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Gendering Land and Buen Vivir:
Transnational Mayan Performance, Theater and Documentary Film

A Dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction
of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

Spanish

by

Emily Grace Pryor

June 2018

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The Dissertation of Emily Grace Pryor is approved:

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Gendering Land and Buen Vivir: Transnational Mayan Performance, Theater and
Documentary Film

by

Emily Grace Pryor

Doctor of Philosophy, Graduate Program in Spanish
University of California, Riverside, June 2018
Dr. Freya Schiwy, Chairperson

Gendering Land and Buen Vivir: Transnational Mayan Performance, Theater and Documentary Film addresses how the gendering of land in Latin America has fueled on-going practices of neocolonialism that reduce and devalue cultural and biodiversity. The multi-media archive analyzed in this dissertation enacts alternatives to, and expansions of, traditional gender expression thus disrupting aspects of hegemonic power. Furthermore, it explores how constructs of the gender binary have filtered into, and thus limited, supposed decolonial practices such as Buen Vivir.

The notion of Buen Vivir, which emerged from the Andean-Amazonian region, has since gained traction among native and indigenous communities in Mexico and Central America as an alternative to 20th century development proposals. Buen Vivir is the subject of academic debate given its varied interpretations across written theories,

quotidian practices, and state policy. This dissertation suggests that collaborative cultural productions in the transnational Mayan context make community-based visions of Buen Vivir apprehensible, offering understandings that are often anchored in the land but also derived from the experiences of diasporic urban Mayan artists and activists.

Further pushing at the limits imposed by colonial rationale, this study engages with queer theory through the lens of Native studies and a queer of color critique. Focusing on both gender and race creates a more thorough interrogation of the internal workings of colonialism and sheds light on the current power structures of neoliberal capitalism. Lastly, by intersecting disciplines and drawing ties between works found across the Americas, this analysis contributes to expanding notions of decoloniality through contesting gendered renderings of colonial constructs.

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Introduction

Mazorca, a 2014 multi-part performance/installation by Guatemalan Regina José Galindo, positions us in front of a projected video of a cornfield.¹ The leaves on the stalks are a mix of green, yellow and light brown. Dried tassels sprout out the top of each stalk. They rustle in the breeze. In the distance, rolling green mountains cocoon the landscape. Corn. Maíz. We are in the presence of Mayans' sacred sustenance. Moments go by while we gaze upon the field. Swift metallic-tinged blows ring off-screen. The hat-covered head of a man enters the right bottom frame of the lens. He reaches for a stalk, swings his machete. Tosses the stalk to the side. A second man, in a red striped shirt enters the left bottom frame of the lens. He too, works among the rows of corn, slashing and tossing the stalks aside. They proceed methodically, cutting row after row. We watch in real-time as they move away from the camera, clearing a path as they go. They cross the parcel of land as if they were crossing time.

This is one of two videos that form the diptych art installation.² A single take of an establishing shot, the video runs for just under 30 minutes. As the men distance themselves from the camera, they eventually meet up with two other men that have been cutting corn stalks from the other side, hidden from our view. As the four men fell the

¹ I am grateful to Regina Galindo for granting me access to two videos of her performance, *Mazorca*.

² Another part of the complete art installation of *Mazorca* is the display of the rich variety of corn species original to Guatemala. The different varieties relate to the specific geographies in which they grow, and within each region of Guatemala, the varieties and color determine the corns' culinary and spiritual use. See the study conducted by E.J. Wellhausen et al., *Races of Maize in Central America*.

last rows, a naked body, planted among the rows is revealed. Galindo stands tall like the corn. Her body camouflaged in the leaves, her feet firmly planted in the soil beneath the tall grasses and yellow flowers that also call this field home. As the men finish their work, they exit to the sides. Galindo stays. One cut zooms in for a long shot. Her body slightly sways in the breeze, just like the corn stalks had.

Mazorca elicits a connection between the scorched earth campaign of the civil war, part of the genocidal efforts implemented in the early 1980's against Guatemala's indigenous peoples, and the 2014 government-backed policy of "La ley de protección de obtenciones vegetales" (henceforth called La ley). The campaign of the 80's included massacres, torture and rape of both indigenous people and their crops. Entire communities were eradicated, over two hundred thousand indigenous Guatemalans killed and another forty thousand disappeared by the state (Gordon and Webber 90). La ley that the government provisionally passed in June 2014, would have ushered in the privatization of seeds, beholdng farmers to large corporations such as Monsanto, Bayer and Dupont.³ This exercise of soft-power redesigns the actual burning of crops during the civil war into out-pricing farmers from accessing seeds, rendering subsistence farming even more difficult than it already is and potentially forcing rural families off their land.

Galindo's bare body rooted to the earth renders legible two critiques. For one, it plays into the body-land connection of colonial logics that equate indigenous peoples and

³ The law was originally approved by Pérez Molino's government in June of 2014, and then revoked a short three months later due to mass protests and highway blockades. The opposition included 82 indigenous communities, mayors, farmers and local inhabitants. See Belén Marty's *Panam Post* article, "Congreso de Guatemala derogó la polémica Ley Monsanto."

land to the feminine.⁴ Folding in and contesting the gendered colonial imaginary in *Mazorca*, Galindo acknowledges the violent consequences played out over centuries of the “on-going force of the colonial encounter” (Gómez-Barris 2). We can see here how Galindo draws connections between gender and race within the logics of colonialism. Her critique urges us to expand our thinking to include gender as a founding, and lasting, pillar of colonial power.

The second critique of *Mazorca* doubles the feminizing gaze of the colonizer and projects the enduring figure of indigenous peoples. In constantly navigating the changing rationalities of colonialism, many indigenous communities world-wide currently stand firm defending their territorial and cultural rights. “It is often in the heart of resource-rich territories that Indigenous peoples exist in complex tension with extractive capitalism and land defense. In these geographies, Indigenous peoples often multiply rather than reduce life possibilities, protecting land and each other at often extremely high personal and communal cost” (Gómez-Barris xix). I contend that *Mazorca* recognizes how colonial logics of gendering have required resourceful and creative resistance from indigenous peoples who remain committed to epistemes that conflict with capitalist practices that operate in favor of temporal material accumulation for the few over the well-being of the many.

⁴ The second video of *Mazorca* is much shorter, with a duration of 8:29, and offers multiple perspectives and angles of the four workers and Galindo’s naked body. The camera positions Galindo within long shots that utilize low-angles. These angles work to privilege what she embodies: Guatemalan indigenous survival, for one, and secondly, the strength and loyalty to protect the community and the land.

Gendering Land and Buen Vivir: Transnational Mayan Performance, Theater and Documentary Film, places in the forefront and builds upon the problematics raised in *Mazorca*: how the *gendering* of *land* has fueled the on-going practices of neocolonialism that work to reduce and devalue cultural and biodiversity in Latin America, and how the constructs of the gender binary have filtered into, and thus limited, supposed decolonial practices such as *Buen Vivir*. Through a close reading of the multi-media texts highlighted in the following chapters, I discuss how the works themselves seek to propose alternatives and expansions to the gender binary as it relates to land and theorizations attempting to delink from colonial matrices.

BUEN VIVIR IN LATIN AMERICA

The notion of Buen Vivir, which first emerged from the Andean-Amazonian region, has since gained traction among native and indigenous communities in Mexico and Central America as an alternative to 20th century development proposals that centered on promoting national sovereignty and integrating peripheral countries into the world economy by opening the markets through free trade agreements and attracting foreign investment.⁵ The Spanish term Buen Vivir (henceforth BV), is a translation of similar terms referencing living well in a range of indigenous language: *sumak kawsay* (Kichwa), *allin kawsay* (Quechua), *suma qamaña* (Aymara), *ñandareko* (Guarani), *kyme mogen* (Mapudungun), *lekil kuxlejal* (Tsotsil and Tseltal-Maya), *shin pujut* (Awajún), *utz*

⁵ María Josefina Saldaña-Portillo writes, “Development replaced the ‘civilizing mission’ of the age of colonialism with the imperatives of self-determination, Independence, free trade, industrialization, and economic growth in the postcolonial era” (20).

kaslemal (Quiché), and *balu wala* (Kuna). BV takes from the old – beliefs considered to be ancestral, such as living symbiotically with the natural environment so both humans and non-humans can thrive - and applies them strategically to protect territorial and socio-cultural rights in the face of foreign and state imposed notions of development and progress. Broadly speaking, BV offers “una oportunidad para construir otra sociedad sustentada en la convivencia del ser humano en diversidad y armonía con la naturaleza, a partir del reconocimiento de los diversos valores culturales existentes en cada país y en el mundo” (Gudynas and Acosta, “El buen vivir” 103). However, given its geographic reach, and diverse implementation, theorists are careful to warn of its multiplicity while also allowing for its continual evolution (Gudynas and Acosta, “El buen vivir” 104; Macas 14).⁶ In fact, Hidalgo-Capitán and Cubillo-Guevara offer what they consider to be the three main categorizations of BV: “una indigenista y *pachamamista* (que prioriza como un objetivo la identidad), otra socialista y estatista (que prioriza la equidad), y una tercera, ecologista y posdesarrollista (que prioriza la sostenibilidad)” [Emphasis in the original] (“Deconstrucción”). It is not all together surprising then that the implementation and interpretation of BV has generated academic debate on the supposed contradictions of its written theories, its quotidian practices, and its use in state policy.

⁶ The translation of *Kawsay* from the Kichwa version of BV, *Sumak Kawsay*, as Luis Macas defines it is, ““vida en realización permanente, dinámica y cambiante; es la interacción de la totalidad de existencia en movimiento”” (qtd. in Vega Ugalde 74).

Whereas most of BV theorists are from or write on the Andean region, there is an emerging number exploring the concept in Mexico and Central America.⁷ Initially, the focus on BV in South America was in large part due to its integration into the 2008 and 2009 political constitutions of Ecuador and Bolivia, respectively.⁸ It was touted as revolutionary given that BV was a theory originating in the communities of the countries' historically marginalized indigenous peoples and because these constitutions conceptualized Mother Nature as a living being with rights and in need of protection. On a global economic scale, BV's positioning within the political network attracted fantasies of effecting profound changes within the era of neoliberalism (Villalba 1428). Supporters of BV were hopeful that it could usher in not just strategies of alternative development but rather true alternatives to development (Gudynas and Acosta, "a renovación" 72; Villalba 1428). Yet, this public rendering of BV through its appropriation for state use has been a principle point of contention given that aspects of its doctrines have been interpreted in a myriad of ways, some of which seem to contradict ideas of BV that seek protection for the earth. Alberto Acosta argues that in Ecuador and Bolivia BV is reduced to a term employed by the state for appearance purposes and thus renders hollow its stance on protecting the rights of Mother Earth and incorporating indigenous epistemes

⁷ Hardly an exhaustive list, see Alberto Acosta, Eduardo Gudynas, Arturo Escobar, Silvia Vega Ugalde, Roger Merino, Regina Cochrane, François Houtart, Francesca Belotti, Boris Marañón Pimentel, Gustavo Esteva, Luciano Conchiero Bórquez and Violeta Núñez, Antonio Luis Hidalgo-Capitán and Ana Patricia Cubillo-Guevara, Miguel Sánchez Álvarez, as well as Subcomandante Marcos (or as of 2014, Galeano) and other writings from the Zapatista community.

⁸ In Chapter II, I discuss in further detail Peru's involvement in extraction and its repercussions on the environment and society.

(“El buen vivir como alternativa al desarrollo. Algunas reflexiones” 321). Yet, Bolivia’s vice-president, Álvaro García Linera posits that BV can be interpreted to follow socialist logics that seek to redistribute locally the wealth gained by natural resource extraction raising living-standards and growing the middle class. He writes,

Like any emancipation, to escape extractivism we have to start from it....isn’t it possible to use the resources produced by the state-controlled raw materials export activity to generate the surpluses that can be used to satisfy the minimum living conditions of Bolivians, and guarantee an intercultural, scientific education that generates a critical intellectual mass capable of taking over and leading the emerging processes of industrialization and the knowledge economy? (34)

Hidalgo-Capitán and Cubillo-Guevara thus characterize Ecuador and Bolivia’s approach to BV as “socialista y estatista” (“Deconstrucción”). In Ecuador, the governments of former president Rafael Correa and current president Lenín Moreno, and in Bolivia, president Evo Morales and vice-president García Linera, interpret BV as a means to improve social equity by embracing ideas of modern development based on revenue generated from extractivism (“Deconstrucción”). In terms of economic growth and social upward mobility, these efforts have produced impressive results in both countries. While raising the standard of living, these Leftist governments, elected in large part through the support of mass social movements and active indigenous populations have, over the course of the past two decades, effectively phased out the very voices that pushed for BV’s integration into the political realm in the first place (Farthing and Riofrancos; Hidalgo-Capitán and Cubillo-Guevara, “Deconstrucción”). Furthermore, reliance on extractive industries has made the Ecuadorian and Bolivian governments

dependent on Chinese and Brazilian investments.⁹ This dependency fails to fully contest neocolonial structures of power disparity and deconstruct the entrenched stratification of social class. On the contrary, it has created ruptures in an only recently more united front between social and indigenous movements.¹⁰ As Farthing and Riofrancos point out, the success of these Leftist governments has relied on the redistribution of new income from extraction profits - which makes the state dependent on transnational capital and megaprojects.¹¹

We must not forget, and further adding to these complexities, the question of the rights of Mother Earth and indigenous territorial rights when it comes to mining and energy extraction. The model of development employed by Ecuador and Bolivia, continues to operate within a system that privileges material accumulation for material gain over the long-term well-being of land. This specific adherence to Western

⁹ Farthing and Riofrancos note that Bolivia's dependency is less on the United States and European countries as it has been historically and is now more dependent on Brazil China. Ecuador, on the other-hand, as Gordon and Webber observe, is host to Canada's largest mining industry (210). However, Canada's footing in Ecuador was not always sure given Correa's initial association with anti-mining activists (211). For an extensive study on Canadian extraction in Ecuador and Correa's involvement, see Chapter 7 in Gordon and Webber.

¹⁰ The Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador (CONIAE) is one indigenous association that has maintained staunch opposition to mining and other extraction (Gordon and Webber 210; Farthing and Riofrancos)

¹¹ Gordon and Webber note that Ecuador under Correa did not nationalize its natural resources whereas Bolivia partially did (209). Darío Indalecio Restrepo Botero and Camilo Andrés Peña Galeano point out that in terms of environmental protection, "state companies are not necessarily more efficient, nor do they cause less contamination when extracting natural resources. National private companies and transnationals are not necessarily more predatory than state-owned companies."

development emerges as a key point of contention between the state and social and indigenous movements that fervently oppose “the rapacious extraction of natural resources [that] entails environmental destruction and the fragmentation of indigenous territory” (Farthing and Riofrancos). While it is true that governments projecting an agenda of BV drive programs that improve the standard of living of impoverished populations, they have done so at the cost of territorial and social fragmentation and environmental ruin. Furthermore, to maintain such programs, the state has also inadvertently muzzled, and criminalized the social and indigenous groups that oppose extractivism at all costs. Gómez-Barris writes that though Bolivia and Ecuador propose policies to “legalize Native peoples’ rights,” they simultaneously “enable and normalize resource exploitation that ends up perpetuating anti-Indigenous and anti-Black racism” (xvii). To date, BV, in the Andean region, has yet to show itself as a true alternative to development and we are still posed with the quandary of how to benefit the human-race while also sustaining the earth in regenerative and organic ways.

In Central America, on the other-hand, BV has not been integrated into state policies but it does inform quotidian interactions within rural communities. Confronted by transnational companies involved in the business of mineral and oil extraction, aspects of BV are called upon as a strategic tool to protect indigenous territorial and cultural rights. In the Maya worldview, “nature is not an isolated part of reality. It is totally integrated into the social and economic dimensions. Every dimension of life forms a unity and is sacred, so every element deserves respect and protection” (Urkidi 571). Testimonies, community consultations, and images of the documentary by Caracol

Producciones, *El oro o la vida: la recolonización y resistencia en Centro América* – which I analyze in detail in Chapter II - exemplify the urgent need to protect the life of both the social and the natural over the destruction of land for temporary accumulation. A shared ethos among the affected communities, grounded in the belief that the well-being of nature intimately connects with the well-being of the social, informs their staunch opposition to large-scale extractive activities.

BV's principles, in this sense, counter the layers of bio-power wielded against indigenous peoples. The series of shots that relate proximity to mining sites with cases of horrific skin rashes, cancer and muscular underdevelopment in children and adults, along with the images of exploded mountain-sides, dead cows in waterways, and military intimidation and violence, place forefront the exercise of bio-power. As theorized by Michel Foucault, bio-power is the institutional use of power to implement a system of values that controls and regulates the life and death of certain bodies (169-171). *El oro o la vida* directly equates neoliberalism with indigenous elimination. Todd Gordon and Jeffery Webber's extensive research on Canadian funded extraction projects in Latin America, write,

The extractive model of capitalism maturing in the Latin American context today does not only involve the imposition of a logic of accumulation by dispossession, pollution of the environment, reassertion of power over the region by multinational capital, and new forms of dependency. It also, necessarily and systematically involves what we call militarized neoliberalism: violence, fraud, corruption, and authoritarian practices on the part of militaries and security forces. In Latin America, this has involved murder, death threats, assaults, and arbitrary detention against opponents of resource extraction. (28)

In other words, bio-power is not just as in Foucault a technology of modernity, but rather a technology of coloniality. If bio-power's current iteration is neoliberal capitalism, BV seeks to refashion the relationship of human with his/her/*hier* environment, combating these drastically unequal interactions built on the colonial dynamics of power.

THE GENDERING OF LATIN AMERICA

Michael Horswell's research on the Andean region, before the arrival of the Spaniards, reveals evidence of a third-gender. The *chuqui chinchay* was a *quariwarmi* (man-woman) shaman who dressed as a transvestite and mediated the masculine and feminine realms of Andean cosmology, at times performing same-sex erotic practices.¹² Because the Spanish colonizers were influenced by the values of medieval patriarchy, the role of the *quariwarmi* challenged their notions of masculinity and femininity, and sexual and gender norms. In order to maintain the gender binary which upheld the patriarchal authority of the Spaniards, they "conspired in the near erasure and eventual transculturation of third-gender ritual subjectivity" (Horswell 4). By representing themselves as masculine, categorizing the indigenous as feminine, and marginalizing any other androgynous expression of gender, the Spaniards secured their power in the Andean region, and the rest of *Las Indias*. Therefore, "to comprehend the representation of colonized subjectivities marked by processes of marginalization in hegemonic discourses

¹² I have noted there are different spellings of the word for the Andean third-gendered subjects (men-women). As written above, Horswell uses *quariwarmi*, and in other places I have seen it written as *chacha-warmi* (Articulaci3n Feminista MarcoSur 12).

requires an inquiry into the gender and sexual culture of both the invader and the invaded” (Horswell 5).

Like Horswell, I also place gender and sexual culture as important themes of inquiry when studying colonialism and its evolution. As he suggests, I trace contemporary iterations of power back to the foundations of colonialism. As the Spaniards sought to secure their power, they deemed both the indigenous body and land as feminine to justify physical, spiritual and mental penetration. The native bodies of *Las Indias* were thus writ as a *terrus nellius* to be done with as the colonizers pleased. Andrea Smith, within a Native studies context, contests,

...gender violence is a primary tool of colonialism and white supremacy. Colonizers did not just kill off Indigenous peoples in the island, but Native massacres were always accompanied by sexual mutilation and rape...It is through sexual violence that a colonizing group attempts to render a colonized people inherently rapable, their lands inherently invadable, and their resources inherently extractable. (59)

As both Horswell and Andrea Smith have shown, gender constitutes an essential strategy the Spaniards employed to establish the logics of colonialism. The more recent cultural productions highlighted in this dissertation, as *Mazorca* exemplifies, perform how the gendering of Latin America continues to this day, warranting the violations committed against land for monoculture and mineral extraction and the forceful removal or violent assaults against indigenous people. Establishing how Latin America has been gendered since the arrival of the Spanish is essential to undoing the imposed gender binary and combatting subaltern tropes. Freya Schiwy observes that approaches to decolonization need to “address the intersection of gender relations and colonial subalternizations”

(“Decolonization” 273). Without taking gender into consideration, we run the risk of perpetuating notions of coloniality even as we think we are delinking from them (273). Following Schiwy’s lead, I engage with cultural works that foreground and contest the gendering of indigenous peoples and land as constitutive of colonial power.

THE QUESTION OF GENDERING BUEN VIVIR

Peruvian sociologist Anibal Quijano and academic Walter Mignolo have written extensively about the interrelation of modernity and coloniality. Quijano bases his theory of the coloniality of power on the establishment of two fundamental axes: race and labor. The idea of race – a phenotypical and biological categorization of persons – paved the way for colonizers to position themselves as dominant to the natives of *Las Indias*. This display of power further provoked a system that included controlling not only the labor of natives but their resources and production (Quijano 534). Implemented with consistency during colonial times, these ideas and systems naturalized the racial difference between colonizer and colonized, entrenching demarcations of superiority and inferiority. Based on these two fundamental axes, Europe’s colonial design reached a global scale and laid the foundation for what we know as world capitalism (536). Moreover, Europe’s dominion “over the new model of global power concentrated all forms of the control of subjectivity, culture, and especially knowledge and the production of knowledge under its hegemony” (540). In other words, the subjectivity of the native, along with his/her/heir knowledges and cultures were repressed if not always devalued in comparison to the dominant culture (541). Hence, this ushered in polarities between the two cultures such as

primitive-civilized and traditional-modern (542). The colonized was colonial - read traditional and primitive - while the colonizers were civilized and modern.

Mignolo, inspired by Quijano's observation that "modernity was also colonial from its point of departure," further developed the relationship between modernity and coloniality (Quijano 548). While contending that the hegemonic systems of colonialism constituted the possibility of modernity, Mignolo also argues that opposition to colonizing efforts initiated "at the very moment in which the colonial matrix of power was being put in place" (*The Darker Side* xxiv). Decolonizing, then has always been part of the interconnected relationship of modernity and coloniality. These acts of defiance and proposals of alterity to Eurocentrism or Western thought are grounded in what Mignolo calls the "colonial difference" which is in turn informed by the intricacies of colonial power (*Local Histories* 80). In other words, "epistemologies emerging from the wounds of colonial histories, memories...[,]experiences" and bodies encompass the colonial difference (*Local Histories* 37). Thinking, speaking, acting, and essentially being from this difference offers possibilities of critiquing Eurocentrism which in turn has the possibility of producing decolonial thought.¹³

While Quijano and Mignolo have been influential on decolonial discourse, Freya Schiwy and María Lugones bring forefront the importance of how ideas and expressions of gender factor into the establishment and continuity of colonialism. Moreover, they call upon gender as a protagonist in the work of deconstructing fabricated

¹³ This critique of Eurocentrism from the colonial difference is opposed and different than the "Eurocentric critique of Eurocentrism" which occludes the dynamics of power in the coloniality/modernity relationship and which also cannot truly delink from its own interiority. See Walter Mignolo, *Local Histories/Global Designs*.

notions of structural power within this context. My work further expands this intersectional understanding of gender and coloniality. As *Mazorca* exemplifies, metaphorical gendering concerns not only indigenous bodies, but also land. I concur with Gómez-Barris, that decolonial work lies in feminist and queer interventions that challenge “patriarchal logics, monoculture, and extractive capitalism...” (Gómez-Barris xx).

The scholarship on BV has largely occluded a critique of gender and instead continues to privilege heteronormativity, effectively limiting gender to a binary. Fernando Huanacuni Mamani, an Aymara Bolivian researcher, writes on BV from an Andean perspective and relays that cosmic ordering relies on the parity or complementary of humans (man and woman) and living objects (rocks, plants, etc.) (74). From a Tsotsil-Maya point of view, professor Miguel Sánchez Álvarez, states that a principle of achieving *lekil kuxlejal*, or BV, is the coupling of man and woman (59). Silvia Vega Ugalde and Regina Cochrane along with indigenous women from Latin America at the Articulation Feminist Mercosur event in 2010, however, highlight how these ideas reinforce essentialism, legitimize patriarchy and reproduce “women’s social, cultural and material inequality” (Cochrane 586). BV seems caught then, in another paradox – one that struggles to not only fully circumvent Western notions of development and modernity but also seeks alternatives to societal ordering that delink from colonial practices of gendering.

THE ARCHIVE

Many of the works I analyze in this dissertation were made available to me by their producers. In years 2012, 2013, 2014, and 2015, I traveled to Chiapas, Mexico where I studied Tsotsil-Maya and conducted field research on Mexican folkloric dance in the rural indigenous community of Jocosic in the municipality of Huixtán. In the city center of San Cristóbal de las Casas, I attended multiple theater performances by the all-female troupe of Fortaleza de la Mujer Maya (FOMMA) and their vigils for the growing number of femicides in the area. Through acquaintances, I was invited to listen to Zapatistas and their sympathizers and to engage with students and scholars during the Thursday-night seminars at La Universidad de la Tierra. I attended patron saints' festivals in the indigenous communities of Zinacantán and San Juan Chamula, and enjoying cup after cup of Chiapaneco coffee, I met with professors, artists, activists and film directors. San Cristóbal de las Casas is a cosmopolitan city, but the community is small, and people generously introduced me to their acquaintances, many of whom authored the archival body of this dissertation.

I also spent my nights practicing with folkloric dance troupes and I would be remiss if I didn't also disclose that I dedicated time to learn to dance banda, and frequented the dance clubs to hone my salsa and bachata skills. Being a dancer is significant because, for me, it is the conduit for creating community and for understanding cultural norms and transgressions. Although none of the analyzed works in the following chapters are dance per se, many of them use embodied knowledge and movement to transfer meaning. The unwavering stance of Galindo in her video-

performance, *Tierra*, recalls social and indigenous movements that resist the machine of global modernity and denounce excessive material accumulation at the price of the environment's destruction. The unanswered questions and side-glances of Pascuala in Tsotsil-Maya Pedro Daniel López's documentary film, *La pequeña semilla en el asfalto*, signal distrust of the colonial gaze and a refusal to be positioned as an object of study. The cinematography, employed by director Ernesto Cabellos in the Peruvian documentary film, *Hija de la laguna*, privileges water and woman as interconnected beings. Tsotsil and Tseltal-Mayan actresses of the theater piece, *La tragedia de Juanita*, penned by Petrona de la Cruz Cruz, project subjectivity through playing both male and female characters and transforming lived-experiences of trauma into acts of healing.

These works, and others explored in depth in the following chapters, offer critical stances to issues of socio-political and economic global significance. Materializing in communities profoundly and directly affected by policies of the Global North - and accepted by national governments, and at times, local populations - in the Global South, these performances, art installations, collaborative documentaries, and theater plays function to decry compliancy and hopelessness. I position them as offering theories of their own that align with the diverse, yet similar, colonial histories, societal structuring and cultural values pertinent to their context.

Answering to Gómez-Barris' question, "What cultural and intellectual production makes us see, hear, and intimate the land differently?" this dissertation suggests that collaborative cultural productions in the transnational Mayan context make community-based visions of BV apprehensible, offering understandings that are often anchored in the

land but also derived from the experiences of diasporic urban Mayan artists and activists (xx).

The first two chapters (“Articulations of (non)Productivity: *Buen vivir*, Bolívar Echeverría and Audiovisual Archives” and “(Mis)Communication of Socio-Natural (re)Production: A Transnational Conversation in *El oro o la vida* and *Hija de la laguna*”) cross borders, discussing pieces from Guatemala, Peru and indigenous territories divided by the northern border of Mexico with the United States. Chapters Three and Four (“Exploring Tragedy as a Queer Aesthetic in *Li svokol Xunka’e/La tragedia de Juanita*: a play by Maya-Tsotsil playwright Petrona de la Cruz Cruz” and “Decolonial Articulations of Gender: A Tsotsil-Maya Documentary Film, *La pequeña semilla en el asfalto* (2009) *Queers Buen Vivir*”) focus on Tsotsil-Mayan works originating in Chiapas, Mexico. Tracing connections between the Americas – South, Central and North - I gesture towards shared struggles existing across contemporary (and historical) socio-economic and political sites. As the documentary film *El oro o la vida* relays, establishing lines of communication within and across communities aides in building united fronts of support systems to tackle urgent issues. It is also a transnational production, linking community resistance to extractivist mining in Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador. Produced by Caracol Producciones, this as an example of collaborative filmmaking that maintains bonds among indigenous and non-indigenous media activists.

While markets reach globally and transnational companies spread across borders, national and international networks of resistance must too be forged. In 2016, a *Truthout* article by John Abbott reported that five Maya, Xinca and Garifuna representatives from

the National Council of Ancestral Authorities of Guatemala traveled to Standing Rock to express solidarity with the Lakota Sioux communities protecting the land and waters from construction of the Dakota Access Pipeline. Abbott starts with, “The defense of water knows no borders....” In assembling an archive that not only reaches across geographic boundaries but intersects themes and similar lived-realities, my dissertation also endeavors to place seemingly insulated academic disciplines in dialogue with one another. Two particular threads worth weaving, as I alluded to above, are Native studies and Latin American Indigenous studies. While honoring the differences, finding similarities and points of overlap might have revolutionary possibilities. Sharing beyond borders and across delineations has the potential to generate new understandings of the system within which one operates, so that new systems of subversion and alterity can be constructed. Shannon Speed, a Chickasaw who has spent her professional career working with indigenous communities in Latin America, echoes this idea positing the significance of analyzing Latin American states as settler colonial states, as is done with its northern neighbor: it holds “important implications for indigenous peoples’ resistance” (789). She argues that Latin America needs to understand the ramifications of settler logics in order to confront the current iteration of state formation – neoliberalism – that disguises the continued colonial occupation as “permanent structure” (789). She believes this shift is essential in eliminating the “racial and gendered logics that allow Euro-American men to remain inevitably dominant and render indigenous peoples the subjects of ongoing occupation” (789). Certainly, the entire world stands to gain much if indigenous

communities can circumvent colonial logics and forge lines of communication, exchange knowledges and experiences, and seek recognition amongst themselves.¹⁴

Further pushing at the limits imposed by the colonial rational, I add another layer and engage with queer theory through the lens of Native studies and a queer of color critique. Although there is acknowledgement of non-conforming gender identities within Native communities, there is a lack of engagement with queer theory in native studies (Andrea Smith 43). Similarly, in the Tsotsil language there are words for people who engage in non-heteronormative coupling (*antsilvinik* and *tsikilan*), yet intellectuals from these communities write on the necessary partnership of man and woman to achieve the founding principles of BV (Sánchez Álvarez, pers. comm.). In contrast, in using the term *queer*, I draw in the idea of expanding the male-female binary to an unlimited and undefined expression of personhood. Secondly, I employ *queering* as grating against the norm (Andrea Smith 46). I employ both definitions as I tease out how the individual works of this archive contest colonial gendering. Largely drawing on José Esteban Muñoz's theory of queerness as creating moments of utopia, I deliberately bring in others that engage with issues of indigeneity such as Qwo-Li Driskill and Pete Sigal. Like me, Driskill voices the importance of bringing together Natives and indigenous peoples to bolster and fortify the web of decolonial activism (86).

¹⁴ Marisol de la Cadena and Orin Starn point out in their introduction to *Indigenous Experience Today* that alliances among, and even within indigenous communities is not always an easy task given that “indigeneity operates within larger structures of ethnicity and identification” that creates hierarchies and stratifications of power (19). “‘National formations of alterity,’ as Claudia Briones...calls them position native peoples within hierarchies of color, gender, generation, geography and class that operate to differentiate between and *and within* groups” [Emphasis in original] (qtd. in Cadena and Starn 19).

Lastly, my hope is that by intersecting disciplines and drawing ties between the works found in this archive that stretch across the three Americas, I contribute to expanding the notion of decoloniality through contesting gendered renderings of colonial constructs. It is as Gómez-Barris writes, “decoloniality moves away from singularity and the reduction imposed by the European gaze toward the proliferation of epistemological possibility” (3).

By bringing the question of gender into focus, we can better interrogate the internal workings of the colonial matrix and how it relates, and affects, the structuring of power in its current iteration of neoliberal capitalism. My dissertation thus addresses a set of interrelated questions. How has the gendering of land and the indigenous body as feminine spurred capitalist imperialism in Latin America? How does this feminization justify practices of penetration such as extraction of mineral and energy resources or dispossession of territory? How does the archive, garnered in this project, contend these views and systems of power? How does the archive propose innovative and encompassing ideas of self-determination and expression of personhood while boldly engaging with the realities of neocolonialism?

CHAPTER SUMMARIES

Chapter I, “Articulations of (non)Productivity: *Buen Vivir*, Bolívar Echeverría and Audiovisual Archives,” explores *Pollination*, a 2015 art installation by the indigenous art collective, Postcommodity, and *Tierra*, a 2013 video-performance by Guatemalan Regina José Galindo. Together, these two pieces inform how land has been, and still is,

metaphorically gendered as effeminate and therefore submissive and penetrable to the otherwise constructed masculine extractivist practices of colonialism and now neoliberal capitalism. *Pollination*'s immersive installation invites visitors to enter a private room with a chair facing a shaded window. On the other side of the shade is a luscious garden upon which the visitor can pay to partake in a visual feast. Fashioned after a standard peepshow, *Pollination* pulls on tropes of the masculine/colonizer/capitalist gaze and the garden becomes a commodity to control, consume and fetishize. Through a discussion of Mexican cultural critic, Bolívar Echeverría's definition of Marxist use-value as a natural form of social reproduction that delinks from the chain of productivism and material accumulation, and tenets of BV that call for intimate connection of the socio-natural for continual reproduction of life, I argue that *Pollination* articulates, and calls for critical reflection on the fatal consequences of neoliberal extractivism where the social and the natural are severed.

Tierra reinvigorates the reproduction of the socio-natural by embodying tropes of resistive movements occurring on a global scale that oppose extractive practices that stunt earth's processes of organic regeneration which in turn restrict societies' vitality and potential. Memorializing testimonies of the Guatemalan civil war that proved to be an outright genocide against its indigenous population, *Tierra* further links colonial practices of indigenous elimination and land exploitation to modern practices of capitalism. I argue that this video-performance acknowledges how cultural memory and regenerative relationships to land turn into strategic political tools for indigenous peoples as they question the way extractivist capitalism privileges production.

In Chapter II, “(Mis)Communication of Socio-Natural (re)Production: A Transnational Conversation in *El oro o la vida: la recolonización y resistencia en Centro América* and *Hija de la laguna*,” I analyze the aforementioned documentary films directed by Caracol Producciones and Ernesto Cabellos, respectively. The films highlight communities directly affected by the presence and operations of transnational mining companies in Guatemala, other parts of Central America and Peru. This chapter further explores the intersections of BV’s principles and Echeverría’s writings that intimately link the well-being of the social with that of the natural. I suggest that both documentaries demonstrate that the Eurocentric message to reproduce socially – as in biased notions of progress and development – stagnates the possibility for natural regeneration which then in turn negatively effects social reproduction. In areas where mega-projects of extraction take place, the destruction of nature is synonymous with the destruction of the social body.

I engage with Echeverría’s semiotic reading of the process of production/consumption to exemplify how, in the documentaries, communication between corporations and indigenous and campesino communities is untranslatable. Whereas in rural communities producing and consuming the natural is regenerative for both humans and nonhumans, capitalist extraction violently intervenes. The misinterpretation stems from historical racism and ethnic discrimination devaluing epistemes of indigenous peoples. Here, we are reminded again of how the colonial practice of gendering land and the indigenous body perpetuates hierarchies of power. Through the struggle for accurate interpretation, and in stylistically very different ways,

the documentaries show that the communities protecting their land maintain a message that what is more productive (life-giving) is an absence of production. Not producing then, turns productive in a different sense: one that acknowledges that the Earth's integrity and organic regeneration is intimately connected to populations' physical well-being, economic stability and hence, their social reproduction.

Chapter III, "Exploring Tragedy as a Queer Aesthetic in *Li svokol Xunka'e/La tragedia de Juanita*: a play by Tsotsil-Maya playwright Petrona de la Cruz Cruz," considers how the casting and the play's bold engagement with significant problems experienced in Chiapas' indigenous communities gesture towards repositioning indigenous women not as ornaments for the Mexican national imaginary, but rather as agents of change.

By employing tragedy as its genre, the play raises philosophical questions surrounding significant problems confronting indigenous peoples such as ethnic discrimination, gender-based violence, and economic and political subordination. Appealing to our affect, the drama portrays a nine-year-old girl, Juanita as the tragic heroine for whom we feel empathy and thus desire a different resolution than the one the play offers. Empathy triggers thought which generates a critique of the events on stage. This process has the potential to transcend the time limits of the play and spur social action. Secondly, a pivotal male character in *La tragedia* utilizes the Brechtian notion of *gestus* to forge a dialectical connection with the audience. *Gestus* offers distance from the narrative, inviting viewers to be critical of what occurs on stage. In this instance, the character implores the audience to refuse normalization of rape and under-aged marriage.

Thinking through tragedy as a queer aesthetic signals profound questioning of the norm. If queer is to grate against the norm, then *La tragedia* pushes its audiences to critique aspects of what they witness on stage and then activate transformative possibilities beyond the here and now. Additionally, the all-female casting of male and female characters of *La tragedia* further grates against predominant social norms in Chiapas as indigenous actresses portray the part of their oppressors. I contend that *La tragedia* functions to empower indigenous women (and men) and position them as dynamic subjects within society while also proposing gender and ethnic dynamism that is difficult to attain off-stage.

In the last chapter, “Decolonial Articulations of Gender: A Tsotsil-Maya Documentary Film, *La pequeña semilla en el asfalto* (2009) Queers *Buen Vivir*,” I maintain that this documentary perhaps most successfully contests heteronormative trends found in the scholarship on BV. I place *La pequeña* in dialogue with what has been written on social structuring within the theory of BV, and discuss points of overlap and divergence. I argue that through a series of interviews with its four social actors, camera angles that privilege the indigenous voice and perspective, and diligent editing, the documentary projects an expansion of the male-female gender binary and challenges traditional societal expectations. In this chapter, I engage Native studies and José Esteban Muñoz’s scholarship on queerness to further articulate and expand iterations of gender expression while maintaining acute awareness of the interacting forces of colonial systems. *La pequeña* represents new potentials for how indigenous young-adults both draw strength from and navigate the, at times, limiting structures of traditional practice.

Through defending their right to formulate their own imaginings for the present and the future, they resist neocolonial societal expectations while also re-conceptualizing notions of gender within the realm of BV.

In sum, my dissertation points to BV as a contested and evolving field of discourse, a discussion that in large part takes place not only in the writings of social scientists but in audiovisual and performative collaborations with and by indigenous cultural actors, artists and activists. My dissertation serves to open further, rather than conclude, the conversation on decolonization as it pertains to the question of gender in Latin America. Calling attention to and teasing out the many points of intersection that connect the construction of land and the indigenous body as feminine to destructive practices of neoliberal capitalism, I contend the field of study is ripe and deserving of further research.

Chapter I

Articulations of (non)Productivity:

Buen Vivir, Bolívar Echeverría and AudioVisual Archives

A naked body stands firmly in the grass. Her forward gaze is unyielding, her face stoic. The wind blows and tousles her hair: she does not flinch. Off to the side, a front hoe extends its arm, reaching beyond her body, and pierces the earth. Lifting effortlessly its bucket overflowing with fresh dirt the arm retracts towards its vehicle, swivels from its base and releases the dirt into a pile. The arm reaches again and, with methodical precision and mechanical force, digs. The body stands, rooted.

This video performance piece by Regina José Galindo, Guatemalan artist-activist, is titled *Tierra* (2013).¹⁵ The evocations of *Tierra* encompass conflicts of natural resource extraction; relationships with land; exposures of the marked body; notions of belonging; interpretations of rights; demonstrations of resistance; implications of complicity; conflicts of productivity; assumptions of race; perceptions of gender and much more. Although Galindo is ladina and does not identify as Maya, her vast repertoire boldly draws attention to complex issues confronted by Maya Guatemalan communities and individuals. In other works, such as “Hermana” (2010), she collaborates with Rosa Chávez, reversing everyday racism experienced by indigenous persons at the hand of ladinos or whites as Chávez, a Maya woman, spits in Galindo’s face, calls her names, and slaps her. In “¿Quién puede borrar las huellas?” (2003), Galindo dips her feet in human

¹⁵ A heart-felt thanks to Diana Taylor for putting me in contact with Galindo, and to Galindo for responding positively and granting me access to the video of her performance, *Tierra*.

blood and walks through downtown Guatemala City leaving a trace of footprints symbolically baring and recalling in these public spaces the most violent period of history experienced by Maya communities during the military dictatorship of Efraín Ríos Montt. This meditative transient performance conjures up the memory of Ríos Montt's participation in the genocide and protests his presidential candidacy at the time.¹⁶

Galindo's work makes visible the violence of contemporary Mayan history and the way modernity and coloniality are intimately intertwined. *Tierra* draws attention to the intersections and contestations of ideological and quotidian practices of humanity in the global system of modernity/coloniality. This chapter offers an analysis of Galindo's performance art-activism in *Tierra*, and of *Pollination* (2015), an interactive installation by the indigenous art collective Postcommodity. From different perspectives, both pieces inform how land has been, and still is, metaphorically gendered as effeminate and penetrable, subject to the extractivist practices of colonialism and now neoliberal capitalism. My analysis of these performances – archived as audiovisual productions - is informed by Bolívar Echeverría's understanding of use-value, transnaturalization and socio-natural reproduction. Moreover, Buen Vivir (henceforward BV) figures as a third theoretical angle that helps flesh out further extensions of these Marxists notions, gesturing towards more equitable and reciprocal socio-economic relationships between humans and non-human life. Drawing on conceptions of performativity, orality,

¹⁶ Rebeca Lane, a Guatemalan hip-hop activist has a song titled “Sí hubo genocidio” that voices the populous experience and living memory of genocide during Ríos Montt's dictatorship. The song serves as a historical corrective to the “official” version perpetuated by the government and military in that there was no genocide.

corporality, visibility and historicity the artistic-activist productions explored in this chapter amplify the need to deconstruct and extend Western hierarchical notions of accessibility, language, knowledge and scholarship.

