# LATINX SPIRITUALITIES ARCHIVED IN YOUNG ADULT SPECULATIVE FICTION

By

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ABSTRACT

*Latinx Spiritualities in Young Adult Speculative Fiction* analyzes how ancestral philosophical practices are preserved and wielded by Latina protagonist characters. I argue that late 20th to 21st century Latinx literature reclaims ancestral philosophies and disrupts colonial frameworks of knowledge production. I employ theoretical frameworks of archival methodologies from Aurora Levins Morales (2019), Solimar Otero (2020), and Marisa Fuentes (2018) to challenge histories and narratives of marginalization, invalidation, and dispossession. As case studies, I juxtapose three young adult speculative fiction series, *Wolves of No World* (2020), *Brooklyn Brujas* (2016), and *Shadowshaper Cypher* (2015) to acknowledge Afro-diasporic and Indigenous ancestral philosophies in Latinx speculative fiction, specifically though analysis of the Latina protagonists. I draw on Latina spiritualties to demonstrate how Latina protagonist subvert colonial ideologies, such as gender and ontology. Archival documents from the 17th and 18th century inquisition provide material evidence to show how practices such as shapeshifting are replicated in 21st century Latinx Literature. This scholarly work challenges discourses that invalidate spiritual practices as "superstition," while simultaneously examining the reclamation of Latinx ancestral knowledge within 21st century young adult literature.

I dedicate this labor of scholarship to my Papí and tía Maria, who I lost in 2021, while writing this dissertation. I love you.

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# LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

| | |
|---|---|
| ALA | American Library Association |
| AP | Advanced Placement |
| BIPOC | Black, Indigenous, and people of color |
| BLM | Black Lives Matter |
| CRT | Critical Race Theory |
| DEI | Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion |
| H.B. | House Bill |
| ICE | Immigration Customs Enforcement |
| S.B. | Senate Bill |
| SCI-FI | Science Fiction |
| Spec Fic | Speculative Fiction |
| YA | Young Adult |

# INTRODUCTION: LATINX "SPECULATIVE FICTION" AS A REPOSITORY

## Introduction: Why Speculative Fiction?

Mami and tía María always had a special connection. They shared stories, infectious laughs, broke pan dulce over un cafecito or avenita,[1] and passed sacred practices. Several times I walked into my tía's cozy home, and she gave me consejos about preserving youthfulness, love, healing, and cooking. In the intimacy of her home in Guadalajara, Mexico, my tía and my mother practiced rasquache forms of curanderismo. The term "rascuache" has Nahuatl origins and was taken up by the Spanish to attach social class and was specifically used as a derogatory term used to call people that occupied lower social classes.[2] Today, rasquachimso in Chicanx communities known as the making do with what is available, it is a methodology of being resourceful and a form of reclamation. In this small concrete home sitting on the corner with the large ponytail palm tree and pothos plant growing on the walls, I learned various ancestral knowledges passed down to my tía more so than my mother because she first immigrated to the United States at the age of 15. My mom later returned to Guadalajara and then immigrated again at 23. My tía María on the other hand, stayed in Guadalajara as the youngest child to take care of her parents. On occasion, during our yearly visits to the homeland, I would see my aunt performing ventosas (cupping), brewing special teas, and she regularly took us to the best curandero/as, like Don Aaron Palafox, and sobadores in the city.[3]

Each practice requires magic, a special intention that would forever change the outcome of our present state. I captured these moments in my memory and cherish them in my own spiritual practice.[4] As I grew older, I noticed some of these same variations of magical practices and world views displayed in literature. For example, stories that have curanderas or people possessing gifted abilities, known as dones (natural born gifts), such as seeing the future, talking

to the dead, or spiritual interpretation of dreams, miracles, and hablando en lenguas (speaking in tongues).[5] In texts like Rodolfo Anaya's *Bless Me Ultima*, the female protagonists were always the most powerful and had the ability to change the world with their spiritual knowledge. Yet, mainstream society associated these characters with "witches." In the public library, I knew the section these practices of "magic" were house in, the "fantasy" or "speculative" genres. They were found in the same locations as Roald Dahl's *Witches* (1983) and J.K Rowling's *Harry Potter* (1997).[6] Witches, brujas, and spiritual workers are not synonymous although many scholars still write from that perspective. They work with different energies. Terms like "witch" are facilitated through a Eurocentric lens, which I will further discuss throughout this dissertation. Texts that highlighted spiritual practitioners like those I have encountered in my life were housed in genres of speculative fiction (spec fic) and I knew from my personal experience that ancestral spiritual representations were not like those used by Dahl's and Rowling's characters. I became interested in how ancestral practices were stored in other colonial spaces. I searched high and low in the archives to learn more about these detailed practices. It wasn't until I realized, these spiritual frameworks are disregarded and cast as "superstition." Inspired by my inquiry, this dissertation focuses on archival research methodologies, contemporary young adult Latinx speculative fiction, and persecution of knowledge.[7]

The control of discursive knowledge production is an intersecting commonality in the treatment of Latinx literature and Latinx people throughout history. Latinx is an identity used to refer to people of Latin America descent living in the United States. Through this study, I examine the archive of literature produced by Latinx writers in conjunction with the conventional understandings of the literary genre of speculative fiction to help us understand why ancestral practices pose a threat to Western knowledge through fiction. Ancestral refers to

the spiritual, fictive, and blood kinship of loved ones that have passed. The archive of Latinx speculative fiction is a culturally reproduced collection of literary work that preserves, highlights, and reclaims ancestral philosophies to disrupt colonial systems of knowledge. Ancestral philosophies refer to sets of knowledges, such as wisdoms that have been used by descendants of Indigenous and African people before the colonial invasion. The dissemination of these ancestral knowledges is currently practiced across the globe. Ancestral philosophies have been modified and blended over generations.

The correlation between the marginalization of Latinx literature and the repression of ancestral philosophies as alternative knowledge within hegemonic society is revealed through an interrogation of institutional structures like the traditional archive and the Western literary canon. In addition, Latinx literature re-writes moments of violence and erasure, and within those moments we can find the conjuring of ancestral knowledge production. I argue that through archival methodologies, created by Black and Latinx women scholars, we can map ancestral knowledge found in the genre of young adult speculative fiction and identify how knowledge is preserved, culturally reproduced, and executed by Latinx writers.

**Significance: Subverting Terminologies and Colonial Preservation**

As an intervention, my dissertation rejects the notion that the worlds and philosophies within speculative fiction are estranged, fictional, or a superstition. Rather, I validate the ancestral knowledge culturally reproduced within the genre. The ideology of estrangement situates frameworks that are conceived as "different," outside of hegemonic social acceptance. Another way that estrangement is used is by positioning non-Eurocentric ideologies as "foreign," "unfamiliar," or even incomprehensible. The association of ancestral knowledge as fictional,

estranged, or superstition in Eurocentric patriarchal societies reinforces intellectual oppression. In hegemonic Christian societies, the use of ancestral practices is often considered prohibited because these pre-colonial practices disrupt Christian concepts of sacredness that are constructed to set apart rules and regulations. In this dissertation, I refer to the hegemony as the Christian and Eurocentric viewpoints that attempt to colonize Indigenous and African belief systems in the Latinx diaspora. Hegemonic or hegemony signifies the idea that something is dominant, due to societies' influence over ideologies, politics, religion, economic influence through force of power. Power as we know it in the United States has been facilitated and created by the Western patriarchal system. Possessing power in Western thought is the ability to control, narrate, dominate, and influence both subjects and objects under colonialism enacted under epistemes that preserve colonialism in an authoritative position. Similarly, in literature, distinguishing characteristics map out the classifications of literary genres such as non-fiction, science fiction, and fantasy. The conventional definition of "speculative fiction" does not suffice for Latinx literary work that incorporates elements of the fantastic because Latinx literary fiction draws on real world ancestral philosophies that replicate modes of survival, lived realities, and power. I define speculative fiction as a literary genre that is facilitated by Eurocentric ideologies and colonial discourses of power meant to systematically oppress Indigenous and Afro-diasporic ancestral knowledge. My definition of speculative fiction which goes to the significance of this study is in opposition to the historical conventions. Latinx literary work is not "speculative" as Latinx authors constructs ideologies of survival and existence. I use sacred remembrances as a concept to analyze how Latinx authors draw from the past as a way to create new worlds based on ancestral philosophies. Sacred remembrances are a reclamation ancestral philosophical and spiritual practices found in literature of descendants of Indigenous and African peoples. The

concept of sacred remembrances validates Indigenous and Afro-diasporic practices, wisdoms, and knowledge that has been marginalized by colonial systems of power.

The conventional understanding is that speculative fiction is a literary genre that encompasses elements of fantasy, otherworldly, futuristic, and the supernatural. The supernatural is predominantly understood as an extraordinary paranormal phenomenon that belongs to another realm or an abnormal occurrence that defies the scientific law of nature (supernatural, *OED* 2021). Paranormal phenomenon, like ghosts, have an association with haunting and promote fear. The root word 'para' in paranormal refers to something outside of societal acceptance. Similarly, driven by fear of the unknown, skepticism surrounding the supernatural has long been affiliated with the condemnation of "black magic." "Black magic" is considered a malevolent act promoted by the desire of "evil" to inflict harm through supernatural force. Historically, the idea of black magic has been a tool to racialize and portray Black and Indigenous spiritual practices as primitive behavior. Ancestral philosophies, when exerted by women, have been targeted as "black magic" and identified as witchcraft primarily because of prejudiced beliefs about race, such as anti-Blackness, and European superstition. In this context, unorthodox beliefs were perceived to be associated with witchcraft, which was considered a diabolical practice in orthodox belief systems.

The association of "black magic" as malevolent is a concept rooted in orthodox belief systems, such as Christianity, to deter people from practicing other spiritual practices especially those influenced from African belief systems.[8] The term "black magic" in orthodox religions is wallpapered extension of racism and anti-Blackness. I define magic as a set of intentions symbolically used in rituals directed to reconfigure the rules of reality. The reconfiguration of reality through a series of performed actions, also known as rituals, is used to subvert oppressive

positionalities and change the present. In a similar fashion, the theme of magic in literature assists in reworking hierarchies of power. The production of magic outside of Christian forces was prohibited in the Americas and Caribbean in the early colonial period because in Western society unauthorized magic was a forbidden act against the orthodoxy's sacred realm. Magic has been widely used throughout various cultures, but orthodox religions, like Christianity, associate the magic with demonic practices. In addition, orthodox religions, too, engage in various forms of magic and supernatural practices through rituals, but attempt to demarcate accepted forms of practice like prayers from unorthodox practices. Prayers are a form of magic that seeks to influence the present state of reality. The long tradition of distancing the supernatural engagement from orthodox religion calls into question why certain practices and sets of knowledge are validated and accepted in a Christian dominant society. For example, the miracle act, or milagro, of transforming the eucharist and wine into the body and blood of Christ is a form of magic that transforms material items. In addition, practices like mysticism, which involves entering a trance-like state, was allowed as long as practitioners were guided by male spiritual confessors from the orthodoxy. Mysticism, or visionary experiences, were only allowed by members of the hegemonic society. When practiced outside of orthodox religions, mysticism would have been considered supernatural practice, or even "black magic."

Silvia Federici's *Caliban and the Witch: Women, The Body, and Primitive Accumulation* (2004) demonstrates the historical association of the supernatural with the poor and the proletariat during the era of feudalism in Europe.[9] Since then, engagement in the supernatural has developed as a Christian methodology for persecuting women for their access to unorthodox knowledge and supernatural practices of magic and spiritual possession. In the 1400's, the German text titled, *Malleus Maleficarum* or *Hammer of Witches,* called for solidarity against

prohibited forms of magic. Magic within the *Malleus* primarily centered on women's sexual seduction of men. The authors of the text, Heinrich 'Institoris' Kramer and Jacob Sprenger, believed that magic was predominantly used to manipulate men who held powerful positions and access to property. As a result, texts like the *Malleus* prompted a rise in witch-hunts and strengthened institutional structures like the inquisition which was later enforced in various parts of Catholic Europe, such as Spain, to control bodies, alternative ideologies, and religions. Kramer and Sprenger's persecution tactics were implemented in the Americas and Caribbean which will be further discussed in chapter 1.[10] Indigenous spiritual practices were often categorized as "superstition," "black magic," or "heresy" to control practices that often contested colonial and patriarchal dominance.[11] Eventually, after systemic campaigns like the inquisition were abolished in the early nineteenth century, spiritual practices were still performed but were considered inferior by hegemonic society. The Age of Enlightenment contributed to perceptions that supernatural practices were non-threatening which will be further critiqued in this introduction. In the early 1800's the abolishment of the inquisition imposed the idea that any practice, such as ancestral knowledge, that was unorthodox or had no scientific explanation were mere "superstition" and possessed no logical basis.[12] The term "superstition" is pejorative and has an underlying assumption that supernatural influence is irrational or above nature. In addition, the conventional concept of "superstition" is based upon fear. The occurrence of an idea or event as a "superstition" is grounded in the belief that magic and the supernatural are a myth. Naming magic as "superstition" reinforces the hegemonic claim that magic does not exist. Ancestral knowledge, on the other hand as I argue, is not a myth nor a "superstition" because ancestral knowledge is a foundational framework rooted in pre-colonial and anti-colonial worldviews.

Terms like superstition categorize the production of knowledge on a hierarchical scale of validation where superstition, other worldly, supernatural, ancestral philosophies are held at the bottom. Similarly in literature, the engagement in the supernatural has been categorized as "superstitious" because of its association of "irrational" characteristics. Irrationality is the belief that an idea or practice does not conform to Eurocentric lens of reason or logic. As a result, the genre of speculative fiction and markers of supernatural practices are preserved only in the periphery of institutional structures like the archive and fictional literary genres. Traditions of institutionalizing colonial structures like the archive and conventions of literary genres often attempt to invalidate ancestral philosophies, especially those that promote alternative theories challenging socially constructed ideologies of race, class, knowledge, sexuality, (dis)ability, and gender. Witch-hunts, persecutions, and marginalization stem from historically negative views of supernatural practices and target Indigenous and Afro-diasporic ancestral practices. Today, in Latinx communities, ancestral philosophies have survived because they are passed down generationally as forms of protection, wisdoms, or used in medicinal practices.

*Latinx Spiritualities* argues that in speculative fiction the concept of supernatural engagement is predominantly filtered through orthodox belief systems and Eurocentric ideologies that invalidate knowledge produced by communities of color. Ancestral systems of knowledge have been invalidated by Western constructions that diminish the power of Indigenous and Afro-diasporic knowledge(s) of power through negative terms. I highlight how ancestral practices are misidentified through Western conceptions of the supernatural. Historically, ancestral knowledge was embedded into the criminal system in parts of the Americas and Caribbean and often considered a punishable act. The misconception that ancestral knowledge is only a "supernatural paranormal phenomena" discredits how knowledge is

reproduced. For instance, ancestral presences like spirits are often cross identified with unexplained supernatural engagement. The practice of conjuring presences is a conscious summoning of knowledge and progenitors. I use the phrase ancestral presences to define otherworldly energetic forces to challenge Western understanding of reality. The presences are invoked to defy the laws of nature by refusal to conform to the colonizer's practices of knowledge as a metaphysical philosophical practice. Moments of marginalization and violence unveil how Latinx people summon ancestral knowledge, but this knowledge is still mistaken by hegemonic society as a "speculative" act. The conventional understanding of the term "speculative" diminishes ancestral knowledge, rather than honor ancestral philosophies. I propose sacred remembrances as a concept that validates pre-colonial wisdom to connect spiritual knowledge as a framework which contests the conventional understanding of the speculative fiction genre. Ancestral practices conjure pre-colonial knowledge to disrupt social constructions such as gender, (dis)abilities, race, and identity as a methodology of survival. Latinx engagement in sacred remembrances transforms speculative fiction as a genre for theory making and exertion of such bodies of knowledge.

**Literature Review: Speculative Fiction**

Speculative fiction in the Western literary canon is a subcategory of the literary genre of science fiction. In the field of speculative fiction, there are debates surrounding the slippage and overgeneralization of the title of the genre. Russell Gill's article, "The Use of Genre and the Classification of Speculative Fiction" explains that there is no clear definition of speculative fiction, and that speculative fiction can be almost anything if it offers escapism and temporary alternative reality (80). Gill's analysis of speculative fiction relies on the temporary

disassociation of our present cognitive frameworks. The cognitive frameworks that Gill implies are those that are induced by colonialism. Similarly, the Western literary canon catalogues speculative fiction as a genre comprising the involvement of supernatural or fantastical elements. In Western thought, the term "speculative" is seen as hypothetical rather than theoretical, often aligned with cognitive estrangement. Cognitive estrangement is a concept coined by Darko Suvin in his book, *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction (*1979), who explains that cognitive estrangement provokes a completely new way of conceiving our world. Suvin contrasts his definitions of science fiction, fantasy, and fairytales against what he calls the empirical world and its laws (Suvin 8). The empirical world and its laws as Suvin explains are rooted in European science and epistemology. If the paradigm is that speculative fiction is "hypothetical," then we simply acknowledge that there are other beliefs, modes of living, and being, outside of Western thought. The difference between hypothetical and theoretical is that theories are proven, unlike hypothetical situations that are not yet proven. Latinx authors use ancestral philosophies as interventions against colonialism as a space for theory. I use the term theory to refer to validation processes and to challenge dominant frameworks that try to make Latinx knowledge inferior. In doing so, I highlight how Latinx ancestral spirituality is not "hypothetical" but rather a philosophical framework. In this genre, utopian, dystopian, alternative futurities, and magical worlds are often considered hypothetical situations. There is room to challenge these perceived "hypothetical" situations as spaces where frameworks are formulated and exercised. As part of my intervention, the genre of speculative fiction has been a placeholder for other ways of knowing. Alternative knowledge has been categorized as "speculative" as a continuation of oppressive violence against non-dominant philosophies.

The conventional understanding of the genre describes "speculative" as anything that is not identified in the Western context of rationality. The Age of Enlightenment, a Western philosophical movement, occurred from the 17th through 19th centuries and introduced various indoctrinated ideas surrounding the concepts of the mind, the human, reason, and separation of church and state. One particular concept that encompasses the ideas of the mind, human, and reason is that of rationality. The pivotal assumption of possessing rationality is that one must have reason, whereas to obtain reason, one must be human. Reason in the early modern era refers to a specific intellectual capacity filtered through what is believed to be sets of logic. The concept of reason has been grounded in Greek and French systems of validity. Moreover, the concept of rationality is a philosophical approach that centers European discourses of intelligence, privilege, and epistemic power. Epistemic power happens when one knowledge system dominates over others and is normalized into society. Epistemic or ways of knowing in Western society has been paired with colonial influence. Black philosopher Kristie Dotson references this power as epistemic agency to "refer to the ability to utilize persuasively shared epistemic resources within a given community of knowers in order to participate in knowledge production and, if required, the revision of those same resources" (24). Dotson explains that epistemic agency is complicit in oppression of other knowledge systems because of the ability to pervade in various aspects of life, stigmas, and perception of the world. Ideologies like reason are thrusted upon members of society as an authoritative perspective to engage and live in the world. René Descartes, a French philosopher, birthed the Cartesian model that centers the theory of knowledge on the quality of reason. In addition, the engagement in the supernatural through a Eurocentric gaze has become a marker to differentiate accepted practices and perceived "irrational" practices like spiritual possession. Western-European epistemologies value concepts

of logic, a set of principles rooted in rationality, that focus on the physical and/or natural world. In the Cartesian model, it was believed that one must obtain logic and rationality to produce knowledge. In the conventions of speculative fiction, logic, and rationality often mimic hegemonic ideologies in the real world. If not, then the hegemonic idea in the fictional plot often superimposes a social norm demarcating who "belongs" and who "doesn't."

The influence of Western-European epistemologies lends to the idea of who is human and who has the capacity to produce knowledge, often excluding Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) across the globe. In the Americas, Spanish Fray Bartolomé de las Casas (1484-1566) was named "Protector of the Indians" by Cardenal Jimenez de Cisneros after raising concerns about the treatment of Indigenous people during the colonial invasion. In the *Historia de las Indias* and *Brevísima Relación de la destrucción de las Indias*, de las Casas explains that Indigenous people obtained reason, thus were able to convert to Christianity. He persuaded the Spanish empire to bring enslaved people to the Americas for the reproduction of labor as a result of his persistent initiatives of Indigenous conversion. He wrote, "viendo lo que pretendía y que los religiosos de Santo Domingo no querían absolver a los que tenían indios si no los dejaban—que, si les traía licencia del rey para que pudiesen traer de Castilla una docena de negros esclavos, que abrirían mano de los indios,"[13] (2190–91). De las Casas petitions for Indigenous freedom aided in anti-Black ideologies of enslavement in Americas and Caribbean. He knew that the religious order in Santo Domingo did not want to abolish enslavement, thus, he petitioned for substitution of Indigenous bodies for 12 enslaved Africans. In 1552, De las Casas's debate with Gines de Sepulveda against the subjection of Indigenous peoples further dehumanized enslaved Africans and their descendants by pushing for the Christianization and protection of Indigenous people. Although Indigenous and enslaved African people (and descendants) inhabited the

Americas and Caribbean, they were not provided the same resources, intellectual respect, and freedom as the Europeans and their descendants. To further separate access to power and privilege concepts like reason, rationality, and the human become the focal point in institutional structures, especially those that upheld colonial domination. Therefore, Western concepts became tools in aiding the subjugation of Black and Indigenous communities. The ability to classify knowledge in these communities as "speculative" became a tool of subjugation.

Genre titles like speculative fiction are grounded in Eurocentric philosophies that negate BIPOC access to power, authority, and as knowledge producers. Scholar Marek Oziewecz's anthology entry, "Speculative Fiction," outlines three historical definitions used to encapsulate the genre. Oziewecz explains that:

> The term "speculative fiction" has three historically located meanings: a subgenre of science fiction that deals with human rather than technological problems, a genre distinct from and opposite to science fiction in its exclusive focus on possible futures, and a super category for all genres that deliberately depart from imitating "consensus reality" of everyday experience. (Oziewecz 1)

These definitions of speculative fiction reproduce the hegemonic view of what constitutes reality for those in power. Oziewecz attempts to debunk that there is a consensus reality by positioning speculative fiction as a "non-mimetic" narrative (2). He writes, "*mimesis* signifies the desire to imitate reality" (2). His argument attempts to emphasize that speculative fiction is grounded in the non-mimetic, or non-representation of the world, even though Oziewecz contradicts himself by saying that 20th century scholars have concluded that all literature draws from reality (2). I argue that rather than using non-mimesis, I position speculative fiction as partially mimetic because it houses instances of real-world spiritual practice coupled with the overtly fantastical

elements. Oziewecz continues, "[u]nlike fantasy, science fiction, horror and other genre labels, which are culturally situated designations that arose to describe European and North American developments in the Western literature field, speculative fiction opens a new discursive space for the voice of minorities and ethnic others within non-mimetic narrative forms without relegating them to the ghetto of "ethnic" literatures" (17). Although Oziewecz recognizes speculative fiction is a genre that offers a literary space where authors of colors can traverse the enclosures of marginalization away from categories that only categorize BIPOC texts as "ethnic" literature. However, speculative fiction is a marginalized genre compared to what is often believed as "high" poetry, non-fiction, and prose.

These definitions laid out in Oziewecz's entry reinforce a dominant paradigm that lumps speculative fiction as a catch-all category that assumes that perceptions of reality are homogenous experiences. In turn, three historically located meanings target speculative fiction as a genre that constellates and pushes alternative philosophies into the periphery. Science fiction, on the other hand, is built on what society calls "hard" sciences and does not rely on supernatural power induced by metaphysical philosophies. Oziewecz's first understanding of the genre, based on the idea that scientific advancement supersedes or is more valuable than spiritual knowledge, is embedded in Western philosophical perspectives on technology and knowledge production. Although not directly mentioned within the article, there is an underlying issue surrounding the idea that speculative fiction deals only with the future and human thinking, or intelligence. I bring this to the forefront because historically the concept of the human was afforded to people of Anglo or White European descent. For generations, Black and Indigenous mindbodyspirits, and their descendants were infantilized and seen as objects. Mindbodyspirit is a concept built on conscious healing processes that aims to restore severed fragmentations of the mind, body, and

spirit split. The concept of mindbodyspirit in Chicana/Latina studies explains how the mindbodyspirit as a tri-unit resists colonial philosophies and traditions that demarcate the flesh and the spirit as two separate entities. According to Chicana scholar Gloria Anzaldúa "Catholic and Protestant religions encourage fear and distrust of life and of the body; they encourage a split between the body and the spirit and totally ignore the soul; they encourage us to kill off part of ourselves" (Anzaldúa 59). Mindbodyspirit is meant to repair and unlearn internalized oppression that have been taught though Western ideologies and systems of power. Amanda Ellis adds that the term "contemplat[es] legacy and impact[s] social ontological dualism and its effects of how healing is conceptualized and carried out in the twenty-first century" (Ellis 5). Oziewecz's understanding of speculative fiction continues to dismember the mindbodyspirit. Thus, the concept of rationality and the origins of speculative fiction are limited and confined to the scope of Western thought. Ideologies outside of Western thought are often estranged to those who hold rationality in high regard. In Latinx literature, like Dahlma Llanos-Figueroa's *The Daughters of the Stone* (2019), the concept of the mindbodyspirit is a foundational theme that continuously contests concepts of the human alongside race, (dis)ability, class, gender, and lack of representation.

As a cultural production, speculative fiction can be used to change the way particular mindbodyspirits are perceived in the "real" world. Disability scholar, Sami Schalk's book *Bodyminds Reimagined* explains that:

> Speculative fiction allows us to imagine otherwise, to envision an alternative world or future in which what exists now has changed or disappeared and what does not exist now, like the ability to live on the moon or interact with gods, is suddenly real. For marginalized people, this can mean imagining a future or alternative space away from

> oppression or in which relations between currently empowered and disempowered groups are altered or improved. (Schalk 2)

Schalk situates speculative fiction as a genre of possibilities, recuperation of cultural traditions, and empowerment. Speculative fiction for Schalk redistributes power and the narratives of the historically oppressed. Schalk invites the distortion of the present because to curate a new future, the present and past must be contested through emotional, spiritual, and physical healing from current frameworks that continually reproduce the disempowerment of marginalized people. For example, one subgenre that lends itself to speculative fiction is that of futurism.

In 1993, Mark Dery first coined the term Afro-Futurism in "Black to the Future." In Dery's explanation of Afro-Futurism, he noted that although themes within speculative fiction and sci-fi seem unnatural, they are reworkings of dystopian events first encountered by Black people under colonial invasions. Similarly, Chicana scholar Catherine Ramirez's "Afrofuturism/Chicanafuturism: Fictive Kin" compares Afro-futurism to Chicanafuturisms both of which explore histories that are meant to oppress, stigmatize, and to make primitive Chicanx and Black peoples. Ramirez notes:

> Like Black people, especially Black women, Chicanas, Chicanos, and Native Americans are usually disassociated from science and technology, signifiers of civilization, rationality, and progress. At the same time, many Chicanas, Chicanos, and Native Americans have been injured or killed for science and technology. (Ramirez 188)

Ramirez's remark about the dissociation of Black women, Chicanx, and Indigenous peoples is found in various narratives that continue to portray them as "primitive." For example, Jared Diamond's book, *Guns, Germs, and Steel: The Fate of Human Societies* suggests that Indigenous people in the Americas did not have modern technology, animals, and weapons advanced enough

to win the combat against European invasion. The Pulitzer Prize winner invalidated Indigenous technology and systems of knowledge. Diamond's perspective on technology, including weapons, ships, and tools for developing agriculture often rests on modernity and colonial invasion in which he classifies some mechanisms as "simple technology" comparison to those used by colonizers (16; 53). He disregards metaphysical intelligence as a technology as he mentions that the Aztec and Inca ruled over their empires with stone tools (15). Ramirez, on the other hand, explains that because ideas that dissociate science and technology from people of color, examples of those like in *Guns, Germs, and Steel*, continue to justify colonial domination.

Literary genres like science fiction have an underlying connection not only with narratives of colonial conquest but with ideas of technological advancement. True retroactive speculative fiction dismisses modernity and technological advancement because the ideology of modernity is situated on the exploitation of Black and Brown bodies for labor production and capital gain. Some examples include the Tuskegee experiment, the development of gynecology, bio-cellular research, forced sterilization, and pesticide treatments on farmworkers.[14] Rather than focusing on science and technology that has contributed to the harm of Black and Brown bodies, spiritual Latinx literature emphasizes metaphysical powers and ancestral knowledge as its core element. The long history of Chicanx and Latinx engagement with speculative fiction is dependent on validating alternative knowledge. Black Feminist Thought scholar, Patricia Hill Collins discusses in *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment* that "alternative epistemologies challenge all certified knowledge and open up the question of whether what has been taken to be true can stand the test of alternative ways of validating truth" (271). Alternative philosophies like those posed in Latinx literature contest colonial "truth" through the processes in which knowledge(s) are validated and legitimized in

communities of color. The contestation of certified knowledge becomes subject to marginalization as it interrogates networks of overruling control. The power BIPOC knowledge beholds destabilizes "hegemonic truth" and the structures that uphold it through literature. The literary genre of speculative fiction, especially BIPOC spec fic has been marginalized within the Western literary canon because it engages in systemic difference, drafts alternative conditions, and offers alternative modes of thinking outside of hegemonic frameworks. Thus, BIPOC speculative fiction has been reduced as a subfield of fiction. The conventions of the genre forcefully suppress narratives that offer alternative theories than those accepted in Western thought. Most importantly, there has been an attempt in colonial structures to invalidate the philosophies that are brought forth and contest Western ideologies of power. These philosophies are categorized as "speculative" even though they have been verified in communities of color. In the genre of spec fic by BIPOC authors, the validation of "certified" hegemonic knowledge and "truth" is no longer valued as it cannot be sustained when BIPOC perspectives disestablishes it through the imagination of a world in which BIPOC knowledge supersedes colonialism.

**Young Adult Speculative Fiction**

The repository of Latinx speculative fiction reveals alternative frameworks to combat colonial ideologies such as ontology, mental illnesses, ownership, and power. More specifically, ancestral philosophies can be found within young adult speculative fiction and contest hegemonic perspectives. The idea of alternative realities has been marketed toward YA readers because these ideas are positioned as "fantastical," but actually display ancestral knowledge. The theme of fantasy is often confused with unrealistic experiences or an imagined space. Yet, fantasy as a subgenre of speculative fiction is based on folklore, myths, and the use of magic.

Ebony Thomas coins the phrase "the fantastic" as a literary concept to "capture the wonder of stepping into a world that never was, and immersing yourself in it in a way that speculative fiction does not" (Thomas 8). For Thomas, "the fantastic" represents multiple definitions, however, the term fantastic does not encapsulate the mimicking of real-world spiritual practices that are used in the forefront of Latinx literature. I use the phrase "sacred remembrances" to refer to vestiges of ancestral philosophical and spiritual practices documented in Latinx literature. Sacred refers to metaphysical honoring through ritual practice. The remembrance of these philosophies in fiction displays shattered fragments that have been restored, repurposed, and exerted for purposes of guidance and healing. These practices are methodologies that call upon the past and implement it in the present to create a future of new possibilities. Sacred remembrances are constantly found in Latinx literature whether explicit in the plot or read in between the lines of the text. For example, Lizz Huerta's *The Lost Dreamer* (2022), Zoraida Córdova's *Inheritance of Orquídea Divina* (2021), and Aiden Thomas's *Cemetery Boys* (2021), and *The Sun Bearer Trials* (2022). Latinx authors embed ancestral philosophies through sacred remembrance in the actions of characters as a methodology of archiving.

The stigma of all young adult speculative fiction as fantasy decreases the value of the knowledge produced. Terms like "fantasy" and "speculative" become a part of a system of invalidation as they are misconstrued to target young audiences. The underlying assumption by publishers is that young adult audiences are perceived to possess immature imaginative minds. Thus, the policing of which texts become fantasy, fiction, magical realism, or other genres lies in the hands of the publishers who often position Latinx literature that is heavily influenced by ancestral spiritual practices and sacred remembrance as "juvenile." Young adults and children,

however, can see alternative knowledge as a possibility in spite of colonial ideologies forced upon them at a young age.

What the West deems as a "fantasy" does not correlate with the spiritual knowledge used in communities of color. "Fantasy" becomes a term used by the hegemony to portray ancestral knowledge as imaginational and fiction. "Fantasy" has been applied to Latinx imagined futures, hopes, dreams, and aspirations. Although, we do not see spiritual knowledge as only fantasy, because it is a possibility. We have been taught to conjure magic through our prayers, rituals, creation of space, and manifestations when for centuries, access to magic was frowned upon, unless it was used by white male characters like in *Harry Potter* novels. Magic used by Latinx characters would have been categorized as "black magic" when found in white narratives. The use of magic has been racialized in white narratives often leaving Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) have been erased out to storylines. In mainstream young adult literature, diversity has been excluded. Ebony Thomas's *The Dark Fantastic* (2019) calls the absence of racialized bodies in speculative fiction the "imaginative gap" (Thomas 6). In filling the imaginative gap, Latinx authors rewrite ancestral philosophies to curate a new form of cultural production. The cultural production of ancestral knowledge becomes a representation of how Latinx want to be portrayed as rather than how colonial history has written them into the periphery.

The archive of speculative fiction withholds ancestral philosophies that are available for young adult access. Latinx engagement in the field of young adult speculative fiction in the past decade has flourished as a site of inquiry. For example, Matthew Goodwin's edited anthology *Rising Latin@: An Anthology of Science Fiction and Fantasy* (2017) serves as the first anthology of Latinx science fiction and fantasy. Since then, various anthologies such as *Altermundos:*

*Latin@ Speculative Literature, Film, and Popular Culture* (2017), and *Latinx Rising* (2020) the second edition, and *Speculative Fiction for Dreamers* (2021) have been published. In addition, the plethora of recent releases of Latinx literary pieces in YA speculative fiction marks the importance for further research and understanding of how ancestral philosophies, remembrances, and knowledge are presented.

**Latina Spirituality as a Framework**

This dissertation explores Latinx Young Adult speculative fiction to track Latina spiritualities while drawing on the past and present. I challenge the institutionalized system that categorizes Latinx spiritual practices in texts as purely fictional because Latinx novels provide moments of pre-colonial invasion and anti-colonial methodologies of survival. I use the term pre-colonial invasion to hold the colonial conquest accountable for the violence committed onto Black, Brown, and all racialized bodies. I highlight Indigenous and African beliefs systems in the future, past, and present to document existence. As products of colonial invasion, Latinx people have often preserved their ancestral practices even through times of violence, forceful Christian indoctrination, and unrest.

To do this work, I employ archival methodologies as a foundation to examine three literary texts that make a pivotal contribution to the Latinx YA literary canon. I disrupt histories and narratives of marginalization, invalidation, and dispossession by grounding Chicana/Latina archival methodologies from Solimar Otero (2020), Xhercis Méndez (2014), Gloria Anzaldúa (2015), and Aurora Levins Morales (1998). Archival methodologies serve as a way to excavate literary repositories and showcase how pre-colonial invasion philosophical standpoints are not in the past but exercised in the present. Furthermore, I use Latinx theoretical frameworks grounded

in spiritual consciousness and healing such as spirit praxis, mindbodyspirit, and conocimiento to demonstrate how the Latina protagonists exert embodied and generationally passed knowledge through spirit work, rituals, spiritual possession, construction of alters, and prayers. Using archival methodologies in tandem with spiritual consciousness calls for the probing of narratives that have marked ancestral connection as purely superstition. Chicanx/Latinx literary writers and scholars resist the negative portrayals of liberatory spiritual exercises. As a stream of knowledge, spiritual praxis offers conocimientos provided by forces of energies that can be considered as gifts from our deceased and living elders. "Praxis" refers to the active exercise or initiative in how ancestral knowledge and energies are enacted into the world. Thus, the act of validating is vital to the recording of ancestral knowledge found in literature.

