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Publication Date

2015

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Living Laboratories: Remapping the Legacy of Experiments in American Empire

by

Tala Khanmalek

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

Ethnic Studies

and the Designated Emphasis

in

Women, Gender and Sexuality

in the

Graduate Division

of the

University of California, Berkeley

Committee in charge:

Professor Keith P. Feldman, Chair

Professor Beth Piatote

Professor Paola Bacchetta

Professor Dorothy E. Roberts

Fall 2015

Abstract

Living Laboratories: Remapping the Legacy of Experiments in American Empire

by

Tala Khanmalek

Doctor of Philosophy in Ethnic Studies

Designated Emphasis in Women, Gender and Sexuality

University of California, Berkeley

Professor Keith Feldman, Chair

Living Laboratories traces the gendered racialization of U.S. empire's colonial expansion from the mid-eighteenth to the mid-nineteenth century, as well as women of color feminist texts of the late-twentieth century that reframe these legacies for our present. Each chapter focuses on what I call a "living laboratory," a transnational site of state-sanctioned medical experimentation on populations regarded as bearers of disease. By examining the laws that precede invasive public health measures, I show how these living laboratories within and beyond the United States' national territorial borders circulate interconnected regimes of control. Central to my genealogical remapping of experiments in American empire are the narrated experiences of those not fully recognizable in the annals of history. By reading multi-genre literary works in relation to the juridical and scientific archive, Living Laboratories recovers agential subjects through an alternative grid of intelligibility. In doing so, I emphasize the distinctly embodied subjectivities that emerge from wounded flesh, pursuing a critique of what it means to be human from the literally and figuratively dismembered perspectives of writers Gayl Jones, Gloria Anzaldúa, and Aurora Levíns Morales.

To Mamman

Mimi

and Louise

Julie Thi Underhill

and her family

~In Continued Remembrance Of Our Survival~

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Acknowledgments

Thank you to my ancestors for guiding me on this path and to Lazuli, for becoming another ancestral guide.

Thank you to my dissertation committee members—Keith Feldman, Beth Piatote, Paola Bacchetta, and Dorothy Roberts—for believing in me more than I believed in myself. Your radical mentorship has transformed me into the scholar I dreamt of becoming.

Thank you to my undergraduate advisor, Nelson Maldonado-Torres, for teaching me how to wield the pen as a sword.

Thank you to Laura E. Pérez, for teaching me about women of color feminisms, spiritual activism, and the arts.

Thank you to Shari Huhndorf, for affirming my future in academia despite Lazuli.

Thank you to Trinh T. Minh-ha, for teaching me how to read, write, and listen.

Thank you to all the staff members in the Ethic Studies and Gender and Women's Studies Departments without whom I could not have completed my degree and our departments simply could not exist: Francisca Cázares, Jeannie Imazumi, Latonya Minor, Dewey St. Germaine, Eileen Andrade, and Althea Grannum-Cummings.

Thank you to Carla M. Trujillo for supporting graduate students of color in every possible way.

Thank you to Corliss Lee for teaching me how to use the library and your research assistance.

Thank you to the Designated Emphasis in Women, Gender and Sexuality and especially, to Mel Chen for leading the DE's dissertation research seminar in which I started writing my dissertation. Thank you also to Mel Chen for co-leading the Center for the Study of Sexual Culture/Center for Race and Gender dissertation workshop retreat in which I received feedback on what became the first chapter of my dissertation.

Thank you to Alisa Bierria, Associate Director of the Center for Race and Gender, for showing me how to become a better scholar by becoming a better activist. It is because of you that UC Berkeley leads in cutting-edge interdisciplinary scholarship on race and gender.

Thank you to the Multicultural Community Center for being a safe space on campus for my students and I. Thank you to the Program Director, Elisa Diana Huerta, for transforming the MCC into the university we hope for Cal to become.

Thank you to the Graduate Assembly's Women of Color Initiative for allowing me to be WOCI Coordinator and co-organize an Empowering Women of Color Conference that went down in history.

Thank you to the Politics of Biology and Race in the 21st Century working group members—Keith Feldman, Mahasin Mujahid, Irene Headen, and Emon Elboudwarej—with whom I co-created the very first research collaboration between the Ethnic Studies Department and School of Public Health.

Thank you to *nineteen sixty nine* and Jason U. Kim for entrusting me with it. Thank you to the editorial board of the issue on “Healing Justice,” to the contributors and Aurora Levíns Morales.

Thank you to the Science and Justice Research Center at UC Santa Cruz for taking me on as a Visiting Scholar.

Thank you to Travis Wilds for copyediting my dissertation. I could not have finished it without your help! Thank you also to Shirin Vossoughi, Julie Thi Underhill, and Yomaira C. Figueroa for offering critical feedback on my work.

Thank you to the fellow grad students who became allies and close friends: Julie Thi Underhill, Maria Faini, Kim Tran, Sara Ramírez, Angela Aguilar, Irene Headen, Kim McNair, Victoria Massie, Ugo Edu, Heather Rastovac, Yomaira C. Figueroa, John J. Dougherty, Marco Antonio Flores, and many more.

Thank you to the participants of Womyn’s Circle as well as the Abigail Reynolds Hodgen Publication Fund for helping us publish an anthology of our writing.

Thank you to Ozben and Brad for supporting me during long hours of studying at Far Leaves Tea, my favorite place to dissertate.

Thank you to my best friends, Adi Afek, Ashlee George, and Ella Gluckman, aka the biscuits. You are my chosen family, and I could not have survived without you.

Thank you to my extended chosen family: Julie Thi Underhill, Shirin Vossoughi, Clara Lee, Dina Omar, Mahaliyah O, Stephanie Cowling, Adela Nieves, Ana María Agüero Jahannes, Vanessa Quezada, Greg Epstein, Donna Harati, Sarah Fishleder, Meghann Carey, and many more.

Thank you to the community-based organizations that kept me grounded, including but not limited to: BrasArte, the Niroga Institute, the Healing Clinic Collective, the Yerba Buena Center for the Arts, the Cultural Conservancy, and the East Bay Meditation Center.

Thank you to the students who made it all worth it; Eliana Flores, Seleny Rodriguez, Andrea Ikeda, Naphtalie Jeanty, Mars Rosas, Preyanka Gulati, Karla Gómez-Pelayo, Avery Marguerite Heine, Kristen Leckie, Bobbie Dousa, Maria Heredia, Kahn Ryu, Annie Lagunas, Emily Kuo, and many more.

Thank you to Yeye Teish, Loraine Van Tuyl, and Farhana Huq for mentoring me throughout grad school.

Thank you to Emon Elboudwarej, my partner of nearly five years, for your everlasting love. Thank you for holding my hand as I learned to live with Lazuli and for experiencing the ebb and flow of life by my side. Your work in the School of Public Health watered the seeds of

this dissertation. Thank you also to Heidi and Fakher Elboudwarej for treating me like your daughter, and to Omes for supporting me like a sister.

Thank you to my beloved cousins, Lili Khanmalek, Azeen Khanmalek and Tetona Jackson, for truly caring about me. I am so grateful that we are related.

Thank you to Julie Thi Underhill, to whom this dissertation is dedicated, for offering me your bed when I didn't have a place to sleep. You saved me, and I am forever indebted to you.

Thank you to Andrew Chang, my lomi, my anchor. With your unconditional support, I have accomplished so many things that I thought were impossible. I wrote this dissertation as we fell in love and now I understand why. You are a miracle and God is most definitely in this love.

Thank you to Mamman, Babba, and Abby. To Babba Hooshi, Mimi, and Mamman Fakhri. I am grateful for your encouragement, wisdom, and patience.

Thank you to my great-grandmother, Louise, for communing with me and revealing your true face to be my own.

Thank you to my grandmother, Alieh Mina Eshghi, for being my whole world.

Most of all, thank you to my mother, Mitra Zohary, for sacrificing your life so that I may live a better one.

Mamman, this is for you.

why some people be mad at me sometimes

they ask me to remember
but they want me to remember
their memories
and i keep on remembering
mine

-Lucille Clifton¹

Introduction: Originating Conditions

Grandma's Story

Let me tell you a story, my grandma's story. In the fall of 1981, just after the Islamic Revolution, my grandparents fled their homeland. They resolved to join their daughter, my mother, in rural Texas, where she had immigrated two years prior. Since Mehrabad airport was shut down, they had no other choice but to cross the border illegally. My grandfather, Babba Hooshi hired a smuggler, though smugglers were known to abuse migrants, and they left Tehran the very next day. For two nights they stayed somewhere in Rezaiyeh, then the smuggler bussed my grandparents along with three young men to the Iranian side of the border. On the third day, they set out on horseback across a rocky mountain range towards Turkey. When the group spotted patrollers hunting for border crossers, the smuggler ordered them to leave the horses behind and continue on foot. He led the group to a cave, where they hid out until nightfall, but it was too dark to see the path ahead by moonlight alone. My grandma, the only woman in the group, fell off a boulder and broke her leg. The smuggler abandoned my grandparents, taking their documents with him.

By daybreak, my grandma was in so much pain that she and Babba Hooshi decided to surrender. She yelled the only word of Turkish she knew, "friend," and patrollers detained them immediately. On the Turkish side, there was an immigration station with a makeshift hospital connected to a detention center. My grandma was hospitalized in a room above where Baba Hooshi was imprisoned for close to a month. The patients were mostly residents of the border town and every day one of them would die. My grandma woke up to the corpse of her neighbor, wondering whether she would die next. She was temporarily transferred to a nearby city for surgery instead. Some newspaper reporters scouting around the hospital for illegal aliens interviewed her. They asked her about the influx of Iranians attempting to cross the border and took a picture of my grandma in her hospital bed. She told them her story; but even though a translator accompanied the reporter, none of her words were published.

¹ Lucille Clifton, *Blessing the Boats: New and Selected Poems 1988-2000* (Rochester, NY: Boa Editions, 2000), 38.

Shortly after my grandma's surgery, Turkish border patrol released my grandparents. For months they hopped from place to place throughout Istanbul. When they finally obtained fake passports, Thailand was the only country to grant them visas. They lived there for a few months, then migrated to Malaysia for a few more. Over a year after they left Tehran, my grandparents were granted visas to enter the United States. From Malaysia they flew to the Philippines, then to Hawai'i before reaching California, from where they finally flew to Texas.

My grandma's story doesn't begin or end here. This is just the skeleton of a story I grew up hearing over and over again. Though she told a different version of the story every time, the fact that something changed about her status as she moved from place to place, within and between nations, stayed the same. The older I became, the more she added bits and pieces of previously censored details, like how scared she was of being raped at the immigration station hospital while unable to move. It was very common for border patrollers to sexually assault female detainees, she said matter-of-factly. One day my grandma told me a version of the story with a detail I hadn't heard before. At some point, she said, the doctor gave her a hysterectomy.

Understanding the conditions of possibility, the originating conditions, for this single detail became the purpose of my research. I learned that many immigrant women of my grandmother's generation had hysterectomies but I didn't understand how, and to some extent, I still don't. "Truth does not make sense; it exceeds meaning and exceeds measure. It exceeds all regimes of truth. So, when we insist on telling over and over again, we insist on repetition in re-creation (and vice versa)," states Trinh T. Minh-ha.² Even after years of research, there is a part of this detail I will never fully understand. It is the part I inherited from my grandma, the part that cannot be spoken. In me, and in my mother, it lives on as the memory of a feeling particular to the experience of having a part of your body stolen from the inside.

The more research I conducted, the more I realized that my grandma's experience is actually a systemic injury. I learned about the 1978 *Madrigal v. Quilligan* case, in which ten Mexican-American mothers filed a federal class-action lawsuit against their doctor for sterilizing them without consent at the Los Angeles County-USC Medical Center. Once the epicenter of eugenics in the United States, California had one of the highest sterilization rates during the 1970s. However, the judge ruled in favor of Dr. James Quilligan despite his blatantly eugenic motives for sterilizing the women. Director Renee Tajima-Peña recently released a film about the case titled, *No Más Bebés*, once again bringing sterilization abuse to the fore.

The following story is also my grandma's story, though it starts earlier and further afield. At its core, this dissertation surfaces the similarities between wounds across time and space. I first recognized these similarities, and many more, on an intuitive level; further research echoed what I felt, leading me to other fragments of information. Here, I connect pieces of stories to each other, not for the purpose of recovering a whole narrative, but for the purpose of pushing against the boundaries of a memory that refuses—like water—to be limited by time, space, and even an individual body.

² Trinh T. Minh-ha, *Woman, Native, Other: Writing Postcoloniality and Feminism* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1989), 123.

I want *Madrigal v. Quilligan*, my grandma's story, all of these stories, to be touchstones for bioethics, for ethics, for the transformation of reality. I want reparations for the estimated 7,600 people, mostly young women of color, sterilized by the Eugenics Board of North Carolina from 1933-1977.³ I want everyone to know about the "Mississippi appendectomy" so it may never happen again.⁴ I want the past to end, but it endures. It endures in the California Institution for Women in Corona. The Valley State Prison for Women in Chowchilla.⁵ The South Texas Family Residential Center.⁶ On September 3, 2015, Harris County Sheriff's deputies arrested Blanca Borrego during her gynecologist appointment at the Northeast Women's Healthcare clinic in Atascocita, TX. The clinic staff called the cops on Borrego, an undocumented immigrant, while she was being examined. My grandma reunited with her daughter in Harris County, where I was born. Borrego's story, my grandma's story, is me, is now, is the contemporary legacy of a painful history without end. "In this chain and continuum, I am but one link."⁷ One link in the continuous, inescapable present.

Re-Membering the Past

"I am searching for a method that will turn destiny back," an anonymous detainee carved into the barrack walls of the Angel Island Immigration Station.⁸ This dissertation is in part my search for a similar method, one that would produce different outcomes other than what I know

³ Kim Severson, "North Carolina Eugenics Compensation Program Shelved," *New York Times*, June 20, 2012, http://www.nytimes.com/2012/06/21/us/north-carolina-eugenics-compensation-program-shelved.html?_r=0. See also Allison Kent Cobb's Thesis submitted for the Kendrick K. Kelley Program in Historical Studies in the History Department at Davidson College, "Hardly a Cultural Aberration: The North Carolina Eugenics Program, 1933-1977," (April 8, 2015).

⁴ Civil Rights activist Fannie Lou Hamer exposed the reality of sterilization abuse in Mississippi after she was given a hysterectomy without consent in 1961. The procedure was so common in Mississippi during the 1960s and 70s that it was nicknamed "Mississippi appendectomy." See Jennifer Nelson, *Women of Color and the Reproductive Rights Movement* (New York: NYU Press, 2003), 68.

⁵ In 2013, The Center for Investigative Reporting revealed that: "Doctors under contract with the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation sterilized nearly 150 female inmates from 2006 to 2010 without required state approvals" at the California Institution for Women in Corona or Valley State Prison for Women in Chowchilla. Corey Johnson, "Female Inmates Sterilized in California Prisons without Approval," *The Center for Investigative Reporting*, July 7, 2013, <http://cironline.org/reports/female-inmates-sterilized-california-prisons-without-approval-4917>.

⁶ In July of 2015, nearly 250 immigrant children were given an overdose of the hepatitis A vaccine at the South Texas Family Residential Center, which is an immigration detention center. Natalie Schachar, "Children at Detention Center Given Adult Doses of Hepatitis A Vaccine," *Los Angeles Times*, July 4, 2015, <http://www.latimes.com/nation/nationnow/la-na-detention-center-hepatitis-20150704-story.html>.

⁷ Trinh T. Minh-ha, *Woman, Native, Other*, 122.

⁸ Lai, Him, Genny Lim, and Judy Yung, eds., *Island: Poetry and History of Chinese Immigrants on Angel Island, 1910-1940* (Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press, 1980), 64.

has already happened. A method, you could say, that will turn destiny back by re-membering the past, the originating conditions of destiny itself. Above all else, I wanted, *needed* to see my grandmother's story in "a different mirror," as the late Ronald Takaki puts it.⁹ If I could choose the mirror myself, then maybe her story would change. Maybe what happened wouldn't have happened. Maybe she would stop hurting, and my mother would stop hurting, and I would stop hurting too.

I began by conducting archival research at the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) in New York, NY on the Ellis Island Immigration Station, where the first public health hospital was built in 1902. Before the NARA moved to the Alexander Hamilton U.S. Custom House, holdings were kept above the Varick Street Immigration Court in Greenwich Village. Every time I visited the NARA, I entered through the Department of Homeland Security where an Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agent, who always assumed that I was going to court, inspected me even though the NARA was usually just as packed.

Many people visited the NARA in New York on a daily basis to search for their ancestors in immigrant arrival records. In 2008, the NARA partnered with Ancestry.com to digitize millions of records for genealogical research shortly after several "direct-to-consumer" genetic genealogy products entered the market. By 2012, the year before I began conducting archival research, Ancestry.com had released a new autosomal DNA test called AncestryDNA. Whereas products like 23andMe, deCODEme, and Pathway Genomics, offered some degree of autosomal ancestry analysis, AncestryDNA included a Genetic Ethnicity Summary that traced your ancestry to specific pre-categorized racial groups.

In addition to receiving a statistical breakdown of their ethnicity, consumers could map a virtual genealogy at the NARA. Visiting the Ellis Island Immigration Museum likewise revolved around a hunt for origins on the molecular level.¹⁰ In short, I began conducting archival research during a time when the Statue of Liberty-Ellis Island Foundation was rememorizing the history of immigration to the United States not only as an inclusive one, but also as a history that originates from the good citizen's family tree. At the same time, the ongoing backlash against immigrants following 9/11 led to increasingly restrictive immigration, especially border patrol policies in the name of homeland security.

Specifically built in 1910 to prevent Chinese immigrants from entering the United States, the Angel Island Immigration Station cannot avoid the nation's history of immigration exclusion. However, conducting archival research at the NARA in San Bruno, CA proved equally limiting as a historical research method. I wanted what Sylvia Wynter calls a "counterpoetics of the

⁹ Ronald Takaki, *A Different Mirror: A History of Multicultural America* (New York, NY: Black Bay Books, 2008).

¹⁰ The Statue of Liberty-Ellis Island Foundation website describes genealogical research as an "ancestor hunt" in which you must "surround and conquer:" <http://www.libertyellisfoundation.org/genealogy>.

propter nos,” or civilizational discourse of modernity.¹¹ For this, I had to search elsewhere while reading what federal officials wrote about Chinese immigrants during the exclusion era. I turned to the literary arts, where I’ve always turned for an alternative account of the past. In case studies of haunting, explains Avery Gordon, literary fictions give rise to sociological information absent from the archive.¹² In addition to conducting fieldwork at both the Ellis and Angel Island Immigration Stations for what became the second chapter of this dissertation, I expanded my archival research to include poetry by Chinese immigrants detained on Angel Island, not as separate from the archive, but as another archival document in counterpoint to the INS correspondence files.

It’s not that there is no record of the history I want to tell in this dissertation. The problem is that in the doctor’s registry of patients at the Ellis Island Immigration Station, I found body parts where I searched for people. As Michel-Rolph Trouillot reminds, any historical narrative “is a particular bundle of silences.”¹³ I was prepared for silences, for the archive to construct subjects through silences. The contradiction I kept coming up against though, was that according to the NARA, the people I searched for weren’t subjects at all. They were ontological impossibilities. Listed by organ instead of name in the doctor’s registry of patients. They were cut up into body parts—eyes, heart, lungs—revealing the ways in which the archive both constructs subjects through silences and through the very logic of decorporealization whose originating conditions I sought to trace. “To read the archive,” declares Saidiya Hartman, “is to enter a mortuary.”¹⁴ How do you read against the grain of body parts? What about body parts that aren’t there, like a uterus that has been surgically removed from someone’s body without consent? To develop a method that will turn destiny back, I had to develop a method of humanistic study in which the human was no longer whole.

Building on the interdisciplinary methods of comparative ethnic studies scholarship, I pieced together a reading practice grounded in building bridges between texts. In *Domestic Subjects*, Beth Piatote argues that, “literature challenges law by imagining other plots and other resolutions that at times are figured as nonresolution or states of suspension.”¹⁵ My intertextual reading of women of color feminist texts and the law as well as other archival documents in this dissertation seeks to flesh out imaginative resolutions for contradictions that can’t be resolved in reality, contradictions like my grandmother’s hysterectomy. By situating matters of the flesh

¹¹ Sylvia Wynter, “1492: A New World View,” in *Race, Discourse, and the Origin of the Americas: A New World View*, ed. Vera Lawrence Hyatt and Rex Nettleford (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1995), 27.

¹² Avery Gordon, *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 25.

¹³ Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995), 26.

¹⁴ Saidiya Hartman, *Lose Your Mother: A Journey Along the Atlantic Slave Route* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2007), 17.

¹⁵ Beth Piatote, *Domestic Subjects: Gender, Citizenship and Law in Native American Literature* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013), 10.

within a materialist historiography of “living laboratories,” this dissertation engages the wounded body as a subject of historical inquiry. Furthermore, intertextuality stands in direct contrast to the authorial voice of scientific studies, allowing for a dialogic narrative of history to emerge, one that is not based on absolute truths.

In *Violence Over the Land*, Ned Blackhawk develops a method of research that centralizes “the indigenous body in pain.”¹⁶ As a method, re-membling the past through the violence of dismemberment likewise attempts to account for bodily pain. But, how does one account for bodily pain when it resists representation at every turn?¹⁷ I still don’t know, and I’m not sure if that’s the right question anymore. What I’ve realized is that re-membling the past requires that we remember the pained body as opposed to representing bodily pain. In *Scenes of Subjection*, Hartman argues that the recognition of loss “entails a remembering of the pained body, not by way of a simulated wholeness but precisely through the recognition of the amputated body in its amputatedness, in the insistent recognition of the violated body as human flesh, in the cognition of its needs, and in the anticipation of its liberty.” “In other words, it is the ravished body that holds out the possibility of restitution, not the invocation of an illusory wholeness or the desired return to an originary plentitude.”¹⁸ Violence produces new narratives of subjectivity that literature helps me re-member. It helps me flesh out imaginative resolutions within a “transrelational” framework to confront “what reaches down deep beneath the waters or beneath the symbolics of emancipation, free labor, free citizen.”¹⁹

Transrelationality

A “transrelational” framework is an approach to re-membling the past that combines transnational feminist theories with a relational way of understanding the obscured connections between contingent historical events across national borders. It is a paradigm for elucidating how stories converge and diverge on the imperial spectrum. The spatiotemporal shifts from one chapter of this dissertation to another led me to view things in what Shu-mei Shih calls “relational comparison,” a mode of analysis that considers historical relationalities between separated entities brought together for comparison. Viewing history from the sea’s perspective, contends Shih, “allows us to see the world as an archipelago, where different land masses (whether the so-called continents or the so-called islands) are all in fact islands; though of

¹⁶ Ned Blackhawk, *Violence Over the Land: Indians and Empires in the Early American West* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006), 8.

¹⁷ As Elaine Scarry holds, physical pain resists expression through language. *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 4 and 19.

¹⁸ Saidiya Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 74.

¹⁹ Gordon, *Ghostly Matters*, 168-69.

varying sizes, they are also all interconnected by the sea.”²⁰ In other words, viewing history from the sea’s perspective arrives at interconnections between entities. I am interested in bringing the sea’s perspective to bear on transnational feminist theories through a “transrelational” framework.

The sea connects one place to the next in this dissertation, creating a navigable waterway that holds an archive system of its own—an *oceanic* archive system—of every crossing. “The sea is History,” declares Derek Walcott.²¹ And as such, the sea is as an access point to remembering the past. This dissertation constantly folds back on itself as my argument advances in waves. The connective tissue between chapters is, I think, the most important intervening space. And of course, it is the space with no words. “The Middle Passage, as global capitalism’s constitutive act, filled the waters with the ghosts that imbricate the civilization slavery built,” asserts Jenna Brager in “Bodies of Water.” “The ocean is still where capitalism leaves its refuse, swirling gyres of trash and the sediment of corpses.”²² Ghosts upon ghosts, ghosts of people. How does one discern the sediment of corpses from other refuse? Gordon explains that when something becomes haunted, “it is the complexities of its social relations that the ghostly figures.”²³ Yet beyond wreckage, beyond the haunted objects in the deep, lie the dead who people the ocean, transforming the very substance of water into ghostly matter. “Sentience soaks all things. Caresses all things. Enlivens all things. Water overflows with memory. Emotional Memory. Bodily Memory. Sacred Memory,” states M. Jacqui Alexander in *Pedagogies of Crossing*. “Crossings are never undertaken all at once, and never once and for all.”²⁴

Water has memory. Anything dissolved in it becomes water memory. If water has memory then it also remembers. In “The Site of Memory,” Toni Morrison writes that:

The act of imagination is bound up with memory. You know, they straightened out the Mississippi River in places, to make room for houses and livable acreage. Occasionally the river floods these places. ‘Floods’ is the word they use, but in face it is not flooding; it is remembering. Remembering where it used to be. All water has a perfect memory and is forever trying to get back to where it was.²⁵

²⁰ Shih, Shu-mei, “Comparison as Relation,” in *Comparison: Theories, Approaches, Uses*, ed. Rita Felski and Susan Friedman (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2013), 11.

²¹ Derek Walcott, “The Sea is History,” in *Selected Poems*, ed. Edward Baugh (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2007), 137.

²² Jenna Brager, “Bodies of Water,” *The New Inquiry*, May 12, 2015, <http://thenewinquiry.com/essays/bodies-of-water>.

²³ Gordon, *Ghostly Matters* 179.

²⁴ M. Jacqui Alexander, *Pedagogies of Crossing: Meditations on Feminism, Sexual Politics, Memory, and the Sacred* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), 290.

²⁵ Toni Morrison, “The Site of Memory” in *What Moves At the Margin: Selected Nonfiction*, ed. Carolyn C. Denard, (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2008), 77.

A materialist historiography is, for me, attentive to the memory of water and how that memory operates in the construction of narratives. The sea is central to the territorialized sites of U.S. empire in this dissertation, each of which border a body of water. Treating the sea as containing an oceanic archive system thus articulates with my reading of living laboratories as transnational sites of state-sanctioned medical experimentation on populations regarded as bearers of disease. Water functions as a barrier, but also as a kind of bridge, highlighting the ways in which these sites are historically connected.

Living Laboratories

The *living* laboratory is not a space of living or dying. It is a space of suffering. It is a space where a nexus of historical and discursive threads become entangled in the flesh. In a living laboratory, the encounter with science points to the fundamental contradiction of the United States Public Health Service (USPHS), which did not recognize all immigrants as being fully human. For the USPHS, some immigrants were contaminating agents. Building on the work of historians Nayan Shah and Natalia Molina, this dissertation seeks to show how public health has not only shaped the meaning of race in the early twentieth century, but also developed biologizing techniques and technologies of social differentiation that operate through the body. That cut the body. At the same time this dissertation seeks to situate the originating conditions of what I call “invasive control” in living laboratories that precede the USPHS. It seeks to write the history of public health and medicine more generally into colonialism.

In his study of racial hygiene in the Philippines, Warwick Anderson reveals that “the archipelago was frequently characterized as a laboratory of hygienic modernity.”²⁶ For American medical officers in U.S. colonies, the laboratory was not just a representational space but also a controlled site of colonial governance. In other words, the laboratory motif extended far beyond colonial discourse. Specifically designed for experimentation, the laboratory provided a foolproof method of imperial management that could simultaneously produce scientific knowledge about the colonies through a particular genre of its own. In *Africa as a Living Laboratory*, Helen Tilley further reveals that “the rise and increasing supremacy of laboratories for chemical, pharmaceutical, diagnostic, and experimental purposes developed in tandem with the ascendancy of field sciences whose domain of expertise was often colonial terrain.”²⁷ In other words, colonial medicine is not a corrupt branch of medicine, and discourses of race, nation, and contagion are foundational to the practice of colonialism. The USPHS advanced U.S. nationalist and imperialist interests as a sanitary mission. Its invasive tactics of exclusion weren’t extraordinary but were and still are the norm.

²⁶ Warwick Anderson, *Colonial Pathologies: American Tropical Medicine, Race, and Hygiene in the Philippines* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006), 3. For more on medical laboratories in the Philippines, see also Anderson's “‘Where Every Prospect Pleases and Only Man Is Vile’: Laboratory Medicine as Colonial Discourse,” *Critical Inquiry* 18.3 (Spring, 1992): 506-29.

²⁷ Helen Tilley, *Africa as a Living Laboratory: Empire, Development, and the Problem of Scientific Knowledge, 1870-1950* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011), 12.

In living laboratories, bodies become clinical material for experiments in US imperial intervention. Subjugation becomes “capillary.” In *Haunted by Empire*, Ann Stoler explains that “domains of the intimate” “are strategic for exploring two related but often discretely understood sources of colonial control: one that works through the requisition of *bodies*—those of both colonials and colonized—and a second that molds new ‘structures of feelings’—new habits of heart and mind that enable those categories of difference and subject formation.”²⁸ She argues that intimate domains—beds, kitchens, nurseries, and schoolrooms—are strategic sites of structured violence of imperial states. In living laboratories, flesh becomes an intimate domain. Violence is inscribed directly onto and *into* the body, shifting the lines of identity as well as anatomy.

This dissertation specifically foregrounds the gendered dimensions of biopolitical subjection by asking: how does the scientific racism of earlier centuries create the conditions of possibility for the discursive and material production of gendered racialization? An intersectional approach to the nexus of race, nation, and contagion illuminates its gendered dimensions to show how racialized bodies are not only seen as infectious but also as hypersexualized and prone to spreading sexually transmitted diseases. An intersectional approach reveals the image and idea of the racialized and gendered body as the ultimate contaminating agents that would pollute the nation’s bloodline.

At the same time, this dissertation seeks to reframe the laboratory as a site of contestation and of multiple agencies and uncontrolled space. Creative works of the imagination facilitate a reclaiming of the liminal space of the living laboratory as a site of intervention. They help us understand medical experimentation as state-sanctioned violence and at the same time expose its limits as an instrument of governance. These narratives highlight the failed interpellation, speak against the abstractions of scientific management, and produce a counter discourse of flesh, holding up the broken body, the very bodies figured as contagion, as a site from which contestation materializes and exposes injury as communicating something both within and beyond language, within and beyond the state.

Remapping the Legacy

A history without clear or fixed origins, yet not an unlikely genealogy. Each chapter highlights a key node of American empire often overlooked in the history of U.S. imperial science. Chapter 1, “*Partus Sequitur Ventrem*,” examines the medical regulation of enslaved women’s reproduction in the antebellum South through the intergenerational impact of slave breeding as it is remembered in Gayl Jones’ *Corregidora* (1975). Though Brazil’s 1871 Free Womb Law claimed to repeal the matrilineal heritability of slave status, the legal doctrine of *partus sequitur ventrem* haunts the novel’s main character whose foremothers flee Brazil only to face the wake of another slave nation in Kentucky. The concept “legal binds” names the ways

²⁸ Ann Stoler, “Intimidations of Empire: Predicaments of the Tactile and Unseen,” in *Haunted by Empire: Geographies of Intimacy in North American History*, ed. Ann Stoler (Durham, NC: 2006), 2.

in which binding precedent perpetuates the conditions of partial personhood. Its corollary concept, “invasive control,” names the medicalized social control mechanisms that encroach upon bodily boundaries in order to bind flesh.

Chapter 2, “Loathsome and Contagious Diseases,” shows how “invasive control” serves to regulate immigrants through medical inspection at the Angel Island Immigration Station during the Chinese exclusion era by coupling archival materials and poems engraved in the barrack walls, which Asian-American activists preserved in *Island* (1980). With a state-of-the-art bacteriology lab on Angel Island, the United States Public Health Service (USPHS) tested Chinese immigrants for excludable diseases just as the transpacific trade in contracted “coolie” labor expanded to replace a once enslaved labor force on plantations throughout the Americas.

Chapter 3, “Gasoline Baths,” investigates medical inspection at the El Paso Immigration Station, where Chinese immigrants attempted to bypass Angel Island at the US-Mexico border. Here I examine the *El Paso Times* coverage of the 1917 Bath Riots (led by a group of Mexican women who refused to comply with mandatory delousing procedures) alongside Gloria Anzaldúa’s *Borderlands* (1987), in order to advance a consideration of living laboratories as a contested site of multiple agencies. Chapter 4, “La Operación,” exposes the shift from delousing procedures to surgical sterilization through Puerto Rico’s 1937 Penal Code, which legalized eugenic sterilization under the pretense of public health. A consideration of Aurora Levíns Morales’ *Remedios* (1998) situates the conditions of possibility for Puerto Rico to become a “living laboratory” within global histories of colonialism and racial slavery. This chapter reveals how scientific racism underwrites the eugenics project as well as discourses of population control in the postwar era.

There is a story that eugenics disappeared in the 1940s. As Alexandra Minna Stern asserts in *Eugenic Nation*, “our understanding of eugenics remains trapped in the vortex of the interwar period, even though revamped eugenic projects prospered into the 1960s.”²⁹ This dissertation remaps the historical antecedents of the eugenics movement to show how eugenics emerged through legacies of past violence that I situate within global histories of colonialism and racial slavery.

Grandma’s Story, Better Than In The Beginning

Everything said in the beginning must be said better than in the beginning.

-Gayl Jones, *Corregidora*³⁰

²⁹ Alexandra Minna Stern, *Eugenic Nation: Faults and Frontiers of Better Breeding in Modern America* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2005), 17.

³⁰ Gayl Jones, *Corregidora* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1975), 54.

A few months ago, I helped my grandma move out of the rent-controlled apartment she had been living in for over a decade. Her landlord cut a deal with some development corporation to upgrade the units in our recently gentrified neighborhood and rent them for much higher rates. Within a year, he bought out every longtime tenant.

My grandparents were the last to go. When we finally found an affordable apartment for them, the corporation had already begun demolishing the building. Their new place cost more than double the price, but they had no choice; they had to move or be demolished with their home.

My grandma had collected fifteen year's worth of scrap fabric in plastic bed sheet bags that I was tasked with unpacking. Tucked in between the neatly folded pieces was a jar full of silver screws. Big screws. She picked up the jar and asked if I knew what these screws were. Of course I knew. A wave of nausea overcame me as I looked at her in disbelief.

They're from my leg, she said, exposing her scar. From when I fell.

She had kept the surgical hardware once implanted in her body. Traveled with it from Turkey, throughout Southeast Asia and territories of the United States. Why?

Chera mikharo negar dashti? Chemidoonam, she shrugged.

Haminjoori, yadegari. As a keepsake.

Chera rooznamaro negar dashti? Why did *you* keep the newspaper?

Yadegari, I responded, and we both laughed.

It's true. I had safeguarded the newspaper since I was a teen, though to this day I still haven't translated the article about my grandma. I didn't need to know what Turkish reporters wrote about her. What I needed couldn't be recovered in translation. Why keep it then? Why hold onto scraps?

To say something better than it was said in the beginning is to say it anew. Scraps of fabric. Scraps of stories. Same thing. You need to work with remnants, even when they're not there, even when they must be imagined.

We kept these yadegari in remembrance of what happened. "Not all history is written in books," declares Aurora Levíns Morales, "Sometimes memory is a smooth river stone, a cooking pot, a rocking chair handed down through many years."³¹ Sometimes memory is in the remnants. Remnants of the body subjected to wounding, which can be recovered as bridge. The wounded body-as-bridge, as an agent of survival with its own borderless narrative of selfhood.

³¹ Aurora Levíns Morales, *Remedios: Stories of Earth and Iron from the History of Puertorriqueñas* (Brooklyn, NY: South End Press, 1998), 128.

That day I left my grandma's house thinking, is dispossession the only future in the New World? Somehow, the answer had to be no. The future must be better than in the beginning and for me, everything starts with grandma's story. Here is my attempt at saying it anew, in a way that creates the conditions of possibility for a different patchwork of stories to emerge from pieces of fabric, screws, newspaper articles, and scars—evidence of surviving everything that was said and done, said and done, said and done.

“...The important thing is making generations. They can burn the papers but they can't burn conscious, Ursa. And that's what makes the evidence. And that's what makes the verdict.”

--Gayl Jones, *Corregidora*³²

“The children of women slaves that may be born in the Empire from the date of this Law shall be considered to be free.”

--1871 Free Womb Law³³

Chapter One

Partus Sequitur Ventrem: “Making Generations” in Gayl Jones’ *Corregidora* and Brazil’s 1871 Free Womb Law

In her review of Gayl Jones’ *Corregidora* (1975), Toni Morrison declares: “Ursa *Corregidora* is not possible. Neither is Gayl Jones. But they exist.”³⁴ Published in 1975, Gayl Jones’ novel *Corregidora* narrates the intergenerational impact of slave breeding in the Americas through one family’s matrilineal line. At twenty-four years old, Jones had, according to Morrison, “changed the terms, the definitions of the whole enterprise” to the point where “no novel about any black woman could ever be the same.”³⁵ Indeed, Jones had written a novel that was among the first to be published at the rise of what Barbara Smith heralds as “the African American women’s literary renaissance” of the 1970s, also marked by Morrison’s *The Bluest Eye* (1970). The 1970s ushered in the works of many now-canonical novelists and poets including Alice Walker, Octavia E. Butler, Audre Lorde, and June Jordan, works that conveyed and shaped the concurrent Black feminist movement in the United States as well as global liberation movements. In addition to their own works, many of these writers collaborated to co-author other texts, including the anthologies *All the Women Are White, All the Blacks Are Men, But Some of Us Are Brave* (1982) and *Home Girls* (1983), based on a collective oeuvre that they simultaneously produced.

³² Gayle Jones, *Corregidora* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1975), 22.

³³ Free Womb Law (The Rio Branco Law), enacted September 28, 1871. *British and Foreign State Papers, vol. 62 (1871-1872)* (London: Harrison and Sons), 616.

³⁴ Toni Morrison, *What Moves at the Margin* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2008), 110.

³⁵ Morrison, *What Moves*, 110.

