

THE MEXICAN WORKER: A MARXIST READING OF LABOR STRUGGLES IN
CALIFORNIAN CHICANO/A LITERATURE

By

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ABSTRACT

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The purpose of this dissertation is to examine the representation of labor struggles in Chicano/a literature, through a Marxist lens. This study examines how the Chicano/a literary works selected offer criticisms on the treatment of Mexican laborers within capitalism, and how these Chicano/a authors historicize the racialization and proletarianization of Mexicans within U.S. capitalism. Marxist theory allows to understand how Mexican bodies and their labor become (de)valued within capitalism depending on the needs of businessmen and the American government, thus becoming commodities themselves.

The literary works discussed in this study cover the Chicano/a labor experience in California from 1965 to the late 1990s. Authors such as Luis Valdez, Helena María Viramontes, Francisco Jiménez, Cherrie Moraga, Alejandro Morales, and Luis Rodriguez offer unique perspectives on the Chicano/a labor experience through their characters. They show through their vivid descriptions of labor hardships, how society takes for granted the work that went into picking their fruits and vegetables. At other times, authors show how capitalism influences racial hierarchies and attitudes within the factory and the surrounding community. Through these labor themes, Chicano/a writers show how class and race intersect, thus shaping the Mexican worker's experience.

The Marxist theoretical framework contextualizes the U.S. capitalist social system to analyze the critique of Mexican workers' mistreatment. This perspective helps us to understand American capitalism as the system creating racial tension, the construction of class and gender

roles, and the transformation of the environment. Although fictional representations of Chicano/a labor struggles, the works show that these writers use their creative works to offer a historical sense of real events, while simultaneously demonstrating that the American capitalist system is built on inequality, and more specifically on the exploitation of cheap Mexican labor in agriculture and industrial jobs.

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Dedicated to my family, consisting of my siblings, Melissa, Diana, Bernardo, and Jose. My nieces, Monique, Damaris, Isabela, and my nephew, Jorge. And to my mother, Maricela García and father, Felix Medina Sr., who like many Mexican laborers have lived to work and worked to live.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction.....	1
Theory and Methodology	10
Chapter Outline	20
Conclusion.....	24
 Chapter 1 The Value of the Patroncito, Coyote and Farmworker Relationship	26
Introduction	26
<i>Las dos caras del patroncito</i> and <i>Quinta temporada</i>	42
<i>Vietnam campesino</i> and <i>Huelgistas</i>	56
Conclusion.....	67
 Chapter 2 Looking Beyond the Produce: Defetishizing your Fruits and Vegetables In Viramontes' <i>Under the Feet of Jesus</i> and Jimenez's <i>The Circuit</i>	70
Introduction	70
Commodity Fetishism and the Unseen Farmworker Struggles.....	78
Bringing Transparency to Crimes Against the Mexican Farmworker Body	85
De/Fetishizing the Saints.....	93
Conclusion.....	105
 Chapter 3 The Struggle Within the Struggle in Cherrie Moraga's <i>Watsonville: Some Place Not Here</i>	110
Introduction	110
Labor and Morality.....	123
Senate Bill 1519: The Conquest Continues.....	128
(Re)Humanizing the Scabs.....	134
Chente's Moral Ambiguity.....	139
Conclusion.....	146
 Chapter 4 Representations of Mexican Industrial Laborers in Alejandro Morales' <i>The Brick People</i> and Luis Rodriguez's <i>Music of the Mill</i>	148
Introduction	148
Capitalist and Racial Spatiality	166
Racism's Contribution to Capitalism	180
Conclusion.....	194
 Conclusion	197

WORKS CITED	202
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Introduction

Chicana/o history as part of Chicana/o studies differs from Chicano history. Chicano studies history is political. It follows in the tradition of African American and Feminist Studies. It recognizes that objectivity is a weapon used by those in power to control the “other.” The aim of Chicana/o studies history is not to reinvent another reality, but seek and to find facts that challenge Eurocentric interests. By its very nature, Chicana/o studies history is skeptical about the established truth – it is not confrontational, however for the sake of being confrontational. – Rodolfo Acuña

On December 29, 2013, Jennifer Ludden interviewed Carl Filichio of the Department of Labor, about a project he was heading: Books that Shaped Work in America. Through the Books that Shaped Work in America Project, Filichio intends to compile a list of literary works that “shape [. . .] the public’s opinion of work, workplaces or workers” (Labor); these labor-themed books will be displayed on the Department of Labor’s website. In his interview he offers a few examples of books on the website, such as Upton Sinclair’s *The Jungle* for its “huge impact in food inspections, in worker health and safety wages,” and Louisa May Alcott’s *Little Women* for “introduc[ing] us to a concept very important at work, and that’s being ambitious” (Labor). There is also a variety of women’s literature, African-American literature, and children’s literature. Only two works were listed that might be considered Chicano/a or Latino/a literature, Supreme Court Judge Sonia Sotomayor’s autobiography, *My Beloved World* (2013), and Richard J. Jensen’s and John C. Hammerback’s *The Words of César Chávez* (2002) (Books). To Filichio’s credit he does encourage people to make recommendations on the website of other works that deserve to be mentioned on the list. But as the list stands, it shows that the narrative of the Chicano/a laborer, written by Chicanos/as is largely ignored and/or unknown, and as a result the list is incomplete in that regard. The Department of Labor’s list assists the argument in this dissertation about the lack of knowledge toward Chicano/a literary representations of labor struggles, which do not receive enough attention by readers or critics.

Chicano/a literature that represents labor struggles, not mentioned in the Books that Shaped Work in America Project, are important works that should be acknowledged and studied.

The works narrate stories of labor struggles to audiences that would prefer to read it or see it performed in a play, as opposed to reading it through a history textbook. The creative prose of the authors exposes an audience to the Mexican working class struggles and their response to the adversities they face. And much as Acuña argues in the epigraph that “Chicana/o studies is political and historical,” the same can be said about the works of Chicano literature selected for this dissertation.

This dissertation explores race and class through Marxist paradigms, in the work of Luis Valdez, Helena María Viramontes, Francisco Jiménez, Cherrie Moraga, Alejandro Morales, and Luis Rodriguez. These works show the reality of being a Mexican laborer within the capitalist social framework, in which they are the cheap exploitable labor. In *Chicano Narrative: Dialectics of Difference*, Ramon Saldívar succinctly explains that Chicano literature shows “ways in which historical men and women live out their lives as class subjects” (6). Mexican men and women wrote fictional narratives of the Chicano/a laborer experience for deliberate political reasons. The focus of this study is on labor-themed *actos* written and performed by Luis Valdez and El Teatro Campesino: *Las dos cara del patroncito*, *Vietnam Campesino*, *La quinta temporada*, and *Huelgistas*. This study also examines Helena María Viramontes’ *Under the Feet of Jesus* (1995), Francisco Jiménez’s *The Circuit* (1997), Cherrie Moraga’s *Watsonville: Some Place Not Here* (1996), Alejandro Morales’ *The Brick People* (1988), and Luis J. Rodriguez’s *Music of the Mill* (2005). Within this study, Marxist paradigms are applied to literary works that are thematically about the Chicano/a labor experience, in order to show how Chicano/a authors use their works as counter texts to criticize the racialization and proletarianization of Mexicans by American capitalism.

Labor has historically been a major theme in both the life of Mexicanos and their literature. Since the Chicano Movement, Chicanos/as have published and written about the Chicano/a labor experience. One of the earliest instances of the theme of labor in Chicano/a literature was in 1965 in Luis Valdez and El Teatro Campesino's *Las dos caras del patroncito*. Equally notable is Tomas Rivera's *Y no se lo trago la tierra . . .* (1971) and the labor poems of Tino Villanueva, "Que Hay Otra Voz" and "Day-Long Day" (1968-1971). Vastly explored by critics is often the general themes of the life of the laborer, but largely missing are explorations about the intersection between race and class, or the role of class in the construction of race in the capitalist system.

Chicano/a labor literature provides a look not only into the hardship of being a Mexican laborer in the agriculture and textile industries, but also the larger and at times less apparent social and economic structure, that the writers might not address directly, but are left for the readers to interpret. The writers are in turn informing their audience about this history of labor exploitation while also offering criticism of larger systemic issues such as racism and labor exploitation. These narratives reveal the forgotten struggles of the laborers whom the reader might not think twice about when selecting ripe fruit at the grocery store, or when walking into a building, which was built with the material that was produced at the hands of Mexican labor. It is literature by the writers that have experience as laborers. Their work showcases their struggle to bring to the forefront, the participation of the Mexican worker into the U.S. historical narrative. In doing this, the writers show the audience, that although they have limited visibility in the American mainstream, that the work and lives of Mexican workers matter.

During the Chicano Movement, Chicanos/as were encouraged to engage in political activism and as a result achieve agency, in order to bring attention to the issues of Mexican

farmworkers, the ethnic prejudice of the Los Angeles educational system, police brutality, media misrepresentation and lack of political recognition. The politics of the time very much informed the output of artwork and literature, which has been referred to as a Chicano Renaissance.

Acuña, must be referenced again, in saying that Chicano studies history is not confrontational for the sake of being confrontational. Chicano studies history and literature, is confrontational much as Chicanos and Chicanas were confrontational during the Chicano Movement, when it was necessary to challenge the societal status quo that ignored ethnic minorities, and privileged Anglos and the capitalist elites.

Similarly, Mexicans have a long history as laborers in this country, dating back to 1848 after the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo. Exploitation of Mexican labor and resistance to such exploitation formed an early part of the Mexican identity and struggle in this country since the early 1900s. Mexicans have been recorded protesting against labor exploitation since 1903 during a miners strike in Arizona, long before the 1965 farmworker strikes in Delano, California. Mexican labor struggles continued as many Mexicans migrated to the United States during the Mexican Revolution (1910 – 1920), and found work in mining, railroad construction, and agriculture. Mexican labor and migration for that matter, would be shaped by a deal struck between the United States and Mexico, which would result in the Bracero Program (1942 – 1964), a program which benefitted both countries economically. Both countries also had a vested interest in Operation Wetback (1954), when some farm owners intentionally contracted undocumented Mexican workers who did not arrive through the Bracero Program. Farm owners many times preferred undocumented workers because they could pay them cheaper wages, as opposed to a contractual amount, set up through the Bracero contract agreement. Not to say that farmers who hired braceros, did not find ways to exploit these men or shortchange their wages,

but it was understood that undocumented immigrants were not protected by contractual agreement, and could be threatened with deportation. Thus the Mexican laborer struggle was much informed by capitalistic profiteering. Following the Bracero Program, the Mexican labor force continued to be exploited, but no less than a year after the end of the Bracero Program, saw a Mexican labor movement through the marchas in Delano, but also a mass political consciousness via the Chicano Movement, and Chicanos/as who supported each other's causes.

The politics of the time, during the Civil Rights Era called for social and economic justice, which could be simply defined as fair play for all those parties involved. Chicanos/as, much like African-Americans, women and other marginalized people began to understand their role in the U.S. hierarchical socioeconomic matrix and as result resisted and pushed back in mass. During this period agit-prop (agitation propaganda) theatre was used by the United Farm Workers (UFW) union in order to entertain and inform farmworker audiences and eventually even college students, about their struggles in the fields, while facing racism, difficult working conditions, and capitalist greed. Through their agit-prop actos, El Teatro Campesino, much like striking farmworkers, were no longer simply subjects of the social and economic matrix, they became reporters, exposing the realities of their economic struggles in the fields. In doing so, they also became active participants in the historical narrative which had previously omitted their presence and relegated them to an invisible labor force, that was only seen, through the interpretation of farm owners who at times viewed their farm laborers or any Mexicans that engaged in social protest in the work place, as "malcriados," – spoiled children who were acting up. As a result, in the 1960s and 1970s Chicano narratives about labor, were written by writers who had first-hand experience working in the fields they set as the backgrounds for their stories, or on the picket line. These narratives provided an alternative to the heavily researched texts

written by prominent labor scholars such as Carey McWilliams and Ernesto Galarza. The fictionalized narratives commented on the life of the Mexican laborer differently than McWilliams' *Factories in the Fields: The Story of Migratory Farm Labor* (1939) or Galarza's *Merchants of Labor: The Mexican Bracero Story* (1964). They recorded history differently, by giving the "Mexican laborer," a name and a voice, although fictionalized, a name and a voice nonetheless. However, the work of Chicano labor scholars like Ernesto Galarza also gave Mexican laborers a historical place in the national narrative, unlike the Chicano labor stories.

The work that was done by Luis Valdez, Tomas Rivera and Tino Villanueva, continued well into the 1980s and 1990s by other authors who wrote about the Mexican laborer experience. However, this study does not provide a comprehensive analysis of Chicano labor literature from 1960s to the present. The focus is mainly on lesser known texts and particularly texts that were written by authors who had experience working in the jobs they write about, with the exception of Cherríe Moraga and Alejandro Morales. Aside from this, the literary texts intersect with important historical moments for Chicano/a communities. That is to say that Luis Valdez wrote his acts during farmworker strikes, with the permission of Cesar Chavez and Dolores Huerta. Morales' based his novel on an actual brick making factory in Los Angeles; Jiménez has referred to his work as semi-autobiographical, based on his personal lived history, Cherríe Moraga based her play on a strike that took place in Watsonville, California, and Rodriguez situated his novel in a steel making factory that was a stand-in for Bethlehem Steel, where he spent time as a laborer as well. Historically, these texts cover a Mexican laborer experience from the early 1900s through the 1990s. It is far from an official historical recounting of the Mexican labor experience, but it is to say that thematically, the texts address the role of the Mexican laborer

within American capitalist society; these issues and themes continue to be faced by Mexican laborers up to the present day.

This study does not account for the many poems that have been written about the Chicano worker experience or for that matter Chicano science fiction, such as Rosaura Sanchez and Beatrice Pita's *Lunar Braceros* (1994). This study is focused on literary representation and therefore also omits films that are thematically about the Chicano labor experience, such as *Sleep Dealer* (2008).

The literary works chosen here have not received enough exposure or commentary, with the exception of Luis Valdez and El Teatro Campesino's actos. Through Valdez, audiences learn about the working conditions farmworkers endure. The actos also show an audience the assistance the UFW offers farmworkers during labor struggles. *Under the Feet of Jesus* and *The Circuit* shows how children also work in crop picking to help their families make a better living. These novels also represent how children are capable of achieving agency. The children are intelligent, as shown through Estrella in *Under the Feet of Jesus* who has well-developed reading skills, or through Panchito in *The Circuit*, who has the drive for advancing his own education. The children gain knowledge from their life experiences and extract lessons at their jobs.

Moraga's play on Watsonville shows the evolution of Chicano/a theater, while exposing its audience to a different aspect of the labor struggle: the strikers and their ideological organizing differences. The morally ambiguous characters and situations that arise in the play adds multidimensionality to characters and present the complexity of labor struggles, which do not simply consist of a conflict between an employer and laborer. The conflicts are at times amongst the striking laborers and the organizations that are expected to be supportive of their

cause. Even in the face of dissension many of the strikers manage to stay loyal to one another, which strengthens their unity as they continue their struggle.

Morales' *The Brick People* and Rodriguez's *Music of the Mill* are literary works that offer examples of racism and labor. In *The Brick People*, racism informs paternalism, through the owner's conceived notion that Mexicans are not much more intelligent than children who need to have their hand held and assisted. The owners of the brick factory base their paternalism on misguided stereotypes. In the novel, Morales also develops the notion of how Anglos in the Los Angeles community, "other" Mexicans and in doing so develop racist attitudes toward them; particularly those Mexicans that work for Simons Brickyard and are believed to be the cause of some health issues plaguing the community, which, in reality, are caused by the red brick dust being released from the brickyard. The narrative shows the incorrect accusation and association between the red dust and the Mexican workers. In *Music of the Mill*, Rodriguez portrays Anglo laborers as the main perpetrators of racism, but he complicates this through minority characters that engage in nationalistic rhetoric that borders on racism as well. Most importantly, Rodriguez's text addresses the importance of working class solidarity, as opposed to a nationalist or race-based agenda. He also explores the larger repercussions late or multinational capitalism and globalization has on laborers, such as a damaged psyche after they are left unemployed. In showing this toward the end of his protagonist's saga, he implies that simply fixing the social injustices in the workplace is not an effective long-term strategy; engaging in a labor struggle requires that workers address the importance of how capitalism affects them and their communities, especially if the company they dedicated their lives to, ends up relocating.

Authors represent the Mexican working class struggle in U.S. culture. Some such as Valdez shed a positive light on unions, while others such as Moraga and Morales make the union

an antagonist in their narratives. Rodriguez represents the union as a tool of Anglo workers with a racist agenda, and they use it as a bureaucratic device against fellow laborers. Whether it is in agriculture or industrial jobs, Mexicans struggle with growers, or managers that do not value their labor or humanity fairly. Each author also shows distinct ways in which the laborers try to achieve parity, either through unionization or struggles for fair wages and better working conditions, ultimately achieving agency on their own terms.

Through their representation of the Mexican labor experience in the United States, the stories explain where produce comes from or how buildings were built in major cities. The Mexican worker does most of the work for that. Aside from this, what has been the role of the Mexican laborer within the societal structure? And how do the characters respond to their situation within this structure? How is their livelihood impacted by a capitalistic society that wishes to use their body for labor, and then discard them or ignore them? In the process of giving the laborer experience a voice, Chicano/a writers also show the multidimensionality of their struggles as laborers. The struggles go beyond the simply economic and also address language, education, and what it is to be an undocumented immigrant in the United States.

The experience of the Mexican laborer was and continues to be the Chicano/a experience for many families, who still have one or more relatives working in low-wage agriculture or industrial jobs. Thus Chicano labor narratives remain important to the Chicano literary archive, because they record this experience which is relevant to many Chicanos/as and to the political issues that continue to be important for immigrant communities and for more socially established Chicanos/as.

Theory and Methodology

In analyzing Chicano/a labor literature it is important to think about how these writers engage in a counterhegemonic discourse against the idea of American exceptionalism and capitalism. As mentioned, Chicano labor literature, like Chicano history taught within Chicano Studies, is political and requires an analytical approach that analyzes its hidden polemics. As more Chicano/a writers began to have their work published, scholars started to analyze it and would apply theoretical frameworks that would ignore the social, cultural and historical context that influenced the writers before, during and after the Chicano Movement. By 1977, in “Critical Approaches to Chicano Literature,” Joseph Sommers specifically warns about theoretical frameworks such as the formalist and culturalist approaches which tend to ignore the “social and cultural atmosphere in which this literature exists [. . .]” (92). Sommers is speaking to Chicano literature in general, but his essay is crucial to Chicano labor literature specifically, since it is informed historically, socially, and culturally by Chicano/a labor struggles.

Sommers criticizes formalist criticism, for “seeking to validate Chicano text, for both Chicano and Anglo readers, as authentic modern literature” (92). He views the formalist textual analysis of Chicano literature as limiting and not giving credit where it is due in relation to its “resistance to dominant ideology” (93). He is equally critical of the cultural approach for what he considers to be an “anti-historical” method that ignores the process of “social and historical change” in favor of explorations of the many facets of Chicano culture, including language, folklore, and Mesoamerican symbolism (Sommers 94). Sommers, does propose an alternative critical approach, which he considers more conducive to Chicano literature – the historical dialectical method. According to Sommers the historical dialectical approach incorporates both the formalist and culturalist approach, but transcends their “self-imposed limitations,” by

analyzing the text in relation to “societal structures” and its “interpreta[tion] of the human experience.” (95). There is not a doubt, that Sommers was seeing critical aspects of Chicano literature being ignored, especially as the nation was coming out of the Civil Rights and Chicano Movement. At the time that his article was written, Chicano literature was still fairly new, and therefore it was understandable that many critics would try to give the literature validity alongside American literature. For that matter Chicano literature continues to struggle for validation in the corridors of academia, whether it is through course offerings, or through further attention from academics. Nonetheless, in the late 1970s, Sommers predicted the trajectory of Chicano literature criticism. Postmodernists would later put their own spin on Chicano literary criticism, and out of this postmodernist shift, by the late 1980s, the scholarly community would begin to tinker with Gloria Anzaldua’s borderlands theory (Gonzalez 170).

In 1979, Ramon Saldívar responded in agreement to Sommers, in his own article, “A Dialectic of Difference: Towards a Theory of the Chicano Novel”:

At the outset I will admit that I side with Sommers at least to an extent. I too believe that a confrontation with the sociological, historical, and cultural conditions under which the Chicano novel has been created is virtually indispensable to an informed “ethnic student” in our time of legal, fiscal, and moral entrenchment. (73)

However, Saldívar argues that simply addressing the social and historical context of the Chicano novel should not result in a totalizing effort, in terms of the “truth” or the realities it explores. Instead, analyzing what he terms a dialectics of difference, should make an audience critically conscious of Chicano literature.

Saldívar would continue arguing for a dialectical approach of Chicano literature, in “Chicano Literature and Ideology: Prospectus for the ‘80s” (1981) in which he makes three very important statements. First:

I wish to argue that the traditional view of the Chicano novel, one tied to representational fidelity, to “reflectionism,” is an illegitimate view for at least four reasons. “Reflectionism” reduces the acts of reading and writing into non-dialectical, isolated experiences. It decomposes the laws of composition. It presupposes that readers will find in the work of art only what authors have put there. And it limits our understanding of a work (and therefore of the historical world it represents) to the investigation of only one of the aspects. (36)

Saldívar once again reiterates the importance of considering Chicano/a literary works not simply as reflections of bygone times, thus limiting an analysis of the Chicano/a novel, and ignoring its sociohistorical components. Second, as he continues to speak to the “future” of the Chicano novel in the 80s:

[. . .] as an ideological apparatus the Chicano novel signifies the imaginary ways in which historical men and women experience the real world. Its primary function, therefore, will be to show how men and women live out their lives in a class society, and how the value, concepts, and ideas which tie them to their social functions prevent them from attaining true knowledge of society as a whole. The Chicano novel, individually and as a genre, will continue to confront and eliminate the limiting ideologies which have in many cases determined its course. (36)

Here, Saldívar importantly refers to the Chicano novel as an “ideological apparatus” that shows an audience how its characters, are connected to the fabric of the American capitalist and working class narrative. Thus, we can argue, the Chicano novel shows its audience the role of Mexican workers within this “class society.”

And finally, Saldívar affirms:

As literature, the Chicano novel will continue to embody new ways of perceiving social reality and significant changes in ideology. As ideological force itself, its function will be to help shape its readers’ modes of perception in order to effect new ways of interpreting social reality which might contribute to a general social, spiritual, and literary re-valuation of values. Literature in this sense must serve not only an aesthetic function, but an epistemological one as well. (37)

Above, it is made understood, that Chicano/a literature can and should be used as a tool for teaching about Chicano/a socioeconomic struggles. Saldívar emphasizes the importance of a

dialectical approach to examining Chicano literature, the interconnectedness between Chicanos/as and “class society;” and the ideological modalities that exist within the Chicano/a novel. All pertinent arguments when considering Chicano labor literature, its settings and characters. Similar to Sommers earlier argument, a reflection only on the representation of Chicano culture within Chicano labor literature does an injustice to its intent—it is an implement used to bring awareness to its audience. Hence, per Saldívar’s argument, it is important to consider how Chicano labor literature is shaped by class and societal struggles.

Along with Sommers and Saldívar, Marcial Gonzalez has proposed an approach that takes into consideration the historical and societal context in his article, “Postmodernism, Historical Materialism and Chicana/o Cultural Studies” (2004). He is critical of critics who “tipto[e] into the idealist terrain of postmodernism” and offers that instead, “historical materialism—a method that makes truth-claims about social existence after rigorous critique of the concepts and ideas that emerge from that existence—stands as a viable alternative to postmodernist theory for the interpretation of Chicana/o literature” (161). Gonzalez further contends that “It makes no sense, in other words, for a subordinated group whose history has been misrepresented, excluded or erased to adopt narrative strategies that are antagonistic toward history” (166). In this regard, Gonzalez, Sommers and Saldívar have a similar methodology as Terry Eagleton, who stated that: “Marxist criticism analyses literature in terms of the historical conditions that produce it [. . .]” (vi). Gonzalez, although not speaking to Sommers’ and Saldívar’s historical dialectical approach, instead chooses historical materialism as the proper form of criticism, which is essentially still arguing for a dialectical approach that addresses the social and historical context of Chicano/a literature.

Historical materialism is based on Marx's thoughts on history. According to Tucker, Marx had written about his ideas on the "materialist conception of history" in *The German Ideology* (146). This becomes clear as Marx references the relation between man and materialism: "By producing their means of subsistence men are indirectly producing their actual material life" (*The German Ideology* 150). Erich Fromm explains, "Marx's 'materialist method' [. . .] involves the study of the real economic and social life of man and of the influence of man's actual way of life in this thinking and feeling" (ch. 2). Fromm further adds that although "Marx never used the terms 'historical materialism' or 'dialectic materialism,'" he does "stud[y] man and history by beginning with the real man and the economic conditions under which he must live [. . .]" (ch. 2). Fromm interprets Marx's historical methodology as a form of humanism, not just economic determinism.

Further commenting on the importance of understanding Marxism and historical materialism as more than just a criticism of the economic situation, Friedrich Engels, expanded on Marx's work in a letter to Joseph Bloch:

The economic situation is the basis, but the various elements of the superstructure: political forms of the class struggle and its results, to wit: constitutions established by the victorious class after a successful battle, etc., juridical forms, and then even the reflexes of all these actual struggles in the brains of the participants, political, juristic, philosophical theories, religious views and their further development into systems of dogmas, also exercise their influence upon the course of historical struggles and in many cases preponderate in determining their form. (640)

Engels is making an argument against a focus on economic determinism as the main factor that shapes history. As he explains to Bloch, the economic is an important foundation, but class is also shaped and maintained through political ideologies and institutions. Thus, when applying historical materialism, it is important to also consider the other "elements" that influence class struggles. In his survey of Chicano history, Acuña has similarly written that although economics

was at the center of the spread of American imperialism and capitalism throughout the southwest, the conquest of Mexican people was then maintained through “political control” and “socialization” (*Occupied America* 60). Therefore, in order to apply historical materialism critically onto Chicano/a labor literature, the superstructure and its many facets must be taken into consideration while excavating its fictional representations in the text. Expanding further on the work that had been done by Engels to define historical materialism, Georg Lukács deemed historical materialism “one of the proletariat’s most potent [and important] weapons when it was oppressed,” because “it signifies at the same time the awakening of [the proletariat’s] class consciousness” (223 and 224).

As historical materialism and dialectics have evolved, Gonzalez makes a convincing argument for the implementation of this critical approach to Chicano labor literature specifically. He adds that “historical materialism affords avenues for understanding the complex categories of identity based on race, ethnicity, sexuality and gender, not as autonomous formations, but as interconnected processes within the larger dynamics of social relations;” and that “the goal of Marxism is not to correct faulty ideas but to negate them – to critique them, to transform them qualitatively” (180-182). It is within those statements that Gonzales arrives at the core of this study, in that a Marxist analysis allows for possibilities in understanding Chicano literature through the intersections of class, race and gender that take place within each work. In the works selected for this study the specific intersections analyzed are Mexican workers struggles with class and race within American capitalism.

Sommers, Saldívar and Gonzalez have argued for a Marxist approach to Chicano/a literature namely through historical dialecticalism and historical materialism. In this study the Marxist approach is used to discuss not only the sociohistorical, but to specifically address the

ways in which the authors represent the racialization and proletarianization of Mexican workers in their literary works. Marxism is used in this study to not only focus on the historical aspect of Chicano/a laborer struggles, but to interpret the Chicano/a writers' representation of the Mexican workers within American capitalism. Marxism within the Chicano/a literary works selected for this dissertation is used to understand how the literary works portray the exploitation of the Mexican workers, while simultaneously commenting on racial issues. The authors in turn show how these racial issues are then shaped by the characters' material conditions within an American capitalist society that thrives on cheap labor, and is thus dependent on othering and institutional racism toward ethnic minorities. In this study, the lens is focused upon the authors representation of the Mexican worker experience within such circumstances, along with their depictions of their working conditions. This approach is important because to view Chicano/a labor literature through a Marxist lens based only on its criticism of class, leads to economic reductionism. As Sommers, Saldívar, and Gonzalez have argued, it is important to consider the entirety of the material conditions of Mexican workers.

But it is also important to deliberate the role of racialization in the development of Mexican workers as a socioeconomic class, because Chicano/a scholars have found that Mexicans have indeed found themselves a racialized and proletarianized labor force. This is best explained by Francisco E. Balderrama and Raymond Rodriguez in *Decade of Betrayal* (1995):

Mexican immigrants were usually associated with unskilled, backbreaking jobs and marginal or menial occupations. The Dillingham Commission Report, an early immigration study, noted that "members of this race have always been the hewers of wood and drawers of water." The caste-like employment pattern developed was a very effective way of denying Mexican Nationals as well as native-born U.S. Mexicans the opportunity to attain better or higher-paying jobs. Even though some Mexicans had the requisite skills, training, or experience qualifying them for skilled positions, they were restricted to *pico y pala*, or pick

and shovel work. The prevailing discrimination was encountered in seeking meaningful employment was readily attested to by early immigrants. Merchant Eduardo Negrete and optometrist Dr. Reynaldo Carreon recalled the prejudicial treatment accorded them by American society when attempting to market their goods and services. (10)

The fact that educated Mexican immigrants and U.S.-born Mexicans were relegated to manual labor, shows, that as an ethnic group, Mexicans have historically been racialized and proletarianized, due to Americans linking them to manual labor, even when qualified for other jobs. This is important when analyzing Chicano/a labor literature, to understand that there is an existing history that influences the Chicano/a authors choice to address socioeconomic issues alongside race.

This is also pertinent, because the experience of each ethnic working class group within American capitalism is unique, due to each groups unique cultural heritage. In response, the Chicano/a authors in this study write about both the working class struggle and racism, thus responding to the dual societal invisibility their characters face as workers, but also due to the fact they are Mexican. Given the historical context, it is understandable why Sommers, Saldívar and Gonzalez favor a Marxist approach to Chicano literature, since it takes into account the historical material conditions of Chicanos/as.

Marxism was intended to be a methodology used to explore social and economic conditions as a result of class divisions—the proletariat and the bourgeoisie—and capitalism. It is then imperative to distinguish between Marx and Marxism. The former being Marx's writings, most notably: *Capital* and *The Communist Manifesto*, while the latter refers to the many expansions and modifications on his ideas by other scholars. Due to this expansion, scholars have taken Marx's ideas into other disciplines. Marxist scholar, David Harvey has commented that "[f]or many students these intellectual formations [on Marx] are affected, if not governed by

academic considerations or concerns; there is a tendency to read Marx from a particular and exclusionary disciplinary standpoint” (1). Instead, Harvey implores his audience “to set aside all those things you *think* you know about Marx so that you can engage with what he actually has to say” in relation to capitalism and society (1). His statement is important in approaching Marx through his writing, without deconstructing his ideas beyond their original significance, with the sole purpose of forcing them to fit into a given discipline. Especially within the arts and humanities, and specifically within this dissertation—literature. However, Marxist scholars understandably try to modify Marx’s ideas to fit within the context of the present day, not only their discipline. Scholars of literature have often turned to Marx in order to interpret the symbolism contained in a literary text or its form. In fact, Lee Baxandall and Stefan Morawski collected passages contained in the writings of Marx and Engels that pertained to literature and art, aptly titled *Marx & Engels on Literature & Art* (1973). But even Baxandall and Morawski admit that Marx and Engels’ ideas on literature and art are “brief” and “scattered,” making it difficult to expand and delve into details regarding any Marxian ideology of literature and art (7).

Ann Dobie, similarly acknowledges the socioeconomic premises of Marx’s ideas, clearly stating: “the principles of Marxism were not designed to serve as a theory about how to interpret texts. Instead, they were meant to be a set of social, economic, and political ideas that would, according to their followers, change the world” (79). With that understood, Dobie goes on to explain that Marxist critics such as Lukács and Althusser have nonetheless used Marxist ideas to explain how literature can be understood as a reflection of society or it can lead society to revolution (80). Eagleton, has argued: “Marxist criticism is not merely a ‘sociology of literature,’ concerned with how novels get published and whether they mention the working class. Its aim is to *explain* the literary work more fully; and this means sensitive attention to its forms, styles and

meanings” (3). However, Imre Szeman, offers more pointed commentary on the deficiencies of Marxist literary criticism, stating that “there is no such thing as *a* Marxist literary criticism,” because “it is difficult to establish a core set of interests and commitments that mark it off from other forms of literary criticism” (38). Of course, there are scholars who would disagree with his statement and would outline topics such as the representation of class, capitalism, and social issues in literature which are used to interpret the meaning and form of a literary text.

Nonetheless Szeman further comments that it is western Marxists such as Raymond Williams and Terry Eagleton who “not only differ from one another, but show enough internal variation as to leave things confused in the extreme” (38). Although critical of current applications of Marxism on literature, Szeman is more concerned with the disconnect between the theory and practice of Marxism amongst academics. Meaning that Szeman acknowledges and agrees with Perry Anderson’s criticism of Western Marxism as a shift from “economics and politics to philosophy,” which needs to shift back toward engaging “political struggles” and “social movements” (44-45). Nonetheless, Szeman acquiesces that there are “productive” works by Western Marxists, yet reminds his reader that “Marxism is a theory of social and political transformation – of revolution, not evolution, since it understands that no amount of amelioration of existing political and economic frameworks will address the broad social injustices that capitalism produces” (46).

Given Szeman’s argumentation, it is then important to consider Frederic Jameson’s commentary in *The Political Unconscious*, where he argues that “only Marxism offers a philosophically coherent and ideologically compelling resolution to the dilemma of historicism” (19). Jameson further explains that analyzing the “political unconscious” is necessary to “explore the multiple paths that lead to the unmasking of cultural artifacts as socially symbolic acts” (20).

His approach does not refute what is stated by Szeman, but it does make it understood that literature can in fact be used as a social tool that informs its reader. In this study the cultural artifacts are Chicano/a labor literature texts which, beginning with Luis Valdez's *actos*, are in fact socially symbolic acts that adhere to Chicano/a politics and the Chicano movement. Charles M. Tatum similarly frames Chicano/a popular culture artifacts as "forms [that] are produced by and for subordinate classes as ways not only of rejecting dominant Anglo values but of resisting exploitative economic conditions" (12). Thus, although literary scholars have made it understood that Marx's ideas were not necessarily intended to interpret literary works, they have nonetheless managed to create pathways to Marxist literary interpretations. It is then understandable that Sommers, Saldívar, and Gonzalez would use a Marxist praxis to analyze Chicano literature, because as Tatum commented, it is a counter narrative form that has an ingrained commentary on the socioeconomic struggles of Chicanos/as. However, simply focusing on the economic aspect of Marxism within Chicano/a labor literature is not enough, because the Chicano/a worker experience, like that of other ethnic groups, is unique, and this is shown in the representations in the works selected for this study. In other words it is important to focus on the Chicano/a worker experience historically, and as it has been made evident, the role of race and culture in proletarianizing Mexicans. Thus in this study Marxism is used to show how the authors represent Mexicans as a class and the labor struggles that are shaped by capitalist greed, but also through social positioning influenced by race.

Chapter Outline

There are two novels and four *actos* that focus on the Chicano/a worker in the agricultural space; three of the artifacts are set in a factory. Chapter one begins with Valdez's *actos*, because they offer the earliest representations of the Chicano/a laborer; chapter two focuses on the

agricultural worker; chapter three revolves around a factory strike; and chapter four concludes with the labor struggles faced by the Chicano/a industrial worker. Below, the chapter outline provides a more detailed description of each chapter.

Chapter one will focus on Luis Valdez and El Teatro Campesino's *actos*, *Las Dos Caras Del Patroncito*, *Huelgistas*, *Quinta Temporada* and *Vietnam Campesino*. The discussion will revolve around the relationship between the characters, Farmworker, Patron, and Don Coyote. Namely by showing how the relationship is dependent on the use value, exchange value and sign exchange value of the farmworkers. Valdez and El Teatro Campesino do not limit their criticism to the relationship between the farmworker as a commodity and the Patron as a greedy capitalist, they are also critical of capitalism, as shown in scenes where the Patron places a sign exchange value on institutions and objects, and uses them to flaunt his personal wealth. Valdez's evolution as a Chicano playwright is also addressed, showing that in *Las dos caras del patroncito* and *Quinta temporada*, he began by strictly focusing on the labor struggles of Mexican farmworkers, but by the time he writes *Huelgistas* and *Vietnam campesino* he begins to incorporate other ethnic minorities and begins to criticize American imperialism alongside capitalism. Along with the relationship between the employer and employee, structural issues that revolve around governmental, political, and capitalistic motivated agendas will also be explored.

In chapter two commodity fetishism is discussed in relation to the Mexican migrant farmworker families in Viramontes' *Under the Feet of Jesus* and Francisco Jiménez's *The Circuit*. Commodity fetishism is a Marxist paradigm in which Marx argues that commodities are fetishized by consumers, because they do not encounter the producer of the object they are purchasing. It is argued in this chapter that the authors try to engage in a process of commodity defetishitization of fruits and vegetables bought at grocery stores and the Mexican body, by

showing the consumer, the grueling conditions that Mexican adults and children work in agricultural jobs. That is to say, that fruits and vegetables are commodities that are picked by Mexican farmworkers, whose body is commodified through its labor power. As a result, when the consumer purchases fruits and vegetables at a grocery store, this is a form of commodity fetishism, in that the Mexican farmworker who picked the crops becomes invisible in this process. Fetishism is also addressed in regards to how each writer portrays religious symbolism, given that within Marxism it is the “opiate of the people,” the audience is given divergent approaches in each text.

In chapter three Cherrie Moraga’s play, *Watsonville: Some Place Not Here* addresses a group of mostly Chicana strikers, engaged in a struggle against the frozen food packaging company that is looking to cut their wages and benefits. Moraga’s play is a dark horse in the sense that the labor struggle revolves around the strike and the motivations of each character. In this chapter it is shown that although there is a focus on sexuality and gender role issues, Moraga manages to show conflicts amongst the strikers that revolve around organizing strategies and ideologies. These conflicts then begin to reveal the far-reaching influence and effects of capitalism on people and government policies which effect the characters in the play. While Marxism has been criticized for focusing on economics, Moraga shows the many ways in which capitalism influences racial and gender divisions.

Chapter four focuses on the factory as the central setting of labor, specifically the Simon’s Brick Factory in Alejandro Morales’s *The Brick People* and the Nazareth Steel mill, in Luis J. Rodríguez’s *Music of the Mill*. Most prominent in the novels is the authors’ portrayal of race relations, showing how race is shaped in a capitalistic society, to further a company’s bottom line – profit. Through a Marxist and critical race theory lens, Morales and Rodriguez’s

novels show the synchronization between class and race in the work place and in American society. Mexican workers are shown facing racist co-workers and in surrounding communities. The authors show that this racism is perpetuated through a history of racialization of Mexican people. In the novels Mexican people have been othered to the point that working class white people only see their differences as opposed to their commonalities as fellow American workers.

Throughout the reading of each text, Marxism is used to analyze how the authors interpret the Mexican worker experience in relation to capitalism. Within this analysis, the racialization and proletarianization of Mexican workers is discussed to understand the reasoning behind the portrayals written by the authors. As mentioned earlier, it would not be enough to analyze exclusively within a Marxist framework that might simply reduce the Mexican worker experience to an issue of class or economics. It is important to also consider the Mexican ethnicity of the characters and that the authors writing to the specific experiences of Mexican workers.

All six works discuss the experiences of the Chicano/a laborers in the landscapes of agriculture or factories, but they also speak to labor history, although in a fictional manner. Through the use of literature and theater, the above works of fiction recount the struggles of the working class, in the agricultural fields, the plight of the transitory farmworker and the Chicano/a in the factories. More importantly, they are Chicano/a literary artifacts that contribute to the Chicano poetic consciousness that is a factor in laying bare the history of Chicano/a labor struggles, and compel the American audience to listen to the “background voices” (Ybarra-Frausto 86).