Spiritual knowledge and understanding have been recycled into various conceptual frameworks that are synonymous with Latina spiritual consciousness. The reclamation of Latina spiritualties as ancestral conocimientos in Latinx literature and cultural studies is emphasized by Latina scholars such as Irene Lara, Norell Martínez, Vanessa Valdés, Gloria Anzaldúa, Suzy Zepeda, and Christina Garcia Lopez. Latina spiritualties come in many forms. The spiritualities explored in my literary analysis are those that resemble Afro-Atlantic practices like Santería, Palo, Vodou, and Candomblé. Indigenous spiritual practices used by the Guaraní, Yorúba, Congolese, Mayan, and Aztec including forms of Curanderismo are other specified practices used for medicinal and spiritual healing mentioned throughout this body of work. Additionally, I provide examples of how these practices are partially fused or hidden in branches of Christianity, such as Catholicism due to the forceful indoctrination practices. All these practices and belief systems are found in the Americas and Caribbean. More specifically, they have shaped how Latinx engage in world(s) where Latinx people are often pushed into the margins.

Latina spiritualities as a framework challenges the accounts that position spiritualties rooted in Indigenous and African practices as "superstition." In *Oshun's Daughters: Searching for Womanhood*, Vanessa Valdés explains that "[…] many African spiritual practices, offer a different epistemology than that of what has been identified as European rationalism; this system of knowledge is more holistic in that it places importance on both the physical and metaphysical. There is no difference between the sacred and the secular within this system of thought, given that everything is imbued with the spirit of God" (Valdés 2). As an epistemology, Afro-diasporic spiritual practices, like those derived from Yoruba in the Americas and Caribbean have contributed to the ways that Latinas enact authoritative power. Spiritual knowledge, as Valdés mentions, highlights interconnectedness with the corporeal, earthly, and spiritual. The interweaving of the spiritual with the physical is a stream of knowledge that has been used for generations. Gloria Anzaldúa's "Light in the Dark/Luz en Lo Oscuro" work emphasizes that "spirit-in-the world becomes consciousness, and we become conscious of the spirit in the world" (19). For Anzaldúa consciousness is the transformational process of undergoing deep awareness (17). The enactment of awareness provides the physical standpoint that the spirit world intercedes in the lives of the living. The immaterial, or intangible, essence of a spirit can be embodied through ritual practice contributing to the spirit's corporeal engagement with the world. Rather than believing that the spirit world and physical world are two different spaces, Latinas like Valdés and Anzaldúa call for an embodiment of the spirit as a methodology of resistance against a colonized world that has negated philosophical standpoints of dual spiritual and physical authority. Irene Lara and Elisa Facio call this similar process, "fleshing the spirit." Fleshing the spirit is a non-passive action that requires the healing of "patriarchal separation of between flesh and spirit" (Facio & Lara 10-11). To sew the spirit back into the corporeal requires

an active initiative of colonial opposition. The mindbodyspirit split is a colonial tactic toward promoting Latina dismemberment. The split negates streams of consciousness that require the spirit and the flesh to rely upon each other to achieve healing. A requirement of conjuring ancestor's philosophical practices is facilitated through awareness in ritual practice. Rituals are a process of performativity. In these performances, the body calls forth energies, opens spaces, and follows sets of rules. Indigenous and Afro-Atlantic practices have centered calling forth spirits. Some examples of this are spiritual possession and divination. A convivial space or frame of mind allows invocation of spirits during the ritual performance. When rituals are used as a sacred practice of resistance, the spirits provide alternative modes of existence in the form of ontological standpoints, forms of authority, and modes of being.

Christina Lopez in *Calling the Soul Back: Embodied Spirituality in Chicanx Narrative* uses vocation and ritual as a practice of mending the mindbodyspirit. Lopez explains that "using the knowledge already in one's possession and recognizing one's own cultural and personal practice as a powerful source of resistance to repression can be key to negotiating the very environments that devalue those knowledge forms" (Lopez 16). Lopez conceptually draws upon the ideologies that have been taught to her in the privacy of her own home and in spiritual circles. In literary studies, Latina spiritualities are sites of negotiation that provides opportunities that allow for Latina characters who wield spiritual energetic forces the chance to rewrite legacies of oppression. Lopez's concept of "'calling the soul back' [..] gesture[s] toward an active process of healing the wound of spiritual trauma by reclaiming an embodied state of relational knowing and being that has been displaced" (Lopez 11). As Lopez articulates, the body is a source of power and when the spirit and the body work in tandem there is awareness that begins the process of mending the violence felt through histories of oppression.

The spiritual trauma for many has been a result of associating ancestral spiritual practices with "witchcraft." As Irene Lara in "Bruja/Positionalities: Toward A Chicana/Latina Spiritual Activism" mentions "many people in Indigenous and Chican[x]/Latin[x] communities today are not comfortable with the term "bruja" because it signifies someone who uses her powers for bad, for others, she positively symbolizes the persistence of Indigenous conocimientos in spite of Christian colonial and western scientific attempts to destroy, invalidate, and appropriate" (Lara 12). For Lara, bruja positionalities have become a form of reclamation, because the bruja depicts a defiant figure. Bruja positionalities engage in conocimiento as a branch of ancestral philosophy. Scholars such as Norell Martínez's rewrite brujería as a form of resistance and reclamation of adverse representations of Latinas who situate their spiritual praxis in traditions that have been historically associated as witchcraft. Martínez uses the phrase bruja feminism as "the act of reclaiming la bruja, or witch, for political purposes" (Martínez 33). Bruja feminisms is not only used for personal exercise but also as a method to engage in the governance of the United States. Martinez's essay, "Brujas in the Time of Trump: Hexing the Ruling Class," analyzes the Yerba Mala Collective and the "Brujas Hexing Trump" who use brujería "recover the collective memory of Afro-Caribbean female healers" in literary digital spaces (33). The Yerba Mala Collective and the "Brujas Hexing Trump" reclaim sacred remembrances to cast negative energies on Donald Trump. Both Martínez and Lara's working of conocimiento reclaim the transgressive image of a bruja to show how ancestral practices exemplify social and personal advocacy. The bruja existence defies colonialism, therefore it is believed that she must be censored and those that encounter her must demonstrate their allegiance by following the societal expectations and engage with her only in secrecy.

Latinas draw on cosmologies that have been passed on for generations and transformed them based on necessity. As products of colonial invasion and dispossession, Latinas preserve these ancestral philosophies as a way of remembering sacred knowledge. The process of preservation in spiritual practices like altar work, spirit work, or prayer does not occur only during ritual intention, but also lingers in the everyday experience. Solimar Otero's work in archiving during conjure work explains that "[a]rchiving based on heightened ritual experiences expresses our need to connect with the past and the ephemeral: it is about feeling through the body in the here and now through the dead" (Otero 24). Otero argues that spirits are ever present for many spiritually active Latinas because of the co-existence of the dead, the living, and environment. Otero defines the phrase archives of conjure to discuss "a set of spiritual, scholarly, and artistic practices based on an awareness of the dead as active agents that work through imaginative principles" (6). The presence of the deceased, referencing the deities and ancestors, are not just in the spiritual realm but also in the creative aspects of scholarship, literature, art, and performance. Furthermore, Otero's work on spiritual archiving transforms the way in which methods of preservation are enacted because historically Latina spiritualities were written through a colonial perspective. The preservation procedure of Latina spirituality as a theoretical framework is a practice of futurity, while drawing from the past. Susy Zepeda explains "the methodology of tracing or excavando (digging) with a good heart is productive for unearthing knowledge of historical and ancestral truths" (Zepeda 10). Excavando is a two-fold process that involves the act of mining and piecing mutilated knowledge. Mutilation does not happen just to the body but also to the spirit and history. The abundant funds of knowledge provided by ancestral work grant healing from colonial violence in various ways. These various concepts are peppered through the dissertation to demonstrate the ways in which each literary author uses

spiritual praxis to challenge colonial domination in the lives of the characters, more specifically the protagonists. Each novel chosen for this research highlights a Latina protagonist that has drawn on their generationally passed or embodied knowledge to live in a world that has committed violence against them. Although the characters are on the brink of persecution for their access to power, I chose the three series based on how Latina spiritualties, knowledge, and power, were anchored in the plot.

**Research Questions and Chapter Breakdown**

I utilize three speculative fiction series, *Shadowshaper Cypher*, *Wolves of No World,* and *Brooklyn Brujas,* as case studies and historical archival documents from the 17th and 18th century to examine how ancestral philosophies are valid theoretical approaches. I specifically examined three interrelated questions: 1) How are ancestral philosophies oppressed in inquisition documents? 2) Why are ancestral spiritual practices considered "speculative?" 3) How do contemporary YA Latinx authors incorporate spiritual practices?

In chapter one, I provide a literature review of BIPOC archival methodologies. I apply the methodologies to 17th and 18th century documents from the Spanish inquisition to demonstrate how themes of persecution and censorship have a long legacy against Latinx bodies and knowledge. Then, I connect inquisitorial censorship to 21st century ideologies of book banning in K-12 public education and public libraries. The censorship of books by political parties and the states of Texas and Florida emulates inquisitorial practices that demark ancestral philosophies as "superstition." The theme for employing spiritual practices in the archival documents are recurrent themes found in YA Latinx speculative fiction as a means to combat colonial oppression.

Chapter two examines Daniel José Older's series, *Shadowshaper Cypher* (2015) and the conjuring practice of shadowshaping resembles that of spirit work. Spirit work and conjuring are practice used in Afro-Atlantic rituals. Older's series is the only one in this research that was written by a male identified person and has had significant critics about the series published. I argue that Older's text demonstrates how shadowshaping provides access to ontological change through spiritual possession, such as spirit work. The practice of shadowshaping provides agency for practitioners, thus, my findings complicate the narratives in ethnographic research that associate spiritual possession with various neurodivergences and mental illness, such as schizophrenia. Additionally, I employ Xhercis Méndez's "transcending dimorphism" and Suzy Zepeda's "spirit praxis" to show how engagement in ontological transformation is possible during shadowshaping.

The third chapter, "Latinx of No World" explores the concept of shapeshifting in Romina Garber's duology, *Wolves of No World* (2020). I argue that the protagonist Manu applies metaphorical shapeshifting when navigating various spaces allowing for an ever-changing identity. To do this, I draw from Gloria Anzaldúa's *Light in the Dark/Luz en lo Oscuro* (2015) by adopting concepts of nepantla and spiritual activism. María Lugones's work on "world-traveling" interweaves philosophical transformation with the protagonist's ability to shapeshift as a fluid identity in various fictional worlds. The findings of my literary analysis demonstrate that women were once persecuted for shapeshifting during the Spanish inquisition because it was an avenue to gain access to power outside of colonial constraints. The character Manu also becomes persecuted for her abilities to shapeshift.

Chapter four, "Tethering (Im)material Representations of Yemoja and La Santisima Muerte in *Brooklyn Brujas*" departs from the physical by analyzing sacred objects and figures. I

examine the preservation of female deities as a means for guidance through ritual practice in Zoraida Córdova's *Brooklyn Brujas* Series (2016). I argue that the preservation of spiritual figures like Yemoja and La Santisima Muerte disrupt colonial hierarchies and speak to how ancestral practices survive beyond colonial invasions. The findings of this chapter address how colonial systems attempt spiritual erasure by positioning these practices as "witchcraft." I employ Solimar Otero's (2020) archives of conjure to examine the use of altars, rituals, and prayers in the *Brooklyn Brujas*. Additionally, I ground Jenny Sharpe's concept of immaterial archives to demonstrate how these tangible and intangible items curate a repository of Latina spirituality in literature.

I close the dissertation by addressing the 21st century preservation of Latina knowledge production through publishing strategies. I examine the trends of publishing from 2018-2023 while addressing the booming field of YA speculative fiction. Digital platforms such as social media serve as an otherworldly space where ancestral philosophies survive. Latinx authors such as Córdova and Garber use social media as a tool to promote their books and critically engage with other writers about the continual policing and infantilization of Latinx literary work.

# CHAPTER ONE: SPECULATIVE ACTS, CENSORSHIP, AND PRESERVATION

## Introduction: Historical Marginalization of Ancestral Knowledge in Historical and Literary Repositories

The historical repression and control of discursive knowledge production are intersecting commonalities in the treatment of Latinx speculative literature and representation of women who utilized ancestral knowledge as a means of power found in the traditional archive. In the traditional archive, orthodox magic, and supernatural practices, such as transubstantiation in Catholic rituals, are preserved as permissible acts with genealogies of tradition accessible in collections titled Religion, Religious Life, and Theology.[15] Meanwhile, Indigenous and Afro-diasporic ancestral philosophies are not generally found within those collections because they are considered profane, rather than sacred according to the Christian narrative. The invalidation of ancestral knowledge has been part of a long effort to maintain colonial domination over racialized bodies. Ancestral philosophies including wisdoms, knowledge, perspectives, and practices are often abrogated in Religious and Theological collections. Collections titles such as Religion and Theology imply the dominant religious practices, Christianity, in the United States to continue the transfer of power and control within the archive.

The archive of Latinx speculative fiction presents opportunities for the excavation of truth, knowledge, and methods of existence that rectify Eurocentric narratives. Often, the term "archive" is connected to preconceived notions of colonial history. An archive is a Western social and physical construction traditionally known as a repository. It is an institution set within a colonial centered structure for the purposes of preservation. Preservation in the archive sustains the colonial narratives of domination that repress knowledge used by people of color. Chicana scholar Sheila Marie Contreras in *Bloodlines: Myth, Indigenism, and Chicana/o Literature*, explains that often the preservation of pre-conquest artifacts has been viewed through a

primitivist perspective. Contreras explains that primitivism emerged as an "art-historic term" that is often used in disciplines of archeology and anthropology (16). Primitivism is also an idea that underscores the archive to privilege Eurocentric knowledge and culture, especially in the archive. Yet the concept of primitivism does not capture the rich "ancestral and cultural ties" of Indigenous peoples (24).[16] Terms such as primitivism and primitive are used to juxtapose Eurocentric modernist movements, art, and cultural understanding with Indigenous cultures, knowledge, beliefs, and values. Primitivism is a narrative that inscribes the that Western culture, like that of colonizers, such as the United States, are "superior" to Indigenous cultures.

In the colonial repository,[17] researchers are given access to documents that uphold colonial success, laws, ideologies, and "norms." Not all archives are open to community members or for public use, and the archive was originally and still used as an elitist hub for investigation. Here, I am not referring to community or personal archives that provide agency and active roles in documentation of knowledge, cultures, values, joys, identities, interests, and narratives. Rather, the institutionalized system developed to uphold colonial subjectivities and colonial discourse. Thus, the archive is not romantic, although it is romanticized. The archive becomes romanticized when researchers take on the role of the "discoverer" when really the idea of the discovery is perpetuated through Western conventions of conquest.

The systemic structure of the colonial archive is accompanied by traditional methodological conventions for conducting research. The conventions of archival research are situated on organizational data sets like finding aids, research practices that assist in the longevity of the preserved material, annotations, research cards, and have institutional credibility. It is implied that researchers complete preliminary research before deciding in which archive, they will conduct their work. Once granted entry into the archival reading room,

scholars are assumed to have already been exposed to the finding aids. The finding aids are created from organizational practices, also known as organizational science. The problem with the phrasing organization as a science aligns with how Western thought processes of organization are thought to be at the forefront of large institutions and are considered as systems for reproducing knowledge. The term science becomes problematic because it is defined as "the state or fact of knowing; knowledge or cognizance *of* something" (science, *OED* 2021). Whether organizational sciences are a methodology of knowing, researchers must question what other facts or knowledge sets are implied in the traditional archive. Indigenous and Afro-diasporic research methodologies can help researchers recover repressed knowledge and history often shuffled into the periphery. For example, finding aids reflect the material in the archive and how the material is catalogued by its contents. Researchers are taught to rely on finding aids but ultimately the problem with finding aids is that they only provide a limited amount of information surrounding the textual materials available. The collections listed on the finding aids are organized by dates, events, themes, institutions, and geo-political cartographies. Once materials enter the organizational science system of the archive, the contents are transformed into colonial subjects. Colonial subjectivity is the way in which documents, people, history, etc. are represented through a colonial context. In the conversion of colonial subjectivity, people within the documents become subjected to Western social stratifications, or hierarchies, and implied ontologies that erase alternative possibilities used by various cultural groups.[18] This transformation process displays how material are repressed in the archive and what is knowledge, culture, and ideologies are deemed valuable. Every piece of material that enters the archive is treated similarly and the role of the archivist is expected to uphold the learned archival organizational practices.

The omission, invalidation, and erasure surrounding these "traditional" practices highlights how materials in the repositories are processed and converted within the larger narrative of archival finding aids. In addition, unprocessed or uncatalogued material adds to the complexities of what material documents are considered important or of high interest to be available for immediate research. Unprocessed materials are then subject to dispossession because the content in the boxes is kept, pushed into the periphery, and forgotten. Repressed material in the archive, such as Latinx histories and knowledge, fall subject to ill-treatment of its content as "unworthy."[19] There is a disparity when it comes to Latinx history versus colonial narratives in the archive. Thus, traditional conventions do not suffice when conducting research on marginalized communities, histories, and literature.

Researchers are expected to know the language of the archive, but for BIPOC researchers the development of underground knowledge has created new methodologies in conducting research in systems that are created to overlook BIPOC as knowledge barriers. The unequal treatment of repressed materials is not taught to researchers through the established conventions since the conventions are built to replicate hegemonic narratives of power and historical domination. Traditional research methodologies such as objectivity can be inapplicable when the researcher belongs to a marginalized racial and/or ethnic group. These conventions do not teach BIPOC researchers how to consume data when the person in the document phenotypically, emotionally, and spiritually resembles that of the BIPOC researcher. BIPOC researchers are subject to experiencing violent acts of dispossession, silencing, and erasures that are unfolded before them.

Latinx and Black women's investigative strategies have explored ways to cope with violence in the archive to re-write histories. The strategies that are conjured for this research are

those of women who destabilize the hegemonic truth. The practice of conjuring is an active initiative to disrupt silences by voicing the mistreatment of BIPOC knowledge and people preserved in the archive. By applying the following methods to the archive of literature, I explore how ancestral practices combat erasure and dispossession to reconfigure an archive of Latinx young adult literary work. Saidiya Hartman's article, "Venus in Two Acts," questions the role of the researcher and how representation versus re-presentation is imperative in disrupting the recurrent violence of brutality toward Black bodies. For Hartman, represent and re-present are two different things. Represent reinscribes violence but re-presenting is subverting that dominant image of oppression. The power of the narrator/researcher of archival materials is not about the ability to speak, but the way the message is received. To fulfill this, researchers of materials in the archive must either denounce colonial traditions of historiography or find ways to subvert them. Hartman's explains that researchers must exercise narrative restraint which is "the refusal to fill in the gaps and provide closure, is a requirement of this method, as is the imperative to respect black noise [...]" (Hartman 12). To disrupt the ways history has been written and continuously rewritten, Hartman tells researchers to avoid finding closure because in the search for closure, researchers invoke more violence. Closure is the personal fulfillment of resolving sentiments of physical, emotional, or spiritual violence. There is no need to expose more violence when violence is constantly on display in the traditional archive. The "black noise" references the audible aspect of violence synonymous with the excessive laws and regulations in place that police Black bodies found within the documents. Hartman urges respect which requires a lack of interference with auditory reverberations of the various layers of violence. Respect in this sense becomes a way to improve the general handling of gaps in the archive. In my own archival practice, I have applied Hartman's methods when conducting research in the

traditional archive. I apply the methodology of gap refusal when addressing 17th and 18th century autos de fe from the inquisition catalogues. Autos de fe were used as live performances that included public Catholic confessions and often a public walk of shame, where spectators could chastise the person on trial. However, many of these confessions during the public performance were forced under torture. The sounds of torture fill the pages of the autos de fe in which I will not disclose in the body of the text, the treatment of women found in the inquisition documents. Hartman's outlook on refusing to fill in the gaps as a form of restrictive narrative. Hartman reminds researchers that the audible noise already transpired on the page echoes across collection titles and the archive itself. There is no need to reproduce the noise embedded in the documents because the act of reproduction reinstates violence. The reinstation of violence awakens the ferocity by rewriting narratives that are harmful, demonstrate violence, and treatment of historically oppressed people. Similarly, in the archive of literature, the violence toward Latinx literary work can be heard if we examine the historical marginalization of the genre of speculative fiction. By examining the policies and laws or what I consider the conventions of the genre, the audible repression and violence toward pre-colonial knowledge becomes overwhelmingly present.

Ancestral philosophies in documents and literary texts appear in various ways. In subaltern studies, Spivak's "Can the Subaltern Speak" interrogates how subaltern women are perceived not to be able to "speak." Subalternity is a postcolonial social status where the marginalized occupy a low social economic rank under a dominant regime. World, class, identities, and race are all important aspects in analyzing privilege. For Spivak, privilege consists of the ability to be heard and not spoken for by someone with privileged social mobility. Spivak considers the debates of Deleuze and Foucault to address how epistemic violence is a cyclical

structure embedded in colonialism. While subaltern subjects can speak, they are not often heard because voice is governed by the colonial dynamics of power. The allowance of being listened to is an assumed characteristic of entitlement. Spivak's methodologies require researchers to restrain themselves from attempting to represent a subaltern population. Spivak pioneers this methodology by enforcing researchers to see their privileges and positionalities in "first worlds."

Spivak provides an example the violent act of not listening or hearing subaltern women speak through the Sati narrative. The Hindu story explains that Sati, a woman, married Shiva against her father's wishes and became Shiva's wife. Sati was a pious woman who devoted herself to Shiva. In short, to defend her husband's honor, Sati self-immolated (set herself on fire) and was reborn into the goddess, Parvati. Spivak mirrors this narrative with that of Hindu windows that sought to follow their husbands to their death. Spivak states, "[i]n the case of widow self-immolation, ritual is not being redefined as superstition but as *crime"* (97). The British colonial rule in India saw self-immolation as a sin. In 1829, the Sati Regulation Act was set in place in which imperialist believed they were helping women from performing sin (Raina 2018). In 1987-1988, the Parliament of India outlawed sati and portrayed self-immolation as suicide, rather than an honorable ritual practice. The widowed women's actions of glorified death were overshadowed by Christian beliefs that positioned widowed Hindu worshippers as immoral, sinful, and impious for their choice in death. Spivak's essay further explores how colonial narratives have misconstrued women's practices by stripping them from the ability of being "heard" while using their culture, beliefs, and actions to "speak."[20]

Chicana scholar Antonia Castañeda challenges Western scholars who say the subaltern "cannot speak," by finding audible voices within the fissures of the archive. Castañeda's article, "Engendering the History of Alta California 1769-1848: Gender, Sexuality, and the Family"

uncovers how women articulated their power through sexuality during the transfer of land controlled by Mexico to the United States. Castañeda's case studies highlight that sexuality and power in the Indigenous community she analyzed does not resemble Christian ideologies that portray women as submissive to men. She explains that gender is only one dimension of colonialism used to dominate women's bodies. Castañeda explains since women's roles within their Indigenous communities afford them power, their beliefs on sexuality are mistaken as sorcery and witchcraft. In fact, she explains that "Indian women, African-origin women, and racially mixed women whether Indo-mestiza or Afro-mestiza were suspect by virtue of being female, by virtue of deriving from non-Christian, or 'diabolic,' religions and cultures, and by virtue of being colonized or enslaved peoples who might rebel and use their alleged magical power at any moment" (Castañeda 237). The power and voice of these women were constantly feared and thought to have been possessed only through magic because women holding power was impermissible in Western society. By configuring power through their bodies, Indigenous women in Castañeda's case studies used their bodies as a form of authoritative voice. Voice in this context does not specifically mean the act of speaking but rather that ability to symbolically resist colonial domination. For instance, in 1785, Toypurina, an esteemed healer, was negated and dismissed as an authoritative figure because she fit into assumed Western constructions of gender based on her biological sex. Although Toypurina was revered amongst her people, outsiders of the community like colonial settlers and the military did not recognize her power. According to Castañeda, Toypurina led revolts against priests and soldiers nearby villages. Under the colonial gaze, however, Toypurina was categorized as a defiant woman and "witch." Similarly, in the archive of literature, Western notions of sexuality and gender are reconfigured,

repurposed, and altogether challenged to demonstrate authority outside of colonial social constructions.

Colonial violence like those of gender, sexuality, and voice force researchers to see the atrocities committed onto the people preserved in archival documents. Researchers experience colonial violence by being both in the presence of the archive in-and-of itself and witnessing brutality through the material. "Witnessing" is a method that is not often taught rather becomes a learned experience in archival research. Global diaspora studies scholar, Yomaira Figueroa-Vásquez explains that witnessing is a necessity to examine "[…] our pasts, […] our futures, and […] our present moments, it is our responsibility not to collude with those who have stripped others of their humanity by denying their voices, intellects, histories, or freedoms" (86). Witnessing is an act and methodology of restraint and refusal. Figueroa-Vásquez, takes up María Lugones's concept of faithful witnessing to attest "against the grain of power, on the side of resistance" (Lugones 7). A faithful witness rejects being complicit to colonial narratives of power, oppression, and domination. The practice of witnessing in archival documents and literature "allow us to understand the shifts in the structure of power and resistance to domination, particularly the domination of women of color, femme, and queer bodies" (Figueroa-Vásquez 67). It is important to truthfully see how women of color challenge colonial power, even when the dominant narrative attempts to suppress women's voices. Witnessing is a multi-dimensional experience in which the body has an affective response, embodies trauma, and reproduces its own truth. As an investigative response to the vicious acts displayed on the archival materials, the body remembers, carries, and recounts experiences of discrimination, dispossession, and violence. The following inquisition trials are moments of witnessing, yet violence does not remain on the pages of the document. The BIPOC researcher experiences

violence as well even if the violence is hard to see. The archive itself is violent as it is a constant reminder of forced colonialism. The foundation of the archive is rooted in counting bodies owned by institutionalized systems, the amount of land forcefully taken, and the invalidation of other knowledge by preserving colonial "truths." Rather than affirming the inquisitorial script that socially marks the women in the 17th and 18th century trials as brujas or heretics, I listened to the silences, the yearning for validation, and the spiritual practices that provided each woman with connections to their ancestors. I testify that their practices were not "speculative."

## 17th and 18th Century Mexican Inquisition Documents: Case Studies of "Speculative" Practices as Persecution

In the gathering of data from the archives of UC-Berkeley's Bancroft Library, Archivo Histórico del Arzobispado de Guadalajara (AHAG), and Archivo Histórico Nacional de Madrid. These documents are housed in Mexican Inquisition Collections, yet it is important to emphasize that in the 17th and 18th century geo-political cartographies were different than today. The lands that the documents are from were stolen lands from Indigenous people by the Spain empire which they referred to it was New Spain.[21] I witnessed the violence that was inflicted on the lives of the women who are preserved in the archive as criminals. Rather than replicating the violence in the archival documents, I use conocimiento and BIPOC archival methodologies to highlight how women use knowledge to subvert a systemic structure that negated access to power. The autos de fe, or public performance of spiritual confession, used in the following section showcase the truths of the defendants and demonstrate justified reasons why each woman relied on ancestral knowledge to climb hierarchical structures, seek social justice, offer spaces of existence, or spiritual/cultural way of engaging in the world. At face value, the front of the pages

of the documents highlight that the women were accused of "superstitious" acts, "heresy" or "brujería." While the inquisition recognized these acts as "superstitious," I situate the narratives of the defendants to showcase their reasons for drawing upon spiritual practices. The use of chocolate, menstrual blood, prayers, and herbs in unorthodox rituals were prohibited. The women in these cases were aware that these practices were banned, but still used them regardless of the Catholic church's attempt to regulate. The inquisition made a recurrent practice to publicly announce edicts regarding the prohibition of material items such as herbs and unorthodox practices. According to Stacey Schlau, a scholar of Spanish colonial studies, "although the number of cases prosecuted by the Spanish and Spanish American Inquisitions was relatively small [compared to Europe], they reflect larger socio-cultural and especially religious issues" (Schlau 119). The regulation of women's knowledge production and execution of such knowledge highlights how the Spanish empire sought to exert social control by limiting spiritual practices that allowed seeking social justice in the hands of the community. Early practices of activism used by spiritual practitioners targeted what is now known as gendered violence, poverty, and racism. Regardless of decade or historical period, the practices reveal the deep connection to pre-colonial knowledge that have been safeguarded in spite of colonial invasion, control, and attempted erasure. Each case I examine represents various themes discussed in the following chapters. For example, the practices of shapeshifting, the passing of knowledge, and the use of material and intangible items such as prayers. The practices examined in the following sections are neither "speculative" nor "superstitious" rather they display alternative hierarchies, knowledge, and methodologies.

**Manuela "la Luzera" Roque de los Santos in Zacatecas, México**

On November 16th, 1729, Juan Roque de los Santos and Manuela "la Luzera," both originally classified as Indigenous or "Indios" were brought forth on accusations of practicing hechicería, sorcery, in Zacatecas, México (1729, AHAG, 4). Hechicería was often associated as a practice used by Indigenous people while brujería was often associated for Afro-diasporic people. Each term, hechicería and brujería, resulted in various degrees of punishment, brujería being the most violent. The trial documents consisted of 62-double sided pages where several witnesses accused the curanderos, or healers, of practicing witchcraft, superstición, or superstition, and using prohibited herbs on a Mestiza patient named María Ignasa. Juan Roque de los Santos and Manuela "la Luzera" were denounced for mixing an herb referred to as Rosa María with sugar and feeding it to their client, María Ignasa, in an attempt to heal her from symptoms of "grave interior pains" (3). The curandera revealed that María Ignasa was a victim of brujería inflicted by another person (38).[22] Another testimony in the same set of trial documents claimed that Rosa María was the same plant as peyote. Joan Bristol in *Christians, Blasphemers, and Witches: Afro-Mexican Ritual Practice in the Seventeenth Century* (2007) explains that "in 1620 the inquisition issued an edict declaring that the common uses of peyote—discovering thefts and predicting the future—fell under the category of superstition […]" (162). However, the edict did not delineate that the use of peyote for medicinal purposes was classified as superstitious practice.

Peyote was one of the first hallucinogens banned in the New World. Regardless of common street names or pseudonyms for peyote, the cactus plant was prohibited and considered an act of evil if consumed. The use of peyote for spiritual rituals and criminal activities was outlawed. The medicinal properties of peyote prompted hallucinations which helped patients

forget about their bodily pain. The curanderos, however, utilized peyote as medicinal treatment during their ritual to heal María Ignasa. Aware that peyote was offered to her, she did not stop or reject the curanderos curing process. At this time, peyote was widely known as a prohibited herb and María Ignasa would have been fully aware of this as the inquisition made it a point to make society aware that it was banned through various published edicts. Furthermore, the second step in the healing process required the curanderos to bathe María Ignasa's legs with branches and leaves of a Peruvian tree (1729, AHAG, 5). In the afternoon, anis in powdered form were rubbed on Maria Ignasa's feet. Juan Roque de los Santos explained in his testimony that he requested that María Ignasa fall asleep, but she wanted to hear music, so he began singing and dancing to calm her. Witnesses to this event were listed with the names of Nicolasa de Arias, María de Silba, Jose Molina, and Juan Bentura (5).[23] Witnesses testified that the curanderos were seen dancing at night, a time when brujas were thought to appear to join in ceremony. This made them the witnesses suspicious of Juan and Manuela "la Luzera's" relationship to brujería. The witnesses' details of that night attempt to illustrate that Juan Roque de los Santos, Manuela "la Luzera," and her sister Agustina Rosa were having a witch's sabbath, where they were seen dancing during a ritual of sorts. A witches sabbath, also known as an aquelarre, was the prohibited act of gathering for a spiritual ritual. The patient, María Ignasa claimed that the curanderos transformed into the form of floating lights where other brujas mysteriously appeared. Driven by fear, the client denounced the curanderos to the Holy Inquisition.[24]

In this trial, Manuela "la Luzera" testifies that she was not a witch, but a curandera (42). She denied any association of participating in an aquelarre. Her nickname, "la Luzera," means "coming from the light." The significance of her name suggests that she was a well-known curandera gifted with healing abilities. Ideologies that surround "witchcraft" during this time do

not align with la Luzera's name as her nickname symbolizes illumination. This references that she possesses spiritual and intellectual insight. The knowledge that she obtains may have been passed onto her as illumination implies that she was chosen to wield healing abilities. For many people in the community, seeking assistance from curanderos was common because it was affordable and accessible. Names such as "la Luzera" have been reused in literature, such as Daniel Jose Older's *Shadowshaper Cypher* series, analyzed in chapter two.

The shapeshifting in the document occurs in two ways: 1) in the physical form in which the patent claims the curanderos transformed into floating lights and 2) the metaphorical shapeshifting that occurs in the auto de fe, where the curanderos negotiated their identities, beliefs, and healing practices to protect themselves from the inquisition. The curanderos caste ranking alongside biases of discrimination are factors that should be interrogated in the depictions of the curanderos as "brujos." In the trial, Manuela provided evidence that she was not an "India," but "Castiza" (97). Castizos were categorized as children of Mestizos and Spaniards. Manuela was passing as an Indigenous woman. Manuela "la Luzera's" rhetorical practices in the trial demonstrate that she knew it was important to negotiate her identity and healing practices within a colonial system that was built to persecute those who had knowledge while gaining power in the community as a healer. Thus, Manuela "la Luzera" emphasized that her work was curanderismo, not witchcraft (42).

**María de la Cruz and 3 Other Women in the Pueblo de Macagua**

Denouncing people of Indigenous or African descent as shapeshifters was common because their knowledge challenged the Western conceptual understanding of modes of being and social justice. For instance, in 1704, in what we know as present-day Guatemala, María de la

Cruz alias “la Marota,” an 80-year-old classified as “Mulatta” under the Spanish caste system,[25] was a grandmother who taught her relatives the art of chuntal.[26] The art of chuntal provided the family the ability to spiritually transform by tapping into animal spirits. In some Indigenous communities, animal spirits were assigned at birth (Bristol 154). María de la Cruz, alongside three women, María de Durango, María de la Candelaria, and Michaela Gerenomia were denounced to the inquisition for “echisos y brujerías, y especialmente contra Magdalena Durango” (1704, UC-Berkeley Bancroft Library, 2). In this 101-page document located in the UC-Berkeley’s Bancroft Library, María de la Cruz and the other women were accused of shapeshifting into cats, frogs, and other animals while explaining to the inquisition that their practice was not witchcraft but rather a religious system. The process of transformation in this document references spiritual and religious engagement in spiritual possession through ritual offering.

Chuntal provided María de la Cruz and other women ways to control society. The women gave members of the community, especially those they wanted to get revenge on, a secret drink filled with prohibited herbs to “atontar” or stupefy them. This concoction was a method to gain social and personal justice (6). These women shared their secret spiritual practices to gain freedom from patriarchal control while earning a name for themselves in society. Spiritual intimacy united the women. The art of chuntal was grounded in interpersonal relationships. Magdalena Durango and María de la Cruz served as the heads of the spiritual group. They initiated others, beginning with close relatives such as their children and then inviting others in the community. The ritual practices of chuntal were recorded in the documents as an act of brujería; however, the ritual demonstrates how women played a vital role in their spiritual hierarchy.