Despite Morrison's praise for both Jones and her novel, *Corregidora* and later *Eva's Man* (1976) faced major criticism for allegedly misrepresenting the experiences of black women. Critics claimed that Jones had failed to take heed of the Black feminist movement and painted a stereotypical picture of black lesbian women in particular.³⁶ Often compared to Alice Walker's novel *The Color Purple* (1982), in which the romantic relationship between Celie and Shug is both central and not closeted, the depiction of lesbianism in *Corregidora* has been criticized for being a homophobic one. What is it then about *Corregidora* that for Morrison went "straight to the jugular?"³⁷ What characterizes the parallel (im)possibility of protagonist Ursa Corregidora and Jones herself? "She had written a story that thought the unthinkable; that talked about the female requirement to 'make generations' as an active, even violent political act," proclaims Morrison. "She had described the relationship between a black woman and black man as no one else ever had with precision, ruthlessness and wisdom. She had lit up the dark past of slave women with klieg lights and dared to discuss both the repulsion and the fascination of these relationships."³⁸ It is precisely the female requirement to "make generations," in the words of Ursa's foremothers, which persists from the era of legal slavery to Ursa's present in the Jim Crow South. Exactly how does *Corregidora* think the unthinkable and in what ways does the novel's literary form show how the unthinkable was not just possible but "common sensical" both then and now?

Gayl Jones' *Corregidora*

Set in Kentucky, the story begins in April of 1948 when twenty-five year old Ursa Corregidora is working as a blues singer at Happy's Café and married to Mutt Thomas. One night, Mutt drunkenly confronts Ursa as she exits the club after work. She struggles to loosen his grip around her waist and the next thing we know Ursa is at the hospital recovering from an unanticipated miscarriage and an even more unanticipated hysterectomy. As she continues to recover in the care of club owner Tadpole McCormick and neighbor Cat Lawson, Ursa recollects the past of her foremothers—Mama, Gram, and Great Gram—in conversation, flashback, and dream. Memories that are in fact generationally specific thus exist in layered palimpsests of chronology, blurring the lines between the characters' particular experiences.

Ursa is the fourth generation in a family of women with the same surname, Corregidora, that of a seventeenth-century Portuguese slave master and breeder. Great Gram, once a field hand on his coffee plantation in Brazil, is subjected to sexual exploitation. Corregidora fathers

³⁶ See June Jordan, "Eva's Man," *The New York Times Book Review*, May 16, 1976, 36-37; Ann Allen Shockley, "The Black Lesbian in American Literature: An Overview," in *Home Girls: A Black Feminist Anthology*, ed. Barbara Smith (New York: Kitchen Table, 1983), 83-94; and Barbara Smith, "The Truth that Never Hurts: Black Lesbians in Fiction in the 1980s," in *Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism*, edited by Chandra Talpade Mohanty, Ann Russo, and Lourdes Torres (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1991), 101-29.

³⁷ Morrison, *What Moves*, 110.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

Gram and later Mama, Gram's daughter, all of who choose to keep his surname. Prior to Mama's birth, Great Gram and a pregnant Gram flee Brazil to the United States, living in the wake of slavery in another former slave nation. After staying in Louisiana for a while, they settle in Kentucky where Ursa is eventually born. In an attempt to leave evidence of their sexual exploitation at the hands of Corregidora, Great Gram, Gram, and Mama insist on "making generations" of female descendants who can carry on the memory of their trauma.

In Portuguese, the word *corregidore* means colonial magistrate while, in Spanish, *corregidora* refers to the wife of a magistrate. Its French root word, *corregir*, means to correct. The women's choice to keep Corregidora's name constitutes a larger claim to legal personhood against the grain of slavery's objectifying rituals. The word *corregidora* signals their self-determination in relation to the law, as if to say, "I stand *corrected*," on multiple levels of meaning. Asserting their very existence as conclusive contrary evidence, Ursa's foremothers act as both the testifier against and witness to sexual exploitation during and after slavery. It is precisely such legalities that compose the backdrop of the novel and, as I argue, inform both the demand to "make generations" and Ursa's hysterectomy, which prevents her from giving birth an heiress.

A closer look at the laws governing the characters reveals that Great Gram is the only legally enslaved person in the novel. Though the subsequent generations of Corregidora women are not subject to slave law, related doctrines nevertheless seek to control their bodies. Most striking of all is the case of Gram, who experiences the exact same sexual exploitation as her mother, post-slavery. I argue that the novel's literary form shows how slavery is not yet past and highlights the primacy of medical control over reproductivity to the perpetuation of sexual exploitation. I therefore approach the novel as a historical archive, reading it as a counterpoint to Brazil's 1871 Free Womb Law, which freed the unborn children of enslaved women prior to the abolition of slavery. By the date of their departure in 1906, slavery was already abolished in both Brazil and the United States. Ursa's grandmother is actually born in 1888, the very year of abolition in Brazil. The Free Womb Law would nevertheless have exempted her from inheriting Great Gram's slave status had she been born anytime after 1871.

Unlike the fixed temporality of official documents, the novel scrambles time to uncover a palimpsest that bridges the spatiotemporal gap between Great Gram and Ursa. In *Pedagogies of Crossing*, M. Jacqui Alexander develops the notion of "palimpsestic time" to trace processes of heterosexualization within and across multiple sites. The state's investment in sexuality, she argues, functions like a palimpsest with the new structured through visible traces of the old. Palimpsestic time, as it applies to my intertextual reading, allows the ideological traffic between social formations to surface.³⁹ Using modes of speech specific to oral storytelling, particularly the blues tradition, the novel presents an account of slave breeding on a continuum that seems transhistorical but remains situated. Rather than progressing in chronological scenes, the novel unfolds by way of what Jones calls "ritualistic sequences," a method of storytelling that develops

³⁹ M. Jacqui Alexander, *Pedagogies of Crossing: Meditations on Feminism, Sexual Politics, Memory, and the Sacred* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006), 246.

in coinciding layers.⁴⁰ As a result, Ursa's embodied process of recovering what was presumed as lost while in recovery from the operation pieces her past together in order to establish a genealogy of the present. My intertextual reading further exposes how the novel's literary form positions the 1871 Free Womb Law in Brazil as a historical antecedent of Ursa's 1948 hysterectomy in Kentucky. Though nearly a century apart, both are cases of reproductive regulation presuppose partial personhood as a means of *invasive control*. The novel's palimpsestic time frame shows how a decorporealizing logic once enforceable by slave law endures through the epistemic authority of medicine.

Because a palimpsest refers to a type of text on which the original writing has been effaced, it serves as an apt analytical framework for thinking about records. In addition to the legalities that compose the backdrop of the novel, there are other historical events that magnify the problem of erasure. In 1891, for example, the provisional government of Brazil ordered all records of slavery burned. Approaching the novel as a historical archive, evidence in and of itself, both extends archival research to include literature and sheds light on the characters' attempt to leave evidence. In other words, there may be no trace of the past except for memory, and even intergenerational memory runs the risk of becoming a totalizing narrative of its own. Great Gram, Gram, and Mama literally transmit evidence of their sexual exploitation through a *body* of facts, a task that Ursa must negotiate after her hysterectomy. Named after a constellation, she is the only person in her family whose proper name we know for certain. The month of April is when Ursa Major can be seen best in the Northern Hemisphere, and as I argue, the novel ultimately challenges the reader to see Ursa's character—history at large—much like a constellation: as stars forming the image of a bear that changes position as it travels through the sky *and* as an essential part of a much larger galaxy, all of which we can never see at once.

Legal Binds

Expanding on Alexander's analytical use of the palimpsest to imagine a nonlinear time frame that brings social formations into ideological proximity, I develop the concept of *legal binds* to address palimpsestic time in the laws that inform the novel. Legal binds highlight the (in)visible traces of slave law within conditions of possibility for partial personhood to persist beyond the bounds of its period. Even in extralegal circumstances, legal binds expose the ontological boundaries of existence that nevertheless create the conditions to bypass authority. In other words, how the slave master's law becomes immortalized in ways that are both specific to legal formations and transcend them, revealing a fundamental question of human intelligibility that simultaneously functions through and exceeds the law. Rather than a kind of haunting, legal binds efface themselves to appear spectral when in actuality they are literal repetitions. Combining my concept of legal binds with palimpsestic time to analyze the relationship between past and present in the novel situates Ursa's nonconsensual hysterectomy in a legacy of reproductive regulation that dates back to Great Gram. The setting alone, in Kentucky from the 1940s-60s, is situated squarely within an undeclared binding precedent of slave law maintaining

⁴⁰ Michael S. Harper, "Gayl Jones: An Interview," in *Chant of Saints*, edited by Michael S. Harper and Robert B. Stepto (Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1979), 359.

de facto conditions of slavery.

Kentucky was one of four Border States, including Delaware, Maryland, and Missouri, that did not secede from the Union during the Civil War (1861-1865). The slave state was therefore not subject to military occupation in the Reconstruction period like other Confederate States of America. However, Kentucky had more in common with the Deep South than with partisan factions in favor of a national government. Most importantly, Kentucky did not ratify the Thirteenth Amendment to abolish slavery. With the abolishment of slavery following the Emancipation Proclamation (1863), Southern states passed a set of laws called the Black Codes. Kentucky followed in early 1866, with the addition of other laws that legalized de facto discrimination.⁴¹ When examined in relation to the Slave Codes rather than as a predecessor of Jim Crow, the Black Codes unveil legal binds that preserve the antebellum status quo. “It remains perfectly evident,” states W.E.B. Du Bois in *Black Reconstruction*, “that the Black Codes looked backward towards slavery.”⁴² The Codes of Kentucky did more than just look back; they excerpted directly from the Slave Codes, replacing the word “slave” with “black” or “negro.”

Similar to a palimpsest, a legal bind refers to the idea of an original text in so far as its exact words reproduce a literal copy of a statutory constraint. Repetition is key to the production of a legal bind because it not only sets an ideological precedent for the future but also carries on the text of a previous law. In *Specters of the Atlantic*, Ian Baucom describes the function of repetition as fundamental to “a regime of [colonial] accumulation” defining the slave trade. The present, he explains, is accumulated past, folding cycles of time within itself.⁴³ To create a cumulative effect, the past repeats preceding moments and their attendant epistemologies through a dialectical reanimation in the present. Baucom argues that the *Zong* massacre of 1781 haunts the history of modern capital by reanimating a trans-Atlantic bill of exchange. Repetition likewise structures a legal bind; direct excerpts from previous laws accumulate the truth claims of slavery. The original text appears over and over again across time and space so that *it is in fact*, now. Replacing words to stage some semblance of progress and distinguish the Black Codes from the Slave Codes, its direct past, paradoxically emphasizes the system of signs that remain *unchanged*. The codes, the set of rules governing enslaved people, secure themselves onto substituted racial classifications, inscribing a later time, a later body, with marks from slavery.

At the same time, a legal bind problematizes textual origins since it is necessarily palimpsestic, or structured in repetitive layers. The Black Codes were based on the Slave Codes of the antebellum South, while those were in turn based on the 1685 *Code Noir* of the French

⁴¹ See Beverly Forehand, “Striking Resemblance: Kentucky, Tennessee, Black Codes and Readjustment, 1865-66,” (master’s thesis, Western Kentucky University, 1996), <http://digitalcommons.wku.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1871&context=theses>; and Clayton E. Jewett and John O. Allen, *Slavery in the South: A State-by-State History* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2004), 97-121.

⁴² W.E.B. Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction in America 1860-1880* (New York: Free Press, 1935), 179.

⁴³ Ian Baucom, *Specters of the Atlantic: Finance Capital, Slavery, and the Philosophy of History* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005), 24-29.

colonial empire. A reconfigured map of the Black Codes thus evinces a nonlinear conception of time as well as space in favor of a constellation-like assemblage. The scope of a legal bind is always already transnational, accounting for global histories of racial slavery that are interconnected by legalized modes of subjection. A legal bind therefore involves a process of performativity that increases the discursive power of the law as well as its *material* effects. The law literally binds itself to previous laws by performing them in another time and/or space, constructing reality retroactively in the present. Words that are left unchanged, like “code” for example, perform a kind of representational violence by way of citing the past. However, legal binds are both legally binding and actively *bind* bodies; they are court orders that restrain, restrict, and regulate. Legal binds subject the body, circulating through its very capillaries on a microphysical level as Foucault describes the exercise of power.⁴⁴

To what extent is the setting of the novel within the period of de jure segregation in Southern states of the former Confederacy? The legal binds of Jim Crow laws, which established a “separate but equal” status for African Americans in 1890 with no pretense of *genuine* equality, predate Ursa’s contemporary moment. By privileging her embodied process of remembering, the novel performs its own kind of palimpsest that moves beyond violent affect to engage the intergenerational impact of slave breeding materialized in the flesh. Through Ursa’s accumulated memory unfolds another genealogy of the present, one that proves her hysterectomy has precedent in global histories of racial slavery and colonialism. I am interested in how Ursa is bound to the slave master’s law, to Corregidora, nearly a century after slavery and most importantly, how she *unbonds* these enforced ties.

The 1871 Free Womb Law

In *Monstrous Intimacies*, Christina Sharpe considers the everyday violence of slavery an original trauma that marks post-slavery subjectivity as “largely borne by and readable on the (New World) black subject.”⁴⁵ Her reading of Gayl Jones’ *Corregidora* as a neo-slave narrative focuses on the women’s desire to selectively repeat the “monstrous intimacies” defining slavery. By birthing free daughters who will bear witness to the trauma, their wombs remain bound to Corregidora’s desire while they struggle to become unbounded from him. Instead of using reproduction as a means of re-remembering the past of slavery within freedom, it is the former slave master/father whom they carry on into the future. Sharpe draws attention to Brazil’s 1871 Free Womb Law to stress the signifying power of the demand to make generations. “At stake,” she points out, “was a legal claim that a slave master, like Corregidora, might have on the bodily

⁴⁴ See Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: the Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage Books, 1995); *The History of Sexuality, vol. 1: An Introduction*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978); and “*Society Must Be Defended*”: *Lectures at the Collège de France, 1975-76*, ed. Mauro Bertani and Alessandro Fontana, trans. David Macey (New York, Picador, 2003).

⁴⁵ Christina Sharpe, *Monstrous Intimacies: Making Post-Slavery Subjects* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), 3.

and psychic life of future generations.”⁴⁶ As previously mentioned, Great Gram is the only legally enslaved person in the novel, by law. “What then,” asks Sharpe, “is the nature of these family transmissions that at every turn seem to threaten a redoubling of the primal scenes of slavery?”⁴⁷ Though forcing generations to repeat the monstrous intimacies of slavery, it also highlights the co-constitutive performances of slavery and freedom. For the generations following Great Gram, legal binds that restrain, restrict, and regulate black female bodies perpetuate the gendered dimensions of biopolitical subjection in the afterlife of slavery. I argue that the 1871 Free Womb Law reinforces the partial personhood of enslaved people by granting freedom to an imagined category of would-be persons—the unborn—through the decorporealization of women who are already enslaved.

Nearly two decades *before* emancipation, the Free Womb Law passed under the governance of José Maria de Silva Paranhos, better known as the Visconde de Rio-Branco, during his first year in office.⁴⁸ In short, the law freed all unborn children of enslaved women without affecting the slave status of their mothers. Championed as a stepping-stone towards the abolition of slavery at large, the law was in reality a legal loophole left in the hands of slave masters to administer. Though in decline since 1850 for a variety of reasons, the enslaved population remained the same in select coffee-exporting *municípios*, whose gendered division of labor demanded a higher number of enslaved women to work in field gangs.⁴⁹ The law claimed to reverse the legal doctrine of *partus sequitur ventrem*; literally, “that which is brought forth follows the womb.”⁵⁰ Instead of inheriting the slave status of their mothers, the unborn children of enslaved women would be free, albeit as a kind of government-owned asset. The law required that slave masters either care for a child until age eight in exchange for a state-financed indemnity of 600 *milreais* which accrues interest at a rate of 6% per year or that they employ the child as an *ingenuo*, free born, until age twenty-one. As such, it establishes a type of debt bondage similar to indentured servitude, anticipating a permanently dependent labor force that is racially set apart yet still on plantation grounds.⁵¹ Should the slave master choose a state-

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 39.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 47.

⁴⁸ For more on the law’s passage under Rio-Branco, see Jeffery D. Needell, *The Party of Order: The Conservatives, the State, and Slavery in the Brazilian Monarchy, 1831-1871* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2006), 223-72.

⁴⁹ Many factors influenced the decline of Brazil’s enslaved population prior to the 1871 Free Womb Law including death, migration, and manumission. For a statistical overview see Herbert S. Klein and Francisco Vidal Luna, *Slavery in Brazil* (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 180-88.

⁵⁰ The children of enslaved women inherited the status of their mother regardless of their father’s identity. In the United States, Virginia passed the law of inheritability in 1662 (though a legal distinction between English and African women was first made in 1643). For a discussion of how Virginia’s law of inheritability departed from common law, see Kathleen M. Brown, *Good Wives, Nasty Wenches, and Anxious Patriarchs: Gender, Race, and Power in Colonial Virginia* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 133.

⁵¹ According to the Free Womb Law, to be born free is to be a debtor, duty-bound to public establishments instead of slave masters.

financed indemnity, the government will “dispose of” children to authorized associations that “shall have a right to the gratuitous services of the minors” thereby extending the rights of ownership to public establishments. Said establishments, government institutions under the inspection of the Orphan’s Court, also had a right to hire out the minor’s services.

The birth of a free child thus translates to the loss of property comparable to the terms of a slaving contract though the child will continue to be owned in debt bondage. As Baucom emphasizes in his examination of the *Zong* massacre, contract law treats enslaved people as a type of commodity—and as interest-bearing money. Because the transatlantic slave trade depended on a binding act of mutual credibility that determined the conditions of a later transaction, value was a matter of agreement between two contracting parties who imagine a future moment of exchange. The actual moment of exchange “does not create value, it retrospectively confirms it, offers belated evidence to what already exists.”⁵² Contract law therefore detaches value from an object in a way that survives its material existence; even an enslaved person who is deceased can exist as exchangeable credit.⁵³ By compensating slave masters for the birth of a free child, the Free Womb Law likewise credits the unborn with imaginary value. It insures against freedom, reanimating “a contract to human beings as a species of money.”⁵⁴ Unlike a slaving contract, the Free Womb Law does not speculate loss but presupposes it by guaranteeing immediate compensation. Remember: the law does not abolish slavery. On the contrary, the law continues to govern the unborn within relations of property. The birth of a legally free child actually serves to reestablish the material wealth of slave masters like Corregidora. What distinguishes the Free Womb Law from the 1888 *Lei Áurea*, or Golden Law that abolished slavery in Brazil is the fact that it further decorporealizes enslaved women, imagining the womb as separate from the body in an attempt to maintain slavery through the language of freedom.⁵⁵

It was jurist Agostinho Marques Perdigao Malheiro who, as early as 1863, proposed “an emancipation of the womb.” Slavery was continuously debated in Brazil throughout the 1860s, resulting in a long-term plan to free groups of enslaved people.⁵⁶ Gradual emancipation initiated a series of piecemeal reforms of which the Free Womb Law was a culminating part. “The government declared freed the *emancipados* or the Africans captured aboard ships attempting to

⁵² Baucom, *Specters of the Atlantic*, 17.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 85-95.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 62.

⁵⁵ Echoing Du Bois on racial slavery in the North American, Saidiya V. Hartman declares the perpetuation of slavery through the language of freedom to be the failure of Reconstruction. “It was often the case,” she states, “that benevolent correctives and declarations of slave humanity intensified the brutal exercise of power upon the captive body rather than ameliorating the chattel condition.” Saidiya V. Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1997), 5. The Free Womb Law likewise poses as a reformative measure when in actuality, it begins with the premise that enslaved women shall remain slaves. As such, it verifies nonorigination of the unborn in spite of freeing the womb.

⁵⁶ The Crown feared Brazil’s economic downfall as well as rebellion should all enslaved people be freed at once.

bring them illegally into Brazil after 1831; slaves could no longer be publicly whipped; some government-owned slaves were freed; and from 1869 slaves could no longer be sold at public auction nor slave families legally split up by sale,” explains Sandra Lauderdale Graham in “Slavery’s Impasse.”⁵⁷ Though officially called the Rio-Branco Law, the Free Womb Law was referred to as the *Lei do Ventre Livre* (“Law of the Free Womb”), a palimpsestic citing of Malheiro’s original proposition. In her review of public opposition to the Free Womb Law, Martha Abreu confirms that the law’s true objective was “to seal a perfect alliance between the state, which had promised to send forth a wonderful reform designed to ‘civilise the country,’ and the landowners’ interest in maintaining their dominance and prosperity.”⁵⁸ She suggests that because slavery was in need of reform after the Paraguayan War (1864-1870), in which slaves fought as members of the imperial army, the law passed despite opposition to it from wealthy *escravocratas*, slavocrats, and the Brazilian parliament. According to Article 179 of the Brazilian constitution, they argued, confiscating a slave master’s property without compensation is extortion. Nevertheless, it would prove morally difficult for the colony to remain the last slave holding nation in the Americas. In an effort to present a new and improved image of Brazil on the world stage *and* appease his critics, the Visconde de Rio-Branco strategically passed the Free Womb Law.

In *Ariel’s Ecology*, Monique Allewaert examines disaggregate conceptions of the enslaved body emerging from slavery in the American tropics, which she refers to as being in a state of “parahumanity.”⁵⁹ “Under the regime of plantation colonialism that extended into the United States, Afro-American persons did not always possess bodies in which all parts were present and contributed to the functioning of the whole,” she explains. “Instead, the slave and maroon body could be justifiably amputated.”⁶⁰ Classified somewhere between persons and property, “the punishments of disfigurement and amputation made the slave body, at least in legal terms, an always potentially dismembered body.”⁶¹ Both the Slave Code (1661) and the French *Code Noir* (1685) legalized the mutilation of enslaved people, making the parahuman body “distinguishable from other bodies produced in emerging biopolitical regimes because her body was broken in parts: an ear amputated for petit marronage, a hand for theft, an arm pulled from the body by the sugar mill, and sometimes a head cut from the body for resistance so total as to warrant death.”⁶² However, dismemberment went hand in hand with reproductive regulation in the case of enslaved women.

⁵⁷ Sandra Lauderdale Graham, “Slavery’s Impasse: Slave Prostitutes, Small-Time Mistresses, and the Brazilian Law of 1871,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 23.4 (1991): 690.

⁵⁸ Martha Abreu, “Slave Mothers and Freed Children,” *Journal of Latin American Studies* 28.3 (1996): 569.

⁵⁹ Monique Allewaert, *Ariel’s Ecology: Plantations, Personhood, and Colonialism in the American Tropics* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2013), 15.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 12.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 90.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 85.

How though, can a part of one's body be free while the rest is enslaved? How can the law determine the fate of a single organ, a self-contained part of an organism, as if it were a separate entity? Under the purview of the Free Womb Law, an enslaved woman's womb is not integral to her body because of the *a priori* assumption that she is not a whole person. The law thus reveals the gendered dimensions of biopolitical subjection during slavery, and more specifically, the centrality of enslaved women's reproduction to sustaining slavery on a global level. "The essence of Black women's experience during slavery," states Dorothy Roberts in *Killing the Black Body*, "was the brutal denial of autonomy over reproduction."⁶³ According to *partus sequitur ventrem*, the children of enslaved women were the prenatal property of slave masters by law, giving rise to a dual interest in enslaved women as (re)productive laborers.

Slave Breeding

As a source of material wealth, enslaved women's reproduction was central to the colonial economies of the New World. The 1871 Free Womb Law bespeaks the ways in which the womb, imagined as separate from the body, encapsulated the slave master's economic stake in fertility. By controlling enslaved women's reproduction, planters could reproduce an enslaved labor force despite the ban on the international slave trade. Western medicine served as a tool for slavery's economic management of procreation. Borrowing from evolutionary biology's then newfound theory of natural selection to control childbearing, slave masters developed breeding practices with the help of doctors who shared their economic and political interests. The womb was thus a site of legislation as well as of medical experimentation at the hands of planters and physicians alike.

In the first half of the fifteenth-century, the Portuguese had developed a new model of labor critical to the modern slave-based economies of the colonial Americas: the plantation system. Throughout the eighteenth century, the plantation system depended entirely on the international slave trade for enslaved laborers. When the international slave trade was banned in 1850, Creoles comprised a majority of the enslaved population, which had more than doubled in Brazil by 1804.⁶⁴ The demand for coffee, a new export crop at the time, dramatically increased the labor needs of plantations. With the fall of Santo Domingo after the Haitian Revolution, the demand for Brazilian coffee skyrocketed in North American and European markets.⁶⁵ Brazil quickly dominated the worldwide production of coffee, accounting for more than half the world's supply. The three main coffee provinces—Rio de Janeiro, Minas Gerais, and Sao Paulo—were thus the three centers of slave labor in nineteenth-century Brazil. As Klein and

⁶³ Dorothy Roberts, *Killing the Black Body: Race, Reproduction, and the Meaning of Liberty* (New York, NY: Vintage Books, 1997), 24.

⁶⁴ In fact, Brazil's Creole, or mixed race, population was already a majority by 1804.

⁶⁵ Klein and Luna, *Slavery in Brazil*, 91.

Luna detail in *Slavery in Brazil*, the enslaved population steadily increased until slavery was abolished in 1888, the year Gram was born.

As the coffee frontier expanded inland, plantations required more field hands per unit or *fazenda*. The value of an enslaved person “represented more than 40% of the total value of estates and their coffee trees,” making it less profitable to hire free laborers.⁶⁶ Furthermore, purchasing a female slave of childbearing age was, simultaneously, a way of purchasing future labor. In fact, the price of a female slave included a premium for her unborn children.⁶⁷ “Here lies one of slavery’s most odious features,” states Roberts, “it forced its victims to perpetuate the very institution that subjugated them by bearing children who were born the property of their masters.”⁶⁸ This is precisely the case of Great Gram, and though Gram is legally a freeborn child, she experiences the same sexual exploitation as her mother.

Similarly in the American South, the booming Cotton Kingdom demanded a larger enslaved labor force. By the 1820s, cotton had spread throughout a wide stretch of the Deep South previously unavailable for settlement, driving planters and would-be planters westward. “The only practical way to increase the pool of slave laborers was through the birth of children,” states Marie Jenkins Schwartz in *Born in Bondage*. “Without children born in bondage, the South could not continue as a slave society.”⁶⁹ North America’s enslaved population was largely native-born, with birth rates significantly exceeding deaths in comparison to other countries, like Brazil, which participated in the international slave trade well after 1808.⁷⁰ By 1860, the U.S. was the largest slave-holding nation in the world. It was precisely this positive growth rate of the enslaved population that led to the ban on the international slave trade sooner than expected and without protest from slave states.⁷¹ For slave masters, enslaved women’s reproduction was an economic asset justified by scientific claims that enslaved women were more fecund.⁷² Controlling every aspect of enslaved women’s bodies, including reproduction, was a key element of slave economies—and of subjugation. Roberts explains that reproductive control was first and foremost a means of sexual exploitation. “The law reinforced the sexual exploitation of slave

⁶⁶ Ibid., 101.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 126.

⁶⁸ Roberts, *Killing the Black Body*, 24.

⁶⁹ Marie Jenkins Schwartz, *Born in Bondage: Growing up Enslaved in the Antebellum South* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000), 4.

⁷⁰ The United States had the highest birth rate of any colony in the Americas though slavery began later and was abolished earlier in North America. See Klein and Luna, *Slavery in Brazil*, 164-69.

⁷¹ Schwartz, *Born in Bondage*, 4-5.

⁷² Harriet A. Washington, *Medical Apartheid: The Dark History of Medical Experimentation on Black Americans from Colonial Times to the Present* (New York, NY: Doubleday, 2006), 32-46.

women in two ways,” argues Roberts, “it deemed any child who resulted from the rape to be a slave and it failed to recognize the rape of a slave woman as a crime.”⁷³

Planters regularly contracted “medical men”—assistants, male midwives, and doctors—to increase the birthrate of enslaved women using scientific methods. Medicine thus became central to the development and systematization of slave breeding practices, which involved a wide range of experimental medical procedures including sexual violence. “Physicians’ memoirs, medical journals, and planters’ records all reveal that enslaved black Americans bore the worst abuses of these crudely empirical practices, which countenanced a hazardous degree of ad hoc experimentation in medications, dosages, and even spontaneous surgical experiments in the daily practice among slaves,” states Washington in *Medical Apartheid*.⁷⁴ By the late antebellum years, slave masters *and* mistresses monitored enslaved women’s menses in the slave quarters. The number of physicians increased faster in the South than in the North, especially in newly established states. As Marie Jenkins Schwartz suggests, “Where slavery flourished, it was said, medical practitioners stood a chance of making a good living.”⁷⁵ Most physicians did not have any formal training or a medical school degree, and many of them attended their first childbirth in the slave quarters.⁷⁶ In *Birthing a Slave*, Schwartz explains that “slaveholder and physician were not mutually exclusive occupations, and the tendency for doctors to combine planting with medical practice either simultaneously or sequentially contributed to physician identification with the slaveholding class.”⁷⁷ As the allied roles of planter and physician merged into one, slave masters performed medical procedures using home medical guides specifically written for the South’s slaveholding class.

A primary concern for physicians and planters alike was developing treatments for infertility and diseases that might reduce time in the fields. Roberts explains that, “a slaveholder was caught in an impossible dilemma—how to maximize his immediate profits by extracting as much work as possible from his female slaves while at the same time protecting his long-term investment in the birth of a healthy child.”⁷⁸ Schwartz further adds that, “any condition that had the potential to interfere with fertility materially diminished the monetary value of a woman in the eyes of potential insurance agents and buyers.”⁷⁹ Physician-planters inspected enslaved women for signs of being good “breeders” based on the racist and sexist belief that they were biologically more fecund. Infertility, on the other hand, was subject to violent punishment. In the

⁷³ Roberts, *Killing the Black Body*, 29.

⁷⁴ Washington, *Medical Apartheid*, 29.

⁷⁵ Marie Jenkins Schwartz, *Birthing a Slave: Motherhood and Medicine in the Antebellum South* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006), 38.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 37.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 40.

⁷⁸ Roberts, *Killing the Black Body*, 39.

⁷⁹ Schwartz, *Birthing a Slave*, 73.

Old South, gynecology emerged from experimental treatments on enslaved women who were subjected to invasive procedures that benefited physicians and planters. A slave owner could take infertility to court and with a doctor's testimony, return a slave.⁸⁰

However, the infant mortality rate increased proportionately to the increase in births so that enslaved children did not grow to adulthood. Because of the large number of stillborns and miscarriages, the enslaved woman's life was in some cases more important than the continuation of pregnancy, which could disable or kill her. At the same time, the value of induced abortion was highly debatable among physician-planters. In addition, there was a widespread fear that enslaved women were aborting en masse.⁸¹ Physician-planters obsessively investigated cases of interrupted pregnancy. But even an interrupted pregnancy was profitable for the physician-planter who collected stillborn or short-lived infants as specimens either for their personal collections or those of the region's medical school and museums.⁸² Physician-planters also performed surgical experiments on enslaved women who were deemed infertile, and those who "cured" gynecological disorders secured successful reputations and published their findings for others to test.⁸³ With the introduction of anesthesia came a host of other violations committed while women were not conscious. During an operation enslaved women "might be raped or become the victims of other crimes, including euthanasia."⁸⁴ Doctors regularly demanded access to the bodies of enslaved women "for their own sexual pleasure and to insist that certain slaves mate in an effort to ensure the birth of strong and healthy children in bondage."⁸⁵ As Washington points out, medical science was necessary to perpetuate enslavement and at the same time, physicians were dependent on slavery for enslaved "clinical material."⁸⁶ Ursa's hysterectomy fits into the need to increase fecundity in the enslaved population

Invasive Control

Whereas legal binds highlight the (in)visible traces of slave law across time and space, the concept of *invasive control* provides a framework for understanding the ways in which these binds subject the body through the decorporealizing logic of medicine underlying the law. Invasive control thus focuses on the material effects of court orders that restrain, restrict, and

⁸⁰ As Schwartz states, "Not everyone succeeded in such suits, but the fact that some secured judgments against sellers indicates that planters considered a woman's reproductive capacity important to her worth." *Ibid.*, 75.

⁸¹ Abortion and infanticide were chargeable crimes.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 218.

⁸³ All caesarians performed before the Civil War were experimental procedures conducted on enslaved women.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 232.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 314.

⁸⁶ Washington, *Medical Apartheid*, 26.

regulate, even in extralegal circumstances. As I have argued, the Free Womb Law reinforces the partial personhood of enslaved women. Though the generations following Great Gram are not enslaved, they are nevertheless revalued as property. What their experiences convey, that the law alone cannot, is how the originating metaphors of captivity and mutilation are repeated despite the demand to make generations, “so that it is as if neither time nor history, nor historiography and its topics, shows movement, as the human subject is ‘murdered’ over and over again by the passions of a bloodless and anonymous archaism, showing itself in endless disguise.”⁸⁷ The concept of invasive control draws attention to the foundational role of medicine in establishing the ruling episteme. Before moving on to a close reading of the novel, I want to *flesh out* the concept of invasive control using Hortense Spillers’ work.

In “Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe,” Hortense J. Spillers explains that the socio-political order of the New World represents “a scene of actual mutilation, dismemberment, and exile.”⁸⁸ Captive sexualities, she argues, lose gender difference, becoming instead a concentration of imposed and contradictory meaning. The central distinction between a captive and liberated subject position is that of body and flesh. Spillers explains that “before the ‘body’ there is the ‘flesh,’ that zero degree of social conceptualization that does not escape concealment under the brush of discourse, or the reflexes of iconography.”⁸⁹ “If we think of the ‘flesh’ as a primary narrative,” she continues, “then we mean its seared, divided, ripped-apartness, riveted to the ship’s hole, fallen, or ‘escaped’ overboard.” Spillers’ problematization of gender by way of the ungendered captive female provides another analytical framework anchored, as with palimpsestic time, in the conditions of slavery, marking a theft of the body. Spillers’ conceptualization of flesh allows for a perspective simultaneously inside and outside the symbolics of female gender that adds multiple dimensions to the category of subject-commodity, most importantly “a lexical and living dimension.”⁹⁰ Following Spillers’ lead, invasive control takes up the category of flesh that distinguishes the captive from a liberated subject position to locate medicine in a discussion of sexualized subjugation. Medicine intensifies the fissure between the body and the flesh on a gendered register. More specifically, invasive control highlights the ways in which medicine perpetuates partial personhood, both in theory and in practice. Particularly evident in the institutionalized sexual exploitation of enslaved women, the sexualization of violence defines the legal status of a slave. Within the slave system, access to the bodies of enslaved women was a prerogative of masters, mistresses, all members and friends of the slaveholding family. In fact, “men who had sex with women they owned could hope for economic benefits,” Fischer notes in *Suspect Relations*, “because the children of enslaved women inherited their mother’s unfree status, slave women’s reproductive capacities became a

⁸⁷ Hortense J. Spillers, “Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe: An American Grammar Book,” *Diacritics*. 17.2 (1987): 68.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 66.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 67.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 68.

means by which slaveholders increased their property.”⁹¹ White servants “could sue a master for corporal punishment that overstepped the legally acceptable” and hope for redress, whereas the law endorsed violence against the enslaved just as it limited violence against white bodies, rendering the enslaved body a site of extralegal exception.⁹² Invasive control emphasizes the ways in which medicine facilitated the decorporealization of enslaved women and constructed the parahuman by introducing chemicals, instruments, other objects, and other *living* species into their bodies in an attempt to regulate reproduction.

Leaving Evidence

Corregidora begins with a first-person play-by-play of Ursa’s last encounter with Mutt. Her narration of events reads like a testimony, revealing that her hysterectomy was in fact nonconsensual. While other scholars have interpreted Ursa’s hysterectomy as a liberating break from her foremothers’ demand to “make generations,”⁹³ I argue that the operation perpetuates the decorporealizing logic of slave breeding. Overlooking the fundamental issue of consent frames the procedure as both normal and neutral, whereas the particularities of Ursa’s position—all of which she points us to at the beginning—brings a number of important factors to light. The year 1947 marks a pivotal post-war moment in America prior to the Civil Rights Movement of the 50s and 60s, during the rise of negative eugenics. Contrary to popular belief, cases of forced sterilization increased after World War II through state-sponsored programs that sought to reduce the birthrate of “undesirable” populations. Among those targeted were poor black women in the Jim Crow South where the racist ideologies underpinning segregation provided further justification for eugenic campaigns.

By extending culpability to the hospital staff, Ursa prompts us to consider how they too lay claim to her body. “They said when I was delirious I was cursing [Mutt] *and* the doctors and the nurses out,” she recalls.⁹⁴ Understanding the hysterectomy at face value ignores Ursa’s own genealogical account of it, which I argue extends far beyond the event to include her intergenerational memories of slave breeding. It also conflates her foremothers’ demand to

⁹¹ Kirsten Fischer, *Suspect Relations: Sex, Race, and Resistance in Colonial North Carolina* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2002), 165.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 169.

⁹³ See, for example, Jennifer L. Griffiths, “Uncanny Spaces: Trauma, Cultural Memory, and Female Body in Gayl Jones’s *Corregidora*,” chap. 4 in *Traumatic Possessions: The Body and Memory in African American Women’s Writing and Performance* (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 2009), 68-88; Stephanie Li, *Something Akin to Freedom: The Choice of Bondage in Narratives by African American Women* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2010); by Deborah Horvitz, “‘Sadism Demands a Story’: Oedipus, Feminism, and Sexuality in Gayl Jones’s *Corregidora* and Dorothy Allison’s *Bastard Out of Carolina*,” *Contemporary Literature* 39.2 (1998): 238-61; and Elizabeth Anne Yukins, “Bastard Daughters and the Possession of History in *Corregidora* and *Paradise*,” *Signs* 28.1 (2002): 221-47.

⁹⁴ Jones, *Corregidora*, 4.

“make generations” and the sexual exploitation they experienced at the hands of Corregidora. The demand to “make generations” is distinct from slave breeding and additionally, a subversive attempt to leave evidence of the latter that Ursa still participates in despite her hysterectomy. Though the doctors perform the procedure while she is unconscious, Ursa responds with curses—and a scathing critique. Like Mama, Gram, and Great Gram, she constellates her memory within a past-present continuum that reveals the palimpsestic time of her scar and the legal binds of its stitching. Their collective memory thus becomes a seemingly delirious yet incredibly lucid narration of the 1871 Free Womb Law’s enduring logic.

