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**IMPERIAL MYTHS, ABJECT DEVOTION: MAPPING  
AFFECT IN NEW MEXICAN VISUAL CULTURE AND  
DISCOURSE**

by

**N. C. LIRA-PÉREZ**

**B.A., SOCIAL SCIENCE, UNIVERSITY OF WYOMING,  
2016**

THESIS

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the  
Requirements for the Degree of

**Master of Arts  
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Albuquerque, New Mexico

**December, 2020**

## **DEDICATION**

This thesis was written and published on unceded Tiwa Pueblo land.

Dedico este ofrecimiento a lxs espíritus y antepasadx que quidan de nosotrxs y de la tierra.

This offering is dedicated to our Black, Indigenous, Brown, queer, transgender, and gender non-conforming relatives.

Estamos aquí para servir.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I breathe in. I breathe out.

I extend my heartfelt thanks to my dead and living relatives—for they shape this life, this writing, this offering. I acknowledge all of those before me whose writing and offerings contribute to this present moment. I acknowledge the life that is here and the relatives that inevitably shape this work. I am grateful to have pursued this work with the support of various scholars, community members, artists, activists, queers, and visionaries. The amount of love that this thesis received is its source of life.

Mamá, gracias por apollarme en cada momento de mi vida. Gracias por alimentar mi ser entero con amor incondicional. Es un gran placer tener una mamá chingona y mejor amiga.

I give thanks to my siblings, Jennifer, Kevin, Antonio y Carlos. Thank you all for being there when I thought I was alone. Y'all taught me how to fight for my voice to be heard, whether through growing pains or shared moments of tension. Thank you, familia, for showering me with support and love.

Mayam, thank you for watering me with patience and loving kindness when I struggled to freely give it to myself. Thank you for generously sharing your wisdom, life path and radical vision. I give thanks for the queer transgender love and home we cultivate and for its power to manifest infinite possibilities for all. I look forward to our qt farm dreams and more adventures. Thank you, sweet.

I acknowledge the haunting landcestors, or ancestors of the land, and the ghosts that refuse to be unheard, unseen and unfelt.

**IMPERIAL MYTHS, OBJECT DEVOTION: MAPPING  
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DISCOURSE**

by

**N. C. Lira-Pérez**

**B.A., Social Science, University of Wyoming, 2016  
M.A., American Studies, University of New Mexico, 2020**

**ABSTRACT**

New Mexican visual art and culture, as molded by state-sanctioned endeavors, is often casted in order to conceal the tension, conflict, and violence of settler colonialism and imperialism. Widely known myths of empire, such as the Tricultural myth, create a visualizing enterprise through which settler colonial logics transit and create political material reality. This thesis explores the following questions: How do New Mexican Hispanos and queer Chicanxs position themselves in relation to the logics of settler colonialism and empire? How are they positioned in relation to settler colonialism and empire? On the one hand, I argue that the state of New Mexico and the University of New Mexico prop and mitigate the shaping logics of settler colonialism and empire through visual regimes, culture and discourse. Through a settler colonial and queer of color critique, I deploy a visual analysis of the stolen Zia Pueblo sun sign, Conquistador statues, and the Three People's murals. On the other hand, I offer a disruptive alternative to the visualizing enterprise of New Mexico. I frame my analysis with religious affects and queer of color critique to examine how erotic devotionism, when cast by queer and transgender people of color, can be utilized as a liberatory tool. I spotlight the art of (J)Ade Cruz and Alma Lopez to envision how worldmaking aesthetics create a future-present rooted in racialized queer feeling, bodies, and ways of relating that are inherently anti-racist, anti-capitalist, and anti-US-empire-sensorium.

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## SECTION I: INTRODUCTION

After I left the state of Wyoming to attend graduate school in New Mexico, I moved in with a self-identified Xicana<sup>1</sup> who was born and raised in Albuquerque—a city built on the stolen lands of the Tiwa, Isleta and Sandia Pueblo people. As we got to know each other, we began to discuss the history and political climate that shaped the land, spaces and institutions we navigate. In the time I have lived here, I have built relationships with Indigenous people and people of color whom I met in social, academic, arts, and activist spaces. In academic and community spaces, it is common to acknowledge the stolen land we live on. This is beyond a simplistic gesture or thing we check off a list. It is a political act made to address the vexed past-presence of settler colonialism as well as the relationships that exist/ed and form/ed on the land itself. These encounters—with the land/scape, politics, history and people—have raised questions about who is living across the state and how they are absent and/or present from the state’s visual hold. My encounter with the landscape itself begged of me to ask: how do settler colonialism and empire affectively and visually manifest across the state of New Mexico?