These two performances raise questions about how indigenous and non-indigenous activists struggle to exert sovereignty, to operate on the peripheries of capitalism, if not outside it, and to maintain the integrity of Earth's composition as it connects intimately with the constitution and well-being of human populations. I trace the way this audiovisual archive acknowledges the constructed Western history of gendering both indigenous peoples and land for the purpose of domination, and how the integrated connection between indigenous peoples and the land has become a strategy for politicizing communities, defending territory, and reproducing the socio-natural.

Born in Ecuador and later nationalized in Mexico, Echeverría began publishing in the mid-seventies. Echeverría posits new ways of engaging with Marxist concepts as he links historical materialism with a critique of spiritual or epistemic subjugation. As Jaime Breilh, a student of Echeverría's suggests, in order to differentiate a truly radical moment or future from capitalist materiality one must transform the two axes upon which it rests. The first is a material axis, revolving around the maintenance of inequality in the market, and the repetition of organizing life around the material which propagates dependence and manifests subsumption in the sense of Marx.¹⁷ The second axis upholds the spiritual or cultural subjugation imposed by the hegemony of capitalism (Breilh 393). Due to

¹⁷ My understanding of subsumption is that it is the internalization of capitalist tenets within an individual, or collective, which subordinates the person, or persons, to the machine of capitalism.

capitalism's pervasiveness, Breilh argues that "in order to unravel these processes and develop a material notion of the 'good life' that is truly emancipatory, the reading of the political economy proposed by Echeverría is important" (393).¹⁸ According to Breilh, Echeverría tackles the first axis by redefining use-value as a natural form of social reproduction that frees itself from the chains of productivism and material accumulation. Secondly, Echeverría maintains that in order to truly disassociate from the spiritual/cultural hegemony of capitalism, a revolutionary consciousness must respond to the "material existence" of the time (394). Otherwise, a revolution is not a revolution at all but mere "mythical or ideological garb" (Echeverría qtd. in Breilh 394). Thus, Echeverría argues for a "materialist theory of culture" to recover "knowledge historically rooted in culture" so as to better understand how capitalism's power translates to the symbolic and permeates society. Based on these ideas, Echeverría seeks "a modernity that differs from that which has been imposed up to the present day" (qtd. in Breilh 395).

According to Echeverría, an object, before entering into a relationship with the social, is already a participant rather than an inert, empty signifier. It is instead, a 'practical object' that exercises agency as it confronts and is confronted by a 'social subject.' As both entities enter into this relationship of production and consumption, the process constitutes a transnaturalization in which the 'natural' affects or is affected by the political. The transnaturalization process allows for an equalizing of hierarchy between object and subject - recognizing the politicization of both and acknowledging a symbiotic

¹⁸ As I do, Breilh draws the "good life," a direct reference to Bolivia and Ecuador's definition of BV, into the conversation on Echeverría. In other words, Echeverría, to my knowledge, does not reference BV in his writings.

relationship between the two. In this understanding, the social and the natural interact with each other in regenerative ways indicating shared dependency on the other. This understanding resonates with BV.

Foundational to BV is the interconnection between human and nonhuman life that pervades economic and political practices. Thus, practitioners and theorists of BV reject the Cartesian notion that human reason is superior to nature's (Ibáñez 31). This distinction helps us to better understand how BV functions as delinking from colonial epistemologies. If the division of the mind and body or the division of humans from nature instilled itself as a colonial practice in which the "very relation between colonizer and colonized provided a new model to understand the relationship between the soul or mind and the body" then BV's encouragement of non-hierarchical interactions among soul, mind, body and nature seeks such decolonial re-structuring (Maldonado-Torres 245). Moreover, instead of conceptualizing the earth as a productive tool, practitioners of BV honor the life-giving forces of nature viewing them as integrally intertwined with their own well-being and social reproductive capacities (Altmann 286; Belotti 42; Cochrane 580). It is then that objects' or nature's contents are instruments that serve humans by entering into a productive and regenerative relationship for the benefit of human life, yet also require a reciprocal contract in order for nature's conditions to be ideal for continued creation and recreation.

In light of the impact of capitalism's productive forces on the life of planet earth and on human populations, Breilh draws connections between Echeverría's alternative modernity and other existing, viable civilizational models that are "connected to life

rather than death” (395). While Echeverría helps us re-think use-value and its function in the production and reproduction of the social, he does not engage with BV that echoes his theory of the interrelatedness of the socio-natural. Whereas Echeverría’s 1970 article, “La forma ‘natural’ de la reproducción social” adheres to importing a European framework, BV stems from the colonial difference, critically aware of and navigating the power structures of modernity/coloniality. This myopia is symptomatic of the colonality of power that occludes knowledges such as BV. I concur with Breilh and suggest that in the process of searching for alternatives to capitalism, we should “discover the virtues and capacity...of other civilizational models that embody other paradigms for ways of life.” (Breilh 395). Thus, I call attention to the connections between Echeverría’s work and BV, and further draw on *Pollination* and *Tierra* to flesh out critiques of, and alternatives to, capitalism.

PART I – *Pollination* (2015)

¡En términos económicos gráficos, el imperialismo nos está devorando a tragos gigantescos! Tenemos materias primas que están en vías de agotamiento....¡y en menos de diez años importantes variedades de árboles figurarán sólo en los textos especializados y en las enciclopedias!
- Sanjinés & Grupo Ukamau 55

An immersive installation by the indigenous art collective, Postcommodity, titled *Pollination* has visitors approach a make-shift structure with a set of doors with numbers on them.¹⁹ On the outside wall there is a towel dispenser, hand sanitizer and a trashcan (see Figure 1). Choosing a door to go in, the visitor enters a room just large enough for a

¹⁹ The installation was hosted by SouthwestNET at Scottsdale Museum of Contemporary Art in Scottsdale, Arizona January 31-April 26, 2015.

chair that faces a shaded window. To one side of the window there is a tissue box, to the other side there is an arcade coin slot. If the visitor sits down and enters tokens into the slot, the black shade raises up to reveal a luscious garden with a variety of plants, trees, flowers, grass and even butterflies (see Figure 2).

How does this installation engage with the capitalist drive for objectifying and subordinating nature for (some) humans' accumulation of wealth and comfort? How does *Pollination* intervene in and question such neocolonial practices? Does the critique that *Pollination* offers reinforce BV's biocentric epistemologies?



*Figure 1: Photo by Sean Deckert / Calnicean Project.
Source: <http://postcommodity.com/Pollination.html>
View of Pollination from the outside. Courtesy of Postcommodity.*



*Figure 2: Photo by Sean Deckert / Calnicean Project.
Source: <http://postcommodity.com/Pollination.html>
View from inside booth in Pollination. Courtesy of Postcommodity.*

In order to gaze at the garden in *Pollination*, special tokens must be acquired so the visitor can feed the slot once inside the booth (see Figure 3). They are stamped with an image of a butterfly and the words “Pollination.” Playing off the title of the piece itself and imprinting a butterfly on the monetary currency required to engage with the installation, several questions arise that draw us into the conversation of speculative capitalism and finance and indicate dedifferentiation. What is it that the coin fertilizes as it is pumped into the arcade slot? What symbolism does the butterfly offer? What metamorphosis is made possible by the coins’ journey prompting the curtain to rise? What is pollinated by the migration of the token as it joins its fellow replicas collecting in the belly of the arcade slot?



*Figure 3: Photo by Sean Deckert / Calnicean Project.
Source: <http://postcommodity.com/Pollination.html>
Coin used in *Pollination*. Courtesy of Postcommodity.*

This coin, directly associated with the art piece, simulates an exclusive currency. It does not circulate outside of this event and thus only those that acquire the coin have access to view the garden. The fact that *Pollination* incorporates currency mimics the economy that lies outside the installation: a capitalist one that privileges access for the few instead of the many. It calls attention to realities of those with money and those without it. The utility of the coin also grants a voyeuristic encounter with nature. With the token, visitors can lust over an experience that soon enough will no longer be possible – an intimate experience in nature. With the token, visitors can escape what ever greater populations experience as barren due to carving out the core of the earth. *Pollination* creates a space of paradox simultaneously pointing out the privilege needed to view a rarity, and harshly critiquing that nature is in danger of extinction. The tokens circulated

and pumped into the arcade slot remind visitors that Western society has made earth a commodity to be bought and owned, not in its original form, but processed and manufactured into products such as gasoline, batteries for laptop computers, smartphones and electric cars, aluminum cans and gold or diamond rings (Earthworks and Oxfam 8, 28, 13, 2).

Pollination thus subtly invokes a long colonial history. Beginning with the colonization of *Las Indias*, the mission to civilize and render productive both the land and its native people was set into motion. In Aimé Césaire's scathing critique of colonialism he quotes Carl Siger, a Frenchman who wrote *Essai sur la colonization* in 1907. Siger notes that colonies represented freedom to engage in "violent" activities that otherwise would be judged harshly in the metropolis (qtd. in Césaire 41). To the colonizers' then, colonies were deemed adult playgrounds where indulgent activities such as raping and pillaging human bodies and bodies of land were realized. The critique *Pollination* draws attention to is precisely the inability of the Western socio-economic system to show a true transnaturalization process. In this way, I argue that the art installation highlights how the Western world has distanced itself from the process of transnaturalization so the machine of modernity can proceed. By first disregarding and then severing the connection between object and subject or the social with the natural, manifestations of modernity can thus advance unabashedly. This investment in the exploitation of distant territories commencing over five-hundred years ago and persisting up until today directly links colonial systems with the onset of developmental capitalism.

The new empires of the twentieth century, the United States and Canada, gave colonialism a new face and named it development. Nonetheless, this new era “carried within it the traces of imperial reason, of an evolutionary hierarchy and racialized subordination” (Saldaño-Portillo 22). Replacing the “civilizing mission” of colonialism, development globalized and imposed ideas and knowledge such as “self-determination, independence, free trade, industrialization, and economic growth in a postcolonial era” (20). These ideals, Saldaño-Portillo argues, paradoxically posed as (re)justifications for meddling in the settler colonial societies of Latin America in that they insinuated emancipatory practices of decolonization (23). Through economic growth, free trade and the like, those countries, deemed as less developed, would be less dependent and more productive.²⁰ Ironically, proposing development as decolonial legitimized and intensified resource extraction and in order for this to occur, the more industrialized countries would supply the tools (19-22).²¹ Hence, removing minerals and gems from below ground became the ticket to decolonization, progress, and a new type of postcolonial (in)dependence. Instead of valuing land for its totality and its integrity, its mined components, wrenched from its whole, become the desired commodity.

²⁰ Development theory was initially conceived as an economic cure for the ills of the least developed or the developing countries. When such practices struggled to provide remedies in a timely fashion, new theories emerged under the umbrella of “modernization theory.” Studies surfaced on the sociological, psychological, and cultural reasons for certain countries lack of development. See Saldaño-Portillo (26).

²¹ Decolonial in the sense of situating previously colonized countries as post-colonial; as in colonized countries were now invited to participate in the global economy as sovereign nations.

In addition to extending themes of industrial capitalism, *Pollination* also draws attention to a subtler facet of the economic model: speculative capitalism. In his book *Speculative Fictions*, Alessandro Fornazzari works with the term *dedifferentiation* formulated through the readings of Fredric Jameson and Niklas Luhmann to better understand the era of neoliberalism. On one hand, Jameson writes of crystallization that is incited by the paradigmatic shift in 1973 when both economic and cultural systems collapsed into each other erasing distinction between the two. On the other-hand, Luhmann theorizes differentiation to explain responses to ever-expanding and changing systems within an evolving environment. Unlike crystallization which bundles the economic and the cultural, differentiation augments the number of systems to respond to an increasingly complex world. Fornazzari thus engages dedifferentiation indicating the decrease in systems despite increased complexity and variation of environment. In his sense, dedifferentiation specifically relates to the melding of economic systems into that of culture and vice versa. It is, "...a conjuncture when everything including commodity production has become cultural, and culture has become profoundly economic" (7). In other words, dedifferentiation explains how neoliberalism reduces the economic and cultural spheres into one totality - that of the social sphere. Because the rules of economics enter into the workings of the social, it subsumes the "entirety of human action" under its rational (8).

If we assume that the natural and the social are distinct systems but intimately connected and therefore inseparable, as BV and Echeverría do, then Fornazzari's dedifferentiation would then also collapse the natural, along with the economic and the

cultural, into the social sphere. This leaves a newly comprised social sphere dominated by the logics of the economy and vulnerable to the market. The installation, *Pollination*, provides a demonstration and critique of this process of dedifferentiation.

Moreover, rather than using the token to purchase a known experience, the payment is issued for access to an unknown opportunity. The low lighting and the individual private booths entice visitors to enter without indication of what will be seen, heard or felt after introducing the coin into the arcade slot. The acceptance to play the slots, in a sense, suggests a gamble; a risk taken for the thrill of the risk itself. Perhaps the pollination of the token not only grows the money gathering in slots but breeds more desire to risk engagement with novel experiences. In other words, the shock is what makes investment worth it. The symbolic metamorphosis of the butterfly as it migrates from the sweaty palm of the visitor down the throat of the arcade machine signals the addiction of the visitor to repeat the act, betting on a surprise that may or may not come. In this context of speculative capitalism, the possibility of gain – regardless of the cost and consequence – is privileged. Therefore, the premise promotes economic development even if it becomes violent. Because the economic and cultural have become so intertwined, we fail to recognize its profound effect on the socio-natural connection. In *Pollination* however, the violence required for economic development reveals the process of dedifferentiation. Displaying a severed connection between the social and the natural, *Pollination* simulates the fate of nature's commodification and near extinction. Thus, the art installation exemplifies the "authoritarian violence on which the new economists' temple of speculation is built" (Fornazzari 49).

Pollination draws on tropes of the thrill experienced in gambling or, perhaps, when attending a peepshow, thus stoking the fire of speculation. It simulates how the market capitalizes on the cycle of dedifferentiation where the social finds itself regulated by the whims of economics. Currency gains access to an experience that might or might not be the same every time. Although the view that meets the visitors' eye when payment is registered will always be the garden, the visitor does not know that and the addiction is humored. *Pollination* serves as a stark reminder that such speculative capitalism indeed perpetuates dedifferentiation and thus alienation from how the natural is integral to the vitality of the social.

This immersive installation offers a glimpse into how global penetration of capitalism distances not only from workers and consumers the integral process of use-value by formulating abstract exchange-values and hierarchies of lives-that-matter, but also from vital and reciprocal connections to and with land, forces of nature and animal life. In the *Grundrisse* Karl Marx affirms this fact when stating that the capitalist system provoked a severing of the relationship between human and nature, and fomented practices of valuing nature as a thing of utility instead of recognizing it as a power in and of itself.²² This relationship, or lack thereof, is a distortion considering that in his

²² Considering my desire (and the necessity) to highlight the intersections of race, gender, sex and labor in the context of coloniality, it is first important to discuss, albeit briefly, how Marxism stems from a European background and divides society based on class. Given that, as a general rule Marxism does not engage with issues of race nor gender considering the proletariat reflects the body of a working white man. To perhaps no fault of his own, and rather to those who succeed him, the Marxist coined term "proletariat" became a universal model to refer to subjugated persons in other geo-political contexts around the globe that were seen by some to hold potential political and economic agency. However, as Mignolo points out, the colonial wound never touched the bodies of "Marx's

manuscripts from 1844 Marx writes, “el hombre es primero e indisolublemente parte de la naturaleza y este metabolismo primitivo se redobla en el proceso de preservación de su ser: la constante relación del hombre con la naturaleza no es sino la relación consigo mismo” (qtd. in Houtart 18). If humans’ relationship to its surroundings is synonymous with that to itself, then, as *Pollination* draws attention to, we are witnessing an era of homicidal and suicidal tendencies (Sianes and Abellán 61).

Likewise, Echeverría writes of this alienation between the ‘natural form’ and the ‘social form’ in a capitalist system, “las relaciones de producción/consumo aparecen... como una entidad realmente exterior al sujeto....Enajenándose de la vida en que se constituye la ‘forma natural’ de la sociedad, se vuelven sobre ella y la obligan a deformar su actualización de la estructura del proceso de reproducción social” (34). Thus, *Pollination* shows quite starkly how capitalism, in its excessive, wasteful, and accumulatory practices, lacks a translatability of the connection between the natural and the social, and how this denial of correlation reduces vitality for both.

While *Pollination* at once draws its visitors into the intricate web of Western practices of land penetration, commodification of its integral elements and loss of human intimacy with earth, it seeks to critique such modern practices of development. In this way, the message of *Pollination* coincides with BV in that both argue that this transnaturalization process hinges on living a life of “plenitud” so that all living beings - human and nonhuman - can coexist through continuous performance of sustainable

German and English working class” and therefore the Marxist rhetoric is “blind to racial oppression and the reproduction of the colonial wound” (“On Subalterns...” 399, 403).

actions (Macas 14). For reciprocity to take place however, Echeverría contends that in order for an exchange between object and subject to render both as political and integral actors, successful communication and interpretation of that transfer is required. In other words, the possibility of social reproduction that is born from acknowledging the value and power of both object and subject (or the natural and the social) can only occur if the significance of the object is regarded by the subject in a non-hierarchical and reciprocal way and vice versa. If such an interaction is facilitated, it is considered an emancipatory interpretation because it not only reproduces the socio-natural, it honors the integral purpose of all life thus working to destabilize systems of power and hierarchy.

My reading of this interaction, which is informed by indigenous world perspectives, accounts for, “other values at play, such as: knowledge, social and cultural recognition, ethical and... spiritual codes of conduct in relation to society and nature, human values [and] a vision of the future” (Acosta qtd. in Martin 27). In allotting subjectivity to the object in its ‘natural form,’ it opens us to the following epistemes: an active role played by a possible sacred or spiritual presence; a re-connection of humans’ actions with objects’ (re)actions; and a destabilization of humans’ dominance over non-human entities. For instance, in the Tsotsil or Tseltal community this would be related to the *ch’ulel* or spirit/sacredness that exists in all earthly objects. Just one example of this is Tseltal-Maya scholar Juan López Intzín who proposes the way to decolonization is to *corazonarse* and *re-ch’ulelizarse* (“*Ich’el ta muk’...*” 77; Presentation 14 April 2016). In a presentation at the Hemispheric Institute for Politics and Performance, López Intzín argues that the process of colonization displaced the heart and emptied the sacredness

from all life forms. Thus, in order to live in *lekil kuxlejal* (Tseltal and Tsotsil translation of BV), indigenous communities must deconstruct the imposed hegemonic vision of the world and begin to create new futures through epistemologies of the heart (*corazonarse*) and the sacred (*re-ch'ulelizarse*).²³ Being even more specific, he directly links the need to *re-ch'ulelizarse* with the eco-system given that capitalism recasts everything as a commodity.

Thus, it seems that Echeverría's understanding of the transnaturalization process would require a cyclical conceptualization of regeneration. If this is so, it operates in a realm understood differently than the linear time of Western history and modernity. Because the initial production and subsequent reproduction of ones' individual and then social identity is not organic to that person, meaning, it is not predisposed to its identity, it must be continually constructed and then reconstructed. It is then that humans' behavior is not only dependent on regeneration, but also dependent on the 'natural form' of objects to work in tandem to reproduce the social and in consequence, one's identity. This relationship and interaction is in constant motion and must be reenacted continuously to sustain the identity of one's sociality. Echeverría writes,

El *telos* estructural que anima al comportamiento del ser humano o social difiere por tanto esencialmente de aquel que presenta la dimensión puramente animal de, [sic] la naturaleza. No se trata de la conservación de un principio de socialidad que estuviese ya dado en la organicidad animal, sino de la fundación y refundación constante de ese principio. Este sentido peculiar de la reproducción social hace del enfrentamiento del sujeto con la naturaleza...un

²³ López Intzín makes it clear that although the heart is the key element in forming new epistemologies for the future, it works in tandem with the mind (Presentation, 14 April 2016).

enfrentamiento indirecto, *mediado* por el enfrentamiento del sujeto con su propia sociabilidad. [Emphasis in the original] (39)

And while this ‘natural form’ of social reproduction is not established as a given, it is proposed as a liberating potential to be enacted for both the natural and the social and of course, the relationship between the two.

Nonetheless, *Pollination* creates an environment where the reproduction of the social is stalled. To be in such a setting where one must pay for the privilege to engage in a voyeuristic experience with nature, the natural alienates from the social and the social is also removed from itself. If, on the one hand, constitution of identity of the social-self depends on a (re)cycling through and with other ‘natural forms,’ *Pollination* simulates this impossibility linking its rupture to systems of modernity and development in which regenerative relationships between humans and land do not exist. On the other-hand, the experience had by the visitor in viewing the garden is void of social interaction. It lacks the possibility of building or renewing community with other humans and even less so in, around, and with nature. The visitor instead is isolated, alone in a booth with his/her/hier own thoughts and feelings. On the other side of the window, the garden too is confined inside a room and severed from its larger self. *Pollination* then offers a glimpse of how the process of transnaturalization ceases. Precisely because they have no regenerative interaction with each other, neither humans nor nature in this setting offer a life of plenitude where all living beings coexist through constant performances of sustainability.

Pollination successfully critiques Western economic systems’ violent engagement with the natural folding in notions of capitalist speculation and exemplifying dedifferentiation. As discussed above, such economic systems have, in part, been

justified through the Cartesian notion of the nature-human divide. However, within the Latin American context of modernity/coloniality, unbridled exploitation is rooted in the gendering of land and its inhabitants as feminine. Fashioned after a standard peepshow, *Pollination* questions expectations of what is exotic; what is fantasized; and what is desired. It articulates, and calls for critical reflection, the connection between the objectified and commodified female body and the objectified and commodified earth in a patriarchal, Judeo-Christian and capitalist society. To further unpack *Pollination*, we must engage with how the gendering of Latin America intimately paved the way for the socio-natural rupture.

As is well known, through the perpetuated legend of La Malinche, the letters of the conquest, and the naming of the continent, both land and indigenous peoples of *Las Indias* were represented as the feminine “other” upon the arrival of the Spaniards.²⁴ Establishing a paradigm of comparison, European explorers described the Amerindians as they perceived them to be and as they needed them to be in order to legitimize their presence as colonizers to the Spanish crown. Christopher Columbus writes in his 1492 diary describing the Amerindians as poor and as naked as if they’d just been born.²⁵ He comments that they also knew nothing of steel and swords - a phallic symbol and tool of

²⁴ See Freya Schiwy, “Decolonization” and “Ecoturismo;” Rolena Adorno, “El sujeto colonial;” Michael Horswell, *Decolonizing the Sodomite*; María Josefina Saldaño-Portillo, *The Revolutionary Imagination*; Ella Shohat, “Imaging Terra.”

²⁵ Columbus’s diary entry on October 11, 1492 reads, “luego vinieron gente desnuda, [...] me pareció que era gente muy pobre de todo. Ellos andan todos desnudos como su madre los parió, y también las mujeres [...] todos los que yo vi eran todos mancebos...no traen armas ni las conocen...No tienen algún hierro” (26-27).

patriarchal domination. Juan Ginés Sepúlveda, writing from Spain in 1547, associated the submissiveness of the Amerindians as an indicator of an inferior culture. Moreover, their supposed attributes – “Cobardía, ineptitud y rudeza” – aligned them with other meek groups such as women (qtd. in Adorno, “El sujeto colonial” 58).²⁶ According to the (white) European man, moors, women, children and now Amerindians shared similar traits of inferiority and infantilism. The (white) man thus positioned himself the virile hero called to tame the virginal yet savage “other.” “El amerindio llega a ocupar el mismo sitio que la mujer y el niño, gracias en gran parte a las comparaciones del amerindio con otros seres dominados en las jerarquías y la superposición de las oposiciones. Así los discursos de dominación y jerarquización domésticas e imperiales se sobreponían” (Adorno, “El sujeto colonial” 62). As Adorno argues, not only was the “other” seen as docile but also as unpredictable and thus threatening, requiring Europeans to use force to subdue them (59).²⁷

The narratives of the conquest thus constructed a gendered imaginary of the native inhabitants that extended to the very earth of the continent. Humans and nature

²⁶ Sepúlveda provides a stark example of how epistemologies were formed on the sole basis of reading news of the conquest. Sepúlveda never set foot in what is now Latin America yet he advocated for the enslavement of the native populations. This point also draws critical attention to how technologies of knowledge and the geopolitics of knowledge are structured hierarchically. The letter is situated as rational whereas the oral, the lived and the embodied experience is seen as irrational. Thus, methods of communication were also subjected to a process of subalternization. Thus, we must be aware of and work to dismantle as a process of decolonizing.

²⁷ Adorno writes, “Es importante notar que en interpretaciones como las de Sepúlveda, la cobardía femenina y la crueldad feroz (hasta la antropofagia) se veían como comportamientos complementarios” (“El sujeto colonial” 59).

folded into each other, were represented as feminine and virginal to the conquerors' and contrasted with the explorers' virility and ability to penetrate. As such, equating the native peoples with the natural and the European with the civilized, the European explorer imposed an ethnocentric ideology that forever colored the story of the conquest, colonization, and now modernity (Gonzalez-Ortega 135-138; Adorno, *Colonial* 12). Just as Margo Glantz draws attention to the indigenous women in the conquest era being exchanged as spoils of war, relegated to objects to be handled by men, the natural environment was also seen as an object to be exploited ("Doña Marina"). The Amerindians were seen as living harmoniously with the abundant and rich land in and of which Columbus observed and desired to appropriate given its "extraordinary promise of...economic gain" (Gonzalez-Ortega 138; Adorno, *Colonial* 13).²⁸ Lastly, the continent, having been "discovered" was (re)named by Columbus using a word that not only gave homage to Italian Amerigo Vespucci but also forever established the view that the land and its inhabitants were seen as feminine. "“No veo razón para que no le llamemos América, es decir, la tierra de Américo, por Américo su descubridor, hombre de sagaz ingenio, así como Europa y Asia recibieron ya sus nombres de mujeres”" (qtd. in Gonzalez-Ortega 144).

As shown, nature and the indigenous (both men and women) were, and still are, intimately connected in the colonial imaginary and both gendered metaphorically as

²⁸ Gonzalez-Ortega writes, "En los textos de y sobre Colón sobre el descubrimiento y conquista de América, se revela el triple deseo del almirante de hacerse rico y noble y de ser reconocido por la Iglesia católica como un 'iluminado' por Dios para descubrir una 'nueva tierra'" (138).

subordinate to the domination of the European man and his knowledge (Schiwy, “Decolonization” 275; Saldaño-Portillo 34). In the early seventeenth century, philosopher-scientist Francis Bacon wrote in a sexualized language that when it came to the “inquisition of truth” man should not hesitate to “penetrate” uncharted territories (qtd. in Shohat 44; qtd. in Klein 170). Perhaps Bacon was emboldened by Biblical passages of Genesis 1:26 and 28 in which they state that man was created in God’s image to have dominion over all the earth and to replenish and subdue it.²⁹

Given this constructed power, Andrea Smith argues that “Patriarchal gender violence is the process by which colonizers inscribe hierarchy and domination on the bodies of the colonized” (23). As it pertains to my argument in this chapter, I read violence being directed at “bodies” of both humans and land. In other words, both land and indigenous peoples have been constructed and considered effeminate and therefore subordinate to the otherwise constructed patriarchal systems of neocolonialism. Currently, we observe how indigenous-owned land is being unjustly appropriated, violated and repurposed in the name of progress and development - or more unapologetically, in the name of profit - through agreements signed by transnational companies and country governments. To give just one example, I mention the class-action suit between the oil company Chevron, then Texaco, and the indigenous communities of the Ecuadorian Amazon that has been in proceedings since 1993 and is

²⁹ King James Version (KJV).

still not resolved.³⁰ Such a case, states writer Kyla Sankey in her *Truthout* article, is “representative of the new direction of the global institutional infrastructure...where treaties [between corporations and governments] offer unprecedented levels of protection for private investment, and privilege the rights of investors over decisions of governments and the rights of citizens and the environment in their home country.”

What used to be masked as the “salvation” and the “civilization” of the “savages,” has evolved into an utter disregard for the well-being of the land or its inhabitants to satisfy the insatiable greed for material excess. The rationale of neoliberal capitalism seems to endorse violent indifference to the land and communities within which it sends corporations to drill, mine, or deforest. On the dawn of global trade treaties such as the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP), and the Trade in Services Agreement (TiSA) being pushed by the Global North, it is easy, although painful, to see how the structures of coloniality continue to expand and consume that which lies in its path. Its practices, even in their evolution across time and space, preserve the strategies that made it possible in the first place: a rhetoric of racism, epistemological power, and patriarchy. In its wake, affected geographies and populations repeat the experiences of inequality, of disregard for heterogeneous epistemologies, of human rights abuses, of fatal health issues, and of dwindling integrity and stability of the natural structures of earth.

³⁰ Although recently absolved of any responsibility to the Ecuadorian communities for leaving behind 880 pits of solid waste, 60 billion gallons of toxic water in the local water sources and 650,000 barrels of crude oil spilled in the jungles and pathways, by the World Bank’s private tribunal, the Union of People Affected by the Oil Operations of Texaco (UDAPT) have still not relented and succeeded in solidifying a trial date in the Toronto court (Sankey, “Ecuador’s Legal”).

Pollination connects the link between land construed as feminine and the capitalist practices that penetrate it, rendering it a commodity to consume and fetishize. What is the effect when visitors enter a booth and are confronted not with a naked woman but rather a garden? Why does Postcommodity overlay the objectification of women with that of nature?

As a physical space, *Pollination* mimics an economy largely run by men for men at the expense, labor and exploitation of women. Whereas the signposts of its external structure conjure up feelings associated with (male) lust, taboo, guilt, excitement, arousal, domination, relief and pleasure, the visual of the garden transfers these feelings towards natural flora and fauna - that which could be a rare sight and thus fetishized due to capitalist practices of unrelenting accumulation, consumption and waste. If Postcommodity meant to critique the visitor's gaze projecting from the booth onto the garden as male, the words of bell hooks pinpoint this normalized unilateral voyeurism: "'Naturally,' the presence of the Other, the body of the Other, was seen as existing to serve the ends of white male desires" (309). "They [white males] claim the body of the colored Other instrumentally, as unexplored terrain, a symbolic frontier that will be fertile ground for their reconstruction of the masculine norm" (310). If read within a colonial context, "Other" in hooks' sense easily cognates as "land" or "natural resource." Thus, her message can be read to relate the feminine body to that of land.

Further expanding hooks' argument, the "Other," whether a minority female body or a body of land, is seen by modern man as incomplete, passive, without agenda or agency. A terra nullius if you will, "land seen as belonging to nobody and going to

waste” (Sankey, “Ecuador’s Legal”). Thus, the gaze of the (white) male whose eyes settle on “fertile ground” and “unexplored terrain” seeks to control this unproductive body and render it productive for his own desires. Such beliefs and actions are perpetually justified, first under colonialism and now capitalism, by a racist rhetoric that disregards indigenous communities, their livelihoods and their ecosystems, and appropriates elements of the earth to commodify and sell them as commercial goods (Sankey, “Ecuador’s Legal”).

Through its immersive art installation, *Postcommodity* intersects how the gendering of Latin American land and its inhabitants rationalizes economic practices that extract resources for profit, displace populations and disrupt livelihoods. *Pollination* articulates, and calls for critical reflection on the fatal consequences of neoliberal extractivism where the social and the natural are severed.

PART II – *Tierra* (2013)

Whereas *Pollination* questions the synonymy of the earth and the female body within the colonial framework and calls for critical reflection on the construction of the patriarchal gaze to control, own, and exploit, Regina Galindo in her video-performance piece, *Tierra*, looks past such a gaze, refusing a looking relation, and positions her exposed body grounded in the earth. She stands not as a sexualized body but as a political one (see Figure 4).



Figure 4: Photo by Bertrand Huet. Courtesy of Regina José Galindo.

The murmur of the front hoe, the arm reaching within what seems like inches of her body, recalls resistive movements of history and contemporary moments where women (and men) confront and disrupt the machine of global modernity, exercising the right to defend their livelihood, land, and well-being (see Figure 5). Providing Figure 5 as an example, we can see how Galindo's performance enacts a trope employed by innumerable movements that protect land and peoples from destruction. Employing such imaging conjures up an already extensive - and growing - archive that includes, but is not limited to, the #NODAPL movement in North Dakota, women of San Juan de Canarias in Northern Peru protesting Candente Copper mine; the animated image of Goldman Environmental Prize recipient, Máxima Acuña holding the arm of a front hoe in her hand;

those that laid in the mouth of a bulldozer in Myanmar protesting the Letpadaung copper mine; women clashing with riot police after the Federal Government of Ecuador gave their resolution about oil exploitation; and protests against the highway construction through Territorio Indígena Parque Nacional Isiboro Secure (TIPNIS).



Figure 5: Image of Máxima Acuña.

Source: <https://www.mama-tierra.org/justice-maxima-acuna-atalaya/>

Images of such defense, and the stories they tell, are hard to come by in mainstream media. As Judith Butler puts it, “the violence that we inflict on others is only – and always – selectively brought into public view” (*Precarious Life* 39). Or, as Derrida writes, “‘Writing is unthinkable without repression’” alluding to “‘the deletions, blanks, and disguises’” (qtd. in Diana Taylor, *The Archive* 25). Printed largely in alternative media sources, if at all, the average citizen must search to find such news. Not only is the information hard to find but the reporters – not to mention those protesting – are

increasingly being criminalized or killed by repressive state forces. Just to name several, Honduran environmental activist Berta Cáceres was assassinated, “Democracy Now!” radio journalist Amy Goodman was arrested, and the rising number of Mexican and Central American news correspondents all register as those suffering criminal accusations, charges or death for covering stories that speak out against the neoliberal, capitalist machine of modernity.

If we can call *Tierra* a denunciation of capitalist extraction as well as of the numerous themes mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, and recalling an image echo of other social movements of resistance, it also catalogues as an audiovisual archival piece. Filmed in Les Moulins, France without a public audience, *Tierra* is not considered a true performance in the repertoire sense of Diana Taylor who states, “A video performance is not a performance, though it often comes to replace the performance as a *thing* in itself” [Emphasis in original] (*The Archive* 20).³¹ In other words, since *Tierra* is a video, that in and of itself makes it less performative and arguably functions as archival due to being captured within a form of “enduring material” (19).³² However, the video of *Tierra* could engage in its own performative acts depending on how it is discursively disseminated and viewed. Furthermore, the repertoire and the archive are not always

³¹ “The repertoire...enacts embodied memory...all these acts usually thought of as ephemeral, nonreproducible knowledge. Repertoire...allows for individual agency....The repertoire requires presence: people participate in the production and reproduction of knowledge by ‘being there,’ being part of the transmission....the actions that are the repertoire do not remain the same” (Diana Taylor, *The Archive* 20).

³² The archive registers “as documents, maps, literary texts...videos, films...all those items supposedly resistant to change” and is considered to work “across distance, over time and space” separating the origin of knowledge from the knower (Diana Taylor, *The Archive* 19).

dichotomous. In fact, “(the video is part of the archive; what it represents is part of the repertoire). Embodied memory, because it is live, exceeds the archive’s ability to capture it. But that does not mean that performance – as ritualized, formalized, or reiterative behavior – disappears” (20).

What Galindo archives in *Tierra* emerges from the testimonies of Guatemalan generals who massacred indigenous persons during the 36-year civil war. Portrayed as enemies of the state for allegedly sympathizing with the guerrilla insurgents and promoting leftist ideals, entire indigenous communities were targeted. Such eradication of the “enemy” justified the officials in confiscating and appropriating the land for their own use.

En Guatemala [la guerra civil] se extendió durante tantos años porque la ley oligarquía, o sea la parte pudiente, la gente rica en Guatemala aprovechó [...] la guerra, para seguir atacando y quedarse con la mayoría de la tierra de los indígenas....Cuando llegaban a las comunidades indígenas y los atacaban y los masacraban de tal forma aduciendo que eran comunistas, era mentira. Eran indígenas que vivían en la montaña. Pero *los asesinaban para poder quedarse con las tierras*. [My emphasis]
(Interview with Galindo:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mlteAI2P_98)

Witness to how military officials accomplished such tasks of ideological cleansing, material gain, and ethnocide in the name of war was shared in the 2013 court case against Ríos Montt and Mauricio Rodríguez Sánchez.³³ A protected military official testified crucial evidence revealing that yes, there was a strategic genocide in Guatemala:

³³ Rodríguez Sánchez served as head of military intelligence under Ríos Montt. Ríos Montt on May 10, 2013 was found guilty of genocide and crimes against humanity during his 17-month rule in 1982 and 1983. Ríos Montt was sentenced to 80 years in prison. Sánchez Rodríguez was acquitted on both charges. Days later, the constitutional court annulled the judgment.

- ¿Cómo mataban [sic] gente? –preguntó el fiscal.
- Primero ordenaban al operador de la máquina, al oficial García, que cavara un hoyo. Luego los camiones llenos de gente los parqueaban frente al Pino, y uno por uno, iban pasando. No les disparaban. Muchas veces los puyaban con bayoneta. Les arrancaban el pecho con las bayonetas, y los llevaban a la fosa. Cuando se llenaba la fosa dejaban caer la pala mecánica sobre los cuerpos. (*Tierra's* web-page on reginajosegalindo.com)

Present at the hearings, Galindo sourced the testimonies to create *Tierra*. In this piece she utilizes her own body as a site of memory and remembrance of the indigenous peoples silenced by bayonets and pressed into each other and the earth. The presence of the front hoe that digs methodically re-presents the preparations required for mass burial sites. On the other-hand, it symbolically uncovers the indigenous bodies which simultaneously unearths their erasure within Guatemala's official history.

Inspired by the testimonies, this piece strikes at the heart of neocolonial violence connecting the eradication of indigenous peoples from their land for the purpose of appropriating and exploiting their territory in the name of modernity. *Tierra* intimately links historical reality with performance while serving as a representational archival piece that fills a historical void. Therefore, I posit that *Tierra* is both an archived memory and a performance piece. It is part of the archive because of the “requirements of storage and dissemination,” but it is also part of the repertoire due to its nonverbal and embodied expression (Diana Taylor, *The Archive* 24).

Including, yet moving beyond the historical references of *Tierra*, the piece is timeless as it reverberates with the common tropes employed globally to resist the machine of modernity. In this regard, *Tierra* indeed exceeds the confining frame of the video, and thus the archive, not only revitalizing repressed memories but also joining the

established and emerging network of anti-capitalist movements. Moreover, the presence of Galindo's exposed and marked body carries within and on it memories not only of Guatemala's history of genocide and state repression but also her personal history as a performance artist. I call upon particularly haunting pieces such as *Autocanibalismo* (2002), *Un Espejo para la pequeña muerte* (2006), *Mientras, ellos siguen libres* (2007), *150,000 Voltios* (2007), *Cepo* (2007), *Confesión* (2007), *Reconocimiento de un cuerpo* (2008), *Trayectoria* (2008), *Breaking the Ice* (2008), *Juegos de poder* (2009), *Libertad condicional* (2009), *Crisis Dignity* (2009), *Crisis Blood* (2009), *Crisis Hair* (2009), *Estrias* (2009), *Object* (2010), *Looting* (2010), *Punto Ciego* (2010), and *Caparazón* (2010). In these performances, Galindo utilizes her own female body as a site of testimony upon which and within which to represent the violence, exploitation, mourning, rape, torture, abandonment, poverty, abuse and suffering experienced by indigenous and non-indigenous women and men in Guatemala as well as other parts of Central and South America.

In *Mientras, ellos siguen libres*, Galindo lies face-up naked on a bed, her arms are tied above her head and her spread legs are tied at the ankles to the bottom corners of the bed frame. She is 8 months pregnant and her upper thighs and genital area are smeared with blood. She writes of the piece,

During the armed conflict in Guatemala, rape became a commonly used tactic used by the army against indigenous women. The fact that the pregnancy wasn't ignored by the aggressors, who showed their direct intention to have the victims abort through repeated sexual assault, and thus eliminate this way, the origin of life from the indigenous peoples. (Galindo, *Regina* 196)

In several of her 2007 pieces, *150,000 Voltios*, *Cepo* and *Confesión*, Galindo receives 150,000 volts from an instrument used commonly by the police in the first one; sits confined in a pillory for 12 consecutive hours in the second; and is water-boarded by a volunteer in the third. Lastly, in *Looting*, Galindo has a Guatemalan dentist drill 8 holes in her molars to insert encrustations of the purest national gold. Weeks later in Berlin, a dentist removes the gold fillings which she then displays in a glass case in a museum. Through this small sampling we can see how Galindo acutely embodies and inscribes the history of Guatemalans on her flesh and in her organs. Her physical presence recalls the memory that some Guatemalans have forgotten or erased.³⁴ In a 2006 interview with Francisco Goldman in *BOMB* magazine she states, “I cannot separate myself from what happens. It scares me, it enrages me, it hurts me, it depresses me. When I do what I do, I don’t try to approach my own pain as a means of seeing myself and curing myself from that vantage; in every action I try to channel my own pain, my own energy, to transform it into something more collective.”

