions wrought by the Orange” (54). To illustrate this

³⁴ I further discuss the role of La Malintzin (also called “La Malinche”) in Mexican history in Chapter 3.

“distortion,” Sheffer describes the jaguar as an “ancient, mythic, and honorable symbol of Mexico” and the snake as “a treacherous figure on the Mexican flag and its coat of arms,” both of whom are given new and different meanings when mapped to the figures of Hernando and Rafaela (54).

Sheffer’s suggestion that “globalized confusions” are responsible for the transformation aligns with many of the novel’s themes; however, Yamashita’s use of the serpent to represent Rafaela seems to link her less with contemporary globalism than with Mesoamerican history. The snake has strong associations with Quetzalcoatl, the Aztec deity whose name derives from the Nahuatl words for “bird” and “snake” (“Quetzalcoatl”). In a sense, Rafaela, whose last name is Cortes, is both the Spanish conqueror and the Aztec god. Beginning with the historical moment of Spanish invasion, Yamashita then links Rafaela to the histories of other atrocities, both human and environmental:

Battles passed as memories: massacred men and women, their bloated and twisted bodies black with blood, stacked in ruined buildings and floating in canals; one million more decaying with smallpox; kings and revolutionaries betrayed, hacked to pieces in a Plaza of Tears, ambushed and shot on lonesome roads, executed in stadiums, in presidential palaces, discarded in ditches, tossed in the sea...But that was only the human massacre. (Yamashita 220-221)

The transformation in this chapter, then, connects Rafaela to a long history of abuse and violence for which she becomes a tangible symbol. Though Hernando brutally injures her, the chapter ends with hope: “Suddenly the sky was a chorus of heavenly chanting, a terrible blessing, and a great fluttering of millions of wings withdrawing nightfall, away” (Yamashita 222). Rafaela’s survives and will reunite with her family.

Before they reunite permanently, Bobby and Rafaela temporarily meet across space and time in another example of magical realism. This moment reflects the shifting geography that has taken place over the course of the novel. At this point in the text, Rafaela is still in Mexico, and Bobby is in Los Angeles, but they somehow reunite: “They both walked and ran forever” (Yamashita 253). Their reunion is the most intimate of any interaction in the novel to this point. Yamashita uses words such as “stroked,” “tenderly,” and “cradled” to describe the way Bobby initially holds an injured Rafaela (Yamashita 254). Rafaela pulls herself along the thread of the Tropic to get to him, and as they get closer, “they [come] together in a fleshy ball, wrapped and clinging one to the other, genitals pressed in a lingering fire, heart to heart, mind to mind” (Yamashita 254). This moment is not only sexually intimate but emotionally and mentally, as well. Having been estranged for most of the novel, coming together in this way emphasizes the intimacy Bobby and Rafaela still share. The moment does not last, however. As the divide between them grows, Rafaela asks, “‘Will you wait for me on the other side?’ she whispered as the line in the dust became again as wide as an entire culture and as deep as the social and economic construct that nobody knew how to change” (Yamashita 254). Harrison has remarked Bobby and Rafaela’s relationship seems unlikely, and here, Yamashita articulates the cultural, social, and economic forces that are keeping them apart; they do not, however, remain separated, and their final reunion offers hope their intimacy will transcend those forces.

In addition to emphasizing history and intimacy, magical realism allows Yamashita to connect the text to the tradition of *testimonio*.³⁵ In Chapter 1, I discussed the role of ‘truth’ in *testimonio*. Regarding magical realism, Zamora and Faris write, “Texts labeled magical realist draw upon cultural systems that are no less ‘real’ than those upon which traditional literary realism

³⁵ For an introduction to *testimonio*, see pp. 7-8.

draws... Their primary narrative investment may be in myths, legends, rituals—that is, in collective (sometimes oral and performative, as well as written) practices that bind communities together” (3). Zamora and Faris’s argument here that magical realism is no less ‘real’ for its non-Western narrative modes seems to address a similar concern as *testimonio*. The magical realist moments in the novel offer a way for Yamashita to examine collective trauma.

I have already noted the way Rafaela’s transformation into a snake links her to Quetzalcoatl. Gloria Anzaldúa embraced serpent imagery in *Borderlands/La Frontera*. She writes about her own kinship with the Mesoamerican goddess of fertility and Earth, *Coatlicue*, or “Serpent Skirt” (Anzaldúa 49). Many of the Mesoamerican goddesses, Anzaldúa argues, were transformed into monsters by the male-dominated culture, resulting in negative connotations for snakes and other ancient symbols of female power. For Anzaldúa, reconnecting with *Coatlicue* means embracing contradiction and duality: “Goddess of birth and death, *Coatlicue* gives and takes away life; she is the incarnation of cosmic processes” (68). In the same way *testimonio* melds individual testimony with the experience of the collective, Anzaldúa finds completeness in “entering into the serpent”: “someone in me takes matters into *our* own hands, and eventually, takes dominion over serpents—over my own body, my sexual activity, my soul, my mind, my weaknesses and strengths. Mine. *Ours*” (73, emphasis added). When Yamashita turns Rafaela into a serpent, she imbues the character with the strength of the Mesoamerican deity, thereby linking Rafaela to a wider cultural history.

Beyond offering historical testimony, Rafaela’s individual trauma also reflects the collective trauma of female immigrants, especially the undocumented. In her analysis of journalist Alicia Alarcón’s *La Migra me hizo los mandados*, a 2002 collection of *testimonios* by California residents who had migrated to the U.S., Brittany Henry argues, “the testimonios in *La Migra* offer

a humanizing narrative that combats nativist panic, underscores the importance of lived experience to explanatory narratives of immigration, and models an intersubjective relationality that disrupts the nationalist mythology of the American Dream by uncovering the arbitrariness and ethical limitations of citizenship status as the prerequisite for inclusion in political community” (110). In two of Bobby’s chapters, he remembers bringing Rafaela across the border. The first memory directly links Rafaela to La Malintzin: the address where he goes to find her is on “Calle Malinche” (Malinche Street) (Yamashita 77). According to the narration, the house “wasn’t much, but at least it was safe,” highlighting the danger for a woman waiting in Tijuana to cross the border. The second memory reveals further danger crossing the border poses: “Rafaela got lucky. Places ‘long the border everybody knows, every woman don’t get raped, she don’t pass. The price she pays” (Yamashita 201). Rape is the “price” of entry into the United States, and these rapes are perpetrated by coyotes, civilians, police, and immigration agents (Henry 121). Henry writes, “According to Olivia Ruiz Marrujo, it is estimated that between 80 and 90 percent of migrant women experience some form of gender-based violence” (121). Rafaela “got lucky” when she crossed the border as Bobby’s wife, but her later rape by Hernando individualizes and personalizes the very real atrocities that happen daily for undocumented migrants from the South.

Conversely, Emi’s silence regarding Manzanar as her grandfather acts as reverse or anti-*testimonio*. She avoids speaking with him, “suggesting the lasting trauma of Japanese internment³⁶ and the dangers of community silence and amnesia about this history” (Sheffer 53). President Roosevelt authorized the wartime internment of Japanese Americans in February 1942. According to historian Brian Masaru Hayashi (2010), writers disagree on the causes of internment (2).

³⁶ Nagata et al. note while “the term ‘internment’ is often used to refer to this historical event, scholars have noted that this is a misnomer since ‘internment’ refers to ‘the legally permissible detention of enemy aliens in time of war.’ The term ‘incarceration’ is now considered to be more accurate (Densho, n.d.)” (357). I will use “internment” throughout this chapter in parallel with my critical sources.

Among the possible causes, Hayashi cites race, “military necessity,” “wartime hysteria,” and “failure of political leadership” (2, 3, 4, 6). The result was for four years, the United States imprisoned over 100,000 of its Japanese-descended residents, “regardless of citizenship and without formal hearings,” on unsubstantiated suspicions of disloyalty (Hayashi 1). Many detainees lost their homes and businesses as a result of the relocation, and the psychological trauma of the experience impacted the generations that followed.³⁷ American and environmental studies scholar Chiyo Crawford (2013) links the displacement of Japanese Americans during WWII to a history of displacement in the Owens Valley. She identifies the relocation of the Paiute Indians, who “had been living peaceably in Owens Valley for thousands of years” until white prospectors forced them to leave in the 1860s after gold was discovered in the area (Crawford 89). Then, in the early 1900s, the white descendants of the prospectors were forced to relocate due to the construction of an aqueduct that diverted water away from the Owens Valley to Los Angeles, which created “desertification” that hindered farming and ranching in the area (Crawford 89). Yamashita’s use of the Manzanar Relocation Center in the Owens Valley for the novel, rather than one of the other War Relocation Authority facilities, places *Tropic of Orange* along this historic continuum of displacement and relocation.³⁸

Manzanar Murakami claims to have been born in the Manzanar Concentration Camp—“the first sansei born in captivity”—and to have taken the name of this birthplace as his own, but Gabriel doubts the story (Yamashita 108, 110). The text notes if Manzanar had literally been born at Manzanar, he would only be in his mid-50s, arguably too young to be Emi’s grandfather. Manzanar’s “birth at Manzanar” should instead be interpreted as a figurative nascency. Having

³⁷ Nagata et al. suggest some of this cultural trauma was mitigated by redress efforts of the 1980s, but *Tropic of Orange* emphasizes the ongoing community and intergenerational impact of the event.

³⁸ Manzanar was also the first of the WRA Relocation Centers, opened in March 1942, and was the closest facility to Los Angeles.

been born a free United States citizen, Manzanar is reborn through his unjust incarceration by a government that sees him as irrevocably foreign.³⁹ Crawford asserts this experience of internment directly impacts Manzanar's decision to become homeless: "He physically removes himself from society to become homeless because that is how he feels: out of place. Moreover, his loss of a physical place to live parallels the actual loss of homes and businesses faced by internees returning home after the war" (Crawford 91). Still suffering the trauma of forced homelessness, Manzanar chooses homelessness, perhaps as a way to regain control of his circumstances. His decision to leave his family, however, creates a new kind of trauma; Sheffer writes this abandonment "is a traumatic rupture caused by external, institutional forces—not unlike those that label human beings 'illegals' or disproportionately incarcerate minority communities over fears of innate criminality" (Sheffer 59). This, in turn, creates further ripples out into his family and community.

The fact Emi refuses to talk to and about Manzanar demonstrates her own unwillingness to engage with a history that has so traumatized her family. Crawford writes, "Emi's blood relation to Manzanar, in fact, literalizes the direct tie she has to the unjust history of internment, a history she would rather not discuss, even though she is eager to talk about almost every other political topic" (Crawford 97). As I will discuss later in the chapter, Emi's refusal to claim Manzanar can also be linked to her broader refusal to claim her Japanese American identity. Unlike Bobby and Rafaela, who do engage in intimacy and *testimonio*, Emi and Manzanar's decisions to remain apart result in further rupture. Since Emi never speaks to Manzanar and is herself killed by government violence, the testimony remains unspoken and the trauma cannot heal.

³⁹ The "paradox of being simultaneously 'American born and foreign'" continues to plague non-white Americans in politics and the media (Bow 12). Just days after the announcement of Kamala Harris as Joe Biden's running mate, racist birther rumors began circulating—and have been perpetuated by Donald Trump—to undermine her qualifications for office (Ordoñez). These same rumors followed Barack Obama for years but never seem to be levied against Anglo-American political candidates.

Estrangement and Belonging: Immigration and the Value of Labor

Throughout the novel, Yamashita uses labor and immigration to demonstrate the characters' struggles to integrate into Anglo-American culture. In this section, I examine the histories of NAFTA and Japanese American internment, as well as the labor of Bobby, Rafaela, and Manzanar to illustrate the dehumanizing impact of globalism in the text. *Tropic of Orange's* critique of globalism parallels its critique of NAFTA.⁴⁰ The United States, Mexico, and Canada passed the North Atlantic Free Trade Agreement in 1994 to facilitate trade on the continent. Sheffer writes, "NAFTA...was sold on the promise that it would create jobs in the United States by limiting trade restrictions across national borders. By most accounts, NAFTA primarily helped corporations become more efficient, which resulted in job losses across North America" (Sheffer 45). Corporations found they could cheaply outsource labor to Mexico, and with fewer trade restrictions, they could do so without great penalty. Inexpensive outsourced labor meant fewer unskilled jobs in U.S. factories and the exploitation of laborers south of the border. As Sheffer notes, "under unchecked capitalism, people are turned into goods that can be bought and sold, just like fruit or consumer products" (Sheffer 48). This results in the dehumanization of individuals that all the authors in this study critique.

The novel's organ-smuggling subplot best exemplifies dehumanization through capitalism. Sherryl Vint writes, "Just as the human body is physically destroyed when cut up to become organs-as-commodities, so too is the full human subject destroyed when reduced to the commodity of labor-power" ("Orange County" 407). Juxtaposing the ease with which the organs enter the country, Yamashita includes another subplot in which Bobby must bring his Chinese cousin across

⁴⁰ In November 2018, the leaders of the United States, Mexico, and Canada signed a new agreement, formally called the "United States–Mexico–Canada Agreement" in the U.S. but colloquially referred to as "New NAFTA." While the major structure of the deal has not changed from NAFTA, some of the major changes include more U.S. access to the Canadian dairy market, new digital trade legislation, and revisions to intellectual property laws.

the border after she arrives in Mexico on a boat. Bobby's plan for getting his cousin into the U.S. is to pass her off as his daughter, thereby conferring his own legal status onto her. For his plan to work, however, he has to create an image of 'Americanness': "Get rid of the Chinagirl look. Get a cut looking like Rafaela. That's it. Now get her a T-shirt and some jeans and some tennis shoes. Jeans say Levi's. Shoes say Nike. T-shirt says Malibu. That's it" (Yamashita 203). The American image he cultivates for "Cuz" mostly emphasizes American clothing brands, recalling his first meeting with Rafaela in Mexico "next to a bunch of American T-shirts" (Yamashita 78). His cousin's brother is not able to enter Mexico, however, and Bobby notes, "Cuz is staring at her new Nikes. Made in China. Nikes get in. But not the bro" (Yamashita 230). Outsourced labor means American consumer goods can be made cheaply abroad, but the labor itself is only valuable if it remains outside the U.S. Wald writes, the novel depicts "the power and possibility of mobility for some in the globalized economy alongside the violent consequences of socioeconomic immobility for others" (70). The immigration and trade system, therefore, allows organs of (presumably) murdered Mexican children to cross the border, most likely to be sold to rich Anglo-Americans, but does not allow the bodies of living Mexican and Chinese children to enter the country.

Yamashita's focus on immigrant stories within the text makes the relationship between ethnicity and 'Americanness' a major concern for these characters. She does not, however, cast 'immigrant identity' as a monolithic or homogeneous concept. Bobby and Rafaela are especially cognizant of their immigrant status, and they each conceptualize their national identities in different ways. Emi and Manzanar, on the other hand, are not immigrants, but as Japanese Americans, they too struggle with acceptance into Anglo-American culture, particularly as they contend with the history of Japanese American internment during World War II. Using these

characters' labor in the wake of NAFTA, Yamashita comments on the value of various kinds of labor as well as the value of laboring non-white bodies.