Witnesses such as Joseph Hernández, one of the "victims" of the chuntillas, testified that he saw the women performing a ritual practice. He explained that the women were seen naked at night sitting under a large ceiba tree. Indigenous group like the Mayans believe that the ceiba tree was the tree of life and thus sacred.[27] In other religions such as Palo Mayombe, the ceiba tree is a symbol believed to host spiritual power and many rituals take place under ceiba trees (Hartman 22). Palo, known as Regla de Congo (Rule of Congo), is a Congolese-based religious practice of the Bakongo people. Regla de Congo is predominantly found in Cuba and practiced various places in the Americas and Caribbean. In Spanish the term "palo" refers to sticks or branches used in the ritual adoration process of altar building. The foundation of Palo is the ability to control, conjure, and engage with the dead. According to scholars in Afro-Atlantic religions, Elizabeth Paravisini-Gebert and Margarite Fernandez Olmos, "the sticks of special trees ("palos") designate the sect and are key ingredients in the nganga-making process (90). Trees are scared elements in building nganga, an altar with a cauldron where spirits reside. In Palo, like in Catholicism, women play a secondary role in ritual practice, meanwhile the chuntalillas in the document led the ceremonial rites. The engagement in leading a spiritual practice aligned the women with heresy because their communal ritual was mistaken as an aquellare, a witches sabbath. Women were not allowed to perform spiritual rituals outside of the orthodoxy. Witnesses associated the ritual to an aquelarre accusing the women with making a pact with the devil. María de la Cruz's grandson testified that the women conjured of a color-shifting cat. Transformation according to the witness of the ritual provided spiritual possession of animal spirits, where it was believed that the women could tap into various forms of being, like animals. Then, he continues his account by mentioning that the women took of their rosaries, clothes, and laid on the floor in a spiritual trance (1704, UC-Berkeley Bancroft Library, 141).

The removal of the rosaries from their bodies demonstrates the influence of forced indoctrination of Catholicism, however the rosary may have been a cover-up to protect their belief systems.

The document states that the witness, Joseph Hernández, died following the denunciation. Joseph Hernández's timing of death raised suspicions as he died after denouncing the women to the inquisition. This led prosecutors to believe that his death was a result of brujería by the chuntalillas (chuntal women). Additionally, another man named, Damian was believed to have been "atontado" after Michaela Gerenomia transformed him into a cow. Michaela Gerenomia fled the city of Macagua following the alleged accusations. The fourth woman, María de la Candelaría, was accused of providing her husband a potion where he then died after drinking it. In the folder of the trial lies four edicts titled "Nos los inquisidores" outlining the prohibition of members of the community from having any interaction with the four accused women (107-114). Toward the end of the trial, three of the women, María de la Candelaria, Michaela Gerenomia, and María de la Cruz, pled guilty to charges of brujería through confession. As Graciela Rodriguez Castañón mentions:

> The woman accused of making a pact with the devil, of blasphemy, and apostasy—after denying in a first instance such accusations and demonstrating […] complete adherence to the Christian flock—finally admits her guilt and declares herself a witch and enemy of the religion, thus appropriating the discourse that subjugates her, until she firmly believes that perhaps unknowingly after her torture, she was a witch, after all. (180)

The process of persecution forced the women to plead guilty to brujería, not because the women believe that they engage in brujería, but because the women were claiming the image of a transgressive figure, one that prompts fear in society. Torture, forced confession, and social expulsion were leading causes in women's confession to heresy, brujería, and sorcery, known as

hechicería. Additionally, the rhetoric of the inquisition trials was known to members of the community. This rhetoric of confession, by the accused required piety, innocence, confusion, and guilt. Women were told to confess because if they did complete the sacrament then they could be saved from violent persecution. Confession was an act of performativity which allowed the women to demonstrate their allegiance to the Christian faith. María Durango, on the other hand, chose not to confess nor plead guilty. Her rejection of confession was considered as an act of heresy as she decided to push against the norms that made women confess to brujería under a system of persecution.[28]

**María de Rivera Una Vecina de la Cuidad de La Puebla de Los Ángeles**

María de Rivera, a woman classified as a "Mulata libre,"[29] was a resident in the city of Puebla de los Angeles in New Spain. Born into the Catholic faith, María was baptized, confirmed, and completed the required sacraments. She declared that she was born to a "Portuguese father and a Black mother, creole, of said City of Puebla, descendent of Africans from the capes" (1690, UC-Berkeley Bancroft Library, 127). On paper, María lived the life of a faithful Catholic, however, María, was accused of heresy as an infamous sorceress in 1690 for teaching women rituals of ligatures and love. Ligatures were considered binding spells used to tether a lover or reject unwanted sexual encounters. A witness overheard María de Rivera in a private conversation with other women where she told them to bathe with a tied string around their feet, while cleaning their "bottom parts (genitalia) with water then use the water to create chocolate, add menstrual blood, and clippings of hair" (5). This prepared drink was then to be strained and given to men in a tecomate jug, a plant converted into a drinking gourd. This combination to be used as an incantation. This incantation provided good luck for physical

attraction and love. The accusations are simplified as heresy in the trial, while the ratifications and testimonies explain that she was as an esteemed women in the community known to share prohibited unorthodox knowledge.

The holy tribunal officials explain that María de Rivera's prayers during ritual practice incorporated St. Martha and Jesus Christ's name. While this act may seem blasphemous, the amalgam of Curanderismo and Afro-Atlantic religious practices with Catholicism has been a common practice used throughout Latin America and the Caribbean. Lizabeth Paravisini-Gebert and Margarite Fernández Olmos explain, "[t]he strategies of religious syncretism—the active transformation through renegotiation, reorganization, and redefinition of clashing beliefs systems—are consistent with the creolization process" (9). Religious creolization is the process of combining spiritual practices from Africa, Europe, and Indigenous practices. Syncretization, on the other hand, is a term used when there is an equal relationship between two religious figures or ideas. Syncretism is a term that has been loosely thrown around as a way to attempt to explain how two beliefs form one religious practice. In a world where Christianity and colonialism are dominant, syncretization does not apply to the blending of Indigenous or Afro-Atlantic practices, because there is an unequal distribution of power. In addition, the Catholic church does not see Indigenous or Afro-Atlantic practices as its equal. Indigenous and Afro-Atlantic iconographic figures or ideas are suppressed in Catholicism. The Catholic images and prayers to St. Martha and Jesus serves as a marker for the forceful erasure of unorthodox practices. We can infer that María de Rivera was accused of the creolization of various religious practices, not explicitly stated in the documents. The ritual was a method where she could fuse aspects of unorthodox spiritual practice with Catholicism. Creolization was used in the daily lives of the 17$^{th}$ century people even though Catholicism was superimposed, and all other

religious practices could be considered "superstitious." The use of orthodox prayers alongside unorthodox practices made María subject to punishment. María's use of blood for love, ingesting blood, and body parts parallel with those used during the transubstantiation process of the Holy Eucharist. However, the inquisitions' strict regulations of women leading ritual practices was prohibited.

In the 131-page document, María de Rivera testifies in her auto de fe that she was not guilty of the accusations. She verified that she was a "fiel y catholica cristiana, y que no era hechicera, ni brujera, ni hejere, ni habia tenido pacto con el demonio[30]" (128). María confirmed her religious background as a "faithful Catholic" providing the rhetorical practices of a devout and pious religious woman.[31] Pious rhetoric had been used by many Catholics such as spiritual accounts such as St. Aurelius Augustine's *Confessions* (397–398 AD) and utilized by mystics like Santa Teresa de Avila's *Vida Espiritual* (1562-1565) and Ursula de Jesus's *Spiritual Diary* (1650) to veil their subversive intentions through visionary spiritual encounters.[32] This visionary accounts were seen as milagros, or miracles. Their spiritual accounts became models for others who were able to obtain recognition in the Catholic church's religious order. This rhetorical practice consisted of humility, knowledge of prayers, and penance for their sins. María de Rivera was also raised in the Catholic faith although she fused together unorthodox practices. Her practices were not uncommon as there was a recurrent blending and negotiation of various spiritual practice in the colonial Spanish Americas. Scholars such as Stacey Schlau (2012), Ruth Behar (1987), Joan Bristol (2007), and María Zamora Calvo (2021) have delved into the various ways women were punished in the inquisition for their engagement in unorthodox practices like ligatures. While women in the 17th and 18th century had agency, often limited agency, it was not seen as such. For instance, Ruth Behar explains that "unlike the secular judges of northern

Europe, who viewed women's power as illegitimate in the sense that it threatened the state and through the conspiracy of the "coven," the inquisitors of Spain and Mexico viewed women's power as illegitimate in the sense that it was a delusion and therefore not really a form of power at all" (Behar 184). Inquisitors in the so-called "New World" did not believe that women's use of spiritual authority posed a threat to the larger system of power. Spiritual knowledge was written off as "superstitious" which further suppressed women's agency.

The inquiry for investigating women's rhetorical practice prompted research methodologies that explore how women in the Americas and Caribbean navigated around the inquisition. For example, in "Divine Aspirations: Beatas, Writing, and the Inquisition in Late Seventeenth-century Lima," Stacy Schlau explores the concept of voice used by mystics in their spiritual diaries. She states, "The voice of the speaker/writer demanded a level of authority about one's spiritual state that lent authenticity to the narrative at the same time that deference of tone and attitude to one's superiors in the Church, (confessors, archbishop, and inquisitional judges especially) remained compulsory" (25). The writer who becomes the speaker for the women had to testify that mystic was living a pious and devout spiritual life. If the woman herself was the speaker/writer, then she had to continually negotiate her rhetorical strategies alongside the prescription of being religiously obedient. Scholars such Marissa Fuentes in *Dispossessed lives: Enslaved Women, Violence, and the Archive* (2016) explores how gender, sexuality, and Black women's agency were recorded in archival documents in Bridgetown, Barbados by colonial scribes who witnessed the testimonies. Fuentes states that although we can get glimpse of the women's voices, or narratives, in documents "the archival voice—the voice of power and authority—is increasing present and invasive" (Fuentes 127). For Fuentes, women of Indigenous and African descent voices are constantly muddled within the archive because the in documents

and collections they are usually found in such as the inquisition or enslaved ledgers inflicted violence. The violence, then, transgresses into the institution of the archive built to portray one "truth," the colonial narrative.

In the "Introduction" to *Women's Voices and Textual Negotiations in Latin America (1500-1799),* Monica Díaz and Rocio Quispe-Agnoli argue that there is a difference in the concepts of voice and text. Díaz and Quispe-Agnoli explain, "[w]e refer to 'voices' to signal the intention and participation of female agents in producing texts that, in many occasions, were put into writing by a scribe, as in the case of women under Inquisitorial scrutiny, the Afro-Peruvians left wills, and the poetry of native women in Pre-Hispanic times" (Díaz and Quispe-Agnoli 1). In the inquisition documents, each actor plays a role, the prosecutor, the witnesses, the defendant, and the secretary. The text on the pages attempt to highlight the confessions of the defendants and yet are still censored and distorted by the author's power of writing.[33] Díaz and Quispe-Agnoli address that the reader can find glimpses of women's agency and voice through the inquisition documents. While reading the documents the accounts offer various standpoints of each person, however, the final judgement always comes down to the inquisitors.

**Corporal Control, Capital Wealth, and Suppression**

The social compulsion of denouncing women as witches in the 17th and 18th century was not just for the purpose of keeping religious order, although it was masked as such. It was a methodology of societal and political control. Bristol writes "although the crown and church defined "witchcraft" and "curing" as distinct activities, most men and women probably saw them as points on a continuum of methods capable of regulating the body and its place in the world" (Bristol 161). In Spanish America the crown and the church were two pillars that ruled its

subjects. There was a fine line in classifying healing as a medicinal practice or a spell. Spells, known as hechizos where often considered a part of "brujería." Medicinal practice and witchcraft lied on opposite ends of the spectrum. Bristol highlights that at the root of both brujería and healing lies the corporeal. Both practices can alter the state of the body in the present. Additionally, both have the option to change the outcome of the body's presence in the future. The body is an important source of power. As seen in history, the control over rights of the body, what to do with it, and how to preserve it has been regulated by various institutionalized structures, such as the government, enslavement, and the inquisition.

Although the body has been used as a site of control, spiritual practitioners use ancestral knowledge to liberate themselves from oppressive structures. The women in the documents engaged in spiritual production to promote practices of love, healing, access to corporeal freedom, and social justice, and yet were preserved in the inquisition documents as criminals for their liberatory work. For instance, spiritual practices such as shapeshifting disrupted the subjugation of bodies. Silvia Federici's *Caliban and the Witch* examines from a Marxist perspective the social position of women in Europe and labor as a form of power. Federici's text primarily focuses on Western Europe as the epicenter for witch-hunts, but the transgression of these ideologies was not confined to Europe. The denunciation of women, particularly racialized women in the Americas and Caribbean as brujas, became a phenomenon that has shaped contemporary femicide. Silvia Federici states "above all, as in Europe, witch-hunting was a means of dehumanization and as such paradigmatic form of repression, serving to justify enslavement and genocide" (Federici 220). The consequences of the inquisition such as gendered violence transferred to various parts of the world. The theme of witch-hunts concealed the larger phenomenon of the conquest. The witch-hunts led to the long-lasting suppression of women's

voices. Currently, Latina's are targeted as victims of femicide at higher rates than that of other ethnic groups. Ideologies to control women's bodies, reproductive rights, and promotion of gendered violence are examples of modern-day extension of inquisitorial persecution.

The transgressive image of the bruja has been used to portray women as "bad," "promiscuous," and immoral. As Irene Lara mentions, "[a]t the very least, the deeming of a woman as a witch marked the desire for her social death, an attempt to silence her bodymindspirit" (Lara 11). The control over women's bodies, especially Latina bodies, is centered on narratives that allow the reigning systems of power to construct bodies as weapon against society. The idea of social death, as Lara mentions, is a tactic synonymous excommunication where Latinas can be shunned in society. It is a censure enforced by the church to deprive a living being from speaking with or seeing their loved ones. The "death" refers to the physical body living while their convivial life is no longer in existence. As witnessed in the documents, the inquisition further implemented methodologies of control such as social death, against those who practiced ancestral spirituality mistaken for brujería. The controlling of bodies and ritual practice extend beyond archival documents. Materials items had their own form of censure such as literature passing on written forms of knowledge.

**Banning of Knowledge Beyond Bodies**

Historically, Latinx people's ancestral practices have been preserved within the traditional archive as defiant acts. Some recorded pre-colonial knowledge produced by ancestors such as image, artifacts, and symbols were often burnt by Christian priests who thought Indigenous ancestral knowledge was "demonic" and "illegitimate." The inquisition had banned several books that were considered heretical, morally indecent, and sexually explicit. In 1560,

the Catholic church published the "Index Librorum Prohibitorum," a list filled with publications that were considered prohibited for their heretical content. This list also influenced the censorship of texts in the Americas and Caribbean. According to Carolee Laine "the word censorship refers to the suppression of information. It occurs when the government, church authorities, special-interest groups, or individuals impose their values on other people by limiting what others may read, write, hear, or see" (Laine 11). For example, in 1562 Franciscan Friar Diego de Landa burnt codices of the Maya in New Spain (present-day Mérida, Yucatan, Mexico) due to the material's perceived heretical nature. The banning of books did not end with de Landa's public display. Throughout the era of the Spanish inquisition, several books that challenged or discussed themes not in favor of the Catholic faith were placed on edicts. These edicts compiled a list of texts outlining reasons that the public could not access the publications. In 1768, one of these decrees was preserved in the Archivo Histórico del Arzobispado de Guadalajara. The document mentions, "[w]e have ordered that they be prohibited, and that they be completely collected, so that no person can have them, or read, or sell the said books and papers, unprinted, or manuscripts, in any language, or impression that they are, penalty of greater excommunication" (1768, AHAG, Sección Justicia, Caja 1, Exposición 19, Ficha 19).[34] If found guilty of housing one of these text in personal archives or libraries, the defendant would be shunned. The consequences of obtaining a prohibited text resulted in excommunication, just like punishments women accused and charged with brujería. Excommunication in the edict forced members of the community to reject any interaction with the beholder of prohibited texts. Once the outlawed texts were found in a person's repository and denounced, then the inquisition would step in and either destroy the books or confiscate them. Although the "Index Librorum Prohibitorum" was frequently circulated people still read and owned unauthorized books. The

influx of banned texts were smuggled into the Americas and Caribbean through various ports in Mexico, Guatemala, and Peru (Lopez 235; 245). The censorship of laws in New Spain were stricter than that of Spain. For example, Miguel de Cervantes's *Don Quixote* was banned in New Spain as it was believed to promote free thinking.

Books were harder to confiscate in urban cities. Some commissionaires were more lenient on the surveillance of prohibited books listed on the "Index" (Lopez 235). When it comes to books and paintings that were specifically focused on Indigenous spiritualities and lifestyles such as the codices, early Friars destroyed them. For instance, the notorious Juan de Zumárraga who became the first archbishop and inquisitor in Mexico City in 1535. Similarly, to Bartolomé de las Casas, Zumárraga was proclaimed the "Protector of the Indians" for his efforts in forced evangelization. Ann-Claude Lopez in *Ideology and Inquisition: The World of the Censors in Early Mexico* explains, "Zumárraga, too, claimed to have destroyed hundreds of Nahua images" (112). Although many significant Indigenous images were destroyed, the preservation of knowledge has been safe guarded through daily practices and oral stories. The practice of safekeeping knowledge did not end with the burning or prohibition of books and images as members of the community continued to teach their sacred knowledge. Today, the preservation of ancestral practices is found in contemporary literature, yet politicians have targeted books that display vestiges of pre-colonial knowledge.

**Banned and Challenged Books in the United States**

The positive outlook on Latinx young adult speculative fiction is that it widely available. However, many books are at risk of being banned or challenged by the U.S. government. "Banned" implies the removal of the book from public institution bookshelves. Once a book

becomes banned, then public schools are not able to supply the shelves with the prohibited book. Challenged books on the other hand, are those that are in an attempt to be removed, but not yet considered banned. Challenged books are still accessible for public consumption in public schools and in libraries. For example, according to the American Library Association, in 2013, Rodolfo Anaya's *Bless Me, Ultima,* was ninth in the top ten list of the most challenged books of that year. Anaya's book was added to the most challenged list because his text was believed to address themes of "occult/Satanism, offensive language, religious viewpoint, [and] sexually explicit" (ala.org 2013). *Bless me, Ultima,* does not discuss satanism, but rather highlights spiritual knowledge used by the character Ultima, who is an elderly curandera. Other texts such as Laura Esquivel's *Like Water for Chocolate* were added to banned lists across the United States. Esquivel's novel was banned in various school districts, such as the Nampa School District in Idaho for its "vivid descriptions of sexual arousal" (Robinson 2012). However, Esquivel's novel emphasizes elements of magical realism and medicinal practices identified during the inquisition as "brujería." In both *Bless Me, Ultima* and *Like Water for Chocolate*, the female characters resemble the conventional association spiritual practitioners as brujas. Another Latinx novel added to the banned book list is Sandra Cisneros's *House on Mango Street* published in 1984. *House on Mango Street* provides scenes where the protagonist Esperanza encounters a curandera. Chicana scholar Tina Dey Robolledo examines the archetypical figure. She writes:

> In general, the curandera/partera is the positive side —a woman whose life is devoted to healing, curing, helping —again, attributes commonly associated with the Virgin Mary. The other side, the bruja, is more problematical for the writers because the curandera is

> always also the witch; that is, she has the power to become one, but she may never choose to do so. (83)

Curanderas and spiritual healers are not synonymous with brujería, unless otherwise specified by the practitioner themselves. However, since the characters draw from unorthodox ancestral knowledge, their practices have become threatened by censorship. There is a fine line for authors who incorporate characters that follow the curandera/bruja archetype because audiences can interpret the characters as brujas due to Eurocentric ideologies that created the illusion of powerful women as threatening to the social order. Each author has the power to portray the figure on opposite ends of the spectrum or a fusion of the two. More than often the character has already been marked by outsiders of the culture as a bruja.

The practice of limiting texts available to the public is ever-present. Over the years, many literary pieces have been challenged and placed on restricted lists in public institutions. These texts, however, are still available for personal purchase. On October 25th, 2021, Texas Senator Matt Krause wrote a letter to the Texas Education Agency advocating for the banning of 850 texts that openly discusses sexual education, LGBTQ+ or Queer Studies, critical race theory (CRT), and race. On this list resides Romina Garber's text *Lobizona* because it advocates for the awareness of differences in race, class, gender, or sexuality, and citizenship status. Additionally, Garber's *Lobizona* incorporated characters that identify as brujas. Garber highlighted that she became a writer to contribute to more representation of Latinx people in fiction. In an interview with *Rolling Stone* about the possibility of her book being banned in Texas, Garber emphasizes, "For too many readers, this book is the first time they're seeing themselves on the page" (Marks 2022). In the article, the interviewer highlighted that Garber's text is fantasy novel about werewolves, witches, "and a protagonist whose mother gets arrested by ICE" (2022). On the

same list, Krause suggested the banning of Zoraida Córdova's novel *Wayward Witch*. Córdova's book is the second in the series, *Brooklyn Brujas*, which the two other texts were left out of Krause's suggestion for banning. The inclusion of the term witch in the title is speculation for its addition onto the large list of censorship. Sources such as BookRiot have remarked that research about the themes of the book were overlooked as Córdova's first book, *Labyrinth Lost* emphasizes sexual identity since the main character Alex is bisexual (Ellis 2021). Republican states have attempted to target literary pieces more so on the images on the cover and titles of the texts, rather than exploring the so-called "explicit content." Right-wing states, such as Texas attempt to conceal knowledge production through the censorship of books in public school education and at public libraries. Censorship tactic utilized in the Americas has had a long history. Many public systems such as libraries battle against the prohibition of books. Examples such as Krause's 850-book list serve as a tool to maintain right-wing political viewpoint, conservative religious views, and impediment of freedom of speech. Krause's proposed list strategically serves to hinder the freedom of knowledge circulation in the United States where particularly students of color attend public schools. The Krause list was strategically proposed to be embedded in the Texas governmental system by accompanying the present Texas House Bill number (H.B) 3979 that went into effect in July 2021.

Censorship in public schools has specifically targeted books written by authors of color, especially those that have been used in ethnic studies curriculums. In 2010, the Arizona Senate Bill (S.B) 2281 targeted the Mexican American Studies, also referred to as Raza Studies, for its advocation of ethnic awareness and cultural history in the United States. Raza Studies was used to teach the history, culture, and literature of Mexican Americans in the United States. Members of the legislation believed that Raza Studies was used to indoctrinate students to rebel against the

reigning government. On January 19th, 2023, Florida Representative Ron deSantis, banned an Advance Placement (AP) class on African American Studies. Systemic educational attacks on BIPOC histories and knowledge interconnect with curriculum development to suppress philosophical liberation and the voicing of histories of oppression especially those of marginalized communities. The censorship of African American Studies as an AP course is an extension of the "Stop WOKE" act,[35] which prohibits the promotion of critical race theory in high education across the state of Florida. Critical Race Theory (CRT) is "a movement of a collection of activist and scholars to engaged in studying and transforming the relation of race, racism, and power" (Delgado and Stefancic 3). Critical race theory serves to unpack the systemic injustices and discriminations under governmental systems of power. As Marisa Shearer states, "in response to the increased societal awareness of the continued existence of systemic racism in the United States, the attack against critical race theory in current book ban proposals seeks to calm public discomfort by erasing race-related discourse and the experiences of BIPOC altogether" (Shearer 45). Rather than understanding that there are various cultures, identities, sexualities, religions, races, and (dis)abilities the system has been used to obfuscate social and racial differences by further suppressing literature that emphasizes social injustices and lived experiences of minorities. Discourses of race are being eradicated from curriculums further ignoring inequality. The erasure of race leads to the continual domination of White and colonial narratives that have obfuscated socially diverse experiences in the United States. In 2020, Diverse Books reported that "70% of the books challenged [in the United States] were by marginalized authors" (Yao 2021). The statistics collected by Diverse Books demonstrate that there is a significant racial indifference when it comes to the members of the public at large challenging BIPOC literature.

Censorship and the banning of books are an extension of inquisitorial persecution with a modern-day twist. Initiatives such as the "I Read Banned Books" and Banned Books Week were established to push back against the censorship of literary texts. The Banned Books Week campaign was first launched in 1982 by the American Library Association (ALA) and is commemorated every year during the last full week of September, often going into the first dates of October. Banned Books Week initiatives have been taken up with We Need Diverse Books, a non-profit initiative to foster an array of identities and cultural inclusivity. Banned Books Week "brings together the entire book community in shared support of the freedom to seek and to express ideas, even those some consider unorthodox or unpopular" (Yao 2021). The initiative We Need Diverse Books advocates for intellectual freedom and the promotion of various experiences of racialized communities in partnership with the ALA's effort to bring awareness. We Need Diverse books was created in response to the lack of diverse representation at the 2014 BookCon (Lavoie 2021). Attendees of the conference protest on Twitter, a social media source, with the hashtag #WeNeedDiverseBooks. Since then, the organization has flourished. Zoraida Córdova, one of the authors of the series that will be analyzed, serves on the board of directors.

Legislations like Krause's and that from the Tucson Unified Schools District have challenged the need for socially and ethnically diverse books in the public-school curriculum. Lists such as Krause's maintain Eurocentric values, politics, and colonial control by compiling lists of books to outlaw from public access in libraries and public schools. House bills like H.B No. 3979 criminalize intellectual freedom. Supporters of the censorship of books have threatened to impose a penalty for providing banned materials to minors. For instance, if a text is censored for being sexually explicit, then the librarian or public institution can be criminally charged and fined for child pornography by providing services and access of the banned materials (Kasprak

2023). Other states like Florida have not developed penalties for providing access to banned books but have implemented H.B 1467, a legislation focused on educational transparency. On March 22nd, 2022, educators were required to start providing materials, such as lesson plans for parents to access (flgov.com).

**Conclusion: Archiving Literature**

BIPOC literature as an archive serves to exploit, record, and challenge colonial systems that have historically attempted to persecute, censor, and invalidate BIPOC lived realities. Literature is a cultural repository that pieces together gaps in history that exclude BIPOC representation to reveal why people find refuge in ancestral practices whether it is in the real world or in literature. For instance, Desideria Mesa's *Bindle Punk Bruja* (2022) protagonist, Luna, wields magic inherited by her Mexican lineage allowing her to traverse racism in 1920's Kansas City, Missouri. The transmission of knowledge within ancestral practices makes the Latinx archive of literature a space for inquiry. The genre of speculative fiction in this repository discloses that cultural and spiritual practices are not ephemeral, although the traditional archive positions them as ephemera. For instance, David Bowels YA text, *Secret of the Moon Conch* (2023), uses the language Nahuatl and Mesoamerican culture. Spiritual practices in his literary work demonstrate that Mesoamerican beliefs are still existent today not just considered folklore or mythology.[36] On the contrary, spiritual practices can help audiences understand how pre-colonial knowledges are used as a means for existence in the past, present, and future. Similarly, the inquisition trials highlight how women of Indigenous and African descent in the Americas utilized ancestral practices even when they were prohibited. The traditional archive teaches that histories, ancestral, cultural, and spiritual practices are preserved in a past tense, but I explore

how ancestral practices in YA speculative fiction can help envision a future that continues to use philosophies passed down by our deceased loved ones as a site of refuge, power, and contestation.

Latinx literary studies relies upon archival materials whether the materials are stored in repositories or absent. Meanwhile personal or communal archives fill in the gaps in the traditional archive. The characters conjured in Latinx YA speculative fiction draw upon the fictional and personal repositories within their households just like many BIPOC engage with their personal archives. Literature as an archive provides the reshaping of U.S. narratives that have been disregarded as invaluable work. In chapters two through four, I convey how the abnegation of knowledge is not confined to geopolitical borders by conflating contemporary borders. The evidence found in the institutional repositories demonstrates a body of literature that houses ancestral practices emphasizing the necessary use of grasping authority within one's own hands. As Suzanne Bost emphasizes "[a]rchival work has particular significance for scholars in Latino/a literary studies, a field developed in resistance to dominant national knowledge traditions (United States and Latin American)" (Bost 625). Bost parallels Latinx people's fight for literary representation and publishing. Research in the archives is foundational in the interrogation of histories that overlook Latinx contribution in the United States. Literature is a branch of the traditional archive, however, Latinx literary work is often excluded, thus, calling for a new repository that situates Latinx literary work as part of knowledge production. Scholars such as Allan Pasco's *Literature as Historical Archive* calls for historicizing literature to fill the gaps of Latinx knowledge in the archive. Pasco explains historicizing literature is the act of viewing literary work in a social context (378). Contemporary Latinx literature provides glimpses of lived experiences in the United States. All texts, even if considered "speculative" or

"fantasy" offer insight to how people are imagining a world where themes of identity, sexuality, race, and religion are no longer under attack by colonial ideologies that attempt to censor them. Therefore, Latinx literary work transcends epochs while housing sacred remembrances in the process.

# CHAPTER TWO: SPIRIT WORK, CONJURE, AND SPIRITUAL POSSESSION IN DANIEL JOSÉ OLDER'S *SHADOWSHAPER CYPHER* SERIES

"Her voice carried the voices of a hundred thousand souls in it; a whole history of resistance and rage moved with her"

–Older, *Shadowshaper* 281

## Introduction: Shadowshaping as Resistance

The legacy of resistance and engagement with ancestral philosophies are centered in Latinx fiction texts like Daniel José Older's *Shadowshaper Cypher* Series (2016). This series highlights the extraction of spiritual knowledge within ethnographic research in disciplines like anthropology, demonstrating how colonial violence is institutionalized. The *Shadowshaper Cypher* series follows teenager Sierra Santiago, an Afro-Boricua with luscious curls that fall from her head. Sierra falls into the precarious world of shadowshaping after her grandfather, Lázaro, is mysteriously hurt. The legacy of shadowshaping in the novel is a practice passed down through matriarchal lineage. Shadowshaping is the conjuring of spirits used through various forms of creativity such as chalk art and spray-painted murals allowing Sierra to access shadowshaping through artwork. The artwork becomes a ritual practice that provides the ability to conjure ancestral presences. Robbie, a handsome Haitian American tattooed boy from her high school teaches Sierra how to shadowshape through items and intentionality. In the process of learning this ancient artform, Sierra learns that her ancestors were the ones who created shadowshaping while battling colonialism, enslavement, and prejudice in Puerto Rico.

This chapter examines how the practice of shadowshaping challenges Eurocentric philosophies such as René Descartes's 17th century Cartesian model which contributed to the invalidation of Latinas access to power through use of spirit work. Shadowshaping resembles spiritual conjuring found in Santería. Out of respect for the sacred and private knowledge of

Santería, I will not disclose practices that are not public information. I examine how the fictional practice of shadowshaping allows Sierra to connect with various spirits. Furthermore, I address how Sierra's wielding of spirit work through the fictional practice of shadowshaping provides her the ability to coexist with spirits in a world where spiritual presence and possession are often associated with negative views of neurodivergences and mental illness. Additionally, I examine how the character Dr. Jonathan Wick, an anthropologist, is a metaphor for colonial institutional systems that have invalidated ancestral philosophies, implemented colonial domination, and extracted knowledge for ethnographic research.

**Literature Review**: **Views on *Shadowshaper***

Scholars in the fields of Latinx literature and young adult fiction have analyzed Daniel José Older's novel *Shadowshaper* through the lens of social justice movements, belonging, and gentrification. However, scholarly work published on the *Shadowshaper Cypher* has often overlooked the ways in which the fictional practice of shadowshaping resembles examples of real-world female spiritual practitioners contesting colonialism through spirituality. In *Nerds, Goths, and Freaks: Outsiders in Chicanx and Latinx Young Adult Literature* (2020), Ella Díaz in "The Art of Afro-Latina Consciousness-Raising in *Shadowshaper,*" argues that art in shadowshaping is a performative tool to challenge colonial confinements of race and gender (Díaz 100). Performance provides opportunities of activism. According to Díaz, "the historical role of art is conscious raising– a transformational process in one's thinking through exposure to the elided histories, cultures, and spiritual beliefs of disenfranchised peoples in the United States" (Díaz 88). The teenage characters, Sierra and Robbie, in *Shadowshaper* are aware of the historical oppressions, local gentrification in New York, and art as activism. Artwork in

*Shadowshaper* is a form of activism influenced from art waves in 1960s and 1970's led by women of color. Artists began pushing back against conventions of the "classical" and "traditions" art. Díaz provided examples from las mujeres muralista from the Mission neighborhood in San Francisco who used art to promote visibility during the Civil Rights Era. For Díaz, shadowshaping is an outlet where Sierra draws on cultural forms of activism from women's muralist arts movements to combat colonialism. Similarly, Marilisa Jiménez García's, "En(countering) YA: Young Lords, Shadowshapers, and the Longings and Possibilities of Latinx Young Adult Literature" analyzes how the *Shadowshaper Cypher* serves as a counter-narrative to the forceful effects of gentrification as a form of advocating for social rights like the Young Lord's Party did in New York and Chicago. For instance, in 1968, the Young Lord's Organization, later renamed as the Young Lord's Party (YLP), a community organization advocated for access to medical care, employment, housing, and education (1968: Young Lords Party). The Young Lords were inspired by the Black Panther Party and adopted a 13-point program that urged for liberation from oppressive systems (The Young Lords Party 1983). Counter-narratives in literature are told from the perspective of historically marginalized peoples. According to Jiménez Garcia, "Latinx authors essentially use the master narratives that made YA a distinctive and revolutionary medium for American white audiences in the 1950s as a means of questioning and disrupting narratives of U.S. colonialism for young readers" (223). Jiménez Garcia situates Daniel José Older's creative work as radical activism to employ counter-storytelling, such as examining the influence of the Young Lord's Party as a backdrop of Puerto Rican resistance in New York and other cities across the United States. Jiménez Garcia explains that Latinx YA literature expresses a legacy of resistance by drawing on real world practices used in Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) social movements. Jiménez Garcia

highlights that Sierra carries the trope of a rebellious teenager, often synonymous with a revolutionary, as a methodology of counter-storytelling. For example, Sierra sneaks into Columbia University to access archived documents on shadowshaping. The narratives of Puerto Rican spiritual resistance and literature have been kept out of the public records and meticulously out of the hands of the community. For instance, Sierra's mother, María, mentioned to Bennie, Sierra's best friend, about a time that many books were banned in public school curriculums (9). Sierra's mom contested the banning of books and urged students to read them as assigned texts. In the library, Sierra encounters Latinx literature as a field of study when browsing down the aisles while looking for the documents of shadowshaping. Sierra remarks, "Studies in Puerto Rican Literature said another. It'd never occurred to her there was such a thing as Puerto Rican Literature, let alone that it would be worthy of a thick volume in a Columbia University library" (48). This moment made her realize that there is a rich literary history that she was not exposed to in her public education at Octavia Butler High School in Bedford-Stuyvesant (Bed-Stuy), New York.

Sierra's encounter in the library with Puerto Rican literature was the first time in the novel where she saw her own culture as a site of inquiry. Although she had to sneak into the library, Sierra learned to navigate around the gatekeeping tactics of the institution. Jiménez Garcia highlights that Older's novels are a counter-storytelling of the history of Puerto Rican people in New York as gentrification, police brutality, and exclusion of authority were topics that affected many Puerto Rican families in the Bedford-Stuyvesant neighborhood. Outside of the school setting, Sierra had been exposed to the violent attempts of erasure and marginalization of Puerto Rican people in the United States. For instance, Sierra recalls police brutality where her friend Vincent, Bennie's (Benaldra) brother, had been murdered at the hands of the police (33).

As a counter narrative, *Shadowshaper* envisions a world where BIPOC exist even if physically deceased. Vincent continues to live in the novels as a spirit (108).