Because of its archival and mobile form, the performance of *Tierra* has the potential to circulate showing a story not only of land exploitation, but of the previous told and untold stories Galindo holds within and on her very body. Through such a transfer of experience and knowledge, Galindo reaches beyond her single body to the collective. She offers historical and visceral testimonies to her viewers forming a multiplicity of bodies that, if nothing else, mentally capture what she portrays. Thus, the

³⁴ In a 2006 interview with Francisco Goldman in *BOMB* magazine she states a reason for her performances, “I say that these efforts were necessary because Guatemala is a country without memory. The people, with little access to education, are easy to mislead.”

videoed performance encapsulates memories that can continually be revitalized and revisited.³⁵

Resisting the ephemerality of performance, *Tierra* is added to the archives that index enactment of resistance. It positions itself among the other images mentioned above, that if found or merely disseminated for that matter, attempt to document the “...losses that we are asked not to mourn, when we attempt to name, and so to bring under the rubric of the ‘human,’ those whom the United States and its allies have killed...” (Butler, *Precarious Life* 46). And although *Tierra* resonates with realities and themes of resistance and defense of land, the possibility of viewing it is limited. Although it is posted on the Internet for downloading, a search for the full video, or even clips of the video will render you empty handed. Locked with a password and on a private account, I was only able to view it due to academic connections and the privilege of networking, not to mention access to both a computer and Wi-Fi. In this sense, the piece is stunted in its ability to form a collective.

Tierra, thus perpetuates an archive that “sustains power” since it was not a public performance and the video is for limited viewers only (Diana Taylor, *The Archive* 19). “The repertoire, like the archive, is mediated” (21). Calling on a performative act of staging such an audiovisual film recording requires us to discuss mediations, power dynamics, and mediums of transfer, knowledge and embodiment of both the archive and the repertoire.

³⁵ Diana Taylor is quick to mention several myths that are associated with the archive. One is that it “resists change, corruptibility, and political manipulation” (*The Archive* 19). Therefore, just because an item is archived does not mean that it cannot also be erased or destroyed.

Although selectively available for viewing, *Tierra* nonetheless engages not only with unearthing political memories of genocide but also reiterates and re-grounds vital relationships to land, stages conflict with extractivist practices of modernity, and incites discourse among the intersections and divergences of female bodies and bodies of land. *Tierra* resonates with how indigenous women at AFM conceptualize BV in that it offers space to “...pensar el cuerpo como territorio político de dominación-emancipación. Sabemos que liberar la sexualidad de sus prejuicios y ataduras sigue siendo un desafío, una aspiración y un deseo que permiten subvertir las bases del patriarcado abriendo nuevos caminos a la libertad individual y colectiva” (12). Due to the colonial representation of indigenous peoples and land as discussed in Part I of this chapter, the indigenous female-led/feminist movements in Latin America recognize the importance of re-appropriating and re-articulating this relationship for themselves in their own words. Stated as a central axis of some indigenous women’s movement is, in fact, the body in relation to the environment and land (AFM 25; Osorio Hernández 283; Castañeda Salgado and del Jurado Mendoza 218). Given that in the Latin American colonial context both land and women were, and are, socially constructed categories, this also means that they can be reconstructed, liberated to change through time and space (Osorio Hernández 295). Schiwy also argues that the indigenous female voice that didactically speaks of “la memoria de una ética ecológica,” positions herself as a subject knowledgeable of other epistemologies (“Ecoturismo” 227). Thus, operating in difference to the Western world’s constructs, cultural memory and regenerative relationships to land turns into a political tool for indigenous populations. These ways of knowing and living with land require and

desire no scientific reasoning or proof rather, it is the lived experiences gained by such intimacy and connection between humans and land that is monitored to know how best to evolve.³⁶

Galindo's performance piece, *Tierra* bolsters and functions within the discourse of indigenous peoples' and women's activism in resisting land exploitation and capitalist development. It contrasts with notions of women and land as passive and Galindo's naked body dialogues with conceptions of Westerners' unseeing the "native." In short, *Tierra* enacts principles of BV and thus adds nuances to this philosophical framework, enunciated in the language of performance.

Watching *Tierra* and witnessing Galindo's rootedness in the earth as it is carved out around her, I cannot help but recall Columbus's diary entry mentioned above as well as a representation of the first encounter (see Figure 6). In it, an objective angle illustrates the arrival by boat of Spanish explorers to *Las Indias* and the Amerindians watching them on land. The naked bodies of the Amerindians emerge from the undulating hills and trees lining the shore. Some of the faces in fact resemble the same brush strokes used to draw the foliage of the trees, and the lines of the hill ridges mirror that of the legs extending

³⁶ Jonathan Watts, a journalist writing from Rio de Janeiro, states in *The Guardian*, "The world's indigenous communities need to be given a bigger role in climate stabilization....Alain Frechette of Rights and Resources...urged national governments and negotiators to make indigenous communities a more central part of climate policies. 'When communities have secure forest rights, not only are forests better protected, but communities fare better. It's what economists call an optimal solution. Everyone wins,' he said. 'By contrast, large-scale development initiatives produce quick wins, but the long-term environmental, economic and political costs are not taken into account. They are just pushed on to future generations.'"

towards the water. The sketched Spaniards, on the other-hand, are well distinguished from the swirling waters in the background. They are fully clothed with pointy hats and beards. One Amerindian and one of the two Spaniards extend what looks like an offering of sorts towards the other party. Whereas the Spaniard holds out what looks like a small tower and is detailed, the Amerindian's object is round-like and undecorated. The Spaniard's gaze seems direct while the Amerindian who extends the gift looks sideways at his/her/hier fellow people. This representation depicts the Amerindians as effeminate and passive to the more phallic rendering of the Spaniards with their pointy object, hats, beards and penetrating look.



*Figure 6: A representation of the arrival of the Spaniards to Las Indias Occidentales.
Source: <https://www.uhmc.sunysb.edu/surgery/america.html>*

This sketch registers, of course, as just one representation of the numerous colonial constructs of indigenous peoples inherently linked to land and deemed as feminine/passive/subordinate and the explorers and conquerors of Spain as masculine/aggressive/dominant. I now however, link this image to Galindo's layered

performance of *Tierra* but with a twist. Although she situates herself within this colonial history, she does not perpetuate it. Instead, *Tierra* is embedded in a historical consciousness of this dichotomy maintained by Western epistemologies. *Tierra* echoes *Mazorca* in the sense that it also has a chronological depth that condenses time and space projecting awareness of the continuous practices of neocolonialism. With her feet planted firmly in the ground, her body unwavering, Galindo stands in solidarity with past histories of the civil war and present social movements that resist extraction and exploitation of land. Just as their mobilizations have strived to accomplish, *Tierra* too shows Galindo refusing to be displaced from her plot of land and thus offers alternatives to how history is created, and who creates it.

Adding to the layers of *Tierra* is the persistent presence of the front hoe and how it creates such a spectacle that its' exploitative acts are overlooked. Guy Debord's definition of spectacle is helpful here. It "is a material manifestation of an ideological framework rooted in capitalist accumulation and commodity fetishism. As the spectacle advances, it supposedly erases the traces of the human labour that brought it into being, generating alienation and blinding its audience to the structural inequalities created and sustained by capitalism" (qtd. in Butterworth 135). Although a principal focal point of the piece, Galindo's seemingly vulnerable naked body could be made invisible and thus disregarded by the viewers' concern or interest with the machine. Let me explain further.

Throughout the video of the performance, the front hoe, digging around Galindo's body, accumulates a pile of dirt extracted from the core of the earth, leaving roots split mid-growth, dirt displaced, and deep holes. Despite Galindo's body always positioned

within the view-finder of the camera and thus on-screen, she could be overlooked after a short time because she isn't doing anything. She stands there. The editing cuts to include different angles of Galindo in relation to the front hoe, to the mote being dug around her, to the pile of dirt growing, but Galindo herself does not move. Our eyes are drawn to the activity performed by the machine: it moves all around Galindo and if at first, we were worried the retractable arm would crush her, we realize that that will not happen. Thus, we content ourselves with watching the pile grow higher and the mote get deeper. We begin to wonder, what will be next? What is the objective, what is all the digging for? The constant rumble of the machine lulls us and we are transfixed. The transformation of the earth and the product accumulated by the work of the front hoe contrasted to the stagnancy of Galindo's body lures us into the spectacle to which Debord alludes. As the spectacle advances we no longer pay attention to the naked body. Instead, we are captured by the moving parts of the powerful machine and what it draws from the bowels of the earth. Indeed, this is precisely what *Pollination* warns us of: We are so often distracted by the product we consume that we are blind to the sacrifices of others, land included, that brought it into being.

Not paying attention to Galindo's human figure however, demands a discussion as to why the nude body is not the site of spectacle whereas the machine is. Based on the historical referencing this piece invokes, Galindo stands in for the indigenous body. Surrounded by tall grasses and trees blowing in the wind, Galindo's raw representation of the bare indigenous body is seen by Western viewers as "part of the landscape" and "already known" (Rony 5-6). In other words, a naked body standing in what seems to be

a rural setting plays into Eurocentric constructions of “natives,” in terms of where they should be, how they should look, and what they should be doing. “The ‘native’ is even more Other – represented as trapped in some deep-frozen past, inarticulate, not yet evolved, seen as Primitive, and yes, Savage” (Rony 5). Galindo indeed could be interpreted as “inarticulate” for her silence. She could be interpreted as “primitive” for exposing her flesh. Viewed through a Western lens, her exposure and silence plays into the already expected narrative that positions the indigenous body as part of the rural *mise-en-scène*. Instead of questioning the action of the indigenous body, or the stillness for that matter, it is “often not even ‘seen’ by the viewer but is taken for real” (5). Meaning, the silent, naked body standing in the grass seemingly enacts the very limitations imposed by neocolonizers and therefore it stays properly within the Western confines delineated for it. Fatimah Tobing Rony recalls Claude Lévi-Strauss’ musings that “explorers, anthropologists, and tourists voyage to foreign places in search of the novel, the undiscovered. What they find, he tells us, apart from their own trash thrown back in their faces, is what they already knew they would find, images predigested by certain ‘platitudes and commonplaces.’ It is thus impossible to view the ‘native’ with fresh eyes” (qtd. in Rony 5). Due to stereotypes constructed and perpetuated throughout the centuries, Westerners have already drawn their conclusions about certain peoples considered to be “others” to themselves. Within this reality then, what seems exotic is at the same time “always already known” (Rony 6).

And although Galindo does not break her silence to convince the Western viewer otherwise, the physical backdrop of her performance site, not to mention the historical

referencing, calls into question the romanticization of the indigenous body in bucolic landscapes. For starters, and as mentioned above, the video-performance takes place in a historically colonizing European country: France. This dislocates viewers' preconceived ideas of where there is indigenous presence, and gestures towards globalization and the migratory flow of bodies crossing borders. Next, although the majority of the filming occludes what lies outside the frame of the camera lens, there are multiple angles that show a fence off to the left that encircles what vaguely looks like tombstones. If indeed a cemetery lies steps away, death is not just being remembered in Galindo's performance, it is also physically present on site. Off to the back right and through the trees, facades of brick houses peep through. To the far right, a wooden fence extends beyond the lens's frame walling in a two-story house. Directly behind where Galindo stands immobile, far past the trees, we can see the occasional car or truck passing by.

Choosing this site to film *Tierra* overlaps certain realities of modernity that upset ideas of romanticizing the indigenous or needing to travel to faraway lands to witness the "other." If Galindo's body represents those of indigenous persons, her positioning in France, on this plot of land that is surrounded on three sides by either remnants of past lives (the cemetery) or evidence of animated life (moving cars and occupied houses), highlights the quotidian nature of violence and death, the migration of ethnicities and races, the appropriation of land without memorializing/acknowledging its past/present

purposes, and the extractivist and contaminating activities that are increasingly occupying our backyards.³⁷

At the end of *Tierra*, Galindo's immobility has preserved the plot of land where she stands. The stability of the sides of this earthy pedestal however have been compromised and clumps of dirt hang from its sides. The integrity of the land where she stands and the possibility of its regeneration are both dubious. The deep mote that was dug out around her on all sides impedes any chance of escape. The machine of modernity has pushed her and the land to its tipping point and although she is unwavering in protecting the land she stands on, what will become of that land? What will become of her and her resolve?

Tierra provides a layered video performance that unearths and memorializes historical erasures in Guatemala's past and questions current fetichizing of extraction and the machine of capitalism. It shows historical consciousness of neocolonial practices that violate indigenous persons to gain access to land, links women inherently to land and traces the chronological continuity as women and land are still seen in contemporary practices as that which can be mastered and subdued by mankind. Galindo however, screams through her silence and defies in her rootedness in the ground that she will bear

³⁷ In regards to the extraction practices, Klein writes, "No place, it seems, is off limits....As *The Guardian*'s Suzanne Goldenberg reports, 'Energy companies have fracked wells on church property, school grounds, and in gated developments. Last November, an oil company put a well on the campus of the University of North Texas in nearby Denton, right next to the tennis courts and across the road from the main sports stadium and a stand of giant wind turbines.' Fracking now covers so much territory that, according to a 2013 *Wall Street Journal* investigation, "more than 15 million Americans live within a mile of a well that has been drilled and fracked since 2000" (qtd. in Klein 312).

witness to that which the military and government wanted to erase. She will bear witness to continued acts of exploitation. She will not be defined or categorized by the colonial gaze, and she will stand, literally, for the world views that believe and live by the fact that, as Klein argues, all humans are “...not apart from nature but of it” (61). Indeed, Galindo herself comments that *Tierra* is a “utopic” “hopeful” piece that shows a “historia de supervivencia,” and that “la vida vale más que cualquier otra historia trágica” (Interview with Fluxnews). *Tierra*, seen thus as a life-force, puts forefront how our current global economic system disregards our planetary system and “many forms of life on earth, including human life” (Klein 21).

As I have analyzed it, *Tierra* opposes commodifying the earth as well as ignoring the human life that works the earth, depends on it, and lives on it – which includes all of us regardless of where we live, what we do, and what we look like. This message of *Tierra* coincides with enactments of BV that also seek to combat developmental practices of modernity and defend the earth (Belotti 42). BV’s lens offers views and practices of life that promote sustainable functioning of all life-forms. In a similar way to how Galindo refuses interaction with the extraction occurring around her, Macas writes that BV cannot coexist with the current modern system founded on accumulation and waste and utilized by nation states. Rather, “hay que pensar fundamentalmente en el cambio de estructuras...y construir uno nuevo, pero hecho con nuestras manos, con las manos de todos y todas. Estamos presentando una propuesta como opción de vida para todos, no es una propuesta indígena para los pueblos indígenas sino para toda la sociedad” (Macas 16). A new economic structure aligning with BV, as León offers, “...debe dar cuenta de

la integralidad de los ciclos de producción y reproducción, asegurando condiciones para que todos los ciclos de vida se reproduzcan” (Magdalena León T. 24). To Westernized and neocolonized eyes, the only productiveness seen in *Tierra* would be the front hoe digging and accumulating dirt. Certainly, Galindo’s immobile body would be considered unproductive. However contrastingly, I propose that this image of stagnancy offers a different way of looking at production and reproducing the socio-natural. Calling on the poetics of Gloria Anzaldúa’s *Borderlands/La Frontera*, I quote at length overlaying the images she conjures with the images provided in *Tierra*:

Not me sold out my people but they me. Because of the color of my skin they betrayed me. The dark-skinned woman has been silenced, gagged, caged, bound into servitude with marriage, bludgeoned for 300 years, sterilized and castrated in the twentieth century. For 300 years she has been a slave, a force of cheap labor, colonized by the Spaniard, the Anglo, by her own people (and in Mesoamerica her lot under the Indian patriarchs was not free of wounding). For 300 years she was invisible, she was not heard. Many times she wished to speak, to act, to protest, to challenge. The odds were heavily against her. She hid her feelings; she hid her truths; she concealed her fire; but *she kept stoking the inner flame*. She remained faceless and voiceless, but a light shone through her veil of silence....*The spirit of the fire spurs her to fight for her own skin and a piece of ground to stand on, a ground from which to view the world – a perspective, a homeground where she can plumb the rich ancestral roots into her own ample...heart.* [My Emphasis] (44)

In *Tierra*, Galindo seemingly does nothing, voices nothing and does not move. Yet, perhaps, as Anzaldúa suggests for the *mestiza* body, Galindo is doing something: she is stoking her inner fire, communicating a message from the ground she stands on. It is a message that calls for seeing value in non-productive productivity. In Klein’s book, *This Changes Everything: Capitalism vs. Climate Change*, she argues that ecological substances such as fossil fuels, crude oil, minerals, etc., should be kept where they are, in

the ground, “where they are performing valuable ecological functions” (176).³⁸ Galindo, using her body as language, states that there can be no more production, at least not in the way Western modernity perceives production. Instead, the message given is that not-producing is more productive for the environment and the human race. *Tierra* offers communication that, “expresa y facilita maneras *otras* de vivir en comunidad y de relacionarse con la naturaleza” [Emphasis in the original] (Valencia and Magallanes 21).

In the following chapter, I further explore this notion of non-productive productivity and how it relates to transnaturalization and the politization of both subject and object. Through an analysis of two documentaries, *El oro o la vida* directed by Caracoles Producciones and *Hija de la laguna* by Ernesto Cabellos, we see manifest mobilizations which *Pollination* attempts to instigate, drawing attention to the type of relationship we might have one day with nature if we continue enacting and supporting practices of modern extraction. Whereas *Pollination* simulates a distancing between human and nature and thus is unable to reproduce the social, *El oro o la vida* and *Hija de la laguna* exemplify this cyclical regenerative connection between community members and the land. *Tierra* on the other-hand, presents layers of historical consciousness drawing together contemporary indigenous women’s relationship to land, remnants of colonial construction, capitalist spectacle and messages of resistance, questioning the way extractivist capitalism privileges production. Similarly, the documentaries in question intersect these themes while also drawing heavily on capitalist racist practices of

³⁸ Klein’s book largely focuses on the fossil fuel industry, the front runner for emitting fumes into the atmosphere and causing, and perpetuating, climate change.

exploiting “sacrifice zones” as Klein so boldly puts it.³⁹ Deemed as such by Western venture capitalist, how do communities in these two documentaries unify to defend their rights as humans, the rights of the earth around them, and the rights of all-life to live a good life? How does the message of non-production simultaneously reproduce the social and politicize the subject/object relationship? Indeed, archives such as *Pollination*, *Tierra* and now *El oro o la vida* and *Hija de la laguna* are “...necessary reflections [that] help us to elucidate the meaning of the political fight in the face of a foolish unsustainable and wasteful economic system that lacks vital capacity and subsumes life to capital and destroys it” (Breilh 395).

³⁹ Klein points out that “extreme energy (tar sands, fracking for both oil and gas, deepwater drilling, mountaintop removal coal mining)” is a high-risk industry (310). “Running an economy on energy sources that release poisons as an unavoidable part of their extraction and refining has always required sacrifice zones – whole subsets of humanity categorized as less than fully human, which made their poisoning in the name of progress somehow acceptable” (310). Klein also observes that, at least in the past, these sacrifice zones were strategically chosen based on their distance from people who wielded political power – the rich, the upper class, the Euro-American races. Sacrifice zones “were poor places. Out-of-the-way places. Places where residents lacked political power, usually having to do with some combination of race, language, and class” (310).

Chapter II

(Mis)Communication of Socio-Natural (re)Production:

A Transnational Conversation in

El oro o la vida and *Hija de la laguna*

...do you not see the tremendous factory hysterically spitting out its cinders in the heart of our forests or deep in the bush, the factory for the production of lackeys; do you not see the prodigious mechanization, the mechanization of man; the gigantic rape of everything intimate, undamaged, undefiled that, despoiled as we are, our human spirit has still managed to preserve; the machine, yes, have you never seen it, the machine for crushing, for grinding, for degrading peoples?

- Aimé Césaire – *Discourse on Colonialism* 77

Nosotros rotundamente rechazamos la minería porque media vez que se queda destruida nuestra naturaleza nos vamos a quedar sin agua, nos vamos a quedar sin bosque, entonces lo que estamos defendiendo es la vida.

– A woman protester in Huehuetenango, Guatemala in *El oro o la vida: la recolonización y resistencia en Centro América*

A woman sits at the edge of a lake, her face turned towards the water that moves, gently kissing the grass covered hills that are its perimeter. In her lap there are small bouquets of purple and yellow flowers picked from the surrounding fields. In other shots, we have seen these flowers growing wild. The camera cuts to a close-up of the woman's profile and adjusts from out-of-focus to in-focus. Another cut and we are behind the woman as she kneels at the water's edge, placing carefully one bouquet and then another into the lake. Her voice off-screen breaks the silence, explaining her offering to "Mamá Agua, Madre Agua." Her words seem to float on the surface of the lake, softly riding the ripples as the camera draws us close to the floating flowers, and then black and white photographs. We witness a symbolic burial of five men who died defending and saving

the lake from those that want her destroyed. The woman's voice off-screen calls each one by name as the water seeps into their image: "Paulino Eleuterio García Rojas, Joselito Vásquez Jambo, César Medina Aguilar, Antonio Joselito Sánchez Huaman, José Faustino Silva Chávez."⁴⁰ After the last name is voiced, the camera cuts to fill the screen with our protagonist, the lake. Water ripples carry the five men and envelope them in an aquatic embrace. We see their photographs fading into her waters, and it is as if the lake accepts the woman's offering and the men's sacrifice for her continued well-being.

This scene in *Hija de la laguna* (2015), written and directed by Ernesto Cabellos, echoes the well-known choreography of any protest, march and ritual when names of men and women who have died are voiced out-loud to acknowledge their sacrifice and to recommit to the cause so their deaths are not in vain.⁴¹ This scene helps to situate the documentary within the growing canon of audiovisual texts that address the onslaught of renewed imperialism of the Global North in the Global South. The archive analyzed in this chapter raises awareness, and critiques neoliberal economic practices of extractivism and labor exploitation, presents local knowledge and worldviews, and chronicles the

⁴⁰ These men from Cajamarca, Peru, were killed because of their involvement in opposing the operation of the Conga mine. For more media coverage on the five deaths and specifically on García Rojas and Medina Aguilar, respectively, see the following Youtube videos that denounce the impunity of their assassins:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2R68x4JNCzI>
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=svBSwxlxWgU>
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h6uOp-UehY>
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K8NfGOxM5yM>

⁴¹ Cabellos was born in Lima, Perú and has produced and directed *Choropampa* (2002), *Tambogrande* (2007) and *The Devil Operation* (2010) that document the worldviews of Peruvian communities as they encounter the array of neoliberal practices employed by transnational mining companies.

criminalization and murder of environmental defenders and activists. Because of blood shed and lives lost by those defending the environment, the issue has become intimately intertwined with human rights.

The two documentaries discussed in this chapter, *El oro o la vida: la recolonización y resistencia en Centro América* (henceforth *El oro o la vida*), produced by Caracol Producciones in 2011, and *Hija de la laguna*, bear witness to the invasion of international extractivist companies exploiting indigenous and campesino communities and land. *El oro o la vida* highlights the presence and consequences of the Marlin mine in Mam and Quiché communities of Sipakapa and San Miguel operated by the Canadian mining company, Goldcorp. The Marlin mine is the “flagship project” of Canadian capital in Guatemala and “most emblematic to Guatemalans for the violent and ecologically-devastating impact of foreign investment” (Gordon and Webber 97).⁴² The documentary further expands its’ geographic reach to document similar realities in numerous other indigenous, campesino and rural communities of Central America.⁴³ *Hija de la laguna* is set in the Andean region and follows Nélidea, a woman from Cajamarca, Peru, who is determined to protect the lakes of her community from the Conga Project of

⁴² “Goldcorp is the second largest gold producer in the world and Guatemala’s largest source of export-earnings” (Gordon and Webber 93). For more information, see Gordon and Webber, Chapter 3 “Mining in the Wake of Genocide: Canadian Corporations in Twenty-First Century Guatemala.”

⁴³ The Marlin mine is the first mining project in Guatemala after the Guatemalan government passed the Mining Law in 1997. Since this date, the government has sought avenues to entertain foreign investment and exploit Guatemalan’s natural resources. As mining contracts were signed and sites began to crop up, protests by locals commenced. In response, the government did not hesitate to recall the Peace Accords of 1996, and resort to military force and violence against native communities to protect the rights of foreign corporate interests.

the Yanacocha mine run by the Denver, Colorado-based Newmont Mining Company and Peruvian company, Buenaventura. As in *El oro o la vida*, *Hija de la laguna*, crosses borders to show the effects of other mining projects in Bolivia. The unifying thread between these two works demonstrates the new design of the colonial project, that of extractivism.

The extractive view sees territories as commodities, rendering land as for the taking, while also devalorizing the hidden worlds that form the nexus of human and nonhuman multiplicity. This viewpoint, similar to the colonial gaze, facilitates the reorganization of territories, populations, and plant and animal life into extractible data and natural resources for material and immaterial accumulation. (Gómez-Barris 5)

The documentaries analyzed here witness the continuum of indigenous, campesino, and rural communities' struggle against neocolonization in all its varied iterations: defense of epistemes, cultural and historical rights and protection of the vital land upon which they have resided and subsisted for centuries. The works revive the “submerged perspectives,” as Gómez-Barris puts it, that value land as a source of knowledge, life and sustenance (1). In this way, they are part of the archive that not only “rejects colonialism” but also expands “how we see and what we know about Indigenous spaces especially within the extractive zone” (xvii).

Thus, the messages of *El oro o la vida* and *Hija de la laguna* are urgent not only because the economic and political practices of neoliberalism give way to destruction and contamination of lands upon which we all depend but because the humans whose epistemes and ideologies are incongruent with capitalist extractivism are denied basic human rights and accused of criminal activity and in many cases, murdered. In 2015, 185

environmental defenders and activists around the globe were murdered, and in 2016 that number grew to just shy of 200 (Global Witness 2016 report; Nelsen, “Latin American Countries”). In 2015, 12 were accounted for in Peru, 10 in Guatemala and 8 in Honduras.⁴⁴ The number one conflict stemmed from mining projects and 40% of the victims killed were from indigenous groups (Global Witness). Among them is the high-profile environmental campaigner and activist Berta Cáceres who was awarded the Goldman environmental prize in 2014 for her struggle against the Agua Zarca dam.⁴⁵ Along with Cáceres, Honduran Lesbia Janeth Urquía, Brazilian Isídio Antonio, Guatemalan Pascual Pablo Francisco, and Peruvian Alfredo Ernesto Vracko Neuenschwander, to name just a few, have all died defending the environment against, in order, privatization of rivers, the palm oil company Reforestadora de Palamas del Petén, S.A., Hidro Santa Cruz hydroelectric dams, and illegal gold miners (Global Witness). “La persecución y violencia contra quienes defienden el medio ambiente es una constante en aquellos países donde empresas transnacionales extractivas, hidroeléctricas o del sector

⁴⁴ It is important to note that these numbers are only the reported statistics. It is very likely that aggressions occurring in remote villages or against indigenous victims are grossly under-reported in which case the number of murders might be much higher (Global Witness). For example, as the credits run in *El oro o la vida* it lists the names of over 120 people from Guatemala alone that were assassinated in 2010-2011 for defending life and territory.

⁴⁵ For more information on Cáceres’ life and activism watch *Berta Vive*, a 30-minute documentary produced by Oxfam and Terc Producciones in 2016 or *Guardiana del río*, produced by Campaña Madre Tierra in 2016. For recent developments on the trial against her murderers see Nina Lakhani’s article, “Berta Cáceres Murder: ex-Honduran Military Intelligence Officer Arrested” in *The Guardian*.

agroindustrial tienen intereses, muchas veces en connivencia [sic] con los poderes políticos y financieros” (“Asesinan a Lesbia Yaneth”).⁴⁶

In neocolonial contexts where decolonial practices struggle to gain footing, the audiovisual archive offers itself up to advocate for social and natural reproduction making explicit the interdependent connection required for the well-being of humans and land. In this way, it coincides with Bolívar Echeverría’s argument that transformations to the natural environment directly affect the social figure as an individual and as a collective (37). Documentary film serves as a platform within which this connection is revealed, and tells of the darker side of modernity. It gives voice, image and body to that which modernity and Eurocentric knowledge attempt to hide: the irreversible repercussions of contamination caused by disturbing earth’s contents, disintegration of communities and cultural practices autochthonous to the affected area and continual severing of human’s relationship to the natural environment. The pieces discussed in this chapter provide accounts that counter notions of progress or development and thus offer alternatives to modernity just as some principles of BV do.

Explored in detail in the introduction, BV, for some, articulates a socio-economic platform from which to confront mainstream development systems and in turn offers alternatives that resonate with indigenous cosmologies based on biocentrism and reciprocity of the social and the natural (Merino 272). On the other-hand, principles of BV are incorporated into the 2009 and 2008 Bolivian and Ecuadorian constitutions,

⁴⁶ On March 5, 2018, *The Guardian* reported that 24 countries signed a legally binding agreement titled the Latin American and Caribbean countries declaration on Principle 10 (LAC-P10) which protects land defenders. See Arthur Nelsen, “Latin American Countries Sign Legally Binding Pact to Protect Land Defenders.”

respectively, and are interpreted from a socialist perspective. Both Andean countries seek to combat neoliberal practices by redistributing locally the wealth gained by natural resource extraction that then raises living-standards and grows the middle class (García Linera 34). Alberto Acosta argues that this state use of BV reduces it to a term employed for appearance purposes and thus renders hollow its stance on protecting the rights of Mother Earth and incorporating indigenous epistemes (“El buen vivir como alternativa al desarrollo. Algunas reflexiones” 321). This disconnect between theory and practice on the level of the nation-state works to discredit how the values of BV are the ontology, and therefore woven into the fabric of every-day life, of the practicing indigenous communities. Nevertheless, iterations of BV continue to emerge as the backbone of indigenous peoples’ political projects that express self-determination, right to territory and culture (Merino 271).

In Peru, the state’s relationship to extraction is very different than its Andean counterparts. For one, mining represents 64% of its country’s exports even though Peru lacks control of the resources (Poole, “El buen vivir”; Gordon and Webber 182). Mining activity in Peru spans centuries, but as Gordon and Webber highlight, the scope and intensity of extraction grew in the 1990’s and 2000’s which in turn provoked opposition from rural indigenous communities in both the Andean highlands and the Amazon (183).⁴⁷ Whereas revenue from extraction in Bolivia and Ecuador has translated to an increase in its population’s living standards, in Peru extraction produces a “type of

⁴⁷ While the Andean highlands confronted multinational mining corporations, the low-land Amazonian region squared off with the transnational oil industry (Gordon and Webber 183).

development incapable of improving the lives of Peruvians or protecting the environment” (185). Secondly, just within the last decade indigenous communities in the Peruvian Andes are mobilizing to confront neoliberal extraction in contrast to their Amazonian counterparts who have been involved since the 1980’s (Mario Palacios qtd. in Poole, “El buen vivir”). Mario Palacios, the 2008-2010 president of the National Confederation of Communities Affected by Mining (CONACAMI), states that building a strong alliance with the Inter-Ethnic Development Association of the Peruvian Rainforest (AIDSEP) has pressured the Peruvian government to recognize the International Labor Organization Convention 169 (ILO 169) and indigenous rights to prior consultation (Poole, “El buen vivir”). He goes on to state that these proposals and the indigenous resistance go “‘well beyond this question of rights and the defense of our own territories and natural resources. We are fighting because humanity itself is lost in a way of life that is marked by forms of accumulation and by the destruction and contamination of Mother Earth’” (qtd. in Poole, “El buen vivir”). To confront Western developmentalism, he calls on BV to be both a political project as well as a proposal for life that encompasses “‘harmony with, and respect for, Mother Earth’” (qtd. in Poole, “El buen vivir”).

Further exploring BV as an alternative to Western ideas of progress, Roger Merino states that it “assumes and respects differences and complementarities among human beings and between humans and non-humans from an ecological perspective, emphasizing the principles of reciprocity, complementarity and relationality in human interactions and in relation to the cycles of nature (272). Based on this definition, a capitalist system that includes unbridled extraction privileging accumulation of material

wealth over the well-being and regeneration of the socio-natural - as is the case in Peru – is in radical dissonance with BV. In the words of an Awajun, ““We are indigenous and ask: Where is the development of our people after decades of exploitation? In all areas of exploitation the minority is benefited and the majority is worse: the rivers, land, environment are polluted...”” (qtd. in Merino 279).

In varying degrees of success, *El oro o la vida* and *Hija de la laguna* visualize and sound interdependence between society and the natural environment and in turn denounce the Western practice of society-nature dualism. In addition to the two documentaries explored in this chapter, the examples of this theoretical and practical struggle between forces is present in a growing number of audiovisual texts that include, but are in no way limited to *When Two Worlds Collide* (2016), *Una gota de vida* (2015), *Mover un río* (2015), *El negocio de oro en Guatemala: crónica de un conflicto anunciado* (2010) and *Sipakapa no se vende* (2005).⁴⁸ In these documentaries, the interviews, narration, and images boldly work together to exemplify the conflict between the desires of capitalism and those that oppose extractivist practices and foreign investment. Similarly, editing choices highlight conflicting perspectives and beliefs.

⁴⁸ I would like to draw attention to a 2013 literary *testimonio* titled, *Tu’n Tklet Qnan Tx’otx’, Q’ixkojalel, b’ix Tb’anil Qang’ib’il: En defensa de la madre tierra, sentir lo que siente el otro, y el buen vivir: La lucha de Doña Cristanta contra Goldcorp* spoken by Maya-Mam Cristanta Pérez Bámaca and transcribed by Morna Macleod. While the *testimonio* is over-laden with the editor’s voice, it highlights the struggle of Pérez Bámaca who protests and struggles against the mining company Goldcorp and who has had to go into hiding at times because of threats on her life. To my knowledge, this *testimonio* is only available through an online site, [issuu.com](https://issuu.com/plurijur/docs/libro_la_lucha_de_do_a_crisanta_fi). The site serves as a public digital platform on which authors are invited to upload PDFs of their publications https://issuu.com/plurijur/docs/libro_la_lucha_de_do_a_crisanta_fi

For example, *Una gota de vida* includes footage of Sonoran community members sharing how they have benefited from the presence of a mine. These videoed interviews touting appreciation for educational and professional advancement are produced by the foreign mining company in efforts to exemplify how advantageous their community outreach programs are. These shots are juxtaposed with scenes from a community that was relocated inland so the mining company could use their ancestral land for extracting minerals. Members of the community share that water is scarce because they depend on the company to shuttle it in. The livelihood of many fishermen is thwarted due to living farther from the river. The medical center and school that were built for the community have no supplies or staff and remain closed. Members show signs of recent skin infections that did not exist prior to relocation and the presence of the mine. Lastly, a man's voice narrates that he worked for the mine and received good evaluations, but was never paid. We listen to him as we see images of buses picking up workers. It leaves us wondering if the company manipulated all its local employees and exploited their labor.

The dissonance of the scenes described above are unique to place and how they are told, but by no means exceptional in scope. Take any of the texts listed above and the examples of such contradictory interaction and interpretation are abundant. These works make blatantly clear that world views are often misconstrued between Western and indigenous (or non-capitalist) systems of development. In *Mover un rio*, a Yaqui from Sonora, Mexico declares,

Es importante manifestar que son dos tipos de forma de ver la vida, y nosotros, los pueblos indígenas, lo vemos desde el lado de la encomienda divina que nos dio. De preservar, de conservar, de aprovechar y de cuidar nuestros recursos naturales. Nosotros nada

más vamos de paso en esta tierra. Nosotros tenemos que hacer todo lo posible para que los que vienen, los que aún no han nacido tengan el beneficio de gozar de este calor, de este frío, de esta tierra y sus productos, de gozar y conocer el canto de los pájaros, nuestros animalitos, de una cultura milenaria que se ha resistido morir.

In accordance, a Mayan from Santa Eulalia in Huehuetenango, Guatemala states in *El negocio*, “estamos trabajando para que la humanidad comprenda que el bienestar es colectivo, no individual.”

In a series of medium and long shots in *Hija de la laguna*, Nélide walks along a babbling creek. The soundtrack is overwhelmed by the sound of rushing water. She walks slowly, looking down at the water in the creek and then looking out in front of her as it begins to rain. The camera shifts subtly from focusing on Nélide to focusing on the trees and then the rain drops as they fall. Three sequential cuts draw us closer to the droplets as the camera maintains the focus on the rain, each time offering a more intimate shot of water. The next several cuts offer establishing shots of rural landscapes as it rains – trees and sky, rolling hills, and distant misty mountains. Complementing the sound of the falling rain, Nélide’s voice off-screen begins to speak,

Mamá Agua, en tus entrañas guardas oro. ¿Sabes para qué sacan tu oro? Para guardarlo otra vez en los bancos. El oro no se bebe, el oro no se come. Por el oro se derrama sangre. Si de tanta utilidad les hace el oro a los grandes y a los poderosos, mándales a sacar de las reservas de sus bancos y que lo vuelven a utilizar. Pero a ti, que te dejen en paz. Cuidándote bien, podrías alimentarnos para siempre.

The filming of this scene intimately connects water with Nélide and Nélide to the well-being of water. Not only does the camera work suggest that both water and Nélide are protagonists in this story, Nélide reassures us that this is the case by addressing her

concerns to Mamá Agua, showing, by title, relationality. Furthermore, Nérida puts into the forefront the difference of world perspectives between excessive extractivism for insatiable material accumulation and the preservation of the natural for limitless regeneration of the social. This scene intimately connects humans' vivacity with that of the water's. By critiquing Western practices that deplete nature and destroy human lives, Nérida also suggests limiting extraction through sustainability and recycling.

As I argue in the following analysis, both audiovisual texts demonstrate that the Eurocentric message to reproduce socially – as in biased notions of progress and development – stagnates the possibility for natural reproduction which then stalls the possibility of social reproduction. If nature is unable to engage in an organic and sustainable process of regeneration and reproduction, the consequence is an absence of social renewal. Finding the natural and social to be integral to the other, the texts mentioned above and discussed in the rest of this chapter boldly echo this urgent message. The destruction of nature is synonymous with the destruction of the social body.

In the previous chapter, I discussed the cyclical regeneration required of social reproduction and how its possibility hinges on a dialectical relationship among the object and the subject - the non-human and the human. Embedded in and informing this relationship could be the presence of the spiritual or the sacred. Until now in this process we have assumed a material production, distribution, and consumption in order to reproduce the social and constitute political identity. As alluded to at the end of Chapter I, what I would like to explore now are concrete moments of interaction between the

‘natural form’ and the ‘social form’ where both deny immediate material production and thus deny its consumption. How does the absence of material production, distribution and consumption of the ‘natural form’ affect the cycle of social reproduction?

Before exploring this idea, it is important to address Echeverría’s semiotic reading of the process of production/consumption. He traces the links between social reproduction and the signifiers created in the act of producing and consuming. He posits that by producing, one communicates. This communication offers a translation of the object that signifies its value for another consumer. By consuming, one interprets this translation and accepts the assigned value. In the theoretical construction of BV, the ‘natural form’ of the object is ideally produced and consumed in a regenerative way for both humans and nonhumans. A local Amazonian organization affiliated with Confederación de Nacionalidades Indígenas del Ecuador (CONAIE) published a text determining the community’s right to the land, reiterating the equilibrium of the socio-natural environment sustained between human and nonhuman interaction. It states, “...había que dar tiempo de regeneración a la naturaleza, para renovar nuestra propia vida. Hemos estado en permanente movimiento, permitiéndonos a nosotros y a las otras formas de vida continuar su ciclo...” (qtd. in Altmann 291).

Just as this organization seeks to protect its land from outside influences and extractivist practices, it could be, then, that the message disseminated in the process of production/consumption is the negation of production. To deny the frenzied production required of Western modernity and instead allow the natural process of regeneration to occur indicates an alternative possibility for translating the process of production and

consumption. In the quote above, it draws an intimate connection needed between the life of the earth and that of humans for both to regenerate throughout time. It also alludes to the movement that permits not just humans to continue living but other forms of life as well. By not specifying what forms of life, the quote opens itself to a non-secular reading in which such presence could include that which cannot be seen but rather felt. In other words, a sacred presence.⁴⁹

In the Maya worldview, “nature is not an isolated part of reality. It is totally integrated into the social and economic dimensions. Every dimension of life forms a unity and is sacred, so every element deserves respect and protection: the mountains, the valleys, the wind, the soil, the trees, the harvest and the seeds. Every natural element has its *Nawal*, or protective spirit” [Emphasis in original] (Urkidi 571). There are several scenes that speak to this idea in *El oro o la vida* where women at a street march and at a village consultation denounce mining to preserve “life.” Although not elaborated in the documentary, the usage of this word is expanded in an interview with a community member from Huehuetenango: “...there is a defense of life, which is...related to the Maya *cosmovisión* (worldview). Indeed, in the Maya *cosmovisión*, everything is considered as a unity. For instance, the human being, the water, the air, and every element of life are inside a circle. We are conscious that every natural element is life” [Emphasis in original] (qtd. in Urkidi 572). Although it is not explicitly stated or shown in *El oro o la vida*, we can infer that the natural is imbued with sacred presence. *Hija de la laguna*, on the other-hand, foregrounds the sacred presence of *duendes* who live in the

⁴⁹ Or to think of it as Gómez-Barris’s does with “submerged perspectives” (1).

lake. Through Nélida's voice off-screen, she links the desire to protect the lake and its duendes from the harm threatening it by the Conga Project. In addition to Nélida's words iterating the sacredness of the natural, the cinematography intentionally positions the lake as a protagonist and as viewers we are drawn into her world where water is animated with life-giving forces.