Yamashita establishes Rafaela's immigrant status early in the text, as well as Rafaela's resilience in trying to improve her life and the lives of her family. Her intelligence and hard work are consistently reiterated: "In eight years... she had learned English, married Bobby, helped start their janitorial business, borne a baby, and got a degree at the local community college. She was smart, savvy, and eager to take on the tasks at hand" (Yamashita 6). This early description establishes Rafaela's credentials as Gabriel's house-sitter and renovator in Mazatlán, yet despite these obvious strengths, "Gabriel [is] doing her a favor" by allowing her to work for him (Yamashita 6). The juxtaposition between Rafaela's capabilities and the idea Gabriel is being generous in employing her is an excellent example of the way many immigrants experience life in the United States: she is clearly qualified and able, yet she must rely on generosity in order to live and work. Even her ability to go to the United States initially was a result of Bobby doing a favor for her brother.

Rafaela is distinctly aware of her position as a Mexican immigrant in the United States. She has progressive socialist ideals and resents feeling like a second-class citizen. This is the source of the initial conflict between her and her husband: "Rafaela thought about her argument with Bobby, about how she and Bobby did all the work without benefits, about exploitation" (Yamashita 17). She desires to be treated as an American citizen, with the rights and privileges that entails, and she recognizes, as immigrants, she and Bobby are not treated equally by American society: "But she kept talking, saying we're not wanted here. Nobody respects our work. Say we cost money. Live on welfare. It's a lie. We pay taxes. Bobby knows he pays taxes" (Yamashita 80). Rafaela came to the United States for better opportunities but finds herself excluded from

society because of her status as an immigrant despite her hard work to learn the language, get an education, and raise a family. When she returns to Mexico, however, her feelings become conflicted: “Now she had crossed the border and forgotten her anger. Lupe did all the work. Someone was always at the bottom. As long as she was not, did it matter?” (Yamashita 117). Rafaela’s experiences in the United States and Mexico shift her perspective on class hierarchy as she begins to accept her place with the capitalist structure.

Like Rafaela, Bobby also came to the U.S. for opportunity. Unlike Rafaela, Bobby gives little thought to acceptance by Anglo-American culture and, instead, measures his success by the material comforts he can give his wife and son: “Everything was a gift to her and Sol: all those amazing things he loved to buy. She had scorned his materialism, but it was his way of showing love, of trying to delight her with the nice things that other Americans had. That is what he wanted to tell her” (Yamashita 116). For Bobby, being American is about having the same comforts other middle-class American families have. He sees his work as a means to this end and does not care if other people find his work ‘demeaning’ or undesirable. Knowing he does his job well and provides for his family gives Bobby satisfaction. Both Bobby’s and Rafaela’s chapters reiterate this aspect of Bobby’s identity: “[Rafaela] remembered that Bobby loved his work no matter what it was. To want a better kind of work didn’t make sense to Bobby. No work what’s better than another” and “Bobby’s proud of his business, proud of his rep” (Yamashita 64, 159). Bobby loves his work and takes pride in it. It demonstrates a struggle he has successfully overcome since arriving in the U.S. at age 12 (Yamashita 203).

Yamashita links Bobby’s work to movement throughout the novel, which reinforces the link between labor and migration. During Bobby’s initial introduction, the narrator, who may or may not be Bobby himself, says, “Bobby’ll tell this story. But only after hours...He don’t have

time to tell stories. Too busy. Never stops. Got only a little time to sleep even. Always working. Hustling. Moving” (Yamashita 16). Even the style of Bobby’s passages emphasizes economy of language and movement. Short, clipped sentences move quickly from one idea to another as Bobby moves throughout a workday that never seems to end: “Ever since he’s been here, never stopped working. Always working” (Yamashita 79). Yamashita also draws on the classic play *Death of a Salesman* in articulating Bobby’s relationship to capitalism. Like Willie Loman, Bobby reflects, “Pretty soon he’ll be worth more dead than alive. Dead, he’ll be some kind of lottery. Then again, if he never finds Rafaela and the boy, what’s it gonna matter?” (Yamashita 160). Bobby measures his value by the monetary benefits his family can gain from him, but he also emphasizes that the presence of the family is essential for him to have meaning.

Just because he does not share Rafaela’s frustrations does not mean Bobby is oblivious to outside perceptions. He contemplates how his life might have been different if he had stayed in Singapore: “Maybe he shoulda never left; cleaning buildings here, cleaning ‘em there. What’s the diff? Well, might be being Chinese in Singapore’s different than being Vietnamese in the U.S.” (Yamashita 159). In the U.S., he is expected to play the role of the grateful Vietnamese refugee, an identity he uses to access the opportunities afforded by Americanness: “Orphan refugee can’t be communist. Gotta be happy he’s alive in America. Saved by the Americans. New country. New life. Working hard to make it. American through and through” (Yamashita 159). For Bobby, outside perceptions matter in a material sense, but they do not seem to impact his own attitudes about his life and work.

Over the course of their separation, however, Bobby begins to understand Rafaela needs “something more” in her life: “She respected his work. But she wanted more... She didn’t want any of this. She wanted more. It’s like his kid brother in college. He keeps sending him

money...But when they get together, there's nothing to say...The kid brother wants something more. Rafaela wanted something more. Maybe she was right" (Yamashita 80). A major part of Bobby's story arc is trying to figure out what this "more" is. By tying in Bobby's brother, the narrative seems to suggest knowledge or education might be the root of this longing.

Both Rafaela and Bobby's brother have college educations, which have made them more cognizant of structural inequities as well as their status as immigrants. To understand Rafaela better, Bobby begins reading her college papers, noting their titles: "*Maquiladoras & Migrants. Undocumented, Illegal & Alien: Immigrants vs. Immigration...Internationalization of the labor force. Exploitation and political expediency. Devaluation of currency and foreign economic policy*" (Yamashita 161). Though he does not spend much time reading her papers, Bobby's relationship with Rafaela helps him begin to achieve class consciousness regarding his own labor, even if he struggles to articulate or act on it.

Though less ostensibly tied to NAFTA and international relations, Manzanar's labor also reveals societal expectations for Japanese Americans. Manzanar's homelessness stems from a sudden decision to no longer perform his labor as a surgeon: "Long ago, Manzanar had been a skilled surgeon...One day, he left a resident to sew up a patient, removed his mask, gloves, and gown, strode through the maze of corridors, down the elevator, through patient waiting, to become a statistic under missing persons" (Yamashita 56). His subsequent conducting of traffic makes sense to him but puts him at odds with the greater JA community: "To say that Manzanar Murakami was homeless was as absurd as the work he chose to do. No one was more at home in L.A. than this man. The Japanese American community had apologized profusely for this blight on their image as the Model Minority" (Yamashita 36-37). Manzanar's conducting is his "work," but it is also described as "absurd." Unlike being a respectable surgeon, Manzanar is now

considered a “blight” on the image of Japanese Americans in Anglo-American society. In his 2012 analysis of Alejandro Morales’s *The Rag Doll Plagues*, Stephen Hong Sohn examines the concept of the model minority and what it reveals about racial formation. Sohn writes, “Conservative understandings of the model minority construct promote the success of Asian Americans despite the costs that might be related to securing upward mobility and state-sanctioned enfranchisement” (“Minor Character” 160). When he walks away from his job as a surgeon, Manzanar rejects this state-sanctioned success, as well as the emphasis on math and science that comprises “some of the stereotypical foundations for this mythic racial construction” (Sohn, “Minor Character” 156).

Bobby, Rafaela, and Manzanar all experience labor in ways that highlight their status on the margins of Anglo-American culture. Bobby and Rafaela’s labor is linked because they work together as a couple, but the ways they conceptualize both the labor and its value is different. Similarly, Manzanar chooses his labor for the value he perceives though others do not see its value. By choosing a form of labor that is outside the mainstream, he situates himself outside and above the capitalistic hierarchy that threatens Bobby, Rafaela, and the other characters in the text.

Ethnicity as Identity and Family as Culture

Their ethnicities and familial cultures also reflect the characters’ places on the margins of Anglo-American society. In a 2008 interview, Yamashita explained that Japanese Brazilians think of themselves as simply Brazilians, whereas “in the United States, we are always a kind of American,” recalling Morrison’s “hyphen after hyphen after hyphen” (Yun 206, *Playing in the Dark* 47). The characters’ attempts to reconcile being American with being “a kind of American” influence and are influenced by the ways they perceive themselves and their places in a larger social continuum.

Bobby's introduction in the novel's second chapter serves to up-end readers' stereotypes, both about Asian men and about the demographic makeup of Los Angeles. The narrator of Bobby's chapters speaks directly to the reader, stating, "If you know your Asians, you look at Bobby. You say, that's Vietnamese... Korean's got rounder face. Chinese's taller. Japanese's dressed better. If you know your Asians. Turns out you'll be wrong. And you gonna be confused" (Yamashita 14-15). Right away, the narrator asserts that assumptions will lead to confusion. The examples here for why a reader would assume Bobby is Vietnamese rely on physical stereotypes, but because Bobby's primary language is Spanish, the narrator then shifts to stereotypes based on who readers would expect to live in LA—"Japanese from Peru, Korean from Brazil"—and stereotypes based on who lives in Singapore—"Indonesian, Malaysian" (Yamashita 15). Evoking another stereotype, the narrator says, "look at his name. That's gotta be Vietnam. Ngu. Bobby Ngu. They all got Ngu names" (Yamashita 15). The passage ends, "Bobby's Chinese. Chinese from Singapore with a Vietnam name speaking like a Mexican living in Koreatown. That's it" (Yamashita 15). Throughout this introductory passage, the narrator undermines and corrects judgments about "what Bobby is." The U.S. government and many of his friends and neighbors believe Bobby to be an orphan refugee of the Vietnam war. Instead, he gave himself a new (Ngu) name and immigrated to America under a false identity; this identity is the basis of Bobby's legal status in the U.S. The last words of the passage are "That's it." "That's it" belies the complexity of Bobby's identity and suggests simplicity in how Bobby's American neighbors and employers came regard him the way they do.

Though not as complicated as Bobby's, Rafaela's family history also exhibits multiracialism. Fantasizing about her, Gabriel thinks about her "soft Afro-Mayan features bronzed by the Mexican sun," which demonstrates the way he romanticizes and sexualizes her, even though

she is married and his employee (Yamashita 45). She describes her mother as having come from Yucatán and her father's family as having come from "even farther south. Ayacucho in the Andes" (Yamashita 8). Rafaela does not specifically mention the "Afro" part of her heritage, but her parents' migrations and her own marriage speak to the ethnic and cultural blending that has characterized her personal and family history.

From her first introduction, Yamashita links Emi's identity to the idea of stereotypes: "so distant from the Asian female stereotype—it was questionable if she even had an identity" (Yamashita 19). Since Emi is not a stereotype, she lacks an identity. This line also forces readers to think about what the "Asian female stereotype" is and what makes her distant from it. One Asian female stereotype Emi actively rejects is the stereotype that Asian women are quiet and submissive. Her mother encourages her to fit into the stereotype, saying Emi's "big mouth was always getting her into trouble and that it was no wonder any boyfriend didn't stick around very long. 'Whatsa matter with you? Your dad and I don't talk like that. Your brother and sister don't talk like that. In fact no J.A. talks like that... It's your dad's genes. Not mine. We Sakais keep our mouths shut, that's what'" (Yamashita 21). Her mother blames Emi's failure to be quiet on her father's DNA. Emi's rejection of the stereotype, however, might be rooted in her larger rejection of Asian American stereotypes that pervade Western culture. In *Articulate Silences*, literary critic King-Kok Cheung notes the stereotype has both positive and negative connotations: "The quiet Asians are seen either as devious, timid, shrewd, and, above all, 'inscrutable'—in much the same way that women are thought to be mysterious and unknowable—or as docile, submissive, and obedient, worthy of the label 'model minority,' just as silent women have traditionally been extolled" (2). In the same way Manzanar upsets the model minority perception by quitting his job and becoming homeless, Emi upsets it by speaking her mind.

In her pushback against Japanese American stereotyping, Emi actively disputes the idea of “diversity.” These arguments usually occur with Gabriel as her foil, whom she teases about being Chicano: “she liked trying to be antimulticultural around him. Right in the middle of some public place, she might burst out, ‘Oh you’re so Chicano!’” (Yamashita 21). The novel frames this as “obnoxious” teasing that Emi only does “to push his buttons” (Yamashita 21). By engaging Gabriel in direct conversations about ethnicity, however, she seems to be challenging him to articulate what it means to be Chicano, Japanese, or any other “kind of American.” When her mother chastises her for not being appropriately Japanese American, she responds, “Maybe I’m not Japanese American. Maybe I got switched in the hospital” (Yamashita 21). Emi blurs the distinction between racial and cultural Japanese American identity, rejecting her genetic inheritance as a rejection of cultural expectations. Because she does not conform to the cultural standards her mother outlines, she evokes a melodramatic plot device to suggest she may have been born into some other ethno-cultural family.

Later, at a Japanese restaurant, Emi expresses her most virulent rejection of multiculturalism. She argues, “Cultural diversity is bullshit... Do you know what cultural diversity is?... It’s a white guy wearing a Nirvana T-shirt and dreds. That’s cultural diversity” (Yamashita 128). She also asserts that she “[hates] being multicultural,” and after a white woman in the restaurant tells her to calm down, Emi implores the sushi chef, “See what I mean, Hiro? You’re invisible. I’m invisible. We’re all invisible. It’s just tea, ginger, raw fish, and a credit card” (Yamashita 128). This last statement provides the clearest explanation for Emi’s rejection of multiculturalist ideology. “Cultural diversity” leads to cultural erasure and to monoculturalism, which values only assimilation.⁴¹ The products of Japanese culture are what the white woman

⁴¹ In *Multiculturalism* (1994), David Theo Goldberg argues that the rhetoric of the “melting pot” is a core value of the monoculture; it requires assimilation into the hegemonic culture and renunciation of other identities (Goldberg 5).

cares about: “I happen to adore the Japanese culture. What can I say? I adore different cultures. I’ve traveled all over the world. I love living in L.A. because I can find anything in the world to eat, right here. It’s such a meeting place for all sorts of people. A true celebration of an international world” (Yamashita 129). The actual human beings these cultural products represent do not really matter. What matters is the product, much in the same way Bobby’s cousin’s subplot reveals the power of products to cross borders, while humans cannot.