After the operation, Ursa moves in with Tadpole McCormick, the owner of Happy’s Café, whom she later marries. Tadpole accompanies her to follow-up visits at the doctor’s office though he continuously questions Ursa’s reports about when the doctor says she can work again. On one occasion, the doctor mistakes Tadpole for Mutt, assuming Mutt was with her because she had “stopped blaming him.”⁹⁵ “He thought you were Mutt,” Ursa tells Tadpole, “I mean, my husband. He thought you were Mr. Corregidora.”⁹⁶ Tadpole, however, is only interested in whether the doctor said she could work and what time her next appointment is in a few weeks. “Same time, same position,” Ursa replies, now at home. “He had me up on the table so he could look at the scar. Every time you go to the doctor they say, ‘Get up on the table’ or ‘Take your clothes off and get up on the table.’ Somebody ought to say Naw,” she declares.⁹⁷ The doctor’s misunderstanding speaks to the collapse of time and space throughout the novel, which allows for continuities to emerge that Ursa’s intergenerational memory then confirms. Substituting Mutt for Tadpole and both for her husband, “Mr. Corregidora,” highlights the ways each reenact aspects of a proprietary relationship to Ursa, one defined by Great Gram’s original trauma. Though she is the first of her matrilineal line not fathered by Corregidora, the assumption that her husband is named Mr. Corregidora not only alludes to the fact that, like Gram, she would have been vulnerable to sexual exploitation in spite of the law but also that something about her contemporary moment does not escape the slave master’s law. Because it is the doctor who mistakes the men for one another, their substitution for Corregidora unequivocally points to the historical alliance between planter and physician. Implying that she should forgive Mutt displaces the blame for denying Ursa’s reproductive autonomy as well as the age-old and now institutionalized medical apparatus upholding a claim to her body. Read differently, Ursa’s discerning response to Tadpole—the person who was actually with her—verifies the continuities that the doctor’s misunderstanding inadvertently exposes: same time, same position, in spite of, or perhaps as a consequence of history.

Her elaboration further substantiates the glaring continuities between her examination at the doctor’s office in the U.S. and those of enslaved women by the Portuguese slavocracy. The doctor speaks to Ursa in routine commands that, outside of a medical context, betray sexual undertones. The command to take off her clothes and get up on the table is both nonconsensual

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 19.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 20-21.

and echoes the discourse of assault. As a normalized and neutralized part of medical examination, this happens every time she goes to a follow-up visit. Ursa's declaration that someone should refuse the doctor disrupts the objective perception of routinized patient care to highlight its inherent sexualization. She later describes her second follow-up visit: "I went into the examining room and undressed and got up on the table. The doctor came in. He started feeling my belly, feeling places and asking me if it hurt. I kept saying Naw."⁹⁸ Ursa's account might appear complicit to the doctor's commands, even apathetic though it once again reads like a testimony. Read in conjunction with her previous declaration, we can interpret Ursa's "Naw" as a refusal rather than an indifferent answer to the doctor's questions. She repeats the word "Naw" as the doctor touches her body without consent. Her account consistently figures the doctor as a perpetrator, exposing medical examination in the Jim Crow South as a form of sexualized exploitation extending from the era of legal slavery.

Furthermore, Ursa's intergenerational memory reveals a double and paralleled repetition in this scene. Forced to sleep with Corregidora and his wife, Gram recollects the ways in which sexual exploitation shaped her everyday life on the plantation as Great Gram's free born daughter. "*He would've fucked you and your mama if y'all been there,*" she tells Ursa matter-of-factly.⁹⁹ Ursa remembers Gram recollecting Great Gram's memory of slave breeding to her as a child. Gram explains that, according to her mother, when Corregidora bought women, "*They'd have to raise up their dress so he could see what they had down there, and he feel all around down there, and then he feel their bellies to see if they had solid bellies.*"¹⁰⁰ The women had to be pretty, Gram adds, and the color of his coffee beans. Corregidora inspects enslaved women of childbearing age to determine their reproductive ability. The women had to be the color of his coffee beans, the commodity in exchange, because they too were a species of money bearing exchangeable credit. Their bellies held the promise of financial gain, an otherwise imaginary value guaranteed by sexual exploitation. We thus have a double and paralleled repetition. Like Corregidora, the doctor feels Ursa's belly without consent for another kind of inspection. Ursa uses the same words to describe the doctor as Gram uses to describe Corregidora. In a reflection of legally binding codes, repeated verbatim across time and space, Ursa's intergenerational memory shows how slave breeding laid the foundation for centuries of reproductive regulation, including her nonconsensual hysterectomy in Kentucky.

The double, and redoubled, repetition rests in the telling. The novel's juxtaposition of Great Gram's memory of slave breeding, repeated over and over again by Gram and Mama, with Ursa's recovery process unveils her hysterectomy as a contemporary form of reproductive control. Here, Mama recollects Great Gram's memory for Ursa in the first-person:

...when he send them white mens in there to me he didn't look like that, cause he be nodding and saying what a fine piece I was, said I was a fine speciment of a

⁹⁸ Ibid., 57.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 172.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 173.

woman, finest specimen of a woman he ever seen in his life, said he had tested me out hisself, and then they would be laughing, you know, when they come in there to me. Cause tha's all they do to you, was feel up on you down between your legs see what kind of genitals you had, either so you could breed well, or make a good whore. Fuck each other or fuck them. Tha's the first thing they would think about, cause if you had somebody who was a good fucker you have plenty to send out in the field, and then you could also make you plenty money on the side, or inside.¹⁰¹

Mama talks until she becomes Great Gram, recollecting the memory as if it were her own lived experience. Here she expands on slave breeding as a method of reproductive control enabled by and enabling sexual violence. She describes the scene as a kind of “sex show” in which death is also part of the spectacle: “all them beatings and killings wasn't nothing but sex circuses, and all them white peoples, mens, womens, and childrens crowding around to see.”¹⁰² The medicalization of the sex show, figured as a test or type of experiment, once again links Corregidora to Ursa's doctor, and slave breeding to her hysterectomy. Corregidora refers to Great Gram as a specimen, betraying the role of medicine in sexual exploitation. The sex show is simultaneously an operating theatre in which the spectators observe and participate in violence. This memory points to slave breeding as the nexus between medical and sexual exploitation, and to the sadism it involved. Furthermore, being a piece or a specimen of a woman alludes to the parahumanity of enslaved women. It is precisely the repeated retelling that exposes these connections and the not-yet-past of slavery. Ursa's intergenerational memory rejects periodization, offering a historical narrative that, as Jennifer L. Griffiths states in *Traumatic Possessions*, “activates multiple levels of witnessing, including bearing witness to the intersubjective dynamic of witnessing itself.”¹⁰³

The slave master's motive for slave breeding differs from Great Gram's demand to make generations. For Great Gram, the ability to preserve a record of the past in the absence of written sources requires a female descendant. Like Corregidora himself, Great Gram, Gram, and Mama insist on procreating, albeit for the purpose of leaving evidence in the flesh. “The important thing is making generations,” Gram stresses. “They can burn the papers but they can't burn conscious, Ursa. And that what makes the evidence. And that's what makes the verdict.”¹⁰⁴ According to Gram, consciousness of Great Gram's and her own experience constitutes empirical evidence. Instead of documentation, the material object that determines the verdict is literally a *body* of facts. For whom must her descendants leave evidence? Who will bear witness to their story? Making generations can be read as evidence of matrilineal genealogy and therefore resistance to natal alienation. The demand to make generations signifies reproductive autonomy in relation to

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 127.

¹⁰² Ibid., 125.

¹⁰³ Griffiths, *Traumatic Possessions*, 69.

¹⁰⁴ Jones, *Corregidora*, 22.

Corregidora as well as a narrative of self-determination rather than victimization. Great Gram, Gram, and Mama assert their free will through the demand. In the context of slavery, making generations is a claim to humanity not to be conflated with slave breeding. "Procreation," Tadpole responds to Ursa, "That could be a slave-breeder's way of thinking." "But it's not," she replies. "No," he confirms.¹⁰⁵ A memory of Gram looking down at Ursa while recounting sexual exploitation on Corregidora's coffee plantation interrupts their dialogue. For a moment, the dialogue resumes: "No, because it depends on if it's for you or somebody else. Your life or theirs."¹⁰⁶ Although it is unclear whether it is Ursa or Tadpole who speaks, the statement distinguishes making generations from slave breeding based on reproductive control and the freedom not only to choose, but also to desire. The juxtaposition of Gram's first-person account of sexual exploitation with Ursa's conversation further contrasts slave breeding to a situation in which Ursa's desire is not determined by another, transforming the demand to make generations into an act of reclamation.¹⁰⁷

At the same time, the demand to make generations is a totalizing narrative of its own. Defined by a foundational trauma between Corregidora and Great Gram, the demand also has a way of binding their descendants. As Sharpe points out, "Ursa is charged not only with the telling but also with the living of the impossible instruction to stigmatize her body in ways that selectively mimic an unknown initiating trauma but *only* in the ways that *they* (the women) *need* to bear witness to reinscribe the original inscription."¹⁰⁸ The demand to make generations "forces the women to reoccupy slavery's evacuated spaces in precisely the same way that Great Gram did."¹⁰⁹ In other words, remembering what happened becomes a method of perpetuating Great Gram's individual trauma. Corregidora haunts Ursa, especially in dreams, and her contemporary social relations with other men and women. Ursa thus represents the end of the master narrative as a result of her hysterectomy, making it possible to "transform the female body from an object that bears the mark of trauma within cultural narratives to the active creator of her own testimony," emphasizes Griffiths.¹¹⁰ This line of argumentation overlooks the legal binds that perpetuate the slave master's law across generations. However, the multiple voices in the novel constantly challenge the reader to identify Ursa in genealogical relation to her foremothers. Jones' mode of narration, characterized by a poetic collapse of voice and time, work to show exactly how the slave master's law transcends time and space even though the characters are historically situated—and also how the law can be defied.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 22.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 23.

¹⁰⁷ For more on Corregidora's "miscegenous consumption of Black female bodies," see Carlyle Van Thompson's *Eating the Black Body: Miscegenation as Sexual Consumption in African American Literature and Culture* (New York, NY: Peter Lang Publishing, 2006), 80.

¹⁰⁸ Sharpe, *Monstrous Intimacies*, 39.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 49.

¹¹⁰ Griffiths, *Traumatic Possessions*, 13.

A New World Song

After the operation, Ursa recovers the powers of reproduction through other forms of power, specifically cultural production. The novel's literary use of African-American oral traditions as well as dialogue, especially imaginary dialogue, to structure Ursa's intergenerational memory highlights an alternative to her foremothers' system of transfer that is nevertheless embodied.¹¹¹ As a professional blues singer, Ursa also carries on the early twentieth-century legacies of classic blues women, for whom this post-slavery musical genre was a lyrical expression of their lives after abolition.¹¹² In *Blues Legacies and Black Feminisms*, Angela Y. Davis argues that the blues is an oral tradition of feminist consciousness specific to black working-class communities.¹¹³ "The birth of the blues," she contends, "was aesthetic evidence of new psychosocial realities within the black population" marked by freedom from enslavement.¹¹⁴ Overarching sexual themes thus speak to previously controlled experiences such as reproduction. According to Davis, black women's blues in particular advance a working-class model of womanhood based on collective experiences of sexual exploitation during slavery and *simultaneously*, post-slavery social constructions of sexuality.¹¹⁵ Ursa likewise takes hold of the blues as a critical aesthetic engagement with the past as both her foremothers *and* the historical archives remember it.

On the one hand, blues repetition enacts an aesthetic representation of legal binds haunting the novel. "I wanted a song that would touch me, touch my life *and* theirs," explains Ursa:

A Portuguese song, but not a Portuguese song. A new world song. A song branded with the new world. I thought of the girl who had to sleep with her master and mistress. Her father, the master. Her daughter's father. The father of her daughter's daughter. How many generations? Days that were pages of hysteria. She went and got her daughter, womb swollen with the child of her own father. How many generations had to bow to his genital fantasies?¹¹⁶

¹¹¹ For more on oral tradition in African American literature see Gayl Jones, *Liberating Voices: Oral Tradition in African American Literature* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991).

¹¹² Cat compares Ursa's strained voice to Ma Rainey's, asserting that, "the strain made it better, because you could tell what she'd been through" (44).

¹¹³ Angela Y. Davis, *Blues Legacies and Black Feminisms: Gertrude "Ma" Rainey, Bessie Smith, and Billie Holiday* (New York, NY: Vintage Books, 1998).

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 5.

¹¹⁵ Davis, *Blues Legacies*, 4-10. Elsewhere (46-47), she specifically discusses slave breeding.

¹¹⁶ Jones, *Corregidora*, 59.

In this passage, Ursa's description of matrilineal descent emphasizes intergenerational sexual exploitation. The repetition of father, rather than a metaphoric return to the slave master or "first father," performs the actuality of her own parental lineage, which the 1871 Free Womb Law claimed to reform. Like repeated blues lyric, Ursa's description generates a rhythm that gestures towards the inevitability of escape for *herself*, next in line after the girl's daughter's daughter (Mama). The rhythm seems to control reproductivity, which also reflects the legal doctrine of *partus sequitur ventrem*, until *she* breaks the driving beat to ask how many generations—a question that can be posed in response to the law of inheritability *and at the same time*, her foremothers. Though, as I argued earlier, an attempt to *reclaim* reproductive autonomy, the demand to "make generations" becomes a totalizing narrative of its own. While equating her foremothers' demand to the slave master's genital fantasies very dangerously conflates the self-determined making of generations and slave breeding—the economic management of procreation central to transatlantic modernity's systems of domination—posing Ursa's question to the girl, Gram, signals a concurrent break in the transmission of intergenerational memory. Within the interval emerges a different mode of (re)production: a new world song. And only the blues, situated squarely within its *historical* interval, can (not) be a Portuguese song, branded, like the bodies of enslaved women, like the trauma of human branding on post-slavery subjectivity, with *global* histories of colonialism. Only the blues could *touch* her life and theirs, creating a womb-like song of many voices. "*They squeezed Corregidora into me, and I sung back in return*," Ursa tells Mutt in an imagined conversation.¹¹⁷ Through singing, sexual violence transforms into resistance as alternative to making generations.

Whenever Ursa talks about her music she distinguishes herself from Corregidora; what does in fact distinguish her from Mama, Gram, and Great Gram is that unlike them, she is indeed *not* his daughter. Hers is a demand to be seen as a break in transmission, not because of her hysterectomy, but the divergent circumstances of her own birth. In an earlier passage she even renames her herself, erasing the surname that in Kentucky, is a source of curiosity and constant reminder that the American South is part and parcel of a circum-Atlantic world. "*I am Ursa C*," she announces, "*I have tears for eyes. I was made to touch my past at an early age. I found it on my mother's tiddies. In her milk. Let no one pollute my music. I will dig out their temples. I will pluck out their eyes.*"¹¹⁸ Ursa refuses to inherit Corregidora's surname, yet the surname she chooses for herself is not completely divorced from his legacy; C is and is not Corregidora. Like a song branded with the new world, so too is the letter C. While it bears the trace of Corregidora, C sets Ursa apart. The surname she chooses is a palimpsest on which Ursa has written a new story that demands recognition. Read instead as "*I am Ursa see*," the phrase becomes an assertion of Ursa's standpoint epistemology.¹¹⁹ In other words, an assertion of Ursa's situated knowledge about the past rather than a story she repeats for the sake of repetition. She was literally made, conceived by Mama, to touch her past at an early age. The purpose of making

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 103.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 77.

¹¹⁹ See Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment* (New York, NY: Routledge, 1990).

generations however, goes beyond repeating an inherited past in its original form. Ursa finds a song in Mama's milk, in her foremothers' milk, one that she sings anew. As such, Corregidora necessarily changes, revealing another narrative unbound to his name or to his legacy.

Her inability to reproduce does not prevent Ursa from making generations precisely because she bears witness through the blues. And it is through the blues that she, unlike her foremothers, produces a different present from their past. Ursa uses blues lyric "to explain what will always be there:" the trace of Corregidora in her flesh.¹²⁰ Though Gram listened to the blues, Mama believes that it is "devil's music," that even the voice is a devil.¹²¹ Indeed, blues singers were historically associated with the devil in part because women's blues contested patriarchy in dominant culture as well as in African-American communities.¹²² The blues emerged as a secular genre through which black women engaged with social constructions of sexuality and in particular, sexual autonomy after slavery.¹²³ Like the blues women who shaped a working-class model of womanhood through the blues, one that accounts for sexual exploitation during slavery, Ursa lays claim to her sexual autonomy in blues form. Jones' literary use of blues stanza in the novel draws attention to how the blues, as a critical aesthetic representation, allows for collective historical memory to be remembered without reproducing trauma.¹²⁴

While mama be sleeping, the ole man he crawl into bed

While mama be sleeping, the ole man he crawl into bed

When mama have wake up, he shacking his nasty old head

Don't come here to my house, don't come here to my house I said

Don't come here to my house, don't come here to my house I said

¹²⁰ Jones, *Corregidora*, 66. In "Gayl Jones and the Matrilineal Metaphor of Tradition," Madu Dubey similarly argues that, "Ursa's blues voice at least partially breaks free from the collective feminine tradition represented by the Corregidora women's narrative, but it does not thereby achieve an absolute break from the past, for the blues voice always carries the traces of prior history and tradition." Madhu Dubey, "Gayl Jones and the Matrilineal Metaphor of Tradition," *Signs* 20.2 (1995): 264.

¹²¹ Jones, *Corregidora*, 53.

¹²² See Davis, *Blues Legacies*, 120-24.

¹²³ "Because slaves were legally defined as commodities, women of childbearing age were valued in accordance with their breeding potential and were often forced to copulate with men—viewed as "bucks"—chosen by their owners for the sole purpose of producing valuable progeny," states Davis. "Moreover, direct sexual exploitation of African women by their white masters was a constant feature of slavery." *Ibid.*, 10.

¹²⁴ For more on Jones' use of blues stanza in the novel as well as the structure of spoken language, see Donia Elizabeth Allen, "The Role of Blues in Gayl Jones' *Corregidora*," *Callaloo* 25.1 (2002): 257-273; Ashraf H. Rushdy "Relate Sexual to Historical: Race, Resistance, and Desire in Gayl Jones's *Corregidora*," *African American Review* 34.2 (2000): 273-297; and Melvin Dixon, "Singing a Deep Song: Language as Evidence in the Novels of Gayl Jones," in *Black Women Writers (1950-1980): A Critical Evaluation*, edited by Mari Evans (NY: Anchor Press, 1984).

Fore you get any this booty, you gon have to lay down dead

*Fore you get any this booty, you gon have to lay down dead.*¹²⁵

Here, Ursa could be singing about any one of her foremothers, all of whom refer to Corregidora as “Old Man.” Within the blues stanza, multiple voices exist simultaneously, making it possible for Mama to be singing about Gram as well, or for Gram to be singing about Great Gram. In other words, the story unfolds on a continuum in which repetition performs the demand to make generations; Ursa retells their story as she is taught to, leaving evidence against the grain of slave breeding. Though she does not break with the rhythm, she does break with the storyline. In this version of the past, Corregidora fails to violate Mama. It is the blues stanza that allows her to create a dissonant storyline without destabilizing the harmony. Far from a narrative of victimization, Ursa repeats the past in a way that centralizes her foremothers’ agency.¹²⁶ Through the blues, Ursa participates in the transfer and continuity of knowledge while at the same time, reproducing a different past, rewriting a history of cumulative trauma. The blues stanza conserves intergenerational memory, making generations as well as claims on meaning. Mama threatens to kill Old Man Corregidora. In this version of the past, Mama disrupts slavery’s economic management of procreation. The blues provides a performance of history that refuses the American grammar and elucidates the resistance inherent in rescripting the rape narrative to have self-protection.

Conclusion

The 1871 Free Womb Law reversed the matrilineal heritability of slave status, *partus sequitur ventrem*, by freeing the unborn children of enslaved women. A closer look at the law reveals that it actually reestablishes control over enslaved women’s reproductivity. Reading in counterpoint to Gayl Jones’ *Corregidora* further reveals that the Free Womb Law failed to protect the children of enslaved women from sexual exploitation. Though Gram is born on Corregidora’s coffee plantation after 1871, she faces the same sexual exploitation as Great Gram, the only legally enslaved person in Ursa’s matrilineal line. Ursa’s intergenerational memory shows how sexual exploitation is generationally repeated from the era of legal slavery to her present in the Jim Crow South. I argue that the novel draws a connection between slavery breeding and Ursa’s hysterectomy, exposing the latter as another form of invasive control. In particular, I point to the role of medicine in perpetuating invasive control across generations as well as national contexts, which the following chapter expands on in an analysis of medical inspection at the nation’s borders. Finally, I argue that Jones’ use of blues stanza in the novel

¹²⁵ Jones, *Corregidora*, 67.

¹²⁶ Li argues that, “Jones treats enslavement both as a historical condition and as an overwhelming attachment to inherited trauma.... I chart how the resistance of one generation becomes the trauma of another and the ways in which slavery’s legacy perpetuates a form of psychological bondage.” Stephanie Li, *Something Akin to Freedom: The Choice of Bondage in Narratives by African American Women* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2010), 13-14.

emphasizes Ursa's transmission of embodied knowledge in a way that upholds her foremothers' agency.

In *The Archive and the Repertoire*, Diana Taylor argues that performance transmits a repertoire of knowledge through the body.¹²⁷ Ursa's performed blues likewise transmits a repertoire of embodied resistance and knowledge about the past. Jones' use of blues stanza in the novel further shifts the focus from the discursive to the performative, highlighting other possibilities of transmission situated in the body. The demand to make generations, as I have argued, is more than a traumatic repetition of the past that binds Ursa to the slave master's law; it is a way of leaving evidence. Ursa's blues places her foremothers' memory within a collective historical memory that draws attention to the continuous present of slavery. As a nonarchival system of transmission, it stands against the master narrative. "*They can burn the papers but they can't burn conscious,*" declares Gram.¹²⁸ The transmission of consciousness produces a body of evidence, a verdict. Through the blues, Ursa makes generations despite her inability to reproduce, attesting to the fact that Corregidora will never be forgotten though his legacy can be reclaimed. In the "end" of the story, she articulates the slave master/father as a rapist and resists him; for her, the blues is another way to saw "Naw."

¹²⁷ Diana Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003). This is the process that Joseph Roach calls "performance genealogy." *Cities of the Dead: Circum-Atlantic Performance* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1996).

¹²⁸ Jones, *Corregidora*, 22.

There are tens of thousands of poems
composed on these walls.
They are all cries of complaint and sadness.
The day I am rid of this prison and attain
success,
I must remember that this chapter once existed.

-Anonymous, *Islands*¹²⁹

No one who suffers may go, though the mark of disease be
infinitesimal and oured (sic) save by the narrowest margin.

-The American Consulate General in Hong Kong, INS
Correspondence Files¹³⁰

Chapter Two

‘Loathsome and Contagious Diseases:’ Medical Inspection at the Angel Island Immigration Station During the Chinese Exclusion Era (1882-1943)

In the spring of 1882, Congress passed the Chinese Exclusion Act—the first federal law to exclude immigrants based on race—just as the transpacific trade in contracted “coolie” labor expanded to replace a once enslaved labor force on plantations throughout the Americas. An immigration station was subsequently built on Angel Island to process immigrants from Asian countries in the San Francisco Bay. This chapter examines medical inspection at the Angel Island Immigration Station during the exclusion era to show how the United States Public Health Service (USPHS) became a federal agency charged with enforcing restrictive immigration policy. With a state-of-the-art bacteriology lab on site, public health officials tested Chinese immigrants for ‘loathsome and contagious diseases.’ Doing so allowed the USPHS to exclude all Chinese immigrants, including citizens, though the Act specifically barred laborers and their female spouses. Most importantly, disease carried racialized meaning as part of medical inspection and simultaneously served to racialize immigrants in a way that differed for Chinese women previously excluded under the 1875 Page Act. This chapter builds on the work of Angel Island historians Erika Lee and Judy Yung to highlight the alleged threat of *moral* contagion

¹²⁹ Him Lai, Genny Lim, and Judy Yung, eds., *Island: Poetry and History of Chinese Immigrants on Angel Island, 1910-1940* (Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press, 1980), 66.

¹³⁰ “Trachoma and American Citizens,” Immigration and Naturalization Service Records, Record Group 85, No. 245, National Archives and Records Administration, San Bruno, CA.

posed by Chinese women in particular. I argue that the gendered dimensions of biopolitical subjection at America's Pacific gateway legitimized ever-invasive public health measures until eventually, public health officials proposed to examine sexual reproduction vis-à-vis paternity tests.

This chapter couples records of the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) with another set of archival material: poems carved into the barrack walls by detained immigrants. In the 1970s, Asian-American activists fought to preserve these poems, later collected and translated in *Island* (1980). Read in counterpoint to the INS correspondence files, the carved poems materialize other voices that reframe medical inspection as a biologizing technique of social differentiation within a transnational optic. Historical studies of the Angel Island Immigration Station often rely on Chinese immigrant case files to recover agential subjects from the immigration station, completely overlooking their poetry as an alternative self-narrated record. In this chapter, I engage with these poems on multiple levels, necessarily expanding archival methodology to include an affective site analysis. Woven throughout this chapter are reflective field notes from my own physical experience of being at the Angel Island Immigration Station. Drawing attention to the physicality of archival research further emphasizes the ways in which these poems, and the act of carving them into the barrack walls, document the past as well as embodied memory. It likewise leads me to consider Angel Island as a transpacific crossing point inextricably linked to *Corregidora's* coffee plantation in colonial Brazil. Here I push the boundaries of methods in comparative ethnic studies scholarship by shifting my gaze to the ocean, which reveals the communicability of invasive control across time and space.

From the American South to Angel Island

While conducting research on the Angel Island Immigration Station at the National Archives and Record's Administration in San Bruno, California, I stumbled across a document in Portuguese entitled: "*termo de modificação do contrato com a companhia imperial de imigração de Tóquio, Japão, para introdução de imigrantes japonezes.*"¹³¹ Among the records of the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) was also a translated copy of the original contract, dated and signed by the Land, Colonization, and Immigration Directorate of Brazil's Department of Agriculture on November 6, 1907.¹³² The contracting parties, "Government" and "Company," agree to the terms of subsidized immigration of up to 1,000 laborers per year from Japan to Brazil. "The company," it reads, "pledges itself to secure and

¹³¹ The document is an enclosed clipping from the *Diário Oficial*, which published a copy of the modified contract. A translated copy of the original contract is included in the dispatch as well. The modified contract states that although the Government agrees to pay the price of passage for Japanese immigrants, planters reserve the right to discount travel expenses from their salaries.

¹³² It is worth noting that the Gentlemen's Agreement restricting immigration from Japan to the U.S. was concurrently signed in 1907. For details on emigrant ships en route to Brazil, including the *Kasato Maru*, see Robert Eric Barde, *Immigration at the Golden Gate: Passenger Ships, Exclusion, and Angel Island* (Westport, CT: Praeger Press, 2008), 104-07.

transport from Japan to Santos three thousand Japanese immigrants, agriculturers, made up of families of from three to ten persons in a condition for manual labor, and shall be considered in a condition for that work men or women from 12-45 years of age.”¹³³ One year later, 790 Japanese immigrants arrived in São Paulo aboard the *Kasato Maru* after 52 days of travel and were assigned to six different coffee plantations throughout the region.

How could I have returned to *Corregidora*'s coffee plantation from the Angel Island Immigration Station in the San Francisco Bay? That is the last place I expected the archives to lead me. I should have known, of course, that the biopolitics of colonial outsourcing would always lead to a preceding site of extra-territorial dispossession. Just as former slave nations declared abolition, legal binds within the extension of rights-based discourse continued in the exchange of human flesh along the same trade routes. However, substitution betrayed historically recurring patterns that the archives, or in the case of Brazil, burned archives, sought to conceal. Rising from the ashes were phoenix-like bodies of evidence spanned by a narrow bridge of memory connecting the slave quarters to the detention barracks. In 1940, a fire destroyed the Angel Island Immigration Station's administration building. The government might have tampered with evidence but memory leaks the fundamental tenets of a circum-Atlantic world bleeding into Pacific Ocean crossings.

This chapter is not supposed to be about *Corregidora*. A closer look at the contract nevertheless reveals a few “ghostly matters” central to medical inspection at the Angel Island Immigration Station during the Chinese Exclusion Era (1882-1943).¹³⁴ The contract is the empirical evidence of a haunting that I trace through seemingly disconnected cases of invasive control, cases of subjecting non-legal persons to medicine, often in the form of experimentation. “The general opinion in Brazil,” reports Irving B. Dudley in an enclosed dispatch from the American Embassy to the INS, “is that Japanese immigration is greatly desired and that Japanese would be an excellent substitute for Italian labor on the coffee plantations.”¹³⁵ In the transition from slave to free labor after abolition, coffee remained Brazil's number one export; Italian immigrants were the first to replace Creoles on plantations impervious to the 1888 Golden Law, which abolished slavery in Brazil, followed by Japanese.¹³⁶ Although the Government agrees to pay the price of passage, the modified contract includes an insurance policy that requires the

¹³³ Immigration Agreement—Japan and Brazil, 1907-1909, Immigration and Naturalization Service Records, Record Group 85, File 51814/8, Reel 1, Frame 0751, Reel 1, National Archives and Records Administration, San Bruno, CA. According to the contract, "Government" refers to the State of São Paulo and "Company" refers to the Imperial Company of Immigration of Tokyo.

¹³⁴ For the notion of “ghostly matters,” see Avery Gordon, *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2008).

¹³⁵ Dispatch by Irving B. Dudley, Immigration and Naturalization Service Records, Record Group 85, File 51814/8, Reel 1, Frame 0751, Reel 1, National Archives and Records Administration, San Bruno, CA.

¹³⁶ Prior to Japanese, Brazil contracted Italian laborers. However, the Prinetti Decree prohibited immigration to Brazil in 1902 due to poor working conditions and low pay. See Thomas H. Holloway, “Immigration and Abolition: the Transition from Slave to Free Labor in the São Paulo Coffee Zone,” in *Essays Concerning the Socio-Economic History of Brazil and Portuguese India*, ed. Dauril Alden and Warren Dean (Gainesville, FL: University of Florida Press, 1977), 150-78.

Company “to return at its cost the immigrants who are found not to be in the conditions of the contract and of the regulations in force.”¹³⁷ Moving to Angel Island from the American South necessarily returns to colonial Brazil through a series of predetermined substitutions.

Medical Inspection at the Angel Island Immigration Station

Subsumed under the terms of subsidized immigration is an insurance policy. The obligation to refund the government for those who cannot work exposes the enduring slavocratic logic still dominating the international market. From this binding agreement, brokered with the Company instead of the laborers, emerges a concern for medical conditions reminiscent of the slave master’s economic interest in the welfare of enslaved laborers. “Profit drove the medical treatment of slaves from their very first encounters with Western medicine,” reminds Harriet Washington. “Kidnapped Africans en route to the Americas were cursorily examined by ship’s surgeons in an attempt to cut losses by immediately jettisoning those with such stigmata as Winterbottom’s sign, a swelling of the lymph nodes found in those who harbored trypanosomiasis, or sleeping sickness.”¹³⁸ At the Angel Island Immigration Station, public health officials first examined passengers aboard the arriving ships.¹³⁹ Those in steerage, the poorest of all and predominantly Chinese, were loaded onto a “foul” ferryboat for primary inspection on the island, where officials segregated immigrants by race and gender.¹⁴⁰ The never-ending need for workers, for a labor force in the American West, renewed a partnership not between physicians and planters, but physicians and the INS. At the same time, Chinese immigration led to increasingly restrictive laws in the United States for fear of race suicide, defined as “a dangerous dilution of the pure Anglo-Saxon Protestant racial stock.”¹⁴¹

According to the Immigration Act of 1891, the Public Health Service (PHS) classified excludable medical conditions into three groups: A, B, and C. Class A includes “loathsome and contagious diseases,” on the basis of which public health officials could legally detain and deport immigrants. “A loathsome disease is a disease which excites abhorrence in others by reason of the knowledge of its existence,” states the *Book of Instructions for the Medical Inspection of Aliens*. “The term contagious as used in the law shall be regarded as synonymous with communicable. By loathsome contagious disease is meant a loathsome communicable disease,

¹³⁷ Immigration Agreement—Japan and Brazil, 1907-1909.

¹³⁸ Harriet A. Washington, *Medical Apartheid: the Dark History of Medical Experimentation on Black Americans from Colonial Times to the Present* (New York, NY: Doubleday Press, 2006), 43.

¹³⁹ According to the Federal Quarantine Act of 1893, immigrants were actually inspected upon *and* before arrival, in their country of origin.

¹⁴⁰ For more on “primary inspection,” see Erika Lee and Judy Yung, *Angel Island: Immigrant Gateway to America* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2010), 31-35 and 69-74.

¹⁴¹ Natalia Molina, *Fit to Be Citizens? Public Health and Race in Los Angeles, 1879-1939* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2006), 47.

essentially chronic in character.”¹⁴² This definition depends on an unspoken “Chinese” presence demarcating racial lines within the boundaries of disease. “What does this even tell me?” I scribbled in the margins of my field notes on the Doctor’s Register of Patients. It tells me that during the Chinese Exclusion Era, medical inspection became an institutionalized form of biopolitical subjection on the basis of race, sexuality, and ability, whose simultaneity—whether in an individual or a population—signified symptoms of excludable diseases as part of border-control policies designed to quarantine “undesirable” immigrants on Angel Island, the space of abjection. The PHS played a major role in the enforcement of exclusion laws, which had less to do with fitting the able-bodied standards of a new industrial economy than those of a racial *and* sexual nationalism.¹⁴³

I want to focus, for a moment, on the affective politics of excludable diseases. The communicability of a loathsome disease, its potential to infect other bodies, the potential, even, for mass outbreak, in a way queers the alleged bio (read ontological) security threat posed by Chinese immigrants. Communicable disease control therefore functions as part of a regulatory regime seeking to contain the carriers of foreign contagion, racialized and sexualized bodies slipping outside the symbolic order into an abject state that disrupts the relationship between the biological and the discursive. Chinese immigrants thus embody, *a priori*, the threat of a disease that can be transmitted to a citizen-subject or to a whole nation as with an epidemic. At Angel Island, standard inspections “used different and more invasive procedures that were due in part to popular beliefs in the inscrutability of Asians, particularly Chinese,” notes Rand, including bacteriological tests that required samples of blood and stool.¹⁴⁴ In a site of hypersecuritization, a queer theoretic denaturalizes how the state attempts to regulate racialized and gendered bodies, drawing attention to the underlying discourse of public morality. Trachoma, tuberculosis, syphilis, gonorrhea, and leprosy—the syntactic proximity of these words written next to patient names betrays the conflation of race and disease, an embodied conflation that *excites* abhorrence. Something loathsome, *the object of the feeling*, causes hatred, disgust, and repulsion in part, because it has no morals. I recall Kant’s classification of moral character according to “finer” feelings of the beautiful and sublime. Like West Indians, Kant professes, the Chinese “display love of the grotesque sublime.”¹⁴⁵ The embodiment of disease signifies abnormal social reproduction, spreading both the disease itself and immorality, as a contagion does.

I can’t help but wonder if the PHS based their instruction book on that of Dr. Juriah Harris, author of the 1858 manual that classified diseases rendering blacks “unsound” for work;

¹⁴² Quoted in Amy L. Fairchild, *Science at the Borders: Immigrant Medical Inspection and the Shaping of the Modern Industrial Labor Force* (Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins University Press, 2003), 23.

¹⁴³ For more on ableism, but in relation to medical inspection at Ellis Island, see Roxana Galusca, “From Fictive Ability to National Identity: Disability, Medical Inspection, and Public Health Regulations on Ellis Island,” *Cultural Critique*. 72 (2009): 137-63.

¹⁴⁴ Erica Rand, *The Ellis Island Snow Globe* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005), 75.

¹⁴⁵ Immanuel Kant, *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime*, trans. John T. Goldthwait (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1960), 97-117.

“among the deal-breaking ailments it cited were loss of limbs, cancer, asthma, rheumatism, debilitating injury to muscles, keloid scars, and syphilis.”¹⁴⁶ Testifying to an enslaved laborer’s soundness or ability to work was an integral part of the slave auction as well as the practice of Southern physicians. Upon who else’s unspoken presence does the definition of loathsome and contagious diseases depend? Who else is there haunting the inspection line? The Chinese Exclusion Act evinced the need for federal immigrant inspection sites, placing immigration regulation in the hands of public health officials who differentially applied inspection procedures intended for all new arrivals. As Lee and Yung argue in *Angel Island*, the Angel Island Immigration Station was specifically built to enforce the Chinese Exclusion Act at the nation’s Pacific gateway, setting it apart from other immigration stations. “Both public opinion and medical theory assumed that Asians were more susceptible to dangerous diseases and therefore posed a greater health risk to the public,” they contend.¹⁴⁷ Transmission is a central factor, for exclusion laws enforced by the PHS on the pretext of biosecurity attempt to ward off race degeneration; here lies the early institutionalization of eugenic principles, whose foundations rest in Ursa’s intergenerational memory.¹⁴⁸ The Angel Island Immigration Station is undeniably connected to the American South, to Brazil, to global histories of racial slavery and colonialism. The question is, how? What are the (un)intelligible patterns, repetitive instances, of invasive control discernible across time and space, from one historical moment to another, from one living laboratory to another?

A Transpacific Crossing Point

Arrivals at the Angel Island Immigration Station were neither granted nor denied citizenship, a legal aspect of the station not yet considered. Specifically designed to exclude, Angel Island was fundamentally different from the Ellis Island Immigration Station and paradoxically, an *extralegal* zone at the nation’s border where non-admitted foreigners were held in detention for unknown periods of time. Detainees included new arrivals but also returning residents, those awaiting trial, others deportation, and passengers en route to neighboring countries. While on Angel Island, however, all immigrants were *would-be* citizens of the United States *who bore the legal burden of proof for entry*. Applicants claiming the right of admission, as members of exempt classes, had no way to prove their status besides testifying to who they are. The station’s cut-off location, however, limited access to witnesses from the mainland and isolated immigrants on an escape-proof island.¹⁴⁹ Often referred to as the “Ellis Island of the

¹⁴⁶ Washington, *Medical Apartheid*, 43.

¹⁴⁷ Lee and Yung *Angel Island*, 38.