Literature as a space of existence is highlighted in "Imagining Possible Futures: Afrofuturism and Social Critique in Daniel José Older's *Shadowshaper.*" Megan Jeanette Myers explored "how the representation of Afrofuturism and other alternative futurisms in *Shadowshaper* supports the presence of complex social critiques in the novel" (105). The themes of body image, spirituality, police brutality, and gentrification in the context of futurisms serve as a social commentary to narratives that omit BIPOC bodies in the future of the United States. Myers analyzed the kinships between Mark Durey's concept "Afrofuturism" and Catherine Ramirez's "Latin[x] Futurisms" in *Shadowshaper* to critique social inequalities and injustices experienced by Afro-Latinx in New York. Global diaspora studies scholar, Yomaira Figueroa-Vásquez in *Decolonizing Diasporas: Radical Mapping of Afro-Atlantic Literature* argues that *Shadowshaper* is an apocalyptic narrative that draws on Afro-Atlantic systems like Lucumí and Santería (147). Apocalyptic narratives are not just futuristic text nor dystopian, but what Figueroa-Vásquez coins as worlds/otherwise, a concept that "engages in the apocalyptic, the ends of the worlds birthed by the non-ethics of modernity, coloniality, and settler colonialism" (148). Worlds/otherwise draws from African ancestral knowledge to disrupt colonial concepts that have continued to marginalize Black women. Worlds/otherwise like the world of the shadowshapers is a reclamation of imagined spaces that refuse to conform to colonial narratives that oppress Black woman. *Shadowshaper Cypher* grounds worlds/otherwise to showcase how Black women's mindbodyspirits, like Sierra's, are vital to imagining just futurities through Afro-Atlantic spiritual knowledge and practices.

The act of reclamation is also highlighted in Domino Pérez's chapter, "Afuerxs and Cultural Practice in *Shadowshaper* and *Labyrinth Lost*." Perez examined how Sierra Santiago and Alex Mortiz, a character discussed in Chapter 4, occupy liminal spaces as outsiders in young adult literature. According to Perez, outsiders, or the afuerx, disrupt conventional tropes of heroism in YA speculative fiction. Phenotypes, cultural heritage, and skin complexion, like Sierra's have been marginalized in YA literature. BIPOC characters are considered "outsiders" in children's literature because of their race, ethnicity, and culture. Fiction texts that center protagonist of color wielding spiritual power fall into the categories of "fantasy" and "speculative" fiction. The Western literary canon marginalizes these narratives as an estrangement of reality, when in actuality these texts are inspired by cultural traditions. According to Pérez, "folklore and fictional cultural practices in the novel become a reflection of cultural logics, namely gender, power, and control over knowledge circulation" (Pérez 80). In *Shadowshaper*, masculinity and knowledge are highlighted in Sierra's grandfather, Lázaro's, attempt to keep shadowshaping outside of the hands of female practitioners. Lázaro machismo views convert shadowshaping into a practice used predominantly by male figures, regardless of race. Older uses Dr. Wick and Lázaro as characters who deeply believe that shadowshaping should be used within a patriarchal system to interrogate the circulation of knowledge production. The context of gender and power in the novel is contested as Sierra, a female, resituated the original source of power to the matriarchal lineage. In many religions, especially Afro-Atlantic religious practices like Santería and Vodou,[37] women hold esteemed positions of power, yet their power is often mistaken and synonymous with negative viewpoints of "brujería." Similarly, gender as it is understood today is facilitated through the lens of Eurocentrism and is not conceived in the same manner within many religious and spiritual

practices, like that of the fictional practice of shadowshaping. Older's series is an example of Latina, particularly Afro-Puertorriqueña, also known as Afro-Boricua, spiritual resistance highlighted through the fictional practice of shadowshaping.

**Preservation of Spiritual Systems as Urban**

Daniel José Older reproduces ancestral philosophies to demonstrate how spiritual practices and ancestral knowledge have been invalidated by institutionalized systems. For example, Older develops shadowshaping in the novel as an urban spiritual system. Spiritual practices are not lost nor used only in the past, but a practice within the novels that represents a tradition called upon to resist colonialism. He embeds elements of Congolese spiritual practice used in Sierra's familial lineage. Shadowshaping began in Puerto Rico and then migrated to the New York when Sierra's mother moved to the inland of United States. The protagonist, Sierra, plays a vital part in the reclamation of ancestral knowledge. Sierra's knowledge and persistence rewrites the history of the shadowshapers and the legacy of female spiritual power as the head of the practice.

Sierra's grandfather, Lázaro, suffers a stroke and urges Sierra to finish painting a mural she had begun on the tower. The tower represents colonialism and the systemic invalidation of knowledge in two ways: 1) gentrification in New York and 2) the academic ivory tower. Academic disciplines, such as anthropology, are a dominant themes highlighted in book one, *Shadowshaper*. The tower is metaphorically represented through Dr. Johnathan Wick's anthropological research techniques. The symbolism of the tower in the Brooklyn neighborhood of Bed-Stuy pinpoints the multiple forceful effects of colonialism that marginalize communities of color. Sierra's mural on the tower highlights resistance and permanently displays how the

community advocated existence while facing gentrification. After Sierra's conversation with Lázaro, Sierra begins her quest to stop the murals from fading. The fading of the murals is a metaphor for colonial invalidation and dispossession through gentrification and extraction of spiritual practices, like shadowshaping.

The tower is the physical symbol of gentrification that looms over the Bed-Stuy community serving as a constant reminder of colonial presence. Manny, known as the "domino king" and friend of Lázaro, remarks toward Sierra, "We hate the Tower. We spit on the Tower. Your paint is our nasty loogie, hocked upon the stupidity that is the Tower" (2). The 'T' in the word tower is capitalized representing the physical structure's dominance over the junk lot where it is located. The junk lot is located one block behind the Santiago brownstone home and three blocks north of Octavia Butler High School. The tower is described as an "outer structure" that was quickly "abandoned and unfinished," [...] unplanned windows (2). Additionally, Older's emphasis on capitalizing "Tower" in the text illustrates the ascendance of structures that have reinforced displacement in urban areas. Manny's choice of words describes the emotional toil that the physical tower played in aiding in the persistent reminder of displacement and colonial power that continued to remove, gain economic-capital resources, and access to homes where predominantly people of color resided. Manny encouraged Sierra to continue her mark on the tower by finishing her dragon mural. Manny describes Sierra's artwork through metaphor of bodily fluids, like loogie, also known as a phlegm, alluding to the ways Sierra's artwork is in opposition of the tower. Her artwork becomes the literal spit, as Manny refers, the act of resistance and disgust for gentrification efforts forever marked on the tower. For instance, the dragons' vivid dark green scales and spines insinuate the community's power, strength, and protection from displacement. The scales serve to shield the community from gentrification as

the dragon's body is wrapped around the tower. Sierra's dragon grasps the tower dominating it rather than vice versa. The abandonment of the tower's construction in its skeletal exterior form attempted to become a permanent physical reminder of colonial domination in a predominantly Black and Brown neighborhood.

Manny and Grandpa Lázaro encouraged Sierra to engage in collective artwork, like painting murals in the neighborhood, to converge conjured spirits with the masterpieces that other shadowshapers have painted in the past. According to Ella Díaz, Manny's invitation to permanently mark the tower "reveals that spatial relationships are more complicated than Eurocentric construction of individual property right[s,] which are predicated on seventeenth century doctrine that emerged during the transatlantic slave trade and the seizure of Indigenous peoples land" (Díaz 94). Communal sharing is a pre-colonial practice that provides equal access to resources. Manny employs communal sharing as a methodology to subvert the Eurocentric frameworks of land ownership which promotes individual and capital wealth, rather than communal. Texts, such as *Shadowshaper* challenge land ownership and individual property rights because property rights were often stripped from people of Indigenous and African descent in the Americas. One of the first evidences of stolen land was used in the "Requerimiento" translated as "the requirement." This document was produced in 1513 by the Spanish monarchy to take possession of Indigenous lands. The document was read to Indigenous people who didn't understand the Spanish language. The "Requirement" outlines that if the Indigenous people were to devote themselves to the church and the monarchy then they will live peacefully among them. If not, the "Requerimiento" stated that "I certify to you that, with the help of God, we shall powerfully enter into your country, and shall make war against you in all ways and manners that we can, and shall subject you to the yoke and obedience of the Church and of their Highnesses;

we shall take you and your wives and your children, and shall make slaves of them, and as such shall sell and dispose of them as their Highnesses may command" (1510). The "Requirement" was a performative script to "justify" the Spanish conquest. The Spanish believed that it was their divine right to take control of unorthodox land. In the United States, efforts, like gentrification work in a similar fashion as government leaders increase house costs to push out people from predominantly Black and Brown neighborhoods to revive and make neighborhoods "safe." Gentrification efforts by the U.S. government targets low-income families that often rely on subsidized housing and rental control. While many people relocate to other neighborhoods, others are left without places to live, leading to homelessness. The tower served as a constant reminder of gentrification efforts. Manny's active role in inviting Sierra to tag the tower is grounded in a collective framework that provides communal support, shared spaces, and access to material objects.

The second aspect that the tower represents is the academic ivory tower which looms over the Bedford-Stuyvesant landscape attempting to extract the shadowshapers who practice urban spiritual system from New York. Bed-Stuy sits in northern-central Brooklyn in the middle of Williamsburg, Bushwick, Clinton Hill, and Crown Heights neighborhoods. As Sierra's mission to stop the unexplained deaths of the shadowshapers unravels, she is handed an old photograph of her grandfather Lázaro and the men in the barrio, such as Manny, Papa Acevedo, Delmond, Alcaraz, and Joe Raconteur. The photograph captured the bond between the men. Sierra's grandfather preserved the photo in his own personal archive as an arsenal and vital memory which will lead to the reason why Sierra's grandfather may have suffered from a stroke. In the photograph, Sierra noticed an unknown white male "with a pouf of dirty blonde hair" standing beside her grandfather in a one-armed embrace (30). On the side of the photo reads,

"Dr. Jonathan Wick" (30).[38] Bennie, Sierra's friend, composed a quick google search revealing that Wick is a "highly esteemed" anthropologist who studies urban spiritual systems, like shadowshaping. Wick's anthropological notes, data collection, and research on urban spiritual systems became stored within the archives of Columbia University after his disappearance. Instead of categorizing shadowshaping as a spiritual folk practice, Older positions it as urban as a way to disrupt and bring forth how spiritual systems are not forms of invalidation, rather practices that have survived colonial dispersal. Furthermore, on a mission to discover more information about Wick and his whereabouts, Sierra befriends Nydia Ochoa, a graduate student who specializes in library studies. Nydia oversees the archival section at Columbia University. At the institution, Nydia explained to Sierra that Wick's work on shadowshaping has been stored in the depths of the archive. Nydia pedagogical practices disrupt traditional archival research by providing community members such as Sierra, access documents. Researchers, students, and academic scholars have access to the library. Outsiders not affiliated with the institution must either typically meet with a librarian or archivist beforehand requesting access to archival collections. Nydia, however, gives Sierra access to the library's resources, such as the shadowshaping materials as Sierra cannot access information in the library archives unless she was a student or researcher there.

The gatekeeping that unfolded as Sierra learns more about her family's spiritual practices hindered her ability to learn about her heritage, traditions, and powers. The presence of the tower is a reminder that although the spiritual systems, land, and resources belong to the community, there are colonial structures that block Sierra's access to knowledge production. Nydia Ochoa is aware that these implemented gatekeeping practices prohibit community members from learning about their own communities, spaces, and ideologies. Nydia becomes a crucial character who

offers Sierra access to uncovering more information about Wick's involvement with the shadowshaper community. Nydia disrupted the regulations of the academic ivory tower by offering access to the special collection allowing Sierra to learn more about the spiritual system that her grandfather has engaged in for many years.

Academic disciplines like anthropology have historically extracted sacred information from communities of color. Linda Tuhiwai Smith highlighted in *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous People*, instances where scholars exploited Indigenous communities like the Māori, an Indigenous community in New Zealand, and withdrew sacred rituals and chants to reproduce for academic audiences (87-88). Scholars such as Sharla Fett and Aurora Levins Morales have brought forth allegations that demonstrate how academic disciplines and research on vulnerable communities involves unethical practices. In the novel, Nydia explains, "He was a big anthro dude, specifically the spiritual systems of different cultures, yeah? But people say he got too involved, didn't know how to draw the line between himself and his—[...subjects]" (Older 50). Older used Nydia's remarks about Wick to highlight specific disciplinary practices and the rhetoric that accompanies such fields, continues to dehumanize practitioners of Afro-diasporic spiritual systems. Older's fictional spiritual system, shadowshaping, expressed observations of how ivory towers, such as universities, forcefully take knowledge then convert it to accessible knowledge for academics. Wick superimposed colonial rhetoric situated around discourses of conquest by converting the shadowshapers as "subjects." The idea of subjecthood is synonymous with inferiority and insubordination which is rooted in Eurocentric imperial politics in which subjects are the hands of the state or reigning government. Subjects in this sense do not have access to authorship, power, nor privilege. Research subjects have been historically dehumanized and communities of color have been seen as objects of

domination. For Wick, the shadowshapers are expendable because he was able to pry their knowledge, use it for his own gain, and secretly prohibit others from learning the practices of shadowshaping.

Upon reading Wick's journals about shadowshaping, Sierra realized that Wick's intentions were to kill off the shadowshapers and hoard the knowledge for himself. Like many other religious systems, shadowshaping involves an initiation process. Lázaro, Sierra's grandfather, initiated Wick into the group, yet still had reservations about Wick's intentions. Nydia explains that Wick would, "go in and learn a whole bunch about some group and their rituals, and then, like, disappear for a while and learn actually how to do… you know…[...] Magic. Stuff with the dead. Whatever" (51). Nydia's remark refers to spirit work, also known as conjure work. Spirit work is a spiritual practice which involves working with various energies or presences, which could be ancestors or any dead spirit. According to Nydia, Wick learned about the conjure work that shadowshapers used to protect themselves. As an outsider of the shadowhouse's spiritual system, Wick decided to extract the knowledge from his research participants, disappear without notice, and in turn use the sacred rituals learned to perform spirit work. Once Lázaro initiated Wick, although while keeping Wick in the dark about the supreme shadowshaper Lucera, the world of the shadowshapers began to disappear. Even though Wick was part of the shadowshapers house, called the shadowhouse, he did not stop investigating and actively sought more knowledge for his own capital gain. Houses, or religious sects, in shadowshaper resemble those of Ilé's in Santería. Elizabeth Perez explains that Ilé means "'house' in Yorùbá and refers to both physical structure and an extended kinship unit in the context of religious practice" (Pérez 7). Ilés are spiritual houses where practitioners are taught and initiated into specific ways of worship. Although not directly replicating Santería, Older's

fictional spiritual system of shadowshaping has a similar construction in which there are various "houses," for example the shadowhouse and the house of sorrows. In the shadowhouse, Lucera was the spiritual leader who had the ability to initiate new members into the practice. After Lucera's death, shadowshaping was converted into a spiritual practice used only by those that belong to the "Brotherhood of the Shadows." Lázaro believed that shadowshaping should be a practice used predominantly by men, especially after Lucera's death and the rejection of his daughters from joining the practice. Lázaro was then converted into the head of the shadowhouse and changed the name to the "Brotherhood of the Shadows."

**Spiritual Possession: Invalidation of Ideologies and Neurodivergence**

Wick continued to use Eurocentric ideologies of colonial domination by learning the knowledge of the shadowshapers. He blurred the lines of ethical and unethical research practices by making his fellow shadowshapers as his research subjects. Wick attempted to overthrow the Brotherhood of the Shadows as he pretended to befriend them. On her quest for shadowshaping knowledge and finding out more about the practice, Sierra uncovers Wick's journal, where he mentions, "*one world's schizophrenic is another's medicine man, no? Whatever we shall call it, I want only more. More understanding, more knowledge. More… power. Because that's what it is, power*" (70-71). In this passage, Older alluded to the Eurocentric notions that often portray Afro-Atlantic spiritual possession as "mental health diagnosis" such as schizophrenia, which has had a long history of violent treatment of patients who are neurodivergent. According to Nick Walker, "neurodivergent means, having a mind that functions in way in which diverge[s] significantly from the dominant societal standards of "normal" (Miller 2022). Although schizophrenia is a diagnosis in Western medicine, I am referring to the way Indigenous and

African systems of belief have been lumped into the present Western negative portrayal of neurodivergences and mental illnesses. For example, spiritual practices like spiritual possession have been associated through a Eurocentric-gaze as "irrational" episodes. Emma Cohn in "What is Spiritual Possession?" explains that spiritual possession is a cultural phenomenon, rather than an "illness." Cohn considers cultural viewpoints that validate ecstatic experiences such as spirits afflicting or entering the body. Cohn explains that "possession is not a 'thing' to be explained, but a complex series of patterns of thinking and [behavior]. Failure to recognize this fundamental premise has led, in part, to the generation of definitions (or theories) of possession as something else that purportedly bears arbitrarily selected similarities, or causal underpinnings (e.g., dissociative identity disorder, or hysteria, or mental illness, and so on)" (105). Spiritual possessions in religious practices are complex in the ways that practitioners and host bodies of spirits engage in the natural world in order to alter the present state. Cohn explains that there has been a historical failure in the Western medical field that overlooks culture as an influence on the alteration of mind and bodies. In *Shadowshaper* spiritual possession is not questioned or aligned with mental illness or neurodivergences, but rather accepted among the community. Conjure work known as shadowshaping in the novel, promotes various neurodivergences and philosophical standpoints.[39] For example, spiritual possessions are a practice that allows the body to access a higher power. Spiritual possession is when an energy, idea, or presence occupies a material object, such as the body. As Paul Christopher Johnson mentions, "activating a spirit, making a piece of history move, dance, speak takes enormous work. It requires memory work, but also aesthetic, material, and even mechanical work" (2014). In *Shadowshaper*, spiritual possession through spirit work is brought forth through the incantation of music, stories, and art.

As an ancestral practice, spiritual possession is not associated with the Western comprehension of mental health and "disorders," rather spiritual possession is induced by rituals to conflate the spirit and physical worlds. However, texts like the *Malleus Maleficarum* reference that spiritual possession was an act that allowed demons to enter and occupy the body and thus exorcism or punishment were "cures" for removing "evil" spirits. Women across the Americas and Caribbean were called weak, punished, and hospitalized if they were "possessed." Later, during the Spanish inquisition, women were punished if they actively engaged in spiritual possession and were often called alumbradas for their practices of dejamiento. Dejamiento, or leaving, was believed to be a practice that was borderline heresy. Dejamiento correlated with an abandonment of the soul and passivity allowing any spirit whether "good" or "bad" entered the body. Many who practiced dejamiento believed that "temptation or evil thoughts might come, but the practitioner was not to fight them, as they might have originated from God" (Sluhovsky 106). The so-called evil temptation positions the dejado as a heretic,[40] providing an argument that it was the inquisitions "responsibility" to protect its citizens and empire. As a result, "the *dejados*, were later to be accused as Enlightened or Illuminated—*alumbrados*—and prosecuted as heretics and sectarians" (106). Alumbrados were considered false mystics who practiced spiritual possession. If convicted in by the Holy Tribunal then, the practitioner's life was threatened. The borderline heresy constituted that many who practiced were seen as ilusos (false) or alumbrados (enlightened practiced with demonic spirits). Before the end of the Spanish inquisition, many men and women who were convicted as ilusos or alumbrados were punished, exorcised, and often killed.

The violent act of exorcism negates women's ability to engage with the spiritual realms. However, in Afro-Atlantic and Indigenous practices spiritual possession offers wisdom and

challenges Eurocentric concepts of rationality, being, and identity. Monica A. Coleman explains that "spiritual possession occurs when an ancestor spirit strongly influences the living person in order to communicate to and through this person, displacing his or her normal sense of consciousness" (115). In *Shadowshaper Cypher*, spiritual possession occurs when Sierra allows the spirits to flow through her, however, she is able to control the spirits rather than them controlling her. Additionally, Sierra's consciousness is heightened as she performs shadowshaping because it allowed her to reach a state of awareness and power.

**Contesting Reason Through Spiritual Possession**

The 17th and 18th century "Age of Reason" and "Age of Enlightenment" aided in the idea that spiritual possession was attributed to the loss of rationality, primitive behavior, and ignorance. Rationalism was a foundational ideology in being classified as human. In Western theory, to be considered a human-being was only afforded to those of predominant European ancestry through the maternal lineage,[41] which further complicated the concept of rationalism. Rationalism was often only afforded to those who were not enslaved. René Descartes's ideology of rationalism emphasized that knowledge was produced through the ability to obtain "reason." Reason was a topic discussed throughout various European philosophical movements to understand human life, progression, and "truth." Rationality was obtained because there was a natural and explained purpose. Descartes rejected that lived experiences, feelings, and emotions, or senses informed knowledge. Reason, for Descartes delineated men from animals, because Descartes believed that only humans could think which for him was the true source of knowledge production. However, Indigenous and Afro-diasporic knowledge has suffered greatly from Western-derived arguments of "reason" and "rationality" because Indigenous and Afro-diasporic people were viewed as "primitive," used as labor, seen as property, and used for capital

wealth. It was believed that to obtain rationalism, means that one must be "human" or believe in the Christian God, anything inferior could not produce knowledge-- a concept further used under the "Age of Enlightenment." In *Shadowshaper*, Older uses Wick as a mouthpiece to explain that although marginalized spiritual practices are invalidated by Eurocentric ideologies, practices such as the fictional shadowshaping offer knowledge and power to its practitioners through spirit work.

Under spirit work, shadowshaping practitioners like Sierra and Robbie reach altered states of consciousness, often experiencing ecstatic moments of awareness. Ecstatic experiences require spiritual workers to invite energies, spirits, or ancestors to guide them with sacred knowledge. Since the Cartesian model is centered on Western philosophy and scientific approaches, spiritual workers' knowledge production is invalidated. As a result, their knowledge is called "superstitious" and "irrational." Thomas Paine makes a similar argument in *Age of Reason* (1831). He believed that reason was a logic needed to separate the church and state. Paine argues that institutions are corrupt, "monopolize power and profit" (22). Knowledge produced used within religious institutions were "skeptical" and "superstitious." Those that engaged with spirits and deities, for Paine, lacked reason. Shadowshapers embrace supernatural forces beyond the natural world providing a holistic understanding of the mindbodyspirit that challenges the Cartesian model and Paine's understanding of reason. Spiritual practitioners like Sierra are not confined to the Cartesian model of rationality. Outside of the Cartesian model, spiritual practitioners theorize the possibilities of human and nonhuman subjects by reimagining new meanings of existence, identities, and creating new social groups within newly constructed worlds conjured through rituals.

Xhercis Méndez's article, "Transcending Dimorphism: Afro-Cuban Ritual Praxis and the Rematerialization of the Body," explores the construction of "human" or who is considered "human." The "human or Homo-Sapiens" is a scientific taxonomic category. The idea of who is "human" is a privilege afforded to White-Cis-Men and Black and Brown bodies were not under consideration for the categorization of "being or being human." Women of color, like Sierra, have fallen on the lower end spectrum of non-human. The criteria of being "human" meant that the subject has "rationality," in such a way that the concepts of reason and logic were the debates that originally favored European control over Black bodies. Rationality centers European philosophical viewpoints of intelligence and privilege. Logic and Christian beliefs were once the main components in deliberating who was able to possess rationality.[42] Dominican Priest and Theologian, St. Thomas Aquinas released the *Summa Theologica* (1265-1273 A.D.) which argued that Catholic faith and reason were intertwined principles of intellect and humanity (2014). Without these two pillars logic cannot be achieved. Western philosophers like Paine, Aquinas, and Descartes modeled their principles of intellect, logic, and discourses of who are considered human around Eurocentric ontologies. However, knowledge possessed within Afro-diasporic practices and rituals destabilize Western ontological frameworks of "being" and "reason." In Western philosophy, being human is the only ontological possibility. Contrary to that standpoint, in the novel, shadowshapers like Sierra conjure philosophical interventions to destabilize what it means to be a living thing within the natural world. Spiritual possession through shadowshaping is an avenue used in the novel to combat colonial structures of oppression. For example, spiritual possession induced by Indigenous and Afro-diasporic rituals in the novel are the embodiment of spirits, ancestors, deities, transcendence, or transformation into animals. Spiritual possession is achieved in an altered state of consciousness that provides

access to interstitial and metaphysical spaces. Furthermore, since Indigenous and African descent peoples were thought to be non-human, they "activate another reality and possibility, a reality not fully captured or subsumed by a colonial logic or imagination" (Méndez 104). Activation of another reality, or perception of the world, was not even in the scope of cognitive abilities of European thought. For example, Sierra can see dead spirits, a world in which the spiritual and physical converge. Indigenous and African descent bodies were excluded from ideologies of the "human," allowing the shadowshapers to develop identities that are neither male nor female, but liminal and fluid.

Yoruba religious variations like in Santería are mistaken as "witchcraft" as a ploy to invalidate and racially discriminate against unorthodox religious practices used by African descent peoples. Across the Caribbean and Americas, Santería provides alternative non-binary transformative consciousness manifested in rituals like those of the mounting or crowning ceremony. Roberto Strongman's *Queering Black Atlantic Religions: Transcorporeality in Candomblé, Santería, and Vodou* further explores how Yoruba religions break away from Cartesian models of ontology. Strongman's book explores how, "the Cartesian notion of the body is the detachable and disposable vessel of an invisible mind or soul and extends it to interrogate just how the notion of the body as vessel allows for queer resubjectifications that are rare or impossible under containment model provided by Descartes" (Strongman 11). The body is a physical object, while the mind has the ability to be fluid and transform the body. The body for the shadowshapers is important because it is a vessel in which spiritual meaning enters into the natural world. The body serves as a bridge for the natural, interstitial, and alternative space(s) but in the Cartesian model the body is not valued in such high regard. Descartes notes, "In order to begin this examination, then, I here say, in the first place, that there is a great difference

between mind and body, insomuch as the body is by nature always divisible, and the mind is entirely indivisible" (105). For Descartes, the mind is only a thinking thing. It cannot do much more than that, but in spiritual possession the mind invites plural consciousness into the body. In the West, the body has been viewed as a vehicle for labor production and reproduction, rather, for the shadowshapers, the mind and spirit are more valuable and powerful because they cannot be controlled. Wick decides to eradicate the shadowshapers because the body is a vehicle for the shadowshapers to perform the rituals, but the spirits withhold the power and meaning. In the novel, Sierra conjures multiple spirits bridging the spiritual world and the physical. The multiplicity of spirits work with Sierra to combat Wick, gentrification, and the erasure of the spiritual system.

Rituals, like spiritual possessions in Afro-diasporic practices such as Santería, are considered a higher knowledge that encourages the embodiment of spirits. In the novel *Shadowshaper*, the practice of shadowshaping resembles spirit work, however, does not directly employ the practices of Santería. Daniel José Older in a conversation with Taryne J. Taylor about Santería being an influence in the creative process of writing *Shadowshaper Cypher*, remarks, "But yeah, shadowshaping is essentially about spirit work, and it's about spirit work directly, how it connects to creativity. And that is certainly something that we do a lot, in the Santería tradition" (Older & Taylor 2). Older makes it clear that he draws on various aspects of Santería, like acknowledging copresences and unity of living in a world that engages with a constant state of spiritual life and death. Copresences, according to Aisha Belsio De-Jesus, "are [spirits] felt, in, on, and around the body" (Belsio De-Jesus 504). For Sierra, the presence of spirits was with her before she even knew about the practice of shadowshaping. Robbie taught her shadowshaping by using physical sensory skills like seeing and touching to manifest the

spirits into physical form (Older 136). Sierras second encounter with spirits work was when Robbie invited Sierra to night on the town at Club Kalfour, a small local dance club. Robbie encourages Sierra to look at the painting on the wall of the club, where she realizes that the painting has come to life. Sierra asks, "Can others see through it?" (93). Robbie tells her no, mostly because they are not looking (94). Sierra learns that the presence of spirits is not a new phenomenon as the deceased live among them but are invisible to the untrained eye. Artwork becomes a vessel in which shadowshapers conjure spirits.

The close relation of conjuring spirits in the novel provides shadowshaping practitioners with access to transformation through consciousness rather than ontology, a concept highlighted in the following chapter titled, "Latinx of No World." The practice of shadowshaping involves two main components, the material and intentionality (134). The material in the novel comes in the form of Sierra's artwork. In order to perform spirit work, Sierra must aim to summon a spirit into her artwork. Yomaira Figueroa-Vasquez explains that "[s]hadowshapers are initiated across racial, ethnic, and national backgrounds. Thus, the practitioners are pan-Caribbean and intergenerational, and as a result, heterogenous art forms and creative practices lure the spirit to the shadowshapers" (164). The spirits ability to lure the shadowshapers conflates time and space. Skilled practitioners use creative outlets like music and art, especially art forms derived from Black and Brown communities like murals, graffiti, and rap. Robbie explains to Sierra that, "[It] can be any spirit," however this practice is supposed to allow spirits to work in unison *with* the shadowshaper, rather than the spirit working *for* the shadowshaper (135). When conjuring, Sierra intentionally used the spirits and relied on the knowledge that was ever-present. The material form symbolizes the sacredness of unity between the spiritual world and physical world.

This ritual is only possible to those who have been initiated into shadowshaping. Rituals are a set of performative practices used in ceremonies or daily practices that create meaning through symbolism, gestures, and intentions. Rituals provide a connection to past, present, and futures because rituals create otherworldly spaces through consciousness. When Sierra uses ritual practices, she is protected by her ancestors. In the novel, Sierra learns that Lucera is her deceased grandmother, Mama Carmen. Robbie, Sierra's boyfriend in book one, feels the copresence of the shadowshapers within Sierra. Robbie takes her hand and explains that someone bestowed on her the ability to do spirit work through shadowshaping. In the ritual practice, Sierra feels a surge of energy. Aisha Belsio De-Jesus refers to energy as "electrifying spiritual currents" (Belsio De-Jesus 2). These currents are always present but change the present state during the ritual of the embodiment of spirits. Mama Carmen tells Sierra that "Without Lucera there's no shadowshaping, but without shadowshaping there's no Lucera. We are entwined. I drew power from the spirits and spirit workers and I return it to them tenfold. The true source of the shadowshaper magic is in that connection, community, Sierra. We are interdependent" (220). The synergetic connection of spirits and the physical body provides communal connection. Mama Carmen shares the knowledge that Lucera's role is vital to the livelihood of spiritual practice. The symbiotic moment in which Lucera draws energies from the spirits and the shadowshapers demonstrates that there is a moment of conflation when all entities are intertwined. Lucera collided physical ecologies and spiritual cosmologies within her body to generate power.

Although the role of Lucera serves as the head of the practices, there can be no shadowshaping without assistance from the community. Lucera gains energy from other shadowshapers and spirits. Mama Carmen draws on power from light and darkness, yet she

makes sure to distribute the power by initiating others. Community in the novel includes the deceased. The ancestors support Lucera and fill her with "gentle electric charge" (213). The electrical current is the energies of spiritual presences working though the connection of mindbodyspirit. Wick knew that he had to eliminate Lucera, the spirit of the shadowshapers, and the shadowshapers to obtain complete power. According to Michelle Salazar Perez and Cynthia Saaverda, "the separation of the sacred from the mundane, our bodies, nature and dreams have been secularization tactics of colonization that have and continue to be a technology of power to suppress Indigenous, ancient and Other cosmologies" (Saavedra and Perez 126). The split of the body and spirit has been influenced by colonial ideologies that posit the flesh and spirit on opposite spectrums. The colonial framework of the split of the spirit from the body and the community is a component in the invalidation process of ancestral practices. Without the role of Lucera, the spirits and shadowshaper community are at risk of spiritual erasure as Lucera is the glue of the shadowhouse.

The name Lucera in *Shadowshaper* resembles "La Luzera" from the inquisition documents in chapter one. Lucera refers to gifted or divine knowledge from either an ancestor, deities, or a deity. In the novel, Older mentions, "[…] Lucera, the exiled sun of the spirit world" (221). The first Lucera fled for her own safety against her mother La Contessa, who attempted to kill her. Lucera is a powerful woman who holds power from Congolese and Spanish knowledge. Mama Carmen explains to Sierra that Lucera is an esteemed position, the leader and initiator of the shadowshapers. Lucera draws on spiritual power as an ecosystem that is interdependent with the spirits. The intimacy of the ritual practice is the transfer of energy between the spirit world and physical. For example, Older writes, "she should feel it all over her body, like the same faint glow the spirits emitted radiated from her too" (144). The transmission of spiritual energy

pulsates through Lucera's body, in a moment of spiritual possession in which multiple energies and identities enter her body. Shadowshaping conjures ontological interventions, such that Lucera, Sierra, and the shadowshapers initiate alternative modes of being through the spirits. Sierra's active engagement with knowledge production as a shadowshaper is considered a defiant act, in Wick's perspective, toward the patriarchal system and its paradigms.

Older writes, from Wick's perspective as he gains power from the sorrows and shadowhouse, "It's in me, I tremble with it— both the knowledge of what's to come and the power being so close, so close. Close to what? I don't exactly know, I admit. Is it a spirit? Ancestor? The dead? Those quiet murmurs I've heard throughout my life, the ones that I never trusted, buried inside myself, in fact all these years? Perhaps?" (70). In this passage, Wick explains how spirit work prompted by shadowshaping offers him another way to access power that he never had the capacity to understand. Wick gained the trust of the shadowshapers, yet his greed transpired into a conqueror complex. He becomes greedy and seeks out other groups spiritual knowledge and practices, such as the Sisterhood of the Sorrows. The Sorrows are a group of three spirits that belong to another spiritual house called the house of light, who attempt to prohibit Sierra from accessing Lucera's powers.

In book three, *Shadowshaper Legacy*, Sierra learns that the three sorrows are also her ancestors, daughters of La Contessa Araña,[43] Sierra's great-great-great-grandmother. Wick is aware that Sierra is a powerful shadowshaper as his research led him to investigate the source of knowledge back to Sierra's lineage in Puerto Rico. In *Shadow Legacy*, Older reveals that La Contessa aided in the United States's mission to occupy Puerto Rico. She used her powers to assist U.S. military forces to dominate the island against the Spanish. Similarly, Wick converts shadowshaping for his own domination efforts. Wick crosses the sacred boundaries, adopts a

white savior complex, and ultimately betrays the shadowshapers. Wick becomes a metaphor for colonial domination by using ancestral practices to rewrite how knowledge can be accessed. Wick attempted to preserve shadowshaping by institutionalizing the practice in the ivory tower of academia. Wick planned to gather as much knowledge and prohibit others from learning that shadowshaping can dismantle colonialism. The only way a person could learn about shadowshaping is through research while attending Columbia University. Wick wanted to gain control of the knowledge and initiate others on his own terms rather than the community's voice in the matter. In his research, he becomes aware of a long legacy, but as an outsider of the shadowshaping community he is rejected as a leader (250). The Sorrows remarked, "[t]he greedy professor makes his domination in the Tower" (253). The Sorrows described Wick's thirst for power as covetous. Covetous refers to wanting to possess something that belongs to someone else. The tower is a metaphor for his conquest to occupy knowledge, land, spirits, and land. His domination resides in the physical tower that Sierra painted the dragon mural. He attempted to claim a landmark of gentrification in Bed-Stuy as a reminder of the government's tactics to push out Black and Brown bodies from the land.

**Shadowshaping as Spiritual Praxis**

Wick understands that the shadowhouse engages in spiritual praxis. Spiritual praxis is the application of sacred knowledge. Cynthia M. Saavedra and Michelle Salazar Pérez explain that "a central aspect of spiritual praxis is energy work, which entails shifting vibrational frequencies that exist within everything: ourselves as human beings, objects, light and the earth. In this energy expanse, with even thoughts, one can influence her experiences in/with the world and the world itself" (130). Energy work requires negotiation. However, Wick failed to understand that

spirit work required the use of energies to assist in healing. Instead, Wick relied on his Eurocentric ethnographic research practices that historically positioned research participants as objects. This resulted in a methodological practice that puts his shadowshaping subjects in the line of harm. Wick's unethical standpoint is rooted in ideologies that have separated various energies from the mindbodyspirit and Earth. The shadowshapers grounded ancestral philosophies that continually bind various energies through spiritual praxis.