As a result of these various individual ethnic and cultural identities, more collective family values and identities emerge in the novel. The priorities of individual family members provide the foundation for a family’s values. For example, both Rafaela and Bobby came to the United States for economic opportunity, but they have somewhat different priorities in their current lives, as evidenced by their use of language. Rafaela learns English to assimilate in the U.S. and build her business: “Bobby’s wife likes to study. She’s got a Walkman in her ears... It’s not music. She’s studying English. She’s Mexican. Bobby don’t teach her English. Speaks to her in Spanish. She’s got to learn by herself. She’s smart” (Yamashita 17). The text is not clear about whether Bobby himself speaks English. Presumably, he knows enough English to run a successful janitorial business in Los Angeles, but Spanish seems to be his preferred language in the U.S. Bobby learns Spanish to assimilate in his Spanish-dominant neighborhood and to talk to Rafaela. Rafaela and Bobby are practically strangers when he helps her cross the border from Tijuana: “Rafaela remembered that she and Bobby couldn’t talk much at first either, but Bobby learned fast. He had already been fluent in some kind of Chicano street talk, but she herself had never bothered to learn Chinese. Maybe she should have” (Yamashita 8). The fact Rafaela does not learn Chinese demonstrates that her husband is not her main priority, though she seems to regret the choice once they are apart.

Bobby's values and priorities seem material and financial, but at their core, his values revolve around his family. His father equates the United States with success and a better future. He frames Bobby's immigration as something that will help the family but also says not to worry about those left behind: "You wanna future? Better go to America. Better start out something new. For the family. You better go. Don't worry about us. You start a future all new" (Yamashita 15). Bobby has started a new future with Rafaela and Sol, but he is still concerned about his Singapore family, demonstrating his place in a larger social network: "It's not just the kid and the wife. Bobby's gotta send money to his dad. Back in Singapore. Keep the old man alive...And Bobby's baby brother. He's in college. Smart kid. Gets all As. Bobby put him in college. Pays for everything" (Yamashita 17). Fundamentally, Bobby links his family with happiness: "Gonna fly back to Singapore and see his dad. Gonna see his sisters. See his nephews and nieces. Gonna bring the kid bro and the family along, too...Can't be happy without his family" (Yamashita 18).

Significantly, much of what we know about both Bobby and Rafaela comes not from their own chapters but from those of their spouse. Bobby and Rafaela spend a lot of time thinking about each other: Bobby continually thinks about how smart Rafaela is, while Rafaela spends a lot of time thinking about what a hard worker Bobby is. In this way, Yamashita once again uses form to emphasize the interconnectivity of the characters. Filtering information about them through each other highlights the significance of their relationship. The relationship literally shapes their identities in the text.

When they finally reunite, Bobby finds himself trying to hold the line of the Tropic of Cancer. As it begins to pull him apart, keeping him separated from Rafaela and Sol, he suddenly lets go: "Lets the lines slither around his wrists, past his palms, through his fingers. Lets go. Go figure. Embrace. That's it" (Yamashita 268). Throughout the text, the movement of the Tropic

of Cancer has been incredibly important. Bobby's holding of the line is his recognition of that importance, despite his not really knowing why. But in the final moments of the narrative, when the choice is between this 'imaginary' line and his family, he makes a simple choice: he drops the line and embraces his wife and son. In the same way the narrator ended Bobby's introduction, the text ends with "That's it," emphasizing simplicity despite the complexity of the moment. Bobby, Rafaela, and Sol are a family, and their connection to each other is the most important shaper of their identities in the novel: "Rafaela's marriage to Bobby, this is to say, is one of the key points in the novel where transnationalization meets the energy of American interethnicity, and ethnic subjectivity is enmeshed in a global and dialogic context" (Rody 135). These identities further develop through the characters' status as immigrants, their shared (and unshared) languages, and the way they approach and understand their own Americanness.

Conversely, Emi and Manzanar's family remains fractured. Emi's initial recognition of Manzanar suggests the unlikeliness of connection in a city as vast as Los Angeles: "Emi stared at that face in disbelief. She knew this face. She knew it intimately from some time in the past. She knew this very man" (Yamashita 167). The phrase "from some time in the past" relegates Manzanar to a past Emi had considered lost, but encountering Manzanar's face on a TV screen brings back memories she must confront. Similarly, memory keeps Emi present in Manzanar's life: "He remembered his youth, the woman he loved, the family he once had, a nine-year-old grandchild he was particularly fond of. He remembered his practice, his parents, his friends. Curiously. He remembered" (Yamashita 170). He seems surprised to remember, much like Emi encounters Manzanar with "disbelief."

Unfortunately, their curiosity and amazement at encountering each other is not enough to overcome the rift between them. Emi seems afraid to confront Manzanar—"she still had not had

the courage to march up there to meet the man”—perhaps because she worries his madness will somehow infect her, or already has (Yamashita 235). The text links insanity with genetics in a way that seems to worry Emi: “Of course, Emi thought, he was crazy, but she understood how denial might be a favorable attitude. Wasn’t everything from Alzheimer’s to schizophrenia genetic? Damn. Damn Gabe. Damn this character Buzzworm. Damn that old deadbeat on the overpass. Damn” (Yamashita 175-176). Emi rejects her genetic connection to Manzanar just as she rejects her identity as a Japanese American for fear it will mean she is “crazy” or otherwise unable to exist within mainstream American culture. Instead of speaking to him, she chooses to sunbathe on top of her news truck, where soldiers aiming for the satellite dish shoot and kill her. To say she dies because she refuses to acknowledge her familial and cultural past might be melodramatic, but Yamashita does seem to suggest the missed connection between Emi and Manzanar has more significant repercussions than just the loss of this one relationship.

When Emi dies, Manzanar stops conducting, realizing “He had seen enough. And he had heard everything” (Yamashita 255). After seeing her body, he begins to remember elements of his old life, including things he had said to her and an acknowledgement of his abandonment of her: “*Are you sad today? I have a new song for you. How about that?* The words and the songs wandered around his head. He hadn’t *meant* to leave her, or anyone else” (Yamashita 255). The regret of the failed connection reifies the trauma wrought by his initial abandonment of his past light. Sheffer writes, “The family is only reunited when Emi dies and Manzanar accompanies her body in a helicopter, suggesting that traumatic histories can create insoluble ruptures within minority communities” (59).

Conclusion

Ultimately, Emi and Manzanar's relationship offers insight into history and the nature of being an "outsider within" in the United States, but Bobby and Rafaela's relationship offers hope for the future. As the tangible result of Bobby and Rafaela's union, Sol especially represents Yamashita's vision: "Sol is the embodiment of racial hybridity...Yamashita depicts the future of the United States through Sol, a multiracial child whose parents are both immigrants" (Jansen 115). Rody further argues this emphasis on interracial bonding extends to the other non-related characters in the novel: "Yamashita's ethnics thus emerge not as representatives of their ethnic groups—indeed they are barely connected to ethnic families—but as participants in a heteroglossic metropolis and region, who, throughout their discourse, their relationships, their work, and increasingly, as the novel progresses, the interlacing of their stories, exceed ethnic and national definitions" (Rody 136). As these characters unite and form bonded relationships, the possibility for cross-cultural coalition grows, similar to the interracial bonding between Dana and Kevin in *Kindred*.

Emi's death makes finding hope in the text difficult, but Yamashita's uses of form and humor suggest *Tropic of Orange* is not ultimately a tragedy. In a 2010 interview with Noelle Brada-Williams, Yamashita talks about her use of humor, which offers a counterpoint to the story's bleak moments. She says, "Ethnic writing about immigrant, refugee, exile stories can't help but be about suffering and sacrifice, but it can't be just about abuse and victimization" (Brada-Williams 2). Humor adds dimension, both to the story and to the multiethnic characters contained within it. These characters represent complex humans, not stereotypes, and by tempering adversity with humor, Yamashita infuses the story with verisimilitude.

In *Understanding Karen Tei Yamashita* (2020), Sheffer contextualizes *Tropic of Orange* within Yamashita's oeuvre. Sheffer identifies several themes of Yamashita's work, including "uprooting from a native environment," "the social limbo experienced by transnational migrants," and "the ambivalences of language" (1, 2). Yamashita's first two novels, *Through the Arc of the Rain Forest* (1990) and *Brazil-Marú* (1992), were both set in Brazil and focused on the struggles of Japanese Brazilians. *Through the Arc of the Rain Forest* is told from the perspective of "a ping-pong-ball-sized satellite hovering by the head of Kazumasa Ishimaru," indicating an interest in magical realist form (Sheffer 10). Sheffer also notes *Brazil-Marú* is an early example of "Yamashita's signature polyvocality" (11). As I have discussed, magical realism and polyvocality are important elements of *Tropic of Orange*, Yamashita's third novel and her first set in North America. After *Tropic of Orange*, Yamashita published *Circle K Cycles* (2001), which follows Japanese Brazilians who have migrated back to Japan. Her fifth and most recent novel, *I Hotel* (2010), documents the Asian American community in San Francisco in the 1960s and 1970s. These five novels illustrate Yamashita's interest in Japanese, Brazilian, and North American experiences that mirror some of her own experiences with transnational migration and identity construction. These novels also demonstrate Yamashita's experimentation with form, departing from the realist narrative strategies that have historically dominated the field of Asian American literature.

Through her use of form and meditations on history, labor, and ethnicity, Yamashita presents a world endangered by rampant abuse of the economy and the environment. It is easy to read the novel pessimistically, seeing only the failed connections and the deaths. Even the great hero of Latin America, Arcangel, dies in battle against his capitalist nemesis SUPERNAFTA, but the novel is bookended by Rafaela and Bobby and by their uncanny experiences with the Tropic

of Cancer. Their movement from separation, through pain and violence, to reunion suggests borders can be redrawn, circumstances can be changed, and though Arcangel is dead, he did take SUPERNAFTA with him. *Tropic of Orange* does, however, present a warning for the future: unchecked capitalism, labor exploitation, and environmental malfeasance will have serious negative consequences. Rosaura Sánchez and Beatrice Pita imagine these consequences in *Lunar Braceros* 2125-2148, where once again, the solution lies in cross-cultural family creation.

	Monday Summer Solstice	Tuesday Diamond Lane	Wednesday Cultural Diversity	Thursday The Eternal Buzz	Friday Artificial Intelligence	Saturday Queen of Angels	Sunday Pacific Rim
Rafaela Cortes	Midday - Not Too Far from Mazatlán chapter 1	Morning - En México chapter 10	Daylight - The Cornfield chapter 18	Dusk - To the Border chapter 24	Dawn - The Other Side chapter 30	Nightfall - Aztlán chapter 38	Midnight - The Line chapter 45
Bobby Ngu	Benefits - Koreatown chapter 2	Car Payment Due - Tijuana via chapter 12	Second Mortgage - Chinatown chapter 15	Life Insurance - L.A./T.J. chapter 26	Visa Card - Final Destination chapter 34	Social Security - I-5 chapter 40	American Express - Mi Casa/Su Casa chapter 49
Emi	Weather Report - Westside chapter 3	NewsNow - Hollywood South chapter 9	Disaster Movie Week - Hiro's Sushi chapter 20	Live on Air - El A chapter 27	Promos - World Wide Web chapter 29	Prime Time - Last Stop chapter 41	Commercial Break - The Big Sleep chapter 44
Buzzworm	Station ID - Jefferson & chapter 4	Oldies - This Old Hood chapter 13	LA X - Margarita's Corner chapter 16	You Give Us 22 Minutes - The World chapter 22	AM/FM - FreeZone chapter 31	The Car Show - Front Line chapter 37	Hour 25 - Into the Boxes chapter 48
Manzanar Murakami	Traffic Window - Harbor Freeway chapter 5	Rideshare - Downtown Interchange chapter 8	The Hour of the Trucks - The Freeway Canyon chapter 19	Lane Change - Avoiding the Harbor chapter 28	Jam - Greater L.A. chapter 35	Drive-By - Virtually Everywhere chapter 42	SigAlert - The Rim chapter 46
Gabriel Balboa	Coffee Break - Downtown chapter 6	Budgets - Skirting Downtown chapter 14	The Interview - Manzanar chapter 17	Time & a Half - Limosine Way chapter 25	Overtime - El Zócalo chapter 32	Working Weekend - Dirt Shoulder chapter 39	Deadline - Over the Net chapter 43
Arcangel	To Wake - Marketplace chapter 7	To Wash - On the Tropic chapter 11	To Eat - La Cantina de Miseria y Hambre chapter 12	To Labor - East & West Forever chapter 23	To Dream - America chapter 33	To Perform - Angel's Flight chapter 36	To Die - Pacific Rim chapter 47

Figure 1. This is a recreation of the HyperContexts table, which lists each of the characters in *Tropic of Orange* with their chapter titles and locations. It appears just after the Table of Contents at the start of the novel.

CHAPTER THREE:

NAVIGATING SPACE AND CREATING FAMILIES IN *LUNAR BRACEROS 2125-2148*

Space is formative, and when you grow up and become an astronomer, Pedro, you will need to remember this alternative space in which you were born and recall always that space is a product of social relations.

Rosaura Sánchez and Beatriz Pita, *Lunar Braceros 2125-2148*

Lunar Braceros 2125-2148 tells the story of an multiracial group of people who choose to work as lunar braceros (low-wage physical laborers) on the Moon. Rosaura Sánchez and Beatriz Pita's novel portrays a dystopian future through lessons and anecdotes—called “nanotexts”—imparted to a 10-year-old boy, Pedro. The text is narrated mostly from the perspective of his mother Lydia, a twenty-second-century Chicana. Her partner Frank and their friends who also work as waste management on the lunar outpost—Leticia, Maggie, Sam, Jake, and Betty—contribute to the narrative as well. Being a lunar bracero offers an alternative to indentured servitude on Earth, where a series of economic and environmental crises have allowed for the rise of the New Imperial Order (NIO) and facilitated the establishment of involuntary work camps known as “Reservations.” By calling their lunar workers “braceros,” Sánchez and Pita directly evoke the Bracero Program, a U.S. migrant labor program that began in 1942 to fill the agricultural labor shortage caused by WWII. Migrant workers were allowed into the United States from Mexico and guaranteed particular wages and working conditions; however, these guarantees were

routinely undercut by employers, leading to labor strikes and discontent from domestic workers. The program, which ended in 1964, was the “largest foreign worker program in U.S. history” (Calavita 1). The novel is a work of speculative fiction that interrogates capitalistic hegemony and activist identity in the wake of twentieth-century U.S. imperialism.

Addressed to and compiled by Lydia and Frank’s son, Pedro, the nanotexts include reflections on Lydia’s youth on a Reservation, her early struggles for social justice, her labor in outer space, and the circumstances that lead the lunar braceros to escape the Moon. Other characters add their stories to Pedro’s collective education, but most nanotexts are in Lydia’s voice. In the lesson that serves as this chapter’s epigraph, Lydia explains to Pedro the nature of ‘space.’ Lydia draws on several meanings of the word ‘space.’ She hints at theoretical space, which she describes as formative; she envisions Pedro as an astronomer, studying outer space; and she evokes the physical space of the Chinganaza Commons. This tripartite definition reinforces the various physical and political movements in space that form the structure of the novel. The lesson also teaches Pedro his own importance as a product of the spaces, histories, and experiences that brought his mother and her hybrid family to this point in their lives. Pedro is an embodiment of their struggle: he will synthesize those varying experiences and use them to transgress space as an adult. Space makes these strangers a family, and in turn, their familial identities shape how they occupy the spaces. While Lydia and her companions navigate a variety of oppressive spaces, their shared need for social and emotional support becomes the impetus for their actions. Pedro himself is the novel’s tangible representation of family creation: he is the son of Lydia and Frank, but because his parents were sterilized by radiation in space, he is conceived from the frozen genetic material of Lydia and her dead lover Gabriel. He is gestated by a surrogate and raised by his whole community.