Given this context, an urgent inquiry began with questions concerned with affinity/belonging, history, land, positionality, space, place, and relationality. This thesis project serves as a reflection on my own positionality—and the positionality of other Mexican descendants—in relation to the regional and national conversations on Indigenous sovereignty and movements. Within the local and regional space, questions of

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1. The term Xicana/o derives from Chicana/o. The “X” is specifically used to acknowledge and embrace indigeneity from past-present bloodlines. The term is often used by various Mexican descendant’s intent on reclaiming indigenous roots and ancestry.



affinity and belonging overlay the land/scape and are performed across place. For instance, I have come across terminology used to describe relations with and to land, such as *querencia*. *Querencia* is a way of being or living inherently rooted in affective notions of belonging and is extensively theorized by New Mexican scholars and activists that are intimately connected to communities across the state.<sup>2</sup> These theorizations are meant to describe the intimate relationships experienced between and across communities, the earth, land or natural world, and human and non-humans alike. Though it is vital to develop cultural knowledge, concepts, and ideas, this current moment urges us to account for immeasurable and discursive affects/effects of settler colonialism. I find it generative to interrogate concepts rooted in affective notions of belonging that tend to blanket the haunting tensions and relations between Indigenous peoples, Nuevo Mexicanos, and Chicanxs<sup>3</sup>. In focusing on affective notions of belonging and these particular communities, I hope to create more space to cross-examine the structural social dynamics and consequences of how non-Indigenous<sup>4</sup> people of color position themselves in relation to settler colonial and imperial projects. In other words, how we, non-Indigenous

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2. See the *Querencia Series* published by the University of New Mexico Press for a growing collection that builds on the term *querencia*. This ongoing series is assembled by various interdisciplinary scholars that have a relationship to New Mexico. ([https://unmpress.com/Querencias\\_Series](https://unmpress.com/Querencias_Series))

3. I choose these specific groups for the purpose of this project. I do so while acknowledging the presence of racialized people who have settled across the state, which include but are not limited to Black and African relatives, Mexican descendants, and relatives of Vietnamese, Korean, Filipinx, Latinx and Southeast Asian descent.

4. I use non-Indigenous here and onward to account for those who are not Black and are not claimed by a sovereign Indigenous nation or Pueblo. For New Mexico, this means someone who is not claimed or recognized by the 19 Pueblos or the Apache nation. In addition, I acknowledge the settler colonial obsession of blood quantum politics that ultimately attempt to erase our Indigenous relatives that are not claimed or recognized on paper by a sovereign nation, such as the Pueblos and Apache. For a critique on blood quantum and DNA testing, see Kim Tallbear's "Native American DNA: Tribal Belonging and the False Promise of Genetic Science."

racialized people, take part, consciously or not, in fashioning settler colonial imperial imaginaries matters. I am interested in what non-Indigenous racialized people can do to rework—and ultimately rupture—the material discursive effects and affects of settler colonialism at the local and regional levels. Indeed, one of my focus areas is how non-Indigenous racialized people within New Mexico establish their sense of relationality “to the land and to one another.”<sup>5</sup> This project is intent on tackling the question of settler desire, which informs a sense of relationality that one forms while living on these stolen lands. I am interested in the rampant visual regimes—and the material consequences that come with them—of New Mexico through its well-known image as the multicultural or minority-majority state and “Land of Enchantment.” I am acutely concerned with how the state and the University of New Mexico, as institutional enterprises, create narratives and imaginaries of empire through the configuration of racialized visual landscapes.<sup>6</sup>

Various New Mexican scholars have attempted to confront and tease out identitarian narratives that exist across the New Mexican landscape.<sup>7</sup> In shifting away from identitarian approaches, I am interested in how visual narratives materialize political social realities between and among the existing communities within the state. This thesis

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5. See Carrillo’s *Settler Xicana: Postcolonial and Decolonial Reflections on Incommensurability*, 2017, for a personal reflection on what it means to self-identify as a Xicana in the context of land, history, territoriality, affinity, and belonging.