This alternative message that denies perpetuation of the Western modern notion of production relates to historian Dipesh Chakrabarty's questioning of the translatability of history. His discussion of labor, as understood in South Asia, highlights the tendency of secular societies to disregard the possible presence of the divine or super natural and thus their agency (35). When such conflicting perspectives come in contact, as in the modernity/coloniality relationship, a breach of interpretation and comprehension ensues. Chakrabarty critiques the subaltern scholars who attempted to write the history of the subalterns from a "disenchanted" ideology which in turn thwarts the social justice intentions of the group (35). As such, "Gods, spirits, and other 'supernatural' forces can claim no agency in our narratives" (36). The result thus disenfranchises perspectives incongruent with secular belief. It not only violates perspectives operating in-difference to Western modernity but also works to subjugate and (re)colonize other belief systems. Just as we must caution to take nature for granted, we must not construct history as "something that belongs to nature" thus witting it down to the universal (37).

Likewise, BV allots for differing definitions of and relations to place, time and people encompassing diverse interpretations depending on context and physical surroundings (Sianes and Abellán 62-63; Ibáñez 29). In addition, it treats the vitality of

all living beings – of this world and others, enchanted and sacred – as agents of change having an effect within the workings of an interconnected web. Should such forces be visible or invisible, they are always present and engaged (Altmann 290; Acosta, “El Buen Vivir, una oportunidad”). And while the iterations of relationship to land are carried out in communities across the globe, the common belief that land and that of what it holds is, as ecologist Stan Rowe states, not “merely ‘resource’ but ‘source’” (qtd. in Klein 444). Furthermore, there exists an understanding that we, as humans, are not in charge (Klein 444). Miguel Sánchez and Manuel Bolom Pale echo this idea when describing a concept of BV (*lekil kuxlejal* in Tsotsil) termed *Jkaxiltik*. Translated as *Sagrada Tierra*, *Jkaxiltik* calls for supreme respect, “porque el hombre no es superior a la Tierra, el hombre es una pequeña parte de ella y pasajero” (59).

In a similar vein, Houtart states, “[la Naturaleza] No se trata de ‘recursos naturales,’ sino del ‘espacio donde se realiza la vida’” (30). Thus, communication about an object whose worth, for some parties, is deemed most valuable as untouched, unmodified, and undisturbed, still can be circulated and offer itself as a non-product of productivity (or product-in-absentia) to be consumed on the receiver’s end. If the value assigned is accepted, the process of social reproduction and politicization of both object and producer can still be realized.

In the subsequent sections, I discuss how a careful reading of the two documentaries, *El oro o la vida* and *Hija de la laguna*, shed light on the following questions: How is the construction of humans dominating nature reexamined? How do the documentaries present the reunification of society and the natural as a process vital to

the continuation of life – both social and natural – as Echeverría argues and the principles of BV propose? Furthermore, I pay close attention to how the audiovisual technology is a platform from which historically oppressed voices and bodies of colonialism, and now neocolonialism, project beliefs, practices, and perspectives that offer radical alternatives to the destructive operations of Western systems. For indigenous communities, creating documentaries or films serve as strategic communicative tools from which to exercise political empowerment (Magallanes-Blanco 202). Indigenous videos, “encompass a struggle for power over knowledge and over the recognition for indigenous traditional knowledge as valid, necessary, and a key element of their everyday life and their place in the world” (202). Thus, how do the documentaries use camera work and editing to engage with the questions stated above, and how successful are they in creating an aesthetic that engages its viewers?

PART I – (Mis)Communication of the socio-natural

The documentary, *El oro o la vida* is host to many voices effected by or related to open-pit mines in Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador run by the Canadian company, Goldcorp, and a female narrator whose voice is always in-off. The soundtrack weaves in protest songs and raps, Spanish and native languages of Guatemala. Many of the interviewed members of various rural communities utilize their time on-screen to denounce the experience of living near open-pit mines. In contrast, the Goldcorp executive and the Guatemalan minister of mining speak of how the corporation benefits

local communities.⁵⁰ The narrator provides statistics of Goldcorp's financial gain and global projects, and explains processes of open-pit mining as the images on screen show dynamite blowing up mountain-sides, large pools where cyanide leaching occurs and dead cows in water-ways (see Figures 7 and 8). These images and the narrated information are coupled with a dissonant and ominous soundtrack that clearly positions the documentary's agenda as a neo-imperialist critique. I contend that *El oro o la vida* works carefully to organize images and interviews in ways that discredit the neo-imperialist view points and instead privileges the message originating in rural communities that oppose extraction. The following scenes bolster this argument.

⁵⁰ Gordon and Webber have found the exact opposite to be true for the communities near the Marlin mine. Not only are the environmental costs much higher than any economic benefit that the mine offers, "Guatemala's low royalty rates... goes to the national government and is not guaranteed to the local community" (99). Furthermore, if not obvious, the environmental costs drastically effect the well-being of the physical health of those living near waterways that have been contaminated with cyanide (98).



*Figure 7: El oro o la vida.
Dynamite explosions on mountain sides to access gold and silver.*



*Figure 8: El oro o la vida.
As stated in subtitles, this photo shows cows killed by drinking river water located near the Marlin mine.*

El oro o la vida films the voting process of numerous indigenous community consultations. The sequence of shots includes a panning shot that films young children, men and women raising their hands to unanimously oppose mining as they shout “¡No a la minería!” or a point-of-view shot showing a desk with a ledger where a long line of community members form to register their vote in ink. A close-up shot of a radio host tells us that all results of the community consultations he has broadcasted reject contracts to extract valuable elements of the earth signed between nation-state governments and transnational mining, gas, and hydroelectric companies without local consent.⁵¹ Within this sequence, the last shot focuses on a Quiché woman speaking directly into the camera in her native language:⁵²

The trees will dry up and die. And then...there will be sickness. The land will turn into a desert. Why doesn't it rain now? Because they have already taken the gold out of San Marcos. That is why we're suffering, because of our resources. The “gringos” want to harm us; we're poor, and to top it off, they want to harm us. No, we don't want this! Yes, we are poor, but this doesn't mean we'll sell out, even if we're paid 200 or 260 Quetzals a day....How sad for our children! There are so many children we need to think

⁵¹ Another example where rejecting extraction was productive was in the initial stages of Ecuadorian's president Rafael Correa's decision to protect from extraction the Ishpingo-Tambococha-Tiputini (ITT) oil block of Yasuní National Park. In a country, whose GDP is fueled by oil production, Correa's announcement to leave crude oil in the ground recognized the importance of non-production for the earth and the global community as it pertains to climate change and fuel emissions into the atmosphere. Fast forward several years however, and we see Correa cave in, lifting the oil embargo. Another example could be Bolivian president, Evo Morales and his questionable valuing of the land in TIPNIS national park. In Ecuador's case, unfortunately this decision was made despite the knowledge that poverty rates in oil abundant territories is 66.8%, 23% higher than areas where oil is not drilled. In addition, cancer rates are 19% higher in oil producing areas than the national average (Pamela L. Martin 24).

⁵² Spoken in Quiché, except for the last expression which she speaks in Spanish, I use here the transcription of the subtitles provided in English.

about them, how they'll suffer. Because we will witness this later on. The earth is suffering. This is another reason why we don't want this. ¡Minería vaya a la chingada!

The shot pans the community gathered around her – mostly women and children – as they smile and applaud her message. They are outside under a gray sky and surrounded by green mountains in the background.

The series of events filmed in these scenes confirm rural communities' opposition to mining. This message is transparent and firm. Yet, as the soundtrack fades the applause and cuts to a meeting room, it is made apparent that there are two worlds that exist in Guatemala: the rural communities in resource rich territory and the political and economic agenda of the nation-state. A panel of men in business suits, one of which is Carlos Meany, the 2007-2010 Minister of Energy and Mines of Guatemala, sit at a long table in front of rows of chairs. Behind them hangs a poster titled "Feria Energética." In an interview conducted by Caracol Producciones, Meany discusses how the community consultations are not legally binding according to the Constitutional Court of Guatemala. Regardless, he states it is still important to treat the communities' decisions with respect and to take their opinions into consideration given that no project can feasibly be implemented without their agreement. Thus far, his statement seems to have received the message disseminated from the community. However, he continues, "pero, la manifestación de pretender *cambiar la forma de pensar* es lo más importante....Estoy seguro que es un cambio que precisamente es eso, que *no hay el entendimiento necesario y no han llegado a conceptualizar los beneficios* que conlleva la minería sobre todo a las comunidades..." [My emphasis]. Upon his last word, the camera cuts to an image of a

young man participating in a street protest holding a handmade sign that says, “Manifestamos ‘NO’ minería porque afecta la salud,” and the score that plays is a song with the chorus, “Entiéndelo, entiéndelo Guatemala no se vende.”

The deliberate editing of placing Meany’s statement directly after the Quiché woman’s determined rejection of mining and before the anti-mining protest discredits his message that rural communities are apolitical, easily manipulated, and need convincing.⁵³ Those that live and work near mine sites, know firsthand that there are very little benefits to mining. Indeed, it is documented elsewhere that while Goldcorp insisted that the mine improved local welfare, there were increased numbers of “alcoholism, prostitution and rape, divisions among people, and the criminalization of resistance” (Urkidi 569). The irony of these three sequential scenes is that the communities are not the ones that need to understand, rather it is Meany and the mining companies that must listen and validate the message produced in many of the communities.

The Quiché woman speaks directly to the political and economic marginalization and land dispossession and exploitation experienced within her community. Not only do her words draw direct connections between the well-being of the land to the health of her people, but she refuses to embody the initial text projected on screen at the beginning of the documentary itself. The text is an excerpt from the *Annals of the Kaqchikels* published in the sixteenth century. It states how the Spaniards, shortly after their arrival to *Las Indias*, forced the natives to extract, wash and bring them gold. In this way, *El oro o la vida* is similar to Galindo’s performance, *Tierra* in that it acknowledges a

⁵³ Urkidi states that in Guatemala, 95% of the mining licenses granted by the government were in indigenous provinces (557).

chronology extending beyond the frame of the screen. The Quiché woman positions herself in the present while simultaneously recognizing the history of colonization and refusing to perpetuate inequality or allow extraction in the future.

She serves, in this shot, as a representative of her community who generated, voted on, and spread the message of “¡No a la minería!” along with 53 other communities. Thus, she situates herself and her village as political by intra-culturally producing and consuming the idea and the act of not producing the natural. Not producing then, turns productive in a different sense: one that acknowledges that the earth’s integrity and organic regeneration is intimately connected to populations’ physical well-being, economic stability and hence, their social reproduction.

As they assert their opposition to earth’s extraction, the Guatemalan communities in these shots represent the following: they produce a message that intersects the ethos of viewing earth as regenerative and life-producing for both human and non-human beings; and they display a historical consciousness of the conflict of neocolonialism, and an awareness of the modernity/coloniality paradox. The decision to be against production in this sense then, is a decision that finds value in non-production. As an example, Klein highlights the service coal provides to the rest of the earth when it is not extracted: It “helpfully sequesters not just the carbon long ago pulled out of the air by plants, but all kinds of other toxins” (178).

Hence, the communities shown organizing in *El oro o la vida*, offer a vision of how a refusal to produce signifiers based within a capitalist ideology offer alternative methods of how subjects and objects interact and relate while producing and reproducing

the social. Land and territory are central in “el desarrollo de la nacionalidad o la evolución del pueblo indígena. No es el mismo significado que les atribuye un Estado nacional liberal y burgués, a saber, como medio de producción, sino que contiene fuertes connotaciones espirituales” (Altmann 286). Furthermore, Adriana Estrada writes of the concept of territory in indigenous communities in that it serves as a “espacio apropiado y valorizado de manera simbólica...donde se articulan estrategias de supervivencias....es también, el espacio donde se construyen las estrategias de resistencia, la cual cobra forma en las múltiples maneras de poner en práctica conocimientos ancestrales de los recursos para beneficio de la vida” (317-318). In this sense, land has multiple uses, values, and meaning. This multifaceted understanding of land allows detachment from the secular and one dimensional meaning attributed to it by the Western modern system of capitalism. Moreover, it makes it all the more significant as to why the violations committed against land by mining companies, or other extractivist companies, are a direct offense to not only community resources and livelihoods but also to their “rights to development and culture” (Tauli-Corpuz, Enkiwe-Abayao, and de Chavez 54).

Nevertheless, despite 54 Guatemalan communities generating almost one million votes of “¡No a la minería!” more than 155 mining licenses still exist. This is considering that municipal laws, the Republic’s constitution, and the International Labour Organization (ILO) of Indigenous and Tribal Peoples’ Convention 169 all acknowledge the community consultations to be legal processes. Here, *El oro o la vida* exemplifies what happens when the message of a produced product-in-absentia is rejected at the value initially intended. The prospective consumers – Goldcorp, the company and its investors,

the Guatemalan government and certain community members that have chosen to support mining - condemn the initial stages of reproduction - the object, its value, and the producer - and thus derail the social reproduction cycle. In contrast, Goldcorp assigns their own values to objects of which they then find like-minded consumers, thus continuing to operate in defiance of local values. This is made clear by Meany's statement discussed above.

The rejected message of the community consultations that value land as more productive if not mined, is further demonstrated through two interviews with David Deisley, the then vice-president of Goldcorp.⁵⁴ The first time Deisley is interviewed, the *mise-en-scène* is like that of a business meeting: a room filled with tables and chairs and equipped with a projector screen. He wears a suit and tie and although he expresses himself in Spanish, it is clearly a second language. He shares that the impetus behind Goldcorp expanding mining and development projects in Guatemala is the market increase in the price of gold. Thus, there is more financial backing for emergent mining initiatives. In other words, Goldcorp invests in countries like Guatemala because it is profitable, not because it will benefit the local communities. The scene cuts to a close-up of a computer screen as someone types Goldcorp into Google. As we see the search unfold, the female voice in-off shares that Goldcorp makes more than Guatemala's entire GDP and attributes it to low production costs in the Global South because of scarce environmental regulations, cheap labor, and minimal pay-outs to the Guatemalan

⁵⁴ David Deisley now works for NovaGold Resources, Inc as their Executive Vice-President. His yearly compensation is estimated by Bloomberg to be \$2,407,477.

government - less than 1% of profits.⁵⁵ The second interview with Deisley is in the same meeting room and behind him on each table are pitchers of water. Before cutting to Deisley, *El oro o la vida* shows a series of quick still shots documenting the consequence of water contamination due to the mine: children with skin diseases (see Figure 9).



Figure 9: El oro o la vida.

As stated on-screen, this photo shows cases of skin disease of those living near the Marlin mine.

⁵⁵ Goldcorp has eight “Operations” and two “Development Projects” in Latin America listed on their website. Goldcorp also operates in other areas under subsidiaries of their company such as the Cerro Blanco mine in Guatemala which is run by Entre Mares. The “Operations” are: Marlin - an open pit and underground mining site in Guatemala. From the perspective of the company, it is considered a highly productive mine producing 168,600 ounces of gold in just 2015. Marlin has been in production since 2005. Since the release of *El oro o la vida* it has transitioned into primarily an underground mine. On the website, it states that recent exploration activities have been successful in extending the life of this mine. See Goldcorp’s website for more details on its other mines scattered across Central and South America: Peñasquito in Zacatecas, Mexico; Los Filos in Mezcala, Guerrero, Mexico; El Sauzal in Urique, Chihuahua, Mexico; Alumbra in northwest Argentina; Cerro Negro in Santa Cruz, Argentina; Pueblo Viejo in the Dominican Republic; and San Martin in Valle de Siria in Honduras. There are also “Development Projects” that include Camino Rojo and El Morro.

<http://www.goldcorp.com/English/Unrivalled-Assets/Mines-and-Projects/default.aspx>

A biologist connected with the local catholic parish takes water samples and verifies that the levels of arsenic are much higher in water ways connected to the mine than in others. With a vigorous nod, she states that the skin diseases can and do lead to cancer and can be directly linked to ingesting arsenic. As the shot fades to the interview with Deisley, we hear him excuse Goldcorp of any contamination.⁵⁶ He evades detailing how the company will respond to community allegations of arsenic in water sources near the Marlin mine and instead states that the water was always monitored and there was never any pollution. The scene returns to the biologist and this time a priest denounces Deisley's response and challenges him to come see for himself the repercussions of the mine.

The scenes analyzed above are evidentiary of how (mis)communication and (mis)interpretation between rural communities and Goldcorp executives and Guatemalan state representatives stagnate the possibility of reproducing the socio-natural. The embolden extractive activities refuse to interpret the message of non-production as valuable thus disrupting the (re)production of the social as it is tied intimately with the regeneration of the natural. Through its careful editing and placement of scenes, *El oro o la vida* clearly relays its mission of denouncing extraction, and privileging the voices – and land - of the rural community.

Stylistically, the documentary concentrates on condemning mining through facts or eye-witnessing provided by the narrator, the biologist, the priest and numerous

⁵⁶ Gordon and Webber quote Goldcorp arguing that there were no ecological repercussions from the Marlin mining site despite evidence of the contrary. ““The Guatemalan government’s testing and extensive Company monitoring...demonstrate that there is no evidence of adverse impacts related to mining activity from the Marline [sic] mine”” (100).

community members. *El oro o la vida* in this way places forefront a didactic voice that simultaneously shows the operation and destruction of mining, and while informative, lacks character development that would work to build a connection between the viewer and the social actors on screen. Upon concentrating on accumulating multiple voices across borders in Central America to show pervasive negative effects of mining, the documentary distances the viewers and renders them less sympathetic to the cause.

In contrast, *Hija de la laguna* envelopes its viewers in a world that intimately connects the well-being of humans with the land, and more specifically, to water. The documentary not only works within a narrative arc by following the same social actors, its aesthetics powerfully function to draw its viewers into the world-view of the main protagonists, the young woman, Nélide, and Mamá Agua, the lake, the water. The filming privileges a telling through the image instead of relying on just the voice and in this way works to immerse its viewers in consuming a message that is alternative to extractivism.

A sequence of shots show Nélide looking out over the rolling mountains – some still green and lush while others are stripped of their vegetation, their dirt exposed, redesigned into tamped down, flat surfaces that switch-back and forth as trucks drive, carting out debris and minerals extracted from their core. This shot spectacles the mountains' strata literally re-stratified by the violence of Western-extractivism. As the camera pans across and up the layers of the exposed mountains, it continues to rise to the sky above. The shot cuts to another sky that presides over the city of Cajamarca. We watch Nélide as she navigates the cement sidewalks and crosses streets with cars driving by. Her voice speaks to us off-screen, “No me acostumbro, los carros, la bulla. Es duro

estar aquí. Mamá Agua, ¿por qué hay tanta injusticia contra ti? ¿Acaso no entienden que tú eres un ser viviente?” As she voices this last question, she crosses an intersection and in the background, there are two signs that remind the inhabitants to dispose of their trash: “Mantengamos el orden y limpieza” and “Yanacocha cuida el medio ambiente.”

In contrast to the scenes of Nélida by the lake, or walking in the grassy mountains, the movement and noise of the city is noticeable. We can imagine that from Nélida’s perspective it seems odd to have signs reminding people to throw away trash, or hypocritical to tell others to take care of the environment when the sponsor, Yanacocha, is a mining company. The signs remind us that in the discourse of development, caring for the environment is an after-thought, a topic that must be reiterated, so as not to forget. It also suggests that the environment is not the original landscape, but rather what modernity has constructed – cement that suffocates the earth and prohibits the rain from seeping into the dirt; people living in close-quarters, running from the rain or covered from it and driving cars.⁵⁷ Furthermore, the sign that implores its readers to maintain order, normalizes the life required in a city. Order denotes that part of consuming is producing trash that should be put in certain receptacles to be transported out of sight. Certainly, trash is not thrown away, as in it disappears completely, but rather moved elsewhere so that those that consume do not have to think about where it ends up nor whose life it might affect. These two signs that frame the shot as Nélida crosses the street not only clash with Nélida’s belief that water is a living-being, but their messages are

⁵⁷ As Nélida walks the streets of Cajamarca, it is raining. In the camera’s peripheral, we see a woman running across the street shielding her head from the rain, and we also see raindrops hit the cement and bounce back up, rejected by the road’s impermeability.

rendered hollow given the previous shots of open-pit mining. These images encourage us as viewers to ask the question, what does taking care of the environment mean? Does it include open-pit mining? Is it as simple as throwing away trash in marked receptacles?

Nélida's voice off-screen, coupled with the sequencing of shots, clarify that the environment cannot be reduced to an empty signifier within the discourse of development and progress. Her discomfort in the city gestures towards her refusal to assimilate to the idea of modernity as posed by Western epistemes that requires a separation between the social and the natural. A scene later in the documentary reiterates and solidifies the profound connection Nélida feels to her family, the vitality of land they live on and off-of, and how the way of life in the city entirely disrupts and demeans her ethos.

The scene begins with a point-of-view shot that focuses on a growing mound of freshly dug potatoes while the movement of humans in the background digging and throwing potatoes into the pile is blurry. The potatoes are the protagonist in this shot and the human activity is secondary. The subsequent images include close-up and medium shots of people working together to dig potatoes. The camera privileges the dirt, what it renders, and the work of the humans. Shots show a cross-section of generations and genders working together: The boots of a man hoeing the rich earth and a woman squatting in the dark earth, digging with her bare hands, while a vibrant green backdrop of leaves seem to envelop her, like a protective blanket. The soundtrack is the murmur of voices, the hoe as it pierces the earth and birds chirping. The camera cuts to Nélida's hands rubbing off the moist dirt caked on a new potato and we hear her voice begin a conversation with her mother as they sit facing each other. "¿Sabes Mami, cuando estoy

en la ciudad qué extraño?” As she lists what she misses, her voice breaks and she begins to cry. All the while, her hands repeatedly reach into the dirt, gathering it, raking it with her fingers, holding it and letting it go. As her tears slide down her cheeks, we hear thunder, and then see and hear rain falling around her and her mother. As she finishes her confession her tears continue in the form of a sequence of shots of rain falling on crops, running off terracotta roofs and beside the dirt-packed walls of a house.

By inviting us into this raw intimacy with the earth, the land, her family, and how her family chooses to live and juxtaposing it with the values of the city and those that live there, Nélica captures the emotion of her audience. In this way, the documentary privileges her perspective as well as that of the lush landscape that is tied to her well-being. Because *Hija de la laguna* carefully develops Nélica’s character and draws us into her world by offering a soundtrack of the sounds heard wherever she is as well as images of the land she seeks to defend from destruction, as viewers we are more sympathetic of her point of view.

While the documentary’s narrative and aestheticism make for a more effective viewing experience, I also argue that *Hija de la laguna* postures the aesthetic of biocentrism and as such, boldly opposes Western practices motivated by material wealth and accumulation. It visualizes ideas of BV in that it rejects the Western invention of society and nature as dichotomous. Furthermore, it rejects the idea of development as proposed by Western discourse through Nélica’s yearning to sustain and grow the connection among the socio-natural. As some iterations of BV do, this documentary

reveals “un ‘desacople’ entre la calidad de vida y el progreso, y su expresión actual en el desarrollo económico” (Gudynas and Acosta 109).

The scenes from *El oro o la vida* and *Hija de la laguna* discussed above illustrate what Enrique Dussel calls the “myth of modernity” while simultaneously confronting and rejecting it. Such a myth is founded on the performance of superiority enacted by modern civilizations to render themselves the actors who save, develop, and civilize other cultures deemed barbaric and primitive. From the perspective of modernity, “el bárbaro y el primitivo asumen la culpa de oponerse al proceso de civilización. Esto a su vez permite a la modernidad representarse a sí misma como inocente y como fuerza redentora” (Schiwy, “Ecoturismo” 208). For one, the communities in Guatemala, and other parts of Central America highlighted in *El oro o la vida*, do not bear guilt when in opposition to the practices of multinational corporations. In fact, *El oro o la vida* offers the medium and visual space to share community members’ defiance to the bio-power operations of both their governments and the foreign mining company of Goldcorp.⁵⁸ In this way, the documentary archives verbal and physical evidence of the intimidation and violence

⁵⁸ I use bio-power in the sense of Michel Foucault. As in, those in power administrate and institutionally implement a system of values that control and regulate the life and death of other bodies within certain populations. The exercise of power over a body stems from ideological managing of the economy (in this case capitalism and neoliberalism), politics, education, medicine, security, sexuality, phenotype, among others. Foucault writes, “Ese bio-poder fue, a no dudarlo, un elemento indispensable en el desarrollo del capitalismo; éste no pudo afirmarse sino al precio de la inserción controlada de los cuerpos en el aparato de producción y mediante un ajuste de los fenómenos de población a los procesos económicos. Pero exigió más; necesitó el crecimiento de unos y otros, su reforzamiento al mismo tiempo que su utilizabilidad y docilidad....[Garantiza] relaciones de dominación y efectos de hegemonía; el ajuste entre la acumulación de los hombres y la del capital, la articulación entre el crecimiento de los grupos humanos y la expansión de las fuerzas productivas y la repartición diferencial de la ganancia” (“Derecho de muerte y poder sobre la vida” 170).

enacted by allies of the gold mine and directed at both indigenous peoples and the earth. Secondly, *Hija de la laguna* privileges the perspective and actions of Nélida, a campesina, as she defends the life of water. The documentary thus questions and critiques the imposition of modernity that drives city-dwelling and practices of irreversible natural destruction for temporary material gain.

Both documentaries acknowledge the struggle to produce a message within societal and economical structures mired by neo-imperialism, historical racism and ethnic discrimination that values the non-production of land. Regardless of their individual success in employing cinematographic tools to engage their viewers, it is explicit in both *El oro o la vida* and *Hija de la laguna* how the global ecological debate is also a fight for epistemological power (Schiwy, “Ecoturismo” 205; Merino 281).

As we have seen above through the interviews with Deisley and Meany in *El oro o la vida*, and through notions of development that privilege city-life and extraction over that of rural-life and cyclical regeneration in *Hija de la laguna*, the beliefs of Western development adhere to the rhetoric of neocolonialism based on myopic views that drive progress regardless of consequences. As Deisley stated in his first interview, Goldcorp expanded its projects because the price of gold had risen and there was money to be made. In other words, the prospect of material – monetary – gain overrode any concern for the socio-natural well-being of communities near mining sites. This recalls Saldaño-Portillo’s claim that development was masked as decolonial and hence adopted, in large part, by Latin American governments (see Chapter I). Such beliefs hinder, if not sever, the message produced by community members in *El oro o la vida* or Nélida and Mamá

Agua in *Hija de la laguna* - to leave territories and populations undisturbed – making interpretation by the consumer (the government, the interested corporations and their shareholders) impossible. In other words, the value initially circulated that privileges the territory “as is” and credits its “natural form” as most valuable struggles to translate in the epistemic realms operating outside of such belief systems.⁵⁹

As I hope to have shown, *El oro o la vida* and *Hija de la laguna* present conflicting epistemologies from the Global North and South, calling on its viewers to question the pillars and operations of capitalism and neo-imperialism. In the following section, I continue to discuss these documentaries in terms of how they combat this disturbance of translating and valuing non-production. I posit that the scenes analyzed below frame the ecological values and knowledge of those that defend land and nature as superior to Western modernity (Schiwy, “Ecoturismo” 219). The documentaries, again with varying degrees of success, honor the socio-natural process by safeguarding reproduction and regeneration of both the natural and the social. They serve as communicative tools that disseminate the message reversing the alienation of the social from the natural and honoring the vitality of both if intimately intertwined.

⁵⁹ Schiwy posits such a “colonial experience grounds a lasting colonial difference in thinking, which is ‘not just a case of incommensurable cosmologies or worldviews but a difference articulated by the colonality of power.’ This difference has resulted in an unevenness in the value of languages and the politics of translation and, most important, in the silencing of ideas by those subalternized in the colonial process” (Mignolo qtd. in “Making Visible” 86).

PART II - (Re)Producing the socio-natural

In *El oro o la vida*, we watch a Salvadorian cattle rancher guide his herd to drink at waters' edge. He gestures towards the river as he walks alongside it and says, "Este es el río que cuidamos." The camera cuts to two little boys jumping off a submerged tree trunk into the river while an older woman sits in a lawn chair cooling her feet in the water. The boys' splashes reach the camera, leaving water drops on the lens. As a viewer, I am drawn into their reality, tempted by the refreshing waters of the river. Men and women lounge by the shore in the trees' shade. A man wading in the river throws a fishing net towards us as the camera zooms out to capture the image of the threads landing and sinking into the water. The camera cuts to a medium shot of the Salvadorian in the forefront and the river in the foreground. He tells us that if the Cerro Blanco mine, located in Guatemala near the border of El Salvador, is permitted to operate, the river will be contaminated and people will not be able to visit and play in it anymore. Although he does not mention the repercussions of mining pollution for his cattle, we know from earlier images of dead cows in water ways that the mine will be their demise, and as a result the rancher's livelihood (see Figure 8 above).⁶⁰ He accuses the Guatemalan government of ignoring the porousness of borders when it comes to toxic run off from the mine into water ways, and the Salvadorian government for not defending the villages and

⁶⁰ Gordon and Webber affirm this cattle rancher's concern about the Cerro Blanco mine. In their thorough research on Canadian mining in Guatemala they write of Cerro Blanco - which is also another project of Goldcorp - "Critics point out that the proposed development poses an environmental threat to the shared Lake Güija and rivers in both countries. For Salvadorans, there is concern about seepage of mine waste into the Lempa river, upon which 3 million depend for their agricultural and livestock-raising activities (104).

ecology near the mine. To conclude his remarks, he looks directly at his interviewer and asks, “¿Me entendió, verdad?” His question is not a rhetorical one. Together with his tone and direct eye contact he forms a looking relation that engages the interviewer and international and national viewers to hear his denouncement of socio-political marginalization and ecological disregard.

As he introduced himself, he identifies as a protector of the river. He is socially aware that contamination of the river would deteriorate the livelihood and well-being of his community. By linking the government to the mine industry, he is conscious of the fact that the economics and political players are valued more than the ecological and social (re)production of his community. Lastly, he exercises chronological awareness addressing the negative changes that will occur if the mine commences operation.⁶¹ In

⁶¹ According to the operating company, Entremares, a subsidiary of Goldcorp, the license to explore was given in 1997 and to exploit in 2007 (<http://goldcorpguatemala.com/entremares/>). According to a report published on December 14, 2014, by Centro de Medios Independientes (CMI Guatemala) Entremares temporarily suspended operations in 2012, due, supposedly, to the decrease in price of gold on the international market. Upon further investigation, local organizations found that the research presented to el Estudio de Impactos Ambientales (EIA) by Entremares insufficiently addressed hydro-geographic and geothermal risks to the surrounding area. Nonetheless, Entremares assures the public that the Cerro Blanco mine, much like Deisley’s response discussed above, would not contaminate neither superficial or underground water sources. However, a report in the “Anuario Minero” later that year stated that the Cerro Blanco had been closed due to technical failures and tunnel flooding. This report solidified the concern held by locals and environmentalists that the mine was indeed polluting the most vital water ways of the area – the Ostúa River which flows into Lake Güija which then supplies the Lempé River. After taking water samples, Madre Selva de Guatemala and el Centro de Estudios para Inversión y Comercio de El Salvador found a high concentration of toxic metals such as arsenic. Both Salvadorian and Guatemalan communities are requesting the definitive closure of the Cerro Blanco mine given that it puts at risk a “amplia población de ambos países y que amenaza a los principales afluentes de agua de la región... vital para el país” (<https://cmiguate.org/la-mina-cerro-blanco-un-proyecto-fallido-y-desastroso/>)

opposition to the government and the mining company's intention, his statement is one that advocates for non-production. He demonstrates knowledge that the areas near the main water sources of the region are more valuable unexplored and unexploited.⁶²

Alluded to by the Salvadorian, the effects of mining are not isolated to just the environment or the social fabric of the surrounding community. The effects instead form an intricate web of destruction infiltrating life-styles, the psyche, mobility, fertility, traditional knowledge, among others. Two community members living near the Marlin mine in Guatemala share how it has affected their lives. In a medium close-up, a man positions himself underneath the shade of several trees. Through an opening in the foliage the camera zooms out from the stripped mountain where the open-pit mining occurs. The man recalls a long list of tree varieties that used to grow naturally where the mine currently is.⁶³ Here, the documentary calls attention to knowledge of flora and familiarity with the landscape that is rendered obsolete in the face of large scale extraction. Moreover, because future interaction with the trees will be impossible, so might his ability to recall them in memory. The mine, therefore, disrupts traditional knowledges, memory and connection with the flora of the land.

Similarly, the effects of the mine cause doubt in residents' daily practices. An initial scene of the documentary follows an older woman in Siete Platos Village in Guatemala from the creek where she washes clothes, to her home where she pours a drink

⁶² Put in monetary terms, the projected damage is expected to cost the Central American countries a much higher amount than the 5% royalties received (<https://cmiguate.org/la-mina-cerro-blanco-un-proyecto-fallido-y-desastroso/#rf9-6818>).

⁶³ “Había árboles encino, de roble, de palo negro, de pino, de magrón y otros [sic] variedades de árboles que habían [sic] en ese lugar.”

from a pitcher into cups, to the local naturalist clinic where she complains in a native language of a bleeding eye that will not get better. Her remedies as of then were to wash it in the river but she knows something is wrong. When the attendant asked if she had applied a prescribed ointment, she said it didn't help. He proceeds to explain that the river is now sick because of mining activities and even if she applies ointment, her eye will not get better. He too is at a loss, stating that there are illnesses in their community that can be cured but there are others associated with the mine that are irreversible. The woman defiantly states that for sixty years she and her community members have drunk from the river and nothing bad ever happened. Now, "el agua ya no sirve."

Further south in Palo Ralo, Honduras, a community downstream from the Marlin mine experiences skin deformations, rashes, and depigmentation. The cases are widespread and linked to high levels of arsenic in drinking water. Rodolfo Arteaga, affected by arsenic poisoning, explains that he, along with his community, drank for four years from a well the mining company drilled for them. In 2004 however, arsenic was detected in the water and the well was shut down. Issues beyond skin malformations include an increase in miscarriages at three-to-six months of pregnancy, an increase in infant mortality due to deformations, and an increase in the number of babies lacking proper muscle development.⁶⁴

These scenes reiterate that community knowledge is informed by the socio-natural process of reproduction. To further analyze their effectiveness, I employ Doolittle's

⁶⁴ En *El negocio*, a doctor also links cases of anencephaly to the activities of the Marlin mine. In the short time he has been working near the Marlin mine, he has already seen three cases.

thesis that indigenous peoples use two rhetorical tools when defending and legitimizing their active position in international climate change negotiations. While one addresses the earth as a being with rights and indigenous peoples assume responsibility to protect it from mistreatment and manipulation, the second draws on the “political and economic marginalization and land dispossession, experienced first through colonialism and more recently through globalization” (Doolittle 286). These tools coincide with articles of The Universal Declaration of the Rights of Mother Earth.⁶⁵ In Article 1:2 it states, “Mother Earth is a unique, indivisible, self-regulating community of interrelated beings that sustains, contains and reproduces all beings.” In Article 1:7 it states, “The rights of each being are limited by the rights of other beings and any conflict between their rights must be resolved in a way that maintains the integrity, balance and health of Mother Earth.” Echoing these declarations, Rebeca Lane, a Guatemalan hip-hop activist, recently commented on Mother Earth, “...just because she is a mother, she’s not someone we can take advantage of. She doesn’t have the responsibility to nurture us. We must have a relationship - to give and take - a more harmonious relationship...I think also behind the Mother Earth thing sometimes we can put upon her things about motherhood that we are trying to get rid of through feminism” (Visions and Voices at UCS).

As these tools are implemented in *El oro o la vida*, they also “negocian de diferentes maneras el imaginario sexual vinculado a los conceptos de naturaleza y cultura e iluminan así límites y opciones para la reformulación de las geopolíticas del conocimiento” (Schiwy, “Ecoturismo” 205). As such, *El oro o la vida* not only shares

⁶⁵ This declaration was created in Cochabamba, Bolivia on April 22, 2010 at the World People’s Conference on Climate Change and the Rights of Mother Earth.

epistemes founded in the recognition of the socio-natural reproduction cycle but it also seeks to deconstruct the gender binary metaphor engrained in the construction of Latin America.

The documentary thus redefines, “la relación entre cultura y naturaleza como práctica natural-cultural que se basa en una ética ecologista transmitida a través de las tradiciones locales que no se dejan reducir al código racional” (Schiwy, “Ecoturismo” 219). Furthermore, the social actors, both female and male, enact what Margarita Velásquez calls “sustentabilidad social” thus intimately linking ecological regeneration with social transformation (426). In other words, to redefine the relationship between human-life and the planet fortifies not only ecological sustainability for the future, but it also implies a process of initiating models for equitable gender relations (426).

In *El oro o la vida* both women and men denounce the repercussions of mining in their vicinities. Explicit in their testimonies is ecological, socio-political and chronological awareness. Ecological, meaning that the men and women witness a change in the earth’s composition and how it directly relates to their own life experience. Socio-political in the sense that they are conscientious of speaking from a colonial experience and thus in-difference to that of Western modernity. Chronological, in that they archive a clear demarcation before and after the commencement of mining in their territories. Measuring life experiences before and after the mine represent the injustice and irrational exploitation committed by Goldcorp and Guatemala state’s complicity.

The scenes above continue to follow the structure of *El oro o la vida* as discussed in Part I: that of interviewing members of communities effected - on some level – by

mining and extractivist activity. The voices and faces we hear and see on screen are effective in denouncing the consequences of mining such as water contamination and ecological ruin, and associating the well-being of the natural with the social. However, the social actors are many, and isolated from each other. They speak from different contexts and geographies of which we do not have background information. As such, it is difficult for viewers to engage fully and feel moved to sympathize with their cause.

Hija de la laguna also functions to denounce mining activity through the lens of showing the vitality of socio-natural (re)production. Yet, I posit that because it focuses on one main and three secondary narratives and employs the aesthetics of film to immerse its viewers in a world that privileges and honors land and its relationship to the humans that care for it, *Hija de la laguna*, is more compelling and therefore, effective.⁶⁶ Here, the medium of film is employed to weave a story through character development and the overlaying and editing of images, angles and sound, fully enveloping its audience for its duration.

An initial scene from the documentary films shots in Cajamarca, Peru, the land on which Máxima Acuña lives. The hills and mountains are grassy and rocky and their tops are covered in rolling mist. In subsequent shots, Máxima and Nélida peel potatoes and share a meal. We see a person in a parked truck with a video-camera pointed at Máxima. We assume the person is associated with the Conga Project that wants to mine the gold

⁶⁶ Here I do not discuss the second or third secondary narratives. One follows a Dutch jeweler who discovers that her trade requires mass destruction of the social and the natural in the countries where her gems are mined. This process of conscientiousness inspires her to work with sustainably mined metals and jewels. The other follows women miners in Oruro, Bolivia.

that lies under her property. This vigilance poses an imminent threat as armed military crest the hill and look down on her home. After looking through her certificates of ownership, Nérida assures Máxima that her documents verify that she is the owner of the land and the Conga Project cannot rightfully evict her. Sitting under the overhang of the house, they are sheltered from the rain that has begun to fall. A series of shots highlights the lushness and wetness of the land on which Máxima lives and defends from extraction: deep green foliage bending as droplets hit its leaves, rain falling into existing puddles, small canals being further filled with water, and dark-grey mud getting wetter.

The soundtrack abruptly switches to the slice of a hoe in dry dirt and muffled wind as the camera cuts to a close-up of sun scorched clumps of brown dirt being broken apart. The next cut offers a medium-long shot of a woman hoeing the dirt and yellow brittle reeds. Behind her a mountain looms parched and brown and to the right is a cluster of what seem to be abandon buildings and a crane. The woman disentangles the reed's roots from the earth and pulls it up, throwing dust to the wind. Her voice begins to speak off-screen and as she explains that there used to be a tin mining company in the area, the camera cuts from long shot to the next showing brown and brittle reeds covering the hilly landscape; rusted equipment abandoned by the side of a dirt road; and mountain sides of loose rocky rubble. Everything is brown or tan and exposed to the sun. A friend of the woman hoeing shows us with her hands far apart how big the potatoes used to grow in this dirt. She looks away and back at the camera. Now, not anymore. They are all tiny.

For the next couple of minutes, we follow the two women as they walk back to town. One of the women tells us off-screen that the town was called King of Tin, but it

was also known for its big reeds which is how it got its name, Totoral, Bolivia. The exaggerated inflection in her voice as she says big signals to us how impressive the reeds must have been. At this moment, she walks carefully across a plank that is thrown over a trickle of dirty, shallow water. She says, “¿Quién iba a pensar que nos iban a dejar así como está ahorita, un desastre?” She walks over barren land with bleached rock and brown sand. Half-disintegrated plastic flaps in the wind, trapped under debris. There are no reeds anymore. Reeds require wetlands.

In town, she and the other woman attempt to draw water from a well, but the pail hits the bottom and makes a hollow sound. There is none. In a native language, one says to the other, “You help me with water and I will help you with the *guano*.” For the next shots, we follow them down dirt roads until they come to a PVC pipe that has a slow but steady stream of water where they can fill their jugs. They mention it is the only one that serves the community. Around this jimmy-rigged, man-made spring, wet clothes lie about attracting flies, and empty chip bags are scattered around, their branding effaced by the scorching sun. As we hear water filling the jugs and watch the woman kneel waiting, the camera cuts to a close-up of a furiously bubbling spring bulging out of the ground, vibrant green grass all around. A hand dips down and scoops up some water to the mouth. It returns for another cup. A subsequent shot is hazy, but we can make out Nélida in her galoshes as she walks through sopping wet grasses.