Conclusion

Finally, it should be noted that this dissertation was inspired by the “background voices” of the Watsonville Frozen Food Strike (1985-1987). It came about during research for a seminar paper, and it developed into a newfound understanding and respect for the importance of the “small history,” of a group of “anonymous” Mexicans in my hometown, Watsonville, California. While doing research on the strike, a flyer was found, announcing “Navidad en la Huelga”:

Theatre
The Watsonville 1000 Present:
Political Theatre in the style of the strikers.
A message from the strikers for workers.
With the purpose of showing the reality of how the strikers live.
Do you want to see why your support is needed?
Come and live a portion of the problems and joys of the strikers.
Support us and be entertained with your family.
Strikers free (Bardacke)

The above was a flyer for a play organized by the “Watsonville 1000” as in one thousand strikers. It was a political play produced to make the audience aware of not only the purpose of the strike, but also the economic disparity the strikers were experiencing. By the time the flyer was published, the strikers had been on strike for approximately sixteen months, and had experienced two holiday seasons without a steady income to provide much sustenance, let alone gifts for their families. It is not surprising that the strikers and the organizing committee turned to the production of culture, specifically teatro in order to have their narrative heard and experienced. The strikers engaged in the dialogical, and reminded the community that the strike continued, and thereby did not allow it to leave the community’s consciousness. Unfortunately, an actual script or a vhs recording of the play has not been found, but the flyer does bridge the importance between Chicano/a literary production and the Chicano/a laborer experience. The end result is a dissertation that incorporates Chicano/a labor literature and an exploration of the ways

in which the authors show the proletarianization and racialization of the Mexican workers within American capitalism.

Chapter 1

The Value of the Patroncito, Coyote and Farmworker Relationship

Introduction

In *Mexicanos: A History of Mexicans in the United States*, published in 1999, Manuel G. Gonzales describes the correlation between race and capitalism, which was used to racialize and proletarianize the Mexican population. Gonzales cites U.S. society's personal interest in race, which "not only provided a justification for the exploitation of Mexicans, and other racial minorities, but also accounted for much of the ill-treatment they received" (137). The racialization of the Mexicano, began as early as 1803, after Captain William Shaler visited California, and "While singing the praises of the land and its resources, he was less complimentary of its Spanish residents, suggesting that their lethargy made progress impossible" (Gonzales 55). After viewing the land and its people through a colonizer's gaze, Shaler, believed that "Only American energy and diligence [. . .] could develop the vast potential of California" (Gonzales 55). This early documented description, by an American, of "the Spanish" (they would begin to identify as Mexicanos after achieving independence from Spain in 1810) begins the racialization process of first creating the prototypical image of the "lethargic" brown person with a large sombrero having a siesta underneath a cactus. The American racialization of Mexicanos would later evolve into making them the primary ethnic group for stoop labor in the United States, thus going from "lazy" to an ideal exploitable laborer. As Gonzales has noted, this correlation between Mexicans and labor began with American capitalistic interests: "Moreover, the economic penetration of American capitalism into Mexico during the Porfiriato, based as it was on the exploitation of cheap native labor, fortified the nearly universal belief that Mexicans were meant to be subservient to whites" (137).

Mae Ngai has similarly argued that the racialization, proletarianization and commodification of Mexicans was done for American capitalistic interests, however she traces the origins of this process further back, by citing the Spanish conquest of Mesoamerica and the enslavement of native people for their stoop labor needs. In *Harvest of Empire*, Juan Gonzalez, supports Ngai's statement, arguing that "Latin America's size and mineral wealth required an enormous supply of laborers," which was filled by mestizos and Indians (22-23). Spanish colonialism was then followed, by "Euro-American" colonialism. Ngai argues that "Euro-American" colonialists have historically enslaved people of color for their labor necessities, through a process of racialization, that instilled the minority with "foreignness" or "otherness." Ngai's argument is compelling, because it shows that the "colonial [labor] project" never ended, it just exchanged hands and continued well into the 1900s within the industrious United States agribusiness. Like Gonzales, she believes that Mexicanos were racialized for the benefit of American industrial and agricultural capitalism, writing that:

Equating Mexican culture with seasonal stoop labor was central in creating a negative referent, making Mexicans, as anthropologist Carlos Velez-Ibanez has described, "not only strangers in their own land but strangers to themselves" [And] Mexican migrant labor was similarly, constructed as an imported workforce, which Euro-Americans defined and situated wholly in terms of the latter's needs. (132-133)

The construction of Mexicans as a stoop labor force was assisted, by what Gonzales referred to as the American interest in race and what Ngai discusses as foreignness or otherness. But as both scholars have noted, simply making comparative observations about race or foreignness—that is what Americans believed made Mexicans inferior to them—was more important to reinforce the place of Mexicans as stoop labor, by implementing a social structure that supported racism and foreignness. This was accomplished through "Jim Crow practices," such as segregation within some public places and the denial of voting rights in some locations (Ngai 132). Such regulations

assisted in the process of associating Mexican culture with seasonal stoop labor. The end result of the racialization and proletarianization of the Mexican, led to their commodification as laborers.

This “universal belief” of Mexicans as a subservient labor force for Anglo entrepreneurs was further exacerbated during 1910 to 1920 as they began to migrate to the U.S. in large numbers to escape the strife of the Mexican Revolution and with the emergence of corporate enterprises, such as factory-farms. These “Factory-farms required huge numbers of workers, and by the 1920s, only Mexico was in a position to provide them” (Gonzales 123). Mexico’s geographical position provided easy access to a surplus labor force, that made Mexicans the dominant ethnic group in farm labor throughout the Southwest. In California alone, Mexicans working in agriculture went from 121,176 to 368,013 between 1920 to 1930 (Acuña 193). It is important to remember, that regardless of Mexican migratory patterns, “Agribusiness desired large numbers of Mexican laborers, but the economic and social segregation and isolation of Mexicans was necessary to insure continued Euro-American control and domination” (Ngai 131). Depending on American agribusiness needs, over the next few decades the amount of Mexicanos doing farm labor would fluctuate following the Great Depression, the Bracero Program and Operation Wetback, but the agriculture labor force to this day has persistently remained Mexican.

In the 1960s the racialization and proletarianization of Mexicanos as America’s agricultural laborers was well established, but there began to be an ideological shift amongst many Mexicanos throughout the Southwest. The ideological shift came by way of Chicanos/as organizing an antiwar movement (The Chicano Moratorium), a high school student movement for educational reform (the East Los Angeles Blowouts), and a labor movement (The United

Farm Workers grape boycott). What assisted in this ideological shift was the many aforementioned fronts in which Chicanos/as united to confront issues pertaining to their communities. But as Tomas Ybarra-Frausto has acknowledged, the 1960s did not signal the beginning of “Chicano militancy” it was “rather the continuation of a long historical process of militance and resistance” (81). No longer happy as simply exploitable commodities for labor, Chicanos/as began to combat the roles that they had been historically funneled into and exploited through. In relation to farmworkers specifically, Ybarra-Frausto argues that “it is the campesino struggle or ‘La Causa’ that has fundamentally altered the consciousness of most Chicanos” leading them to identify with the farmworkers as a representation of the “poor working class Chicano” (83). The Chicano farmworker labor movement was led by Cesar Chavez and Dolores Huerta through the National Farm Workers Association (presently known as the United Farm Workers union). But it was the arrival of Luis Valdez which supplemented culturally the activism of the farmworkers, with theater through the formation of El Teatro Campesino. This chapter shows how Valdez and El Teatro Campesino use their actos to subvert capitalism, while advocating for labor reform on behalf of Mexican farmworkers.

Through his labor-themed actos, Valdez addressed the issues particular to the farmworkers, namely exploitative labor conditions that included low wages, the use of harmful pesticides on crops picked by the farmworkers, and a lack of empathy for their humanity. Through the actos, Valdez addresses Gonzales’ commentary on the “universal belief” of the Mexicano as America’s stoop labor and Ngai’s own observation that “The construction of “Mexican” into a one-dimensional “commodity function and utility” devalued nearly everything that held meaning to Mexicans—the individual self, the family, culture and political experience” (132). In order to combat the “universal belief” and the construction of the “one-dimensional”

Mexicano, Valdez sought to “imbue the campesino with positive traits,” which assisted him in his endeavor, by no longer representing farmworkers “as a gallery of silhouettes” and instead shaping a “rounded literary creation” which ultimately led to “authentic artistic expressions of campesino reality” (Ybarra-Frausto 86-87). Valdez and El Teatro Campesino embraced the universal representation of the Mexican laborer, but built on it through the use of satire, with the intent to inform an audience about the farmworker struggle for fair and humane treatment. Valdez and El Teatro Campesino contributed to the representation of the farmworkers struggle or “campesino reality” in their *actos*, *Las dos caras del patroncito*, *La quinta temporada*, *Huelgistas*, and *Vietnam Campesino* to demonstrate the Mexican labor struggle, but it also works as a social commentary on historical class relations, between Mexican laborers (in the form of the Farmworker/Campesino character) and their Anglo bosses (the Patroncito/Patron/Ranchero/Butt Anglo characters); and as a result on the commodification of Mexican labor. Valdez’s *actos* were very much propaganda for the United Farm Workers union, but as Ybarra-Frausto has argued, they became representative of the working class Chicanos/as and through a Marxist lens we find that in the *actos*, Valdez shows how the commodification of Mexicanos leads to relationships with owners, that place an exchange value on their work based on how much they can produce with their bodies, for meager pay and minimal humane treatment.

Written and performed during the first six years of the Chicano Movement, Luis Valdez and El Teatro Campesino’s labor-themed *actos* can be seen as short chronicles of Mexican agricultural workers pushing back against capitalist agribusiness greediness and the injustices they faced as agricultural laborers as a result of the patron’s need for capitalist accumulation. The *actos* also show a progression of Valdez’s concerns as a Chicano playwright, who was

writing strictly for farmworkers (in *Las dos caras del patroncito* and *La quinta temporada*) but later broadens his political outlook to include other socioeconomically exploited ethnic groups along with concerns over U.S. imperialism, as seen in *Huelgistas* and *Vietnam Campesino*. For that matter, as noted by Carlota Cardenas de Dwyer, his opinion on political propaganda versus art changed, as Valdez initially viewed the actos primarily as a form of politicking as opposed to art, but would later change his opinion on the form of the actos, stating “I’ve found an audience that needs an art that speaks to their way of life” (163).

Valdez’s participation in the Chicano labor movement was in part influenced by his family’s farmworker background. He has cited his interest in theater as early as first grade, but pursued his interest in drama more in depth at San Jose State University, after switching majors from math and science, to English (Bagby 73). The playwright began considering taking theater to farm laborers in 1965, and he eventually did just that after participating in a march in Delano in September of that year. Soon after he met Dolores Huerta and Cesar Chavez, and then proposed his idea for a farmworker’s theatre (Bagby 74). From there it was a matter of getting farmworkers to volunteer their time as actors, when not on the picket line. Thus El Teatro Campesino was founded as a collaborative effort, which used “‘campesino vernacular’ and [focused] on social issues in a compact dramatic format, the actos emerged as a truly original art form to project the Chicano experience” (Ybarra-Frausto 87). Ybarra-Frausto has referred to El Teatro Campesino’s early performances as “total cultural ‘happenings’” that served as a gateway for “local musicians, dance groups, and poets” to share their art with the Chicano community (87). Thus the actos had a dual function of not only informing an audience about the labor struggle, but also sharing their art with each other, which would flourish into a Chicano Renaissance.

Although noted as a trigger of the Chicano/a literary and artistic renaissance, Luis Valdez and El Teatro Campesino would eventually struggle with their commitment between the labor movement and their art. In 1967 Valdez and El Teatro Campesino distanced themselves from the labor movement in order to hone their craft as a theatre troupe. Valdez himself acknowledged this, saying, “The strike in Delano is a beautiful cause, but it won’t leave you alone. A cause is a living, breathing thing. It’s more important to leave a rehearsal and go to the picket line. So we found we had to back away from Delano . . . to be a theatre.” (qtd. In Ybarra-Frausto 87). It is not to say that, Valdez and El Teatro Campesino abandoned the Chicano labor movement, since they continued performing their labor-themed actos, they simply found their time strained between doing actual activism alongside fulfilling their duties as an actual theatre troupe. It is apparent that the troupe although being born out of the farmworker struggle, was beginning to identify more as a theatre troupe as opposed to farmworker activists. However, this simply went along with the evolution of Valdez’s perspective on politics versus art and El Teatro Campesino’s initial purpose as teatro by campesinos for campesinos, as it began to touch upon other topics pertinent to the Chicano community at the time. As noted by Ybarra-Frausto, the farmworker struggle became representative of the collective Chicano/a working class struggle, and although El Teatro Campesino, naming itself specifically, for the group they represent (“campesinos”), evolved its subject matter beyond the issues faced by farmworkers. El Teatro Campesino went on to perform actos that focused on other issues affecting the Chicano community, such as the educational system in *No saco nada de la escuela*, the Vietnam War in *Soldado raso*, Chicano history in *La conquista de Mexico*, and indigenous spirituality in *Bernabé*. Thus El Teatro Campesino was no longer focusing its actos only on the farmworker struggle, it was more topically inclusive and began to represent the whole of the Chicano

Movement. This is not surprising, seeing as to how it was mentioned that Valdez soon saw his performances not only as politics, but as art. Valdez's teatro, understandably began as a political tool, but by synthesizing their political ideology with their art they contributed to Chicano cultural production, which at the time of the Chicano Movement, was nonetheless political.

Since the focus of this study is on the representation of labor struggles in Chicano/a literature, only his four labor-themed actos are the concentration of this chapter. More specifically in relation to the theoretical framework of this study, his actos will be analyzed through a Marxist lens, specifically noting how they criticize a capitalist and racist agribusiness system which commodified their bodies through a process of racialization and proletarianization. His labor-themed actos also show the ideological evolution of Valdez and El Teatro Campesino, where in his first two actos focus specifically on Mexicano farmworkers, but in the later two actos, he incorporates other ethnic groups and in one also criticizes American imperialism via the Vietnam War. By making a leap to include other ethnic groups and other issues impacting young Chicanos—who were being sent to die for the U.S. during the Vietnam War—Valdez and El Teatro Campesino begin to attack capitalist exploitation on a wider scale by seeing the entirety of those that encompass the working class struggle.

Valdez's theatrical influences are various, such as "Old Comedy," "commedia dell'arte," Brecht, "agit-prop," "ritualistic of Japan" and "religious drama of the pre-Hispanic people of Latin America" (Cardenas de Dwyer 160). In particular, commedia dell'arte has influenced his actos, after having spent time with the San Francisco Mime Troupe. Donald Frischmann has pointed out that some of the commedia dell'arte techniques such as the use of only essential items was used to communicate a situation, the use of humor and exaggerated body language, were all techniques that would transfer over into Valdez and El Teatro Campesino's actos (260).

The utilization of exaggerated body language was very important given that many of the farmworkers/actors spoke very little to no English. In watching a performance, Beth Bagby noticed that one of El Teatro Campesino's actors, Felipe Cantu, did not speak English, but that "he reacts so totally with this voice, face and body that most of the audience never observes that he does not have any lines" (72). This worked in the favor of the actos and the actors, as Bagby would further note: "Dialogue fluctuates between English and Spanish, but with little loss of meaning—Spanish and English slang are commonly known anyway, and wherever either is not understood, there is little visual doubt" (72).

Aside from *commedia dell'arte*, Valdez also engages in what Mikhail Bakhtin referred to as the carnivalesque. Characteristic of the carnivalesque is the suspension of "socio-hierarchical inequality or any other form of inequality among people (including age)" (Bakhtin 123). This is achieved through role reversal within the hierarchical structure. Specifically, through the decrowning and crowning of a king. That is to say, a king that is decrowned becomes a slave and a slave is then crowned as the new king. This technique is notable in *Las dos caras del patroncito* where the audience sees the Patroncito and Farmworker switch roles. Along with this, there is the important use of masks and costumes which were crucial to the sense of the carnival, within Valdez's actos.

While Cardenas de Dwyer lists Bertolt Brecht as an influence for Valdez, Barclay Goldsmith wrote a critical essay, "Brecht and Chicano Theater," on the topic. Barclay draws some specific correlations between Brechtian theatre and Chicano theatre, specifically the creative use of language and the "popular presentational form," which he defines as a form of entertainment that "refers to a working class audience, peasant, or campesino audience who can identify with the subject matter presented through song, topicality of humor, and immediately

identifiable archetypal characters” (169). Due to their interest in presenting to a working class audience who recognizes the socioeconomic issues being critiqued, he believes that both Brecht and Chicano theatre were influenced by the popular presentational form, and thus in this way are similar, but he tends to find far more differences as Brecht shifted from the popular presentational form to the Epic form. Barclay characterizes the techniques of Brecht’s epic form as scenes which present expansive shifts in time and more psychologically multifaceted characters. He further argues that Brechtian theatre, was created by one person, “while Chicano theatre springs from a movement with differences of class, cultural makeup, and political orientation within the Chicano community” (173). Furthermore, Barclay finds that the Chicano theatre produced during the movement years, generally lacked the realism, complexity and dialectical analysis found in Brecht’s Epic form (173). In relation to Valdez specifically, he acknowledges that El Teatro Campesino’s actos were generally Brechtian in the use of the popular presentational form of the campesino labor struggle and Chicano social issues, citing specifically *La quinta temporada* and *Los vendidos*. He compares Valdez and El Teatro Campesino’s *La gran carpa de la familia Rascuachi* to Brecht’s Epic form due to its complex characters. Barclay would ultimately state that the use of the Brechtian style was dependent on the Chicano theatre troupe, but that Valdez in particular had himself stated that he is “somewhere between Cantiflas and Brecht” (173).

Although Barclay finds that Chicano theatre in general lacks in Brechtian techniques, exploring the playwright’s purpose behind his approach to theatre, shows that Valdez followed some of Brecht’s ideas regarding the use of theatre as a way to bring awareness to socioeconomic issues. More specifically epic theatre was intended to make audience members observe societal issues and unlike dramatic theatre was also intended to inspire action in the

spectator (Brecht 171). David Krasner succinctly explains, “[Brecht] wanted the spectator to reflect on the staged event, consider how it took shape in reality, and consider what could be done to change the course of events” (170). This is of course what an audience will find Valdez trying to do in his labor-themed actos. In fact, Valdez has stated that the purpose of his *actos* was to “1) inspire the audience to social action, 2) illuminate specific points about social problems, 3) show or hint at a solution and, 4) express what people are thinking” (qtd. in Ybarra-Frausto 87). All very similar to Brecht’s social conscious approach to theatre.

Another important point made by Barclay, questions whether another of Brecht’s influences, namely Marxism, plays a role in Chicano theatre? He explains, “Brecht wrote moreover, with a broad Marxist perspective, and very few teatros, if any, are Marxist in concept, at least in the way Brecht intended with his merciless exposé of contradictions within the bourgeois value system” (Barclay 174). Barclay is correct in his statement to an extent, in that it appears, that Valdez did not arrive as a Marxist ideologue desiring to critique the entirety of the capitalist system, but more as a Chicano that wanted to engage in labor activism by using his playwriting skills. But once applying those skills within the farmworker labor struggle an audience finds that he does critique the contradictions found amid an agribusiness system whose capitalistic growth is built on the labor of the Mexican farmworker. In *Space and Time in Epic Theater: The Brechtian Legacy*, Sarah Bryant-Bertail also acknowledges Marx’s influence on Brecht, by noting that the “ideological basis of epic stage practice was Marx’s historical materialism,” since “This practice called for the relating of stage events to the material situation of the spectators and characters; the theater was to demystify the operation of social, economic, and political forces by showing how certain orders of reality had developed historically and were perpetuated” (2-3). Bryant-Bertail’s explanation similarly addresses the use of different historical

periods in Brecht's plays, specifically through historical materialism to explain Marx's influence on Brecht's technique, which is a point made earlier by Barclay, in that Valdez's labor-themed actos are set in the present time, and deal with the socioeconomic issues in that moment, without tracing the history of the United States' exploitation of Mexican laborers. However, not engaging in this Brechtian technique that criticizes capitalism, does not take away from the fact that El Teatro Campesino had similar goals which they were able to achieve through their actos, namely bringing awareness to the present material condition of the Mexican farmworkers in California. Epic theater's influence on Valdez's approach to theatre is apparent through his use of teatro in order to get spectators, usually farmworkers, to join the United Farm Workers union. As he took the actos out of the fields and onto venues such as college campuses, even traveling as far as Europe to put on performances, it was also used to recruit the spectator, or consumer, to understand the plight of the farmworkers and then take action, by supporting the grape boycott.

As early scholars such as Bagby, Cardenas de Dwyer, Barclay and Frischmann have noted, Valdez and El Teatro Campesino engaged in many different theatrical techniques which worked well for a teatro lacking in both financial and technical resources (for example, not having many English speakers or trained actors), they were truly representative of their target demographic—Mexican farmworkers. For that matter, having a troupe that was economically under sourced, not only made El Teatro Campesino's actors ideal critics for a teatro that criticized agribusiness, their minimalist style also countered dramatic plays that were considered productions of high culture¹. Nonetheless, even though El Teatro campesino had a rasquache

¹ As defined by Charles Tatum in *Chicano Popular Culture* (2001), "high culture" refers to "activities that appeal to an educated and sophisticated audience [. . .]" Examples of "high culture" given by Tatum, include "opera, ballet, certain kinds of literature, symphonic music, theater, and art collected and exhibited in private galleries and museums" for "audiences that have refined tastes and highly developed aesthetic sensibilities" (3).

aesthetic, in each acto there can be found a mixture of the carnivalesque and epic or Brechtian techniques. El Teatro Campesino also managed to challenge traditional theatre through their use of a mixture of Spanish and English in their performances.

A great many scholarly articles have been written on Valdez and El Teatro Campesino's actos. The focus that scholars in the 1970s and 80s have taken has been generally to address Valdez's dramatic and social influences, such as has been done by Cardenas de Dwyer, Barclay, Frischmann and Jorge A. Huerta. In the 1990s Yvonne Yarbrow-Bejerano and Yolanda Broyles-Gonzalez focused on gender role issues, critiquing the lack of representation of female characters in the actos, which had been observed by Bagby over thirty years earlier in her 1967 interview with Luis Valdez. By 2012 Meredith Heller offered a "Mestiza" approach on Valdez and El Teatro Campesino's lack of female representation, arguing that "teatristas were able to coexist and grow within Teatro Campesino and El Movimiento because gender-bending roles allowed them to embody plural subjectivity" (769). Although Heller's argument does not fully align with Yarbrow-Bejerano and Broyles-Gonzalez's criticism, she adds to their feminist historiography of the women of El Teatro Campesino, by discussing how they embraced the roles and made them their own. In 2007 Ingrid Mundel analyzed the evolution of El Teatro Campesino within what she termed a "corporatized North America;" where Luis Valdez and El Teatro Campesino pursued "a kind of success defined and sustained by Anglo American hegemony" (15). Where the work of Yarbrow-Bejerano and Broyles-Gonzalez was groundbreaking for its feminist critique of Valdez and El Teatro Campesino, Mundel's analysis is interesting for putting forth a debate about a grassroots theatre troupe that challenges the capitalist status quo, yet later strives toward this same standard of success.

At this point it is important to reiterate that Valdez did not arrive as an anti-capitalist idealist, nor was the United Farm Workers union trying to incite a proletariat revolution by overthrowing agribusiness bosses. Valdez, El Teatro Campesino, and for that matter the United Farm Workers union, were working toward economic justice for laborers within the capitalist system that exploited them. Therefore, although Valdez and El Teatro Campesino attack greedy patronos in their labor-themed actos, they are not against capitalism, however, they strike and perform in order to be able to survive economically and receive humane treatment within the agribusiness capitalist system. Therefore, this chapter focuses on the labor-themed actos themselves and their overt criticism of agribusiness greed, racism, and the commodification of the Mexican farmworker. Consequently, a Marxist analysis of the labor-themed actos aligns with Valdez and El Teatro Campesino's condemnation of the excesses of agribusiness.

The labor-themed actos focus heavily on the commodification and the exploitation of Mexican farmworkers. The actos are not only agitation-propaganda, they are also cultural productions that offer a scathing commentary of the imposed social positioning of Mexicans within the American capitalist society. Returning to the argument made earlier regarding the racialization, proletarianization and commodification of Mexicans, the labor-themed actos show how human social behavior leads to a comical subjugation within capitalism. In *Capital Volume One*, Marx has argued, "labour-power can appear upon the market as a commodity" and that the person who is selling his/her labour-power must be sure to sell it on his/her own terms, for a "definite period" of time, otherwise risk "converting himself from a free man into a slave, from an owner of a commodity into a commodity" (337). However in Valdez's actos the audience finds that the Mexican farmworker is not simply a person who is offering labor power to the owner of a ranch. Instead Valdez shows that the Mexican worker's body is commodified by the

Patron. This occurs more specifically *Las dos caras del patroncito* and *Vietnam campesino*. In the context of Valdez's labor themed actos, it is not only the Mexican workers labor power that is viewed as a commodity by the patrones, their bodies are also commodities, in the instances when they are treated and referred to as agricultural machines. In this sense even though, the job of the Mexican farmworker is to use his labor power to pick commodities for consumption, in the form of fruits and vegetables, Valdez portrays the commodification of the Mexican worker's body through the treatment he receives from the patrones. Due to Valdez's portrayal of the commodification of farm workers and their interactions with the patron characters, it is beneficial to analyze the exchanges between characters to show how the patron relates to the farmworker more so as an object, based in terms of their use value, exchange value, and sign exchange value.

When explaining use-value, Marx writes "The utility of a thing makes it a use-value." (*Capital* 303). That is to say an object or commodity is given a use-value when a person has the money to purchase it for their needs. He further adds, "A commodity, such as iron, corn, or a diamond, is therefore, so far as it is, a material thing, a use-value, something useful" (Marx *Capital* 303). A present-day example would be that of a car. A car is an object that has a use-value in that it can provide a person transportation. Extending this specifically to Valdez and his actos, the Mexican farmworker has a use-value because he can provide his labor power to the patron. Once seeing the usefulness in an object or in this case in the Mexican farmworker as a commodity, an exchange value is placed on his labor power and by default his body. Or as Marx explains, "The particular ratio in which [commodities] are exchangeable constitutes their *exchange value* or, expressed in money, their *price*" (*Wage Labour* 209). In his actos, Valdez shows that a price is placed on both the labor power of the farmworker and his body, thus portraying him as a commodity in the eyes of patrones. Throughout the actos, the farmworker

characters are shown questioning their working conditions and pay, before eventually resolving to join the United Farm Workers union in order to renegotiate the cost of their labor power and bodies.

Aside from showing the patron character relating to the farmworker character based on his use-value and exchange value, Valdez shows how the patron relates to other objects and people based on sign exchange value as well. Jean Baudrillard uses sign exchange value as an extension of Marx's ideas regarding exchange value, by arguing that depending on the item purchased and its cost, it will give social stature to the person who bought it. He argues, "In consumption generally, economic exchange value (money) is converted into sign exchange value (prestige, etc.)" (113). He goes on to explain that aristocrats who participate in art auctions, do so in order to purchase paintings which essentially do not have a utility or use-value as defined by Marx, but instead are purchased as representations of that person's "economic and social power," hence the sign exchange value (Baudrillard 112-116). Returning to the example of the car, if a person buys a vehicle only because its expensive price tag will signify the person's wealth (social class status) or believe that it gives him/her a certain level of prestige, they are buying it for the sign exchange value. This person could buy a less expensive car, if it is simply about the need for the vehicle's capability to provide transportation, but instead buys the more expensive car which does the same, only to use it as a signifier of his/her wealth.

In *Psychological Politics of the American Dream: The Commodification of Subjectivity in the Twentieth-Century American Literature*, Lois Tyson expands on sign exchange value beyond aristocrats and paintings, by arguing, "Anything can be commodified. Art can be commodified when a work is purchased solely for the price it will bring a few years hence or for the prestige of owning it. A woman's youth and beauty can be commodified, just like the jewels she is wearing"

(7). Tyson extends the use of sign exchange value even further by stating that relationships can also be commodified offering as an example that if she were to date a man to impress friends based on his wealth or title (medical doctor, a wealthy businessman, etc.), this would also be a form of sign exchange value (“Marxism” 115). This has led Tyson to additionally argue that, “Commodification, then, is the act or condition of relating to persons or things in terms of their exchange value or sign-exchange value to the exclusion of other considerations” (Psychological Politics 6). It is from Baudrillard’s and Tyson’s ideas regarding exchange value and sign exchange value that an audience of Valdez’s labor themed actos, can then begin to understand that within the social context presented in the play, the patron character constantly relates to the Mexican farmworker characters as his commodities, while also illustrating the minimal price that is placed on the labor power of the farmworker during the exchange value process. Accordingly, Valdez depicts the patron as a greedy capitalist who relates to other objects and institutions based on their sign exchange value, which is found prominently *Las dos caras del patroncito*. Throughout this chapter the analysis focuses on how Valdez uses his actos as recruitment propaganda for the United Farm Workers union, by showing how the patron character commodifies the Mexican farmworker, while simultaneously devaluing his worth as a person and laborer through the exchange value and sign exchange value process. Aside from this, it is also shown, how Valdez then begins to shift his focus from illustrating the patron as the sole person exploiting Mexican workers in *Vietnam campesino*, wherein he shows the American government commodifying Mexicans for their own needs as well.

Las dos del patroncito and Quinta temporada

Use value, exchange value, and sign-exchange value show that the actos are not only agitation-propaganda, but they are critical to remember the treatment of Mexican laborers within

an agrarian capitalist society. The actos show representations of the Farmworkers as tools or machines, no longer fellow human beings, they become a part of the industrialization process, and thus the means of production for agribusiness. While the Patron character tends to represent agribusiness bosses that want to uphold the capitalist status quo, through the commodification of the Mexicano farmworkers. The end result is a commentary on the commodification of the Mexican agricultural worker based on Marx's explanation of exchange value, and Tyson's definition of commodification as an end result of people relating to one another based on exchange value or sign exchange value within a particular social context. In Valdez's actos the social context involves the Mexican farmworker and the patron who relates to his workers based on their exchange value and as a result commodities.

It is important to take into consideration *Las dos caras del patroncito* as one of the first actos to touch upon farmworker labor struggles because it informed the audience about the farmworker struggle in relation to his pig mask-wearing patron. In this acto, the characters consist of the Farmworker, Patroncito, and Charlie, an armed guard, but the majority of the interaction occurs between the Farmworker and the Patroncito. The acto opens with the Farmworker pruning vines on the Patroncito's property, at which point the Patroncito arrives and begins to converse with him. Their conversation becomes a humorous exchange of wit, as the Patroncito laments the cost to maintain his own material wealth, and explains that the Farmworker has an easier life as an underpaid agricultural laborer. In order to prove his point, the Patroncito exchanges roles with the Farmworker, only to find himself abused, exploited, and eventually carted away by the armed guard. It is not until the Patroncito is able to experience the abuses the Farmworker suffers at the hands of agribusiness owners, that he yells for help from the union, Cesar Chavez, and even ironically demands a strike.

Huerta argues that this acto was born out of “the growers and their unabashed flaunting of their wealth and materialistic strength” (19). The traits described by Huerta take shape in the character of the Patroncito, who makes his wealth sound like a curse, to keep the Farmworker complacent in his social class. Huerta explores the relationship between the Farmworker and the Patroncito, stating that “The worker is no more than a machine for the pig faced grower, who can turn him on, set his pace and stop him at will” (21):

PATRONCITO: You working hard, boy!

FARMWORKER: Oh, si patron. Muy hard. (He starts working furiously)

PATRONCITO: Oh you can work harder than that, boy! (He works harder)

Harder! (He works harder.) Harder! (He works still harder.) Harder!

FARMWORKER: Ay, that’s too hard, patron! (Valdez 18)

Thus from the onset of the acto, the audience finds that the patron, has commodified the farmworker. The exchange value of the farmworker is the fact that he can work more diligently on the patron’s command, as he is being paid by him. This critique specifically becomes that of the mistreatment of the farmworker, where as long as he is paid, regardless of how meager his wages might be, he must do as he is told.

A process of dehumanization and alienation, begins with a sense of ownership over the Mexican laborer as an agricultural contraption continues through the Patroncito’s tone of proprietorship as he refers to “*my* Mexicans” [italics added]. This occurs in dialogue where he says, “I love my Mexicans,” and “All my Mexicans love to ride in trucks!” (19). By taking ownership of *his* Mexicans he commodifies them, making it understood that they are simply property – his specifically. The farmworkers are an asset to his agriculture business, and therefore not treated as humans, but simply as tools, whose labor helps him accumulate capital. As further evidence of the racialization and socioeconomic divisions in American capitalism, when the Patroncito says, “Yes, sirree, I sure love my Mexicans, boy!” The Farmworker places

his arm around the Patroncito, but the Patroncito pushes him away and says, “I love ‘em about ten feet away from me, boy” (19). The scene shows Patroncito upholding a strict employer-employee relationship with the Farmworker, and the “love,” that he feels for him, is not as a person, but instead as an object that allows his wealth to grow, reaffirming that in the capitalist society, Mexican farmworkers are only valued and needed for their labor skills. In this way the audience is shown the social positioning of the Mexicano based on their ethnicity which leads to their status as America’s stoop labor.

El Teatro Campesino continues to critique the social positioning that takes place through the Patroncito, as he brags about his standing within capitalism, stating, “I’m an important man, boy! Bank of America, University of California, Safeway stores, I got a hand in all of ‘em. But look I don’t have my shoes shined” (19). El Teatro Campesino exposes the Patroncito as a man who not only profits from agribusiness through the exploitation of the Mexican farmworkers, but is associated with other institutions of capital, such as the bank, the university, and a grocery store chain. The bank representing capitalism, the university an educational institution, where Mexicans are not expected to attend for being considered stoop labor, and, the grocery store chain, where the farmworkers send the produce they pick, and thus become invisible to the American consumer. In doing this, the Patroncito places a sign exchange value on himself as well, in relation to the bank, university, and grocery stores. By commodifying these institutions, he uses them as symbols to promote his own social and financial status.

The Patroncito’s dialogue is a lesson on sign-exchange value, however he attempts to place a positive spin on the condition of the Farmworker’s socioeconomic conditions, in relation to his own within the capitalist system. He argues that the Farmworker has it better, because he does not have to pay taxes, insurance, housing, transportation or even food, all of which are

provided by the Patroncito. Interestingly, the Patroncito begins to bemoan his own expenditures, resulting in a role reversal critique where he tries to outwit the Farmworker and insult his intelligence by explaining himself as the victim of capitalism:

PATRONCITO: Exactly. You got it good! Now look at me, they say I'm greedy, that I'm rich. Well, let me tell you, boy, I got problems. No free housing, for me, Pancho. I gotta pay for what I got. You see that car? How much you think a Lincoln Continental like that costs? Cash! \$12,000! Ever write out a check for \$12,000, boy? (21)

Although within the act the Patroncito begins to downplay his own economic wealth by citing the money he has to invest in his materialistic lifestyle, this dialogue develops the sign-exchange value for the audience, based on the commodities he owns. The Patroncito laments that he does not have free transportation, the Lincoln Continental and the money he spends are intended to show his socioeconomic status, hence using both as a form of sign exchange value. The theme of sign exchange value is used further, as the Patroncito then complains about the "LBJ [Lyndon B. Johnson] ranch style house" he built on a hill, which cost him \$350,000 (22). Valdez continues to use this dialogue to show the audience the sign exchange value, giving credence to the pig mask the Patroncito wears, based on the objects he owns. The car, the house, and the money spent on them, are used to articulate to the audience that the Patroncito is rich, and owns luxurious commodities as a form of sign exchange value, even though he tries to downplay his own socioeconomic privilege.

Valdez, shows sign-exchange value not only through the Patroncito's property, but also through his commodification of people. The Patroncito points out that he has a wife wearing a "mink bikini" that cost him \$5,000 and that "every weekend she wants to take trips. Trips to L.A., San Francisco, Chicago and New York" (22). As Tyson has argued, anything can be commodified when a person relates to another person through sign exchange value. The wife is

commodified when she is used for her sign exchange value, which is based on how attractive she is, crudely showing that the Patroncito can afford a good-looking wife. However, an exchange value also takes place when the price he places on having an attractive wife is paid for in expensive clothing and trips. Therefore, the use-value he finds in her is based on her beauty, and in particular the sign exchange value that her beauty brings him. Following Baudrillard's and Tyson's rationale, the Patroncito uses her beauty to impress society, hence the sign exchange value. But the wife also becomes a signifier of his social stature, when he vocalizes how much he has to pay for her to be his wife. There is also exchange values in that the car provides transportation and the large house provides shelter, but by naming the type of car, clothing, home and their cost, Valdez is able to illustrate the greediness of the Patroncito, for the audience, allowing them to see how he places a sign exchange value on commodities and as a result his socioeconomic status in comparison to that of the Farmworker. The Patroncito embodies a capitalist who commodifies people and objects because he relates to society through his wealth; all things and people are commodities, including women, and Mexican laborers.

However, when these roles are reversed, after handing the pig mask to the Farmworker, the Patroncito begins to see that the exploitation he described as a good fortune for the poor, is far from that. When the Farmworker dons the pig mask he mimics the Patroncito's behavior by yelling, "get to work" and physically abuses him. This results in a scene that shows the inhumane treatment of the Farmworker, which had previously been largely perpetrated by the Patroncito. Aside from this, the Farmworker makes the Patroncito understand his exchange value, when he tells him, "I don't pay you to think. I pay you to work" (25). That line of dialogue perfectly exemplifies the commodification of the Farmworker, and the proletarianization of Mexican laborers, as they are simply paid for the amount of produce they can pick with their bodies.

This is soon followed by the Patroncito's enlightenment of the living conditions and wages he pays his farmworkers:

PATRONCITO: You're nuts! I can't live in those shacks! They got rats, cockroaches. And those trucks are unsafe. You want me to get killed?

FARMWORKER: Then buy a car.

PATRONCITO: With what? How much you paying me here, anyway?

FARMWORKER: Eighty-five cents an hour.

PATRONCITO: I was paying you a buck twenty five!

FARMWORKER: I got problems, boy! Go on welfare! (26)

Having cited the disparity of the shacks, the danger in the trucks used to transport them to work sites, and the low wages, the Patroncito comes to the realization that the conditions he created are less than ideal for any person. Once understanding this, Valdez shows the audience, that even the agribusiness boss, would not live in such conditions for so little pay and calls upon Cesar Chavez and the union for assistance. Once being on the receiving end of the same type of mistreatment received by the Farmworker, the Patroncito begins to understand the extent of the exploitation that farmworkers are being placed through.

Hernández similarly argues that the Patroncito does not understand the injustices experienced by the farm laborers until he exchanges roles with the Farmworker. In his analysis Hernández explores the idea of the structural and systemic issues involved in labor and capital as he argues that, the exchange of roles "subverts the notion that social identity and evaluating frameworks are the result of personal choice, since, as these two protagonists demonstrate, values depend on the fortuitous circumstances of birth" (35). That is to say that the act is an exemplum of the social and class order that people are born into. Having been born into his social class, the Patroncito does not understand the Farmworker's struggles. The Patroncito has a "belief that rural poverty is a pastoral existence free from tax burdens and the great expenses besieging the wealthy" (Hernández 35). Thus, when the Patroncito exchanges roles with the

Farmworker, he is able to gain an “evaluating framework” that changes his perspective on the reality of farmworkers labor conditions. Upon gaining this perspective, the Patroncito goes from complaining about his expenses and telling the Farmworker “you got it good!,” to calling out for César Chávez and yelling for a huelga.

Mundel argues that the abuse perpetrated by the Farmworker “foregrounds the subjugation of the Mexican farm worker as a deeply ingrained component of the farm-labour system regardless of the particular individual in charge” (4). Her argument is valid, but within the context of the acto, Valdez shows that the abuse is perpetrated as a moral act, in order to open the eyes of the exploiter. This is further enhanced at the conclusion of the acto. Once the Patroncito is hauled away, the Farmworker claims he owns all of his material belongings, yet states that he will not keep them, with the exception of the Patroncito’s cigar. The Farmworker could have kept the Patroncito’s capitalist accumulation, commodities which provided sign-exchange value, but rejects them. This of course is not a rejection of capitalism, but a call for reform. Resulting in the lesson of the play: Cesar Chavez and the union will fight for the monetary and humane rights of the farmworker. Valdez also shows that the Farmworker although in the position of authority, does perpetrate abuse within capitalism, but is able to walk away from the wealth. Which in turn also works as a warning to other farmworkers, in that they hope to warn Mexican farm owners to consider the way they too treat their laborers, lest they become that which exploits them, and then find Cesar Chavez and the union picketing their farm.

