STAGING RACE IN LATINA/O AND MEXICAN TRANSBORDER THEATER

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ABSTRACT
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Staging Race in Latina/o and Mexican Transborder Theater
(Under the direction of Professor Stuart A. Day)

This dissertation addresses the issue of race in regard to the Mexican immigrant in both Latino and Mexican theater and performance. The introduction, Chapter 1, defines race as biological differentiations that are reiterated through historical understandings in both Mexico and the United States. In the United States, the history of race is based on colonial encounters and issues of slavery, among other factors. In Mexico, racial concepts were influenced by a process of cultural mestizaje that tended to incorporate indigenous elements into the modernizing project of Mexico, and resulted in a movement toward the whitening of the race. Chapter 2 discusses role playing in regard to the construction of racial identities in Milcha Sánchez-Scott’s Latina and Víctor Hugo Rascón Banda’s La mujer que cayó del cielo. I question racial categorization in terms of globalization and transnational markets in Coco Fusco and Nao Bustamante’s Stuff and Luis Valdez’s Los vendidos in Chapter 3. The concept of ‘nation’ and national identity for Mexican immigrants, and how their racialized bodies challenge conceptualizations of an essentialist nation-popular is explored in Hugo Salcedo’s El viaje de los cantores and Cherrie Moraga’s Watsonville: Some Place not Here in Chapter 4. The characters in each play of this study must confront their biological differences and learn to classify
their Latino identity in order to confront the binary black and white racial standards of the United States as well as the process of mestizaje in Mexico.

In order to negotiate a definition of the term race that is not based on bipolarities, the concept of a posthegemonic race is introduced. This term proposes an ideology of race based on performances that challenge an historical duality of hegemonic and counterhegemonic racial identities that are determined primarily by skin color. This study concludes that posthegemonic races are classified according to individual performances and, as such, skin color is no longer the primary determining factor in racial classifications. In the Conclusion, Chapter 5, the issue of choice is reiterated as a challenge to immigrants that remains to be questioned in regard to race in both Mexico and the United States.
Many will cross the border North in search of the source of the rainbow, only to find racial hatred and inhumane working conditions.

Guillermo Gómez-Peña
“The New Global Culture”
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Chapter 1

Introduction:
Racial Categorization and Globalization

The border between Mexico and the United States is crossed each year by an unprecedented number of Mexican immigrants, both documented and undocumented, who eventually settle permanently in the United States.¹ According to the Migration Policy Institute, in 2004 the foreign-born population living in the United States reached 35.7 million persons. They estimate that of this group, approximately 10.3 million were unauthorized migrants from around the world. When further categorized by country, nearly six million migrants of this unauthorized group were born in Mexico.² This ever-increasing phenomenon of border crossing by migrants from all countries necessitates an expansion of definitions of border and a reconfiguration of current discourses regarding cultures, traditions, languages, and racial/ethical determinants.

A border can no longer be configured solely as a geographical site of division between two countries in today’s ever-expanding global condition. In particular, since the terrorist bombings of September 11, 2001, borders have become linked to international networks and means of communication that are not confined to easily definable divisions. This does not imply that transnational development began with a

¹ Although for many Mexican immigrants migration to the United States is not a one-time event, eventually a significant number of them settle in the US permanently.

single terrorist act in 2001 against the United States. Gareth Williams’s study on neoliberalism and subalternity links the transnational movement of peoples, cultures, and economies to an earlier period. He explains, “the order of accumulation that has emerged over the course of the last three decades circulates power relations through an endless multiplication of (no longer necessarily national) centers and border-crossing networks” (79). As such, borders have become complex sites of multiple understandings that complicate a center/periphery dichotomy. Included in these sites of understandings are factors that extend beyond borders as geopolitical systems. Gender, literary genres, cultures, races, and even philosophical beliefs have been absorbed and (re)inscribed into various academic disciplines regarding the border, such as, for example, borderland studies, anthropology, sociology, feminism, and political history.

Border critics from these various disciplines seek to explain concepts like mestizaje, cultural assimilation, hybridity, and expressions of sexuality as positive sites for future reconciliation between two or more identities that are in conflict. As David E. Johnson and Scott Michaelsen specify in their introduction to Border Theory: The Limits of Cultural Politics, entry into and across the borderlands itself has not been thoroughly problematized: “In the majority of this work, interestingly, the entry point of ‘the border’ or ‘the borderlands’ goes unquestioned, and, in addition, often is assumed to be a place of politically exciting hybridity, intellectual creativity, and moral possibility. The borderlands, in other words, are the privileged locus of hope for a better world” (3;

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3 Perspectives of a (trans)continental vision are not merely a recent phenomenon. During the late nineteenth century, José Martí produced several essays concerning racial conflicts in New York and Martí’s vision for an American continent where “no hay odio de razas, porque no hay razas.” See José Martí, Nuestra América, ed. Roberto Fernández Retamar.

4 Some influential works by border theorists are D. Emily Hicks, Border Writing: The Multidimensional Text and Juan Bruce-Novoa, Retrospace: Collected Essays on Chicano Literature.
original emphasis). Both Michaelsen and Johnson agree in their text that the borderlands as defined by critics of late represent a political site of marked difference that offers hope for a future site where these differences can somehow live harmoniously, and that this positive outlook ought to be challenged.

The border can present a challenge to theorists as a site of contention for political and racial misunderstandings. When immigrants cross the Mexican-United States border they often must confront their racial identities in terms of biological differences. These racialized bodies are an indicator of indigenous heritage and poverty for Rubén Martínez in *Crossing Over: A Mexican Family on the Migrant Trail*. He writes, “lying on a fallow plain south of downtown Mexico City, the district of Iztapalapa, by the looks of things, was a rough-and-tumble barrio long before the Spaniards arrived. It has the color of old poverty: dark brown, almost chocolate-brown skin, the color of little or no cross-breeding” (12-13). Concepts of race as phenotype that have developed from an historical understanding in the United States will be explored in this dissertation in context with plays regarding Latino and Mexican immigrants crossing the Mexican-United States border. My study will explore the trafficking and performance of race in Latina/o and Mexican theater that results in the negotiation and often re-definition of racial identities. The term trafficking refers to a physical movement of bodies across borders and how these same bodies are re-defined by their crossing and/or (dis)identified with due to differences in, first, biological differences (race) and, second, language, clothing, customs, place (terms commonly related to ethnicity, although not exclusively). I explore further how the performance of one’s race is affected by crossing borders and who determines the script of that performance and for whom. The concept of race as a
performance is further convoluted when particular immigrants cross borders and discover that they do not easily fit into pre-established and accepted forms of race. They must contemplate their own performance that may or may not be expected of them by a dominant society and how they can acknowledge their own agency.

One theorist who has influenced current border and borderlands discourses is Gloria Anzaldúa. In her work relating specifically to the border between Mexico and the United States, Anzaldúa relates notions of mestizaje to gender. She posits that the borderlands offer up the possibility of a “new mestiza,” a complex Chicana who embodies the identities of her indigenous ancestors combined with Mexican and Anglo cultural elements. Anzaldúa explores the border as a convoluted political, philosophical, and gendered locus. Yet the borderlands remain for her a site of progressive construction of identities that is in constant negotiation but always building toward a stronger fusion of those very overlapping elements. This does not imply that Anzaldúa’s theory promulgates the notion of cultural purity or an ‘essentialist’ identity that exists a priori to the creation of a new mestiza. Indeed, she struggles with notions of ‘authenticity’ by weaving various cultural elements together that are in a constant state of change and movement characteristic of a multiculturalism in the vanguard of the creation of a new identity.

Anzaldúa sees the borderlands as a positive site of political contention and, perhaps, political resolution for the female subject. The borderlands will produce a new

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5 Anzaldúa utilizes the umbrella term “Chicano/a” in her critical text on borders to refer to persons who identify culturally and ethnically with their Mexican ancestry and who reside in the United States; however, my dissertation additionally will employ the word “Latino/a” in order to include persons who identify with Latin American nations other than Mexico.
mestiza who recognizes varying elements of her culture that will progress over time
toward a combination of indistinguishable identities. She concludes her text with a poem
entitled, “Don’t Give In, Chicana (para Missy Anzaldúa)” and a call for the future race:

Yes, in a few years or centuries
la Raza will rise up, tongue intact
carrying the best of all the cultures.
That sleeping serpent,
rebellion-(r)evolution, will spring up.
Like old skin will fall the slave ways of
obedience, acceptance, silence.
Like serpent lightning we’ll move, little woman.
You’ll see. (225)

For Anzaldúa, survival will privilege those who embrace all languages, all genders, and
all cultural identities. She projects her ideas upon a positive future of understanding and
multiculturalism. On the one hand, Anzaldúa tends to create a utopian view of identities
that will someday merge without the loss of any particular cultural elements, a concept
that is reminiscent of José Vasconcelos’s theory regarding the “cosmic race.” On the
other hand, she does not promulgate only the positive aspects of the borderlands, as
Johnson and Michaelsen imply in their criticism of her work.6 Anzaldúa incorporates
negative aspects in her work as well, such as the difficulties with embracing gender
identities in her utopian future. But who decides those guidelines? Anzaldúa defines
mestiza as the inclusion of people of Mexican descent (Chicano/as) in the United States.
There still remains a challenge to confront the dominant society that opposes an inclusion
of Chicano/as as a mestiza people or a race.

Anzaldúa struggles against a “consciousness of duality” yet tends to embrace
some dualities in her work, such as, for example, the dichotomy man/woman. She
visualizes the border as a bifurcated site, a physical separation point marked by the term

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6 See Johnson and Michaelsen’s text Border Theory: The Limits of Cultural Politics.
itself: border. As she states in her definition, “the U.S.-Mexican border es una herida 
abierta where the Third World grates against the first and bleeds. Borders are set up to
define places that are safe and unsafe, to distinguish us from them. It [the Mexican-
United States border] is in a constant state of transition. The prohibited and forbidden are
its inhabitants” (25; original emphasis). Although Anzaldúa intends to criticize dualities,
one inherent problem with her use of the dichotomous metaphors “Third World” versus
“first” and “us/them” is an implied essentialism. In today’s global context, borders are
becoming convoluted in such a manner that defining identities in terms of “us/them” is an
infinite task of inclusion/exclusion. Despite the binaries, Anzaldúa clearly demarcates
the borderlands as a site of contact between political and social identities that are in
constant negotiation and re-negotiation in an attempt to define themselves within various
facets of hegemonic systems of power.

The peril lies with these same hegemonic powers that are capable of incorporating
notions of multiculturalism back into the hegemonic structure itself via means of
inclusion that on the surface appear to embrace multiple identities. Anzaldúa’s theory
promulgates the creation of a new mestiza, yet there remains the challenge posited by a
constant movement of cultures coming into contact with one another and transforming
from their original state into a ‘newly’ acquired identity that has somehow incorporated
elements (the most favored ones?) from their original source in a process referred to as
transculturation. Gareth Williams’s study of neoliberalism and subalternity defines
notions of hegemony/counterhegemony together with these complex processes of sharing
cultures. Williams calls into question a definition of transculturation that underscores a
future “accomplishment” of any particular society. This “accomplishment” is achieved
by combining positive aspects of varying cultures in order to inscribe a minority culture into the dominant ideology of a national popular.\textsuperscript{7} This historical definition of transculturation sought to explain “otherness” within the “imagined community” during Latin America’s search for modernization.\textsuperscript{8} Williams explains:

As such, the affirmation of transculturation as a national or continental identitarian essence does not provide us with a site from which to counter colonialism’s spectral and often violent reemergence onto the political landscapes of the capitalist social order. It merely redistributes ethnic divisions in an attempt to somehow save the meaning and order of historical order and foreclose the possibility of a radical break with the genealogies of domination and of their social organization. In this sense, transculturation is (at least to the extent that it has been generated in relation to populism) not so much the telos for a popular heterogeneity capable of opening up the social field to alternative repertoires of thought, experience, and practice, but rather it is a fundamental path into uneven subsumption of subalternity to the dominant horizons of capitalist modernization. (67)

The emergence of counterhegemonic discourses in a modern capitalist society, rather than opening up alternative structures, becomes subsumed by the dominant capitalist system as an affirmation of modernizing the nation-state. Williams proposes a new critical perspective to counter a binary understanding of dominant/non-dominant cultures “in an order and a language other than that of the hegemonic/counterhegemonic” (15; original emphasis). His critical perspective includes transnational developments that extend beyond the parameters of a single nation-state. The ideology of “imagined community” as a naturalized logic from within a particular dominant national structure is interrupted by transnational structures that extend beyond geographical borders. This is

\textsuperscript{7} Williams criticizes Ángel Rama’s transculturation theory as outlined by Rama in {\textit{Transculturación narrativa en América Latina}}.

\textsuperscript{8} The phrase “imagined communities” is in direct reference to Benedict Anderson’s theoretical text on Latin American nationalities entitled {\textit{Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism}}.
not to imply that the national popular as an historical construct was never influenced by regimes from outside the state itself or that it has been successful in the integration of all inhabitants as peoples with equal rights. Yet in the current order of global configurations, words such as “nation” or “national culture” no longer hold the same meaning in Latin America or the United States. The problem, then, is how to view the politics of cultures and borders from transnational perspectives that incorporate various disciplines and discourses of thought without subsuming them according to dominant ideologies.

The constant migration of peoples across varying borders has had a profound effect on neoliberal discourses regarding issues of culture and race. The phenomenon of the migration of people poses serious challenges to concepts of popular national definition and integration of races. The term ‘race’ as used here requires a specific definition of meaning due to an historical and sociocultural construct of the word that continues to shift in meaning over time. There is no denying that race is a substantial word that engenders notions in the United States of establishing inferior groups of people. In contrast, the current term of choice in the United States, ethnicity, embodies less moral implications. The terms race and ethnicity, as well as identity, tend to merge at times while in other instances they are defined separately. First, the term race cannot be defined without taking into account its historical and cultural context. Particularly in the United States race has played an undeniable political and social role throughout the historical construction of the national popular. Concepts of race and racism in the United States are imminently linked with a history of colonial encounters that resulted in social categories of first ‘black’ and ‘white,’ and later ‘black,’ ‘white,’ ‘red,’ ‘brown,’ and ‘yellow’ (Wade 21). Second, these initial categories were based primarily on
observations of the bodies themselves as a means of subversion and control: ‘blacks’ were categorized as inferior and ‘whites’ as superior. Yet what constitutes as ‘black’ in the United States may take on the term ‘mulato’ in Latin America, thereby indicating that bodies as biological markers are socially constructed. If the meaning of ‘black’ varies according to social context, can we say that race is not defined as biological differentiation? This question deserves further exploration since, for example, when a dark-skinned Puerto Rican crosses the border into the United States, he is categorized as ‘black,’ an observation based primarily on phenotype and one that may or may not include such identifications as rich/poor, female/male, and homosexual/heterosexual.9

Peter Wade’s text Race and Ethnicity in Latin America seeks a re-definition of both race and ethnicity: “the general consensus is that ethnicity refers to ‘cultural’ differences, whereas, . . . race is said to refer to phenotypical differences” (17). Further in the text, Wade explains what he means by “cultural differences.” He indicates that “ethnicity is, of course, about cultural differentiation, but that it tends to use a language of place (rather than wealth, sex, or inherited phenotype). Cultural difference is spread over geographical space by virtue of the fact that social relations become concrete in spatialised form” (18; original emphasis). Race, then, appears to be a biological construct of difference (phenotype) based on sociohistorical understandings and cultural context, while ethnicity is related to geographical space that has resulted in social commonalities not based on phenotype alone.

Race as a biological marker substantiated by historical and social constructions takes on distinct meanings for Anglo Americans living in the United States, and Mexicans and Latinos who cross the border into the United States. As previously

9 See Frances Negrón-Muntaner’s 1994 film Brincando el charco.
mentioned, the United States has a long history of race based on colonial encounters and issues of slavery, among other factors. While Native Americans were either exterminated or confined to specific reservations, African Americans were treated as an inferior race in order to maintain control over them. These issues of race occurred at the foundation of the United States as a nation-state, but the question as to whether categories of race are used today remains to be addressed. Wade argues that “indeed in the US, racial identity is so politicized that no one is really complete without one. The brute fact of physical difference exists and people have used these cues to create ranked social categories which are used to include and exclude and which are said to show more or less innate, natural differences which are passed on over generations: racial identification involves a discourse of naturalization” (14-15). The concept of race in the United States is linked to a history of thinking/writing about difference and a process of “naturalizing,” over generations, these disparities in physical appearance, disparities that may include skin color as well as other cultural codes.

In Mexico racial concepts were influenced by a system of “socioracial stratification,” also referred to as “sociedad de castas” (Wade 29). While this system applied to all races, for Africans, in contrast with indigenous ethnicities, there existed the possibility for individual freedom (as a legality, although in practice this was very often not the case) and thus slavery was deemed a temporary state. Native people were originally considered property of the Spanish empire and a degenerate race due to their non-Catholic practices and supposed lack of morality or social structure. The portrayal of the New World inhabitants as an ‘uncivilized’ people deserving to be conquered was imposed upon the colonized by the Spanish conquerors and some, but not all,
missionaries who arrived at the new continent with their European standards and modes of thought.\textsuperscript{10} The indigenous groups thus led a precarious dual life of protection and exploitation by the Spanish colonizers. The ideal of a separatist society in Mexico, however, was undermined by what actually occurred and became to be known as mestizaje, a mixture of peoples, races, cultures, languages, and religions. This mestizaje resulted in a system of vague categorization based on color and lineages that included such terms as “zambos,” “pardos,” “morenos,” and “criollos,” among others. Regarding the categorization of peoples within the colony, Wade concludes that “in this society, whites were at the top, Indians and blacks at the bottom and positions in the middle were defined by various criteria of status, among which colour and descent were very important, without being definitive” (29). Thus generations could weave among the various categorizations via modes of sexual reproduction. As such, this system of movement resulted in contempt for the dark-skinned male since the ideal situation was to become “white” and reach the top of the scale. Even among family members ‘light-colored’ skin was more desirable. In Luis Valdez’s drama The Mummified Deer, Armida explains that her grandmother “always favored the white chocolate in the family” (16). The idea of “blanqueamiento,” a process of ‘whitening’ skin color, within a culture that posits mestizaje as a positive ideal, is a contradiction that continues to exist in many countries today and one that is not confined solely to Mexico or Latin America.

The concept of mestizaje is then re-conceptualized in the early 1900s by the Mexican philosopher José Vasconcelos. Vasconcelos’s theory regarding “La raza cósmica” justifies the concept of mestizaje in not just Mexico but all of Latin America as

\textsuperscript{10} Fray Bartolomé de Las Casas, Spanish Catholic missionary and chronicler in the New World during the conquest of the Americas, wrote about the mistreatment of the indigenous population in his controversial text Historia de las Indias.
indicative of a future positive race that benefits from the very mixture of dissimilar peoples. He expounds his theory as a counterpoint to European scientific reasoning that Latin America was a degenerate continent of people due to inferiorities based on biological (mis)understandings that were prevalent at the time. Vasconcelos instead offers the “designio de constituir la cuna de una raza quinta en la que se fundirán todos los pueblos, para reemplazar a los cuatro [amarillos, blancos, negros, rojos] que aisladamente han venido forjando la Historia” (58). Thus Vasconcelos proposes a universal race that incorporates all other races by becoming one through a process of mestizaje. He further outlines the importance that Latin America will have in the creation of this fifth race because “las grandes civilizaciones se iniciaron entre trópicos y la civilización final volverá al trópico” (63). Geographical location is an important factor for the theorist as well, since the North is a cold, harsh environment that engenders means of control over society rather than intellectual and cultural freedom. Vasconcelos recognizes some advances the harsh environment promoted as positive and posits that there will be similar or even greater advances acquired with the heat of the tropics. Finally, Vasconcelos explains the stages necessary for the development of this cosmic race: (1) liberation from material necessity; (2) liberation from intellect or illusions of the mind; and (3) a state of “mystical union” that generates love and harmony, i.e. the “cosmic” or aesthetic element (Introduction to La raza cósmica xxix). His theory requires a spiritual element that embraces intellectual and aesthetic development of peoples as well.

Vasconcelos’s conceptualization of a “cosmic race” was later embraced by Chicanos in the earlier stages of Chicano political and cultural expression in the United
States. Similar to Anzaldúa’s definition for a new *mestiza*, the Chicano movement fostered an ideology of “la raza,” a triumphant race equivalent to Vasconcelos’s cosmic race in that a mixture or blending of cultures is of main importance for its survival. For some, Chicanos had already acquired the necessary qualities to overcome all other races due to their *mestizaje* and thus embraced concepts of “chicanismo” as the single “raza cósmica.” Yet Vasconcelos’s ideology of *mestizaje* extends beyond what can be understood as a mixture of Chicano or Mexican, one that implies a product of the biological mixture of indigenous and European blood, and the eventual elimination of all other races in favor of a singular *raza cósmica*. For other Chicanos, Vasconcelos’s concept of a universal race that erased all others became their understanding of the term “la raza.” Yet rather than eliminating all other races, they chose to embrace their indigenous heritage in favor of a *mestizaje*, like Anzaldúa posits, and also to empower themselves as a community that shared the oppression and the need to survive of other racialized people of the United States. Angel R. Oquendo explains the importance of the term “raza” for Chicano populations in his article “Re-imagining the Latino/a Race”:

*Raza* evokes a primeval and mythical union with the indigenous people that populated the North American expanse of Aztlan. The natives of Aztlan spread south and eventually formed the Nahuatl tribes living in Mexico as the European conquest began. The concept of race also has political connotations. ‘*Raza*’ is the name taken by the organizations that initiated and have continued the struggle for political, social, and economic empowerment of the Chicano community. These groups—including the party ‘La Raza Unida’ founded by José Ángel Gutiérrez—also encouraged Chicanos to take pride in their history and culture. (69)

Thus the term race, or “*raza*,” implies for Chicanos a shared history of struggle by a community of people that acknowledge their indigenous heritage (albeit of varying ethnicities) and cultural understandings that differ from those of Anglo Americans.
Both Mexico and the United States have an historical understanding of race that continues to affect society’s current conception of the term. The main difference between them is mixture, or mestizaje, which was prevalent in Mexico while a clearer separatist mode developed in the United States, although this is not to imply that there were no exceptions on either side of the border. Chicanos in the United States are challenged to sustain a precarious balancing act between a Mexican ideology of mestizaje and an Anglo American historical development of racial segregation. Yet Chicanos are not the only minority group forced to confront a binary racial heritage in the United States. While the term Chicano refers specifically to immigrants of Mexican descent, the need for a more encompassing term that classifies people from all Latin American countries has led to the employment of the term Latino in the United States. As Oquendo explains:

‘Latino’ is short for ‘latinoamericano.’ Like its English counterpart, the term refers to the people who come from the territory in the Americas colonized by Latin nations, such as Portugal, Spain, and France, whose languages derived from Latin. People from Brazil, Mexico, and even Haiti are thus all ‘latinoamericanos.’ . . . What I do find attractive about the expression ‘Latino’ is, first, that it calls to mind the Latino/a struggle for empowerment in the United States. The leaders of this campaign support ‘Latino’ because it came from the community. . . . Second, ‘Latino’ is a newer term that invites re-thinking and re-defining of what membership in this community is all about. . . . The third reason why ‘Latino’ is a better term is because it is a Spanish word. It accentuates the bond between the Latino/a community and the Spanish language. Furthermore, in insisting upon being called by its Spanish name, the Latino/a community is demanding recognition and respect for its culture. (62-63)

The term ‘Latino’ recognizes a broader community of Latin Americans that seeks self-definition in the United States. The necessity for racial categorization continues to exist, whether as a perpetuation of race-consciousness or as a means of pursuing racial justice. According to Oquendo, the Latino community recognizes this necessity for racial
categorization in the United States and, in an effort to establish and maintain political, social, and economic empowerment, has responded with a self-classification as ‘Latinos.’\textsuperscript{11} Oquendo proposes the umbrella term Latino in order to promote a shared political and social development in contrast with a dominant Anglo-American discourse.

One problem with existing racial classifications in the United States is that they posit a polarity of races based on physiognomy that are meant to be absolute. A well-defined black/white duality among Latinos or other racial groups in the United States becomes a matter of personal assertion since there are infinite gradations of color among people. Latinos’ presence in the United States disrupts neatly defined Anglo racial categorizations of ‘black’ and ‘white’ since Latinos are of various phenotypes. The challenge to Latinos in regard to race is in how to define a Latino race when race is based primarily on skin color. Due to the importance placed on classifications of race in the United States, denying Latinos their own category of race may indeed be denying them a possibility to become historically contextualized within United States politics and history. The difficulty lies in defining a Latino race based on phenotypes because all Latinos do not share the same skin color. The same problem can be applied to other racial groups as well. There exist various phenotypes of ‘whites,’ ‘blacks,’ and ‘Asian/Pacific Islander’ or ‘American Indian/Alaskan native,’ all of which were categories of race in the United States 2000 census.\textsuperscript{12} Included in the 2000 census was an additional category of “other” and, for the first time, the option to indicate more than one racial affiliation. Also incorporated in the census was a question regarding ethnicity. In \textit{Latino Politics in}

\textsuperscript{11} This is not to imply that all Latinos or Hispanics recognize the necessity for racial classification. At times, the term Latino is imposed on other racial groups, such as, for example, Cuban-Americans.

\textsuperscript{12} Source: John A. García. \textit{Latino Politics in America: Community, Culture, and Interests.}
America: Community, Culture, and Interests. John A. García explains the reasons for these categories in the 2000 census in the following quote:

The census recognizes five racial categories: white, black, American Indian/Alaskan native, Asian/Pacific Islander, and other. The last category, ‘other,’ represents persons who identify themselves racially in ways that are different from the other four categories. In the case of ethnicity, ancestry and/or country forms the basis on which origin is categorized. Persons who identify themselves as of Spanish origin are asked a follow-up question seeking their particular ancestral group (i.e., Mexican, Cuban, Puerto Rican, Central/South American or other [to be specified]). In essence, ethnicity [for Latinos] in the census is limited to ‘Spanish origin.’ (15)

García later concludes that “following the census distinction of race and ‘ethnicity,’ a Spanish-origin person can be of any race. The American understanding of race and ethnicity is strongly related to skin color and serves as an external influence on group identification” (18). A Latino and/or Hispanic category was not included among the list of choices for race in the United States 2000 census. According to the United States 2000 census, Latinos were not considered a race. Latinos first had to choose the category of ‘other’ and then indicate their place of origin as an identifier of ethnicity. Latinos who were born in the United States were obliged to consider their country of origin as an indicator of their ethnicity. Wade defines ethnicity as commonalities based on geographical space, yet Latinos come from various countries within Latin America that are distinctly unique in forms of dress, customs, and sometimes even language. By choosing the category of ‘other’ and then place of origin, the Latino community is divided in terms of a singular race or ethnicity that could serve to define them.

Many Mexicans that cross the border into the United States identify themselves not as Mexican but rather according to their particular state of origin within Mexico, such as, for example, Oaxaca. Does this process of choosing the category of ‘other’ and then
place of origin divide Latinos rather than unite them under a common political and social understanding? If Latinos do not have a racial categorization with which to define themselves, then they are separated into an ‘other’ category. This ‘other’ category does not recognize the Latino community as a cohesive group because it is a category designated for persons of any racial background. In Oquendo’s article on the Latino race, he calls for a new understanding of the term ‘race’ in the United States that opposes a black/white dichotomy: “Latino/as and other groups should stand up to that obsession [the obsession with the black/white dichotomy]. They should resist the notion that what distances African Americans is qualitatively different than what separates Latino/as from the White majority. If the majority insists on declaring African Americans a distinct ‘racial’ group, then all other ‘ethnic’ groups should insist on begin equally described” (68-69). The difficulty of understanding and conceptualizing such paradoxically limiting and convoluted terms as race and ethnicity becomes even more complicated by categories such as Latino.