By positioning these scenes from Cajamarca, Peru and Totoral, Bolivia, *Hija de la laguna* shows us with image and soundtrack the stark difference between land fallen prey to extraction and land still valued as not-produced. Totoral, known for its wetland reeds

and harvest of large potatoes is now a dry, desolate place with brittle reeds, tiny potatoes and scarce water. If the Conga Project succeeds, Cajamarca could be another Totoral. After watching scenes of Totoral where the women lack water, their crops are stunted, and the sun beats down seeming to scorch everything in sight, my desire to return to the misty, wetness of Cajamarca almost hurts. I am relieved to see the soft green of the grasses, and hear Nélida slosh through an abundance of water.

Positioning these scenes back-to-back produces a strong argument within the narrative of the documentary. On the one-hand, producing the land in ways that adhere to the values of Western capitalism drains the earth of its natural flora and as a result stunts the possibility of social production as seen in Totoral. On the other-hand, it illustrates a symbiosis of the natural and the social if left alone; if not-produced as seen in Cajamarca. We recall Nélida lamenting to her mother of life in the city and how to her, life there stunts the social in large part because it is alienated from the natural.

Whereas *El oro o la vida* does indeed argue that non-production is more valuable as it allows for reproduction of the socio-natural, it does so through isolated interviews of locals who clearly demarcate life before and after the arrival of extractivist companies. These interviews serve as informative and didactic but perhaps they do not fully capture us as viewers in the emotional sense. In contrast, *Hija de la laguna*, although relaying similar significance, allows the images of the natural itself to send the message that it is more viable to the social if not produced.

Conceivably by focusing more on the interview as structure, *El oro o la vida* highlights a reflection on historical and global consciousness. It shows that communities

and governments alike know directly or indirectly, depending on the case, the correlations between extractivist capitalism and population displacement, economic disparity, spikes in cancer rates, and other physical and psychological deformations. As Quijano states, historical awareness informs the present and the future envisioned by indigenous and non-indigenous organizations and communities that counteract capitalism and its racist epistemologies (qtd. in Cochrane 583) This propagation and continuity of intelligence is essential to the enactment and embodiment of BV. In fact, De Sousa Santos links social global injustice to cognitive global injustice writing that societies must develop a critical consciousness capable of overcoming the abysses that exclude and make peripheral cognitive diversity (qtd. in Sianes & Abellán 60). If *El oro o la vida* is being consumed intra-culturally, the detailing of how communities are one, effected by the operations of transnational extractivist companies, and two, fighting back through community consultations and protests, serves to raise awareness, bolster political engagement and ultimately work to change the future. Schiwy, within the context of Andean indigenous video, argues that these types of intra-culturally circulated videos create “spaces for intercultural debate and exchange of ideas” which then lead to an “effort to decolonize the soul, that is, to counter the effects of ethnic self-denigration that the pressure to assimilate has exacerbated” (“Decolonization” 282).

Given that both documentaries have international and national audiences, the exchange of ideas founded in ecological, socio-political and chronological knowledge by those affected by mining is disseminated. As such, the message is produced in line with a socio-natural awareness, and thus circulated and received by other communities. In *El*

oro o la vida, 54 communities generated, spread, and consumed the similarly stated message of non-production as being more productive for both human and non-human life. While the Guatemala state still struggles to recognize these consultations as legally binding, and thus the message originating in these communities is not accepted as was intended by the government or the transnational mining companies, the documentary nonetheless serves as an instrument “in an ongoing political struggle to challenge power positions and to allow people relegated from decision-making processes to take part and to be taken into consideration” (Magallanes-Blanco 200). Therefore, the documentary’s effectiveness lies, for now, in its intra-cultural circulation.

Hija de la laguna chronicles the protection of land against the Conga Project which has since been rescinded. Here, we witness the process of transnaturalization which allows for an equalizing of hierarchy between object and subject recognizing the politicization of both and thus acknowledging a symbiotic relationship between the two. Whereas extractivism can never be reciprocal, the transnaturalization process is based in such regenerative reciprocity.⁶⁷ The struggle then, lies in how to relay such messages without miscommunication and misinterpretation so they can intervene and effect change where extractivism and material accumulation is most valued. Is it possible that through the medium of film, worlds are changed?

⁶⁷ Klein writes, “Extractivism is a nonreciprocal, dominance-based relationship with the earth, one purely of taking. It is the opposite of stewardship, which involves taking but also taking care that regeneration and future life continue....It is the reduction of life into objects for the use of others, giving them no integrity or value of their own.... In an extractivist economy, the interconnections among these various objectified components of life are ignored; the consequences of severing them are of no concern” (169).

Furthermore, by presenting both male and female as connected and concerned with the well-being of both human and non-human life, *El oro o la vida* breaks with the gendered metaphor constructed through Western perspectives of Latin America that imagines an inherent link between indigenous women and land. Instead of perpetuating this idea, it advocates the need for all – indigenous and non-indigenous women, men, adults and children – to redefine relationships with land so that all may live. This community-based resistance resounds with Urkidi's findings that, "The imagined Maya community is a historized identity related to the idea of a traditional sacred community, where the cult of earth, landscape and mountain spirits had a central role (Wilson 1993)" (570). Urkidi further argues that the movement of anti-mining in Guatemala has spurred communities to re-commit to internal solidarity of promoting nature as a spiritual entity (570). This reconnection then, can be read as renewing past epistemes as strategic or as essential. They both could be true.

With this said, the directing and production of the film – although male dominant – is based within the organization of Caracol Producciones whose approach is communal as it works in collaboration with communities to generate alternative independent video and social documentaries.⁶⁸ Nonetheless, these testimonies - spoken in both Spanish and native languages – are perhaps over-crowded by other voices that seem more predominant and thus further reinstate patriarchal norms, such as those of the priest, the

⁶⁸ Álvaro Revenga is credited as writer, director and producer. Victorino Tejaxún is the assistant director, producer and sound director. Sergio Paredes is the extra camera. Revenga and Tejaxún edited and assembled.

Guatemalan Mining Minister, the Goldcorp Executive, the doctor in Honduras, and the radio host and pharmacist in Guatemala.⁶⁹

In *Hija de la laguna*, at first glance, we might assume that it is in stark contrast to *El oro o la vida* that offers a cross-section of gender and generations valuing a relation of non-production with their natural environment. After all, the main narratives are all adult women. However, we must keep in mind that the documentary is a mediated form and in this case, the writer and director is male. Furthermore, there are several insights into male narratives such as the priest who protests in solidarity with Nélide against the Conga Project; Nélide's father who lost his mining job because of her public opposition, and the men and children who gather on the hill alongside Nélide, Máxima and other women to protect the land from mining during the stand-off with the riot police. In this last case, we can infer that the community as a whole shares principles that honor the vitality of the socio-natural relationship. However, the film makes explicit that it is the women who

⁶⁹ Particularly in the case of Guatemala where the indigenous population endured a 36-year internal armed conflict and presently struggles for retribution with the Rios Montt trial and recognition within the structures of the nation, producing media highlighting indigenous voices in indigenous languages is paramount. Laura Vargas and Claudia Arteaga write, "In the resonating Rios Montt trial, Guatemala's mainstream media was, for the first time, witnessing indigenous women speaking in Maya languages. Such a powerful representation implies that even though the mechanisms to reach justice are provided by the State – conceived from and within a western idea of governmentality – the indigenous voices that have claimed for justice, fought and resisted injustice opened up other possibilities of resolving profound social crisis. Indigenous women giving their *testimonio* in their own language is just one step forward in the Guatemalan process to recognize – as Julio Solorzano stated – 'its pluricultural conditions not as a problem but as a reality.' Having said this, struggles for cultural rights (for language recognition and demands for own representation) are linked to a broader issue regarding the defense of their vital territories, where an ultimate question of the limits of state sovereignty in alliance with neoliberal interests is at its underscore." (6). See Laura Vargas and Claudia Arteaga's "Dislocating Decolonial Feminist Genealogies and the Making of a Chi'xi Feminism."

draw strength from the living earth and therefore are also the ones committed to defend it. In this case, *Hija de la laguna* intimately intertwines the well-being of the natural with that of women in particular. As BV proposes in some iterations, I argue that *Hija de la laguna* attempts to disassociate with Western anthropocentrism, “para generar otras relaciones con la naturaleza, y la búsqueda de igualdad, justicia social y valorización de otros saberes” (Gudynas and Acosta 108). At the same time, I posit that as it privileges the female voice, it also essentializes it and thus risks falling into the Western trope of indigenous women as passive bearers of culture and connected to land.

CONCLUSION

Magallanes-Blanco proposes that video is a medium where indigenous peoples may relay arguments about nature and the environment “(earth as living being, a mother, or the history of abuse and exploitation)” (212). Notice her use of or here as she contends that both arguments cannot form the main narrative in the same video. In line with this, as I have discussed above, *El oro o la vida* seems largely tilted towards denouncement and displaying historical and contemporary exploitation of Guatemalan rural and/or indigenous communities. *Hija de la laguna* on the other-hand, centers on the interconnection of Nélida and Mamá Agua, showing water and the earth as a living being. By lingering on the long shots or close-ups of water, vibrant foliage, or misty mountains the documentary offers reflective spaces that draw the viewers into an alternative ontology. While perhaps Magallanes-Blanco’s statement might largely be true within the growing audiovisual archive documenting the defense of the environment, I argue that

Hija de la laguna is an exception. Although *Hija de la laguna* concentrates its cinematic efforts on making nature a protagonist, the aesthetic doubles to also work in countering and opposing Western constructs of social and nature duality and practices of extraction. In this way, the documentary functions to both denounce exploitation of the socio-natural and privilege the vitality of (re)generating and (re)producing the socio-natural.

By arguing *Hija de la laguna* as multi-faceted in this sense, and by default, *El oro o la vida* as more one-sided, I find it imperative to caution against being romanced by the aesthetics of the former.⁷⁰ In an article discussing filmmaker Marta Rodríguez's work with indigenous communities in Colombia, David M. J. Wood details her move away from the technical and aesthetic tools allotted by the use of the film apparatus and how instead she focused on the, "'poetics' of reality to emerge more profoundly from the protagonists themselves" (160). The cinematographic qualities employed by *Hija de la laguna* while perhaps more palatable should not disregard the importance of video projects such as *El oro o la vida*.

Additionally, utilization of the audiovisual medium provides space for community members affected by mining to speak out against the injustices targeted against them. In a recent article, Laurel Smith explains what she calls "comtechs" or communication technology. "If and when groups gain access to them, communication technology...can enhance dialogue and the exchange of information among grassroots organizations, international NGOs, and other sources of support that comprise transnational networks of advocacy (185). Of course, the question here is if these comtechs actually do circulate

⁷⁰ I am guilty of this as a viewer. Yet, I firmly believe both documentaries operate in different ways and are effective for different audiences.

well enough to influence change? Although important for global awareness, I argue that the circulation of a comtech is not and should not be the limiting factor for its ability to influence. In fact, “with comtechs, data based on local knowledge may be authoritatively rendered and then mobilized in the interest of those who, until recently, have not had a voice in planning development projects. In short, comtechs can relocate the politics of representation at a variety of scales: community, regional, national and global” (Laurel Smith 185). As such, *El oro o la vida*, within certain markets and audiences could circulate intra-culturally and still empower a politics of representation.⁷¹

Therefore, I conclude that *El oro o la vida* and *Hija de la laguna* complement each other in critiquing the extractivist practices of Western modernity, addressing constructions of metaphorically gendering bodies of land and indigenous populations, and proposing ontologies that privilege the interconnection of the socio-natural. Intersecting themes such as reproducing the social, human and non-human relationships, bio-power, and epistemes operating alternatively to Western secular practices, the two documentaries function to privilege ecological and socio-political ethos originating in the colonial difference. Operating in contrast to the agenda of neoliberal development, the

⁷¹ Both documentaries however tout fairly-large viewing populations – *El oro o la vida* is accessible on Youtube, has been broadcasted on over 5 TV channels in Central and South America (TeleSUR, Canal Capital, Tv Canaria, Vea-Canal and Tv Maya), has received 8 recognitions, and was screened at 21 festivals world-wide. *Hija de la laguna*, on the other-hand has less public access as it streams on Netflix, yet has received several awards such as a Hotdoc selection and the winner of the Doc LA Award in 2015. Later, in 2016, it received the Audience Award for best documentary at the Moscow International Documentary Film Festival. It was first released in Canada, and in Peru it had a limited release reaching just 4 Peruvian theatres: UVK Larcomar, UVK San Martín, Cineplanet San Miguel and Cineplanet Cajamarca.

message disseminated by this audiovisual archive suggests that in order for the regeneration of either the social or natural worlds to occur, both must function symbiotically so as to continually initiate a process of reproduction. As both Echeverría and certain iterations of BV remind us, the reproduction of the social is dependent on the ‘natural form’ of objects to work in tandem with the efforts of humans.

A scene in *Hija de la laguna* illustrates this: In a series of shots, we watch Névida in the country-side at her family’s home. She is framed by adobe brick as she looks out on the sowed fields of tender greens. The camera cuts to her twirling small yellow flowers as she walks garden rows with her dog. The camera cuts to a long shot of an aerial view of the green landscape full of tall trees, grasses, scattered houses and grazing animals. Another cut positions Névida at a medium low angle shot with the cloudy sky filling the top half of the screen and the meadow the bottom. She sits, staring out beyond us. We look up at her as she sits silent and contemplative. The voice of the priest, Father Marco Arana, interrupts the soundtrack that has up until now been of birds chirping, the sound of Névida’s steps as she walks across the soft, moist earth, or the breeze. He initiates a conversation with Névida that poses the question of how does she want to leave this earth. “¿Cómo quieres seguir avanzando, caminando? Me refiero a qué mundo quieres dejar, ¿no?, ¿mejor o peor? Como decían los viejos indígenas, ‘El mundo no te pertenece sino tú perteneces al mundo,’ entonces ¿qué quieres dejar?” Surrounded by a lush and dense forest, the camera offers a medium profile shot of Névida against the leaves. She is in focus, but the leaves behind her rustle constantly in the breeze. Their movement seems to suggest that they are listening to what Névida will decide. As the film

progresses, we know that she commits to defend the earth because she knows its destruction will also be her own.

This scene, and others in *Hija de la laguna* as well as in *El oro o la vida* show us that humans have no ability to reproduce their own identity – individual or social – without the involvement of the natural. Due to the current global system of capitalism and its perpetuation of human-to-non-human disconnect, we are witnessing both human and nature's demise (Sianes and Abellán 61). The vitality and viability then of reconnecting and redefining an integral relationship among all life-worlds, as BV and the works analyzed suggest, encourages finding productivity in non-production. By communicating this message those that speak from a colonial difference, regardless of gender or ethnicity, garner epistemological power by intertwining the necessity of the socio-natural relationship.

Finally, the revitalization of acknowledging the interconnectedness of the 'natural form' producing and reproducing the social theorized by Echeverría and exemplified through enactments of BV has provided space for discourse while also illuminating the potential of socio-ecological insurgent activity. Not only does it imbue multiple layers of meaning and vitality into the relationship between human and nonhuman life but it also expands the possibility of alternative epistemologies that operate despite capitalist dominance. Regarding BV, we must endeavor to separate state and organizations' appropriations of the term for progressive appearances from the quotidian practices, acts of resistance, and discourses that parallel its' principles and disrupt the Eurocentric paradigm whose practices extract, dislocate, fracture and deplete the possibility of

regenerative human and nonhuman life. By the same token, we must not disregard the important interventions of media projects such as *El oro o la vida* for the more enticing, aesthetically pleasing ones like *Hija de la laguna*.

Chapter III

Exploring Tragedy as a Queer Aesthetic in

Li svokol Xunka'e/La tragedia de Juanita: a play by Tsotsil-Maya playwright

Petrona de la Cruz Cruz

Petrona de la Cruz Cruz's play, *Li svokol Xunka'e/La tragedia de Juanita*, unabashedly performs a representation of ethnic and gender discrimination and violence within a Maya community in the Chiapas Highlands. Despite its sparse stage-directions, austere stage-set and props and simple language, *La tragedia* nonetheless boldly tackles themes grounded deeply in contemporary iterations of colonial systems of the past such as the ills of alcohol, economic strife, ethnic hierarchy, gender violence and racist oppression. The play tells the story of a not so uncommon occurrence – the forced marriage of a young daughter. Largely adhering to the tenets of a tragedy, I propose that de la Cruz Cruz's play also operates within certain melodramatic modes.

La tragedia stages a mestizo cacique, Ceferino, in a Tsotsil community in Chiapas Highlands that lusts over a nine-year-old girl, Juanita. With economic and political power, along with alcohol as the social lubricator, the cacique and his petitioner, Caralampio – a community representative - convince the parents, Mariano and Magdalena, to sell Juanita's hand in marriage. Taken by force from her home, Juanita is subsequently beaten, raped, and stabbed to death by her new husband. I argue that the characters, Caralampio and Juanita, act in ways that reveal and resist stratifications of patriarchal and ethnic discrimination and violence. In the following pages, I propose that the employment of tragic structuring and select melodramatic operative modes work in

tandem to suggest moments of queerness and undoing that transcend the stage, creating potentiality for a different future.

Philosophers over time have privileged the genre of tragedy as it seeks to “bring to consciousness the most significant moral, social, political and existential problems of the human condition, and to challenge spectators to respond in some way to them” (Shapshay and Wagschal 162).⁷² *La tragedia* is no exception. Theorists however, contest the definition and true nature of tragedy disagreeing on not only the essence of tragedy but also its tenets (Appel 190). In cinema, true tragedies are few and far between whereas films with tragic structure that operate within a melodramatic mode are much more common (Shapshay and Wagschal 163). Indeed, some tragedies are said to gravitate towards the melodramatic (Kenneth Burke qtd. in Appel 184). Given that melodrama is considered a “close cousin” to or a “subset” of tragedy, it is understandable that the distinction between the two is vague at times (Shapshay and Wagschal 168; Appel 179). Therefore, I posit that the play, *La tragedia* operates as a tragedy – as its title suggests – yet toys with several modes of melodrama as discussed by Linda Williams.

Before proceeding, I include Sandra Shapshay and Steven Wagschal’s definition of tragedy, reworked from the original as written by Aristotle in *Poetics* in 335 B.C.:⁷³

⁷² Shapshay and Wagschal list philosophers who have focused on the value of tragedy: “Aristotle, Seneca, Hegel, Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, Benjamin, Heidegger and, more recently, Martha Nussbaum and Bernard Williams” (161).

⁷³ Aristotle’s definition states, “Tragedy is a representation of a serious, complete action which has magnitude, in embellished speech, ... [represented] by people acting and not by narration; accomplishing by means of pity and terror the catharsis of such emotions. ... So tragedy as a whole necessarily has six parts ... plot, characters, diction, reasoning, spectacle and song” (qtd in. Shapshay and Wagschal 163).

Tragedy is a representation of an action (or series of actions, but not so many that the drama approaches epic), and the effects thereof, that is complete, serious, plausible and has universal significance. The drama involves the protagonist's *reversal* of fortune (from good to bad), moment of recognition (a change from ignorance to knowledge), and significant suffering – in the form of death, agony or an irreversible terrible wound – and at least some of this significant suffering must come at the end of the performance. Intended effects of a work of tragedy must include the arousal and emotional resolution of pity and fear. [Emphasis in original] (169)

And Linda Williams offers the following criteria to determine if a piece operates within a melodramatic mode, “If emotional and moral registers are sounded, if a work invites us to feel sympathy for the virtues of beset victims, [and/or] if the narrative trajectory is ultimately more concerned with a retrieval and staging of innocence than with the psychological causes of motives and action” (42). Moreover, Elena Lahr-Vivaz, author of *Mexican Melodrama: Film and Nation from the Golden Age to the New Wave*, argues that whereas the melodramatic content of Mexican films of the early twenty-first century reflected a hegemonic ideology of building a homogenous nation, the genre now creates spaces of resistance, and draws in its spectators encouraging them to assume a critical stance to what they see on screen (3). Of course, *La tragedia* is a play, not a movie, yet by positioning it as a tragedy operating with traces of melodrama the piece offers moments of resistance, moments that disrupt systemic and individual oppression and question entrenched ways of life.

In addition to Lahr-Vivaz, my analysis of *La tragedia* as it consists of melodrama modes is informed by Linda Williams’ and Ana M. López’s writings, and as a tragedy is informed by Sandra Shapshay and Steven Wagschal, Geoff Ashton and Sonja Tanner,

and Edward C. Appel. In the following pages, I suggest that de la Cruz Cruz's piece, *La tragedia*, can be read and analyzed through the structure of tragedy although the play employs melodramatic modes. Working in tandem with the structures of tragedy that engage with the socio-political and historical contexts of the Chiapas Highlands, I argue that tragedy's complexity bolsters and empowers melodramatic tropes.

By employing aspects of melodrama, I can better name the theatrical traits employed in *La tragedia*. The play shows the excessiveness - the darker side - of the unjust and violent practices of colonization, indigenismo, multiculturalism and now neoliberalism in indigenous communities.⁷⁴ Through the medium of theater, *La tragedia*, depicts the darker side of the cinematic Mexican melodramas of the Golden Age that were widely viewed as posturing an idealized and unified Mexico yet excluded, whitened, or trivialized the indigenous figure. Intertwined with the melodramatic tendencies of excessive emotion and violence, Manichaeian portrayals of certain characters and the absence of psychological depth of our victim-heroine are the tragic threads that engage and critique the law of patriarchy, the power imbalance within ethnic hierarchy, the justice system and the traditions of marital arrangements within Tsotsil and Tseltal communities of the Chiapas Highlands.

⁷⁴ Rosana Blanco Cano writes of the creation of a Mexican nation: "Concebir un México uniforme a través de la construcción de la historia nacional y del ejercicio de prácticas culturales discriminatorias ha sido un medio de exclusión y opresión de las diferencias culturales, así como una manera de ignorar la experiencia lacerante que las estructuras e instituciones coloniales, nacionales e incluso globales han impuesto sobre los pueblos indígenas sobrevivientes a las violentas dinámicas de aculturación y genocidio (118); Mercedes Olivera Bustamante also aligns with Blanco Cano as she signals to the period of indigenismo as modern ethnocide (83).

Tragedy - considered to require more cognitive activity on the part of the spectators - coupled with traces of melodrama – seen as excessively emotional and in search of a return to innocence – end up complimenting each other. Williams argues, “It is never a matter of simply mimicking the emotion of the protagonist, but, rather, a complex negotiation between emotions and between emotion and thought” (49). Within the realm of feminism, Williams observes that experiencing pathos should not be enslaving but rather empowering (47). In this way, emotion can inform cognition rather than limit it. Ashton and Tanner argue that tragic emotions have a unifying property to them where the audience feels part of a larger whole. It is important to note that the emotion felt does not saturate to a point of paralysis, but rather culminates in a way that is transformational (26). This link between emotion and thought, as argued by Williams in revising (and rescuing) melodrama, and by Ashton and Tanner in tragedy, is the catalyst for profound questioning. Furthermore, I argue along with Jill Dolan that the emotion experienced at the theater might transcend the stage (or the pages of the script) and spur social action (16). She writes, “performance can be a transformative experience useful in other realms of social life. Being moved at the theater allows us to realize that such feeling is possible, even desirable elsewhere” (16).

I posit that *La tragedia* triggers a desire – a hope – for a different tomorrow. In doing so, I position the play as host to properties of queering. José Esteban Muñoz offers queerness as performative in that it is not necessarily a being but rather an enactment that ignites a moment in the now indicating difference in the future (*Cruising* 1). If such emotion translates to hoping for a different outcome for the characters on stage, out of the

dystopic narrative of *La tragedia* shines a utopic light. “Utopian performatives persuade us that beyond this ‘now’ of material oppression and unequal power relations lives a future that might be different, one whose potential we can feel as we’re seared by the promise of a present that gestures toward a better later” (Dolan 7).

Muñoz states that through queer aesthetics it is possible to glimpse worlds that have yet to be created (*Cruising* 1). Christine Gledhill claims that melodrama is a platform on which contemporary struggles and every-day realities are staged (qtd. in Williams 53). To give an example, Edward C. Appel argues that melodrama copies how politics tend to function in reality pronouncing “moral absolutes, ideological simplicities, policy rigidities, hyper-emotional characterizations, black-and-white schematizations, and our-heroes-against-their-villains” (189). In the realm of politics, we see how Appel links the Manichaeic tendencies of melodrama to human nature. Moreover, I posit, as do Osborn and Bakke that there is a close “affinity of melodrama and politics, that melodrama is the realm of social action, public action, action within the world” (qtd. in Appel 189). In tragedy on the other-hand, Aristotle maintains that it is an imitation of action rather than the action itself (qtd. in Diana Taylor, *The Archive* 148). In this way, may we infer that a tragedy enacts and represents life but at the same time elevates the actions from what would be plausible in real life? If so, tragedy differs from melodrama as it is a performance of what could be, rather than what already is. However, by incorporating Manichaeic absolutes and simplicities that resonate with daily life or reflect human nature into a tragedy, the play can both be grounded in the here and now and offer interventions that gesture towards utopic potential.

Indeed, what is represented in *La tragedia* is grounded firmly in reality, and I therefore contend that moments of queerness appear to gesture towards a different future. In this sense, I argue that the play follows an aesthetic of queerness as it refuses an unrealistic account of life in a Maya indigenous village in Chiapas Highlands. Queerness in *La tragedia*, does not hide from reality, from the “prison house of today” (Muñoz, *Cruising* 1). It is “a longing that propels us onward, beyond romances of the negative and toiling in the present. Queerness is that thing that lets us feel that this world is not enough, that indeed something is missing” (1). The themes explored in this play, resonate with the ethnic discrimination, violence, absence of political, social and economic subjectivity and agency that is experienced daily in Chiapas indigenous communities and especially for females (Blanco Cano 127).⁷⁵

The Tsotsil-Maya playwright, de la Cruz Cruz focuses on depicting systems of oppression imposed on native populations since colonization, and representations of the quotidian in Maya communities in Chiapas Highlands. As Rosana Blanco Cano states, de la Cruz Cruz and the other writers and actresses of the non-profit organization Fortaleza de la Mujer Maya (FOMMA) based in San Cristóbal de las Casas work to reconfigure the ornamental position assigned to the Mexican female indigenous body (27).⁷⁶ The very

⁷⁵ De la Cruz Cruz’s solo plays include: “Una mujer desesperada,” “Madre olvidada,” “Desprecio paternal,” and “Infierno y Esperanza” (Blanco Cano 123n5).

⁷⁶ Blanco Cano draws on the national imaginary figure of La Malinche as well as the indigenous female body represented in artistic representations of native life. These national symbols have portrayed indigenous women as first, despicable, next, adored and always silent. In addition, such bodies have served as empty vessels upon which to write the authentic Mexican woman. Contradictory representations of her are found in

fact that all the characters are played by women disrupts supposed restrictions of women's roles in the public sphere, pushing the limitations of gender expression imposed by patriarchal colonial systems. Regardless of the perceived radicalness of indigenous women's public presence on stage – either acting as a woman or a man - many find it possible to become actresses because they are single (Steele 251).⁷⁷ On one hand this allows them a certain liberty and on the other-hand renders their social positioning precarious and subject to rumors of promiscuous activity or deviating from heteronormativity.⁷⁸

In cross-dressing, representation of gender on stage becomes excessive in that the women actresses over-act certain traits of their male characters. And while this gestures towards a dynamism of gender expression, it also teeters on reinvesting in certain patriarchal tropes.⁷⁹ This excess at once limits some of its characters and for others queers them, pushing societal expectations and disrupting traditional gender roles.

museums, national cultural and educative agendas as well as in mass communication forums (27). See *Cuerpos disidentes del México imaginado*.

⁷⁷ In an interview with Petrona de la Cruz Cruz, she recollects how Maya women in communities would approach her after presenting a play and ask how was it that her husband allowed her to participate in theater. How was it that he did not abuse her? (pers. comm.).

⁷⁸ See Jeanne Simonelli, Josefa Hernandez Perez and La Fomma's article, "Pathway to Autonomy: Women's Testimony of the Chiapas Experience" in *Foundations of First Peoples' Sovereignty: History, Education and Culture* (207).

⁷⁹ De la Cruz Cruz admits that she prefers to play women's roles because when she plays a male part, she remembers too vividly how her father mistreated her mother. She feels such rage that she instantly regrets it. "Imitar a mi papá de lo que hacía...no, no me gusta. Me gusta más hacer los papeles de femenino....No me gusta repetir lo que viví, lo que hizo mi papá a mi mamá" (pers. comm.).

Veering from patriarchal and historical practices that utilize the indigenous female body to superficially promote Mexico's multicultural state, FOMMA engages in social activism theater that reflects on global, national and local discourses that either deny or create civic empowerment for women of Mayan communities in the Chiapas Highlands (Blanco Cano 27).⁸⁰

Considering Chandra Mohanty's critique of Western women writing on "Third World Women" I take a moment here to specifically situate the historical and societal context within which *La tragedia* was written and performed.⁸¹ Teasing out the historical and contemporary intricacies of each community of the Chiapas Highlands is a vast project that is not mine. In the following pages however, I attempt to draw a succinct and informative picture of reality in terms of gender and ethnic relations in Tsotsil and Tseltal communities surrounding the city of San Cristóbal de las Casas.

La tragedia was written by de la Cruz Cruz who was born in 1965 in the established and well-known Tsotsil community of Zinacantán located outside the metropolitan center of San Cristóbal de las Casas where FOMMA has its headquarters. At age 24, the playwright began her career with the literacy and writing cooperative Sna

⁸⁰ Cynthia Steele's article "'A woman fell into the river': Negotiating Female Subjects in Contemporary Mayan Theatre" mentions how current state and federal policies project images of the Mayas of Chiapas engaging in traditional, cultural activities to promote the tourism agenda, "La Ruta Maya" (241). She writes, "Highlands Chiapas, which was long the government's showcase for Indian policy intent on assimilating Indians into national society, is now offered as proof of the Mexican state's respect for cultural diversity" (242). Here we can see how indigenous communities are celebrated within the Mexican imaginary when economically or politically advantageous but are otherwise disregarded by the nation.

⁸¹ See Chandra Talpade Mohanty's article titled "Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses."

Jtz'ibajom/La casa del escritor (henceforth Sna) that supports the formation of Tsotsil and Tseltal writers and actors. Here she met Tseltal playwright and actress Isabel Juárez Espinosa with whom she would later co-found FOMMA in 1994. Although Sna formed de la Cruz Cruz as a playwright, the cooperative was run by men and looked to maintain an idealized image of Mayan culture in Chiapas (Blanco Cano 126). In 1991, she wrote her first solo play, *Una Mujer desesperada* which depicted and denounced patriarchal and domestic violence. De la Cruz Cruz received the Rosario Castellanos prize a year later for this ground-breaking work and in consequence, she was pushed-out of Sna because they rejected her representation and critique of Tsotsil, Tseltal and Ch'ol cultural practices (Blanco Cano 125).⁸² In addition, the environment of Sna at that time narrowly defined gender roles and de la Cruz Cruz and Juárez Espinosa were dissatisfied with “their prescribed roles as (passive) bearers of Mayan culture” (Underiner 54). In 1994, they founded their own organization, FOMMA, and created an all-female theater troupe, *El reflejo de la diosa luna*. Over the past twenty-four years, their reputation has grown in Mexico and the United States as they tour internationally to perform plays and give talks. Despite this hemispheric recognition, they remain dedicated to the local issues of Chiapas, performing in indigenous villages and providing literacy, art and health programs for women and children. While FOMMA's theater troupe writes many of their

⁸² In an interview with de la Cruz Cruz conducted by Donald Frischmann, she shares how her colleagues at Sna rejected her rendition of what happens in Chiapas indigenous communities. She recalls that they said to her, “No, ¿por qué vas a salir escribiendo esas cosas de que los hombres matan y se pelean por una Mujer? Eso no pasa en la comunidad.” To which she responded, “Sí pasa en la comunidad porque yo lo viví; yo lo experimenté, les digo. En mi familia pasaban tantas cosas.” (qtd. in Blanco Cano 125).

plays collectively, I have chosen to analyze *La tragedia*, a play penned individually by de la Cruz Cruz.

This play was originally written in Tsotsil, her native language, and then translated into Spanish. Neither the play's introduction nor the initial stage-directions specify the setting other than stating it takes place in a rustic house in a village. By maintaining geographic anonymity, the play opens itself to global audiences without confining its message to an exact location and population. In this sense, the play offers up its contents to the audiences in front of which it is staged, or its script to its readers, allowing for an array of effects: self-identification, resistance, education and/or call to action. Nonetheless, the content of the play resonates with testimonies given by Mayan women and men of the Chiapas Highlands as well as anthropological studies and historical accounts of ethnic discrimination, gender violence and more specifically, the hierarchy of power enacted in marital rituals.

The societal positioning of women in the Chiapas Highlands varies in degree depending on the community, the immediate family, and the marital relationship.⁸³ On a large scale, however, indigenous women of the region live daily oppressions that include domestic violence –both verbal and physical – ethnic discrimination, illiteracy, monolingualism, economic immobility and little-to-no-access to a justice system. As Mercedes Olivera Bustamante argues, “La condición de género se refiere a las formas históricas de discriminación social y cultural que, basadas en las diferencias sexuales,

⁸³ Brenda Rosenbaum writes that Chamulan women are in line to inherit along with their male counterparts. Chamuluan women may own land, houses or other property. In this sense, Chamulan women are more independent and less submissive than women in other nearby communities such as Zinacantán and Oxchuc (49-50).

ubican a las mujeres en una posición subordinada al poder masculino y se han transmitido generacionalmente como prescripciones culturales trascendentes, funcionando como modelos de ser mujer en cada sociedad y cada momento histórico” (56). She also notes that regardless of social and cultural progression and economic opportunity, gender discrimination is the most permanent as woman are always the most oppressed: “la subordinación de género sólo cambia de forma, se resignifica, ajustándose a la nueva situación sin que su esencia y significado cambien significativamente, aun cuando la posición económica y social de la mujer haya variado positivamente” (58).

At the Taller Internacional de Mujeres Indígenas y Violencia Doméstica: del Silencio Privado a las Agendas Públicas in 2007, Salvador Campos Icardo, the Executive Secretary of the National Commission of Human Rights in Mexico, states in his opening remarks the plight of the indigenous woman,

El caso de las mujeres es aún más grave, toda vez que están sujetas a una triple opresión al ser mujeres, indígenas y pobres. Esto limita su desarrollo y el de miles de familias, pues al vivir en condiciones de extrema pobreza: su trabajo no es valorado ni remunerado; tienen el más alto grado de analfabetismo; carecen de servicios sanitarios adecuados; sufren violencia intrafamiliar, y son víctimas de prácticas y costumbres lesivas a su condición de mujeres. Todo lo cual padecen en medio de un inadecuado sistema de justicia, lo que evidentemente, violenta sus derechos fundamentales. (8)

Mariana Fernández Guerrero seconds that the justice system is blind to the accusations brought by women and largely treats them as less-than-human (47). Instead, male aggressors are seemingly protected by the justice system in that they are largely immune to charges brought against them (44).

And while for some communities the women are relegated to the home with little access or opportunity to education and political involvement, the Zapatista Rebellion of 1994 planted a seed that indigenous peoples – men and women – are deserving of rights. Jan and Diane Rus write that the indigenous members of Taller Tzotzil remember feeling “a surge of pride that others like them had occupied a mestizo city and defeated the Mexican army in initial encounters. Encountering other indigenous people on the sidewalk, friends say that for months they smiled knowingly to each other, proud of their identity” (“The *Taller Tzotzil*” 17). Women who formed part of the weaving cooperative, J’pas Joloviletik, mentioned that the armed rebellion instigated, formally, the formation and movement of indigenous feminism (Rovira 172).⁸⁴ One woman of the cooperative, Cristina, shares that the importance of women engaging in politics extends beyond the now given that women are breaking the silence, sharing information with each other and discussing how to transform the oppressive lives they have lived and live. They maintain that their engagement extends into the future because their daughters are listening. Their

⁸⁴ I write the indigenous feminist movement “formally” started because indigenous women were already involved politically before the Zapatista Rebellion. However, there is no denying that January 1, 1994 is an internationally recognized date that solidified indigenous efforts to be acknowledged and reckoned with within the state of Mexico and on a global scale. This ushers in momentum for adopting terminology that is recognizable on an international level, such as feminism. Yolanda – part of the weaving cooperative, J’pas Joloviletik, states that the indigenous feminist “‘antes ni existía’” (qtd. in Rovira 172). In the early 1980’s many women were forced to depend on their own income because their husbands had to go further and further from home to find work. Many men found themselves migrating to other states or to the United States and spending larger amounts of time away from their families. Women became agricultural wage workers or vendors of their weavings and handicrafts (Rus and Rus, “The *Taller Tzotzil*...” 3). This economic independence spurred the formation of weaving cooperatives such as J’pas Joloviletik.

daughters are growing up with other thoughts and developing the ability to discern between the good and bad customs (172). During a panel on the Culture and Rights of Indigenous Women organized by the Zapatistas, Tojolabal Roselia Jiménez Pérez from Comitán states “...afortunadamente desde el levantamiento armado nuestra gente dice que ya estamos con la Mirada levantada y nos sentimos orgullosos. Y las mujeres también. Ya somos otros. Yo creo que nos infundieron ese valor, ese valor para hablar y para decir las cosas” (qtd. in Rovira 227). It is important to note that all communities in Chiapas – Zapatista or not – vary in their societal structuring and in this sense, differ in their expectations of women and men. Even within Zapatista autonomous territories, complicity of the Women’s Revolutionary Law varies. Not surprisingly, reversing centuries of engrained systemic oppression is painfully slow and Graciela Freyermuth Enciso comments that after 1994 the living conditions of indigenous communities in the Highlands have not improved and are in fact, deplorable (68).

La tragedia, does not shy away from representing the complexity of the Chiapas Highlands and the play’s action is squarely situated in a patriarchal society deeply affected by neocolonization. However, *La tragedia* differs from how the midcentury Mexican cinema industry used melodrama to simulate the values of unifying a multicultural nation and to perpetuate patriarchy of the state and within the family. Rather, *La tragedia* resonates with those melodramas that Ana M. López has identified as ones seeking to “complicate straightforward ideological identification for men *and* women” [Emphasis in original] (153). Furthermore, the tragic emotions felt towards actions of certain characters – pity and fear – “trigger a unifying process, in which the

theater-goer recognizes herself as part of a larger whole...The audience reaches an astonished saturation of emotion, a limit that is not a cessation or purgation of feeling so much as it is its culmination and possibly even a transformation” (Ashton and Tanner 26). This tragic emotion which translates into philosophical reasoning has the power to initiate profound questioning (26).

In the following pages, I argue that de la Cruz Cruz pens certain characters voicing a critical relation to the traditional gender expectations in Maya-Tsotsil indigenous communities. In turn, the action seeks to elicit emotions from its audience and as such moments of potential transformation are born. Main characters such as the nine-year-old daughter, Juanita and the community member and liaison for the town’s cacique, Caralampio offer moments of undoing gender and ethnic norms. This undoing on stage works to queer the present, thus encouraging potential interventions in social life off stage. The disruption of norms provides a transgression of what are perceived to be societal limitations and produces transformative potentialities for the future.

PART I - Juanita

In the beginning half of *La tragedia*, Juanita acts based on her own whims rather than following the requests of the adults in her life. Early in the play, Juanita leaves her house in the morning to replace the tortillas a neighbor lent. Along the way, she encounters a friend, Felipe, who entices her to come play with him by the pond.⁸⁵ In the

⁸⁵ In Chamula, until the age of 10 there is seemingly little separation of gender and Chamulan children enjoy a childhood of playing with each other (Rosenbaum 42).

exchange, she is aware of avoiding the tasks left to her at the house, but agrees to meet him after she drops off the tortillas. At the neighbor's house, Juanita cunningly tells Guadalupe that she is out of breath because she was running from a dog – not that she was in a hurry to get to the pond and play with Felipe. Furthermore, Juanita refuses to stay for breakfast stating that she must get back to the house to tend to the fire and the chicks. Of course, this is what she was requested to do, but Juanita prefers to play with her friend and does so.

The actions above align with the portrayal of her character in the first act of this play. She is represented as a blithe young girl not yet having responsibilities that her family depends on.⁸⁶ The fact that she does not complete the duties left to her by her mother - tend to the fire so the beans cook and watch the chicks – is largely forgiven by both her mother and her father in a following scene. Upon arriving after being gone all day, the parents and Juanita have this interaction:⁸⁷

JUANITA: ¡Mamá, mamá! ¡Tengo mucha hambre!

MAGDALENA: ¡Sí, hijita! ¡Voy a ver si los frijoles están cocidos!
(Mueve con una cuchara los frijoles de la olla.) Y tú,
Mariano: ¿Vas a comer de una vez? (Sorprendida.)
¡Pero si los frijoles no están cocidos! ¿Por qué,
Juanita?

⁸⁶ Based on Rosenbaum's findings, Chamulan men and women fondly remember their early years of life as carefree. Until the age of 10 there is seemingly little separation of tasks based on gender and Chamulan children share household duties to help the family (42).

⁸⁷ As noted in the body of this text, *La tragedia* was first written in Tsotsil and then translated to Spanish. I have decided not to draw attention to the grammar errors found in the script.

MARIANO: No, mujer; yo creo que primero voy a ver al compadre, para ver si me puede prestar unos centavos, mientras, ves qué haces de comer. Ya no regañes a la niña.

MAGDALENA: Bueno, como quieras, pero mejor come primero y luego te vas. A ver, Juanita, ¿dónde estabas que el fuego estaba apagado?