As Suzy Zepeda offers, "there is also a necessary expansive consciousness created in spirit praxis where one is rooted in the present, aware of the vastness of the past and at peace with uncertainty of the futures" (28). The consciousness that Sierra imbues is that of knowing that the spirits are there to guide her. Although she is in search of learning more about her fragmented awareness of shadowshaping as an ancestral practice, Sierra continues to accept that the future is malleable. Unlike Wick, Sierra uses spirit praxis to mend her fragmented past. Wick becomes sick with power not just because he has more than he can handle, but due to his lack of spiritual humility. Sharla Fett explains that "[i]llness or affliction could arise from abraded relationships within a broadly defined community of living kin and neighbors, ancestors, and spirits" (36). Strained relationship results from loss of trust or respect. Spiritual illness is often a result of breaking foundational beliefs of trust. For Wick, his "illness" developed out of the immoral actions that he took to weaken the shadowhouse. Wick lacks the embodiment of spiritual practice and the values that have allowed the practice of shadowshaping to exist even through the movement of bodies, spirits, and philosophies throughout the diaspora.

In book three, *Shadowshaper Legacy,* spiritual praxis is a form of healing spiritual erasure. Sierra and her family understand that the shadowhouse is rooted in Afro-Atlantic practices. In *Shadowshaper Legacy*, Sierra learns that her ancestors La Contessa and her former

lover and enslaved man, Santo Colibrí were both powerful people in their community because of the spiritual knowledge they possessed. La Contessa and Santo Colibrí procreated had a child named María Cantara. María Cantara, also known as "la bastarda" or "the bastard," was rejected by her mother, La Contessa, because she was illegitimately conceived. La Contessa tried countless times to murder her illegitimate child. Santo Colibrí, the father, raised María Cantara and taught her the practices of spirit work known as shadowshaping, a fictional African derived religion. In a battle against her mother and three half-sisters, María Cantara, joined forces with Death, a spiritual figure.[44] Upon the pact, María Cantara was then named daughter of Death and given the name Lucera. Therefore, the role of Lucera has been passed down through María Cantara. María Cantara symbolizes colonial resistance because she refused to follow La Contessa's unethical practices. Mama Carmen, Sierra's grandmother had been passed down the role of Lucera and passed the role of Lucera to Sierra. As Lucera, Sierra utilizes spiritual praxis learned from her ancestor Santo Colibrí and powers given by Death, therefore, "shadowshaping is about connecting to the dead, to art, to the world" (*Shadowshaper Legacy* 235). The shadowshapers, unlike other spiritual houses, have the ability to use spirit work as ritual practice because of the pact made by María Cantara with Death.

Sierra had embodied spiritual praxis to heal the fractured lineage as a methodology of survival. Like María Cantara, Sierra finds community with her blood family and chosen family, the shadowshapers, Tee, Izzy, Juan, Bennie, and Caleb.[45] In Sierra's final battle against Wick, Older writes, "Her voice carried the voices of a hundred thousand souls in it; a whole history of resistance and rage moved with her" (281). When Sierra conjures spirits around her, she is working with the gift of spiritual energy to fight persecution. Shadowshaping is a practice that works in unison with various energies from the past and present to shape a future where Sierra

and those who face colonial oppression can exist. Additionally, Sierra embodies a legacy of resistance referring to the connection that the practice was used and rooted within an enslaved community. The history that came forth in the passage are the voices of La Contessa's enslaved people she dismembered to keep silent and unable to revolt against her unjust treatment (*Shadowshaper Legacy*, 206-07). In the battle between Sierra and Wick, Sierra relies upon the ancestors who provide her strength, wisdom, and power to defeat Wick and preserve the practice granted by her maternal lineage.

**Conclusion**

Shadowshaping, in the novels, requires consciousness where the spiritual world and physical are reciprocal. Older uses literature to demonstrate that there is valuable knowledge in spiritual practices. In the fictional practice of shadowshaping, Sierra uses spiritual ancestral knowledge as a form of resistance to combat oppression and exemplify the ways in that the ivory tower has historically extracted such knowledge even when ancestral knowledge is invalidated. *Shadowshaper Cypher* becomes a form of counter-story telling because it requires attentive witnessing. Witnessing requires the readers to understand that although this story is fictional, there are elements that mimic real-world dispossession, erasure, and invalidation of Latinx knowledge production and bodies. *Shadowshaper Cypher* is a strategic method of healing used in literature to disrupt socially unjust systems that have undervalued Latinx ideologies. Furthermore, Older rewrites the perception of spiritual practices into a holistic way that centers spirit work as an instrument to eradicate harm, negative portrayals, and violent defamation of Indigenous and African knowledge. For instance, in the texts, Older never refers to spirit work as brujería. Older rejects Eurocentric ideologies that have historically associated Indigenous and

African spiritual and ancestral knowledge as "brujería." The protagonist Sierra demonstrates how literary characters in ethnic literatures push back against colonial rhetoric that has recurrently marketed racialized characters as witches because they employ unorthodox spiritualities as modes of magic. For example, Maryse Condé's, *I, Tituba: Black Witch of Salem* (1986) and Alicia Gaspar de Alba's *Calligraphy of the Witch* (2012), two books that have protagonist that are cast as witches by others from the hegemonic society. Instead, Older uses the antagonist, Wick, as a villainous character to demonstrate how research practices have not only influenced how Afro-Atlantic spirituality is associated with negative portrayals but how Wick embodies colonialism through actions of forceful erasure, appropriation of knowledge and culture, and attempt female persecution. Wick identifies Sierra as a threat because she has access to power in unconventional ways in which Wick's Eurocentric trained mind cannot fathom. Although Sierra's knowledge and power is not unconventional to the shadowshaper legacy and community, she challenges the system that has attempted to keep young Latina women into the margins.

# CHAPTER THREE: LATINX OF NO WORLD & SHAPESHIFTING IN ROMINA GARBER'S *WOLVES OF NO WORLD* SERIES

*Thing. Hybrid. Freakish.*
*Hunted down and destroyed.*
*I am illegal.*
-Romina Garber*, Lobizona 129*

## Introduction: Undocumented Latinx

In 2018, under the Trump administration's "zero tolerance" policy, many undocumented children were separated from their parents along the U.S.-Mexico border. Writers, such as Romina Garber used their writing skills as a commentary against the unjust treatment of undocumented children and the enclosing of people in cages. This chapter explores the Romina Garber series, *Wolves of No World*, consisting of two novels, *Lobizona* (2020) and *Cazadora* (2021). The duology series follows Manuela "Manu" Azul, an eighteen-year-old teenager, who lives life behind her mirrored sunglasses to hide her unique star-shaped irises, never before seen amongst the people in the United States. Cloistered away for most of her life, Manu felt like she never belonged in society, especially outside of the protection of her home which consisted of mother, Soledad, and their elderly 90-year-old roommate, Perla. At five years of age, Manu was uprooted from Argentina and moved to Miami, Florida where she lived 13 years of her life with her single mother, Soledad (Garber 30). Manu is in constant hiding from the United States Immigration Customs Enforcement (ICE) and is required to watch her every move, as the threat of being deported to Argentina is ever-present. Soledad tells Manu that she can never return to Argentina because father's family will discover her existence. In chapter five, Perla is physically assaulted, and the home is raided by unknown people whom Soledad suspects are Manu's father's family members. Manu quickly runs to her mother's job where she discovers that

Soledad has lied to her about their citizenship application and her career as a caretaker. Very soon, an unforeseen ICE raid occurs at the clinic. Soledad is detained and urges Manu to hide. In a hurry to flee, Manu stumbles upon files enclosed in a duffle bag. Soledad sends with her files that classify Manu as "abnormal" (56). Uncommon, aberrant, bizarre, and unnatural are all synonyms that describe when something that does not fall into the category of belonging. Words like "abnormal" demarcate the "foreign." The ideologies that surround words like "foreign" have contributed to rhetoric that stigmatizes undocumented immigrants as "aliens." Manu self imposes this rhetoric by calling herself as a "*Thing. Hybrid. Freakish"* all that target undocumented people in the United States. Social constructions such as borders, politics, and identities have been used to make people feel like they do not belong in a hegemonic society.

The duology follows Manu's journey as she flees discovery and evolves into her own identity while navigating multiple worlds in which she is classified as undocumented. As an effort to protect Soledad from deportation, Manu disobeys her mother's instructions to hide and jumps into a mysterious vehicle that takes her to the Everglades. She falls upon a magical school called el laberinto, the labyrinth, where she encounters a world filled with brujas (witches) and lobizones, or werewolves, called the "septimus" who have star-shaped irises like Manu. At el laberinto, Manu must continue to hide her identity, she takes on another name, Manuela Marquez, and quickly realizes that she is uniquely different from the brujas and lobizones. Manu has impeccable strength and agility and is a shapeshifting lobizona, which has never before seen in her generation.

Throughout the journey, Manu engages in the tradition of shapeshifting. I define shapeshifting as a pre-colonial practice rooted consciousness which offers metaphorical and physical transformation. For example, the transformation of identity and mutation. In *Wolves of*

*No World,* Manu physically and metaphorically transforms challenging Eurocentric concepts of ontology. Ontology has been primarily understood as the study of "being," a structure that is analyzed through Eurocentric frameworks meant to delineate aspects or traits possessed by those who are categorized as "human beings." Terms like consciousness are not limited to ontological philosophies. Consciousness, on the other hand, allow for transformation in which one does not need to fall under the category of the "human." Not all people have had the privileges to be able to classify and reap the benefits of being seen as a "human." Ontology as we know it is a Eurocentric system of knowledge that forcefully shapes identities around colonial norms. The concept of shapeshifting is a stream of consciousness used by Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) since pre-colonial encounters in the Americas and across the globe. Shapeshifting into animals, entities, or "alternative ontological" forms are used in Mesoamerican communities, Afro-diasporic religious practices, and various Indigenous communities. For example, in Mesoamerican communities, naguals were people who could shapeshift into animal entities. I explore Garber's use of shapeshifting within *Wolves of No World* to evaluate how Manu metaphorically and physically shapeshifts while navigating various worlds. In doing so, Manu occupies a liminal, or in-between state. Manu, like other women in the Americas and Caribbean, fall into spaces of liminality after colonial forces and ideologies attempt to strip women's autonomy. Women have been historically accused of using shapeshifting as a practice of brujería after the European invasion in the Americas and Caribbean. I highlight how systems such as the Spanish inquisition served as a means of persecution for those who develop spiritual consciousness through shapeshifting. Furthermore, I employ María Lugones, Aurora Levins Morales, and Gloria Anzaldúa's frameworks rooted in consciousness to examine how Garber's character, Manu, uses shapeshifting to seek spaces of existence. I argue that the application of

shapeshifting in *Wolves of No World* is preserved by Garber in literature to highlight existence outside of the domains of colonial boundaries of "legality" and conjures alternative consciousnesses and philosophical standpoints.

**Shapeshifting Isn't Just for "Brujas"**

In early Europe, the Catholic church believed shapeshifting was the process by which only witches had the ability to transform into animals. Inquisitors believed that physical transformation was achieved only by witches because they were granted this power through pacts with the devil. This transformation was seen by authors of the *Malleus Maleficarum* as an imminent threat to the Catholic patriarchal hierarchy as shapeshifting assumed that women could change physical form to seduce men and inflict evil thoughts. The *Malleus* was a manual for persecuting and offered a step-by-step process on denouncing women as witches. If women could seduce men and change form, then women had bodily autonomy. In Catholicism, the possibility that women could possess dominance over men could only be achieved with assistance from the "devil" because women were indoctrinated to be submissive. Irene Lara in "Bruja Positionalities: Toward A Chicana/Latina Spiritual Activism" explains, "while the bruja (witch) figure challenges the Western binary that splits sexuality from spirituality, the flesh from the spirit, her erotic power is vulnerable to being contained within a patriarchal and colonial cultural rubric that delegitimizes her form of spirituality as "superstition," and ultimately, as dangerous to the social order" (Lara 22). In orthodox religions, sexuality and spirituality are situated on the opposite ends of the spectrum.

Spanish literary comedies such as, *la Celestina* (1499), cast as brujas as "ugly." The character Celestina became the archetype for depicting spiritual women as repulsive figures.

Witches were illustrated as elderly and unattractive. In the medieval comedy, Celestina was murdered by two men, Semporio and Pármeno, who stole her earnings off her dead body. *La Celestina* was written in Queen Isabel and Ferdinand's reign during the rise of the Spanish inquisition. In Spain, Rojas's comedy influenced the idea that women who fit this description could suffer bodily and spiritual violence. Celestina became a term to reference women who were perceived to promote sexual promiscuity and was in opposition of Christian beliefs. In Roja's play, Celestina was a madam who pimped out her employee, Elicia. The character, Celestina learned of people's vices and used them to gain money, jewels, and gold. Celestina used prohibited magic and became the archetype of the "witch" in Spanish culture. Roja's *La Celestina* highlighted spiritual genocide for those of non-Catholic religions and female persecution.

In the Americas and Caribbean, the hyper-sexualization of racialized bodies further contributed to how women were often cast as brujas. Brujas were thought to seek beauty to enchant male suitors. This perception was due to the fact that women in the Americas and Caribbean could produce offspring that could classify their families in various castes, access more resources, and pass on "pagan" or Indigenous and African beliefs. For instance, in Carlos Fuentes's *Aura* (1962), the character Aura was an older woman who used powers to make the character Felipe Montero fall in love with her. The narrative that surrounds spiritual women as brujas makes them seem deceitful rather than knowledge bearers. In Spanish America during the inquisition period, women had to suppress their sexuality because if they didn't, they were susceptible to being denounced to the inquisition for their "overt sexual desire." La bruja was either a hypersexual being or altogether non-sexual. There was no neutral zone to center sexuality in Catholic religious values. Women could not express sexual desires. They had to

follow strict religious orders as being pious and virtuous were acceptable traits imposed by the church and in hegemonic society.

Women's potential to combine sexuality with spirituality challenges notions of power. Again, power was believed to only be attained by men who devoted themselves to colonial and Catholic systems of control. Power is inherent within women's bodies, especially those who use ancestral Indigenous and African spirituality; it becomes associated with sexuality and eroticism to outsiders. Ancestral power bridges the spirit and flesh, the two become one, a consciousness that derives from ideologies that preceded colonial invasion. This form of power challenged the enforced colonial social order because power was believed to be anointed from "non-sexual" male figures, like priests and clergymen, who only work from the spiritual aspect as the body as it is considered weak and sinful. Latina spiritual power is a product of embodied knowledge. Embodied knowledge refers to a decolonial framework that places emphasis on the corporeal and spiritual as a method to produce ways of knowing. Monica González Ybarra and Cynthia M. Saavedra refers to the embodiment of knowledge as a form of literacy used by Chicana/Latina feminists (100). In *Fleshing the Spirit: Spirituality and Activism in Chicana, Latina, and Indigenous Women's Lives* (2014), Elisa Facio and Irene Lara call this "fleshing the spirit" (Facio & Lara 11), referring to a decolonial practice that fuse back together the spirit and flesh because the body houses the spirit of the ancestors as a form of materialized practice. According to Lara, la bruja is stereotyped as inherently sexual because la bruja embodies energetic forces such as the spirit, yet la bruja's supernatural and spiritual abilities fall victim to colonial ideologies that invalidate her knowledge. The embodiment of knowledge is what separates la bruja from the European concept of a witch because brujas draw on legacies of Indigenous and African ancestral practices. The spiritual practitioner who is mistaken as a bruja draws on

various Indigenous, including Afro-Indigenous, ancestral cosmologies to change the present state. She is a hypersexualized being in the Americans and Caribbean. Community members respect la bruja, even if she is feared. The witch, on the other hand, used a variation of European practices like Celtic, Norse, and Romani. The witch was socially constructed to prohibit women from owning land, gaining power, and regulate procreation during the Middle Ages and early modern Europe.[46]

Ruth Behar's "Sexual Witchcraft, Colonialism, and Women's Powers: Views from the Mexican Inquisition" explains that "the inquisitors of Spain and Mexico viewed women's power as illegitimate in the sense that it was a delusion and therefore not really a form of power at all" (Behar 184). Under the Spanish inquisition, women's power became associated with hysteria and false beliefs because it was believed that only elite males, such as priests, possessed knowledge from God. Power in the form of knowledge was legitimized if it was supervised under the guidance of a male confessor. In most inquisition trials, women's practices were classified as brujería, hechicería, and most often considered "superstition." The inquisitorial documents on brujas and hechiceras predominantly center on sexual desires or revenge. Ultimately, their practices were considered a form of "black magic" since "black magic" often was viewed as a practice to promote promiscuity. Phrases like "black magic" are grounded in anti-Blackness. It was classified as a type of magic that was considered sinister and "evil" intended for malicious harm. The term was meant to differentiate "light" and "dark" suggesting the contrast of acceptable forms of magic used by Europeans versus practiced used by racialized people.

I use "fleshing the spirit" and "theory in the flesh" to demonstrate that embodied knowledge is a spiritual practice that is inherent to Latinas shapeshifting abilities. Orthodox religions like Christianity suggest that the body is weak by virtue, therefore women who use the

body as a means for accessing power were considered "brujas." Chicana/Latina scholarly works like Lara's "fleshing the spirit" emphasize that mindbodyspirits are interconnected rather than split as suggested in Christianity. The connection of the mindbodyspirit provides a way to link the past, present, and future allowing for embodied knowledge. The concept of embodied knowledge refers to the inherent actions, instincts, wisdom, and discernments corporeally embedded. The awareness that derives from the interconnected mindbodyspirit provides Latinas with the ability to access power as a means for intellectual and social justice. Anzaldúa's concept of spiritual activism claims that the importance of reconnecting the mindbodyspirit split allows for the enactment of an inward/outward consciousness by employing metaphysical powers, such as shapeshifting, to campaign for alternative existence(s), modes of being, and access to power. It is important to rewrite Latina negative stereotypes that portray them as superstitious and hypersexual, and to see Latinas as ambiguous mindbodyspirits wielding ancestral philosophies to urge for social change through spiritual activism. The benefit of spiritual practitioners as ambiguous entities departs from Western thought processes, like ontology. Spiritual activism as a method of consciousness draws on ancestral philosophies because spiritual activism can only be practiced if the body and spirit are connected as one. An example of spiritual activism is the reclamation of narratives that socially mark Latinas spiritual knowledge as inferior. Advocacy for pre-colonial practices subverts harmful narratives and provides healing. Similarly, Susy Zepeda in *Queering Mesoamerican Diasporas: Remembering Xicana Indígena Ancestries* (2022) draws on "spirit praxis" as a method to remember ancestral knowledge and provides a pathway for healing (Zepeda 13; 28). Zepeda's understanding of spirit praxis calls for binding the body and spirit through ceremonial practice. Ceremonial practice calls on Indigenous and Afro-diasporic practices to provide liberation from systemic structures of oppression that enforce the

mindbodyspirit split. Metaphysical practices like shapeshifting heal the split to assist in navigating of identities, prompt awareness, and bind the mindbodyspirit.

In *Light in the Dark/Luz en lo oscuro: Rewriting, Identity, Spirituality, Reality* (2015), Gloria Anzaldúa explains that "Chamanas, curanderas, artists, and spiritual activists, like nepantleras [and shapeshifters], are liminal people, at the threshold of form, forever betwixt and between. They move among different realities and psychic states, journeying beyond the natural order or status quo and into other worlds" (31). For Anzaldúa, the threshold is what she calls "nepantla," a Nahuatl term for "in-betweenness." Furthermore, Anzaldúa explains that shapeshifting is used by nepantleras, women who occupy the in-between spaces. To become a spiritual activist, nepantleras must be conscious of two additional spaces, which Anzaldúa refers to as "remolinos," or vortexes. Vortexes are swirls of energies or "worlds" that house streams of consciousness. The first remolino is the colonial and the second is the individual's deep awareness that informs ways of knowing, or conocimiento, an alternative understanding of epistemologies. Once a spiritual activist becomes conscious of the various worlds and the in-between spaces, then the spiritual activist can travel across remolinos, relations, and philosophical understanding. A fundamental metaphysical consciousness of existence for Manu in *Wolves of No World* is the ability to travel through vortexes.

Closely working with Anzaldúa's concepts, scholar AnaLouise Keating explains that "spiritual activism is spirituality for social change, spirituality that posits a relational worldview and uses this holistic worldview to transform one's self and one's worlds" (Keating 54). Spiritual activists' ability to use deep awareness, or consciousness, subverts colonial oppressions. A relational worldview refers to an ancestral framework rooted in understanding the kinships of concepts, items, and values that contribute to spiritual and physical well-being. Relational

worldview is the balance of the mindbody and spirit. For Keating, this core Indigenous concept restores spiritual authority. To achieve social change, spiritual practices like shapeshifting exercise advocacy of ancestral knowledge. Colonialism invalidates the knowledge of shapeshifters. Colonial ideologies suppress the knowledge production of women who enact spiritual activism through rituals. For spiritual activists rituals can be practiced in various ways such as ceremonies, intimate performance, symbolism, or even through the body itself.

Latina scholars employ metaphorical shapeshifting between identities to challenge narratives of oppression. Decolonial scholar Maria Lugones documents the conscious activity of shapeshifting in her concept of world-traveling. In "Playfulness, "World"-Traveling, and Loving Perception," Lugones rejects that multiple worlds are a utopian concept. A utopia is an imagined state or place of near-perfect conditions, qualities, or characteristics. Lugones states, "a 'world' in my sense […] has to be inhabited at present by some flesh and blood people" (Lugones 9). Inhabited worlds are not perfect and Lugones explains that world-traveling is a practice used by particularly women of color because of consciousness of oppressions and the ways in which they are often "othered." Therefore, being pushed into the margins calls for world traveling since it is a necessity for navigating spaces, or worlds, in which there is a "plurality of selves" (14). The plurality of selves is metaphorical shapeshifting. Lugones notes, "[...] I am both and that I am different persons in different "worlds" and can remember myself in both as I am in the other" (14). Through this deep awareness, Lugones subverts colonial ontologies of being. Lugones engages in world-traveling not only to survive but to heal from injustices in worlds that are harmful and negate 'playfulness.' Playfulness is an attitude that "carries us through the activity, a playful attitude, turns the activity into play" (16). Playfulness, according to Lugones, challenges fixed constructions of the self. When it comes to traveling to various worlds, it may be difficult

to be playful. For instance, the colonial world is structured to oppress women of color and their knowledge. However, being playful during world-traveling is a reclamation of oppressive positionalities, engagement in various worlds, and recognition of other people's worlds. I situate Lugones as shapeshifter because Lugones' metaphysical shapeshifting challenges Eurocentric ontology. In the Anglo "world," world-traveling is seen as a speculative practice because traveling is not necessary for those of the dominant class and race. Those that hold positions of power because of racial/ethnic privileges do not need to confer their identities to fit in or scale up to various social hierarchies. Thus, world-traveling as a form of shapeshifting can be a recurrent practice used within marginalized communities.

Despite their deemed invalid status, world-traveling and shapeshifting interrogated marginalized histories, knowledge, and practices. It is through the practice of reclamation and preservation that Latinas subvert patriarchal structures of oppression. For example, Aurora Levins Morales' *Medicine Stories* highlights the practice of rewriting histories of injustice amongst Latinx communities. Levins Morales draws upon the concept of the curandera, Indigenous healer, to mend colonial-based narratives that invalidate Latinx knowledge and erase racialized bodies in U.S. history. Morales engages in spiritual activism through the historian as curandera. Furthermore, Morales's challenges the Eurocentric world, or remolino colonial. Levins Morales claims, "we write from necessity; that our writing is a form of cultural and spiritual self-defense" (61). Creative writers, too, highlight how spiritual practices provide characters with the ability to live in worlds and still preserve ancestral practices. Fiction writers like Romina Garber defend both cultural and spiritual traditions. For example, in the height of the Trump administration, texts like *Wolves of No World* ground politics in literature by engaging with discourses of discrimination against undocumented Latinx people. The

supernatural legacies are interwoven in *Wolves of No World*, showing how pre-colonial philosophies assist her character in a world that attempts to erase the character's tradition.

As a form of spiritual protection, authors like Romina Garber conjure ancestral practices, like Curanderismo, shapeshifting, and world-traveling to affirm existence for Latina characters. Garber's *Wolves of No World* highlights the application of shapeshifting to disrupt the colonial remolino that continues to reproduce rhetoric that stereotypes undocumented people as foreign, criminals, or "illegal." Garber's deep awareness provides us with *Wolves of No World*, a text that demonstrates how Latinx engage with everyday shapeshifting in a world, or vortex that attempts to erase Latinx existence. Further, *Wolves of No World* demonstrates shapeshifting as the ability to physically and metaphorically transform oneself rooted in various Indigenous practices of consciousness. Although shapeshifting is associated with the denunciation of witches, shapeshifting has been used in various pre-colonial communities, such as the Olmec, Aztec, and is found in Afro-diasporic ritual practices. Yet, there is little scholarship on the preservation of the ancestral practice of shapeshifting within Latinx young adult novels. Garber draws on the idea of transformation by rooting it back into Indigenous Guaraní beliefs to demonstrate that it is not a practice used by "witches," but in actuality it is a spiritual system that allows for higher forms of consciousness. As Latinx authors like Garber write about the tradition of shapeshifting, they challenge colonial structures, rewrite oppressive histories, and provide an opportunity to exist.

**Metamorphosis: An "Outsider" Within**

Shapeshifting in Latinx novels has become synonymous with otherization. Novels such as Maya Montayne's *Nocturna* (2019) follows Finn Voy, a faceshifter, who lives in the poorest

area in kingdom of Castallan. Finn does not "fit" in society as she has unique magical abilities and a strained relationship with her family. Latinx protagonist narratives with supernatural powers focus on themes of societal exclusion, such as otherization. Otherization is the process in which people who do not pertain to the dominant community or "fit" within colonial "norms" are cast into the margins based on their social, racial, class, economic, religious, or political differences. In *Wolves of No World*, Manu falls victim to the process of otherization. For example, Manu's star-shaped irises make her feel like a "freak" (Garber 22). According to Manu, a "freak" is someone who "looks too different" referring to her "aberrant" features (22). Manu's extraordinary eyes have haunted her throughout her life. For instance, she recalls her earliest encounter making friends as a horrible experience. Manu remembers one of her peers asking, "*What. Are. You?*" (26). However, Manu doesn't fully understand her own identity in the present state, although later in the novel she learns that her father too possesses the same curious star-shaped eyes. According to the "Introduction: Wording Out Latinx America" in *Nerds, Goths, Geeks, and Freaks: Outsiders in Chicanx and Latinx Young Adult Literature,* terms like "outsider" or "freak" are used as a form of reclamation of marginalized identities within the Latin community (Buffone and Herrera 8). Manu is pushed into the periphery within her own Latinx community for looking different. When she later discovers her new identity, she is able to use derogatory terms like "weird" and "abnormal" as a form of reclamation.

Within the margins, Manu's ambiguous identity allows her to craft multiple identities within the various intersecting worlds she occupies. Manu's identity relies on her undocumented status, as an outsider, and her ambiguous paternal lineage. However, Buffone and Herrera mention that "[n]onetheless, the characters who take on these identities do not wish to separate themselves from the mainstream Latinx community. Rather, they theorize their identities to forge

new paths for Latinx youth to follow in ways that harmonize notions of being different and fitting in" (Buffone and Herrera 8). In the novels, Manu never wants to remove herself from society but is forced by her mother. In fact, Manu develops an alter ego called the "Other Manu" in which she fantasizes about an alternative life where she is confident, has friends, a boyfriend, and attends school. The "Other Manu" becomes a coping method that allows Manu to fit into social norms. However, Manu becomes accepting of her differences as the novel develops and just wants to understand who she is to craft an identity that she defines on her terms. Due to the oppressions Manu faces, she delves into the practice of world-traveling, a practice that transforms her outlook of her identity in the United States.

Manu's transformative state began after her 13th birthday (18). Manu states, "[m]y metamorphosis started this year" (10). Metamorphosis occurs when there is a change in form often associated with supernatural effects influencing the body. The concept of metamorphosis is usually used when referencing an animal. For instance, amphibians undergo structural body transformation. However, the metamorphosis that Manu references is the hormonal and physical changes in her uterus as she reaches puberty. Garber references this transformation as a condition called lunaritis, a menstrual cycle, in which Manu's mother, Soledad,[47] provided her with blue pills called septis (12). The septis forced Manu into a three-night slumber to help subside the painful cramps from lunaritis. Lunaritis serves as a plot device to foreshadow that transformation is vital to Manu figuring out her identity. Manu experiences vivid dreams during lunaritis that transport her to another world, called Lunaris. In Lunaris, Manu has the same recurrent dreams that lead her to various landscapes like the Citadel (11). Lunaris is a land of "magic and mist and monsters" (11). Manu describes Lunaris as a nightmare. Lunaris is a place where shadows and darkness reside (170). When Manu awakens from her slumber, she is engulfed in curiosity about

her recurrent dreams in Lunaris. After fleeing for safety from ICE, Manu encounters a new world, that of the septimus, one where the Citadel is real. As previously mentioned, as the climax of the story develops, Manu and her mother, Soledad, get caught in an ICE raid. Soledad fears for Manu's life and tells her to go into hiding. Manu rejects her mother's wishes and seeks to find out who threatened her loved ones. Manu jumps into a suspicious truck that leads her to el laberinto, a magical school.

**Non-human: Guaraní Legend of Luison and Argentine Law**

Falling upon a magical world in the Everglades, Manu unveils hidden truths about her life. In el laberinto, Manu runs across a boy named Tiago, who shares the same star-shaped eyes. Upon the discovery of el laberinto, a school for brujas and lobizones, Manu becomes aware that others possess the same iris features as herself. In el laberinto identities rely upon Western ideologies of gender: only females are brujas and only males are lobizones. The lobizon derives from the Indigenous Guaraní legend of the luisón (lobison), or werewolf. The Guaraní, also referred to as the Tupi-Guaraní, are located in the present day South American geographical area of Paraguay, Brazil, Argentina, and Bolivia. It is believed that the luisón was the cursed seventh child of Kerana, a human, and Tau, an evil spirit. In the story, Tau wooed the beautiful Kerana, and disguised himself as a handsome man. Some stories suggest that Kerana was raped by Tau, while others highlight that they married. The oral story impacted society as many members of the community believed that their seventh child would be cursed as the fearful luisón leading to the murder of the seventh child in a family. In 1907, "in an attempt to stop this practice, the Argentinian president began adopting seventh sons, which the president insisted would stop the curse" (Nuwer 2014). This legend and newly founded law were used as a backdrop for *Wolves of*

*No World*. Romina Garber interview addresses, that the Argentine law called, Ley del padrinazgo presidencial, established in 1974 states "by law the president of Argentina becomes the godparent of to the seventh consecutive son or daughter in a family" (18). Perla educates Manu about this belief, but Manu calls it a "*government-sanctioned* superstition" (20). While at el laberinto, Manu realizes that this law is not a superstition.

Garber uses Manu joining the academy as a plot device to reveal Manu's identity. In the story, Manu believes that el laberinto is the perfect place to hide from those who are hunting her. At el laberinto, she discovers the world of the septimus. The septimus are those of the seventh son in from the Guaraní legend, in other words, the brujas and lobizones. In el laberinto, she believes that she is a bruja. Therefore, Manu tries to evoke supernatural powers like those of the brujas in el laberinto. For instance, there are four different types of brujas congeladoras, jardineras, invocadoras, and encendedores (133).[48] Congeladora possesses freezing abilities and conjure water; Jardineras work with the earth and specialize in identifying herbs; Invocadoras control and summon the winds; Encendedoras yield flames with their amber eyes (133). Each bruja's powers are associated with their eye color. Since Manu has yellow eyes, she is believed to be an encendedora, although encendedora's irises lean more amber in color. However, Manu isn't a bruja, she is a lobizona, a female werewolf. The metamorphosis first began with Manu's symptoms of lunaritis and then transformed into heightened hearing, vision, and the growth of bones and hair (217). Manu, after the revelation, is the only known lobizona to have existed.

As a lobizona, Manu doesn't fit into a gender category or have a socially constructed identity. Social constructions are influenced by hegemonic ideologies and possess distinct characteristics often accepted as a concept in society such as race, class, and gender. Garber draws upon Eurocentric concepts of race and racial markers, such as terms like "hybrid" to

interrogate historical oppression of mixed-race people. Yet, as a speculative fiction text, race is associated with species implying Eurocentric ideologies rooted in the human vs. non-human, just like concepts formulated under the Cartesian model. In *Wolves of No World*, Manu is considered a "hybrid," half-septimus and half-human. The racial categories and markers represented in *Wolves of No World* serve as commentary against Eurocentric models that are built to categorize and demarcate based upon skin color, body parts, and ethnicity. Garber's novels highlight colonial rhetoric that identifies people in derogatory terms, such as "lobo" as a commentary against the Spanish caste system.

The Spanish caste (casta) system was created to categorize people based upon "race." Eighteenth century casta paintings depicted "lobos" as children of one parent of African descent and one Indigenous parent. The infamous casta painting located in Museo Nacional del Virreinato, Tepotzlán, Mexico illustrates the "lobo" as 10th ranked in the Spanish hierarchical scale. *Wolves of No World* reproduces a caste system following Eurocentric ideologies of social ranking as a way to remark on the oppressive systemic structure that Latinx face in the United States and across the Americas. In the Spanish caste system, racial construction was embedded in the social hierarchy of a being. Lewis's *Hall of Mirrors* explains that:

> Casta was more akin to modern notions of race, insofar as it referred to descent and to putative distinctions carried in blood, ancestry, and color. But caste was not exactly race, at least in the sense that the latter has come to be understood—above all in the Anglo West—as the unambiguous separation of the world's peoples according to alleged biological differences. (Lewis 22)

According to Lewis, casta originally referred to categorizing people based upon various aspects, such as the familial lineage of religious affiliation referencing blood purity. Blood purity, or

limpieza de sangre refers to one's religious lineage and ties to old Christianity. The phrase "purity of blood" refers to a person whose ancestors did not recently convert to Christianity and was a method to distinguish and discriminate recent Muslim or Jewish converts. In 1492, the Spanish inquisition targeted African and Jewish religious systems through genocide and forced conversion in Spain under the Expulsion Edict, known as the Alhambra Decree (Pérez 105).[49] The decree was anti-Semitic and anti-Black requiring the forceful conversion to Christianity. The Spanish used limpieza de sangre to expose genealogies of allegiance to the crown. Limpieza de sangre was institutionalized as a way to record who were conversos, known as new converts, and how long familial lineages practiced Catholicism. The Spanish inquisition would fact check through documents of sacraments and ancestry to see how long a person had practiced Catholicism, where their parents originated, and if a person was faithful to the crown. Limpieza de sangre heavily influenced the development of the caste system and social ranking to classify people in accordance with ancestry through religion and ethnic origin. The modern notion of caste is analyzed through the lens of racial identity instead of religious affiliation. Those of European descent reinforced the caste system in the Americas and Caribbean attempting to portray a narrative of religious and ethnic superiority. In the duology, the septimus's identity is not specifically tied to race, but to supernatural abilities and gender.