One difference between ethnicity and race that warrants further analysis is the concept that race includes, but is not limited to, a country’s particular history perpetuated over time and from generation to generation via modes of expression, including writing. In the critical anthology edited by Henry Gates Jr., “Race,” Writing, and Difference, notions of race/racism are questioned as markers for cultural definitions in colonial writings (as a sign for race and the promulgation of it, i.e. how difference is enunciated through writing). The word ‘markers’ refers to several elements that make up the term race: skin color (phenotype), dress, language, history, national borders, behavior, and writing. For Gates, a division of ethnicity/race is conflated when defined within the
parameters of social and historical context, and then expressed in writing. The several contributors to this text, including Mary Louise Pratt, Homi K. Bhabha, and Edward W. Said, question race as a trope for mechanisms of power, a trope that is articulated in words and then perpetuated in writing (as the sign). This concept of race as a trope posits the possibility that racism exists yet races do not. To further complicate the theory, often a definition of race/racism leads to the “trap” of a Manichean dualism of black/white. In order to generalize (as in the creation of racial categories), one must articulate one group’s attitude toward another based on thought that is accessed through behavior. How one thinks that other group behaves/reacts/lives is generalized into his/her attitude and then articulated in speech. It is a matter of not only negative attitudes but patronizing ones as well.

This raises the question of group behavior that is/is not influenced by an outside group’s thoughts that are then articulated in speech and perhaps even performance. Particular groups may be expected to ‘behave’ according to a dominant group’s imposing ideology regarding their race. In Coco Fusco’s study “Pan-American Postnationalism: Another World Order,” the performance of race among African Americans in the United States is questioned:

In this country [the United States], the black cultural critic’s ethical responsibility to do the right thing frequently generates public displays of anxiety (Did I do the right thing?), opportunism (Only I can do it), and theatrical exercises in defensive authoritativeness (Only I can tell you how to do it). These positions point to a paradox at the heart of nationalist and essentialist ideas of identity--for while they invoke an absolute, preexisting blackness, they also characterize it as performative. To be black, we must understand, doesn’t just mean to do the right thing, but also to do it. (22; original emphasis)
The performance of one’s race for Fusco is the result of (1) an identification of biological differences and (2) an expectation to “perform” what Wade refers to as a process of “naturalization.” That is what one is expected to “do” or “perform” based on historical and sociopolitical understandings as well as dominant ideologies.

Of particular interest to my dissertation is the behavior or performance of marginalized groups that disrupts pre-existing generalized and historical concepts of race in the United States. My dissertation will further question current concepts of race in both Mexico and the United States within the context of ever-changing borders challenged by migrants who, like Anzaldúa, define mestiza as the inclusion of people of Mexican descent (Chicano/as) in the United States. The following chapters focus primarily on Chicanos, Latinos, and Mexican immigrants that are expected to perform as racialized bodies when their race has yet to be defined and/or recognized. Race as a performance implies a distinct type of ‘theatricality’ that is not staged but rather performed in everyday lives. In her introduction to Negotiating Performance: Gender, Sexuality, and Theatricality in Latin/o America, Diana Taylor defines the term performance as opposed to theatricality:

Performance differs from theatricality--the term that Juan Villegas prefers--in that it signals various specific art forms common both to Latinos and Latin Americans (from performance art to public performance) but also in that it encompasses socialized and internalized roles (including those associated with gender, sexuality, and race) that cannot really be analyzed as ‘theatrical discourses’ (which Villegas holds as synonymous with theatricality). Additionally, the term performance, and especially the verb performing, allow for agency, which opens the way for resistance and oppositional spectacles. (14)
The term performance, in addition to referring to artistic modes of expression, implies for Taylor the performance of particular roles—including race—that have been socially and historically defined as well as “naturalized.”

For purposes of clarity, the plays I will be analyzing have been classified as transborder texts. This term defines texts written by playwrights from any ethnicity who deal with issues of border crossing, including identities across geographical borders, languages, and customs. I intend to demonstrate the process of border crossing by both female and male characters and to analyze how their migration produces a performance of race that, paradoxically, questions the very existence of race and yet reinforces it at the same time. Categories of race become convoluted via border crossings, thereby requiring a negotiation of the term that focuses on performance. Yet the mere fact that these same racial categories require (re)defining indicates a perpetuation of racial categories by a dominant society in order to maintain authority and control, or, as is the case with Latinos, in order to divide the community and negate Latinos’ existence within the historical construction of the United States. The performance of races in the plays I have chosen for my study creates a dialogue with the audience, a dialogue that is sometimes disrupted by language barriers, racial “markers,” and cultural misunderstandings. Yet it is through this dialogue that audience members begin to question their own racial classification that they have chosen—or perhaps that has been chosen for them. The audience’s everyday racial conceptualization is pronounced on stage, revealing that identities are indeed a performance.

Through the course of the migration or trafficking of identities across both a physical and geopolitical border between Mexico and the United States, the term race
becomes a questionable category as something that is not only written but also performed and trafficked. Bodies are trafficked across the border in such a manner that they become exploited by an Anglo consumer as long as they maintain the performance scripted to them by the dominant society. These bodies are both ‘exotic’ and desirable to Anglos as well as ‘alien’ and undesirable. On the one hand they are ‘exotic’ bodies in the manner that they represent the sexy ‘Latin lover’ who is desired yet forbidden due to dominant society’s unwritten codes of accepted behavior regarding sexual behavior. On the other hand, these bodies are ‘alien’ in physical appearance, dress, and conduct. Yet, to what extent is one side consuming the other? An ‘exotic’ performance of Latino bodies is desired and despised by an Anglo consumer in a similar manner that the achievement of the metaphorical ‘American dream’ is both desired and despised by Latinos. The Latino and Mexican plays I have chosen not only function to embrace Latino identities confronted with dominant Anglo-Saxon ones, but they also dismantle those very categories that define either side of the border.

Before dismantling categories, however, there exists the problem of knowing the ‘other,’ a non-dominant cultural logic of alternative discourses and performances that does not correspond with a hegemonic power structure. The problem arises when one seeks to know this alternative ‘other’ without claiming appropriation and possession. A reader from a particular dominant power structure, such as a Western reader, may indeed be projecting his/her desires upon the ‘other,’ whether conscious of this projection or not. The term ‘other’ refers, in this study, to immigrants being raised in the United States who continue to maintain direct ties, via language, customs and/or dress, with their country of origin. My perspective is influenced as a Western reader who is part of a dominant
society, a position that requires me to be cautious of defining the ‘other’ while remaining in an outside position. This position affords me the complicated (and perhaps impossible) task of knowing and describing the ‘other’ without appropriation.

Each chapter of my dissertation seeks to define current racial categories in Mexico and the United States as portrayed in various plays in order to (re)conceptualize them from an alternative perspective. Chapter 1 will analyze the issue of race as a performance in transborder texts and how concepts of race are revealed, questioned, and negotiated with the audience. In particular I develop further in this chapter the concept of role playing race and how role playing negotiates concepts of identities, first, by projecting them as multi-dimensional and, second, by dismantling existing categories of distinction. This chapter will include two plays: Milcha Sánchez-Scott’s Latina and Victor Hugo Rascón Banda’s La mujer que cayó del cielo. Concepts of borders and border crossing in relation to role playing race will be studied in terms of Gloria Anzaldúa’s critical text Borderlands / La Frontera: The New Mestiza.

Milcha Sánchez-Scott, a playwright from Southern California, first produced Latina in 1980. The drama questions the performance of race by female immigrant workers who have recently crossed the border as well as Latinas that have resided for years in the United States. Sarita, the main character, believes that identities are marked by clothing and that they are related to human conduct that can either alter or perpetuate established social structures. For example, Sarita decides that by switching the clothing on a Peruvian immigrant woman Sarita can make the immigrant more acceptable to a southern California society. The Peruvian woman will thereby achieve greater success in her ultimate assimilation into society (that which is considered to be the culmination of
Sarita’s interpretation of the ‘American dream’). By switching clothing and altering the perceived human conduct of the Peruvian immigrant, Sarita believes that she can change established social structures that define and categorize identities. She is trafficking the Peruvian woman’s body into the boundaries of Anglo society’s expectations of a Latina. Sarita struggles with her own inability to assimilate completely until she eventually realizes that her dream is impossible to achieve. Her identity is a result of her own relation to an ideological border between Latinos and Anglo-Americans and how that same relation produces a self-awareness of herself and other Latinos. This border maintains a difference of cultures within multiple sides but eventually Sarita realizes that it produces one hegemonic identity for her: Latina.

Víctor Hugo Rascón Banda, a contemporary Mexican playwright, dramatizes a true event about an indigenous woman in his 2000 production of La mujer que cayó del cielo. The play stages an indigenous woman’s plight as she is one day ‘discovered’ in Kansas and the authorities have no knowledge of where she came from or how she arrived there. This woman speaks a native tongue that is unfamiliar to the medical staff that has been assigned to investigate the issue. After several failed attempts to communicate with her, they decide to ‘fit’ her into a stereotype of Mexican immigrant and proceed to try to teach her English (again, as part of a process of assimilation). The indigenous woman fails at the staff’s attempts to ‘assimilate’ her and by the end of the play she appears on stage from behind bars that the audience presumes to be an insane asylum. This play raises multiple questions of assimilation, border identities, stereotypes and racism, gender problems (is she a figure of La Llorona/La Malinche, a lost woman
who searches for her family?), language barriers, and the institutionalization of those who do not “fit” into a dominant society.

Chapter 2 focuses on issues of trafficking bodies and consumerism. Latino bodies are marketed to Anglo-American consumers (most frequently by both anglicized and non-anglicized Latinos) as exotic items to be displayed for their “foreignness” or as items of commodity to be used to complete a specific task in Anglo society, such as housecleaning and gardening. The consumer thus exploits the Latino body for economic or exotic purposes. Those being consumed, in this case Latinos, fulfill the “fetish” desire of the consumer in order to attain his/her own gain: the American dream. In some cases, the Latino who was beforehand the one being exploited, or consumed, then becomes the one who begins to traffic other Latinos thereby perpetuating a cycle of exploitation and expropriation of bodies for economic gain. In regard to this issue of consumerism, I will be analyzing Coco Fusco and Nao Bustamante’s Stuff and Luis Valdez’s Los vendidos.

Coco Fusco and Nao Bustamante’s play Stuff first premiered at the National Review of Live Art in Glasgow in 1996. The play combines the concept of trafficking Latina bodies as an exotic ‘other’ with Anglo perceptions of Latino food and pre-colonial rituals. In her introduction to the play, Fusco refers to this process as “cultural consumption” of Latino identities, a process that for her entitles a loss. In the play, audience members are selected to be “travel tasters” and partake in an experience where

13 Although to some extent certain tasks being fulfilled by Latinos is changing within the Anglo-American society, regarding recent immigrants to the United States there continues a trend of exploitation of the bodies for demeaning positions of employment. Thus, there is also an issue of social class, education, and language barriers.

14 See Fusco’s introduction to the play Stuff in the anthology entitled Out of the Fringe: Contemporary Latina/Latino Theatre and Performance, eds. Caridad Svich and María Teresa Marrero.
they are introduced to varying elements of stereotypical Latino cultures. Through this tour of Latino bodies, myths, and rituals, Anglo society’s desire to consume the ‘other’ is questioned and performed on various levels. The play criticizes Anglos in regard to their desire to consume; yet Latinos are also criticized for the fulfillment of their role as the consumed.

Luis Valdez’s *Los vendidos* was first written in 1967. In the play a Mexican-American salesman attempts to sell a stereotypical Mexican immigrant to a female Anglo-American buyer/consumer. The salesman presents to his buyer an immigrant worker, a Pachuco, a Revolucionario, and a Mexican American. The various Mexicans for hire are required to perform their scripted parts in order to be purchased by the female consumer. Valdez blatantly presents stereotypical characters in his play in order to reveal to both an Anglo audience as well as a Latino one that stereotypes regarding Mexican immigrants do exist as part of an expected social structure in the United States. Mexican immigrants living in the United States cease to be ‘Mexican’ once they cross the border and become an ‘immigrant,’ a ‘pachuco’ or a ‘Mexican American.’ By fulfilling one of their expected scripted parts, these characters become eligible for hire and consumption by an Anglo society. Latino stereotypes as well as Anglo-American ones are presented in this play with their scripted performances in regards to expectations of race.

This chapter explores concepts of race as established categories of distinction based on physical appearances that become convoluted via a process of consumerism. Néstor García Canclini proposes in *Consumidores y ciudadanos* a state-regulated citizenship based on market types that promotes various ethnicities within a nation. According to García Canclini, terms such as nation and nationality in contemporary
society are defined by consumer types and citizen’s participation in a global market and mass communication. Gareth Williams’s text *The Other Side of the Popular* challenges García Canclini’s citizenship based on consumerism as another form of “capitalist hegemony,” a hegemony dictated by elite consumers that incorporate minority groups in the market in order to sustain the system, or rather, the hegemony. The plays by Fusco/Bustamante and Valdez challenge dominant mechanisms of power defined by market consumption via a performance of race that questions the validity of tropes and/or visual signs, such as, for example, phenotype, used as a means to identify bodies for consumer purposes. Bodies that are consumed by an Anglo society may either cease to exist, become something different, or remain exact as before. The consumption of the ‘other’ raises questions of assimilation of races and to what extent racial identities are influenced by a mere change in performance.

Chapter 3 examines concepts of race as related to a performance of structures and practices, and a performance of space, meaning how one’s racial performance is affected by territory, boundaries, and surroundings. First, race as related to a performance of structures refers to an historically constructed definition of race that is reinforced and (re)inscribed through various societal organizations such as standardized education, museums, and labor unions, among others. These various organizations contribute to a nation’s perception of race, racial acceptance, and even to the perpetuation of stereotypes within the national popular. Indeed, at issue here is the concept of ‘nation’ as one single-speaking voice that does not differentiate opinions, a topic that is addressed in this chapter. Second, race is related to a performance of practices in the manner that these

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15 Although Peter Wade defines ethnicity in relation to place, (“it tends to use a language of place”) this chapter analyses place and space as also influential to racial understandings and the development of transnational identities.
same organizations, through artwork or classroom textbooks, affect the production of racial concepts. In turn, how one performs and how one is expected to perform becomes a part of national identity, pride, or (non)acceptance. By further defining race through a reading of history (i.e., textbooks), it becomes based on current time, which indicates that the definition itself is in constant negotiation and transition. Third, race as related to a performance of space refers to boundaries themselves on an infinite level of understanding. Spatial boundaries exist as nation’s borders, within communities or even within households. These same boundaries may be convoluted via a performance of race that corresponds to neither side(s) in question. Is a performance of race something that is reflected in a mirror—not itself but how ‘other’ sees itself, thereby blurring space as a boundary? These issues regarding race and performance in relation to concepts of nation are explored in two plays that are based on actual historical events that occurred in their respective countries: Hugo Salcedo’s 1989 production of *El viaje de los cantores* and Cherrie Moraga’s 1995 drama *Watsonville: Some Place not Here*.

Hugo Salcedo’s play takes place along the Mexican-United States border and involves the frequently dangerous and illegal movement of bodies across the border from Mexico into El Paso, Texas. Throughout the course of the play the audience is introduced to several male characters who intend to cross the border in search of economic stability and eventual success in the United States. In addition to becoming involved in these male characters’ plight and unsuccessful attempt to cross the border while hidden in a train car, the audience is also exposed to the lives of the women who are left behind while their sons, husbands, and/or brothers leave them with the hopes of one day returning. The women are left to fill the void of a lost “pueblo” and to dream of
future lands that they have yet to discover. Some women are left behind to care for children, many of whom will grow up and leave them as well, completing a cycle of abandonment and unfulfilled dreams. Both the abandoned men in the train car and the abandoned women in the pueblo belong to neither side of the border yet live in a constant state of temporality where their permanent home or “community” is neither here nor there, but only a fantasy of what could be achieved. Salcedo’s play challenges notions of space as an indicator for defining concepts of race and nationality.

One Chicano play that questions issues of race in regard to defining a nation is Cherrie Moraga’s *Watsonville: Some Place not Here*. Moraga’s play was first produced at the Brava Theater Center in San Francisco and later was included in the Southern California Hispanic Playwrights Project at South Coast Repertory. Moraga explains in an introduction to the play that her drama is “pure imagination, based loosely on three actual events that took place in a central Californian coastal farm worker town by the same name” (344). The three events based on Moraga’s play are: the cannery strikes from 1985 to 1987, a 7.1 earthquake in 1989, and the miraculous vision of the Virgin de Guadalupe that appeared on an oak tree in Pinto Lake County Park in 1992. Moraga does indicate that her fictionalized characters are a product of interviews with mostly Mexican residents of Watsonville and the stories, images and ideas that resulted from those interviews (344).

The play focuses primarily on female immigrant workers (some illegal, some not) who decide to strike against the local cannery for unfair wages, and intolerable and unsafe working conditions. As a result of the strike, the women eventually realize that they are mere bodies of consumption whose sole purpose is financial gain for the
company. Their status as documented or undocumented worker does not matter since their bosses, the media, and even the United States government do not differentiate between a legal or illegal worker: they are all categorized as an ‘undocumented and illicit Mexican immigrant’ without any regard to their actual legal status. The Mexican workers discover that their dream of belonging somewhere becomes a nightmare of displacement, even among their own community. In the end, the one event that consolidates them and saves their lives is the appearance of the Virgin de Guadalupe and the town’s procession to see her while an earthquake destroys their homes and personal belongings, leaving them with nothing but each other.

Both plays by Salcedo and Moraga raise questions of definitions of nation and inclusions/exclusions of particular races from that same definition. Also included is the issue of space in defining a nation and how displaced immigrants are without nation, thereby representing a counter-performance to concepts of essentialist identities that are reiterated through history, organizations, and multimedia. Sarah Radcliffe and Sallie Westwood explain in *Remaking the Nation: Place, Identity and Politics in Latin America* the role of race in relation to concepts of nation and state: “It is precisely this issue that is central to this book--the impact that racism has on de-centering the nation--and the ways in which minorities in those ‘liminal spaces’ have been able to reconstruct the national story and insist on the plurality that was constitutive of the modern project” (30). The challenge posed by these ‘delegitimate’ bodies, bodies that do not conform to dominant roles of accepted categories that may or may not be incorporated into concepts of nation, are further questioned in this chapter.
The performance of race implies a repetition throughout history of discourses of ‘normalization’ that have been produced by power relations and perpetuated by a process of reiteration and identification with the accepted categories of ‘normal.’ The characters in both plays analyzed in this chapter depict particular bodies that fail to conform and provide necessary ‘legitimated’ bodies for defining and maintaining the power structure of ‘normal’ acceptance that in part defines a nation. At issue here are the challenges of defining a ‘nation’ in a transnational, global context that involves a constant movement of peoples across legitimate national borders that previously served as a marker of separation between ‘us’ and ‘them.’

The final chapter of my dissertation addresses issues of border crossing that relate to the trafficking of racial bodies from Mexico and other Latino countries into the United States and how this movement across countries affects a scripted performance of race. Borders between countries are physically crossed by immigrants who find themselves in a performance of race that invariably may decide their fate or survival. The issue of choice is explored and whether Latinos can choose a racial affiliation that has not been imposed on them. When immigrants cross borders, they create more boundaries while erasing some as well, indicating a loss and/or gain of cultures, identities, races, and ethnicities. This loss and/or gain of identities can only be defined momentarily within a specific time frame. Yet this same historically defined moment seeks to build upon past definitions in an effort to become a positive step toward the future.
Chapter 2

Role Playing Race in an Undefined Space

The term race in the United States today invokes negative stereotypes based on physical appearances and/or cultural practices. These associations of the term “race” are the result of an historical definition based on biological differentiations that serve the purpose of maintaining political control of one group over another. Yet for non-dominant voices in the United States, such as Latinos, proclaiming a particular race may imply an opportunity for political agency and positive change that promotes the inclusion of Latinos in political and social organizations. By establishing themselves as a minority race in the United States, Latinos may have greater opportunity to receive government funding and to achieve wider acknowledgement in political forums. John A. García explains in Latino Politics in America: Community, Culture and Interests the importance of recognizing distinct political groups: “In some respects, governmental initiatives and actions that classify persons by group terms or identities (i.e., race, ethnicity, and social class) can serve as an indicator of political presence. Part of the political empowerment process is recognition of the group, even in symbolic ways” (7). Acknowledgement of a Latino race by both Latinos and US policymakers may contribute to a greater political awareness of Latinos as a minority group seeking recognition by and contributions to American politics.

Political recognition based on racial affiliation has to balance the negative problems the negative usage of race implies. Therefore, rather than perceiving it as a fixed identity marker implying difference, race needs to be defined through performance and role playing.
This would imply a negotiation that is not confined to terms of biological difference but one that allows for an exchange of ideologies and understandings. The question still remains, however: who writes the scripts and for whom are they written? Race defined through performance and role playing could easily be manipulated by dominant groups as a euphemism for biological difference, thereby regenerating the negative usage under a cleverly disguised rubric. The challenge resides in altering established ideologies of race as an issue of black/white. There is no denying the fact that biological differences exist between varying groups of people, yet perhaps the areas of inherent similarities and/or contradictions to those same biological markers of difference is where a negotiation of race should begin.

In *Borderlands / La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, Gloria Anzaldúa posits that an understanding of multiple cultures is a conscious effort that *mestizas* must embrace. Anzaldúa’s notion of *mestiza* emphasizes the creation of a cultural category that includes both indigenous and non-indigenous elements, and that reinserts a positive female heritage. Anzaldúa insists on reworking the term *mestiza* in order to propose an inclusion of an indigenous heritage that glorifies a pre-colonial past as well as a postmodern future. Her proposed definition of the category does not seek to homogenize the indigenous presence in the Latinos heritage, nor does she intend to promote a ‘whitening’ of the race. Her reconceptualization of the *mestiza* implies a positive combination or hybridity of cultures that seeks to embrace a female Latina consciousness. This ideology of cultural categories of distinction that blend into a new cultural creation raises questions of a priori identities and essentialism. Anzaldúa herself is aware of the problems related to essentialist classifications and concludes in her text that only by discovering her (the *mestiza’s*) multifaceted identities,
not based on social specificity but rather on ambivalent ones, can she then begin to understand her alternative expression of difference. Anzaldúa explains the process of developing a *mestiza* consciousness as follows:

The new *mestiza* copes by developing a tolerance for contradictions, a tolerance for ambiguity. She learns to be an Indian in Mexican culture, to be Mexican from an Anglo point of view. She learns to juggle cultures. She has a plural personality, she operates in a pluralistic mode—nothing is thrust out, the good, the bad and the ugly, nothing rejected, nothing abandoned. Not only does she sustain contradictions, she turns the ambivalence into something else.

What does she turn the ambivalence into? This “something else” that the *mestiza* creates is a possibility for self-identification based on a combination of many cultures. On the one hand, Anzaldúa’s *mestiza* offers up a possible multi-cultural identity based on a conscious effort by the *mestiza* to accept her plural cultural heritage. On the other hand, Anzaldúa appears to fall into the same trap of essentialism by creating a hierarchy of specific cultures, such as “Mexican,” “Indian,” or “Anglo.” Her text seeks to embrace all cultural representations but does not address the issue of race, an issue that persists in the United States as well as in Mexico. Anzaldúa’s *mestiza* will be accepted in Anglo society due to her ideologies (a conscious decision) and not her appearance. Yet in order for this change to occur, dominant Anglo society needs to recognize an awareness of particular ideologies that are conceptualized in binary modes of black/white paradigms, dualistic antagonisms that persist despite attempts to embrace all races under the rubric of ‘ethnicities.’

This chapter seeks to question historically constructed categories of race as a conscious choice to be made via performance and whether that choice can be altered regardless of physical appearances or biological differences. Coco Fusco argues in her article “Pan-American Postnationalism: Another World Order” that race is defined not
merely as a state of being, but also as a performance of one’s perception of what it means to be, for example, ‘black.’  Fusco writes:

In this country, the black cultural critic’s ethical responsibility to do the right thing frequently generates public displays of anxiety (Did I do the right thing?), opportunism (Only I can do it), and theatrical exercises in defensive authoritativeness (Only I can tell you how to do it). These positions point to a paradox at the heart of nationalist and essentialist ideas of identity—for while they invoke an absolute, preexisting blackness, they also characterize it as performative. To be black, we must understand, doesn’t just mean to do the right thing, but also to do it. (22; original emphasis)

By employing an action verb “to do,” Fusco implies the act of movement or a negotiated performance that characterizes blackness as a social construct as well as a preexisting identity. Yet is the act of “doing” a type of performance? Diana Taylor explains in her “Opening Remarks” to Negotiating Performance: Gender, Sexuality, and Theatricality in Latin/o America that the term performance “encompasses socialized and internalized roles (including those associated with gender, sexuality, and race)” (14). For Taylor, the term performance signifies more than a theatrical piece performed on a stage in front of a paying audience. Indeed, Taylor explains that the word performance can also indicate an action verb ‘to perform,’ thereby relating to Fusco’s concept of ‘doing’ the “right [black] thing.” The term performance connotes that every action is scripted, even our everyday actions. Richard Schechner confirms that “‘to perform’ can also be understood in relation to: being, doing, showing doing, and explaining showing doing” (Performance Studies: An Introduction, 22).

For Schechner, a performance is defined in part by the degree of response from others who view it; the behavior has to be made evident. He explains that everyday actions can be studied as a performance as long as the actions are reflexive, meaning that they influence other participants and there is a type of interactivity with other beings (23). Included in Schechner’s definition of performance is the effect of social and historical context: “But from
the vantage of cultural practice, some actions will be deemed performances and others not; and this will vary from culture to culture, historical period to historical period” (30). The problem remains regarding race and performance as to whether performing the role of being ‘black,’ to give one example, is an internalized, socialized, and/or historically defined practice that can be altered via a conscious effort by both participant and observer to comprehend their particular social behavior, and their perception of it.

One challenge to a ‘black’ performance is how to avoid the notion that blackness has been defined by phenotype. This also raises the question as to whether blackness really is defined solely by phenotype. As stated earlier, historical understandings influence concepts of race as well as biological appearances. If race is defined as an historical construct, then racial identifications can be negotiated in reaction to specific socio-historical changes. For example, as late as the 1970s categories such as “black” or “colored” were common, but today the term “African American” is preferred by some, a term that references geography instead of only color. Yet altering labels for specific racial groups does not exempt them from visible markers that continue to persist in US society. Furthermore, those who attempt to disassociate themselves with specific stereotyped looks and behaviors assumed by their group are at times accused of ‘passing.’ Schechner explains further this concept of ‘passing:’ “when someone who ‘looks’ black ‘acts’ white, or vice versa, the person may be accused of ‘passing’--pretending or performing a self that one has no legitimate claim to given racist constructions of contemporary Euro-American society” (135). For Schechner, race is not “real scientifically” but continues to be something that is constructed and performed in US society, with increasing amounts of “cultural-racial mixing” than before. The following excerpt from Piri Thomas’s novel Down These Mean Streets exemplifies further this concept
of performance and race, as Thomas’s father insists on his “Latinidad” regardless of his dark appearance:

I ain’t got one colored friend …at least one American Negro friend. Only dark ones I got are Puerto Ricans or Cubans. I’m not a stupid man. I saw the look of white people on me when I was a young man, when I walked into a place where a dark skin isn’t supposed to be. I noticed how a cold rejection turned into an indifferent acceptance when they heard my exaggerated accent. I can remember the time when I made my accent heavier, to make me more of a Puerto Rican than the most Puerto Rican there ever was. I wanted a value on me, son. (152)

This excerpt from Thomas’s novel conveys a concept of implied choice (albeit limited) within a social context where a hierarchy of races establishes accepted behavior. In this instance, whiteness is the desired category, followed by an “indifferent acceptance” of Latinos, and ending with African Americans at the bottom of the rank. Thomas’s father ‘chose’ to perform his ‘latinidad,’ his Puerto Rican identity, by exaggerating his Spanish accent. His choice was affected by the reaction of “white people” when they noticed his dark skin color and presumed that he was an African American. Thomas’s father recognized that he would maintain a greater “value” in the United States if he were considered to be Latino rather than African American. He chose to perform a particular race, that of ‘Latino,’ in order to be re-classified and hence more accepted—or rather tolerated, in the novel--by the dominant Anglo society. For Thomas’s father, the choice was made possible not by (re)interpretations of biological difference but rather through language. He was able to “do” the right [Latin] thing” and re-classify his ‘blackness’ in a society that continues to differentiate race as a dichotomy of black/white. His performance was accepted at the time by those who witnessed it, but would such a performance be accepted by society in general and if different actors were playing the part?
Thomas’s father altered conceptions of his race by accentuating his Spanish accent. One possible solution to a reconceptualization of race is to define the term based on similarities in language, as, for example, stating that a definition of Latino race includes all persons who speak Spanish. Obviously there are downfalls to categorization via language alone, since not all Latinos speak Spanish and language can be lost from generation to generation, not to mention that most Spaniards would not define themselves as Latinos. Another option is to define race via dress and/or customs, yet dress and customs differ greatly from country to country, as, for example, among Latin American countries. Furthermore, the term ethnicity is most commonly associated with the customs and dress of a particular group of people and cannot be merely replaced with the term race. A third possibility is to define racial categories determined by a shared history of oppression, a definite factor that links Latinos under the same rubric within the United States. A common history of persecution and exploitation does not take into account wealthy Latinos who exploit and oppress other Latinos within their respective countries and within the United States as well.