The commodification of the Mexican farmworker continues to be explored in *La quinta temporada*. *La quinta temporada* follows the character, Farmworker as he has to contend with the challenges that come with picking crops during the changing seasons, as well as the exploitive Patron and Don Coyote characters. The acto begins with the Farmworker offering his

services as a laborer, which is quickly taken advantage of by Don Coyote, a labor contractor. As the act progresses the Farmworker finds himself having to haggle with both the Patrón and Don Coyote who garnish, withhold, and steal his wages, and in return blame the seasons, autumn and winter for his economic woes. Spring, Winter, Autumn, and Summer are allegorical characters, representing “summer rich with fruit, and lean winter threatening any hopes of financial respite” (Huerta 23). Summer and Fall bring wealth, while Winter demands money from the Farmworker and Spring offers him solace. The Farmworker soon finds that in order to confront the Patron and Don Coyote, he must go on a strike. During the strike he gains assistance from the community, through the characters Churches, Unions, and La Raza. After a successful strike the Farmworker manages to get the Patron to sign a union contract, rendering the labor contractor, Don Coyote, obsolete.

Marx established that labor power is the commodity of the worker, yet he should be careful to not become the commodity himself (*Capital* 337). Valdez on other hand shows that for the Patron, Mexican labor power is not the only commodity, he views the Mexican farmworker as his commodity. The commodification of the Mexican worker is complete during the exchange value process, when the patron places a price on the labor power of the farmworker. The commodification of the farmworker does not end there, as it is then shown that the Patron begins to treat him as an agricultural tool. This again returns to Tyson’s argumentation that anyone can be commodified in a social context when they are associated with an exchange value or sign exchange value. However, in *Quinta temporada* sign exchange value is more prominent and exists mainly through the seasons, specifically, Summer and Fall. Once having hired the Farmworker, an actor dressed as Summer strolls in, covered in dollar bills, which he then tries to pick frantically off the character. Of course, Summer is supposed to represent the abundance of

crops that grow, and the perceived capital the Farmworkers can make by picking them, represented by the dollar bills. The sign-exchange value is in the wealth that Summer brings the Farmworker. But he soon finds that his earnings are meager, seeing as to how Don Coyote and the Patron are stealing from him. Valdez makes the sign exchange value equally explicit in relation to Autumn, as Don Coyote implores the Farmworker not to lose hope, and notifies him that “Fall is coming in FAT! Fatter than last summer” (32). By also making Autumn a signifier of wealth he places a sign exchange value on the season in an attempt to make the eager Farmworker continue picking crops. With the promise of wealth that comes with Autumn, the Farmworker is led to believe that he too can become rich on par with his Patron. In this sense the act shows how the Patron and Don Coyote have the power to also commodify the seasons for their own capitalistic interests, by placing a sign exchange value on them via the promise of wealth that they bring with them.

Don Coyote tries to convince the Farmworker further by putting together a capitalistic collage: “You’ll have enough money to buy yourself a new car, a Cadillac! Two Cadillacs! You’ll be able to go to Acapulco! Guadalajara! You’ll be able to send your kids to college! You’ll be able to afford a budget! You’ll be middle-class! You’ll be Anglo! You’ll be rich!” (32). Don Coyote places sign-exchange value on Autumn, by describing the material commodities that can be gained, along with symbols that would give the Farmworker better socioeconomic positioning. For example, he offers Cadillacs as the type of car that he will have, trips he can take and the education he can provide for his children. Ultimately he is describing socioeconomic status as “middle-class” if he picks crops during the Fall season. Through Don Coyote’s dialogue, Valdez frames an “American Dream” that is based on capitalist accumulation, while also noting the racialization of socioeconomic rank. The Farmworker’s

rank, is that of poor working class, yet when Don Coyote says he too can become a part of the middle class, he follows that with “You’ll be Anglo!,” to which he adds “You’ll be rich!” Thus, it is found that the socioeconomic positioning of Anglo people has been established as middle class and rich, with many advantages afforded to them, not typically available to Mexican farmworkers. Therefore, the audience can perceive the racialization process in place, as Anglos are the ethnic group epitomized to have material wealth and social advantages, while the Mexican is typified as the agricultural worker that should strive for capitalist accumulation, even though the agribusiness system is set up against him.

The acto shows that nature itself can become an antagonist within capitalism that affects the Farmworker’s income and survival: “[Autumn and Summer] represented income, Winter signifies expenses with no prospect for remuneration, because there are no crops at this time of year” (Huerta 25). Or as Mundel puts it, “Teatro Campesino’s use of personified seasons to forward the action of the play further serves to highlight oppression in terms of repetitive cycles of abuse and systemic relations of domination” (3). To display the suffering, the Farmworker must endure through meager earnings, El Teatro Campesino has Winter demand money and physically abuse him. In turn, Don Coyote conveniently blames the lack of crops during the winter season, for the Farmworker’s poverty and socioeconomic status.

Aside from trying to hold the seasons accountable for the Farmworker’s economic gain or lack thereof, Don Coyote also accuses the Farmworker of irresponsible money management. He offers the Patrón as an example of a person who understands proper fiscal handling, telling the Farmworker, “You’re stupid. You don’t know how to save your money. Look at my patrón, how come he always has money?” (31). Don Coyote’s cliché Benjamin Franklin perspective (“strap yourself up by the boot straps”) ignores the role he and the Patron have in the

farmworker's poverty, and instead, blame the victim. By blaming the farmworkers of fiscal irresponsibility, Don Coyote ignores the reality – it is the growers and labor contractors' stealing from farmworkers wages that is leaving them broke after a season of picking crops. Don Coyote becomes complicit in the agribusiness system that exploits and oppresses the farmworker economically. Through his own subservience, Don Coyote assists in maintaining the status quo in the agribusiness hierarchy. This points to another cliché that the Teatro Campesino is bringing attention how, “the rich get richer, and the poor get poorer.” Although cliché, it is the “campesino reality” that Valdez had set out to expose to audiences.

The solution to the Farmworker's dilemma is to bring upheaval to the agribusiness system. It begins with Spring offering advice to the Farmworker:

SPRING: There, there, you poor, poor farmworker, here, now, get up. You mustn't let this happen to you again. You've got to fight for your rights!

WORKER: You mean I've got rights?

SPRING: Sure!

WORKER: Ahora, sí. I'm going to fight for my rights like Pancho Villa, Francisco I. Madero, like Emiliano Zapata . . . (35)

Having gained insight from Spring, the Farmworker cites Mexican revolutionary leaders who fought for social justice. The Farmworker then decides to join in this tradition of resistance. This exchange demonstrates a long history of Mexican militancy dating back to the Mexican Revolution. Whereas the Patron and Don Coyote looked forward to the seasons to have the Farmworker pick the crops and then pay him scant wages, and then blaming Winter's arrival, the Farmworker is later able to use the seasons to his own advantage by going on strike. That is to say, that by striking during peak seasons like Summer and Autumn, the Farmworker is able to bring financial hardships onto the Patron and Don Coyote.

The Farmworker's refusal to pick the crops during Summer causes the Patrón's harvest to rot, and he loses money. As he looks to the audience and frantically shouts that he needs “Five

hundred workers,” Summer is shown going by, as the actor walks across the stage until he exits. Valdez makes it a point to show that during the labor struggle, yes, the Patron begins to suffer losses due to the lack of labor, but he also shows, that the Farmworker must endure continued financial hardships, in order to secure a contractual understanding that their labor will be given a fair exchange value. As the strike progresses, the Farmworker must sacrifice a meager, yet steady income, and cope with a lack of sustenance. During the strike he receives institutional assistance from the Churches, represented by an actor that offers, “Wait! I am the Churches. I bring food and money” (37). Soon another institution the Unions and La Raza, both allegorical characters that represent the collective effort involved in the labor struggle, offer more community support. For example, the Unions encourages him with, “I am the Unions. We’re with you brother! Keep fighting” and La Raza offers, “La raza está contigo, mano. Sigue luchando” (38). The communal support is a boon for the Farmworker as Winter soon arrives, and they assist him in repelling its attacks, and survives it.

The Patrón finds himself in the situation that the Farmworker had been in during the previous visit from Winter. He is financially broke and has to survive during the harsh season. His level of socioeconomic suffering is however not on the same scale as that of the Farmworker. The Patron is not shown experiencing cycles of abuse that the Farmworker has had to suffer through, he only suffers through this once. Aside from that, the “systemic relations of domination” do not change during his plight, because the Farmworker is waiting for him to sign a union contract, since he is the one with the land and money needed to pay them. Even after signing a contract the “systemic relations of domination” will not change, because the Patron is Anglo, while the farmworker is a Mexicano within American capitalist society. Meaning that that their social positions have been established through the racialization and proletarianization

process. Nonetheless, once having experienced the Farmworker's financial instability during the changing seasons, the Patron begins to ask for help from the community as well, which they refuse unless he signs a contract. The Patron concedes and signs a contract, through Don Coyote's protests. The Farmworker's strike causes the Patron to experience the socioeconomic struggle that farm laborers must deal with during the lean months of winter, thus humanizing them in his eyes as well. Therefore, while initially the Patron does not want to lose more money over crops that go to waste, he also begins to understand those who struggle financially within capitalism.

Triumphant, the Farmworker celebrates a raise in his income, "restrooms in the fields" and "vacations with pay" (Valdez 39). The Farmworker gained a signed contract with the concessions he demanded, but he is also successful in having Don Coyote removed as a middleman who looked out for his own and the Patron's best interests. This results in the Patrón having to deal directly with the Farmworker's demands, via the union. Having won the strike, the Farmworker rejoices and Don Coyote tries to leave, but Winter catches him, and claims to be the "fifth season." Winter then flips over a sign around his neck, to reveal the words "Social Justice." Once having revealed this, Winter kicks Don Coyote off the stage. Through his strike, the Farmworker manages to bring about change by removing Don Coyote, thus eliminating the exploitation perpetrated by him and the Patrón.

As a result of the play, the audience finds that the commodification of the Mexicano is based on the exchange value of his labor as a farmworker. The Patron learns that he cannot simply dictate the value of the Farmworker's labor and take advantage of his situation. Valdez then shows that the Patron places a sign-exchange value on the seasons, because depending on the season, his crops will be abundant and ready for picking. It is not to say, that the Farmworker

does not also see this sign exchange value in the seasons, especially after Don Coyote points this out to him, and this is ultimately a critique of capitalism and how the rich agribusiness boss looks out for himself and will take advantage of the situation unless the Farmworker stands up for himself by going on strike and getting a signed union contract.

Vietnam campesino and Huelgistas

By 1970 there is a notable shift in Valdez's labor-themed actos. This shift came by way of the incorporation of farmworker characters from more diverse ethnic, gender, age, and geographic backgrounds, most perceptible in *Huelgistas*. Aside from this, Valdez and El Teatro Campesino addressed imperialism in *Vietnam campesino*, where they ended up drawing a comparison between the Mexican campesinos and Vietnamese peasants. Although creating a more diverse cast of characters and including the Vietnam War in one of his actos, both actos remained labor-centric, they just expanded their focus beyond Mexican farmworkers as those affected by capitalism, by including more diverse groups, and even expanded this further in *Vietnam campesino*, by trying to show that U.S. exploitation had an international reach. Following these noticeable changes the audience begins to see the use of exchange value and sign-exchange value is still used in the labor actos, but within different contexts.

Beginning with *Huelgistas*, Valdez diversifies the cast of farmworkers. Where in *Las dos caras del patroncito* and *Quinta temporada* consisted of a character that represented Mexicano farmworkers, in *Huelgistas* there are multiple farmworkers consisting of Campesino Mexicano, Campesino Filipino, Campesino Tejano, Campesina Casada, and Campesina Viejita. This of course is of importance seeing as to how, before the campesino is typically represented as a male character, giving off the illusion that only Mexican males suffered from socioeconomic exploitation in agribusiness. Ethnically, diversity comes through the use of Campesino Filipino,

showing that the struggle began with Filipinos and Mexicanos striking in Delano. But the other Campesinos such as Tejano, Casada and Viejita are all assumed to still be Mexican. This is important nonetheless given that Valdez incorporates Mexican women as farm laborers too, showing them to also be a part of the labor struggle. Viejita, representing an older or elderly female farmworker, obviously shows the audience that socioeconomic struggle also impacts people of all ages that continue to make a living from picking crops. And with Campesino Tejano, Valdez shows that the exploitation of the farmworker is not geographically contained in the state of California, it is far-reaching throughout the Southwest. There is not necessarily an ideological shift, it simply shows that as mentioned by Cardenas de Dwyer and Mundel, Valdez begins to use the farmworker labor struggle to associate not only with Mexicanos, but to make it inclusive to other ethnic groups, women, and geographic locations. The acto itself is still a critique on the exploitation of farmworkers, but with a more diverse body of farmworkers as listed based on the character list. More importantly the acto shows that all of the farmworkers, regardless of their ethnic background, gender or place of origin want the same thing--fair pay for their labor.

Valdez addresses the diversity of working class people in the beginning of his acto, by having striking farmworkers singing a mock version of the song, De Colores: “de colores se visten los hijos, de rancheros ricos,” and adding, “de colores son los campesinos allá en labores” (95). The first line is a discourse on the socioeconomic difference between rich white ranchers, as it refers to the colors of the clothing worn by their children. The second line, references the ethnic, gender and geographic backgrounds of the farmworkers. This of course is an allusion to the class differences that exist between the rich white ranchers and working class people made up of minority farmworkers. While the children of rich white ranchers only have color in their

life due to materialism, via their clothing, the farmworker labor movement is rich in color, based on the diversity of the working class people. Once again, Valdez provides the audience with a sign exchange value by referencing the colorful clothing of ranchers' children with a comparison of the farmworkers on strike whose color represents the diversity of the members in the labor struggle.

The acto has a similar make-up as *Las dos caras del patroncito* and *Quinta temporada*, in that the protagonists are farmworkers, and the antagonists are the boss, Ranchero and Campesino Coyote. But in the opening of *Huelgistas* the farmworkers have already gained agency and are on strike, rejecting the commodification of their labor power which they feel is not given a fair exchange value. In its fifty-four lines of dialogue, the play encompasses the spirit of unity and resistance associated with the farmworker struggle and the United Farm Workers union. Since the acto is so short, the use of exchange value is only visible through the Ranchero's anger over the striking workers who should be picking his crops since he pays them to do so. Showing that exchange value is placed on a diverse group of farmworkers, making the working class struggle more expansive. He is equally angered with Campesino Coyote, who does not put a halt to the strike and even argues, "You're supposed to be such a hot labor contractor. Earn the money I pay!" (96). Of course, here the exchange value of Campesino Coyote is known, since he is paid to contract laborers, but the Ranchero also wants to use him to quell the strike, and get them to go back to work. Campesino Coyote understands that his exchange value is dependent on whether he can convince the farmworkers to stop striking, which he is of course unable to do.

It is important for Valdez and El Teatro Campesino to illustrate how they and all working class people have their labor commodified. For example, Campesina Casada adds to the conversation about the reasons for the strike, saying, "Nos dicen los patroncitos que el trabajo

siempre se hace con bastantes esquirolas”² (96), noting that growers try to use the threat of scab labor to break strikes. By acknowledging that the ranchers use scab labor to continue picking their crops, they are showing the dual exchange value of the scabs, in that they are paid not only to continue harvesting the crops, but also to break the strike. Campesino Tejano also contributes to the discourse, offering, “Y mandan enganchadores pa’ engañar trabajadores que se venden por frijoles”³ (96), making the audience aware of the labor contractors’ role in the exploitation of the farmworkers. As a result the farmworkers make their labor struggle and demands known to the Ranchero, Campesino Coyote, and simultaneously to the audience.

Initially as the Ranchero enters, the strikers shout their demands:

Campesina Casada: We want justice!
Campesina Viejita: And port-a-potties in the fields!
Campesino Filipino: Vacation with pay!
Campesino Mexicano: And a union contract! (96)
[My translation]

The above lines capture the intent of El Teatro Campesino and the farmworkers they represent, as each character shouts for justice through the betterment of their working conditions. This does not stop the Ranchero from attempting to bring a halt to the strike. He demands that Campesino Coyote do something about it, which proves futile as the striking farmworkers heckle him and reject his offers. After chasing off the Ranchero and Campesino Coyote, the strikers chant “¡Abajo los contratistas! ¡Arriba los huelgistas! ¡Que se acabe el esquirol!”⁴ (97). And thus the play ends, showing that until the strikers have their demands met, the struggle will continue.

² The bosses tell us that the work can be done with plenty of scabs.

³ And they [the bosses] send labor contractors to manipulate workers to sell themselves for beans.

⁴ Down with contractors! Power to strikers! Bring an end to the scab!

In *Vietnam campesino*, as mentioned earlier, the audience begins to see Valdez's ideological evolution regarding labor and capitalism. In this acto he does focus on the commodification of Mexicano farmworkers, but he goes beyond the campo, so to speak, by simultaneously looking at the commodification of Mexicans not just as farmworkers, but also as expendable bodies that are sent off to die on behalf of the United States during the Vietnam War. This of course is not surprising, since this was during the height of Chicano/a concientizacion, where Chicanos/as had begun to organize against the Vietnam War. This would lead to the formation of the Chicano Moratorium Committee which then organized demonstrations in Los Angeles. This resistance to the Vietnam War, was due in part to the fact that "Undereducated, and often ignorant of their rights, Mexicanos were prime targets for draft boards" (Gonzales 214). More importantly Chicanos/as began to consider the socioeconomic component which, Gonzales notes, "Even more than most wars, Vietnam was fought by poor people," and yet "the poor of the nation, were the individuals who had gained the least from it" (214-215). This class scapegoating is of course a specific point that Valdez attacks in the acto. Valdez had already written other actos that contributed to different aspects of the Movement, such as education (*No saco nada de la escuela*) for example, but *Vietnam campesino*, is unique in that it is a labor-centric acto, that manages to have another facet of the Chicano Movement incorporated into it. This is of importance, due to Valdez's broadening criticism of capitalism, in the sense that, Mexicanos are shown not only having to struggle with a ranch patron, but they are also struggling with a larger perpetrator of their exploitation: the U.S. government. Aside from this, beyond critiquing capitalism, Valdez also offers criticism on imperialism, by using a campesino character, that eventually joins the military for what he believes is his own advancement, but turns out to be simply used as a tool for the U.S. armed struggle. All this in turn shows that

Valdez begins to think more systemically about capitalism, in that the farmworker does not only suffer exploitation in the agricultural fields, but also within the larger U.S. society. Valdez then applies these ideas on an international scale, by eventually comparing Mexican farmworkers with Vietnamese peasants and the oppression they face from the U.S.

The acto begins with as Campesino Father, Campesino Mother, Campesino Son, and Dolores Huelga find themselves in a struggle against Butt Anglo, Little Butt, Don Coyote, and the government, as represented by General Defense. The acto continues to address the farmworker/grower relationship and workers' rights issues, along with the United States war in Vietnam. In the beginning, General Defense advises Butt Anglo to portray the strikers as communists similar to the Vietnamese, in order to end the strike. The acto concludes showing that General Defense and Butt Anglo work in conjunction with one another, to help further each other's agenda. The agenda consisted of the growers' continued exploitation of farmworkers, and the government's illegal war. Ultimately labor and anti-war activists find that they need to unite in order to assist one another in their struggles.

The commodification of the Mexican farmworker is made apparent early in the acto, as General Defense explains to Butt Anglo that "the Dow Chemical Corporation has just created a new lettuce picker." When asked what it looks like, General Defense describes it "Like a Mexican about three feet tall, with arms four feet long. Runs on diesel," and then names it a "greaser" (101). The machine that is described is simply a replacement for Mexican labor, since in the view of Butt Anglo, Farmworkers that are striking do not have a use value, let alone an exchange value in relation to his crops getting picked. But, of course this, is also Valdez acknowledging that, ultimately, Butt Anglo and the U.S. government, commodify Mexican bodies and labor, by treating them as nothing more than automatons. By commodifying them as

agricultural machines, Valdez shows the audience that both the ranchers and the government are the ones that decide the exchange value of their labor, while disregarding their humanity.

Deciding the exchange value of Mexican labor is apparent, but Valdez also shows that the rancher and general, devalue the Mexican body, by inserting a criticism of pesticides. El Teatro Campesino addresses the misuse of pesticides in a scene that opens with the farmworkers refusal to work due to Little Butt's crop dusting. In the face of farmworker resistance, Butt Anglo refers to the pesticides as "country smog," and tries to downplay their effect:

BUTT: Is that all? Why I thought it was something serious. Nothing to worry about, amigos. Just a few chlorinated hydrocarbons, mixed in with some organo phosphates. Sounds like a new breakfast food, don't it? It sure does. Might even go good with your frijoles, mix it in like chile powder. It's harmless. (106)

By speaking dismissively about the chemicals in the pesticides, going so far as to referring to them as a "new breakfast food" for the farmworkers, El Teatro Campesino shows, that the rancher is ignoring their well-being, and thus their humanity. He assumes that since Mexican farmworkers are willing to work under any conditions and accept low wages, they would not complain about being sprayed with the pesticides. Thereby showing that a Mexican body is commodified as the "lettuce picker," but its value, being that it is a Mexican is very minimal and therefore replaceable, as any machine would be if it were to break down. Valdez reveals how little the health of the farmworker is valued, if at all, due to this historical sense amongst American ranchers that there is a surplus of Mexican labor at their disposal.

Valdez and El Teatro Campesino further address the devaluation and disposability of Mexicanos, as he begins to shift attention to their use in the Vietnam war. Huerta lays out *Vietnam campesino's* purpose as: "'The Military-Agricultural Complex" portrays the machinations devised by agribusiness and the military-industrial complex to defeat the lettuce boycott promoted by the United Farmworkers Union" (87). Of the four actos, this one shows a

greater awareness of the role of the Chicano within about the agribusiness system and the larger U.S. society by connecting it with the government and military. Valdez does this to expose both the agribusiness and military agenda concurrently. The acto aside from being propaganda for the United Farm Workers union, is also offering scathing commentary about U.S. imperialism and is thus anti-imperialist propaganda as well. To deny the influence of the Vietnam War on Luis Valdez's *Vietnam campesino*, would be similar to overlooking the inherent criticism of agribusiness, of the acto. Similar to U.S. imperialistic interests in trying to fight in Vietnam, in regards to the ideological empirical expansionism, corporate agribusiness growers were interested in retaining as much land as possible to grow a surplus of crops and gain the wealth for that one grower. In this manner, the theme of imperialism intersects with the discourse regarding the role of the United States in Vietnam, but also with the role of corporate agribusiness owners in the United States.

Through exchanges between the General and Butt Anglo, it becomes clear that the imperialistic agenda, extends beyond the taking of land, and building empire, it is just as much about imposing U.S. ideology, economy and culture. This can be best described as “neoimperialism, of cultural, economic, and political dependency, which have replaced the classic versions of territorial imperialism from the nineteenth and early twentieth century” (Harlow 156). The conversion of the Mexican body into agricultural tool and militaristic weapon occurs through this neoimperialist ideological initiative. Luis Valdez, effectively uses discussions between General Defense and Butt Anglo to show both the growers point of view of Cesar Chavez and the UFW as troublemakers, but also the military's perspective of the Mexican as cannon fodder, for their imperialist war:

GENERAL: What trouble? Mexicans are pouring into the army. We just give'em a pretty little uniform, a few pesos, a blessing from mamacita, and wham-o, they're on the frontlines. Those boys are just dying to show their machismo.
 BUTT: Okay, okay, but you still need a Mexican-American leader. One who will unite all Mexicans, instill them with a fighting spirit, send them marching down the road to freedom, have them willing to fight and die for the American ideals.
 GENERAL: Who? Trini Lopez? Herb Alpert? Ricardo Montalban? Jim Plunkitt? Who is it?
 BUTT: Cesar Chavez!
 GENERAL: It's a deal. (*Extends hand to conclude deal. Stops.*) Cesar Chavez! You trying to be funny? We don't need his type in the Army.
 BUTT: Do you think we need him Salinas? (101)

Through this dialogue, Valdez shows the audience that economic struggles and a need to exhibit their courageousness or manhood *sic*: machismo, are reasons that Chicanos wrongly decide to join the military and fight in the war. Thus through the neoimperialist schema, the military inverts a Mexican cultural characteristic, like machismo, and uses it to appeal to young Mexican men that want to prove their manhood. Also typical of neoimperialism, is the exploitation of Mexican working class men and their economic needs, by offering them “a few pesos,” to join the United States military. In this way, the exchange shows, that the government places a use value and then exchange value on the Mexicano. In relation to the war, the use value placed on their body, becomes that of soldier for the U.S. imperialist agenda, while the exchange value of their life, is a “few pesos” and a military uniform.

Additionally, Valdez shows the devaluation of a Mexicano's life, as he shows a scene in which Campesino Son struggles with the personification of the draft, which is represented by an actor wearing a death mask, and using the American flag as a shroud. The Draft pantomimes a fishing rod which he uses to hook Campesino Son and forcibly drag him into the war.

Campesino Son's situation is contrasted alongside Butt Anglo's son, Little Butt, who is also about to be dragged into the draft, but is saved by General Defense. The general scolds the Draft, explaining, “What's the matter with you, Draft? Haven't I told you to stick with minorities? Go

draft some Mexicans, some Indians, some Blacks, some Asians, some Puerto Ricans. Now get out of here” (109). This quick exchange regarding the bias of the draft, reaffirms Gonzales’ earlier point, about it only impacting those that are poor working class people. As the scene shows, the Draft walks away with the son of Mexicano farmworkers, yet the son of a white rancher is able to dodge the draft, through his father’s ties to government officials. Valdez does this to further expose the extent of capitalist bias that discriminates based on race, where, those who are white and rich, manage to receive special treatment, while Mexicanos are commodified and expendable. Therefore, there is exchange value in the relationship between Butt Anglo and General Defense. The exchange value of their relationship is based on what they can do for one another, and for capitalist and imperialist agendas. Butt Anglo offers him farmworkers that are on strike or might be fed up working in the fields, while General Defense offers to remove those striking farmworkers and also protection for his son, by keeping him from being drafted. By requesting that the Draft pick up any number of minorities for the war effort, the exchange value placed on their expendability is apparent, since they are othered. By showing how General Defense, a representation of the American government, protects the son of the rich white rancher, it then shows that the Mexicano’s life (or that of any other minority), is valued far less than that of a rich white male. Valdez tries to illustrate further toward the conclusion of the play, after Campesino Son is killed while fighting in Vietnam, that even in death the Mexican body is commodified. General Defense uses the death of Campesino Son to give it a sign-exchange value that plays into his ideological agenda. After the death, the general gives the campesino family, a purple heart for their son’s sacrifice, then uses his death to convince the father to hate the Vietnamese, going as far as asking Campesino Father if he has any more children to send to the

fodder, “Got any more young Chicanos at home?” (117). Thus continuing the commodification of Mexicans to continue fighting his war.

Eventually, the Mexican farmworkers are shown alongside Vietnamese farmworkers, and Campesino Father acknowledges to his wife, “Oye vieja, son iguales que nosotros,” meaning that they are campesinos like themselves, yet they are also labeled communists for fighting for their rights. This association of both Mexicanos and the Vietnamese as campesinos is acknowledged by the General as well, as he tells Butt Anglo’s son, “You spray pesticides and I bomb Vietnam” (119). Both Chicanos and the Vietnamese are “campesinos” not in the sense that they do farm work, but in the sense that they are poor working class people, whose bodies and socioeconomic status is devalued within American capitalist and imperialist schemas. This acto is a multi-faceted critique that incorporates a criticism of the use of pesticides, capitalism, and imperialism, while also showing how the American government and ranchers try demonize any minorities engaged in a class struggle. This is all the more obvious as it is shown that Mexicanos are racialized and expected to keep quiet and simply work in the fields; but as these Mexicanos begin to stand up for their rights, in an exaggerated conspiratorial tone, it is shown that the government tries to intervene when they challenge the status quo by trying to funnel them into military combat to dwindle their numbers down. In this way, Valdez manages to coalesce many different aspects of the Chicano Movement within this acto. Which in turn shows that Valdez used his skills as a playwright to not only assist in the labor movement, but also used his labor-themed actos to address working class exploitation as multiethnic issue alongside the far reaching effects of systemic U.S. capitalism.

By the time *Huelgistas* and *Vietnam Campesino* are written, Valdez and El Teatro Campesino interpret the farmworker labor struggle not simply as a Chicano/a issue, but a

multiethnic issue. As mentioned earlier, in *Huelgistas* there are other ethnic groups represented in the acto. Similarly, in *Vietnam campesino*, there is recognition that the Vietnamese look like Mexican campesinos, and although the Vietnamese are not facing labor struggle, El Teatro Campesino identifies with them as victims of U.S. political machinations. There is a recognition that class is the common denominator for all minorities regardless of their ethnicity. Viewing the farmworker struggle through a social class lens offers an inclusive framework, which El Teatro Campesino is able to provide when they include other ethnic groups in their actos. Identifying with working class ethnic groups transnationally is important in the face of global labor exploitation.

Class is an overarching unifying factor, because working class laborers are exploited regardless of their skin tone. It is recognized in *Vietnam campesino*, in that the United Farm Workers strike in Delano was a concerted effort organized by both Filipino and Mexican laborers. Similarly, well over a decade before the Delano strike, Anglo and Mexican miners had united to strike against the Empire Zinc Company in 1951; which resulted in the release of *Salt of the Earth* (1954), a film based on that strike. El Teatro Campesino does well in recognizing the importance of class solidarity which incorporates working class people from different backgrounds.

Conclusion

There is not enough scholarship on El Teatro Campesino's labor-themed actos. Their working-class provenance is at times disregarded or lost. *Las dos caras del patroncito* has received the most attention by scholars, in no small part due to it being one of the first actos performed, but its criticism of agribusiness, social order, race and class relations is not fully considered when it is analyzed. These issues become marginalized in scholarship.

The scholarship on Luis Valdez's labor-themed actos suffers from similar historical amnesia found in the work of traditional American scholars. Traditional American scholars forget or omit the narrative of minorities, when discussing U.S. history or literature. The Mexican working class and their literature in turn becomes marginalized by Chicano/a scholars that do not take the time to explore the importance of the actos as products of the Mexican farmworker and the Mexican working class in general. *La quinta temporada*, *Vietnam Campesino*, and *Huelgistas*, are actos that are important and should be considered alongside *Las dos caras del patroncito*, when examining El Teatro Campesino and their role as a voice for the Mexican farmworker.

It is beneficial to view the actos through Marxist concepts such as use-value and exchange value, which have been expanded by Baudrillard and Tyson through their own ideas regarding commodification, exchange value and sign exchange value in relation to a given social context. It is through their ideas on commodification, exchange value and sign exchange value that an audience becomes aware of how Valdez and El Teatro Campesino use the antagonistic social relationship between the Farmworker, Patron and Don Coyote to show how it is not only labor power that is commodified, it is also the Mexican farmworker himself that goes through a process of commodification based on exchange value and objectification. Aside from this, the actos also show, how the patron, as a capitalist relates to most people and objects based on their sign exchange value as well, that is to say he relates to certain commodities based on how they can be used as signifiers of his wealth and socioeconomic status. By showing the patrones wealth through the material things own and their money, Valdez and El Teatro Campesino provide the sign exchange value for the audience show capitalist greed alongside their treatment of the Mexican farmworker. As a result Valdez's labor themed actos provide nuanced criticisms of

American capitalism, that extend beyond the agricultural field, and into a larger condemnation of U.S. exploitation of all working class people.

Chapter 2

Looking Beyond the Produce: Defetishizing your Fruits and Vegetables In Viramontes'

Under the Feet of Jesus and Jimenez's *The Circuit*

Introduction

The texts studied in this chapter, Helena María Viramontes' *Under the Feet of Jesus* (1995) and Francisco Jiménez's *The Circuit* (1997) are told from the perspective of Mexican migrant farmworker children. The authors give a voice and soul to all farmworkers, children and adults alike in their narratives of migrant agricultural workers. Viramontes and Jiménez's novels reflect characteristics of Marx's ideas on commodity fetishism, because the authors narrate the literal aches and pains that Mexican farmworker children and adults must endure in the areas of substandard housing, working conditions, paltry wages, pesticide use, and criminalization. Commodity fetishism as defined by Marx, "has its origin [. . .] in the peculiar social character of the labour that produces [commodities]" (155). Frederic L. Bender explains that by "the social character of the labour," Marx is referring to the "social role of human labor as the basis of the (exchange-) value of commodities" which people fail to see within the commodity itself (335). In other words, the consumer does not see the labor or for that matter the laborer within a given commodity in the marketplace, thus the consumer fetishizes the commodity by not seeing the role of the laborer and his/her labor power. In the context of Viramontes' and Jiménez's novels and farmwork, this means that at a grocery store, consumers only see the fruits and vegetables, but not the Mexican farmworker who picked them. Per Marx's explanation, as commodities, fruits and vegetables are fetishized by the consumer, because s/he does not take into account the role of the Mexican laborer and his/her labor power. Thus, by showing the realities of the farmworker laborer's life, the authors defetishize farm commodities, and as a result make

Mexican agricultural laborers and their struggles visible and pertinent for their audience which consists of readers who are also consumers. This chapter shows that the authors engage in the defetishitization of farm commodities through their concrete descriptions of the difficulty of labor, also by showing that agricultural labor is also done by children and their struggle with poverty after their wages are paid. The narratives also show how consumers fetishize fruits and vegetables they purchase when they do not take into consideration the Mexican worker that picked for them the farm commodities.

Helena María Viramontes was born and raised in East Los Angeles, California, and her publications include most notably *The Moths and Other Stories* (1985), *Under the Feet of Jesus* (1995), and *Their Dogs Came With Them* (2007) (Mermann-Jozwiak and Sullivan 79). Francisco Jiménez, born in Tlaquepaque, Mexico, in 1943, refers to *The Circuit: Stories from the Life of a Migrant Child* (1997), as a semiautobiographical work, which was followed by the sequels *Breaking Through* (2001), *Reaching Out* (2008), and *Taking Hold: From Migrant Childhood to Columbia University* (2015). Both authors worked in agriculture at one point in their lives: Viramontes, picking grapes in California's Central Valley (Mermann-Jozwiak and Sullivan 79), and Jiménez picking a variety of crops throughout southern and central California.

A brief summary of the texts is provided before analyzing them, in order to offer context. *Under the Feet of Jesus* revolves around Estrella, Petra, Perfecto and Alejo. The novel takes place in the 1970s and follows fifteen year-old Estrella's family after they have been evicted from a farmworker camp because of a physical altercation between her and another young girl named Maxine. From there the narrator delves into the subconscious of individual characters and their thoughts regarding their current plights, whether personal or external factors. Far from being simply a character driven novel, Viramontes best captures the plight of the farmworker

life, by describing their environment and the physicality of the farmwork labor they endure. Aside from this, the reader is also expected to pay attention to unseen systemic structures, such as education and religion, so as to fully grasp the predicaments faced in the farmworker life cycle.

The Circuit by Francisco Jiménez is a semiautobiographical novel that like *Under the Feet of Jesus* narrates the farmworker experience from the perspective of a child. The title refers to the seasonal harvesting circuit that the migrant farmworker family must travel. In the novel, Panchito recounts the experiences of his farmworker family which consists of Mamá, Papá, Roberto, Torito, Rorra, Rubén, and Trampita. The novel is wrought with scenes describing farmworker housing, which consists of barracks, the physical toll of the labor, and also a consistent fear of deportation due to a lack of proper documentation.

In many Chicano/a literary works that narrate the labor struggles of the protagonists, the perspective of the children has often times been left out. However, one of the earliest and most notable Chicano/a literary novels published, *Y no se lo trago la tierra . . .* (1971) by Tomás Rivera, did use a young farmworker protagonist. Since the publication of Rivera's novel, *Under the Feet of Jesus* and *The Circuit*, offer two examples of the same labor struggles migrant children experienced. Their perspective is important in acknowledging the overall historical and generational narrative of Chicano/a labor struggles as represented in literature, because children have contributed to their families' struggles for economic survival and the American labor narrative as well.

Viramontes' and Jiménez's texts would benefit specifically from an analysis of commodity fetishism in order to discuss how the writers expose readers and consumers to facing the invisible part—the Mexican laborer's struggles—of the produce they purchase at the grocery

store. Étienne Balibar further defines commodity fetishism as “the idea that the capitalist mode of production is the only one in which exploitation (the extortion of surplus-value), i.e. the specific form of the social relation that binds classes together in production, is ‘mystified,’ and ‘fetishized’ into the form of a relation between the things themselves” (217). A given commodity is fetishized, whether it is a wooden chair, a coat, or more relevant to Viramontes and Jimenez’s text, fresh fruits and vegetables, while the Mexican farmworker is overlooked. For example in the introduction of “The Fetishism of Commodities and the Secret Thereof,” Marx discusses the production of a wooden chair to illustrate how the chair becomes a commodity that has a value placed on it, while ignoring the role of the producer (154). David Harvey uses a head of lettuce in place of a chair, to explain commodity fetishism:

Hidden within this market exchange of things [money for the head of lettuce] is a relation between you, the consumer, and the direct producers—those who labored to produce the lettuce [. . .] The end result is that our social relation to the laboring activities of others is disguised in the relationships between things. You cannot, for example, figure out in the supermarket whether lettuce has been produced by happy laborers, miserable laborers, slave laborers, wage laborers or some self-employed peasant. The lettuces are mute, as it were, as to how they were produced and who produced them. (39-40)

Harvey states that “fetishism is an unavoidable condition of a capitalistic mode of production” (41), however the argument in this chapter, is that Viramontes and Jiménez have written narratives about the role of Mexican laborers and their labor power in order to defetishize farm commodities, thus inserting the social relation back into the exchange of commodities.

In relation to Viramontes and Jiménez, Marx “demonstrates how, at the heart of consumption, there lies an implicit denial of forces and the relations of production that make commodity consumption possible in the first place” (Cluely and Dunne 253). Cluely and Dunne further explain that as a result of this behavior, “At the very moment that we consume, Marx explains, we relate to the object consumed on its own terms. We mistakenly see it as a self-

sustained and self-sustaining object imbued with qualities, characteristics and properities of its own. We thereby make a *fetish* of the commodity” (253).

By exchanging capital or cash, for a product (commodity), the consumer only sees the product (commodity), but ignores or is apathetic to the laborer and conditions that produced it. The value or for that matter the struggle placed on the farmworker and his/her labor is ignored by the consumer. Through their novels, Viramontes and Jiménez expose the consumer to how this fetishization displaces the role of the Mexican farmworker, and they establish the humanized immigrant at the center. This means that the consumer at the grocery store simply sees the baskets of strawberries organized perfectly, awaiting to be purchased for their consumption. The consumer will also see a cartoonish company logo along with a bland font. But aside from this, the consumer does not see the Mexican laborer hunched over from sunrise to sunset, picking the strawberries, placing them in the baskets, and walking them over to the truck that will then transport them to the grocery store.

Earlier scholarship on *Under the Feet of Jesus* shows scholars focusing on the novel’s feminist overtones, such as the work done by Carmen Flys-Junquera and Deborah L. Madsen. Mitchum Huehls and Jeeyun Lim centered their analyses around the author’s linguistic choices, which can either show that characters like Estrella are empowered through her bilingualism, or that Viramontes intentionally plays with omission, to allow an audience to assume whether pesticides have a true impact on the health of farmworkers or not. Outside of what has practically become the gender role issues and linguistics analysis of the novel, Dan Latimer indirectly addresses the role of class positioning, by arguing that the author is simply holding herself up as an example of an exceptional Chicana who was able to break herself free from the farmworker

life of struggle, and has chosen to use her position as a writer to criticize other Chicanos/as who have not done the same.

Aside from Latimer's assessment about the author's intended message for her Chicano/a audience, only three other scholars address working class struggles in the novel found within capitalism. Anne Shea for example, argues that Viramontes is concerned with Mexicans that are accepted as laborers, but still criminalized for being Mexican. Shea further contends that the author, "offers tools for intervention into the current legal and representational practices that seek to define migrant workers through essentializing race and gender stereotypes" through the publication of her novel (124). Marilyn Mcentyre also offers a unique approach to the socioeconomic representation of Mexican farmworker struggles, in her article, "Sickness in the System: The Health Costs of the Harvest." Mcentyre essentially argues that literary works like *Under the Feet of Jesus* are "political and moral appeals" to a readership that does "not see or acknowledge the sacrifices sustained by the those whose undercompensated labors are an integral part of our food systems" (97). Thus both Shea and Mcentyre essentially argue for the importance of Viramontes' novel as a tool that assists in making the farmworker visible. In this sense both scholars present a case for commodity fetishism, in that by fetishizing farm commodities, the consumer does not see how the Mexican farmworker is criminalized for being represented as an immigrant, or their struggle to gain adequate social services such as health care.