¹⁴⁸ The 1850 Anti-Miscegenation Law prohibiting interracial marriage between Whites and Blacks was amended in 1860 to prohibit marriage between Whites and Chinese, also on the basis of race degeneration.

¹⁴⁹ For these reasons, Chinese community leaders in San Francisco’s Chinatown repeatedly petitioned to have the Immigration Station on the mainland. For more, see H.M. Lai, “Island of Immortals: Chinese Immigrants and the Angel Island Immigration Station,” *California History*. 57.1 (1978): 90.

West,” it was anything but; more akin to the adjacent Alcatraz Island prison, the Immigration Station replaced steamship detention at the Pacific Mail Company’s overflowing wharf.¹⁵⁰ As an anonymous detainee confirms, “This place is called an island of immortals / But as a matter of fact the mountain wilderness is a prison.”¹⁵¹ Like the construction of Chinatown as a threatening urban space during the successive smallpox epidemics in nineteenth-century San Francisco, Angel Island was constructed, literally and metaphorically, to confine disease-breeding immigrants.¹⁵² In a way, immigrants were simultaneously in a state of confinement and (territorial) transience. The Immigration Station processed one million people during its years of operation from 1910-1940. Although it sought to enforce national borders, Angel Island was itself a floating break in spatial and temporal boundaries that exceeded the nation’s obsessive containment efforts in ways not always recognizable to the state.

To think of Angel Island as a *transpacific* crossing point highlights processes of (un)becoming specific to, in the words of Joseph Roach, “oceanic intercultural.”¹⁵³ Only a forty-five minute ferryboat ride away from San Francisco, its location—at sea—nevertheless situates Angel Island on a separate as well as unfixed geopolitical map of empire in relationship to many other fixed points. We might think of it, instead, as a three-week steamship ride away from, or back to, Hong Kong. I want to draw attention to the importance of our orientation for a critical consideration of the island as a site of exclusion where federal agencies could suspend the protection of citizenship rights without impunity.¹⁵⁴ The Immigration Station is a key for understanding immigration policy and how the law shifts according to contingent historical events. As a place of exchange, of processing, it is likewise a key for understanding how immigrants renegotiate legal boundaries and ever-invasive regulatory mechanisms through forms of resistance not limited to contesting the law.¹⁵⁵ In the detention barracks of the Angel Island

¹⁵⁰ Barde, “Moving Migrants Across the Pacific,” chap. 4 in *Immigration at the Golden Gate*.

¹⁵¹ This poem reads in direct contrast to the *San Francisco Chronicle*’s 1907 report, “San Francisco to Have the Finest Immigration Station in the World,” excerpted by Lee and Yung in *Angel Island*: “the newcomers from foreign shores will probably think they have struck Paradise when they emerge from the steerage quarters of an ocean liner and land at the summer resort which the Immigration Bureau has provided for them” (13).

¹⁵² For more, see Susan Craddock, “Sewers and Scapegoats: Spatial Metaphors of Smallpox in Nineteenth-Century San Francisco,” *Social Science Medicine*. 41.7 (1995): 957-61; and Nayan Shah, *Contagious Divides: Epidemics and Race in San Francisco’s Chinatown* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2001), 57-63.

¹⁵³ Joseph Roach, *Cities of the Dead: Circum-Atlantic Performance* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1996), 5.

¹⁵⁴ I borrow the notion of “orientation” from the anthology *Orientations: Mapping Studies in the Asian Diaspora*, eds. Kandice Chuh and Karen Shimakawa (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001), in which the authors discuss the importance of epistemological orientation in relation to disciplinary boundaries.

¹⁵⁵ With regards to the law, Lee and Yung state that, “The Chinese in America consistently challenged the constitutionality of the exclusion laws and protested the ways in which they were enforced” (*Angel Island*, 76). For more on resistance to the law by way of the law, see Christian G. Fritz, “Due Process, Treaty Rights, and the Efforts to Exclude the Chinese, 1882-1891,” chap. 2 in *Entry Denied: Exclusion and the Chinese Community in America, 1882-1943*, ed. Sucheng Chan (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1991), 25-56; Lucy E. Salyer, “Laws Harsh as Tigers”: Enforcement of the Chinese Exclusion Laws, 1891-1924,” chap. 3 in *Entry Denied: Exclusion and*

Immigration Station, Foucauldian biopower falls short of accounting for the racialized and gendered bodies of transient immigrants at this global crossroads.¹⁵⁶

The 1875 Page Act

In *Wayward Reproductions*, Alys Eve Weinbaum describes the co-constitutive relationship between race, reproduction, and nation as a “race/reproduction bind” that organizes transatlantic modernity’s systems of domination.¹⁵⁷ Attendant ideas of reproductive genealogy, unlike *partus sequitur ventrem*, secure belonging in a racially homogenous nation threatened by non-white immigrants. At seaports of entry, the conflation of race and disease sheds additional light on the race/reproduction bind as it relates to the regulation of (non-)reproductive sexuality. Among the physical and mental illnesses listed in the first class of excludable diseases is polygamy. This classification betrays the underlying moral code that rules medical inspection and the desire to *purify* the abject from the nation, not just racially, but also, always already, sexually as well. What then, defines inadmissibility and its counterpoint, fitness for citizenship? How does the medicalization of racial nationalism legitimize invasive public health measures as part of medical inspection until finally, the INS proposes to conduct paternity tests in 1934?

To answer this questions means putting the Chinese Exclusion Act in a longer genealogy. In *Chinese Immigrants, African Americans, and Racial Anxiety in the United States 1848-1882*, Najia Aarim-Heriot suggests that we think about Chinese Exclusion as a *movement* beginning with the Mexican-American War in the late 1840s. She explains that the ideology of Manifest Destiny conceptualized the American West, and specifically California, as a racially homogenous region devoid of all non-white populations including blacks, later giving rise to anti-Chinese racism.¹⁵⁸ Claims that blacks had “bad blood” extended to the Chinese and

the Chinese Community in America, 1882-1943, ed. Sucheng Chan (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1991), 57-93; and Sucheng Chan, “The Exclusion of Chinese Women, 1870-1943,” in *Entry Denied: Exclusion and the Chinese Community in America, 1882-1943*, ed. Sucheng Chan (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1991), 94-146. See also Lucy E. Salyer, “Judicial Justice, 1891-1905,” Part 1 in *“Laws Harsh as Tigers”: Chinese Immigrants and the Shaping of Modern Immigration Law* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1995); and Erika Lee, “One Hundred Kinds of Oppressive Laws: The Chinese Response to American Exclusion,” chap. 4 in *At America’s Gates: Chinese Immigration During the Exclusion Era, 1882-1943* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2003).

¹⁵⁶ For more on transience, see Shah’s latest book, in which he shifts the focus away from permanent settlement to explore the intimacies between transient male migrants in the western regions of the U.S. and Canada during the first half of the twentieth century. Nayan Shah, *Stranger Intimacy: Contesting Race, Sexuality, and the Law in the North American West* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2011).

¹⁵⁷ Alys Eve Weinbaum, *Wayward Reproductions: Genealogies of Race and Nation in Transatlantic Modern Thought* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004), 34-60.

¹⁵⁸ Najia Aarim-Heriot, *Chinese Immigrants, African Americans, and Racial Anxiety in the United States 1848-1882* (Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2003). For more on the image and idea of the west coast as a racially homogenous region in the late nineteenth century, see Ronald Takaki, *Strangers from a Different Shore: A History of Asian Americans* (Boston, MA: Little, Brown and Company, 1989): “Historically, whites generally perceived

leveraged to accuse commercial sex workers of poisoning the Anglo-Saxon bloodline with venereal diseases. The Page Act, passed in 1875, just two days after the Civil Rights legislation, excluded Chinese women—except for merchant’s wives—whose perceived propensity for prostitution was further “proven” by scientific racism.¹⁵⁹ Since California state law could not exclude women for being Chinese, the Page Act successfully legitimized exclusion on the basis of regulating public *morals*, inextricably linked to disease, via sexuality. In her very brief consideration of Angel Island in comparison to the Ellis Island Immigration Station, Erica Rand astutely points out that “the resulting gender imbalance, at best before 1920 little better than ten to one, bears, of course, on the issue of whose reproductive practices are valued; any portrayal of an easy flow of heritage along progenitor lines elides the differential access to the making and maintenance of such ties.”¹⁶⁰ We might say that notions of genealogical *disease* transmission frame the race/reproduction bind when it comes to maintaining the defining the nation’s boundaries.

Connected to the administration building by a curved path is a two-story hospital on a hill with separate entrances for whites and Asians. I can’t go inside, but I know that on the first floor there is a disinfectant room to fumigate passenger belongings, including their clothes, using live steam, formaldehyde, and ammonia. At one time, arrivals were also disinfected, bathed with carbolic soap, and quarantined for fourteen mandatory days while ships were fumigated too. In addition to the hospital facilities is a once state-of-the-art bacteriological laboratory where Public Health officials examined the blood and stool samples of select arrivals. They’re looking for what they can’t see with their eyes, for otherwise undetectable traces of parasitic “Oriental” diseases classified as loathsome and contagious in 1910. For Asian immigrants, lab tests were part of medical inspection at the Angel Island Immigration Station, which began with a physical examination of the naked body after examination aboard ships where each new arrival received an identification number. “Take your clothes off and get up on the table.”¹⁶¹ There it is again, the command to strip; I can hear Corregidora’s voice in the doctor’s and now, in the public health official’s voice barking orders in English at the line of Chinese women corralled in a separate patient ward. “When the doctor came, I had to take off all my clothes. It was so embarrassing and shameful. I didn’t really want to let him examine me, but I had no choice,” recounts Lee Puey You, detained for twenty months before she was eventually deported.¹⁶² “The physician had us stripped to the skin and exposed to the chilly sea breeze for several hours before he

America as a racially homogenous society and Americans as white. Long before the Chinese arrived, they had already been predetermined for exclusion by this set of ideas” (49).

¹⁵⁹ Rand also points out that the Page Act “also intended to control the sexual behavior of white people, seen to be under threat by contamination from sex with Chinese prostitutes” (*Ellis Island Snow Globe*, 57).

¹⁶⁰ *Ellis Island Snow Globe*, 57.

¹⁶¹ Gayl Jones, *Corregidora* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1987) 21. I analyze this passage at length in the first chapter of my dissertation.

¹⁶² Lee and Yung, *Angel Island*, 77.

routinely tapped our chest and spine and ordered us to jump up and down like monkeys,” adds Jann Mon Fong. “Was it really a physical exam or was it designed to insult our entire race?”¹⁶³

Unlike male arrivals, public health officials subjected immigrant women to examinations that included an inspection of their moral behavior. In an extension of the Page Act, sexual norms determined medical standards of inadmissibility for non-white women. An immigrant’s *private* sexuality thus becomes a public health concern to be exposed by federal officials, which at the Immigration Station included physicians. In addition to prostitution, officials could exclude immigrants accused of fornication, premarital sex, adultery, and homosexuality. “Immigrant women were especially vulnerable to exclusions based on crimes of moral turpitude, which had been defined by a federal district court in 1913 as an “act of baseness, vileness, or depravity,” stress Lee and Yung.¹⁶⁴ Physicians examined the hands of Chinese merchants for calluses, evidence of being a laborer in disguise.¹⁶⁵ What does evidence of respectability look like on the inspection line, in a blood sample? How did physicians examine Chinese women claiming to be the wife or daughter of a merchant, perhaps a citizen, exempt from exclusion laws? What about women traveling alone? How did federal officers detect “immoral behavior” in Chinese women whose only access to citizenship was by way of their relationship to naturalized men?

Angel Island Poetry

I’m the only person walking towards the Immigration Station on the northeast corner of the island, a National Historic Landmark as of 1964 thanks to the lobbying efforts of Asian American organizations. When I spot the administration building, I instinctively break into a run all the way down the hill to shore. I stare at San Francisco, clear as day, from the dock—it’s a beautiful view of the city, “beautifully torturous” I write in my field notes, adding insult to injury. “For over a month, I have experienced enough winds and waves. / Now on an extended sojourn in jail, I am subject to the ordeals of prison life. / I look up and see Oakland so close by,” one detainee illustrates.¹⁶⁶ I can’t imagine what it must have felt like to see America from here, from this no place, this “state of exception” in the words of Giorgio Agamben, every single day while in confinement after crossing the Pacific Ocean, only to be deported. I turn my back on Gold Mountain and proceed to the detention barracks on the same path on which Public Health officials would have led thousands of Chinese immigrants. On the barrack walls are hundreds of poems, carved in wood by detainees, still visible through layers of paint and putty, which ironically served as a sealer for these first person testimonials. Imperfect erasure: another

¹⁶³ Ibid.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., 53.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., 78-79.

¹⁶⁶ Lai, Lim, and Yung, *Island*, 40.

palimpsest.¹⁶⁷ Most of the poems, in the style of classical Chinese poetry, are undated and unsigned. I could have focused my archival research on the detailed reports of Public Health officials, but these carved poems produce a body of knowledge about the past that dismisses the case files of “diseased aliens” in the INS records. These poems, like Ursa’s songs, refuse the American grammar.¹⁶⁸

The haunting is real. But it’s not just the imperial ghosts of Angel Island that demand our attention. Folded into these poems are ghost stories of survival that only other detainees would understand, stories that, in the words of Avery Gordon, “not only repair representational mistakes, but also strive to understand the conditions under which a memory was produced in the first place, toward a counter-memory, for the future.”¹⁶⁹ A counter-memory of modernity’s violence, sometimes in statements as simple as “I was here,” reveal the Immigration Station for what it really was: a repetitive instance of invasive control extending from the past. At Angel Island, former detainees speak much louder than imperial ghosts still haunting the land. Far from a marginal discourse, “I was here” serves as a resounding declaration of existence unintelligible to the state, one that simultaneously subverts the violence of discourse itself. The declaration doesn’t beg recognition so much as deeply impress upon the present; a counter-memory forever engraved on the barrack walls contrary to the confined yet transient state of its author. Like a moment of connection that constellates Angel Island and other ghost stories, “I was here” is a plaque too for those preceding the exclusion era. In 1775 the Spanish colonized this land, belonging to the Hookoeko tribe of the indigenous Coast Miwok people, followed by other European settlers before the U.S. occupied it for over 100 years of military history.¹⁷⁰ These poems cut; an archival incision—before documents, before paper even—wounding the legacy that walls in some from sea, sun, and citizenship, from the very category of being human. At the same time, these poems expose systemic injury in a way that the national archives can never do. It’s almost as though they stand in for the flesh, scars of a branding iron, laying bare the material effects of state terror. The declaration begs to be *touched* and in doing so, demands our attention affectively, as if touching the “I” would reveal the ghost of an actual person disappeared in the records.

The racially segregated barracks of the Immigration Station are subdivided by gender, though all are guarded and locked. In the section for Chinese men—the “Oriental quarters”—are rows of stacked single bunks, restored for museum visitors. Male detainees, as Lai chronicles in “Island of Immortals,” formed a self-governing organization otherwise known as the Angel Island Liberty Association or *Zizhihui* in 1922.¹⁷¹ Until Yung interviewed Lee Puey You, many

¹⁶⁷ M. Jacqui Alexander, *Pedagogies of Crossing: Meditations on Feminism, Sexual Politics, Memory, and the Sacred* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006), 190.

¹⁶⁸ Hortense J Spillers, “Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe: An American Grammar Book,” *Diacritics* 17.2 (1987): 64-81.

¹⁶⁹ Gordon, *Ghostly Matters*, 22.

¹⁷⁰ For more on the history of Angel Island itself, see Lee and Yung, *Angel Island*, 9-16.

¹⁷¹ Lai, “Island of Immortals,” 96. See also Lai, Lim, and Yung, *Island*, 75.

historians assumed that female detainees had no such organization let alone poetic accounts of their experiences in the detention barracks. However, You confirms that women did indeed write. “The bathroom [burned in the 1940 fire] was filled with poems expressing sadness and bitterness,” she states, “They were about how hard the stay at Angel Island was, how sad and depressed the women were, not knowing when they would be allowed to leave the island.”¹⁷² “During one of my more painful moments,” she continues, “I wrote this poem:”

From across the Pacific Ocean to America

I left my village and all my loved ones.

Who would have thought I would be im-
prisoned in this wooden barrack?

I do not know when I will ever be set free.¹⁷³

You’s poem performs the reorientation necessary for dislocating the nation’s master narrative. By foregrounding the transpacific crossing, she figures Angel Island as an exilic location. She defines America in terms of its distance *away from* her village or home rather than as a specific place. We sense the fact that, to some extent, You immigrated against her will for the promise of something worth leaving all her loved ones.¹⁷⁴ Imprisonment stands in direct contradistinction to the image and idea of Gold Mountain, which her own surprise reduces to a cruel joke, mythos, an unthinkable journey’s end if the destination is America. The wooden barrack from where she writes brings slave quarters in the South (generally of wood frame construction) to mind, as does the contingency of her freedom. In You’s poem, the Immigration Station becomes a configuration of global relations characterized by (dis)continuities from the past that most importantly, render her unfree. Officials eventually deported You on the pretext of fraudulent entry after imprisoning her for almost two years. She never reaches America and on the other hand, she does; the wooden barrack is a referent for Gold Mountain and a national ontology predicated on exclusion. As a form of knowledge production, You’s poem details information about America at a time when Asia—as an object of study—dominated the U.S. imagination, returning the gaze while her interrogators extend theirs further and further into her private life.

¹⁷² Judy Yung, ““A Bowlful of Tears”” Revisited: The Full Story of Lee Puey You’s Immigration Experience at Angel Island,” *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies*. 25.1 (2004): 10.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*, 10-11. For an updated translation, see Lee and Yung, *Angel Island*, 104.

¹⁷⁴ For a first-person account of why You immigrated, see both of her interviews with Yung.

Moral Contagion

Whereas the interrogation of male arrivals focused on busting “paper sons” who forged family ties in an attempt to circumvent immigration restrictions, for women it revolved around determining legitimate intimacy. In 1888, the Chinese Exclusion Act was revised to deny the admission of all immigrants, in addition to laborers, except for officials, merchants, teachers, students, and travelers. Women had to prove that their husband, or father in the case of paper daughters, was a member of an exempt class to gain entry *and* that their marriage was real. The possibility of exemption provided a strategic loophole in the law through which immigrants developed a transnational and highly complex system of coaching.¹⁷⁵ Coupled with the shadow of prostitution, itself an Orientalist haunt, fear of fraudulent entry was nevertheless a justification for subjecting Chinese women to a invasive interrogation process, which included cross-examination often with the supplemental employment of secret detectives. Below is a series of questions from You’s interrogation that exemplify the degree of personal provocation:

Q: During the few days you lived with Woo Tong after that dinner [in Hong Kong], did you have sexual intercourse with him?

Q: [After you were admitted to the United States and started living with Woo Tang] did you immediately have sexual intercourse with Woo Tong?

Q: When did you last have sexual intercourse with Woo Tong?

Q: After you obtained a marriage certificate with Sai Chan, did you voluntarily submit to relationships with him?¹⁷⁶

Questions about You’s sexual relations with Sai Chan, whom she married in China, and Woo Tong, whom she planned to marry in the U.S., are meant to ascertain her “moral character.” While immigrants created false identities that fit the model of nuclear family settlement to bypass race based restrictions, officials leveraged the heteronormative standards of citizenship to further enforce exclusion and at the same time, the boundaries of moral turpitude. The *a priori* assumption that Chinese women are commercial sex workers unless proven otherwise allowed federal agencies to regulate sexuality as part of immigration law. Officials established elaborate forms of examination specifically for Chinese women, detained the longest of all immigrants at Angel Island, harking back to regulations of the Page Act. During the Chinese Exclusion Era, non-normative sexual relations *outside* reproductive marriage constituted the distinction between a legal and illegal alien.

Venereal disease: the most common diagnosis in the Doctor’s Registry of patients. Written, rewritten, and starred. “Seems to be of great concern,” I note, not yet knowing that it was considered by far, the most loathsome and contagious of all diseases. I want to go back once more to the Page Act, which prohibited the immigration of alleged Chinese as well as Japanese

¹⁷⁵ For more on coaching, see Lee and Yung, *Angel Island*, 84.

¹⁷⁶ Yung, ““A Bowlful of Tears” Revisited,” 15.

and Mongolian sex workers alongside “coolie” laborers. As Sucheng Chan points out in “The Exclusion of Chinese Women, 1970-1943,” laws against sex workers affected other groups of Chinese women who were restricted under the pretense of moral hygiene.¹⁷⁷ The Page Act set a precedent for the exclusion law that defined immigration restriction with regard to a specifically gendered construction of undesirability. In *At America’s Gates*, Erika Lee goes so far as to argue that fear of Chinese female prostitution alone, bolstered by a police crackdown on prostitution in San Francisco, prompted the anti-Chinese movement resulting in the Page Act.¹⁷⁸ “Viewed as symbols of social decay, exploitation, and even slavery, Chinese prostitutes—and by extension all Chinese women—were considered to be one of the most dangerous threats of Chinese immigration,” she states, and further argues that the Page Act established an entirely new system of law enforcement.¹⁷⁹ In addition to a network of “remote control,” which stationed officials abroad to examine immigrants before departure, documentary requirements for Chinese women paved the way for a regime of recording information about arrivals.¹⁸⁰ Charged with immigrating for “lewd or immoral purposes,” a false accusation borrowed directly from the Page Act, Chinese women faced a dramatically disproportionate degree of scrutiny at Angel Island. Officials deemed even those claiming membership of an exempt class through dependency status concubines in disguise.¹⁸¹ Lee’s book includes a photograph from Gee See’s immigration case file that exposes her bound feet in an effort to prove that she belonged to a higher class and was therefore not a prostitute but a merchant’s wife.¹⁸² Her lawyer, Lee captions, attempted to bolster the photographic evidence with an X-ray of Gee See’s feet. Gee See’s *reappropriation* of modern biotechnology to contest the terms of exclusion ingeniously reveals the relationship between disease and the restrictive regulation of immigration policy while satirizing its increasingly invasive procedures.

¹⁷⁷ Chan, “The Exclusion of Chinese Women,” 95. Chan highlights the case of steamship *Japan*, which brought 89 Chinese women to Angel Island, 22 of whom were accused of being prostitutes and detained on board for an extended period of time.

¹⁷⁸ See Lee, *At America’s Gates*, 93; and Shah, *Contagious Divides*, 81-85.

¹⁷⁹ Lee, *At America’s Gates*, 93.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 41. See also Pfeffer, who explains that, “The law required all Chinese emigrants to undergo an examination by the American consular authorities at their port of departure. Through this examination, the consul was expected to determine the nature of each person’s emigration and ferret out prostitutes among the female applicants. Those who gained his approval then received clearance to the United States, while persons failing to meet the Page Law’s standards of morality lost the privilege of emigration.” George Anthony Pfeffer, “Forbidden Families: Emigration Experiences of Chinese Women Under the Page Law, 1875-1882,” *Journal of American Ethnic History*. 6.1 (1986): 30.

¹⁸¹ Lee also points out that such accusations speak to the unintelligibility of Chinese marriage customs even though they fall within the purview of heterosexual norms.

¹⁸² Lee, *At America’s Gates*, 136. For more on cases of Chinese women contesting exclusion, see Chan, “The Exclusion of Chinese Women.” There, she documents such attempts by wives of laborers, wives of merchants, women claiming to be U.S.-born citizens, wives of U.S. citizens, daughters of U.S. citizens, and prostitutes.

The stereotype of the *syphilitic* Chinese female prostitute quintessentially embodied the threat of “Yellow Peril” infecting, on a biological and social level, the white nation. “The charge that Chinese female prostitution was an ‘offense to public decency’ accumulated a web of moral and medical meanings,” explains Nayan Shah in *Contagious Divides*, an extensive study of Public Health measures in San Francisco’s Chinatown before and after the exclusion law which also traces the development of scientific knowledge about the Chinese race.¹⁸³ “Chinese physical features and behavior became the indications of syphilitic conditions,” while syphilis infection likewise evidences racial difference.¹⁸⁴ Shah stresses how clashing cultures of “respectable domesticity” situate the threat of Chinese female prostitution, to reproduction in particular, within a larger discourse of race degeneration.¹⁸⁵ Otherwise a matter of personal cleanliness, state-sponsored racial hygiene programs targeting San Francisco’s Chinese population served as a eugenic measure to prevent disease-breeding Orientals from reproducing.¹⁸⁶ The association of hygiene with Western civilization once again recalls Kant’s moral philosophy, in which enlightenment ideals of individual freedom rest on a morally driven self-consciousness antithetical to Chinese female prostitution. “At the edge of American empire in San Francisco, white women’s projects of domestic reform in Chinatown mobilized the cultural practices of ‘imperial domesticity’ to manage and reform the ‘foreign’ within the nation,” explains Shah. “The imperial reach of American modernity depended on the success of white women in creating domestic space in foreign terrains [both inside and outside of the nation] that protected against the disorder and contagion of alien races.”¹⁸⁷ Just beyond the edge, at Angel Island, officials interrogated Chinese women like Lee Puey You based on a medical perception of the racialized and gendered threat of moral contagion. In other words, the regulative norms that justified increasingly invasive procedures combined a range of intersecting variables not limited to race, as the exclusion law would have us think.

Invasive Public Health Measures

It is no coincidence that officials detained Chinese women the longest of all immigrants at Angel Island and that their detention coincided with proposals to intensify the use of modern biotechnology for inspection. Consider You’s interrogation questions, penetrating further and further into her private life. The need to extend the gaze inward for fear of fraudulent entry was at odds with the indeterminacy of interrogation itself as well as physical examination. Officials

¹⁸³ Nayan Shah, *Contagious Divides*, 79.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 88.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 77-78 and 97. See also Shah’s article “Cleansing Motherhood: Hygiene and the Culture of Domesticity in San Francisco’s Chinatown, 1875-1900,” in *Gender, Sexuality and Colonial Modernities*, ed. Antoinette Burton (New York, NY: Routledge, 1999).

¹⁸⁶ See Shah, “White Women, Hygiene and the Struggle for Respectable Domesticity” and “Plague and Managing the Commercial City,” chapters 4 and 5 of *Contagious Divides*.

¹⁸⁷ Shah, “Cleansing Motherhood,” 20-21.

straddled the line between fact and fiction, and they were certainly aware of it. The INS correspondence files are full to the brim with anxious dispatches about false identities. How could they know for sure who was who, without empirical evidence? Modern biotechnologies like the X-ray provided the sense of visibility that officials thought they needed to see the truth. Intestinal parasitic infections, loathsome and contagious “Oriental diseases” invisible to the eye, were suddenly observable. The Immigration Act of 1891 authorized the federal government to enforce immigration policy, soliciting the United States Public Health Service (USPHS) to work as inspectors at seaports of entry. Coupled with the nineteenth-century advancements in germ theory, the USPHS established a state-of-the-art bacteriology lab on Angel Island to replace the “six second exam” reserved for European immigrants. The USPHS insisted that inspecting Asian immigrants required more invasive public health measures to identify diseased immigrants. What I’m interested in accounting for is the jump from descriptive data as a form of scientific knowledge to collecting blood and stool samples without consent. An anonymous detainee laments:

I cannot bear to describe the harsh treatment
by the doctors.

Being stabbed for blood samples and
examined for hookworms was even more
pitiful.

After taking the medicine, I also drank
liquid,

Like a dumb person eating the *huanglian*.¹⁸⁸

Consent, though, presupposes a physician-patient dyad. A critical consideration of the island as a site of exclusion where federal agencies could suspend the protection of citizenship rights with impunity sheds light on the conditions of possibility for harsh treatment by the doctors. Contrary to medical care, “being stabbed” suggests violent injury and positions the detainee as a victim of a crime committed by Public Health officials, perhaps indicting America at large.¹⁸⁹ We cannot assume that the medicine in question was a treatment for disease precisely because parasitic disease, specifically hookworms in the case of Chinese immigrants, was a rationale for exclusion. Though these “Oriental” diseases were treatable, officials detained Chinese

¹⁸⁸ Lai, Kim and Yung, *Island*, 100.

¹⁸⁹ The authors note that “*huanglian*” is a metaphor for “a victim who cannot voice his complaints to anyone” (100).

immigrants nevertheless. Even more disturbing than the fact that the doctor medicated this detainee, is that he was also forced to drink an unknown liquid—presumably another drug—for no apparent reason. The law excluded Chinese immigrants from naturalized citizenship, but what did it enable the federal government to do instead? New arrivals believed that trachoma, a bacterial infection, did not actually exist and ‘loathsome and contagious diseases’ were simply invented to deny entry.¹⁹⁰ Far from being victims of medical experimentation however, the Chinese community of San Francisco consistently condemned the USPHS, whose own statistics reveal their discriminatory procedures for malpractice.¹⁹¹ Delegated Chinese doctors successfully amended the classification of many so-called “Oriental diseases” by proving otherwise to Public Health officials in Washington D.C.¹⁹²

What baffles me is the sheer volume of information that federal officials recorded. From the case files themselves to their own correspondences, the archives overflow with details that, to me, reveal close to nothing. “There’s so much here!” I wrote, overwhelmed. But that momentary sense of deluge was followed by a more important question: “What’s not here?” In 1903 the Bureau of Immigration instituted the Bertillon system, which in addition to photographs of every new non-white arrival, used detailed body measurements to identify criminals. “Believing that photographs were not reliable tools of identification,” explains Lee, “Bertillon [a French scientist and criminal detective] recorded the lengths and width (or circumference) of subjects’ forearms, feet, fingers, ears, heads, teeth, hair, and genitalia, claiming that these measurements alone provided exact identification markers.”¹⁹³ These archives are full of bodies—bodies on display, bodies in parts. This is a record of “humiliating and mutilating practices” that reads like the sections from *Gunn’s Domestic Medicine* on how to treat slaves.¹⁹⁴ INS correspondence number 12-0247: “procedures for examining Chinese immigrants at Angel Island.”¹⁹⁵ Before Congress passed the exclusion law, Dr. Arthur Stout published *Chinese Immigration and the Physiological Causes of the Decay of the Nation*.¹⁹⁶ Yes, the Page Act set a precedent, but there are other

¹⁹⁰ See Lai, “Island of Immortals,” 94.

¹⁹¹ See Lee, *At America’s Gates*, 39; and Howard Markel and Alexandra Minna Stern, “Which Face? Whose Nation? Immigration, Public Health, and the Construction of Disease at America’s Ports and Borders, 1891-1928,” *American Behavioral Scientist*. 42 (1999): 1322.

¹⁹² See Lai, “Island of Immortals,” 102n28.

¹⁹³ Lee, *At America’s Gates*, 84.

¹⁹⁴ “In the slaveholding United States, where the planter owned the slave and employed the physician, owners made their complaints or treatment wishes known to physicians and gave or withheld consent for procedures, from sterilization to amputation to autopsy,” highlights Washington, “The southern relationship was a slaveholder-physician dyad, with the slave left outside, unconsulted, uninformed, and with no recourse if she or he was unsatisfied, injured, or killed—a medical nonentity” (*Medical Apartheid*, 46).

¹⁹⁵ Detention Shed—San Francisco, 1908-1909, File 52270/21, Frame 0247, Reel 12, Immigration and Naturalization Service Records, Record Group 85, National Archives and Records Administration, San Bruno, CA.

¹⁹⁶ Arthur Stout, *Chinese Immigration and the Physiological Causes of the Decay of a Nation* (San Francisco, CA: Agnew and Deffebach, 1862).

historical antecedents codified into law. “Days that were pages of hysteria.”¹⁹⁷ The hysteria of what Alan Kraut calls “medicalized nativism” in *Silent Travelers*.¹⁹⁸ The hysteria of the Asiatic Exclusion League, a white supremacist coalition of San Francisco labor unions determined to restrict immigration by any means necessary.¹⁹⁹ The hysteria of the mob that lynched eighteen Chinese immigrants, strange fruit in Los Angeles’ Calle de los Negros, better known as “Negro Alley.” Is it a coincidence that the Chinese Massacre of 1871 occurred during the same year as the Free Womb Law? Slavery was not yet abolished in Brazil when the Chinese Exclusion Act was passed. The specter of Corregidora—a confluence of legal binds across national contexts—materializes in immigration policy and its invasive procedures; as Gordon puts it in *Ghostly Matters*, “such endings that are not over is what haunting is about.”²⁰⁰

In his comparative study of deportation law, *Deportation Nation*, Daniel Kanstroom argues that the Chinese Exclusion Act laid the foundation for the present day deportation system, which he divides into two main forms: extended border control and post-entry social control. However, he also traces a direct doctrinal line from the exclusion law to “early colonial, state, and federal systems for the removal of people, including American Indian law, colonization plans, and fugitive slave laws.”²⁰¹ The series of mid-nineteenth-century removal regimes leading up to the Chinese Exclusion Act reveal legal binds in the afterlife of slavery for those debating Chinese immigration. Furthermore, the forced removal of tribes from their native land figured exclusion as a sovereignty-based legal doctrine, providing the extra-constitutional plenary power used to deport Chinese immigrants more than fifty years beforehand.²⁰² The restrictions on enslaved people’s mobility, such as the 1850 Fugitive Slave Law, likewise informed the development of post-Civil War deportation systems later used against the Chinese. Nevertheless,

¹⁹⁷ Jones, *Corregidora*, 59.

¹⁹⁸ Alan M. Kraut, *Silent Travelers: Germs, Genes, and the “Immigrant Menace”* (Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins University Press, 1994), 3.

¹⁹⁹ See Michael C. LeMay, *Guarding the Gates: Immigration and National Security* (Westport, CT: Praeger Security International, 2006), 56, 71 and 95. LeMay attributes the league’s formation, in part, to the Great Depression. Higham similarly deduces that at first, “there was a widespread demand for immigrants in the West (and South), almost every state appointed agents or boards of immigration to lure new settlers from overseas...but when the great depression hit, it fueled an exclusionist movement against the Chinese.” John Higham, *Strangers in the Land: Patterns of American Nativism 1860-1925* (New York, NY: Atheneum Press, 1973), 18 and 25. See also Salyer, “From Counting to Sifting Immigrants,” chap. 1 in *Laws Harsh as Tigers*.

²⁰⁰ Gordon is actually talking about slavery here. “Slavery has ended,” she writes, “but something of it continues to live on, in the social geography of where peoples reside, in the authority of collective wisdom and shared benightedness, in the veins of the contradictory formation we call New World modernity, propelling, as it always has, a something to be done. Such endings that are not over is what haunting is about” (*Ghostly Matters*, 139).

²⁰¹ Daniel Kanstroom, *Deportation Nation: Outsiders in American History* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), 22. See also Fujiwara, who suggests that the Naturalization Act of 1790 in particular set a precedent for Chinese Exclusion. Lynn Fujiwara, *Mothers Without Citizenship: Asian Immigrant Families and the Consequences of Welfare Reform* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), 96-97.

²⁰² Kanstroom, *Deportation Nation*, 63-74.

to consider the confluence of ideas within and across national contexts we must tread the unbearably heterogeneous water surrounding Angel Island and, at least for a moment, shift the field of inquiry away from a territorial site to the open ocean. Nowhere else is transatlantic or pacific racial formation a more “unstable and ‘decentered’ complex of social meanings” than on moving ground.²⁰³

Forced Labor Migration

Remember the *Kasato Maru*, the ship that sailed 790 Japanese immigrants to Brazil in 1907? This group of Japanese immigrants was the first of many shipped to São Paulo from Tokyo after the abolition of slavery. What’s more, Brazil was not the only former slave nation to subsidize the mass immigration of Japanese laborers; other South American and Caribbean governments also contracted cheap labor through offshore brokers in East Asia to replace a once enslaved labor force on coffee plantations. “Hundreds of thousands of Chinese “coolies” were taken in mid-century to work the plantations and hellish guano deposits of Peru’s Chincha Islands (100,000-150,000 from the late 1840s to 1863), Cuba (a similar number, between 1850 and 1875), and other plantation-type economies in the Caribbean,” reveals Eric Barde in *Immigration at the Golden Gate*. “These were involuntary migrations: most of the Chinese laborers in those three countries claimed to have been deceived, coerced, or simply captured and put on the ship.”²⁰⁴ I didn’t want to believe it when I stumbled across the document in the INS correspondence files, but for an instant, I wondered whether Irving B. Dudley was suggesting that the INS illegally deport those denied entry to Brazil. Could it be true? He certainly knew about the Chinese Exclusion Act, which was bad news for shipping and anyone in the import-export business. It would have been the perfect deal between the Government, Company, and Immigration Service, profiting every single stakeholder, except for those in steerage.

Founded in Japan, the Toyo Kisen Kabushiki Kaisha (TKK) or Oriental Steamship Company ventured into the transpacific trade before the Pacific Mail Steamship Company dominated it. The first TKK vessel was the *Nippon Maru*, which sailed from Yokohama to San Francisco in 1899. Vessels like this one traveled throughout Asia before sailing to the United States and reserved the best accommodations for wealthy passengers. Below deck, in the ship’s stern, contracted laborers were held captive. Known as the “coolie trade,” laborers were sometimes chained to their berths, barrack-style lodgings exactly like those later built at the Immigration Station. High rates of disease, death, and sexual violence plagued those in steerage.

²⁰³ Michael Omi, and Howard Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States: From the 1960s to the 1990s* (New York, NY: Routledge, 1994), 55.

²⁰⁴ Barde, *Immigration at the Golden Gate*, 87. See also Shu-Mei Shih, “Comparison as Relation,” in *Comparison: Theories, Approaches, Uses*, ed. by Rita Felski and Susan Friedman (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2013), 13 and 22-23: “Before Chinese coolies were brought to the East Indies,” Shih writes, “they were brought over to the Caribbean as early as 1806 in the earliest experiment with coolie labor during the time of slavery, but the most concentrated period was between 1852 and 1866 after the abolition took place in various Caribbean islands. As contracted, but essentially indentured, laborers, the Chinese coolies were often treated as de facto slaves, governed by inhuman laws and regulations and imprisoned in their plantations” (22-23).