Defining a racial category by degrees of historical oppression alone implies an interpretation of history, more often than not, by dominant groups that impose their own understandings of ‘oppression’ and of race. Additionally, racial categorization of groups by historical exploitation belies an act of performance in what Homi Bhabha refers to in his text *The Location of Culture* as “double-time.” Bhabha explains the importance of both the pedagogical and performative subject in culture:

> The people are the historical ‘objects’ of a nationalist pedagogy, giving the discourse of an authority that is based on the pre-given or constituted

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16 African-Americans, as well as other minority groups, also share a history of oppression in the United States, albeit one that is distinct from that of Latinos.
historical origin in the past; the people are also the ‘subjects’ of a process of signification that must erase any prior or originary presence of the nation-people to demonstrate the prodigious, living principles of the people as contemporaneity: as that sign of the present through which national life is redeemed and iterated as a reproductive process. (145; original emphasis)

This “double-time” includes, on the one hand, a nation’s historical understanding of people as ‘objects’ that are perpetuated via various national and non-national institutions, and, on the other hand, it includes a present understanding of people as ‘subjects.’ Bhabha relates that any possibility for change regarding issues of races and cultures lies in the present, where a chance to (re)direct any prior understandings exists.

Race as defined via performance, then, incorporates notions of cultures that become institutionalized in national and historical ideologies. Bhabha maintains in his textual analysis of culture, race, and ethnicity that there exists a need to embrace ambiguities beyond singularities of organizational categories. Instead, Bhabha focuses on what he terms the “in-between spaces,” cultural interstices that indicate to a fuller extent understandings of multifarious identities. These “in-between spaces” displace a binary logic through which identities of difference are often constructed as Black/White, Self/Other. Bhabha further explains the importance of performance, whether collaborative or dialogical, within these cultural sites of representation. He concludes that “terms of cultural engagement, whether antagonistic or affiliative, are produced performatively. The representation of difference must not be hastily read as the reflection of pre-given ethnic or cultural traits set in the fixed tablet of tradition. The social articulation of difference, from the minority perspective, is a complex, on-going negotiation that seeks to authorize cultural hybridities that emerge in moments of historical transformation” (2; original emphasis). According to Bhabha, culture can never be defined from a perspective outside of history since its very definition depends
on a negotiation and/or performance from within history. Similar to race, then, culture represents a momentary “present” that in turn reflects upon a historical “past,” thereby maintaining a constant negotiation that in turn denies any fixed traits or notions. For Bhabha, these moments of negotiation offer a possibility for communal awareness and recognitions of difference and sameness from this space of “in-between.” As an articulation within the “interstices,” culture overlaps at times and thus reveals sameness as well as difference (12-13). Thus the terms culture and race share some commonalities with regard to a performance of difference and sameness from a historical perspective that is conjointly a continual negotiation. The only differentiation between culture and race appears to be biological differences and a performance of its (mis)understandings.

The negotiation and performance of racial differentiations from a space “in-between” results in a re-inscription of “otherness” that produces an excess of ambivalent categorizations of race. Race as role playing and performance is explored in this chapter within the context of two plays: Latina, by Milcha Sánchez-Scott and La mujer que cayó del cielo by Víctor Hugo Rascón Banda. For several diasporic women in these two plays, this space of negotiation becomes a site of problematic and often misunderstood performances. In Latina, Sánchez-Scott explores essentialist notions of race through a performance of difference. Latina was first produced in 1980 in Southern California and was later published in an anthology of Chicano theater edited by Jorge Huerta, entitled Necessary Theater: Six Plays about the Chicano Experience. It is important to note that the dramatist Sánchez-Scott represents a multiethnic identity: her father is Colombian and her mother is Indonesian, Chinese and Dutch. Her inclusion in Huerta’s anthology of Chicano theater challenges
identifications of Chicano texts and whether the author or the content of the text classifies it as Chicano.

Sánchez-Scott presents in *Latina* the struggle of various immigrant women from Latin America to survive economically and to maintain their Latino culture in the United States. Sarita works for a domestic agency in Los Angeles, California, placing Latina immigrants in upper-class homes as household employees. When a young Peruvian girl arrives at the agency and Sarita proceeds to switch her own clothing with the Peruvian girl’s in order to hide her appearance as a recently arrived immigrant, Sarita discovers that altering clothing and outward appearances does not change the girl’s status in the United States as a Latina, and an immigrant. Sarita’s discovery contradicts Piri Thomas’s description of his father’s performance in that he succeeded in that particular moment in his attempt to alter racial perceptions. He was effective at foregrounding his ‘*latinidad*’ in order to receive an “indifferent acceptance.” Sarita attempted to hide all traces of a minority immigrant in the Peruvian girl through a performance that would deny both her race and her heritage. In the end, Sarita learns not to invalidate her Latino race, but instead to embrace it.

Sarita struggles with notions of racial identity as a minority living in the United States. She represents a first generation Latina who struggles to distinguish herself from other Latino immigrants by inclusion in an Anglo society that in turn rejects her based on racial differences. She wishes to deny her cultural heritage and eradicate any physical distinctions (including clothing and phenotype) in order to blend into the proverbial ‘melting pot’ of America. In the process of this denial, Sarita creates an “alternate” role that, from her perspective, will eventually move her from the margins of the dominant culture to a position of centrality within that same culture. As the play develops, Sarita discovers that her racial
identity is not defined within the parameters of a category of ‘other’ immigrant nor does she
classify herself as belonging to an Anglo culture. Rather, it must be constructed in a
convoluted space that exists between two stereotypically delineated cultures. Through the
process of discovering this alternative space, concepts of race are revealed, questioned, and
negotiated with the audience.

The concept of a convoluted space refers to the construction of an identity in a nation
without borders. The nation being defined is based on cultural ideologies as opposed to
geographical space. Juan Bruce-Novoa explains notions of national identities among
immigrants to the United States in terms of their problematic positions in relation to the more
traditional binary poles of national identity: “Immigrants are judged from the extremes in
opposition, and upon them are projected the demands of the binary structure. They become
less than authentic natives of either side—half breed; their mere existence is considered an
interference into both poles, a threat to either national identity” (16; original emphasis).
Since immigrants are considered to be a type of “interference” to both nations, they begin to
create a space between the two national identities, assuming, of course, that there exists
beforehand an “imaginary” ideal of a single national identity.17 Bruce-Novoa concludes that
this creation begins from an “intercultural nothingness [that offers] intercultural possibilities
for that space. We continually expand the space, pushing the two influences out and apart as
we claim more area for our reality” (98). Similar to Anzaldúa’s concept of mestiza, Bruce-
Novoa assumes that there exists an absence of any a priori cultures, an “intercultural
nothingness” from which the space is created. This space is further complicated by the
multicultural elements of the Anglo culture (a problematic term itself) that are in constant

17 The term “imagined communities” was developed by Benedict Anderson in Imagined Communities:
Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism.
creation and assimilation with the multicultural elements of the various Latino cultures that are present in the United States. Neither culture should be monolithically classified due to inherent differences apparent within each. The mixture of various cultural elements into a space defined by ideologies and not geographical borders results in an alternate identity that does not conform to a dominant or ‘imagined’ national one. This alternate identity is the minority, the ‘other’ living in the United States as an exotic ethnicity without a unifying category of race, and therefore with limited agency for political power. As Sánchez-Scott demonstrates in Latina, a performance of one’s race cannot be disengaged from one’s biological difference as a Latina struggling to survive (culturally and economically) in the United States.

Sánchez-Scott’s play stages several female characters that represent a variety of Latino cultures. Sarita works at an employment agency where she places both illegal and legal Latina immigrants in positions in middle-class family households. Through the course of the play, the audience is introduced to women from Colombia, Cuba, Guatemala, Mexico and Peru. Although the women migrated from a variety of Latin American countries, their viewpoints and opinions express a common practice among Latinos: to generalize all immigrants under specific national rubrics. In the following scene, the characters themselves, who are unknowing of the country of origin of their female companions, reveal their misconstrued categorization of Latinos:

EVITA. The ones from Colombia are the worst.
MARIA. No es cierto, I am from Colombia.
EVITA. You’re the only person from Colombia I ever like.
CLARA. Los de Guatemala son los peores.
LOLA. I am de Guatemala.
CLARA. De veras, you are? I thought you was like me, from El Salvador. (107)
The female characters fail to recognize their companion’s unique cultural heritage and subsequently categorize all Latino immigrants under similar rubrics based on stereotypes affected by over-simplified viewpoints. While this labeling tends to homogenize and diffuse any differences among Latinos, at the same time it entitles the women to a sense of community. As ‘Latinas’ they share the same language, similar attitudes and customs, and the same consequences of an insensitive society that alienates them from the hegemonic culture. Indeed, they define and are the definition itself of a mestiza culture comprised of ethnic minorities whose identities consistently fluctuate and shift among varying perspectives. This alternate culture delineates a space of conjoining identities that have been classified as ‘other’ by a dominant Anglo culture.

The realization of existing in a distinct culture becomes an opportunity for personal empowerment at the expense of others for Don Felix, the only male character in the play. Don Felix is the stereotypical image of what has been termed the Mexican-American “sell-out.” He is a multicultural figure, in the sense that he maintains certain aspects of his Latino heritage, such as the Spanish language. Yet as a “sell-out,” he has chosen to take advantage of other immigrants who are below his social position in society as a bilingual businessman and owner of several “scheming” companies. Don Felix’s variety of business enterprises, for example the maid service and the wedding chapel, consists of exploiting other immigrants in order to gain a profit. Don Felix is considered the typical “sell-out” figure because on one level he believes in an American ideology of capitalism and the importance of economic gain. On another level, he is a parody of the “American dream” as envisioned by other Latino immigrants because he has adapted to both languages and is the proprietor of several small

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18 This sense of nationalism is shared by people in other countries as well, not only by immigrants in the United States.
businesses, yet he remains a target of ridicule in the play since the audience recognizes that he will never be accepted into the Anglo culture no matter his degree of chosen assimilation (or in other words, his performance). Don Felix’s “American dream” includes the exploitation of Latinas for cheap domestic labor. His agency offers American middle class clients the opportunity to hire illegal and/or legal immigrants. Since the Latinas are “illegal,” Don Felix assumes that he is doing them a favor by offering employment. However, he treats them as machines important only for the labor they supply. In the following scene, Don Felix explains to Sarita the process of charging a price for the women’s labor: “No English, no references . . . another $60 girl, if we’re lucky. Ah, don’t waste your time with her. Just work with the $100 and up girls” (92). Don Felix is only willing to work with the girls who have learned some English because he can charge more for their services. It is obvious that the women are valuable according to the amount of money he can earn from their domestic labor. Exploiting others of Latino heritage is one step toward the fulfillment of his “American dream.”

Don Felix is representative of a stereotypical character who, according to Jorge Huerta, denies “his cultural heritage and [attempts] to blend into the allegorical melting pot” (47). Huerta adds, with regard to Chicano plays, that their characters exemplify negative traits in order to suggest positive alternatives that in turn are aimed at creating political awareness for Latinos. He writes, “the plays demonstrate what the Chicano should not be and indicate positive alternatives to such behavior. To the emerging playwrights and creators of these intentionally didactic dramas, the ideal characters exhibit a political awareness that suggests an active substitute to assimilation” (47). Don Felix views himself as a “man of success,” failing to realize that he exemplifies a person who exploits others. He explains that
he is living the “American dream”: “now, take me for example. I got a dream that I’ll be businessman of the year. I’ll be the speaker at the Rotary Club luncheon” (119). In effect, he is creating his own role play of a successful Anglo businessman in society. He never understands, or perhaps he never admits, that he is living a delusional “American dream” since he will never be accepted into the Anglo culture as businessman of the year. In order to achieve his ‘American dream,’ Don Felix searches for social recognition in addition to economic success. Similar to Schechner’s definition of performance, Don Felix feels that his behavior must be made evident by receiving a response from the community. In reality, Don Felix will only be accepted in a marginal position as a Mexican-American businessman whose domestic laborers fulfill the need of the middle-income Anglo family. He continues to insist that money constitutes the “American dream” and lives his life comfortably as a stereotypical Latino “sell-out,” never questioning the validity of his dream or his means of someday realizing it.

Sarita also struggles to assimilate into the dominant Anglo culture. Unlike Don Felix, however, Sarita’s desire to assimilate is for personal satisfaction—a need to define her own space and identity—rather than for economic benefits. What Sarita fails to realize is the impossible task of defining her own or a new identity due to the fact that first, she cannot erase her identity or create one from nothing and, second, she will continually be categorized by others into stereotypical and socially constructed (thereby negotiable) rubrics of “Latino/a” and not of “Anglo.” On the one hand, Sarita’s failure is based on her inability to create a new identity for herself that will aid her in her desire to assimilate with the Anglo culture. On the other hand, Sarita’s identity is the product of her personal experiences and memories that she may choose to include or exclude in her process of self-discovery.
Sarita’s journey toward self-discovery of her identity is similar to Anzaldúa’s return to her birthplace, the lower Rio Grande Valley, in “La conciencia de la mestiza / Towards a New Consciousness.” Anzaldúa relives her memories as she travels the streets she knew in her childhood: “I walk through the elementary school I attended so long ago, that remained segregated until recently. I remember how the white teachers used to punish us for being Mexican” (111). Sarita has a parallel experience to Anzaldúa’s during various scenes in the play that flashback on Sarita’s childhood experiences. At a young age, Sarita attempted to embrace her Latino heritage with enthusiasm, as exemplified in the following flashback:

YOUNG SARITA. Sister! Sister, I know, I know the answer . . . Francisco Zúñiga, the statues of the Latina women, on page 324, were done by Francisco Zúñiga and he is Mexican. The statues are made of bronze, not pink marble and Mr. Zúñiga made them to sit outside on the earth. They’re tough, they sit outside, through the rain, the wind, the snow, even tornadoes. They look soft, like my Grandma’s lap, like you could hug them, but they are hard and strong and heavy . . . 2, 4, 6 even 100 strong men couldn’t move them, not even Mr. Amador’s truck.

SISTER. That’s enough, Sarita.

SARITA. They would need a bulldozer.

SISTER. I said that’s enough, Sarita. Now, class, turn to page 375 and look at those extraordinary statues of Michael Angelo. (126-27)

In this scene with her former Catholic teacher, Sarita appears to make a conscious effort to include her Latina heritage in her identity by choosing to express her knowledge about Mexican art rather than hide it (was it intentional that author Sánchez-Scott mentions the bronze color of the Mexican statues--related to skin-color--in contrast to the pink marble of the European art?). Further on in the play, Sarita has another flashback of a different Catholic teacher who tries to persuade her not to change her name from Sara Gómez to Donna Reed, a name that Sarita chose from the star of popular Anglo television programs such as “Leave it to Beaver.” At this point in Sarita’s life, she has already made a conscious decision to try to assimilate into the Anglo culture. The progressions in Sarita’s flashbacks
are directly related to her process of self-discovery in the play. Memories are an inescapable part of her identity that continually haunt and influence her decisions.

The second reason Sarita fails to create a new identity for herself is the influence of others that impose their ideologies on her with regard to traditional roles and inescapable generalized categories of race. Several scenes in this play enunciate concepts of race as biological differences based on historical understandings and thought processes, meaning that race is not merely something that is reiterated in government institutions (e.g., school history textbooks), but also includes ideologies based on generalizations. These same ideologies that are learned in social practice as opposed to educational teachings in turn lead to racism, both “well-intentioned” and aggressive. Henry Louis Gates, Jr. argues that differences of racism are both physical and conceptual in “Talkin’ That Talk.” He explains, “it is the penchant to generalize based upon essences perceived as biological which defines ‘racism.’ . . . . The racist’s error is one of thought, not merely, or only, of behavior” (404; original emphasis). Generalizations regarding race are thus constructed by what one perceives to be “normal” behavior for a particular group of people that have similar biological features. As Sánchez-Scott’s play demonstrates, generalizations regarding race lead to misunderstandings that are projected upon the character Sarita who, until the end of the play, struggles with the notion that she may or may not have a choice for self-identification with a particular racial group that is not based on biological differences alone. Sarita, throughout the course of the play, constantly finds herself confronted with stereotypes regarding Latinos, from her Anglo American clients. In the following scene, Mrs. Homes, a client for the Sánchez Domestic Agency, decides that she wants to “return” Alma, her current

19 “Talkin’ That Talk” is one of many chapters in the theoretical anthology edited by Henry Louis Gates, Jr. entitled “Race,” Writing, and Difference.
domestic worker, due to Alma’s apparent lack of respect for, and understanding of, beautiful household items. Mrs. Homes, whose mere name depicts one stereotype of Anglo American women as traditional “homemakers,” or women that do not work outside the home but instead occupy their time by maintaining the home, entertaining for their husband’s clients and friends, explains that Alma does not understand the proper care required for her elegant silver and costly furniture. Mrs. Homes explicitly states to Sarita that she is willing to pay a higher price for a more “educated” servant, one who exhibits an expertise in household cleaning:

MRS. HOMES. Oh, I’ll be more than happy to go higher for a proper person. I’d go to, say, $100 a week. Of course that would be live-in with Monday’s off. What about a black lady. (Excited by the idea) Or better still, an Oriental? How much would an Oriental run me?
SARITA. H ... How much?
MRS. HOMES. Some of our friends have Orientals. I hear and I can see they are efficient. Oh, yes, indeed, and very clean, energetic, too ... no grass growing under their feet, but they are moody, surely too, I hear. No, I can’t have that, now, you Mexicans . . . have the best dispositions.
You people may not be the cleanest or the most energetic, but I’ll say this for you . . . you know your place. (109-10)

Mrs. Homes generalizes all Orientals as “clean and efficient” but too “moody,” and then proceeds to incorporate all Latinos under the rubric of “you Mexicans,” thereby including Sarita as well. Sarita, who struggles with the notion throughout the play that racial categorization can be an individual choice, begins to view herself as reflected in the Latina women who surround her. After Mrs. Homes departs from the agency, Sarita’s monologue reveals her inner turmoil regarding racial identification. She begins to question Alma’s behavior with Mrs. Homes, which quickly becomes a self-interrogation regarding her own behavior: “Why is she so stupid? Why couldn’t she know those things? Why, why did she look that way? Like a stupid, docile Mexican, like me, just like me . . . . Why didn’t I say
something? How could I allow her to say those things to us? To both of us?” (111). At this point in the play, Sarita begins to question her racial identity as not mere behavior that can be changed via self-realization, but as modes of thought or ideologies that are pre-existent in the dominant Anglo society in which she lives. Does she have the capability to choose her own racial category?

In an attempt to separate herself from a racial identity that is defined and imposed by an Anglo culture as well as from stereotypes that are prevalent among the Latinos themselves, Sarita creates her own world of role playing. The term role playing can be defined on various levels according to the type of performance or human conduct being created that is appropriate to a particular “theatrical” situation. In the article “Spanish American Theatre of the 50s and 60s: Critical Perspectives on Role Playing,” Eugene Moretta explains the importance of role playing for certain characters in plays as a means for developing a distinct understanding of their reality:

Faithful to very basic patterns in day-to-day existence, these [forms of human conduct] would include any kind of behavior governed primarily by a character’s effort to sustain a particular image of himself and, often, to impress it upon the perceptions of another character or other characters, who thus become his special audience. In certain cases one or more characters, with or without audience, find themselves emotionally or intellectually attached to a given image and begin to regard it as definitive, even if this places them at odds with the total reality in which they move. (5; original emphasis)

Role playing is a means by which characters can separate themselves from the reality of their situation in the play in an attempt to better understand a particular “image.” This “image” that they wish to portray often coincides with one that has been pre-determined for them in

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20 One level of role playing that comes to mind is the term “play within a play,” that which was made famous by Shakespeare’s theatrical piece Hamlet. See Lionel Abel’s Metatheatre: A New View of Dramatic Form. On another level, role playing can occur among characters that play the role of themselves, with no characters as an audience present. An example of said role playing that is analyzed in Moretta’s article is Cuban playwright José Triana’s “La noche de los asesinos”.
the play. Role playing provides a means to explore alternative “images” not only in isolation of other characters but also in their presence, as a type of “special audience.”

One level of role playing evident in Latina is a performance for the part of ‘lady’s companion’ that occurs between Sarita and La Cubana. La Cubana is the only Cuban woman, and the only Latina with her green card, among the group of Latinas searching for jobs at the domestic agency. She considers herself privileged due to the fact that she does have an official green card, and insists on being placed as a ‘lady’s companion’ instead of a housekeeper. In the following scene, Sarita and La Cubana practice the role of ‘lady’ and ‘lady’s companion’ in an attempt to further prolong La Cubana’s dream of someday becoming one:

LA CUBANA. Andale, Sarita, you start.
SARITA. Okay, okay. (Sarita concentrates for a moment.) “Ah, good morning, Margarita.” (Takes a pretend sip of coffee.) “Oh, delicious coffee.”
LA CUBANA. It’s Colombian. Would you like me to take you to the park? It’s a beautiful day.
SARITA. “Not just yet, maybe later. How are you feeling Margarita?”
LA CUBANA. Ay, lady, it’s the cancer. Last night alone in my bed, I felt it like, ay ... like feathers on my arms ... (She strokes her upper arms sensuously) On my neck, on my thighs, and even, even there (Quickly points to her genital area.)
SARITA. “Oh, that nasty cancer!” Wait a minute, hold it. You can’t talk to the lady about cancer. Nobody’s going to hire you if you keep talking about cancer. People don’t like to hire people with cancer. So, don’t talk cancer, okay? (122)

In this scene, Sarita is a type of director who stages a role or instructs La Cubana as to the proper mannerism for becoming a ‘lady’s companion.’ In Metatheatre: A New View of Dramatic Form, Abel refers to Shakespeare’s play Hamlet and compares Hamlet’s role playing as one example of a playwright. Similar to Sarita, Hamlet assumes the role of playwright, or director, and begins to instruct other characters as to their specific parts. The
metatheatrical nature of the ‘play within a play’ in both *Hamlet* and *Latina* underscores that the actors are in a play and that an audience is viewing them. These are actors performing for an audience and role playing their race. Abel explains that Hamlet “[employs] a playwright’s consciousness of drama [in order] to impose a certain posture or attitude on another” (46). This “attitude” is also transmitted to an audience that is aware of the role playing and the fact that they are watching a play. While Hamlet desires to “impose a certain attitude,” in *Latina*, this role playing only serves to further falsify and alienate La Cubana from her reality, a reality where there does not exist a job as ‘lady’s companion.’ Role playing here is a game, a game in real life that does not seek confrontation or imposition but refuge from an alienating society. As with the other Latinas, Sarita finds herself forced to do what Don Félix refers to as “M.B.” or make believe. She must find a way to “make believe” or invent false employment for the Latinas in order to keep up their hopes and dreams; yet she must also “make believe,” meaning, to make the Latinas believe falsely that they will achieve their dreams. These Latina women are searching for economic survival, an escape from the poverty of their countries that they left behind, and hope for a better future for the next generation of Latinos. Role playing for La Cubana thus serves a purpose of hiding the “truth,” the fact that her position as ‘lady’s companion’ exists only in her imagination and in her dreams. Yet this same role playing gives La Cubana the means to survive in an unwelcoming society that, even though she has a green card, will still perceive her as an illegal “alien.”

Role playing for Sarita within the play allows for an autonomous sphere of activity wherein she can imagine and possibly define an identity that she strives to achieve as distinct

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21 This scene with Sarita and La Cubana demonstrates just one aspect of role playing. Further, role playing is something that all persons do, not only Latinos.
from that of other Latina women in her community. Sarita views her own world of role playing as a possible means of creating an identity that will lead to her eventual assimilation into the Anglo culture, an assimilation that she strives to achieve throughout the beginning of the play not just for herself, but for the other Latinas as well. As Sarita explains in an aside directed to the audience, “Well, I don’t hate the women . . . it’s just that . . . I am not one of them . . . I don’t want to be identified with them” (87). Sarita creates her own world outside the sphere of the stereotypical Latino homogeneity identified by the Anglo society in order to escape from the perpetual label of all Latinos as ‘others’ who do not fit into either identity. She struggles to be included in the Anglo culture of “whiteness,” a cultural space that represents for Sarita one alternative to being defined as “other.” At this point, Sarita has not fully discovered the possible consequences of cultural assimilation: the suppression of certain aspects of her identity. She fails to recognize that she has created a paradigm of distinct binary categories of Anglo and Latino culture, rather than discovering an alternate space between the two. However, one could argue that the binary structure has been projected upon Sarita by the Anglo society itself. No matter the power of Sarita’s performance, the Anglo culture rejects her attempts to assimilate based on her Latina appearance, namely, the color of her skin. Her bitterness at being rejected is exemplified in the following conversation between Sarita and María regarding Sarita’s attempts to become a Hollywood actress:

SARITA. Too exotic, María. They say I am too exotic.
MARIA. You are?
SARITA. That means I am too dark, too unusual, they don’t have people like me on their show.
MARIA. What show?
SARITA. Eight is Enough. I am too dark and freaky for Eight is Enough. They don’t have stupid Mexicans playing nurses on prime time, you know. I might scare the kids. (93)
Sarita struggles with notions of assimilation into a society that continues to view the color of one’s skin as a determining factor for that person’s identity. Hollywood producers cannot cast Sarita for their family show because she is too “dark and freaky” and their viewers would see Sarita and categorize her due to her skin color as, perhaps, a maid. Although this perception of Latinos and African Americans is gradually changing, there is no denying the fact that Latinos are assigned particular roles in Hollywood movies and television series as “drug dealer,” “servant,” “barrio girl,” or “immigrant.”\(^{22}\) Indeed, another level to Sarita’s own role playing is the fact that she aspires to be an Anglo actress. Acting involves the presentation/representation/identification of a role as another person similar to the “acting” Sarita has chosen to perform in her “real” world. The aspiration to become an Anglo actress suggests that she wants to perform a role that is not typically assigned to Latinos, a role different from the “barrio girl,” “barrio grandmother,” “barrio wife,” “barrio lesbian” (89).

Sarita’s search for a non-Latino acting role correlates with her desire to assimilate into the Anglo culture. Being hired as a non-Latina actress would mean that her “role playing” in “real” life had succeeded and that she had been assimilated into the Anglo culture at the expense of denying her Latino one.

In addition to disallowing one’s identity in the real world, role playing may also serve a more positive function as a mean of self-exploration for particular characters. Eugene Moretta explains that this technique can lead a character to recognize his/her situation with greater clarity:

> To live fully, to be authentically in touch with oneself, is to leap out of one’s normal being into a new dimension, which is at the same time to re-encounter oneself in hitherto unsuspected ways . . . . Once consciously and wholeheartedly entered into, role playing becomes, again, the necessary first

\(^{22}\) A recent discovery of Latinas, such as Selma Hayek and Jennifer López, as exotic and sexy figures in Hollywood movies leads to my discussion on consumerism in Chapter 2.
step in the individual’s discovery of his most profound identity in the larger
world. (27-28)

If role playing is a means for characters to explore their own identity in the world, then it
becomes evident that this exploration can further lead a character to reach the point of radical
change through the realization of his/her ‘authentic’ identity (a relative and negotiable term)
in society.

In Latina, the young woman who had recently arrived from Peru and was searching
for domestic employment at the agency where Sarita works was named Elsa Maria Cristina
López de Moreno. At the beginning of the play she is dressed in typical clothing worn by
“Peruvian Mountain village people . . . . She has a Peruvian shawl around her shoulders. Her
hair is in braids. She has on a peasant skirt and a work shirt and sandals on her feet” (85). In
the play, she is assigned the name “New Girl” as she represents a stereotypical Latin
American female who has recently immigrated to the United States.