6. I theorize racialized landscapes in direct conversation with in Saldaña-Portillo’s *racial geographies*, as written in her recently published book (*Indian Given: Racial Geographies across Mexico and the United States*). For a thorough analysis on “a complex history of Hispanic and Native land tenure and its representation, as it is shaped by Euro-American landscape art, see Alicia Inez Guzmán’ *From Place to Property: Landscape/Land Tenure in New Mexico*, (2012) [https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/greenleaf\\_scholars/7](https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/greenleaf_scholars/7).

7. See Michael Trujillo’s “Oñates Foot: Remembering and Dismembering in Northern New Mexico,” for a reading on various identity claims throughout northern New Mexico. Although Trujillo attempts to historically and culturally contextualize these identities, they are not situated within a settler colonial and neoliberal context.

underscores visibility, affect, and performance to open up new lines of inquiry beyond identity politics. As with any commitment or project focused on justice, we must take the necessary time-space to address and perturb the unchallenged hegemony of identity.<sup>8</sup>As our Pueblo<sup>9</sup>, Diné and Indigenous relatives continue to confront the settler colonial realities of resource extraction, dispossession, erasure, and gender-based violence, we—as non-Indigenous racialized people—are responsible for how we relate to each other, the land, and existing structures of power.

This thesis project explores the following questions: How and where do New Mexican Hispanos and queer Chicanxs<sup>10</sup> fit within and in relation to the logics of settler colonialism and empire? How do these groups *position themselves* in relation to settler colonialism and empire? On the one hand, I argue that the state of New Mexico, and by extension, UNM, act as institutional structures that prop and mitigate the shaping logics of settler colonialism and empire through visual culture and discourse (as discussed in Section II: Imperial Myths). On the other, I assert that visibility has the potential to undo and disrupt imperial logics through queer of color affect, aesthetic practices and relationality (the focus of Section III: Abject Devotion). I index the visual register, which I deem as inseparable from visibility as a technology of empire and coloniality, to explore

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8. Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang, “What Justice Wants,” in *Critical Ethnic Studies*, Vol. 2, No. 2 (University of Minnesota Press, Fall 2016), 1-15. For a more thorough understanding of decolonial perspective on justice, what it wants/desires, what it does and how it fails.

9. See The Red Nation’s website for their article “Pueblo/a/x Feminist Caucus” that expands on the term Pueblo/a/x in addition their radical manifesto. (<https://therednation.org/pueblo-a-x-feminist-caucus/>).

10. From here on out, I use the identity marker “Chicanx” with the exception of cited quotes or specific self-identification. I do so to acknowledge the spacial-temporal shifts of cultural politics and subject formations of Mexican descendent communities across the settler nation-state.

the discursive and material violence of settler colonialism. In the decision to spotlight the visual register, I emphasize possibilities that unsettle deep-seated settler colonial logics and affects through queer of color aesthetic practices. I index the visual and visual register as neither are passive nor are they discrete technologies.

The visual and performance optics at the heart of this thesis support my attempt to map affect and ephemerality within and between (non/bodily) spaces. To reckon with these formations, I attempt to document un-mappable moments, affects, structures, and dynamics—which are contingent on being in or out of view, in the past present or future present. I take up “mapping” while acknowledging that it was conceived of through the discipline of Geography, which has played its part in forming and visualizing national geographies of coloniality. Indeed, as Saldaña-Portillo reminds us, “geographic knowledge [formations] and production is a visual and visualizing enterprise, one that in an era of colonial exploration ‘brought the world into view.’”<sup>11</sup> Geography, then, is representational. In my move to map affect with a queer of color calculus, I am to address and destabilize Geography’s conventional approach of “disciplining what we see [and] of disciplining us into seeing (and knowing) mapped space as racialized place.”<sup>12</sup> Mapping affect creates space for an in-depth investigation of how the process of imperial myth telling becomes a performance, through accumulated visual acts, of affective and trauma entanglements. The violent ongoing erasure of Pueblo people, resistance and movements occurs through their very institutionalized inclusion within the New Mexican racialized visual landscape. As I argue later, visual acts of violence are entangled with the affective investments of Hispano elites that uphold settler desires to eradicate the “native.”