Although Manu doesn't fit within the mythical caste system of the septimus, she is still dehumanized as the only known half-mortal and half-septimus. Terminology like "hybrid" alludes to continuation of Spanish colonial rhetoric in the septimus's understanding of race and blood purity. In the text, septimus identity is synonymous with blood purity, rather than religious affiliation. If the septimus identity is a concept of blood purity, then Manu's identity would be "impure" according to the septimus and the caste system because she is a "hybrid" septimus. As

a “hybrid” of sorts, Manu explains, “[...] I’m still caught in the crevice between worlds” (Garber 200). Manu occupies a liminal threshold in Lunaris providing her the opportunity to build her own identity outside of the septimus’ gender binaries and racial markers. Cast as an “outsider” in the septimus world it is assumed that she does not have authority. Rather, the in-between space provides opportunities to make her own decisions about her identity as a fluid lobizona. The worlds that Manu engages in are three: 1) Argentina, 2) United States, and 3) Lunaris. In all three places, Manu does not “exist,” rather she is undocumented in all three, allowing her to shift her identity as needed while she navigates various worlds. Existence in the septimus’ world, like in the United States, is based on citizenship and documentation of birth in Kerana or Lunaris. When traveling to and from Lunaris she uses a huella, a forged identification card. Furthermore, the in-between space promotes multiplicity and critique Western constructions of race, class, and gender. Manu becomes conscious of the oppressive structures in each of the three worlds and develops an identity outside of the various worlds she occupies. More specifically, her fluid identity allows Manus to challenge the septimus’s socio-political views on gender and identity, which mirrors that of Latinx in the United States. Anzaldúa in *Borderland/La Frontera: The Mestiza* mentions the phrase “neither from here nor there.” Manu embraces the idea that she neither fits in any of the three worlds. She employs the practice of shapeshifting because her identity changes, is fluid, and is defined on her own terms.

Shapeshifting requires Manu to alter her identity based upon her geographical location. Shapeshifters like Manu transcend borders contesting ownership and prohibition of land. Shapeshifters like Manu are not confined to identities that are socially constructed in various worlds. While constantly reconfiguring her ever-changing identities, Manu occupies various worlds in the in-between state. Ritual transformation requires the practice of shapeshifting.

According to Anzaldúa, “The liminal space facilitates the bridging and joining of these worlds through ritual transformation” (Anzaldúa 28). Aspects of ritual work are displayed in the tradition of drinking mate. Mate is a traditional South American herbal drink such as a tea. The practice of sharing mate is tied to her daily practices with Perla and Soledad. The intimate act of sharing mate is also used amongst the septimus. Manu drinks mate with the septimus in el laberinto as a ritual heightening physical and supernatural abilities. Mate is given to the septimus before their training practices. The ritual of drinking mate allows Manu to surrender to the inherent instincts that transform her body into a lobizona.

Manu follows her innate instincts while intoxicated with magical powers of strength induced by mate. While occupying the colonial remolino of the septimus world, Manu’s werewolf body distorts implied ideologies of womanhood after the ritual has taken place. During a liminal state of transformation, she releases her body, her thoughts, and relies on her embodied knowledge. Cherrie Moraga calls this theory in the flesh (Moraga 19). Moraga states, “[t]heory in the flesh means one where the physical realities of our lives— our skin color, the land or concrete we grew up on, our sexual longings— all fuse to create a politic born out of necessity” (19). Theory in the flesh grounds Manu’s ability to shapeshift her identity. As a comment on U.S. Latinx and immigrant experiences, Garber used Manu’s life to speak toward the various ways that Latinx people navigate multiple identities shaped by living within the margins. For instance, in the novels, Manu’s identity is an embodiment of resistance. Her friend, Diego remarks, “I think Manu’s existence invalidates labels. The systems defines most of us by one identity—bruja or lobizón—but Manu defies classification. She can’t be caged by a category” (354). Manu contradicts the septimus’s binary identities, politics, and laws. Her lobizona identity is a framework for how she engages in worlds that attempts to marginalize her. The margins

become the fissures in which Latinx people contest Eurocentric modes of being. As a result, theory in the flesh in the novels confront binary identities that negate Manu as a septimus. Manu, therefore, engages in the curation of identity formation based on a necessity across the three worlds she occupies.

**Shapeshifting as an "Undocumented" Lobizona**

*Wolves of No World* speaks to the ways in which identities change according to space. The contemporary use of shapeshifting demonstrates how Latinx people are able to change their identities even when socially constructed borders and "worlds" attempt to push Latinx into the margins, however the margins are critical spaces that aid in the development of identities. In analyzing Manu's socially imposed hybrid identity readers can see how she becomes a victim of colonial structures that create invisible borders deeming her as undocumented. Manu is not documented in Lunaris, the United States, or Argentina, in other words, Manu is from "neither here nor there." Anzaldúa's phrase of "neither here nor there" expresses identity, political, and cultural tensions experienced by Chicana/Latinas in the United States. For Manu, she is not fully accepted as a septimus, Argentinian, nor as American.

Manu's journey challenges political viewpoints that label undocumented Latinx people as criminals and worse yet, non-humans, as a commentary on the treatment of undocumented people. For example, rhetoric employed by the U.S. government that deems undocumented as "aliens." However, the true foreign aliens are the colonizers who invaded and stole Indigenous lands through genocide. The concept of alien invasion is taken up in literary genres like science fiction, but terms like "alien" are also applied to undocumented peoples who seek better opportunities, equal access to resources, and asylum. In *Wolves of No World,* being "half-

human" becomes an asset for Manu as she has the ability to shapeshift her identity and status. Shapeshifting powers provide instances of corporeal and cognitive liberation from oppressive systemic structures.

Manu occupies the in-between spaces of "legality" and "illegality." Garber constructs interstitial spaces as a form of world-making, where metaphysical practices like shapeshifting produce knowledge that is incomprehensible in Western thought. In the novels, Garber promotes cognitive dissonance against Western philosophies. Cognitive dissonance is the estrangement and promotion of conflicting knowledge(s) both within and outside of hegemonic epistemology (Aguilar 2023). Spiritual activism advocates for cognitive dissonance by raising contradictory beliefs against Western epistemologies. Colonialism's contribution to epistemic violence via Western indoctrination of knowledge production is a creation of cognitive dissonance. To reduce the effects of cognitive dissonance, colonialism's power within epistemic violence serves as a methodology to control knowledge production and bodies. Women's intellectual engagement in knowledge production has been invalidated, considered "illegal," and even perceived as threatening to the social order. As a form of knowledge production, shapeshifting becomes a tool of resistance that allows the production of characters, like Manu, to contest, question, and challenge Western hegemonic thought through the promotion of cognitive dissonance.

Manu engages in cognitive dissonance by challenging the narrative that pins her as the only lobizona to ever exist. Manu states, "[I] can't help thinking that maybe the reason we haven't heard of lobizonas is they're all in hiding. But if no one knows we exist, how can the system ever hope to accommodate us?" (Garber 230). Manu begins by contemplating her identity as a lobizona, yet other characters too become aware that there is a possibility that Manu is not the first born lobizona. The underlying practice of eugenics by the septimus is uncovered as

Manu flees and fights for her survival. Genetic selection is a racist and ableist idea focused on the aim to control future generations by determining specific hereditary traits such as skin and eye color. The involvement with eugenics practices among the septimus highlights colonial practices of erasure. The septimus believe that they must keep the species "pure" by one procreating amongst their own species. The students in el laberinto help Manu realize that there may have been others that were considered "illegal" and thus persecuted.

Septimus history erases the presence of others who do not fit within the identities and gendered binary of females as brujas and males as lobizones. As an "outsider," Manu recognizes that in the world of the septimus she is marginalized and unwanted. She remarks, "[i]f there [are] no words in any known vocabulary to encapsulate me, that just means language can't define me. A label can't hold me. I'm beyond classification. I'm an original. I'm— Undocumented" (382). Manu crafts her own identity by breaking out of the bounds of Eurocentric and septimus taxonomy in a world that does not recognize her existence. Taxonomy is a branch of science that classifies organisms. Humans are identified under "species." As a species, humans are categorized as homo-sapiens, while other animals fit into other categories of species. In the Age of Enlightenment, race was once considered a subcategory of species to understand human difference. Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel's views on race provided White Western Europeans with hierarchical privilege (1807). Decolonial philosophers such as Frantz Fanon in *Wretched of the Earth* (1991), and Sylvia Wynter in "The Ceremony Must Be Found" (1984), critique Hegel's views as he excludes racialized bodies from conceptual frameworks of humanity. Categories of the human from the Age of Enlightenment are models for present day racism. Garber uses the term "undocumented" to extend decolonial arguments into fiction and highlight that there is no official procedure or classification of status by which Manu has to abide. Garber

uses colonial rhetoric that identifies those who do not possess citizenship status as undocumented to speak up against racial and political injustice, rather than creating a new term to express people who are unwanted in governments. The play on the term "undocumented" is two-fold as there is no record of Manu's existence amongst the septimus nor "legal" socio-political status in the United States.

In both the worlds of U.S. and Lunaris, there is an active initiative to erase the existence of hybrids, like Manu. Aurora Levins Morales states "[t]o live surrounded by a popular culture in which we do not exist is a form of spiritual erasure that leaves us vulnerable to all the assaults a society can commit against those it does not recognize" (61). In Manu's case, she experiences a crisis in which she is aware that she is not welcomed by either government or institutional structure. Levins Morales explains that erasure, physical and spiritual, is a methodology in which colonial structures attempt to break down marginalized people by making them feel like a non-human outsider. In creating erasure, colonial ideologies facilitate histories of oppression and craft a world in which the "undocumented" fall into a vicious cycle where there is no equal access to resources, opportunities, or acceptance among the dominant group. In restoring the spiritual erasure of Indigenous Guaraní stories, Garber's novel rewrites oppressive and racist narratives like Manu's to promote visibility while using literature as a form of documentation. Yet, Latinx fiction is continuously classified as juvenile or is promoted to target young adult audiences. Garber uses speculative fiction to highlight how ancestral practices can be utilized as weapons against moments of erasure.

The practice of shapeshifting is usually examined after the physical form has changed. Yet, Manu takes the moment of transitioning as an opportunity of reflection. The critical reflection provides a guide for Manu to contest histories of oppression. Manu states, "If your

undocumented, you're *unwritten*" (*Lobizona* 273). Under the Cartesian model, Manu is not considered human. Therefore, laws do not apply to Manu. To disrupt the current understanding of documentation, Manu creates an alternative narrative that is outside of the septimus's worldview: "you can't break the law if it doesn't apply to you" (273). Shapeshifters defy the septimus laws of nature and being. The use of non-binary identities, such as shapeshifters, disrupts colonial systems of control.

Manu prompts fear in a binary society because by challenging imposed hierarchical systems of power as a hybrid and mixed species. In a septimus society based upon classifications from which she is excluded, as in the United States, Manu accesses authority in various ways. For instance, in el laberinto she is the only female allowed to play on the septibol team alongside the lobizones. The brujas are not allowed to play on the field. The brujas are not shapeshifters in the novel, only the lobizones, male werewolves. The septibol sport was thought to be too physical and was used to keep the women submissive. Manu subverts the laws of nature among the septimus allowing for her to challenge systems of control. Manu possesses the ability of transformation defying the septimus's perception of power. For the septimus the males have more authority because they can transform into werewolves, however, Manu's existence flips the patriarchal order on its head. Manu is criminalized in the septimus's society because her existence is considered outlawed.

**Transcending Margins: Gender, Politics, and Existence**

Garber preserves the practice of shapeshifting. Manu transforms into an unconceptualized entity in a non-confined space where lobizonas can exist outside of the septimus society. When she taps into her mindbodyspirit as a lobizona, she breaks out of binaries enforced in Lunaris.

Mindbodyspirit requires Manu to engage with theory in the flesh, deep awareness, and reliance on embodied knowledge and wisdom because of preserved ancestral knowledge that are generationally passed on. As Manu embraces her newfound abilities, she learns to trust her instincts. In an in-between state, Manu negotiates which embodied practices she will apply to formulate her identity and take stance on her existence in Lunaris.

In the second novel, *Cazadora,* Manu relies on her embodied wisdom as she becomes a spiritual activist. According to Anzaldúa, "conocimiento," or knowledge, is an important process of spiritual activism because it provides alternative methodologies. Anzaldúa states, "[c]onocimiento, the more difficult path, leads to awakening, insights, understandings, realizations, courage, and the motivation to engage in concrete ways with the potential to bring us into compassionate interactions" (Anzaldúa 19). Conocimiento provides the opportunity to see the world through other's eyes. For instance, Manu becomes aware of the way her mother tried to protect her from the septimus. Before, Manu was unable to see that her mother knew that the septimus would not welcome her into their society. Manu had to learn for herself through experience of knowledge production. For Manu, conocimiento provides her the ability to forge a new understanding of life through her supernatural abilities of shapeshifting. Additionally, to reach conocimiento, Manu becomes aware that she is not the only one who lives on the outside. In *Cazadora*, Manu joins a revolutionary group called the Coven. The Coven is a radical group of septimus forced into secrecy. Upon finding the Coven, Manu realizes that her identity isn't the only forbidden one.

In *Cazadora*, Manu leads the Coven into a revolution against the septimus. The revolution is rooted in social justice for various gender identities, sexuality, and expectations. Manu states "Our entire way of life forces septimus into a male-or-female binary, which is a

narrow and outdated approach to identity, especially since our biological sex assignment is tied to our gender and supernatural makeup" (126). Supernatural makeup refers to the way in which magical powers and shapeshifting abilities define predetermined biological construction which is associated with their magical abilities. However, Manu proves that this concept is not true because Manu's existence invalidates preconceived notions that resemble colonial ideologies, that biology and magic define gender.

In the Coven, Manu meets Laura and Oscar who identify as non-binary and transgender. Laura and Oscar are pushed into the margins and choose to live within the coven because they are outlawed for their identities. The Coven is a radical group which first began with the brujas. Overtime, the Coven "extended […] invitation to lone wolves" (93). The Coven became a haven for marginalized identities. Manu claims, "[t]here's no breaking out of the gender binary, no room for anything in between" (16). Characters like Laura and Oscar teach Manu that she is not the only one who lives in the septimus world that positions her as a criminal because of her identity. While the "in-between" refers to the world of Lunaris, the people of the coven create another world. As shapeshifters, Manu, Laura, and Oscar use the Coven as an in-between space to build a new world that provides refuge outside of systems of control. Manu, Laura, and Oscar use conocimiento to create a space that is inclusive for all identities. Graciela, a member of the Coven explains, "[u]ntil now, our system has assumed female sex assignment equals Septima which equals brujas– and so the terms have been used interchangeably in our governance. Laws must be rewritten. Our entire binary way of thinking must be overhauled–" (135). The septimas, female septimus, have been considered only as brujas. Supernatural abilities define the septimus. Oscar and Laura are examples of identity that are not fixed on supernatural ability, rather identities can be fluid. Legal discourse in the septimus governmental system is written through a

binary perspective. The discourse must change to accommodate fluid identities and various supernatural abilities.

The concept of shapeshifting used by Manu, a fluid lobizona, is a method to rectify the septimus's ontological and physical ideologies. Manu's identity becomes revealed to the entire septimus world through media coverage. Manu is being tracked down by the cazadores (hunters), for her outlawed existence, and decides to speak into the camera showing the septimus world that she is a lobizona. Several media outlets in the novel take advantage of Manu's existence to portray her as a rebel or estranged individual. A commentator remarks, "If lobizonas exist, what does that say about the link between power and gender?" (135). Here, Garber uses characters like Manu to interrogate structures that contribute to the gatekeeping of power. In the septimus world, females are brujas, however characters like Laura and Oscar defy this notion. Brujas are not granted unsupervised access to power. Lobizones, males, are paired with brujas to protect them. This "protection" conceals how the septimus attempts to control and surveillance female powers.

In Lunaris, brujas are subordinate to lobizones. For example, brujas are not allowed to travel without a lobizon, or male, escort (68). Brujas are not allowed to play on the septibol field with the ball. The only way they are allowed to engage in the sport is by using their powers on the sidelines. Brujas are not recognized for their contribution in winning septibol games, only the lobizones. Garber mentions in the *Feminist Book Club Podcast* interview that this was a reference to gender inequality and the fight for equal pay by the U.S. women's Olympic soccer team (Feminist Book Club Podcast, episode 93, min 15:17). *Wolves of No World* contests misogynist ideals that contribute to unequal access to power for women, transgender, and non-binary people.

**Colonial Rhetoric: Access to Power Equals Persecution**

The use of shapeshifting combats gendered violence and allows Manu to access agency outside of colonial-like structures in the septimus's world. Once Manu reveals her identity to the septimus world, Manu and members of the Coven begin a revolution to overthrow the septimus. In *Wolves of No World,* Manu's supernatural powers as a shapeshifter alarm the septimus because they are unaware of the amount of physical strength and political power she possesses. Additionally, Manu's undocumented status is constantly at the hands of mirrored colonial punishment in Lunaris. When she travels outside of her protected world of the Coven, Manu is at risk of death. Manu states, "Discovery= ~~Deportation~~ Death" (321). If her existence is known, both in the United States or in Lunaris, she could be expelled or worse, assassinated. Manu is seen as a threat and becomes hunted by the cazadores, a law enforcement team made up of hunters. Discovery in this sense refers to extraction, extinction, and exposure. In speculative and science fiction, discovery is a violence that is accompanied with genocide. Manu knows that if she is captured, she will be punished. If she were discovered in Miami, as an undocumented person she would be deported to Argentina. In Lunaris, there is no such thing as deportation. The laws enforced by the septimus at this point are only binary, either Manu lives or suffers death.

The septimus portrays Manu as "evil" to support the cazadores' reason for hunting her. The septimus's rhetoric reflects that of the *Malleus* which states that women who use supernatural abilities use "black magic," an "evil" source of power. The media coverage in Lunaris stated, "she's a demonio from Lunaris coming to stir up divisions" (136). Manu is criticized for shapeshifting abilities as a means of existence in a septimus world that wants to murder her. Manu's identity as a non-binary wolf is incomprehensible to the septimus leaders who want to preserve their binary thinking. Shapeshifting was only allowed for males. The

septimus criminalize her because they are unable to envision a world that accommodates non-binary and half-septimus people.

The policing of knowledge in Garber's series draws upon historical Catholic structures of policing such as the inquisition. The inquisition aided in the mass persecution of women of Indigenous and African descent because their knowledge was categorized as "black magic," a prohibited form of access to power. In *Wolves of No World*, Garber incorporates a tribunal, mirroring the holy tribunal used by the inquisition. Catalina, Manu's friend, and daughter of headmistress from el laberinto exclaims, "[i]f she is found, the tribunal will have her *executed*" (183). The theme of execution demonstrates that the only way the septimus can obtain control over Manu since she does not fit into the laws of existence is by eliminating her. Structures such as the tribunal are meant to keep those who are privileged in high socio-political positions. In the Coven, Manu was aiding in the revolution against the tribunal. She gathered many people who admired her cause for equality. Due to the toll her mission was taking on her loved ones, Manu decides to surrender. Yamila, a cazadora involved in Manu's persecution states, "[p]er the laws of the tribunal, you are under arrest and subject to stand trial in Lunaris" (318). During the trial, Manu and her classmate Diego, who serves as her defense attorney, understand that their only defense in saving Manu is by portraying her as non-guilty. Yet, the tribunal portrays Manu as a creature called la ladrona (a thief), a fearful figure who is part septimus and her womb would carry a curse (344). La ladrona's story is reason why the septimus believe Manu must die because if she is la ladrona, then she will give birth to a demon that will kill off the septimus (344). By highlighting fear, the tribunal reconstructs rhetorical practices that position Manu as a "demon" to sway the head judge.

Another methodology that draws from colonial rhetoric is that of limpieza de sangre, or quality of blood. The prosecutor, Bernardo expresses, "[w]e submit she comes from a tainted lineage and presents an existential threat; therefore we charge her with treason and recommend her execution" (*Cazadora* 342). Blood impurity, an ideology during the Spanish inquisition, led to injustices against many mixed-race people occupying lower social status in the caste system. Limpieza de sangre was a belief during the Spanish inquisition imposed in Spain and the "New World" on the false belief that those who were not of European Christian lineage, were considered "unclean" and "impure." Bernardo is an important character in the trial because he is also Catalina's father. Bernardo believes that Manu is la ladrona and therefore wants Manu killed.

Not bound to the identities that the septimus imposes on her, Manu takes on an identity of her own. As a form of resistance, Manu claims, "[t]he real me. Not Manu la lobizona. *Manu la ilegal*" (*Cazadora* 96). By drawing on rhetoric of illegality, Manu reclaims it as a methodology of living within a world where law, identities, and expectations do not confine her. Manu embraces "illegality," referring to the ways that laws are not structured around her identity. The septimus do not try to accommodate their laws and perceptions of the world to allow Manu to "fit" into their society. Manu's ability to shapeshift is outlawed because shapeshifting was a practice that could be exclusively used for men. As women's knowledge production outside of the patriarchal structure was considered prohibited, the reclamation of terms such as illegality highlight that although practices are outlawed, they are not controllable by colonial structures. Manu moves away from terms such as "undocumented" to reclaim criminalized terms like "illegal" to challenge the septimus's governmental structure. Manu no longer wants to be

documented on the septimus's terms through shapeshifting Manu negotiates how her practice is defined within various worlds, even if they are unsanctioned.[50]

**Conclusion**

Garber uniquely preserves the pre-colonial practice of shapeshifting. *Wolves of No World* draws on Guaraní beliefs of Tau and Kerana's children as lobizones and brujas. Additionally, Garber's *Wolves of No World* provides an insight to how the application of ancestral practices in fiction like shapeshifting offer autonomy in worlds that oppress Latinas. For the character Manu, shifting enables her to craft identities outside of the narrative of gender binaries, undocumented, and the "other." Manu stands up against colonial-like structures that are mirrored within the novel. Garber allows for the tradition to speak for its important theoretical aspects that provide spaces of existence by archiving the application of shapeshifting used by lobizonas. In challenging inquisitorial rhetoric, Manu's shapeshifting practices as a lobizona break from gender binaries.

Outside of speculative fiction, shapeshifting has become a practice employed by Latinx people. Shapeshifting is an embodied practice synonymous with Moraga's theory in the flesh. Although there are various ways we can investigate shapeshifting, we should also look at other opportunities that relate to modern day subversion of citizenship, "legality," knowledge, and ontology. Instead of taking what has been recorded in archival documents as "truth," scholars must understand that the archive only provides one type of truth— that from a Western colonial perspective. Thus, ancestral philosophical practices like shapeshifting are not "speculative" or "superstitious" but philosophical interventions in a fight for existence.

# CHAPTER FOUR: TETHERING (IM)MATERIAL REPRESENTATIONS OF YEMOJA AND LAS SANTISIMA MUERTE IN ZORAIDA CÓRDOVA'S *BROOKLYN BRUJAS*

## Introduction: Spiritual Vestiges

Zoraida Córdova's trilogy, *Brooklyn Brujas* (2016), published by Sourcebooks inc., follows three Latina sisters, Alejandra "Alex," Lula, and Rose Mortiz, who call upon female deities within their Brujx faith. Each novel in the trilogy follows one of the Mortiz sisters. *Labyrinth Lost* centers on sixteen-year-old Alex's journey across the mythical realm of Los Lagos. The second novel in the series, *Bruja Born,* follows the eldest sister, Lula, a gray-eyed girl with honey brown skin, who must fend off the casimuertos, or "half dead" in Brooklyn (Córdova 10). Lula is known for her beauty and fawns over her boyfriend Maks. The third novel, *Wayward Witch* highlights Rose's journey in the fairy Kingdom of Las Adas. Rose is the youngest of the three Mortiz sisters. In this chapter, I explore the symbolism of two deity characters, La Ola and Lady de la Muerte, to draw the connections to Afro-Atlantic, Indigenous, and spiritual figures in literature as sacred remembrance. La Ola (the Wave) represents a water goddess. Lady de la Muerte (Lady of the Dead) is the goddess of death. I draw connections to two real world female spiritual figures La Santisima Muerte and Yemoja. I highlight how Córdova preserves representations of La Santisima Muerte and Yemoja through the spiritual figures of La Ola and Lady de la Muerte via (im)material items found in *Brooklyn Brujas*. I employ Solimar Otero's *Archives of Conjure* and Jenny Sharpe's, *Immaterial Archives*, to address the ways in which Yemoja and La Santisima Muerte are conjured as spiritual guides in the trilogy and reveal how Córdova stores symbolic physical and abstract representations through apparitions, rituals, and devotional practices. Literary scholar Jenny Sharpe notes, "Immaterial is the intangible such as dreams, spirits, and visions" (Sharpe 3).[51] The immaterial is often

mistaken as a figment, or production of an illusionary image. Sharpe's research on Afro-Caribbean art and literary work examines how the intangible items become stored in the traditional archive. This is noteworthy because in literature, spiritual devotion, and figures too, are preserved in a literary repository. I use Sharpe's work to address how Latinx engagement in speculative fiction preserves devotional practices influenced by Afro-Atlantic and Indigenous spirituality. The preservation of such practices reproduces a repository and pre-colonial devotion to contemporary audiences as a way to demonstrate how ancestral spiritual practices continue to exist in creative writing. *Brooklyn Brujas* centers narratives of female deities and/or saints that are often historically regarded as symbols of "witchcraft" in orthodox religions, meanwhile pinpointing replications of colonial structures threatened by the Mortiz sister's supernatural power. I examine how both the tangible and intangible items in *Brooklyn Brujas* curate a space where fiction becomes a repository where fragments of Yemoja and La Santisima Muerte are brought forth through rituals of devotional practice used by Latinx characters.

In addition, I use Solimar Otero's theoretical framework of archive of conjure to address how deceased ancestors of the Mortiz sisters are invoked through visions and dreams provoked through rituals. Throughout *Brooklyn Brujas,* Yemoja and La Santisima Muerte appear as themselves or through the Mortiz's ancestral family members. Therefore, the (im)material, such as prayers, in Córdova's text provides vestiges of Afro-Atlantic and Indigenous beliefs in literary fiction. Furthermore, the relationship between material items offered to the deities refer to what Otero calls residual transcripts. Otero explains, "[r]esidual transcripts are links to how copresences interact, influence, and guide human actors like scholars, artists, and practitioners. Here, the copresences are the occurrence of multiple entities such as deities, the dead, and the living. Córdova's *Brooklyn Brujas* was inspired by multiple religious belief systems in which La

Ola as Yemoja and Lady de La Muerte as La Santisima Muerte are both conjured agents in the trilogy. By reading Córdova's use of La Santisima Muerte and Yemoja as active agents reveals how the trilogy itself serves as an item of symbolic spiritual preservation.

**The Mortiz Family's Religious System**

In the trilogy, Córdova combats the historical representation that posits Latinas as practitioners of "black magic." Black magic, in the Christian sense, is the power granted through pacts with the devil. The "Introduction" and "Chapter 1" of this dissertation challenges the long history of Catholic control over narratives that attempt to associate unorthodox religious and spiritual practices as "black magic." These perceptions stem from non-practitioners of Afro-Atlantic and/or Indigenous belief systems and racist ideologies. Córdova uses the negative narratives of brujería as a form of reclamation. According to Córdova, "I chose to call Alex and her family "brujas" and "brujos" because their origins do not come from Europe or Salem. Alex's ancestors come from Ecuador, Spain, Africa, Mexico, and the Caribbean. Her magic is like Latin America– a combination of the old world and new" (Córdova, *Brooklyn Brujas* 318).[52] As an amalgam, the Mortiz sister's lineage resembles the effects of colonial domination, forced enslavement, and dispersal of bodies across various landscapes. In the first book, *Labyrinth Lost*, Alex, the middle child, establishes the ancestral lineage, explaining that their father's family moved from Ecuador to Puerto Rico (*Labyrinth Lost* 65). Alex further explains that "[m]y mother's family were run out of their lands in Spain and fled to Mexico. My dad's ancestors were African slaves in Ecuador. They went to Panama and then Puerto Rico" (187). Similarly, Rose Mortiz, the youngest, remarks that their father is from Puerto Rico (*Wayward Witch* 267). In the novels, the mother's ancestral lineage is overshadowed by the paternal side, as the

daughters connect more with the father's cultural and racial experience. The migratory patterns of the Mortiz family provides a conceptual viewpoint that demonstrates how various Latin American and Caribbean beliefs shape the novel. By mapping dispersal and migratory patterns, the Mortiz daughters illustrate a porous belief system fused with various aspects of indigeneity. The use of the term indigeneity to include those of racialized ethnic groups, like the Afro-Indigenous who live across the Americas and Caribbean. Córdova particularly shapes the Mortiz lineage to disrupt the Western conventional understanding of "witchcraft" and "black magic."

Throughout the trilogy, Córdova distinguishes the Eurocentric concept of witchcraft from the understanding of brujería used across the Americas and Caribbean. The character Alex explains, "[a]ll brujas are witches but not all witches are brujas" (*Labyrinth Lost* 11). For Córdova, brujas are witches because brujas have been categorized under the European gaze that associates women with prohibited power that is often considered "black magic." Thus, mentioning that not all "witches are brujas" demarcates conceptual differences in which brujas are linked to Afro-Atlantic and Indigenous practices. In doing so, Córdova establishes that brujas engage with power rooted in Afro-Atlantic and Indigenous practices.

In the *Brooklyn Brujas* series, the historical perception of brujería as witchcraft is challenged by the three protagonist characters, Lula, Rose, and Alex. The significance of this highlights that brujería is not synonymous with European ideologies of witchcraft because brujería in the Americas and Caribbean is linked with Indigenous belief systems. Witchcraft on the other hand, is tied to Christian narratives of people making pacts with Satan. In Indigenous and Afro-Atlantic belief systems there is no concept of Satan as the devil. According to Córdova "brujería is a faith for many but it is not the faith in my book" (*Labyrinth Lost* 318). Córdova distinguishes that the cultural beliefs found in *Brooklyn Brujas* do not correlate with the Western

notion of brujería, instead, Córdova rewrites the conventional understanding of brujería away from "black magic" and Christianity. As inspiration for the belief system in the novel, Córdova draws from the West African Yoruba based religions of Santería (Regla de Ocha) and the Mexican holiday of Día de los Muertos (*Labyrinth Lost* 318). Santería, also known as Regla de Ocha, is an Afro-Atlantic religion rooted in the Yoruba belief system. Día de los Muertos, or Day of the Dead, originated as an Indigenous tradition where the spirits of ancestors are honored and guided home for a two-day celebration on November 1st and 2nd. Córdova created a belief system imbued with spiritual figures from Afro-Atlantic and Indigenous lore by fusing these two separate ideologies. In the blog *Fictional Unbound*, the Unbound contributors note "[...] Alex's story is a hero's journey that is not based on northern European mythology" (Peterson 2017). Alex's story began with her newfound supernatural abilities as an encantrix, the most powerful type of bruja. Alex becomes the hero in which she saves her family from the Devourer, a figure who attempts to steal all supernatural abilities to become the most powerful entity. Córdova rewrites literary conventions of the epic by centering Latina characters as heroes. Heroes in epics are traditionally mythological figures who are granted divine power or strength. Similarly, the Mortiz sisters are blessed with their powers through their ancestors and approval from the deos, or gods. Instead of using Greek mythology as the focal point of the belief system in the trilogy, Córdova decenters whiteness by writing in Afro-Atlantic and Indigenous spiritualities to transform the literary conventions of the epic.

The hierarchical structure of this new faith is centered on El Papa and La Mama who are two supreme deos who occupy the highest rank within this fictional religion. Beneath the two supreme deities, follows a pantheon of deos, such as El Viento (the Wind), La Ola (the Wave), and El Terroz, all of which represent natural elements. In this mythical religion, it is noted that El

Papa and La Mama created the deos. The deos resemble characteristics possessed by Orishas, such as Shango, Obatala, and Oshun, found in Yoruba beliefs. Orishas are spiritual deities who possess divine power. There is a pantheon of Orishas all of which have their own legends, devotional practice, and symbolic reference to the real world. Some Yoruba Orishas are recognized as commanders of elements like thunder, lightning, water, and sky. The Orishas' powers and lives are granted by the supreme god Olodumaré, the almighty father of the Orishas. In like manner, the deos in *Brooklyn Brujas* were birthed by El Papa and La Mama, parents of the deos. La Mama and El Papa grant the deos with supernatural powers. Both La Mama and El Papa hold equal access to power over the deos. Alex explains that in her home lies "an etching of a golden sun and silver moon for La Mama and El Papa" on a purple painted door (42). The almighty deities symbolize light both in the night and during the day. La Mama and El papa illuminate constantly over the brujx community as forms of light.[53] Beneath the ranking of the deos lies the encantrix, then last on the hierarchical scale are the brujx.

Resemblances in the religious hierarchy within the trilogy replicate real world religious belief systems. Córdova's use of gender neutrality and equal access to power mirrors that of Yoruba practices. For example, Yoruba religious variations place Olodumaré as a gender-neutral god. Although the deities in the novel are gendered by their names in Spanish, the deos "are more than male or female. They are both and neither at the same time. They are creators and destroyers of the worlds" (149). According to Córdova, the deos are entities who are fluid. The deos are not reduced to Western constructions of gender that are generated from societal expectations. As gender neutral, the deos possess equal amounts of power gifted from La Mama and El Papa. The parallels of gender-neutrality between Orishas and the deos in *Brooklyn Brujas* are just one example of the similarities found in the trilogy. Córdova writes, "I never want to

take an existing god and plop them into my world, [...]" (*Wayward Witch* 360). In stating that the deos in the novel are imaginative, provides Córdova a way to respectfully engage with pre-existing belief systems in literature. For instance, Yemoja and La Santisima Muerte are two prominent figures in Afro-Atlantic and Indigenous spirituality that are symbolized through the creation of the pantheon of fictitious deities. The resemblances between Yemoja and La Santisima Muerte demonstrate how female spiritual figures provided ancestral guidance in the combat against colonialism and the development of the brujx identity in *Brooklyn Brujas.*

**La Ola Symbolized as Yemoja**

Yoruba religious practices are infused across the Atlantic into the Americas and the Caribbean through the Trans-Atlantic slave trade. As a result of this forceful dispersal by colonial invasion, the Yoruba belief systems, oral stories, and legacies were carried by enslaved practitioners. Enslaved peoples nurtured the stories of the Orishas and Olodumaré throughout generations of violence and dispossession. Across the Americas and Caribbean, Yoruba developed into other variations and is practiced among different communities. For example, Brazilian Candomblé, Lucumí, and Santería, to name a few, consist of Yoruba practices. Brazilian Candomblé is a religion developed by Afro-Brazilians and their ancestors in the 16th to 19th centuries.[54] Lucumí derives from various West African practices such as Yoruba and has developed as a religion in the Caribbean which spread across the Americas. Santería is also referred to as Lucumí. There are many variations of Santería such as Cuban Santería. The root word, 'sant' or 'santera' was used to explain that this religion had various saints, known as the Orishas. In *Brooklyn Brujas,* the religious variations of Candomblé, Lucumí, and Santería are all represented through La Ola as symbolic references to Yemoja. According to the Mortiz

migratory pattern, the belief system of the deos also survived beyond the impacts of colonialism. For example, the geographical locations of Panama, Ecuador, and Puerto Rico have a rich history of Afro-religious presence due to patterns of colonial enslavement. Therefore, this analysis highlights La Ola's shared characteristics within the various versions of the Orisha Yemoja found in Santería (Yemayá), Candomblé (Yemoja, Yemanja, & Iemanjá), and Lucumí (Yemayá) through close reading.[55]

Folklore scholar Solimar Otero's text, *Yemoja: Gender, Sexuality, Creativity in the Latina/o and Afro-Atlantic Diasporas,* notes "Yemoja is a deity known in Yoruba-based Afro-Atlantic religious cultures for her ability to dominate natural phenomena, especially aquatic zones of communication, trade, and transportation such as oceans, rivers, and lagoons. She is also associated with women, motherhood, family, and the arts" (Otero xix). References to La Ola, or the wave, parallels Yemoja through symbolism of water, the color blue, half-moons, power, and matriarchy. The Mortiz sisters preserve their ancestral spiritual practice through symbolisms of La Ola to assist in their fight against references of colonial domination, such as the figure called the Devourer and the Rot. The Devourer is a figure in *Labyrinth Lost* who attempts to conquer the mythical land of Los Lagos, translated as the lakes, a symbolic nod to Yemoja. The concept of the Devourer symbolizes colonialism's conquest of the Americas and Caribbean while attempting to erase ancestral Afro-Atlantic and Indigenous spiritual practices. Córdova writes, "[h]er cruelness has conquered many souls of Los Lagos" (149). Terms like conquer emphasize that the Devourer's intentions are to control the native people of Los Lagos. In other parts of the novel, the Devourer is cast as an intruder who wanted more lands, "the more land she possessed, the more the tribes defied her" (212). The tribes in Los Lagos are various people who are native to the land in which she is known to enslave them (206). The Devourer's

ill intentions threaten to eradicate histories, traditions, remembrance, and devotion to deities in the Devourer's process to conquer Los Lagos. The Devourer becomes a metaphor of the invasion of European conquest across the world. Furthermore, in the third book, *Wayward Witch*, the Rot is a black mass that symbolizes the effects of colonial genocide and forced migration. One of the Adas (fairies), Eliza, explains, "A Rot has taken root in our land" (104). In this description the "R" in rot is capitalized emphasizing the magnitude of power the rot possesses. The act of taking root means implanting in the earth, in which the rot is invasive to the various communities the Rot is forcing out of homes. References to La Ola as Yemoja are used as a method to push against the violent effects of the Rot and the Devourer. Yemoja is symbolized in images of mermaids, rivers, ocean, and in altar raising. The Mortiz sisters' faithful devotion to the deos and La Ola is a metaphor for the resistance to the colonial ideologies that threaten to eradicate, alter, and invalidate ancestral philosophies.