Passenger Ryo Mizuno discloses that “the lower ranking crew, such as cooks/cleaners, sneak into the emigrants’ rooms and attack and rape women and children.”²⁰⁵ An escapee on board the Peruvian vessel *Maria Luz* reported that it was indeed a slave ship.²⁰⁶ “In fact, the coolie ships were often nothing more than re-functioned ex-slave ships, and they traversed both the Pacific and the Atlantic to reach the Caribbean islands from China and Southeast Asia,” confirms Shumei Shih.²⁰⁷ The poor conditions in steerage contributed to the high rates of disease among laborers, especially on ships headed for South America, establishing the very medical inspections that would eventually overflow the Pacific Mail Company’s wharf with quarantined ships full of immigrants, thereby necessitating the construction of an Immigration Station.²⁰⁸ Of course, the conditions were no better at the Company’s complex, which included an area for “bonded Chinese” next to imported coffee, and later at Angel Island.²⁰⁹

In 1916, the *Nippon Maru* carried 147 passengers in “Asiatic steerage” to San Francisco. Among them was twenty-year-old Quok Shee, “the alleged wife” who broke the detention record at Angel Island.²¹⁰ Of the 300,000 immigrants processed there, officials detained Shee for nearly two years on the pretext that she was in fact a prostitute, although she had arrived with her husband who was already a legal resident of the United States. Where does her story begin? Where does it end? In 1880, *The City of Peking* sailed to San Francisco flying a yellow flag because one of its Chinese steerage passengers had been diagnosed with smallpox. Those in steerage were transferred to the hulk of an empty ship and left to die without medical assistance before ever touching land.²¹¹ To think of Angel Island as a transpacific crossing point casts a different shadow on medical inspection at the Immigration Station. According to Shah, quarantine became a widespread practice in the 1800s as a result of Europe’s colonial expansion. Shipping companies in the United States later adopted quarantine and other containment systems to regulate the transmission of disease through oceanic commerce. “Production and dissemination of scientific knowledge were considered imperative in an era of imperial ambitions and global trade,” Shah points out. “Vast global and impersonal trade required insurance—not only financial guarantees but health guarantees as well.”²¹² But the whole story is much more complicated than that. The value of disease tracking was two-fold, since oceanic commerce included more than goods. In an era of imperial ambitions and global trade, transactions also included bodies. Subsumed under the terms of subsidized immigration from

²⁰⁵ Barde, *Immigration at the Golden Gate*, 105.

²⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 94.

²⁰⁷ Shih, “Comparison as Relation,” 13-14.

²⁰⁸ Barde, *Immigration at the Golden Gate*, 120-26.

²⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 57-75.

²¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 82.

²¹¹ Craddock, “Sewers and Scapegoats,” 961-62.

²¹² Shah, *Contagious Divides*, 122.

Japan to Brazil is an insurance policy. The obligation to refund the government for those who cannot work exposes the enduring slavocratic logic—the specter of Corregidora—still dominating the international market. When it came to these laborers, who would harvest the exporting raw materials, financial and health guarantees were entangled in a binding agreement of mutual credibility between Government and Company, an agreement predicated on slavery’s valuation system. In other words, the requirement for insurance simultaneously extended to contracted laborers shipped across the Pacific as part of the transactional commodities on those very ships. The economic interest in their welfare correspondingly evinced the turn towards disease tracking and containment, which had already been set in motion across the Atlantic.

Perhaps Quok Shee’s story begins with Great Gram. Or, what if we started it there without collapsing the historical specificity of their circumstances? Even if we didn’t, if we chose to ignore the connections surfacing at sea, their stories are always already interconnected by way of what Shih calls “the plantation arc,” a post-slavery plantation circuit connecting the American South to Southeast Asia and the Caribbean.²¹³ That original trauma, experienced first by Great Gram, carries through generations and marks Ursa’s post-slavery subjectivity, while on a structural level it remains a blueprint for state-building that marks other bodies filtered through its mode of operation: “the harsh laws pile layer upon layer,” a detainee succinctly remarks.²¹⁴ The transpacific trade in “coolie” labor was in part a continuation of slavery. Dwelling with the *Nippon Maru* on which Shee sailed brings this palimpsestic reproduction to light; like the carved poems at the Immigration Station, that process of cutting into something over and over again permanently fixes it, engraving a paradigmatic pattern in the legislation of restrictive nationalism—but also in memory.²¹⁵ “Some of the so-called Chinese coolies brought over to the Caribbean were themselves transported across the Indian Ocean and the Atlantic, not from China, but from Southeast Asia, as the European colonizers had brought them there earlier,” reveals Shih.²¹⁶ The Chinese exclusion era reflects this (un)changing pattern for even at the Immigration Station, the system of invasive control borrows from procedures not-yet-past. “The cry of the sea-gulls is in the air, bells or whistles sound from different vessels, Chinese and Japanese wander about,” writes a member of the Women’s American Baptist Home Missionary Society on her 1916 visit to Angel Island.²¹⁷ This scene is familiar. It reads like a depiction of slavery in travel journals from the early 1800s. Observing the “peculiar institution” by way of recorded anecdotes, this scene likewise relegates Chinese and Japanese immigrants to the background among natural features of the landscape. And yet the sense of normalcy, even

²¹³ Shih, “Comparison as Relation,” 3.

²¹⁴ Lai, Lim, and Yung, *Island*, 56.

²¹⁵ For more on “restrictive nationalism,” see Salyer, “Drawing the Sieve Tighter: The Rise of Nativism and Administrative Power,” chap 5 in *Laws Harsh as Tigers*.

²¹⁶ Shih, “Comparison as Relation,” 13.

²¹⁷ Mary Bramford, *Angel Island: The Ellis Island of the West* (Chicago: The Woman’s American Baptist Home Mission Society, 1917), http://www.english.illinois.edu/maps/poets/a_f/angel/bamford.htm. In comparison, see “Crude Poem Inspired by the Landscape” in Lai, Lim, and Yung, *Island*, 128.

pleasantness, with which Mary Bramford describes the Immigration Station, is stilted; everything feels misplaced, *wrong*. Even the sea gull's cry seems to echo a warning sign of horror in the vicinity that sounds out the bells or whistles of different vessels. And yet, according to the imperial past, the sense of normalcy is precise, predictable. How then, do we negotiate the disjunction at hand?

Following other circuits along the same route negotiates the disjunction for us. The ghost haunts the living and, as Gordon suggests, is not quite dead; "we are in relation to it and it has designs on us such that we must reckon with it graciously, attempting to offer it a hospitable memory *out of a concern for justice*."²¹⁸ As "One From Xiangshan," declares:

There are tens of thousands of poems
composed on these walls.
They are all cries of complaint and sadness.
The day I am rid of this prison and attain
success,
I must remember that this chapter once
existed.²¹⁹

These poems leave an undercurrent of visceral evidence. The need to remember this chapter of One From Xiangshan's life mirrors the need to re-member this chapter of Angel Island's history within what Shih calls, an "integrated world historical context."²²⁰ The late 1960s and early 1970s mark a critical moment in the fight for an oppressed past which gave rise to the Bay Area's Asian American Movement as well as the African American women's literary renaissance that paved the way for Jones' novel. During this time, a group of Native American activists occupied the neighboring island of Alcatraz from November 20, 1960 to June 11, 1971, demanding that the U.S. government return the land to the Indians of All Tribes. Founded by local community members in 1970 when the site was slated for demolition, the Angel Island Immigration Station Historical Advisory Committee fought to preserve the site as a state monument. The Chinese Exclusion Act constitutionalized a new wave of immigration regulation characterized by an expansion of the modern administrative state.²²¹ On this small island off the

²¹⁸ Gordon, *Ghostly Matters*, 64.

²¹⁹ Lai, Lim, and Yung, *Island*, 66.

²²⁰ "Comparison as Relation," 3.

²²¹ For more on how Chinese litigation during the exclusion era determined U.S. constitutional doctrine see Charles J. McClain and Laurene Wu McClain, "The Chinese Contribution to the Development of American Law," chap 1 in *Entry Denied: Exclusion and the Chinese Community in America, 1882-1943*, ed. Sucheng Chan (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1991).

California coast, “Devil’s pass” in the words of one detainee, emerges a network of interconnections that situates the American West outside of its own national boundaries and within a geopolitical scale encompassing the entire world “as a sea of islands.”²²² These poems measure the material impact of exclusion laws in a way that federal legislation can’t, bridging the personal and the political to expose “the country of the flowering flag” for a gate keeping nation. “America has power, but not justice,” another detainee engraves on the barrack wall.²²³ From this archipelagic perspective, the proximity between Angel Island and Brazil shrinks in “relational comparison.” According to Shih, “apparent parallelisms are not historical accidents” because power is itself a form of relation.²²⁴ In an integrative world history, genealogical approach becomes more like a constellation as with Ursa’s intergenerational memory, indeed her very name. “I am searching for a method that will turn destiny back,” states Anonymous.²²⁵ As if in direct response, Shih explains that, “To do the work of Relation as an exercise in poetics—that is, Relation as a method—is then to relate here and elsewhere, and to explore the inexhaustible and unpredictable entanglements and confluence among cultures and histories.”²²⁶

Blood Testing

The Chinese Exclusion Act passed in 1882, just shy of abolition in Brazil. Quock Shee sailed to the West Coast ten years after Great Gram and Gram immigrated to the American South aboard a ship that could have been a slaver not a few decades earlier. The Angel Island Immigration Station stands as a symbol of the Chinese immigrant experience; however, in relational comparison it represents a transnational history of biopolitical subjection. Left in the hands of federal officials to administer, much as the Free Womb Law was left in the hands of slave masters, enforcing the Chinese Exclusion Act relied on regulatory mechanisms beyond legislation itself.²²⁷ The USPHS subjected Chinese immigrations to longer examinations, interrogations, and detentions than any other immigrants at the Angel Island Immigration Station. With no way of really discerning fraudulent applications, federal officials—described as “heartless white devils” on multiple occasions—used a number of techniques, including medical inspection, to deny the rights claims of noncitizens. The Chinese Exclusion Act reproduced racial hierarchies in immigration law, though it wouldn’t be the first time. The Page Act was in fact the first restrictive federal immigration law based on race—but also gender and sexuality. “By making the assumption that most Chinese women were entering as prostitutes, [the Page

²²² Lai, Lim, and Yung, *Island*, 152.

²²³ *Ibid.*, 58.

²²⁴ Shih, “Comparison as Relation,” 6.

²²⁵ Lai, Lim, and Yung, *Island*, 64.

²²⁶ Shih, “Comparison as Relation,” 10.

²²⁷ For more on the role of anti-Chinese federal immigration officials in enforcing the law, see Lee, “The Keepers of the Gate: U.S. Immigration Officials and Chinese Exclusion,” chap 2 in *At America's Gates*.

Act] denied entry to nearly all these women, greatly intensifying the gender ratio imbalance and hindering the establishment of communities of Chinese families,” explains Fujiwara. “However, not only were Asian immigrant women shorn of the right to naturalize, but even their presence heightened nativist concerns—by virtue of their capacity to bear citizen children [according to the Fourteenth Amendment].”²²⁸ A look at the cases of Chinese women at Angel Island reveals the nation’s continued anxiety about prostitution in particular, which heightened preexisting anxieties about race suicide. Coupled with the concurrent and growing eugenics movement, a zealous advocate of immigration restriction, the threat of “Yellow Peril” hinged, in part, on a notion of disease transmission characterized by the Chinese female prostitute who embodied a danger to public health and morals of the worst kind.²²⁹ The performance of exempt norms on the inspection line thus included a wide range of intersecting variables besides identifying “Chineseness.” Furthermore, federal officials assumed that immigrants, and especially Chinese women, lied about their identity. Similar to the accusation of malingering leveled against slaves, officials paradoxically thought of immigrants as masters of deception and grew increasingly obsessed with tracking paper trails in an attempt to determine an applicant’s true line of descent.²³⁰ Medical inspection served as yet another method of tracking albeit for exclusionary purposes. At Angel Island “[class] differences were compounded by racial prejudices,” add Markel and Stern in “Which Face? Whose Nation?” “For example, when examining first-class passengers who came through San Francisco Bay—for the most part White Europeans and other American citizens returning home after overseas travel—USPHS officers were far more conscientious about taking sanitary precautions, such as routine hand washing and the sterilization of clinical instruments, than when they handled the steerage class, made up principally of Chinese.”²³¹ The irony was, of course, that many immigrants contracted an illness while in detention as a result of the unsanitary conditions; Quok Shee herself caught smallpox during her two-year sentence.

In its hunt for a foolproof examination that would leave absolutely no doubt as to an applicant’s true identity, the INS constantly proposes to gather more and more corroborative evidence on immigrants at Angel Island. One inspector requests the permission to photograph every Japanese woman together with her husband or relative at the time of her release. “I know that the Government has, a number of times, experienced considerable difficulty in making a case on account of the cunning of the ordinary Oriental,” he writes to the Commissioner-General of Immigration, “but with a photograph as evidence of the relationship and that photograph made a part of the records of this office showing the man and wife, it would have an influence in breaking up the practice of bartering in wives or importing under the pretense of “wife” and then

²²⁸ Fujiwara, *Mothers Without Citizenship*, 98.

²²⁹ See Salyer, *Laws Harsh as Tigers*: “The American Medical Association singled out Chinese prostitutes as a special health concern and sponsored a study in 1875 of their effect on the “nation’s bloodstream” (11-12).

²³⁰ See Washington, *Medical Apartheid*, 30. See also Lee, *At America's Gate*, 87-109.

²³¹ Markel and Stern, “Which Face? Whose Nation?”, 1322.

compel her to follow a life of shame.”²³² But even photographs failed to assuage their anxiety about unlawful entry. Nestled in the archive is a 1934 article about establishing paternity by blood tests attached to a dispatch from the San Francisco District Director to the INS. “Bartering of the citizenship claims is considered a recognized business and a general practice,” warns the director.²³³ Enclosed are excerpts from coaching letters, as well as a year’s worth of statistics, exaggerating “the absurdity of claims” to citizenship. “It is recommended that the Service consult with the Public Health Service with a view to having this method of blood testing thoroughly investigated and, if feasible, used in testing applicants claiming United States citizenship as sons and daughters of citizens,” he urges, “Such a method would greatly facilitate examination to the best interests of all concerned.”²³⁴ There’s an undeniable element of science fiction in the fact that this particular proposal is actually within the authoritative realm of possibility. The institutionalized alliance between the PHS and the INS aside, assuming that federal officials can gain access to a detainee’s DNA without consent is precisely the haunting I have sought to trace from the slave quarters to the detention barracks. Embedded within the request to establish paternity by blood tests is the persistence of a scientific imaginary that not only views non-legal persons as legitimate objects of study but also claims the right to control their bodies in ever-more invasive ways.

That the state can, as early as the 1930’s, collect DNA, reflects the enduring proprietary logic of white supremacy applied to racialized and gendered bodies; relying on biological evidence to establish paternity uses an applicant’s own genomic resources against them while at the same time, claiming ownership of their blood. The request to move away from the standardized practice of ocular examination to an examination of sexual reproduction vis a vis paternity tests also reflects the legislation of sexuality in the Page Act. The idea that officials could extract truth claims about Chinese immigrants and, in particular, Chinese women through their blood shifts the visualizing strategies deployed to read bodies toward the molecular level. At Angel Island, historical forms of dispossession continue to verify “fundamental truths” from those without rights through medicine, albeit not for medical study per se. As one of many detainees lament, “the doctor extracting blood caused us the greatest anguish.”²³⁵ The existing bacteriological laboratory at the Immigration Station both foreshadows such blatant violations and stands on layers of sedimentary precedent.

Conclusion

²³² Memorandum, Immigration and Naturalization Service Records, Record Group 85, File 51520/21, 15-0147 casefile 55452/385, National Archives and Records Administration, San Bruno, CA.

²³³ Memorandum, San Francisco District Director, Immigration and Naturalization Service Records, Record Group 85, File 12030/11, National Archives and Records Administration, San Bruno, CA.

²³⁴ Ibid.

²³⁵ Lai, Lim, and Yung, *Island*, 102.

I used to see Angel Island, an unassuming island in the San Francisco Bay, all the time from the Berkeley marina. I don't believe that our historical memory favors the present only because the politics of the past survive time. How can we forget something that is ongoing? The excerpt I previously cited from Lee Puey You's interrogation is actually from 1953, when she faced deportation yet again after the Chinese Exclusion Act had already been repealed. Though a resident grandmother by then, the INS issued a warrant for her arrest on the basis of illegal entry years ago.²³⁶ I chose this excerpt precisely because it could have been easily mistaken for her 1939 interrogation at the Angel Island Immigration Station. As Ursa's intergenerational memory shows, repetitive cases of biopolitical subjection blur the boundaries of time and space. What we might assume is Great Gram's particular experience during slavery is in fact that of Ursa's contemporary moment, calling into question the meaning of abolition, of dialectic progress and the forces maintaining the status quo.

I want to conclude this chapter with two corresponding sources. In the archives, there is a long letter from the American Consulate General in Hong Kong to the Secretary of State protesting the medical inspection of Chinese immigrants abroad in which he presents "pitiful cases" of the common rejection cycle whereby an applicant with all of the proper documentation is diagnosed with trachoma and barred from traveling to America. Woven into his own analysis of the situation are bits and pieces of a scathing critique:

I cannot believe the humane men at the seat of government realize what suffering is caused, what rankling sense of injustice is kindled among the Chinese by the gradual growth of the trachoma test, an incidental detail of sanitary inspection, until now, under the zealous efforts of the Public Health Department, and inflammation of the inner eyelid is the heart of the momentous Chinese immigration question; and this question with its far reaching trade and issues of delicate international relationships is taken from the hands of statesmen and confided to young doctors, whose desperate effort to escape rebuke from their superiors for not correctly gauging the redness or induration of an eyelid. No one who suffers may go, though the mark of disease be infinitesimal and oured (sic) save by the narrowest margin.

The whole subject of trachoma should be investigated by disinterested men who may consider not merely the physiological side but the humane and political factors that enter in. The menace to national health has been unduly exaggerated, as many physicians familiar with it admit; and no more complete system could be devised for unscrupulous men than the present one, where one doctor may determine what Chinese may go and who must stay, under a technical test mysterious to all non-professionals; with a cure to be effected at any cost and on any term eagerly accepted by Chinese men, women, and children desperate to get back to their livelihood and their loved ones.²³⁷

²³⁶ For more on Lee Puey You's case, see Yung, "'A Bowlful of Tears' Revisited," 13.

²³⁷ "Trachoma and American Citizens," Immigration and Naturalization Service Records, Record Group 85, No. 245, National Archives and Records Administration, San Bruno, CA.

For the American Consul General, the trachoma test is misused to justify immigration restriction and most importantly, causes suffering. His recognition of suffering, however, does not serve to assert the humanity of Chinese immigrants. Instead, the American Consul General frames suffering as another kind of embodied threat. The trachoma test causes suffering, which kindles a “rankling sense of injustice” among Chinese that could jeopardize contractual agreements between nations. In other words, the Secretary of State must be careful to enforce Chinese exclusion without losing favor with the Chinese government. If too many immigrants are rankled by an otherwise “incidental detail of sanitary inspection,” their sense of injustice will curb operations in Hong Kong. Yet the American Consul General confirms that immigration restriction has become a matter of disease tracking left in the untrained hands of young doctors. It is in fact, the Public Health Department’s zealous efforts to enforce Chinese exclusion that could jeopardize “delicate international relationships.”

The Chinese immigration question is indeed one of “far reaching trade;” as I have shown, Angel Island was not only a seaport of entry to the United States but also a transpacific crossing point. His words betray the momentous issue of *forced migration*, a question with far reaching trade in “coolie” labor across the plantation arc. The American Consul General probably had a greater awareness of how the Chinese Exclusion Act was detrimental to the shipping industry from Hong Kong, drawing attention to a transnational stakeholder economy at the heart of Chinese immigration. In this complicated web of interests, even the contingent of young doctors employed by the Public Health Department have their own concerns which don’t necessarily intersect with those of other statesmen. He therefore proposes that *disinterested* men investigate the trachoma test to ascertain its “human and political factors,” once again revealing the use of medical inspection to exclude all Chinese immigrants regardless of exempt status. The “mark of disease” depends on racial difference, making the Chinese a menace to public health, for on a purely physiological level, trachoma is not worthy of exclusion according to the American Consul General. With individual doctors enforcing the Chinese Exclusion Act, “no one who suffers may go.”

The American Consul General also includes Chinese men, women, and children as stakeholders, “desperate to get back to their livelihood and their loved ones” in the U.S. He appeals to the Secretary of State by describing immigrants as proper citizens, yet the closest we come to recognition of human suffering is through the eyelid, mentioned twice in symptomatic terms. In the INS correspondence files, the racialized and gendered body is only intelligible in parts and only by way of gauging those parts diagnostically. The poems carved into the barrack walls provide a radically alternative epistemology against the grain of ontological exclusion. An anonymous detainee protests medical inspection:

I thoroughly hate the barbarians because they
do not respect justice.

They continually promulgate harsh laws to
show off their prowess.

They oppress the overseas Chinese and also
violate treaties.

They examine for hookworms and practice
hundreds of despotic acts.²³⁸

This poem is a first-person testimonial that speaks to the limits of what can be gleaned from the INS correspondence files alone. Here, public health officials are the barbarians who enforce laws “to show off their prowess.” As part of a despotic regime, public health officials use medical inspection to oppress Chinese immigrants. This poem contests a common sense left unquestioned in the American Consul General’s critique, a common sense that represents the other as threat. The underlying logic of gatekeeping extended to all edges of empire, and as we shall see in the next chapter, established another living laboratory at the U.S.-Mexico border.

²³⁸ Lai, Lim, and Yung, *Island*, 100.

1,950 mile-long open wound
dividing a *pueblo*, a culture,
running down the length of my body,
staking fence rods in my flesh,
splits me splits me
me raja me raja

-Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands*²³⁹

“The certificates read ‘United States Public Health Service, Mexican Border Quarantine. The bearer,, has been this day deloused, bathed, vaccinated, clothing and baggage disinfected.’”

-*El Paso Times*²⁴⁰

Chapter Three

Gasoline Baths: Medical Inspection at the El Paso Immigration Station and Gloria Anzaldúa’s *Borderlands*

On January 28, 1917, seventeen-year-old Carmelita Torres refused to bathe in gasoline at the El Paso Immigration Station, igniting a large-scale protest that would come to be known as the “Bath Riots.” Torres lived in Ciudad Juárez and worked on the American side of the Santa Fe Street Bridge in El Paso, Texas like many of those who joined her in protest against the United States Public Health Service’s (USPHS) border quarantine. The quarantine, which lasted until the late 1930s, subjected all Mexicans entering the United States to mandatory delousing procedures including but not limited to gasoline baths. Daily border crossers—mostly female domestic workers—bore the brunt of these draconian measures that distinguished medical inspection along the southern border from other entry points. Unlike white tourists who freely entered Mexico on a regular basis, Torres had to undergo inspection every day before public

²³⁹ Glorinda Anzaldúa, *Borderlands La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (San Francisco, CA: Aunt Lute Books, 1987), 24.

²⁴⁰ “Order to Bathe Starts Near Riot Among Juarez Women,” *El Paso Morning Times*, January 29, 1917, <http://texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metaph198630/>; accessed October 22, 2015.

health officials allowed her to cross the bridge. This chapter moves to another edge of the empire-nation in the American West to better understand how medical discourses that associate immigrants with disease are central to enforcing its boundaries and more specifically, the way racialized bodies become the site of this enforcement.

Biopolitical subjection, as the Bath Riots reveal, characterized militarization of the U.S.-Mexico border from the outset. Instead of beginning with the USPHS's border quarantine however, I highlight the regulation of prostitutes leading up to it. Doing so draws attention to the racialized *and* gendered dimensions of what historian Alexandra Minna Stern calls "eugenic gatekeeping." Public health discourse played on longstanding stereotypes of Mexican women as sexually promiscuous and, in particular, as "breeders of disease" threatening the adjacent white population. Gasoline baths provided a foolproof solution to racial segregation that ensured all Mexicans, including female sex workers, were chemically disinfected before coming in contact with whites. I argue that the implementation of gasoline baths created the conditions of possibility for eugenicists to have a hand in passing the 1924 Immigration Act, which established immigration quotas based on national origins. As a form of sterilization, gasoline baths also foreshadow the legal bind between public health and eugenics that later established policies designed by the same eugenicists to surgically sterilize Puerto Rican women en masse, which I explore in the next chapter. In what follows I trace the historical and geopolitical context of another living laboratory at the U.S.-Mexico border where medical inspection took an even more invasive experimental turn.

Rather than examining the relationship between race, citizenship, and nation within the law alone, I consider how this nexus of (un)belonging is codified in the flesh. I therefore engage in a historical materialist approach to archival research that refuses to leave the body behind. I couple a newspaper report on the Bath Riots published in the *El Paso Times* with Gloria Anzaldúa's 1987 *Borderlands*, a multi-genre text that privileges an embodied analysis of the border beyond territoriality. My intertextual reading recasts the significance of Torres' refusal through a cultural studies lens while simultaneously marking the Bath Riots as an event that underpins Anzaldúa's conceptualization of "a new mestiza consciousness." At stake is a perspective of the borderlands as a contested terrain of multiple agencies where, in addition to sovereign states, the locus of politics is situated squarely within the personal boundary line of bodies.

From Angel Island to El Paso

There is a direct connection between Angel Island and El Paso. In addition to dispatches concerning the medical inspection of Chinese immigrants, the Immigration and Naturalization Service correspondence files contain a conspicuous number of memos on illegal immigration from Mexico.²⁴¹ Incoming communications detail the deportation proceedings of Chinese

²⁴¹ For more on smuggling networks from Mexico, see Erika Lee, *At America's Gate: Chinese Immigration During the Exclusion Era, 1882-1943* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 159-165, and Alexandra Minna Stern, *Eugenic Nation: Faults and Frontiers of Better Breeding in Modern America* (Berkeley, CA:

immigrants and their smugglers, who attempted to bypass the Angel Island Immigration Station from the southern border; an ingenious plan for all intents and purposes since the U.S.-Mexico frontier was not yet patrolled, nor was it precisely demarcated.²⁴² As the number of cases involving fraudulent entry increased, a mounted guard consisting of “former and active Texas Rangers, sheriffs of border counties, and deputized cowboys” began to patrol the area.²⁴³ They rode between Texas and California from an unofficial base in El Paso, on the prowl for Chinese immigrants. With orders to “ride and shoot,” there was no guaranteeing that the mounted guards would send those captured here to be processed at the Angel Island Immigration Station.

In 1924, the mounted guard became an official federal law enforcement agency: the U.S. Border Patrol. Today *la migrá* is largely associated with Mexican immigrants, though it originated as a result of the Chinese Exclusion Act (1882-1943). Moving from Angel Island to El Paso reveals the ways in which the borderlands is a contested and relational terrain of multiple agencies within a transnational circuit. Often a point of departure for considering other federal immigrant processing stations, the Ellis Island Immigration Station in New York does little to illuminate the exclusionary laws that define operations on the West Coast and how they were applied to newly acquired territories including but not limited to Mexico.²⁴⁴ In *At America's Gate*, Erika Lee traces such “gatekeeping” policies to debates over Chinese immigration in the late nineteenth-century American West, where nativists alleged that foreigners of non-European descent would dilute the pure Anglo-Saxon racial stock.

As an extension of the American South, the era of legal slavery likewise haunts the region's juridical genealogy.²⁴⁵ In fact, the still booming Cotton Kingdom was central to the contrasting measures that closed the gate on Chinese immigrants while opening them for Mexicans, who could cross the border completely unrestricted. “This disparate treatment is directly related to the expansion of the southwestern economy from the 1890s through the 1920s

University of California Press, 2005), 59-60. In *Island*, one of the poems by an anonymous detainee at the Angel Island Immigration Station reads: “I entered the land of the Flowery Flag by way of Lusong / Conditions at the border were strict and I was not clever. / In the wooden jail, I was imprisoned for days. / Now I am to be deported back in the steel vessel, *Persia*.” The border referred to in this poem is not the Angel Island shoreline but the southern border separating the land of the Flowery Flag (America) from Lusong, or Mexico. See Him Lai, Genny Lim, and Judy Yung, eds., *Island: Poetry and History of Chinese Immigrants on Angel Island, 1910-1940* (Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press, 1991), 126.

²⁴² A number of Chinese immigrants who migrated from California to build the Transcontinental Railroad already lived in El Paso, Texas. See Marilyn Dell Brady, *The Asian Texans* (College Station, TX: Texas A&M University Press, 2004).

²⁴³ Miguel Antonio Levario, *Militarizing the Border: When Mexicans Became the Enemy*. College Station, TX: Texas A&M University Press, 2012), 95. See also Stern, *Eugenic Nation*, 71-73.

²⁴⁴ The Chinese Exclusion Law was also enforced in Hawaii and the Philippines. See Lee, *At America's Gate*, 22 and 173-174. See also Tomás Almaguer's *Racial Fault Lines* for the particular ethnic history of California since the late nineteenth-century Anglo-American conquest. *Racial Fault Lines: The Historical Origins of White Supremacy in California* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1994).

²⁴⁵ See Lee, *At America's Gate*, 184, and Levario, *Militarizing the Border*, 10.

and the related need for a steady pool of labor,” explains Lee. “The curtailment of Asian and southern and eastern European immigrant labor beginning in 1882 and continuing through 1924 made Mexico a logical source of new labor.”²⁴⁶ The Chinese Exclusion Act paradoxically produced a labor shortage in U.S. industries that was filled by Mexican immigrants just as South American and Caribbean countries contracted Chinese laborers to replace former slaves. Nothing captures this complex and layered history better than cases of Chinese immigrants using fake Mexican citizenship certificates to cross the southern border on the pretext of being hired to work in cotton fields.²⁴⁷ Coupled with an increasing number of Mexican immigrants during the 1910 Mexican Revolution, the demographics of Texas began to shift in ways that threatened race-based nativism. The USPHS once again mobilized the specter of disease to establish another living laboratory in El Paso as part of a militarized effort to close the gate.

Situating the borderlands within a transnational circuit also draws attention to the colonial past of biopower that was simultaneously superimposed on both the Angel Island and El Paso Immigration Stations. In other words, gatekeeping policies that relied on technologies of disease control traveled back *and* forth on imperial routes overseas. As Stern sharply points out in *Eugenic Nation*, “the racialized public health measures implemented in the American West were initially devised and assayed in U.S. colonies.”²⁴⁸ The direct connection between Angel Island and El Paso betrays the way in which tropical medicine returned to the metropolis as a means of delimiting national sovereignty. Stern is the first to identify that Claude C. Pierce, the USPHS surgeon at the El Paso Immigration Station, was chief sanitary officer at San Francisco’s Panama-Pacific International Exposition in 1915—a critical fact that undeniably remaps the U.S.-Mexico border onto an enduring colonial cartography.²⁴⁹ What appears to be a banal bureaucratic assignment draws attention to the overarching colonial regime under which military and civilian posts repeatedly intersect. As she so aptly puts it, “the dialogical interplay between empire and neocolony played out across the Rio Grande” and well into the twentieth century.²⁵⁰ The American West remains a largely overlooked though deeply entrenched region in the history of eugenics whose foundational traces lead right to El Paso.²⁵¹

²⁴⁶ Lee, *At America’s Gate*, 172.

²⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 161.

²⁴⁸ Stern, *Eugenic Nation*, 21.

²⁴⁹ Alexandra Minna Stern, “Buildings, Boundaries, and Blood: Medicalization and Nation-Building on the U.S.-Mexico Border, 1910-1930,” *The Hispanic American Historical Review*. 79.1 (1999): 59.

²⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 52.

²⁵¹ “It is surprising that the American West has been largely overlooked, given that California performed twenty thousand sterilizations, one-third of the total performed in the country, that Oregon created a State Eugenics Board in 1917, and that the impact of restrictive immigration laws designed to shield America from polluting “germ plasm” reverberated with great intensity along the Mexican border,” Stern states, “In addition, the “West” spawned metaphors and myths for the initial generation of American eugenicists, who updated the Manifest Destiny doctrines of the 1840s with a twentieth-century medical and scientific vocabulary to expound on the noble westward march of Anglo-Saxons and Nordics” (6).

The U.S.-Mexico Border

The U.S.-Mexico Border stretches from the Gulf of Mexico to the Pacific Ocean. Prior to 1910, however, there was no international boundary line separating the two nations. “Although the U.S.’s southern border became a focal point at the turn of the century for apprehending illegal immigrants, Mexican immigration was largely inconspicuous,” confirms Miguel Antonio Levario in *Militarizing the Border*.²⁵² With the racial homogeneity of Texas in question, federal institutions assumed a greater responsibility in securing the border against Mexican residents already targeted by local vigilantes for crossing between Ciudad Juárez and El Paso.²⁵³

In the nineteenth century, the original riverbed served as a makeshift border. The Paso del Norte or Santa Fe Street Bridge later connected El Paso, Texas and Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua over the Rio Grande. The Chihuahuan desert, the third largest on the Western Hemisphere, included an area known as Pirate Island—the center for El Paso’s criminal activity. Situated between the original riverbed and Rio Grande, the “island” was an ambiguous territory ideal for lawbreakers. “Texas authorities had difficulty patrolling the area since the Mexican line was so close and could place the Rangers out of their jurisdiction and at the mercy of Mexican officials,” states Levario.²⁵⁴ This 15,000-acre land is emblematic of the interstitial spaces that emerge from imaginary lines of separation in which crossing becomes a kind of transgression, and how these spaces escape sovereign rule. Put differently, borderlines also demarcate the ontological boundaries of national belonging. In this zone, “where the multiplicity and chaos of the universal and the discomfits and possibilities of the body intrude,” the historical construction of the ethnic Mexican materializes as the enemy other.²⁵⁵

As Robert Fischer points out in “Mobility and Morality at the Border,” El Paso had initiated a clean-up campaign to rid the city of “disease, criminality, and sloth” long before any mention of the typhus scare that evinced quarantine. The process of “outsourcing vice” revolved around transplanting commercial sex workers, who were already confined to the red-light district, and later extended to all “colored women.”[□] “Since the 1880s prostitutes in El Paso were subject to various regulative measures including license fees, registration and weekly medical

²⁵² Levario, *Militarizing the Border*, 95-96.

²⁵³ For more on the Texas Rangers as well as regionally based struggles between civilian ranchers see Levario, *Militarizing the Border*, 17-38.

²⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 24.

²⁵⁵ Prem Kumar Rajaram, and Carl Grundy-Warr, eds., *Borderscapes: Hidden Geographies and Politics at Territory’s Edge* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2007), xxx.

[□] All “colored women” were evicted from El Paso, Texas in 1904. Fischer, “Mobility and Morality: A Lefebvrian Spatio-Temporal Analysis in Early Twentieth-Century Ciudad Juárez and El Paso,” *Historical Social Research*. 38.3 (2013): 185.

examinations,” explains Fischer.²⁵⁶ They were subject to similar regulations in Juárez, whose burgeoning amusement resorts sought to attract white American tourists from El Paso. At once El Paso’s immoral other, the twin city of Juárez was selectively developed as a place of entertainment, especially for the nearby U.S. army soldiers stationed at Fort Bliss. “In addition, the *Reglamento para el ejercito de la prostitución* regulated the public conduct of prostitutes by trying to make them behave as ordinary as possible so as not to disturb the public,” he continues. “In 1914 sex work was restricted to certain areas where it was legalized—namely in the *zona de tolerancia* at *Calle Mariscal y Urgate*.”²⁵⁷ According to Fischer, this clean-up campaign set a precedent for the USPHS to call for a quarantine regime in 1917.²⁵⁸ The USPHS provided a seasoned scientific rationale that linked disease and immorality in favor of existing nativist arguments. Soon, all areas where Mexicans were, had been, or would be—including their bodies—became locations in need of medical inspection.

Medical Inspection at the El Paso Immigration Station

Underneath the Santa Fe Street Bridge, on the Juárez side, the USPHS built a disinfection plant where officials conducted medical inspection. Physicians had been stationed at various points along the border as early as the 1890s, but there was no standardized procedure of medical inspection until 1910. Segregated by gender, Mexican men and women stripped in separate undressing rooms before entering the adjacent disinfecting room. While officials disinfected their clothing and baggage, they deloused, bathed, and were sometimes vaccinated before officials allowed them to cross the bridge.²⁵⁹ The gasoline bath, a highly flammable and toxic chemical solution of mostly kerosene, was a mandatory part of medical inspection at the El Paso Immigration Station that lasted well into the twentieth century. “Desired as laborers, Mexicans were only allowed to enter the United States after they had been cleansed and disinfected,” verify Howard Markel and Alexandra Minna Stern in “Which Face? Whose Nation?” “This process, on one hand, was pivotal to the construction of the border as a solid boundary line between the two nations and, on the other, worked to associate Mexicans, especially from the working classes, with filth and disease.”²⁶⁰ Mexican immigrants were exempt from the 1917 Immigration Act’s

²⁵⁶ Ibid., 185.

²⁵⁷ Ibid., 186.

²⁵⁸ Ibid.

²⁵⁹ For more on the inspection process see Stern “Buildings, Boundaries, and Blood,” 45-46; and David Dorado Romo, *Ringside Seat to a Revolution: An Underground Cultural History of El Paso and Juárez: 1893-1923* (El Paso, TX: Cinco Puntos Press, 2005), 235-37.

²⁶⁰ Howard Markel, and Alexandra Minna Stern, “Which Face? Whose Nation? Immigration, Public Health, and the Construction of Disease at America’s Ports and Borders, 1891-1928,” *American Behavioral Science*. 42 (1999): 1325.

strict regulations at the behest of industrialists, who relied on them as a source of cheap labor.²⁶¹ The USPHS nevertheless “broadened the issue of immigration from a labor question that affected employers to a social problem that could affect all citizens” through the trope of disease.²⁶² In this case, that disease was typhus.

Using race as an organizing principle, the USPHS constructed typhus as a Mexican disease and immigrants as its active transmitters. “Backed by the notion of scientific objectivity, health officials gave wide circulation to constructed categories of Mexicans as unclean, ignorant, of basic hygiene practices, and unwitting hosts for communicable diseases,” explains Natalia Molina in *Fit to be Citizens* regarding Los Angeles’ typhus scare.²⁶³ According to El Paso city surgeon Dr. George B. Calnan, the most effective way to prevent typhus from spreading was to kill the vectors—lice, ticks, mites, and rat fleas—that transmitted it. Coupled with nativist arguments, this faulty reasoning created the conditions of possibility for intrusive measures of social control by way of pseudo-medical procedures.²⁶⁴ These methods of invasive control characterized living laboratories such as the El Paso Immigration Station and functioned to figure otherwise ambivalent zones into national borders. At the same time, methods of invasive control extended far beyond these sites.