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11. María Josefina Saldaña-Portillo, “Indian Given: Racial Geographies across Mexico and the United States,” (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2016), 17.

12. Saldaña-Portillo, “Indian Given,” 18.

## *Optics and Methodologies*

I consider this thesis an act and project of queer curation. Gayatri Gopinath describes queer curation as a practice that leads with care: care for the archival matter, for the web of relations that support it and made it possible, for its rootedness in Black, Indigenous, Women of Color feminist thought, for the connections it makes, and for its potential to co-create queer futurities and radical relationality. The intention of this thesis is to reckon with archives/logics of empire (the focus of Section II) and queer visual imaginaries through, what I deem as, abject devotion (discussed in Section III). I am intent on exposing the violence of imperial myth telling through the visual register, while also documenting queer ephemerality, that which is devalued or regarded without value, and encounters marked as illegible. These sites of inquiry are potentially generative for interrogating imperial myths narrated by settler colonial logics and discourse of New Mexico.

This project aims to decipher state-sanctioned visuality and settler desire intent on reproducing coloniality of power:

The repression fell, above all, over the modes of knowing, of producing knowledge, of producing perspectives, images and systems of images, symbols, modes of signification, over the resources, patterns, and instruments of formalized and objectivised expression, intellectual or visual. It was followed by the imposition of the use of the rulers' own patterns of expression, and of their beliefs and images with reference to the supernatural. These beliefs and images served not only to impede the cultural production of the dominated, but also as a very efficient means of social and cultural control, when the immediate repression ceased to be constant and systematic."<sup>13</sup>

I find Ranak Kapadia's "queer calculus" particularly useful in theorizing what it might mean to lead with queer of color aesthetics as they exist within geographies of imperialism and settler colonialism. In his analysis of US war-making technologies,

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13. Anibal Quijano, "Coloniality and Modernity/Rationality," in *Cultural Studies*, Vol 21, No 2-3 (Routledge, March/May 2007), 168-178.

namely the field of vision, Kapadia asserts that a queer calculus “unsettles prevailing interpretations of the forever war, makes *sensuous* what has been *ghosted* by US technologies of abstraction, and endows the designs for seemingly impossible futures amid infinite aggression”<sup>14</sup> For Kapadia, then, a queer calculus is critical of, and disidentifies with, imperial logics through its offering “alternative logics, affects, emotions, and affiliations of diasporic subjects living and laboring in the heart of empire.”<sup>15</sup> A queer affective aesthetics brings to focus the possibilities of visual artwork produced by “diasporic artists” who collectively assemble unvalued “knowledges, histories, geographies, and memories preserved by the ‘lower’ senses of empire’s gendered, racialized, Others to fashion an insurgency against empire’s built sensorium.”<sup>16</sup> Indeed, a queer calculus, as it is deployed by diasporic visual artists, reimagines what Kapadia theorizes as the necropolitical calculus of neoliberal security and warfare across the globe. The insurgent aesthetics that Kapadia explores within this queer calculus have the potential to alter dominant ways of knowing and feeling under neoliberal structures of ongoing violence. I index the Kapadia’s *insurgent aesthetics*, as queer aesthetics, to explore the “alternative articulation of minoritarian knowledge produced by those populations and their diasporic kin most devastated by the effects of the homeland security state and its forever wars.”

I consider visual art, as created by and for queer transgender people of color, specifically through the lens and worldmaking performances in the art of (J)Ade Cruz, in

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14. Ronak Kapadia, “Insurgent Aesthetics: Security and the Queer Life of the Forever War” *Art History Publication Initiative*, Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2019.