New Girl is eventually offered an opportunity for employment with Ms. Harris, an
Anglo employer. Before allowing New Girl to be introduced to Ms. Harris, Sarita decides to
make some changes to New Girl’s appearance and name. She proposes these changes in
order to achieve the effect that New Girl is not a new arrival, but in fact has experience living
in the United States. The following scene depicts the changes that Sarita performs on the
New Girl:

SARITA. (To New Girl) A ver, ¿cómo se llama otra vez?
NEW GIRL. Elsa María Cristina López de Moreno.
SARITA. No, no más dile a la señora, Elsa Moreno.
NEW GIRL. Sí, Elsa Moreno.
SARITA. Okay, now we have to make her look like she’s been here a
couple of years.
LOLA. ¿Y por qué? Why we have to do that, because you say it?
SARITA. Why? Because the client doesn’t want someone who just fell
off the turnip truck, that’s why! (132)
In this scene, Sarita proposes shortening the name and changing the appearance of New Girl so that she may perform the role of an experienced immigrant worker, one who has not recently arrived to the United States. Sarita believes that she must hide the young girl’s true Peruvian identity in order for the American client to hire her for the position. She directs New Girl in the performance that she must play in order to appease the expectations of the American client, thus initiating the process of cultural “assimilation” for New Girl. In her role as director, Sarita instructs her new pupil in her part to play, a role that has been previously assigned to immigrants by a dominant Anglo society with certain expectations toward Latinos. This assignment of a role to play is a process that involves the erasure of New Girl’s distinctive identity as Peruvian and a re-definition of her category in society as “Mexican” immigrant seeking domestic employment. The process of erasure involves ‘hiding,’ as much as possible, distinctive qualities such as dress, speech, and even biological features. Lola, one of the older Latinas in the play, explains the process that Sarita may use in order to produce the necessary role, “she’ll dye our hair, change our names, anything you want, Mrs.” (136).

As the play proceeds, Sarita must reconcile the fact that New Girl is a human being and that not only New Girl but Sarita herself has been bought and sold by an Anglo society along with the other characters. When the group of women finally separate after having formed a circle around Sarita and New Girl, the audience sees an “Americanized” version of New Girl. She is wearing Sarita’s clothing, and Sarita is wearing the Peruvian’s. At this point, Sarita is confronted with the reality of the divided cultures in which she lives:

SARITA. No, it’s not right. I made a mistake.
LOLA. You make a terrible mistake. Didn’t you have eyes to see she was beautiful the way she was? . . .
SARITA. Oh no, please. Let’s change her back . . . She was beautiful the way she was. (133-34)

At this moment in the play, Sarita recognizes the falseness of the self-constructed world of role playing that she had been performing in order to create her own identity as well as those of others around her. Role playing earlier in the play presented, for Sarita, a way out of meaninglessness in an Anglo society. In the end, Sarita learns to put on the ‘mask’ of the ‘other’ and sees her image, that of the Peruvian girl, as if in a mirror. Role playing results for Sarita in a gradual intensification toward a crisis point of self-realization of her own race. She eventually discovers that erasing one’s cultural heritage and one’s race in order to achieve “complete” assimilation into another culture is an impossible--and a false--performance. Her role playing is a false performance because it denies her Latino heritage and her undeniable Latino race, something that Sarita cannot merely shed, as clothing. The problem with her performance is that she creates an incomplete ‘actress’ who has not been able to incorporate her new role, so the performance fails. Sarita’s role playing is similar to Piri Thomas’s father who changes his behavior and exaggerates his accent in order to appear more ‘Spanish’ and less ‘black.’ They both wish to change one assigned racial category for another. Sarita discovers that she cannot create an identity based on a self-made projection alone because her identity is intricately interwoven and produced within the social, political, and cultural context in which she lives. Sarita faces her final identity crisis: she is not an Anglo nor does she belong to the ambivalent category of ‘other’ immigrant, a category assigned to those who cannot be classified as ‘black’ or ‘white.’ She is more accurately a result of the complex intermingling of cultures; and as such, she seeks to express herself in a “third space.” The “third space,” according to Sánchez-Tranquilino and Tagg, is “between the dualities of rural and urban, Eastside and Westside, Mexican and American, and,
arguably, feminine and masculine. Not pure negation. Not mestizo--half and half--but an even greater mestizaje. A new space: a new field of identity” (560; original emphasis). This “third space” is created by Latinos in order to construct an alternate identity based on a contradictory concept of combining cultures while maintaining them separate. In regard to race and this “third space,” perhaps a concept of race existing as a mestizaje, between dualities of ‘white’ and ‘black,’ will emerge in the form of a Latino race, one that is a construction of Latinos and not of Anglo Americans.

Eventually Sarita discovers that as a Latina she can never be an Anglo. She discovers that adaptation does not mean denial of one’s own heritage, but rather cultural survival and Latina consciousness. She must learn to create a “third space” that exists on a hyphen between the paradigmatic bipolar racial identities of black/white, identities that are further complicated by varying levels of difference within each one. Sarita’s actions and role playing in daily life force the audience to confront and to question their own identity within the Anglo culture. As Sarita is forced to see the truth regarding her cultural heritage and race, the audience also becomes observant of its identity within various shared and multifaceted communities of Latino cultures. Sarita’s discovery of her own cultural awareness leads audience members to reflect on notions of ambiguous cultures among their own distinct communities and perhaps even to question their own “performance” of identity and race.

While Sarita struggles to understand her own identity from the standpoint of a Latina living in the United States, other immigrants learn that they must confront their racial identities upon crossing the Mexico-United States border. When migrants cross geographical

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23 The concept of living on a ‘hyphen’ in reference to the immigrant experience was introduced by Gustavo Pérez-Firmat in Life on the Hyphen: The Cuban-American Way.
borders from one country to another, racial deviations to a national “norm” are underscored at the point of contact. Due to the fact that race is an historically defined term, concepts of race differ based on a nation’s particular dominant ideology that is affected by historical understandings. In effect, an actual physical crossing of one person from one country into another thereby prompts racial (mis)understandings, whether empathetic or objectionable.24 Defining race across national borders requires generalizations of sameness and difference from both sides of the border. Indeed, generalizations not only exist among differing national identities, but are an intrinsic part of defining race on a whole, even at the microscopic level of communities. In Proceed with Caution, When Engaged by Minority Writing in the Americas, Doris Sommer analyzes Latin American texts within the context of particularism and the necessity of readers to understand what she refers to as “strategic refusals,” moments when the literary or testimonial author (Rigoberta Menchú is one of the authors discussed by Sommer) defiantly refuses to invite the reader to understand his/her secret differences of “otherness” in order to maintain a certain autonomy. Sommer begins her textual analysis with an explanation of the importance of “particularism” within “universalism” with regard to these decidedly spoken silences:

If there were no difference, there could be no recognition of one subject by another, but only the kind of identification that reduces real external others into functions of a totalizing self. Yet the gap that allows for enough autonomy to make mutuality possible also risks misrecognition and violence. The risk is worth taking, because without it we allow the violence of forcing sameness on others: either they are forced to fit in or they are forced out. (3)

Sommer maintains that difference is necessary in the expression of ‘others’ in order to define and recognize them, and this same “gap” in difference allows for possible sociopolitical negotiation. Although postcolonial thought tends to view these “gaps” as negative moments

24 Homi K. Bhabha warns against empathy as a means of echoing voices of the ‘other’ within the familiar sounds of a subject-centered self in his text The Location of Culture.
of separateness that can hinder dialogue, Sommer argues that sometimes an interference is “not a bad thing; it interrupts the person who speaks for someone else and makes for time to listen” (3).

In context of the Mexican-United States border, there is no denying the fact that “gaps” persist on varying sociopolitical levels that affect both country’s (mis)understandings of racial identification. The Mexican-United States border has long been a contested site of cultural and political dissidence. With regard to the “immigrant experience” of Mexicans to the United States, the border represents a sight of problematic issues in the status quo of United States policy studies. Mainstream public discourse raises questions as to the suitability for assimilation by Mexicans into hegemonic society, always assuming that the optimal option of all immigrants is to be absorbed into the allegorical ‘melting pot.’ These arguments are based on a concept of “Mexican” identity as a stereotypical Spanish-speaker from the lower class. This classification of “Mexican” immigrants is challenged by an indigenous woman named Rita in Víctor Hugo Rascón Banda’s drama La mujer que cayó del cielo.

In Rascón Banda’s play, the protagonist is an indigenous woman named Rita who speaks Tarahumara, a language that would be unfamiliar to both public audience/reader that do not speak or read the language. Rita is “discovered” one day, not in Texas, California, New Mexico, or Arizona (the four border states with Mexico) but in Larned, Kansas, and authorities are bewildered as to where she came from, how she arrived there, and what they should do with this “problem.” She is placed in a psychiatric hospital pending further medical and psychological evaluations by doctors. In an effort to discover her origins, the doctors subject Rita to a battery of tests and medications that result in further
misunderstandings due to language barriers and misconstrued ideas regarding her racial identity. In the end, two political organizations from Mexico, La Coordinadora Estatal de la Tarahumara and el Instituto Nacional Indigenista, fight over Rita. One organization represents the PAN [the Partido Acción Nacional] and wishes to place Rita in a psychiatric hospital in Chihuahua. The other one represents the PRI [the Partido Revolucionario Institucional] and they desire to return Rita to her pueblo, where she will undoubtedly end up alone and abandoned. In the final scene of the play, the audience discovers that Rita was institutionalized in an insane asylum in Chihuahua, Mexico where she will most likely remain for the rest of her life.

This disturbing drama of a Tarahumara woman progressively destroyed mentally and physically, and abandoned by both Mexico and the United States, is based on true events. Rita spent a total of twelve years in a psychiatric hospital in Kansas, only to be “returned” to Mexico where she will spend the remainder of her life in a mental institution. While this play questions concepts of national identity, race, language barriers, and definitions of “normal,” it is important to remember the human side of the story. Rita simply wanted to return to her pueblo, Porochi, but instead became a victim of social and political institutions that denied Rita the freedom to be different; she is neither Mexican in Mexico nor Mexican immigrant in the United States. Rita, by her very presence, does not reify the border but instead attacks the barrier itself between Mexico and the United States, reconfirming that a concept of “national essence” still exists in practice, an essence that expresses a duality of racial identifications to which she does not belong. The protagonist represents an intrusion into the pre-established duality of the two sides of the barrier, i.e., “Mexican” and “American” (in the sense of an ‘imagined community’ of mainly dominant Anglo-
Americans) thereby disrupting categories of established racial identities. She defies the dual categories themselves, pointing to the performativity of their very existence and threatening it as well. However, by attacking the border, albeit unwillingly, she runs the risk of being destroyed by its collapse.

At the beginning of the play, police officials in Kansas attempt to define Rita’s racial background by categorizing her according to her biological features. In the following scene, two police officials discuss her racial origin via speculation and pre-established categorization based on Rita’s appearance:

POLICIA II. She’s got lots of skirts, one on top of the other. We thought she was an Apache, but no...
POLICIA I. Look at her face.
POLICIA II. She’s frightened.
POLICIA I. She has oriental features.
POLICIA II. She’s not Chinese.
POLICIA I. Could she be from Vietnam?
POLICIA I. They brought somebody from Vietnam and they couldn’t understand each other.
POLICIA II. In California there are Koreans all over the place. She must be Korean.
POLICIA I. Or Japanese.
POLICIA II. Turkish, maybe Eskimo! She’s Eskimo. Do you remember the film with Anthony Quinn? She’s Eskimo! (27)

The two officer’s conversation reveals a process of categorizing race based on generalizations derived not from any knowledge as to Rita’s background, language, customs, or ideology, but rather from observations of her physical appearance, including dress. Their knowledge of races appears to come from suppositions regarding types of races that reside in the United States, and in particular, in California, and from images of races that are portrayed by Hollywood film producers in movies. The character Policía II recalls a film with Anthony Quinn as a point of reference for identifying Rita as an Eskimo. Hollywood producers have long been known for perpetuating racial “types” in film, and in this scene Policía II
references a 1959 Anthony Quinn movie entitled *The Savage Innocents*. Policía II establishes a racial comparison between the Eskimos from this Hollywood movie and Rita based on physical similarities alone. At this point in the play, the officers can only speculate as to Rita’s race, an aspect of her identity that they find important to define as a means of solving her mysterious origins. Their perspective of race as defined by biological appearances leads them to further misunderstandings regarding Rita’s place of origin.

In another scene of the play entitled “Rita por fuera,” the audience is provided with a biological account of Rita’s appearance, and a linguistic and psychological evaluation. At this point in the play, the psychiatric doctors still do not have any indication as to Rita’s origin and continue to question her and force her to take certain medications for psychiatric treatment.\(^25\) She is described in a monologue as follows:


This description of Rita is reminiscent of a scientific experiment or an exhibition in an anthropology museum. The language used is also reminiscent of positivism, a nineteenth century scientific discourse based on a system of classification that dehumanized its subjects. Her facial features are listed and identified with Mongolian ethnicities, her language is compared to Japanese, and her stature has similarities with the aborigines of New Zealand.

\(^{25}\) Since the drama was staged in Mexico and written by Mexican playwright Rascón Banda, the scenes switch from English to Spanish in the beginning, even though the action occurs in Kansas.
Rita’s physical appearance, language, and behavior patterns lead the doctors to conclude that she is purported to be descendent from a “raza primitiva,” a primitive race from the Stone Age. An additional scientific analysis of Rita is conducted in another scene in the play where two doctors provide an even greater detailed description of Rita’s anatomy. As Doctor II explains to the audience, Rita has a “marcada desproporción entre las medidas del cráneo y la cara. El diámetro naso-indiano mide 7 pulgadas que exceden la cifra normal” (49). This scientific jargon used to identify Rita resonates in nineteenth-century concepts regarding race. Peter Wade explains in his text Race and Ethnicity in Latin America the foundations of scientific racism in the earlier part of the nineteenth century. He writes, “Cuvier [a French scientist of the early nineteenth century] expounded a ‘static non-evolutionary tradition of comparative anatomy’, and spent his time collecting (or rather stealing) bones and skulls for comparative measurement to assess racial difference. This was an early example of a whole industry of anatomical measurement, designed to specify racial typologies, with great attention being paid to the skull since brain size was held to correlate with superior intelligence” (10). The concept of scientific racism persisted for several years until the rise of Nazism and the Second World War, followed by black civil rights movements in the United States that initiated the need for changes in racial definitions (13). Yet the question persists as to whether scientific racism been completely dismantled or if it has merely been disguised under the rubric of ‘physical differences’ that do not affect categories of race.

In the play, Rita is treated as a scientific experiment, one who needs to be observed, medicated, and (re)trained before she can become a part of ‘normal’ society again. The doctors at the psychiatric hospital have decided that Rita does not ‘fit’ into any category of race that they have defined, nor does she comply with any concept they have regarding
proper social behavior. Thus they begin a process of ‘socialization’ or assimilation of Rita into what they deem to be ‘normal’ codes of society. In the following scene, the doctors give the audience their prescription for Rita’s assimilation process:

DOCTOR I. Insiste en vestirse ella misma y en permanecer descalza y vestida de día y de noche.
DOCTOR II. Qúitenle la ropa y que duerma como la gente normal . . .
DOCTOR I. Los estados sociales deteriorados que muestra creo que son resultado de la ausencia de estimulación verbal.
DOCTOR II. Entonces, hay que incorporarla y orientarla socialmente. Dentro de sus actividades, prográmenle caminatas, cantar, participar en grupos musicales, actividades en el gimnasio, que participe en la hora social y en las terapias de grupos amistosos y pónganle un custodio en todas las actividades. (38-39)

As demonstrated in this scene, Rita does not conform to ‘normal’ codes of conduct or dress that have been pre-defined by a dominant Anglo society. What is esteemed to be ‘normal’ behavior is indeed a pre-scripted performance that has been assigned to various racial groups, and Rita’s current performance is not cohesive with any races that are accepted by the two doctors.26 The doctor’s plan to ‘normalize’ Rita is that she should complete the following tasks: wear only one skirt instead of several and use appropriate nighttime clothing, maintain proper hygiene, such as taking a daily bath and brushing her teeth, learn to speak English, and participate in various social activities such as walking, musical groups, and physical activities in the gymnasium. If Rita follows their prescribed regime, then the doctors feel that she will be ‘fit’ for (re)immersion into society, in particular, an Anglo-American society.

Another aspect of this play that remains to be analyzed is the importance of effectual communication through spoken language. The issue of language differences and misunderstandings contributes immensely to the eventual demise of Rita in Rascón Banda’s play since Rita is unable to adeptly communicate with the doctors in Kansas. Based

26 Some racial groups mentioned by various characters in the play that are presumed to be ‘normal’ are: Chicanos, Mexicans, Japanese, and Anglo-Americans.
principally on Rita’s physical appearance, the doctors try to communicate with her first in Vietnamese, then later in Spanish. On the one hand language is ultimately the only means of identifying Rita’s indigenous heritage and eventually her place of origin. Her “oriental features” and unaccustomed manner of dress do not aide in the placement of her origin since her physical aspect is not easy to categorize. On the other hand, Rita’s language does not help to classify her as Mexican either since the doctors wrongly presume that all Mexicans speak Spanish. Yet Rita attempts to answer some of the questions asked of her, and tries to effectively communicate her desire to be returned to her pueblo, but instead finds herself confronting an immediate language barrier, that which drives her into further obscurity. Her feeling of utter bewilderment is paralleled with the audience in the scene where Rita speaks Tarahumara on the telephone with another character and the audience members who are non-Tarahumara speakers are left to only speculate at the meaning of their conversation. This telephone conversation continues in the play for approximately six written pages (64-70), a sufficient amount of time for the audience to question what is happening and perhaps even to feel uncomfortable and/or excluded from the process. This language barrier is an intentional effect that Rascón Banda desired for his audience in order for its members to fully comprehend Rita’s own bewilderment and fear. As evidenced by this scene in the play, language in some instances is an indicator of ‘foreignness’ and audience members were forced to feel ‘alien’ in their own surroundings without any translations offered.

Language, as an indicator of ‘foreignness,’ serves the purpose in this play of presenting Rita as an ‘alien’ in both the United States and in her own country of origin, Mexico. The first attempt at helping Rita is to assimilate her into an Anglo society. As analyzed earlier, the doctors devise a plan to normalize Rita, one that includes teaching her
English. The character of Giner in the play has a similar concept regarding a process of assimilation for Rita, one that would require re-defining Rita’s role as a Latina or, as Giner explains in the following quote, a Chicana: “Si hablaras inglés podrías pasar por chicana, ¿pero así?” (93). Giner believes that if Rita spoke some English, she would be able to ‘pass’ in the United States as a Chicana. Why does Giner feel that by speaking English, Rita could pass as a Chicana? In order to understand Giner’s reference to Chicana/os in the United States, perhaps it would be best to begin with his own story. Giner is himself an intriguing character who arrives at the psychiatric hospital in Kansas after hearing of Rita and her unknown origins. As indicated in the following monologue to the audience, Rita’s name is what initiated Giner to investigate further the unknown woman’s situation in Kansas. Also revealed in the following monologue is Giner’s personal story regarding his arrival to the United States. He explains:


The audience discovers from Giner that he is a Mexican immigrant to the United States and he speaks Spanish in addition to an indigenous language belonging to the Chabochi, and English. Giner has experience in border crossing and language acquisition, and expresses compassion toward Rita and her situation at the hospital. He would quite possibly be classified as a Chicano, a person who identifies culturally and ethnically with his Mexican ancestry and who resides in the United States. Giner’s understanding of Chicanos is therefore based on his own personal experience with border crossing and living in an Anglo
society. His definition of Chicana in this scene implies that a Mexican immigrant can pass in
the United States from the status of ‘Mexican immigrant’ to ‘Chicano’ based on his/her
ability to speak English. There is no doubt that the audience realizes that Rita could never
pass on language ability alone because it would take years for her to acquire enough English
to do so. Yet Rita’s ability to ‘pass’ from one categorization to another is perhaps further
conditioned by an aspect other than her language: physical appearance. There must be a
degree of difference in Rita’s appearance that marks her as ‘Chicana’ and not ‘Anglo
American’ in Giner’s perspective. Giner is aware of differences in race that exist in the
United States and knows that Rita could not pass as Anglo regardless of her English speaking
abilities.27

In the end, the possibility of Rita passing as even a ‘foreigner’ in the United States is
dismissed, evidenced by the fact that she was placed in an insane asylum without regard to
her personal rights. She becomes for the Anglo doctors a pseudo experiment of assimilation
that fails miserably. Yet the question remains regarding Rita and her ‘foreignness’ within her
own country of origin, Mexico. Does Mexico indeed reject Rita? The second solution the
doctors propose for resolving Rita’s dilemma is to return her to Mexico. Once Mexican
officials become aware that Rita exists and is hospitalized in Kansas, two national institutions
begin to fight for the right to maintain Rita for their own political purposes. As indicated in
the following selection from the play, Rita is unaware of any political dissension regarding
her individual rights:

RITA. No conozco PAN. Yo conozco PRI. Verde, blanco y colorado.
    Yo voto por PRI. No voto, no cobija, no maíz. Comisario es PRI.
    Comisario se enoja. Voto PRI, dice. Verde, blanco y colorado.

27 On another level, Giner’s character was created by the playwright Rascón Banda and his personal
understandings of the term Chicano/a as a Mexican who writes and currently resides in Mexico. What the
audience is receiving is a Mexican’s point of view regarding issues and uses of the word Chicano/a.
GINER. La CORETA [La Coordinadora Estatal de la Tarahumara] quiere sacarte de aquí y llevarte a Chihuahua, para meterte en un hospital siquiátrico de allá.
RITA. Hospital no. Hospital no. Yo no mala.
GINER. El INI [El Instituto Nacional Indigenista] quiere llevarte a la sierra, a tu pueblo, pero allá nadie quiere hacerse cargo de ti. (87)

In this scene, Rita comments that she votes for PRI because she receives basic necessities for living from them and thereby avoids further conflict from any government officials. For Rita, voting is not a matter of choice but rather a decision that has already been made for her. As such, she contributes to the political system without being a part of it; she casts her vote in order to receive provisions, not to have any political agency. Rita is an example of someone who lives within the geographical borders of an ‘imagined community’ but is not an active or rather ‘official’ member of that community. She is a necessary part of the image of ‘mestizaje’ as projected by mainstream Mexico that includes a positive indigenous heritage based on the legacy of Mesoamerica, yet she is rejected by that same society, an outcast, a foreigner in her own land due to her very “Indianness.” For example, Mexican officials accuse Rita of assassinating her husband, yet Rita claims that she did not kill him but rather a coyote that attempted to steal the same goats that Rita had raised. In Rita’s mind, she committed no crime by killing the coyote, yet her description of the account details clearly that she did murder her husband and officials conclude that she is a criminal. The two culture’s concept of justice collide in the case since Rita views herself as innocent and Mexican officials claim she is guilty. Another example of an indigenous woman who is included/excluded from Mexico’s ‘imagined’ nation is Esperanza from Ruth Behar’s testimonial novel Translated Woman: Crossing the Border with Esperanza’s Story. In this text, Behar, a Cuban ethnographer, translates into English Esperanza’s stories, an indigenous
woman who lives in northern Mexico. In her introduction to the text, Behar explains

Esperanza’s socio-political position in Mexican society:

But Esperanza’s “Indianness” is, from mainstream Mexican perspective, less authentic, more degraded, and therefore outside the realm of the INI [the National Indigenous Institute]. She neither speaks Nahuatl—as did ancestors beyond the reaches of her memory—nor makes crafts to sell. Her “Indianness” does not merit any special attention from bureaucratic agencies; Esperanza is part of the vast marginal Mexican population that has been internally colonized to think of itself as descended from Indians and yet can claim no pride or virtue in that heritage . . . But in Mexico a mestiza like Esperanza is Indian for purposes of exclusion and non-Indian for purposes of inclusion. (10-11)

Esperanza’s position of “Indianness” is similar to that of Rita in that both are examples of indigenous women who are included in mainstream Mexico’s national ideal of mestizaje, a combination of indigenous and European heritage, yet are simultaneously excluded by Mexican elite who seek to embrace a movement toward Western notions of civilization that is on opposite ends of the spectrum with ‘uncivilized’ indigenous cultures that have not been modernized according to their ideals.

Rita is thus fought over by two different institutions in Mexico, yet when she returns to her country, she is placed in an insane asylum rather than set free. The audience is left to wonder why Rita is institutionalized in her homeland, Mexico. The doctors know her pueblo of origin, they discovered that the language she speaks is Tarahumara, and Rita has even learned to speak some Spanish and a few odd words in English. Is she indeed an insane woman who requires medication and psychological evaluation? Perhaps the answer lies in Rita’s scripted performance and a matter of ‘choice.’ In correlation with Sánchez-Scott’s Peruvian immigrant character called New Girl in Latina, Rita finds herself receiving a script to perform in her newly acquired and assimilated part in society, a role that Rita is reluctant to enact. In Latina New Girl exchanges clothing with Sarita, is instructed in English, and is
given directions as to her role playing as an experienced immigrant worker in the United States. In *La mujer que cayó del cielo*, Rita also finds herself instructed in the aspect of proper performance and dress at the end of the play. Rather than confront a possible court case regarding Rita’s hospitalization and treatment, the doctors at the Larned, Kansas hospital allow Rita to be returned to Mexico. Rita is transported to a bridge in El Paso, Texas that joins Mexico and the United States. According to the stage directions, she is dressed in new, modern clothing. The character Giner explains to Rita her ‘new’ assigned role:

Estamos en la línea, en el borde, en el límite. ¿No lo sientes? Unos pasos más y estarás del otro lado . . . Irás sentada junto al chofer, como una turista. (Rita se mira la ropa nueva. Se siente incómoda.) ¿No te gusta la ropa que te compramos? Te ves muy elegante. (91-92)

Rita receives proper instruction as to her expected performance in the Mexican society to which she is being returned. Yet for Rita, her role playing is not a game, and it is not a refuge from an alienating society. In the case of Sarita in *Latina*, role playing teaches her self-fulfillment and acceptance as a Latina living in the United States. The Peruvian immigrant girl reflects back upon Sarita her own personal performance as a Latina, and Sarita realizes that she has a choice. In Rascón Banda’s play, however, Rita becomes destroyed by her inability to discover the interrelationship of her performance and her life. Rita has no mirror image from which to see herself and she has no models of performance. The two psychiatric doctors in Kansas become Rita’s directors but are unsure themselves as to what her performance should entail since she does not appear to ‘fit’ into any pre-scripted performance.

Rascón Banda raises several questions in his play regarding racial definitions on both sides of the Mexican and United States border. Rita’s place of origin is a complete bafflement to the doctors in Kansas, as she claims to them eventually that she literally “cayó
del cielo,” or fell from the sky. This concept of falling from the sky is a reference to Tarahumara cosmology specific to the indigenous group to which they belong, the Rarámuri. In the introduction to an anthology of Rascón Banda’s plays entitled Teatro de frontera 13/14, Enrique Mijares explains this Rarámuri belief: “. . . ella proviene del cielo porque los rarámuri, a quienes ella pertenece, sostienen el mundo; los rarámuri son las columnas que están en las orillas del mundo para que no se caiga el cielo . . .” (21). As evidenced further in this chapter, Rita’s indigenous heritage only further complicates the decisions made regarding her future and well-being.