The scholars that have come the closest to applying a Marxist approach to Viramontes' novel, are Scott A. Beck and Dolores E. Rangel in their article, "Representations of Mexican American Migrant Childhood in Rivera's ...*Y no se lo tragó la tierra* and Viramontes' *Under the Feet of Jesus*." Beck and Rangel explore the class struggles represented in Viriamontes' novel by

analyzing the literature through a historical dialectical lens. They focus specifically on the historical, social and political influences on the author. They point to the anti-immigration and anti-bilingual education sentiment and the Los Angeles riots of the 1990s as influences on Viramontes. A period of time that “forced many Chicano activists into defensive postures, scrambling to minimize the damage to what had been won a generation earlier” (Beck and Rangel 18). The scholars draw a connection between the people who took action against injustices in the 1990s and Estrella, a character that also finds it necessary to take the initiative on behalf of her family due to systemic injustices. Beck and Rangel provide fascinating ways to think about Viramontes’ novel, but due to their focus on language and systemic gender role inequalities, they gloss over the inherent systemic labor injustices confronted by farmworkers within capitalism. *Under the Feet of Jesus* is much more than a story about how Chicanas have to fend for themselves due to unreliable men, or an exploration of how young farmworker children understand language so as to better survive in an English-speaking society. At the novel’s core is the farmworker class struggle.

The criticism on Francisco Jiménez’s text, *The Circuit* is limited to a handful of reviews published in education centric journals and an interview with the author. Deanna Day’s interview with Jiménez offers important insight regarding his reason for writing the book, which is also the intent of this dissertation: to show a mainstream audience the typically unknown experience of the Mexican farmworker. Mary-Ferger and Reynaldo Reyes III refer to the book as “poignant” and focus on the importance of teaching culturally relevant literature to their students. Angela Haynes, also wrote a review of the book, but delves deeper into the social issues explored by the author: “By classifying Jiménez’s book as “multicultural children’s literature,” the literary category obfuscates issues of social power and privilege, and the characters’ social

circumstances are rendered private, personal, and cultural, neglecting to link individual lives to power structures” (176). Haynes’ point is extremely important and speaks to the misuse or lack of criticism relevant to the book, because since its publication it has been marketed toward elementary, junior high school and high school classrooms with predominantly Mexican-American students. In this way there is also commodity fetishism, for although Jiménez’s book is used as a tool to educate its audience about the farmworker experience, the book simply becomes a commodity as it is used in schools as “culturally relevant” material, ignoring the importance of class struggle displayed in the book. Equally, distressing is the lack of scholarly criticism that could benefit from exploring Jiménez’s narrative by taking into consideration the Mexican farmworker as an ethnic class that is otherwise invisible to the consumer and mainstream audience. That is to say that by focusing on the novel in terms of the Mexican farmworker as an ethnic class, it becomes possible to begin concentrating on the racialization and proletarianization of Mexican workers. As an ethnic class, Mexican farmworkers have struggles that are historically specific to them and the work they do. By analyzing the novel as a production about Mexicans as an ethnic class, it allows the reader to consider issues relating to class and exploitation within capitalism.

A close analysis of Viramontes and Jiménez’s text, shows the reader that the authors demystify or defetishize farm commodities through their descriptions of the physically taxing labor, working conditions and socioeconomic injustice the Mexican farmworker endures. By defetishizing the produce, through their narrative, the authors make the audience aware of the farmworker struggle. Far from being narratives of victimization, the stories bring awareness to this struggle so that the audience later as the consumer, understands, recognizes and appreciates that their farm commodities do not magically appear in the grocery store or the weekly farmer’s

market. By defetishizing farm commodities, the authors manage to make Mexican farmworkers and their struggles visible for their audience. They use their literature, as Shea and Mcentyre argued, as a tool to further awareness of the socioeconomic injustices faced by Mexican agricultural workers.

Commodity Fetishism and the Unseen Farmworker Struggles

It is important to remember that fruits and vegetables are commodities that are then sold to the consumer at the produce section of their local grocery store. Like any other commodities it is important to consider Peter Knapp and Alan J. Spector's observation: "Now wasn't it nice of someone to raise the sheep and dig the iron and make the machines that knitted your sweater?" (116). The same applies to the fruits and vegetables that the consumer purchases at the grocery store: Wasn't it nice to have an underpaid Mexican farmworker child (you cannot see), work long hours to to pick the fruit and vegetables that you will use in a recipe? For this reason it is important to read *Under the Feet of Jesus* as "unabashedly didactic—even confrontational—in [its] address of the reader or viewer," requiring that they "sustain [their] gaze at the plight of the poor" (Mcentyre 98). But beyond this, the reader is expected to look past their consumer gaze, which allows them to simply fetishize the farm produce, and not look at the origin—the distressed Mexican bodies and psyche that must do the labor but also navigate exploitive social structures. Thus in relation to Mexican farmworkers commodity fetishism occurs, when consumers purchase fruit or vegetables from the grocery store and only acknowledge the commodity, while being ignorant of the Mexican labor that went into picking those commodities and placing them in the store. The result is the commodity fetishism of the fruits and vegetables, a process that makes the Mexican farm laborer invisible to society.

Fetishizing the farm commodities is no less similar to the social positioning process that began in the late 1800s, when Americans began to see Mexicans as their ideal stoop labor. By applying foreignness and othering the Mexican, they become the constructed labor force. And within capitalism, specifically within farm work, their labor becomes an invisible commodity. This is no different than the stereotyping that Charles Ramirez Berg found of Latinos in film, where he discovered stereotypes to be “conveniently ahistorical, selectively omitting the out-group’s social, political, and economic group history” (17). The use of stereotypes have then historically contributed to the U.S. process of establishing and normalizing the Mexican as America’s laborer. The normalization through stereotypes then supports Mexican racialization and proletarianization, making their history of struggles invisible. By controlling the image of the Mexican, or in this case the Mexican as other, U.S. hegemony is also able to reinterpret and redefine their culture. In doing so, as noted by Juan Poblete and Santiago Castro Gomez, “culture” was a useful tool that helped the “colonial difference” machine enable damaging representations of Mexicans, which in turn assisted in the “functioning of the modern system” (252). Such use of culture as a tool of difference was useful not only in making Mexicanos the ideal labor force for capitalist interests, but it also helped maintain them politically and socially invisible. As Lazaro Lima has observed, Mexicans are not invisible when “they are needed for labor or war, in which case they are welcome into the national fold through the elusive embrace of an exhausted American dream” (13). But once visible due to an American need for Mexican bodies to supply work, they then become invisible again as the consumer fetishizes the farm commodities. Therefore what Ramirez Berg, Poblete, and Lima discuss in terms of “in/visibility” in the context of modernity and capitalism, is here discussed as the fetishization of farm commodities and the defetishization of said commodities. It should be understood that in the

context of these texts discussed here, the fetishitization of farm commodities is what in turn makes the Mexican farmworkers invisible to the consumer; and their status as other or foreign then further leads to their social and political invisibility and negation as part of the work force, lacking labor rights. The authors provide texts that defetishize farm commodities and in turn bring visibility to the farmworkers.

Viramontes engages in the defetishitization of farm commodities early in chapter two of her novel when she offers deliberate descriptions of the heat and physicality involved in picking grapes that will be dried into raisins. Viramontes contextualizes the relation of Sun Maid Raisins to the market in this way:

Carrying the full basket to the paper was not like the picture on the red raisin boxes Estrella saw in the markets, not like the woman wearing a fluffy bonnet, holding out the grapes with her smiling, ruby lips, the sun a flat orange behind her. The sun was white, and it made Estrella's eyes sting like an onion, and the baskets of grapes resisted her muscles, pulling their magnetic weight back to earth. (49-50)

The “red raisin boxes” with the “woman wearing a fluffy bonnet” described by the author is easily associated with the Sun Maid Raisins company, since they are packaged in red boxes and their logo consists of a woman in a fluffy bonnet. In the scene, Estrella reflects on the irony of the raisin company logo, because the woman in the fluffy bonnet, hides the ethnicity, age, and material reality of the person picking the grapes. If a person goes into a grocery store, they will see the Sun Maid Raisins product, with its cartoonish logo showing a pastoral image of a woman in a red bonnet smiling while carrying a basket of grapes with a large yellow sun behind her. Because the commodity—the box of Sun Maid Raisins—has been fetishized, the consumer, does not think about the reality of the farmworker, as described by Viramontes: the actual heft of the basket of grapes and the intense heat they have to work under. Viramontes also shows her audience that the Sun Maid Raisins mascot, or the “woman in the red bonnet,” is a false

representation that does not show the involvement of the Mexican child laborer as a component in the raisin-making process.

Viramontes continues to defetishize the boxes of raisins and the myth of the “woman in the red bonnet” by describing the laborious process involved in converting the grapes into raisins for the consumption of the public:

The woman with the red bonnet did not know this. Her knees did not sink in the hot white soil, and she did not know how to pour the baskets of grapes inside the frame gently and spread the bunches evenly on top of the newsprint paper. She did not remove the frame, straighten her creaking knees, the bend of her back, set down another sheet of newsprint paper, reset the frame, then return to the pisca again with the empty basket, row after row, sun after sun. The woman’s bonnet would be as useless as Estrella’s own straw hat under a white sun so mighty, it toasted the green grapes to black raisins. (50)

Viramontes is critical of the woman in the red bonnet for “not knowing,” that is, for not actually representing the reality of the Mexican farmworker. In turn the logo of the “woman in the red bonnet” makes the Mexican farmworker struggle invisible to the consumer. The mascot does not represent the real demographics—Mexican adults and children, such as Estrella. Viramontes’ narrative brings social consciousness to her audience by deglamorizing the Sun Maid Raisins mascot and in turn the audience should understand the irony in their fetishitization of the raisins in the red box harvested by Mexican bodies. Through the of the defetishitization of the raisins as commodities, Virmamontes shows how the Mexican laborer is made invisible through a corporate logo and through the consumer’s fetishitization of the commodity. In describing this laborious process, through her novel, Viramontes is able to make the Mexican farmworker and their labor visible to the audience.

Viramontes continues her defetishitization project by further emphasizing the conditions that these children have to work in. She shows the effects of the stagnating heat on the Mexican body, “Ricky found Estrella’s row. He looked feverish and she put down her basket of grapes

and pressed the water bottle to his lips, tilted it to the sky, [. . .] *You don't know how to work with the sun yet*, she told him and she set him under the vines” (53). Viramontes shows that laboring under the “white sun” nearly leads her younger brother to a heatstroke, further deconstructing the image of the “woman in the red bonnet” who is smiling, and who would not be protected from the sun, because as Estrella observes in her own material reality, not even her straw hat protects her from the heat. Viramontes also stresses the toll taken on the body, “Estrella carried the full basket with help of a sore hip and kneeled before the clusters of grapes. The muscles of her back coiled like barbed wire and clawed against whatever movement she made” (53). The graphic imagery Viramontes provides, sets the tone for what many readers and consumers might not have considered when purchasing their boxes of raisins or reading a narrative of the literal aches and pains inflicted on the body when picking crops.

“The woman in the red bonnet,” in a sense becomes similar to Carmen Miranda, in that her image becomes associated with a specific commodity (coffee, fruits, mainly bananas) in order to sell it for consumption, while hiding the role of the actual worker who picked the product. In her study on Carmen Miranda, Maria Jose Canelo uses Guy Debord’s theory on the culture of spectacle (which builds on commodity fetishism) in order to explain how Miranda’s body and subsequently her image is used in the promotion of consumption of United Fruit Company products. More importantly she argues that the “spectacularization” of Miranda’s image creates an “abstraction of labor,” and this is crucial: “For erasure of the memory of production is the ultimate accomplishment of the commodity culture created by the spectacle [. . .]” (Canelo 70). In this sense Miranda’s image hid the fact that her costume originated from “poor black wom[e]n selling fruit in the streets of Bahia” and it also hid the “banana plantation worker” (Canelo 70). Similarly in *Under the Feet of Jesus*, as argued earlier, the image of the

Sun Maid Raisin's logo, which consists of a smiling Anglo woman in a red bonnet, also erases the physical labor done by the Mexican farmworker (both adults and children) and their working conditions. Although the image of Miranda obfuscated important aspects of class, it was still the image of a Brazilian born woman which represented the products being sold, while the Sun Maid Raisins logo consists of an aforementioned smiling Anglo woman holding a basket of grapes, which does not represent the demographics that are described in *Under the Feet of Jesus*—Mexican men, women, or a teenage girl like Estrella.

Francisco Jiménez also engages in the defetishitization of farm commodities in *The Circuit*, by describing scenes that incorporate the impact of the weather and the physical toll on farmworkers. For example Panchito recounts his experience working under the California heat as he, Roberto, and Papá pick grapes, "Around nine o'clock the temperature had risen to almost one hundred degrees. I was completely soaked in sweat, and my mouth felt as if I had been chewing on a handkerchief" (65). Similar to Estrella's younger brother he soon finds out that experience is required when working under intense heat:

I walked over to the end of the row, picked up the jug of water we had bought, I began drinking. "Don't drink too much; you'll get sick," Roberto shouted. No sooner had he said that than I felt sick to my stomach. I dropped to my knees and let the jug roll off my hands. I remained motionless with my eyes glued on the hot sandy ground [. . .] I poured water over my face and neck and watched the dirty water run down my arms to the ground [. . .] The next morning I could hardly move. My body ached all over. I felt little control over my arms and legs. This feeling went on every morning for days until my muscles finally got used to the work. (66-67)

In his narrative, Jiménez also attests to the difficulty of California winters for the migrant farmworker as well:

I took my hand out of my pockets and started picking and piling the cotton in the furrow. Within seconds my toes were numb and I could hardly move my fingers. My hands were turning red and purple [. . .] I could not go on. Frustrated and disappointed, I walked over to Papá. He straightened up and looked down at me.

His eyes were red and watery from the cold. Before I said anything, he looked at Roberto, who bravely kept picking, and told me to go over to the fire. I knew then I had not earned my own cotton sack. (59-60)

Panchito's narrative verifies the intense heat and cold, giving the audience a close representation of what the Mexican farmworker child experiences daily. Even the minutiae, such as learning the correct way to drink water, or how to keep hydrated throughout the day is important knowledge for the Mexican migrant farmworker child to attain and for the reader to become aware about. But it is also important for the reader to become aware of the learning curve that these children have to go through, to provide the consumer with fresh farm commodities.

Also prevalent in Panchito's account is the toll that the farm labor takes on the Mexican body and psyche:

As days went by, Papá's back did not get better, and neither did his mood. Mamá, Roberto, and I took turns massaging him with Vicks VapoRub. When he was not complaining about not being able to work, he lay in bed, motionless, with an empty look in his eyes. He took a lot of aspirins, ate very little, and hardly slept during the night. (103)

Just as harmful to the physical health of the farmworkers, are the tools that they are required to use, such as the six-inch hoe. While thinning lettuce, Panchito challenges Roberto to a race of stamina, while hunched over, thinning lettuce with the six-inch hoe:

I stooped over and began thinning with my six-inch hoe. After about twenty minutes without rest I could no longer stand the pain in my back. I dropped to my knees and continued thinning without stopping. As soon as I reached the marked spot, I fell over. Roberto did too. "We did it," I said out of breath. "But my back is killing me." To ease the pain, I lay flat on my stomach in the furrow and Roberto pressed down on my back with his hands. I felt relief as my spine cracked. (104)

The use of a six-inch hoe as is apparent in the above passage causes severe back problems in the farmworker. Jiménez shows how this agricultural implement, that has since been outlawed, created a torturous work experience.

Through their descriptions of the painful impact on the Mexican farmworker's body, Viramontes and Jiménez deconstruct farm commodities that are fetishized while simultaneously constructing the actual Mexican labor that goes into bringing the fruits and vegetables to the consumer. By defetishizing the farm commodities and introducing the human body in the narrative, they bring the Mexican laborer to the forefront and make their physical struggles visible to the audience. Another manner to think about de/fetishization and in/visibility in Viramontes and Jiménez's novels, is through Lima's analysis of Latino texts as "countertexts that emerge from memories of loss" that "inhere in lived experience" (14). Lima invokes what Cherrie Moraga termed the "the memory of the body," which he interprets as "Moraga's corporeally rendered mnemonics of history, the "body in dissent against oblivion," is an aestheticized meditation on communal memory as a publicly rendered personal antidote to cultural forgetting, a countertext to historical elision" (14-15). That is to say that in order to combat American historical amnesia or erasure, countertexts are provided, so that the contributions of Chicano/a bodies are remembered within the context of the American nation's memory. Therefore, Viramontes and Jiménez's descriptions of the physical labor done by Mexican bodies not only helps defetishize farm commodities and bring the visibility of this community, they offer countertexts that establish them in the collective memory. By writing their novels and defetishizing the farm commodities, the authors make the Mexican farmworker corporeal, as opposed to allowing them to exist as ghosts within the capitalist machine.

Bringing Transparency to Crimes Against the Mexican Farmworker Body

Viramontes and Jiménez, make the effects of the intensive physical labor visible for their audience through their descriptions and narrations, and this way begin defetishizing farm commodities in order to make the audience aware of the Mexican laborer. Their narratives

further defetishize farm commodities by describing other problems impacting the Mexican farmworker body, such as pesticides and poor living conditions. By describing the impacts of pesticides on their environment and bodies, the authors further engage in bringing visibility to other problems plaguing the Mexican farmworker communities. It is imperative to address the environment because, as Mcentyre argues, “the consequences of environmental degradation are not borne equally, but fall heavily on the poor” (99). In this sense the health of the Mexican farmworker is a nonissue for the consumers, as they do not see how they are impacted by the environment in which they work and live. In this regard Viramontes and Jiménez’s novels are further countertexts which do not allow the American narrative to forget what was done onto the Mexican farmworker body. Therefore, through their narratives, the authors continue what Lima cited as Moraga’s “memory of the body,” making their novels countertexts that “dissent” against American consumers historical amnesia. This loss of memory of what the Mexican farmworker body has done for the American consumer and in turn, what was done to the Mexican farmworker body, is not forgotten by Viramontes and Jiménez, as their narratives further defetishize the farm commodities and make these other injustices--be it pesticides or criminalization--ostensible for the audience.

Viramontes for example, threads the theme of pesticide use and its impact on the farmworkers throughout her novel in order to offer a critique of the labor conditions for farmworkers. The impact of the pesticides on the environment and on the farmworkers, is first explored in a scene in which Estrella and her friend Maxine walk near an irrigation ditch and consider swimming in it. Estrella is reluctant, because she “had heard through the grapevine about the water, and knew Big Mac the Foreman lied about the pesticides not spilling into the

ditch” (Viramontes 32). Nonetheless, Maxine drinks the water and not long after, they notice a dog floating in that same irrigation ditch:

[. . .] the air became thick with the smell of rotting flesh [. . .] Looky there! [Maxine] pointed to a drowned, bloated dog, which floated down the canal. The carcass rolled on its back, its belly swollen and damp dark, then rolled back to its side, its legs like spears dipping gently toward the bridge until it passed them. The girls pinched their noses. (33-34)

It is not clear if the dog was dead before being found in the ditch, but it is ominously hinted that the dog possibly died from lapping up the pesticide-infested water. Regardless, whether the dog died from drinking the water or not, it is evident that the water is contaminated not only from the chemicals, but also due to the dead dog’s carcass floating in the “pesticide-free” water intended for the use of the farmworkers. This in turn speaks to the deliberate apathy and disregard for the labor conditions of Mexican farmworkers and the poor in general. Ultimately this shows that the laboring body is disposable. Big Mac’s knowledge of the pesticides in the water speaks to another important point made by McEntyre: “[The farmworkers] are the primary victims of pollution, since some of them live “downstream” from our factories and megafarms, and most of them cannot afford the self-protective strategies available to the affluent—distance from dumps, from direct exposure to pesticides, from industrial plants and their spillage” (99). In McEntyre’s interpretation, the poor, but specific to Viramontes’ novel, the Mexican farmworker’s health is a nonfactor for the companies, and the effects of their own waste and pesticides become invisible to them as it does not impact their own health. And as it does not impact their health, and since the consumer generally does not have to deal with living “downstream” from these companies, the Mexican farmworker’s health is invisible to them as well. Nonetheless, Viramontes continues to make the effects of the pesticides vivid, and thus informing about the issues from the point of view of the worker, through a narrative that continues to defetishize farm commodities.

The following scene further exemplifies Viramontes' attempt to inform her audience about the working conditions through the impact of pesticides on the farmworkers. It is also a scene that shows the ranchers further disregard for the humanity of the farmworker:

Alejo slid through the bushy branches, the tangled twigs scratching his face, and he was ready to jump when he felt the mist. He shut his eyes tight to the mist of black afternoon. At first it was just slight moisture until the poison rolled down his face in deep sticky streaks. The lingering smell was a scent of ocean salt and beached kelp until he inhaled again and could detect under the innocence the heavy chemical choke of poison. Air clogged his lungs and he thought he was just holding his breath, until he tried exhaling but couldn't, which meant he couldn't breathe. He panicked when he realized he was choking, clamped his neck with one hand, feeling his Adam's apple against his palm, but still held onto a branch tightly with the other, afraid he could fall long and hard, like the insects did. He swallowed finally and the spit in his throat felt like balls of scratchy sand. Was this punishment for his thievery? He was sorry Lord, so sorry. Alejo's head spun and he shut his stinging eyes tighter to regain balance. But a hole ripped in his stomach like a match to paper, spreading into a deeper and bigger black hole that wanted to swallow him completely. He knew he would vomit. His clothes were dampened through, then the sheet of his skin absorbed the chemical and his whole body began to cramp from the shrinking pull of his skin squeezing against his bones. He wheezed and almost fell. (76-77)

The body is at the center of this narration for the reader to envision the result of the pesticides on the Mexican farmworker body. Hence in the passage above Viramontes goes into descriptive detail about the texture and smell of the pesticides and their effect on Alejo, a Mexican farmworker body. She initially describes the pesticides as a "black mist" with scents likened to those a person might find at a beach, but notes that they are simply masking the initial toxicity of the chemicals contained in the pesticides. The narrative also clearly states that pesticides are "poison," and makes it appear as thick substance, that is described as "moisture" that rolled down Alejo's face. Not content in only giving the pesticides texture, the narrator also brings perceptibility to the effects on the health of the Mexican farmworker's body. He is described as having difficulty breathing and just as the pesticides are described as "black," the same blackness gives him the sensation that he is being swallowed by it. The contamination of Alejo's body with

the pesticides, becomes illustrative of Moraga's "memory of the body" where his body becomes representative of all farmworkers who have been affected by the growers use of pesticides sprayed on farm crops and Mexican agricultural laborers' bodies. The narrator describes the blackness that consumes Alejo, as a tar pit that swallows him whole, "Black bubbles erasing him [. . .] Blankness [. . .] No fingerprint or history, bone. No lava stone. No story or family, bone" (78). The tar pit signifies Alejo's erasure from American society through his body's poisoning and deterioration. This works further as commentary on the invisibility of agricultural workers and their working conditions as a result of the fetishization of farm commodities. In response to this fetishization, the narrator describes for the reader-consumer, what the Mexican farmworker's body goes through if they are poisoned by the same pesticides that are used to keep insects and weeds from damaging the fruits and vegetables they purchase. The description of the pesticides and their effect on Alejo's body, bring visibility to the issue of the pesticides in relation to the Mexican farmworker body. Thus the same farm commodities that make Mexican agricultural laborers invisible to the consumer, can envision how industrial farming is poisoning their bodies as well. Soon after, the effects on Alejo's body become apparent, and Viramontes emphasizes his health deteriorating throughout the novel.

Aside from using Alejo's body to show the effect of the pesticides, Viramontes, then offers other scenes as evidence that show their effects. In one scene in particular Perfecto stands underneath a tree and as he blows his nose, "Flies tumbled like leaves from the bushy trees, dropping onto his shoulders and then on the ground [. . .] Dying insects lay on the soil everywhere" (81). This scene adds symbolism to earlier descriptions of Alejo's fear of falling out of the tree "long and hard, like the insects did" after he himself had been doused with the mist of pesticides. Viramontes then shows the potency of what is referred to as "daño of the fields," as

Alejo “could no longer stand upright without feeling faint, his body weak from bouts of diarrhea and vomiting” (93). The narrator also makes it understood that the pesticides instill fear of the danger they pose to unborn children of farmworkers, as evidenced from the following scene as Petra thinks about the fetus she carries, “[she] thought about the lima bean in her, the bean floating in the night of her belly, bursting a root with each breath. Would the child be born without a mouth, would the poisons of the fields harden in its tiny little veins?” (125). The description of Petra’s concern over the fetus in her belly which she fears might be poisoned from her own exposure to pesticides then becomes another way in which the farm commodities are defetishized for the reader-consumer. In this regard the narration brings further visibility to farmworkers and humanizes them by showing how the potent pesticides impact the health of their health. This fictional representation becomes all the more important when studies have found that pesticides have caused infertility (Farmworker Justice 3).

The living and working conditions of the families are not authorial exaggeration. In a study done in 1993 by Valerie G. Zartarian, Joel Streicker, Angelica Rivera, Claudia S. Cornejo, Servando Molina, Oscar F. Valdez, and James O. Leckie for the Stanford Center for Chicano Research, on farm labor children ages 2 to 4 in the Salinas Valley of California, it was determined that “many workers and their families live in conditions which expose them chronically to toxic agrochemicals,” and “[m]ost of these farm labor families live in old, sub-standard housing, in close proximity to pesticide applications” (2).

In a more recent study conducted in 2013, the Farmworker Justice organization found that “an estimated 5.1 billion pounds of pesticides [are] applied to crops each year and thousands of farmworkers experience the effects of acute pesticide poisoning, including headaches, nausea, shortness of breath, or seizures,” amongst other health problems such as “cancer, infertility (and

other reproductive problems), neurological disorders and respiratory conditions” (3). In 2005, in the town of Caldwell, Idaho, it was reported that there were some workers “vomiting and suffering from headaches, nausea, and diarrhea,” while working in an onion field that had been sprayed with pesticides that morning (Farmworker Justice 5). Yuma, Arizona has one of the latest incidents that occurred in 2012. It involved forty farmworkers being sprayed by a crop duster as they worked (Farmworker Justice 5).

According to both studies not much has changed, unfortunately, in agribusiness and the dangers it poses to farmworker health, since the time periods the novels represent—the early 1950s and the 1970s. Therefore Viramontes’ passages about pesticides, illustrate the material experiences and living conditions of the farmworker children, and their families. Through her continuous inference to the pesticides, Viramontes represents this in the novel to report the importance of these issues. Viramontes is engaging in an important discourse with her audience, because, “A growing number of U.S. consumers have reduced their consumption of produce grown with pesticides to protect their family’s health [but] Little is being done to protect the farmworkers who are routinely exposed to high levels of toxic pesticides in the fields where they work and in the communities they live” (Farmworker Justice 3). In this regard, the Farmworker Justice report makes overt, what Viramontes shows her audience-consumers through her narrative, that the Mexican farmworker body, and the many harmful things that effect it, such as the physicality of the work, the heat, and pesticides are invisible to the consumer, along with the Mexican farmworker’s body itself.

Jiménez addresses the inadequacy of the dwellings provided for these farmworkers. At times the family has to stay in tents, barracks, or even a garage, such as the one described by Panchito, “The garage was worn out by the years. It had no windows. The walls eaten by

termites, strained to support the roof full of holes. The dirt floor, populated by earthworms, looked like a gray road map” (64). The living conditions are no better when Panchito and his family happily return to Bonetti Ranch in Santa Maria, California, “The barracks were still the same. Mr. Bonetti, the owner, continued to ignore them. Looking like the victims of a war, the dwellings had broken windows, parts of walls still missing, and large holes in the roofs” (100). They also have to deal with contaminated water they cannot consume, because it smells like sulphur. The novel establishes the guilty hand of Mr. Bonetti, who ignores the conditions of the barracks and allows them to deteriorate with time.

Mr. Bonetti’s reasons for not repairing the barracks can be due to the fact that it was more cost effective to let the barracks deteriorate. That reason alone gives the audience an understanding about the way in which Mr. Bonetti perceives his Mexican workers. He might respect the fact that they are hard workers, but he also prefers them because they are cheap labor. Since Mexicans are cheap labor and as a class their ethnicity is associated with agricultural work, Mr. Bonetti does not deem it a necessity to improve their living quarters. This in turn shows the direct correlation between Mexican ethnicity, labor and class, showing a larger social structure problem. This intersection of race, labor and class precipitates the positionality of Mexican farmworkers in the social structure. Mr. Bonetti unlike the consumer understands he needs Mexican labor, and chooses to ignore their living conditions. The consumer is equally complicit for his/her role in the transaction that takes place between the seller and the buyer. Because the seller, in this situation, Mr. Bonetti, ships the fresh produce to a grocery store, where the buyer purchases these farm commodities picked by Panchito’s family, who are paid a low wage and given a less than livable home, in order to increase profits. Thus, the grower, makes profit from the consumer, but also by ignoring the living conditions of the farmworker. Both the grower and

consumer enable the continual use of substandard housing for Mexican farmworkers by participating in the masking process that takes place within commodity fetishism.

De/Fetishizing the Saints

Viramontes' and Jiménez's novels have been discussed in this chapter as deconstructions of the consumer's fetishitization of farm commodities. However, the authors also address the fetishism of religion in divergent ways. This is not to argue that they show their characters commodifying religion, but they do show religion being fetishized. Analyzing how fetishization occurs relative to religion, is advantageous to explore how the authors portray the role of religion in the lives of their fictional Mexican farmworker characters. Thus, religious fetishization is the focus, along with Marx's ideas on religion, specifically his claim, that "it is the opium of the people" ("Contribution" 54). Or in the context of these novels it is the opium of the Mexican farmworkers. In each novel the audience is treated to authors who have different ways of showing whether religious faith supports Mexican farmworkers in their daily struggles or if it is simply a form of fetishitization that does not allow them to see beyond religious hagiography, and into struggles that are rooted in their ethnicity and class.

Viramontes' representation of the fetishitization of religion through a Jesus Christ statue will be analyzed alongside religious imagery she provides in her narrative in order to emphasize the importance of self-determination in the face of exploitive working conditions. In comparison, Jimenez is less cynical and a very devout catholic author that fetishizes La Virgen de Guadalupe and abides by the role of religion as an aspect of the ideological state apparatus within the superstructure. Thus where Viramontes seeks to defetishize religion in her narration through characters that fetishize it, Jimenez in turn fetishizes religious conviction to show that it provides hope in the face of their daily socioeconomic struggles. To reiterate, it is important to consider

the portrayal of working class struggle and religion in the novels, in relation to Marx's well known commentary on faith in "Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*: Introduction": "[Religion] is the opium of the people," and how these texts adhere to this idea or rail against it (54).

Marxism and religion have had a complicated time sharing space among ideologues from either side of the socioeconomic debate. Of course this was influenced by Marx himself when referring to religion as "the opium of the people" ("Contribution" 54). Jan Rehmann and Brigitte Kahl perhaps best describe the differing viewpoints in their article "A Spirituality of the Commons: Where Religion and Marxism Meet": "In the eyes of religious people, socialism (and more particularly Marxism) is the typical representative, if not of the devil on earth, then at least of a narrow 'materialism'" while, "[m]any Marxists, on the other hand, consider religious folks as dupes caught up in an irritational worldview and manipulated by the powers that be" (45). Scholar-activist Alexander Saxton has acknowledged that when he worked as a "seaman, construction worker and labor unionist, the reason for avoiding religious talk was that it was divisive and potentially dangerous," thus undermining labor organizing efforts, and further notes that, "[m]any a Marxist organizer doubtless wished (as occasionally I did) that Marx and Engels had kept their mouths shut about religion" (323). Balancing religious beliefs and working class centered ideologies was especially difficult for labor activists that had strong ties to Christianity and Catholicism. There was for example Louis Budenz a former labor activist and Communist Party member who stated that he "fingered a rosary in his pocket" while engaging in work for the party (Saxton 324). He would later fully embrace his faith and declare that "Communism and Catholicism were irreconcilable," going as far as working with the FBI to identify Communist Party members (Saxton 325). Another notable religious labor activist is Edward M. Marciniak,

who did not identify with communism per say, yet engaged in Catholic social action to assist working class people facing socioeconomic injustice. Marciniak founded the Catholic Labor Alliance which Charles Shanabruch documented as an organization whose “objective was “to bring the spirit of Christ into the working world” not by replacing organizations already in existence, especially labor organizations, but by developing men and women to be good unionists and good employers in their existing organizations” (7). Although Marciniak did not identify with communism he was open to their pursuit for socioeconomic justice for the working class, and was yet critical of Marxists who reproached religion, but equally critical of Catholics and Christians who disparaged communism, in the guise of patriotism. Unlike Budenz, Marciniak remained a staunch religious labor activist and never felt the need to choose between his faith and communism. Marciniak essentially did the same work of labor activists without engaging Marxist rhetoric nor joining the Communist Party, which by the 1950s had been under heavy scrutiny under McCarthyism.

Budenz and Marciniak, are hence two examples of how religion has influenced labor activists and their activism. Religious faith and Marxist ideology have nonetheless struggled to find a middle ground. However by 1965, the United Farm Workers Union, and their largely Mexican membership, did not necessarily face the same conflicts that were faced by Budenz and Marciniak. Although growers often accused them of being communists, the National Farm Workers Association understood that this was simply an effort to undermine their struggle for socioeconomic justice. In fact, the NFWA incorporated religious symbolism without any seeming ideological conflicts regarding socioeconomic justice and Mexican Catholic beliefs. In *Why David Sometimes Wins: Leadership, Organization, and Strategy in the California Farmworker Movement*, Marshall Ganz found the regular use of religious symbolism since 1965,

when members of the NFWA, pledged on a cross, not to break a strike they had organized for May 2nd of that year (112). The religious symbolism can also be found in the image of the La Virgen de Guadalupe which would regularly be seen at marches along with a wooden cross. Aside from this, some of their organizing strategies had a religious bent, such as the peregrinacion (religious pilgrimage), and fasting. It is not to say that there was not conflict over the use of some of this symbolism, for as Alan J. Watt discussed in *Farm Workers and the Churches: The Movement in California and Texas*, there were evangelical Protestants and Pentecostal supporters of the NFWA who disagreed with the use of a banner that contained the image of La Virgen de Guadalupe, finding it distasteful, and eventually left (79). Nonetheless, even in the present, when Mexican laborers have found the need to organize in the face of labor struggles, they regularly continue to display the image of the La Virgen de Guadalupe and/or a cross on their marches or on the picket line. Unlike labor activists from the 1940s and 1950s, Mexican farmworker activists did not struggle with mediating space between communism and religion, for they did not identify as Marxist ideologues, and thus found a slightly simpler transition for their religious faith alongside their fight for socioeconomic justice. In fact, in El Teatro Campesino's actos, the church has been portrayed as a friend of the Mexican farmworker as shown in *La quinta temporada*. This in turn shows that in one of the earliest Chicano/a literary productions based on labor struggles, religious spirituality is portrayed as a significant component to their fight for socioeconomic justice.

Within the framework of Marxism and the argument made regarding religion as the opiate of the masses, it would then be important to be critical of Chicano/a literature that represents labor struggles within its covers, in order to gain an understanding of the manner in which the author is portraying religion alongside the Mexican laborer's class-based struggles. In

other words it would be important to ask, does the author fetishize or defetishize religion and the symbols associated with it in order to offer commentary or criticism on the role of religion within Mexican labor struggles? And depending on whether religion is fetishized or defetishized, what is the narrative saying about the campesino reality, which exists in a matrix of socioeconomic struggles induced within capitalism through the racialization and proletarianization of the Mexican people?

Throughout her novel, Viramontes juxtaposes the material reality of the Mexican farmworker family, with their religious faith, in particular the matriarch's, Petra. For example, in the opening pages of *Under the Feet of Jesus*, when the family has to relocate due to a physical altercation Estrella had with Maxine, they find that they are once again moving into a condemnable home that is described as having the "stink of despair" along with a dead bird in one of the rooms (Viramontes 8). Regardless of the bungalow's condition, Petra finds a corner where she can place statues of Jesus Christ, La Virgen Maria and San José. Viramontes constructs religious Catholic faith as a habitual aspect of the Mexican farmworker migratory routine. Wherever they migrate to, they always carry these symbols of their religious faith with them, and must have them on display. Viramontes continues to do this type of methodical juxtaposition in very minor ways, that might go unnoticed, such as: "The children stood in the shade of the barn, a cathedral of a building" (9). The image of the barn, a place associated with farmwork, the Mexican farmworker, and the burden of the labor they endure, is compared to a building associated with religion.

Analogously right before Alejo is doused with pesticides, the narrative ominously affirms, "Alejo had not guessed the biplane was so close until its gray shadow crossed over him like a crucifix, and he ducked into the leaves" (76). Where the barn described as a cathedral

represented the close association between the Mexican farmworkers ethnic class and their religious faith, the shadow of the biplane is described as a crucifix that seals his fate on the following page. The biplane douses him in pesticides and Alejo believes that he is being punished by God, for stealing fruit, “He was sorry Lord, so sorry” (Viramontes 77). His faith blinds him to the fact that it was not necessarily a divine intervention nor punishment from God for his crime, but the pilot’s carelessness and heedlessness for the Mexican body. Viramontes places the imagery of religion alongside the pesticide biplane showing the binary contradictions of the lives of the farmworkers, where they are in actuality being harmed by physical problems related to their ethnic class, yet seek forgiveness and solace through their religious faith.

The narration does this again in a scene where Perfecto Flores is under extreme duress from Petra and Estrella to assist the ailing Alejo, but he has to consider the monetary cost to the already meager wages he and his adopted family earn. As he considers this, “He noticed a puncture in the ribbed clouds which floated right toward him. For a moment, he felt as if the hand of God was going to reach right through the hole and pull him up to the heavens. He glanced down and the maggots looked like the white specks against the chocolate soil. His chest ached” (97). In this vivid image the author continues to toy with the religious metaphors and the actual wretchedness of their lives; as Perfecto seeks respite from his worries, he is reminded of his reality as he looks down at the maggots in the earth.

In other instances, Viramontes shows the characters not praying, but pleading to God during moments of extreme stress. When Petra’s husband abandons her and her children, she is shown kneeling in prayer as “She rolled beads of the rosary between her fingers [and] made the sign of the cross [. . .]” (17). Under this moment of anxiety, Petra prays as a form of meditation to keep her own sanity, but she simultaneously is pleading with God, to help her forget her

husband and figure out what to do. The rosary beads and the sign of the cross itself symbols of the fetishism of religion.

The Jesus Christ statue that Petra also uses as a paper weight for the documents that would prove her children's status as legal citizens of the United States is another form of commodity fetishism. The statue is a commodity, in that it was either manufactured in a factory or possibly by a person whose job it is to sculpt these statues and then sell them. It is doubtful that Petra and her family received the statue for free it was more than likely part of a market-exchange in which she paid someone for the statue. The person who labored to make the statue is ignored, because the statue is now a festishized commodity. It also intersects with the festishitization of the religious symbols and as a result is a facet of the oppressive ideological state apparatus that keeps the farmworkers in their ethnic class.

The scene that shows Petra advising Estrella, "If they stop you, if they try to pull you into the green vans, you tell them the birth certificates are under the feet of Jesus, just tell them" (63), shows an intersection between the state apparatus and ideological state apparatus. The government paperwork proving Estrella's documentation embodies the state apparatus, while the statue of Christ represents the ideological state apparatus. Therefore, the Christ statue shows the complicitous relationship between the state and its use of religious ideology as part of their hegemonic toolkit. The audience must consider entrenched oppressive social structural ideology instead of thinking that praying or having faith will help improve farmworker wages, or keep their humanity from being disregarded when growers spray crops with pesticides or from being criminalized. The embedded message in the novel is that religion and self-pity are not the answer, action is the answer.