The sensationalized typhus scare allowed federal agencies to police Ciudad Juárez at large, as well as Mexican immigrants in El Paso where the USPHS appealed to citizens. Just as border jurisdiction exceeded border geography, the responsibility of enforcing biopolitical surveillance extended beyond the hands of public health officials. “Individuals who employed domestic servants from Mexico were asked to bathe their employees with coal oil and vinegar and prohibit them from entering the southern part of the city after dark or on Sundays,” states Levario.²⁶⁵ Furthermore, the El Paso school board banned Mexican schoolchildren commuting from Juárez to attend school. Most telling however, is the order to burn people’s bedding in Juárez’s Chihuahuita neighborhood.²⁶⁶ City health inspectors suddenly had access to private spheres previously protected from their interference. For some, the boundary between public and private collapsed in an effort to enforce national boundaries. But it wasn’t just that public health

²⁶¹ Ibid., 1323. Though exempt from the 1917 Immigration Act, Mexicans still had to delouse before crossing the border. Markel and Stern argue that the mounted guard was specifically developed to apprehend migrants who attempted to cross without delousing.

²⁶² Natalia Molina, *Fit To Be Citizens? Public Health and Race in Los Angeles, 1879-1939* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2006), 74.

²⁶³ Ibid., 69.

²⁶⁴ Kraut coined the term “medicalized nativism” to describe the conflation of race and disease in nativist discourse. I am interested in how medicalized nativism not only justified the stigmatization of immigrant groups but also invasive measures of social control. See Alan M. Kraut, *Silent Travelers: Germs, Genes, and the "Immigrant Menace,"* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 1994).

²⁶⁵ Levario, *Militarizing the Border*, 58.

²⁶⁶ Ibid.

discourse exposed the private realm of intimate relations to inspectors. It was also that inspectors had a right—a moral obligation—to burn people’s bedding, which in part, paved the way for bodies to become a reasonable site of public concern. Such polices transformed the intimate spaces where bodies are seen to have private identities into public ones in need of invasive control.

In El Paso, county physician Dr. G. N. Thomas additionally ordered all prisoners of the county jail subject to gasoline baths.²⁶⁷ Beginning on March 4, 1916, female and male inmates were stripped and “dipped” in baths of 50% kerosene while their clothes were disinfected. Two days later the highly flammable solution caused what Levario calls the “jailhouse holocaust,” setting the prison on fire and killing 23 people.²⁶⁸ A euphemistic term, bathing conjures up images of the quotidian that displace federal law enforcement agencies from their role in subjecting Mexicans to medical inspection. Bathing is an act we perform on ourselves, not something we are subjected to. It also conjures up images of purifying bath rituals such as a baptismal. Both allusions, replete with hygienic connotations, reinforce the notion that Mexicans are a “child race” in need of an intervening force to achieve proper sanitation. The USPHS branded the word “admitted” in permanent ink on the arms of those who bathed at the border.²⁶⁹ According to Alexandra Minna Stern’s calculations “871,639 bodies were inspected, 69,674 disinfected, 30,970 vaccinated for smallpox, 420 excluded on account of illness, seven denied entry for refusing disinfection, and eight retained for observation” within a four month period at the El Paso Immigration Station, though not a single case of typhus was ever found.²⁷⁰

Most importantly, bathing conjures up images of water; that these baths were comprised of kerosene instead speaks to the fact that the El Paso Immigration Station was a living laboratory in which the USPHS could take otherwise forbidden risks based on a population’s race. As a method of invasive control, gasoline baths were an experimental form of state sanctioned regulation. The purpose was not necessarily to exclude Mexican immigrants, or “to discipline the laboring force in accordance with industrial expectations,” as Amy L. Fairchild argues in *Science at the Borders*.²⁷¹ With the advent of germ theory came the idea that epidemic diseases know no boundaries. In other words, public health officials were not inspecting for visible conditions affecting an immigrant’s ability to work but for invisible signs of contagion. Officials believed that “race modified the face of disease” and that racial difference was itself a kind of contagion.²⁷² “Unhealthy, then, became a convenient metaphor for excludable, legislation

²⁶⁷ Mexican immigrants admitted to the hospital in El Paso were also subject to compulsory gasoline baths.

²⁶⁸ See Levario, *Militarizing the Border*, 59.

²⁶⁹ For more on ink branding see Stern, *Eugenic Nation*, 57-58.

²⁷⁰ Stern, “Buildings, Boundaries, and Blood,” 47.

²⁷¹ Amy Fairchild, *Science at the Borders: Immigrant Medical Inspection and the Shaping of the Modern Industrial Labor Force* (Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins University Press, 2003), 16.

²⁷² *Ibid.*, 205.

the remedy, and public health bureaucrats—first state, later federal—the instruments of cure,” quips Alan M. Kraut in *Silent Travelers*, shaping what he calls a distinct brand of *medicalized* nativism.²⁷³ The most salient description, I think, is in the *El Paso Times*, which refers to gasoline baths as “filth cleansing.”²⁷⁴

The Bath Riots

On January 28, 1917, the very morning that the USPHS announced quarantine, Carmelita Torres refused to take a gasoline bath. Like many *domesticas* working in El Paso, seventeen-year old Torres lived in Ciudad Juarez and had to cross the Santa Fe Bridge every day. At approximately 7:00 a.m., streetcars carrying a group of domestic workers stopped at the disinfection plant. Officials ordered the women to get off the streetcars and enter the plant for a compulsory gasoline bath before being allowed to cross the bridge. Torres refused, and with her, all the other women. Community members quickly joined the protesting women, who reached the tollgate midway on the bridge. They threw stones at officials and anyone crossing from El Paso; “they kept up a continuous volley of language aimed at the immigration and health officers, civilians, sentries and any other visible American.”²⁷⁵ Those attempting to enter Juarez were forced back. The fast growing group of protesters—nearing 1,000 by late morning—took over the streetcars. According to Fischer, the women threw their conductors off the bridge and into the Rio Grande. Military personnel from El Paso arrived shortly thereafter. U.S. army soldiers tried to prevent protesters from advancing to El Paso from above and below, forcing them back to the midway point. To their bewilderment, however, the Carranza cavalry paraded their forces on Juarez Avenue in a show of solidarity. “Not only was the civil population of Juarez permitted to make a disgusting exhibition, but the Mexican soldiers were turned out as though to encourage the civilians in their anti-cleanup demonstration,” reports the *El Paso Times*.²⁷⁶

The *El Paso Times* headline for the next day reads: “Order to Bath Starts Near Riot Among Juarez Women: Auburn-Haired Amazon at Santa Fe Street Bridge Leads Feminine Outbreak.” One of the subheadings reads: “Rumors among Servant Girls That Quarantine Officers Photographed Bathers in the Altogether Responsible for Wild Scenes.”²⁷⁷ Reports had circulated on both sides of the river that public health officials had verbally assaulted the women while bathing and photographed them nude.²⁷⁸ The women further alleged that the officials had

²⁷³ Kraut, *Silent Travelers*, 6.

²⁷⁴ “Order to Bathe,” *El Paso Morning Times*.

²⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁷⁸ Levario, *Militarizing the Border*, 92.

circulated the photographs in local saloons. “The responsible surgeon of the USPHS in El Paso, C. C. Pierce, was quick to report to the General Surgeon in Washington, D.C., promptly denying the alleged production of the nude pictures and promising private investigations into the origin of the pictures,” states Fischer. “His reference to the Mexican edition of *The El Paso Morning Times* reveals the reason for the unusual actions of the Mexican army: parallels were drawn between the protests at the bridge and the failure of the U.S. Punitive Expedition when General Pershing unsuccessfully tried to capture the Mexican revolutionary Francisco “Pancho” Villa. Thus, the incident was symbolized as an act of resistance against the U.S.-American border regime ridiculing their quarantine actions.”²⁷⁹

The description of Torres in the *El Paso Times* is striking because it plays off the stereotype of black women as Amazons, which stands in contradistinction to that of a proper lady, who was not fit to endure the backbreaking labor of slavery according to the purity of white womanhood.²⁸⁰ Unlike the Mammy stereotype, however, Amazonic traits depict black women as domineering.²⁸¹ Yet the newspaper headline simultaneously distinguishes Torres from blackness by pointing out the color of her hair. Flipping the idea of a passive Mexican domestic worker on its head, the headline borrows from other racialized and gendered figures already etched in the white supremacist imaginary to recast Torres in hysterical terms. Indicating her auburn hair color is an important detail that alludes to medical debates about skin pigmentation specifically in the case of mulattoes. Born from “the sin of miscegenation,” mulattos were considered objects of scientific scrutiny. The description of Torres, as the antithesis of virtue, is thus riddled with biologisms of earlier centuries attempting to classify non-white or black races. Her leadership of a “feminine outbreak” further frames the Bath Riots as an epidemic requiring the intervention of military personnel. The fact that the outbreak is feminine in nature also betrays the gendered dimensions of biopolitical subjection; contagious disease is once again situated squarely within the racialized female body. “Those who witnessed the actions of the Mexican mob at the end of the bridge will never forget it,” reports the article:

Composed largely of young girls, the mob seemed bent on destroying anything that came from the American side. As soon as an automobile would cross the line the girls would absolutely cover it. The scene reminded one of bees swarming. The hands of the feminine mob would claw and tear at the tops of the cars. The glass rear windows of the autos were torn out, the tops torn to pieces and parts of the fittings, such as lamps and horns, were torn away. All of this happened in view of Mexican military, who had a sufficient force at hand to stop any kind of difficulty. But the commanders and the soldiers seemed in

²⁷⁹ Fischer, “Mobility and Morality,” 190.

²⁸⁰ See Kali N. Gross, *Colored Amazons: Crime, Violence, and Black Women in the City of Brotherly Love, 1880-1910* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006).

²⁸¹ bell hooks, *Ain't I a Woman: Black Women and Feminism* (Brooklyn, NY: South End Press, 1981), 83-84.

sympathy with the mob. The impulse was to injure and insult Americans as much as possible without actually committing murder.²⁸²

Against the backdrop of a booming automotive industry, the disassembling of American vehicles strikes a significant chord. These were the very hands that the government actively recruited for large-scale assembly line manufacturing. Tearing the cars apart in protest, cars that freely transported tourists from El Paso across the bridge, was not only an affront to border patrol policies and the border itself, but also to the contract labor system. The deliberate destruction of anything that came from “the American side,” from symbols of progressive civilization to the so-called primitive, profoundly subverts the narrative of imperial expansion, literally breaking it down. That the scene reminds of swarming bees in particular equates the protesting women with the biting vectors that transmit disease. Their uncontrollable “impulse” rather than rational will is “to injure and insult Americans as much as possible without actually committing murder,” presupposing once again, an inherent desire to physically harm white Americans.

I want to return for a moment to the “rumors among servant girls.” Torres did not ignite the Bath Riots spontaneously or in isolation. She was an intentional political actor responding in part to the scientific spectacle of public health. The El Paso Immigration Station and borderlands at large served as a stage for the visual display of bodies in line with race science exhibitions of the nineteenth century. One of the key differences between medical inspection at the El Paso and Angel Island Immigration Stations is that Mexicans were stripped and forced to wash themselves in gendered bath stalls. A general medical examination followed the gasoline bath, during which public health officials examined people after they had already re-dressed in fumigated clothes.²⁸³ The discourses of science and spectacle intersect through public health; in the disinfection plant, everyone is subject to the medical gaze no matter its design. The fact that public health officials photographed Mexican women while they bathed in gasoline does not mark a moment of slippage from a medical to a pornographic gaze, but exposes the medicalized voyeurism already embedded in early anthropological science. As an “objective” visual technology for the study of race, photography captured evidence of difference (read pathology) that further legitimized anthropological knowledge.²⁸⁴ Daguerreotypes included graphic representations of stripped non-white subjects, supplying a racial iconography for scientists who used photographs as visual data relating to the body. That public health officials photographed Mexican women nude follows a long history of depicting “the other” by way of ethnographic images, which relied heavily on the racialized and sexualized female body. And as Anna Pegler-Gordon points out in *In Sight of America*, U.S. immigration policy first relied on photographic identity documentation to regulate

²⁸² “Order to Bathe,” *El Paso Morning Times*.

²⁸³ A general medical examination might also include a psychological examination and interrogation.

²⁸⁴ See Fatimah Tobing Rony, *The Third Eye: Race, Cinema, and Ethnographic Spectacle*, (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1996), xxx; Molly Rogers, *Delia’s Tears: Race, Science, and Photography in Nineteenth-Century America*, (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2010), xxx; and Laura Wexler, *Tender Violence: Domestic Visions in an Age of U.S. Imperialism* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 15-52.

race *and* health at the border in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries.²⁸⁵ Here, the intersection between race, science, and photography hinges on a sadistic sexual fantasy that betrays the eroticized nature of medical inspection.²⁸⁶ By occupying the borderlands in protest, the Bath Riots exhibited a counter-fiction to public health imagery that sought to fix and fracture Mexican women. Torres returned the gaze in a way that completely disrupted multiple visual registers at once, including a racialized surveillance apparatus that relied on empirical observation.

Gloria Anzaldúa's *Borderlands*

It is *precisely* the auburn-haired Amazon figure leading a feminine outbreak at the Santa Fe Street Bridge that Anzaldúa reclaims in her 1987 multi-genre text *Borderlands*. She is *la mestiza*, the product of a palimpsestic crossing situated squarely within the borderlands. Far from the tragic mulatto figure—a common trope in nineteenth century American literature who, according to the biological sciences, was a genetically inferior being with a short life expectancy—*la mestiza* is “a hybrid progeny, a mutable, more malleable species with a rich gene pool.”²⁸⁷ Most importantly, *la mestiza* is much more than racially mixed. She embodies a particular consciousness of the borderlands (her own existence) alien to the dualistic thinking that creates the conditions for borders in the first place. This new and uniquely *mestiza* consciousness has the capacity, born out of sheer necessity, to move beyond a counter-stance. Rather than standing on the opposite river bank, a reactive form of protest locked into and limited by a dualistic paradigm, *la conciencia de la mestiza* allows for the possibility of standing on both shores at once. As such, it leads to alternative territories, to a third place—there all along and simultaneously manifested—from the consciousness of a third perspective.

Torres' stance, in the middle of the bridge, epitomizes the type of crossing that for Anzaldúa has the potential of expanding consciousness. Though the Bath Riots do not explicitly figure into the text, there are intangible links between medical inspection at the immigration station and the kind of borderlands epistemology that Anzaldúa produces in relation to the same border. What continues to strike me about the Bath Riots is the fact that the protesting women did not seek to enter El Paso without delousing. Instead, they tried to keep white American tourists from crossing the bridge and entering their community for consumptive and entertainment purposes. They effectively stopped oncoming traffic *using their bodies* as a blockade, constructing not another border wall but a protective barricade to prevent the

²⁸⁵ Anna Pegler-Gordon, *In Sight of America: Photography and the Development of U.S. Immigration Policy* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2009), xxx.

²⁸⁶ For more on daguerreotypes and pornography in the 1850s, see Brian Wallis, “Black Bodies, White Science: Louis Agassiz’s Slave Daguerreotypes,” *American Art*. 9.2 (1995): 38-61.

²⁸⁷ Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, 99.

unrestricted movement of imperial expansion.²⁸⁸ It is as if they stopped the very vehicles of imperial transfer by disassembling the cars right at the site of interface between two nations, a site they were forced to inhabit; “dozens turned back every hour on being informed that it was a “bad day for Americans,” the *El Paso Times* reports.²⁸⁹ Denied consumption of the spectacle, white American tourists have no choice but to turn back. The Mexican armed forces “drew their sabers threateningly,” pretending to attack the women who “laughingly caught their bridles and turned the horses aside, holding the soldiers sabers and whips.”²⁹⁰ A display of solidarity prompted by Torres’ direct action becomes a playful and powerful performance unintelligible to their gaze except as a “wild scene.”

In the middle of a bridge at the borderlands, where two worlds merge and “phenomena tend to collide,” is the *mestiza*’s home. From this dangerous juncture emerges the possibility of uniting severed parts into an assemblage rather than a coherent whole, one that conceptually and materially reflects a new consciousness though it is also a source of pain, for the borderlands is itself a hurting landscape.²⁹¹ While living in the borderlands triggers certain transformative faculties, it is a contradictory territory characterized by “hatred, anger and exploitation.”²⁹² Anzaldúa begins *Borderlands* with a critical rewriting of history that serves to trace the ancestral lineage of Chicanos. As the once forsaken offspring of the Spanish, Indian, and later Anglo races, Chicanos are originally and secondarily indigenous to the Southwest. With the Spanish colonization of the region in the 1500s, a *mestizo* race was born that the “white imperialist takeover” of Texas in the 1800s further dispossessed.²⁹³ In this sense, the 1848 Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo established the border fence long before Border Patrol, linking its origins to the region’s colonial history, a consideration of which, Anzaldúa argues, reveals border crossing as a continued effort to return home beginning with the Southwest’s native Cochise population in the sixteenth century. Interspersed with childhood memories of working in the fields under the constant threat of *la migra*, Anzaldúa’s rewriting not only functions as a genealogy of Chicanos but also of contemporary agribusinesses that hire gangs of undocumented Mexican laborers to evade federal minimum wages and adequate living conditions. When she narrates her mother’s retelling of how agribusiness corporations stole her grandmother’s land—in the same way that Ursa connects Corregidora’s legacy, through her foremothers’ intergenerational memory, to her

²⁸⁸ According to Romo: “The protesters laid down on the tracks in front of the trolley cars to prevent them from moving. When the street cars were immobilized, the women wrenched the motor controllers from the hands of the motormen. One of the motormen tried to run back to the American side of the bridge. Three or four female rioters clung to him while he tried to escape. They pummeled him with all their might and gave him a black eye. Another motorman preferred to hide from the Mexican women by running into a Chinese restaurant on Avenida Juárez.” *Ringside Seat*, 225.

²⁸⁹ “Order to Bathe,” *El Paso Morning Times*.

²⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

²⁹¹ Anzaldúa, *Borderlands*, 102.

²⁹² *Ibid.*, 17.

²⁹³ *Ibid.*, 28.

own present moment of state-sanctioned violation—it becomes an apparent extension of colonial history. “In our very flesh, (r)evolution works out the clash of cultures,” Anzaldúa states, speaking as if in conversation with Ursa.²⁹⁴

Conceptualizing the borderlands with Anzaldúa as opposed to Agamben, Rancière, or LeFebvre draws attention to the ways in which borderlands are physically present *in the flesh*. Anzaldúa also foregrounds how the psychological, sexual, and spiritual dimensions of an actual border transcend its own spatio-temporal boundaries and translate into the most intimate of interstices, including but not limited to *la mestiza*'s very anatomy. “The U.S.-Mexican border *es una herida abierta* where the Third World grates against the first and bleeds,” Anzaldúa explains, “And before a scab forms it hemorrhages again, the lifeblood of two worlds merging to form a third country—a border culture.”²⁹⁵ *An open wound*. Because the borderland is an embodied landscape, *la mestiza* internalizes the dichotomous logic that legitimizes it. In order to heal the open wound within herself she must develop a tolerance for ambiguity that starts with embracing her own dichotomous identity; the process is “a struggle of flesh, a struggle of borders, an inner war.”²⁹⁶ By breaking down exclusionary paradigms in favor of a non-dualistic mythos through which we can perceive reality anew, *la mestiza* transforms the collisions that constitute her pluralistic mode of being into internal and external cultural shifts. Moving “from sacrificial goat to officiating priestess at the crossroads” requires a conscious rupture with habitual formations rooted in a layered colonial history at the hands of five countries: “Spain, Mexico, the Republic of Texas, the U.S., the Confederacy, and the U.S. again.”²⁹⁷ This series of conquests perpetuated what Anzaldúa calls “cultural tyranny” in tandem with a patriarchal order already set up in pre-Columbian America.

Anzaldúa's concept of “intimate terrorism” is especially helpful for thinking about the mutually reinforcing relationship between the personal and the political, more specifically, the national. “I have so internalized the borderland conflict that sometimes I feel like one cancels out the other and we are zero, nothing, no one,” she states, “*A veces no soy nada ni nadie. Pero hasta cuando no lo soy, lo soy.*”²⁹⁸ The experience of being alien in a territory is not specific to the borderlands and produces self-alienation within a constant state of nepantlism (torn between ways-ness) that *la mestiza* can balance out by reclaiming the Shadow-Beast, the part of her that refuses to be split. Her sixth “proximity” sense, *la facultad*—unknowingly cultivated for protection after surviving repetitive instances of intimate terrorism—accesses a deeper form of seeing through the surface.²⁹⁹ However, learning how to utilize *la facultad* as an agent of

²⁹⁴ Ibid., 103.

²⁹⁵ Ibid., 25.

²⁹⁶ Ibid., 100.

²⁹⁷ Ibid., 112.

²⁹⁸ Ibid., 85.

²⁹⁹ Anzaldúa explains that: “*La facultad* is the capacity to see in surface phenomena the meaning of deeper realities, to see the deep structure below the surface. It is an instant “sensing,” a quick perception arrived at without conscious

transformation demands negotiating with her most painful survival experiences. This period of negotiation or “Coatlicue state,” named after the serpent goddess Coatlicue (a female deity predating the patriarchal order) is a pathway “that transforms living in the Borderlands from a nightmare into a numinous experience.”³⁰⁰ Here, I want to focus in on Anzaldúa’s memory of an encounter with snakes while picking cotton in the fields as a child. Her retelling slips into a first-person account of being swallowed by a snake and then metamorphosing into one herself. Breaking with prose, she writes:

Dead,
The doctor by the operating table said.
I passed between the two fangs,
The flickering tongue.
Having come through the mouth of the serpent,
Swallowed,
I found myself suddenly in the dark,
Sliding down a smooth wet surface
Down down into an even darker darkness.
Having crossed the portal, the raised hinged mouth,
Having entered the serpent’s belly,
Now there was no looking back, no going back.

Why do I cast no shadow?
Are there lights from all sides shining on me?
Ahead, ahead.
Curled up inside the serpent’s coils,
The damp breath of death on my face.

reasoning. It is an acute awareness mediated by the part of the psyche that does not speak, that communicates in images and symbols which are the faces of feelings, that is, behind which feelings reside/hide. The one possessing this sensitivity is excruciatingly alive to the world” (60).

³⁰⁰ Ibid., 95.

I knew at that instant: something must change

Or I'd die.

*Algo tenía que cambiar.*³⁰¹

In this scene, the doctor figure appears as an authoritative voice. Based on where he stands in relation to Anzaldúa's body, we can assume that he is looking down on her—ominously, as the Angel of Death might—with a diagnostic eye. The physician-patient dyad falters significantly when read against the backdrop of medical inspection at the El Paso Immigration Station. Although the doctor claims that she died, Anzaldúa speaks, refuting his diagnosis.

It is her precarious position on the operating table that removes Anzaldúa from the living in two ways. First, she dies in the hands of a doctor from a presumed surgery whose purpose remains unknown; like the obfuscated forms of experimentation that happen in a living laboratory, when an immigrant might replace a rights-bearing patient, there is no given reason for operating. A citizen of nowhere yet classified as a transmitter of communicable disease from one side to the other, *la mestiza* threatens to *pass infection* “between the two fangs.” In the borderlands, public health measures restrict her civil rights, creating the conditions of possibility for increasingly violent procedures. Such procedures, often high-risk because of their experimental nature, dismember the body both literally and metaphorically. Anzaldúa dies on the operating table, before she has been stitched together, in a dismembered state. Second, a serpent swallows her. According to Anzaldúa's first-person account of dying, the two fangs become a gateway into another world. Crossing the border, reinterpreted as a “portal,” lands her in the serpent's belly. Far from the belly of a beast called America, this dark place is more akin to a womb though not without risk; proximity to “the damp breath of death” serves as a necessary push to change. Anzaldúa is in control of her fate when passing through Coatlicue. Here, outside the shadow of biopolitical surveillance, she can choose to die or live differently. And in the end, something *does* change: the language. As a speaking subject of the borderlands, *la mestiza* reclaims Chicano Spanish against the grain of what she calls *linguistic terrorism*.³⁰² The last line (“*Algo tenía que cambiar*”) signals a personal and political paradigm shift that departs from dualisms. Anzaldúa is not dead, but reborn. She has accessed a mestiza consciousness that rejects the confines of cultural tyranny, as well as the tyranny of Western aesthetics.³⁰³ Moving from English to Spanish through a break with prose, Anzaldúa *performs* a surgery of her own, stitching herself back together where the doctor had left her for dead.

However, *la mestiza* reemerges a “protean being” that Anzaldúa often describes as *alien*. In this way, mestiza consciousness offers an alternative form of experimentation through which the self can shape shift against the grain of living laboratories. *La mestiza* is ontologically more than, thereby expanding her conscious capacity beyond the limited human mind. Those who

³⁰¹ Ibid., 57.

³⁰² Ibid., 80.

³⁰³ Ibid., 89-92.

inhabit the borderlands, “*los atravesados*,” exist outside the realm of humanity by virtue of transgressing boundaries, whether national borders or racial and sexual lines. Queerness, explains Anzaldúa, is a kind of borderland identity precisely because it deviates from heterosexual norms. As she crosses boundaries of the self within the self, *la mestiza* once again becomes an alien in new territory. Anzaldúa distinguishes this *sense* of alienation from state-sanctioned exclusion. The former, a productive though painful unsettling, leads to increased awareness whereas the latter is punishable by law. “Do not enter,” Anzaldúa warns, “trespassers will be raped, maimed, strangled, gassed, shot.”³⁰⁴ In other words, *la mestiza* experiences deeply interconnected processes of estrangement. Becoming alien is not always dehumanizing. On the contrary, when she is the agent of change self-alienation elevates her to a *suprahuman* category of being. *La mestiza* mutates on a *biological* level, into new forms of multiple species including the extraterrestrial. As such, she is also *extraterritorial*, escaping national boundaries and their legal jurisdiction. Crossing—“to cross, make a hole in the fence and walk across, to cross the river”—thus characterizes the way *la mestiza* moves in a divided world as well as her constant encounter with internalized boundaries that crossing works to denaturalize.³⁰⁵ Similarly, the Bath Riots denaturalized the borderline through a refusal located in the flesh. When Carmelita Torres said no, she subverted the false sense of *immutability* that attempts to suppress other forms of agency in what is actually a relational and contested site within a transnational circuit. Her refusal symbolizes a mutable self-possession (and perhaps healing?) in stark contrast to the anti-clean-up demonstration depicted by the *El Paso Times*.

“Wild tongues can’t be tamed, they can only be cut out,” declares Anzaldúa.³⁰⁶ This declaration takes on added meaning in relation to the Bath Riots. Medical inspection functions, in part, to tame or discipline. At the U.S.-Mexico border, the USPHS served as the primary federal agency from 1910 well into the 1940s. Until the Border Patrol was established in 1924, the USPHS enforced immigration law, and forms of governance specific to the USPHS. Mutilation falls within the purview of corporeal regulation, making it possible for the USPHS to incorporate pseudo-medical procedures directed at the body in their law enforcement practices. Those who refuse destabilize the disciplinary function of these procedures. Anzaldúa’s work illuminates the fact that, even more destabilizing than Torres’ refusal to bathe, is the counter discourse exemplified in her action. The untamable wild tongue, read as language, emphasizes the significance of this counter discourse in Torres’ speech act, an act she performs through the body. What I ultimately hear Torres saying, though there is no official record of her words, is that her body belongs to her and that her status of belonging to a particular place, situated squarely within her flesh, cannot be determined by the USPHS precisely because belonging is embodied—a completely different notion of territorial nationalism. If we think of the borderlands as a site of multiple semiotic systems, then *wild* tongues pose a threat to the racialized and gendered narrative underpinning public health discourse, especially the knowledge that it produces about the Mexican race through invasive control. Read as a body part, the

³⁰⁴ Ibid., 25.

³⁰⁵ Ibid., 71.

³⁰⁶ Ibid., 76.

untamable wild tongue escapes biopolitical surveillance, and not necessarily in a literal way. Again, Anzaldúa's work illuminates just that. The transformative capacity in Torres' refusal lies less in the fact that she was successfully not subject to bathing on January 28 than how her refusal ruptured the dominant semiotic system fixed in place by compulsory gasoline baths. She averted the pornographic medical gaze in a more complicated way, by showing that even when bathing in gasoline, she is not bound to it. The pornographic medical gaze cannot bind her to its law no matter how far it seeks to penetrate the body and it cannot know despite invasive control.

Often overlooked is the context of this oft-quoted passage in *Borderlands*. The section, "How to Tame a Wild Tongue," begins not with a discussion of language but a doctor's appointment. It is yet another doctor figure, a dentist, who tells Anzaldúa that her tongue is preventing him from completing an operation:

"We're going to have to control
your tongue," the dentist says, pulling out all the metal from my
mouth. Silver bits plop and tinkle into the basin. My mouth is a
motherlode.

The dentist is cleaning out my
roots. I get a whiff of the stench when I gasp. "I can't cap that
tooth yet, you're still draining," he says.

"We're going to have to do
something about your tongue," I hear the anger rising in his
voice. My tongue keeps pushing out the wads of cotton, pushing back the drills, the long
thin needles. "I've never seen anything
as strong or as stubborn," he says. And I think, how do you tame
a wild tongue, train it to be quiet, how do you bridle and saddle
it? How do you make it lie down?³⁰⁷

Though Anzaldúa narrates this passage, the dentist's voice is the only one we hear. The fact that she cannot speak, however, does not mean she is a passive recipient of his operation. I want to suggest that for Anzaldúa, becoming a *speaking* subject of the borderlands is not necessarily *la mestiza's* goal. Anzaldúa recasts the dentist's surgical instruments, tools of invasive control, as natural resources being extracted from her mouth, a rich "motherlode." Drawing a significant parallel between the land and her body places the doctor figure in the position of agribusiness

³⁰⁷ Ibid., 76.

companies through the historically specific metaphor of mining. The role of mining operations in settler colonialism emphasizes continuity from one extractive process to another.

Cleaning out her roots thus takes on multiple and interrelated meanings. Following my previous interpretation, we might begin by reading this passage as an allusion to the destruction of natural resources at the root zone. In *Borderlands*, Anzaldúa situates cultural identity squarely within an embodied relationship to land in which there is no separation between it and the flesh. On the one hand, cleaning out her roots translates into cleaning out her land-based origins or homeland. As I have shown, racial hygiene played a major role in establishing the U.S.-Mexico border, the actual geopolitical site that Anzaldúa refers to. Cleanliness defined the Mexican “race problem” in the Southwest, constructing Mexicans as illegal in their former homeland. In the position of public health officials who operated the disinfection plant at the El Paso Immigration Station, the doctor figure points to how the nativist basis for Mexican unassimilability hinged on tropes of contagion.³⁰⁸ To cross over, to access citizenship, Mexicans had to be sterilized of their cultural identity, including their mother tongue. Anzaldúa’s mouth is also a motherlode in the sense that, as a *mestiza*, she speaks many languages. The dentist’s need to control her tongue in order to clean out her roots betrays the fact that the state must operate through the body to regulate its boundaries. Anzaldúa’s tongue “keeps pushing out the wads of cotton, pushing back the drills, the long thin needles” connecting everything at the nexus of her mouth. The wads of cotton stand in for the dentist’s surgical supplies *and* the still-booming Cotton Kingdom recruiting Mexican field hands post-slavery followed by drills, the agricultural technology of subsequent eras and finally needles. It is Anzaldúa’s uncooperative tongue and not her voice that relentlessly pushes out ever iteration of controlling mechanisms. In other words, dissent originates from her body, which refuses even though she cannot speak. Taming a wild tongue is just as much about controlling the body as it is about policing language. Because *la mestiza* develops a pluralistic rhetoric beyond the discursive domain, she does not necessarily need her voice to speak in tongues. In this passage for example, Anzaldúa gasps, articulating a number of expressions at once *from the body’s breath*. Above all else, I want to suggest that she articulates a sign of life against the grain of what can be read as chronological yet conflated reiterations of invasive control whose continuities merge at the hands of a doctor ultimately unable to carry on.

The 1924 Immigration Act

Seven years after the Bath Riots, Border Patrol became an official federal law enforcement agency in 1924, the very same year that federal law limited the annual number of immigrants who could be admitted to the U.S. based on race. I want to trace an ideological thread from the El Paso Immigration Station, where the USPHS was the first law enforcement agency responsible for patrolling the border, to the 1924 Immigration Act, which eugenicists co-authored with lawmakers and lobbied for. I argue that the ideologies (and practices) tested at the borderlands were codified in the 1924 Immigration Act and as Anzaldúa further illuminates, in

³⁰⁸ Demolition squads also destroyed hundreds of Mexican adobe homes in South El Paso for “hygienic” reasons during the time of the Bath Riots.

ways that coverage of the Bath Riots alone cannot, the historical antecedents of these ideologies arise from a much longer history of colonization. The 1917 Immigration Act, or Asiatic Barred Zone Act directly based on the Chinese Exclusion Act set a precedent, a legal bind, for the Immigration Act of 1924.³⁰⁹ If we only consider the legislative traces of the eugenics movement however, we run the great risk of erasing the ways in which invasive control operated *through flesh* notwithstanding the law. Immigration restriction (and anti-miscegenation) laws went hand in hand with sterilization practices that, as the El Paso Immigration Station reveals, were not necessarily enabled by the law but rather created the conditions of possibility to legalize eugenics. In 1917, the USPHS published the *Manual for the Physical Inspection of Aliens* written by a group of leading medical scientists, progressive reformers, and eugenicists.

In *Impossible Subjects*, Mae Ngai explains that the 1924 Immigration Act produced a new kind of subject at once barred from citizenship yet an integral part of society: the illegal alien. The Immigration Act established an understanding of national membership that centralized the importance of enforcing preexisting territorial borders of inclusion and exclusion. Within its remapped boundaries, violating the nation's sovereign space became a spatial as well as a racial transgression punishable by law. It makes sense that the renewed significance of state territoriality as central to immigration policy coincided with establishment of the Border Patrol as a fixed federal enforcement entity along the border. The Immigration Act linked race, as a biological-based category, to nationality in a way that drew borderlines around the desired composition of the nation. As part of the 1924 Immigration Act, this logic expanded into protecting the nation against the contamination of social degeneracy, though it was still the public health agencies at the local, state, and federal levels producing official reports and demographic data about the high rate of social degeneracy of ethnic populations.³¹⁰

The Johnson-Reed Immigration Act of 1924 was the nation's first comprehensive restriction law. It limited the number of immigrants who could be admitted to the United States based on a system of quotas called the National Origins Formula. In short, the quotas were calculated using racial categories from the 1890 census with the goal of controlling the nation's ethnic composition. Ngai has problematized the concept of "national origins" to show how the Immigration Act codified racial categories within a hierarchy of desirability that favored white Europeans. As such, the law excluded all others—more than half the world's population—from American nationality because of their race. According to restrictionists, immigration threatened U.S. national identity. "The causal link in this theory rested on the assumption that the nation possessed a natural character and teleology, to which immigration was external and unnatural,"

³⁰⁹ The 1917 Immigration Act restricted the immigration of 'undesirables' from other countries, including "idiots, imbeciles, epileptics, alcoholics, poor, criminals, beggars, any person suffering attacks of insanity, those with tuberculosis, and those who have any form of dangerous contagious disease, aliens who have a physical disability that will restrict them from earning a living in the United States...polygamists and anarchists, those who were against the organized government or those who advocated the unlawful destruction of property and those who advocated the unlawful assault of killing of any officer." Prostitutes were also barred from entering the United States.

³¹⁰ Mae M. Ngai, *Impossible Subjects: Illegal Aliens and the Making of Modern America*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003), 32.

states Ngai. “Those assumptions resonated with conventional views about America’s providential mission, Manifest Destiny, and the general march of progress.”³¹¹ The Immigration Act effectively sidestepped debates about assimilability through scientific discourses of biological determinism that called for gatekeeping policies to prevent race suicide.

Prominent eugenicists worked with congressmen to pass immigration law for the first time in 1924.³¹² This conversely placed immigration reform within the purview of eugenics as a means of perpetuating racial hygiene campaigns. Comparing them to phrenologists of earlier centuries, Ngai explains that eugenicists “worked backward from classifications they defined a priori and declared a causal relationship between [demographic data] and race.”³¹³ Indeed, eugenics directly stemmed from nineteenth-century scientific racism. Coined by English scientist Francis Galton (a cousin of Charles Darwin) in 1882, eugenics developed into a popular field of study in the 1920s with an emphasis on hereditary that reinscribed difference into the body. The “bad blood” of immigrants made it impossible to achieve standards of cleanliness for admission. Social undesirability thus rested in the conflation of germs *and* genes, rendering entire races ineligible for citizenship. Attention to the gendered dimension of restrictionist claims highlights the fact that scientific arguments about the loss of purity hinge on reproductive politics. The alleged defilement of the nation’s Anglo-Saxon blood hearkens back to characterizations of Mexican women as not only sexually promiscuous and hyperfertile but more specifically as “breeders of disease.” Birthright citizenship was at the intersection of overlapping concerns related to immigration and population.³¹⁴ Controlling “borders and babies,” as Elena R. Gutiérrez quips in *Fertile Matters*, therefore went hand in hand. The underlying assumption however, is that defilement will inevitably lead to degeneration.

Stereotypes of dirty Mexicans that legitimized medical inspection in the early 1900s served to evidence biological inferiority as well as the need for increased surveillance techniques at the border. “In tandem, these two trends—medicalization and militarization—worked to created a regime of eugenic gatekeeping on the U.S.-Mexico border that aimed to ensure the putative purity of the “American” family-nation while generating long-lasting stereotypes of the Mexicans as filthy, lousy, and prone to irresponsible breeding,” argues Stern.³¹⁵ It is no wonder that the Border Patrol was also founded in 1924 to enforce the Immigration Act and regulate Mexican immigration in particular. Stern sheds significant light on the eugenic background and infrastructure of militarization that allowed for medicalization to persist after the shift towards

³¹¹ Ibid., 30.

³¹² Stern, “Buildings, Boundaries, and Blood,” 73-80.

³¹³ Mae M. Ngai, “The Architecture of Race in American Immigration Law: A Reexamination of the Immigration Act of 1924,” *The Journal of American History*. 86.1 (1999): 77.