The process that the play leads the audience through to the eventual discovery of the truth regarding Rita’s origin is perhaps an indication of how racial identities are categorized. To begin with, there is no denying the fact that country of origin is most commonly related to race. If someone states they are from Japan, then they are most likely categorized as Japanese; however, included in the decision to categorize this person as Japanese is physical appearance. If a dark-skinned man of tall stature states that he is Japanese, then his categorization becomes questionable by mainstream society. The concept of ‘choice’ becomes convoluted within social context in terms of racial identification. In Rascón Banda’s play, Rita is unaware of a necessity to make a consciously chosen performance from the dual options that are being presented to her: Mexican or Mexican immigrant. Yet one of the most abhorring aspects of the play is the fact that Rita should have to choose to ‘fit in’ to one of two options only, and that she should have to force herself to perform and to conform to dominant society’s ideals regarding standards of race. In his article entitled “Chance, Context, and Choice in the Social Construction of Race,” Ian F. Haney López argues the notion of making a choice in racial identifications. He remarks:
Choice composes a crucial ingredient in the construction of racial identities and the fabrication of races. Racial choices occur on mundane and epic levels, for example in terms of what to wear or when to fight; they are made by individuals and groups, such as people deciding to pass or movements deciding to protest; and the effects are often minor though sometimes profound, for instance, slightly altering a person’s affiliation or radically remaking a community’s identity. Nevertheless, in every circumstance choices are exercised not by free agents or autonomous actors, but by people who are comprised and constrained by the social context . . . in racial matters we constantly exercise choice, sometimes in full awareness of our compromised position, though most often not. (13-14)

Choice is, ironically, not an autonomous decision that one can make freely without any regard to social context since the two are superimposed upon one another, and social context correlates directly with historically constructed and reinterpreted events particular to individual countries. Haney López explains that “a race is not created because people share just any characteristic, such as height or hand size, or just any ancestry, for example Yoruba or Yugoslav. Instead, it is the social significance attached to certain features, like our faces, and to certain forebears, like Africans, which defines race” (13). Race as comprised of physical features together with shared historical understandings poses a problem for categorizing Rita’s race. Audience members question her classification as ‘Mexican’ because she perhaps does not share “certain forebears” or rather a part of the ‘imagined community’ of a Mexican national. Rita maintains until the very end of the play, “yo tarahumara,” to which Giner replies, “el país de los tarahumaras no existe.” He then explains the dilemma of Rita’s inability to perform a ‘proper’ role, “sin lengua y sin papeles no tienes país.” (92-93). Rita is trapped on a border where she is incapable of discovering any ‘gaps’ or differentiation. These ‘gaps’ reference back to Sommer’s quote regarding particularism and the understanding of ‘others’: “The gap that allows for enough autonomy to make mutuality possible also risks misrecognition and violence. The risk is worth taking, because
without it we allow the violence of forcing sameness on others: either they are forced to fit in or they are forced out” (3). As evidenced by the character of Rita, immigrants who do not conform to ‘normal’ standards of performance as deemed appropriate by a dominant Anglo society in the United States are “forced to fit in or they are forced out.” In the case of Rita, she was “forced out” not only by the United States, but by her own country of origin as well: Mexico. Rather than returning her to the pueblo Porochi in the mountains of Chihuahua, Mexican officials place Rita in a mental institution where she quite possibly will spend the remainder of her life.

Both theatrical pieces, Latina and La mujer que cayó del cielo, written by playwrights from opposite sides of the United States-Mexican border, portray the lives of women who have come into contact with an Anglo society and find themselves on a symbolic cultural and racial border. The women disrupt the pre-existing racial categories of ‘black,’ and ‘white’ in the United States, and Mexico’s concept of mestizaje and the inclusion of ‘Indianness’ into the national ideal. While the character of Sarita in Latina discovers through role playing her own script and racial performance in an Anglo society, one that includes her Latina heritage, the character of Rita is not so fortunate. Rita has no legal papers, no passport, and no country, and is hospitalized in an insane asylum, the only place that, according to the United States and Mexico, she ‘fit’ or belonged. She is unaware that any performance is required in order for her to survive nor that there exists any choice for her life other than the desire to return to her pueblo. In opposition to Rita, Sarita successfully attacks the border (of her own accord and choice) as a site of cultural contention and finds self-realization as a way out of meaningless; she comes to terms with her physical appearance that cannot be changed and begins to struggle for an identity separate from the
black/white paradigm that makes Latinos a spectral race. The question remains whether Sarita is manipulating or directing her own role playing, or whether she is merely fulfilling a part that has been assigned to her as a Latina immigrant living in a society based on concepts of consumerism.
Chapter 3

Consumerism and Racialized Bodies

The recent globalization of markets has rendered possible the crossing of virtual
borders between nations on a larger scale through technological advances including, but not
limited to, the internet and mass media communications. Such transnational communication
has contributed to an ever-increasing awareness of national borders as arbitrary lines of
distinction replicated in a transnational market. These lines indicate a limitation, marked by
physical and ideological borders, for nations that seek to define a distinct national/popular
culture--a conceived essentialist identity--in relation to other nations. This national/popular
culture that is reiterated in museums, national ceremonies, art, literature, and folklore has
become rearticulated through globalization and a transnational market of consumption. The
articulation of cultures via the internet, television, film, and radio has altered traditional
concepts of national culture as a homogeneous identity. National identities have always
negotiated differences among identities within the confines of their own region. These
identities, however, were constructed from within one country that opposed another country
in terms of singularity and cohesion. The emergence of transnational markets whereby
commodities, ideas, and labor are exchanged among corporate enterprises has influenced
concepts of single or homogeneous national identities in terms of cultural consumption. The
habits, tastes, and preferred forms of communication of consumers, combined with national
and international integration in the market, have conditioned means of understanding and
negotiating cultures in modern society.
Cultures defined via consumption in today’s international markets are characterized by group ‘types’ that share commonalities based on preferences, such as sports, music, and gastronomy, among many others. These particular ‘types’ can be further categorized via market strategies according to the level of consumption, for example, the older generation, youth, working or non-working parents, families, and single parent households. This categorization based on market types and consumption of commodities creates categories of people that cross geopolitical national borders. García Canclini refers to this concept in *Consumidores y ciudadanos: Conflictos multiculturales de la globalización* as “comunidades interpretativas de consumidores” (196). He compares the delimited territorial spaces previously expressed as “imagined communities”\(^\text{28}\) with a concept that emphasizes postmodern identities and the influence of technology, communications, and a consumption of commodities:

> En cambio, [con las naciones definidas arbitrariamente o ‘imaginadas’ dentro de los límites de una región geopolítica], las identidades posmodernas son transterritoriales y multilingüísticas. Se estructuran menos desde la lógica de los Estados que de los mercados; en vez de basarse en las comunicaciones orales y escritas que cubrian espacios personalizados y se efecturaban a través de interacciones próximas, operan mediante la producción industrial de cultura, su comunicación tecnológica y el consume diferido y segmentado de los bienes. La clásica definición socioespacial de identidad, referida a un territorio particular, necesita complementarse con una definición sociocomunicacional. (30-31; original emphasis)

García Canclini’s “definición sociocomunicacional” of identities poses a challenge to concepts of nationalism that were previously defined by hegemonic state organizations whose intention was to create a homologous national identity. These challenges to nationalist identities require significant financial investments, managed primarily by a privileged class, that in turn create unequal access to advanced communications and to

\(^{28}\) This phrase was coined by Benedict Anderson in his text *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism.*
varying levels of market consumption. For example, most large-scale malls located in major cities around the globe sell Banana Republic, Guess, and Tommy Hilfiger products that are marketed to a specific social class of society. This class-targeted and saturated market of predominantly ‘American’ products raises the following question: what difference exists, if any, between globalization and Americanization? Thomas Friedman explains the phenomenon of an ever-increasing ‘American’ world market in terms of a globalization that has replaced the Cold War system: “Unlike the Cold War system, globalization has its own dominant culture, which is why it tends to be homogenizing to a certain degree . . . Culturally speaking, globalization has tended to involve the spread (for better and for worse) of Americanization--from Big Macs to iMacs to Mickey Mouse” (9). This dominant culture of globalization incorporates certain social classes while excluding others. This is not to suggest that lower economic social classes do not participate at a certain level in globalization--they are often exploited for labor production and as consumers of products targeted specifically for their class. Friedman emphasizes that globalization “has one overarching feature--integration” (8). This integration includes markets, nation-states, and technologies that enable connections among varying individuals worldwide.

A concept of culture based on consumerism, however, must take into account consumers with limited resources and their positionality, or rather lack thereof, in a global

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29 García Canclini explains further this unequal access to mass consumption: “Al imponerse la concepción neoliberal de la globalización, según la cual los derechos son desiguales, las novedades modernas aparecen para la mayoría solo como objetos de consumo, y para muchos apenas como espectáculo. El derecho de ser ciudadano [de consumo internacional], o sea, de decidir cómo se producen, se distribuyen y se usan esos bienes, queda restringido otra vez a las élites.” Consumidores y ciudadanos (26).

30 Several American-made products and articles of clothing have an ‘American’ label yet are fabricated in foreign countries and sold as ‘American’ products even in countries, like Mexico, where they were originally produced.

31 See Thomas L. Friedman, The Lexus and the Olive Tree.
market. One of the aims of the project of modernization in Latin America was the incorporation into nationalist development alternative identities, mainly indigenous. The indigenous groups were, for several Latin American countries, a representation of diversity within the confines of national cultures; in contemporary society, they represent one of the last resistances to globalization. A diverse and occasionally misrepresented group of society that has limited participation in global market consumption may or may not be included in a definition of national identity based primarily on global markets of production. Gareth Williams challenges the concept of cultures as defined by mass productions by questioning the limitations of particular consumers in his text *The Other Side of the Popular: Neoliberalism and Subalternity in Latin America*. Williams examines the possibility of some reconciliation with market consumption and individuals struggling for survival. He argues, “how could a consumption-based model of citizenship account for the sustained and increasing functionality of a postindustrial subaltern reserve army that scarcely has access to the means of consumption, never mind to the means of production?” (132). This question poses a problem with defining national identities based on their consumption. García Canclini attempts to reconcile the limits of market participation by non-consumers through the promotion of a new institutional infrastructure that upholds popular, local sites of difference. A discourse of identities based on market values and means of mass production and communications, can be regulated through the state as protector and promoter of regional interests that do not partake in transnational processes (89-90). However, Williams posits that this alternative discourse of counterhegemony is a clear path toward “capitalist hegemony”:

García Canclini, then, explicitly positions his critique as a means of transcending the state’s homogenizing and universalizing pretensions.
Furthermore, he does so in order to privilege the multiple particularities and differences of civil society’s market-based multiculturality, yet he does this not just by upholding but by actively reinvesting in his object of critique—namely the universalizing management techniques of the market/state—as a sustainable ground for market-based reformation. (129)

García Canclini’s theory proposes that the state regulate popular interests or minority groups that exist in contrast with the dominant one. According to Williams, these minority groups, once regulated by the dominant group, risk becoming part of the national hegemony that they desire to repudiate. This occurs when the dominant group decides to ‘adapt’ certain aspects of the minority and promote them as part of the nation-popular. Representations of particular non-hegemonic cultures are transformed into a ‘political opinion’ within an established region or nation. These same representations then have the possibility of becoming (re)absorbed into the hegemonic or, at the very least, a necessary representation of a marginal group that reaffirms a dominant group’s existence. This continual process of (re)presentation of cultures of difference belies the fact that a dominant discourse could not exist without its counterpart, the non-dominant. The question that remains for Williams is how to represent alternative articulations that are not defined by either hegemonic or counterhegemonic modes of discourse.

Before elaborating on a space of alternative articulations of an ‘other’ beyond the binary hegemonic/counterhegemonic, there remains the issue of race in relation to cultural consumption. At first glance, race as biological difference appears to become absorbed by the market in terms of social organization of labor (social class) and ‘types’ of people based on commodity sales. Rather than ‘racializing’ identities (as phenotype) they are negotiated according to varying levels of market consumption and the production of goods. Race should not be dismissed in place of a culture of consumption when “about one out of every
five children in this country [the United States] lives in poverty, including one out of every two black children and two out of every five Hispanic children” (West 7). In addition to a list of categories organized according to the consumption of products, such as sports, music, gastronomy, families, and youth, perhaps a more accurate list would include racial denomination: African American clothing, Latino music, and Asian youth, just to mention a few. This creates a list of ‘others’ that are not labeled as ‘white,’ while ‘white’ remains the single, undefined category to which all others are compared. Additionally, racial denomination of ‘types’ of consumers is not inclusive to a particular race. Some Latinos, as well as other racial groups, prefer African American clothing and vice versa. Finally, this discourse of market consumption is further convoluted by border crossers who are part of labor production on one side of a geographically defined region, yet continue to be market consumers on both sides of the border when they return to their place of origin in order to spend their earnings.

García Canclini briefly considers the effects of Mexican migrants on cultural consumption and identities in a study he conducted in Tijuana, a border town located in Mexico adjoining the United States. He discovered that residents from Tijuana that interacted with North Americans maintained a strong awareness of cultural differences between Mexico and the United States. They tended to be less influenced by an idealization of the United States as commonly portrayed on national Mexican broadcasts due to their close proximity and immediate interaction with North Americans. García Canclini explains the results of his study in the following extensive quote:

Los habitantes de Tijuana y de otras ciudades fronterizas, en gran parte bilingües, cuya interacción diaria con estadunidenses ha creado una intensa hibridación, sostienen que ellos no son menos mexicanos que los de otras regiones. Por el contrario, dicen que los sesenta millones de cruces de
personas por año que ocurren sólo entre Tijuana y San Diego les hacen vivir constantemente la diferencia y la desigualdad. Por eso, afirman tener una imagen menos idealizada de los Estados Unidos que quienes reciben una influencia parecida en la capital mexicana a través de la televisión y de los bienes de consumo importados. Argumentan que quienes se vinculan con la cultura estadunidense a distancia, mediante el consumo de imágenes y objetos desprendidos de las interacciones sociales, tienen una relación más abstracta y pasiva con la influencia ‘gringa.’ En cambio, quienes negocian todos los días, económicamente y culturalmente, están obligados a discernir entre lo propio y lo ajeno, entre lo que admiran y rechazan de los Estados Unidos. . . . Siguen siendo indudablemente mexicanos (y el racismo estadunidense se los recuerda a cada momento), pero su identidad es polígona, cosmopolita, con una flexible capacidad para procesar las informaciones nuevas y entender hábitos distintos en relación con sus matrices simbólicas de origen. (176)

Inhabitants that reside in border towns along the Mexico-United States border and interact with North Americans administer a privileged understanding of and insight into cultural nuances between Mexico and the United States. The fact that they “continue to be Mexican” as an affirmation of their cultural and racial affiliation (as García Canclini states, “y el racismo estadunidense se los recuerda a cada momento”) entails a continuity based on ideologies and awareness rather than language, traditions, or customs. Their understanding of cultural differences is less influenced by mass communication and the consumption of particular products than those who reside at a greater distance from the homogenous culture (in this case, the United States) and are influenced via commercialization. Border crossers may express a greater awareness of “U.S. racism that continually reminds them” that they are Mexican due to their physical proximity and interaction with North Americans whereby biological differences are more readily observed. The question of phenotype is exacerbated on the border while being dismissed, ignored, or accepted as a ‘norm’ (to be ‘white’) from a distant location where direct contact is less frequent.

Challenges to immigrant migrations, racial identities, and market consumption are explored in this chapter through the works of contemporary Latino playwrights who are
directly involved with border crossings in the United States. Two Latino plays that address issues of cultural and market consumption as well as racial ideologies are Stuff by Coco Fusco and Nao Bustamante, and Los vendidos by Luis M. Valdez. Fusco and Bustamante’s Stuff premiered at the National Review of Live Art in Glasgow in November 1996. The performance has since been staged at various venues, including London’s Institute of Contemporary Arts, Highways in Santa Monica, and the Portland Institute for Contemporary Art, among others. Chicana playwright Nao Bustamante was raised by her family of immigrant farm workers in the San Joaquin Valley of California, a region recognized for the early Chicano political struggles of the 1960s and 1970s. As the daughter of an immigrant farm worker, she is familiar with the struggles of surviving both economically and culturally in the United States. Coco Fusco’s family is from Cuba, a country with a dissimilar immigrant experience from the Chicanos, one that involves primarily, but not entirely, the migration of political refugees from all social classes who seek to escape the island. In preparation for scripting Stuff, Fusco returned to Cuba to interview women involved in an industry referred to as “sex tourism” and incorporated her findings of this industry in the play. After traveling to Cuba, both playwrights visited Chiapas, Mexico, in order to converse with women and children who have daily contact with foreigners in their area. The phenomenon of foreigners visiting Chiapas, particularly in recent years, is due to the 1994 Zapatista insurrection which indirectly led to the creation of Chiapas as the site of ‘authentic’ Mexican indigenous-culture (and of resistance). The differing points of view of Cuban prostitutes and Mexican indigenous women converge together to create a play based on shared experiences of exoticism and an idealization of Latinas.
Stuff seeks to understand the Western fascination of Latinos as representing the ‘exotic.’ The performers offer a cultural ‘tour’ of Latino food and women, and invite certain audience members to come forward onstage to participate in various rituals, meals, dances, and a Spanish language class. In their introduction to the play, both Fusco and Bustamante reveal that “Stuff is our commentary on how globalization and its accompanying versions of ‘cultural tourism’ are actually affecting women of color both in the Third World, and in Europe and North America, where hundreds of thousands of Latin women are currently migrating to satisfy consumer desires for ‘a bit of the other’” (45).

The performance begins with a pre-show in which two performers, Fusco and Bustamante, are reading from various postcards that they received from female acquaintances. In order to address issues of sexual desire and exoticism, the women in this play confront their foreign ‘looks’--based on biological appearances--that have a tendency to cause a particular reaction, a sexual attraction, among men. Bustamante directs the audience with the following text:

NAO. Last night I was walking home at 3:00 a.m. when a young guy started following me. He asked me to go home with him and said he just wanted to make me feel good. At one point he noticed that I had dark hair sticking out from under my cap, and that made him very excited. He wanted to know if I was Mexican. When we got to the house where I was staying and I started to go inside, he made one last attempt to win my affections. And then he said, with a smile on his face as if it were some big turn-on, ‘I have chips and salsa at my place and you can have some if you come home with me.’ (47)

The dark hair that the man notices under the female’s cap leads him to stereotype her as a ‘Mexican’ woman. This stereotyping of the female character further creates in the male character’s imagination an exotic imagery combined with sexual desire. The stereotypes are compounded when he offers her chips and salsa in exchange for following him home. The
male assumes from her hair color that she is Mexican, making her even more appealing to him due to his false understanding, or rather ideology, of Latinas as exotic beings who are easily subdued by foreign males. Fusco and Bustamante’s performance seeks to challenge concepts of Western ideologies versus Latina/o exoticism, and convolutes the binary one/other or First/Third World. The definition of ‘West’ or ‘First World’ is being challenged by a global market of capitalism where definitive national borders are increasingly more difficult to identify. Stuart Hall explains this understanding of ‘Western’ thought in the new international marketplace: “That is to say, Western technology, the concentration of capital, the concentration of techniques, the concentration of advanced labor in the Western societies, and the stories and the imagery of Western societies: these remain the driving powerhouse of this global mass culture” (28). Hall then proceeds to explain the exotic in terms of modern capitalism:

If you look at one of the places to see this speaking itself [the fact that globalization needs difference in order to proceed], or beginning to represent itself, it is in the forms of modern advertising. If you look at these what you will see is that certain forms of modern advertising are still grounded on the exclusive, powerful, dominant, highly masculinist, old Fordist imagery, of a very exclusive set of identities. But side by side with them are the new exotics, and the most sophisticated thing is to be in the new exotica. To be at the leading edge of modern capitalism is to eat fifteen different cuisines in any one week, not to eat one. . . . this concentrated, corporate, over-corporate, over-integrated, over-concentrated, and condensed form of economic power lives culturally through difference and is constantly teasing itself with the pleasures of the transgressive Other. (31)

Those who assume to proliferate the “pleasures of the transgressive Other” are political elites that seek to control the “Other” without obliterating it. In terms of Latina/os, there exists a contradiction: Latinos are part of the ‘West’ and participate in Western capitalism (albeit in varying degrees) yet have inherited an exotic imagery that is commonly, and falsely, associated with Latin American women. Are Latinos part of this “Western technology” and
“the concentration of capital” or are they designated the part of exotic “Other” that provides pleasure to the Western capitalist?

In the preshow to Stuff, Bustamante reads several postcards to the audience that originated in New York, Copenhagen, Toronto, Hamburg, and San Cristobal de las Casas. All these cities are associated with what is considered a ‘First World’ country, with the exception of the last postcard from Chiapas, Mexico. The postcard from Hamburg, Germany, reads as follows: “They are really crazy about the Brazilian girls. . . . Dark-skinned women drive the Germans wild! Everywhere I go there is a lingerie ad staring me in the face that features a gorgeous black girl with huge breasts” (48). This exotic imagination of Latinas (including Brazilians) establishes an ideology of understandings between Europeans, in this case Germans, and the ‘other,’ defined in this instance as exotic Latinas. This imagery is then perpetuated in the mass media through advertisements that exemplify dark-skinned women as exotic, sexy, and desirable, an imagery that correlates directly with Hall’s “modern advertising” and the “new exotica” (31). The object of consumerism in this example is characterized by phenotype and gender, and it is a representation that crosses geopolitical boundaries through the use of the advertisement industry. Latinas who view these same advertisements may be led to classify themselves as exotic objects of desire, or they may seek to challenge such a stipulated definition.

This concept of generalized ideologies that establish boundaries of difference between Latino exoticism and Western imagery of desire compares to Edward W. Said’s ‘orientalism.’ In Orientalism, Said analyzes an ideological understanding and continual production of an Oriental world by a Western consciousness that maintains a position of superiority over the Orient. Said argues that orientalism exemplifies a cultural and political
subject matter that not only enunciates geographical distinction between the Oriental world and the West but also involves a “certain will or intention to understand, in some cases to control, manipulate, even to incorporate, what is a manifestly different (or alternative and novel) world” (12). According to Said, representations of the Orient are more contingent upon Western thought and less on perspectives engendered by “Orientals” themselves:

That Orientalism makes sense at all depends more on the West than on the Orient, and this sense is directly indebted to various Western techniques of representation that make the Orient visible, clear, ‘there’ in discourse about it. And these representations rely upon institutions, traditions, conventions, agreed-upon codes of understanding for their effects, not upon a distant and amorphous Orient. (22)

The Western perspective implies certain knowledge of power over the Orient through the establishment of boundaries between the West and the Orient (ideological boundaries based on an awareness of physical, geographical boundaries). Derived from this position of power via knowledge, the West purports to know Orientals better than they know themselves. As Said continues his analysis, he explains the arbitrariness of geographical distinctions regardless of acceptance or even acknowledgement by those who are regarded as exotic:

In other words, this universal practice of designating in one’s mind a familiar space which is ‘ours’ and an unfamiliar space beyond ‘ours’ which is ‘theirs’ is a way of making geographical distinctions that can be entirely arbitrary. I use the word ‘arbitrary’ here because imaginative geography of the ‘our land-barbarian land’ variety does not require that the barbarians acknowledge the distinction. It is enough for ‘us’ to set up these boundaries in our own minds; ‘they’ become ‘they’ accordingly, and both their territory and their mentality are designated as different from ‘ours.’ (54)

Said determines that ideological and geographical distinctions exist between the West and the Orient as codes of understanding that have been imposed upon the Orient with or without consent. These same codes of understanding do not exist solely as a distant idea but rather
are perpetuated in material form, such as scholarly works, literature, political discourses, travel books, journals, and religious and philological studies (23).

In the quoted fragment from Stuff, dark-skinned Brazilian women were portrayed in advertisements as exotic beings. In the first example from the play, when the man on the street glimpsed the dark hair from underneath the woman’s hat, he became even more excited because he assumed that she was Mexican. Her classification as Mexican further implied that she would be an easy target for an indiscriminate sexual encounter. The geopolitical distinctions and ideological differences established in this play indicate a position of power that men assume over Latinas. This position of power is based on the men’s arbitrary knowledge that Latinas are separated from them by an “imaginative geography,” meaning that since Latinas belong to a distant, foreign place (as conjured in the imagination), then men can assume superiority over them. As exotic, foreign women, Latinas maintain a position of subordination to men who live and associate themselves with a more “developed country,” an arbitrary term in and of itself that is determined by and negotiated according to particular circumstances. This ideological distinction allows men to maintain certain control over the ‘other’ through their standpoint of superior knowledge that derives from their own supposed positioning of Western ideology. The issue becomes one of containing the ‘other’ through power of knowledge based on association with the assumed superior side, or rather, the more ‘developed’ country.

Yet for the male characters and audience participants in the play, exotic Latinas are not mere objects to be discovered or idealized from a distance. Latinas are rather a fulfillment of men’s fantasies, a representation of hot climates, spicy food, and ancient wonders. As the play Stuff opens with Scene One, the character EEE Jones, host and
director of the Institute for Southern Hemispheric Wholeness who appears only as a face on a video, explains to his audience the need for his services:

EEE JONES. To them, and to you, I say, “Objects are not enough.” You need complete nutrition for the spirit, and only people can provide that. Why not have the best without suffering the worst? I have devised a service that will bring you heat without sweat, ritual without revolution and delicacies without dysentery. And you don’t have to go anywhere—we deliver it to you. (49)

Through EEE Jones’s services, the audience can receive fulfillment of their exotic fantasies from the safety of their own home where they are able to maintain confirmation of their superior knowledge about Latinas. The image of the ‘other’ in this play is that of an object (mainly Latinas) that can be controlled, packaged, delivered to another location, and sold for consumption by tourists. EEE Jones’s service provides tourists with a ‘tour’ of exotic Latin America that avoids any complications commonly (and often falsely) associated with the countries: “sweat,” “revolution,” and “dysentery.” Tourists can thereby maintain an ‘imagined’ distance yet still fulfill their desires for exotic Latinas, food, and rituals.

In another section of the play, a male audience member is brought forward on stage and taught some simple, necessary Spanish that he can use to seduce a Latina. Rosa, one of the employees for the Institute, begins by explaining to the audience the need to be able to converse with Latinas on a very basic level:

ROSA. We’ve been working on our conversational abilities with our fantastic Hot International guide, which comes with translations for love and sex in seven different languages. Tonight though, we’re going to work on our Spanish. Ready? Or should I say listo? (65)

This translation guide provided by the Institute actually comes in seven different languages. As exemplified with the postcards from the preshow, this play problematizes clear-cut distinctions between a category of Latino as ‘other’ and Western ideologies. The play
expands notions of Latino exoticism versus Western capitalism and power to include concepts of the ‘other’ in opposition to, but not always in contradiction with, the ‘one.’ In other words, any particular society that maintains power of knowledge over another is the homogenizing society that seeks to incorporate certain aspects of the ‘other’ within it while remaining separate. The Spanish language acquisition scene then proceeds with a conversation between the selected male audience member and Blanca, who poses as a Latina. The male audience member, who is referred to as “Travel Taster,” is prompted by Rosa with sentences in Spanish to repeat to Blanca in order to seduce her and lead her to believe that the couple will someday live together in his country. Again, the male audience member maintains a position of power over the Latina by, first, learning only the vocabulary necessary in order to seduce her and, second, by promising her a future together in his country. His control is further accentuated by the assumption that Latinas desire to leave their own ‘developing country’ in order to live in the ‘developed’ one where they can achieve financial security from their partner, and where perhaps one day they will even fulfill a similar ‘American dream’ that Sarita searched for in Latina.

Parallel to the female character Sarita in Latina, Rosa and Blanca are role playing the parts of a Spanish instructor and a seduced Latina respectively. Are these women, like Sarita, searching for personal understanding in a world that in turn alienates them? Stuff is not about self-discovery of Latinas living in the United States. Instead, the play explores geographical and ideological distinctions of difference based on understandings that have been defined according to positions of power. The image of the Latina in this play moves beyond that of an immigrant worker in the United States or that of a dark-skinned actress who is type-cast by Hollywood. Latinas in Stuff discover that whether in Hamburg,
Copenhagen, or their own country of origin, they portray, or are viewed, as an image of exoticism to the foreign male, an image that has been imposed on them. Yet does this play only exemplify stereotypical images of Latinas or is a stereotyped image of the Anglo male explored as well?

Immediately following the Spanish language instruction scene involving the seduction of a Latina, a male voice begins to question Blanca and her involvement with the male audience member. The male voice causes a break in the actions of Blanca and Rosa and allows them to analyze their positions as Latinas in a somewhat Brechtian-style format:

MALE VOICE. Un momento compañía. I saw you with that foreigner. ¿Cómo te llamas?
BLANCA. Me llamo Lola.
MALE VOICE. Sure. Where do you live?
BLANCA. En Centro Habana.
MALE VOICE. Where do you work?
BLANCA. Wherever I can. Todos seguimos al Señor. You know, the man in charge here? (She makes a gesture to show a beard on a chin.) He’s bending every which way to keep things going. And we’re following him.
MALE VOICE. What did you say your name was again?
BLANCA. (Taking off her wig): Coco.
MALE VOICE. You know, that guy you talked to didn’t seem like the kind of man who would take advantage of a Third World woman.
BLANCA. Not all the guys who come here are pigs you know.
MALE VOICE. Aren’t you making light of a very serious situation?
BLANCA. What else can I do? Haven’t you ever had sex with someone who had more than you?
MALE VOICE. More?