Lim offers a similar interpretation of the scene: “the birth certificate references the political and legal system of which Estrella is a part” but the image of the Christ statue on top of the documents “elevates the moral claim of Estrella’s citizenship above legal claim” (233). Lim’s arguments are valid, especially since the audience must consider the role of morality since Viramontes humanizes the Mexican farmworker through her narrative. There are many other scenes that juxtapose religious imagery with the actual agony of being a farmworker. Beck and Rangel’s analysis of the religious imagery similarly discuss Viramontes’ as an author who is critical of religion, writing that she “demonstrates her understanding of the oppressive implications of the first word in her title *Under the Feet of Jesus*, which implies that her entire novel can be read as proposing an anti-colonial understanding of Christianity as a colonizing religion that encourages and justifies the submission of the oppressed, both internally and socially” (17). This argument falls closer in line to the idea that religion is a tool of the ideological state apparatus used to keep the farmworkers oppressed, thus showing that praying is not enough. As a result of simply praying, the farmworker, or a character like Petra, remains “under the feet” of religious ideology while ignoring the role of social class structures and the policies that are created within it that allows greedy capitalists and consumers to create systemic violations against them.

All of the aforementioned scenes show Viramontes strategically building upon the inherent contradictions in religion and thus defetishitizing it, while emphasizing the importance of race, class, and social structures as components that shape the campesino reality. From the opening where Petra finds a place to put the saints in the broken down home, the shadow of the biplane as a crucifix, the barn as a cathedral are not inserted in the narrative for the reader to simply think that Mexican laborers are able to endure their struggles thanks to their Catholic

faith. On the contrary, Viramontes is building up to two climatic scenes that more visibly expose the inherent contradictions; the first being specifically the scene just mentioned above which serves as the title of the novel.

The second climatic scene comes after Estrella threatened the nurse with a crowbar, because her family needed the nine dollars and seven cents they paid, returned, in order to have enough gas to get Alejo to a hospital twenty miles away. Upon returning to their bungalow, Perfecto and Petra are clearly distressed by what had transpired and are unsure if the nurse will call law enforcement, thus making their future uncertain. Petra only trusts Jesus Christ, and when they return to their bungalow she kneels in front of it and lights the candles around it. However as she stands up:

She raised herself but couldn't stand without struggling to brace her legs and so she leaned on the crate to support her weight, and the statue of Jesucristo wavered. Her reflexes were no longer fast enough to catch a falling statue; she could almost see the head splitting from the body before it even hit the wood planks of the floor. The head of Jesucristo broke from His neck and when His eyes stared up at her like pools of ominous water, she felt a wave anger swelling against her chest [. . .] Petra lifted the head and body of Jesucristo from the chips of white plaster on the ground. She was surprised by the lightness of the head, like a walnut in the palm of her hand, and nervously fumbled it on to the neck of the body. Unsuccessful, she replaced the headless statue on the tread of crocheted doily, crossed herself and kissed Jesucristo's feet. She held onto the head. (167-168)

This scene contradicts the previous scene where Petra reminds Estrella where to find the documents and their importance. Here the state apparatus and the ideological state apparatus still intersect, but where Petra wanted to believe or only trust in Christ, the breaking of the statue signals an evident break in her faith as she begins to consider her material reality. She begins to realize, "That was all she had: papers and sticks, and broken faith and Perfecto and at this moment all of this seemed as weightless against the massive darkness, as the head she held" (169). When Viramontes writes that "Petra's grasp tightened around the head of Jesucristo [. . .]

If anybody could fix it, Perfecto could” (169), it is unclear if Petra is thinking that Perfecto can fix the broken statue, which would mean she is trying to hold onto her faith regardless of her situation, or if she is thinking that the “it” she believes Perfecto can fix, is the predicament they are in after Estrella’s incident with the nurse. If Petra expects Perfecto to fix the latter situation, then it shows a clear break with her faith, because she has decided to instead place her faith in a person as opposed to her religion. This is emphasized by the fact that she realizes that she has tangible objects: papers, sticks and Perfecto, alongside what was once the intangible, her religious faith. This would then mean, that she understands having religious faith will not solve all their problems.

Unlike Petra, Estrella is portrayed as a character that is ready to take action as opposed to pray for miracles or for God to give her strength. In fact, before the scene that shows the Jesus Christ statue breaking, while still at the clinic Estrella thinks “God was mean and did not care and she was alone to fend for herself” (Viramontes 139). Soon after this realization, Estrella returns to the clinic with the crowbar and demands the money back, showing that she “is no longer “under the feet of Jesus” in the sense of being inhibited in her development by Christianity” (Latimer 342). This goes further than just showing that Estrella is no longer going to be subdued by her religion or faith, it shows she understands that fetishizing God and her faith, does not assist in her day to day struggles. Action was required in the situation with the nurse. Estrella understood that Alejo needed medical assistance, however her family’s meager earnings would not afford him the healthcare he required.

Agency is necessary to survive, and Estrella exemplifies the need for the farmworker to put aside faith, and take action. She arrives at a full understanding to this after the incident with the nurse, but fully embraces independence from her faith, when she returns to the barn and

stands on top of it, where the narrator then describes her as an “angel on the verge of faith” (176). Accordingly, Estrella stops taking the religious opiates, and instead becomes the solution to her unanswered prayers. Ellen McCracken offers a similar reading, “Viramontes suggests that a new model of female empowerment and strength can replace the traditional ethnic strategy of prayer and recourse to the protection of a deity . . . the statue breaks, and Estrella herself symbolically replaces the image as she stands tall atop the barn that she has been forbidden to enter” (qtd. In Beck and Rangel 17). Estrella’s understanding of social and class relations replaces her faith. She understands that her role within the capitalist socioeconomic system is unfair, and that the only way survive is to do away with faith, and instead grapple with her material reality. Much like Christ is nailed to a cross, the farmworker sacrifices his/her body to provide the consumer with fresh farm commodities, except unlike the well-known biblical story of Jesus Christ, the story of the farmworker is either hardly known or not known at all by the consumer.

Unlike Viramontes’ representation of religion as an opiate that does more damage to the Mexican farmworker and keeps them from taking action against their social conditions, Jiménez represents faith as an important tool in the survival of the Mexican farmworker’s daily struggles. Jiménez, a committed Catholic has had no qualms expressing his faith in his religious beliefs in *The Circuit*. He devotes the chapter, “Miracle in Tent City,” to the importance of religious faith in the face of anguish perpetrated by a person’s socioeconomic condition.

Similar to Viramontes Jiménez’s commentary on religious faith revolves around the issue of healthcare, but that is where the similarities end. Where Estrella and her family were trying to save the ailing Alejo, Panchito and his family try to save his newborn brother, Torito, who becomes ill with a disease that causes him to stop breathing for short periods of time. From the

moment the severity of Torito's illness is noted, the family begins to pray for him in front of a faded picture of La Virgen de Guadalupe. Where Viramontes methodically defetishizes religious imagery in her narrative, Jiménez amplifies the fetishitization of religion with multiple scenes showing the family praying to La Virgen de Guadalupe and pleading with God to save Torito. Panchito's parents originally hesitated to take Torito to a hospital, because they did not have the financial means to do so, but eventually take him. As Torito spends several days at the hospital, his parents return one day to announce to Panchito and his siblings, that they must all pray to El Santo Niño de Atocha, because they promised if Torito got well they would pray to him every day for a year (33). The parents pin a picture of the Santo Niño next to La Virgen and they accordingly begin praying.

Eventually, a dream that Panchito has about Torito as el Santo Niño de Atocha, prompts his mother to make an outfit similar to the one worn by el Santo Niño to be worn by Torito. After year of praying and dressing Torito in that outfit, they find that Torito is healthier. Jiménez even likens his healthy appearance to that of a "cherub." Further emphasizing the importance of religious faith, the mother reveals:

"I have something to tell you," Mama said teary-eyed as she took off the cloak. "When we took Torito to the hospital, the doctor told us my son would die because we had waited too long to take him there. He said it would take a miracle for him to live. I didn't want to believe him," she continued, gaining strength as she talked. "But he was right. It took a miracle." (35)

Jiménez's characters, and the author himself, happily swallow the opiate of religion in the face of evident socioeconomic issues. In doing so not only is the image of La Virgen fetishized, but the fetishitization is taken to another extreme when they dress Torito in an outfit similar to that of the Santo Niño de Atocha. The text says: "Mama always prayed to [El Santo Niño de Atocha] when one of us got sick because she said the Holy Child Jesus took care of poor and sick people,

especially children” (33-34). Jiménez attaches the Mexican farmworker class-based struggle with religious faith, in that his characters believe that saints are specifically looking out for the poor. Where Viramontes engages in the process of decolonizing her characters from religious ideology by taking into consideration the importance of political agency within the unseen socioeconomic structures, Jiménez’s characters submit to their ideological oppression, believing that it is faith that saved Torito, and allows them to survive. Unlike Viramontes who methodically juxtaposes religious imagery with the social material conditions of the farmworkers, Jiménez associates the Mexican farmworker family’s disparate socioeconomic well being with a scene that shows that regardless of their struggles, their situation will improve soon by having unabated religious faith.

Conclusion

Simply showing an audience that they are commodity fetishists does not bring a resolution to the work done by Viramontes and Jimenez. It is also important to further consider the role of the consumer, through what Cluley and Dunne and have termed “commodity narcissism.” Commodity narcissism is a Freudian influenced concept, that is explained as “more than a desire to have—it is a desire to have at the expense of others” (Cluley and Dunne 253). That is to say that even if the consumer is knowledgeable about the socioeconomic implication about the purchase of fresh picked produce, they will buy it to satisfy their need for consumption, regardless of the exploited Mexican farmworker. People have counteracted commodity narcissism in the past, by boycotting products. An example is the UFW-led grape boycott of the 1960s. By informing the consumer about the farmworker struggle, many of them stopped consuming grapes and as a result assisted in affecting change for the Mexican laborer. In other words, similar to Viramontes’ and Jiménez’s characters, proactive action was necessary to create change. Fortunately, Viramontes and Jiménez wrote novels that begin the work of defetishizing

commodities, not by portraying victimized Mexican farmworkers, but by humanizing the person picking crops, and accordingly reminding the consumer about this as they make their purchase.

In order to further defetishize the produce and bring visibility to the farmworker, Viramontes uses Estrella's inner thoughts to engage the audience in a dialogic exercise where she forces them to understand, what consumption has hidden from them. When Alejo first meets Petra he offers peaches he had stolen, for which Estrella warns him to be cautious about stealing. But Petra replies, "For the pay we get, they're lucky we don't burn the orchards down." But Estrella once again showing that she believes in taking action, Estrella responds "No sense talking tough unless you do it" (45). Through Petra it is understood that the wages they earn are a socioeconomic injustice, but through Estrella, Viramontes also reaffirms the need for action once class consciousness is achieved.

Viramontes continues to confront the reader and consumer with discourse about the role of the invisible Mexican laborer through Estrella, who takes action in the climactic scene of the novel. As mentioned earlier, Estrella and her family take Alejo to a clinic where the nurse that assisted him, simply gave him a basic checkup, then recommended that they take him to a hospital. At this point in the novel Estrella begins to think about the interconnection between her labor, and the products it provides the nurse and the country for its consumption:

She remembered the tar pits. Energy money, the fossilized bones of energy matter. How bones made oil and oil made gasoline. The oil was made from their bones, and it was their bones that kept the nurse's car from halting on some highway, kept her on her way to Daisyfield to pick up her boys at six. It was their bones that kept the air conditioning in the car humming, that kept them moving on the long dotted line on the map. Their bones. Why couldn't the nurse see that? Estrella had figured it out: the nurse owed *them* as much as they owed her. (148)

By understanding her place in the socioeconomic structure, Estrella finds it necessary to take action, because her own situation is more desperate than the nurse who is trying to get to her

family. Estrella's response is to become proactive by picking up a crowbar and using it to threaten the nurse, into returning the money that they paid for Alejo's checkup. Estrella uses violence out of necessity, because her family does not have enough gas to take him to a hospital and return to their home. By taking this action, she gains agency and strikes a blow on behalf of Mexican laborers, whose contributions go unknown and ignored.

Viramontes again shares this perspective as Estrella converses with Alejo, "They make you this way, she sighed with resignation [. . .] You talk and talk and talk to them and they ignore you. But you pick up a crowbar and break the pictures of their children, and all of a sudden they listen real fast" (151). Through this dialogue, Viramontes once again addresses the importance of being proactive, but also directs this commentary at the consumer reminding them, that they do not see nor listen to the person that picked their crops, because they have fetishized their produce. As a result, *Under the Feet of Jesus* is Viramontes' weapon that she uses to defetishize and demystify farm commodities.

In the opening of the novel, Panchito's father says that they are traveling to California to "make a good living" and leave their "poverty behind." Jiménez demonstrates that they are unable to ever fully achieve the economic stability they sought after leaving Mexico. Throughout the novel, the family finds that achieving economic stability is a Sisyphean task. They barely make enough money to feed their family, and to get from one job to the next on the circuit. Another complication arises when Panchito's father injures his back and can no longer work to assist his family in achieving their goal. It is not until the final chapter of the novel that the family decides to set roots in Santa Maria, while Roberto looks forward to the prospects of being employed as a school janitor that there is a moment of stable economic hope. Jiménez sheds light on the struggle of the migrant farmworker child and his family, through Panchito's experience

for an audience that is oblivious not only to the economic struggle, but also to the impact of migration on a child and his/her relationships.

Underneath the narrative of a boy and his family's pursuit "to make a good living," is a narrative about the background voices of the migrant farmworker children. The voices of migrant farmworker children are critical to this country's labor force and its historical narrative. The scenes of the deplorable living conditions speak not only to the living experiences on the migrant circuit, but also the larger intangible circuit that involves capitalism and labor. As Panchito himself mentions, the owners of the ranches they work at, do not bother to maintain the homes that farmworkers stay in temporarily, due to the money they would need to invest in repairs. They also do not bother investing in proper plumbing, nor offer clean water, because it is more cost effective to allow their Mexican workers to cope with the situation. Throughout his narrative, there is a keen sense that there are larger factors to consider in his family's failed attempts at attaining the socioeconomic stability they sought.

The reader must consider that the scenes mentioned above are not simply about making people aware of the experience of the Mexican farmworker, nor about victimization. The novels address what remains invisible: a system of agricultural labor that exploits cheap labor, criminalizes, and dehumanizes Mexican farmworkers. The system of agricultural labor dehumanizes through the rundown living quarters given to those families, the careless use of pesticides and the indifference that ranchers have toward their effects on the Mexican farm laborers.

Viramontes' commentary on the (mis)use of pesticides, the physical toll the labor takes on the farmworkers' bodies, and the living conditions are components that represent the system of agricultural labor, and the position of the farmworkers within it. By placing a spotlight on all

of the themes she touches upon in relation to Mexican farmworker struggles, she brings enlightenment to their plight, and pulls them forth from the margins, and skillfully places them closer to the consumers line of sight. Similar to her character, Estrella, Viramontes brings and demands attention not only for the farmworkers, but for the entirety of the injustices created in the agricultural labor system. Equally important, Viramontes brings special attention to the farmworker children, who are just as marginalized as the adult farmworkers, because consumers in this country tend to forget or not know, that Mexican children do this type of labor as well, to help in their families make a better living and survive.

Chapter 3

The Struggle Within the Struggle in Cherrie Moraga's *Watsonville: Some Place Not Here*

Introduction

Cherrie Moraga's *Watsonville: Some Place Not Here* is loosely based on the Watsonville, California cannery strike (1985-1987), but it is just as much about the unseen capitalist oppressive structural forces that the Mexican proletariat must face. These structural forces are supported by both Anglos and Mexicans that reinforce the patriarchal, social, cultural and economic repressive ideology of capitalism. Moraga's play continues the tradition of the Chicano/a working class theater's function as a form of resistance against exploitive capitalist principles; but her play also critiques and resists the sexist, homophobic, and patriarchal sphere of heterosexual Chicanismo. Her play shows a natural progression of Chicano/a labor theater from its beginnings with Luis Valdez's *El Teatro Campesino* and its criticism of growers' treatment of farmworkers, to *Watsonville*, which criticizes the treatment of Chicana cannery workers, and the Chicano/a queer. In this sense Moraga's play, along with most of her other works creates a "disruption of Chicano theatrical canons," due to a cast consisting of Chicana and queer characters, along with a critique of institutions like unions and churches, generally believed to support Chicano/a working class struggles (Jacobs 25). Unlike most scholarship on Moraga, and this play specifically, an analysis of *Watsonville* reveals that there are also Mexican labor issues she explores, such as the working conditions and capitalist exploitation. She frames the labor struggle in a larger context that engages the role of the government through an anti-immigration law which influences the characters' sense of morality, and creates strategizing conflicts based on ideological differences amongst the rank-and-file. Her depiction of opposing moralities, ideologies, and strike strategizing decisions also make *Watsonville* a play that disrupts

the traditional Chicano/a labor narrative of Mexican working class unity. She does this by presenting a narrative of divergence that takes place amongst the rank-and-file when faced with difficult decisions. By displaying this realistic portrayal of internal friction within a group of strikers, Moraga's *Watsonville*, criticizes the role of capitalism and classism in a complex and nuanced labor struggle. She shows that what occurs in the play is a battle not only against Shea and his cannery, it is also a battle against the structures of capitalism: racism, sexism, and classism. Shea's cannery and its takeaways is only one component in this structure. The other components involved in this structure are a fictional proposed anti-immigration law, Senate Bill 1519, and the union that represents the workers. Moraga offers an intersectional play that incorporates a criticism of capitalism and its effects on Mexican workers. The issues faced by the workers are then magnified within capitalism whether the character identifies as Chicana, lesbian, religious, documented or undocumented. In the intersectionality of themes, Moraga engages in an anti-capitalist critique showing how capitalism and its instructions function against the Mexican worker. Moraga's play presents how capitalism affects different aspects of society, which means that a labor struggle does not necessarily consist of economic issues, but it also intersects with issues of race and gender. Showing that capitalism corrupts individuals through individual economic interest, but also reinforces the status quo of power through race and patriarchy.

Cherrie Moraga, born in Whittier, California in 1952, is known for her works: *This Bridge Called my Back* (co-edited with Gloria Anzaldua and published in 1981), *Loving in the War Years: Lo que nunca pasó por sus labios* (1983), *Giving Up the Ghost: Teatro in Two Acts* (1986), *The Last Generation: Poetry and Prose* (1993), *Heroes and Saints and Other Plays* (1994), *Waiting in the Wings: Portrait of a Queer Motherhood* (1997) and *Watsonville: Some*

Place Not Here (2002). She is half Mexican and Anglo, but identifies as a Chicana lesbian and a third world feminist whose political ideology was influenced by the radicalism of the 1970s. Therefore, the Chicana and Chicana lesbian characters appear prominently throughout her works, including her play *Watsonville*, where issues of gender and sexuality are explored through her protagonists.

Watsonville revolves around a group of prominent Chicana workers from a cannery: Dolores, Amparo, and Lucha who go on strike against the Pajaro Valley Cannery. But it is also about the people that help them organize: Chente, Juan Cunningham, and Susana. The antagonists at the beginning of the play are Shea, the owner of the cannery, and the state apparatus, represented by the anti-immigration law, Senate Bill 1519. As a result of the strike and Senate Bill 1519, the protagonists find themselves debating organizing strategies, while taking into consideration the implications of the proposed law on undocumented strikers. They must also consider the ethics of their choices in their pursuit of a victory in the labor dispute. The discourse of the characters exposes the internal politics involved amongst the strikers as they find themselves taking on the cannery, the government, and at times one another due to competing ideologies. The play is complex in this regard because the internal conflicts between the strikers take center stage, making an audience consider whether the choices made by the strikers were right or wrong. The decisions show the moral dilemmas that are created by capitalist and class agendas.

The inner turmoil and the consequences of the decisions made by characters show a greater interconnectedness of labor struggles with other issues such as immigration, ethnicity and class which can in turn expose contradictions amongst the strikers and their individual interests. Georg Lukács has argued that the “relationship between class consciousness and class situation

is really very simple in the case of the proletariat, but the obstacles which prevent its consciousness being realized in practice are correspondingly greater. In the first place this consciousness is divided within itself” (70). This is apparent in *Watsonville*, as Moraga portrays the Watsonville labor struggle as a multi-layered situation that requires the strikers to arrive at a synchronized class consciousness, which is complicated by the anti-immigration law and the individualistic interests of one of their labor leaders. The contradictions found in the play’s plot, lead to a consideration of reification. Reification is generally considered objectification. Hanna Fenichel Pitkin understands reification as a “concept intended to diagnose our self-entrapment and empower us” within a capitalist society that has normalized commodity fetishism (264). In “Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat,” Lukács stated: “Reification is, then the necessary, immediate reality of every living person in capitalist society. It can be overcome only by *constant and constantly renewed efforts to disrupt the reified structure of existence by concretely relating to the concretely manifested contradictions of the total development, by becoming conscious of the immanent meanings of the contradictions for the total development*” (197). In order to resist being reified, the inherent contradictions within a class situation must be understood in relation to capitalism as a whole by the proletariat. In his study on Chicano/a literature Marcial González defines reification as “the failure to understand how objects, events, and situations are intricately connected to and constituted by dynamic social processes that have evolved historically at different levels: locally, nationally, and globally” (11). González then uses reification to show how the Chicano novel, “stands out for the manner in which it simultaneously embodies and resists reification, a novelistic feature that I refer to as contradictory form” (11-12). By exploring reification and different “modes of the reified consciousness,” González then manages to do as Lukács urged—disrupt the reified structure by acknowledging existing

contradictions. Similarly, in *Watsonville*, Moraga shows her audience how the reified consciousness of Chente, a laborer and labor leader of the struggle, is in reality a contradictory figure, when he puts his own interests before those of the rest of the strikers. Instead of disrupting the reified structure, he reinforces it through his motivation for upward mobility in the union. In another instance, he turns against undocumented workers, as form of retaliation after Lucha refused to sleep with them. Moraga also shows her audience how institutions become a part of the reified structure, when the union which is intended to support the worker, instead uses one of their own (Chente) to work against the better interests of the strikers. Moraga portrays the church as a contradictory institution as well, when it refuses to support the strike over a difference of opinion on whether the La Virgen de Guadalupe appeared to one of the strikers or not. Both union and the church in turn become a part of the reified structure, but by showing these inherent contradictions, Moraga resists reification. What might at times appear as binaries can in fact be instances in which Moraga is exposing intrinsic contradictions within institutions and characters who are a part of the reified structure—that is a system that has “naturaliz[ed] social inequalities” in a capitalist society (González 10).

To contextualize Moraga’s play, on September 9, 1985, employees of both Watsonville Canning and Shaw Frozen Foods went on strike to prevent both companies from cutting their wages and benefits. The Watsonville Frozen Food strike lasted approximately eighteen months, officially ending on March 11, 1987. During those eighteen months, over a thousand, mostly Mexican women rank-and-file strikers and their families faced financial hardships, court injunctions, scabs, and long days on the picket line (Castillo 55). Fortunately, the strikers had a strong base of assistance, thanks to a prominent strike support committee, and the reluctant backing of their union, Teamsters Local 912. The strike managed to bankrupt Watsonville

Canning, which as a result was bought and taken over by Norcal Frozen Foods. The new ownership settled on a contract with the strikers, but the conclusion of the strike did not necessarily result in a triumph for them. After the settlement the strikers still took a pay cut, going from \$6.66 an hour to \$5.85 (Schilling and Lasnier). However, the strike's triumph lies, first, in the fact that none of the strikers ever crossed the picket line to return to work until the dispute was settled. Secondly, through this struggle Watsonville's Mexican workers contributed to the town's historical narrative. This victory has also become a part of Chicano/a literature, through Cherrie Moraga's play in that she brings a different dimension to the struggle, by framing the Mexican worker struggle in the form of an act of resistance against capitalist exploitation.

The intersectionality of her play, shows that it is just as much a criticism of modernity and globalization as it is about capitalism. In *The Last Generation: Prose and Poetry* (1993), Moraga had begun critiquing U.S. expansion and the taking of land that belonged to indigenous people. She places an emphasis on the importance of remembering the indigenous people who although lost their land through colonial expansion still have a history here, that requires present-day people to resist. She writes in her foreword to *Watsonville*, on the importance of remembering: "I began to recognize these towns as sites where Indian memory is allowed place and finds articulation in the bodies of its own displaced residents: Mexican, Xicano, African-American, Vietnamese, Samoan . . ." (vii). Where her play might otherwise seem filled with binaries, where she brings into question the role of the church in labor struggles represented in both positive and negative ways, or the intentions of labor unions, which she portrays as an institution of the state apparatus, the reality is that her play is a criticism of capitalism, but

equally a text that seeks to bring light to the indigenous past of the Mexican laborer through La Virgen de Guadalupe, which she uses to represent this past.

By using the La Virgen de Guadalupe within a capitalist state, she engages in what Walter D. Mignolo has studied and referenced as “local histories” and “global designs.” This, of course is important, for if Moraga is criticizing capitalism, she is also criticizing the erasure of the local indigenous history along with the current proletarianization and exploitation of the Mexican people. For Mignolo global designs consisted of Western expansion which in turn consisted of a religious and economic agenda that would eventually bring about modernity/coloniality and presently globalization. Mignolo brings attention to the fact that global designs were also “a hegemonic project for managing the planet” (21). The “hegemonic project” refers to knowledge and culture that came with modernity and colonialism that resulted in the erasure and replacement of the indigenous past. He argues that in response to the “hegemonic project” Moraga is a scholar that engages in “bilanguaging,” a process in which she “[builds] on dual memories, memories articulated in two or more languages” (267). Beyond Mignolo’s analysis of Moraga’s “bilanguaging mind” Moraga has sought to engage in decolonization in order to rewrite, or better yet remember that indigenous past which was lost through colonization and capitalism. Scott Lauria Morgensen contextualizes this within an Indigenous Queer Studies praxis, by writing, “[a]t the moment they affirmed their own indigeneity, Anzaldúa and Moraga did not claim to be identical to Native American Two-Spirit people. Rather, they proposed linking *Chicana lesbian* desires to the histories Two-Spirit people claim. I thus invite reading their work as tracing the borders of Indigenous identities, as they affirmed Chican@ indigeneity while announcing a desire from a location different than that of Native Americans” (141). Given

Morgensen's explanation the audience begins to understand Moraga's use of La Virgen de Guadalupe as a representation of the indigenous past within the play.

Moraga has written that, "In [the play] and places, characters and real people resist and remember, for remembering gives them courage to resist" (*Watsonville* vii). And what are these people resisting exactly? Moraga writes in *The Last Generation* that it is the continued "occupation by an Anglo-centric, patriarchal, imperialist United States" (173). In her play it is found that she not only brings forth the importance of the labor struggle, but also begins to show that a possible alternate space is needed for the Mexican working class. Hence in the conclusion of the play, the Mexican community ends up in a park where La Virgen de Guadalupe appeared as an apparition to one of the characters. When La Virgen makes her first appearance, Moraga connects her to the Mesoamerican past, through the chanting of indigenous names: "Chihuacoatl, Quilaztli, Tonan, Centeotl, Centeotlcihuatl, Xilonen, Teteoian, Chicomecoatl, Citlalicue, Chinipa, Yoalticatl, Coatlicue, Tlaliyolo, Toci, Tonantzin" and finally "Madre" (*Watsonville* 52).

In "Some No-Place Like Home: Thirdspace Production in Cherrie Moraga's *Watsonville*;" Ruben Mendoza similarly makes a case for Moraga's approach to an alternate space, specifically referring to it as the thirdspace. He discusses Moraga's representation of capitalism within the play, by framing it within Henri Lefebvre's theory of abstract space, and Edward Soja's interpretation of Homi Bhabha's thirdspace¹. Mendoza argues that "Cherrie Moraga subverts and critiques capitalist spatial practice through the plays counter-production of

¹ In *The Location of Culture* Homi Bhabha defines Thirdspace as "represent[ing] both the general conditions of language and the specific implication of the utterance in a performative and institutional strategy of which it cannot 'in itself' be conscious" (53). He further adds, "[i]t is that Third Space, though unrepresentable in itself, which constitutes the discursive conditions of enunciation that ensure that the meaning and symbols of culture have no primordial unity or fixity; that even signs can be appropriated, translated, rehistoricized, and read anew" (55).

a communal resistant, thirdspace,” and that the thirdspace provides an alternative to the abstract space or the “capitalist colonizing space” (132). Ikue Kina also touches upon the theme of capitalism within the play, but contends that Moraga’s *Watsonville* can be read as a work of ecofeminism, in that it takes a critical look at the role of women, patriarchy, and the environment. She further argues that capitalism is an end result of patriarchy, which as a consequence, affects both women and the environment. Elizabeth Jacobs similarly contends that “The environment is central to all of Moraga’s plays that were written, produced, and published during the early to mid-1990s,” because “[t]his was a time when corporate America was continuing to erase the historical and ethnic specificity of certain California spaces, when immigration policies increasingly denied government services to undocumented workers, and levels of pollution due to the use of pesticides in farming were threatening numerous farm workers’ lives” (96). It becomes apparent then, that although a third world feminist, Moraga must not only criticize the prevalent gender role issues, it is also becomes of importance for her to bring forth the issues in her play regarding capitalism and Mexican working class issues.

Watsonville makes a case for the importance of a “double critique” in regards to the use of Marxist criticism. That is to say that important dimensions missing from Marxist criticism pertain to colonized peoples, or in particular to the present day ethnic groups; in Moraga’s play, Chicanas and Chicanos specifically. In this sense although based on a labor struggle, Moraga does criticize capitalism but also addresses the impact of capitalism on Mexican workers both documented and undocumented, along with the issues faced through gender. In support of the “double critique,” Mignolo cites Franz Fanon, Abdelkebir Khatibi and Subcomandante Marcos stating that all of these anti-colonial thinkers criticized Marx, but also understood the importance of the criticism of capitalism. Mignolo writes, “Fanon is calling attention to the force of black

consciousness, not just of class consciousness [. . .] Khatibi criticizes Marx for his blindness to colonialism and for suggesting that the colonization (and industrialization) of India was a necessary step toward the international proletarian revolution, he is not denying the powerful analysis of the logic of the capitalistic economy” (85-86). Mignolo has also found that what Subcomandante Marcos has referred to as “Zapatismo” is also simply a way of considering Marxism in a way that is specific to the ethnic group which suffers not only from capitalist exploitation, but from a history of racial and social positioning, influenced through hegemonic imposition. Of “Zapatismo,” Subcomandante Marcos writes: “Zapatismo is not fundamentalist or milenarist indigenous thinking: and it is not indigenous resistance either. It is a mixture of all that, that crystalizes in the EZLN” (qtd. In Mignolo 86). Therefore, a discussion of Marxism in relation to a particular Chicano/a text must be able to mesh with, or at the very least consider the history of the particular group it is to focus on.

Gayatri Spivak, like Mignolo, has argued that Marxism cannot simply be taken in and of itself when analyzing the struggle of a particular ethnic group as well. She contends that approaches such as “feminism, anti-racism, and anti-colonialism [. . .] should swallow and digest these dynamic materials rather than seek to fit correctly the authoritative label ‘Marxist’” (187). The “dynamic materials” that are being referred to are Marxist ideologies on capitalism, that should not compromise feminist or anti-colonial ideologies and in turn feminist and anti-colonial ideologies should not be forced to fit within Marxism, but should utilize or complement it instead. This line of thought pertains to Moraga whose feminist themes tend to be predominant in a text, and as a result might obfuscate her criticism of capitalism and its impact on Mexican workers. It should be possible to analyze Moraga’s work within a Marxist and feminist framework, for as Catherine A. MacKinnon has argued, “both Marxism and feminism are

theories of power and of its unequal distribution” (107). In *Where We Stand: Class Matters* (2000), bell hooks recalled reading the work of Marx, but found it lacking because it did not touch upon race or gender. She would later also state that discussing race also makes it imperative to discuss class if there is indeed to be serious discourse on ending racism (hooks 7). All of them argue on the importance of a critique of capitalism/class/Marxism alongside the other issues (colonialism or proletarianization) particular to their ethnic group.

As a third world feminist, Moraga has similarly looked beyond class in order to address specific issues pertaining to Chicana women, ethnic queer women, and the environment. Most often associated with her feminism however, it is understandable that class and race might receive less attention. But in a 1982 interview on the origins of *This Bridge Called My Back*, she speaks of the frustration that she and other ethnic women had at the lack of attention they received, noting specifically “the frustration of being in feminist situations with race and class not addressed” (Sorrell 4). In 2008, following Barack Obama’s presidential inauguration, she would then stress the importance of race in relation to class amongst other issues plaguing minority communities:

Throughout Obama’s campaign, the needs of the urban poor, who for the most part are communities of color, were completely erased from the national debate. To speak of poverty and the working poor in the United States, Obama would have had to face the barbed wired wall of racist, inhumane immigration policies and entrenched violence and resultant ever-expanding prison system that has emerged from the government’s full-scale abandonment of the inner city. In short, he would have to bring “race” into the national discussion [. . .] Maybe one of the greatest disappointments to me in the 2008 campaign is how the national dialogue reduced race and racism to a black and white issue. The specific concerns of east and west Asian-Americans, Latinos, and indigenous peoples were seldom specifically addressed in campaign speeches. Instead our communities were relegated to a kind of roll call of generic ‘others.’ (“What’s Race” 165 and 168)

Moraga’s scholarship and criticism has essentially gone unchanged. Although still ardently identifying as a Chicana lesbian feminist, her line of criticism on the role of class in the “national

debate” adheres with the importance of the “double critique,” in that she views the importance of race in any discussion on class and vice versa. Thus, supporting the argument made by Fanon and Khatibi, in that any criticism of capitalism under the lens of Marxism must not only look at class, but also consider race or colonialism. While Fanon makes an argument for black consciousness and class, and Khatibi argues for the inclusion of colonization in a discussion about class, Moraga argues specifically for not just an analysis of race and class, but for class and Chicana/o workers specifically in *Watsonville*. In *Watsonville*, the audience receives an anti-colonial criticism, by way of a group of Mexican workers involved in a labor struggle, and simultaneously in a battle to remain within the U.S. As a result, *Watsonville* provides the struggle of the Mexican worker within capitalism, as opposed to the “black and white” version, where being Mexican, these workers also face systemic racism that is only exacerbated through capitalism’s corrupting influences. Through its focus on class and the Mexican worker, Moraga is able address another issue particular to this ethnic group, that of the state’s attack on “illegal” immigrants. Accordingly, her play also explores capitalism through the intersectionality between class, gender, sexuality, and race.

Some scholars have already explored some of these intersectionalities in relation to capitalism, such as the aforementioned article by Mendoza, on capitalism and communal space and Kina on capitalism, feminism and the environment. Although Jacobs did not discuss capitalism in her article she does explore intersectionalities of feminism, the environment and indigeneity; resulting in an article that engages in exploring specifically the theme of indigeneity in order to “dig up” the local history which existed before colonialism and modernity. The commonly explored intersectionalities in *Watsonville* tend to involve feminism and the environment, with capitalism and race not necessarily receiving a similar amount of attention.

The scholarship available on Moraga's *Watsonville*, acknowledges that it is based on a labor struggle, but the landscape, and gender role issues appear to be of most importance to academics. Largely ignored is the fact that the play is based on an actual location, and a real historical labor struggle. For that matter the impact of capitalism, class, and socially constructed obstacles, that played a role in the real labor struggle, as well as in the play, are not addressed. Nor does the scholarship explore how Moraga approaches the labor struggle by creating tension in the play through the interactions between the strikers, Lucha, Susana, Chente, Juan, Dolores, and Amparo as they discuss organizational strategies, and at times find themselves on opposing sides or with contradictory points of view. Their dialogue about organizing ideologies is important, because it showcases an aspect about a labor struggle not commonly addressed in Chicano/a fictional portrayals: what occurs once the strikers are trying to organize and are faced with making difficult decisions that might have negative effects on other people? It helps that Moraga made the labor struggle a background element, allowing the play to largely focus on the dynamics of the characters and the morally ambiguous situational obstacles they face. The moral "gray areas" result in situations in which characters need to consider decisions that might be beneficial to the strikers, but as a consequence might jeopardize the welfare of other Mexicans that are a part of Watsonville's community. In turn, morally ambiguous situations result in morally ambiguous characters and institutions that are corrupted by symptoms of capitalism and classism, such as greed, individualism and upward mobility.

This chapter argues that it is important and fruitful to analyze Moraga's play by focusing on the ways in which she shows how capitalism molds oppressive structures and they in turn effect and mold the morality of the characters. Exploring the intersectionality of these themes, provides an outlook on how people were affected and even shaped through capitalist

machinations used to turn them against one another. A textual analysis of Moraga's play through a Marxist lense, is important in order to become more receptive of capitalism's corrupting influence on the proletariat, as it is represented in the text. As mentioned earlier the function of capitalist doctrine is continually reinforced through its multilayered superstructure. Within the play this super structure is represented through Senate Bill 1519, which is represented of the government and Chente, who represents the union, which in turn is a component of the ideological state apparatus, both of which work in conjunction, one could even argue, in collusion, in order to continue enabling capitalism.

Labor and Morality

Moraga truncates the causation of the strike in act one, scene two, as the characters Lucha, Amparo and Chente discuss their grievances about timed bathroom breaks, and broccoli cutting quotas. They also discuss the benefits that the owner, Shea wants to take away from his employees, such as paid vacations, sick leave and seniority. The play shows that within the capitalist structure, the Mexican body is a labor commodity whose exchange-value is dependent on its productivity. To get the most out of the Mexican worker, the owner of Pajaro Valley Cannery, implements timed bathroom breaks and broccoli cutting quotas. By having his forelady time the bathroom breaks, Shea insures that the women will spend more time at their job post. Imposing broccoli cutting quotas is a similar strategy that insures that the women will work at a quick pace to meet their allocated portion, otherwise risk being fired. This is all done to reassure the owner, that he is getting the most productivity out of the Mexican womens' labor. Tucker explains this well: "Marx characterizes capitalism as a system geared to the maximizing of surplus value through intense—and ever intensifying—exploitation of labour power to the utmost extent sufferable by 'that repellant yet elastic natural barrier, man'" (xxx). Tucker's

explanation is tangible in the play, as the workers are given timed bathroom breaks and quotas to fulfill in order to increase production.

This scene begins to show a contrast between the ethics of the Mexican workers and the profit-motivation of their employers. On his biographical work on Marx, Peter Singer wrote that “It is true that for Marx morality is part of the ideological superstructure of society, is determined by the economic basis, and serves to promote the interests of the ruling class [but] what has to be rejected is morality that serves the interests of the ruling class” (112). In his own studies of Marx and Engels, Robert C. Tucker found that “they not only analyze exploitation and the division of labour in society, but morally condemn these phenomena as evil” (725). Therefore, there are labor ethics between employee and employer that should be followed, but within capitalism this does not remain a part of the capitalist employer-employee model, given that employers or companies give in to their need for capitalist accumulation, and in turn find it easier to short change their workers for the sake of profit. In this way, the labor of the worker is devalued and is slowly dehumanized as well. Engels in particular argued that due to “class antagonisms, morality has class morality; it has either justified the domination and the interests of the ruling class, or, ever since the oppressed class became powerful enough, it has represented its indignation against this domination and the future interests of the oppressed” (726). In the context of *Watsonville*, the audience will find that as the Mexican workers move toward a strike, the ethics of their employers are heavily based on maintaining the socioeconomic status quo.

In the play, the dehumanization of the Mexican worker through capitalism includes the taking of their benefits, such as the aforementioned paid vacations and sick leave. The process of the dehumanization of the Mexican worker historically began as discussed in chapter one, when American expansionists sought to increase their territory and believed that the Mexicans

inhabiting the land would be incapable of developing it. This dehumanization would later evolve once the Mexican became a laborer for the industries of American capitalists. Within Marxism this dehumanization is discussed as alienation, estrangement, and objectification. In “The Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844,” Marx wrote, “The product of labour is labour which has been congealed in an object, which has become material: it is the *objectification* of labour. Labour’s realization is its objectification” (71). In the setting of Moraga’s play the Mexican worker becomes an object whose labor power produces commodities, and as a result of the commodification of their labor power s/he becomes dehumanized; for Shea (the capitalist) the Mexican worker is simply the object he needs in order to keep Pajaro Valley Cannery producing. This relationship between the employer and employee is further expanded on by Tucker who wrote that “[i]n wage labour, the argument runs, the worker sells the capitalist employer the only commodity that he possesses, his labour power, and receives in recompense a wage reflecting this commodity’s ‘value’” (xxx). Therefore, in Moraga’s play the audience will find the Mexican workers objectified as labor power and thus dehumanized in the sense that they are no longer a person, but a body that provides labor power for Shea’s product. This dehumanization continues as Shea’s company begins to struggle financially and he decides to pay the workers less and take away their health care benefits.