JUANITA: Nada más fui con doña Lupe a dejar las tortillas. (61)

Upon her family's return to the house in the evening, Mariano willingly accepts pozol instead of the expected beans for dinner. Even though bothered with the irresponsibility of Juanita, Magdalena ends up covering for her, tending to the chicks and stating she will eat later. Rather than chastise Juanita and use the moment to educate her on the importance of helping her family with the daily duties, the father chooses to protect Juanita from her mother's disappointment. As this excerpt shows, her parents do not expect much of her. By the end of this scene, they do not punish her and she is ultimately forgiven for skipping out on the duties assigned to her.

The fact that Juanita's only words in the above scene are to express hunger to her mother and tell a white lie as to her whereabouts shows a certain dependence on her parents to provide for her. Indeed, Act I shows us that Juanita probably does not attend school, does not know how to make her own food, expects others to wake her up in the morning, and based on the absence of stage direction in this specific scene is not fazed by admonishment. In this sense, Juanita coincides with how Chamulans remember their childhood, but veers from the testimonies of women from other indigenous communities in the Chiapas Highlands that state the expectations of young girls are to grow up and

have children, to clean the house, wash the dishes and clothes, prepare food, weave, embroider and carry wood (Rosenbaum 42; Rovira 83, 155).

In their direct interactions with Juanita, neither parent is all that perturbed that Juanita is still a child who plays with dolls and successfully dodges her chores. In relationship to her older brother, Pedro, Juanita deviates from the expectation held in Mayan society that “Mothers raise their daughters to wait on their sons” (Diana Taylor, “The Demon’s Nuns” 164). Neither Magdalena or Mariano makes moves to encourage this type of indoctrination. Although Pedro takes it upon himself to comment on Juanita’s lack of involvement, it comes across more as banter or annoyance at his younger sister. In Scene Two when the family wakes up in a frenzy because they have all overslept, Juanita is the last to rise and upon entering the stage she complains that no one woke her up. The following exchange ensues:

PEDRO:	(Aparece Juanita, desperezándose.) (A Juanita.) ¡Ayuda tú, dormilona! (Salen Pedro y Mariano con las cosas para cargar el caballo.)
MAGDALENA:	Ay, hijita... ¡Todavía quieres que te despertamos si también a nosotros nos agarró el sueño! ¡Pero qué bueno que ya te levantaste! (Entra de nuevo Pedro.)
PEDRO:	¿Por qué qué bueno, si no ayuda para nada? ¡Sólo se levanta a estorbar! (Entra Mariano.)
MARIANO:	No, no importa que no haga nada. ¡Es bueno para que se vaya acostumbrando a madrugar! (53)

As shown in this scene, Juanita is not taught to wake up with her mother and wait on the men in the house. Instead, she is the last to rise and while Pedro gives her a hard time, her parents, yet again, give positive reinforcement rather than chastise her. Juanita is seen and

treated as an inculpable and naive child within her own family. She is not burdened with responsibilities nor with the pressure of learning how to fulfill the female's traditional role in Mayan society. The first act of the play portrays Juanita as innocent and carefree. In this sense, she aligns with the definition of a tragic character that is worthy of compassion (Shapshay and Wagschal 165). As audience members, we have become emotionally attached to her well-being.

This depiction of Juanita is starkly juxtaposed in Scene Five where Juanita and her friend, Felipe, play in the lake and encounter Ceferino. Juanita is weary of Ceferino's presence from the beginning, suggesting that she and Felipe should go play somewhere else, "¿Por qué no nos vamos a jugar por otro lado? ¡Ya me dio miedo! ¡Qué tal si está borracho!" (58). Felipe, on the other-hand, assures Juanita that he is not drunk and that they should ask where the stranger is from so they will know who he is. Juanita agrees, although she states again that she is afraid and Felipe should do the talking. As Ceferino lures them closer stating he just wants to become friends, Juanita continues to resist but is persuaded by Felipe to engage in conversation. She excitedly shares that they were catching "cucharitas," but when Ceferino asks her to show them to him, she says no and tells Felipe they should leave (59-60). Ceferino stalls and offers her a piece of candy which she accepts eagerly and then states again that she is leaving. He tries to convince her to stay, "No te vayas, tu mamá no te va a regañar, le dices que estuviste conmigo. Ellos me conocen; vivo en el pueblo, en una casita solito" (60). Ceferino then hugs Juanita and this time, Felipe becomes alarmed at Ceferino's intimacy and exclaims, "¡Vámonos ya, Juanita, es tarde!" to which Juanita responds, "(A Felipe) ¡Sí, vámonos!

(A Ceferino, enojada) ¡Suélteme, por favor! (Felipe toma la mano de Juanita y salen apresurados de escena.)” (60). Left behind, Ceferino talks out-loud to himself, “(Lascivo) ¡Nunca pensé que hubiera una niña tan linda como ella! ¡Tengo que conquistarla como dé lugar! ¡Hablaré con sus padres y le pediré ayuda a Caralampio! ¡Con unos buenos pesos no me la negarán!” (60).

This scene shows that Juanita might be naive when it comes to household chores, but she is uncomfortable with Ceferino’s presence, dislikes how he hugs her, and is aware that a drunk man could mean trouble. In the context of Chamula, Rosenbaum states that girls learn to avoid contact with males and that from an early age, they are taught to fear men (46). Furthermore, Juanita’s reaction to the idea that Ceferino might be drunk, resonates with the reality of many women in the Chiapas Highlands. Rovira writes, “los malos tratos a las mujeres están directamente relacionados con el alto consumo de alcohol” (36).

With this scene, de la Cruz Cruz pens a foreshadowing of a harsh interruption to Juanita’s childhood and future suffering. Juanita’s interaction with Ceferino has solidified his desire to make her his wife.⁸⁸ The play has taken a turn, settling into the discomfort that Juanita felt as Ceferino hugged her. Whereas perhaps before we sided with Mariano and Magdalena and were slightly bothered by Juanita’s lack of responsibility, now we are sympathetic to the possibility of Juanita’s childhood being stolen from her.

⁸⁸ Rosenbaum writes within the Chamulan context that if a man shows interest in a woman and the woman reciprocates the attention, she is accepting of his desire to marry her (91).

Given that both tragedy and melodrama share a narrative arc that positions the suffering protagonist as fundamentally sympathetic, audiences of both genres experience emotions of fear and compassion for the victim-heroine (Shapshay and Wagschal 168). This provocation of emotion, argues Christine Gledhill, stems from “assessing suffering in terms of our privileged knowledge of its nature and causes” (qtd. in Williams 49). In Chiapas, 70% of women raped know their aggressor and a very large percentage are under the age of 12 (Rovira 34).⁸⁹ Indigenous audiences of the region then, know the action of the play – the marriage of a daughter for money, the young bride, the rape and violent murder of a wife – is also a lived reality.⁹⁰ And, if it has not directly happened to them, it has happened to someone they know (de la Cruz Cruz, pers. comm.). In this context, indigenous audiences have privileged knowledge that allows them to engage affectively with the play. This privileged knowledge of the truth represented on stage along with identifying with the content causes a connection between emotion and thought. Experiencing pathos when watching the play does not consume the audience to a point where thought is blinded by emotion, argues Gledhill. The idea that one might lose oneself in “over-identification” and thus be unable to think critically about what was seen, is a misconception for both melodrama and tragedy. “The understanding of melodrama has been impeded by the failure to acknowledge the complex tensions

⁸⁹ Rovira denounces the fact that child rape is all too common yet not spoken about in San Cristóbal de las Casas or in the rest of the country (34).

⁹⁰ “Dos hechos que reiteradamente se presentan en los testimonios de las mujeres que provienen de las comunidades indígenas de la región son su escasa intervención en la decisión de casarse, decisión que fue tomada por el padre, y la temprana edad en la que fueron obligadas a contraer matrimonio” (Robledo Hernández 124).

between different emotions as well as the relation of thought to emotion....If pathos is crucial to melodrama, it is always in tension with other emotions” (Williams 49). Furthermore, the tragic emotions – pity and fear – work in tandem to “turn the prospect inward. Feeling pity or compassion toward the tragic hero(ine) is founded on an identification of sorts with that person” (Ashton and Tanner 23). In a tragedy, “Emotions and cognition...have a potentially symbiotic relationship” whereby experiencing emotion “may also affect cognition positively” (Ashton and Tanner 23). In *La tragedia* then, if Juanita’s story arc causes us to respond affectively, we will not be consumed by the emotion, but rather have the opportunity to wonder critically how things could be different. Watching a play and allowing ourselves to engage in pathos can be a transformative experience as Dolan argues above.

In Act II, the scenes that play out Juanita’s untimely death denounce a societal system that accommodates patriarchal violence and power over women. Thus, the play aligns with the definition of tragedy that requires a bleak ending (Shapshay and Wagschal 168). Whereas melodrama tends to end reassuringly and in a place of innocence, tragedy “cannot end with a remedy to the problems confronting the human condition...rather, the remedy for the situation...is left up to the spectator to determine” (168-69). However, Williams contends that within the operative mode of melodrama there can be a partial questioning of the heroine’s fate on the part of the spectator (47). In Act I, Juanita is depicted as an innocent and carefree young girl seemingly unburdened by traditional expectations of a Maya female in a patriarchal society. Instead, she has embraced being a child with no responsibilities and no ability to live independently from her parents. In Act

II however, due to external events she becomes a girl who refuses to remain silent in the face of her premature marriage, subsequent rape and brutal death. Through the stark juxtaposition of the trajectory of Juanita's life from Act I to Act II, her character engages the pathos of the audience, screaming for someone to hear and save her, for them to sympathize with and "at least partially question" her plight (Williams 47). Here, one of the play's morals becomes legible: what happens to Juanita on stage should be harshly critiqued and condemned. Because the play does not return Juanita to a place of innocence, it leaves the resolution to her plight incomplete. This irresolution is a trait of tragedy as it highlights "extremely difficult, terrible problems that confront...culture, and [prompts] audiences to recognize and to find some way themselves, creatively to deal with them (Shapshay and Wagschal 170).

In the following excerpt from Scene Two, Act II, we understand how the men solidify the marriage deal determined to follow their own desires with no recognition of those of the women. Ceferino is invited into the house and sets numerous bottles of liquor at the feet of Mariano. With this offering, he makes clear the purpose of his visit.⁹¹ Mariano attempts to reason with Ceferino's proposition, mentioning how young Juanita is and that all she does is play.⁹² Magdalena tries to second this concern but is silenced by her husband.

⁹¹ The act of gifting moonshine to the prospective parents-in-law is customary (Rovira 83-84).

⁹² As Rosenbaum writes, it is customary for the petitioner to encounter initial rejection from the woman's parents and even the woman herself. If the petitioner is serious, he will be adamant and not take no for an answer. It is also strategic on the part of the woman's

- MARIANO: Pues sí, yo le decía que todavía es una niña. Pero ya con otros años más se la lleva, pues usted ya se fijó en mi hija.
- CEFERINO: ¡No, don Mariano! ¡No quiero esperar más tiempo! No vaya a ser que otro me la gane. Lo que quiero es que crezca en mi poder para verla crecer con ternura. Yo le voy a dar todo. No le va a hacer falta nada. Usted sabe muy bien que yo tengo mucho dinero. (Saca un manojo de billetes de la bolsa y lo empieza a contar ante el asombro de Mariano.) Mire, esto se lo voy a dar para usted. Si necesita más, ahí me dice. Acéptalo (Le pone los billetes en la mano.) Reciba también las botellas que le traje.
- MARIANO: (Confundido.) Don Ceferino...ese dinero...no puede ser. No, es muchísima esa cantidad...ya es suficiente con el regalo que traje.
- CEFERINO: (Insistiendo.) ¡Acéptalo, don Mariano, que le daré mucho más todavía si me concede a su hija hoy mismo! (Mira a Juanita lujuriosamente.)
- MARIANO: (Ambicioso.) ¡Sí, don Ceferino! ¡Si lo desea, se la puede llevar ahora mismo! Ya que usted la quiere de una vez, por mí no hay problema.

La tragedia stages the patriarchal power of a man petitioning for a daughter who has not given consent, and a father deciding on a partner for his daughter. This is not uncommon in Chiapas Highlands as, “La decisión de aceptar o no la petición de matrimonio generalmente está en manos del padre, quien suele imponerla a la joven” (Robledo Hernández 124). Neither Magdalena or Juanita are consulted and furthermore are silenced when offering their thoughts.

parents to negotiate a higher bidding price. The longer they stall the petitioner, the more the dowry increases (91-103).

Whether Mariano was coerced by Ceferino's power in society or his cash, or it was his strategic plan to stall until the price for his daughter was raised to more than several liquor bottles, Juanita is essentially sold as a young bride to Ceferino. This rash shift in Mariano's role as protector to marriage broker is never made comprehensible. Although a loose thread in the play, I believe it is likely to relate to one of the forces I just mentioned – societal pressure, ethnic power or monetary distress. To solidify the deal, Ceferino asks for cups and together with his new parents-in-law they drink. “Una vez que el padre acepta tomar el licor que lleva el solicitante, se considera que el trato está hecho” (Robledo Hernández 124). They continue to drink and all parties end up inebriated. Mariano and Magdalena pass out and Ceferino sets his eyes on his virgin prize.

Juanita, having little indoctrination thus far in her life to bend at the will of a man, refuses to remain silent. In response to his demand that she go with him, Juanita raises her voice, crying and expressing her desire to stay in her home. “¡No quiero!, mejor váyase, mi papá va a despertar y van a pelear... (Al escuchar la voz fuerte de Ceferino se pone a llorar.) ¡No quiero ir! ¡Buuu! ¡Quiero ir con mi mama!” (73). A drunk Ceferino defiantly responds stating that she belongs to him now, “¡pues, a las malas tienes que venir conmigo. Ya me perteneces! ¡Pagué mucho dinero y di mucho licor por ti, así que vamos!” (73). Once forcefully removed from her home and in the confines of Ceferino's, she continues to sob, expressing the wish to be with her mother. “¡Llévame con mis papas! ¡Quiero ir con mi mamá!” (74). While Ceferino opens a bottle to continue drinking and mentions that soon he will take her to bed, Juanita attempts to escape but is

unable to open the door. Ceferino roughly pulls her back and states that no amount of screaming will save her as, “¡La gente del pueblo me respeta, nadie se mete conmigo!” (75). Juanita however, does not cease her sobbing and in response, he hits her until she faints. Minutes later, despite the arrival of an unexpected visitor – Caralampio - Ceferino carries Juanita, still half conscious, to his bedroom where he rapes her and then orders her to kill a chicken and make soup. At this moment she responds, “No quiero matar la gallina. No sé cómo se mata...¡Sólo quiero ir con mi mama!” (78). For Ceferino, this is the final straw and despite Caralampio’s interventions - and Juanita pleading with him – “¡No me mate! ¡Déjeme, por favor! ¡Aaaay no! ¡Aaay!” - he stabs her to death and in his drunken state lets out a deranged laugh (79).

Although Ceferino ends up killing her for not complying with his wishes, his expectations of a woman are destabilized as he is denied a wife that obeys him. In this sense, having no previous domestic education, or expectation for that matter, of successfully completing household chores, Juanita’s character represents an undoing of the expectations of a young bride in the traditional structures of a patriarchal society. Even if Juanita’s verbal and physical resistance is not out of the ordinary – a typical response to such a fate – by making noise she raises the potential that the audience will experience pathos. In this sense, her character incites both pity and fear from the audience given that even if she wanted to comply with Ceferino’s orders to kill a chicken and make soup, she does not know how. Therefore, she is not defiant, but rather incapable. The innocence and powerlessness of Juanita’s character positions her as the victim-heroine for whom we feel compassion. The bleakness of Juanita’s truncated life confronts the

audience “with ethical and existential problems that they themselves are challenged to resolve” (Shapshay and Wagschal 167). In keeping with tragedy’s potential for philosophy, Juanita’s death poses a universal question of marital traditions, the patriarchal power it perpetuates and the domination of women (Shapshay and Wagschal 164). The singularity of Juanita’s death is felt within the confines of the duration of the play. However, the knowledge that her death is representative of identical events in real life triggers audience members to engage cognitively with the reality of other young girls’ deaths. Juanita’s individual suffering becomes universal in this sense, and the reasons for her death stay with the audience, ruminating long after the curtain has been drawn.

While *La tragedia* is not staged within Zapatista territory where forced marriage and rape would be severely punished according to the Women’s Revolutionary Law, I find it important to note that in part due to the rebellion and its sustained presence in Chiapas, its intentions have had a ripple effect in other communities outside its autonomous territory. Zapatista law informs surrounding communities even if they do not consider themselves Zapatistas.⁹³ I argue this to propose that indigenous audiences of *La tragedia* are not wholly desensitized to Juanita’s fate even if it is a somewhat common

⁹³ See “Construyendo la utopía: esperanzas y desafíos de las mujeres chiapanecas de frente al siglo XXI” in *La otra palabra: mujeres y violencia en Chiapas, antes y después de Acteal* coordinated by Rosalva Aída Hernández Castillo (125-142); See Chapter 22, “Thanks to the Zapatistas: Chamula and its Exiles, January-February 1994” in *Rebellion in Chiapas: A Historical Reader* by John Womack, Jr. for how the Zapatista uprising initially effected indigenous communities near San Cristóbal de las Casas. It highlights San Juan Chamula but also mentions Zinacantán, Amatenango, Mitontic and Huistán (257-266); See section titled, “Cómo vieron las mujeres de los pueblos a las Zapatistas” in *Mujeres de Maíz* by Guiomar Rovira (107-111).

occurrence in their villages. In other words, there is knowledge of other places where rape and forced marriage are condemned. These audiences then can experience sympathy (or even empathy) for Juanita and when confronting this emotion, as Williams argues, can couple it with thought which can in turn generate a spectatorship critical of the events on stage. Dolan would argue that engaging with affect – being in touch with the emotions felt - while at a play might spur social action. She writes, “I believe that being passionately and profoundly stirred in performance can be a transformative experience useful in other realms of social life” (16).

In contrast to Laura Mulvey’s seminal article that assumes a male spectatorship thus excluding the possibility of a female one, I juxtapose it with Williams who quotes herself elsewhere stating, ““It is a terrible underestimation of the female viewer to presume that she is wholly seduced by the naïve belief in these masochistic images....[in melodrama] [r]ather than raging against a fate that the audience has learned to accept, the female hero often accepts a fate that the audience at least partially questions””(47).⁹⁴ Moreover, she suggests that there is power in identifying with the victim. “To suffer innocently, to be the victim of an abusive power, is to gain moral authority, to become a kind of hero, no matter how pathetic” (Williams 47n15). Although larger in scope, this is true for tragedy as well. Ashton and Tanner argue that the emotions thought to be tragic by Aristotle – pity and fear – “are indicative of a deeper social and ethical

⁹⁴ Williams traces how feminists viewed emotion of pathos as a key agent of women’s oppression in the early and mid-eighties. Whereas pathos was debilitating, anger, was liberating. Therefore, “viewer identification with pathetic suffering seemed only to invoke the dangerous specter of masochism, which seemed antithetical to a woman’s quest to break out of patriarchal power and control” (46).

significance....Pity and fear are deeply social emotions, grounded in altruism and empathy, and belying a sense of connection to, and identification with, others” (22).

Therefore, we cannot ignore the possibility that women (and men) in the audience of *La tragedia* question the silencing of Magdalena when her daughter is propositioned for marriage, or feel sympathy for a nine-year old forced into marriage and subsequently raped and stabbed to death solely because these characters do not directly ask the audience to do so. In fact, what Williams and Ashton and Tanner propose for both melodrama and tragedy is that one, the (female) spectator is not paralyzed by emotion when watching a melodrama (or a tragedy), but rather garners this emotion to critique societal systems and work towards change. By identifying with the victim of the play, audience members locate the “here and now” and can imagine a “then and there” (Muñoz, *Cruising* 1).⁹⁵

In the final scenes of the play in which Juanita is forcefully taken to Ceferino’s house, beaten, raped, and stabbed to death, she does not silence her sorrow, fear or pain. Juanita, in this sense, resists the patriarchal system that sees her as an object to be sold for profit and pleasure. Moreover, unable to kill and cook a chicken, Juanita ruptures the expectations held of Mayan women and wives. The fact that de la Cruz Cruz portrays Juanita’s persistent resistance by raising her voice denies Ceferino an easily submissive wife, both emotionally and physically, and therefore offers potentialities of a different

⁹⁵ Indeed, if the international forums of indigenous women have shown us anything, it is that from oppression and pain, women are agents of change.

futurity for other Mayan girls and women.⁹⁶ If we situate Juanita as doubly marginalized within Mexico for being female and indigenous, her death not only renders her the victim-heroine who denounces her entrapment within a discriminatory social system, but also engages the sympathy of spectators who can use their emotion to be critical and work towards difference.⁹⁷

While Ceferino is responsible for his drunkenness and the violent abuse, rape and actual murder of Juanita, de la Cruz Cruz's script suggests he is not the only one at fault. Yes, Juanita's death is directly linked to Ceferino, a drunk, lascivious and power-hungry mestizo man yet it is also a consequence of complicit parents and community members that operate within a societal structure of male-dominancy and ethnic hierarchy. De la Cruz Cruz does not allow the play to end perpetuating or condoning the actions committed. Instead, she lingers on the harrowing knowledge that several players in Juanita's life – both male and female - could have made different choices that would have led to any number of outcomes avoiding the premature death of a young girl. Calling on

⁹⁶ As stated above, in Zapatista territory women have identified forced marriage and physical violence to be problematic in society and have written their prohibition in the Women's Revolutionary Law. In clause seven and eight it explicitly states, "Women have the right to choose their romantic partner, and are not to be forced into marriage" and "Women shall not be beaten or physically mistreated by their family members or by strangers. Rape and attempted rape will be severely punished" (*Dissident Women* 3); As mentioned in Chapter IV of this dissertation, the social actress, Dolores, also shares that in her community of San Juan Chamula, women have fought and won the right to decide who to marry, or to not marry at all; Rovira also gives several testimonies of indigenous women in Chiapas Highlands who succeed in the autonomy to decide what is best for their own future. This includes communication with their parents to not marry or to attend school (84-85).

⁹⁷ See Chapter IV where I quote Zapatista Comandanta Esther as she addresses the Mexican congress in 2001. In her speech, she positions the indigenous woman as doubly marginalized within Mexican society for being first, a woman, and second, indigenous.

the tenets of a tragedy, the themes raised are not isolated to the unique experience of Juanita but rather seek to reflect on the state of how indigenous women are treated in reality as a whole. Tragedy is deemed to address and represent problems of existential, social and political importance. Within the confines of *La tragedia*, gender relations and patriarchal violence are harshly questioned. However, the play's critique is also one that extends beyond the stage. In addition, by drawing on aspects of melodrama – which historically is a genre that trivializes female roles, domestic life, and the private space of the home - de la Cruz Cruz resituates these issues within the universality of tragedy to suggest the social gravity of gendered violence and denounce not just Juanita's death, but any patriarchal abuse of power. Thus, echoing the efforts of Williams and Ana M. López, de la Cruz Cruz redesigns how modes of melodrama can be viewed and analyzed, impressing upon the importance of female issues and at times redistributing power to the female viewer and protagonist (Williams 45-50; Ana M. López 149).

Furthermore, de la Cruz Cruz reveals in *La tragedia* that power is not just about gender relations. Gender relations are complicated not only by economic contexts but also by ethnic hierarchy. Writing of Chitapampa, the Peruvian community near Cuzco, Marisol de la Cadena teases out the layers that inform and effect gender and inter-ethnic relationships. Chitapampa, de la Cadena observes, operates within the ideology of gender complementary that is also present in Tsotsil and Tseltal-Maya communities. Nevertheless, under this belief of gender complementary she posits that women are still mistreated verbally and physically by their male counterparts who legitimize their actions by explaining that women are inferior and infantile (182). Thus, gender complementary

alludes not to personal relationships between a man and a woman - and as such the hierarchy of power – but rather to the division of labor among men and women. In other words, the term gender complementary relates only to the shared labor of a household where what a man does is just as necessary as that of the woman.⁹⁸

De la Cadena delves further though, beyond the economic and gendered aspects of domination within relationships to find that difference of ethnicity is paramount when it comes to social hierarchy within the community of Chitapampa (183). She argues that this ethnic hierarchy is still trapped in a patriarchal and ethnic-discriminated web because indigenous men can *amestizarse* and gain social leverage and power, but indigenous women have no opportunity of gaining ethnic mobility without partnering with a man of higher ethnic - and thus social - status. She writes, “Además las mujeres ‘indígenas’ son el último eslabón en la cadena de subordinaciones y también los personajes en los que la ‘volatilidad’ de la etnicidad se expresa con mayores dificultades” (186). This echoes Olivera Bustamante’s observations on the static nature of indigenous women’s oppression regardless of social and cultural changes as mentioned above.⁹⁹

⁹⁸ De la Cadena is careful to point out that even though the woman’s labor is an integral part of maintaining a household, her efforts are not considered “trabajo.” It is to say that the women in Chitapampa do not work whereas the men do. In a capitalist society, working vs. not working is valued within society and because women do not “work” they are disqualified from accessing sources of power (187); I further discuss the problematics of gender complementary in a capitalist society in Chapter IV.

⁹⁹ De la Cadena makes this idea explicit by explaining that in Chitapampa when land was valued for agricultural use, only men inherited it. As agriculture became obsolete and making a living required migrating and interacting in cities, land decreased in value. Only when land was disassociated with power and economic access were women allowed to inherit it (192).

The relationship between Mariano and his daughter, Juanita and Ceferino, Mariano and Ceferino, and Ceferino and Caralampio are all laced with the power dynamics of ethnic and gender difference. By marrying Ceferino, Juanita had the opportunity to *amestizarse*.¹⁰⁰ By agreeing to the marriage, Mariano also gains clout by marrying up his daughter. As de la Cadena contends, “los vínculos con el sector mestizo le concedían al patriarca indígena ascenso étnico” (194). However, regardless of Mariano’s newly forged connection with Ceferino, he has no real power to negotiate given that a patriarchal system is based largely on control of productivity, and domination is stratified not just among men and women - but also among men (de la Cadena 186n12).

Pareciera ser que, en América Latina, las manifestaciones históricas de los sistemas patriarcales incorporan entre otros rasgos locales culturales, la diferenciación étnica y económica. Los ‘indígenas’ a veces ‘femenizados’ y otras no, subordinados en la estructura patriarcal son vistos como ‘menores’ y por lo tanto incapaces del control directo de su potencialidad reproductiva económica y biológica” (186n12).

Thus, Ceferino, a mestizo cacique has ethnic and economic power over Mariano.

PART II - Caralampio

The other character that acutely feels the ethnic hierarchy is Caralampio, an indigenous community member who initially speaks on behalf of Ceferino’s desire to marry Juanita and posteriorly witnesses Ceferino rape and stab Juanita to death. His reaction to both reveals a man – played by a woman - caught uncomfortably in the web of

¹⁰⁰ See Marisol de la Cadena, “Las mujeres son más indias” and Brenda Rosenbaum *With Our Heads Bowed* for their analysis of how women’s class and ethnic status are effected by marriage.

patriarchy and at the bottom rung of the ladder of hierarchy of class and ethnicity. The discomfort he shows throughout the play expresses to the audience members a figure who desires transformation within his community, yet also understands the difficulty of inciting change given that traditions are engrained in historical practices of power and hierarchy.¹⁰¹

Caralampio does not condone Ceferino's pedophilic request but given Ceferino's position as cacique and his ethnic superiority, Caralampio feels he cannot deny his wishes. As audience members, we witness Caralampio's discomfort with not only the situation but his role in it. When initially broaching the topic of marriage with Mariano in his home, Caralampio stumbles over his words and is hesitant to state his reason for visiting, "...no sé ni cómo empezar, ya que el asunto que le vengo a plantear siento que es muy delicado" (63). He places liquor bottles by his feet, but Mariano does not notice the traditional offering.¹⁰² Thus, Caralampio must proceed, dancing around Ceferino's marriage proposal until finally stating that which he wishes he didn't have to, "Lo que pasa es que me dijo que si usted... le podría dar a su hija... ¡por esposa! Ahora... si usted..." (65). Interrupted by Mariano's incredulity, Caralampio sympathizes, but holds his ground, "¡Sí, don Mariano, le entiendo, no sé ni qué hacer también! ¡Como él nos ha ayudado mucho aquí en el pueblo... peor ahora que es el cacique!.... pienso que sería

¹⁰¹ Harley Erdman points out that indigenous men live daily struggles and humiliation stemming from the material conditions of their existence. This reality is compounded by residual systems of colonialism where the power and prestige is wielded by "Spanish-descended *caciques* who preside paternalistically (but not benevolently) over the region" (161-162).

¹⁰² See Rovira pages 83-84.

mejor que usted aceptara...” (65). The ellipses in the script, coupled with the verbal performance gesture that Caralampio does not agree with the message he conveys, yet because he represents the cacique, he has no power to desist.

In a subsequent scene, in La Casa del Pueblo, Caralampio relays to Ceferino how upset Mariano was to hear the cacique’s request. As Ceferino imposes drinks on an anxious Caralampio, he asks how Mariano reacted to his willingness to pay a high price for Juanita. Caralampio responds, “¡Sí, le dije; además le comenté que usted nos había ayudado bastante! ¡Y que si no aceptaba, el pueblo se podría poner en su contra!” (68). Here, it directly states the power Ceferino has to sway public opinion if he so chooses. If Mariano does not accept, Ceferino could make life much more difficult for him in the village. This echoes Caralampio’s advice to Mariano earlier in the play, and reiterates the apprehension Caralampio feels towards the cacique. In addition to the words exchanged among the two men, key stage directions suggest the power difference between Ceferino and Caralampio. The cacique looks at his representative with distrust “(También toma otra copa, mirándolo con desconfianza.)” (68). In turn, Caralampio nervously responds that Mariano would give his answer in several days “(Nervioso.)” (68). Moments later, he hastily finishes his drink indicating a desire to end the conversation. Nevertheless, Ceferino persists, mentioning that Mariano will not be able to refuse the amount of money he will offer and that he will go himself tomorrow.

These emotions and corporal gestures, coupled with dialogue, make clear not only the power Ceferino has over the town but how Caralampio - and Mariano - would suffer if the cacique’s marriage proposal is denied. Here we can see how tenuous access to

societal positioning can be when oppressed within an ethnic hierarchy.¹⁰³ Although Caralampio reiterates how upset Mariano was at the proposal, he has no real power to persuade Ceferino to cease his quest. In his attempt to hastily leave the scene, we perceive Caralampio's character's discomfort with Ceferino's persistence. Like Mariano unable to protect his daughter from a premature marriage when propositioned by a more powerful man – both ethnically and economically - we see a parallel in the relationship between Caralampio and Ceferino. Although representing the cacique, which according to de la Cadena's findings might increase Caralampio's social power, the process is precarious and uncertain. Furthermore, without the connection, Caralampio is an indigenous man just like Mariano. It is to say, neither have permanent ethnic or economic power except for over their indigenous wives.

In addition to de la Cadena's observations in Chitapampa, Judith Butler's thoughts on who is considered human is pertinent. She states, "The human is understood differently depending on its race, the legibility of that race, its morphology, the recognizability of that morphology, its sex, the perceptual verifiability of that sex, its ethnicity, the categorical understanding of that ethnicity. Certain humans are recognized as less than human, and that form of qualified recognition does not lead to a viable life" (*Undoing* 2). Thus, the various power dynamics we see played out in *La tragedia* cannot be reduced to a simple explanation of gender difference. Rather, the relationships reveal a complex web of categorical discriminations that include sex, ethnicity, economic access and colonial history. Furthermore, the recognition which deems another a human or less-

¹⁰³ De la Cadena writes, "las identidades étnicas se construyen en interacciones, de acuerdo con atributos que se reconocen y se fijan, conflictivamente, en la relación" (184).

than-human is directly related to how power functions within a society. “This means that to the extent that desire is implicated in social norms, it is bound up with the question of power and with the problem of who qualifies as the recognizably human and who does not” (*Undoing 2*).

In separate circumstances, Mariano and Ceferino wield the power to recognize, or not, the humanness of what Magdalena and Caralampio advocate for – that Juanita be allowed to live out her childhood under the protection of her parents. In the scenes thus far analyzed, Mariano’s utilization of power renders Magdalena mute and without agency since she is an indigenous woman. As de la Cadena mentioned above, indigenous women are always the most oppressed within the hierarchy of ethnicity and gender (186). By the same token, indigenous men are effeminized by mestizo dominance and thus, Ceferino’s power renders Mariano weak to his marriage proposal and Caralampio ineffective in convincing Ceferino to abstain from lusting after Juanita and ultimately from ending her life. Such a lack of recognition, as Butler puts it, and an entrenched inter-ethnic hierarchy, as de la Cadena posits, leads to violence and continued injustice within the community of the play, *La tragedia*.

In the final scenes of *La tragedia*, Caralampio enters Ceferino’s house in Act II, Scene Three to find Juanita splayed out on the floor and a drunk Ceferino about to take her to bed. Despite Caralampio’s attempts to save Juanita from rape, he is once again ignored by the cacique. Caralampio is left sitting at the table, hearing the screams of Juanita. At this moment, Caralampio employs the Brechtian notion of *gestus* to forge a dialectical connection with the audience so as to incite critical reflection on what they

witness on stage (or in this case hear off stage).¹⁰⁴ Caralampio addresses the public, “¿Qué puedo hacer, Dios mío? ¡Si apenas es una niña! No puedo hacer nada, sus padres están de acuerdo. De seguro se la vendieron, además... no podría contra Ceferino” (77). Here we see how Caralampio feels impotent to the traditional system that relinquishes all right to the parents to make decisions for their children.¹⁰⁵ Furthermore, he recognizes his influence over Ceferino is useless based on his social positioning in patriarchy as well as his ethnic standing in the hierarchy as explained by de la Cadena. Caralampio’s confession to the crowd reveals his feeling of powerlessness to change the situation within the current society and yet hints at a desire for the situation to be different. Here, de la Cruz Cruz assures the audience that Caralampio refuses to normalize the marriage and rape of Juanita. By writing in the stage directions for Caralampio, “(Habla hacia el público.),” I argue that de la Cruz Cruz invites the spectators to distance themselves from the narrative so as to look at the characters’ actions critically (*La tragedia* 77). Like the performance convention in cinema of breaking the fourth-wall, this moment of actor-audience connection intervenes in the “complacent acceptance of character, motive,

¹⁰⁴ I cannot confirm that de la Cruz Cruz knowingly used Brechtian techniques in her play. In fact, Diana Taylor mentions that the playwrights of FOMMA mix theater styles and genres and do not necessarily mean to align with established theater techniques. See the Chapter “‘The Demon’s Nuns’: by Petrona de la Cruz Cruz and Isabel Juárez Espinosa” in *Staging International Feminism* (164).

¹⁰⁵ Rovira points out that the Women’s Revolutionary Law protects women from being forced into marriage and allows them to choose their partner (83). This veers from what often occurs in rural communities unsympathetic to Zapatista systems: “si a un muchacho le gusta una muchacha no le pregunta a la muchacha si le gusta, sino que va directamente con el papá y la pide. Lleva su litro de aguardiente y dice: ‘quiero a tu hija’. Cuando se enter a la muchacha es que ya está vendida” (83); In *De sumisiones, cambios y rebeldías: mujeres indígenas de Chiapas Vol. 1*, Olivera Bustamante states that an unwed daughter is considered property of her father (237).

narrative, incident or resolution as ‘fixed’ and ‘unchanging’ or ‘obvious’ and ‘inevitable’” (Millie Taylor 76). It is an example of what Dolan calls a utopian performative which works to queer the present in that gestus engages the “spectator in ‘a critical consideration of utopian enterprise, rather than simply aiming to secure his or her passive assent’” (Chris Ferns qtd. in Dolan 7). Juanita’s forced marriage and death should not be accepted as predetermined and Caralampio’s reflective thoughts should not be over-looked regardless of inter-ethnic and patriarchal systemic discrimination.

Given Caralampio’s lowly position as explained by de la Cadena, he, along with Juanita – an innocent character unable to help herself due to her age and entrapment in a patriarchal and ethnic discriminatory system - might be considered pathetic characters. Nevertheless, Williams argues that no matter how pathetic the character is, suffering innocently engenders gaining moral authority (47n15). Both Caralampio and Juanita’s characters are representative of similar social stratification found in most of the audiences when the play is performed in indigenous communities of Chiapas. If Caralampio and Juanita are both redeemed in this play by gaining moral authority for their suffering and victimization within society, then those who identify with their characters in the audience have the possibility to also “become a kind of hero” and critique unjust social systems and traditions that persist within their personal relationships and community (Williams 47n15). “In some ways, utopian performatives are the received moment of gestus, when those well-delineated, moving pictures of social relations become not only intellectually clear but felt and lived by spectators as well as actors” (Dolan 7).

Caralampio's character echoes a vision shared by FOMMA's co-founder, Isabel Juárez Espinosa. She states in an interview,

As a theater company composed of women, we have a...vision. We're the ones that suffer. We're the ones that live through the worst situations. Sometimes there are people or men who do not understand us. For example, if there's a rape, you tell them about it, and they accept it naturally. But for women, it's traumatic to suffer incidents like that. (qtd. in Erdman 165)

Caralampio, an indigenous man, witnesses the rape and stabbing of Juanita and publically announces his discomfort with the violent event. From his meek position within the social and ethnic hierarchy, he educates the audience that one, indigenous men can be in solidarity with their indigenous sisters and advocate for their rights, and two, forced marriage or rape, should not be naturalized nor condoned.¹⁰⁶

In addition to Caralampio's moment of gestus, he reacts – albeit overdue and ultimately too late to save Juanita - by fetching the police. Perhaps endeavoring to undo what he wished he could have initially stopped, Caralampio attempts to restore justice by arresting Ceferino. Nevertheless, Caralampio's efforts are reduced by a potent and seemingly untouchable Ceferino.¹⁰⁷ When forced out of his house by the police, Ceferino,

¹⁰⁶ According to Rosenbaum, rape in Chamula is considered a serious offense that is met with years of incarceration in the San Cristóbal de las Casas prison (47). As mentioned above, according to the Women's Revolutionary Law, rape is criminal. Nevertheless, rape is still feared by women due to the problems of alcohol in Chamula and the belief that men can overpower them (Rosenbaum 47). Giving more generalized information for the Chiapas Highlands, Rovira states that 60% of women know their aggressor and of these women, a very high percentage is under the age of twelve (34).

¹⁰⁷ Through-out the play, it is apparent that Ceferino is accustomed to getting what he wants. Particularly in Act II, Scene Three, he makes multiple remarks that indicate no one in the town will deter him from acting as he pleases. After imbibing with his new in-laws and returning to his house with a defiant and scared nine-year old bride, he tells her,

although furious, laughs at their efforts, “¡Me lo van a pagar! ¡Se van a arrepentir pidiéndome perdón de rodillas! (Se carcajea.) ¡Porque a mí, nadie me puede hacer nada! ¡Toda la gente está a mi favor, hasta las autoridades! Qué, ¿no lo saben?” (80). In response to Ceferino’s confidence of impunity, Caralampio says, “Sí, sabemos que las autoridades te respetan.... De todas formas, aunque avisemos a la Presidencia, no nos van a hacer justicia. Él compra a las autoridades... y nosotros ¿con qué dinero vamos a comprar?” (80).

Here we blatantly see represented a patriarchal system stratified by ethnic difference. A mestizo cacique has economic and ethnic superiority to that of an indigenous representative to the community. Within a historical context, the inter-ethnic relations of Mexicans reiterate dynamics inherited by colonial systems. Disenfranchised by societal networks echoing power dynamics of old, Caralampio knows all too well that they will bend to Ceferino’s influence. Although aware of what he is up against, he does not resign himself to victimhood. He instead voices a final conviction that closes the play. “Lo único que podemos hacer es ver la manera, todos juntos, de cómo vamos a sacar del pueblo a Ceferino antes de que siga hacienda más daño” (81). While his solution seems short-sighted - getting rid of one cacique would hardly make a difference when taking into account the larger systems that operate under the rules of patriarchy and racism – it is

“¡Ven para acá, y ya deja de gritar, nadie te va a escuchar! ¡La gente del pueblo me respeta, nadie se mete conmigo!” (75). A little while later in front of Caralampio, he says to Juanita who begs for Caralampio to take her back to her mother, “¡No pienses que Caralampio te va a llevar con tu mamá! ¡Ni él ni nadie puede hacerlo porque eres mía!” (78).

still a concrete action that will perhaps lead Caralampio's community in the play, and more importantly, the community of the audience, to question power dynamics. Through Caralampio's moment of *gestus* and his closing remarks, de la Cruz Cruz's play employs utopic performatives that hope for a different reality. In addition, his message acknowledges that to change the system, it will take more than one person. It must be a collective action, "todos juntos."¹⁰⁸

PART III – Crossings

This final message is spoken by a male character, but acted by a female. Thus far, we have discussed how within a tragedy, Juanita's character has the potential to incite compassion in the audience which causes them to question her fate and thus be critical of how the actions on stage translate to reality. In analyzing Caralampio's character, we see how ethnic hierarchy and patriarchal power impede the desire of his character to seek justice for Juanita and how his moment of *gestus* implores the audience to think judiciously about the contents of the play.¹⁰⁹ In separate, but similar ways, Juanita's and

¹⁰⁸ It is important to distinguish how indigenous communities, especially in Mexico where the Zapatista movement is influential, view and organize themselves against hegemonic and discriminatory state policies. Thus, indigenous feminist movements posit what Rosalva Aída Hernández Castillo terms "a double militancy" that links gender-specific struggles to the autonomy of their communities ("Zapatismo" 42). Indigenous feminism has made it clear that "the struggles against racism, sexism, and economic exploitation, can and should be complementary and simultaneous struggles" ("Zapatismo" 43). Therefore, as Caralampio alludes, men and women must work together for the collective good.