This dialogue between Blanca and Male Voice invites audience members to contemplate the various stereotypical images of Latinas and Anglo men that the play reveals. Yet this scene also has specific references to Cuba and Fidel Castro, “el Señor.” The audience is reminded of the fact that stereotypes regarding Cuban women extend beyond Cuba to include Latinas.
or “Third World” women, and these stereotypes affect very specific and real situations. The images regarding Latinas are not mere ideologies but rather are carried out in everyday society by Latinas who are compelled and perhaps even forced to contemplate and to address their exotic image on a daily basis. The male voice leads Blanca to take off her wig and step outside her role playing for a brief moment. What is discovered from this unveiling of Blanca is that not all men who visit Cuba are “pigs,” or rather, stereotypical men who exploit Cuban women. Blanca additionally defines for the audience a relationship of power that has been addressed throughout the play. She explains that “more power, more money” is the basis for her sexual encounters. Blanca assumes an assigned role as Cuban female prostitute. Although prostitution may be one of her only means of survival, it is also a role that has been imposed on her as a representation of an ‘exotic Latina.’

The other exotic element that the Institute offers its Travel Tasters is Latino food. In Scene One, four travel tasters, two males and two females, are chosen from the audience and escorted on stage where they are asked to participate in a ritual that involves ancient goddesses and stereotypical Latino food such as corn, yucca, potatoes, papaya, tomatoes and chili (51). This ritual involves dance, music, recitations, and food sampling by the four travel tasters. At the end of the scene, Coco reads from a postcard addressed to the audience and explains the reasons for such fascinations with Latino food and Latinas:

COCO. (Reads a postcard with date and place of performance):
Dear Audience,
I think it’s time to explain why we are so interested in Latin women and food. Actually, this piece is about consumption--of our bodies and our myths--and food. Let’s start with Antropofagia. That’s what the Brazilians used to call it in the 1920s. An-thro-po-pha-gi-a. That was supposed to be our great, creative, cannibalistic revenge. Absorb our sacred enemies and transform them into totems, they said. Take everything that is thrown our way and have our way with it. That’s how we were supposed to live up to our ancestors. So when you come
This quote raises questions of consumption by both Anglos and Latinas. As Coco states, “you may not think that we who serve you could be eating as well.” She is, of course, referring to a symbolic gesture of consumption. Yet what are Latinas consuming, an Anglo culture? There appears to be a reciprocation of ideological distinctions occurring in this process of consumption. While the West establishes dominance over ‘other’ Latin American countries via knowledge of power, Latinos are in turn establishing an ideology of Anglo men as exploiters who indeed desire the exoticism found in Latino cultures. Latino identities become essential for Anglo consumers who seek exotic women and food. The basic forces of the market are at play: supply and demand. However, knowledge of power has the potential to shift if Latinos become aware of their position as suppliers to the demand of Anglo consumers.

Finally, an exotic ideology of Latin America that places significance on women and an indigenous pre-mestizaje past of rituals and food illustrates the role of women in the formation of ideological rhetoric yet tends to dismiss any involvement of men. Although men were involved and continue to be involved in pre-colonial rituals (or their re-enactment), this play focuses on an ideology that emphasizes images of Latinas in Latin America as defined by dominant societies. An ‘orientalism’ of Latin America based on females and pre-

mestizaje cultures not only displaces men as contributors to Latino identities (albeit as the ‘other’) but also produces an ideology that does not recognize any modernization of Latin American countries based on Western conceptualizations. Latinas participate in an exploitation that is driven by a market based on García Canclini’s ‘types.’ The ‘types’
established in this play are exotic, dark-skinned women representative of what Fusco and Bustamante refer to as ‘Third World women’ (both Latinas and Brazilians are mentioned) that serve the purpose of the necessary ‘other.’ These women represent “pleasures of the transgressive Other” that are a necessary difference in order for globalization to proceed, a difference that involves the control and power of one dominant group over another. Why are they necessary for globalization to proceed? Hall explains that, “but it is now a form of capital which recognizes that it can only, to use a metaphor, rule through other local capitals, rule alongside and in partnership with other economic and political elites. It does not attempt to obliterate them; it operates through them” (28). The Latinas in this play are a product of consumption in a global market that seeks to exploit an exotic ‘other’ without eliminating its presence.

While Stuff dramatizes an ‘orientalism’ of Latin America based on exotic women, food, and rituals, Luis Valdez’s play Los vendidos explores the creation of stereotypes of Mexican immigrants living in the United States. Racism, ideologies, and stereotypes of Latino immigrants in the United States as well as Anglo exploitation of those same immigrant bodies are examined in Valdez’s Los vendidos. While Bustamante and Fusco explore notions of being a Latina within the context of a perspective that repudiates the dichotomy one/other, Valdez focuses his play on Mexican immigrants and Chicano perspectives from within the United States. Jorge Huerta offers a solid definition of the term Chicano in the following excerpt:

Most observers agree that “Chicano” came from the people themselves; it is a self-definition that denies both a Mexican and an Anglo-American distinction, yet is influenced by both. In essence, Chicanos assert that they are neither Mexican nor Anglo-American, employing a term that stems from barrio realities and linguistic patterns on this side of the Mexican border [the United States]. The term has been in common usage for generations and is often
employed to distinguish between the middle-class Mexican American and the
working class Chicano, a delineation that separates the so-called
“assimilationist” from the political activist. There are still many Americans of
Mexican descent who see the term Chicano as “common” and indicative of a
low-class status. (Chicano Theater 4)

The difference of perspectives regarding Latinos in general and Chicanos/Mexican
immigrants is important to note since Valdez intentionally targets Chicanos and Mexican
immigrants (specifically males, since Mexican female stereotypes are not explored in this
play) who are being exploited by a dominant Anglo-American economic system. Although it
is important to note that Valdez’s Chicano and Mexican immigrant stereotypes are applicable
to a more generalized Latino population as well, and his plays certainly continue to be used
as examples for all Latinos.

Valdez is the founder of Teatro Campesino, a theatrical movement that began in the
1960s with the immigrant farm workers in California. His theater encourages exploration of
social understanding and change among Mexican immigrants with a style that involves
audience members as actors in a play that mimics their reality. The basic concept of
Valdez’s theatre is to “demonstrate and educate the campesino in the politics of survival”
with the possibility of educating them in order to achieve a life different than one of
exploitation and mere economic survival (Contemporary Chicano Theatre 10). Valdez
initiated his career as an activist with the Farm Workers Union from 1965 to 1967 where he
developed Teatro Campesino, a theater that focused on union organizers and the farm
workers labor movement. Los vendidos was the first production by Valdez after he separated
from the Farm Workers Union, that which resulted in a second phase of the Teatro
Campesino’s development. Jorge Huerta explains that “it was no coincidence that when the
Teatro Campesino separated from the union, their first acto, Los vendidos, dealt with the
identity of the Chicano” (Necessary Theater 147). Los vendidos challenges the many social injustices against both minority and migrant laborers—particularly, Mexican immigrants and Chicanos—through the exploration of stereotypical images that have been created and perpetuated by a dominant Anglo society.

In the play, a secretary from the Governor’s office arrives at a shop in order to purchase a Mexican. She is introduced to four models that Sancho, the salesman for the shop, currently has available. They are in order of appearance: a Farm Worker, a Pachuco, a Revolucionario, and a Mexican-American. The Secretary finds defects in each of the first three models until she is presented with the fourth model, the Mexican-American, which she decides to purchase. After paying what she considers to be a high sum of cash for the Mexican-American, the Secretary discovers that he also has a defect and runs from the shop, screaming hysterically. A surprise ending reveals that each of the four models was portrayed by real men while the salesman Sancho is the only actual machine.

In the opening scene to Los vendidos, the audience is introduced to Honest Sancho’s Used Mexican Lot and Mexican Curio Shop where initially only three stereotypical Mexican ‘types’ are on display: a Farm Worker, a Pachuco, and a Revolucionario. The last Mexican for hire, the Mexican-American, is brought out near the end of the play. These four men are mechanical models for hire and Honest Sancho, another stereotypical name and character, is the shop owner. From the onset of the play, audience members are introduced to these main categories of Mexican immigrants living in the United States. The first model, a Farm Worker, is a stereotypical hard-working type who is “built close to the ground,” reliable, and durable. The second model is the Revolucionario, also referred to as the Early California Bandit type that represents the Hollywood image of a typical hero and/or martyr who rides a
horse, survives in the mountains, fights revolutions, displays romantic notions with the women, and portrays an image of Emiliano Zapata or Pancho Villa, revolutionaries from the 1910 Mexican Revolution. The third model, the Pachuco, represents a bilingual young man from the city that gets arrested, steals, and appears to have an inferiority complex. Finally, the Mexican-American portrays the image of an Americanized or assimilated immigrant who is bilingual, educated, and ambitious. These four types (or rather, five if Honest Sancho is included) represent images of Mexican immigrants that have been created, defined, and perpetuated by a dominant Anglo society. Valdez specifically chooses an immigrant farm worker, a revolutionary from the Mexican Revolution, a pachuco, and a Mexican-American in order to emphasize current stereotypes by Anglos in southern California. However, although Valdez’s work focuses primarily on Mexican immigrants, his message of awareness of the exploitation of campesinos and lower income workers has an impact upon immigrants from all countries of Latin America.

As the play opens, a secretary with the name “Miss Jiménez,” pronounced by her as “JIM-enez,” enters the stage and states that she needs a “Mexican type” for her work place. Although her surname is obviously of Latino origin, Miss Jiménez insists on an English pronunciation of it. She represents a Latina immigrant that has been Americanized and that wishes to hide her heritage and her last name by altering the pronunciation. While Honest Sancho seeks to exploit Mexicans for economic gain, similar to the character Don Felix in Latina, Miss Jiménez has opted to deny her Latino heritage in exchange for an Americanized image that makes her feel exempt from an exploitation of Mexican immigrants and Chicanos. She presumes that by association with a dominant Anglo-American society, she can allege a certain prestige over the “Mexican type” as well. The first model for hire introduced to Miss
Jiménez is the Farm Worker, who begins to show his ability by pretending to harvest grapes. Miss Jiménez appears perplexed by the Farm Workers movements, and Sancho finds it necessary to explain to her what task the Farm Worker is performing. In response, Miss Jiménez merely replies, “Oh, I wouldn’t know,” assuming that a person from her social status would never understand that type of labor (18). Her position as an Americanized Latina allows her to contend a particular ignorance of the exploitation that occurs with ‘other’ Mexicans and Chicanos working in the United States, those that are not of her ‘type’ or social stature.

After reinforcing her social status as an English speaking and Americanized secretary, Miss Jiménez repeats her reasons for visiting the shop: to purchase a Mexican type. In the following dialogue, Miss Jiménez, known simply as “Secretary,” describes for Sancho the image of a Mexican that her office seeks to acquire:

SECRETARY. As I was starting to say, I’m a secretary from Governor Reagan’s office, and we’re looking for a Mexican type for the administration.
SANCHO. Well, you come to the right place, lady. This is Honest Sancho’s Used Mexican lot, and we got all types here. Any particular type you want?
SECRETARY. Yes, we were looking for somebody suave.
SANCHO. Suave.
SECRETARY. Debonair.
SANCHO. De buen aire.
SECRETARY. Dark.
SANCHO. Prieto.
SECRETARY. But of course not too dark.
SANCHO. No muy prieto.
SECRETARY. Perhaps beige.
SANCHO. Beige, just the tone. Así como cafecito con leche, ¿no?
SECRETARY. One more thing. He must be hard-working. (18)

As indicated by this dialogue, one of the primary concerns of the secretary is the color of the Mexican type’s skin. She specifically asks for someone “dark, but not too dark” and finishes
with “beige,” someone who would not be mistaken for ‘black’ yet is not too ‘white’ as to create any doubt that he is the Mexican type that the Governor’s office desires. While Sancho creates a humorous tone to the dialogue by changing “debonair” to “de buen aire” and the color beige to “cafecito con leche,” this opening scene indicates an importance placed on skin color when categorizing Mexican types. The Governor’s office seeks a Mexican with a certain skin color, “beige,” in order to be assured that the hired person is indeed of Mexican heritage. The secretary indicates further in the play that what the Governor’s office specifically necessitates is “something that will attract the women voters. Something more traditional, more romantic” (22; my emphasis). This Mexican “thing” that the Secretary wishes to purchase for the purpose of attracting Anglo-American women voters represents a stereotypical Latin lover. The Governor’s office apparently was unable to hire or to find a Mexican type that would “attract the women voters” so they sent their secretary to purchase one. From this first scene with Miss Jiménez, Valdez establishes the importance of finding a Mexican with distinctive physical features that indicate a Mexican type or race based on phenotype. The male they will eventually purchase is to perform the role of a Mexican being employed by the government so that the Governor may claim equal representation in his office and perhaps attract more votes. Valdez questions concepts of ‘equal representation’ and neoliberal notions that races do not exist by exaggerating the need for a “brown face” by the Secretary. If skin color were not an indication of a Mexican race in the play, then why does the Secretary insist on a specific color?

In the process of selecting a Mexican ‘type,’ the Secretary is asked to consider first the Farm Worker. The Farm Worker is described as being “built close to the ground” with “four-ply Goodyear huaraches” and a “wide-brimmed sombrero” (18). His most attractive
feature is, of course, that he “works hard.” The Farm Worker represents a stereotypical Mexican immigrant who comes to the United States in search of any form of labor in order to survive. He is “economical,” easy to store since “five, six, seven, even ten in one of those shacks will give you no trouble at all,” and, finally, he returns to Mexico at the end of the season and doesn’t return until the following spring. The only problem that the Secretary finds with the Farm Worker is that he doesn’t speak English. The Governor’s office not only needs someone to portray a particular image of a Mexican, but they also require that he speak English in addition to Spanish in order to communicate with both an English and Spanish speaking public that is prevalent in southern California.

Yet in what manner do these stereotypes of Mexican immigrants relate to constructions of racial differences? In The Location of Culture, Homi Bhabha associates the term stereotype with fetishism as a “process of functional overdetermination” that is a matter of manipulation between sameness and difference:

For fetishism is always a ‘play’ or vacillation between the archaic affirmation of wholeness/similarity--in Freud’s terms: ‘All men have penises’; in ours: ‘All men have the same skin/race/culture’--and the anxiety associated with lack and difference--again, for Freud ‘Some do not have penises’; for us ‘Some do not have the same skin/race/culture.’ . . . The fetish or stereotype gives access to an ‘identity’ which is predicated as much on mastery and pleasure as it is on anxiety and defense, for it is a form of multiple and contradictory belief in its recognition of difference and disavowal of it.

(74-75)

This contradiction in “recognition of difference and disavowal of” the fetish or stereotype is exemplified by Valdez through the creation of various common Mexican immigrant ‘types.’ Valdez forces his audience members to recognize the perpetuation of a ‘sameness’ regarding Mexicans in the United States while also exaggerating that sameness in order to manipulate an awareness of difference. While Anglos assume that Mexican males are brown-skinned
and easily categorized into four types: the Farm Worker, the Pachuco, the Revolucionario, and the Mexican-American, they must also maintain an “anxiety and defense” in the recognition that not all Mexicans are simplistically labeled. The issue of race is of particular interest in this play since all four models portray a standardized ‘look,’ that of a “brown face.” According to the Secretary, this “brown face” is necessary in order for the Mexican ‘type’ to be considered as ‘authentic’ by the Governor’s office and, presumably, the voters. Yet as each of the four categorizes of ‘Mexican’ is explored on stage, audience members discover that the ‘type’ as portrayed by the men and pre-conceived by the Secretary does not always conform to standards.

Stereotypical images of Mexican immigrants and Chicanos continue to be revealed in the play with the next model that is introduced to the Secretary: Johnny Pachuco. Johnny is the image of a Chicano urban youth who sings, dances the “Chicano shuffle,” has knowledge in street survival, gets arrested, is bilingual and, of course, is economical to maintain. Sancho describes him as “built for speed, low-riding, city life. Take a look at some of these features. Mag shoes, dual exhausts, green chartreuse paint-job, dark-tint windshield, a little poof on top” (20). Johnny Pachuco represents a young Chicano city-dweller who emerged after the “Sleepy Lagoon” case of 1942 and the zoot-suit riots of 1943 as a reaction to the exploitation of Chicano youth living in urban society. The “Sleepy Lagoon” case involved the prosecution of twenty-two Chicano gang members in the death of a man named José Díaz who was found by the side of a dirt road with no wounds, indicating that he could have been killed by a hit-and-run driver. Even though there was insufficient evidence in the case, the youth were charged and portrayed as Mexican hoodlums, a portrayal that was compounded by the press. While the ruling was reversed by the Second District Court of Appeals, the
reputation of Chicanos as violent criminals had been established. A report by Lieutenant Ed Duran Ayres, head of the Foreign Relations Bureau of the Los Angeles Sheriff’s Department, concluded that “Chicanos were inherently criminal and violent. . . . Chicanos were Indians, that Indians were Orientals, and that Orientals had an utter disregard for life. Therefore, because Chicanos had this inborn characteristic, they too were violent. . . . Chicanos were cruel, for they descended from the Aztecs who supposedly sacrificed 30,000 victims a day” (Acuña, Occupied America 268). The zoot suit riots soon followed the “Sleepy Lagoon” case when sailors on leave in San Diego, in an effort to prove their “manhood,” began to rampage Chicano neighborhoods, specifically targeting those who wore zoot suits. These rampages soon escalated into riots that were encouraged by the local press as they continued to sensationalize the zoot suits as gangsters. Even in today’s society, the image of the zoot suits continues to symbolize Chicanos and their struggle for understanding and cultural survival.

The pachuco surfaced as a form of self-representation for Chicana/os who were struggling to discover their identity in a dominant society that continued to exploit them and to perpetuate their status as lower class immigrants in a manner that Kevin Johnson refers to as “citizens as ‘foreigners” (198). Acuña, in his article “Early Chicano Activism: Zoot Suits, Sleepy Lagoon, and the Road to Delano,” describes the emergence of pachucos in southern California as a result of young gang members who desired to maintain a certain disparity in dress and language that would distinguish them from other cultures, mainly an Anglo American one:

In this environment [of segregation of minorities during World War II and following, and a rapid migration of many races to the Los Angeles area] a minority of Chicano youth between the ages of thirteen and seventeen belonged to barrio clubs that carried the name of their neighborhoods. . . .
The fad among gang members, or pachucos as they were called, was to tattoo the left hand, between the thumb and index finger, with a small cross with three dots or dashes above it. Many pachucos, when they dressed up, wore the so-called zoot suit, popular among low-income youths at that time. Pachucos spoke Spanish, but also used Chuco among their companions. Chuco was the barrio language, a mixture of Spanish, English, old Spanish, and words adapted by the border Mexicans. (310)

The pachuco in Valdez’s play portrays a stereotype that emerged from the racial discrimination in Los Angeles that began to escalate in the 1940s. He represents an outlaw for some, yet for others he is a form of self-representation and an expression of identity. The image of the pachuco questions notions of race being determined by a choice of clothing and language. The pachucos were identified by a certain type of dress and language, as well as neighborhood affiliation. Yet according to Acuña, the pachuco evolved as a response to “mass media racism” stemming from “war-like propaganda conducted during the repatriation.” He writes, “the events of 1942 proved the extent of Anglo racism. Euroamericans herded Japanese Americans into internment camps. When the Japanese left, Mexicans became the most natural scapegoats” (309). The pachuco was the result of various factors involving racism, appearance, clothing, language, social status, and traditions of Mexicans living in southern California. Similar to the Farm Worker, the pachuco is a stereotype of Mexicans, and in particular Chicanos, that has been perpetuated by Anglo-American society’s historical understanding of race and racism based on differences in skin color as well as cultural determinants.

Another model that is briefly introduced to the Secretary is the Revolucionario, a romantic fighter representative of Zapata or Villa from the 1910 Mexican Revolution. The Revolucionario portrays an image of Mexicans as perpetuated by Hollywood films and
television commercials. Sancho explains to the Secretary the many functions of the
Revolucionario in the following quote:

SANCHO. You name it, he does it. He rides horses, stays in the
mountains, crosses deserts, plains, rivers, leads revolutions, follows
revolutions, kills, can be killed, serves as a martyr, hero, movie star—did I
say movie star? Did you ever see Viva Zapata? Viva Villa? Villa Rides?
Abbott and Costello—. . . . And even if you didn’t see him in the movies,
perhaps you saw him on TV. He makes commercials. [Snap.]
REVOLUCIONARIO. Is there a Frito Bandito in your house?
SECRETARY. Oh yes, I’ve seen that one! (22-23)

In this scene, Sancho exaggerates the fact that Mexican stereotypes are created by Hollywood
filmmakers who make no attempt to recapture the historical figures or events in a more
realistic setting that would portray the Mexican revolutionary as a human and not a Mexican
‘type.’ David R. Maciel argues in his article “The Border According to Hollywood: The
Three Caballeros, Pancho, and the Latin Señoritas” that Hollywood film producers demean
classical Mexican characters in their productions of Mexican and North American border
films. In Maciel’s analysis of the film Viva Max, he explains that “the main character, the
Mexican general, and the rest of his men are cast within the classic Hollywood stereotype of
the Mexicans—slow, dumb, lazy, and cowardly. What began as an interesting idea with
potential resulted in a superficial, negative, and demeaning film of a classic border historical
theme” (224). The “classic Hollywood stereotype” that Maciel refers to conjures up an
image of a Mexican revolutionary based on certain biological characteristics such as dark
hair, brown skin, and a thick moustache. In addition to a particular ‘look,’ the Mexican hero
needs to perform according to Hollywood standards of what constitutes a Mexican: “slow,
dumb, lazy, and cowardly.”
In Valdez’s play, the Secretary eventually decides that she cannot use the Revolucionario because he was made in Mexico and what she specifically requires is an “American product.” This leads Sancho to the final model he has to offer: a Mexican-American named Eric García. This model appears as a “clean-shaven middle-class type in a business suit, with glasses” and he is bilingual, college educated, and capable of “acculturation” (24). Even his first name, “Eric,” is easy to pronounce in both English and Spanish and could be of either origin. Sancho describes this model’s production to the Secretary as “sturdy US STEEL frame, streamlined, modern. As a matter of fact, he is built exactly like our Anglo models except that he comes in a variety of darker shades: naugahyde, leather, or leatherette” (24). The importance of skin color, a marker for Mexican race in the play, is again highlighted in this model. While the performance of each model varies according to the stereotype being exaggerated, the one constant among all the models is a distinct skin color: brown. The Secretary explains to Sancho after purchasing the Mexican-American for $15,000 (and complaining about the high cost) that she does not need him to be wrapped up because “the Governor is having a luncheon this afternoon, and we need a brown face in the crowd” (26). The model must not only behave according to certain standards, but more importantly, he must “look” like a Mexican, meaning that he must have a “brown face” that the general public can easily recognize as a representative of Mexican origin. Otherwise, the Governor’s plan to ‘de-hegemonize’ his office in order to appear more culturally conscious and concerned for Mexicans and Chicanos (perhaps in order to win their vote, although this is not explicit in the text) would only be a failure if the model they purchased did not ‘look’ the part of a Mexican.
During the final scene of the play, the Secretary is frightened off stage by all four models that begin to behave erratically and advance toward her screaming “Viva la Raza, viva la huelga, viva la revolución!” (26). The audience soon discovers that the four models were actually live persons performing these stereotypical roles of Mexican ‘types.’ The only actual mechanical model is Sancho, the salesman. The Farm Worker explains that “they think we’re machines” referring not only to the Secretary but to any Anglo-American buyer who comes to the shop with the intention of purchasing a Mexican (27). The four models/performers are obviously conscious of the stereotypes that exist in the Anglo society and have decided to capitalize on the need for a Mexican ‘type’ that the Governor’s office requires. Furthermore, this is not the first time that someone has come to their shop, as indicated by Johnny when he mentions “man, that was a long one, ése” (26). The creation of this shop of Mexican stereotypes in order to exploit Anglo-American as well as Latina/o buyers seeking to purchase a particular Mexican ‘type’ is an unexpected twist that the audience does not anticipate. The four men have discovered a way to turn a negative aspect regarding race, the necessity for a “brown face,” into their personal economic gain. They knowingly use the very system that attempts to exploit and demean them, one that seeks to confine the images of Mexicans to specific unchanging ‘types.’ The ruse is successful and the four men leave the stage with $15,000 to be split equally among them.

In the end, audience members realize that the four male models were performing specific stereotypes associated with Mexican immigrants and Chicanos. These four men presented their audience with a misrepresentation of the stereotypes, a performance that negated the perpetuation of ‘types’ based on the fact that the four performers are not truly a Farm Worker, Pachuco, Revolucionario or Mexican-American but instead actors who role
play the parts. On another level, the four models are stage actors performing the role of models pretending to be stereotypical Mexican immigrant and Chicano machines for hire. Their performance reveals what Bhabha refers to as an “access to an ‘identity’ which is predicated as much on mastery and pleasure as it is on anxiety and defense, for it is a form of multiple and contradictory belief in its recognition of difference and disavowal of it” (74-75).

This performance of Mexican immigrant and Chicano stereotypes allows audience members to recognize, first, that these stereotypes exist and, second, that the ‘sameness’ of stereotypes is also a contradiction. This contradiction is exemplified by the fact that the four models are role played by actual men who only simulate the stereotypes. The actors are precisely not what they portray to be, and by role playing the respective stereotypical parts, they establish that all Mexican immigrants are not alike or easily categorized into ‘types.’ The stereotypes are revealed as arbitrary fabrications by a dominant Anglo-American society that seeks to confine images of Mexican immigrants and Chicanos into over-simplified rubrics for purposes of political control and economic exploitation.

Valdez’s play creates categories of Chicanos for hire similar to García Canclini’s theory regarding market types and a consumption of commodities based on preferences. In this instance, the preference of the buyers is a male with “brown” skin who can represent a Chicano figure for the Governor’s office. The dominant culture does not seek to integrate Chicanos into their culture as a homogenizing element, but rather desire to exploit the Chicanos as consumers of products targeted specifically for their class. An ironic twist occurs at the end of the play when Anglo consumers are exploited instead for their insistence on marketing a “brown face.” By suggesting a supposed integration of Chicanos into the politics of southern California, Chicanos are ‘represented’ in politics, but are they included in
the decision making and in the formation of a ‘nation-state’? Would Chicanos want to participate in this integration of market types, an integration that may lead toward what Williams refers to as “capitalist hegemony?” In Valdez’s play, race is not absorbed by the market in terms of social organization of labor and ‘types’ of people based on commodity sales. Instead, race as biological difference is the primary determining factor in the establishment of these same ‘types.’ The stereotypes explored in this play represent a Chicano race based primarily on ‘brown’ skin and, as such, they fulfill a particular role in the dominant US culture: a contradictory image of integration and separation. Similar to Valdez, Fusco and Bustamante suggest a Latino race that interrupts this process of integration/separation in a global market. Latinas participate in and are a component of Western ideologies, yet maintain a position as ‘exotic’ fantasies that supply necessary commodities to a dominant culture: an escape from the mundane and another ‘type’ of market to be consumed, that of exotic flavors and Latina lovers.

Valdez contradicts and repudiates stereotypes regarding Mexican immigrants and Chicanos thus allowing for a space of “recognition of difference” where immigrants can begin to define themselves outside the established parameters of a dominant Anglo-American society. While Bustamante and Fusco seek to understand Latinos within a global context where ideologies regarding Latinos are pre-determined and perpetuated, Valdez focuses on Mexican immigrants and Chicanos living in the United States where stereotypes regarding them have similarly been pre-defined. All three playwrights seek to create an audience awareness of these same ideologies in order to, first, recognize them and, second, begin to dismantle and negotiate their meaning. Concepts of race regarding Latinos, Mexican immigrants, and Chicanos perpetuate negative classifications (historically defined as a
black/white binary) and stereotypes based on the fact that brown skin color is one of the determining factors in their definition. As exemplified by both plays, brown skin signifies Latina/o or Mexican immigrant, that which in turn conjures up images of sexual fantasy, as in the case of Stuff, and appropriate representation for the Governor’s office in Los vendidos. A negotiation of stereotypes and ideologies regarding Latinos is a first step toward an alternative understanding regarding race, one that dismisses color as incongruent and replaces it with a performance of race that has the possibility of creating a positive image of Latinos within the historical context of the United States and Mexico as well.
Chapter 4

Race, Nation, and the Mexican Border Immigrant Experience

A continual movement of immigrants, both illicit and licit, between Mexico and the United States challenges notions of national identity as a definition based solely on geographical borders. The redistribution of Mexican immigrants to rural and urban areas in the northern United States reconfigures concepts of national identity on a significantly more transnational level of understanding. While migration has always existed, the twentieth-century maturation of capitalism has led to a global extension of cultural and racial understandings that interrupts negotiations of national identity from within the confines of a nation’s borders. Although a similar phenomenon occurred before the twentieth-century, the difference with previous notions of defining a nation’s border is the degree to which national identities are challenged by migrants living in the country and by information shared through mass communication. This shifting of “imagined communities” to a more global understanding underscores the impact of migrants on a nation’s definition of national character and essential identity. Although an essential or homogenized national identity has always been defined ambiguously within the confines of a nation’s borders, the struggle for an idealistic national character was contained within the borders of each nation. Recent transnational markets disrupt national differences that are governed and confined by geographical borders. In earlier years, these same national differences served to define a nation in comparison with others, thus providing a sense of belonging to a particular culture,
society, and even race. However, a transnational market that crosses geographical borders leads to an exchange of not only material products but also people, ideologies, and cultures.