The financial woes lead the owner to devalue the labor power of his Mexican workers, expecting the same level of productivity, even though he will be paying them less, and taking away their benefits. Shea finds it easier to cut back on wages and benefits, leading to a very simple explanation given by Marx: “as capital accumulates, the lot of labourer, be his payment high or low, must grow worse” (qtd. in Tucker xxx). This works in a reverse manner in the play, in that Shea’s company begins to struggle financially and due to this, as Marx explained, the

situation of the Mexican laborers does become worse since they are expected to accept a pay and benefits cut, all for the sake of capital accumulation. It becomes a double-edged sword of capitalism, in that whether the company is doing well or not, over time the employee's labor power is not paid its worth. Instead capitalists try to find other ways to exploit the workers or if their company is going through monetary loss, then they seek to relocate to an area where they can find cheaper labor. For example, in *Watsonville*, when the workers begin to discuss a strike, Shea considers leaving the United States for Mexico, where they can pay the laborers in that country even less than the Mexican laborers in the United States.

Another tactic used by Shea, is increasing the pay of workers, in order to silence discussions about a strike. Chente is aware about the reasoning behind this tactic: "I guess they figure if you get a bigger check in your hands, you'll be happy" (1.2.16). This becomes the first moral dilemma some workers faced. It is a moral dilemma influenced by the temporary use of capital to entice the workers into complicity. By offering them a raise he expects them to reconsider discussions about the strike. In response to this quandary, Lucha speaks for the general outlook of the workers: "¿Cree que somos pendejas? Does he think we'll just go along with them for a lousy eighteen dollars a month?" (1.2.16). Thus, none of the workers allow themselves to be corrupted or influenced by Shea. The laborers decide to go on with the strike understanding that they will be unpaid for its duration.

Following this discussion, scene three opens with the characters chanting "Huelga! Huelga! Huelga! Huelga! Huelga! Huelga!." The labor struggle itself is summarized compactly in act one-scene two, but Moraga further illustrates the working conditions that the assembly line workers face by inserting an agit-prop act, performed by characters, dubbing themselves, "Teatro de las Bravas." The act within the play revolves around the characters Veterana and Obrera who are

supposed to be training a newcomer to the assembly line, Mrs. Oprimida. They have to do this while under the watchful eye of their supervisor, a character named Forelady, who badgers the women to work faster and harder, yelling “¡Andele! ¡Andele” and “Move those hands! ¡Rapido! ¡Rapido!” The pressure to keep up with the quota causes Mrs. Oprimida to slice her finger, and is then taken away by Forelady. Veterana and Obrera have a discussion about the situation:

OBREA: (beneath her breath) Vaca fea.

VETERANA: ¡Eh Obrera! Don’t “agonize.” Organize!

OBREERA: ¿Qué quiere decir eso, Veterana?

VETERANA: (Throwing off her gloves) I mean, Ya basta! It’s time we go on strike!

OBREERA: (Shouting to the audience) ¡Qué viva la mujer obrera! (1.3.19)

Prior to Mrs. Oprimida, Veterana and Obrera had been joking about the number of fingers they had lost working under similar conditions. The acto performed by the women, shows the problem—the overbearing Forelady, which is similar to the Patrón character in El Teatro Campesino, and Obrera, Veterana, and Mrs. Oprimida are comparable to the Farmworker(s). And just like El Teatro Campesino’s actos, there is a problem briefly showcased for the audience: that of the women having to deal with the pressure to fulfill a broccoli-cutting quota, which causes them injury as they rush to keep up with the Forelady’s demand to work faster. The acto, much like the previous scene encapsulates the struggle of the cannery workers, by focusing on an aspect of the working conditions that the women feel is unfair. Veterana offers that being proactive, organizing and striking is a solution to their work environment issues. Once having established the struggle, Moraga moves onto issues that are equally a part of the labor struggle.

With the labor struggle established, the focus shifts to the characters that are on strike, and their strategizing conflicts as they attempt to bring a resolution to the strike. In scenes where characters discuss organizational tactics and morality, Moraga shows “her ability to pair up characters of opposing views and let us hear their voices, [and] their perspectives, in an open

dialogue that favors neither” (DeRose 77). Moraga does not focus on the struggle as it occurs in the cannery, instead she focuses on the struggle as it occurs outside of the workplace amongst the strikers, putting forth dialogue about organizational strategies and ethics. Another complication added to the strategizing of the strikers is that Shea begins to use esquiroles or scabs, during the strike, giving the strikers a sense of urgency toward a resolution. The union also creates friction amongst the strikers by not giving them its full support. These obstacles create conflict for the strikers as they consider how to approach the strike, while also taking into account who in the community, their decisions will affect.

Senate Bill 1519: The Conquest Continues

In order to see the full extent of capitalism’s influence over the Pajaro Valley Cannery labor struggle, it is important to analyze the role of fictional Senate Bill 1519 which “effectively bars employment, education, and health services to all illegal aliens and their children” (1.7.45). Senate Bill 1519 is based on California’s 1994, Prop 187, which was also intended to deny social services to “illegal immigrants.” Senate Bill 1519 not only echoes the racist, nativist and xenophobic tone of Prop 187, it hearkens back to similar policy from the past that targeted Mexicans after American colonization of the Southwest region, such as the Foreign Miner’s Tax (1850), The Greaser Act (1855), the Depression Era Repatriation Program (1929) and Operation Wetback (1954). Since the publication of *Watsonville*, other such laws have been proposed and/or approved, including the Border Protection, Anti-Terrorism and Illegal Immigration Act (2005), and Arizona Senate Bill 1070: Support our Law Enforcement and Safe Neighborhoods Act (2010). Most of the laws were established due to the perceived economic threat that Mexicans and other foreigners posed. The more recent laws tend to be imposed by an ideologically conservative, racist, xenophobic and nativist white majority that already

criminalizes all Mexicans, but does it further by proposing and passing anti-immigration laws in order to maintain the status quo.

These laws give the state, socioeconomic control over the Mexican population, thus continuing the imperialist agenda that began with the colonization of Mesoamerica. By labeling the fictitious Senate Bill, “1519”—the year that Spaniards conquered and colonized what is presently known as Mexico—Moraga draws a parallel between the past by way of the indigenous who were under the rule of the Spaniards and the present day Mexican laborers struggling within the United States, as its labor force. Moraga makes these connections in the scene that shows Don Arturo watching television as a news anchor introduces the bill:

Well, in spite of yesterday’s Columbus Day blizzard, the weather looks bright for the Republicans here in Washington, Liz. The surprisingly swift passage of Senator Casanova’s bill, #1519, cracking down on illegal immigration, met with little to no resistance from Democrats. The bill effectively bars employment, education and health services to all illegal aliens and their children. The Florida Senator was all smiles— (1.7.38)

The passage of the law on Columbus Day is a clear link to the colonization of the Americas, while the name of the Senator, “Casanova” indicates that he too is Italian like Christopher Columbus, the original colonizer of the Americas. This demonstrates that the passage of the bill, is simply continuing colonial rule of Mexicans in the United States in the modern day, through the use of the state apparatus. Aside from this, Moraga offers subtle commentary on the American duopoly of American politics—the Republicans and Democrats. By briefly mentioning that the Democrats, the political party that has come to be known for representing liberal interests, offered little to no resistance against the law, she is in essence stating the political party is simply one side of the same coin that reinforces the socioeconomic position of the Mexican working class through the laws imposed by the state apparatus.

Mendoza similarly argues that the imposition of abstract space or capitalist spatiality on Chicanos began at the moment of European colonization of the Indigenous in what is now the “Americas” (132). Europeans achieved their colonial agenda through “physical places of domination (missions, cities, plantations), but [also] religion, history, culture, economic system, and objectification of nature, that all served to profoundly reshape space around colonial interests” (Mendoza 133). Likewise, laws like Senate Bill 1519, “support transnational corporate exploitation of resources and migrant labor while, at the same time, restricting and regulating the movement of migrant workers” making the bill, one “in a long line of colonizing “legal” documents (“papeles”) stretching back to Cortes’ arrival” (Mendoza 134). Hence, Senate Bill 1519 is not simply a fictional law, it encompasses a long history of policies created to maintain the social and economic oppression of Mexican people.

Senate Bill 1519 intersects with different aspects of the play. The play which begins with strikers resisting capitalistic greed, must shift attention to the anti-immigration law and its effect on the Mexican labor activists struggle. Showing that the “class struggle is a political struggle,” that is waged on more than one front for the Mexican socioeconomic class (Marx 481). The law also impacts Watsonville’s predominantly Mexican community, since some of them are undocumented. It is also revealed that the law favorably interconnects with Shea’s capitalistic interests and that it corrupts individual characters’ morality through promises of upward mobility. Consequently, this shows how capitalism influences decision-making during the labor struggle and taints the ethics of the Mexican workers.

From the onset, the proposed Senate Bill causes divisiveness amongst the documented and undocumented strikers. This tension, is justified as Lucha points out that, “This bill could kill la huelga. If the workers get divided between who’s legal and who’s not, we’d be almost a

year on the line para nada” (1.7.40). Their struggle is further complicated when it is noted that the Mexican laborers would be specifically targeted: “The enforcement of the law would begin in labor camps and food processing plants throughout California [. . .]” (1.7.42). This in turn reveals that the strikers must fight on two different fronts, against their employer and the government’s new law.

The threat of deportation through the new law, causes the strikers to begin a discussion over its potential impact on their labor struggle, and it is at this juncture that the audience begins to see the control of the state apparatus on the ethics of the strikers. Chente appears willing to continue the strike, even in the face of Senate Bill 1519 and is adamant that, “The bill’s passage means nothing. The law’s unconstitutional. The courts will rule that [. . .] We got to convince the huelgistas that they must go on with the strike no matter what. We have to make them believe we believe, that this is no wrench in the works” (1.7.45). Even after picketing for a year, Chente appears optimistic that the bill will not have an impact on the strike and believes that they should convince the other strikers about this, so as to continue the strike. But as Susana points out, “Half the workers don’t even have papers [and] They’ll have no legal right to their jobs” (1.7.45). Chente would rather ignore the law, while Susana recognizes the implications that come with it, understanding that ignoring the law is also ignoring the fact that some of their co-workers are undocumented, and therefore could be effected directly by the law. This is how the tug and pull of ethics within their struggle begins.

The conversation takes an unexpected turn, when Juan recommends getting the oral support of the union, which causes Chente conflict:

JUAN: (To Chente): But if we can get the union’s support, get them to make some public statement that they are not in accord with the law –

CHENTE: You expect the union bosses to go to jail for the huelgistas?

JUAN: No, I mean only to say that they oppose the spirit of the law.

CHENTE: We got to be realistic here. We've got to find out who's legal, and who isn't.

SUSANA: What?

CHENTE: Really get a sense of the numbers and let the union know. Maybe it's fewer than we think. Maybe the loss of a few workers won't—

SUSANA: You can't do that.

CHENTE: I didn't say turn them in, I said just find out cuantos son ilegales.

(1.7.45)

Juan would like the union to oppose Senate Bill 1519, because the struggle is no longer only about the strike against Pajaro Valley Cannery. The strikers now find themselves struggling on behalf of all Mexicans who are facing the possibility of deportation. The organizers must also consider the impact it might have on the strike. If undocumented workers are deported, it might result in fewer strikers picketing and possibly lead to the end of the labor struggle and a defeat for the strikers. Chente begins to think that maybe losing a few strikers is not a bad idea, because he believes that the union will not oppose the law. Juan and Susana's morality is not in question in relation to the law and undocumented strikers, and rightly ask for the union to oppose the law. Chente's morality, in turn, does begin to come into question.

Chente finds his obligations to the cannery workers shifting, as he begins to represent the interests of the union. As Chente's allegiance shifts toward the union's agenda, it becomes more apparent to the audience, that the union does not necessarily have the best interests of the cannery workers in mind. The union is portrayed as an organization that tries to "play it safe," and uses Chente to try to convince the other cannery workers on the best recourse to resolve the labor struggle. The concern for the union and Chente becomes a prompt resolution. Chente's faulty morality becomes more apparent as he advises that it might be in their interest to sacrifice some of their undocumented coworkers, as opposed to expecting the union to take an active role against the law.

At this point the union's role and morality within the struggle also comes into question. For if the union truly represents the laborers, then it should consider that the base they represent is made up of a majority of Mexicans. Simply representing them as a working-class group is not enough, for it does not address the importance of their ethnicity within the working-class struggle. As a result of this, the union is willing to support the strike against Pajaro Valley Cannery, but is unwilling to support the worker's resistance against Senate Bill 1519, both of which intersect given that their constituency consist of Mexican cannery workers that will be effected by both. In this sense the audience is shown that the union is in reality an aspect of the ideological state apparatus. By refusing to oppose the anti-immigration law, the union shows that they indirectly support Shea's business interests and the new law. Although it is understood that within the superstructure, ideological state apparatuses such as churches, educational institutions and unions can provide forms of social consciousness, they can also be used to stifle a struggle. "Ideological State Apparatuses function massively and predominantly *by ideology*," Althusser writes, "but they also function secondarily by repression, even if ultimately, but only ultimately, this is very attenuated and concealed, even symbolic" (138). Althusser uses the example of "expulsion" and "selection" as forms of repression used by ideological state apparatuses such as schools and churches (138). In *Watsonville*, the ideological state apparatus that is the union tries to repress the strikers broad-based rationale, by using Chente to undermine their ideas. As a result, the audience begins to see that Chente is simply a tool of the union, being used to destabilize his fellow strikers, while supporting the superstructure's general repression of the Mexican working-class through the state and ideological state apparatus.

(Re)Humanizing the Scabs

In Chicano literary productions, such as El Teatro Campesino's actos, the scab is always portrayed negatively. Typically, the scab is represented as a sellout to the Mexican labor struggle, as most Chicano labor narratives, like Moraga's revolve around the point of view of the Mexican workers. The personality trait that authors tend to imbue on scab laborers is lecherous, cheap work-for-hire, used by employers to break a strike. For that matter, they are simply identified as "scabs" as seen in Moraga's play. But Moraga addresses the complicated matter of scab labor in her play, in that, they are used by Shea to continue operations at his cannery, but they are people who are struggling economically as well. Although she portrays characters angrily chastising scabs, through her character's dialogue, she also manages to humanize the scab in the face of Senate Bill 1519. In doing so, she shows the audience that capitalism creates fault lines between in the Mexican community, specifically between the cannery workers and unemployed Mexicans seeking a job, because Shea uses them to compete with each other for the same positions.

In the beginning of the play, Moraga, uses the scabs as an entity that lacks an identity other than the identifier that shows that their intended role is to disrupt the strike: "scab." Through her characters she shows the way in which the cannery strikers similarly view temporary workers in the pejorative, as Lucha asks who they are and Amparo replies with "esquiroles," followed by Chente's translation, "scabs" (1.3.20). Moraga further vilifies the scabs, by showing the anger they incite amongst strikers trying to fight for better wages, as Lucha yells, "Pinches cabrones! Vendidos! Hijos de la chingada! Se venden por unos pinches pesos!" (1.3.20). In that scene, Moraga captures the general historical reaction to scab labor. More importantly she takes the time to show her audience how the strikers dehumanize the scabs

and view them as their enemy. Viewing the scabs as their enemy is created by Shea's need to hire the temporary replacement workers, who will be paid cheaper wages for doing the same work. By hiring the temporary workers, Shea creates an atmosphere of tension, because as Lucha points out, the temporary workers will be paid lower wages, but ultimately they are being used to break the strike, and sway the strikers to return to work. The scabs are used for their labor power, therefore their importance is undeniable because they allow Shea to continue operations at the cannery. It also shows that Shea, is in competition with the strikers and will do what is necessary to keep the cannery functioning while simultaneously trying to break the strike. Competition itself is a tenet of capitalism, that is "oppressive, because it tends to ensure that the most selfish, unethical people, will rise to the top, as they're the ones willing to do whatever it takes to win" (Tyson 114). Competition within capitalism creates opportunities for an individual to thrive, therefore the strikers are functioning as a community of workers in solidarity to have the value of their labor recognized, while Shea is an individualist who chooses to ignore their value, in favor of continuing to produce and profit. The scabs are products of their own socioeconomic conditions and thus inserted into the capitalist matrix of competition, during the labor struggle. Reasonably the strikers view them as their competition, even though it is Shea who is using them for his own gain, while the scabs just want to survive economically.

By the opening of act two Jojo and his mother, Lucha briefly converse about the role of the scabs, and through this dialogue, she offers a different representation of them, that nonetheless still leaves the characters and audience conflicted:

LUCHA: Son esquiroles.

JOJO: They don't care, 'ama. They just wanna work.

LUCHA: Well, so do I. I just wanna work, tambien. I been just wanting to work already for fifteen months. Aren't you tired of food baskets?

JOJO: Yeah.

LUCHA: Seeing your mama stand in front of the Safeway and be for donations?

JOJO: Yeah.

LUCHA: Digging through the stack of old clothes to find a damn pair of pants for you to wear to school?

JOJO: Yeah, yeah.

LUCHA: Seeing your sister with patches in her dresses?

JOJO: You know I'm tired of it.

LUCHA: Pues, I'm tired too. I'm tired of the pinche landlord always on my back . . . que la renta, y que la renta . . . y que cuando vas a trabajar. Ever scab bus you see means another month on the picket line for your mother. (2.1.49-50)

Through Jojo's acknowledgement that, "They just wanna work," Moraga begins to frame the scab within the same capitalist structure that has led to the strike against Pajaro Valley Cannery. It is a line of thought that is expanded on later, by Juan, but it begins the process of humanizing the scab as a fellow working-class Mexican, simply seeking economic survival. However, Moraga continues to show the economic ordeals that the strikers must face, after choosing to stop working, as a form of resistance to capitalist exploitation. Lucha ends her explanation to her son by saying, "Every scab bus you see means another month on the picket line for your mother," meaning that regardless of the scabs own desire to work, those resisting exploitation suffer the consequences of their defiance.

Lucha begrudgingly addresses the scabs, by getting on the bus that is carrying them, and explains to them that both the strikers and they are being used and commodified in order to provide commodities for greedy bosses and consumers: "Quizas en ese tiempo you saw algun Americano, wearing a cotton shirt que yo pizque. Una camisa muy bonita, muy blanca, and made with the cotton I picked. Y despues aca en Watsonville, I've worked en las canerias, packing todo el proceso de comida. Para que? So that us inmigrantes could fill the gringos' table con comida" (2.1.51). Lucha importantly asks, "para que?," or "what for?," as in "For what purpose did she do the intensive labor required to provide the consumer with products she had a hand in producing?" What has been the purpose of her fifteen years in the U.S. as a laborer? Through her

question, and her final comment she shows an understanding of the defectiveness of the capitalist structure, and her invisible role within this structure. Or put another way, she addresses the American consumers' commodity fetishism, by pointing to the Mexican labor that provided the cotton for the t-shirt and the packaged food they eat. To the American consumer, Mexican workers and their labor is non-existent, and engaging in a labor struggle is simply a form of having their presence recognized by being paid fairly for the work they provide.

Lucha's speech continues on while she tries to convince the scabs not to go in:

Gente, no vaya a trabajar. En esta caneria, they had us working como esclavos. If you go in there to work today, you'll be hurting us. Es verdad que you get a day's pay, pero que pasara manana? They'll do the same to you as they have done to us. If you don't go in, we can negotiate a contract and later you can come in as real workers, tambien. Los patrones son Americanos. They they are exploiting es nuestra raza. La gente Mexicana. (2.1.51)

By appealing to the scabs' sense of morality and their plight as fellow workers, Lucha draws a personal equivalence between them and the strikers. In denoting the cannery's treatment of the strikers as "slaves" and inferring that the cannery will eventually treat the scabs the same way, she makes a valid comparison between them and strikers, as proletariat in the same socioeconomic struggle. Another dimension she adds to her comparison between their struggle, is the importance of their ethnicity. She signals that the bosses are Americans, exploiting Mexican people. This is significant because she brings attention the ethnic makeup of those who are the bourgeoisie (Americans) and those relegated to the manual labor (Mexicans); in doing this she exposes the built in racial bias within the capitalist social structure of labor. Hence showing that the cannery is a microcosm of larger systemic issues which have constructed and upheld the Mexicans ethnic class status as consumable laborers within the capitalist matrix. Showing Lucha acknowledge that the scabs are Mexican laborers in a similar socioeconomic struggle, in turn humanizes the temporary workers as well, hence revealing that the scabs are not

simply devious nonentities in cahoots with the ownership. More importantly Lucha's action creates solidarity with the scabs as raza Mexicana, but also as people from the same social class background.

Not all the strikers feel that they are on common ground with the scabs, especially since the cannery is still being kept functional with scab labor. Nonetheless, humanizing the scabs by relating to them as Mexican workers, becomes more imperative as the strike progresses. By humanizing them it becomes difficult to simply hate them as a nonentity and wish them ill will. Instead within the larger social structural issues, their humanization, causes some of the strikers to refocus their agitation back at Shea. In turn they do not allow capitalism to corrupt their morality.

Due to to the longevity of the strike and their own economic woes, the strikers try strategizing other ways to impact Shea's cannery. Juan and the strikers consider collaborating with farmworkers, to apply pressure on all aspects of food production. Chente disavows the strategy, saying the union will not accept it as an option. Instead he blames the scabs for keeping the cannery operational, saying, "as long as those scabs keep coming, the strike isn't even making a dent in the cannery's output" (2.7.77). Since act one, Chente's character had shown some ethical deviances based on his individualism, as he was the first one to consider reporting some undocumented scabs, so that they might be deported under Senate Bill 1519.

By act two, scene three, Chente subversively acts against the scabs, by reporting many of them as undocumented. This leads to a heated discussion with Juan:

JUAN: You turned them in didn't you?

CHENTE: I—

JUAN: You bastard! You put the migra on them.

CHENTE: Let me explain.

JUAN: How could you do that, man?

CHENTE: Calmate, hombre, I don't wanna fight you.

JUAN: (Pushing him away in disgust) Give your own Raza up to la migra.
CHENTE: They were scabs. They were vendidos—
JUAN: No, they're just people, man, just people trying to make a living.
CHENTE: That's very nice, Juan, but not too practical.
JUAN: Is it practical to split up families?
CHENTE: I couldn't think about that.
JUAN: Apparently not.
(2.8.81-83)

Chente's action fully converts the scab into a sympathetic casualty of the labor struggle, not an enemy of the strikers. The scab still represents a problem to the strikers, but there is an understanding that the scab is a tool used by the cannery owners to continue production. By calling the scabs "vendidos," Chente tries to continue the process of dehumanization, by portraying them as traitors to their people's socioeconomic struggle. Juan, on the other hand, still considers the scabs, "raza," and is mindful of the fact that although they are prolonging the strike, they do not deserve to be deported because they are in fact "trying to make a living" as well. The scabs also have families they might be separated from if they are deported. In the above exchange, through Chente's action, and Juan's defense of them as members of the same ethnic group and socioeconomic struggle, Moraga appropriates humanity onto the scab just as she does to the strikers, who are trying to cope with a lack of money, food, and eviction notices. The humanization of the scab does not only create conflict to the characters, it also brings awareness to the audience about the working-class struggle as a whole. Scabs are not simply devious people who wish to disrupt the strike and take jobs away; they are in need of financial stability to support their own families as well.

Chente's Moral Ambiguity

Through the nearly symbiotic relationship between Chente and the union, Moraga is able to capture the essence of the real-life person that the character is based on—Sergio Lopez. Lopez, was a representative for the local Teamsters union who is described as the person sent in

to speak with the workers whenever there was unrest amongst them. Geoffrey Dunn refers to him, as a “frustrating, complex, and, at times, despicable figure” who “earned the nickname ‘mil mascaras’ (a thousand masks)” for “portray[ing] himself as a man caught in the middle” (118). But Lopez was serving the Teamsters’ best interests, a union that had a reputation for making sweetheart deals with the cannery ownership. Dunn describes the union as “a pro-business, rubber-stamp Teamster leadership whose ideology and interests mirrored those of the cannery owners and the rest of the white, bourgeois power structure in Watsonville” (118). Consequently, Moraga’s play imitated the material reality of the Watsonville cannery strike quite well, making Chente and the union mirror images of their real-world counterparts. And in doing so, Moraga is also able to capture the social structure issues that arise when Mexicans are allocated at the bottom of the socioeconomic ladder. Thus, showing that even the Teamsters played a role in the superstructure which allowed capitalism to thrive by refusing to fully represent the Mexican workers interests.

It is clear that pleasing the union, by winning the strike is more important for Chente. Here the audience begins to see more clearly that Chente’s morality has been corrupted by capitalist ideals. In fact, Chente is very much a character study of a person who believes in the U.S. capitalist falsehood of the American Dream. Chente describes himself as a person who “started climbing right up the [socioeconomic] ladder,” after coming to the United State through the Bracero Program. After working for some years as a farmworker he joined Pajaro Valley Cannery, became a member of the union and received a GED. His social climbing, shows he truly believes in the American Dream ideological axiom that, “anyone [that] has the determination to work hard enough and the persistence to work long enough can rise from ‘rags to riches’ because America is the land of equal opportunity for all” (Tyson 115). By trusting in

the American Dream, Chente, also exemplifies other ideologies of capitalism such as competition, showing that although he claims to make certain decisions for the greater good, in reality his decisions are done to appease the union leadership, and his individualistic self-interest.

Nonetheless, Chente is an ethically ambiguous character, because he claims to make difficult decisions for the greater good. Aside from that he is also a mouthpiece for the union, which is supposed to represent the best interests of the Mexican workers. It is Chente's cooperation with the anti-immigration law, which poses the question—does this make Chente a good organizer and leader? It is possible to argue that many leaders make difficult decisions that cause ideological rifts amongst their ranks. Chente is placed in such a situation, and he stands by his decision, because after eighteen months of struggle, the union was about to pull their support. Chente finds himself in a situation that will not result in him becoming popular amongst his constituents, but he stands firm by his decision, referring to it as the “right” recourse. As justification for his actions he points to the cannery's halt of operations after the removal of the scabs. Juan, a humanitarian looks at the long-term repercussions from a different perspective, he takes into consideration the fragmentation and loss of families. Juan also cannot help but to question Chente's morality and loyalty to the strikers since he took matters into his own hands.

But Chente's morality is no longer ambiguous once more of his actions are revealed. Aside from this, as mentioned earlier, through a Marxist framework that criticizes capitalism and its role in manipulating individuals within the same struggle, it becomes apparent that Chente's morality is not ambiguous at all, his morality has very much been influenced by the capitalist ideological state apparatus via the union, therefore his morality is besmirched. Chente is essentially a pawn of the very union that rubs elbows with the cannery ownership. This poses another interesting situation for the audience: Is Chente right to work closely with the union even

though his tactics can be considered less than noble? On the other hand, is Juan naïve to think that the already eighteen-month long strike can be won without some casualties? It is the incongruity of Chente's actions that leaves the audience conflicted about his character.

As the strike reaches an apex, Chente tries to convince the strikers that signing a deal offered by the cannery is the best direction to take especially in the face of Senate Bill 1519. But Moraga begins showing how much capitalist ideals have sullied this character's morality:

CHENTE: But, regardless of what you think of my tactics, it won us the strike.

AMPARA: *Some* of us can have our jobs back.

CHENTE: All we have to do now is sign the contract. This is the best deal we'll ever get from Shea. You return to work with your full wages, complete health benefits, paid vacation. We should be celebrating. This is a victory for la huelga!

AMPARO: No es una victora, cuando nuestra raza sufre por ella. . . Fuiste mojado! How can you forget that. You came to this country crawling on your belly like every other pobre Mexicano!

CHENTE: I don't care lo que opinan de mi! This is where each person's got to think about your own families, your own future. Es verdad que not all of the huelgistas will be able to return to work.

AMPARO: Which child should we give up to the slaughter, Chente? Which one of Mexico's children doesn't deserve a decent living?

CHENTE: How many people are we really talking about, Amparo? Tambien what good will a job do those workers anyway, when they won't be able to send their children to school or get a doctor to see them when they're sick?

AMPARO: You wait Chente. A year or two from now and the gov'ments gointu take away the same rights from legal inmigrantes. Where will you be then? With your green card stuck up your culo. (2.11.91-92)

Chente defends his decision to the rest of the strikers, in a situation where the audience has to ask themselves if there really is a right or wrong? Or if the "gray areas" allow for characters such as Chente to create opportunity when there are many obstacles the strikers have to contend with. Chente appears blinded to the issue of morality, because he is enjoying what he feels is a victory for "some" of the strikers, since they were allowed to keep their jobs and original labor package. He becomes an institutional reformist that benefits for himself, the union, and Shea's cannery by turning in undocumented scabs in the hopes of getting the strikers to sign an agreement that will

end the strike. Amparo, like Juan, sees the moral issues that arise, especially if a person turns on their own people, even if they are scabs, because selling out their own is a worst betrayal.

The strikers begin to see that simply continuing the strike against Shea is not enough, they must also engage in resistance toward Senate Bill 1519, because it intersects with their struggle as some of them are also undocumented. During this conversation, Moraga continues to build on capitalism's corrupting influence, as the strikers discuss whether continuing the strike is a viable option, and begin to see that Chente's allegiance has shifted:

CHENTE: You can't take on the whole U.S. government.

AMPARO: No? What happened to solidarity, Chente?

CHENTE: I'm talking facts here, Amparo, not idealism. You can't eat idealism. You can't pay your rent with solidarity.

AMPARO: And who's paying your rent now, Union-man?

CHENTE: What do you mean by that?

AMPARO: You going back to the assembly line with us once we sign this contract?

CHENTE: No. Well, I've been offered—

AMPARO: You got an office job now, verdad?

CHENTE: Yes.

AMPARO: Con la union?

CHENTE: Bueno . . . si.

AMAPRO: Nice salary?

CHENTE: It's all right. (2.11.94)

Chente is ousted not only as a reformist but as a sellout to the struggle and strikers he had supported and encouraged into initiating the strike. It is revealed that Chente sells himself cheaply to the union in order to get the strikers to settle. He is able to get himself a cushy office job, away from the assembly line. His character continues to bring into question how far a cause should be taken, before the people draw the line and settle. Although Chente is correct in pointing out to Amparo that idealism and solidarity cannot fully help the strikers survive the realities of having to feed and shelter their families, the fact of the matter remains that idealism and solidarity are better alternatives in the face of a nativist federal law and socioeconomic

exploitation. Both the company takeaways and the law are factors that impede and deny Mexicans the means of socioeconomic survival. The solution Chente offers the strikers is to settle for the bread crumbs the union and the cannery throw them or face deportation.

In the same scene, Moraga reveals Chente's complete moral corruption in the following exchange between him and Lucha:

AMPARO: Pero major que what Lucha and me will be making on the line, que no? Even with all these great benefits we'll be getting.

CHENTE: Lucha? She won't be getting nothing.

LUCHA: Y porque, Chente? Dime en voz alta en frente de toda d'esta gente, why Lucha Lerma won't be getting a thing after eighteen months on the picket line.

CHENTE: Because you're illegal.

SUSANA: Lucha!

LUCHA: And because I won't open legs to you. (2.11.94-95)

As shown, Chente's decision and the approval of Senate Bill 1519 does not only affect the scabs, it affects Lucha and other strikers as well. According to Lucha, Chente made her believe he could get her proper documentation, but when she refused to sleep with him, he stopped assisting her. Once Chente realized that Lucha was not going to sleep with him, the passing of Senate Bill 1519 and its impact on the Mexican community no longer worried him. His concern was no longer the injustice perpetrated by the law against his fellow working-class Mexicans. His main objective was bringing the strike to an end to appease the union. Whether any of his fellow strikers were going to be effected by the law, no longer mattered to him, and he makes this understood to them, "What's done is done. Those of you who have the proper documents will be allowed to vote on the contract and return to work. Any fraudulent paperwork and the government hits the company with sanctions and the workers with arrest" (2.11.95). This brings Chente's motivations into further question, along with his politics, but also offers a commentary on the influence and corrupting power of capitalism.

Prop 1519 created the perfect opportunity for both Shea and the union, due to the fact that they understood that there was a possibility that many of the Mexican strikers might be undocumented. The passing of Prop 1519 gave leverage to both Shea and the union to negotiate a deal with each other without consulting the strikers. Instead, Chente was sent to notify the strikers about the compromise, he stood to benefit from. Thus, the Mexican workers face not only opposition from Shea, but also from the union that is supposed to represent them and their interests. Aside from this, they have to contend with one of their own, Chente, who turned his back on their struggle for a position in Shea and the union's bureaucratic structure.

Following the confrontation with Chente, the strikers decide to go on the hunger strike, and ask the farmworkers to join their strike. Along with this, they decide to go on a peregrinación on their knees to a tree where an apparition of La Virgen de Guadalupe appeared to Dolores at the end of act one. The intent of the strikers is to show solidarity for each other and their labor struggle, but they understand that the struggle encompasses all Mexicans facing injustice in the face of the new law. The strikers reject the offer set forth by Chente on behalf of the union and Shea, and decide to continue engaging in resistance. By rejecting the offer, they are also rejecting the union and its representation. They instead become an autonomous group of strikers.

Dolores puts it best in a speech she gives to the strikers, "They think they can kill la huelga with the law, pero seguimos siendo huelgistas whether we got a union or not" (2.11.98). Dolores said in her speech, they were going to continue the strike without the support of the union, because it becomes more than just a labor struggle. It becomes a struggle for the civil rights of all Mexicans in the state of California.

Conclusion

Moraga shows that the Mexican working class not only has to contend with the problems they faced in the cannery, they also have to contend with one another, along with outside factors that are trying to dictate the outcome of the strike. On a larger scale, they must engage forces that have a racist and nativist agenda in the government—oppressive U.S. forces that seek to keep Mexicans in their place. It is obvious that the solution for the strikers from the beginning of the play is to strike against Shea. When faced with having to grapple with Prop 1519, they want to include it as part of their labor struggle, because the struggle also involves resistance against racism and nativism. Even facing a strike that is well past eighteen months, and without union support, the strikers move forth with solidarity and resistance as the solution to the labor struggle and the Senate Bill 1519.

Finally, in *Watsonville*, Moraga shows that within a capitalist society it is important to point out the many contradictions that occur within institutions and amongst people with differing ideologies. Chente and the union are very prominent examples of how contradictions exist in a labor struggle, within the larger capitalist matrix. However, this is not limited to Chente and the union. The play shows how the strikers themselves can lose their way and find themselves caught in contradictions within capitalism as well, when it pertains to scab labor. Instead of viewing the scabs as budding Mexicans looking for jobs, they viewed them as their enemies. This in turn would show that due to their situation, the strikers were unable to arrive at a fully realized class consciousness until they began relate to the scabs as Mexicans and members in the same socioeconomic struggle. Without realizing how a person's mind becomes socialized to believe that societal inequalities are a common part of life, the person cannot see the contradictions that exist their own labor struggles. Moraga brings to light many of the

contradictions when the consciousness is so reified that even within a labor struggle, those considered the leaders do not see how interests intersect or how they have their bias and contradictions within the labor struggle due to individualistic interests.

Chapter 4

Representations of Mexican Industrial Laborers in Alejandro Morales' *The Brick People* and Luis Rodriguez's *Music of the Mill*

Introduction

Chapters one through three have shown the ways in which Chicano/a authors represent Mexican laborers in order to bring awareness to the reality of their daily struggles. Race has not been discussed as of yet as a major component, although it has been framed in terms of discrimination within the capitalist structure through the ideological state apparatus via anti-immigration laws, specifically in Moraga's *Watsonville*. The authors have commented on race as it relates to or as a function of the exploitation of Mexican labor that takes place within American capitalism. From Valdez's criticism of Anglo patrones that take ownership of their Mexican laborers to Viramontes and Jimenez who leave aside the issue of race within socioeconomic class struggles, but nonetheless ask the readers to become less apathetic against injustice and exploitation. Those books have been analyzed specifically as critiques of capitalism and classism. The racialization and proletarianization of Mexicans within those texts has not been analyzed, but it seems evident in some texts. In Alejandro Morales' novel, *The Brick People* and Luis Rodriguez's *Music of the Mill* race is more prominently featured as a component in the labor struggle. Their novels frame Mexican working class struggles within a class and race based framework. Therefore, the analysis of the Mexican labor struggle in this chapter examines these texts through a Marxist and a critical race theory lens. For example, Morales' *The Brick People* and Rodriguez's *Music of the Mill* show how "whiteness" and othering is constructed and reinforced by white industrialists, white working class men and white citizens, which racializes the Mexican proletariat. Capitalism was built around the use of racial

others, which in turn allows capitalists to place different ethnic groups against one another; in these texts Anglo men are privileged over other minorities for better jobs on the same work site, based on the color of their skin, or when minorities are prevented from living in nicer or white neighborhoods.

To discuss how the authors show how capitalism and racism impact the Chicano/a characters in their novels is also to engage in the intersectional work that involves class and race, discussed in chapter three. For example, it was noted earlier that Mignolo had discussed the fact that race relations tend to be discussed in terms of white and black, or Anglo and African-Americans. Yet the issue of racism and its impact on class also effects the Mexican community. Postcolonial scholars such as Gayatri Spivak and Walter Mignolo have argued about the importance of considering Marxism's intersections with race and colonialism. While Spivak and Mignolo have criticized Marxism for not addressing racial or colonial dimensions, other scholars have critiqued Marxist scholars who reduce the role of race as a lesser issue in comparison to class, while insisting that class will unify people of different ethnic backgrounds. For example, in 1988, Cornell West criticized Marxism stating, "In short, the time has passed, when the so-called race question, or Negro question, can be relegated to secondary or tertiary *theoretical significance* in bourgeois or Marxist discourses" (18). Offering a similar perspective on race and Marxism, in *Wages of Whiteness*, David R. Roediger criticizes Marxists for "naturaliz[ing] whiteness" and "oversimplify[ing] race" (6). Tomas Almaguer had a comparable sentiment when writing "[Marxists] fail to recognize that race and class systems are mutually constitutive yet autonomous stratification systems that both have material and discursive dimensions simultaneously structuring the articulation between these hierarchical systems of group inequality" (207). Although West is calling for a specific analysis of class and African-

Americans, his argument still falls in line with Roediger and Almaguer in that they argue for a balance when analyzing race as component in the construction of class. Roediger argues that Marxism must look at the history of the working class and how race contributed to them as a dominant ethnic class, similar to what West argues regarding African-Americans; while Almaguer importantly states:

Not every cultural group that entered into competition with European Americans was perceived in the same ways nor were they subjected to identical institutional closures or racializing discourses. Each group's collective attributes (such as their internal class stratification, gender composition, population demographics, occupational skills, employment background, somatic differences from the white population, and explicit cultural factors such as language, values, religion, and ethnic traditions) were critically important in shaping their respective histories. (208)

Almaguer's point is important because it helps frame the importance of Chicano labor literature, within the American historical narrative. That is to say Chicano/a labor literature addresses how their history was formed based on an American need for cheap labor, thus racializing Mexicans. Morales and Rodriguez have written novels that balance the criticism of capitalism and racism, specific to Mexican workers, thus addressing many of the "collective attributes" listed by Almaguer.