³¹⁴ In particular, there was a concern about “overbreeding” immigrant women draining public resources. See Elena R. Gutiérrez, *Fertile Matters: The Politics of Mexican-Origin Women’s Reproduction* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2008), and Molina, xxx

³¹⁵ Stern, *Eugenic Nation*, 58-59.

more abstract registers of inspection. Even then, to receive a visa immigrants were required to obtain a certificate of mental and physical health from a physician.³¹⁶

Conclusion

1,950 mile-long open wound

dividing a *pueblo*, a culture,
running down the length of my body,
staking fence rods in my flesh,
splits me splits me
me raja me raja

Anzaldúa concludes *Borderlands* by way of return. In *el retorno*, she goes back to the borderlands where agribusiness companies have destroyed the Mexican economy. Her father, a farm laborer, only lived to be 38. He might have been a farm laborer in the 1942 government-sponsored Bracero Program through which the U.S. legally admitted thousands of seasonal agricultural workers from Mexico for a limited time. The name of the program, from *brazo* or the Spanish word for arm, reveals the underlying logic of massive labor recruitment.³¹⁷ The Bracero Program is a contractual exchange in field hands, in body parts, negotiated with planters. It temporarily and partially legalizes a person in pieces, exposing an underlying logic of commodification as well as dismemberment that in part, allows for invasive control. Yet the land has survived, reflects Anzaldúa. Like its people, the land has survived centuries of dispossession and will continue to survive.

I began this chapter with two epigraphs; a stanza from the opening poem in *Borderlands* coupled with an excerpt from the Bath Riots report in *El Paso Times*. The excerpt is a reprint of the certificate issued by the USPHS to border crossers. Though the procedures are specific to the El Paso Immigration Station, it is almost exactly the same as the certificate issued at Angel Island. What strikes me the most about the certificate is not the procedure of medical inspection—delousing, bathing, vaccinating, disinfecting—that officials must conduct and confirm, but the blank. In this blank space, an official would have recorded a person's name—a

³¹⁶ See Kraut, *Silent Travelers*, 257, and Fairchild, *Science at the Borders*, 215-20.

³¹⁷ Alicia R. Schmidt Camacho, *Migrant Imaginaries: Latino Cultural Politics in the U.S.-Mexico Borderlands* (New York, NY: New York University Press, 2008), 63.

person who the certificate has already determined is the *bearer* of disease. There is something ghostly about the blank. It stands for the specter of disease, and so much more than disease, materialized in the image and idea of a Mexican (im)migrant. At the same time, it betrays the limits of biopolitical knowledge claims; the USPHS cannot know despite invasive control. In *Borderlands*, however, the ghost becomes flesh. Traces of life emerge from the kerosene that, according to the USPHS alone, killed everything submerged in it. Traces of life in the waste products of modernity.

There are also blanks in Anzaldúa's poem. In 1994, the U.S. Border Patrol launched Operation Gatekeeper, the first of three large-scale operations to construct a physical barrier along the U.S.-Mexico border.³¹⁸ Ongoing construction of the border fence or wall is not subject to any protection laws. Anzaldúa's description of the wall as a "1,950 mile-long open wound" speaks to the long history of conquest waged by the U.S. against Mexico. Once a unified pueblo, belonging to neither country but native tribes of the southwest, the territory is now a forcibly divided region. According to Anzaldúa, the wall not only demarcates a geographical division but also a cultural boundary betrayed by the final two lines of the stanza that repeat the same phrase in English and then in Spanish as if broken on the basis of language, a key feature of cultural identity. The literal gaps between the phrases on the same line perform the splitting construction of the wall and, on a visual register, produce an unsettled empty space that seems to disrupt the enjambment of its poetic form. However, reading the empty space as yet-to-be-filled rather than as a complete erasure reveals the possibility of suturing this open wound anew. The border wall, simultaneously spanning the length of her body and that of a nation, is a locatable injury figured in geopolitical/personal terms. As opposed to a scar, it remains an open wound due to repeated historical injury, conjuring up violent images of excavation as well as amputation. Repetition of the phrase "splits me" without punctuation bleeds across the linguistic borderscape in the direction of imperial expansion to the Spanish-speaking "side" below the previous line. At the same time, Anzaldúa's flesh is the raw material for the wall itself, fixed in place with fence rods that stake a claim to the land through her body. The stanza travels a crooked path mirroring the 1,950 mile-long stretch of the wall itself and, I would add, the nonlinear entanglements of imperialism at large as well as the movement of migrants intertwining these zones across time and space.

Anzaldúa's introductory poem ends with the ocean. At Imperial Beach, the border fence extends 300 feet into the surf. "But the skin of the earth is seamless," she reminds, "The sea cannot be fenced, / *el mar* does not stop at borders."³¹⁹ Water, like disease, knows no boundaries. These ideologies and practices traveled as well. Medical Inspection at the El Paso Immigration Station set a precedent for the 1924 Immigration Act and for the gas chambers in Nazi Germany. In *Ringside Seat to a Revolution*, David Dorado Romo reveals that the fumigation agent used by public health officials in the gas chambers of the disinfection plant, Zyklon B, was later used in Nazi Germany. Zyklon B, a combination of gasoline, kerosene, sodium cyanide, cyanogen,

³¹⁸ Lee, *At America's Gate*, 19.

³¹⁹ Anzaldúa, *Borderlands*, 25.

sulfuric acid, and later DDT as well, is extremely poisonous to humans. There is a direct connection between the *Desinfektionskammern* or fumigation cubicles in Nazi Germany, which used pellets of Zyklon B, and the gas chambers at the El Paso Immigration Station. Romo cites Dr. Gerhard Peters' 1938 article published in a German pest science journal, which calls for the Nazis to adopt Zyklon B and includes two photographs of the disinfection plant.³²⁰ The blueprint for Nazi racial hygiene conceptually and materially emerged from a living laboratory at the U.S.-Mexico border whose historical antecedents date back to global histories of colonialism and racial slavery.

³²⁰ Romo, *Ringside Seat*, 240-43.

“I created for myself the possibility of healing my own wounds as I explored the collective wounds of Puerto Rican women’s oppression and the medicinal powers of history. I became my own laboratory. It is the laboratory of an herbalist.”

-Aurora Levíns Morales, *Remedios*³²¹

“The Commissioner of Health is hereby authorized to regulate the teaching and divulgation of eugenic principles in public-health units and pre-natal, maternological, puericultural centers, and public maternity clinics or hospitals.”

-*Laws of Puerto Rico 1937, Act 136*³²²

Chapter Four

La Operación: Eugenic Sterilization in Puerto Rico and the 1937 Penal Code

In 1974, the grassroots Committee for Puerto Rican Decolonization charged the government with a U.S.-backed genocide campaign. In a two-part article on the mass sterilization of Puerto Rican women, the committee leaked an economic policy report entitled, “Opportunity for Employment, Education, and Training,” in which a network of government agencies propose a plan to reduce the working-class population.³²³ Puerto Rico’s colonial status, the committee argues, created the conditions of possibility for mass sterilization under Operation Bootstrap, though it was never an official policy. In this chapter, I draw attention to the 1937 Penal Code to show that sterilization was in fact already legalized as part of the eugenics movement. I highlight three acts—33, 116, and 136—that together set a precedent for

³²¹ Aurora Levíns Morales, *Remedios: Stories of Earth and Iron from the History of Puertorriqueñas* (Brooklyn, NY: South End Press, 1998), xxv.

³²² *Laws of Puerto Rico, 1937*, page 294, Act 136, Section 3, enacted May 15, 1937.

³²³ Committee for Puerto Rican Decolonization, “Report Indicates New Campaign: 35% Puerto Rican Women Sterilized,” *Puerto Rico Libre!* 2.5 (1974): 3-4. (Committee for Puerto Rican Decolonization newsletter. Part 2, “In Response to U.S. Corporate Needs: Gov’t Network Sterilizes Workers” of a two part article in the committee’s newsletter. Vol 2, No. 4 and 5, December 1974. New York, NY. The first part is entitled, “Report Indicates New Campaign: 35% Puerto Rican Women Sterilized.”)

sterilization to become a standard procedure by the late twentieth century.³²⁴ The 1937 Penal Code paved the way for hundreds of federally funded birth control clinics as well as hospitals to subsidize sterilization along with experimental contraceptives. Before it became a social laboratory for anti-poverty development programs, I argue that the island was a medical laboratory central to the process of imperial nation building through invasive public health measures.

While the 1937 Penal Code legally bound the ideological to the material in eugenic sterilization laws, the scope of its injury cannot be decoded from the law alone. I thus read Aurora Levíns Morales' 1998 *Remedios* alongside Acts 33, 116, and 136 to trace the historical antecedents of reproductive regulation by way of storied memories. Structured as a *botánica* or herbal medicine store, this multi-genre book retells the history of Puerto Rican women through corresponding plant-based remedies. Morales chronicles a layered legacy of colonialism in which she also weaves her childhood experience of surviving ritual abuse at the hands of several male adults, including a doctor from the U.S. As a counterpoint to the law, I argue that *Remedios* allows us to situate mass sterilization in the continuity of colonial sexual violence interrupted only by the embodied evidence of Puerto Rican women's stories.

From the U.S.-Mexico Border to Puerto Rico

For General John J. Pershing, overseeing medical inspection at the U.S.-Mexico border was a logical next step in his colonial career. After serving in the 10th Cavalry Regiment, which led the 1898 invasion of Cuba, he oversaw occupation forces in all ceded territories of the Spanish-American War, including Puerto Rico. In fact, Pershing moved to El Paso, Texas from the Philippines, where he was stationed until the early 1910s. "If Chihuahuita could be turned over to the Army as Cuba and the Philippines were, it would soon be changed," reports the *El Paso Herald*. "Those places were cleaned up and disease stamped out."³²⁵ As historian Alexandra Minna Stern highlights in *Eugenic Nation*, there is a direct connection between the U.S.-Mexico border and the newly acquired possessions of American empire.³²⁶ The burgeoning field of tropical medicine shaped public health measures central to U.S. colonialism that Sanitary Corps officers, like General Pershing, applied to other borderland geographies. According to

³²⁴ See Yamila Azize-Vargas and Luis A. Avilés, "Abortion in Puerto Rico: The Limits of Colonial Legality," *Reproductive Health Matters* 9 (1997): 56. See also Harriet Presser's "The Role of Sterilization in Controlling Puerto Rican Fertility," *Population Studies*. 23.3 (1996): 343-61.

³²⁵ Dr. Howard Thompson, "Clean Chihuahita Or Suffer Epidemic That May Be Costly," *El Paso Herald*, November 30, 1915, <http://texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metaph137508/m1/4/?q=el%20paso%20herald%20%22disease%22%20date:1915-1915>. See also, Alexandra Minna Stern, "Buildings, Boundaries, and Blood: Medicalization and Nation-Building on the U.S.-Mexico Border, 1910-1930," *The Hispanic American Historical Review* 79.1 (1999): 56.

³²⁶ Alexandra Minna Stern, "Quarantine and Eugenic Gatekeeping on the U.S.-Mexican Border," in *Eugenic Nation: Faults and Frontiers of Better Breeding in Modern America* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2005), 57-81.

Stern, the process of militarization and medicalization underway in the colonies defined construction of the U.S.-Mexico border.³²⁷ Turning Chihuahuita or El Paso over to the army, as it already had been, would indeed continue the legacy of US imperial hygiene established in Cuba and the Philippines.³²⁸ While Stern traces a direct connection through Pershing's colonial career, I am interested in the continuities that arise through the storied memories of Puerto Rican women in Aurora Levíns Morales' *Remedios*.

As I concluded in the previous chapter, eugenicists played a role in determining the quota-based policy of the 1924 Immigration Act. Moving (back) to Puerto Rico from the U.S.-Mexico border draws attention to the increasing role of eugenicists in the law, particularly state sterilization laws of those deemed socially inadequate. The 1924 Immigration Act set a precedent for eugenics to justify the legality of involuntary sterilization, as Randall Hansen and Desmond King argue in *Sterilized by the State*.³²⁹ In Puerto Rico, the 1937 Penal Code institutionalized eugenic principles, establishing sterilization as the only accessible form of contraception by law. At the same time, however, Puerto Rico became a test site for pharmaceutical companies entering the consumer market with experimental contraceptives.³³⁰ When in later decades the discourse of population control espoused eugenic principles, sterilization was already a legalized public health measure on the island. Specific acts of the 1937 Penal Code were in part made possible by the 1924 Immigration Act, and further justified eugenic principles as the ideological basis for invasive control. The entire Caribbean island of Puerto Rico thus became a living laboratory.³³¹

Population Control

Population control emerged in response to concerns about “developing” countries and adopted the eugenic principles underlying the preexisting birth control movement in the U.S.³³²

³²⁷ See Stern, “Buildings, Boundaries, and Blood.”

³²⁸ For more on the history of American tropical medicine in the Philippines, see Warwick Anderson, *Colonial Pathologies: American Tropical Medicine, Race, and Hygiene in the Philippines* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006).

³²⁹ Randall Hansen and Desmond King, *Sterilized by the State: Eugenics, Race, and the Population Scare in Twentieth-Century North America* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

³³⁰ *Ibid.*, 180.

³³¹ Betsy Hartmann argues that the history of U.S. involvement in sterilization abroad actually began in Puerto Rico. *Reproductive Rights and Wrongs: The Global Politics of Population Control* (Boston, MA: South End Press, 1995), 247-48.

³³² For more on eugenics and world population growth see Hansen and King, *Sterilized by the State*, 186-207. See also Allan Chase, *The Legacy of Malthus: the Social Costs of the New Scientific Racism* (New York, NY: Alfred A. Knopf, 1975), 367. See also Committee for Puerto Rican Decolonization, “Report Indicates New Campaign: 35% Puerto Rican Women Sterilized.” *Puerto Rico Libre!* 2.5 (1974): 3-4.” This article documents how the U.S. in particular carried out population control programs throughout the Third World.

American social scientists blamed Puerto Rican women for the island's poverty—a result of Spanish colonialism subsumed under U.S. colonial domination through the plantation system. However, “clearly omitted from defense of an official birth reduction policy was the economic situation of a colonized economy based on the extraction of resources,” states Mass.³³³ Puerto Rico rivaled Brazil in coffee production during the final decades of the eighteenth century. Slavery was abolished at the height of its coffee boom in the 1870s, yet what Antonio Benítez-Rojo calls the plantation *machine* endured and planters expanded coffee production throughout the 3,350 square-mile island. In her 2013 blog post “Hold the Coffee,” Aurora Levíns Morales declares: “I grew up in a landscape entirely restructured to serve three great addictions of modern life: sugar, tobacco and coffee.”³³⁴ Her body, she explains, refuses to let her drink coffee, once Puerto Rico's chief export where Morales grew up. For Morales, refusing to drink coffee is an embodied refusal to forget its bloody origins. In a way, this chapter returns full circle to the transatlantic slave trade by way of the Caribbean or “meta-archipelago” connecting North America and South America. According to Benítez-Rojo, the Caribbean is an island that literally and figuratively repeats itself, even outside of its own limits. M. Jacqui Alexander's palimpsest is, for Benítez-Rojo, akin to the steps of a spiral staircase linking the past with the future. Preceding structures of colonial domination like the plantation machine were never substituted, nor did they disappear; they existed, rather, in the same spatiotemporal frame. The Caribbean thus “covers the map of world history's contingencies” just as it necessarily covers the length of my dissertation project to signal the chaotic repetition of American empire from the New World's so-called beginning.³³⁵

In 1917, when the Bath Riots erupted at the southern border, the U.S. granted citizenship to Puerto Ricans in an organized effort to encourage migration from the island to the mainland. The U.S. appointed governor of Puerto Rico had also approved several expeditions to Hawaii and other Caribbean islands where excess people were likewise encouraged to migrate.³³⁶ Mass migration was considered a temporary solution to overpopulation, which American social scientists identified as the main roadblock to industrialization.³³⁷ As Michael Lapp points out,

³³³ Bonnie Mass, “Puerto Rico: A Case Study of Population Control,” *Latin American Perspectives*, 4.4 (1977): 69.

³³⁴ “Hold the Coffee,” *Aurora Levíns Morales*, last modified May 31, 2013, <http://www.auroralevinsmorales.com/blog/hold-the-coffee>.

³³⁵ Antonio Benítez-Rojo, *The Repeating Island: The Caribbean and the Postmodern Perspective* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1997), 5.

³³⁶ These were actually off-island labor contracts “where agents from U.S. business or agriculture would offer transportation to places like Hawaii, Arizona, or Georgia in exchange for work contracts, often involving very low wages.” Laura Briggs, *Reproducing Empire: Race, Sex, Science, and U.S. Imperialism in Puerto Rico* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2002), 83.

³³⁷ In “Puerto Rico: A Case Study,” Bonnie Mass writes, “Depression conditions during the 1930s, had stimulated a huge emigration from PR to the US mainland, and natural population increase was offset in the process. In order to seek living wages during the 1930s approximately 3,700 PRs left yearly as compared to an annual exodus of about 500 between 1900 and 1920. Emigration was also stimulated by massive repression against popular movements, as evidenced by the Ponce Massacre of 1937 where many were killed and imprisoned” (69).

American social scientists expressed a vested interest in Puerto Rico from the mid-1940s to the mid-1960s as a “social laboratory” for Third World economic development.³³⁸ The Depression had devastated the island’s economy, contributing to the already extreme poverty. Once based on subsistence farming, Puerto Rican agriculture was now a mono-crop production dominated by U.S.-owned sugar plantations.³³⁹ Its colonial representatives saw an opportunity in the island’s rapidly declining economy to conduct state-sponsored sociological experiments. By transforming the island into a progressive modern society, Puerto Rico would become a showcase for democracy in the Caribbean. The more permanent solution to overpopulation however, was population control.

According to the eighteenth-century myth of Malthusianism, unchecked population growth causes poverty. The twentieth century witnessed a neo-Malthusian revival that, coupled with social Darwinism in a colonial context, led to a eugenic approach to population control.³⁴⁰ An unofficial sterilization policy complemented migration under Operation Bootstrap (1947), a New Deal-like industrialization plan for the island. Because it was the only method of birth control available, sterilization did not need to be a *legalized* population control measure. In fact, Puerto Rican women did not have legal access to contraceptives until the Comstock Law (1873) was repealed in 1937 but even then, continued lack of access, further restricted by law, set the stage for sterilization to become the standard. Though it is wrong to view all Puerto Rican women as victims of sterilization abuse, Iris Lopez emphasizes the importance of interrogating reproductive freedom alongside these women’s sociopolitical conditions in *Matters of Choice*.³⁴¹ In other words, those with limited reproductive options cannot always exercise full reproductive agency.³⁴² For thirty-one years, she recalls, sterilization “was systematically available while temporary methods of birth control were only haphazardly available.”³⁴³ Furthermore, Lopez stresses a critical distinction between birth control and population control: the latter specifically refers to a state imposition that *eliminates* the individual right to birth control. Reproductive

³³⁸ See Michael Lapp, “The Rise and Fall of Puerto Rico as a Social Laboratory, 1945-1965,” *Social Science History* 19.2 (1995): 169-99.

³³⁹ Mass, “Puerto Rico: A Case Study,” 69-70.

³⁴⁰ Betsy Hartmann offers an extensive critique of Malthus in *Reproductive Rights and Wrongs* (13-40), as well as a concise history of the population control philosophy and movement and how it turned into a powerful political lobby in part two of the book. For an overview of Malthus’ legacy, see Allan Chase, *The Legacy of Malthus*.

³⁴¹ Iris Lopez, *Matters of Choice: Puerto Rican Women’s Struggle for Reproductive Freedom* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2008).

³⁴² Lopez makes a distinction between agency and constraint in her book as well as her article, both of which examine the factors that constrain reproductive choice among Puerto Rican women, who have the highest documented rates of sterilization, in New York City. Iris Lopez, “Agency and Constraint: Sterilization and Reproductive Freedom Among Puerto Rican Women in New York City,” *Urban Anthropology and Studies of Cultural Systems and World Economic Development* 22.3/4 (1993): 299-322. See also Johanna Schoen, *Choice and Coercion: Birth Control, Sterilization, and Abortion in Public Health and Welfare* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2005), 29-30.

³⁴³ Lopez, “Agency and Constraint,” 320n4.

choice no longer exists when birth control methods are used to control population growth among a particular group. Because it terminates the ability to reproduce rather than pregnancy alone, sterilization eliminates the need for other types of birth control altogether.

Testing Ground

Puerto Rico's colonial status has since determined its history of anti-natalist population policy leading up to Operation Bootstrap. The early twentieth-century birth control movement overlapped with U.S. colonization, which created the conditions of possibility for Puerto Rico to become a social as well as a medical laboratory for experimental contraceptives in the 1950s. "That decade also witnessed the rapid increase in the number of sterilizations performed, to the point where," Lapp reveals, "according to one study, more women had what became known as 'la operación' [the colloquial term for sterilization] than in any other country in the world."³⁴⁴

Operation Bootstrap was itself a kind of experiment. Its various economical projects sought to destroy the island's rural agricultural society by transforming it into an industrial working class. If Operation Bootstrap succeeded in Puerto Rico, it could serve as a blueprint for rapid industrialization in other Latin American countries—one that relied on private investment from the U.S. and, in reality, increased economic dependency. The "bootstrap" mythos harks back to an older version of American exceptionalism rooted in the ideology of Manifest Destiny. Though a misnomer in the sense that Operation Bootstrap reinforced U.S. control, it otherwise betrays the vestiges of colonialism defining this postwar development model.

The role of eugenics in legitimizing population control policies to solve international demographic problems gained traction with the 1924 Immigration Act. In the mainland, 30 states had already passed compulsory sterilization laws by the 1930s, including laws against miscegenation. Legally mandated sterilization of those deemed socially inadequate—"feebleminded, insane, criminalistic, epileptic, inebriate, diseased, blind, deaf; deformed; and dependent"—passed in the name of eugenics.³⁴⁵ Harry Laughlin's 1914 Model Eugenic Sterilization Law set a precedent for the colonies where far more experimental population campaigns were well underway. Applying eugenic concepts to immigration restriction, Laughlin led the passage of the 1924 Immigration Act. The only Puerto Rican law regulating eugenic sterilization, Law 116 of the 1937 Penal Code, passed under U.S. territorial jurisdiction and was a direct offshoot of Laughlin's Sterilization Law.³⁴⁶ Indeed, U.S. geopolitical strategy in Puerto Rico hinged on demographic management. However, it was the island's colonial status that

³⁴⁴ Lapp, "The Rise and Fall of Puerto Rico as a Social Laboratory," 182. Lapp also considers how studies undertaken by the *Centro de Investigaciones Sociales* in Puerto Rico contributed to the increased experimentation with contraceptives.

³⁴⁵ Harry Laughlin, "Model Eugenic Sterilization Law," in *Eugenic Sterilization in the United States* (Chicago: Psychopathic Laboratory of the Municipal Court of Chicago, 1922), 445-52.

³⁴⁶ Mass, "Puerto Rico: A Case Study," 68.

created the conditions of possibility for indiscriminate use of surgical sterilization as the U.S.'s unofficial population control policy in the postwar era.

After World War II, private companies likewise used the island as a laboratory not only for sterilization technology but also for the birth control pill, IUD, and EMKO contraceptive foam. In Puerto Rico, experimental birth control clinics operated under the School of Tropical Medicine. These clinics, funded by the New Deal's Puerto Rico Emergency Relief Administration, reorganized healthcare on the island. Clarence Gamble, an ardent eugenicist and a colleague of Margaret Sanger, founded the Maternal and Child Health Association, a private birth control organization to test contraceptives not yet approved by the FDA. With the establishment of 23 clinics by 1937, "Gamble turned Puerto Rico into his own personal birth control laboratory."³⁴⁷ He later collaborated with Searle Pharmaceuticals to test the birth control pill with the help of Sanger herself. The largest trial started in 1956. During this period, the Sunnen Foundation subsidized experimental contraceptives such as EMKO contraceptive foam while performing surgical sterilization in private clinics throughout the island. With the support of the U.S. government in the nineteen-fifties, "Puerto Rico's governor and commissioner of health had temporarily opened 160 private birth clinics, and many small hospitals were established primarily if not solely for the purposes of performing sterilization."³⁴⁸

In the nineteen-twenties and -thirties, eugenicists pioneered the widespread use of surgical sterilization in Puerto Rico, which later became the "cure" for poverty. Even before the twenties, however, "moral reformers, the military, and colonial officials had located what was wrong with the 'natives' in sexuality, as they targeted venereal disease, prostitution, and immoral sexual relations as key arenas for reform if Puerto Ricans were to become civilized."³⁴⁹ In other words, state-sanctioned reproductive regulation under Operation Bootstrap was a continuation of scientific research in imperial tropical medicine. State interventions to regulate reproduction as well as sexuality were, as Laura Briggs points out in *Reproducing Empire*, central to defining the difference that makes colonialism both possible and necessary. "It is precisely through science and social science that Puerto Rican difference has been produced and located in women's sexuality and reproduction," she explains.³⁵⁰ Knowledge about the bodies and behaviors of Puerto Rican women in particular provided evidence for racial inferiority that framed U.S. rule as a civilizing mission.

The a priori assumptions that legitimize medical experimentation are located squarely within the bodies of poor and working class women's bodies. In Puerto Rico's case, the entire island was treated as a living laboratory. Scientific ideologies about the racialized female body provided a technology for empire that not only allowed the state to intervene in the intimate domain, but also in the flesh. It increased the reach and authority of the state beyond medicalized

³⁴⁷ Lopez, *Matters of Choice*, 16.

³⁴⁸ Mass, "Puerto Rico: A Case Study," 71.

³⁴⁹ Briggs, *Reproducing Empire*, 8.

³⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 9.

discourses of domesticity, family, and sexuality could do alone. Rather, in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the colonial *science* of tropical medicine transformed imperial prostitution policy into a health related concern. As a moral *and* a sanitary measure, prostitution reform also concerned the science of venereal disease. Viewing colonialism through the lens of reproduction, sexuality, *and* science highlights the ways in which Puerto Rican prostitutes were simultaneously characterized as *vectors of disease*. In this formulation, Puerto Rican women's reproduction and sexuality was immoral and most importantly, produced contagious disease.

Early in the twentieth century, before the economic narrative of overpopulation, "military officials and reformers diagnosed the island as suffering from an epidemic of venereal disease caused by prostitution, adultery, and the passing of the disease from immoral husbands to innocent wives and children."³⁵¹ As with El Paso in the same exact years, prostitution policy was implemented to protect white soldiers from disease.³⁵² Tropical medicine was similarly deployed, Briggs notes, to protect the colonial population. In 1918, one year after the Jones Act institutionalized Puerto Rico's colonial status, Puerto Rican women arrested for illicit sexuality were subjected to "repeated blood tests and pelvic exams, vaginal irrigations, and treatments with assorted mercurials and arsenicals" for venereal disease while in jail.³⁵³ On August 26, 1918, more than 300 imprisoned women in Ponce staged a series of riots protesting invasive biomedical treatments from the physician, intern, and nurse. In *Imposing Decency*, Eileen J. Suárez Findlay focuses on the repressive state campaign to jail sexually suspect women in Ponce. Concepts of decency and, by contrast, disreputability, she argues, worked to secure colonial order via a moral code defined by racialized sexual norms. Moral reform centered on promoting civil marriage, including the legalization of divorce, and nuclear family formation as a sign of decency as well as whiteness. Findlay stresses the fact that sexual surveillance had everything to do with racial purity, especially in the aftermath of abolition, when *libertos* or former slaves now constituted members of society. Panic over sexually promiscuous plebian women, the objects of state-sponsored regulatory campaigns, discursively conflated immorality, femaleness, and blackness. The coterminous public hygiene movement "systematized and gave scientific, medical legitimacy to state attempts to regulate prostitution."³⁵⁴ The laboratory science of syphilis developed from the criminalization of prostitutes.³⁵⁵ With eugenics as a dominant

³⁵¹ Ibid., 6.

³⁵² In *Reproducing Empire*, Briggs actually makes a passing comparison between segregations of the red light district in Ponce to El Paso (31).

³⁵³ Ibid., 50. Eileen Findlay additionally argues that the escalating political demands of laborers, feminists, and Afro-Puerto Ricans catalyzed wartime anti-prostitution campaigns launched by U.S. colonial officials and local elites. *Imposing Decency: The Politics of Sexuality and Race in Puerto Rico, 1870-1920* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999).

³⁵⁴ Findlay, *Imposing Decency*, 89.

³⁵⁵ See Briggs, "Sexuality, Medicine, and Imperialism: The International Traffic in Prostitution Policy," chap. 1 in *Reproducing Empire*.

public health paradigm, the need to sanitize was a simultaneously medical, moral, and racial imperative.

The imperial logic of tropical medicine produced racial difference, which further legitimized Puerto Rico as an experimental site for U.S. modernization conditional on women's reproduction. As Briggs states, "from eugenics to population policy to sterilization, the sexuality and reproduction of poor women would become the battleground—symbolic and real—for the meaning of the U.S. presence in Puerto Rico."³⁵⁶ Colonialist accounts of overpopulation blamed the island's impoverished state on excessive fertility. The image and idea of overtly fertile Puerto Rican women became, in the postwar period, subsumed under the social scientific discourse of population control, but its roots lie in colonialism. "The notion that through overpopulation poor women were responsible for the economic ills of the island simultaneously served to mask U.S. capitalist extraction and to provide an occasion for further U.S. involvement," explains Briggs.³⁵⁷ Yes, the island was a laboratory in which the U.S. tested Third World economic development plans in the postwar era. But how did U.S. involvement come to encompass medical experiments in population control and reproductive biology research to promote fertility limitation? Briggs points out that "overpopulation, eugenics, and birth control programs intervened in debates about whether the island was entitled to independence, and whether the 'race' of the island's inhabitants was 'black' or 'Spanish.'"³⁵⁸

American social scientists had not come up with anything new; they simply maintained previously established eugenic principles. In other words, the legacy of sterilization abuse in Puerto Rico not only emerged from the mainland birth control movement but also and most importantly, from the historically intertwined eugenics movement and its roots in colonialism. For Helen Safa, the U.S.'s reluctance to fully incorporate Puerto Rico to this day reflects the ongoing belief that its population is racially inferior.³⁵⁹ By 1937, a decade *before* Operation Bootstrap, sterilization was already the primary method of birth control. Over one-third of the island's female population was knowingly sterilized by 1965.³⁶⁰ While Lopez emphasizes the fact that federally funded birth control methods were not available until 1968, making sterilization the only accessible option (especially for poor women), birth control legislation alone does not account for the use of surgical sterilization as a medical solution for overpopulation.

³⁵⁶ Briggs, *Reproducing Empire*, 51.

³⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 108.

³⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁵⁹ Helen Safa, "Changing Forms of U.S. Hegemony in Puerto Rico: The Impact on the Family and Sexuality," *Urban Anthropology and Studies of Cultural Systems and World Economic Development* 32.1 (2003): 7-40.

³⁶⁰ That is, 34% of the female population, two thirds of whom were in their early twenties, by 1965 and 39% by 1982. Mass, "Puerto Rico: A Case Study," 72.

Acts 33, 116, and 136 of the 1937 Penal Code

Briggs argues that hormonal contraception was a product of postcolonial development.³⁶¹ However, I argue that the state-sponsored use of birth control methods for eugenic purposes dates back to the early 1900s making sterilization in particular a distinct product of *and* mechanism for U.S. colonization. In 1937, a decade before Operation Bootstrap, three key acts were passed in Puerto Rico that together, essentially served as a set of forced sterilization laws. Acts number 33, 116, and 136 of the 1937 Penal Code set a legal precedent for mass sterilization in the nineteen-forties and -fifties, making it unnecessary to pass an official population control policy. I want to emphasize the fact that in Puerto Rico, the state-sponsored use of birth control methods for eugenic purposes did not emerge in a legal vacuum. While population control by way of forced sterilization was never an official policy under Operation Bootstrap, it was still a legalized eugenic program with enough a priori reasoning to make sterilization the commonsensical economic strategy. These U.S.-initiated eugenic policies, supported by the Puerto Rican government, placed reproductive regulation in the hands of the state.

First, Act 33 criminalizes the deliberate termination of female pregnancy by focusing on the dissemination of information. According to Act 33, *anyone* “who willfully writes, composes, or publishes any notice or advertisement of any medicine or means for producing or facilitating a miscarriage or abortion, or for the prevention of conception, or who offers his services by any notice, advertisement, or otherwise, to assist in the accomplishment of any such purpose, is guilty of a felony.”³⁶² Neither miscarriage nor abortion leads to the loss of reproductive capabilities. Since other forms of contraception were not yet available, Act 33 essentially outlaws both the practice of common birth control methods and public information about them. The act’s emphasis on public information strikes me as particularly interesting because as a counseling ban, which is a type of gag rule, it prevents access to healthcare information *and* suppresses local knowledge, thereby indirectly impacting consent. If public information about terminating pregnancy is unavailable, it leaves no option other than what *is* authorized: sterilization. Considering this act in tandem with those that legalize sterilization raises critical questions about informed consent. Whether or not women knew that sterilization would be permanent rests in part, on whether or not they had access to alternative, temporary birth control methods. In Puerto Rico, abortion would not become legal until the 1973 *Roe v. Wade* decision as a case of *jure ex colonial* (legislation due to colonial status).³⁶³ What’s more, Act 33 not only regulates the dissemination of public information about birth control but also, and most importantly, knowledge production. By banning the promotion of certain information, the state assumes control of producing medical knowledge.

³⁶¹ *Reproducing Empire*, 129-41.

³⁶² *Laws of Puerto Rico, 1937*, page 154, Act 33, enacted May 1, 1937.

³⁶³ Azize-Vargas and Aviles, “Abortion in Puerto Rico,” 57. For different sides of the reproduction debate in Puerto Rico, see Briggs, *Reproducing Empire*, 89-98. In *Matters of Choice*, Lopez offers a succinct summary of island’s birth control movement from 1925-1948 (9-10).

I want to pause for a moment on hereditarian concepts of improvement in Act 116, which establishes an Insular Board of Eugenics “to provide means for the improvement of the race, and for other purposes.”³⁶⁴ The underlying discourse of race betterment must be highlighted here, for it goes hand in hand with that of race suicide, which justified the 1924 Immigration Act. The 1924 Immigration Act marked the first time that eugenicists played a major role in defining the terms of a law. Harry Laughlin, who helped write the 1924 Act and the Model Eugenical Sterilization Law on which these three acts of the penal code were based, was instrumental in providing the financial support to popularize eugenics. Like the 1924 Immigration Act, Act 116 draws on eugenic ideology, whose stated purpose was to improve society by advocating for the reproduction of some races over others. Race betterment discourses promoted negative eugenics, or decreasing the birthrate of undesirable populations so as to thwart the biological threat of “inferior types.”

According to Act 116, the eugenic board would be composed of four members—an attorney and three physicians (one of whom shall specialize in psychiatry)—appointed by the Governor of Puerto Rico *with the Senate’s consent, in addition to the Commissioner of Health*. As an ex-officio member and chairman of the board, the Commissioner of Health betrays the ways in which eugenic ideology was not separate from but rather totally informed public health initiatives. The act holds that all government institutions require the board’s permission to perform surgical sterilization and simultaneously decrees the sterilization of any inmate “who suffers from mental disease or who is mentally retarded, an epileptic, or a sexual pervert, for the purpose of improving the mental or physical condition of such inmate, or so that society may be benefited by such operation.”³⁶⁵ By streamlining authority over the operation, Act 116 further reinforces state control of women’s bodies. And of course, by determining who should be sterilized, Act 116 reinforces a presumed hereditary difference between those with and without specific, supposedly inheritable traits. If someone working for a hospital, asylum, or jail “believes that a patient or inmate under his custody may procreate children with certain tendencies to inherit serious or grave diseases, or physical, mental, or nervous deficiencies,” they may petition the board for permission to perform a vasectomy in the case of a man and a salpingectomy (removal of the fallopian tubes) in the case of a woman. The word “tendencies” as opposed to symptoms reveals the belief, at the heart of eugenic ideology, that types of *behavior* are hereditary, eventually leading to racial degeneracy unless stopped from reproducing. In other words, the children of a criminal had an inherited tendency to commit crimes and therefore anyone convicted of a crime should not be allowed to procreate.

Act 116 takes eugenic ideology a step further by advocating for surgical sterilization and authorizing the state to give “contraceptive instruction” not just to patients and inmates but also to any person, according to section 4 of the act. The board withholds the right to choose a surgeon *and* operating place if the person slated for sterilization is unable to pay for it.³⁶⁶

³⁶⁴ *Laws of Puerto Rico, 1937*, page 267, Act 116, enacted May 13, 1937.

³⁶⁵ *Laws of Puerto Rico, 1937*, page 268, Act 116.

³⁶⁶ The law reads: “Section 15 The directors or superintendents of institutions or persons who legally intervene in carrying out the purposes of this Act shall have no civil or criminal liability.”

Coercive strategies that preclude informed consent are tacitly built into the law. Government subsidy of the operation for those who cannot afford it further incentivizes the procedure for poor women in particular. The constant slippage between “patient” and “inmate” speaks again, to the issue of consent complicated by framing sterilization as a kind of public health measure. On the one hand, Act 116 presents sterilization in terms of receiving a medical treatment and on the other, as compulsory. Alluding to a time when patients were inmates of a hospital, the slippage exposes the deeply rooted history of experimentation in state institutions like asylums. In 1937, eugenic ideology was already embedded in American popular culture. Acts 33, 116, and 136 were, in effect, policies of differential breeding whose hereditarian social attitudes were simply carried over to the postwar era.

It is not surprising then that Act 136 promotes “the teaching and divulgation of eugenic principles with a view to obtaining sound and vigorous offspring and to lowering the high coefficient of infantile mortality.”³⁶⁷ Following Acts 33 and 116, Act 136 further criminalizes abortion in particular, outlining specific abortive techniques.³⁶⁸ Most importantly, it authorizes the Commissioner of Health “to regulate the teaching and divulgation of eugenic principles in public-health units and pre-natal, maternological, puericultural [childcare] centers, and public maternity clinics or hospitals.”³⁶⁹ It also authorizes the Commissioner of Health to issue physicians who do and do not specialize in obstetrics as well as midwife-nurses a license “to teach and practice eugenic principles in public institutions and centers.”³⁷⁰ Eugenics was not an isolated movement but, as Act 136 reveals, legally bound to public health. Though public health is portrayed as championing an epidemiological approach to disease in the face of eugenic principles, it likewise subscribed to the notion that heredity played a significant role in contagion.