Immigrants supply a necessary workforce for the production of commodities, but at a cost to a particular nation’s racial and/or cultural homogeneity. Their presence is both warranted and unwarranted; they supply the needs of capital, yet interrupt any projected negotiation of national identity. Gareth Williams considers, in The Other Side of the Popular: Neoliberalism and Subalternity in Latin America, the exchange of bodies between nations as an indication of an “exhaustion” of the national-popular. For Williams, the national-popular provides a means of identifying and defining a particular nation by that which is most common to all—a mainstream, popular culture:

It appears that foundational categories such as national fictive ethnicity and the national-popular have been diluted, at least in part, by thousands of bodies moving northward, en masse, like cross-border floating organs propelled toward new forms of daily experience; toward new circuits and new relays of personal and collective memory, as well as to as-yet unnamable and perhaps-unheard-of forms of cultural and historical embeddedness. Within the recent scenario of massive and generally impoverished migration, the uprooting and displacement of peoples, classes, genders, and ethnicities becomes the essential terrain from which to evaluate the exhaustion of the nation. (195)

The presence and performance of migrant cultures and identities not only interrupts concepts of national-popular, but the national imaginary itself as “moving calendrically through homogenous, empty time.” Nations are imagined at any one specific moment from within the confines of their borders. Yet they are constantly reimagined and renegotiated from a transnational perspective, often in times of national crisis when the need arises to determine who defines any sense of “essential” national character from within and who does not. More often than not, during these times of national crisis concepts of race and nation, although

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32 Homi K. Bhabha quotes what Walter Benjamin refers to as “homogeneous empty time” in regard to Western historical discourse that excuses its exploitation of others by including the other’s history as a necessary part of modernization. See Bhabha’s The Location of Culture (95).
always mutually constitutive, are intensified in the shaping of the nation’s determinants. As Thomas C. Holt explains in his foreword to Race and Nation in Modern Latin America, “national identities were sometimes constituted as racial identities, and vice versa, at different historical moments and in response to different social and political needs” (ix-x). As Holt suggests, the term “race” is in constant negotiation in correlation with sociopolitical experiences and processes within a particular nation-state.

What part does race play in the definition of national identity and the “exhaustion” of the nation? In terms of a black/white binary that has been historically produced and reiterated in the United States, racism appears to confirm this dualistic political regime of power. Yet race can no longer be viewed as a bi-polar expression based on two colors alone. As Sarah Radcliffe and Sallie Westwood suggest in Remaking the Nation: Place, Identity and Politics in Latin America, racism both sustains national identities and allows for a de-centering or a diffusion of powers at both national and transnational sites:

Consequently, racisms can be organized into ‘racial hegemonies’ and racial projects which promote the national and the centered nation. However, racisms simultaneously disorganize the national through the fractures and divisions that are promoted and sustained via racisms, generating instead the de-centered nation. (41)

Concepts of racism based on plural signifiers that tend to emphasize the body are not fixed to biology alone but rather include imagined understandings, or ideologies, based on social and political interpretations. As a process of imagined understandings, racism postulates a possible articulation of the concept of race in terms of differences that interrupt a national unity based around discourses of color. Although race as body type may or may not be fully eradicated in the future, concepts of racism as plural constructions of difference (beyond the body) lend to a re-articulation of national and transnational identities that shift current
perspectives of racism away from skin color alone. Radcliffe and Westwood maintain the existence of a plurality of racisms that can be advantageous to those who are subjected to it:

Racisms are specific and contingent, thereby allowing for ways in which those who are subjected to racism can themselves usurp the symbols around which racism is organized. Thus, the black man uses his physicality to demonstrate prowess on the soccer pitch and the indigenous trader from Otavalo uses the signifiers of culture (long hair for men and dress) to signal ethnic authenticity as part of a strategy for successful capitalist development. (41)

Racial signifiers are thus reinterpreted in performance by racialized subjects in order for them to capitalize on their own ethnic heritage. In the example by Radcliffe and Westwood, race and culture serve the purpose of economic gain or “successful capitalist development.” Are these racialized subjects performing a type of self-exploitation based on their own race, or are they ‘usurping’ established codes of racial difference?

Race as biological difference, sociohistorical constructs (perpetuated through historical understandings), and cultural criteria have continuously shifted concepts of national identity throughout historical periods. Yet recent capitalistic production, transnational markets, and ever-increasing migration have exasperated national distinctions of difference and affected understandings of race, culture, and ethnicity. In terms of race and nation negotiated in today’s expanding markets (of both material products and labor), this chapter seeks to expand notions of race as not only body type and historical understandings, but as a performance of social and cultural differences. Although various theorists define race as a social construct in opposition to biological distinctions, preferring to employ the term ‘ethnicity’ instead of race, they have not abandoned the idea completely that a racial definition involves references to body types that are constructed via social and historical
processes of understanding. In the Introduction to Race and Nation in Modern Latin America, the co-authors note how criteria for racial classification continue to shift over time and conclude that “racial difference has been defined according to notions such as civilization, honor, and education that have been manifested in dress, language, and religion as well as body type” (19). This concept challenges notions of race as a negative classification of disparity based on skin color and instead implies a possibility for a more positive difference based on cultural practices that continue to shift in meaning over time as well. This positive difference can perhaps be directed toward a greater social and political understanding of races and racial classifications.

The two plays analyzed in this chapter from a context of race as biological markers of difference that are influenced by social and historical understandings are Mexican playwright Hugo Salcedo’s El viaje de los cantores (1989) and Latina playwright Cherríe Moraga’s Watsonville: Some Place not Here (1995). Of particular interest in these two plays is a concept of race as a social and cultural performance based on a production and reproduction of the conditions of exploitation suffered by Mexican immigrants living in the United States and Mexicans residing in the border towns between Mexico and the United States. As these two plays exemplify, notions of race as biological distinctions are challenged, as well as historical interpretations that are dominated by a particular political discourse that seeks to exclude any representation of an ‘other.’

Hugo Salcedo has published several plays that explore the economic and social exploitation of Mexicans living in border towns, including Arde el desierto con los vientos que llegan del sur and Sinfonía en una botella. Salcedo’s El viaje de los cantores is defined

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33 Howard Winant explains, “although the concept of race appeals to biologically based human characteristics (so-called phenotypes), selection of these particular human features for purposes of racial signification is always and necessarily a social and historical process” (115).
by Héctor Azar, in his introduction to the text, as a “reportaje trágico.” The play dramatizes the lives of several immigrants as they attempt to cross the border from Mexico to the United States in desperate search of work, only to discover that they are trapped in a train car where they are asphyxiated and suffer a horrible death. Salcedo’s play portrays the fragmented lives of these immigrants as representative of migrating people who live on any border between two countries and find themselves forced to attempt to cross over to the other “foreign” side due to a basic socioeconomic need for survival.

The play opens with a brief written account from a Mexican newspaper, La Jornada, detailing the tragic event that leads to the death of eighteen Mexicans who attempt to cross the Mexico-United States border in a train car. The article mentions one survivor, Miguel Tostado Rodríguez, who was able to carve a small opening in the floor of the train car from which to breathe fresh air. Instructions from the playwright regarding the staging of the play are also included in the beginning of the text. Salcedo suggests three different methods for staging the play: 1) to follow the current order of the scenes as they appear in the text 2) to follow chronological order according to the dates and times given in each scene and 3) to ask the opinion of the public before each production the order that they prefer, thereby creating different combinations each night (15-16). Additionally, Salcedo includes in the beginning of his text an itinerary of the event, with a brief synopsis of each day’s occurrences. These instructions for the staging of the play and synopsis of the text that were intentionally included by Salcedo are meant to be read and not performed by the actors, and they attribute to the creation of a “reportaje trágico.” By including these various aspects of the written text, Salcedo establishes, on the one hand, that the play is based on historical facts that have been translated into a fictionalized piece of literature and, on the other hand, that these tragic
events are being recreated in order to augment an emotional, human perspective to the historical account. He establishes the worth of these men’s lives and their inclusion in an alternative history beyond imposed dominant modes of representation, even though they belong to a border culture, one that labors on the edges of Mexico where the inhabitants attempt to flee one country in order to survive, albeit via exploitation, in another.

As the drama opens with Scene One, readers/audience are introduced to three characters who discuss the significance of living in a border culture where an anxiety of desiring to live “allá” is reproduced among generations. The three men dialogue about the possibility of crossing the border themselves, believing that this is ultimately the desire of all Mexicans living in extreme socioeconomic conditions:

RIGO. Allá a todos en algún momento, nos da por pasarnos al otro lado.
MARTÍN. ¿Y a quién no? Mejor vivir de pobres con los gringos, que de ricos en México.
LAURO. Eso sí.
MARTÍN. Nomás uno crece y emprende su propio camino. . . .
MARTÍN. ¿Y nosotros cuándo?
LAURO. ¿Cuándo qué?
MARTÍN. ¿Cuándo tendremos los papeles?
LAURO. Tranquilo, calmantes montes. (17-18)

This scene establishes a sense of desperation and desire for those who travel to the northern Mexican border towns in order to cross into the United States. Yet Martín’s words, “nomás uno crece y emprende su propio camino,” define a particular type of Mexican who is raised with the belief that he/she will eventually undertake a crossing of the border. He remarks on a “cultura de vivir allá,” a culture that is defined by a desire to live among another culture, and one that continues to be repeated from generation to generation. This desire, however, is also often a matter of necessity. For many Mexicans who migrate to the north, they find themselves in desperate economic struggle and barely able to survive. Any chance to
perform within any level of subsumption in society represents the potential to improve their current living conditions. Their performance of a reproduction of exploitation is very often not a matter of choice or difference yet one of necessity. Gloria Anzaldúa explains that many migrant workers find themselves “living in a no-man’s-borderland, caught between being treated as criminals and being able to eat, between resistance and deportation” (34). These migrating people are products of a global system that in turn produces its own ‘outsides,’ alternative identities that contribute to a market necessity, that of a cheap labor force, in order to perpetuate its existence, yet that remain a transitory identity in terms of a national-popular. Does this border culture represent a part of the national character of Mexican identity? This collective community of border crossers enunciates the very “exhaustion of the nation” that Gareth Williams examines in his account of national identity in transnational markets. Williams considers the possibility of challenging dominant discourses with these fragmented narratives by ‘outsiders.’ He writes, “the truth of subaltern experiences often remains hidden, even though spectral part-narratives do continue to circulate in an often unknowable fashion among more or less reticent subaltern populations” (174). As Salcedo’s play progresses, audience members are exposed to these “subaltern experiences” that often remain hidden due to their very transitory identity that involves a movement across borders. Although the tragic event involving the passage of these immigrant workers to the United States was published in various Mexican newspapers, Salcedo notes that “hay demandas de empleo y de justicia por parte de los familiares y de los jóvenes asistentes; y como siempre, aún no ha habido respuestas concretas a estas peticiones” (17). This play seeks to uncover the “reality” entailing the lives of these eighteen men, a reality that has the potential to
include their tragic event in an historical account that contributes to an understanding of Mexican identity regarding migrant border cultures and races.

In another scene in the play, several women gather each day that the train is due to arrive and depart their border city in order to await loved ones or wish farewell to those who are departing. These women tell their story of loneliness and survival, and perhaps even insanity, when faced with the constant departure of the men in their lives. Their stories circulate “among more or less reticent subaltern populations” as witnesses to those who are left behind in Mexico, struggling to survive while awaiting the return of their loved ones.

Consider the following monologue by La Abuela, an older woman who is sitting in a church in Ojo Caliente, Zacatecas, with a young woman referred to as Mujer 5:

LA ABUELA. Ayer se quedaron muchas mujeres solas en este pueblo. . . . Aunque esté ciega, bien me doy cuenta de lo que pasa en este pueblo. Me llaman loca. Y si estoy loca, ellas están más porque no aguantan quedarse solas en este pueblo. Me dicen ciega. Debajo del rebozo se aguantan las ganas de gritarme que estoy ciega. Pero ellas están más, porque despiden a sus hijos con la esperanza de volverlos a ver, cuando ellos ya no van a regresar nunca. (37-38)

La Abuela refers in this passage to an entire community of women who have been left behind in Mexico while their husbands, sons, and grandsons migrate to the north in search of a better life. She recounts the lives of these “subaltern experiences” and becomes a voice for expressing their bitter hope that borders on insanity. As her name suggests, La Abuela, she represents any grandmother waiting for her loved ones to return to Mexico, a wait that often borders on insanity. How are the lives of these partial narratives, of men crossing the border and women waiting to receive them when they return, included in any notions of Mexican national identity?
In regard to racial categorization, the characters in this play are not being defined by race as biological distinctions or by cultural notions such as dress, language, or religion. Indeed, the only mention of body type in the play is when La Abuela mentions that her grandson, el Mosco, is “tan prieto, tan flaco y tan feo” and there is little or no reference to dress, language, or religion (39). In the most dramatic scene of the play where the eighteen undocumented workers are suffocated in a locked train car, even the true names of the men are substituted with nicknames. They are referred to as El Mosco, El Chayo, El Timbón, El Miqui and El Noé (40). Yet they are not portrayed as distant and inhuman but rather as a collective group of real men who have found solidarity in a shared plight: cross the border in search of work or continue an even harsher struggle to survive in Mexico. What audience members discover from these men during their time in the train car is their desperation to cross the border, find work, and survive in extremely severe conditions. They are also portrayed as sincere human beings who fear the unknown that they must face upon arrival to a “foreign” culture in the United States. This border culture that seems to be instilled in young ones not only living in border towns but living in any dire economic situation appears to be defined by an action of constant migration, or a repetitious act of crossing the border, returning to Mexico, and crossing again to the United States, as well as an absence/presence felt by those who are left behind. This repetitious action of crossing the border is driven by a globalizing market that tends to dehumanize and dehistoricize the immigrant experience. As ‘outsiders’ to their own national identity and ‘outsiders’ to the foreign culture to which they migrate, these immigrants find no place to exercise difference, a difference that may challenge dominant accounts of subaltern representation that are often mired in misunderstandings and/or ignorance.
In terms of racial understandings, these migrating men and women represent a posthegemonic race, alternative articulations and residues in historical interpretations and literature that redirect intellectual modes of thinking toward an ‘other historicity’ that is not black/white in the United States or mestizaje in Mexico. Although this binary black/white racial definition is slowly being challenged by neoliberal politics in the United States, in regard to hegemonic and counterhegemonic identities, there persists a binary mode of intellectual engagement that has dominated most historical and political accounts. In Mexico, there exists an ‘other,’ a pre-colonial indigenous element that the hegemonic (an elite sociopolitical class) intends to incorporate into a modernizing nation under the racial category of mestizaje. The hegemonic in both instances (Mexico and the United States) tends to embrace the non-norm, or rather, the counterhegemonic, in an attempt to manipulate any discourse of difference as a necessary alternative articulation of culture for the national-popular. How does posthegemonic race differ from the hegemonic and counterhegemonic? The term posthegemonic expresses an ‘other’ space of elaboration that is not defined by either hegemonic or counterhegemonic discourses. Instead, posthegemonic seeks an understanding of the nation-state through spaces of production that are not imposed by dominant cultures (although they may continue to be influenced by them). These same spaces are at times affected and defined by a globalizing national identity that extends beyond geopolitical borders that have governed a nation’s identity in years past. Gareth Williams refers to this process of defining an ‘other’ residual culture as a “politics of memory” that points toward the possibility of a distinct mode of defining a nation:

It seems that this is a memory not of state-related injunctions allowing for the foundation of omniscient systems and totalizing orders of analysis. Nor does it appear to lend itself to consideration of the transparent realities and consensual demands of the social sphere. Rather, it is a memory of narrative
residues and of leftover fragments within narrative that might be capable of disrupting the suturing of history’s traditional literature-politics/power-knowledge relations, be they hegemonic or counterhegemonic. (157)

Williams’s definition of a “politics of memory” interrupts traditional dominant modes of understanding, positing instead the possibility for a ‘third’ or even multiple narratives. Are Mexican immigrants who cross the Mexico-United States national border possible sites of these “narrative residues,” an expression of an ‘other’ identity that no longer can be classified as ‘Mexican’ in one country, or ‘American’ in the other?

The term posthegemonic race relates to Williams “politics of memory” in that it redirects toward an understanding of an ‘other race’ that has not been defined in terms of national historical understandings. It seeks instead to disrupt the binary of black/white in the United States, and the inclusion/exclusion of mestizaje in Mexico. As evidenced in Salcedo’s play, Mexicans living in border towns along the Mexico-United States border represent the possibility of a residual experience not defined solely by political and historical dominant modes of representation. Their racial and cultural identity is expressed where one geographically defined country ends and another begins. Salcedo’s play succeeds in blurring fine lines of distinction between differing nation-states, thereby offering instead a complex intertwining of the two that is further convoluted by globalization and socioeconomic forces that contribute to an unending exploitation of immigrant bodies, identities, and historical representations in the national identity of either country. The other play to be explored in this chapter, Cherrie Moraga’s Watsonville: Some Place not Here, exemplifies further this concept of posthegemonic race that renders possible an understanding of alternative expressions not determined by historically accepted dominant modes of intellectual discourse.
Watsonville: Some Place not Here was initially commissioned and produced by the Brava Theater Center of San Francisco in 1995, and was later developed and published by South Coast Repertory’s Hispanic Playwrights Project in southern California. Moraga has published numerous plays, such as Shadow of a Man and Heroes and Saints, as well as a collection of poems, essays, and a memoir about Chicana identity. In Watsonville: Some Place not Here Moraga explores the lives of several Mexican immigrant laborers who work and reside in Watsonville, a farm worker town in central California. Moraga explains that the story of Watsonville was invented by her based on three actual events that took place in this small town. They are “the cannery strikes from 1985 to 1987, the 7.1 earthquake of 1989, and the appearance of the Virgin de Guadalupe on the face of an oak tree in Pinto Lake County Park in 1992” (344). Additionally, Moraga interviewed various workers from Watsonville and adapted their stories into a fictionalized account for the play. Similar to Salcedo’s interpretation of an actual historical event, Moraga’s play seeks to represent alternative expressions of history in relation to concepts of race, culture, and national identity.

Moraga’s play portrays the lives of several Mexican immigrant workers living in the small town of Watsonville. The local cannery employs mostly female workers, both documented and undocumented, to perform assembly line work involving the preparation and packaging of local produce. The employees decide to go on strike, with the support of the local union, based on the fact that the cannery has decided to cut their wages and deny their employees any benefits, including earned vacation pay. As the strike continues throughout the play, audience members discover that the workers are subjected to exploitation and harsh working conditions that would never be tolerated by a vast majority of
Anglo-American workers. In the end, faith and religion save the townspeople from a major earthquake and the female cannery workers, together with the help of Dolores, raise an awareness of the exploitation and inhuman working conditions of many Mexican immigrants struggling to survive in the United States.

There are several issues to be explored in this play, including definitions of categories of race or “raza,” Mexican immigrants recently arrived to the United States (referred to as “scabs”) versus Mexican immigrant workers who have established themselves in the United States, documented and undocumented workers, and Mexican identity living inside or outside a nation’s geographical borders. The initial notes from the playwright indicate Moraga’s awareness of these differing terms in her self-categorization as “Chicana (i.e. Mexican, US-born)” (344). As Moraga proceeds to describe the characters and setting, she refers to Watsonville as “a setting for ‘a people’--a Mexican immigrant worker, Indo-Catholic people--where private property is the land on which they work, represented by chain-linked and barbed-wire fences and corrugated aluminum walls. Still, as Mexicans of Indian descent, el pueblo remembers the land as belonging to no one but the earth itself” (345). In her definition of the set of Watsonville, Moraga categorizes the Mexican immigrants of the town as a distinct category from other Mexicans who might not be of indigenous descent. She separates the historical representation of Mexicans of indigenous descent from those of Spanish heritage, yet at the same time recognizes the Catholic religion as a part of their identity. This is important to note since religion in the play, posed as a fusion of Catholic and indigenous beliefs, is another significant element in creating an identity for the immigrant workers. Finally, this play raises issues as to definitions of

34 Although the term race translates as ‘raza’ in Spanish, code switching changes the significance of the word according to the social context and political implications in which it is being expressed.
national identity for Mexican immigrants residing in the United States. Are they Americans
or Mexicans, neither or both? Is their identity part of a national-popular in either country?
Moraga’s play explores a construction of race that is comprised of constituents other than
biological differentiations. These constituents include religion, historical understanding,
social class and gender, and national identity based on an ideological connection with a race
that is not biologically determined.

In Act One, Mexican immigrants recently arrived to the United States are bused to the
cannery in order to replace the striking workers, thereby threatening any chances for a
compromise to the strike. If the cannery no longer needs the striking employees, then they
will lose their jobs and simply be replaced by another busload of Mexican immigrants. One
of the female strikers, Lucha, understands the threat that these workers pose and decides to
address them personally on the bus with the following speech:

LUCHA. Yo tengo 15 años en los Estados Unidos. I came here alone,
without a husband and I worked in the grapes in the Central Valley.
También trabajé, picking cotton a mano, dragging the sack y mi bebé
recién nacido. . . . Y después acá en Watsonville, I’ve worked in the
canneries, packing todo el proceso de comida. ¿Para qué? So that us
immigrants could fill the gringos’ table con comida.
Gente, no vaya a trabajar. En esta canería, they had us working como
esclavos. If you go in there to work today, you’ll be hurting us. Es
verdad que you get a day’s pay, pero ¿qué pasará mañana? They’ll do
the same to you as they done to us. If you don’t go in, we can negotiate
a contract and later you can come in as real workers, también. Los
patrones son americanos. The people they are exploiting es nuestra
misma raza. La gente mexicana. (380)

These replacement workers that Lucha addresses in her speech are a parallel to the migrating
people from Salcedo’s play El viaje de los cantores. They cross the border in search of work
without any regard to the system of exploitation in which they are about to become
involuntary victims. Lucha establishes a connection with these recent immigrant arrivals,
stating that they are all from the “misma raza, la gente mexicana.” Lucha problematizes the term “raza” in her speech and raises the question as to whether Mexican elites would be considered as part of the “raza.” A concept of race as determined by social class and a repetition of exploitation may or may not define “la gente mexicana.”

In another scene in the play, Chente, the shop steward at the cannery and also fellow striker, converses with Juan, an ex-priest who decided to dedicate his life to helping the poor through various local and national organizations. In this scene, Juan has just received information that Chente released the names of the undocumented workers at the cannery to Immigration Services so that the documented ones would sign the agreement and return to work. Juan confronts Chente in the following dialogue regarding Chente’s decision to inform Immigration Services:

   JUAN. You turned them in, didn’t you?
   CHENTE. I--
   JUAN. You bastard! You put la migra on them.
   CHENTE. Let me explain.
   JUAN. How could you do that, man?
   CHENTE. Cálmate, hombre, I don’t wanna fight you.
   JUAN. Give up your own Raza to la migra.
   CHENTE. They were scabs. They were vendidos--
   JUAN. No, they’re just people, man, just people trying to make a living.

(402)

Chente establishes in this scene a differentiation among documented Mexican workers and undocumented ones, or as he labels them, “vendidos.” Even though they come from the same “raza,” Chente sacrifices them for the sake of his own personal gain: an office job with a local organization. Yet the other characters do not share Chente’s view regarding the recently arrived Mexicans. Another female cannery worker, Amparo, defends the “vendidos” and reminds Chente that “¡fuiste mojado! . . . You wait, Chente. A year or two from now and the gov’t’s gointu take away the same rights from legal inmigrantes”
The concept of “la misma raza” has been challenged by Chente who chooses to become a “sellout” of his own people for his own personal economic gain. Yet Amparo reminds Chente that illegal or legal, they are all considered “immigrants” once they cross the border from Mexico to the United States.

Another scene in the play explores further this concept of illegal and legal Mexican immigrants as pertaining to the same ‘race.’ The striking cannery workers have recently discovered that a law may be passed that would bar employment, education, and health services to all illegal workers and their children. One of the female strikers, Lucha, explains to her companions that this law will affect all immigrants, both illegal and legal. She believes that not only their legal rights are being threatened, but also any fair treatment will be altered because of a shared commonality: race. In the following dialogue, Lucha details her ‘racial’ experience with a bus driver:

LUCHA. I went to get on the bus yesterday en Santa Cruz. The bus driver stop and let on everybody else and then when I tried to subirme al autobus, me dijo que he didn’t have to pick me up, that he didn’t have to give service to no wetbacks. He just shut the door on Elenita and me and he just drove away.

JUAN. But he doesn’t know si eres legal o no.

LUCHA. I got el nopal estampado en la frente, that’s all they need to know. . .

AMPARO. Esta ley me da mucho miedo. I didn’t have to suffer, como muchos otros, la desgracia of coming here ilegal. But I suffer the same consequences. En eso nada me servían los papeles. (377)

Illegal or legal, documented or undocumented, many (but not all) Mexican immigrants living in what constitutes for them as a ‘foreign country,’ belong to the same ‘race,’ one that has “el nopal estampado en la frente.” This “nopal” that Lucha refers to is a signifier of difference that could possibly be based on body type, dress, social class, and even Lucha’s broken English language in this case. The bus driver presumed that Lucha and her daughter were
“wetbacks” by observation alone. He did not ask to see her documents or to hear her account of how she came to live in the country. This racialization of Mexican immigrants in this scene indicates a class issue. The question remains as to whether Lucha and her daughter had appeared differently, dressed in finer clothing, would the bus driver still have referred to them as “wetbacks.”

The following dialogue between JoJo, son of an illegal worker, and Chente reveals the fear involved with belonging to a particular ‘race.’ A newscaster has just announced that the legislation was upheld by the Supreme Court regarding the prohibition of employment, education, and social services to illegal immigrants. JoJo comments on the reactions of his classmates upon hearing the recent decision:

CHENTE. What about the high school?
JOJO. Our principal’s a punk, man. He just shut the whole school down for now. He said he was trying to prevent ‘further violence.’ Shit, we didn’t even really wreck nuthin’, not compared to how we was feeling.
CHENTE. What happened?
JOJO. I dunno. We were all just kina stunned. After they made the announcement, everyone just stopped and looked around the room at each other. It was like allava sudden we were trying to read on each other’s faces who was ‘legal’ and who wasn’t. Thinking real quick about who had an accent and who didn’t, who dressed like a Mexican, who brought tacos to school ... stupid stuff like that. It was crazy the stuff going on in our minds. (405)

As JoJo reveals, the concept of a Mexican race becomes divided between those who are legal and those who are not when news of the new legislation is heard. The factors used to determine the illegal immigrants among the classmates are, according to JoJo’s account, spoken accent, dress, and food. The fear of being labeled as ‘illegal Mexican’ alters any account of a shared race that previously united all the immigrant workers under one rubric based on heritage, biological distinctions (“el nopal estampado”), and an exploited social class. With the passing of the law, those who “had an accent,” “dressed like a Mexican,” and
“brought tacos to school” were suddenly categorized as ‘illegal’ whether they possessed legal documentation or not. JoJo’s classmates, mainly sons and daughters of Mexican immigrants, begin to distinguish among themselves those who are deemed ‘Mexican,’ a synonym for illegal immigrant in this scene, and those who are not.