Since its 2009 publication, *Lunar Braceros* has received some scholarly attention focusing primarily on space, time, and labor in the text, but family remains an area needing critical exploration. Lysa Rivera (2012), Shelley Streeby (2014), Ana M^a Manzanas and Jesús Benito (2014), and Camilla Fojas (2017) have explored the negotiation of spaces and borders in the novel. Rivera and Fojas both discuss contemporary borders and globalization in the wake of NAFTA and how *Lunar Braceros* reflects these concerns. Streeby identifies the novel's use of "bad enclaves" as places where undesirables are separated from the rest of society; Manzanas and Benito explore a similar idea through their discussion of the Reservations and the Moon as spaces of both "waste management" and "population management" (95).

Rivera (2012), B.V. Olgún (2016), and Christopher Perreira (2019) have examined the novel's portrayal of the relationship between history and the future. Rivera also raises the idea of "future histories" in the novel, which nearly every article about *Lunar Braceros* published since 2012 has cited. Olgún analyzes the novel's use of history through the idea of *testimonio* and collective memory. In his discussion of *Lunar Braceros*, Perreira focuses primarily on capitalism and the environment; he also contextualizes the nanotexts as subversions of official history developing collective memory and kinship. Labor and the impact of capitalism appear in almost all criticism of the novel. The specific relationship between labor and food has interested critics Gabriela Nuñez (2016) and Curtis Marez (2016). Nuñez examines Chinganaza as a site for indigenous, sustainable food production and labor, distinct from the exploitative Reservation system. In the afterward to his book *Farm Worker Futurism*, Marez talks about *Lunar Braceros* in terms of projecting agricultural labor exploitation into the future.

Many of these inquiries address collectivity and kinship, but few explore the role of family in the novel in detail. Kristy Ulibarri's 2017 article on labor and motherhood is an exception.

Ulibarri emphasizes Lydia's absence in the novel as a symbol that her revolution can only ever be speculative. She also argues Lydia's absence "produces a queer redefinition of *familia* and motherhood" and the novel emphasizes "nonnormative forms of belonging" (Ulibarri 87). I build on some of Ulibarri's points, examining how the novel explores space and history in relation to nonnormative family creation and social justice.⁴² Rather than emphasizing Lydia's absence, I focus, instead, on Lydia's presence through her nanotexts, and I identify Pedro as the fulfillment of Lydia's revolutionary aspirations. In this chapter, I blend many of these strands of inquiry; because time, space, and labor are so pervasive and closely related in *Lunar Braceros*, a critical approach including all these areas is essential. Chicana studies, feminism, speculative fiction, Chicanafuturism, New Historicism, Critical Geography, and Borderlands theory offer the theoretical framework necessary to blend these disparate strands.⁴³ The theories with which I engage share common themes related to identity formation and challenging Western epistemologies.

Revisiting the novel is especially salient because of its speculative fictional approach to history and the future. I view the term *speculative fiction* similarly to Latinx studies scholar Isabel Millán, who describes it as "an umbrella term for science fiction, fantasy fiction, and other fictions

⁴² In *In a Queer Time and Place* (2005), gender theorist and literary scholar J. Jack Halberstam articulates a use of the term *queer* that encompasses nonnormative expressions of time, space, and embodiment that dovetails well with what Sánchez and Pita do in the novel. Halberstam writes, "I suggest new ways of understanding the nonnormative behaviors that have clear but not essential relations to gay and lesbian subjects" (19).

⁴³ It is important to note the term *Chicana* is not universally accepted by Chicano/a people. A March 2019 NBC News article expresses some aspects of the debate surrounding the use of *Latinx*. The authors note the assertion that the term is used primarily by academics but not by average Latinos (Nuño-Pérez and Aviles). Nuño-Pérez and Aviles also note that *Latinx* elides historical efforts by Latinas and Chicanas to combat gender inequality: "Concern over the use of *Latinx* also comes from Chicanas, women of Mexican descent who have a desire to respect past political battles, including the fight to use terms like Chicano/a and the more gender-neutral Chicana@" (n.p.). In addition, because the term *Latinx* is not easily pronounceable in Spanish, some critics have argued that the term is an example of "linguistic imperialism" by English speakers (deOnís 79). Proponents of the term emphasize its inclusivity by acknowledging people who do not identify with a gender binary. Throughout this chapter, I have opted to use 'Chicana,' rather than "Chicana/o," to emphasize the gender neutrality of the term. I will still use 'Chicano,' 'Chicana,' or 'Chicana/o' in quotes or where the gender distinction is relevant.

that blur the lines between what we may consider plausible or impossible” (168). Though long-term habitation on the Moon is a major aspect of the plot, nothing in *Lunar Braceros* is purely fantasy. Instead, the story is rooted in a 2009 understanding of what is both possible and plausible. For example, *in vitro* fertilization, while expensive, has been in use since the late 1970s; Pedro’s conception through this process indicates the novel’s grounding in contemporary science. I also privilege the economic and political environment from which Sánchez and Pita write in my analysis of the novel’s speculative elements. Lysa Rivera emphasizes the relevance of the authors’ contemporary moment in her examination of “future history” in the text, explaining, “Future history enables sf writers to situate their imaginary futures somewhere along a projected historical time line, one that often begins during or shortly after their real-life historical moment and extends into the future” (“Future Histories” 418). In this sense, ‘speculative fiction’ offers a prediction of what could happen in the future if the world were to continue along its current path. We need look no further than the Trump administration’s detention of immigrants and asylum seekers to be convinced of the plausibility of *Lunar Braceros*’s Reservation system.

Using liminal space, Sánchez and Pita demonstrate family is not simply an amalgamation of blood relations; it is a network of people with a shared purpose. Families, both emotional and biological, are essential to the characters’ identities, and in *Lunar Braceros*, space and community are inextricably linked; just as “space is a product of social relations,” social relations are a product of space (*Lunar Braceros* 25). The way the characters negotiate spaces determines if and how they survive in a world destroyed by human consumption and greed. By challenging normative Western conceptions of time, space, and the body, Sánchez and Pita enact a kind of ‘queering’ of the twenty-second-century family. Drawing on J. Jack Halberstam’s “nonnormative logics and organizations of community, sexual identity, embodiment, and activity in space and time,” I will

show the novel's use of the nonnormative Chicana family in shaping activist identity (20). Even spaces that are oppressive and deadly offer opportunities for family creation, and through the creation of these families, larger social change is possible. The next section will lay out my methodology. Then, I will discuss the novel's unique form, which I will link to Sánchez and Pita's interest in history and the future. I will then examine each of the novel's three major spaces: the Reservations, the Moon, and the Chinganaza Commons. Finally, I will show the effects of these spaces on bodies in the novel: the bodies of the braceros, as well as the collective 'body' of the nonnormative family.

Critical Frameworks: Chicanafuturism, New Historicism, Borderlands Theory

I blend a variety of theoretical frameworks to analyze the novel's nonnormative logics. Similarly to what Afrofuturism does for *Kindred*, Chicanafuturism informs *Lunar Braceros*' characters' relationships to the past and future and provides theory to analyze the speculative elements of the text. New Historicism helps me examine the authors' use of storytelling about the past, challenging the hegemonic nature of Western historical 'fact.' I will also include Gloria Anzaldúa's Borderlands theory to show how the characters exist in liminal spaces throughout the novel, linking Chicana understandings of place to Critical and Feminist Geographies.

Building on Afrofuturist theory, Latinx studies scholar Catherine Ramírez coined the term *Chicanafuturism* in her 2004 article, "Deus Ex Machina: Tradition, Technology, and the Chicanafuturist Art of Marion C. Martinez." Ramírez's full definition of *Chicanafuturism* is "Chicano cultural production that attends to cultural transformations resulting from new and everyday technologies (including their detritus); that excavates, creates, and alters narratives of identity, technology, and the future; that interrogates the promises of science and technology; and

that redefines humanism and the human” (“Deus ex Machina” 77-78). She draws heavily on the relationship between Chicana people and technology, modernity, and identity, asserting that Chicana people have historically been considered “primitive” and disconnected from Western ideas of “progress.” This historical view of Chicana people causally links Chicanafuturism to Afrofuturism in Ramírez’s analysis. In her 2008 article “Afrofuturism/Chicanafuturism: Fictive Kin,” Ramírez writes, “Like black people, especially black women, Chicanas, Chicanos, and Native Americans are usually disassociated from science and technology, signifiers of civilization, rationality, and progress” (“Afrofuturism/Chicanafuturism” 188). While the two theories share many characteristics, Chicanafuturism differs from Afrofuturism in its relationship to place and belonging. Ramírez highlights Afrofuturism’s emphasis on diasporic experience,⁴⁴ while Chicanafuturism “articulates colonial and postcolonial histories” (“Deus Ex Machina” 78). Afrofuturism imagines the future by looking to a past that has been marred by kidnapping and displacement. Chicanafuturism examines Chicana connection to ancestral place as well as a connection to the technological present and future. Practitioners of both theories embrace the idea of an ancestral homeland where they can be free of white supremacy.

Though she does not discuss *Lunar Braceros* explicitly, Millán’s 2015 article, “Engineering Afro-Latina and Mexican Immigrant Heroines: Biopolitics in Borderlands Speculative Literature and Film,” offers insight into the importance of Pedro’s unconventional birth and builds on research begun by Catherine Ramírez on Afrofuturism and Chicanafuturism. Millán argues genetically engineered characters in African American and Chicana science fiction

⁴⁴ Ramírez is specifically discussing African American diasporic experience, but I should note Afrofuturism is not limited to the Americas or to African-descended people in diaspora. In “Toward a Planetary History of Afrofuturism” (2017), Sofia Samatar argues for why African artists should be included in Afrofuturist discourse by emphasizing areas where African futurism converges with African diasporic futurism (175). These convergences include the trauma and alienation of colonization, the blending of spirituality and folklore with modern technologies, and the emphasis on bricolage and remixing. For this dissertation, I have chosen to focus on African American experience to explore the nature of belonging in the United States.

mirror the neocolonial relationship between the U.S. and Mexico. She uses close readings from Chicana science-fiction texts to demonstrate the ways hegemonic dynamics of race, class, and gender are perpetuated in the contemporary United States and to suggest that the presence of people of color in science fiction acts to interrogate these relationships. While genetic engineering on the scale that Millán explores does not take place in *Lunar Braceros*, we can see hegemonic dynamics in the ways characters' bodies are altered. Millán writes, "A living organism engineered or altered into existence usually holds a contentious relationship with its creators, especially if the organism is imprisoned or exploited against its will" (169). This is certainly the case for the braceros, whose time on the Moon results in both sterility and imprisonment; however, the 'engineering' of Pedro becomes a counter-hegemonic act. By taking the idea of genetic engineering and using it to create a new hybrid family, Lydia and Frank transgress the heteronormative bounds of biological reproduction.

In addition to Chicanafuturism, New Historicism offers insight into the practice of "telling history" and the relationships between the past, present, and future. New Historicism precludes the possibility of objective analysis, emphasizing instead the importance of context and interpretation. This approach to historical analysis privileges non-linear understandings of 'progress'; critical theorist Lois Tyson explains, "at any given point in history, any given culture may be progressing in some areas and regressing in others" (269). Writing in 2009, Sánchez and Pita are engaging with a variety of historical contexts, including the rise of *El Movimiento* in the 1960s and 70s, the passage of NAFTA in 1994, and the global War on Terror after 9/11. Emphasizing interpretation over 'facts' allows New Historicists to analyze the past as part of a larger discourse within a culture. In *Lunar Braceros*, this larger discourse of past and present creates the foundation of the authors' speculative future.

El Movimiento, in particular, provides important historical context for the novel. Also called the Chicano Movement, *El Movimiento* can be traced to the late 1960s, a period “when Mexican Americans began to vocalize demands for education reform, labor rights, and political self-determination” (Rivera, “Chicana/o Cyberpunk” 190). *El Movimiento* privileged indigenous identity in the quest for Mexican American social justice and specifically resisted assimilation to Anglo-American culture.⁴⁵ Rivera points out, however, that *El Movimiento* did not emphasize gender issues, and some critics saw it as too nationalistic, impeding “cross-racial and cross-ethnic alliances and solidarities” (“Chicana/o Cyberpunk” 193). Chicana and Latina studies scholar Ylce Irizarry also highlights the early movement’s “clear exclusion of the Chicana” (*Chicana/o and Latina/o Fiction* 78). She writes, “Patriarchal dominance within Chicana/o America fragmented la raza” (Irizarry, *Chicana/o and Latina/o Fiction* 79). In her introduction to *Beyond Stereotypes*, Chicana studies scholar María Herrera-Sobek quotes Rosaura Sánchez, noting “what distinguishes Chicana writers from their male counterparts is their ‘relative invisibility’” (11). Herrera-Sobek further asserts, “Sánchez presents a compelling case for the reexamination of Chicano *machismo* and shortsighted discrimination practices visited upon Chicanas by members of their own groups” (11). As a result of this patriarchal dominance, Chicanas in the 1980s began to shift the focus to incorporate Third World feminisms and cross-cultural alliances. *Lunar Braceros* more clearly fits within this latter context, emphasizing female power through Lydia’s narrative and resisting

⁴⁵ Gutiérrez Nájera, Castellanos, and Aldama write in the Introduction to *Comparative Indigenities of the Americas* (2012), Mexican *indigenismo* was “a problematic nationalist ideology that... glorified Mexico’s indigenous past while neglecting the significant contributions of contemporary native peoples and casting Indians as obstacles to national development” (2). This problem is reminiscent of the myth of the Vanishing Indian, which frames Indians as relics that no longer exist in order to allow European colonists to claim native status in the Americas. [See Jace Weaver, *That the People Might Live* (1997).] Nevertheless, the reclamation of indigenous ancestry has been important for Chicana people experiencing racial exclusion in the United States (Gutiérrez Nájera et al. 2).

Chicano and Mexican nationalism through the characters' multiethnic and multinational backgrounds.⁴⁶

In addition to challenging Chicano nationalism, storytelling itself becomes an act of transgression as the narrative of Lydia and the lunar braceros progresses. The story has the explicit purpose of inspiring social action. Lydia tells the story to her son so he will join her fight when he is old enough. Lydia orchestrates everything she shares with Pedro to instill revolutionary fervor in him. She tells him, "You'll undoubtedly be involved in the production of new spatial relations, maybe—hopefully—even in outer space, on another planet" (Sánchez and Pita, *Lunar Braceros* 25). Later in the text, she adds, "The world is a dangerous place, Pedro... That's why I've been telling you all this. These are things you need to know, so that you too can face the wind" (*Lunar Braceros* 119). Their family bond becomes a bond of shared political intention, with activism as a kind of inheritance Lydia passes down to her son. She wishes for him not only to have the ability to redefine space but also to escape the confines of the Earth, which has become an oppressive space—economically, politically, and environmentally.