¹⁰⁹ I admit that intensive field study is required to reveal the in real-time-practice of my theoretical wonderings in terms of answering just how much an indigenous audience

Caralampio's actions can be read as utopic performatives as they represent the struggle of the here and now but gesture towards a then and there.

To end this chapter, I discuss how theater has a queering function for de la Cruz Cruz, Juárez Espinosa and the other women that form *El reflejo de la diosa luna*. In other words, how these women engage with theater reflects an urgency that denounces the present way of life for themselves, and interaction among their indigenous brothers and sisters. As cited above, queerness is a yearning that propels us forward, beyond what is directly in front of us. It is what lets us know that what we live now is not enough. Queerness reminds us that something is missing (Muñoz, *Cruising* 1).

Discussed earlier, de la Cruz Cruz and Juárez Espinosa left Sna in the early 1990's and created an all-female organization because they longed for their society, and their position in it, to be different. They believed that as women they were capable of way more than acting female characters that blindly reinstated Mayan women as passive bearers of culture (Underiner 54). Together, they built FOMMA with the mission to privilege the indigenous female voice and body in a society that largely prohibits "women from exposing themselves in public, as physical, sexual beings and as speaking, thinking subjects" (Diana Taylor, "The Demon's Nuns" 163). Through the organization's workshops and mentorship, it empowers women and children to value and share their experiences and skills. Engaging with FOMMA enables personal transformation as is evident with co-founders de la Cruz Cruz and Juárez Espinosa. Both women lived through violence and social marginalization at the hands of family members, husbands,

responds to Juanita's or Caralampio's character. It is part of a future research project that I plan to undertake.

and colleagues (Taylor and Townsend 318). They risked their reputations and jobs to reveal through theater the lived realities of patriarchy and the consequences of the discourse on the Mexican nation in indigenous villages. “Scorned both in their own communities and in the city as alternately, ‘prostitutes’ or ‘lesbians,’ they stimulated further animosity by writing plays depicting the lives of Indian women” (Simonelli, Hernandez Perez and La Fomma 207). Nevertheless, they boldly engaged (and continue to engage) with issues of rural poverty, domestic violence, male authoritarianism, forced migration, alcoholism, local politics, and women’s participation in the economy (Underiner 55).

The women of FOMMA use theater to transform their own tragic histories into personal acts of healing (Simonelli, Hernandez Perez, and La Fomma 209). De la Cruz Cruz states, “‘The theater has changed me. It’s given me confidence. It’s helped me get stronger’” (qtd. in Erdman 167). By writing and acting in plays that reflect lived experiences of their personal lives, they are empowered by voicing the injustices of their worlds. This process “serves as therapy in helping them surmount their emotional suffering and dream a future beyond the lives they lead today” (Simonelli, Hernandez Perez and La Fomma 209). In a sense, de la Cruz Cruz and her colleagues at FOMMA engage in what Ernst Bloch and Muñoz call concrete utopias in that their theater pieces and outreach programs stem from hoping for, and actively enacting, a different tomorrow yet are still firmly grounded in the historical and local realities of Maya-Tsotsil and Tseltal lives. “Concrete utopias are the realm of educated hope” (Muñoz, *Cruising* 3).

Through staging such representations of contemporary life, the playwrights reach beyond themselves to engage the public in denouncing the violent realities of gender and ethnic discrimination.

Cuestionar las connotaciones de lo tradicional es una tarea urgente para mujeres de los Altos de Chiapas pues, como sugiere Teresa Marrero, el concepto de lo tradicional en las comunidades mayas de esa zona es muy problemático, pues es el resultado de los violentos procesos de aculturación colonial a la que se han visto expuestos estos pueblos. Al mismo tiempo, como define esta crítica, los usos y costumbres están organizados alrededor de la creencia en la diferencia sexual como demarcadora de subordinación cultural. (Blanco Cano 126)

One such tactic de la Cruz Cruz and Juárez Espinosa employ to empower the indigenous women and position them as dynamic subjects within society, is to intentionally cast their plays with all-female actresses. Therefore, all the actors on stage are women playing female and male characters. This means that all lines are filtered by the perspective of the female writers and then in performance, the actions of the male characters are interpreted by women based on real-life experiences of interacting with men. According to Simonelli, Hernandez Perez and La Fomma, by women playing the “parts of mestizo bosses and abusive husbands, they unmask the power plays of their abusers” (207). Theater offers indigenous women the possibility of shedding the skin of past traumatic events and interacting with gender and ethnic dynamism that is difficult to attain off-stage.¹¹⁰

It is well documented that theater for the women of FOMMA has been and continues to be transformational. Returning to the play in question, I close with queries –

¹¹⁰ See above mentions and quotes of Mercedes Olivera Bustamante.

questions that I do not have the answers to - on what it means to have indigenous women playing all the parts. In the initial pages of this chapter, I spoke of the excess caused by women over-acting certain traits of their male characters. While this action has proven to be cathartic and empowering for women, does it also reinvest and perpetuate certain patriarchal tropes? Do women acting the male characters deconstruct and denounce patriarchy, or does it perpetuate certain mannerisms and actions the playwrights seek to critique? How does the actress's cross-dressing and "cross-acting" propel a hope for different interactions between the society as a whole and how much does it reinstate patriarchal norms?

In *La tragedia*, does de la Cruz Cruz succeed in disrupting patriarchic and ethnic systems of stratification by penning Caralampio as the character that questions the violence of Ceferino? Caralampio's character is a man, and can these oppressive systems maintained largely by men be undone by a man? Is it a nod towards indigenous feminisms that seeks collaboration between men and women to eradicate symptoms of inequality and inequity or does it further entrench patriarchy in that men are the ones deciding to act from a place of power? (Even though Caralampio does not wield much, he still has more power than an indigenous woman). Does it teach women that men will be their liberators? Or does the fact that Caralampio is played by a female ultimately place the power to change – the power to queer – in the hands of a woman? The script's action is largely propelled by male characters (Ceferino, Mariano and Caralampio), but the casting of the play means that the action is, in fact, driven by real women. This message, proposed by every play written and performed by FOMMA, intervenes drastically in a

society that perpetually and systemically oppresses indigenous women. The excess of personal emotion that is layered into the performances of the male characters by women is supposed to be noticed. Maya women are certainly not passive bearers of culture. They are the subjects, the innovators.

CONCLUSION

Dolan and Muñoz argue that a utopian performance holds the potential to ignite a desire among the audience and the actors to engage critically and civically within the social and political realm (7; 3). This is largely seen as a collective effort – a revolution of sorts. The genre of tragedy resounds with utopian performances as its content provokes emotion that emboldens the audiences to profoundly question what is seen on stage. Grounded in significant problems confronting society, the questioning transcends the limits of the play and carries the potential to effect change in daily life. In the specific case of *La tragedia*, after tragic emotions have been sounded with the death of Juanita, Caralampio's character calls upon the power of the collective as an agent of change to rid the town of the corrupt and violent cacique.

Within the historical context of Mexico, revolutions have not always served the indigenous communities as was perhaps desired. The Mexican Revolution of 1910 certainly did little to improve living conditions and upward mobility, and the Zapatista Rebellion of 1994 succeeded on a small scale, but their autonomy (both in ideology and

practice) is largely confined to specific territories.¹¹¹ Nonetheless, I posit that de la Cruz Cruz's play presents a tragic message wrought with compassion and fear for the innocent victim (Juanita) that connects emotion with analytical thought which in turn spurs desire for a different future than the here and now. Furthermore, employing a Brechtian gestus by Caralampio offers critical space for the engagement of the collective audience to reflect on what was seen on stage and work together to change reality. Lastly, how de la Cruz Cruz and others at FOMMA use theater incites the message that by transforming oneself, there is the possibility that others too will be transformed.

¹¹¹ In fact, Olivera Bustamante argues that the Mexican Revolution caused displacement, assimilation to the mestizo world and death for many indigenous people. Mestizaje culture accelerated post-revolution (80).

Chapter IV

Decolonial Articulations of Gender:

A Tsotsil-Maya Documentary Film, *La pequeña semilla en el asfalto* (2009)

Queers *Buen Vivir*

A black screen emits sounds of the city: chains dragging on the streets (a distinct noise in Mexico indicating the approach of a truck selling gas tanks), cars accelerating, honking and the murmur of conversations. The location, San Cristóbal de las Casas, Chiapas, appears in writing along the bottom right of the frame. The black screen cuts to follow behind a female character walking through the streets. Her body is a silhouette due to the brightness of the day and we, as viewers, cannot see the details of her clothing. Within seconds though, two people walking towards her stop to ask if they can take a picture of her Chamulan *traje*.¹¹² When their question is met with silence, they explain that the photo will be used for a school project, displayed for a short time and then taken down. Having focused on the characters talking, the camera employs a dolly shot to capture the female character's reaction.¹¹³ Using a low-angle shot, we see her facial expressions register a range of emotions: first incredulity, annoyance and ultimately defiance. The image fades to the logo of Mundos Inéditos: Escuela del Cine y Video Indígena.

¹¹² A Chamulan *traje* includes a *rebozo* which is a silk blouse intricately embroidered around the collar, the upper part of the chest, and the shoulders by hand or machine. A Chamulan *enagua* is a woven cotton skirt that is then threaded throughout with black lambs' hair. The result is a heavy, furry skirt.

¹¹³ Pedro Daniel López, director of *La pequeña semilla*, shares that this encounter on the street was in no way planned. He just happened to have his camera with him and was able to capture it on film (pers. comm.).

This initial scene of the documentary, *La pequeña semilla en el asfalto* (2009) (henceforward *La pequeña*), directed by Pedro Daniel López, introduces us to an environment in which discrimination and the essentialization of indigenous subjects in Mexico is routine. The female character, who we come to know as Pascuala, is stopped by strangers who want a picture of her clothing (would the photo leave her faceless?). Given their ease in asking, it seems as if they thought getting a photo would be straightforward. However, they are wrong. Through her body language, Pascuala simultaneously declines to be part of their project, and denies them any verbal exchange: their request is met with powerful silence. She exercises subjectivity and demonstrates dignity when confronted with those who see her as an object to be utilized for their own purposes.

In the following pages, I argue that *La pequeña*, through its content and filming practices, strategically articulates decolonial interventions of gender representation and expression. While *La pequeña* exemplifies certain foundational aspects of Buen Vivir (henceforth BV) such as representations of (socio)biocentrism that recognizes all life (past, present and future) as having equal ontological value, it posits new potentials for how to conceptualize notions of gender within the realm of BV. Given that the quotidian practices of BV as well as the scholarship written on it continue to fall within a heteronormative framework, I propose that *La pequeña* functions to queer this aspect of BV. Casting traditional gender norms aside, the social actors of this documentary defend their right to formulate their own imaginings for the present and the future and thus resist settler colonial societal expectations as well as the expectant gaze of its viewers.

The content of the film consists of a series of informal interviews where the social actors relay specific experiences from their past or share hopes for the future. I discuss particularly how these testimonies show social actors' resistance to fully disclose information about their life and at times show distrust of the listening ear of those present at the time of filming and the watchful eye of the potential viewer. Conscientious of the onlooker's gaze and the relational histories and powers of "looking" that conjure up realities of violence, objectification and exploitation, the social actors exercise agency in guarding particular knowledges from entering into this type of subjection. In Mexico, where the indigenous woman's voice and leadership has steadily emerged since indigenous conventions in the 1970's and 80's and the Zapatista uprising in 1994, they still work to combat social, national, and historical practices of discrimination. Unprecedented, Zapatista Comandanta Esther in 2001 addressed Congress to petition against the COCOPA law. She stated that the indigenous woman in Mexico is doubly marginalized, "Desde hace muchos años hemos venido sufriendo el dolor, el olvido, el desprecio, la marginación y la opresión...Nosotras además de mujeres somos indígenas y así no estamos reconocidas."¹¹⁴ Similar to Comandanta Esther's female indigenous voice being the spokesperson for the Zapatista movement on that day, how do the voices of the social actors in *La pequeña* – or the resistance to voice – gesture towards decolonial interventions that question traditional norms and hence destabilize and queer the heteronormative framework of BV?

¹¹⁴ http://palabra.ezln.org.mx/comunicados/2001/2001_03_28_a.htm

In addition to the presence and voice of the social actors as central to the documentary, how does the film enact what Freya Schiwy might call “a means of talking back to the colonial gaze,” that seeks to define, discriminate and limit (*Indianizing* 139)? The “colonial gaze” registers as a continuum of a visual economy beginning with the conquest of *Las Indias Occidentales* where Amerindian representation was perpetually replaced, interpreted and translated with Western images and words. Photography and then audiovisual mediums came next “where the camera extends the phallic powers of pen and gun” (89). Whereas photography visually captured that which the colonizers desired to control: “nature, natives and the enactment of colonial superiority,” the video camera was “crucial as a machine used by western travelers...scientists, anthropologists, entrepreneurs, missionaries, and the entire array of colonial agents – to document and control the ‘primitive’ cultures they had seen and found” (Schiwy 89; Kaplan 61). Moreover, the colonial gaze directed at indigenous populations in the Mexican context comes from both the conquering forces of the Western empire as well as the efforts of nation-building in the first several decades of the twentieth century to create a mestizo nation.¹¹⁵

Thus, in *La pequeña*, how does the employment of camera angles, shots and editing directly confront this gaze to at once acknowledge the contemporary tensions of

¹¹⁵ Forging the mestizo nation was considered vital for the modern development of Mexico (Hernández Castillo, “Between Civil” 65). It indicated a form of inclusion of the indigenous population through racial mixing in order to create the *mestizaje* race, or what José Vasconcelos would call *la raza cósmica*. The impetus for homogenizing the Mexican nation stemmed from the “cultural knowledge that...the Mexican ‘Indian’ [was] the state’s moral obligation: a backward, infantile, and passive entity standing in the way of modernization and progress” [Emphasis in the original] (Analisa Taylor 12).

being indigenous in a settler colonial society, and to assuredly promote alternative ways of navigating and living well within such a context? Contrastingly, how do moments in the film play with different levels of (self)representation, neocolonial tension, and the power dynamics between genders and races? Lastly, how does the conjunction of the testimonial structuring of the film and the confrontation of the colonial gaze work to expand understandings and practices of BV when it comes to intra-inter-societal relationships specific to expression of gender? How then does *La pequeña* as a documentary film work to queer the male-female binary of this particular aspect of BV?

PART I – *La pequeña* and Pascuala

La pequeña works in ways that push against the limits of the historically engrained patriarchal structures in Mexico as well as the heteronormative framework of BV. Pedro López, along with both female and male social actors operate in ways that queer BV and also the expectant gaze (that of the colonial gaze or that of the viewers). In this first part, I discuss how *La pequeña* reveals different levels of (self)representation and power dynamics at play in Mexico. I discuss the basic premise of the film, its production and then explore in depth Pascuala's role in the documentary and the potential ripple effect it has post-screening and off-screen. Further unpacking the initial scene of the documentary mentioned above and analyzing multiple others, I raise topics of how Pascuala refuses the external expectant gaze; is subversive in her language, both body and voice; and transcends the screen bringing reality to life. Her performance is not a neat package that stays within the confines of the lens.

Just as the film deliberately foregrounds the multi-layered socio-historical environment of contemporary Chiapas, Mexico in the initial scene, Pascuala's character represents the complexities of living in and navigating through a settler colonial society as an indigenous female. Her gender, and how she represents herself is under the microscope of both the patriarchal society of Mexico as well as within her indigenous community.¹¹⁶ In other words, her body carries a history of expectancies that she did not chose but must negotiate. It is then through her negotiations that she queers what it means to be an indigenous female.

Receiving little scholarly attention until now, *La pequeña* situates its viewers within the context of the settler colonial society of Mexico through Tsotsil-Maya perspectives.¹¹⁷ Navigating, resisting and moving beyond such structures, the four social actors of *La pequeña*, Dolores, Flaviano, Pascuala and Ronyk and the director, Pedro López, weave their unique histories as young-adults who migrate to and from rural communities and the urban center of San Cristóbal de las Casas (henceforth San Cristóbal) seeking opportunities to pursue their life goals. Through their testimonies they share with viewers the diverse struggles and accomplishments they experience as well as their future plans. Due to the heterogeneous nature of the five social actors' accounts, I

¹¹⁶ Reiterating this societal pervasiveness of discrimination, Zapoteca Judith Bautista Pérez writes, "las mujeres indígenas somos estructuralmente coercionadas [sic] para ser funcionales al sistema capitalista basado en mecanismos sexistas, racistas y clasistas; y las maneras en cómo desde la vida cotidiana, se aprende a vivir y a sortear los retos que estos mecanismos implican" (112).

¹¹⁷ Settler colonial societies, found in the United States, Canada and Central and South America, are constituted by forms of colonial governments that are still intact, and maintain power and control over indigenous populations. See Qwo-Li Driskill (70).

argue that the documentary resists generalized and singular answers to practices of decolonization, and instead offers both a representation of several realities as well as counter-discourses that intersect these realities.

While *La pequeña* falls in line with the most produced genre in Mexico, the documentary, it registers as an anomalous media project in that it was realized largely independent of state funding (Salazar and Córdova 52; Wortham 72).¹¹⁸ Pedro López was

¹¹⁸ Audiovisual technology utilized in Latin America by indigenous organizations and individuals has evolved radically since it became available in the mid-eighties. The first major sites for indigenous video were in Bolivia, southern Mexico, northern Brazil, and Ecuador. In Mexico alone, indigenous video has transitioned from the state controlled and funded Centros de Video Indígena (CVI) housed under the Instituto Nacional Indigenista (INI) in the early 1990's to current independent media organizations such as Mal de Ojo in Oaxaca and the Chiapas Media Project that works largely with Zapatista communities. Erica Wortham writes that shortly after the Zapatista uprising in Chiapas on January 1, 1994 most state-funding for video indígena ceased (3). Although independent from the Mexican state, both Mal de Ojo and Chiapas Media Project largely depend on outside funding. Mexico is also host to numerous national and international film festivals throughout the year.

Funding for CVI projects in the early 1990's was couched under the program Transferencia de Medios Audiovisuales (TMA) which came at a time when Mexico was in the process of refreshing its image by naming itself a "pluricultural nation," and amending the constitution to grant rights to indigenous populations (Wortham 2). TMA was thus conceived, at least initially, to maintain a paternalistic relationship in which indigenous persons were dependent on the state. The mission of TMA rested on providing the opportunity to indigenous media students to "produce a different visual language" that reflected their reality (60). This clearly stated objective not only imposed the state's desired outcome and positioned indigenous participants as other but also "situate[d] indigenous media production within a safe, fairly nonpolitical arena of cultural expression" (60). In other words, the audiovisual media produced under the TMA was not meant to address political and social change. Nonetheless, overtime, that is precisely what happened.

Run by artists and social activists working independent of state ideals coupled with a burgeoning autonomous indigenous movement, the state inadvertently, and perhaps ironically, transferred video equipment and the know-how into the hands of emerging indigenous film-makers (2, 13). In the Mexican context, as in others, the video camera evolved from a tool that represented reality to one that questioned it. In other words,

one of three Mexicans in 2006 to be awarded a Media Arts Fellowship funded by the Rockefeller Foundation.¹¹⁹ Having access to funds and little, if any, artistic restrictions, Pedro López directed his first feature documentary, *La pequeña*.¹²⁰

However, *La pequeña* falls in line with the majority of other indigenous film projects in the state of Chiapas in that the financing, production, distribution and the reception stem mostly from the pockets and connections of non-indigenous peoples (Köhler 387). Hence, bureaucratic protocol came into play when the film was ready to be released (Pedro López, pers. comm.). It was first showed at El Festival de Cine de Morelia, then at El Festival de Guadalajara and ultimately at the Cinépolis Cinema in San Cristóbal. Scheduling a single viewing, two theaters were reserved each with a capacity of 300 people. A free event, Pedro López says all the seats were occupied and the reception of the film was over-all positive (it seems as if mostly friends and family of those involved in the production were invited as well as some distinguished guests knowledgeable in film). In fact, indigenous and non-indigenous viewers alike expressed a feeling of identification with the social actors in *La pequeña* (Pedro López, pers. comm.).

Since the screening in San Cristóbal, Pedro López had the opportunity to tour the documentary outside of Mexico at several universities. Currently however, he does not exercise control over the distribution rights, and recently IMCINE sold them to Canal 22

“media practices become effective strategies for Indigenous peoples to shape counter-discourses and engender alternative public spheres” (Salazar and Córdova 40).

¹¹⁹ Pedro López explains that the fellowship was decided through a lottery system. The fact he won was not luck, but destiny (pers. comm.).

¹²⁰ Later in the production process of *La pequeña*, Instituto Mexicano de Cinematografía (IMCINE) picked up the financial support to transfer the high-definition film to 35mm.

who outsourced them to an Internet company. DVD's of *La pequeña* can be purchased at large department stores such as Gandhi's or Sanborns in the cities of Tuxtla Gutiérrez or Mexico City, but cannot be found in the location where it was filmed: San Cristóbal.

Thus, while the content of *La pequeña* offers to other viewers, indigenous and non-indigenous alike, what Schiwy might call a "same realm of reality," the mode of production and the type of financial backing needed, in the end, stripped Pedro López of his rights to use the film as he pleased (*Indianizing* 145). Furthermore, the places in which the film was screened catered mainly to filmmakers and cinephiles at festivals and Western academic communities at United States' universities. Simultaneously, this information gives us an idea of who the viewers might be and thus who the social actors address through the screen. It also speaks to the power dynamics at play when distributing an indigenous film whose contents center on indigenous auto-representation of life.

Seeing that *La pequeña* is a media project hosting content pertinent to the Tsotsil-Mayas that produced, directed, and acted in it, it coincides with Schiwy's statement of "...indigenous media contests a process of colonial subalternization that has denied indigenous communities participation in the dominant discourses and practices that have shaped Latin American societies (*Indianizing* 9). Therefore, I position this documentary as one that "recognizes that representation - audiovisual, literary, and scholarly - entails the power to shape lived reality" and privileges "the indigenous subject as expert in his or her own right" (9, 11). The initial scene discussed above then informs its viewers of the neocolonial environment of the documentary while also positioning an indigenous

woman, Pascuala, as silent yet powerful and as having agency. With this scene, Pedro López seems to say that *La pequeña* is not a superficial account of four Tsotsil-Maya social actors. Rather it is a layered story whose representation on screen has an intimate engagement with reality off-screen.

In addition to the four social actors, Pedro López himself registers even though he operates in the off-screen space.¹²¹ His presence is felt as we hear his voice asking questions, an integral part of the soundtrack. Several times we see his hand reach into the periphery of the screen as he aides a social actor. Once, when he aligns his camera with that of Dolores's, his physical nearness is so that Dolores leans back from him and turns her head away. Lastly, we feel his presence during interviews as the on-screen social actors interact with him by making or avoiding eye contact. Pedro López's constant utilization of close-up camera shots at eye-level invokes his mission of creating a horizontal relationship among all the characters involved (pers. comm.). It conjures up images of similar interview shots in a particular video made by the Chiapas Media Project entitled, *We are Equal: Zapatista Women Speak* (2005). When filming the women's comments on being indigenous and female, the videographer films them at eye-level, respecting their voiced perspectives and experiences. Avoiding the high-angle shot at all costs, Pedro López, in turn, also employs the low-angle shot, humbling his perspective to that of another indigenous figure on screen. Viewers witnessed this angle when the camera framed Pascuala's face as she refused the photo opportunity in the first scene of the documentary.

¹²¹ Pedro López is well-aware of this auto-ethnographic role (pers.comm.).

Moreover, Pedro López endeavours to use the interview as a way to situate answered, or unanswered, information. On one hand, the interview functions as a type of confessional, in the sense of American philosopher and gender theorist Judith Butler. Committing verbal confessions, Butler suggests, enables the constitution of constructing ones' true self as well as confirming what has truly happened (*Undoing* 163, 165). If we consider that the honest utterances of the five social actors in *La pequeña* are heard by one or more listener, a relationship is inevitably formed between what is said and who hears it (what is enacted and who witnesses the act). This act: confessing to experiences with an audience, simultaneously configures the speaker as a political agent of his/her/*hier* own history; verifies that history as truth; and forms relationships with those listening. The strategy of the interview used as an opportunity for empowerment subverts the definition Bill Nichols employs. He states, "like the ethical issues concerning the space between filmmaker and subject and how it is negotiated, a parallel set of political issues of hierarchy and control, power and knowledge surround the interview" (51). Countering this establishment of hierarchy, Pedro López shares his thoughts on the matter, "Éramos todos iguales y lo más importante era transmitir eso. Cuando nos hablábamos, nos mirábamos a los ojos. En las entrevistas – no eran entrevistas – yo [sólo] quería ser parte de la historia aunque no saliera en la pantalla. Yo era otro personaje más" (pers. comm.).

Yet, on the other-hand, confessions in *La pequeña* are not always voiced. In fact, they are refused. This negation, as we saw in the initial scene with Pascuala, indeed draws on layers of "hierarchy and control, power and knowledge" among non-indigenous

and indigenous and among indigenous women and men within the environment of modernity/coloniality. In this moment, Pascuala, because of her body and dress, is burdened with the history of indigenous peoples seen and treated as objects to be studied and photographed for Western knowledge. "...indigenous people continue to be reified as specimens, metonyms for an entire culture, race, or monolithic condition known as 'Primitiveness'" (Rony 24). Pascuala unwillingly represented an object to be discovered and discussed in an institutional setting. She was not seen, in this moment, as a subject who held knowledge, rather she was a desired commodity. However, Pascuala's reaction to the students demonstrated consciousness of the historical and contemporary neocolonizer's gaze and a refusal to continue such a relationship. Thus, Pascuala engages her "third-eye," as Rony would have it - the perspective of observing the situation from outside one's own body allowing for a "clarity of vision even as it marks the site of socially mediated self-alienation" (4). Moreover, Pascuala turned the intended unilateral expectant gaze and need of the students into a web of bilateral looking. By not responding to their desire on one hand, and not meeting their expectation of allowing a photo on the other, Pascuala initiates a new type of "looking relation" (Kaplan 6). She is no longer a commodity to be captured on film; she is an indigenous woman with the right to decide what she wants.

Like the initial scene of the documentary, Pascuala's resistance in the film, or even to the film itself, is apparent in both her verbal and corporal testimony. Different to the close-up shots of other social actors, Pascuala rarely situates herself squarely in front of the camera. Instead, she provides a profile denying viewers the opportunity to be

confronted with her entire face (see Figure 10). In the few close-ups, her eyes refuse a steady gaze as they constantly shift to look elsewhere. In this way, more often than not, she avoids direct eye contact with the camera. While we do not always know who is filming, we can hear Pedro López's voice when he interviews Pascuala.¹²² It is at these times when she is particularly elusive.



Figure 10: Pascuala in La pequeña semilla en el asfalto.

In responding to prompts, she also differs from the other social actors. Whereas they are, for the most part, eager to share and engage with Pedro López, Pascuala is reticent. She does not seek an intimate relationship with Pedro López nor with the viewer. At times, she distances herself from her interlocutor so much that if she were not amplified with a microphone it seems we would not be able to hear her. When asked directly by Pedro López what prompted her departure from her community, her response is evasive, “salí por muchas razones muy personales que en este instante no le puedo

¹²² Pedro López says that the other social actors helped film as well (pers. comm.).

decir.” The information she shares about her life in her community is scarce: she never met her father, she misses her mother, and her sister also migrated to the city.

While Pascuala denies specifics about life in her community, she does share the difficulties of maintaining a life in San Cristóbal on her own: there were times when she felt self-conscious about her ability to communicate and express herself in Spanish with non-indigenous persons; she struggled to find jobs where her employers valued her based on her willingness to work rather than discriminating against her because of her gender and ethnicity, and there were moments when she did not know if she could continue amidst such hardship.¹²³ In one such instance she states that although she did not know how to respond to people and she was at a loss economically, “tenía muchas ganas de seguir adelante y me sentía capaz... de seguir.” She continues here recalling a time when she had no one to lean on, yet she found jobs working in hotels, restaurants and amber stores. Through Pascuala’s verbal testimonies and the camera editing there is no time for viewers to commiserate with Pascuala. Although her words address difficult experiences, she does not pity herself as perhaps those she encounters pity her. Despite navigating a society that continually sees her through the colonial lens, she garners strength within herself to pursue a life that serves her. For the moment, she is focusing on her own

¹²³ Rodríguez Aguilera highlights the difficulties indigenous women confront when employed in urban centers, “Es necesario subrayar que muchas empleadas domésticas sufren maltrato físico, sexual y/o explotación laboral dentro de los hogares donde laboran, pues hasta la fecha esa actividad no está reconocida como empleo formal y, en la inmensa mayoría de los casos, carecen de leyes y derechos que las protejan. Como es sabido, el trabajo del hogar está históricamente ligado a las mujeres y es enmarcado dentro de las ideologías sexo-genéricas de la sociedad que asignan a la mujer el papel de ‘responsables’ el arreglo y cuidado de la casa” (136).

development. In the future, she hopes to provide some type of assistance to indigenous communities, although the specifics of how and what are still undefined.

Pascuala's resistive form of self-representation in *La pequeña* conjures up similarities in Latin American literary history with how Doris Sommer reads Rigoberta Menchú's testimonies. Upon reading *Me llamo Rigoberta Menchú y así me nació la conciencia*, Sommer attests to initially feeling shocked that Menchú would have secrets and then refuse to share them in her own testimonio (115). Sommer experienced in this moment the realization of three things that are most pertinent to our discussion here: one, that there was a bilateral relation between Menchú and her readers; Menchú knew certain people would read her words and be expecting her to reveal her life to the fullest, yet she chose not to. "Secrecy is a safeguard to freedom, Emmanuel Levinas argues...it is the inviolable core of human subjectivity that makes interaction a matter of choice rather than rational necessity. 'Only starting from this secrecy is the pluralism of society possible'" (qtd. in Sommer 119). By having secrets, Menchú is free from hierarchies in which only certain people hold knowledge. Thus, Menchú exercises agency as a subject in her own right. Secondly, Sommer realized that Menchú, by guarding her words and directly stating that she and her community had secrets that were not to be told, disrupts the Western idea that she is an object to be known and controlled. "Natives who remained incalculable, because they refused to tell secrets, obviously frustrated colonial state control" (Sommer 116). Lastly, the fact that Menchú would not disclose information that she somewhat teasingly dangled under her readers' noses instilled the sentiment that her readers' interest in her was not reciprocated. Menchú, Sommer argues, told her story –

that is also the story of many indigenous Guatemalan communities – to build awareness, but not to seek intimacy with her readers (119).

Parallel to Menchú's relationship with the literary genre of testimonio and her interlocutor, Elisabeth Burgos, Pascuala also grants permission to be filmed at times and at others resists it. Furthermore, Pascuala refused to have her picture taken, yet agreed to be filmed as a social actor in *La pequeña*. It seems then, that Pascuala is also one who frustrates colonial state control by denying expectations (whether they be from the students, Pedro López or us as viewers). She appears on screen avoiding eye contact or distancing herself from the camera. She speaks in Tsotsil and Spanish and at other times interweaves them. She wears her Chamulan *rebozo* and *enagua* and at other times jeans and a sweater. She forges her own path that admits hardship yet demonstrates a strong belief in herself. Lastly, she imagines a future that disrupts familial or societal expectations and projects her beyond the limited geographic binary of her indigenous community and the city of San Cristóbal. Subtly defiant, she relies on herself and refuses to accept or be controlled by the colonizer's gaze.

Utilizing a language of conscientious resistance, whether it is manifested through the voice or the body, Pascuala pushes against the historically engrained racist and patriarchal structures of Mexico, and refuses the expectant gaze of coloniality. Instead of presenting herself as susceptible to external forces, she turns inward, drawing on her own strengths and generating a future vision of and for herself. She thus enacts multiple layers of queering what is expected of an indigenous woman.

Wortham states that audiovisual media production in Mexico shares an intimate connection with indigenous “self-representation” and “auto-determination” (8). The production and filming of *La pequeña* reiterates this claim providing a locus of enunciation for Pedro López’s vision and those of his social actors. Pedro López situates himself as a Tsotsil-Maya indigenous filmmaker who succeeded in his first feature documentary largely independent of state support. Employing low-angle shots and close-ups at eye-level and exerting his presence off-screen he not only exercises solidarity with his characters but also blurs the lines of conventional strategies in documentary filming. Throughout the film, Pedro López creates spaces and moments that demonstrate the subjectivity and consciousness of indigenous subjects as they resist, refuse and navigate the realities of settler colonial societies. Pascuala’s presentation in particular represents the complexities of what it means to be an indigenous woman in Chiapas, Mexico living in an urban center.

PART II – Dolores and Flaviano

As discussed in the introduction of this dissertation, the main body of scholarship on BV acknowledges the intricacies of the matrix of colonial power and posits that BV practices can and should be employed to confront them. However, BV is still only largely employed as alternatives to Western economic and ecological practices and thus insufficiently addresses intersections of societal relationships and constructions of gender with that of economy and ecology. Although the scholarship alludes to such constructions and relationships, universal language presides such as in the following examples: Buen

Vivir “constituye una crítica al desarrollo modernizante en tanto propone una vida en armonía con la naturaleza y los otros seres humanos” (Altmann 283); “...en la práctica refiere a un espacio comunitario constituido por lazos de reciprocidad y convivencia simbiótica con la naturaleza y, al mismo tiempo a un estilo de vida inspirado por los principios de igualdad, responsabilidad compartida y conservación del ecosistema” (Belotti 42); and lastly, “Buen Vivir grew out of indigenous struggles as they articulated with social change agendas by peasants, Afro-descendants, environmentalists, students, women, and youth. Echoing indigenous ontologies, the BV implies a different philosophy of life which enables the subordination of economic objectives to the criteria of ecology, human dignity, and social justice” (Escobar 25).

Despite the main body of work on BV glossing over the specifics of how quotidian practices of BV resonate on the ground level within relationships of community members, indigenous women and feminist scholars are beginning to voice their concerns about this supposed “harmony,” “equality,” “human dignity” and “social justice.” Currently small but growing, the body of work discussing discontentment with the naturalization of patriarchy within the constructs of BV exists. Regina Cochrane synthesizes the arguments of Aymara feminist activist Julieta Paredes and those made at the Articulation Feminist Mercosur (AFM) event in 2010.¹²⁴ She states that the women’s discourses focus on how some of the holistic concepts of BV, such as male-female complementary, reinforce essentialism and legitimizes patriarchy. This in turn

¹²⁴ At AFM indigenous women from throughout South America (Peru, Argentina, Bolivia, Paraguay, Uruguay, Brazil, and Ecuador) and Guatemala and Mexico voiced their concerns regarding aspects of BV.

perpetuates “a sexual division of labor that assigns virtually the entire burden of the reproduction of human life to women, thereby producing women’s social, cultural and material inequality” (Cochrane 586). Discussed at length in Chapter I, I further delve into the discourse on BV as it pertains to indigenous women and their relationship to land. Here, however, I seek to explore what theory has been written on gender relations regarding BV. In this way, I coincide with the voices above as well as Silvia Vega Ugalde when she highlights that “la preocupación es que este debate [del BV] sea ciego al género y que quede fuera - una vez más - el imperativo de transformar las relaciones desiguales de género en el marco de propuestas que se asumen como revolucionarias” (49). If what we find in the writings on BV lacks a revolutionary spin on gender relations, I propose that *La pequeña* works to fold in decolonizing options of gender through a queering of the heteronormativity of BV.

Initially drawing on the late academic José Esteban Muñoz’s definition of queerness, I then expand his notions to discuss how queer theory is being drawn into the folds of Native studies through scholars such as Qwo-Li Driskill and Andrea Smith. “Queerness,” Muñoz states, “is not yet here. Queerness is an ideality.... We must strive, in the face of the here and now’s totalizing rendering of reality, to think and feel a *then and there*” [Emphasis in the original] (*Cruising* 1). For Muñoz, queerness is not only situated in what Ernst Bloch calls a concrete utopia but also aligns with queer feminist and queer of color critiques (*Cruising* 3, 17). A concrete utopia differs from an abstract one in that it is informed by socio-historical consciousness thus inciting engagement with particular struggles performed by a collective (*Cruising* 3). Fully aware of the past that

has created the here and now, and fully engaged with contemporary tensions, queerness offers an educated critique of the present time and simultaneously carves space to feel moments beyond what is directly in front of us. “Queerness is the thing that lets us feel that this world is not enough, that indeed something is missing” (1). It is both a performative doing and a quotidian action; the former imagining a future that is not yet here and the latter framing differently the mundane (1, 9).¹²⁵

Unless queering can simultaneously reveal and respond to the master narratives of Western modernity that systematically exclude persons of color, Indigenous and Native and their ethos and histories by supporting the heterogeneous approaches that these particular populations attest to, the heteronormative hegemony of colonialism continues. In fact, Driskill supports the convening of Native and Indigenous worldviews and practices as it bolsters and fortifies the web of decolonial activism through creating and maintaining “balanced relationships and power dynamics in... communities” (86). Two-Spirit critiques, coined by Driskill, offer interventions to on-going colonialism given that

¹²⁵ Notwithstanding, it must be highlighted that although Muñoz’s theory of queerness addresses queer feminist and queer of color domains – an imperative contribution due to queer being largely developed from the perspective of middle-class male whiteness – Muñoz nonetheless perpetuates Qwo-Li Driskill’s “un-seeing” of (queer) Native and Indigenous issues. In other words, even though Muñoz focuses on minoritarian queer populations he still glosses over queer Native and Indigenous peoples. Rightly so, Driskill is “suspicious of emergent queer critiques...because of the startling absence of Native people and the colonization of Native nations in these theories” (79). See specifically pages 9-10 in Muñoz’s book *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics* to witness the tendency to merely mention, rather than engage, Native and Indigenous populations with queer theory; See Michael Warner’s *Fear of a Queer Planet* in which he discusses how queer culture has been most closely tied to middle-class white men; See pages 50-51 in Andrea Smith’s article, “Queer Theory and Native Studies” in which she coincides with Driskill’s observation that the queer of color critique largely ignores indigeneity which thus perpetuates a genocidal logic of Native populations rather than creating alliances of solidarity.

they, “create more robust and effective interventions in systems of oppression” (79).

Two-Spirit critiques build on and expand the reach of the queer of color critique, which illuminate the intersections of racism, queerphobias, and gender oppressions. They stem from “Native histories, politics and decolonial struggles,” “pay attention to the unique situations...of Native Two-Spirit/GLBTQ people” and work to “understand how heteropatriarchy and heteronormativity are a part of colonial projects” (71, 80, 71). Thus, we can see how Two-Spirit critiques coincide with Muñoz’s queerness as a concrete utopia in that they engage intimately with and draw strength from histories and contemporary Native realities.

A scene in which Flaviano, a social actor in *La pequeña*, speaks with a classmate outside a classroom at el Colegio Nacional de Educación Profesional Técnica (CONALEP) exemplifies his historical and political consciousness of the Mexican reality and his desire to change it. The employment of low-angle shots indicate respect for Flaviano’s mental critical engagement, and a close-up of his gesturing hands that then pans to meet his face encourages us to make a direct link between his skilled hands and his sharp mind. By focusing in on his hands, albeit briefly, we recall previous scenes that show the physical capabilities of Flaviano’s body to accomplish the innovative ideas he generates that have been molded by ancestral traditions practiced in his community, teachings of the Zapatista Movement and the curriculum of classes provided by CONALEP: He works alongside family members to crush sugarcane in the manual roller mill; he cures the surface of an outdoor stove-top; tends to his garlic crop; explains a composting latrine system; and mixes tinctures for natural remedies.

La pequeña depicts Flaviano as a fully competent and engaged human being who draws from an array of experiences and knowledges. He is not only personally familiar with the injustices committed in Mexico but has dedicated his life to search for ways to affect positive change for his country. Discussing with his classmate, he highlights the importance of people realizing and understanding that they live in a country where everyone does not have access to all they need. His classmate responds saying that Flaviano will not be able to change people because it's too hard. With urgency in his voice, Flaviano responds, "Sí yo sé que es difícil...pero si no hacemos nada, ¿quién lo hace?" Flaviano is not content to only make a positive difference in his local community. He carries an impulse to affect the discourse of inequality in Mexico as a whole. *La pequeña* is host to many takes such as these that show Tsotsil-Maya figures interacting with and questioning the dominant structures of on-going colonialism in Mexico. Isolated moments folded within the documentary, as well as the entire production, work to intervene in the discourse on who holds, performs, generates and renovates knowledge.

Upholding the practices of Native and indigenous communities, rather than comparing judgmentally, leads to a validation of the production and ways of being not before offered by structures of colonialism. As Andrea Smith suggests, then we can begin to understand that queer theory is not employed to only theorize about queers but rather to grate against what is normal (46). One particular example that I explore briefly here relates to the constructed normality of heteronormativity and misogynous practices in settler colonial Mexico. It relates back to the genesis of the mestizo and continues in various manifestations through the centuries.

As is well known, in the Mexican legend, Malintzin/Doña Marina/La Malinche gave birth to the first mestizo – a boy - whose mother was an indigenous woman and whose father was a white Spaniard, Hernán Cortés. Regardless of the actual relationship between La Malinche and Cortés, history has it as one of “unequal power relations, racial and sexual domination, and rape: the white male forcing himself on the indigenous woman” (Diana Taylor, *The Archive* 95). The mestizo then is seen as illegitimate and in turn blames his indigenous mother for such a status. In the seminal texts of nation-building published in the early twentieth century by Samuel Ramos and José Vasconcelos they argue that in order for Mexico to progress, the indigenous must be subsumed into the mestizo body, literally and figuratively. Ramos writes that the mestizo male battles with inferiority due to his history of conquest and colonization by European forces and often expresses and relieves this feeling through violence (50-61). In order to rid himself (the mestizo) of such mediocrity he must be open to other cultures, educate himself and work to create a universal culture of Mexico (100-113). Although indigeneity is his history and he himself embodies indigenous blood, it is the part of him that is “inflexible” and holds him back from progress (36-40).