Thus, the debate for Marxists and critics of Marxism is first of all a discussion on the lack of valid concrete discussions on the role of racism in the development of the base, specifically minority ethnic groups, while the second becomes a discussion on how to resolve this issue. In "Marxism and Anti-Racism: Rethinking the Politics of Difference," Abigail B. Bakan has attempted to begin some of the work involved in combining Marxist theories with what she refers to as anti-racism, or what is commonly known as critical race theory. Critical race theory itself is not without its own divisions, for example, Marxist scholars Robert Miles and Mike Cole have criticized the theoretical framework's insistence on race as the main component that shapes

class. Robert Miles has specifically called for a focus on “racialization” as opposed to “race,” simply meaning that he prefers to discuss how an ethnic group becomes racialized through capitalistic endeavors. This is also of course taking into consideration that Marxists believe that racism only detracts from working class solidarity, and in this regard critical race theory contributes to the problem, because it does not take into account what they believe is the more prominent importance of class. However, listed as one of the tenets of critical race theory, material determinism (also known as interest convergence) addresses how “racism advances the interests of both white elites (materially) and working-class Caucasians (physically),” thus addressing a class based component of the role of race, similar to Roediger’s analysis of “whiteness” (Delgado and Stefancic 8). Differential racialization is another aspect of critical race theory that explores the development of socioeconomic classes based on race. As an example of differential racialization, Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic have written, “Critical writers in law, as well as in social science, have drawn attention to ways dominant society racializes different minority groups at different times, in response to shifting needs in the labor market. At one period for example society, may have had little use for blacks, but much need for Mexican or Japanese agricultural workers” (9). Based on the tenets of material determinism and differential racialization there is a clear overlap with a class based analysis. In this regard, it is understandable why Bakan would try to find a way to apply both Marxism and critical race theory when discussing socioeconomic struggles. Aware that Marxism has been criticized for not addressing sufficiently race in relation to class, Bakan tries to bridge the gap by finding a common denominator between both theories. The commonality she finds is in difference. Bakan writes, “The notion of difference as it has been developed in contemporary debates was not a category used explicitly by Marx, but it is implicitly integrated in the categories of human

suffering in his work” (238). She argues that exploitation, alienation, and oppression are “forms of human suffering, or socially constructed human difference, that operate together” to create “conflictual social relationships” within capitalist society (238). As an example of how Marx discusses difference, particularly racist oppression and how it functions within capitalism, she cites an 1870 letter he wrote, in which he draws a comparison between Irish oppression to British capitalism and that of former slaves in the United States. Marx references hostilities that English workers had toward Irish workers as comparable to that of “poor whites” toward former slaves. Therefore, although Marx and Marxism have been chastised, for its lack of a more serious consideration of the intersection between class and race, Marx indeed had drawn some correlation between the two. Bakan uses her argument regarding the importance of considering Marxism alongside difference in order to relate it to critical race theory, and to ultimately state that “Racism is variable and adaptable, but has proved to be remarkably valuable to capitalism and imperialist interests over the centuries” (253). Far from resolving the debates regarding Marxism and critical race theory, Bakan and for that matter, critical race theorists Delgado and Stefancic offer alternatives for analyzing the socioeconomic struggles of ethnic minorities which take into account both class and race.

In this study, specifically it is important to consider the question: What do these Chicano authors say regarding class and race in regards to Mexican workers in a particular space and time? Equally significant is looking at the texts through a class based and critical race theory lens, given that *The Brick People* and *Music of the Mill* are both saturated in those themes, showing that Morales and Rodriguez frame the treatment of Mexican workers within American capitalism and its racist infrastructure. Given how both authors also portray the interactions between the Mexican workers and their elite Anglo employers in *The Brick People* and Mexican

workers with Anglo workers in *Music of the Mill* it is then fruitful to analyze the texts through both a Marxist class-based approach and through a critical race theory lens that shows how the authors depict such interactions in order to get to what can be considered at times a biased portrayal of the Mexican worker in comparison to an Anglo boss, but in another instance shows an author trying to demonstrate how both racism, sexism, and nationalism can blind working-class people to the importance of working-class unity. More accurately it is of importance to delve into the texts with emphasis on what Bakan refers to as “special oppression.” When Marx discusses oppression, he is usually referring to working class oppression, but when discussing capitalist oppression of a specific group based on its race or gender it is referred to as “special oppression.” It is also productive to explore the many instances of material determinism and differential racialization portrayed in these novels. Thus, exhibiting how the authors historicize the treatment of Mexican workers within American capitalism.

Alejandro Morales was born on October 14, 1944, in Montebello, California (Aldama 177). He is both a writer and a scholar that received his Ph.D. in English literature from Rutgers University, and currently teaches Chicano/Latino Studies at the University of California, Irvine (Aldama 177). Morales’ first three novels, *Caras viejas y vino nuevo* (1975), *La verdad sin voz* (1979), *Reto en el paraíso* (1982), were published in Spanish. Followed by his English language publications, *The Brick People* (1988), *The Rag Doll Plagues* (1992), and *Waiting to Happen: Volume 1: The Heterotopia Trilogy* (2001). Luis J. Rodriguez was born in 1954 in El Paso, and is best known for his memoir *Always Running/La Vida Loca: Gang Days in L.A.* (1993). His earlier publications include his works of poetry *Across the Pavement* (1989), *The Concrete River* (1991), and *Trochemoche: New Poems* (1998), a collection of short stories *Republic of East L.A.* (2002), followed by his novel *Music of the Mill* (2005), and his second memoir *It Calls You*

Back: An Odyssey Through Love, Addiction, Revolutions, and Healing (2011). In *Spilling the Beans in Chicanolandia*, both authors voice the need to tell the stories of Chicanos/as in their work and provide a space for “our” stories. Therefore, it seemed more than appropriate to pair the authors together along with their novels, *The Brick People* and *Music of the Mill*, steeped in the labor experience of the Mexican and Chicano/a industrial laborers that produced the literal building blocks of Los Angeles.

Although published in 2005, *Music of the Mill* has not received the same scholarly critical attention that some of the texts analyzed earlier have received. In comparison to Alejandro Morales’ *The Brick People* and his literary works in general which have an abundance of scholarship dedicated to them, the scholarship produced for *The Brick People* generally approaches it as an historical novel. Critics, such as Mario T. Garcia, Yves Charles Granjeat, Luis Leal, Alfonso Rodriguez, Antonio C. Marquez, and John V. Waldron, argue that *The Brick People* is a recovery, and recounting of the history of marginalized people. Carl Jones-Gutierrez, James Kyung-Jin Lee, Monika Kaup, Christopher Schedler, and Adam C. Spires opt to explore its themes of violence and, the influence of technology or a dystopian trope in the novel. A majority of the scholarship acknowledges the working-class theme, but do not discuss it as a work of Chicano/a working class literature, meaning that *The Brick People* is not discussed as a novel that is thematically about Chicano/a labor struggles.

By a historical novel, it is simply meant that the text is a “representation of human experience[s] at a given time and place,” thus offering a fictional “interpretation of history” (Tyson 292). More specifically, in the historical novel, the author will situate the plot during critical historic events in the United States. For example, the Depression and WWII serve as historical backdrops for the narrative about Mexican characters living and working at Simons

Brickyard in *The Brick People*. The historical novel, can be written by a person who lived through the time period s/he writes about, or the author can be far removed temporally from the historical moment in his or her narrative. Morales' novel, is based on the actual Simons Brick Company which was situated in Montebello, near Los Angeles in the late nineteenth century, through the early twentieth century. Morales narrates as a person who actually grew up on Simons Brick Company Location number three and has mentioned that it is based on the lives of his mother and father (Gurpegui 10). *The Brick People* is a historical novel, not only due to the crucial national events unfolding in the background, but also due to it being set in a fictionalized version, of the Simons Brick Company. Morales has cited his sense of responsibility to the Chicano community, as a factor for why he found it important to write about them in *The Brick People*, but also continue to write about them, in his other works. The novel's emphasis is not so much the Depression or WWII, but the Mexican workers and their experiences at Simons Brick Company. In an interview with Morales, Yves Charles Granjeat and Alfonso Rodriguez have pointed out that his literary fiction aligns with Miguel de Unamuno's "intrahistory," since his focus tends to be "the struggles of the common folks; that is, [Morales] reach[es] into the soul of the people and writes about those events in their lives that historians do not touch upon in history books" (111). Morales acknowledges that *The Brick People* although set during major historical events in the United States, is intended to be about Mexicans as a marginalized group that has had its history ignored by traditional American History, and thus writes about the Chicano community to reinsert the laborers within the United States' historical national narrative.

Morales' approach to his novel has been the focus of most literary critics. Mario T. Garcia, for example acknowledges it as historical fiction, however criticizes it because he does not consider it "a history of people's struggles," nor does it offer a "happy ending" for its

working-class protagonists (199). For that matter, Garcia draws a distinction between working class literature and proletarian literature, saying “Working-class literature, in my view, is literature about workers, but not necessarily from a worker’s point of view” (196). In contrast, he believes proletarian literature contains a “revolutionary vision,” and it “is not only about workers’ lives, but the writers, whether of working-class or middle-class backgrounds, are committed to the class struggle” (García 196). García clearly would have liked Morales’ novel to have followed a more proletariat structure and form, where the working-class Mexicans resist and eventually overcome capitalistic exploitation. García reads the novel as a literary work that promotes capitalist accumulation, due to characters that are more concerned with their individualistic capitalistic needs, versus a more communal struggle against their social conditions. García justifies his criticism of *The Brick People* based on the fact that it is written by an author who does not fit his definition of a working-class writer. His argument presents a valid contradiction. Morales has a personal melancholic investment in his historical novel, and has acknowledged in an interview, that he has “warm wonderful feelings about [Simons Brickyard], no bitterness at all,” yet portrays something to the contrary in his novel, in that the reader finds a critique of American capitalism in the early 1900s (Grandjeat and Rodriguez 114). *The Brick People* although not written by an author who is from the working class (based on García’s definition), is nonetheless thematically a working-class novel about Chicano labor struggles.

The Brick People criticizes the Simons family and the way they set up a company town with cheap Mexican labor, in order to accumulate capital. Ironically, Walter Robey Simons, the owner of the brick yard, is at times portrayed as a sympathetic man, who wants his Mexican labor force to have appropriate living accommodations, in order to keep them happy, and productive. But the happiness of the Mexican labor force is simply a means toward that end. This

reveals, that *The Brick People* is not intended to be propaganda literature. The novel critiques white capitalistic industrialists who built a town around a brick yard, for profit motives. When García speaks of proletariat literature, it is certain he is referring to the social realist work of the 1930s, influenced by the Communist Party. Daniel James an American writer who published a play, *Winter Soldiers* while writing within the communist aesthetic strictures of art, (he later published a Chicano novel, *Famous About Town*, under the pseudonym, Danny Santiago), has commented that in the 1930s “We were all supposed to be writing socialist realist novels about class struggles and the triumph of the working class” (qtd. In Marcial Gonzalez 126). According to James, trying to adhere to such guidelines created a hindrance for the proletariat writer and his writing. For García to comment on the need to follow specific plot structures or narrative form if Morales or any other non-working class writers are to write historical fiction about the working class, does a disservice to the writer and his writing as a work of art; especially since he is basing his definition of proletariat literature on the abovementioned social realist communist literary output of the 1930s. Antonio C. Marquez similarly criticizes this point, noting that “García’s impassioned but curiously retrogressive reading fails to account for how Morales has moved away from “social realism” toward a postmodernist sensibility and context. His critique has focused on *what it is not* instead of *what it is* [. . .],” which does not allow him to see that “Morales’s fiction is a testing ground for both the theory and praxis of the historical narrative” (Marquez 77). The reader will find that Morales does apply social realism, to an extent, but there are also elements of magical realism. Therefore, Marquez is correct to argue that the novel needs to be accepted for its own unique approach in addressing the Mexican people’s role as laborers in the United States. Morales uses magical realism in a similar manner, that has been discussed by Stephen Hart in that, in its most basic definition: “the supernatural is never absent from the

magical-realist universe and, indeed, it is always visible to all. In this particular world, nothing is supernatural or paranormal without being at the same time real, and vice-versa” (“Magical Realism in Gabriel Garcia Marquez” 41). Hart specifically cites Gabriel Garcia Marquez’s *Cien años de soledad* and the scene in which a thousand striking plantation workers are killed in which it is claimed that there were no dead (“Magical Realism in Gabriel Garcia Marquez” 51). By comparison in *The Brick People*, the Simons family members are devoured by cockroaches. Another way to view Morales’ use of magical realism and the cockroaches, is to interpret them as “politicized ghosts,” which is an approach taken by Hart when discussing the use of ghosts or apparitions: “the phantom in magical realist fiction is the projection within an ideologically riven nation of a subaltern forced to ‘disappear’ as a result of lying (in both senses of the term) on the wrong side of the political, gender, or race line” (“Magical Realism in the Americas” 115). Based on this definition, the cockroaches can be read as representations of deceased Mexican workers after endless toil under American capitalism.

Marquez, unlike García, does consider the importance of the representation of working class struggles in the novel, in a larger material context of Mexican labor in the United States, by noting that, “The brick factory and the generations of workers form a collective metaphor for the larger story, which is a part of the history of California: exploited workers in the golden land with eyes on the American dream” (80). Luis Leal, having written on the historical aspect of the novel as well, also recognizes that at its core, the novel is ultimately about the socioeconomic struggles of the Mexican laborers (40). Marquez and Leal recognize the importance of the novel as a working-class text, because they understand that it is not possible to think about the novel as only historical fiction, it is important to also consider its content—Mexican workers trying to survive economically in an Americanized version of a hacienda while also trying to navigate

otherness imposed by Anglo racism. As a result, in *The Brick People*, Morales uses the “marginated voice” and “slowly (re)writes its way back into history and the society from which s/he has been excluded” by acknowledging the past in relation to the Mexican socioeconomic struggle within the racial capitalistic framework (Waldron 105).

Scholars that focus less on the historicity of the novel and more on the theme of capitalism and race have offered stimulating ways in which to analyze the Mexican working class struggle. Schedler explores the role of violence as a crucial component that can disrupt the modern capitalist machine. Schedler also believes that Morales intends to show the deterritorialization and reterritorialization process Mexicans have had to face historically because of violence and capitalism, both in Mexico and the United States. James Kyung-Jin Lee similarly argues that “social relations—and by implication, social identities—in the barrio [Simons Brickyard] emerge, at its origin, from conditions of a political economy based in racial violence” (11). Monika Kaup acknowledges the theme of capitalism and labels Mexicans as “industrial-age heroes,” situating them alongside white capitalist industrialists, and recognizing the importance of their labor in the building of “modern California” (160). These three scholars provide intriguing insights into the themes of capitalism and race. *The Brick People* exposes readers to an early iteration of the white supremacist capitalistic system, through characters like Walter Simons and his wife, Edit, who racialize Mexicans through racist rhetoric based on their own preconceived stereotypes of this ethnic group.

The above critics explore the themes of capitalism and race in the novel and Morales’ representation of their effects on the Mexican working class characters. This is important in terms of thinking about how these themes affect the characters in the fictionalized Simons brickyard, and within greater Los Angeles. It then becomes important to ask: what is the novel

saying about Mexicans, race, capitalism, and history? That is to say, Morales uses his novel not only to frame a narrative of the role of Mexican labor in building the city of Los Angeles, but he criticizes the capitalist state apparatus. Although published in 1988, his novel draws attention to the historic struggles of Mexican farmworkers that had just taken place nearly for twenty-three years during the Chicano Movement. His novel reminds the reader that the Mexican labor struggle did not begin in 1965 with United Farm Workers union. Mexican laborers were already trying to navigate the white supremacist capitalist system long before farmworkers decided they had enough of exploitation and racism. In a larger context, it is also about the historic role of the aforementioned white supremacist capitalist system's part in creating a racialized working class through the use of Mexican labor, but also the continuation of this process. Carl Gutierrez-Jones draws parallels between NAFTA and the dependency that the workforce in Simons Brickyard exhibits, noting that this is a manner in which Morales "soundly critiques" such dependency (231).

Similar to Morales, Luis Rodriguez addresses the interconnection between Mexican laborers, capitalism and race. Rodriguez's *The Music of the Mill* has not had the same amount of attention or literary criticism published on it. Critics have yet to get around to acknowledging the book specifically in the way that Rodriguez fictionalizes his own experiences working at a steel mill while dealing with racist co-workers and the reinforcement of a racist hierarchy to further corporate interests. He would later write about his actual experiences at Bethlehem steel along with the continuing evolution of his ideology in his second memoir, *It Calls You Back*. A possible reason for the lack of literary critical attention to his novel, might be due to the fact that it was published in 2005. It is not new by any means, given that it has been just over ten years since it was first released, but as Josephine Metcalf has noted, most of his other published work

which includes award winning poetry and short stories, tends to be overshadowed by his first memoir, *Always Running* (159). This is understandable, given that *Always Running* was the first memoir of its kind, due to its graphic portrayal of the violence, drugs and sex Rodriguez encountered while he was involved in a gang in Los Angeles.

However, the early life he describes in his autobiographical work, did not only consist of gang banging, he also discusses a process of social and political enlightenment he began during the Chicano Movement, being that he was at the epicenter of it, in Los Angeles. Through his involvement in the Chicano Movement, and in particular with a reading group, that he refers to as “The Collective,” he studied “politics, philosophy, economics – the dynamics of social revolution” which the group used to “[delve] into the social processes governing events in the world and the United States” (*Always Running* 156-157). Aside from this, although racism was a daily issue he had to deal with while in high school, “The collective explained how workers of all colors and nationalities, linked by hunger, and the same system of exploitation, have no country; their interests as a class respect no borders” (*Always Running* 185). Thus, Rodriguez’s own ideology is not only served by the Chicano/a fight for equality and recognition in American society during the 1960s and 1970s, he expands his political outlook, by considering the role of racism as a component of a repressive structure and the exploitation of all working-class people in this process of repression.

As a teenager, before attending meetings with “The Collective,” Rodriguez had already begun to notice social injustices that were occurring at his high school due to racial inequalities. In particular, he discusses “The Tradition,” so named, because it happened annually, in which Anglo and Mexican students would get into a brawl with one another. “The Tradition” was spurred by racial tension, which was stoked by inequalities in the educational system. Upon

reflection Rodriguez began to understand how racism worked within the ideological state apparatus, when he recognized that Anglo students were favored by Anglo educators, but were also encouraged to attend college, while Chicano/a students, were encouraged to pursue technical training courses, thus funneling them out into the labor force like many Mexicans before them, instead of aiding them in a pursuit of higher education and careers. He would later begin to experience the interconnectedness of white racism and capitalism, as an adult, working as a Mexican millwright apprentice at Bethlehem Steel. These experiences would become the focus of *Music of the Mill* where Rodriguez shows that his ideas about race and class have evolved further still, to think about how capitalism creates a mental, emotional and spiritual sickness in the proletariat who are constantly finding themselves trying to survive economically, or who must turn to drugs or alcohol to keep themselves productive at their jobs, or to deal with tensions they encounter at work. Due to this recognition, in his second autobiographical work, Rodriguez is constantly trying to attain spirituality by connecting with his ancestral indigenous roots in order to combat the poisoning of the soul that occurs in an American capitalist society. In her interview with the author, Metcalf affirms this: “As demonstrated throughout *It Calls You Back*, his political vision has seemingly evolved from a strict Marxist (among other socialist) standpoints to a neo-indigenous Xicanindio subjectivity” (165). In fact, in much of his fiction and non-fiction, Rodriguez continuously shows the intersection between his Marxist ideology and spirituality, addressing poverty and violence by writing about the role of race and class inequality, and the need for spirituality as an approach to these societal problems. He emphasizes the importance of “the spiritual essence of the transformative process” alongside any type of governmental reform in order to truly get to the root of problems that involve poverty and violence (“Hearts and Hands” 10). Based on his reflections during his time at the steel mill and

on the working class, Rodriguez again addresses how the spirit of the worker diminishes under capitalism, and how this leads to the use of drugs in order to cope: “Families were given opportunities to be materially better off, but they also mutated—fathers schedules were not based on the needs of their children or their wives, but on the needs of the mill to produce profits [. . .] [a]lcohol and drugs become the main way the spiritless cycles can be dealt with [. . .] (“An Interview with Luis” 5). Important to note is Rodriguez’s emphasis on how capitalism not only affects the worker’s spirit, but also the worker’s family. He sees not only the socioeconomic inequalities that come with capitalism, he also sees the how it effects families and entire communities.

The audience will discover that Rodriguez writes *Music of the Mill* as a Chicano who was a part of the working class, and also that his Marxist ideological leanings are apparent in the novel, through a narrator that offers descriptions of the steel mill as a monolith of corporate capitalism that has to be constantly fed with human labor; Harley, an Anglo character that is affiliated with a communist discussion group, and shares his ideas about labor and capitalism with his fellow co-workers willing to listen, and finally Johnny Salcido, his main character who offers the reader a perspective from a Chicano that notices the race issues permeating the steel mill, but whose ideology evolves as he begins to understand the interconnectedness between race and capital by attending meetings with Harley’s communist discussion group (59-62). Unlike *The Brick People*, which is historical fiction, based on research that Morales did, Rodriguez writes based on some of his personal experiences as a laborer, but also exaggerates the role of racism, through a group of Ku Klux Klan members that work in the mill, led by a white supremacist named Earl Denton. Rodriguez eventually shows that the white nationalist group works in tandem with the mill’s white managers and owners in order to keep the union and the

minority employees repressed, thereby allowing the corporate heads to reap the profits from the racial tension. This structures a white supremacist capitalist system in the steel mill that is a microcosm of capitalism in the United States. The reader will find that Rodriguez offers commentary on the importance of considering the class struggle alongside racism, while not forgetting what he learned through “The Collective” regarding the importance of trying to look beyond race, and consider the importance of working class unity.

By analyzing the novel through a Marxist and critical race theory lens, the novel addresses the intersection between the ideology and eventual institution of racism and capitalism. Critics of the both novels tend to discuss the two themes separately or emphasize the role of capitalism, while neglecting the role of race, or more specifically “whiteness” and the othering of Mexicans, in the construction of the white supremacist capitalist structure and the ideological state apparatus that reinforce it. By the “white supremacist capitalist structure,” it is simply meant that the novels discussed in this chapter, represent capitalism as an economic structure that not only thrives through the exploitation of the Mexican laborers, but also by making a commitment toward racializing them in order to reinforce capitalism’s ultimate goal: gain profit for white/Anglo business owners. In *The Brick People*, the reader finds a white industrialist by the name Walter Simons, who benefits by racializing and othering his Mexican labor force, and attempting to keep them complacent through what he provides in his company town. Walter, takes a paternalistic approach to his workforce, believing them to be satisfied with what he provides. The motivation for Walter’s paternalism continues to be the economic growth of the brickyard. Walter soon learns through a visit to *haciendas* in Mexico, that in order to keep his Mexican labor force satisfied he needs to create a sense of community around the brickyard by developing housing and offering basic necessities such as a grocery store, so as to keep them

near the location where they will work. Upon traveling to Mexico, he learns how the *hacienda* system operates and witnesses the power that can be achieved through its implementation on the brickyard. Thus, the *hacienda* system and his paternalism become valuable tools in controlling the Mexican laborers and securing profit. The narrative also shows that his and Americans perception of Mexicans is mired by racial stereotypes. The novel draws parallels to how American politicians and industrialists generally viewed Mexicans as a cheap temporary (and at times permanent) labor force that they could use as was necessary, but were disposable in opposition to other immigrant groups. It is further a white supremacist capitalist structure because in the novel, the white industrialist perceives Mexicans, only as laborers. In the novel, Morales also shows how Los Angeles white residents participate in the white supremacist structures, by portraying them as people who also viewed the Mexicans as inferior and refuse to allow them to live amongst them. They prefer that the Mexicans live in the Simons company town, segregated.

In the white supremacist capitalist structure portrayed specifically in *Music of the Mill*, white industrialists are not the only beneficiaries through the exploitation of Mexican laborers, it is also the white working class people who profit, or at least believe they profit by reinforcing the racialization of minority ethnic groups. Specifically, in Rodriguez's novel, the white working class men, are dependent on privileges that are afforded to them, by their whiteness, and therefore benefit by othering Mexican and other minority working class people. Roediger's study, *The Wages of Whiteness*, analyses whiteness where he argues the necessity of discussing the working-class struggle through a Marxist theoretical framework alongside race, because: "Some have, wrongly I think, even suggested that capital and the state do not foster racism, or that capital does not profit from racism and acts to see racism ended" (9). Roediger's argument

becomes all the more relevant in *Music of the Mill*, which shows how racism and the “wages of whiteness” benefit both the state and capitalism. Roediger cites W.E.B. Du Bois to explain “wages of whiteness,” showing how race, specifically whiteness, contributed to ideas of superiority over other fellow low-wage earners: “even when ‘[White people] received a low wage [they were] compensated in part by a . . . public psychological wage’” due to their affiliation with the dominant racial group—other white people (12). Critical race theorists, Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic have similarly argued that “automatic privileges” tend to be conferred to people with “membership in the dominant [racial] group” (75). These privileges are afforded to the white working class through a history of othering, racializing and proletarianizing ethnic groups. Particularly in Rodriguez’s novel, it is shown that not only do racism and capitalism work in tandem, but that ultimately cultural nationalism, regardless of a person’s ethnicity or affiliation within the dominant racial group, defeats those trying to apply a more progressive agenda not based on race.

Capitalist and Racial Spatiality

In each novel, the setting is the location where the Mexican characters work. In *The Brick People* it is as mentioned, Simons Brickyard and in *Music of the Mill* it is the mill, Nazareth Steel. Each location also serves a semiotic symbol for capitalism. In Morales’ novel, Walter Simons builds a town around a brickyard, and models it after the Mexican hacienda system that is used to exploit peones. His reasoning being, that keeping the work force housed in a company town with the resources they need at their disposal will keep them content, and more importantly keep his business profitable through their exploitation. In Rodriguez’s novel, the steel mill also represents the space of capitalism, and the continuation of the racialization of the Mexican laborers. In order to protect the status quo, the steel mill, is used by white supremacist employees

to inflict physical harm on any workers that challenge, the established white supremacist capitalist ideology. By looking at both the brick yard and the steel mill, as spaces of capitalism, that the authors emphasize the importance of Mexican labor to Anglo business owners, and by doing so, it is revealed that the authors are doing a two-fold criticism of capitalism and racism.

In *The Brick People*, Mexicans were crucial to the growth of the Simons brick-making empire. The narrator notes that “Joseph satisfied with the progress of his company, valued the Mexican worker and, in his opinion, endeavored in every possible to keep his peons happy” (Morales *The Brick People* 16). For Joseph “The Mexican immigrant has now become the preferred laborer in this modern capitalist machine, while the labor and oppression of the previous ethnic immigrant workers [the Chinese] is literally buried by historical amnesia” (Schedler 64). As noted by Schedler, Joseph’s motivations for keeping his Mexican “peons” happy are far from altruistic. His true intention for keeping his Mexican workers satisfied was to prevent them from unionizing. As co-owners of the brickyard, Joseph and his brother Walter share a similar approach to keeping their Mexican labor force appeased in order to assure the success of their business. But Joseph accuses Walter of caring too much and being too nice to his Mexican laborers. Where one brother sees a need to offer a sense of paternalism, the other further dehumanizes them in true capitalist industrialist fashion, by simply looking down upon them as the mode of production.

On his research expedition, he does not only witness the advantages, Walter also witnesses the pitfalls of the Mexican hacienda system as well:

[. . .] millions lived as virtual slaves on the large haciendas [. . .] The owners rarely lived on their properties [. . .] Walter understood that the owners wanted to exploit labor more and the soil less, that they refused to invest in machinery for they preferred to work their cheap labor to death rather than pay for machine maintenance. (35-36)

Throughout chapter three, the narrator continues to show the atrocities committed against the peasants under the Porfirio Diaz regime; such as the poor living conditions, unnecessary beatings at the hands of mayordomos, a paltry diet consisting mainly of beans and corn, and poor health. He also notices “better treatment of animals, since they had more value and were more expensive to replace than the peons;” hacienda justice at the hands of Rurales, usually consisting of murder; and indentured servitude through the tienda de raya (35-37). The narrator shows a system of checks and balances in Mexico that favors wealthy landowners, while exploiting and abusing the poor. It is through such descriptions, that Morales begins to build a correlation between the mistreatment perpetrated through the Mexican *hacienda* system and the exploitation of Mexican workers within the American industrial factory.

Walter personally observes the importance of certain components of the *hacienda* system, such as the tienda de raya:

[. . .] Walter realized that the tienda de raya was the mechanism that enslaved the peon to the hacienda. He saw that the peon paid with special metals disks that could only be exchanged in the hacienda, or he was given lite credit at the tienda de raya. The debt that the worker accumulated could never be paid. Corrupt administrators charged whatever they liked for the basic commodities needed to live. As a rule, the worker went deeper into debt. In most cases the peon was born into debt because children inherited their parents obligations. In any case Walter learned that a child would acquire a debt on the day he was baptized to cover the cost of the priest, liquor and food for the fiesta. The child’s first clothes were bought at the tienda de raya against his future earnings. When the peon was old enough to marry, the money was borrowed. The lives of men, women and children were manipulated by the continuous mechanisms of enslavement which were initiated at birth. It became clear to Walter that what he saw of peasant life was the destiny of just about all of Mexico’s population. (37)

The critical tone of the narrator’s explanation of the tienda de raya, shows a system developed to keep the elites in control over the Mexican peones. The importance of the narrator’s lengthy explanation, is in the criticism of the tienda’s role in keeping the poor in a continual state of struggle through indebtedness. This state of indebtedness then becomes a cycle as the debt is

passed along to the children of the poor. Aside from this, any commodities required are purchased through the tienda and consequently continue to keep the peon in debt, thus continually feeding the hacienda system. The plight of the Mexican poor in the *hacienda* is then transferred to American capitalism through the Walter Simons character when he decides to implement a similar system on his company town. The tienda de raya becomes an important part of the Simons Brickyard's structure, used to keep the Mexican workforce indebted. While Walter's Mexican workers are not treated harshly in comparison to the Mexican peones, the audience learns that his company store is also a tool used to continue a cycle of profiteering off the Mexican laborers, selling them commodities, that Walter's company profits from as well.

Walter does not view himself as an abusive *hacienda* master, because he appears to want better for his Mexican employees in comparison to the treatment he witnesses on the *haciendas* in Mexico, however his sense of paternalism, becomes distorted through capitalism's profit motive at the expense of labor. Meaning that although he might believe that he is creating a working-class utopia for his Mexican laborers, in reality, he has created an internal colonized labor force. In similar fashion, it can be argued that Walter does not view himself as a racist industrialist, nevertheless he hires Mexicans because he knows he can pay them cheaper wages, hence participating in the racialization and proletarianization process that has contributed to Mexicans being a historically racialized socioeconomic class.

Although Walter witnesses the abuses perpetrated against the *peones*, it is soon revealed that he begins to view the power afforded through the *hacienda* system as a necessity, that he can duplicate so as to have control over the Mexican laborers, in the guise of a caring employer. Walter's perception on power soon begins to show minor corruptions. He finds the abuse of power in Mexico's hacienda system, atrocious, yet in a scene involving the a *mayordomo* raping

an underage girl, the narrator shows that Walter is simultaneously intrigued by it. Following the rape, Walter witnesses the parents “thanked [the *mayordomo*] for his kind attention” (37).

Walter, having watched a bit too long is asked by the *mayordomo* “if he wanted her,” to which he “almost answered yes” (37). Once again, while appalled, Walter “almost” answered yes, providing the reader with further insight on Walter’s personality, which up to a point is portrayed as a civilized American white businessman watching in shock as violence is committed in the name of power and control, nonetheless he does not act on his impulses or the behavior that the *hacienda* system permits him as a visiting Anglo American elite.

Following the rape scene, the narrator describes Walter’s observation about power as follows: “He had been disgusted by everything he had seen except the idea of absolute power that the *hacendados* had over the peons. Walter felt that power was needed to help people, but in Mexico the abuse of power was the way of life” (37-38). He sees the power wielded by *hacendados* as corruptive, and is even disgusted by some of the scenes he observes, but concurrently reasons that power over those lower in the social hierarchy is required not to abuse them, but to “help” them. His outlook on absolute power as a necessity to help others is fragmented, yet he associates the abuse and corruption of power only within Mexico and their *hacienda* system. His own perspective on the need of power over others to aid them is distorted in that within the capitalistic framework industrialists do not, if rarely use their power to assist others, they instead use it to profiteer from their labor.

Once having observed what could be accomplished through the *hacienda* system, Walter returns to the United States and establishes his version of the *hacienda* on Simons Brickyard, which would alternately be referred to as Simons Town. Simons Town offers housing and many of the other institutions that could be found in a small town:

[. . .] We will begin to build more houses for all of you with families. I am also aware of the need for a priest and church here and for a school for your children. I intend to resolve those needs. You probably already know that we have a post office here. You can receive and mail your letters from here. You don't have to leave our town for anything. In January the general store will open for business. You will be able to buy groceries and anything else you might need. If we don't carry what you need we'll get it for you. A doctor will come once a month to see any worker or member of his family who is ailing. If you have any problems please talk with your foreman, Gonzalo Pedroza [. . .] Gonzalo is the legally designated law enforcer in Simons. (51)

By supplying housing, a church, school, post office, a doctor and a general store for the company town, in reality Walter has created a space of capitalism along with its superstructure. By providing the Mexican laborers all of the institutions they need at the work site, he is able to keep the brickyard running day and night furthering his business enterprise. Waldron offers a fitting description of the *hacienda* influenced, Simons Town: "Walter has made a humanized hacienda, but it continues being a hacienda [. . .] It is a paternalistic hierarchy that is fed by the labor of the oppressed" (104). It is a "humanized *hacienda*," because unlike the Mexican hacienda system, they have their own church, school, library, and even medical aid once a month. Notwithstanding, he has also created a business apparatus that is a microcosmic equivalent of the state and ideological apparatus of capitalism within the United States. This is further evidenced, as Walter creates his own version of the Mexican *rurales*, by appointing Gonzalo Pedroza as the sheriff. Walter even gives Gonzalo a silver star to pin on his shirt and a holstered pistol. This results in what Gutiérrez-Jones argues is an example of surveillance and the power that affords the brickyard's management control over their employees. In turn, if Simons Town represents the state and many of its functions, then the establishment of Gonzalo as a sheriff, represents an element of what Althusser referred to as the "Repressive State Apparatus." Althusser explains: "The State is 'machine' of repression, which enables the ruling classes (in the nineteenth century the bourgeois class and the 'class' of big landowners) to ensure

their domination over the working class, thus enabling the former to subject the latter to the process of surplus-value extortion (i.e. to capitalist exploitation)” (131). The ruling class hold dominion over the working class through institutions within the repressive state apparatus, such as government, administration, the army, police, courts and prisons (Althusser 136). However, unlike the hacendados, Walter is not a man that visibly abuses his power over his Mexican workers, at least not on the level that was described in Mexico, but he does yield control through his paternalism. Specifically, the idea that regardless of being an industrialist looking out for the profit motives of his business, he indeed cares about the Mexican laborers.

Once instilling a sense of trust in the Mexican workers, Walter manages to create an indentured work force through the store’s credit system, when he has to layoff many workers because his business is impacted during the Great Depression:

It was he who decided how much brick to produce, how much to cut back and how many men would get fired. He also decided to let most of the men with families who had lost their jobs stay in Simons housing and continue to buy at the company store. He realized the difficulty that most families would have if he expelled them from Simons. However, his primary objective was to have available a corps of indebted labor to begin full production once the crisis ended. (182)

Walter admittedly understands his unemployed workers would struggle if he evicted them, but he is knowledgeable about the opportunity this presents. He is able to dock their paychecks based on the amount they owe the Simons company store, once the economic recession is over. Although sympathetic to his Mexican workers, it is a strategy to keep Simons Brickyard profitable through the unpaid work of the Mexican laborer.

Walter did witness many injustices on the *haciendas* in Mexico, but he saw a profitable model that he could apply to a brickyard business. He wanted to improve on his version of the *hacienda* by removing such injustices in the belief that it would gain him maximum production

from the Mexican workforce, and in turn maximum profits. His paternalism is simply another tool that is incorporated into his version of the *hacienda*, used alongside the company store, and his personal law enforcement officer, to keep the Mexican workforce dependent on him and under control.

Just as Morales uses Simons Brickyard to show the use of the Mexican labor within the spatiality of capital, Rodriguez takes a similar approach in *Music of the Mill*. Rodriguez's novel begins with Procopio Salcido arriving in Los Angeles with his wife Eladia toward the end of World War II. Not long after their arrival, Procopio finds employment at Nazareth Steel, a company that first processed steel for ships, and as the war was winding down, began to make steel for "skyscrapers, bridges, and piping" (13). Mexicans are portrayed as an asset to the industry because "Although the war is virtually at its end the mill needs to fill the lowest-paid positions with those who will work like slaves and not complain. Newly arrived Mexicans fit this bill perfectly" (13). And thus, by writing in a social realist style that includes phrases such as "lowest-paid" and "will work like slaves," Rodriguez establishes the exploitation of Mexican laborers as critical to the progress and success of the steel industry. His wording also exposes his Marxist and communist ideological leanings, which take an anti-capitalist tone throughout his novel.

When Procopio first arrives at the steel mill in the late 1940s, it is structured as a small company town. It has housing available to the workers, but it does not have its own school, grocery store, or post office, since those can be found nearby. The narrator describes it as a "monstrous" and "enormous" mill that emits intense heat (12). Also unlike Morales' novel, the characters do not know the owners, it is simply understood that they must answer to foremen that in turn answer to supervisors that answer to corporate heads of Nazareth Steel Corporation. The

narrator establishes a clear division between the appearance of the largess of the mill and the impact that it has on the workers, in that it consumes their lives to the point where some characters like Procopio become dependent on the hard-earned capital it can provide them if they work double-shifts. The vastness of the mill also represents the enormity of capitalism itself on the lives of the American working class—in that it consumes the time and working class body, for the rewards it doles out for those willing to sacrifice both. The mill is also representative of the vastness of capitalism within the United States, showing that the mill is a microcosmic capitalist universality that is secured through an established racist hierarchy resulting in a small-scale version of the white supremacist capitalist system.

At Nazareth Steel the white supremacist capitalist system is reinforced through the structural apparatus already imposed within its confines. The ideological apparatus within the mill is shaped by White laborers on one side, and Mexican and other minority laborers on the other. The steel mill hegemony maintains that the Mexicans in *Music of the Mill* are to work hard, not complain about their low wages, lack of upward mobility, hazardous conditions or difficulty of the work. It does not take Procopio long to see the innate racism that exists in the Nazareth pecking order, since millwright or craft jobs tend to be predominantly held by white workers. It becomes apparent that the racism is rooted in the white supremacist ideology of corporate figureheads and some of the Anglo laborers, namely Earl Denton, “a boisterous and obnoxious millwright who seems to be the ringleader of an anti-Mexican group among the craft workers” (18). The narrator explains that the white millwrights made it their priority to harass the Mexican laborers and establish the racial pecking order: “When the Mexicans first came into the mill in large numbers, these millwrights glared at them, made comments about “panchos” and “burros,” and generally gave them a hard time” (18). Dent and the other white laborers ignore the

fact that they are working class men themselves, similar to the Mexicans and other minorities. White laborers, like Dent consider themselves superior to the Mexican workers in terms of wage, and position as a millwright, in the hierarchy of the mill, but he remains a working-class man, like many of the minorities he despises. His own race-based ideology does not allow him to consider a working-class lens that would be inclusive to all people working in the mill, regardless of their ethnicity.

Eventually during Procopio's time, there is some change via a challenge that disrupts the ideology of the steel mill apparatus, in favor of the minority millworkers. In 1959 a national strike is called against "Big Steel" and the "profitable conglomerates" it consists of are required to "provide decent standard pay and benefits to the men of steel" (23). Procopio gets involved in the strike as a picket line captain. The strikers win after four months, and he becomes involved in the union for some time. By disrupting the Big Steel, Procopio and the minority workers at Nazareth Steel are able to create temporary change.

The story then shifts to Procopio's youngest son, Johnny, being released from the California Youth Authority in Chino, wherein his parole officer recommends he look into factory and foundry jobs. He is able to obtain an entry position as an "oiler-greaser" at Nazareth Steel, following in his father's footsteps (33-39). The victory that was gained by Procopio and the slate of minority workers that took over the union is gone by the time Johnny arrives. The union slate is once again replaced with white racist representatives that made sure to give the company sweetheart deals. The predominantly Anglo union keeps the minority workers in the low-skill, low-pay jobs. The highest position minority workers are allowed to reach are on repair crews and this is only thanks to a consent decree. Achieving status as a millwright was practically

unattainable for minorities. Once having worked some time at the mill, Johnny learns about the injustices faced by minority employees in the face of racial and capitalist interests.