Because the novel's Chicanafuturist approach engages with indigenous and national identities, I also employ Critical Geography and Borderlands theory in my analysis. Now considered foundational in the field of human geography, Yi-Fu Tuan's *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience* (1977) establishes several key concepts regarding the construction of space and place. The two concepts are intimately linked, but Tuan suggests our feelings about them differ: "Place is security, space is freedom: we are attached to the one and long for the other"

⁴⁶ In 2006, in response to increasing hostility toward Latinx people in the U.S., Sánchez and Pita co-authored an article calling for a need "to forge strategic political alliances by constructing [the Latinx] population as a bloc, a nexus of diverse groups that differ at the level of national origin, race, residential status, class, gender, and political views" ("Theses on the Latino Bloc" 25). This emphasis on cross-national Latinx alliances a few years before the publication of *Lunar Braceros* informs my reading of the novel.

(3). This idea particularly resounds with *Lunar Braceros*, as the characters seek liberating spaces but also lack a place to call home. Building on Tuan's work, Doreen Massey's *Space, Place, and Gender* (1994) incorporates theories of feminist geography into her work. Massey challenges Tuan's concept of place as static and fixed. Instead, she argues, our attempts to define "place" are, in fact, struggles to impose meaning on the "unutterable mobility and contingency of space-time" (Massey 5). She also highlights a fault in the traditional understanding of space-time as part of a Western epistemological duality, where time is "coded masculine and space, being absence or lack, as feminine" (Massey 6). From a feminist perspective, the masculine coding of time also suggests time is privileged over space in Western culture, a notion Massey's text interrogates.

The relationship between time and space in Western epistemology is also present in Borderlands theory. In *Extinct Lands, Temporal Geographies*, Mary Pat Brady calls for recognition of the link between narrative and spatialization. Brady argues colonization is a spatial process and Euro-American writers usually privilege time and history over space. Brady's goal in the book is to make examining space more prominent in literary theory, particularly Chicana theory. Finally, in *Demonic Grounds* (2006), Katherine McKittrick links geography with Black feminism by interrogating ability of spaces to reinforce domination. She writes, "racism and sexism are not simply bodily or identity based; [they] are also spatial acts" (McKittrick xviii). Exploring various definitions of space through nonlinear time, *Lunar Braceros* challenges white Western masculinist interpretations of both space and time.

Within the tradition of Borderlands writing, the idea of occupying and negotiating space is essential. In *Borderlands/La Frontera*, Gloria Anzaldúa explores the complex phenomenon of life along the U.S.-Mexican border. Using poetry, personal accounts, mythology, and history, she paints a stark picture of life in the liminal space of the American Southwest. She highlights the

oppressiveness of the geographic border as well as the cultural, linguistic, sexual, and class borders that correspond to it. As I discussed in Chapter 1, the liminal space of the border results in the creation of a “*mestiza* consciousness,” which rejects rigidity. Because Anzaldúa speaks to a common experience among Chicana/x writers, many of these themes are present in *Lunar Braceros* and characterize Chicana/x literature more broadly.⁴⁷ Irizarry writes, “*Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (1987) was radical in its depiction of the ambiguity and complexity of Mexican American identity” (*Chicana/o and Latina/o Fiction* 82). She further asserts, “Anzaldúa shows how US neocolonialism generated the narrative of loss within Chicana/o America: the disintegration of families living near the border, the disappearance of Mexican and indigenous cultural practices, and the emasculation of the Chicano” (Irizarry, *Chicana/o and Latina/o Fiction* 82). Throughout *Lunar Braceros*, Sánchez and Pita seem to be attempting to recoup some of these losses, using movement through and across borders as opportunities for the reclamation of indigeneity and family.

Telling History and Speculating the Future

I will now turn to the novel’s form and its focus on history. I connect these two elements based largely on the critical work of Ramón Saldívar and Ylce Irizarry. In *Chicano Narrative: The Dialectics of Difference* (1990), Saldívar asserts that history is essential to Chicana/x literature: “For Chicano narrative, *history* is the subtext that we must recover because history itself is the subject of its discourse” (5). He further elaborates, history is the “decisive determinant of the form

⁴⁷ For a selection of novels that explore themes of Chicana/x belonging, liminality, and cultural identity, see Rudolfo Anaya’s *Bless Me, Ultima* (1972), Sandra Cisneros’s *The House on Mango Street* (1983), Arturo Islas’s *The Rain God* (1984), Alejandro Morales’s *The Rag Doll Plagues* (1992), Ana Castillo’s *The Mixquiahuala Letters* (1992) and *So Far From God* (1993), Denise Chávez’s *Loving Pedro Infante* (2001), Sesshu Foster’s *Atomik Aztex* (2005), and Alicia Gaspar de Alba’s *Desert Blood: The Juárez Murders* (2005).

and content” of Chicana narrative (Saldívar, *Chicano Narrative* 6). Similarly, in the second chapter of *Chicana/o and Latina/o Fiction*, Irizarry discusses the history of Chicana literary production, noting that Chicana novels of the 1980s drew inspiration from the hybrid texts produced in the nineteenth century. These “postmovement” texts sought to “reclaim local histories” and “[employed] multiple genres, visual media, and cultural practices” (Irizarry, *Chicana/o and Latina/o Fiction* 80, 81). While *Lunar Braceros* was not written in the 1980s and does not easily fit into Irizarry’s definition for “narratives of reclamation,” the novel does enact reclamation of history and employs a hybrid form in order to do so.⁴⁸

A brief examination of Sánchez and Pita’s scholarship reveals their shared interests in history, Chicana identity, and Chicana literary production. They have collaborated on several projects about María Amparo Ruiz de Burton, whom they and others identify as “the first writer of Mexican origin to write and publish in English in the United States” (Sánchez and Pita, *Conflicts* xviii). According to Sánchez and Pita, Ruiz de Burton’s work, published in the late nineteenth century after the 1848 Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, represents an early example of Chicana literary identity. They write, “Her life interests us to the degree that it maps the obstacles in the playing field, never level for women or minorities, whether in the nineteenth century or now” (*Conflicts* ix). Many of the topics that concerned Ruiz de Burton—gender, class, nationality, borders—also emerge in *Lunar Braceros*, demonstrating the authors’ investment in reclaiming the past while speculating about the future.

One element of hybrid form in the novel is the use of three different fonts for the nanotexts: some sections are in all capital letters, some are in italics, and others are in non-italicized sentence

⁴⁸ In the introduction to *Chicana/o and Latina/o Fiction*, Irizarry explains that “narratives of reclamation,” alongside “narratives of loss,” “coincide with the Manifest Destiny and neocolonialism of the nineteenth century” (20). Regardless of their publication date, they are often found within first-generation immigrant stories because they reflect the immigrant’s early encounters with neocolonialism.

case. There is no clear pattern among the font choices. The italicized sections tend to contain lessons and stories related to outer space, but such stories are not exclusive to the italicized sections. In her analysis of the novel, Camilla Fojas has posited the sections in all caps “are notes in direct address from the narrator to her son and give clear explanations of the conditions in the New Imperial Order” (Fojas 42); however, many of the all caps sections do not directly mention the NIO at all (e.g. *Lunar Braceros* 7, 9, 12, 18) and at least one is a message from Gabriel to Lydia, not Lydia to Pedro (e.g. *Lunar Braceros* 22). I agree with Fojas that the typesetting “adds a sense of urgency and expediency” to these sections, but I believe the choice to use different fonts has more to do with form than with content in the novel. Pedro’s initial introduction establishes the document’s multimedia nature: “My mother left me these nanotexts with lunar posts, lessons, bits and pieces of conversations, and notations” (*Lunar Braceros* 5). I understand this to mean that the documents Pedro has compiled are a mixture of typed notes, audio recordings, images, and possibly videos. To convey these different types of media in a print document, Sánchez and Pita use variable typesetting, which demonstrates the multimedia they are using.

Another form of ‘multimedia’ Sánchez and Pita employ in the novel is illustration. There are six images in the text, the cover art included, which are the work of Chicano artist and muralist Mario A. Chacon. The images punctuate the story’s major plot points, including the discovery of the murdered lunar braceros, Lydia’s childhood on the Reservation, Lydia and Frank’s hallucination of Peter, and the braceros’ the escape from the Moon. Like the variable typesetting, the illustrations indicate the hybrid nature of the text. Because of Chacon’s art style, the images also add to Chicax identity creation in the novel. Chacon draws the human characters in each of these images as skeletons, or calacas, such as those used in celebrations of Día de Muertos (the Day of the Dead). The cover art depicts a skeletal astronaut wearing an Aztec-looking headdress

and a spacesuit decorated with indigenous imagery. B.V. Olgún notes, “his left fist is raised in a defiant gesture of counterpower, while his open right hand hails the viewer as if in a call for solidarity” (Olgún 231). This imagery aligns both with Chacon’s interest in indigeneity in his own work⁴⁹ and with Sánchez and Pita’s focus on “the subaltern racialized hybrid cholo indigeneity” of the braceros (Olgún 231).

All of these hybrid form elements add to the innovative way Sánchez and Pita craft their characters’ speculative histories. Lysa Rivera describes the “telling of history” as central to a distinct Chicana tradition, “which is itself the direct result of shared historical, social, and economic conditions specific to Chicano/a lived experiences” (“Future Histories” 418). In their introduction to *Infinite Divisions*, Tey Diana Rebolledo and Eliana S. Rivero add that Chicana writing is defined by “the need to explore and explode the stereotypes given to Chicanas,” “the redemption of the male relationships in the lives of Chicana,” and “the concern that Chicanas have always had about borders” (23-24, 27, 30). Fitting *Lunar Braceros* into this broader context of Chicana literature, Sánchez and Pita demonstrate concern with each of the elements Rebolledo and Rivero identify. They also engage with both personal and global histories in the novel. I read the novel as a kind of speculative *testimonio*, which highlights the importance of both personal and communal histories.

As I described in the Introduction, *testimonio*, as a narrative form, grew out of the need to document and expose human rights violations in Latin America and elsewhere globally. In her examination of Californio *testimonios*, Rosaura Sánchez identifies several common elements: “In all testimonials, the subaltern seizes the liminal space of mediated representation to ‘write’ or narrate identity...Second, testimonials are counter narratives...Third, testimonials represent a shift

⁴⁹ See Chacon’s “About” page on fineartamerica.com: <https://fineartamerica.com/profiles/mario-chacon?tab=about>.

of the struggle to a war of position...launched often from exile or outside the immediate battlefield” (Sánchez, *Telling Identities* 12-13). Each of these aspects of *testimonio* appears in *Lunar Braceros*, including Lydia as subaltern narrating her identity, the counterhegemonic nature of her narrative, and the fact she authors the story from “exile” in Chinganaza. I have also discussed *testimonio*’s collective nature. It is not an individual narrative but a communal one. This remains true in *Lunar Braceros*: the story belongs, ostensibly, to Lydia and the braceros, but global history is always at the forefront of the narrative, explicitly connecting individuals to the collective and shedding light on the hegemonic oppression by capitalist regimes worldwide.

The blending of personal and global histories begins with Lydia’s first nanotext. The narrative opens with “There were seven of us” (*Lunar Braceros* 6). “Us” establishes the personal nature of the story and indicates this is a first-person plural account. Further down the same page, Lydia offers a history lesson; she says, “Lunar colonization really geared up after what back then was called ‘The Great Political Restructuring’” (*Lunar Braceros* 6). This establishes the alternate world in which the novel takes place and foregrounds the history of that world as central to Lydia’s personal journey. Throughout the novel, history is both personal and political, individual and collective. The stories and lessons Pedro has compiled teach him not only about his family’s story but also contextualize that story as part of a larger struggle for social change. As the nanotexts’ primary audience, Pedro illustrates the importance of evolving from a passive recipient of the story into an active participant in revolution.

Sánchez and Pita evoke a history of social uprising that frames their protagonists’ efforts to underscore this evolution. Sharing the history of the Chinganaza Commons, Lydia remarks, “It all began at the end of the 20th century when Indians in South America, especially in Ecuador, and in the Cantón of Guamate, rose up to demand their lands, their linguistic and cultural rights, and

their political rights” (*Lunar Braceros* 21). Here, the possession of land is synonymous with the possession of linguistic, cultural, and political rights. Therefore, the occupation of space determines freedom in other areas as well. Unsurprisingly, these same concerns influence Lydia and the other braceros to demand their freedom. They have been denied linguistic and cultural rights, been failed by a government they trusted, and been exiled from their homes. The movement by indigenous peoples of South America to claim their rights also reinforces Sánchez and Pita’s interest in challenging settler colonialism. Recalling Povinelli and the future anterior justification for oppression, settler colonial studies scholar Quynh Nhu Le writes, “not only were Indigenous communities rendered outside of settler space and time but settler governance also often responded to Indigenous mobilization for justice by registering such demands into a future-oriented projection” (Le 12). In other words, colonists have attempted to appease oppressed communities with promises that justice will arrive at some point in the future. Through Lydia’s testimony, Sánchez and Pita reshape that speculative future into their characters’ history.

Recounting history is an important part of identity creation. Through a tradition of storytelling and shared language, Lydia and her family can remember their origins. Stories and the use of non-English languages (including Spanish and ASL) allow the characters to convey important information needed for their survival (*Lunar Braceros* 62). The telling of history inspires Pedro to political action and is itself a counter-hegemonic act designed to combat the government-sanctioned versions of history. Lydia explains that the government was involved in “memory projects” while she was in prison, one of which “called for revising historical accounts not favorable to the Cali-Texas government” (*Lunar Braceros* 38).⁵⁰ Lydia’s *testimonio* seeks to

⁵⁰ Revision of history and erasure of colonized peoples is an essential aspect of settler colonialism; Le writes, “the production of settler and imperial violence hinges on a settler knowledge production that not only obscures these separate histories but also completely effaces their linkages” (1-2).

counter those government “memory projects.” Through this history that privileges non-English, anti-colonial means of communication, Lydia educates her son Pedro on the need for social change and places the narrative within a broader global context. And by telling her story in a non-linear way, using images and variable typesetting, Lydia transgresses not only physical spaces but also the boundaries of traditional storytelling.

Transgressing Space and Spatial Borders

Sánchez and Pita define space in the novel through the reorganization of political and economic borders, and this reorganization is inextricably linked to history and the speculative future. In her 2012 article, Rivera argues that a transnational reading of Chicana science fiction allows for critical analysis of contemporary globalization along the U.S.-Mexican border and highlights the ways colonial power dynamics persist within this borderlands space. As Anzaldúa and other Borderlands writers illustrate, the 1848 Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, which established the border between the United States and Mexico, created a liminal space between the two countries that had not previously existed. This turned Mexican citizens living on the U.S. side of the new border into “immigrants” and problematized identity creation along both sides: “We were jerked out by the roots, truncated, disemboweled, dispossessed, and separated from our identity and our history” (Anzaldúa 8). The Labor Appropriation Act of 1924 solidified the line of demarcation, establishing the U.S. Border Patrol to limit entry into the country. It is no accident the years in the novel’s title are 2125 to 2148; three hundred years after the passage of the Treaty, the characters of *Lunar Braceros* are still dealing with the issues of identity and history that the new definition of space created.