In the trilogy, the Mortiz sisters demonstrate their devotion to their ancestral practices by pledging to their faith via rituals, ceremonies, and prayers. For example, the Mortiz family rejects orthodox religions by dedicating shrines and altars to the deos, the deities, throughout their home. Lula, the oldest, illustrates spiritual devotion in her altar dedicated to La Ola. Altars are raised areas of worship where ceremonial rites are performed for god(s) and are accompanied by sets of rules for veneration. For instance, Alex explains, "Lula's altar is the only clean part of her bedroom" (*Labyrinth Lost* 15). Lula prays to La Ola as a form of devotion through her private altar located in a sacred corner of her bedroom. The bedroom signifies an intimate place where Lula prays and rests. Although Lula's unorganized bedroom reflects how she is a messy person, the altar becomes a consecrated object where Lula practices cleanliness. In Yoruba practices, the custom of cleanliness is important whether it be a spiritual cleanse or the procedure

of disinfecting during the performance of rituals and offerings. Therefore, the significance of Lula's emphasis on the cleanliness of the altar and that of Yoruba cleansing practices demonstrates the importance of sanitation and purification as an offering to the ancestors. Lula's love story takes precedence in the plot of book two, *Bruja Born*. Lula's boyfriend Maks begins to fall out of love with Lula, because she never has enough time for him as she is hiding her spiritual beliefs and supernatural abilities from Maks. She fears that he will not accept her religious practice. Alex's remark of Lula's unorganized bedroom reflects Lula's state of mind as her boyfriend, Maks, breaks up with her. The state of Lula's clean altar demonstrates that although her emotional love life is suffering, Lula still preserves the traditional values that emphasize the importance of cleanliness as spiritual hygiene, regardless of the imbalanced emotional state.

Alex's perspective of Lula's altar affirms important forms of devotion to La Ola. Alex notes, "[i]t's a shrine to La Ola, Lady of the Sea and Changing Tides. Lula got a prex made of every kind of stone, and she has all kinds of feathers and candles for all the moon cycles" (*Labyrinth Lost* 15). On Lula's altar lies a prex, described as a bruja's rosary (15). The significance of the prex as a rosary of sorts can be read in two ways: 1) as the forced influence of Christianity in Afro-Atlantic and Indigenous practices or 2) as beaded jewelry known as an eleke. In the real world, practitioners of the Yoruba variations in the Americas and Caribbean incorporate Catholic iconography in spiritual devotion. Iconography is the symbolic association of images or ideologies that carry religious significance. For example, the rosary is a beaded bracelet or necklace that represents the act of intercession through prayer. In a similar manner, Lula's prex consists of various stones in beaded form. The incorporation of a prex as a rosary reflects the forced influence of Christian beliefs amongst unorthodox practitioners especially

those that transformed rituals and iconography through forms of religious creolization. For instance, Yemayá is often symbolized by mother-like figures of the Virgin Mary and Black Madonna. In Catholicism, devotion to the Virgin Mary is rehearsed through prayer of the rosary.

In Cuban Santería, Yemayá is often represented through Catholic iconography of La Virgen de Regla, or Virgin of Rule. Catholic lore notes that in the fifth century, Augustine de Hippo, a North African born bishop, first introduced La Virgen de Regla through a dream. It is recorded that an angel appeared to him requesting that he carve an image of La Virgen. La Virgen de Regla, also known as Our Lady de Regla, became known as a Black Madonna, because of her origins in Africa. La Virgen de Regla became the protector of the seas after one of Augustine de Hippo's disciples, deacon Cipriano, carried La Virgen de Regla across a storm while sailing across the Strait of Gibraltar from Africa to Spain (Parella Anderis 7). According to Julie Parella Anderis, Cipriano's place of landing is now designated as Cheponia, a town where "it later became a primary passage for trade and immigration to the West Indies during the Conquest of the Americas" (8). Similarly, Yemayá became a well-known and respected Orisha due to her motherly protection of enslaved Yoruban practitioners during the slave trade across the Middle Passage. Other similarities between La Virgen de Regla and Yemayá are rooted in the relationships between water elements, motherhood, and place of origin.

Theological scholarship addresses La Virgen de Regla as a Catholic saint crafted through Christian visionary experience; however, it often overlooks the North African influence within Augustine de Hippo's visions and spiritual work. Yet, reading the prex as an eleke, a beaded necklace, instead of a rosary, conforms with Yoruba practices. Here, the prex becomes a material item which preserves the blessing of ancestors. Elekes are given to practitioners during the initiation ceremony, just as the Mortiz sisters are given a prex during their deathday ceremony.

Both the prex and eleke are blessed by ancestors. As a rite of passage, the prex, like an eleke, is fueled by the spirits of ancestors. Traditionally, elekes come in various colors representing ilés, or spiritual houses, and colors of the Orishas which are consecrated with blessings and energy from the Orishas during the crowning initiation ceremony (Gonzalez-Wippler 166). Rosaries, on the other hand, can be given to anyone and do not require a ceremony but are suggested to be blessed by priests. The prex reads as an eleke of sorts, instead of a rosary because of the symbolic importance of ancestral and deity blessing which serves to guide, protect, and provide power to the brujx carrying the prex.

Across the various Afro-Atlantic belief systems followers of Yemoja display devotion through other material items found on altars. Altars dedicated to Yemoja are decorated in the shades of blue, candles, salt water, and shells (Fernández Olmos & Paravisini-Gebert 52). These material items archive the symbolic presence of Yemoja. A close reading of Alex's fragmented glimpse of Lula's altar with beads, feathers, and candles highlights pieces of devotional practice in material form. La Ola is a metaphor for Yemoja; Lula's altar could contain shades of blue to represent the sea, while the feathers, stones, and candles would be the material items used during ceremonial offerings to La Ola. These spiritual items are remnants of spiritual devotion displaying the presence of spiritual figures and ancestors. Córdova embeds a fictional form of Yoruba practices like Santería in the text through material items found on Lula's altar.

**Variations of Yemayá, Yemoja, and Iemanjá in *Brooklyn Brujas***

In the Afro-Atlantic practice of Santería, La Virgen de Regla's diasporic image is often used as a placeholder for Yemayá on altars due to centuries of forced creolization and concealment of spiritual practices. Devotees of Yemoja have used La Virgen de Regla as a way

to protect the African image of Yemayá during forced Christian indoctrination and conversion. Although the image of La Virgen de Regla may serve to symbolize Yemoja, the essence of devotion is not syncretic as Catholic narratives of syncretism negate Afro-Atlantic spiritual equivalency. The worship of La Virgen de Regla as Yemoja is more complex as the La Virgen de Regla serves as a stand in image at times while the spiritual devotion, prayers, altar building, and rituals at its core are Yoruba. In Yoruba lore, Yemoja has many stories all of which place Yemoja as mother and protector. Allison Stellers text, "Yemoja: An Introduction to the Divine Mother and Water Goddess" describes various origin stories in which Yemoja births the Orishas through her bosom with water. For instance, one oral tradition remarks that her son, Orungan forcefully advanced his mother to commit incest. Filled with terror and shame, "Yemoja's body then swelled to an incredible size, and two streams began to flow from her breasts, forming a lagoon. From her body issued Shango, god of thunder; Oya, Osun, and Oba (three river goddesses, who later became wives of Shango) [...]" (Stellers 134). This oral tradition marks Yemoja as a born deity, meanwhile other oral traditions note that Yemoja was not always an Orisha but a beautiful mortal who had one breast. According to Stellers, Yemoja's lamentation was heard by "Ogun, the god of water and iron, who happened to be walking the same path, overheard her and suddenly felt the urge to marry her" (Stellers 135). Yemoja accepts Ogun's offer of marriage. The oral tradition explained that one day Ogun struck Yemoja while losing his temper with her. After feeling remorseful Ogun "stroked her breast. She began to tremble, then turned to water and slipped through his fingers" (135). In present day Nigeria, Yemoja is referred to as the spirit deity of the Ogun River following the oral tradition which places Yemoja's body into the landscape. Therefore, these two oral traditions refer to Yemoja in two aspects: first as a mother to the Orishas and second, as a woman whose fluid transformation represents water.

In *Labyrinth Lost*, Alex prays, "La Ola, Divina Madre of the Seas, carry this power to your shores" (*Labyrinth Lost* 5). As a divine mother figure, La Ola provides the Mortiz sisters with guidance and strength. Proceeding directly from the gods, La Ola transfers mystical powers granted by the supreme deity, La Mama. Yemoja is symbolically preserved through Alex's prayer because prayers are recited and taught by ancestors. Prayers are a form of magic in which devotees seek invocation or intercessions from deities. Prayer as a form of preservation is a method in safekeeping sacred beliefs, practices, and traditions. Alex's awareness of La Ola's power over the seas is significant in the way that Yemoja as a water Orisha has been carried over the Atlantic Ocean. In Santería, "Yemayá is the great universal mother. The deity of maternity, the sea, and of salt water, Yemayá gave birth to all the Orishas as well as to the sun and the moon, with which she is associated" (Fernández Olmos & Paravisini-Gebert 52). As the divine mother, Yemayá is known to have birthed the Orishas and even raised the children of her sister, Oshun.[56] The significance of oceanic and maternal references become parallels for La Ola and Yemoja (Yemayá). Alex's awareness of water is important as she continuously crosses bodies of water in her journey across Los Lagos. Córdova's texts remark a striking connection to Yemayá as a maternal figure highlighted throughout the trilogy as the Mortiz sisters look up to ancestral figures such as Aunt Ro and Mama Juanita.

Introduced early in *Labyrinth Lost*, Alex reveals that her first encounter with magical abilities prompted malocsuros, or dark shadows, to attack her and her father. After fending off the maloscuros her father disappeared. Alex blames herself for the disappearance of her father after experiencing the effects of her powers as an encantrix. She believes that her supernatural abilities either killed her father, was transported to another realm, or he left on his own will from fear. Since that encounter, Alex was fearful that her powers could provoke more grief in her

family. She hid this story from her family because she thought they would reject her and shun her out of the family. In the novel, Alex is on the verge of turning sixteen. When brujas turn sixteen they are celebrated with a deathday ceremony which grants them access to more magical abilities. As a result of fear of hurting others, she decides to interrupt her deathday ceremony. The deathday is a rite of passage that grants an ancestral blessing and provides each brujx access to the full potential of their powers when they reach the age of sixteen. Days before her ceremony, Alex meets Noveno "Nova" Santiago, a handsome "bad boy" with black tattoo-like markings on his body inside Lady's shop. Lady is presented as a wise and aged woman, with an obscure life who owns a botanica. A botanica is an herbal shop where the Mortiz family acquires supplies for ceremonial and medicinal practice. In an attempt to resist the blessing, Alex places a blocking canto, or spell, which she finds with the Mortiz family book of cantos, a text that is generationally passed between members of the family. Alex turns to the book of cantos because the book withholds generations of knowledge written by her ancestors. Alex seeks assistance in the preserved spells to help block her deathday blessing. In turn, the blocking canto recoils and banishes her family to the land of Los Lagos.

Los Lagos is a mythical island where brujx lives go to rest. In Alex's journey, she acquires Nova's help, and they then encounter the Devourer. As a symbol of colonialism, the Devourer, commits genocide, conquest of the land, and implements life prison sentencing. Across their journey, Alex feels the pressure and guilt of banishing her family to Los Lagos. Alex, exhausted from her journey, wades in a pond when all of a sudden, a figure appears before her. Alex expresses, "I know I am dreaming when I stand on top of the pond. I jump when I fear I am falling straight through the surface, but my feet only create small ripples. There's a woman standing in front of me. When I recognize her, I want to fall on my knees and weep" (*Labyrinth*

*Lost* 231). This depiction of a woman appearing before her turns out to be her grandmother Mama Juanita who carries the symbolic description of Yemayá (231). The conjuring of Mama Juanita is a practice of summoning spirits for protection and guidance. Mama Juanita's power and wisdom transcends Alex's dream. In this dream, Mama Juanita is described as having skin dark as coffee, gray eyes, and in a long white dress (231). Mama Juanita's long white dress represents purity and the attire of Santeras during initiation ceremonies. In Brazilian Candomblé, practitioners wear white on the Iemanjá's festival day. Additionally, Mama Juanita's white dress resembles that of Santera initiates and the attire of spiritual praise during ceremonies. The apparition of Mama Juanita rising from the water resembles that of stories that explain Yemayá as the deity of water.

**Iemanja/Yemanja in *Wayward Witch***

In the third book, *Wayward Witch*, the symbolic use of mermaids in the novel plays an important part in Rose Mortiz's battle against the Rot from taking over the land of Las Adas. Las Adas is a magical land filled with fairies and other creatures. The third novel centers on Rose, the youngest Mortiz sister, who was forcefully taken through kidnapping. On her deathday, Rose was attacked and taken to the Kingdom of Las Adas where she uncovers the Rot, a mass of blackness that is seeping into the land of Las Adas and sucks the life out of everything it touches. The Rot in *Wayward Witch* signifies forced migration, displacement, corruption, and colonial violence. In the climax of the text, Rose develops her powers as a Siphon. A Siphon is a person who can draw from another's powers as their own. In Las Adas, Rose is conquered through kidnapping by King Cierro, a fairy. Rose is forced to fight as King Cierro's warrior in an attempt

to disrupt the Rot from taking over the island of Las Adas. In this text, Córdova symbolically refers to Iemanjá through references to water, such as rivers and oceans.

In Brazilian Candomblé, Iemanjá, or Yemanja, is the goddess of the seas and oceans. Just like the other Yoruba variations, Iemanjá is known for being the protector of the seas and of fishermen. Paul Mason's article "Festival for the Queen of the Seas" remarks that "In the Northeast [of Brazil], she is an Orisha, a nature Goddess, a divinized African ancestor worshiped by the followers of Candomblé. Iemanjá can be depicted as a seductive mermaid, a buxom African woman, and even the Mother Mary" (Mason 14). The stories surrounding Iemanjá as a mermaid was taken up in visual work by artists such as Nelson Boeira Faederich who created a collection titled, "Deuses do Panteão Africano (Gods of the African Pantheon) (Orixás)." In Faedrich's collection of Orixá images painted in 1976-1978, Iemanjá is depicted as a mermaid wearing a skirt of cowrie shells rising out of the ocean underneath the moonlight. Iemanjá appears as Mother Dayo, a mermaid queen in the third novel.

Mother Dayo appears before Rose having "scales the bright blue of a parrotfish covering her forearms, shoulders, her large breasts, and the sides of her wide belly" (*Wayward* 230). Contending with references to Iemanjá as a full-figure or what Mason considers a Buxom woman, Feadrich's image too, depicts a voluptuous Iemanjá.[57] In addition to the physical description, Rose mentions that "though her deep-brown skin is smooth of wrinkles, I can see how ancient she is in the sharpness of her eyes. When she turns to me, it is like I can *feel* her power, old as the seas" (231). Ancient refers to a time period that exceeded colonialism just like the existence of bodies of water that preceded life itself. Mama Dayo as a venerable figure displays how well respected, she is among the Adas, fairies. Mother Dayo's sensible presence refers to the forceful energy that she obtains and is felt by those that come into contact with her.

Rose mentions that Mama Dayo's glares impose a sensation of energies across her body. Mother Dayo's presence highlight strength and wisdom and is read in the intensity of her eyes as she assists Rose and the other warriors crossing the river. Mother Dayo serves as a guide both spiritually and physically for Rose and her mission to save the Kingdom of Adas.

Spiritual devotion to Iemanjá in *Wayward Witch* is reproduced in the form of a song. The witch's song #23 found in the book of cantos notes, "[t]he mermaid queen has a sweet song for me! I must go find it at the bottom of the sea" (*Wayward Witch* 215). The mermaid queen in this song can be a way to remember the deaths of enslaved Africans kidnapped and forced onto ships to cross the Atlantic Ocean. In addition, the bottom of the sea signifies how Iemanjá is the protector of fishermen especially those who experience shipwrecks. In the festival for Iemanjá, Brazilian fishermen are the ones that pass offerings to Iemanjá by placing the offerings of flowers, perfumes, beauty products, coins, and mirrors in the ocean. (Mason 14). If Iemanjá rejects the items offered, they will wash up ashore, if they are accepted, they will stay in the ocean. At the end of *Wayward Witch*, Rose brings her devotion full circle as she commemorates Mother Dayo by wearing a "fine blue silk" dress resembling that of garments worn by children of Yemoja, Yemayá, and Iemanjá (348). Ada's such as Iris, Rose's friend, mentions "[y]ou look like the sea, Rose" (347). Blue is the symbolic spiritual color of Iemanjá and is worn during ceremonies. Mama Dayo gives Rose a beautiful blue dress to wear for the ceremony of knighthood and celebratory feast. Rose is knighted as a protector, just like Iemanjá is a protector.

The symbolic presence of the different variations of Yemoja addresses how female spiritual figures have become more recently adopted into Latinx literature. Solimar Otero notes, "Latina/o and Afro-Atlantic cultural production surrounding Yemoja have been creolized, hybridized, and combined through creativity on a transcultural and transnational scale" (Otero

xxv). Spiritual figures are continuously transformed although the essence of their power and religious symbolism remains static. For Otero, Yemoja is a deity whose root story is stagnant, but is culturally reproduced due to colonial conquest, limited access to resources, and production of art. The creative process of writing allows Córdova to reconstruct Yemoja as La Ola to her readers as sacred remembrance of African beliefs that shape spirituality in the America and Caribbean. Córdova combines various spiritual figures, yet while not belonging to the practice of Yoruba, Santería, Candomblé, or Mexican folklore. According to Otero, this adopted creolization in Córdova's novels demonstrates how spiritual figures transcend various backgrounds and religious/spiritual beliefs that make up Latina spirituality. Córdova continues to combine various Afro-Atlantic and Indigenous beliefs while building a fictional world where representations of real-world spiritual presence exist and are centered in literature.

**La Santisima Muerte, Mictecacihuatl & Yewá/Yeguá**

In *Brooklyn Brujas,* Lady de la Muerte is a pivotal spiritual figure that represents death. Lady de la Muerte is the central deity in the second novel, *Bruja Born*, who symbolizes three distinct figures: La Santisima Muerte, Mictecacihuatl, and Yewá (Yeguá or Ewá). Each figure carries similar characteristics across Afro-Atlantic and Indigenous oral stories. Lady de la Muerte holds distinct representations of La Santisima Muerte, Mictecacihuatl, and Yewá. In examining each spiritual version, I demonstrate the ways in which La Santisima Muerte, Mictecacihuatl, and Yewá are preserved through the offerings of knowledge, guidance, and authority to Lula and Alex Mortiz throughout their spiritual journey. The preservation of these figures in literature is significant to the ever-present existence of spiritual and cultural values. Furthermore, the symbolic resemblances between the spiritual figures and Lady de la Muerte

provoke the identity transformation of the Mortiz sisters as authoritative brujas. Throughout *Brooklyn Brujas*, Córdova provides readers with vestiges of La Santisima Muerte, Mictecacihuatl, and Yewá as a method to write spiritual figures as powerful characters. These spiritual characters symbolize feared deities because La Santisima Muerte, Mictecacihuatl, and Yewá are well respected, not because they are associated with negative European perceptions of "black magic," death, or the devil.

The first spiritual figure interpreted through the character of Lady de la Muerte is Yewá. Yewá is a Yoruba Orisha who lives in the cemetery. Yewá is known as Yeguá or Ewá, depending on the variation of Yoruba spiritual practice. Migene Gonzales-Wipper's, *Santería the Religion* notes, "Yewá (Yeguá) is an Orisha of many mysteries. She is said to symbolize death (Ikú) or the transition of death [...]" (Gonzalez-Wipper 64). As a symbol of death, Yewá is respected by practitioners even those who are not crowned by Yewá.[58] Out of respect for the sacred stories and knowledge of these spiritual practices, Yewá is often the least discussed Orisha outside of the religion. The obscurity that surrounds Yewá to non-practitioners is synonymous to the narratives of the fictional character Lady de la Muerte in *Bruja Born*. Lula notes, "[O]f all the Deos, Lady de la Muerte is the one we know the least about" (*Bruja Born* 109). It is surprising that Lady de la Muerte is the least known deo because in the first book, Alex calls upon Lady de la Muerte for assistance in her deathday blocking canto. The ambiguity that surrounds Lady de la Muerte highlights how sacredness and secrecy are centered around figures in the novel that represent death. In addition, the obscurity leads Lula's curiosity to seek answers from Angela Santiago, "one of the scariest brujas in Brooklyn" (169). Angela is feared because she is a follower of Lady de la Muerte, who possesses unique macabre characteristics. Angela, too, becomes respected in the brujx community because of her powers. In juxtaposing

Yewá's followers with Angela demonstrates how non-practitioners of specific belief systems synonymously translate obscurity with fright.

**La Santisima Muerte**

The second figure that possesses the quality to death is the folk saint, La Santisima Muerte. La Santisima Muerte, or often called "Santa Muerte [is] known by many nicknames and endearments, such as "La Niña Blanca" (White Girl), "La Flaca" (Skinny Girl), "Mi Reina" (My Queen), "Mi Niña Bonita" (My Beautiful Girl) or "Madrina" (Godmother)" (Martin 2). The terms of endearment like niña bonita and mi reina highlight a loving saint, unlike the negative portrayals that place La Santisima Muerte as a diabolical figure in the eyes of orthodox practitioners and Christian religious systems. Even though the Mortiz sisters consider themselves as brujas, it is important to situate that any unorthodox practice in the form of devotion or ritual would be perceived as "black magic" or "brujería" by some Christian followers, if it were in the real world. In this fantastical world, the Mortiz demonstrates that Lady de la Muerte is a deity that plays an important role in the balance of life because Lady de la Muerte can take years off lives but negotiates with the Mortiz sisters which lives to take.

In *Brooklyn Brujas* death is symbolized in ceremonial practices used by the brujx community. For example, in *Labyrinth Lost*, Alex notes that "Brujos and brujas were dressed in mourning white, their faces painted in aspects of the dead, white clay and black coal to trace the bones." (3). Similarly, the tradition of honoring the dead is found in the Mexican tradition of Día de los Muertos. La Catrina, as a skeletal figure, was introduced in the Mexican cultural tradition of Día de los Muertos by cartoon artist, José Guadalupe Posada Aguilar. According to Ayer Analú's Lopez's blog, "Satirical Calaveras and Day of the Dead," La Catrina was originally

named La Calavera Garbancera, a character used to make fun of Mexican politics. Posada Aguilar illustrated La Catrina as a skeletal figure with elegant clothing. Posada considered la Catrina as the "mother of all calaveras" (Analú Lopez 2017). La Catrina has become a cultural icon, often revered as a beautiful, deathly mother-figure. In a similar manner, La Santisima Muerte is described as a skeletal figure, yet she is often considered ghoulish. Córdova fashions imagery from Mexican culture throughout the Mortiz's multiple ceremonial events. More specifically, La Catrina is symbolized during ceremonial practices used in Aunt Rosaria's (Ro) resurrection and during Alex's deathday ceremony.

In the beginning of *Labyrinth Lost*, Alex references calaveras, or skeletons, during Aunt Ro's passing. Alex describes the significance of the "death mask" as skull-like painted faces decorated by white and black coal. Alex explains that during the ceremony, "[t]hey danced in two circles– the outer ring going clockwise, the inner counterclockwise– hands clasped tight, voices vibrating to the pulsing drum" (*Labyrinth Lost* 3). In the center of the circle lies Aunt Ro whose body is conjured through the canto, or magical intention, of spiritual possession. The dance around Aunt Ro is an attempt to reveal the cause of death. Then, the high circle, leaders of the brujx, chant, "[f]ollow our voices, sister. Tell us the secret of your death" (1). Each member is dressed in ceremonial white attire highlighting the themes of honor, purity, and innocence. In unison, the high circle venerates Aunt Ro's spirit preparing her for the afterlife while seeking an explanation of her unexpected death. In the novel, conjuring can only be used momentarily on brujx spirits, because if the brujx interfere too much they disrupt the balance of life and death. Conjuring is only available to seek answers, such as Aunt Ro's mysterious death. Use of resurrection on sinmagos, or mortals without magical abilities, is prohibited. In the ceremony, the faces of the participants in the conjuring ceremony reflect that of the dead as a sign of

respect. Therefore, the conjuring ritual posits depictions of La Catrina and the Mexican tradition of the Day of the Dead used to guide ancestor's spirits back to the Earth.

In another celebration, the deathday receiver, Alex, wears the exact "death mask" (77). Alex illustrates, "My mother dips her fingers in a bowl of white clay [...] Then comes the coal. She traces the black of bone around my eyes, down my nose, my lips, my cheeks. We wear the face of the dead so the waking spirits feel at home" (77). The brujx call this ceremony a deathday to demonstrate that death is not an end, but a beginning of a new life filled with the blessings and guidance of ancestors. Unlike a baptism, which centers Christian sacraments, the deathday is a practice that honors Indigenous practices. Alex is required to make a blood sacrifice both by animal and through her own blood to receive blessing. Therefore, Alex sacrifices a parakeet of her choosing, meanwhile her hand is sliced by Lady, the high circle priestess (77). Alex's deathday initiation ritual follows ancestral practices of sacrifice. Sacrifice is a sacred intentional offering in the form of energetic forces, corporeal, or animal. Sacrifices have been used physically or metaphorically, many commonly known practices of sacrifice involve an offering with hopes of deities, or a god influencing the lives of the living.[59]

Depictions of sacrifice and offering resemble that of devotion to La Santisima Muerte. The sacrifice that Alex's deathday reproduces is a traditional attempt to please the gods. Yet, Alex wants to reject the blessing altogether. Further, the ritual of sacrifice links Córdova's symbolic references to La Santisima Muerte and La Catrina as skeletal figures that originated from Aztec-lore. The Aztec celebration of the dead and souls is found in the celebration of Micailhuitl, or celebration of the dead. In the Aztec belief system, Mictecacihuatl, "Lady of the Dead" is the goddess of death and is expressed as a skeletal figure. The Codex Borgia presents images of Mictecacihuatl as a corpse-like figure with flayed skin (Codex Borgia Section 20,

image 56; Analú López 2017). Aztec-lore explains that Mictecacihuatl is a death deity. As a deity, Mictecacihuatl governs the underworld filled with the bones of the dead. Similarly, figures like La Santisima Muerte, La Catrina, Yewá, and Lady de La Muerte all possess the image of rulers or spiritual guides with skeletal features. Alex calls upon Lady de la Muerte as a spiritual guide for protection against her deathday blessing. However, Alex doesn't know how to properly engage with cantos, she calls upon Lady de la Muerte regardless of the result. Without assistance from Lady de la Muerte's blocking canto, Alex would have never been granted the prestigious title of an encantrix, the most powerful bruja within the brujx community. The deos intercede in the lives of the brujx. As an encantrix, Alex has direct access to the deo, because on the hierarchical scale Alex is third in line to spiritual power. Alex is a bruja who receives power through energetic forces, or blessings, from the deos. The brujx seek guidance from Alex and honor her because she was chosen by the deos as the ultimate spiritual protector.

**Lady de la Muerte's Spiritual Significance in *Bruja Born***

In the beginning of *Bruja Born*, Lula and the Thorne Hill High soccer team were involved in a tragic bus accident. In this scene, Lady de la Muerte physically appears while collecting the lives of the deceased teenagers. The accident nearly kills her ex-boyfriend, Maks, who moments before the accident breaks up with Lula. While on the verge of death, Lula encounters Lady de la Muerte's spiritual presence. Lula remarks, "Lady de la Muerte. Goddess of Death and the Mortal Earth's Dawn" (*Bruja Born* 30). Lula's tone demonstrates the respect she has for Lady de la Muerte, although it can be mistaken for fear. As the deo of death, Lady de la Muerte does not reveal herself physically to the brujx nor those who pay homage to her, like Nova Santiago's grandmother, Angela Santiago. This apparition makes Lula the only bruja to

have ever seen Lady de la Muerte. Therefore, allowing Lula to build an unexpected relationship with Lady de la Muerte as she traverses the moral lines of bruja politics.

The apparition of Lady de la Muerte in Lula's narrative symbolically demonstrates the ways in which various Indigenous, Afro-Atlantic, and Mexican cultures reference and ask favors from La Santisima Muerte, Mictecacihuatl and Yewá. In addition, Lady de la Muerte provides Lula with unforeseen spiritual guidance as Lula engages with prohibited magic in attempts to save Mak's life through resurrection. However, the result of Lula's unethical practice of cantos of resurrection on a sinmago provides Lula the opportunity to be in Lady de la Muerte's physical and spiritual presence. Lula examines:

> She stands at the center of the highway, dressed in black. Her face is pale as the moon and her eyes are black as the longest night. She's completely bald, wearing a crown of twisted gold thorns that dig into her skull but still don't draw blood. Her dress blows in the breeze and she walks with a spear, the sharp end of its metallic spike that sparks when she slams it on the ground (*Bruja Born* 30).

Lady de la Muerte's presence at the center of the highway represents the ability to stop time. Highways are roads in which commuters are able to move quickly across cities, but Lady de l a Muerte's presence shows that she is a supreme deo who can immediately end movement. Lula's description of Lady de la Muerte wearing a gold crown that doesn't draw blood represents that Lady de la Muerte is a deo who is a skeletal figure. The crown on Lady de la Muerte's head does not pierce through the skull because she doesn't have blood to draw. In *Labyrinth Lost,* Alex remarks that the "Gods don't bleed" (207). Here, Lady de la Muerte's sharp crown symbolically highlights that she is not of the earthly realm.

References to Lady de la Muerte's as a figure of the night refers to the aesthetic characteristics of La Santisima Muerte. In the novels, Lady de la Muerte's spear alludes to the scythe that La Santisima Muerte iconically carries. During Lula's attempt to resurrect Maks, she accidentally transforms him into a casimuerto, half-dead. Casimuertos are a danger to society as they can kill others and build an army of casimuertos. In turn, the spear becomes a powerful tool in correcting the wrongdoings of Lula Mortiz's actions. Lady de la Muerte requires the spear to fend off the casimuertos. Therefore, Lula is selected to retrieve the spear so Lady de la Muerte can collect the bodies of the dead. Similarly, La Santisima Muerte's scythe represents the cutting of lives from the Earth. In *Bruja Born*, Lula's canto goes wrong and tethers all the casimuertos through an invisible thread linking her with the casimuerto teenagers of Thorne Hill High. Therefore, the tethered thread, Lady de la Muerte's spear, and La Santisima Muerte's scythe symbolizes the moment of removing souls and energies that spiritual figure collects.

The commonalities between Lady de la Muerte and La Santisima Muerte lie beyond the scythe. La Santisima Muerte's iconic physical appearance and garments reflect those worn by Lady de la Muerte. Jessica Kindrick's article "The African Roots of La Santa Muerte" explores the ways that La Santisima Muerte, or Santa Muerte, is celebrated throughout the Americas. Kindrick writes, "Traditionally she wears a black, red, or white robe, and each color representations reflect la Santa Muerte serving in a different capacity" (Kindrick 9). The devotion to La Santisima Muerte and specific requests are symbolized through the colors of her garments and candles found on altars. In *Bruja Born*, Lady de la Muerte wears a black dress, meanwhile worshippers of La Santisima Muerte use black candles and the statue of La Santisima Muerte in a black garment. The black garments and black candles are requests to "neutralize enemies, avenge real or imagined wrong doings to them, or for protection of themselves or

goods" (Kindrick 13). Lady de La Muerte's black garment and spear are not just for aesthetic purposes that represent death, but address Lula's wrongdoings. Lula's attempt to avenge the harm done to her because she blames Alex for the scars on her face, banishing her to Los Lagos, and making her mentally and emotionally distant from Maks. Lula intervenes in Maks's death by tethering his life to hers, yet she is unaware of the consequences of her immoral actions.

While images of La Santisima Muerte dressed in black garments are mistaken as a connection to "black magic," La Santisima Muerte also represents duality (Martin 3). Duality is the condition of obtaining contrasting concepts, such as good and bad. As a figure of duality, La Santisima Muerte's devotees worship her in various ways, many of which are symbolized on altars or iconography. In *Bruja Born*, La Santisima Muerte is archived within Angela Santiago's large scaled material altar. Lula addresses "Hundreds of small, white flowers and melting candles are lined on the floor. The entire *room* is her altar. That is when I notice something else between the flowers. Skulls. Some human, some animal, all covered in traces of dirt as if fresh from the grave" (*Bruja Born* 181). The room is transformed into a space dedicated to Lady de La Muerte. This expansive space has tons of white flowers in which Latinx communities use white flowers to symbolize death, innocence, and purity during funeral ceremonies. The candles represent Angela's non-stop devotion as the melted candles have been used before Mortiz sisters appear in Angela's private altar space. As Angela's patron deity, Lady de la Muerte is reproduced as a life-sized figure. In doing so, Angela humanizes Lady de la Muerte. Angela's offerings to Lady de la Muerte significantly resemble the sacrifices offered to Mictecacihuatl. Angela offers Lady de la Muerte skulls as a form of sacrifice. By addressing that the skulls seem recently removed from the grave Lula hints that Angela recently offered the skeletal heads of the

recently deceased to Lady de la Muerte. Furthermore, Angela's active altar becomes a shrine for Lady de la Muerte.