This classification of Mexicans by dress, language, and food consumption challenges concepts of race as biological difference. In Race, Nation, Class: Ambiguous Identities Etienne Balibar refers to this type of racism as “racism without races.” He explains, “it is a racism whose dominant theme is not biological heredity but the insurmountability of cultural differences, a racism which, at first sight, does not postulate the superiority of certain groups of peoples in relation to others but ‘only’ the harmfulness of abolishing frontiers, the incompatibility of life-styles and traditions” (21). Balibar maintains in his text a continuing awareness of “biological geneticism” and race, yet expounds contemporary ideologies of racism to include “a theory of ‘race relations’ within society, which naturalizes not racial belonging but racist conduct” (22; original emphasis). What is interesting to note in this particular scene with JoJo is that the racial categorization occurs among Mexican immigrants themselves who share a similar culture and heritage. With the passing of the new law, varying degrees of assimilated immigrants become apparent along with a method of measuring illegal versus legal status. Balibar explains in greater detail this process of assimilation that occurs among differing populations:

There corresponds to this mission [a universal mission to educate the human race regarding the ‘Rights of Man’] a practice of assimilating dominated populations and a consequent need to differentiate and rank individuals or groups in terms of their greater or lesser aptitude for--or resistance to--assimilation. . . . No theoretical discourse on the dignity of all cultures will really compensate for the fact that, for a ‘Black’ in Britain or a ‘Beur’ in France, the assimilation demanded of them before they can become ‘integrated’ into the society in which they already live (and which will always
be suspected of being superficial, imperfect or simulated) is presented as progress, as an emancipation, a conceding of rights. (24-25)

Balibar suggests a “cultural racism” that is based on degrees of possible assimilation into a dominant, and, particularly in the United States, mainly Anglo-American, society. This assimilation process requires, as many immigrants will testify, a certain degree of loss of heritage that may or may not be desired by the integrating population. Additionally, the dominant culture, as further examples will testify, is not left unaffected by this process of assimilating immigrants.

The passing of this particular legislation in the play creates a fissure among the immigrants who must determine differing degrees of assimilation among themselves. Additionally, the new legislation poses a disparity between the politics of the state and the people of the state since not all Anglo-Americans desire to exploit immigrants. The law as established by the politics of the state represents a form of nationalism, a ‘normal’ ideology reflected in politics and institutions that seek to determine which social groups should be included or excluded. In relation to nationalism, but not always in opposition to it, is the nation, a society of people and their behaviors. Yet can the two terms nationalism and nation be defined separately? Balibar attempts to define these convoluted terms in the following manner:

Why does it prove to be so difficult to define nationalism? First, because the concept never functions alone, but is always part of a chain in which it is both the central and the weak link. This chain is constantly being enriched (the detailed modes of that enrichment varying from one language to another) with new intermediate or extreme terms: civic spirit, patriotism, populism, ethnicism, ethnocentrism, xenophobia, chauvinism, imperialism, jingoism ... I challenge anyone to fix once and for all, unequivocally, the differential meanings of these terms. But it seems to me that the overall figure can be interpreted fairly simply. Where the nationalism-nation relation is concerned, the core of meaning opposes a ‘reality,’ the nation, to an ‘ideology,’ nationalism. (46)
In Moraga’s play, the ‘reality’ of the nation consists of Mexican immigrants, both documented and undocumented, whose contribution to an ‘ideology’ or nationalism is being excluded and challenged. They are not being included as part of a society that has been hierarchized and partitioned, such as the black-white segregation that has historically existed in the United States. Instead, this new law aims to purify the social body, that is, the nation, of the fear that inferior races may represent to a predominantly Anglo society. Balibar notes that there exists a “distinction between a racism of extermination or elimination and a racism of oppression or exploitation” (39). The first form of racism seeks to exclude and the second is inclusive yet aims at creating a hierarchy of races among society. Are the Mexican immigrants being ‘exterminated’ by the new law or are they being subjected to a “racism of oppression or exploitation”? JoJo’s classmates realize that they are being forced to classify and to segregate themselves into illegal and legal immigrants. Yet as noted previously in the episode with Lucha and the bus driver, this distinction is not always clearly acknowledged. The bus driver determined that Lucha was a Mexican immigrant and refused her service on his bus. Perhaps the Mexican immigrants in this play are receiving a contradictory message with the passing of this law: the state, or ‘nationalism,’ seeks to eliminate them, yet a capitalistic ‘nation’ that needs cheap labor wishes to exploit them.

In terms of capital production and the necessity of labor forces, Immanuel Wallerstein notes a contradiction in regard to racism and costs of production versus costs of political disruption. He analyses racism in terms of xenophobia, disdain and fear, and capital production:

Racism is not simply a matter of having an attitude of disdain for or fear of someone of another group as defined by genetic criteria (such as skin colour) or by social criteria (religious affiliation, cultural patterns, linguistic
preference and so on). . . . Disdain and fear are quite secondary to what defines the practice of racism in the capitalist world-economy. . . . Whenever we physically eject the other, we gain the ‘purity’ of environment that we are presumably seeking, but we inevitably lose something at the same time. We lose the labour-power of the person ejected and therefore that person’s contribution to the creation of a surplus that we might be able to appropriate on a recurring basis. This represents a loss for any historical system, but it is a particularly serious one in the case of a system whose whole structure and logic are built around the endless accumulation of capital. (32-33)

Wallerstein suggests a type of racialized but productive work force that contributes to the capital production of a society yet remains isolated from any ideological concept of a nationalism of unity (a nation-state that defines the popular). The isolation, and even exclusion, of this racialized and productive work force rests on issues of fear and disdain toward an ‘other’ that is different from the dominant society. As witnessed in the following quote from the play, anxiety, fear, and hatred continue to compound the lives of the immigrants. In this scene, Juan explains to Dolores the horrifying death of her daughter that he witnessed in the vineyard:

JUAN. They had forced the post through her mouth and had hung the veil like a sign around her neck. And on it, in blood ... her blood, they had written the words: “THOU ART WRETCHED.” (Pause.) And then I understood--

AMPARO. What, Juan?

JUAN. How profoundly those men ... with all their land and all their power ... hated us. And I knew that they would do anything ... anything not to know their hate was fear. (Pause.) And I knew I would never be afraid again. Not even of God. (393)

Who to blame for the death of Dolores’s daughter is never explicit in the play. It is assumed that “those men ... with all their land,” the vineyard owners, are the ones who committed the act of violence, although there is no mention of any justice served. Juan explains to Dolores that “her death was a protest against the same people who crippled her at birth” (392). Dolores’s daughter became a martyr, an example of what happens when there is fear of the
unknown, of what is different. This fear of difference is what maintains a continual process of exclusion/inclusion from a dominant Anglo society, and it is the same fear and disdain that JoJo faced among his classroom companions when they began to assess who “dressed like a Mexican.”

In regard to capitalistic production, concepts of race in terms of Mexican immigrant workers in the United States include social class, an element that involves a contradictory process of assimilation/non-assimilation into a dominant Anglo society. This contradiction of racism, an inclusion/exclusion into the national popular that Balibar refers to as “superficial, imperfect or simulated,” includes biological markers of difference as well as dress, language, food, and even religion. Although some theorists maintain that skin color continues to affect a dominant society’s acceptance of the ‘other’ (see Colonel West, among others), a certain degree of assimilation can reduce the fear and disdain of a nation-popular under the pretext of ‘protecting’ a standard way of life, or rather, a presumed essentialist ‘national identity.’ An essentialist ‘national identity,’ however, remains a mere presumption due to the fact that a ‘pure’ race or culture does not exist, nor a singular national ideology that represents all the multifaceted aspects of any particular nation.

The immigrants living in Watsonville have discovered a sense of displacement between national place and national identity. They live and work in a ‘foreign country’ yet continue to identify with another place that has, in turn, become an imaginative site of longing for those who migrated from their home country, and an unknown place of heritage for others who have never been there. As Juan and Sonora express in the following dialogue, their place, or ‘home,’ eludes them:

JUAN. Where to?
SONORA. I don’t know. Some place not here. Some place that doesn’t
feel like a foreign country.

JUAN. Ironic, huh?

SONORA. (A touch of irony) So, where’s home, carnal? Where’s home for the dispossessed chicanada? (376)

The sense of place for Sonora is disconnected with her sense of identity and she finds herself asking where “home” is located, where she belongs, and how she defines herself in a place that presumes to reject or to ignore her and the Mexican race. In the following conversation between Sonora and Dolores, Dolores reveals her sense of disjuncture with Mexico, a place that remains part of her identity, and the United States, the place where she now lives and that has also influenced her identity:

DOLORES. By the time I got all the clothes down and folded, I saw the sun coming out, peaking up over las lomas. It was so orange, it was almost red y la luz, bien fuerte. Y luego it passed over the top of the hills and spilled its light all across los files. De repente everything was covered en luz. I turn my eyes away, it was so bright. Y miré p’arriba un pedacito de luna. The moon look like a small smile in the sky, un poco chueca. Y por alguna razón, I thought of México así, desapariciéndose. Que mi México es la noche, la oscuridad, the place of dreams. And I saw the sun como el norte, stealing our dreams from us. El sol era brillante y maravilloso pero México was fading from its light.

LUCHA. And now the light is going to burn us out completely with its Jaws.

DOLORES. Eso fue lo que pensaba yo. (378)

In this passage, Dolores discovers that Mexico is the site of her dreams that is slowly being replaced by the United States. Mexico remains a part of her identity, albeit a hidden or secret part (dreams), yet one that will continue to define her regardless of her ‘place’ of residence. It is interesting to note here that “la noche, la oscuridad” symbolize Mexico, the location of her dreams, while the United States, or “el norte,” is represented by a bright light. The light is going to “burn” them out completely, either blackening their skin or erasing Latinos altogether. If their skin is blackened, then a racial categorization of ‘black’ may be imposed on the Latinos. For several immigrants, their ‘patria’ or homeland remains a place of longing.
where they someday wish to return. Yet the sun is slowly “stealing our dreams from us” as many immigrants find it more difficult to return to their homeland and even discover that when they do, they are viewed as ‘foreigners.’ Additionally, as many Mexican immigrants return to their homeland, they bring with them their experiences and perspectives that in turn alter Mexican identity. As Guillermo Gómez-Peña explains in The New World Border, this phenomenon of returning to Mexico has a similar affect on the United States:

The 200,000 Mexicans who cross the border every month bring us fresh and constant reminders of our past (for Mexican Americans, the continual migratory flow functions as a sort of collective memory). And the opposite phenomenon also happens: the mythic North (which represents the future) also returns to the South, searching for its lost past. Many of the Mexicans who come to ‘the other side’ become ‘chicanized’ and return to Mexico--either on their own or by force of the immigration authorities. In the act of returning they contribute to the silent process of Chicanization which Mexico is currently undergoing. (177-78)

This constant movement and continual migration from one country to another challenges formations of national identity in terms of a national-popular that seeks to define itself in contrast with ‘other’ national identities. As indicated by Gómez-Peña, both Mexico and the United States are affected by the migratory process, one that involves an exchange of not only people, but also cultures and ideologies. Radcliffe and Westwood consider this “placing of the nation,” the search for an ‘authentic’ national identity in relation to national place, in the following manner:

In the potential overlap of territory, culture and population of the nation, there can be a disjuncture between the national place and national identity; the ‘space of the nation’ can be imagined by populations which have to ‘place’ in which to express and consolidate that identity. Such disjunctures, or ‘dis-located senses of place’ draw attention to the work done by imagination and discursive formations in (re-)creating linkages between people and place. Even where populations and ‘their’ place are together, identities expressed through ‘imaginative geographies’--the term is Said’s (1978)--by which the differences and distinctions between ‘Us’ and ‘Them,’ and between ‘our place’ and ‘their place’ are discursively imagined and articulated. Such
imagined geographies can provide the basis for a shared identity, articulated through a sense of sameness in social features and a sense of shared space/place, a ‘homeland.’ (21-22)

A search for “sameness” is thus based on imagined notions of space/place that are articulated through lived experiences. These “imaginative geographies” are for Dolores the “place of dreams,” an imagined space that connects her Mexican identity to her current place, Watsonville. Through this shared and imagined commonality, or what Gómez-Peña refers to as a “collective memory,” Dolores can begin to articulate a sense of ‘sameness’ with her fellow Mexican immigrant workers, both illegal and legal, recently arrived (“scabs”), and even second or third generations. This expression of difference created and imagined by Mexican immigrants convolutes official accounts of national identity into a multicultural and delineated space that needs to be negotiated in terms of transnational movements.

In the end, the town of Watsonville is destroyed by an earthquake, yet the majority of Mexican residents survive because they follow Dolores to an oak grove in a County Park where she witnessed a vision of the Virgin of Guadalupe. Although the Mexicans are left without a place, their identity as a united people, a ‘raza,’ remains stronger than before. As Dolores explains, “ustedes tienen raíces that spread all the way to México. . . . Seguimos siendo americanos whether we got papeles or not” (415). Dolores’s words are a reference to the fact that California once belonged to Mexico before the Mexican-American War of 1846-48 and the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo that allowed for the United States annexation of the Southwest. Additionally, Dolores remarks that all Mexican immigrants are “americanos,” thereby classifying them as equals with Anglo Americans, African Americans, or even Native Americans. For Dolores, a Mexican ‘raza’ does not distinguish between
documented or undocumented workers because they all share some “sameness” with an ideological space: Mexico.

In both Salcedo’s and Moraga’s plays, concepts of race as well as the Spanish term ‘raza’ are questioned in regard to the Mexican immigrant experience to the United States. In Salcedo’s play, the “narrative residues” and lives of immigrants living near the Mexico-United States border are possible sites for a renegotiation of terms such as race, national identity, and an ‘other’ history not dominated by hegemonic or counterhegemonic modes of discourse. As such, an appropriation of the term posthegemonic race seeks to include these residual narratives as part of a national essence in both Mexico and the United States. A Mexican posthegemonic race expands notions of race as biological difference to include other such factors as language, religion, social class (economic exploitation), and a shared history of oppression by a dominant society. While biological difference remains a part of the definition of race (as evidenced by the bus driver in Moraga’s play), other factors must be considered in determining a categorization for ‘Mexican race,’ in particular since Mexican immigrants are of various phenotypes. A posthegemonic race as exemplified by Mexican immigrants seeks to disrupt the historical binary of black/white in the United States and inclusion/exclusion in Mexico through the creation of an ‘other’ mode of understanding that includes the experiences of often forgotten or ignored lives. The term calls for a self-categorization as ‘Mexican’ due to shared experiences of exploitation and discrimination, although this is not to state that all Mexicans would choose to self-categorize as Mexican and not all Anglo-Americans would recognize a self-categorization of some Mexicans. The term remains problematic due to a history of race as synonymous with skin color in the United States.
In Moraga’s play, Mexican immigrants struggle with notions of ‘raza’ when congress passes a law banning certain privileges to any undocumented immigrants. A consolidation of the “gente mexicana” must be established in order for all the Mexican immigrants living in the town of Watsonville--documented and undocumented--to begin a process of inscribing their own narratives, history, political agenda, and concepts of race into a system that wishes to exploit them and exclude them from a national identity. The Mexican immigrants in Moraga’s play struggle among themselves with a binary understanding of race in the United States of black/white, a system that excludes them since they don’t ‘fit’ into either category. The immigrants of Watsonville begin to question their own understanding of ‘raza’ when they are forced to exclude undocumented workers in order to possibly sustain their own survival. In the end, they come to an understanding that whether documented or undocumented, they are still considered by a dominant Anglo society as ‘illegal immigrants’ who are necessary for their cheap labor but feared and undesired for a national identity. As evidenced by Salcedo’s play as well, the “narrative residues” as portrayed by the characters in each play remain excluded from a dominant society that continues to exploit immigrants and exclude them from any concept of a national identity.

The two plays by Salcedo and Moraga seek to include the histories and events of Mexican immigrants who live on a sociopolitical and ideological border dominated by the United States yet profoundly influenced by a Mexican heritage. This border culture that they represent disrupts an idealized national identity, albeit one that is in constant negotiation, both in Mexico and the United States. Yet can this notion of Mexican immigrants be expanded to include a Latino population of immigrants who cross the same border? In both plays explored in this chapter, the immigrant experience is related specifically to Mexicans
crossing over to the United States. However, millions of immigrants who cross the Mexican-
United States border originate from other Latin American countries. These immigrants share
a similar experience of exploitation and discrimination as exemplified by Salcedo’s and
Moraga’s plays. Combining Latino immigrants under the same rubric of a Latino race in the
United States would enhance their possibilities for a stronger political agenda and a means of
inclusion in a national popular. Their presence disrupts current understandings of race and
convolutes any notions of an essential national identity. The problem that remains is not only
where to locate the popular, but how to define a national unity in a space that is precisely
disjointed and lacking continuity.
Chapter 5

Conclusion: Race and the Issue of Choice

The term race has been used extensively throughout my study in reference, primarily, to the color of one’s skin. Further analysis, however, reveals that race as determined by skin color has a parallel connection with the historical understandings of the two countries included in this study: Mexico and the United States, and continues to be negotiated separately by the two. Yet as indicated by the plays chosen in my study, a connection between Mexico and the United States in reference to race and the immigrant experience suggests possible influences between the two. Several Mexican immigrants discover that contact with a dominant Anglo-American culture produces an awareness of biological differences among the immigrants themselves. This is not to suggest that differences are not noted among national identities before any contact with another culture occurs. As Mary Louise Pratt examines in her study of colonial encounters, contact among differing cultures produces a heightened awareness of dissimilarity between the cultures, an awareness that may or may not have existed a priori to the encounter between the two. This dissimilarity lends to the creation of cultural identification in an attempt to define one culture in contrast with another.35 Piri Thomas notes in his novel Down These Mean Streets that there existed strife among his own family members due to their difference in color, particularly due to the darker skin color of Thomas himself. These immigrant bodies of varying shades of skin color purport a contradiction in the historical black / white paradigm of the United States. As

35 See Mary Louise Pratt, Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation.
entities of neither category, they supply an alternative understanding of race that may serve to dismantle former definitions of race.

Latino immigrants who cross the United States border bring with them their cultural experiences and their own understanding of race. Whether living near the border or crossing it either physically or by cyberspace, they are faced not only with the challenges of surviving economically but also racially, meaning that some, but not all, are forced to confront their own bodies and to classify themselves according to their phenotype. This confrontation is not equal for all Mexican immigrants since skin color varies greatly among them. While one immigrant may be able to ‘pass’ for a certain race, another may not. As exemplified by Piri Thomas’s novel, this phenomenon may even occur among siblings that are born with different skin colors. Sarita in Milcha Sánchez-Scott’s Latina also experienced a similar understanding of her race. For Sarita, skin color affected her ability to be considered for a role other than that of a maid in Hollywood television. Sarita struggled to achieve ‘success’ despite her “prieto” looks only to realize in the end that the success she desired would have resulted in the denial of her Latino heritage. Yet denying her Latino heritage still may not have guaranteed her success as a Hollywood actress: Sarita was relegated to certain roles in television because of her skin color. Her ability to perform as an actress appears not to have been the contributing factor to her success or her failure.

Sarita’s denial of an alternative role in television raises the question of choice and whether one can choose his / her race or accept the racial classification made by others. In Víctor Hugo Rascón Banda’s La mujer que cayó del cielo, Rita was similarly denied a role in both an Anglo-American society and a Mexican one. Authorities who discovered her in Kansas attempted to classify her as race, only to realize that she ‘fit’ as an ‘other,’ a category
relegated to those whose bodies challenge the current classification system. The ‘choice,’ however, remains to be questioned since Rita obviously did not choose to be placed in an insane asylum. The following excerpt from Thomas’s novel examines the issue of choice by a male character called Gerald who defines himself according to his blood mixture: Malaya, White, Negro, Indian, and Spanish. Gerald chooses to be classified as a person of Spanish origin. He explains choice as an option that exists for him quite possibly due to his lighter-colored skin that Thomas does not share:

I’m not ashamed for what I feel myself to be. Nor how I think. I believe in the right of the individual to feel and think--and choose--as he pleases. If I do not choose to be a Negro, as you have gathered, this is my right, and I don’t think you can ask or fight for your rights while denying someone else’s. . . . It’s true I don’t look like a true Caucasian, but neither do I look like a true Negro. So I ask you, if a white man can be a Negro if he has some Negro blood in him, why can’t a Negro be a white man if he has white blood in him? . . . I believe the Negro has the burden of his black skin . . . And I believe the white man has the burden of his white skin. But people like me have the burden of both. (176)

Gerald was able to choose his racial category due to the color of his skin and his ‘blood’ relation. He classifies himself as ‘Spanish’ even though he is not a native Spanish speaker and does not appear to know much about the culture as well, although he does claim a certain percentage of Spanish blood. Thomas faces an opposite challenge in the novel: he is considered black due to his dark skin color, yet he is Puerto Rican. Thomas feels that the choice is not his alone to make because he is classified according to his looks and how others perceive him. Even though he is Puerto Rican, Thomas finds himself struggling with his self-identification in the United States as either Black or Caucasian. Yet the category he seeks is neither black nor white but that of the ‘other’: Latino.

The category of ‘other’ in the United States is not equivalent to Latino nor is it related to a specific race. While ‘other’ is an ambivalent term that indicates a race that does not ‘fit’
the black / white paradigm or the ‘native’ American and ‘native’ Pacific Islander, the term Latino is relegated to a separate category of ethnicity, as indicated by the 2000 census. There does not exist currently a Latino race as per the United States government, only a Latino ethnicity. Yet in practice, they are forced to contemplate their own bodies and categorize their race as black or white. This contradiction in theory and practice within the United States leaves a gap wherein Latinos must choose to embrace an ethnicity or a racial category. Why would Latinos wish to define their own race? How can they do so when race is based on phenotype and Latinos skin type is of varying shades of color? First, defining a Latino race would provide the Latino community with access to government organizations, funding, and recognition as a racial group that has suffered a history of exploitation parallel to that of African-Americans. Second, the varying skin types that Latinos represent may serve to challenge current racial categorizations that are based primarily on biological differences. Their bodies supply an ‘interstice’ in the system, a plurality of racial identities. An alternative system of classifying ‘other’ would challenge and perhaps even replace current perceptions of race.

This concept of an ‘other’ category that challenges historical understandings of a bipolar race has quite possible become a form of attraction to the culture of mainstream popularity. In search of alternative understandings of race and racialized bodies not based on bipolar oppositions, mainstream Anglo-American society and mass culture has attempted to embrace all ‘margins’ of cultures. Recently, alternative thought and fringe or radical subcultures have been explored by popular Anglo-American culture, in particular through ‘interactive cyberspace experiences’ on the internet or via mass communications. Does mainstream culture seek to understand the ‘other’ or rather experience its difference as a
mere form of entertainment? The search for alternative understandings by mainstream Anglo society is perhaps a step toward changing concepts of race or perhaps it is an attempt to satisfy the curiosity of intellectual elites and global consumers. Guillermo Gómez-Peña explains this exploration of exotic flavors by global consumers in terms of ‘third world’ borders and a certain level of acceptance: “‘Third World’ art products are seasonally fashionable as long as they pass the quality control tests. . . . The new Third World or ‘minority’ artist is expected to perform trans- and intercultural sophistication, unpredictable eclecticism, and cool hybrity.” Those artists who attempt to ‘radicalize’ or ‘problematize’ their interpretation of the ‘other’ through their artwork are returned to a place of anonymity (New Global Culture 16-17). This curiosity for the margins of society appears to be a type of experiment, a curiosity that allows mainstream culture to maintain a distance yet observe differences. Anglo-Americans can embrace the ‘other’ without fully accepting it as part of their national identity. In this manner, Latinos are ‘tolerated’ within certain boundaries, yet without a form of race to define them, they remain ‘outside’ or invisible to the national popular. They are not included in a United States national ideal that is reiterated in history, education, and museums, among other government organizations.

Experiencing the subculture for entertainment purposes is one theme explored in Coco Fusco and Nao Bustamante’s Stuff. The play offers a cultural tour of Latino food and women, and explores the affects of globalization on Latino cultures. The female body is presented in the play as exotic to foreign men who desire to ‘taste’ a little of the ‘other’ culture. This fascination with dark-skinned female bodies as representations of exoticism establishes an ideology of understandings based on biological distinctions. Foreigners seek to consume the ‘other’ race yet maintain their distance as a form of dominance. In Luis
Valdez’s play *Los vendidos*, stereotypical Chicano bodies are displayed on stage for sale in a similar manner that Fusco and Bustamante’s play explores the sale and consumption of Latina bodies. Valdez explores stereotypes of Chicanos living in southern California where contact with a dominant Anglo culture has problematized concepts of ‘other’ that fit neatly into a third category. The Chicano body challenges black / white paradigms of difference through the celebration of the ‘brown’ body. Valdez not only confronts stereotypes but, ironically, embraces them in such a manner that his characters are able to take advantage of their Anglo buyers. Do his characters exhibit a choice with regard to their race? They choose to be a farm-worker, Mexican revolutionary, pachuco, and Mexican-American not because they seek to sustain the stereotypes but rather to define them in order to eventually dismantle them. Valdez’s play examines issues of race as a ‘brown’ body that defies an historical bipolar black / white understanding in the United States.

The matter of choice is one of economical survival for several Mexican immigrants struggling to cross the Mexican-United States border in Hugo Salcedo’s *El viaje de los cantores* and those struggling to survive in southern California in Cherríe Moraga’s *Watsonville: Some Place not Here*. Salcedo explores the urgency that Mexican immigrants confront to cross the border in search of a better life. His characters display an anxiety to immigrate to the United States, an anxiety that is passed down from generation to generation, creating a subculture of immigrants. Moraga’s characters similarly experience a struggle for survival as Mexican immigrants who search for their ‘home,’ a place with which to identify themselves. The Mexican immigrants in Moraga’s play realize that they are living on an ideological border between Mexico and the United States where both countries deny them a place in their national identity: they are neither Mexican nor American. Their option to
choose one side of the border or the other depends on how others perceive them and classify them. For some, they will always represent an ‘immigrant worker,’ as demonstrated by the scene in which the bus driver refused passage to Lucha, one of the female immigrants. She did not have a choice as to her identity: the bus driver labeled her as an illicit Mexican immigrant based on her appearance alone and, according to the bus driver, she did not deserve to use public transportation.

The characters from all six plays in my study find themselves living on a border, a border that is defined, first, by their physical bodies/appearances and, second, by other cultural traits, such as language. This border that is determined by a system of primarily dominant ideologies creates an ‘other’ that does not ‘fit’ in terms of irreconcilable opposites. The Latino bodies in these plays ‘interrupt’ these irreconcilable opposites as representations of neither side. Although in some instances dominant society classifies their phenotype as ‘black’ while other Latinos can ‘pass’ as white, a large majority find themselves in a continual process of reconstitution of their embodied selves. Gloria Anzaldúa explores the Chicana body as constituted by amputated parts that are treated as scientific studies. Due to her struggle with diabetes, she began to identity herself as both a body and interpersonal feelings. She based her self-classification on the body, including skin color and physical ailments, along with her feelings, thus relating her experience to Gerald’s option to choose his race in Thomas’s novel. Border crossing for Anzaldúa represents a sick body of amputated parts that has been cleaved apart by a system of ideologies that creates an ‘other.’ Her interpretation of Chicana bodies as scientific studies is similar to Gómez-Peña’s concept of a curious mainstream culture that seeks to be entertained by the ‘other’ without ever really
knowing it. Anzaldúa offers, in her poem “To live in the Borderlands means you,” the following definition for those who find themselves divided by boundaries:

To live in the Borderlands means you are neither hispana india negra española / ni gabacha, eres mestiza, mulata, half-breed / caught in the crossfire between camps / while carrying all five races on your back / not knowing which side to turn to, run from; . . . Cuando vives en la frontera / people walk through you, the wind steals your voice, / you’re a burra, buey, scapegoat, / forerunner of a new race, / half and half--both woman and man, neither-- / a new gender.
(216; original emphasis)

Anzaldúa posits a new mestiza, a synthesis of identities that defies a concept of ‘other’ in that it is not the ‘leftover’ race--the category that one chooses when he / she does not ‘fit’ into any others--but rather a new expression of identity that is defined by a multifarious composit of cultures. Rather than viewing race in terms of irreconcilable opposites, the new mestiza represents the boundaries of division themselves, defining and claiming the border not in terms of an ‘other’ but rather a race that serves as a gateway between the divisions.
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