Drawing on the work of Anzaldúa, Rivera links the creation of the fictional Cali-Texas state and its corresponding economic hegemony with the real-life passage of NAFTA in 1994

(Rivera, "Future Histories" 428). NAFTA made the trade borders between the U.S. and Mexico more fluid, which in turn, made the exploitation of Mexican labor forces by U.S. capitalist interests easier. Lydia explains, while telling the history of Cali-Texas to Pedro, when the new nation-state came to power, "The US, Canada and Mexico had no other option but to become part of the Cali-Texas commonwealth, autonomous regions but economically linked to and dependent on the hegemonic power" (*Lunar Braceros* 12). This conversation highlights the far-reaching effects of redrawn borders and demonstrates how existence within and outside those borders determines personal growth. The creation of the fictional nation-state Cali-Texas clearly gestures back to NAFTA and the real-world economics of North America, indicating Sánchez and Pita's effort to use speculative fiction to comment on present-day concerns. For the characters in *Lunar Braceros*, this begins with the creation of the Reservations and continues as the hegemonic powers expand to the Moon. When describing the creation of the Reservations, Lydia notes, "In what had previously been called the First World, labor needs were met by workers on the Reservations" (*Lunar Braceros* 15). The redefinition of boundaries has created a new economic order, but it has also disrupted old power structures. The old "First World" has seen both economic and environmental crises, necessitating a new kind of indentured labor. In response to this oppressive reorganization, the characters must create new spaces outside the traditional borders.

The first major space characters must negotiate in *Lunar Braceros* is the government-controlled Reservations. Lydia explains that her entire nuclear family was sent to the Reservation after her father lost his job and could no longer afford rent (*Lunar Braceros* 27). On the Reservation, they produce goods that had been previously outsourced to other countries: "Since our wages were mere subsistence wages, we were even cheaper than any labor force in Asia or Africa. Plus we were guaranteed consumers" (*Lunar Braceros* 14). This reveals the link between

imprisonment and capital. Lydia further notes, “Those who could demonstrate that they had enough funds to rent a place and live off the Reservation and become...‘self-sufficient,’ could petition to leave” (*Lunar Braceros* 40). Once on the Reservation, however, the family’s debt continues to accumulate, all but ensuring no one ever leaves.⁵¹ Thus, in this space, ‘family’ initially has a negative connotation because biological family connections parallel imprisonment.

Lydia describes the Reservation of her youth as “a panopticon prison” (*Lunar Braceros* 35). In this confining space, ResLifers—people confined to the Reservations for life—are not only trapped but they are also constantly watched: “[Lydia] could see the 100-foot-tall tower with radar and high-definition cameras...From the tower [the guards] could scan the perimeter as well as every inch of the Reservation...They could also hear everything” (*Lunar Braceros* 35). Sánchez and Pita connect their text to a long history of incarceration and surveillance by invoking the “panopticon.” Conceived by English philosopher and jurist Jeremy Bentham in the mid-1700s, the panopticon prison was designed to maximize the efficiency of surveillance within the prison space. It allowed for a minimal number of guards who could constantly watch prisoners without the prisoners knowing when they were being watched. The theory behind Bentham’s plan was that because they could be watched at any time, the prisoners would behave as if they were being watched all the time. Furthermore, Bentham proposed using inmate labor to offset the cost of incarceration, situating the panopticon within a capitalist structure and paving the way for the for-profit prison complex (Semple 27). Using the panopticon in *Discipline and Punish* (1975), Michel Foucault links Bentham’s plan to the development of broad social surveillance and policing in the eighteenth century. Sánchez and Pita draw on both Bentham’s literal panopticon and Foucault’s

⁵¹ Lydia quotes her father as saying, “We’re in debt up to our necks, considering the debt we came in with and what it’s grown since then. The clothes and other stuff that we get come out to more than our allotted stipend. Some of that becomes part of our debt... I get no salary for my work here” (*Lunar Braceros* 74).

more metaphorical theory in the design of the Reservations. The surveillance in this space is absolute, and no one leaves without permission.

In addition to external policing, internal policing keeps ResLifers incarcerated, particularly through family connections. For example, all members of a family are responsible for the family's consumption; any type of expense adds to the family's debt, including food and entertainment. If one family member rebels, the rest suffer. Lydia recalls some teenaged peers who had to work after their father's attempted escape and death: "They had to work on the weekends because their father had tried to escape from the Reservation and their mother couldn't get enough hours of work to meet their needs, that is, to work off what they consumed" (*Lunar Braceros* 35). Lydia is lucky to have two living and working parents, but she is still conscious of the way her consumption on the Reservation negatively impacts her family: "I kept thinking about how long it was going to take my dad to work off the two ice creams we had just had" (*Lunar Braceros* 36). In *Lunar Braceros*, the state clearly exercises control over populations it deems undesirable, and it uses family ties to maintain that control.

Because of the forced labor and imprisonment on the Reservations, it is tempting to compare them with antebellum plantations in the United States; indeed, the structure of the Reservations mirrors the debt peonage system that emerged after the abolition of slavery and persisted in the United States until the 1960s. In *Racism: From Slavery to Advanced Capitalism* (1996), political scientist Carter A. Wilson writes, "by the beginning of the 20th century, almost every southern state had laws that defined the act of leaving a plantation without paying back advances or debts as a form of labor fraud" (89). By framing peonage as a punishment for "labor fraud," states perpetuated *de facto* slavery, despite the illegality of the practice. Even today, the use of inmate and immigrant labor reproduces the peonage system throughout the U.S.

There are, however, key differences between Chicana forced labor in the novel and the history of African slavery in the United States. These differences also highlight some of the differences between Afrofuturism and Chicanafuturism. Historically, under African slavery, family units were broken up and their origins effaced by kidnapping, name changing, and denial of native languages. We see these lost origins emerge as a major concern in the diasporic focus of many Afrofuturist texts in the U.S. For example, in *Kindred*, learning her family's lost history is a source of great importance but also great trauma for Dana. As a Chicanafuturist text, *Lunar Braceros* emphasizes the continuity of family history and indigenous identity. The word "Reservation" itself obviously evokes the Native American reservations in the United States, which underscores the ResLifers' indigeneity, and Lydia's family has Native heritage on both sides.⁵² Lydia's mother tells her stories of their ancestor Pacomio, a notable Indian revolutionary who led a revolt against the Spanish in California in 1824 (*Lunar Braceros* 53). Similarly, Lydia's father claims to have had Indian ancestors living in California as early as 1781 (*Lunar Braceros* 54). The Reservations, while clearly designed to suppress the proliferation of social 'undesirables,' nevertheless allow for the families to remain connected to one another and to their ancestral pasts.

Emboldened by her ancestral connection to Pacomio, one of Lydia's first acts of political transgression demonstrates her efforts to reinvent her relationship to space: an unsuccessful attempt to liberate friends and family from their Reservation by cutting a fence. Just before the

⁵² On October 31, 2019, President Trump issued a proclamation declaring November 2019 "National American History and Founders Month" (*Presidential Proclamation*). This proclamation generated a great deal of criticism because November has, since 1990, been recognized as "Native American Heritage Month." The President's proclamation, which praised the Founding Fathers but failed to mention Native Americans, struck many as undercutting the value of that heritage and history. While the proclamation does not cancel Native American Heritage Month, "the introduction of 'National American History' month, [many indigenous communities] say, felt like a particularly ill-timed slap in the face from a president who has a history of mocking Native Americans" (Armus). As this recent controversy shows, indigenous peoples continue to be unrecognized and underrepresented in the United States.

failed rescue, the text includes an impassioned speech from an unidentified activist. The speech ends with the exclamation “Compañeros, it is time to put an end to these Reservations. ¡A desalambrar!” (*Lunar Braceros* 29). Popularized in 1969 by Chilean musician and activist Víctor Jara, the song “A Desalambrar”⁵³ calls for the people to rise up to reclaim the land, asserting “this is land is ours,/yours, anyone’s,/Pedro’s and Maria’s, Juan’s and Jose’s” (Jara, emphasis added). The titular phrase, which Jara repeats throughout the song, can be translated “To Tear Down Fences.”⁵⁴ Lydia and her brother Ricardo literally attempt to tear down fences in their effort to free their family. The Pinochet regime kidnapped and killed Jara in 1973.⁵⁵ Therefore, the allusion to the song in the novel predicts the possible failure of Lydia’s social movement. Indeed, this incident directly results in Lydia’s imprisonment on the Moon, but it also establishes Lydia’s lifelong commitment to social justice and the transgression of space. Like Jara, Lydia tries to convince others to move beyond oppressive spaces by asserting her right to occupy new spaces and to change old ones.

That willingness and need to transgress space continues during Lydia’s imprisonment on the Moon. Initially, the Moon represents a preferred alternative to the Reservations—“[Lydia] was the only ex-convict; the other six were unemployed technicians who preferred to go to the Moon rather than be sent to a Reservation”—but over time, the disparity between these spaces begins to collapse (*Lunar Braceros* 42). Just as on the Reservations, individuals are carefully monitored. Their living spaces are bugged with “hidden sensors” so their employers can spy on

⁵³ As a testament to Jara’s ongoing legacy as a musical activist, his 1971 song “El Derecho de Vivir en Paz” (“The Right to Live in Peace”) was re-recorded in October 2019 by a group of 30 Chilean musicians. The song has united demonstrators participating in the ongoing anti-government protests in the country (Simon and Wharton).

⁵⁴ Various online translations of *desalambrar* have defined the term as “to remove the wires,” “cut the wires,” or “to tear down the fences.” I interpret it as the latter translation. For more information, see [WordReference.com](#), [OxfordDictionaries.com](#), or [LyricsTranslate.com](#).

⁵⁵ A 2019 Netflix documentary, *ReMastered: Massacre at the Stadium*, details the circumstances and aftermath of Jara’s murder. His family’s effort to achieve justice for Jara drives much of the documentary’s narrative and remains unfinished nearly 50 years after his death.

them (*Lunar Braceros* 61), and through the use of ocular and auditory implants, even the workers' vision and speech are subject to constant surveillance (*Lunar Braceros* 46). Unlike the Reservations, the Moon is surrounded by the vacuum of space, making it an even more perfect prison, from which escape is more difficult than earning one's freedom. The protagonists of the novel do escape the Moon, but their plight becomes, for a time, even more hopeless than that of the ResLifers.

One of the hopes of space travel is that new frontiers will offer a change from terrestrial power structures; however, in *Lunar Braceros*, life on the Moon reinscribes the hierarchy that exists on Earth. The characters' spatial movement does not result in new or improved status. Lydia recognizes the structure with relation to the Lab Directors: "Don't you think, Frank, that there appears to be a hierarchy up here, with the Lab Directors on top having the power over life and death and we the grunts, with no say-so in any matter, on the bottom?" (*Lunar Braceros* 83). But the hierarchy is unsurprising to Frank, who asserts, "No shit. Like everywhere, Lydia. Why should it be different here?" (*Lunar Braceros* 83). The hierarchy persists because those who have power within the traditional structure are motivated to help maintain that structure, as demonstrated by Bob, the braceros' supervisor: "I am [the Lab Directors'] spy and as time has passed I have come to enjoy my position and the power it gives me over the newbies, despite my knowing that I will never leave this place" (*Lunar Braceros* 89). Even though Bob is, himself, a prisoner on the Moon, he contributes to the maintenance of the prison because it allows him to exercise power over others.

The characters' experiences on the Reservations and the Moon lead them to engage in their fight for social justice; however, these social movements are unsuccessful, partly because these spaces are too oppressive to allow for large-scale coalition and hopeful speculation of the future. As seen in Lydia's first failed attempt to liberate the Reservations, the culture of oppression and

internal policing of the Reservation system is so pervasive that when given the opportunity to leave, “most of [the ResLifers] didn’t dare come out” (*Lunar Braceros* 30). Similarly, after the braceros escape the Moon, they expect sweeping social reform, but rather than admitting culpability and enacting change, “the government of Cali-Texas expressed...its shock and dismay at what had happened, as if they knew nothing of it” (*Lunar Braceros* 113). The lunar labor system ostensibly changes as a result of the protagonists’ testimony, yet labor oppression persists on the Reservations, “operating with a stranglehold on the working class” (*Lunar Braceros* 116).

Broad social movement is not fully possible until the characters regroup in the Chinganaza Commons. The Commons functions as a truly ‘communist’ dwelling: “the land belongs to those who work it; everything is shared and there are no bosses” (*Lunar Braceros* 119). All inhabitants share the land and contribute to the success of the collective, but as Lydia acknowledges, “life [there] isn’t just work” (*Lunar Braceros* 20). Furthermore, the inhabitants are free to use the money they earn from their labor to enhance their own lives: “Some of the money received for goods pays for the electricity we get from the nearest town and it has been used to acquire computers, like yours, and for the satellite receivers” (*Lunar Braceros* 20). The structure of the Commons benefits from the money its residents earn, but their use of money does not reinforce capitalistic domination as it does on the Reservations. In the same way family creation in the novel emphasizes heterogeneity, Chinganaza represents a blending of indigenous and ‘advanced’ lifestyles. The Commons certainly promotes anti-capitalist systems, but it does not do so at the expense of multi-faceted identities, nor does it ignore the value of advanced technology. The Commons gives the braceros an opportunity to form a new cultural identity, one informed both by the indigenous space they inhabit and by each character’s unique racial and cultural history. While

it privileges tradition and indigeneity, this new identity also acknowledges the ways modernity and technology can be used to advance their cause.

There are both possibilities and problems with blending indigenous and settler identities to create new hybrid ones. In *Comparative Indigeneities of the Américas*, Gutiérrez Nájera, Castellanos, and Aldama note that the colonial use of *mestizaje* (cultural mixing of European, indigenous, and African mores) historically “sought to erase indigeneity” (4). Anthropologist Shannon Speed, in “Structures of Settler Capitalism in Abya Yala” (2017), elaborates, “*Mestizaje* was a racial ideology consciously put forward by *criollo* elites seeking to consolidate national identity in newly ‘independent’ states characterized by the presence of large and diverse populations that did not identify with the national polity (e.g. ‘Mexican’ or ‘Central American’)” (787). In this context, *mestizaje* serves the colonizers’ goals by assimilating the native identities of the colonized, thereby eliminating and reworking those native identities. In Chapter 1, I discussed Anzaldúa’s use of “*mestiza* consciousness” as a strategy to resist marginalization and reclaim indigenous subjectivity. Anzaldúa’s complication of *mestizaje* in the 1980s represents Chicana⁵⁶ resistance to “reproducing dominant narratives of oppression that have often focused on a top-down perspective of *mestizaje*” (Gutiérrez Nájera et al. 7). More recently, Alicia Arrizón (2006) has contributed to the decolonization of *mestizaje* through a process of ‘queering’ the ideology; she writes, “*mestizaje* functions as an epistemology of colonialism and imperialism...and a ‘queering’ of *mestizaje* can provide an opportunity for critical reading and knowledge production that challenges normative systems and discursive practices” (3). Sánchez and Pita embrace a similar kind of queering in *Lunar Braceros* by emphasizing nonnormative family creation and rejecting imperialism within the Chinganaza Commons space.