If the mill is a semiotic symbol of American capitalism, then the Ku Klux Klan (referred to as the KKKers in the novel) embody the role of racism in creating and keeping Mexicans and other minorities as racialized socioeconomic group within the white supremacist capitalist structure. Nevertheless, it is not simply racist ideology, based on the superiority of whiteness, that the KKKers use to maintain the racist capitalist hierarchy, they also use the capitalist spatiality to enforce this hegemony as well. That is to say, they use the steel mill to cause harm to others that challenge their hegemony. Dent and many of the Anglo employees are members of the Ku Klux Klan, and through this sense of racial unity, cover for one another thus maintaining the Anglo hegemony. This loyalty is useful, when they setup minority employees that they or the company management view as “troublemakers.” The narrator refers to them as an “extralegal terror group” that sets up employees at the workplace through seeming “accidents” that are in actuality perpetrated by Dent and his men intentionally (58). After a brawl with some of Dent’s lackeys, at Wild Woolly’s, a bar primarily attended by white mill workers, Johnny is warned about these “accidents” by his co-worker, Robert. Robert, explains that “[Dent’s] known to set people up. To lie to the foreman about guys they consider trouble in the mill [. . .] I don’t just mean to get them fired [. . .] I’ve also heard he’s had people lose limbs and get killed around here. He carries a lot of weight man” (59). It is made understood by the narrator that “The way some of the white guys dealt with the decree was to make it so no black or brown person ever wanted to work in the well-paid craft positions. Violence was their form of persuasion” (59). As mentioned earlier the white laborers are able to hold the better paying millwright positions, through racist capitalist ideology that is then made material by using the physical space of the

mill to harm minority employees that attempt to enter the millwright positions, which they want to keep “White.”

The use of the physical space of capital for violence also occurs in the narrative when the mill’s management decides to hire another minority, women. Much like Johnny, and many of the other minority workers, it takes some time for the women to adjust to the hostile environment. For example, there are no amenities for the women, such as women’s restrooms or showers. If a female does not do a job correctly, the male refuses to explain to her what to do, but “when she brings the wrong tool for the job, when she can’t cut copper piping correctly with her handheld pipe cutter, he’s all over her like a dog on a bone” (129). Despite this adversity, the women eventually gain a level of comfort defending themselves from verbal attacks.

Women defending themselves led to a woman named Darlene getting a reputation as a “sassy bitch,” that “talks loudly and directly, without any pretty ribbons attached to her words.” What really started to bother the “old-guard millwrights,” was that she was politically inclined and started to attend the Communist Labor Organizing Committee (CLOC) meetings held by Harley, the Anglo mill employee that expounds communist ideology to his co-workers; but the situation that eventually places her in the crosshairs of Dent and the KKKers is the day she spots Lane Peterson having a couple of electric motors loaded into his trunk. This upsets Peterson, because Darlene catches him stealing company property, and believes she will report him (135-136).

Darlene does not plan to report him, but is targeted nonetheless:

[. . .] Darlene waits for Milton and Roland to enter first, but they both make way to let Darlene through. Darlene raises an eyebrow . . . [She] pulls on the cabin door, which is difficult to open. There is a kind of pressure that keeps the door almost stuck closed—she can’t figure out what it is. She pulls it partly open, allowing enough room for her to walk through [. . .] As Darlene walks in she places her left hand on the edge of the doorway to balance herself, letting go of

the heavy door in the process. In a fraction of an instant it happens—the door slams so fast that at first Darlene doesn't understand what she's done. The blood spraying onto the walls is the first thing she sees. Then the shots of pain. [Milton and Roland] see four slender fingers fall to the ground by their feet. They hear Darlene's screams. Roland tries to get to the door, but Milton grabs his arm for several seconds before he lets go and they both pull the door open. (139-140)

Here the mill serves as a physical space of capital used to perpetrate violence against a minority. Darlene is targeted both as a woman, a communist ideological sympathizer, but ultimately because she poses a threat to Lane, a man higher up on the white supremacist capitalist structure of the mill. Thus, by threatening a man who works with the KKKers that enforce the social hierarchy in the mill, they then use the mill to cause her physical harm. Having had a similar experience with Anglo co-workers and the overhead-crane door, Johnny believes the incident was not an accident. The narrator explains, "Nobody told [Darlene] about the 22-inch mill overhead-crane door, something most oiler-greasers are warned about early on. Although Johnny had also not been warned about the door when he first started, he managed not to lose any body parts, but knows that this is a way for the KKKers to set up the new hires when they need to" (142). They did not warn Darlene about the door, because the KKKers wanted to make an example of her, but, "When Darlene's fingerless hand heals, she wants to return to the mill—she's not going to quit. [. . .] However, the company refuses to allow her old job back because of her disability. Fingers are crucial in millwright work. With only a few months in, she's already out of the steel mill business" (143-144). Johnny demands an investigation of the incident, but Taylor, Darlene's supervisor is in collusion with the KKKers and he rules it an accident, after "Milton and Roland swear they alerted Darlene; they claim she carelessly went through the door without considering their cautions" (142). As result of the "accident" the company stops hiring women.

Besides using the mill to injure and get rid of any minorities that do not allow themselves to be subjugated, Johnny witnesses institutional racism and the power it bestows the KKKers. Johnny eventually gets fed up with the lack of upward mobility for minorities due to racism. When the company hires a group of young Anglo workers that he has to train, and “a few weeks after,” they are moved into “apprenticeship jobs” (70). Even though he has been there longer, Johnny is kept as an oiler-greaser. He files a grievance with the union, which is ignored (70). The avoidance of dealing with Johnny’s grievance is not surprising, since the union slate consists of racist Anglos associated with Dent and the KKKers, who work in tandem with Nazareth management to handle any situations in which the minority workers—mostly African-Americans and Mexicans—attempt to organize and raise awareness about work-related issues. In turn the Anglo laborers reap the “wages of whiteness” by being placed in the better paying positions. And the company benefits by growing their capital through the indirect control of cheap minority labor.

When going through the proper bureaucratic channels fails, Johnny becomes outspoken and engages in acts of resistance. In response, if using the mill to injure an outspoken employee fails, and if management is unable to incapacitate their efforts through the company and union’s bureaucracy, the minority employee is simply secluded to a location in the mill where they will not be able to influence and organize other employees. This tactic is used on Johnny after his failed attempt to organize a slate of minority workers to run for the union’s executive board. The KKKers also use a smear campaign by red baiting the minority slate, referring to them as communists. This instills fear in many of the other minority laborers who are afraid for their own safety and instead choose not to vote for the new candidates. Through their smear tactics, and intimidation, Dent and the KKKers are able to maintain a race-based hierarchy in hierarchy.

Racism's Contribution to Capitalism

In the previous section, the focus was on the space of capitalism as represented through the Simons Town brickyard and the Nazareth steel mill. In particular, there is a discussion of how white industrialists and corporate businessmen developed these industries with the exploitation of cheap Mexican labor. Therefore, the industrialists and businessmen participated in the racialization and proletarianization of the Mexican community. In so doing it was important to consider the dynamics between the Mexican laborers and their white employers. In considering this is understood that even though industrialists like Walter Simons might have had a paternalistic approach to their labor force, ultimately Simons Town provided any necessity imaginable in order to keep the Mexican labor force content, and to get the most out the labor power. This is not unlike present day tech companies in Silicon Valley that provide their employees with restaurant food, gymnasiums and beds at the work place so that their work force does not find it necessary to ever leave the company grounds, hence keeping their employees at work and working, without leaving the grounds. Therefore, the Simons Town model has not absolutely vanished in the age of late capitalism, it has simply evolved. In *Music of the Mill* the audience is not given a company town, but instead they are shown a model of white supremacist capitalism. In Rodriguez's anti-capitalist narrative, laden with Marxist and communist rhetoric, the employees no longer know their employers, they are simply cogs that keep a corporation and businessmen profiting.

In *Music of the Mill*, Walter's paternalism is influenced by his own racist belief that Mexicans need to be saved by someone civilized, like himself. Walter's wife, Edit, who sees nothing but altruism in her husband's willingness to keep his Mexican laborers content, shares this hidden racist outlook. She reveals it in an interview with Kaila Morrison, a sociologist:

We do not approve of unscrupulous landlords who provide only one toilet for an entire court which may house five families or more. This is inhumane treatment, not decent. Simons housing, on the other hand, is excellent. You will not find any of these deplorable conditions at our factory [. . .] Mr. Simons and I are aware of the horrible housing conditions poor people are forced to live under. We have seen the Mexican courts, the one and two-bedroom shacks where they cook on a very poor makeshift stove, where there are no electrical lights, no plumbing, no furniture, only a trunk where the family guards their most valuable possessions [. . .] The damp, unsanitary, dark homes of the Mexican are constant sources of tuberculosis. And because of the crowded conditions, social diseases are rapidly spreading among these people. Alcoholism, prostitution, and gambling are rampant in the Mexican areas. These evils can be eradicated by providing better homes and offering basic services as we have done in Simons. We provide excellent housing, a school and library, a health clinic, a baseball team, and we have even organized an orchestra that will perform in the Rose Parade this year. My husband and I take pride in the way we treat our Mexicans. And in return they are totally dedicated to the factory and to Mr. Simons [. . .] Mr. Simons and I believe that the Mexicans must be made self-reliant, independent and proud of their efficiency. We have created a town in which Mexicans can achieve these goals. (133-134)

Edit Simons genuinely believes that the solution to the blight that has befallen the “Mexican areas” is to follow the Simons business model, which gains accolades for its creation of jobs, and homes for the Mexican labor force. There is no doubt that the programming that Edit sees Simons offering the employers such as the baseball team, the library and the town orchestra, are pertinent toward building community and morale. But as she lists the accomplishments of Simons Town, she continues to be ignorant of what lies underneath the Simons utopia, that it is simply a capitalist façade. Simons Town is an *hacienda* on American soil, built in the interest of capital gain and profit, through the use of cheap Mexican labor.

Edit’s diatribe comes off as a marketing scheme for Simons Town/Brickyard, and her husband. As Edit compliments *her* “Simons Mexicans” as being hard workers, she doles out racist backhanded compliments throughout her interview:

My husband’s workers are all Mexicans except for the supervisor and a few of the truck drivers. They are excellent, faithful workers. Our Mexicans are not those heavy-lipped, sleepy-eyed Latinos reclining in the sun, too lazy to seek shade. No,

Miss Morisson, these men, women and children are lovely hard workers [. . .] You must consider behind those dull eyes lies the tragedy of a nation. I agree the Mexican is basically lazy. Their idleness is caused by a lack of mental development resulting from decades of violence and oppression. As people they are content with very little, but I believe that is but the heritage of generations forced to adapt themselves to bitter poverty and horrible tyranny [. . .] because they are accustomed to very little in Mexico [. . .] and therefore they accept the very worst living conditions that Los Angeles offers. They are usually content with very little [. . .] The Mexicans are child-like in their desires and accept what they are given. Seldom do they question their situation. If they are housed in ill-drained buildings, with insufficient light and air, with poor sanitary plumbing and small rooms, they will remain lazy and shiftless. (132-134)

Throughout her conversation Edit differentiates between Mexicans that work and live in Simons Brickyard, and Mexicans who do not work and live there, under the supervision of her husband. According to her, Mexicans are good because they are hard workers, yet bad because they are dirty; Simons Mexicans are good, but Mexicans outside of Simons are different, and therefore bad. Edit does not realize that the Simons Mexicans are no different from those “dull-eyed” Mexicans outside of Simons. Edit also replicates her husband’s rhetoric and attitude consistently referring to the Mexicans as their possessions. Like Walter, she also considers paternalism a necessity. She goes as far as describing Mexicans as dull and child-like, making it a point, that if not for her and Walter’s paternalism they would remain dirty, lazy, and shift-less.

All the while that Edit draws comparisons between Mexicans that work for her husband and those who do not, she is engaging in othering. She other Mexicans that do not work in Simons Brickyard, yet also others Mexicans who do work there. In his scholarship on representations of race, “The Spectacle of the Other,” Stuart Hall provides some insight into this process of “othering” that Edit, and later the general Anglo community engage in: “people who are in any way significantly different from the majority [. . .] are frequently exposed to this *binary* form of representation. They seem to be represented through sharply opposed, polarized, binary extremes – good/bad, civilized/primitive, ugly/excessively attractive, repelling-because-

different/compelling-because-strange-and-exotic” (229). Hall describes a similar practice applied during slavery:

The negro, it was argued, found happiness only when under the tutelage of a white master [. . .] Popular representations of racial ‘difference’ during slavery tended to cluster around two main themes. First was the subordinate status and ‘innate laziness’ of blacks – ‘naturally’ born to, and fitted only for, servitude but, at the same time stubbornly unwilling to labour in ways appropriate to their nature and profitable for their masters. Second was their innate ‘primitivism,’ simplicity and lack of culture, which made them genetically incapable of ‘civilized’ refinements. (243-244)

Edit’s rhetoric also echoes, the type of racist commentary exhibited in the early 1900’s by labor scholar Victor S. Clark in *Mexican Labor in the United States* (1908), who wrote that “The Mexican laborer is unambitious, listless, physically weak, irregular, and indolent. On the other hand, he is docile, patient, usually orderly in camp, fairly intelligent under competent supervision, obedient, and cheap. If he were active and ambitious, he would be less tractable, and would cost more. His strongest point is his willingness to work for a low wage” (496). Edit and Clark’s commentary intersects between the historical and fictional, which shows the process and reality of the othering of the Mexican working class. It also shows that Walter and Edit’s paternalism is in fact influenced by racial stereotypes. Walter and Edit’s perspective is Morales’ attempt to show Anglo attitudes and ignorance of the Mexican population.

Morales shows that the racist attitudes toward the Mexican workforce are not confined to Walter and Edit in Simons Brickyard. The greater Los Angeles Anglo community also perpetrates the racism. When Walter and the brickyard face controversy due the red brick dust that caused health problems due to inhalation, the Mexicans are blamed. This began as a problem for the workers, but he tries to fix it by showing “a special oxygen room for those workers who, after years of laboring in the red brick dust, developed nagging coughs and breathing problems” (141). It is not until Walter refuses to water down the dust in the brickyard after a dispute with

the city, that concerns arise regarding the dust and its effects on the rest of the population living near the brickyard:

The dust rose, formed clouds and penetrated through the windows and door screens, settled and covered walls and furniture north of Olympic Boulevard. Rumors and facts spread concerning the effects of the uncontrolled red dust. The death of three elderly ladies found dead in their beds covered with red dust made headline news. Autopsies performed by the Los Angeles County pathologists found large amounts of red dust in the victims lungs. The Red Lung Disease, coined by the workers, cause the women's death. (257)

As revealed, the citizens of Los Angeles are not concerned about the red dust's impact, until it effects the civilians living outside of Simons Town. There is never a concern about the effects it has on the Mexicans who not only work there, but also live there.

The moment it impacts the health of three elderly women who live outside of the brickyard, there is concern. In fact, the direct impact on the health of Mexicans is not only ignored, it is explained away in the following manner:

[. . .] according to the doctor [. . .] Mexicans were able to breathe the red dust and survive. The presentation provided necessary convincing evidence to allow everyone in the [city] council chambers to conclude that the Mexicans were subhuman creatures, cockroaches equipped by nature to be unconsumed in such horrible living conditions. The city and the people were in danger of being polluted by Walter Robey Simons, the brickyard, the Mexicans and the red dust. Better to let them burn. (258)

It is not unlike the issue of pesticides addressed in chapters one and two, in that this is a chemical agent that impacts the health of all people, but because Mexicans are perceived as subhuman, the impact on their health is to be ignored. Attention is not given to the effects of the red dust on *all* people regardless of their age, or race, because the red dust becomes synonymous with the cockroach-like Mexicans.

Throughout the paternalism, racism, and indentured servitude created by Walter, there are characters such as Malaquias and Octavio, who show awareness of Walter's motivations, and as

a result engage in resistance. Malaquias de Leon recognizes that the brickyard was built to prosper not only from Mexican labor, but also through the company store's credit program. In an altercation over the amount of horses that Malaquias owns, Gonzalo considers Malaquias' decision to not consult with him an "affront to his authority" (99). Further, "What bothered Gonzalo most were the two horses and carriage that Malaquias bought and kept in the backyard of his company house. These animals exemplified Malaquias freedom. He was completely and independently mobile. He placed no limitation on himself and quietly encouraged other workers to do the same" (99). Malaquias understands the imbalance in the situation created by Walter Simons, and knows that "the brick factory [. . .] constrains the physical movement and economic mobility of its deterritorialized Mexican workers in order to maintain a captive labor force for its own production" (Schedler 54). Malaquias attempts to gain independence through his economic buying power. When this results in a falling out with Gonzalo over the disobedience of established rules, Malaquias is told to leave Simons Town.

Malaquias understood that:

As his purchasing power grew [he] had become a danger to Gonzalo. Malaquias had expanded his material wealth by purchase of horses which allowed him the freedom of movement and choice. He could buy in any Mexican barrio he pleased. He did not depend on Simons and never saw himself at the mercy of Gonzalo. Malaquias represented an option opposed to the Walter Robey Simons philosophy of the Mexican worker, and thus he was not tolerated in Simons. (104)

According to Schedler the above passage displays that "Malaquias's actions threaten the geographical, economic, and social constraints of labor upon which the brickyard and the capitalist machine depend" (62). Malaquias offers his thoughts on Gonzalo to his fellow co-workers Damian and Octavio Revueltas:

Gonzalo controls it all. We must buy in the company store. We have to ask his permission to purchase an animal. Here you work and spend in the same place. And bear it, because if you don't Gonzalo will fire you. He does not scare me

with his square brick face. I'm taking my family out of here. Finishing this week, I'll get paid and goodbye. (102)

Malaquias resists and rejects the restraints placed on his ability to purchase more than the allotted amount of material property, allowed by Walter. Walter provides his employees everything they need conveniently located in Simons Town, but any person seeking independence is considered a "troublemaker."

Another method applied to control the Mexican workers besides the credit system, is the prohibition of unions on the brickyard. It is upon realizing that "There were no raises, no improvements in anything," due to the "substantial debt that many of the workers had accumulated after three years of borrowing from the Simons general store," Octavio thinks it best to have union representation. He feels it is unfair that "they have to work without a raise or improved family benefits" (188). Having arrived at a similar awareness as Malaquias, Octavio responds by seeking union representation from the Cannery and Agricultural Workers Industrial Union (CAWIU). This results in the workers engaging in collective resistance through a strike outside of Walter's office. During the strike, William Melone reminds them "Mr. Simons treats you and your families very well. He has provided everything that you need. Did you, did any of you, suffer during the Depression? No, because Mr. Simons gave you credit to get what your families needed. Now you owe him a favor. So go back to work!" (216-217). William tries to make the workers feel guilty to justify why they should work without wage increases or benefits.

Edit also tries to remind the workers of Walter's charitable ways:

I am very happy that you voiced your needs in such a diplomatic way. You can be sure that Mr. Simons and I are concerned about your welfare and will do whatever possible to help you and your families. After all, Mr. Simons has been very kind to your people all these years. He has given you a job, a home, a school, a clinic, a band. Many other things Mr. Simons has provided willingly . . . (219)

Edit appeals to Octavio and his men, reminding them of Walter's kindness, and the services he provides for the community. Similar to William, Edit does this in hopes that through reflection on Walter's paternalism, their guilt will cause them to abandon their attempt at union representation.

When William's commands and Edit's pleas go unheeded, Walter steps in, inviting Octavio and his fellow representatives to his home to try to negotiate:

I would like to respond to your observations and concerns by making, as Mrs. Simons said, the following suggestions. The best way to help the crew and their families is to have excellent leadership. That is not to say that I have not been satisfied with the present supervision at the plant. No, instead I would like to add more men to the faithful staff. I believe that you five men are capable of doing the job. Therefore I am promoting you to foremen with all the benefits. In this way you will be able to provide encouragement to the men to cooperate and produce more, and in so doing I will be able to meet their request at a future time. (220)

Walter offers Octavio and his men a sweetheart deal in hopes that they might relinquish their pursuit of a union and instead fall in line as cronies similar to Gonzalo. Octavio and the other representatives make it understood that they cannot be bought. Walter unveils his fear of union representation at his brickyard, "Don't be unreasonable. A union will ruin the company and we are just now beginning to pull ahead. In about three more years I'll be able to meet your demands, without union pressure, and you will be better off. Stick with me. Help me, help you" (220). Walter continues to walk behind *his* Mexicans offering them a raise and an extension on credit at the company store. Walter's desire to avoid union infiltration is evident, through his pleas and offers.

Unfortunately, upon going on a strike, the brickyard hired "black scabs," succeeded by a falling out between Octavio and the union organizers, Armando Takahashi Subia, Caroline Decker and Carlo Lanzetti. The fallout between the strikers and organizers revolves around the lack of monetary support. The workers find themselves in hard times when the strike benefits are

placed in a general fund used to help all strikers in their area according to Caroline Decker.

Infuriated, Octavio labels the organizers the “same as old man Simons [. . .] thieves and exploiters,” only looking for their own “interests and gains” (226). The strikers have a minor request fulfilled consisting of turning the company store into a workers cooperative to avoid accruing further debt:

The plan was to have each family contribute five dollars to the cooperative store treasury and with these monies purchase items of necessity at discount prices [. . .] he store’s cooperative constitution was simple: a five dollar entrance fee, and member must pay at least half of credit purchase debt each month. If these rules were abused, the member was subject to garnishment of wages or expulsion from the cooperative store. (228-230)

The idea of a store for workers, by workers, is proposed to avoid indentured servitude. It was initially a form of resistance, but this idea failed, because the characters used the same system of credit that Walter used. They simply adjusted it for their own profit.

The cooperative store administrators found it difficult to adhere to the code of honor they had established:

The abuse of credit is what it came down to. The workers had long been in the business of production and had been exploited and now they by choice, had launched themselves in the business of selling and buying made easy by the credit installment plan, abonar. This would abolish the Mexican fear of debt. However, it was the installment plan that was the problem with the cooperative store. The saddest thing about all this effort, all the disorganization that it created, was that it had ended in a fight about how much was stolen and who kept what was stolen. (230)

The one concession they managed to gain during the struggle results in a hollow victory after the failure of the cooperative store. The workers failed themselves by instituting a similar system that Walter had been applying. Not long after, the characters find themselves besieged by World War II, and Walter Simons is looking to cut back on employees, hence “[decreasing] his payroll,” a short list is followed by a list of twenty-five names. Octavio ends up on the short list,

and is given notice to vacate the property on which he and his family lived (245-250). Octavio continues to engage in resistance by finding a location where he can build a home for his family, free from dependence on Walter Simons.

Morales' novel serves as not only a work that situates Mexican laborers in U.S. history and the development of California's infrastructure. *The Brick People* shows a Mexican workforce that Walter thinks replaceable. A workforce whose demands are invalidated, are kept indentured and compliant in order to keep Walter's capitalist model running efficiently. The only way to combat Walter's racially and greed influenced paternalism, is through independence from Simons Town.

In *Music of the Mill* racism is a prominent issue addressed by Rodriguez. Racism permeates the work environment. The racism is not based on a paternalistic system, where the boss, sits at the top of the hierarchy of the family business, as it was with Walter Simons in *The Brick People*. In *Music of the Mill* there are corporate shareholders that own the mill, but do not have offices at the mill. The mill's management oversees the rank-and-file employees. The rank-and-file employees are then grouped into a hierarchy of labor, based on their race. In the race-based hierarchy, Anglo laborers hold the high-paying millwright positions. This racism is also institutional since racist Anglo laborers also run the union. Through the characters Procopio, and his son, Johnny, Rodriguez exposes the many facets of racism and discrimination in the mill, and how it is used to gain power that is then allocated to one particular ethnic group. He also shows how race is used not only as a form of control or to gain a sense of ethnic superiority, but also as a means for capital gain, for the company and its corporate heads.

It is not only the KKKers tactics that lead to the failure of the minority slate and their attempt at resistance. Rodriguez toys with the fine line between nationalism and racism. He

posits this conflict for the audience during Johnny's pursuit for social justice and reform. Johnny talks to the African-American and Chicano workers to try to organize them. He is eventually able to get enough support to organize a slate that consists of Al Simmons the representative for the African-American workers, for president, Tigre Montez for treasurer; Jacob Wellborne for treasurer as well, Harley Cantrell as sergeant at arms; and Johnny as vice president (84-85).

Unfortunately, the slate fails due to the hidden agendas of a couple of the men running. For example, Harley is a member of CLOC, a communist reading circle. Therefore, it is assumed that Harley and the other workers that follow communist ideology would like to use the win on the union executive board as a springboard to further their ideological agenda. Al Simmons particularly has his own agenda. He "wants the top union spot so that blacks can run the union the way the whites have done before them" (108). In fact, Al Simmons says as much, as he tries to rally as many of the African-American workers to vote for the minority slate, "We get into office then we move on all the honkies and any Mexican who stands in the way [. . .] if a Mexican wants to join with us, fine, but they're under our leadership. We'll make the local union an outpost of true black power. We'll have a class on black history and organize rallies for housing, education, and political issues [. . .]. (110). Rodriguez is able to build a plot around the conflicting ideologies, and asks the audience whether what Al has in mind is simply nationalism or racism? Al is undoubtedly being nationalistic when he seeks to create a space for African-Americans, but his speech begins to border on the racist as he begins to discuss "moving on" any other non-African-American laborers. His rhetoric is not collaborative: instead he seeks to have any Mexicans who comply with them, follow "under" their (African-American) leadership. This would result with the continuance of a race-based capitalist hierarchy, only with a different oppressor.

Johnny had been warned about such a situation by his father, Procopio, who had seen his fair share of organizing strife during his time at the mill, “the problem is Mexicans and blacks don’t see eye to eye. That’s how the company has us coming and going. We end up fighting each other for the crumbs while Dent and the Klan take up the best positions, and the company gets away with murder” (74). Through Procopio, Rodriguez offers perspective to the audience about what the company and the racist Anglo members want: minority workers fighting amongst each other for any minimal concessions offered. By participating in the racist approach used by the KKKers, there is lack of unity amongst all ethnic groups due to ethnic ideological reasons. As a result, minority laborers prevent themselves from creating the social reform they sought. Both Dent and Al ignore the importance of class unity, versus a race-based or nationalistic approach, and thus both participate in working class disunity.

Just as Rodriguez shows his audience that racist ideologies can be attributed to both Anglo and African-American mill workers, he also shows that there are Anglo laborers who believe in working class unity. Rodriguez complicates the race issue in the steel mill, by introducing an Anglo character named Harley that reads and expounds communist ideologies. Harley is an interesting character, because where Al Simmons seems to hold similar ideologies to Dent, Harley is Dent’s counterpart. Harley knows that racial “divisions are reinforced by the job allocation system” and instead believes in the unification of all working-class people, regardless of their race or ethnicity (60). Due to his communist ideologies, Harley and other Anglo millworkers are ostracized and kept in the low-skill and low-wage jobs, similar to the minorities.

Johnny’s attempt to seek justice and reform through resistance fails. His intent was to unite all minorities under one strong union slate that could hold the mill’s management

accountable for the grievances and possibly finally tear down the established race-based hierarchy. He clearly understands the need for unity amongst all races, making sure to emphasize this to the Tigre Montez who mentions that some of the other employees are wary about voting for the slate, by telling him that, “We have to emphasize that no matter what, it’s better to fight than to sit around and do nothing. Without us, this company wouldn’t be crap, wouldn’t make any profits. We, the workers, make this place go ‘round” (116). Johnny also comes to terms with the need to “educate people on their class interests. Otherwise people vote—or don’t vote—based solely on their immediate concerns” (118-119). He makes the struggle inclusive by addressing class solidarity. A group of workers from a similar class background can and should be united. Since they are all at the bottom rung of the race-based hierarchical ladder they should look past each other’s race and gender, and attempt to help one another win for *all* workers.

International imports eventually cause a downturn in the steel mill’s production and profit, followed by the firing of various employees who did not have seniority, which is soon succeeded by the death of Dent. Dent’s death allows the current minority employees to organize a slate of their own, in order to “create a responsive and egalitarian local union” (182). Johnny and a new employee named Turk lead the new slate. With the death of Dent, and the closing of the mill looming, the racism that existed in the mill’s hierarchy is replaced, at least for a short time by Johnny and his progressive slate. Dent dies a working-class man that never looked beyond his racist ideology. He did not allow himself to consider a labor struggle that included all working-class people in the mill regardless of race or gender. He chose to be a problem for the minorities, and dies seeing the union taken over by progressive minorities.

Through Johnny, Rodriguez also looks beyond immediate systemic issues that need to be dealt with in the factory, such as those of the racism, the grievances, and the environmental

issues, by considering how the closing of the mill will impact the psyche and spirits of the workers. Rodriguez converts the mill into a space of community consciousness for all involved. After seeing the effects that job loss has on the unemployed, “Under Johnny’s leadership, the local set up counseling and alcoholics’ recovery groups—area health agencies claim a 25 percent rise in alcoholism and at least ten suicides the first year of the plant’s demise” (191). Rodriguez clearly wants his audience to consider the issues beyond those created through racism and discrimination. He wants the audience to take into consideration the impact of such abuse on the psyche of the minority employees, but also the effects of job-loss on workers who believed they would work at the mill until they retired. Once international imports began affecting the U.S. steel mill industry, the company closed down and moved its operation. In its departure it left behind the damaged and destitute psyches of the millworkers.

Rodriguez is not only offering a critique on racism in the workplace, he is also commenting on capitalism and its innate disregard for the laborer. Rodriguez best explains this through Harley:

Steel mills don’t make steel; they make profits [. . .] They can truly make profits if they improve their technology and cut costs, which many steel corporations are doing, laying off workers everywhere. They also cheapen the manufacturing process—in other words, paying workers far less than what their labor produces. They do this by breaking union contracts or by moving their plants to cheap labor areas in the South, Mexico, or Asia. (61)

The above passage best explains the structure of the steel mill, and purpose of the laborer within capitalism. Steel mills make profit, and workers are not fully paid what their labor is worth, and that allows the company to thrive economically. The laborers help the mill gain capital by working there, at the cost of their humanity; due to the racism and injustice they have to endure. *Music of the Mill* shows the Mexican laborer struggle as a struggle for a fair valuation of their labor, but also for humane respect. Aside from this, Rodriguez offers his social critique on the

effects of capitalism and systemic issues that oppress the working class. Most importantly Rodriguez shows his audience that race-based agendas and hierarchies in the workplace do not allow advancement or justice for laborers. Rodriguez makes it understood that laborers must unite based on a working-class agenda to address their issues and interests. He also shows his audience that racism is not a trait of one ethnic group. Minorities can perpetrate racism as well, as shown through Al Simmons. Which is why it is important to address work environment issues in a manner that is inclusive and conducive to all working-class people.

Conclusion

It is important to re-emphasize that the intent of this study is to illustrate that through the fictional work of the authors, an aspect of Chicano/a history is being told in relation to labor struggles. Many of the works are based on the actual struggles of Mexican laborers; others are simply fictionalized, but also based on the real experiences of Mexican workers. *Music of the Mill* is based on Luis Rodriguez's experiences working at Bethlehem Steel and other industries, which is recorded in his second memoir *It Calls You Back: An Odyssey Through Love, Addiction, Revolutions, and Healing*. According to Morales, *The Brick People* "is based on the lives of [his] parents" and his time living in Simons, California (Granjeat and Rodriguez 109). Both authors voice a need tell to the stories of Chicanos/as. Morales states, "I would like to think that I am writing for my barrio, for my country, and also internationally" (Gurpegui 9). Likewise, Rodríguez says, "I just wanted to voice that experience—that experience of the urban Chicano working class that wasn't present in mainstream literature" (Aldama 242). Both authors retell the struggle of the Mexican laborer through their fictional prose via the use of magical realism, or the narration of the racist reality.

Morales takes responsibility as a writer, noting that the “Anglo American community has a fear that [M]exicanos will take over Southern California,” (Gurpegui 11). It is a fear that can be expanded beyond California of the early 1900’s in light of the events of the last few years in Arizona with the passing of the anti-Chicano/a Studies law, HB 2281, and the anti-illegal immigration bill SB 1070. Morales places the Chicano/a writer and literature as a direct respondent to such fear and racism, “That’s why I think Chicano literature is so important, because it deals with those fears. It makes people confront those issues, not just Chicanos but Anglo Americans. Prop 187, for example, I think was racist. It deals directly with Mexico. In a sense writers respond to that. We writers have to respond to that” (Gurpegui 11). In other words, Morales reworks the history of a group of people who would otherwise go overlooked, or not matter, which places importance on his novel, because “[. . .] *The Brick People* is intrahistory. It is popular history that gets ignored by historians” (Granjeat and Rodriguez 111).

Morales’s story is one that focuses on the history of the “common folk,” a history that is often times lost or forgotten due to historical amnesia. The majority of the works included in this dissertation are based on the struggles of the Mexican laborers who do not necessarily make it into the history books because the focus tends to be on the larger historical events. Morales addresses the importance of *The Brick People* to the history of Mexicans and labor in the United States:

The Brick People is about the contribution of Mexican labor, Mexicans, who make all the material used to construct many of the older buildings of Los Angeles, Pasadena, Southern California. And all that labor was Mexicano; it’s a tremendous contribution. These people worked there from 1905 to 1953. All that time making the material to house, build, and develop the economy of Southern California. They were in a sense the backbone of industry that was never recognized; one of the great links of a great economic chain. And I think that’s ironic. (Gurpegui 11)

It is ironic indeed that the contribution of the Mexican laborer would be ignored. It is the cheap labor provided by the Mexican working class which contributes to the profiteering of California's economy, but it goes unnoticed, because it occurs "behind the scenes" of the historical stage. It tends to be addressed only in labor scholarship or textbooks that have a limited audience, whereas the Chicano historical novel is trying to gain an audience for the history of the Mexican laborer through works of fiction such as *The Brick People*.

In *Music of the Mill* Luis Rodriguez similarly touches upon the history of the Mexican laborer. He does this through his poetic prose as a closing note for Johnny's saga, but more so for the saga of the mill and its workers:

Every bridge, skyscraper, ship, tank, car, and public art sculpture with steel in it has the stories, songs, blood, hopes, tears, human limbs at times, of the generations that labored in those mills. In the end, more than steel had been created: communities, families, pathologies, triumphs, defeats, great loves, great divorces, values, but most of all character—a character steeled in heat that few people or epochs will truly match, ever again. (195)

The narrator places the history beyond simply the rehashing of the struggle of the "common folks" or laborers. The narration makes it understood that the history not only lies in the stories such as those told in both of these novels, it is also in the artifacts that were built from the steel and the brick that the Mexican laborers produced. The literary works represent Mexican labor that goes forgotten because American society notices the steel and brick used to shape the physical infrastructure of a city, but society does not think about who, or as Rodriguez puts it, the life of the person who helped manufacture and produce the brick or steel. Alejandro Morales and Luis Rodriguez get society to remember, or at least to think about the provenance of the artifacts whose history lies in the hands, bodies and lives of the Mexican working class and their labor. In their fictional works, both authors manage to document and historicize the struggles and resistance of Mexican laborers.

Conclusion

The Chicano/a laborer experience is the American experience. For that matter, Chicano/a literature is American literature. Chicano/a labor literature just happens to narrate the experience of this ethnic group, and its relationship with the United States' need for cheap labor and capitalism. This study was done in part to analyze fictional representations of the Chicano/a worker experience through a Marxist lense, but it was also done to advocate for Chicano/a literature and Chicano/a writers. As mentioned in the introduction of this study, the Department of Labor created the Books that Shaped Work in America project, yet missing were Chicano/a authors and texts that focused on their experience. Chicanos/as have "shaped work in America," but it is also fair to say that America shaped their experience as workers, by racializing and proletarianizing them. In this regard, it becomes important to advocate for Chicano/a workers who tend to become invisible to the consumer, but whose experiences are then brought to the forefront by Chicano/a writers who bring them visibility through their writing. It is equally imperative that the Chicano/a authors used in this study, but also generally be used as a segue into the Chicano/a literary tradition, but also into larger social issues historically and presently for Chicanos/as.

The literary works in this study can be studied as representations of the Chicano/a experience and its themes, but without taking into consideration class and race, the motive behind Valdez's humor or Viramontes' detailed descriptions of grape picking underneath intense heat, is not known. Therefore, it is not just about the representations of the Chicano/a labor struggles, it is also about what shaped these struggles and made it seem as if Mexicans could only ever be America's fruit pickers. Marxism is not necessarily the best choice to interpret literature let alone Chicano/a literature, however Marx's criticisms on capitalism, and the

struggle between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat is relevant when discussing how Mexican labor was used to further capitalist gain. It becomes useful to apply Marx's ideas and the expansion upon his ideas by other scholars, in order to analyze the representation of class within Chicano/a labor literature. However, it is also specifically important to take into consideration the role of race when analyzing class in relation to Chicano/a labor struggles. Therefore, Marxism or any analysis of class needs to also consider the Chicano/a experience within societal structures that have been shaped by classist and racist agendas.

The universality of art does not infer that every audience will read and interpret the selected works or any literature for that matter in the same manner. Each person in the audience comes from diverse ideological backgrounds, from the conservative to the radical to the apathetic. This dissertation simply provides one of many ways to think about the literature, but also exposes the reader to these specific authors, the Mexican working class and their struggles.

Of course, the hope is that any person that reads from the selected works at least walks away with a different perspective about the fresh fruits and vegetables placed in front of them at the local grocery store, the material used in the classroom desks they sit in, even if they choose to ignore it or be apathetic about it after they have read the book. There is always at least one person (Chicano/a or non-Chicano/a) who has their ignorance, apathy and/or monological narrative disrupted. That one person is then brought into the universal knowledge that the selected Chicano/a working class literature offers. The reader then becomes enlightened about the Mexican worker.

Within Chicano/a labor literature, class and race go hand in hand, as shown by the authors. All of the authors bring awareness about working class Mexicans and their struggles. Whether it is in agriculture or industrial work, they must struggle with growers, or managers that

do not value their labor or humanity fairly. Each author also offers distinct ways in which the laborers try to achieve equality, either through unionization or struggles for fair wages and better working conditions

Although the Mexican laborer characters are shown struggling with the issues that are explored through racism and poverty, the authors do not simply represent them as victims of their circumstances. On the contrary, the authors create situations in which the characters do struggle and are exploited, but they then show the characters achieving agency. The characters in multiple instances in their pursuit of financial stability show that they must depend on themselves to survive. On other occasions the characters engage in resistance to better their working conditions. The characters are able to achieve agency by organizing, joining a union, going on a strike, or by outwitting their employer. The literary works are far from narratives about victimhood; they are works about Chicano/a worker empowerment in the face of adversities.

Through their literary works of Chicano/a labor literature, Chicano/a authors attempt to re-map their narrative. The selected Chicano/a labor literature is art that not only endeavors to bring about the Chicano/a and his/her experiences in hard labor to light, it also speaks to the unchecked labor practices that have an impact not only on the Chicano/a body, but on the environment as well, as displayed through the acknowledgement of pesticide use, factory dust, and air contamination.

At times their working-class families have inspired the authors. Other times the writers were influenced by their own experiences as laborers. The authors show that they have not forgotten their roots. They pay homage to the laborers, such as their mothers, fathers, siblings, aunts, uncles, and cousins, in their literary works. Their families paved the way for them to make

a different and better living. The authors (and scholars) engage in the abstraction of “intellectual labor,” as a means to call to the mind the experience of working class Mexicans. Through their writing the authors preserve the working class experience and share it with their audience.

The Chicano/a literary voices in this study and in a lot of the works that are filed under “Chicano/a literature,” challenge the dominant narrative, outside and within ourselves (the raza). Chicano/a literature cannot and does not influence the challenging of social hegemony on its own. Any person that experiences race and class based injustices brings an established intellectual background to the selected literature and has the ability to shape a progressive counter hegemonic discourse. Now, more than ever it is important to look to Chicano/a literature from the past and present to see how authors offered criticisms when they were under attack from the state, and likewise to see that a rich diverse literary backlog has since been compiled.

All a person has to do is look at what occurred in Arizona when nativist and racist Anglo lawmakers perceived the Chicano/a narrative as a threat to their monological space; they instituted HB2281, a law banning Ethnic studies. But Chicano/a Studies was targeted specifically. Chicano Studies was dismantled in Tucson and the banned Chicano/a narrative was placed in boxes. If the street battle for civil rights had truly been won, let alone initiated, the Chicano/a narrative might still have been kept in the boxes, but at least a statement would have been made. The statement can still be made, and both the physical and narrative space can still be contested through the sharing of Chicano/a oral narratives. If there is something that Chicanos/as are capable of, it is challenging and being resistive to dominant narratives. They are also formidable at avoiding becoming agents of monologism, and this can be avoided by being critical of ourselves, and that is revolutionary in and of itself.

These types of attacks on Chicanos/as and their ideological underpinnings have continued. A person has only to consider the rhetoric used by the current president when he first announced he would campaign, in which he criminalized Mexicans and promised his constituency a border wall. It is in the face of these types of attacks and the rise of white nationalism, that Chicano/a literature becomes all the more important, because it humanizes this ethnic group.

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