15. Ibid., Kapadia.

16 Ibid., Kapadia.

order to explore collective possibilities that visually (and materially) create queer imaginaries explicitly rooted in affective ontologies. I understand affective ontologies as ways of knowing, being, feeling and seeing. I am indebted to the growing fields of Indigenous feminisms and queer of color feminisms that offer key frameworks that take up interest in affect and affective formations. In understanding affective mapping, I turn to Indigenous feminist Mishauna Goeman to map the feeling structures that underpin that act of doing research. In the fall of 2018, Goeman presented a paper focused on the ways in which the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women movement has been documented through the field of vision. Goeman began and ended the talk by reminding us of the transformational potential of affect inherent to her personal and academic work. Goeman describes the process behind the work being presented and expressed the need to “write where it hurts.”<sup>17</sup> Thus, the idea and act of affective mapping is personal, social, visual and performative. Affective mapping, as theorized by José E. Muñoz, is also useful for refusing “the pull of identitarian models of relationality.”<sup>18</sup>

In the first section, *Imperial Myths*, I open up with the following New Mexican visual projects: the appropriation of the Zia Pueblo sun symbol, Conquistador state monuments, and the “Three People's Murals,” installed at the University of New Mexico. I also include a brief reading of the common emotional reactions from elite Hispanos responding to Pueblo femme lead movements to abolish settler colonial imagery and visual culture. In spotlighting these visual projects, or landscapes, I aim to tease out the haunting tensions that permeate relations between Indigenous peoples and non-

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17. Goeman, Mishauna. “

18. Muñoz, José Esteban. “Feeling Brown, Feeling Down: Latina Affect, the Performativity of Race, and the Depressive Position” *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture & Society*. University of Chicago Press. Spring 2006. pp. 675-688.

Indigenous Hispanos and Chicanxs. I look at these spaces in order to delineate and theorize forms of neoliberal necropower that connect the settler state and university. This thesis does not take interest in the identities of non-Indigenous non-white peoples (Hispano, Xicanx/Chicanx, Nuevo Mexicano/a, Spanish, etc.) in New Mexico, but rather seeks to complicate the ways in which Hispano elites and queer Xicanxs are positioned and position themselves in relation to settler colonialism and empire. I use the terms “Hispano” and “Chicanx” to describe non-white, non-Indigenous, non-black detribalized racialized peoples within the settler state of New Mexico. I make a clear distinction between non-Indigenous Hispanos and Chicanxs to flesh out the complexities and contradictions of affect and positionality in settler colonial New Mexico. As we begin to think of the overlapping imperial projects of New Mexico, it is important to think of how settler colonial structures account/ed for non-Indigenous people of color.

In Section III, I deploy religious affects and queer of color critique to examine how erotic devotionism, when cast by queer and transgender people of color, can be utilized as a liberatory tool. I set up a comparative visual analysis of the worldmaking art of both (J)Ade Cruz and Alma Lopez to explore queer of color affect and imaginaries—specifically in regard to the body. I frame my analysis with the contributions of queer of color critique and religious studies to address the regional and settler colonial context of New Mexico. I define queer of color affects and imaginaries as ways of knowing, being, feeling, envisioning and seeing that are specific to not only material conditions and positionality, but to those or that which we encounter. I curate an understanding of queer of color ontologies through the raced, sexed, and gendered body as a site of entangled affect and trauma.



This comparative visual analysis serves as a two-fold intervention: Cruz's and Lopez's art reappear to visually narrativize a future-present rooted in racialized queer feeling, bodies, and ways of relating that are inherently anti-imperialist, anti-racist, and anti-capitalist. These ways of relating are intentionally framed by critical readings of devotion in order to get us to think about economies of affect<sup>19</sup>, and interrogate the given/taken binary of "deviancy" and religious morality, as they live within and move through certain bodies and spaces. I situate art by Cruz and Lopez in the context of Christian / Catholic religion and settler colonialism in the "Hemispheric Southwest" to denote "multiple empires and shifts in space while also focusing on the local."<sup>20</sup> Indeed, this thesis critically interrogates the "collisions of romanticized and factual histories" of the Hemispheric Southwest in order to trace and disturb ongoing Indigenous dispossession and discursive processes of settler colonialism as performed by institutional structures. I spotlight the art of Cruz and Lopez, two queer Chicanxs to envision how worldmaking aesthetic practices create a future-present rooted in racialized queer feeling, bodies, and ways of relating that are inherently anti-racist, anti-capitalist, and anti-US-empire-sensorium.