⁵⁶ Gutiérrez Nájera et al. also cite Norma Alarcón and Cherríe Moraga as examples of Chicana scholars who have worked to redefine *mestiza* identity.

Compared with the Reservations and the Moon, Chinganaza is idyllic, but remaining isolated from the world is not possible. For Lydia and her compatriots, social change is always their goal, and when it becomes evident that achieving that goal is no longer feasible from Chinganaza, they must leave: “It became clear...that change had to come through struggles within the cholo Reservations” (*Lunar Braceros* 117). In a way, the safety of Chinganaza becomes as confining as the spaces the braceros had previously occupied. In deciding to leave Chinganaza, the braceros put themselves at risk to serve a higher purpose: “Chinganaza will serve as an inspiration for future changes in Cali-Texas. Our struggle will be the beginning of a different world” (*Lunar Braceros* 118). Though they could stay in Chinganaza indefinitely and protect themselves, Lydia and Frank leave the safety of the Commons to embark on their mission of liberating the Reservations.

The fight for social justice is a communal effort. Early in her narration, as Lydia writes to Pedro about leaving, she explains, “Jed, Jake and Sam will join us in Los Angeles and there the seven of us, together again like on the Moon, will go underground and join the other cells that are working to bring down the Reservation system” (*Lunar Braceros* 16). There are two important elements at work here. First, the movement for social justice requires relocation to a new physical space—the Los Angeles “underground.” Though the space of the Commons has nurtured revolutionary fervor, they must move beyond that space to affect change. Second, their social movement depends on the solidarity they established on the Moon. The ‘Moon family’ becomes the same group that will unite to overthrow the Reservations. Lydia further asserts, “This is not merely a personal thing, not an individual battle...It will be a collective struggle, a class struggle. What Pacomio tried to do oh so many centuries ago” (*Lunar Braceros* 118). Again, Lydia looks beyond individual concerns and connects the present to her own familial past.

Re/Producing Humanity and the Collective Body

Using nonnormative logics of time and space, Sánchez and Pita explore various methods for family creation in the novel. The characters' biological families as well as the new families they form highlight the authors' thematic interests. As I have discussed, the rejection of heteronormative expectations is a major aspect of the novel's families. In this section, I will also examine the nature of humanity and the oppression of individual bodies within the text. The NIO's dehumanization of individuals provides impetus for the collective action Lydia and the other braceros take to liberate the Reservations at the end of the story.

Though the Reservations are oppressive, on the Reservations Sánchez and Pita lay the foundation for the hybrid families that emerge later in the novel. They do so by challenging ethnic distinctions in the Reservation space. The Reservations comprise families from a variety of ethnic backgrounds, all of whom are brought together by class status and by virtue of being cast out by the government. Lydia's biological family is the main one we observe in the text, but by introducing *mestizo* identity in this section of the novel, Sánchez and Pita begin to transcend biology in favor of chosen family and coalition-building.

As noted in the last section, families are imprisoned as a unit on the Reservations, but the penal system allows for family and personal history and culture to subsist. Moreover, the same family ties that confine individuals to the Reservations also have the power to save them. Lydia explains, "Families could leave the reservations if one of the members was offered employment and housing off the Reservation" (*Lunar Braceros* 15). Therefore, people are brought to the Reservations as part of family units, but they theoretically can be liberated if family members can pay for their release.

Family units on the Reservations seem to be primarily biological, as opposed to the non-blood kinship bonds that form in the novel's other spaces, but the characters of *Lunar Braceros* are "all mestizos of one kind or another, all mixed," making their individual ethnic distinctions less essential to the creation of family units (*Lunar Braceros* 62). When Pedro asks about the meaning of the word *cholo*, Lydia tells him that it was originally a term used to designate a specific part of the indigenous population, but under the Reservation system, that ethnic distinction is lost (*Lunar Braceros* 62). She explains, "those who were unemployed and sent to the reservations, of whatever ethnic designation, became known as 'cholos'" (*Lunar Braceros* 63). Thus, 'cholo' comes to describe a class of people rather than an ethnic group. Any member of a Reservation may be a cholo, regardless of biological or familial history. This definition indicates the fluidity of interpersonal connections within the novel. Sánchez and Pita do not explicitly show the creation of nonnormative families inside the Reservations, but the breakdown of historical ethnic distinctions paves the way for the family creation that happens on the Moon and in the Chinganaza Commons. The ability to define oneself holds enormous power. When Pedro asks if 'cholo' is a derogatory term, Lydia responds, "If as indians or cholos we have been oppressed, it will be as indians or cholos that we will rise up" (*Lunar Braceros* 63). In reappropriating the term, Lydia reclaims its power. Like the reappropriation of racist and sexist slurs, Lydia's ability to redefine the meaning of 'cholo' reinvents her own relationship to language and linguistic space.

On the Moon, the oppression of individual laborer bodies supplants the collective oppression of families. The inciting event of the characters' Moon escape is the discovery their predecessors, including Frank's brother Peter, had been secretly murdered by their employers. With this revelation, the lunar space that had once seemed a preferred alternative to the Reservations becomes even more confining. To Frank, this discovery represents the loss of his

brother as well as his connection to the larger community of the Cali-Texas nation: “It was more than the loss of a brother, it was a loss of faith in the state” (*Lunar Braceros* 60). These murders constitute a series of violations: of bodily space, of hope, and of faith.

Outer space robs the braceros of their abilities both to live and to reproduce, violating the inner space of their own bodies. There, the characters lose their ability to create new lives to replace the ones that have been taken: “the nuclear particles that rained down on [them] on a daily basis on the Moon had made both [she and Frank] sterile,” inhibiting their ability to start a new family once they have escaped the Moon (*Lunar Braceros* 118). This is closely linked to the U.S. government’s historic sterilization of women—often poor, non-white, non-English speaking, or intellectually disabled—in the United States and Puerto Rico. As Alexandra Minna Stern explores in *Eugenic Nation* (2005), this involuntary sterilization was often in the service of genetic manipulation and eugenics programs. Furthermore, in *Medical Apartheid* (2006), medical ethicist Harriet A. Washington examines the history of medical abuse of black Americans, beginning in the colonial period and continuing to the present day.⁵⁷

Sánchez and Pita foreshadow the sterilization earlier in the novel when Lydia explains that she and Gabriel had saved fertilized eggs in case either of them died. Lydia and Gabriel know the spaces they may inhabit will likely deny them the ability to create a family in the traditional way, so they take precautions to create a new space for family in the future. Lydia explains, “We began to think we might end up disappeared”⁵⁸ (*Lunar Braceros* 76). This choice not only demonstrates

⁵⁷ On September 14, 2020, a nurse at an ICE detention facility in Georgia filed a whistleblower complaint alleging “an alarmingly high rate of hysterectomies...being performed on Spanish-speaking immigrants, many of whom did not appear to understand why they had undergone the procedure” (Paul par. 5). That these abuses continue to occur is further proof Sánchez and Pita’s speculation for the future is both possible and plausible.

⁵⁸ Enforced disappearance is defined in *Customary International Humanitarian Law* as “the arrest, detention or abduction of persons by, or with the authorization, support or acquiescence of, a State or a political organization, followed by a refusal to acknowledge that deprivation of freedom or to give information on the fate or whereabouts of those persons, with the intention of removing them from the protection of the law for a prolonged period of time”

Lydia and Gabriel's foresight but also emphasizes their desire to start a family, even if they cannot be together physically in the future: "Anyhow, if one of us died and the other lived, there was still the possibility of our having a child together" (*Lunar Braceros* 76). Lydia and Gabriel's decision to freeze their tissues shows the link between oppressive space and family creation in the novel.

Another way capitalism removes hope on the Moon is by taking away the laborers' humanity. The NIO employs the lunar braceros on the Moon because they are more useful and less expensive than machines: "What were needed were hands-on workers who could adapt to changing lunar situations and were capable of solving unforeseen problems. That's where we came in. We could trouble-shoot, and we were cheaper" (*Lunar Braceros* 6). Their humanity confers desirable qualities—creativity and adaptability—yet their human lives are consistently devalued by their employers. Ironically, though the lunar braceros can be exploited because of their human adaptability, this same quality leads to their escape from the Moon. While the government's motivation for employing humans over machines is purely utilitarian, this decision perpetuates and reinforces the importance of humanity within the novel. The characters retain certain human qualities, including their adaptability and problem-solving skills, despite the forces that would dehumanize them.

Even with the loss of life and life-giving ability on the Moon, the trauma of discovering their predecessors had been murdered bonds the braceros in common purpose. As Sam explains, knowing they might die, "it became extremely important to live and that's when [they] developed solidarity and became like a family" (*Lunar Braceros* 70). One or two of the braceros alone could not have succeeded, but all seven together escape and go on to start a new life in Chinganaza. The

(qtd. in Henckaerts et al. 2302-2303). Such an act "constitutes a crime against humanity" (Henckaerts et al. 2302). Irizarry links this practice to human rights narratives, including *testimonio*, and argues these narratives offer ways to give voice to those who have been silenced by abduction and murder ("Ethics of Writing").

need to survive is not only an individual struggle but is dependent on the family unit. Sam further describes himself to Pedro as “tu tío, tu negro Sam,” which means “your uncle, your black Sam” (*Lunar Braceros* 70).⁵⁹ Although Sam and Pedro do not share blood ties or even the same racial background, Sam is Pedro’s uncle. The family creation that takes place on the Moon overrides the traditional biological ties of family, much like the class designation ‘cholo’ creates families in the Reservations that transcend ethnic backgrounds. Through coalition building and Pedro’s unconventional conception and upbringing, Sánchez and Pita challenge the idea that biology is necessary to either family or cultural belonging.

This coalition comes to fruition in the Chinganaza Commons, a place whose name reinforces the theme of linguistic and/or cultural heterogeneity. “Chinganaza” can be found on a map as a real place in present-day Peru, but the name has significance as an allusion to a pejorative nickname for La Malintzin: La Chingada.⁶⁰ Known historically as a slave, interpreter, guide, and mistress of Hernán Cortés, La Malintzin’s legacy is complicated. Latinx literary scholar Sandra Messinger Cypess writes, “[La Malintzin] may be considered the first woman of Mexican literature, just as she is considered the first mother of the Mexican nation and the Mexican Eve, symbol of national betrayal” (2). In the cultural imagination, La Malintzin is both mother and whore, primogenitor and traitor.⁶¹ To combat negative images of La Malintzin, many feminist Chicana writers have reclaimed her since the 1980s, identifying La Malintzin as a mother figure

⁵⁹ As defined in the *Diccionario de la Lengua Española*, *negro* is also a term of endearment in some Spanish-speaking communities, similar to “sweetheart” (see <https://dle.rae.es/>).

⁶⁰ La Malintzin is often popularly referred to as “La Malinche,” a name that appears in several of the critical sources I cite here.

⁶¹ See Octavio Paz’s “The Sons of La Malinche” from his 1961 book *The Labyrinth of Solitude*. In this essay, Paz asserts that Mexican people are a product of the conquest and violation La Malintzin suffered at the hands of Cortés. In Paz’s analysis, the conquest itself and the passivity with which La Malintzin endured it are a source of disdain for the “violated Mother” (Paz 86). He writes, “When we shout ‘¡Viva Mexico, hijos de la chingada!’ we express our desire to live closed off from the outside world and, above all, from the past. In this shout we condemn our origins and deny our hybridism” (Paz 87).

who symbolizes the hybrid identity of Mexican Americans: “[Chicanas] began to react to the negative presentations of La Malinche as a direct defamation of themselves as women who bridge two cultures in their role as hyphenated peoples” (Cypess 142). Echoing this sentiment and using the pejorative name, Anzaldúa writes, “*Sí, soy hija de la Chingada*. I’ve always been her daughter” (39).⁶² Much like the reclamation of ‘cholo’ on the Reservations, therefore, the naming of the Chinganaza Commons suggests a reclamation of La Chingada as a nurturer and protector.

The braceros find safety, community, and the opportunity to form their own hybrid family in this space, named for the mother of a hybrid nation. The Chinganaza Commons offers the characters a liberating space in which they can complete the family development that began in the places they were previously confined. As noted at the start of this chapter, the Commons is an “alternative space,” one that “represents a rejection of everything that is hegemonic and dominated by capital relations” (*Lunar Braceros* 25). Family relations in *Lunar Braceros* are neither hegemonic nor capitalistic. Chinganaza offers a refuge from the government agents who would kill the braceros, and it provides them an opportunity to work and live in a place that is not defined by profit and capital production. Everything they produce contributes to their survival and growth, rather than to supporting capitalist hegemony. In the space of the Commons, everyone works together toward a common goal, and while there is an Elder, power seems to be shared among the residents. This community relies on values of equality, tolerance, and acceptance, which are lacking in the outside world; Lydia reflects, “I think overall we’re the ones who have benefited the most and been affected the most by our Quechua friends, their notion of equality and tolerance for difference. And, most of all, in this day and age, their willingness to take us in and become part of their community is really incredible” (*Lunar Braceros* 21). Not only do the seven lunar braceros

⁶² Asserting herself as “*hija de la Chingada*” while claiming her hybridity, Anzaldúa seems to directly reference and contradict Paz.

have an opportunity to live as a family in Chinganaza, but they also become part of the larger community of displaced and indigenous inhabitants.

Pedro's birth in the Chinganaza Commons embodies this hybrid family identity. For reasons unexplained in the text, Leticia retains her ability to carry a child to term, despite the other braceros' sterility. Using Lydia's and Gabriel's frozen embryos, Leticia becomes surrogate mother to Pedro. Thus, family creation in the Commons has both the emotional bond of common purpose and the biological bond of procreation, bringing together the types of family seen on the Moon and the Reservations, respectively. Though Leticia does not share genetic material with Pedro, her body nurtures his during gestation, making him "as much [Lydia's] son as Frank's, Leticia's, Maggie's, Tom's and Betty's" (*Lunar Braceros* 119). Coming from different class and race backgrounds, the braceros represent a variety of experiences that converge in Pedro's birth and development.

Conclusion

Ultimately, the collectivity of Lydia's struggle hinges on the transmission of her story to the next generation. Though Lydia has disappeared by the time Pedro compiles her nanotexts, she remains present in his life through her narrative. This emphasis on the value of storytelling can be applied to the creation of the novel itself. By telling the fictionalized history of Lydia and her family, Sánchez and Pita also engage in narrative border-crossing and the engineering of new realities. Rosaura Sánchez cites the desire to reclaim and disseminate Chicana working class histories as one of the primary motivations behind her collaborations with Pita, including their work on Ruiz de Burton (Sánchez, "La Pensadora Chicana" 185). Discussing Chicana speculative fiction more broadly, Millán suggests, "perhaps readers and viewers who identify with [Chicana

speculative fiction] might even be inspired to create their own speculative fictions and engineer alternative realities that also pose a threat to structures of power” (Millán 183). *Lunar Braceros*’s structure makes the suggestion apt. The act of storytelling allows the teller to move beyond oppressive spaces that would silence her; the act of reading inspires to reader to join that movement.