Angela's dedicated room becomes a sanctuary where candles, flowers, and sacrifices are made on an often occurrence. Otero notes, "[i]nstead of seeing artifacts and archives as products of one decipherable ephemeral moment, objects like spirit dolls, beaded vessels, offerings on altars, and cloth banners provide invitations for revisiting and renegotiating spiritual connections repeatedly" (Otero 62). The objects used as sacrifices or offerings comment on the ever-present relationship between deities, spirits, and practitioners. Rather than reading the items on Angela's altar as temporary moments of spiritual devotion the objects transcend beyond time because there is a constant reciprocal relationship between Lady de la Muerte and Angela outside of the physical material items. The candles, skulls, and flowers only express that material moment of offering, meanwhile Angela continuously honors Lady de la Muerte. Angela explains, "Lady de la Muerte has collected so many lives as a product of my magic, it is only fitting I choose her as the patron of my magic. She is a reminder that everything ends, even the reign of god. Even this world" (*Bruja Born* 188). Angela's altar stores the ways in which she bargains with her magical abilities and spirituality. Therefore, the altar becomes a repository of material offerings and immaterial devotion. No matter the day, time, or circumstance, Angela's physical altar houses the intentions brought forth to Lady de la Muerte.

Lady de la Muerte's altar is similar to real-world altars dedicated to La Santisima Muerte. Devotees of La Santisima Muerte provide offerings that La Santisima Muerte finds pleasurable. For example, cigarettes, food, drugs, flowers, and alcohol. Kindrick notes, "La Santa Muerte has proven to be more dependable than the traditional saints of the Catholic church and that she will do things the traditional saints would not" (Kindrick 10). La Santisima Muerte has become

popular as she is considered an "amoral" saint. Unconcerned with whether actions are considered "good" or "bad," La Santisima Muerte provides for devotees, especially those who give offerings. Similarly, in *Brooklyn Brujas,* the characters Lula Mortiz and Angela Santiago did not follow the moral and ethical values of the high council. As an "amoral" saint, La Santisima Muerte falls into the category of a folk saint unrecognized by the Catholic church which often becomes synonymous with brujería, because La Santisima Muerte is not canonized.

Despite the growing numbers in worshipers the Catholic church refuses to recognize La Santisima Muerte as a canonized saint, however, she is commonly revered by Catholic and non-Catholic practitioners. Since La Santisima Muerte represents the dead and death itself, many devotees respect her as an almighty figure who fulfills their wishes. Regardless of her status, La Santisima Muerte is known for not judging or discriminating against the marginalized based on sexual orientation, gender, race, class, (dis)ability, or identity. As an "amoral" saint, La Santisima Muerte does not withhold miracles from those who violate individual or communal ethics or morals codes. La Santisima Muerte expects followers to fulfill their end of the deal in the form of either sacrifices or offering. Similarly, in Lula's case, Lady de la Muerte recognizes that Lula has failed to uphold the brujx's standards in the moment she tethered Maks's life to hers. Therefore, Maks transforms into a casimuerto, a figure who is half-dead morally. Córdova writes, "[i]t's a punishment of the Deos when a bruja violates the laws of life" (*Bruja Born* 145). Lula breaches the brujx ordinance that governs the ways in which the brujx are allowed to practice cantos. Lula becomes conscious that her actions are subjected to castigation. Lula exclaims, "*[t]his is Lady de la Muerte's punishment*" (145). As a disciplinary action, Lula is told by Lady de la Muerte to make the sacrifice, however, Lula believes the sacrifice must be her own body. In making a sacrifice, Lula presents her love for Maks as an offering to Lady de la Muerte.

The ultimate sacrifice that Lady de la Muerte wants to acquire is love because love's powerful force is stronger than life. In this pivotal scene, the act of abnegation provides Lula with the ability to find her own identity as a bruja. As a result, Lula must blindly follow the guidance from the deo, Lady de la Muerte, but first Lula must make the sacrifice for Lady de la Muerte to avenge Lula's wrongdoings.

While Lula tries to correct her wrongdoings, she searches for the spear and becomes unaware that the Thorne Hill Alliance (THA) and Knights of Lavant are following her. In the text, the colonial institutions are represented through the THA (Thorne Hill Alliance) and Knights of Lavant. The THA and Knights of Lavant parallel colonial institutions that persecute women who access prohibited power. The THA is an organization that implements rules and regulations of magical abilities and use of spiritual power (*Brooklyn Brujas* 213). Meanwhile, the Knights of Lavant, also known as hunters or sworn protectors, symbolize 15$^{th}$ through 19$^{th}$ century witch-hunters. Lula's actions put her on THA and the Knights of Lavant's radar. The Thorne Hill Alliance and Knights of Lavant become threatened by rising cases of the casimuertos in the world and intercede Lula's quest in finding Lady de la Muerte's spear. The THA and Knights of Lavant symbolically resemble colonial institutions such as the inquisition curated to "promote a sense of safety" to those who are skeptical of the supernatural. Yet, this false sense of safety is a ploy to marginalize spiritual practices that offer power outside of colonial institutions. For example, Lula's power was influenced by her magical abilities to tether Maks's life to hers. Although Lula's actions were prohibited, she proceeded to engage in following Lady de la Muerte's orders. As a result, Lady de la Muerte forces Lula to correct the wrongdoings fostered by the prohibited tethering spell. Lady de la Muerte's orders ultimately provide Lula agency both in her relationship with Maks and as a self-identifying bruja.

In seeking guidance from Lady de la Muerte both Mortiz sisters, Alex and Lula become a threat to the THA and Knights of Lavant mission which focuses on containing magic. Nova remarks "The Knights of Lavant existed to rid the world of evil and keep the supernatural hidden. But not all things that look monstrous are evil" (213). Here, Nova's embedded message remarks that not all things ghastly are considered wicked. Just as unorthodox practices are not aligned with European conceptions of "black magic." Although unorthodox practices may look fearful or different it doesn't mean that they are morally unethical or "bad." For instance, Alex's use of power as a powerful encantrix cannot be tamed by either the THA or the Knights of Lavant in *Bruja Born*. As a last resort effort to control Alex's untamed power, the THA confines her into a sealed bunker where her magic is contained. Therefore, Alex's power becomes terms for imprisonment and endangerment. On the other hand, Lula's access to prohibited power is threatening in the sense that only the deo can correct Lula's canto. The THA and Knights of Lavant are positions held by male characters, meanwhile, the Mortiz sisters and Lady de la Muerte, a supernatural deity, are female. Ultimately, Lula and Alex challenge the enforcement positions held by the THA or Knights of Lavant, such that the female characters are threatening to the systemic patriarchal structure that enforces laws and regulation on the supernatural presence in *Brooklyn Brujas*. In addition, Nova's remark uses terms such as "evil" and "monstrous" allude to Lady de la Muerte's physical appearance and power that have been synonymously mistaken as brujería because Lady de la Muerte is the symbolic opposite of Christian beliefs that surround repentance and life. As a figure of opposition, Lady de la Muerte does not require her devotees to live a sin-free life, rather all she requires is respect for her power. The haunting of Lady de la Muerte across the trilogy comments how Indigenous beliefs have been marginalized by the hegemonic society yet are still ever-present. Figures of death in

the Americas and Caribbean are respected figures, but the Christian association of death with darkness has influenced the minds of orthodox believers into associating spiritual figures of death as demonic.

**Conclusion**

The La Ola and Lady de la Muerte in *Brooklyn Brujas* documents the multiple generations of devotion toward Afro-Atlantic and Indigenous deities. As a result, spiritual figures such as Yemoja and La Santisima Muerte have been integrated within contemporary literature. Although speculative fiction has been synonymous with terms such as "superstitious" or "fictitious," contemporary Latinx authors have integrated real world spirituality as inspiration for belief systems employed by fictitious characters. Córdova uses the Mortiz faith to speak toward the ways in which Yemoja and La Santisima Muerte have become Latinx spiritual and cultural icons. As icons, Yemoja and La Santisima Muerte are constantly reproduced in popular culture because they have become symbols of cultural and spiritual existence.

Yemoja and La Santisima Muerte speak the characters through tangible and intangible objects both on altars in the novels and in real world altars. The objects become expressive ways that retell narratives of spiritual connection. Here, the spiritual arises through metaphorical visions and in sacred altars. The spiritual figure of La Ola can be read symbolically as various versions of Yemoja. In doing so, Córdova builds a repository of Afro-Atlantic symbolisms of devotion. The symbolism in the trilogy is highlighted in the Mortiz family's prayers, offerings, ancestors, and performed rituals. Therefore, the symbolism of Yemoja challenges how unorthodox spiritual figures are often overlooked and associated with Eurocentric perceptions of brujería. Authors such as Córdova embed traditions of spiritual practice and interweave figures

like Yemoja and La Santisima Muerte to bring forth a variety of religious and spiritual practice within Latinx communities.

La Santisima Muerte lingers within the archive of Latinx literature calling for a further investigation of religious influences across various genres, such as speculative fiction. As previously stated in the "Introduction," images of La Santisima Muerte are found in various contemporary speculative fiction texts such as Aiden Thomas's *Cemetery Boys* (2020). The influence of death in the trilogy speaks to how Mictecacihuatl, Yewá, and La Santisima Muerte have become icons of resistance. In *Brooklyn Brujas*, Lady de la Muerte is a deity even though La Santisima Muerte is not a god but a saint figure in the real world. Córdova rewrites Lady de la Muerte as a deity to reference the origin of Mictecacihuatl as an Aztec goddess. In the trilogy, Córdova preserves the image of La Santisima Muerte as Lady de la Muerte. Even though La Santisima Muerte is not canonized in Catholicism, she has one of the fastest growing populations of worship. Córdova uses characters like Angela to display how worshipers of death are spiritual beings. In using terms like bruja, Córdova uses creative writing to reclaim oppressive histories that circulate Indigenous and Afro-Atlantic figures as invalid, "evil," and myths. Thus, scholarly work that critiques Latinx literature must be conscious of the ways in which real world spiritual figures are often mistakenly categorized as "witchcraft." Córdova's character, Angela, provides a commentary on how women are categorized as brujas if they do not follow the dominant religion or practices of worship. The implementation of real-world spiritual figures into speculative fiction is an act of preservation. In the author's note of *Labyrinth Lost*, Córdova shares that Santería and Día de los Muertos provided the inspiration for the brujx faith in her trilogy (319). Although the narratives in Córdova's books over emphasize spiritual devotion through excessive supernatural powers in a fictional world, there are vestiges of real-world practices that mirror

ancestral practices. The paper trails of spiritual devotion in Córdova's trilogy preserve spiritual figures like Yemoja and La Santisima Muerte and practices of spiritual devotion in Latinx literature even though it is categorized as speculative fiction.

# CODA: THE FUTURE OF PUBLISHING TRENDS

In the United States, the COVID-19 pandemic sent young adult book readership into new record heights in 2021. According to the NPD Bookscan, a sales tracking company, young adult fantasy genre jumped over 50% from the previous two years (NPD.com). Although there was a consumer increase, the NPD's data does not reflect that of loaned library books in print or audio form through services like Libby. Recent data, from 2021, highlights the young adult genre had a major increase in sales, however, categories like young adult fantasy had a record of 45.3% in sales compared to 2020 (publisherweekly.com). The significance of this data reveals that YA literature is one of the most read genres since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. Literature occupied people's time as entertainment while many people were sheltered at home. Reading trends over the past few years have become a site of inquiry for many research institutions. In 2022, the Pew Research Center released data explaining that over the span of 12 months readers still preferred books in print over e-books or audio books (2022). In sum, books in print dominated in consumer trends by over 35% compared to books in e-book format and over 42% compared to audio books. Although these numbers represent an increase in readership over the past years, it does not reflect the trends of racial disparities or Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) book releases in the publishing industry.

In 2022, PEN America an advocacy organization that focuses on literary expression, compiled an extensive report on race and publishing trends throughout the United States. Records show that "95 percent of American fiction books published between 1950 and 2018 were written by white people" (Pen.org). Only 5 percent were books published by BIPOC authors over the span of 68 years. In 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic was at its height and many people found refuge in literature as an escape. In May 2020, the death of George Floyd, a

Minneapolis man, resurfaced police brutality and historical violence against Black bodies across the United States. Social injustice movements like Black Lives Matter (BLM) forced publishing presses to restructure the ways the industry had marginalized communities of color across hiring rates, executive boards, and publishing. Presses such as HarperCollins, Simon & Schuster, and Hachette Book Group implemented diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) positions into their companies.

Before the painful events in 2020, critics like Christopher Meyers addressed in "The Apartheid of Children's Literature" that representation matters and that BIPOC have been historically represented in children and young adult literature only when discussing historical events that reproduce violence on Black and Brown bodies (Meyers 2014). Meyers unravels the racial disparities in the book publishing industry. According to Meyers, stories that have BIPOC characters usually only appear during discussions of slavery, race, or civil rights. Narratives that have been historically pushed to the mainstream audience often written by White authors center BIPOC characters as "evil" or the "bad guys," especially in fantasy, fairy tales, speculative fiction, television, and film. For example, In the *Road to El Dorado* (2000), a DreamWorks film, where Tzekel-Kan, a Mayan priest is the antagonist in a narrative that follows the journey to two conquistadors in the New World. Meyers explains "[m]any of the fairy tale stories in popular culture have associated skin color, such as deeper complexion with "villains" (2014). Meyers argues for the importance of supporting BIPOC authors in the quest of publication to counteract negative tropes, archetypes, and stigmas that surround BIPOC characters. Literary scholar Ebony Thomas calls this concept the "Dark Other." The "Dark Other" originated in racist ideologies that were structured to pose people of color as fearful, non-human, "evil," and violent. In literature, BIPOC characters are crafted into the "Dark Other" as stories either lack characters of

color or position them as the antagonist. Thomas explains, the "Dark Other" is the "implicit message that readers, hearers, and viewers of color receive […] that *we are the villains"* (4). Tropes of villainy are stigmas that haunt and reproduce colonial discourses of violence. The way to combat this violence is by promoting literature that has diverse characters, written by BIPOC authors, and intentionally disrupts the concept of the "Dark Other."

The publishing world is a space that has been influenced by gatekeeping tactics that have previously negated racial, ethnic, and cultural representation. The lack of BIPOC authors in children's or young adult genres is grounded in the publisher's tendency to marginalize BIPOC creative and literary work. Ultimately, the circulation and publishing of text lies in the hands of the institution of publishing. Daniel José Older posits a similar argument in "Diversity is Not Enough." Older explains that "[l]ack of racial diversity is a symptom. The underlying illness is institutional racism. It walks hand in hand with sexism, cissexism, homophobia, and classism. To go beyond this same conversation we keep having, again and again, beyond tokens and quick fixes, requires us to look the illness in the face and destroy it" (Older 2014). Here Older hints that the lack of diversity across publishing trends, book covers, and narratives is a systemic problem. Terms like illness, infection, ailment, and condition refer to institutional racism as an issue that impairs the ability to achieve racial diversity. Older references to the conditions that manifest from the cancer of colonial ideologies that have been implemented and spread throughout history to attempt to erase communities of color as a symptom. The United States was built on racism, genocide, and capitalism and this pervading illness has been prevalent since the colonial informed foundation of the country. Institutional racism is accompanied by other ideologies, such as discrimination, that continue to oppress BIPOC authors. Older urges the publishing community to see the violence it has continued to commit and dropping tokenism

here and there is no way to show diversity because it reinforces racism. In literature, tokenism is a problem where authors and/or publishers drop one character of color to represent a racial or ethnic group. This act assumes a homogeneous monolithic experience of BIPOC. Eurocentric ideologies that invalidate knowledge production by people of color have historically haunted characters of color in literature and contributed to the racial disparities in publishing.

Representations on book covers have excluded BIPOC visibility. According to Jenny Kimura's blog post on "Diversity and Visibility in Young Adult Cover Design," a qualitative study on the trends of book covers from 2014 and 2018 visibility plays a large role in sales. In this study, Kimura analyzes 700 books from large publishers, independent publishers, and self-publishing authors. Kimura's data shows that in 2014, Latinx representation of book covers was less than 1% (Kimura 2019). In 2018, there was a jump to 1.4% although this number is not substantial, it was an improvement from the prior four years. The covers examined focus on one individual on the cover, the amount of body parts shown, the position on the cover, and size of scale. Out of all the covers analyzed in this study, white individuals made up over 60% of the covers analyzed (Kimura 2019).

Ebony Thomas's *The Dark Fantastic: Race and the Imagination from Harry Potter to the Hunger Games* addresses the racial gap in fantasy novels. Thomas introduces the text by mentioning that "[m]agic has long been under siege in my culture, social class, and hometown" (1). The production of magic amongst communities of color has been attacked within the United States. Thomas shares her experience growing up in the Detroit area where the history of capitalism and the abandonment of motor companies, a huge industry, left many working class people without job opportunities. Thomas expresses that real-world oppressions hinder children and young adult readers' ability to see magic outside of novels as a possibility. Magic is not just

a “fantasy,” but a strategy for combating colonialism. BIPOC authors have continuously engaged in magic, but the negation of representation across the publishing industry has attempted to control narratives of hope, liberation, and power.

Since the release of critiques by Thomas, Older, and Meyers, there has been a shift in BIPOC representation in the industry. More specifically, young adult fantasy and speculative fiction releases by BIPOC authors have flourished. Publishers are now attempting to keep up with an ever-evolving readership demand, partly due to the social justice movements. For instance, the Hachette Book Group established Legacy Lit, an imprint to promote and publish books by “underrepresented, underserved and overlooked” (legacylitbooks.com). In 2020, Legacy Lit announced Vice President and Publisher Krishan Trotman, a Black woman, to lead the imprint in releasing 12 to 15 titles per year beginning in 2022 (hatchetbookgroup.com). Other Publishers like Wednesday Books Press, an imprint of St. Martin McMillan has dedicated their publishing scope to only young adult books. The imprint was established in 2016 and since then, it has consistently published 10 to 20 titles per year (Southers 2019). Wednesday Books is led by editorial director Monique Patterson and Mara Delgado Sanchez, the editorial assistant, two BIPOC women. Monique Patterson made history as the first Black woman named editorial director, vice president, and executive editor at St. Martin. This is significant to the diversification of book releases in the past few years, in which white authors have dominated the genre of young adult fiction in previous years. BIPOC authors such as Zoraida Córdova have recurrent book publications with McMillan and Wednesday Books. Other authors such as Daniel José Older and Romina Garber are featured in Córdova’s edited collection, *Reclaim the Stars* (2022). This anthology provides readers with 17 tales from Latinx authors showcasing a diverse array of literary creative work from people from the Latin American diaspora. While established

authors like Córdova and those highlighted in the dissertation have been able to enter mainstream publishing other Latinx authors like Aiden Thomas have taken similar publishing outlets that focus on publishing books written by people from diverse backgrounds.

**Pressure of Diversity from the Digital Realm**

Social media platforms such as Youtube, Instagram, and TikTok promote books referencing them as Booktok, Bookgram, and Booktube. Social media has transcended readership audiences across the globe. Youtubers, also known as social media influencers, like Sri Lankan-Canadian, Jananie K. Velu, from the Youtube channel "This Story Ain't Over," has started the Read in Colour Book Club. This book club serves to provide monthly readings that are often paired with an interview with the chosen BIPOC author of the month. For every one book read by a white-author, Velu encourages her followers to read a book written by a BIPOC author from across the globe. Other influencers like, Panamanian Youtuber, Melanie, from "MelReadsBooks" have taken on similar challenges for their audiences. In the United States, Latinx social media influences promote reading challenges such as Black History Month, Pride Month (LGBTQIA+), and Asian Pacific American Heritage Month. In Hispanic Heritage Month from September 15th through October 15th of every year, Latinx books are the center of discussion for book influencers such as Latinxbookreads, Latinxbookshelf, Tomesandtextiles, Bookiecharm, and Johannawithbooks to name a few. Challenges like Latinx-a-thon serve to promote creative works to raise awareness. BIPOC influencers on Instagram push back against the prohibition of books by promoting the texts through social media. Sharing book recommendations becomes an intimate passing of knowledge to their social media followers. Even the language that social media has created to demonstrate the platform that influencers

have among their audiences, like terms such as “followers” emphasizes the role that social influences place upon the public. Followers become part of a group that learns from those that withhold knowledge. Latinx authors such as Garber and Córdova, use influencer platforms like Instagram to promote their novels. This promotion is a direct connection to their readers, one that happens in the intimacy of their own homes rather than only in library and bookstore appearances.

The internet as a platform has become a tool in which authors are able to promote their books even through governmental scrutiny. Censorship on books only limits texts in implemented institutional systems, like public libraries and schools, housed under colonial control. Outside of that control, policies such as H.B 2270 have limited control over audiences because these texts can still be taught through social media outlets. On March 22nd, 2023, the American Library Association (ALA) released the 2022 report stating that the association documented “1,269 demands to censor library books and resources in 2022, the highest number of attempted book bans since ALA began compiling data about censorship in libraries more than 20 years ago” (ALA.org 2023). While there has been an increase in demands in 2022, I believe that there will be more in 2023 due to publishers focusing on inclusivity across themes of identity, social justice, race, 2SLGBTQ+, and spiritual practices.

**The Future of Spiritual Practices in Latinx Literature**

Authors like Córdova, Garber, and Older have made an impact on the recent rise of Latinx literature with spiritual protagonists. These authors play a vital role as part of the Latin American diaspora in preserving cultural and spiritual systems as a form of sacred remembrance. Genres like fiction, fantasy, and speculative fiction reveal how culture influences narratives,

character, and world building. In *Wolves of No World*, *Shadowshaper Cypher*, and *Brooklyn Brujas*, the negative treatment of Latinx people in the United States is combated by spiritual systems. Each novel depicts a strong female protagonist who wields ancestral traditions to challenge Eurocentric ideologies, such as gentrification and gender violence, that impact contemporary Latinx people's livelihoods. Spiritual practices like Santería, Vodou, Candomblé, and Curanderismo are recurrently found in contemporary Latinx literature. Other practices like brujería, a reclamation of oppressive narratives of Latina spiritual practice have been reclaimed by Latinx authors like Lorraine Avila's *The Making of Yolanda La Bruja* (2023) and Aaron Duran's *Season of La Bruja* (2023). While brujería is a theme found among recent Latinx book releases, it is important for the audience to know the history of anti-blackness, gendered violence, and how spiritual practitioner's power has been categorized as "black magic." I urge literary scholars to see how spiritual practice in literature is a site of theory and praxis. Literature preserves Latinx cultural and spiritual practices while demonstrating worlds where Latina character possess authority. Latina spiritualities have evolved due to necessity. In the novels, spiritual practices like shadowshaping, shapeshifting, and worship developed out of need to find safety and liberation from colonialism. Colonial violence has forced the development of spiritual resistance. As a result, religious practices like Santería have developed under colonialism as a form of spiritual resistance, liberation, and power.

Stephen Palmié in *Wizards and Scientists: Explorations in Afro-Cuban Modernity and Tradition* explains that unorthodox spiritualities are a technology. As a technology of spiritual systems like Santería have been developed, modified, and crafted as a tool of knowledge. Palmié flips colonialism on its head and adds that science and colonialism are a form of witchcraft (2002). Palmié refers to colonialism as a witchcraft because colonialism created systems that

enforce Eurocentric ideologies, a malicious spell inflicted the minds of colonial priests, conquistadors, and Spanish monarchs. Palmié draws his argument from Fernando Ortiz, a Cuban anthropologist, who argues "the concept salación signified the working of ''an enemy's spell or of some supernatural power that delights in mortifying and disgracing a person by all means available, that is to say, without restricting himself to a specific form of harm." (Palmié 2002; Ortiz 1973, 86). Salación is a practice that inflicts bad intentions and non-prosperity on its victims. For Palmié and Ortiz, colonialism is a metaphor of salación. Colonialism is an evil spell that takes pleasure in the oppression of marginalizing bodies, literature, knowledge, spiritual practices, and inflicts violence, while attempting to keep the imbalances of power differences in its favor (Aguilar 2023). Latinx spirituality uses ancestral knowledge as magic to counteract colonialism's witchcraft.

## NOTES

[1] Throughout this dissertation, words in Spanish are not italicized to push back against MLA requirements.

[2] Rascuache is the Spanish spelling. In Chicanx communities it is spelled rasquache.

[3] Sobadores are people who possess spiritual gifted talents to remove negative energies through focusing on deep tissues massage and elements of chiropractic practices.

[4] In February 2021, one day before my comprehensive oral examination, I received news that my tía María has passed on to a better place. Today, her home is still preserved in the same state when she left it. It's organized, clean, and the passing of time does not reflect in her humble home. With every pass of her doorway, I can find her favorite bedding, displays of perfumes and oils on her dresser, and in the restrooms lies her favorite soaps. Each item in her home offer intimate practices of nurturing and healing.

[5] Speaking in tongues, also referred to glossolalia, is a spiritual phenomenon and a divine message gifted from the holy spirit or God. Speaking in tongues is prompted by a spiritual trance or ecstasy.

[6] Roald Dahl's books have been under fire for racism and reinforcing stigmas. J.K. Rowling too has been critiqued for not including BIPOC characters in her texts.

[7] I use the term Latinx to encompass and include Afro-Latinx, Indigenous-Latinx, racialized and ethnic bodies, and descendants of the Americas and Caribbean. Furthermore, I have chosen to use the term Latinx throughout the dissertation. Identities such as Latine/a/o are also included in my use of Latinx.

[8] Orthodox religion's functions to control and concentrate power. Outside systems of belief threaten the control of power of the masses.

[9] Feudalism was a system used in the Middle Ages in which the monarchy provided elite members in society land in exchange for military forces.

[10] See Zamora, Calvo, María Jesus. *Women, Witchcraft, and the Inquisition in Spain and in the New World*, Louisiana State University Press, 2021; Bristol, Joan Cameron. *Christians, Blasphemers, and Witches: Afro-Mexican Ritual Practice in the Seventeenth Century*, University of New Mexico Press, 2007.

[11] I use the term Indigenous here to include Afro-Indigeneity across the globe.

[12] The first abolishment of the inquisition began in 1808 but due to the slow spread of news across the Atlantic Ocean via boat and the regaining of Spanish reign, the abolishment of the inquisition across the Americas did not end until 1821.

[13] Translated as "Dominican friars did not want to absolve those who had [Indigenous people] if they weren't freed—that, if he could get a license from the King to bring a dozen enslaved Africans from Castile, this would allow them to free the [Indigenous people]. In this quote, I chose to change colonial terminology like Indian and slaves for Indigenous people and enslaved Africans.

[14] See Skloot, Rebecca. *The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks*, Broadway Books, 2011.

[15] I use the titles of collections from the Newberry and Bancroft Library at the University of California-Berkeley.

[16] Sheila Marie Contreras's *Bloodlines* explores how Indigeneity is complex, romanticized, and subverts Eurocentric narratives. Contreras provides examples of how Chicana/o/x/e writers like Gloria Anzaldúa, Lorna Dee Cervantes, and Alicia Gaspar de Alba heavily take up Mesoamerican myths, culture, and knowledge drawn from disciplines like anthropology and

archeology as a way to construct a Chicano/a Indigenous identity (40). See Contreras, Sheila Marie. *Bloodlines*: *Myth Indigenism, and Chicana/o Literature*, University of Texas Press, 2008.

[17] See Echevarría, Roberto González. *Myth and Archives: A Theory of Latin American Narrative*, Duke University Press, 1998; Burns, Kathryn. *Into the Archive: Writing and Power in Colonial Peru*. Duke University Press, 2010.

[18] See Mignolo, Walter D. "Introduction: Coloniality of Power and Decolonial Thinking." *Cultural Studies,* vol. 21 no. 2-3, pp. 155-167, 2007.

[19] I'm aware of lack of funding for some archives but also, I call into question why some collections are more imperative than others.

[20] Outside of the scope of this research, there are feminist scholars who suggest that sati was used by Hindu men to control women after their death. See Raina (2018).

[21] New Spain was a vast area of land that was broken into viceroyalties with audiencias governing each region.

[22] Double sided documents are counted as one-page in the document. It was located on page 19, but I count each double-sided page as two pages.

[23] 'B' and 'V' letters were interchangeable in the document. See Walter D. Mignolo's *Darkerside of the Renaissance* (2003), specifically the chapter one on Nebrija and the standardization of language in the New World.

[24] As a result, the curanderos, Manuela "la Luzera" and Juan Roque de los Santos were imprisoned for "superstitious" acts.

[25] Mulatta was a derogatory term to classify women of African and European ancestry. In Spanish the root word "mula," or mule, is an offspring of a horse and a donkey. This term has been used to further dehumanize people of African descent as animals.

[26] In my research, I have not been able to find a translation of the art of chuntal or its origins. I am looking to investigating if "chuntal" is a misspelling of the Chontal Maya, a group of Indigenous people located in present day Oaxaca, Mexico.

[27] It is important to note that there are still Indigenous Mayan groups in Mesoamerica today.

[28] The conclusion of this trial resulted that all the women were executed, alongside two of María de la Cruz's two sons Domingo and Manuel. Many of the misconceptions that surrounded the inquisition are that most of those that plead guilty were murdered; those that were denounced were often imprisoned for unorthodox practices. Since there were multiple women gathering to perform chuntal and two deaths that aligned with the timeline of the denunciations, the women were charged with "malicious" intent using brujería, even though they emphasized that they were chuntalillas, not brujas.

[29] The literal translation of "libre" is free referring to non-enslaved.

[30] Translated as "faithful Christian Catholic, and not a sorceress, nor bruja, nor heretic, neither had a pact with the devil."

[31] The inquisitors determined that María de Rivera be imprisoned, excommunicated, upon release of prison, serve 3 years in the hospital. This punishment remained violent as servitude in the hospital could expose her to illness, disease, and further torture. Servitude in the hospital was a sentencing where many women like in the infamous trial of Paula de Eguiluz, a Black woman who was accused of brujería for her spiritual curing abilities (Vicuña Guengerich 2009).

[32] See Van Deusen, Nancy E. *Ursula de Jesus; A Seventeenth-Century Afro-Peruvian Mystic*, 2013. See Teresa, Saint. *Autobiography of St. Teresa of Avila*. Courier Corporation, 2010.

[33] See Burns, Kathryn. *Into the Archive: Writing and Power in Colonial Peru*. Duke University Press, 2010.

[34] In the document it states in Spanish, "hemos mandándose prohíban, y recojan del todo, para que ninguna persona puede tenerlos, ni leer, o vender los dichos libros y papeles, impressos, ni manuscritos, en cualquiera lengua, o impression que lo estén, pena de excomunión mayor."

[35] "Stop Woke" Act is known as the "Stop Wrongs to Our Kids and Employees Act" which was introduced in December 2021 and then enacted in April 2022.

[36] The misconception that folklore is only in the past has been used to erase present day cultural practices used in Indigenous communities.

[37] The "term Vodou, [means] "spirit" or "sacred energy" in the Adja-Tado group of languages spoken in Arada" (Fernández Olmos and Paravisini-Gebert 102). Vodou was developed from various practices within the Afro-diaspora, some of which come from the Fon kingdom, once known as Dahomey, the Congolese, and Yoruba-Nago, who carried cultural and spiritual practices during the Trans-Atlantic slave trade. Haitian Vodou, specifically, emerged out of the blending of West African Vodun practices in Hispañola, now known as Haiti and the Dominican Republic. One of the most known historical ceremonies of Vodou took place the night before the Haitian Revolution. The Vodou ceremony protected the fate of the enslaved revolutionaries leading to a successful revolt against the French in the August 1791 Haitian Revolution (103). This ceremony prompted a medical comatose in which people ingested infused drink. French soldiers thought that the Haitian revolutionaries were dead, but the drink provided them

the ability to awaken and overthrow the French. The comatose is now what is portrayed in fiction as zombification. The French associated this rite with "witchcraft." In Vodou, the Manbo (priestess), leads rituals. In Vodou, there is no hierarchy between the Oungan (priest) and the Manbo (priestess). The Manbo serves as a mediator between the spiritual world and the Earthly. Manbo's knowledge(s) are passed down from other women and hold important roles within their community. Manbo's various roles are not limited to binary gender roles, rather, the Manbo accesses the same privileges as an Ougan. In particular, the Manbo's access power through the loas (deities) and spirits. The ability to access powers is a blessing from the spirits who have passed.

[38] Throughout the chapter, I will be referring to Dr. Johnathan Wick as Wick. I refer to him as Wick to challenge the ways in which the character does not exemplify ethical research practices by stripping the character from the title "Doctor" in which he uses his participants to forcefully extract their knowledge for his own personal and scholarly advantage.

[39] Neurodivergences according to Nick Walker is a brain altering experience produced through trauma or prolonged meditation. See Nick Walker's "Neurodiversity: Some Basic Terms & Definitions." Neuroqueer.com, 2014.

[40] I use the dejado instead of dejada, for consistency with the supplemental quotes.

[41] I emphasize that the maternal lineage was one factor because in the United States, if the mother was enslaved then the children were often enslaved too. Enslaved people were stripped from autonomy and human rights, thus, were not considered human if enslaved.

[42] It wasn't until the "Age of Reason" that the separation of religion and logic were factors in "human" intelligence according to Westerns viewpoints proposed by Thomas Paine.

[43] La Contessa de Araña's name was Doña Teresa de Avila de San Miguel (Older 78).

[44] Death in this book also resembles that of other images or spiritual figures found in the *Brooklyn Brujas* Series by Zoraida Córdova covered in chapter 4.

[45] In book three, it is revealed that Tee is a hierophant not a shadowshaper.

[46] I lowercase historical periods here to not center European influence.

[47] Soledad is an alias name that she uses to conceal her true identity.

[48] Translated as freezers (congeladoras), gardeners (jardineras), summoners (invocadoras), and fire starters (encendedores).

[49] The edict was used after the Reconquista, known as the reconquest, to push out the Moor and Jewish from Castille.

[50] In the end of *Cazadora*, Manu is bound to the septimus and forced to become a cazadora, known as a hunter. While the septimus offer her the opportunity to become a cazadora her life is predetermined by the tribunal.

[51] Sharpe's text, *Immaterial Archives,* focuses on the intangible qualities that can be invisible, therefore called immaterial. I use (im)material to explain both the material and (im)material objects of devotion found in *Brooklyn Brujas*.

[52] In *Brooklyn Brujas*, Córdova allows the readers to depict their own fabrication of the racial and ethnic background of the Mortiz family. Literary scholar Domino Perez article, "Afuerx and Cultural Practice in *Shadowshaper* and *Labyrinth Lost*" identifies Alex as an Afro-Latina (Pérez 74). Although we can infer that the Mortiz sisters are Afro-Latinas, the author does not identify them as Afro-Latinas.

[53] Brujx encompass various identities based on gender such as 2SLGBTQIA. In books 1 and 2 Cordova used bruja/o until in book 3, Córdova introduced brujx to describe a non-binary character named Lin.

[54] Instead of saying enslaved Africans, I refer to them as Afro-Brazilian ancestors to situate away from oppressive narratives focused on colonial violence.

[55] Throughout the chapter, I will transition between the various names of Yemoja, Yemayá, or Iemanjá, all of which refer to specific Santería, Lucumí, and Candomblé variations and symbolic association. At times, I will use Yemoja for consistency, meanwhile being conscious that other variations may refer to the deity by a different name.

[56] Oshun is the deity of fresh waters and is represented through the color gold. See Fernández Olmos & Paravisini-Gebert's *Creole Religions of the Caribbean: An Introduction from Vodou to Santería to Obeah and Espiritismo* (2011).

[57] The image of the Orisha Yemoja, or Iemanjá, is hyper-sexualized. For more interest in the hyper-sexualization of the Orisha's see Elizabeth Perez's essay, "Nobody's Mammy: Yemayá as Fierce Foremother in Afro-Cuban Religions" in *Yemoja: Gender, Sexuality, and Creativity in Latina/o and Afro-Atlantic Diasporas*, edited by Solimar Otero and Toyin Falola, SUNY Press, 2013.

[58] The act of being crowned by an Orisha is a complex ritual and understanding that involves the Orisha's symbolic joining of life between the initiate and deity. I have decided to exclude sacred information about the crowning process.

[59] Out of respect of various religious groups and Indigenous communities, I will not list further examples of sacrifice as many rituals are privately used by initiated practitioners.

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