I cannot overstate the significance of Act 136. First, it places regulatory power in the hands of the Commissioner of Health, further tying eugenics to public health in a way that legally increases the scope of public health practice. Under Act 136, the Commissioner of Health can promulgate eugenic principles, thereby determining the information promoted to the population and in essence, regulating the otherwise voluntary use of reproductive technologies. There is a false sense of choice here, disguised in framing the act as an educational initiative; if

Section 16 In case any section, paragraph, clause or provision of this Act is declared unconstitutional, such declaration or unconstitutionality shall not in any manner affect the other provisions hereof.

Section 17 All laws or parts of laws contrary hereto are hereby repealed.”

³⁶⁷ *Laws of Puerto Rico, 1937*, page 294, Act 136.

³⁶⁸ The law reads, “every person who...may furnish, supply, prescribe, or administer to a pregnant woman, by oral, rectal, or vaginal injections, any drug, substance, or medicinal, therapeutic, or opotheretic agent, or who uses any surgical instrument or mechanical agent with the intention or purpose of causing abortion, or practicing an abortion (294).”

³⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

eugenic principles are simply taught and not forced, women maintain the right to choose. With all other options banned however, Act 136 makes sterilization the only legal and accessible choice. By targeting pre-natal, maternological, puericultural [childcare] centers, and public maternity clinics or hospitals, the Commissioner of Health undeniably seeks to regulate women's bodies through limiting their reproductive freedom. Through the added instrumentalization of knowledge, the Commissioner of Health also perpetuates a particular ideological position that the health sciences serve to evidence. Act 136 appoints a wide range of agents, including physicians who do and do not specialize in obstetrics, as well as midwife-nurses, to shape public health into a vehicle for eugenic principles that specifically seek to control breeding. Authorizing doctors of various kinds to "practice" eugenic principles essentially legalizes forced sterilization, outlining requisite cases in the final section.

According to Section 5 of Act 136, the following cases call for "eugenic and puericultural [childcare] advice and scientific information in regard to contraceptive measures," which "may be given to, or practiced on, married persons, or persons who, not being married, publicly live in concubinage:"

- (1) When by any infectious process on the part of either or both parents, the product of the conception may be interrupted, bringing about the abortion, the death of the fetus, or the birth of a premature, subnormal, or under developed offspring;
- (2) When the conditions of organic poverty or physiological wretchedness of the parents may be a determining factor of abortion, death of the fetus, or birth of an offspring suffering from congenital weakness;
- (3) When one or both parents are mentally abnormal, cured lunatics, epileptics, or tainted with neuropathic syndrome;
- (4) When one or both parents are alcohol, morphine, cocaine, or *marihuana* addicts, or are addicted to the use of any other narcotic or toxic drugs;
- (5) In cases in which one or both parents suffer from any venereal infection;
- (6) When the morbus or diathetic condition of the parents predisposes the embryo or fetus to any pathologic process, or to constitute a factor of degeneration of the species;
- (7) When the mother is suffering from any of the causes of maternal distoccia which make it impossible or very difficult for her to give birth in a natural way, or when her organic condition does not permit her to complete the term of her pregnancy without serious risk to her health or life, or without guaranty of the health or life of the fruit of conception;
- (8) In the case of habitual criminals or social degenerates;

(9) In the cases of persons whose financial poverty or poor social living conditions do not permit them to rear and educate their children.³⁷¹

The way that Act 136 focuses on childcare reflects the changing face of eugenics in the early twentieth century. Here, the justification for reproductive surgery shifts away from one based exclusively on inheritable defects to social factors of degeneration. The eugenics movement becomes increasingly concerned with the social in the 1930s as it expands into other non-biological fields. The overarching emphasis on education is an indicator of how eugenics rationale was beginning to spread beyond state institutions. Act 136 upholds older criteria for sterilization such as specific hereditary traits while at the same time incorporating new measurements of desirability. This shifting dynamic also works to naturalize poverty and view it in terms of a disease, which figures poor women as infectious to the economy and therefore the state. In this way, sterilization becomes a physical marker of social class. Most telling, however, is the act's attention to parenting as a public health strategy for reproductive regulation. The image and idea of Puerto Rican women as unfit for motherhood falls in line with the precursory sterilization of women categorized as immoral. In addition to reproductive regulation, Act 136 betrays a state investment in regulating gender norms as well as female sexuality through public health. As part of the colonial civilizing mission, public health was a key nation-building agency. Portraying Puerto Rican women as unfit mothers served to justify the island's colonial status and provided an avenue for state intervention: women's bodies. According to the above criteria, social and biological factors that might diminish both a mother's ability to give birth and be a caregiver is just cause for involuntary sterilization.³⁷² Act 136 flags poverty as a condition for sterilization a decade before Operation Bootstrap, setting a legal precedent for overpopulation to warrant invasive control.

Aurora Levíns Morales' *Remedios*

An analysis of invasive control from a legal lens alone omits a consideration of how the island's layered colonial context created the conditions of possibility for eugenic sterilization prior to 1937. In *Remedios*, Aurora Levíns Morales re-periodizes the genealogy of invasive control through an experimental narrative of Puerto Rico's past based on storytelling, one that illuminates the gendered racialization of U.S. colonial expansion. This multi-genre text begins 200,000 years ago and chronicles the history of *puertorriqueñas* until 1954. Most importantly, Morales structures the book as a *botánica* or dispensary of medicinal herbs associated with a wide range of spiritual traditions, namely the Afro-Caribbean tradition of Santería. Chapters, and layered subsections within them, introduce stories by way of an herb and its medicinal

³⁷¹ Ibid., 294-95.

³⁷² Mass sterilization was carried out, in later decades, within the general framework of the "health of mother and child" and family planning. See the Committee for Puerto Rican Decolonization's article "In Response to U.S. Corporate Needs: Gov't Network Sterilizes Workers": "This plan sees the Program of Mothers and Children of the Department of Health as the "natural means" to attract the potential clientele," which the report has already identified as the entire female population of child-bearing age as yet unsterilized" (4).

properties. As such, the herb offers a natural remedy relevant to the story, which is a type of medicine itself. Just as the *botánica* is a pluralist spiritual site, so too are the stories that comprise the history of Puerto Rican women. The book's three overarching parts—"Bisabuelas," "Abuelas," and "Discovery"—trace a history that spans the world, one that predates U.S. colonization. Puerto Rico thus becomes the organized "chaos" described by Benítez-Rojo within which there is an island that repeats and connects to other objects across time and space via its own repetition. As an "island bridge," in the words of Benítez-Rojo, Puerto Rico locates seemingly isolated objects within a single spatio-temporal frame.

The type of performance that characterizes the Caribbean cultural machine, what Benítez-Rojo calls "polyrhythm," materializes for Morales, in 'stories of earth and iron.' Morales disrupts the feed-back of colonizing powers by breaking away from the plantation system to show how contingent histories intertwine through women's bodies instead. These histories not only include major historical events but also Morales' childhood experience of ritual abuse at the hands of several male adults, one of whom was a doctor from the U.S.³⁷³ Her story, she asserts, "is exactly the same: invasion, torture, rape, death, courage, solidarity, resistance."³⁷⁴ In other words, it is Puerto Rican women's flesh that constitutes the bridge between indigenous, European, African, and Asian heritages within the same historical time and space. Rather than viewing the Caribbean as shaped *by* Europe *for* the plantation, Morales rewrites history to emphasize the role of women about whom there is no official record. The herb *yerba bruja*, a plant typical of the coffee regions, opens the preface before the first part, "Bisabuelas" or great grandmothers. This witch herb, as it is commonly known, has the capacity to survive anything and willfully sprout anew even in the most fatal of conditions. Like the generations of women following their great grandmothers, *yerba bruja* reproduces against all odds in ways unintelligible to scientific rationale. Sprouting sets reproduction apart as a particularly gendered form of repetition. As opposed to the mono-crop plantation system that eventually renders soil infertile, *yerba bruja* conjures life in the coffee regions, the very same site of exploitation where enslaved *bisabuelas* once labored. The ability to repeat the machine, Morales makes clear, has always lain in the hands of Puerto Rican women despite the illusion of totalizing control.

Structured around plants tied to the land, these stories provide a remedial counterpoint to the law. First and foremost, they impart the very knowledge that the law bans, a primary source of medical knowledge historically preserved and practiced by women: herbalism. Unlike state-sponsored eugenic programs, Morales passes on common sense measures rooted in a culturally specific oral tradition. The herbal, however, is not just a metaphor; these stories double as a kind of manual for healing in direct contrast to the book of inspection used for medical examinations at the border. Under Acts 33, 116, and 136, Morales would have been convicted of a felony for publishing information that subverts the state's ideological control over its sterilization policy. What's more, these land-based remedies are meant to heal individual wounds that bear ancestral

³⁷³ See the Committee for Puerto Rican Decolonization's "Report Indicates New Campaign: 35% Puerto Rican Women Sterilized: "Hospitals in PR are substantially financed by the United States government. The entire medical apparatus in Puerto Rico was developed by the United States; training was carried on by U.S. doctors. Many of the doctors working in Puerto Rico and performing sterilizations have been and are today from the United States" (3).

³⁷⁴ Morales, *Remedios*, xxiv.

injuries. The first part, “*Bisabuelas*,” begins 200,000 years ago with ginkgo, a plant that restores memory. Morales traces Puerto Rican women’s matrilineal line to sub-Saharan Africa, mapping a genealogy that unsettles the account of discovery. She can do this in part because “ginkgo remembers our mother.”³⁷⁵ The plant is itself a transmitter of intergenerational memory also inherited by Morales. Ginkgo simply activates a temporal consciousness already embodied within, allowing Morales to access a past both beyond the colonial account of discovery and memory itself. She thus begins to tell stories, in first and third person, likewise unsettling the anthropological discourse that locates the “Other” in a different time from the observer.³⁷⁶ It is ginkgo, as opposed to scientific technologies, that makes a new timeline of history knowable to Morales and exposes the foundation of our current world order: women’s bodies.

In the following section entitled “scars,” Morales interweaves her own story with that of her great grandmothers. She hears their voices ask across centuries, “*For how many thousands of years have they feared this in us—the masters, the war chiefs, the fathers of clans?*”³⁷⁷ “That we can ripple with pleasure again and again; that we can grow children in our bellies and fill our breasts with milk to feed them?” she responds from her contemporary moment, “For how many lifetimes now have they sought, more hungrily than any trade route or lost treasure city, some fool proof way of owning this power of our bodies?”³⁷⁸ Reading Acts 33, 116, and 136 of the 1937 Penal Code through *Remedios* reveals the ways in which eugenic policies that legalized sterilization bear the patriarchal vestiges of an accumulated past. Morales’ alternating narrative voice highlights the continuity between experiences specific to her great grandmother’s generation and her own without conflating them. Scars, she states, “are the signatures on a contract of control” once forged by the masters, the war chiefs, and the fathers of clans in which women have no legal authority.³⁷⁹ Acts 33, 116, and 136 substitute the state for individual men to whom women belonged. As the mark of a wound, scars situate the body squarely within the ideological and material interface. If we think of the scar from a surgical sterilization procedure as a signature, it completely undercuts the false notion of consent. These acts represent a diminution of women’s rights, giving an institutionalized eugenics board legal power over their bodies while outlawing other contraceptive options. Nevertheless, scars can also be seen as the mark of *surviving* a wound. Scars evidence injury when there is no record of harm. The herb that introduces this section, “*morivivi*,” translates to “I died—I lived” for only it can cure “a wound as deep as the roots of being.”³⁸⁰ *Morivivi* can bring back “if not the torn and cut away body, at

³⁷⁵ Ibid., 1.

³⁷⁶ See Johannes Fabian, *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes its Object* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983).

³⁷⁷ Morales, *Remedios*, 19.

³⁷⁸ Ibid.

³⁷⁹ Ibid., 20.

³⁸⁰ Ibid., 18.

least the shadow of a sensation, a shiver of the lost pleasures, the feeling, the feeling.”³⁸¹ For Morales, the ritual abuse she experienced as a child is yet another repetition of the controlling mechanisms specific to her great grandmother’s era. Though centuries apart, both share the experience of being torn and cut away, of mutilation.

Part II, “*abuelas*” or grandmothers, ends with a section called “calendars” in 1492 immediately followed by the final part, “discovery.” Instead of beginning with a revision of Columbus’ journal, Morales introduces discovery with a poetic account of her own childhood experiences. “The wounding and the healing of nations are not different from the wounding and healing of individuals,” she states.³⁸² Here, there is no separation between the nation and the individual, making the imagined community one bound by the same ‘fugitive flesh.’ What Morales makes clear through a matrilineal genealogy of discovery is that the individuals wounded at the nation’s expense are, over and over again, women. The gendered dimensions of subjection thus constitute the thread that interweaves her story with Puerto Rican women’s history. “In the violated places of my body I find the voices of the conquered of my island,” she explains, “When I seek their voices among the yellowed manuscripts, I find my own bad dreams.”³⁸³ Both share a “sedimentary” quality as the book itself performs, in layers upon layers of stories that do not actually bleed into one another until this moment. In the poem that follows, Morales tells the story of conquest and abuse together in a single voice, by way of the land that connects them. The site of abuse, Indiera, was once a place of refuge for indigenous and African people escaping conquest. It is precisely from the residue of Indiera’s sedimentary bedrock that Morales pieces together the fragments of a simultaneously personal and political past whose trace elements are embodied memory.

The following excerpt from Morales’ poem in this section exposes the sedimentary quality of invasive control. It begins with a nightmare that we soon learn is real. At the site of ritual abuse, Morales looks to the land and wonders how, like her child self, it has survived invasion. The narrative voice suddenly switches, though it tells a single overarching story woven of the same thread. Now Morales looks to the land from the perspective of a native Taíno on shore as ships approach. She is in one place at two different times. As a native Taíno, she witnesses the onset of Spanish colonization in 1492 and rapid enslavement of her people. “*My eyes have seen these acts*,” she testifies from the perspective of Bartolomé de Las Casas, “*Who in later generations will believe this?*”³⁸⁴ The very next stanza begins with a question about Morales’ childhood trauma: “Are you sure, she asks, my friend of decades, / are you sure you remember this?”³⁸⁵ The importance of ginkgo for memory, which opens part one on “*Bisabuelas*,” resurfaces as an antidote to amnesia.

³⁸¹ Ibid.

³⁸² Ibid., 55.

³⁸³ Ibid.

³⁸⁴ Ibid., 59-60

³⁸⁵ Ibid., 60.

Famous for reforming his views on the enslavement of Borikén natives, Las Casas was a Dominican friar among the first settlers in the Americas. He arrived in Puerto Rico shortly after Spanish invasion and not a decade later, wrote *A Short Account of the Destruction of the Indies* in which he advocates for abolishing the *encomienda* system by recounting its horrors. His written account, addressed to the King of Spain, largely influenced the passage of the 1542 New Laws of the Indies, a set of colonial ordinances “for the good treatment and preservation of the Indians.” It is, simultaneously, Morales’ eyes that have seen these acts of violence. Though Las Casas questions the credibility of his eyewitness account, there is a three-fold response with varying consequences. On the one hand, we know that the King of Spain does believe him. His written account is legitimate evidence of abuse that serves as an official record to which the law *must* respond. Las Casas does not denounce the colonial project altogether and argues for the enslavement of Africans to replace the *encomienda* system. The New Laws of the Indies adopt an imperial rhetoric of benevolence that in reality fails to derail the massacre of Indians. It is Morales’ overlapping positionality that signals its ultimate failure.

Read as her first-person testimony instead, which doubles as a native Taíno’s, we see that in fact, no one in later generations does believe this. For Morales, her embodied memory stands in question as opposed to Las Casas’ written account, even by a trusted friend of decades. The “this” in both lines simultaneously refers to the Spanish invasion of Puerto Rico and the ritual abuse that Morales experienced as a child. Layered meanings that pivot based on who is retelling history point to sexual violence as central to the material work of colonization and as an unchanged feature of time passing between the lines. The “this” remains the same. The third of the three-fold response is of the native Taíno’s, whom Morales is also speaking as in italics, though we might have forgotten it when she introduces Las Casas. And that is, I argue, part of the desired effect. As a native Taíno recounting “these acts,” she is not heard as a speaking colonial subject except *through* Las Casas—and the law. The 1937 Penal Code likewise becomes a grid of intelligibility for those it marks with pathology.

Those who survive the *encomienda* system migrate to Indiera and by 1777 there is a community of thousands living there among both Christians and Africans. The “this” is also the actual geo-political site of layered violence that the poem connects by way of a shared voice. In the following excerpt, Morales continues the story of how Indiera was populated:

If they can hurt it, it must not be mine.

So like my Russian many times great-grandmother

I throw things to the wolves: I give them sexuality and digestion,

I give them uterus, vagina, clitoris, intestines, stomach,

I give them sleep and posture, I given them agility and stamina and
athletics.

I give them all the energy I can give up without dying.

I am hoping to stay alive.

*This chieftain Agueybana was a good person and obedient
To his mother; and she was a good woman,
And as she was mature she had news of what happened
In the conquest and pacification of Hispaniola,
And like a prudent person, continually told and counseled her son
And other Indians, to be good friends of Christians
If they did not wish to all die at their hands.*

*And so, because of this advice,
Agueybana went with Captain Juan Ponce
And gave him a sister of his as a mistress
And he took him to the north shore of that island
And showed him gold-bearing rivers.
Captain Juan Ponce took away much gold,
And left Christians there, living peaceably
And in friendly fashion with the Indians
Who gather the gold for them, and bring them casabe.*

I give them the lowlands and flee to the heights.
I give them the croplands. I give them
Cleanliness, order, beautiful clothing,
The banners of aliveness. I am as discreet as possible
About my survival.³⁸⁶

³⁸⁶ Ibid., 60-62.

Historically, Agueybana and Captain Juan Ponce become something of allies. He explores Puerto Rico and later other Caribbean islands with Ponce. The chieftain is accredited with ensuring so-called peaceful relations between the Spanish and Taínos through their friendship. Ponce even baptized Agueybana's mother who, according to Morales' historical account, advises her son to befriend him as a survival strategy. Agueybana's mother is privy to the Spanish invasion of Hispaniola, the second largest island in the Caribbean named by none other than Las Casas. She knows that subsumed under forceful conversion to Christianity, genocide awaits her people. Morales' version of the story describes a matriarchal account of social organization among Taínos. Though Agueybana is the most powerful chieftain, he receives counsel from his mother. However, Agueybana gives his mother's daughter to Ponce as a mistress in exchange for "peace." In this excerpt, Morales interweaves her story to reinterpellate the legacy of indigenous female figures like Agueybana's sister (or the more popular Malinche) otherwise cast as betrayers of their people and blamed for colonization. Here, the chieftain is not a hero but complicit to sexual subjugation as a justification of colonization and enslavement. He gives his sister away just as he gives away the island's natural resources establishing, in effect, the *encomienda* system that dispossesses Indians of their lands. Morales's historical account, however, is sandwiched between two stanzas written in first-person that we can read, simultaneously, as a recollection of her survival and Agueybana's sister, and perhaps as a descendant of the latter too. Enfolded in the figure of Agueybana's sister is also the "original," traitorous act of miscegenation that births the mestizo race. Morales positions herself as a direct descendant of the "encounter" between Indigenous women and Spanish men, which she reveals, was predicated on sexual violence. The "they" of the stanza before she introduces the chieftain refers to Ponce and his fellow conquistadors as well as the group of men who abused Morales. In the first, incredibly powerful stanza, she gives parts of herself to them. She gives them select sexual and digestive organs, *not* her whole body. Here, Morales is far from a passive victim of sexual violence. She is in full control of her body. Unlike the way Agueybana gives his sister to Ponce, Morales is the subject here, emphasized by the repetition of "I" statements. Giving up her digestive organs stands in direct contrast to the colonial consumption of Borikén. Consuming is part of the expansionist ethos. Spain consumes the island into its empire and therefore, its legal order. Morales reveals the fact that consuming the land goes hand in hand with consuming the native Other as well. However, she gives them her sexual organs alongside her digestive organs because colonial consumption is gendered. It is Agueybana's sister who is like gold, another natural resource available for colonial consumption. Morales flips the discourses of cannibalism that defines "discovery" and depicts the conquistadors as eating the native Other instead. They are insatiable animals, wolves that consume by way of mutilation.

The process of consumption parallels the way in which colonial law, from the 1542 New Laws to the 1937 Penal Code, brings colonial subjects within its purview. The law materially and discursively dismembers Puerto Rican women. Just as surgical sterilization removes organs from the body in the name of eugenic principles codified in the law, so too does the material work of colonization. As mentioned earlier, it is actually the region of Ponce, named after the captain, where medical experimentation began on incarcerated sex workers. Morales' shifting narrative voice in this excerpt brings the personal and political into ideological and material proximity. Allowing all the layers to surface at once situates not just colonization at large, but the specifically gendered dimensions of colonial subjugation as the historical antecedents of her

ritual abuse. We also cannot forget, that one of her abusers was a doctor from the U.S. Reading this excerpt against the backdrop of Acts 33, 116, and 136 places these laws within a much longer legacy of biopolitical subjection and shows how colonialism created the conditions of possibility for reenacting sexual violence across centuries. The law is in part what makes repetition possible, establishing a legal bind that literally and metaphorically dismembers Puerto Rican women, just as Ursa's non-consensual hysterectomy reinscribed the 1871 Free Womb Law in the flesh. Morales nevertheless escapes this aspect of the law; she remains in full possession of her body, giving away parts of herself "without dying." "If they can hurt it, it must not be mine," she affirms. She recognizes that she cannot be owned by recognizing that the only parts of her belonging to them are those they believe to be claimable, "the banners of aliveness." She gives them "uterus, vagina, clitoris, intestines, stomach" without taking away from the intact "I" that does so. She never loses a sense of her whole self in spite of dismemberment. She gives them "cleanliness, order, beautiful clothing," all sanitary metaphors central to colonization that depict the colonized as uncivilized and in need of colonial intervention. Directing the interplay between constraints and freedom though is Morales, signaling the ultimate failure of these controlling mechanisms.

The dismemberment of Morales' body also corresponds to the incongruous pieces of proof evidencing the history of Puerto Rican women. "It is difficult to collect reliable statistics about the number of women who underwent sterilization under their program because the Puerto Rican government has always denied that Puerto Rico ever had an official sterilization policy," states Lopez, "Statistics are difficult to find because, by not keeping records, it is as if this policy never existed."³⁸⁷ The dominant historical narrative is that of the invaders, Morales reminds. It is only in the fragments of Puerto Rican women's embodied memory that the true story of their survival can be put together. In the official record, their agency becomes invisible, as does the legacy of invasive control. Yet that is precisely what constitutes the Caribbean machine. "Crack open the new land, split the flowering tree with the blade of an ax, bind the arms and backs of free people to your labor, but first and last and always rape the women," explains Morales, "Mark the conquered through this act until you believe you have erased their humanness, then you may rape them forever without bad dreams."³⁸⁸ Morales' revision of the dominant historical narrative exposes sexual violence, repeated across the conquered Americas, as central to the operation of colonial power. She puts flesh back into relief through storied memories and at the same time, engages the body—her own body—as an archive, one that has chronicled wounds inherited from before the colonial era. Thus the possibility of healing is only accessible through a materialization of these connections by way of the body itself. As opposed to the laboratories in which Puerto Rican women were legally cut open, Morales constructs a laboratory for the purpose of healing. Both are scientific spaces of experimentation. Whereas the laboratories established by the private birth control organizations dismembered Puerto Rican women, Morales' herbalist laboratory restores bodily integrity precisely because she herself *becomes* the site of experimentation. "I became my own laboratory," she declares.³⁸⁹ This laboratory is an

³⁸⁷ Lopez, *Matters of Choice*, 7.

³⁸⁸ Morales, *Remedios*, 65.

embodied one that relies on land-based remedies not separate from the flesh but integral to its very make up.

Conclusion

Eugenics is a part of pre- and *post*-war politics. The myth that scientific racism disappeared in American during World War II casts a shadow over postwar sterilization campaigns. In Puerto Rico, eugenics was subsumed under population control well after 1945 and presented as an economic development plan. According to the co-authors of *Human Breeding and Survival* in their postwar commentary on sterilization, “This substitute for contraception involving only one instance of inconvenience, and surer than mechanical contraception itself, would have special appropriateness in China, and India, and Puerto Rico, where domestic facilities for the use of contraceptives are few.”³⁹⁰ Domestic facilities for the use of contraceptives were numerous on the island and had been established by U.S. companies at least a decade beforehand. What’s more, eugenic sterilization laws passed under the 1937 Penal Code further legitimized sterilization surgery as the only substitute for contraception. Figured as reckless breeders threatening the insular economy, Puerto Rican women were targeted for sterilization as well as experimental trials of the birth control pill, IUD, and EMKO contraceptive cream. “The postwar period, with its vastly expanded governmental and medical establishments, was in many ways more frightening than the period before the war, with its (hardly benign) neglect of poor people and people of color,” states Briggs, “The end of eugenics is perhaps more appropriately dated to the early 1970s, and it is associated with political movements of people of color.”³⁹¹

In the late 1970s, campaigns led by women of color in the U.S. and elsewhere brought sterilization abuse to public attention, flagging Depo-Provera and the Dalkon Shield IUD in particular. Depo-Provera was tested on low-income Black and Native women living in rural areas of the U.S. without their knowledge, let alone consent. It was later distributed to poor women and teenagers in the name of cutting welfare costs. Eugenic ideology constituted this frontier of population control; there was nothing new about the scientific racism that endured throughout the postwar period.

³⁸⁹ Morales, *Remedios*, xxv.

³⁹⁰ Guy Irving Burch and Elmer Pendell, *Human Breeding and Survival* (New York: Penguin Books, 1947), quoted in Chase, *Legacy of Malthus*, 371.

³⁹¹ Briggs, *Reproducing Empire*, 126.

“When we refuse to consider the value of knowledge that is rooted in the body, in the psyche, in the paralogical experience, we fail to challenge colonialist, post-Renaissance, Euro-Western conceptions of reality. We need to move beyond the facile dichotomy of ‘essentialism’ and ‘constructionism’ to embrace other theoretical paradigms inclusive of embodied and in-spirited knowledge.”

--Gloria Anzaldúa³⁹²

Conclusion: A New Poetics

A New Poetics

I drive by Gloria Anzaldúa’s house almost every day, park on the corner of her street, and walk the same path she did to Lighthouse Field State beach, the beach she writes about in *Borderlands*. This is the home she died in on May 15, 2004 while a graduate student in the Literature Department at UC-Santa Cruz. I wrote most of this dissertation just a few blocks away, following Anzaldúa’s footsteps to the sea.

In the early 1970s, the grassroots Committee to End Sterilization Abuse (CESA) developed a set of guidelines to prevent coercive sterilization in which they cite the case of Puerto Rico. They warned of family planning programs on the mainland that would soon market surgical sterilization as the only method of birth control for women of color, and they were right. The 1977 Hyde Amendment defunded abortion just as the U.S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare offered surgical sterilization for free, making it the only option for poor women of color.³⁹³

In the postwar era, Puerto Rican, Black, Chicana, and Native American women continued to be sterilized at alarming rates under the pretext of cutting welfare costs.³⁹⁴ *Corregidora*, *Island*, *Borderlands*, and *Remedios*: all texts of the late-twentieth century, interconnected by a historical moment. A moment that gave rise to worldwide liberation movements in the 1960s,

³⁹² Gloria Anzaldúa, “Forward to Cassell’s Encyclopedia of Queer Myth, Symbol and Spirit,” in *The Gloria Anzaldúa Reader*, ed. AnaLouise Keating (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009), 230.

³⁹³ See Angela Y. Davis, *Women, Race, and Class* (New York: Random House, 1981), 206.

³⁹⁴ See Dorothy Roberts, *Killing the Black Body: Race, Reproduction, and the Meaning of Liberty* (New York: Vintage Books, 1997), 94.

including the reproductive rights movement led by women of color in the United States.³⁹⁵ Women of color were creating a “new poetics,” in the words of Sylvia Wynter, a poetics to name the continued intrusion on their right to bodily integrity, born from a particular epistemological location: the flesh.³⁹⁶

Theory in the Flesh

Traditions of radically theorizing the self have been central to women of color feminisms from the 1960s to the present. In *This Bridge Called My Back*, Cherrie Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa take up the flesh as a site for reimagining the subject of knowledge and how knowledge is produced. A theory in the flesh, they state, “means one where the physical realities of our lives—our skin color, the land or concrete we grew up on, our sexual longings—all fuse to create a politic born out of necessity.”³⁹⁷ For women of color, multiple oppressions shape physical reality, which is embodied in the flesh. To theorize from this place, this place that remains in the absence of language, situates knowledge production within a particular physical reality defined but not determined by difference.

Configured through the sexual dimensions of subjugation, the flesh highlights the sexualization and gendering of racializing assemblages, which the Combahee River Collective describe as “interlocking.” In their 1977 “A Black Feminist Statement,” reprinted in *Bridge*, the Collective states:

The most general statement of our politics at the present time would be that we are actively committed to struggling against racial, sexual, heterosexual, and class oppression and see as our particular task the development of integrated analysis and practice based upon the fact that the major systems of oppression are interlocking. The synthesis of these oppressions creates the conditions of our lives. As Black women we see Black feminism as the logical political movement to combat the manifold and simultaneous oppressions that all women of color face.³⁹⁸

³⁹⁵ For more on the development of the reproductive rights movement led by women of color in the United States see Jennifer Nelson’s *Women of Color and the Reproductive Rights Movement* (New York: New York University Press, 2003); and *More than Medicine: A History of the Feminist Women’s Health Movement* (New York: New York University Press, 2015).

³⁹⁶ Sylvia Wynter, “1492: A New World View,” in *Race, Discourse, and the Origin of the Americas: A New World View*, eds. Vera Lawrence Hyatt and Rex Nettleford (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1995).

³⁹⁷ Cherrie Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa, eds. *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings By Radical Women of Color* (Watertown, MA: Persephone Press, 1981), 23.

³⁹⁸ Combahee River Collective, “A Black Feminist Statement,” in *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings By Radical Women of Color*, eds. Cherrie Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa (Watertown, MA: Persephone Press, 1981), 211.

Interlocking oppressions are experienced simultaneously precisely because their synthesis creates the conditions of existence for women of color. The Collective thus develops a politics of identity that emerges from Black women's embodied knowledge of physical reality.³⁹⁹ "The extremity of our oppression has been determined by our very biological identity," state Gloria T. Hull, Patricia Bell Scott, and Barbara Smith in *All The Women Are White, All The Blacks Are Men, But Some Of Us Are Brave*. "The horrors we have faced historically and continue to face as Black women in a white-male dominated society have implications for every aspect of our lives."⁴⁰⁰

The contributors of *Bridge* further develop this conceptualization of identity politics by upholding the embodiment of difference as a foundation for another theoretical paradigm. Our physical realities, as they are shaped by interlocking oppressions, articulate to a complex and collective mode of life within a cultural history of subjugation. Moraga and Anzaldúa argue that in doing so, a theory in the flesh can bridge the contradictions of lived experience. "We do this bridging by naming our selves and by telling our stories in our own words," they state.⁴⁰¹ By telling their stories, the contributors of *Bridge* perform a subjectivity that is multi-voiced and participates in the creation of physical reality. "As a speaking subject of an emergent discursive formation," confirms Norma Alarcón, "the writer in *Bridge* was aware of the displacement of her subjectivity across a multiplicity of discourses: feminist/lesbian, nationalist, racial, and socioeconomic."⁴⁰²

Central to theory in the flesh is the understanding that the personal is political. In other words, politics must emerge from a specific *bodily* reality. Theorizing is likewise based on the multiplicity of our particular lived experiences as women of color. A theory in the flesh does not negate difference by subsuming women of color into a unitary subject of being. Instead, a theory in the flesh centralizes how the flesh knows against the grain of un-locatable knowledge claims. Theory in the flesh is thus neither a reinscription of biological determinism nor an essentialist identity politics. It is a total reconceptualization of nature that at once leverages the particularities of our selves *and* widens the consciousness of the self (to include the other, what Anzaldúa later calls "conocimiento").⁴⁰³ As such, theory in the flesh does not forego every

³⁹⁹ Ibid., 212.

⁴⁰⁰ Gloria T. Hull and Barbara Smith, "Introduction: The Politics of Black Women's Studies," in *All the Women Are White, All the Blacks Are Men, But Some of Us Are Brave*, eds. Gloria T. Hull, Patricia Bell Scott and Barbara Smith (New York, NY: The Feminist Press, 1982), xvii-xviii.

⁴⁰¹ *This Bridge Called My Back*, 23.

⁴⁰² Norma Alarcón, "The Theoretical Subject(s) of *This Bridge Called My Back* and Anglo-American Feminism," in *Criticism in the Borderlands: Studies in Chicano Literature, Culture and Ideology*, eds. Hector Calderón and José David Saldivar (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1991), 28.

⁴⁰³ See "now let us shift . . . the path of *conocimiento* . . . inner work, public acts," in *This Bridge We Call Home: Radical Visions for Transformation*, eds. Glorinda Anzaldúa and AnaLouise Keating (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009).

consideration of the biological in an effort to transcend identity; theorizing from in the flesh means acting through the wounds of multiple oppressions.⁴⁰⁴

Poetry is Not a Luxury

Poetics is the aesthetic that best expresses a theory in the flesh because it is the only form that can perform it. The flesh escapes formulation. Rather than applying a language to lived experiences, women of color feminisms write the flesh into language. In “Poetry Is Not a Luxury,” Audre Lorde, whose work is also reprinted in *Bridge*, explains that: “For women, then, poetry is not a luxury. It is a vital necessity of our experience. It forms the quality of the light within which we predicate our hopes and dreams toward survival and change, first made into language, then into idea, then into more tangible action. Poetry is the way we help give name to the nameless so that it can be thought.”⁴⁰⁵ The poetic process of nominalization allows for the multiplicity of oppression to be named in a way that accounts for the multiplicity of subjectivity. Poetic language resignifies historically embedded terminology and offers an embodied mode of meaning construction that subverts epistemological erasure. The kinds of dialects through which women of color narrate the contradictions of their lived experiences perform new genres of the human now. It is precisely through a theory in the flesh that a vision for the future is concretized, one that can begin to heal.

The section on theory in the flesh in *Bridge* opens with the words of Lakota activist Barbara M. Cameron: “I am not interested in pursuing a society that uses analysis, research, and experimentation to concretize their vision of cruel destinies for those bastards of the pilgrims; a society with arrogance rising, moon in oppression, and sun in destruction.”⁴⁰⁶ Analysis, research, and experimentation. This is the scientific method. A society that uses the scientific method does so to concretize their vision of cruel destinies. If we consider the living laboratory as a biopolitical institution, then it is a site where bodies become flesh, where analysis, research, and experimentation on the body transform it into flesh. In “Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe,” Hortense Spillers explains that the Middle Passage represents a “zero degree of social conceptualization” in which the flesh, rather than the body, within captivity stands as a subject position outside the

⁴⁰⁴ In *Habeas Viscus*, Alexander G. Weheliye engages with the limits of bare life and biopolitics discourse through the critical project of black studies to recover alternative genres of the human that emerge from flesh. Building on Hortense Spillers’ distinction between the body and the flesh, Weheliye considers how the human materializes when taking the Middle Passage as a point of departure for theorizing modern violence. The flesh, he argues, epitomizes an assemblage of racialization that resists legal recognition precisely because it undercuts the codification of personhood as property. In other words, the flesh remains outside the law, outside the legal body, and as such, provides an intervention in humanity from a perspective beyond the liberal humanist subject of Man. *Habeas Viscus: Racializing Assemblages, Biopolitics and Black Feminist Theories of the Human* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014).

⁴⁰⁵ Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* (Trumansburg, NY: Crossing Press, 1984), 37.

⁴⁰⁶ *This Bridge Called My Back*, 23.

symbolics of gender.⁴⁰⁷ “This materialized scene of unprotected female flesh—of female flesh ‘ungendered’—offers a praxis and a theory, a text for living and for dying, and a method for reading both through their diverse mediations,” states Spillers.⁴⁰⁸ A theory in the flesh likewise begins here in order to develop a politics, a social practice that both names our pain and works to heal from it.

A theory in the flesh creates the conditions of possibility for healing from the continuous past. First published in *Bridge* along with her mother, with whom she later co-authored *Getting Home Alive* (1986), Aurora Levíns Morales critically engages with the possibility of healing from multiple oppressions. Her work was featured in the issue of *nineteen sixty nine* on “Healing Justice,” a collective and critical exploration of the relationship between health and social justice situated in the experience of multiple oppressions.⁴⁰⁹ Contributors to this recent intervention to knowledge production in Ethnic Studies consistently return to *Bridge* as a touchstone for conceptualizing healing justice today. Why? What is it about women of color feminisms that invites us to enact the possibility of recovery and to embrace other theoretical paradigms inclusive of embodied and in-spirited knowledge? “The materialism in this book lives in the flesh of these women’s lives: the exhaustion we feel in our bones at the end of the day, the fire we feel in our hearts when we are insulted, the knife we feel in our backs when we are betrayed, the nausea we feel in our bellies when we are afraid, even the hunger we feel between our hips when we long to be touched,” states Moraga.⁴¹⁰ Women of color feminisms resignify the pain of multiple oppressions. In this dissertation, I have drawn from women of color feminisms to tell a different kind of story about the relationship between re-membling, recovering, and healing, one that creates the conditions of possibility for other forms of humanity, against the grain of living laboratories.

⁴⁰⁷ Hortense J. Spillers, “Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe: An American Grammar Book,” *Diacritics* 17.2 (1987): 67.

⁴⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 68.

⁴⁰⁹ Aurora Levíns Morales, “Guanakan,” in “Healing Justice,” ed. Tala Khanmalek, special issue, *nineteen sixty nine* 2.1 (2013), http://escholarship.org/uc/ucb_es_nsn?volume=2;issue=1.

⁴¹⁰ Cherríe Moraga, preface to *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings By Radical Women of Color*, eds. Cherríe Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa (Watertown, MA: Persephone Press, 1981), xviii.

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