To some extent, the authors’ construction of new identities for their characters can also be read autobiographically. In a 2014 interview, Sánchez discusses her experience as a Chicana among Mexicans. Describing her attendance at an academic conference in Mexico, she says: “I saw other types of differences, differences of class and not of language, in exchanges between Chicanos/as and Mexicans... The professors from the Colegio de Mexico who attended the conference showed a condescending attitude toward the Chicanas, acting as though we were academically deficient and unsophisticated and that they needed to teach us how to do things correctly” (“La Pensadora Chicana” 187). The issues of race and class Sánchez addresses here play out in the novel as the characters learn that shared race does not necessarily result in solidarity. After Lydia’s arrest, the Latinx-controlled government does not come to her aid, and “what had already become all too clear was that skin color, race, ethnicity, and language were irrelevant to the President and his power brokers...Ultimately capital can undo any ties or links on the basis of race, ethnicity, language or color” (*Lunar Braceros* 31). This lack of racial solidarity across the border may be read as critical of Latinx people; in many ways, this allows for other forms of identity creation in the novel.⁶³ As the characters navigate competing spaces, differences and conflicts surrounding race become less central, while new kinds of social, class-based, and

⁶³ Sánchez and Pita are not the only Latinx authors to express this sentiment; as Irizarry has written about Ernest Quiñonez’s *Bodega Dreams*, “what the novel *Bodega Dreams* illustrates powerfully: shared ethnicity does not guarantee ethnic solidarity or respect” (*Chicana/o and Latina/o Fiction* 138).

emotional connections take precedence. Lydia's statement in the text is also an indictment against capitalism, which she sees as more powerful than the aspects of identity that often unite people.

Space is an essential defining feature throughout *Lunar Braceros*. Through the use of both fictional and real history, Sánchez and Pita place their narrative within a broader social context and offer a speculative view of the future. As with much speculative fiction, this view is not particularly positive. In the world of *Lunar Braceros*, personal, cultural, and political spaces are continually violated for the benefit of hegemonic, capitalistic powers. In response to these violations of space, the protagonists decide to engage in social movement. Thus, Sánchez and Pita further emphasize the importance of the characters' desire to transgress space through social and political consciousness by linking their narrative to historical uprisings.

The negotiation of a variety of spaces allows the characters to transcend the oppressive distinctions that are placed upon them and begin to define their own individual and communal identities. Spaces of confinement, such as the Reservations and the Moon, spur them to action, forcing them to bond and to form new communities out of trauma. Spaces of freedom, such as the Chinganaza Commons, allow those new communities to grow and thrive. In the Commons, racial and class distinctions become immaterial, while love and shared purpose serve as the foundations of new family structures. Reading the oppressive spaces of the novel as merely dehumanizing ignores the way the Reservations and the Moon, in particular, force the characters to redefine themselves. Refusing to be victims, the lunar braceros rise above the mechanisms of oppression to create places where they can thrive as a family. Once a solid familial bond has been achieved, Lydia and her chosen family are able to turn their attention to larger social concerns in their world.

These larger social concerns include issues of race, class, and representation. Just as the authors seek the freedom to define themselves, Lydia and the braceros attempt to use space to destroy oppressive structures and replace them with new ones. While the end of the novel is ambiguous, leaving both the reader and Pedro in suspense as to Lydia's fate, Lydia's successful negotiation of oppressive spaces throughout the story ultimately suggests victory in her fight for freedom. As she has moved from the Reservations to the Moon to the Commons and back to the Reservations, she has learned the value of self-identification and solidarity. Thus, the novel ends, but the family lives on and the struggle to redefine space continues.

CONCLUSION

I note the obvious differences
in the human family.

Some of us are serious,
some thrive on comedy.

...

I note the obvious differences
between each sort and type,
but we are more alike, my friends,
than we are unlike.

Maya Angelou, "Human Family"

In her acceptance speech for the 2020 Democratic Party Vice Presidential nomination, Kamala Harris discussed family. She said of her mother, "She taught us to put family first—the family you're born into and the family you choose" (Harris). Harris was born into a multiracial, immigrant family, the daughter of a Jamaican father and Indian mother. Her nomination for Vice President is historic; she is the first Black American and first Asian American person to be the running mate for a major party. Harris has recounted growing up attending marches and rallies for social justice, and like many of the characters in the novels I have examined, she has experienced the struggles of racial and economic hardship. Harris mentioned several people she

considers family, both biological and chosen, and then she turned from her personal family to a larger community: “And even as she [her mother] taught us to keep our family at the center of our world, she also pushed us to see a world beyond ourselves...To believe public service is a noble cause and the fight for justice is a shared responsibility” (Harris). The importance of public service and shared responsibility were themes throughout the speech; she also evoked Dr. Martin Luther King, describing “a vision of our nation as a Beloved Community” (Harris). Community also emerges as a theme in Maya Angelou’s “Human Family,” the first and last stanzas of which serve as the epigraph for this final chapter. In comparing the three novels in this dissertation, I have endeavored to demonstrate the similarities between their portrayals of family and to emphasize the common themes of unity in the fight for justice.

Several pundits have noted the historic nature of Senator Harris’s nomination as Vice President, citing her gender and ethnicity as proof of “how far we’ve come” in terms of the country’s ongoing battle with racism.⁶⁴ Such a view of Senator Harris’s nomination belies, however, the continued injustices perpetrated against non-white and immigrant populations in the United States today, injustices of which Harris is not ignorant. When speaking about the Covid-19 pandemic, Harris noted, “Black, Latino and Indigenous people are suffering and dying disproportionately. This is not a coincidence. It is the effect of structural racism” (Harris). Furthermore, Senator Harris’s speech followed months of unrest in the United States as Black Lives Matter activists gathered in protest of state violence against communities of color.

The ongoing protests highlight a variety of structural and institutional inequities that disproportionately harm these communities. Black and brown people remain statistically much more likely than white people to be killed by police, with the statistical odds of a black man being

⁶⁴ See Jimmy Failla, “Kamala Harris’ Nomination Proves that America has Racism on the Run” (20 August 2020).

killed by police estimated at 1 in 1000.⁶⁵ Native Americans are still being dispossessed of their lands and seeing their sovereign rights ignored or revoked.⁶⁶ Border control and cruel deportation policies continue to separate undocumented immigrant families.⁶⁷ These experiences inevitably affect not only individual victims but also families and larger communities.

Each of the novels in this dissertation illustrates the broad impacts of racial, sexual, and economic trauma and demonstrates the need for collective action in healing this trauma. Terrible things happen to the characters in these texts, often because of structural inequalities; yet, each of the novels ends hopefully. *Kindred*'s epilogue may be inconclusive and unsatisfying because Dana and Kevin cannot find proof to corroborate their experiences. They do, however, find hope that the madness of what they have endured will not follow them. Kevin has the final word, asserting, "We are [sane]...And now that the boy is dead, we have some chance of staying that way" (Butler 264). Their physical trauma is inescapable—Dana has lost her arm, and Kevin is scarred—but this final line suggests their mental trauma may be healed. Hope at the end of *Tropic of Orange* lies with family. As I discussed in Chapter 2, in the final line of the text, Bobby releases the lines of the *Tropic of Cancer* and hugs Rafaela and Sol: "Embrace. That's it" (Yamashita 268). The family's reunion after a novel-long separation suggests they can and will mend the rifts between them. *Lunar Braceros* also ends with hope for the future. At the novel's close, Pedro has not seen his parents in eight years, yet he still believes he will reunite with them and join their resistance: "What I really hope is to find my Mom and Dad and join them in their struggle. After all, I'm not

⁶⁵ See Edwards et al., "Risk of Being Killed by Police Use of Force in the United States by Age, Race–Ethnicity, and Sex" (2019).

⁶⁶ As reported by Vox on April 2, 2020, the Trump administration has taken the 321 acres of Mashpee Wampanoag land in Massachusetts out of federal trust, which also "removes the tribe's ability to govern on its land" (R. Taylor par. 1).

⁶⁷ See the Southern Poverty Law Center's June 2020 report, "Family Separation Under the Trump Administration – A Timeline."

a kid anymore. I'm eighteen now and can help out. Hasta pronto, Tío" (*Lunar Braceros* 120). The last line compounds this hope as he assures his uncle he will "see [him] soon."

In each novel, family dynamics continually change as gender roles shift and individual self-identities are redefined. Examined together, these three novels provide valuable ways of conceptualizing family, race, gender, and national identities across three distinct US multiethnic contexts. By looking at three generations of fiction by women of color, we also see how these forms of identification have evolved using experimental genres that emphasize the power of time and space. All four authors use family to argue for broader social reforms, but the types of families and family constructions their novels portray reflect the cultural perceptions of families at the times the novels were published.

Though it is progressive in many ways, *Kindred* still depicts a largely 'traditional,' patriarchal American family prior to the Civil War. This dynamic makes sense on the Weylins' plantation, but even within Dana and Kevin's nuclear family, Kevin assumes Dana will type for him and perform other 'feminine' labor within the household. Certainly, Butler pushes back against these patriarchal ideas, giving Dana agency and a strong will. Butler makes clear, however, that Dana is considered progressive among her family for not choosing a 'practical' career, and the fact she and Kevin must continually justify their interracial relationship reflects the 1970s' contemporary views on interracial marriage. *Kindred* deals primarily with the trauma of biological family history and demonstrates Dana's struggle over whether to be loyal to blood or to emotional bonds. The text explores the idea of non-biological family creation, but the story's dependence on heterosexual reproduction reinforces heteronormative values that *Lunar Braceros* largely discards.

Published almost 20 years later, *Tropic of Orange* reflects the growing emphasis on globalism and transnationalism in the United States. Like *Kindred*, *Tropic of Orange* depicts

exclusively heterosexual romantic relationships, and through the character of Sol, the text seems to emphasize the importance of biological reproduction to construct an interracial, multiethnic future. That said, whereas all the characters in *Kindred* are black or white, *Tropic of Orange* paints with a much more racially diverse palette, perhaps a result of the multicultural turn in American discourse in the 1980s and 1990s. Of course, Yamashita is unabashedly critical of that turn, but her use of interracial partnership and family creation implies a social move away from the need to justify interracial marriage. The trauma of biological family history is present in the novel, especially through Emi and Manzanar, but through Bobby and Rafaela, Yamashita broadens her focus beyond insular family trauma. Their identities as laborers, immigrants, and social actors connect them to a variety of larger communities.

The most futuristic of the three novels, *Lunar Braceros 2125-2148* portrays an exploded, communal, and technologically engineered family in a speculative future. Like *Tropic of Orange*, *Lunar Braceros* uses the multiethnic child to suggest hope for a multicultural future. The novel, thus, still privileges biological reproduction as an element of family creation and perpetuation. As my discussion of Pedro's conception and gestation argues, however, *Lunar Braceros* challenges assumptions about blood and family creation and suggests biological constraints and expectations will be less binding in the future. The novel also depicts a lesbian relationship, disrupting the heteronormative families that formed the basis of both *Kindred* and *Tropic of Orange*. Both earlier novels highlight care bonds and opportunities to create non-biological families, but in *Lunar Braceros*, the focus is much more about 'chosen family' as a vehicle for social change.

In the eleven years since *Lunar Braceros*'s publication, American families have continued to evolve, and social perceptions of 'acceptable' family structures have continued to change. The 2015 U.S. Supreme Court decision on marriage equality gave same-sex couples the legal right to

wed, and a 2020 Gallup poll found that 67% of Americans are in favor of same-sex marriage. Gallup saw only 27% approval in 1996, when it first conducted the poll, and 40% in 2009 (McCarthy). In 2015, Zinn et al. identified other changes to American families over time, including changing trends in marriage, noting that people are getting married later, getting divorced more frequently, or not marrying at all. They dismiss these trends as proof marriage is a “dying institution,” however, arguing, “the pessimists are concerned about marriage because it no longer fits the idealized 1950s version” (284). They note marriages have changed because social conditions have changed, but the “rewards of marriage—especially love, respect, friendship, and communication” maintain their contemporary value (Zinn et al. 285).

Ultimately, family structures change, yet families remain the first communities most of us belong to. Before we go to school, form peer groups, or participate in government, our identities are shaped as part of a family. Understanding this most fundamental collective identity, then, is essential to better understand individual race, gender, and national identity in the past, present, and future. Merely understanding is not enough. Kamala Harris ended her acceptance speech with a return to family and a call to action: “Years from now, this moment will have passed. And our children and our grandchildren will look in our eyes and ask us: Where were you when the stakes were so high? They will ask us, what was it like? And we will tell them. We will tell them, not just how we felt. We will tell them what we did” (Harris). Likewise, Butler, Yamashita, Sánchez, and Pita focus not just on the identities of their characters—the way they feel—but also on what they do in their struggles of justice and equality. In so doing, they project these struggles outward and encourage readers to join their fights.

Family is pervasive in American literature, and there are many novels that could have fit into this dissertation. One novel I chose not to include is Cristina García’s *Monkey Hunting*.

Monkey Hunting explores questions of family, migration, identity, and belonging. As a family saga, the text also emphasizes the long-term impact of family history on individuals, as opposed to the other novels, which primarily follow a few characters from ‘start’ to ‘finish,’ rather than a single family across time. *Monkey Hunting* is, however, less ‘experimental’ than the other works in this study; the novel’s genre is not science or speculative fiction, like *Kindred* or *Lunar Braceros*, and it does not distort time and space, like *Tropic of Orange*. García does use a non-linear structure, which can be read as a distortion of time, and in a longer study, I would like to compare this novel with the others.

Additionally, Sánchez and Pita published a sequel to *Lunar Braceros*, entitled *Keep Me Posted: Logins from Tomorrow*, in July 2020. Though it was too late for inclusion here, the new novel presents an opportunity for further analysis of Sánchez and Pita’s use of family as a catalyst for social justice activism. *Keep Me Posted* is told from the perspective of Lydia and Frank’s great-grandchildren and reinforces the power of family and the past to influence individual activism in the present. Early in the novel, one of the protagonists reads a letter from Lydia that hopes they will “inherit the DNA of dissent,” emphasizing the idea of resistance as inheritance, which I discussed in Chapter 3 (*Keep Me Posted* 13). Because it offers a multi-generational view of the events of *Lunar Braceros*, *Keep Me Posted* would also pair well with *Monkey Hunting* in a future study.

A longer study would also allow me to draw from earlier texts and a wider variety of perspectives. Though I addressed elements of indigenous identity in Chapter 3, a specifically Native American text, such as Louise Erdrich’s *Love Medicine* (1984) or *Tracks* (1988), would expand that analysis. Additional immigration narratives, such as Jhumpa Lahiri’s *The Namesake* (2003), would extend my analysis in Chapter 2. The racial, economic, and cultural makeup of the

United States is constantly evolving, and literature provides insight into that evolution. Literature also reminds us differences matter, but “we are more alike, my friends, than we are unlike” (Angelou).

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