Vasconcelos, on the other-hand proposes a universal order that seeks to go beyond one ruled by eugenics and European-white supremacy. Vasconcelos refutes both Europe’s invented fiction of Latin America and the United States’ segregationist ideologies, of which perpetuated racist perceptions of Latin America and in particular Mexico (9). He stresses the importance of embracing indigenous roots and history and proposes a fifth race (19, 15). Stated as the four foundational races, “el negro, el indio, el

mogol y el blanco,” Vasconcelos advances the possibility of a fifth race that overcomes the dominant paradigms of caste and racial segregation through acts of love, sexual desire and curiosity (16, 28, 38). Distinct from the Spaniards and English who used violence and patriotism to advance a monochromatic world free of other races, Latinos would serve as the body and geographic site from which a new integrated race would rise, fortified with a universal vision and honest fraternity (30, 31). “Esto implica que nuestra civilización, con todos sus defectos, puede ser la elegida para asimilar y convertir a un nuevo tipo a todos los hombres” (27).

Despite Vasconcelos’ benevolent effort to posit the destiny of the rural populations of Latin America as the corporal and geographic vessel of a universal race, he is unable to decolonize his mind and pen of the oppression imposed first by Spaniards’ and European ideals and continued through the decades by the Spanish-American Creoles and then the Mexican elite. By constructing the human body of the fifth race through mixing African and Latino blood, inserting Asian eyes that see distinctly, and appropriating the White mind, Vasconcelos perpetuates the lineage of Western racism and stereotypes (32). “...la gota que en nuestra sangre pone el negro, ávido de dicha sensual, ebrio de danzas y desenfrenadas lujurias. Asoma también el mogol con el misterio de su ojo oblicuo, que toda cosa la mira conforme a un ángulo extraño, que descubre no sé qué pliegues y dimensiones nuevas. Interviene asimismo la mente clara del blanco, parecida a su tez y a su ensueño” (32).

As shown, both the mestizo and the indigenous are needed in order to position the Mexican nation as different and unique from other countries. Yet, “the price of this

highly ambivalent mixed identity...meant that racism needed to be displaced and rechanneled as misogyny. Despising La Malinche accomplished the Creole's unspoken racial hatred toward the indígenas, but subsumed under the seemingly justifiable hatred toward women" (Diana Taylor, *The Archive* 96). It seems, and Octavio Paz alludes to this as well, that violence towards women, indigenous women in particular, permeates the Mexican reality because the conflict of nationhood, which requires accepting indigenous roots, has not yet been resolved (64, 72, 77-79). Resisting his origins, the macho male finds himself isolated and alone (74, 79). These are characteristics that Ramos argues incite the Mexican man to lash out impulsively (60).

In the Mexican context, then, the story of La Malinche bleeds into realities of daily life where it serves as a tool of subjugation perpetuating practices of heteropatriarchy and heteronormativity. Approaching either of these structures through queerness reveals chronologies and causes of social violence due to discriminatory practices of on-going colonialism. Thus, acts of queering such foundational aspects of settler colonial societies carry potentials of paradigmatic decolonial moments. Or perhaps seen through a different lens, might it be that some Indigenous and Native epistemologies, ontologies, and languages are already queered in that they practice resistance to the normalizing tactics of on-going colonialism (Andrea Smith 52)?

Tsotsil-Maya social anthropologist Sánchez and Tsotsil language instructor Bolom share that linguistic traces in the Tsotsil language reveal queerness (pers.

comm.).¹²⁶ An example of this is the word for husband or wife: *Jnup jchi'il*. The *j*'s at the beginning of each word indicate first person possession. The translation of *Nup* refers to a partner, a meeting, or the act of accompaniment (in Spanish it would be *pareja*, *encuentro*, *acompañar*). The translation of *chi'il* means a comrade who is not complete without partnership. The word relates to an observation of nature and how the seed needs the earth to flourish (Bolom, pers. comm.). And so, the term, *jnup chi'il* refers to a person with whom you share a mutual and necessary relationship. There is no grammatical reference to a specific gender rather listeners assume a certain gender or sexual orientation based on the context. It is interesting then, that within the Tsotsil language an expansion of gendered pairings – operating beyond the binary coupling of male-female - could be easily accommodated. It is as Bolom comments, “la lengua da mucho – qué es lo que quiere decir y cómo se practica” (pers. comm.).

There are two other Tsotsil words, *antsilvinik* and *tsikilan*, that indicate the presence of non-heteronormative practices in Tsotsil culture. Sánchez describes the first word, *antsilvinik*, as a person that identifies as both male and female - *ants* means woman and *vinik* means man (pers. comm.). Having no personal experience with such a person,

¹²⁶ In contrast to Spanish, Tsotsil words are not divided by masculine or feminine suffixes. Instead, there are indicators that are placed in front of the word to specify the gender (*me'* for female or *tot* for male). Different than Spanish, objects and things do not have gender in Tsotsil, whereas the words for animals are neutral until paired with an indicator of gender. For example, *tot alak'* for rooster and *me' alak'* for hen. When speaking of professions, however, the referent by default is male and it is necessary to add the indicator of gender if speaking about a female. To exemplify this, the word for male teacher is *jchanubtasvaneje* whereas the word for female teacher is *me' jchanubtasvaneje*. In other occasions, no indicator of gender is applied to neutral words and it is through cultural contexts that reference of a specific gender would be assumed.

Sánchez remembers hearing the term from his grandparents who told him that there were *antsilviniketik* in their community (pers. comm.).¹²⁷ According to what Sánchez remembers about this conversation, the *antsilviniketik* were welcomed and community members protected and cared for them. In other words, on some level they were accepted into the fabric of the rural society.¹²⁸

The other word mentioned by Bolom is *tsikilan*, which can only be used to refer to men – not women – and indicates a man who does not have or want children (pers. comm.). According to Bolom, community members disapprove of men who are called *tsikilan* (pers. comm.). The fact that the man does not have children calls for doubts about his sexuality.

Regardless of how the Tsotsil language has been manipulated by society in response to historical strategies of maintaining heteropatriarchy, the testimonies of both Sánchez and Bolom indicate that some words in Tsotsil are already queered.

Furthermore, *La pequeña*, filmed in both Spanish and Tsotsil, posits as a documentary

¹²⁷ The suffix: *-etik* is used to indicate plurality.

¹²⁸ In contrast to Sánchez, Bolom was familiar with the term and said it could be applied in a variety of settings but always referred to a man who was sexually attracted to other men. That is, the term could not be used to describe a woman attracted to other women. Bolom mentions that the word also emerges in informal settings where men, who identify as heterosexuals, joke about other men's sexuality; In conversation, Jan Rus confirms that sexual – especially homosexual - banter is common occurrence in Chamulan communities among men who identify as heterosexual; De la Cruz Cruz shared a more anecdotal experience of two lesbians in her village. She says that the women hid their sexual preferences from the community until Mexico City legalized same-sex marriage. Upon hearing about the new law, the women revealed themselves as a same-sex couple. She conjectures that because of this legislation, people are bolder in confessing their gender or sexual identifications lying outside of the male-female binary (pers. comm.); In contrast, Pedro López shared that he thought there was very little information disseminated about the legalization of same-sex marriages (pers. comm.).

that queers given that it is incongruent with the enforced heterosexuality and male-female binary gender systems that are a colonial pillar of nation-building. How then does *La pequeña* expand understandings and practices of BV by showing alternatives to the male-female binary relationship?

The camera frames Dolores' face in a close-up shot at eye-level. Dressed in her Chamulan *traje*, she shares that there was a man in her community that wanted to marry her by force. If she did not agree to his proposal, he would have her incarcerated. Speaking in Tsotsil, she says, “Hubo un hombre que según me quería, no sé si era cierto o sólo quería arruinarme, creo que sólo quería acabar conmigo, no era verdad que [ese hombre] me quería. Me dolió mucho, porque yo no quería casarme con él, y tampoco quería tener marido aún. Lo único que yo quería era seguir estudiando.” Ultimately, she explains, the university and community officials get involved to support her and because of her determination, Chamulan women now have the right to defend themselves and make decisions on their own. Within this confession, Dolores enters dialogue with other indigenous women across borders who are also reflecting on injustices experienced in quotidian life. “En distintas partes de Latinoamérica las mujeres indígenas se encuentran cuestionando y recreando sus identidades...al mismo tiempo que cuestionan los estereotipos asignados a ellas desde sus culturas y desde la cultura no indígena, desde sus lealtades individuales y colectivas” (Méndez Torres 30).

Whereas the norm in a society that practices BV suggests male-female coupling to maintain telluric equilibrium, Dolores postpones and even questions such a commitment

given the circumstances. Fernando Huanacuni, writing from an Andean perspective states:

...las naciones aymara y quechua, conciben que todo viene de dos fuentes: Pachakama o Pachatata (Padre cosmos, energía o fuerza cósmica) y Pachamama (Madre tierra, energía o fuerza telúrica), que generan toda forma de existencia. Es claro y contundente lo que los pueblos originarios decimos: ‘si no reconstituimos lo sagrado en equilibrio (Chacha Warmi, Hombre Mujer), lo espiritual en nuestra cotidianidad, definitivamente no habremos cambiado mucho, no tendremos la posibilidad de concretar ningún cambio real en la vida práctica.’ (33)

And, in another section, he writes:

Desde la cosmovisión indígena originaria somos hijos del Cosmos y de la Madre Tierra, todo lo que existe es generado a partir de ellos. Así también todo lo que existe es par: los animales, los seres humanos, las plantas, las piedras, etc. De esta relación de paridad complementaria emerge, por tanto la comunidad, para preservar la vida cuida la relación hombre-mujer, es por eso que emergen los términos *jaqi* en aymara y *runa* en quechua. Se concibe que la familia surge de la complementación *chacha warmi* y la comunidad emerge de la familia y ello implica volver a entrar en relaciones perdurables como vivieron nuestros ancestros. (74)

It is important to add here that *jaqi* or *runa* in their respective languages mean “person” and that someone is only called *jaqi* or *runa* when they have entered a heterosexual relationship, thus finding their paired complementary (74n47). Hence, everything cosmic and earthly is identified as either masculine or feminine, and the continuation of a stable equilibrium in the community is based on heterosexual coupling.

In Mexico, BV has a similar definition. In the quote below Sánchez writes from Chiapas and relates more to Huanacuni in that he highlights the equal and complementary relationship of male-female and thus assumes a heterosexual orientation:

En la familia hombre y mujer trabajan mutuamente, aunque sea en diferentes actividades definidas por cuestiones de sexo, pero ambas partes colaboran y se apoyan para obtener los sagrados alimentos y para obtener las cosas que desean. Hombre y mujer, en este caso esposo y esposa son complementarios, no compiten. (Sánchez 59)

Sánchez simultaneously confirms what has already been said from the Andean perspective and provides additional information. He comments how daily responsibilities are delegated based on gender, and that there is no competition between wife and husband.

As confessed in the scene above however, Dolores queers both Huanacuni's and Sánchez's definition of community (and family) that is grounded in heterosexual coupling by advocating for her desires to continue studying and holding a potential life partner to high standards. Furthermore, even though Sánchez's statement promotes non-competitiveness and mutual support between man and woman, Dolores's words do not reflect such a relation. As she explains how her suiter wanted to ruin and incarcerate her, we are reminded of the power imbalance between males and females perpetuated by La Malinche's position in the Mexican imagination. Yet, Dolores is not shamed nor silenced. She instead expands Huanacuni's statement of the necessity of a male-female equilibrium to generate real change in life.¹²⁹ Rather than depend on the collaboration of one man to exercise her rights, and ultimately the rights of other indigenous women, Dolores creates alliances with other members of her extended community. Dolores thus offers a different

¹²⁹ For further feminist critiques of the male/female complementary see AFM; Regina Cochrane; and Julieta Paredes.

interpretation of relationality that transcends territorial boundaries and echoes the struggle of other indigenous women across the Americas.¹³⁰

Throughout this scene, Dolores' eyes shift down, gaze to the right of off-screen, or look at the camera. When she shares how the successes of her resistance manifested in reform for all women in her community, she lifts her head and looks directly at the camera (see Figure 11). She is not just confessing to the people behind the camera, present in the current time and place. She confesses to her viewers, and in doing so, redirects their gaze from solely resting on her, to assessing themselves as if she were holding a mirror.



Figure 11: Dolores in La pequeña semilla en el asfalto.

This subtle act not only acknowledges that her confessions have an audience and thus she is seen but that she sees also. This scene transforms a “gaze” enjoyed by the audience into a “look” as Kaplan would suggest (xvi). Whereas the “gaze” operates unilaterally as

¹³⁰ See Méndez Torres for more examples of indigenous women organizing and creating a different sense of community.

if only one person (an active subject, the viewer, the colonizer) has the power and ability to see another person (a passive object, the viewed, the colonized), a “look” is more likely to form a mutual relation (xvi-xviii). Kaplan writes, “Looking will connote curiosity about the Other, a wanting to know (which can of course still be oppressive but does not have to be), while the gaze...involve[s] extreme anxiety – an attempt in a sense *not* to know, to deny, in fact” [Emphasis in the original] (xvii). This layered moment holds viewers accountable for what they hear and see: they cannot deny what they now know. Different than Pascuala, the mirror that Dolores holds up extends the possibility of forming a relationship where she too is curious about them. What will they think about her confession, and how will they respond?

By using a close-up shot, the viewers have no choice but to acknowledge Dolores’ face, and by angling the camera at eye-level she projects the voice and face of authority. In this regard, the viewers are called to identify with Dolores’ recognition and discontentment with the heteronormative, as well as patriarchal, tendencies of her community. She continues, describing the pain and confusion she felt by going against either the man’s wishes for her to be his wife, the wishes of the community for her to marry or perhaps both. We witness her postponing any marriage to focus on her studies. I do not mean to insinuate that because she negates this heterosexual coupling, she would negate all of them thus signalling another sexual preference. I only wish to highlight that in this shot, which frames her as the subject, Dolores resists not only the heteronormative tradition of marriage but also the domestic role of the female in this current time and circumstance. She expands both Huanacuni’s and Sánchez’s heteronormative notions of

building family, and community, to include the extended community and beyond. Thus, Dolores enacts a queering of BV as she questions the scholarly limitations of the texts above necessitating a male-female binary relationship.

Mentioned above, Flaviano, like Dolores, also shows a dedication to his studies and a consciousness about the realities of his home community as well as Mexican society as a whole. In the film, other than Dolores, Flaviano is never seen interacting with another woman of his age. In fact, posing for a photo at his graduation he stands in-between two males. Just before the picture is taken, two women scramble up the stairs to take their places on either side of Flaviano's friends. The snap shot then, consists of two females on either periphery, and three males in the middle with Flaviano in the center. Calling on the parity of BV, Flaviano is left without his complementary.

More explicit than Dolores however, Flaviano portrays himself as someone interested in being married one day. Never specifying the gender of his desired future partner, we deduce he has heterosexual preferences based only on an earlier take where he mentions he had a girlfriend for four years. Yet, marriage (to anyone) is a projected ten years away so that he can continue studying and fulfil his dream of becoming a doctor. By self-identifying more in line with particular sexual preferences and gender identification, he forms part of the spectrum to which Ecuadorian writer and academic, Luz María de la Torre, alludes to when writing about BV. Although she offers what could be considered conflicting details, or if nothing else confusing, when describing the Andean world and its corresponding elements of BV, I argue that she carves space

between the male-female polarities - allowing for a spectrum of identifications, both in sexual preference, in expression of gender as well as in societal responsibilities.

In her book, de la Torre begins the section titled, “El mundo femenino andino” by distancing American culture from that of the West by critiquing how language, in the latter, acquires final and rigid definitions that resist the reality of change. She contrasts this strictness to Andean time and space (*Pachacuti*) that is constantly imbued with variability and movement. Words and their meaning, she insists, are never stagnant because life is always in flux. Instead, expressions show flexibility based on the necessities of human feelings that are dependent on ever changing situations of time and place (20).

After establishing the need for fluidity of expression and language, she relates this idea to that of gender:

Desaparecen los polos comparativos y son grados....Así el hombre y la mujer son cualidades que se van moviendo pero que ambos tienen que compartir y muchas veces se confunden. El sexo es definido, teniendo su propio campo y actividad, pero no así la conducta, la actitud y la propia personalidad, la creatividad y el mismo accionar. El sexo no es la persona, es una parte de ella. (20)

And so it seems that, just like language, gender identification related to the behaviour and instinct of each individual resists fixed definitions and veers from the strict polar opposites of male-female. Even though she states that the two gender binaries disappear, the duality of gender persists since in the same sentence she implies a scaling of gender possibility that ranges from one extreme pole to the other. Of course, this spectrum of identification is certainly more inclusive of varying gender orientations than that of providing only two isolated options – male and female - as we saw in the quotes from

Huanacuni and Sánchez. It is then, that perhaps de la Torre attempts to scratch the surface of the largely heteronormative hegemonic practices, queering the gender duality that has proven quite dominant in our understanding thus far of BV. In this sense, her theory responds to the variety of gender and sexuality expressions occurring in reality, and thus provides a wider definition of what it means to actively collaborate in supporting the equilibrium of BV.

Accordingly, Flaviano represents himself as being closer to the male and heteronormative extreme rather than registering somewhere in the middle. However, his involvement with practicing traditional health remedies of his community situates him in a position more commonly portrayed in Andean indigenous video by women.

“Documentaries...highlight the way cultural practices, religious beliefs, and knowledges are transmitted in embodied ways. Women become the symbolic bearers of indigenous identification; they are the ones with privileged access to indigenous languages, stories, and ethos” (Schiwy, *Indianizing* 109). Hence, Flaviano, who is largely represented as a heterosexual male, destabilizes the tendency of film to only depict women as cultural guardians. Moreover, Two-Spirit critiques also bolster Flaviano’s (self)representation as well as de la Torre’s theory: “Native societies are not necessarily structured through binary gender systems. Rather, some of these societies had multiple genders and people did not fit rigidly into particular gender categories” (Driskill 84). GLBT organizer, Anguksuar (Richard LaFortune), states that while Two-Spirit “in no way...determine[s]

genital activity...it does determine the qualities that define a person's social role and spiritual gifts'" (qtd. in Driskill 85).¹³¹

Through the actions and verbal testimonies of Dolores and Flaviano as well as the filming techniques, *La pequeña* agitates any conclusions that position either social actor in a predetermined gender mold. Once again, the film creates space to explore the relationships and professional activities of its social actors supporting any and all expressions of the self. In this way, the film refashions BV in ways that allow BV to be an autonomous theory and practice that constantly (re)constructs itself in relationship to its context. *La pequeña* pushes the limits of BV to question the dominant culture, politic and historic structures imposed by colonialism and continued now under the guise of Western modernity. In enacting queerness, it is not only a nod toward what could be in the future. It is a critical and conscientious deconstruction of colonial practices that allow for the ever-evolving epistemologies, ontologies and ethos of marginalized populations - Native and Indigenous, people of color, women, LGBTQ, etc. - to intervene in power structures by employing a complex web of intersections (rather than replacing a center with another center) inherent in the heterogeneity of all life. Queering BV truly rejects all

¹³¹ Not unlike Driskill, Pete Sigal observes that Western notions of sexuality and gendered identity register quite differently than those of (pre-conquest) Amerindian societies. However, any notions of gender or sexuality that existed pre-conquest in Amerindian societies have since undergone intense confrontations with Western ideals (Sigal, "Queer Nahuatl" 13). As such, we must refrain from inserting a Western framework of sexuality in the text to avoid drawing conclusions foreign to epistemologies different than our own (10). Here, Sigal reiterates the decolonial practice of engaging Native and Indigenous studies with that of queer.

levels of the “straight time” engrained and employed in settler colonial societies and in the process, posits the beginnings of change for the future (Muñoz, *Cruising* 186).

PART III - Ronyk

An initial question posed by film director López to his social actors within the filming of the documentary, *La pequeña* is whether they would prefer to speak in their native language, Tsotsil, or in Spanish. One of the characters, Ronyk, chooses Spanish even though he has Tsotsil roots. He says he expresses himself better in the former. Nevertheless, when he visits the graves of his parents and sister in the Chamulan cemetery, he recites a phrase in Tsotsil. At this moment, the shot employed is low-angle and thus captures Ronyk profiled against a bright blue sky peppered with clouds (see Figure 12). This shot seems to project Ronyk out of this world and into a world that hosts members of his deceased family. Having mentioned that the cemetery is a sacred place for him this shot offers an ephemeral moment of ec-tasy in which he is at once outside-of-himself with grief and at the same time connected to his family (Butler, *Undoing* 20). His usage of Tsotsil here defies colonizing efforts of past to instill one language, Spanish. By reciting in Tsotsil Ronyk disrupts and thus queers the “straight time” of colonizers’ language and forms of expression. In this instance, Ronyk functions within another epistemic realm in order to deal with and make meaning in death.



Figure 12: Ronyk in La pequeña semilla en el asfalto.

Within the process of exploring linguistic constructions, there exists the possibility of encountering traces of other epistemologies that lie beyond or outside of heteronormative practices. As discussed in Part II, knowledge of certain words employed in daily life or uncovered from the past provides us with clues that point to other ways of interacting with the world. The presence of certain vocabularies, and how we speak them, is power when constructing alternatives to “straight time.”

Thus, in the rejection of all levels of “straight time,” queerness in turn means offering alternatives. In this last section I explore how several social actors of *La pequeña* embody and project representations of alternatives to “straight time” such as BV’s biocentric epistemologies and connections with other ontological realms. In the same light, I analyze further how *La pequeña* serves to expand notions of BV when it comes to division of labor based on gender.

Upon a superficial first glance *La pequeña* seems to recognize gender equilibrium in that the social actors are comprised of two females and two males. As we now know, this would appear to perpetuate the male-female binary in the writings on BV by Huanacuni and Sánchez. However, as we have seen in *La pequeña*, this binary is unravelled, expanding how indigenous females and males choose to live life. Hence, the equilibrium is based on the biocentric notion that all those with life, including those with life in the past, are intimately interconnected. In contrast with the anthropocentrism of the West, hierarchies of power and submission dissolve, and in this way all are free to live the good life. Since the inter-subjectivity allows for all involved to contribute to life, each entity contributes in a balanced manner.

Recalling de la Torre in that she specifies activities for each gender, others, concerned with feminism and economics, write about the importance of recognizing women's work as an integral and invaluable contribution to the functioning of society.¹³² These theorists contrast the current system of capitalism – that dismisses and undervalues domestic labor and negates its supportive role in the functioning of the economic and political spheres - to the proposed system of BV– that acknowledges the labor of all living beings as complementary to the functioning of a healthy society. To further explain this dichotomy Carosio elaborates,

El modelo socioeconómico capitalista no ha crecido sólo a costa de los sistemas naturales, sino también a partir de la incautación de los tiempos de las personas para ponerlos al servicio del mercado. Las mujeres – en condiciones de subordinación – realizan los trabajos de cuidado destinados a satisfacer las necesidades del

¹³² See Alba Carosio; Silvia Berger; Zapatista women in Chiapas Media Project *We are equal: Zapatista women speak*.

grupo, su supervivencia y reproducción, que incluye la participación en los espacios locales y en el ámbito comunitario. En este contexto, la conceptualización de trabajo, forjada en la mitología de la producción y el crecimiento a partir de la Revolución Industrial, lo reduce al empleo. (29)

A reworking of this capitalist perspective is what BV proposes. Irene León summarizes how the definition of “trabajo” has developed and is reflected in the 2008 Ecuadorian Constitution:

...el nuevo enfoque constitucional sienta las bases para un cambio radical, pues ahora el trabajo no remunerado de autosustento y cuidado humano, que se realiza en los hogares, se afirma como labor productiva (Constitución Art. 325), por lo tanto el Estado se ha comprometido a promover ‘un régimen laboral que funcione en armonía con las necesidades de cuidado humano, que facilite servicios, infraestructura, y horarios de trabajo adecuados’(Constitución Art. 332), al igual que a impulsar la corresponsabilidad y reciprocidad de hombres y mujeres en el trabajo doméstico y obligaciones familiares. Y, por primera vez en la historia, la seguridad social se hace extensiva a quienes hacen estos trabajos. (151)

In my understanding, as well as that of Carosio’s, this reconstitution of value in economic practices, while an important advancement for society, still largely assumes that women’s labor is domestic and thus in the private sphere. Of course, it is clear that in León’s reading of the Ecuadorian Constitution, cited above, this domestic role could be fulfilled by either male or female.

Mentioned in the scene above, Ronyk is perhaps the most forthcoming social actor in *La pequeña* as he is always eager to share both his suffering, as we saw already, his artistic struggles and celebrations. More than the others, Ronyk seems to draw on varying epistemologies and operates within both the material and immaterial world. In an initial scene, he details how he became a painter. He dreamt of an old man who gave him

paintbrushes and paint. When he awoke and relayed the dream to his mother, she said its' prophecy would soon be communicated. At this moment, the camera pans a close-up of paint cans, paintbrushes, and canvas. Through this take, it is made clear that the dream predicted Ronyk's artistic talent. Because of the film's focus on his profession, he stands out among the other three social actors in this film.¹³³ Furthermore, when we see Ronyk in his studio, outside in rural areas such as the cemetery or a dirt road, or in his house, he is more times than not with his younger brother. The others, however, we see in their higher education or work environments which, typically speaking, function as part of the larger economy and many times are controlled by hierarchical structures. In this way, it seems that Ronyk participates more as part of the reconstituted economy discussed above by Irene León than part of the capitalist economy that values material production and financial gain. Given the fact that Ronyk presents himself and is portrayed through the camera as a male figure (regardless of his sexual orientation), it destabilizes Carosio's focus on women figures largely fulfilling the domestic labor enacted and under-appreciated in capitalist societies.¹³⁴

Flaviano, on the other-hand, although he attends a government funded educational institution, CONALEP, was once a student of the Zapatista movement and is now a

¹³³ Although the film focuses on Dolores's artistic ability as a photographer, this skill is employed in service of her job at the National Council for the Development of Indigenous Peoples. She is also a student working towards her degree in Communications.

¹³⁴ Convergent with this idea, Pedro López comments that in choosing his social actors he desired a diverse representation of life dreams (pers. comm.). Ronyk, as a male figure who follows his artistic passion fulfils this desired diversity sought by Pedro López.

sympathizer. As detailed in a scene above, Flaviano speaks of the injustices committed by the Mexican state and directed at indigenous populations. He stresses the importance of his people to resist the state's attempts to impose ideologies and to encourage dependency. Working towards a health technician certification, he integrates traditional medicinal knowledges pertinent to his home town. Honouring and privileging the expertise of his people, he utilizes his education at CONALEP to improve aspects of quotidian life that positively affect the health of his family such as a composting latrine and a stove with a chimney. He explains the benefits these changes will make in preventing illnesses common in his family as well as in his community. He acknowledges that many people in his town know the healing qualities of plants, and he is dedicated to continuing that tradition. Accordingly, Flaviano enacts a principle of BV in which Western economic practices are subordinated and instead he works towards what Escobar calls a "criteria of ecology, human dignity and social justice" (26). Instead of commercializing his knowledge of plant remedies for individual gain, Flaviano enacts a more humanitarian approach in which he works to improve the well-being of his community as a whole.

It is then that both Ronyk and Flaviano counter the separation of activity based on gender and instead focus on fostering and maintaining inter-personal and interconnected relationships among all living beings. Ronyk furthers this argument as much of his screen time is focused on sharing about his family. Many members have died and he is left to take care of his little brother who accompanies him in most scenes. Having presided over several of these deaths, Ronyk feels particularly drawn to maintaining a connection not

only with his deceased family members, but also with the geographical location of their passing and final resting place. Not only do these sites appear in his paintings, but he also frequents the cemetery where they are buried.

Upon a visit to his house outside of the city, we walk under an archway as he explains that his mother told him that such entrances welcome deities. Once inside, he shows us his garden of orchids and one of his paintings. As is made clear, Ronyk functions simultaneously in many worlds: he stays connected with family members who have passed on to another space and time; he is attentive to the dream world; he expresses himself through artistic endeavours; he commits to caring for his younger brother; and he is drawn to and makes flourish a host of orchids. Through Ronyk we see manifest the biocentrism of BV. “...ese Otro vivir...implica el bien para todos, incluidos hombres, mujeres, plantas, animales, tierra, agua, viento, montañas, muertos, sol, luna, entre muchos otros. Porque todos son complementarios y necesarios en un universo conformado por una compleja diversidad (universo-diverso)” (Concheiro y Núñez 185).

Fostering this integral connection with plants and his art and valuing familial relationships, it is curious that Ronyk never mentions starting his own family, whereas Flaviano does. The film instead focuses on his struggles and accomplishments as a painter. It is disorienting then, when in the last take of the documentary a medium low-angle shot frames Ronyk as he sits next to a woman holding an infant. The take cuts to him holding the baby and then he gives it back to the woman. There is no dialogue during this part, just the take of two adults and a baby sitting outside. Who is this woman and

where did she come from? Whose baby is it? Only when the credits run do we realize that it is Ronyk's wife and the baby is his offspring.

The close-up shot of the baby and its subsequent fade-out serves as the final take of the documentary. After seeming to resist any specific gender coupling or conclusions regarding sexual orientation, Pedro López decides to end with the image of a heteronormative family. Is this a nod towards promoting a certain gendered society for the future of Mexico? I maintain that it is not. Rather, the entire content of this documentary accumulates to encourage any type of relationship, regardless of where on the spectrum it lies, and any type of life-style as long as it is a good life. Perhaps, it is precisely for this reason that Pedro López resists drawing uniform conclusions for his social actors. If this is true, then the film coincides with the interconnectedness and inter-subjectivity of BV while simultaneously pushing the limits of the constructs of the male-female binary. It can be said that it proposes decolonial options to the heteronormative hegemony of Western modernity where certain bodies, activities, and sexual preferences are relegated to delineated spheres. Thus, I contend that *La pequeña* offers a subtle queering of BV.

CONCLUSION

Theorized as decolonial options to Western modernity, BV offers alternatives to socio-economic and political practices that dominate in such a society. Its principles carry the potential to carve out minoritarian spaces where diverse epistemologies and ethos form a new web of relations differing drastically from the structures inherent in Quijano's

matrix of colonial power. As discussed above however, with few exceptions the written work on BV struggles to rid itself of privileging heteronormativity and thus fails to fully recognize expressions and identifications operating outside of this framework. In part then, it disappoints a complete delinking from the centuries-old power impositions and hierarchical structures residual from the Spanish invasion rendering questionable its decolonial potential. Finding echoes of these concerns and realities in Silvia Vega Ugalde's, Julieta Paredes's and Regina Cochrane's work and in the discussions of indigenous women at AFM, I find it necessary to explore how artistic indigenous productions offer their own interpretations of BV. Through dismantling the idea that theory is somehow only beholden to those from Western territories, institutions and minds, and acknowledging the non-antagonistic link between theory and practice (practice is theory, theory is practice), I have situated, specifically, the Tsotsil-Maya documentary film, *La pequeña* as a theoretical offering to decolonial options (Simpson and Smith 8). Taking leads from Schiwy, Driskill, Simpson, Andrea Smith, and Muñoz, in this way we begin to open ourselves to truly decentering the historical and epistemic imaginations of Western modernity.

As I have shown in this chapter, *La pequeña* offers a diversity of representations on the struggle for a good life, and through this showing functions to queer particular aspects of BV. The verbal testimonies and actions of the social actors in *La pequeña* exercise agency in resisting the societal expectations of how to develop and live life. Instead, they voice and enact their own imaginings of the future that follow their own desires to improve themselves, and as a result their community. Moreover, the

testimonies relay past and current experiences revealing the intersections of race, gender, ethnicity, economy and politics within the context of a settler colonial society. In this way, *La pequeña* responds to Andrea Smith's task of uncovering and analyzing "the logics of settler colonialism as they affect all areas of life" (61). The employment of particular camera angles and shots, such as aligning the camera's lens with that of the social actor, shooting low-angle or close-ups at eye-level, and non-discriminatory implementation of such filming strategies equalizes and honors all the social actors and the paths they have chosen to follow.

While exemplifying aspects of BV principles, *La pequeña* also pushes at its limitations with respects to gender representation and expectation. Each in their own way, the social actors veer from settler colonial societal norms at play in both urban and rural settings that socialize genders in specific ways. In doing so they push against narrow definitions of gender expression adhered to by their surrounding society, the historical colonial past and presently found in writings on BV while also promoting self and community development instigated by individual desires of improvement and engagement. Pursuing their dreams and believing in their intuitions, instead of blindly following expectations of such a society, Dolores, Flaviano, Pascuala, Ronyk and even the director Pedro López queer BV by constructing ways of being and acting that not only question the dominant culture, politic and historic structures imposed by Western modernity but reject them as is. Instead, they propose radical alternatives that queer the present time and enable (re)imaginings of what the past and the future might hold for them and their communities.

Epilogue

My nine-month-old daughter and I brave the Los Angeles traffic to attend the 2018 UC Regents Lecturer performance at UCLA by Jack Gray and I Moving Lab. I first met Gray in 2014 when he was a visiting professor in the dance department at UCR. He is a Maori dance activator from Auckland, New Zealand, a founding member of Atamira Dance Company and the co-founder and producer of I Moving Lab, an international, indigenous, inter-cultural, inter-disciplinary global arts collective.

The show, I LAND 2018, is a series of performances folding in and expanding ideas of place and displacement, embodied knowledge, spiritual and political relationships to earth and its beings, claiming, reclaiming and letting go. One piece in particular catches my attention: *Pōhutu*, choreographed by Bianca Hyslop. A hanging clear plastic wall is lowered from the ceiling. Two dancers move, responding to the soundtrack of a radio that goes in and out of signal, catching snippets of different styles of music. After a while, one dancer takes a paint marker and draws a white undulating line, like a mountain range, across the plastic wall (see Figure 13). She places the marker on the floor and resumes movement.

Later, both her and her partner return to the wall. They each pick up a red marker. This time, they draw red lines that intersect the white. Arches and houses are sketched atop and cut through the white line. Red crosses hang above the white line. The dancers' drawing becomes frantic. Their movement rushed.



Figure 13: Photo by Scott Shaw. I LAND 2018 at Gibney Theater in New York City. Dancer downstage, Lehuanani DeFranco, upstage, Bianca Hyslop. Courtesy of I Moving Lab.

I hear the radio going in and out and I think back to how fast I drove on the freeway to get here; how many other cars were in front, behind and on either side of me. I remember naming the places we could see from the window of our car: a Denny's, a Walgreen's, a McDonald's.

I am reminded that I live in a settler colonial state. I stand on Tongva territory and am in the presence of indigenous ancestors who were the original inhabitants of Los Angeles. Yet, I must recall them, call on them, if I am, if we are, to remember. The permeations of colonialism are alive and present today, just in a different form. We have covered the rolling hills and valleys with the architecture of capitalism. We have filled the skies with fumes from the day's commute and populated them with satellites that survey and track our movement. The red X's in the sky lay claim to particles imbued with

our remnants. In contrast to the white curved line that represents a continuous land, the red lines are forces that disrupt, impose, control and disconnect.

In the post-performance reception, I meet Mercedes Francisca García Ordoñez, a Guatemalan actress from Grupo Sotz'il based in Sololá. We speak about the theater group's most recent production that emerged from a series of conversations with Kaqchikel-Maya communities sharing their experiences and relationships with land. *Uk'u'x Ulew/Escencia de la Tierra* (2014) represents local concerns regarding the influx of mining and monoculture industries and the negative consequences they have on rural society. Specifically, the African Palm farm business is forcing people off the land, and robbing them of their subsistence farming livelihood. In 2007, the Guatemalan state adopted the program, *ProRural* with the goal of promoting smallholder palm oil cultivation in hopes of reducing poverty and enhancing local food security (Hervas 1). The reality, as human geographer Anastasia Hervas writes, has been much different than the state narrative, "As oil palm continues to expand, the host community faces mounting socio-ecological costs including the depletion of natural resources, damage to roads, negative health impacts, and dwindling options for other types of employment" (2). Through *Uk'u'x Ulew/Escencia de la Tierra*, Grupo Sotz'il endeavors to respond to and reflect on the various issues confronting the climate and the environment. *Uk'u'x Ulew/Escencia de la Tierra* invites its viewers to harmonize and seek balance with the earth.

Intrigued by García Ordoñez's recount of how Grupo Sotz'il crafts the themes for their plays - given that it echoes the process Petrona de la Cruz Cruz and the theater group, *El reflejo de la diosa luna*, employ in the Highlands of Chiapas - I ask her if she knows of them and the work of FOMMA (see Chapter III). She has heard of them and is curious to know more about the all-female troupe. She asks me to introduce her to de la Cruz Cruz via email. I say I will.

Within several hours, I LAND 2018 made good on their mission of creating "space for intercultural and indigenous convergence, acknowledgement and ancestral recognition through interdisciplinary work," as stated in the evening's program. Border knowledges and lines of communication had been elicited and exchanged. People from distant geographies had shared physical space. What is to be learned from engagements such as I LAND 2018? How are performers and observers transformed in this process? What type of collaborations might emerge?

The practice of decolonization is ever-evolving. Not a week goes by that I don't hear or read about events or actions that defend communities and land from patriarchal violence and the death traps of capitalism: In April of this year, marches erupted across Ecuador, meeting in Quito to protest large-scale open-pit mining projects (Moon, "Ecuador Grants"). This same month, Zapatista women organized and held the "First International Political, Artistic, Sports, and Cultural Encounter for Women Who Struggle." In attendance were 2,000 Zapatista women and 5,000 female visitors from around the world (Hess, "Zapatista Women"). In March, a convergence in Puyo, Ecuador of 350 women representing seven indigenous Amazonian nationalities showed their

opposition to extractivist industries (Orellana Matute, “Ecuador’s Indigenous Women’s”). In December of 2017, the Community Environmental Legal Defense Fund (CELDF), redacted an easement for a private land owner in Kaua’i, Hawai’i, recognizing nature’s rights. The owner stated, ““I established the easement in hopes that other landowners and governments will also understand the need to change the status of nature from property to bearing rights,”” (Community Environmental Legal Defense Fund, “First Rights of Nature”). In March of this same year, lawmakers in El Salvador banned all mining for gold and other metals (Palumbo and Malkin, “El Salvador”). The machine of capitalism advances, yet there is sustained dedication to altering its course through direct action and evolving methods of intervention.

The archive collected in this dissertation is small in scope, but gestures towards a much larger body of work that is ever expanding. What other organizations, groups, individuals, and movements are responding to the tensions of settler colonialism, neocolonialism, capitalism and all their varied violent forms? As systems of power morph, what kinds of resistance and artistic responses will be created? Or the inverse of this, as the resistance builds, will aspects of this neocolonial power be revealed and disentangled? Will there be channels of exchange formed within nations and across borders bolstering networks of solidarity? How will these activations be documented so they can circulate, engage and inspire, and where will they be archived for further use?¹³⁵

¹³⁵ During the UC Regents Lecturer post-performance panel discussion at UCLA on May 10, 2018, Jack Gray alluded to the importance of spiritual space *and* digital space. The digital allows us to hold onto the memories, to share them, to reuse and re-energize them; Amalia Córdova, Digital Curator at Smithsonian Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage, at a recent presentation in Santa Barbara, CA at the Media in the Americas

Furthermore, how will expressions of BV, or will it at all, respond to the changing faces of neocolonialism, extraction, socialist ideas, and gender identity? Will it respond to queerness and queering? How will conversations of decolonization continue to expand its limits to include the question of gender? How will people and cultural productions use their expressions of gender to posit new theories of decolonization?

And lastly, how can I, and other academics, form collaborative approaches to our research, further drawing lines of intersection and connection? How can we work to generate a sense of interculturality, a concept developed by Confederación de Nacionalidades Indígenas del Ecuador (CONAIE) and other indigenous and Afro organizations that refers to “dialogue and co-existence among diverse cultural groups under conditions of equality” (Escobar, “Latin America” 24)?

In the last part of *Pōhutu*, a dancer returns to the wall with the white marker and begins to write backwards so the audience can read it, “Te Mauri ka tū, Te Mauri ka oho, Te Mauri ka rewa, Te Mauri ka rere, Te Mauri ka tau” / “the life force stands/affirms/upright, the life force awakens, the life forces melts, the life force flies, the life force is peaceful” (Trans. by Jack Gray) (see Figure 14).¹³⁶

conference, posed similar questions, where is indigenous media production housed? How can it be compiled and catalogued making it accessible for viewership? What are the politics inherent in selecting works to be archived?

¹³⁶ These words are from a prayer given to the choreographer, Bianca Hyslop, by an elder, Tui Ranapiri-Ransfield (Gray pers. comm.).

The other dancer follows, spreading out the paint from the letters as if she is searching for significance within them; as if she is transferring the spirit of the words to her fingers and hands, internalizing them, embodying them and making new meaning.



Figure 14: Photo by Jacqueline Shea-Murphy. I LAND 2018 at Glorlya Kaufman Dance Theater in Los Angeles, CA. Dancers from left to right, Bianca Hyslop and Casey Flores. Courtesy of I Moving Lab.

Like *Pōhutu*, the cultural productions analyzed in this dissertation are indeed “forces of life” that confront the myriad forms of oppression born through colonialism. They breathe life into the question of gender allowing for a deeper, more thorough interrogation of the internal workings of the colonial matrix and how it relates, and effects, the structuring of power in its current iteration of neoliberal capitalism. Moreover, the pieces rouse us to reflect and respond to their urgent call of activism.

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