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19. Sara Ahmed, "The Promise of Happiness," Duke University Press: Durham and London, 2010.

20. See Hernández, Bernadine M. "Sexing Empire: The Ontology of Racialized Gender and Sexuality in the Hemispheric Southwest through Mexican American and Chicana Narrative" San Diego: University of California, 2015. Dissertation. In her dissertation, Hernández provides an analysis on the various overlapping histories and land claims through the optics of Mexican American and Chicana literary narratives.

## Section II Imperial Myths: Visual Regimes and Settler Colonial Affect<sup>21</sup>

“It is my contention...that perceptions like these—of natural landscapes and landscapes of cultural difference—are racially derived, the national geographies and the geography of the border region meticulously produced through the colonial encounters with indigeneity. The way we perceive natural landscape, the way we have mapped national and regional geographies out of it—particularly along the Mexico-U.S. border—are the result of a complex history of encounter with indigeneity...[T]he geographies of the United States and Mexico have been produced, materially and representationally, through historical, social, and racial relations with indigenous subjects.”—María Josefina Saldaña-Portillo, *Indian Given*

Settler colonialism is predicated on the concept of *terra nullius*, which literally translates to “empty” or “new” land. This concept became the ideological compass of the Doctrine of Discovery, Christianity and empire building during the 1800s. The settler colonial project materializes in *ongoing* forms of sexual conquest-violence, land dispossession, anti-Indianness and genocide.<sup>22</sup> Indeed, settler colonialism is not only an existing structure fueled by violence but is always already in transit and propped by reconfigured technologies of power. I find the growing scholarship of Indigenous Studies and settler colonial critique to theorize settler colonialism as part of US imperial project. Jodi Byrd reminds us that, “The elimination of the native is a process that endures beyond the eventfulness of any single occasion as conquest itself provides the logistical architecture through which settler societies erect themselves into and onto space.” The

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21. This introduction was presented as a paper at the 2018 Critical Ethnic Studies Association (CESA) annual conference in Vancouver, Canada. It is written and presented in an effort to create a space where both Indigenous and Xicanx/a/o individuals are able to discuss settler colonialism, neoliberal multiculturalism and empire building. This solidarity effort included a roundtable discussion at the CESA conference that directly responded to Laura Pulido’s article, “Geographies of Race and Ethnicity III: Settler Colonialism and Nonnative People of Color.”

22. Jennifer Nez Denetdale, “Indigenous Feminisms,” *First Peoples New Direction in Indigenous Studies*, March 11, 2010, <http://www.firstpeoplesnewdirections.org/blog/?p=511> (accessed December 2, 2017).

“operative temporality” of neoliberal projects “orient themselves through prior presences that provide both the occasion and the rationale through which sovereignty, authority, and power [of the settler nation-state] are founded and demarcated.”<sup>23</sup> The operative temporality of neoliberal projects of the settler nation-state are upheld by institutional, social, material, and I add, affective and visual structures. Operative temporalities warrant indigenous dispossession which then *becomes* the foundation and consolidation of settler myths as they transit through the psyche or imagination. I argue that various acts of violence are caused by the affective investments of Hispano elites that uphold settler desires to eradicate the “native.” This section is interested in how the tri-cultural myth is visually performed and circulated in visual acts that are central to the institutionalized project of neoliberal multiculturalism.

I find both the terms “arrivant” and “alien” useful in understanding settler colonial positionalities as they operate under neoliberal imperial rule. Settler colonial capitalism, as Iyko Day argues, is the structural merging of settler colonialism, abstract labor, and the commodification of racialized and gendered subjects. The category of abstract labor excludes Indigenous peoples because their bodies and labor are marked as merely another marginalized group, which in turn deems Indigenous life as non-valuable to the capitalist project. Within the context of New Mexico, we witness the ways in which Hispano elites generate and control economic structures in the state of New Mexico, especially through visual acts of tri-culturalism.

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23. Jodi Byrd, *The Transit of Empire: Indigenous Critiques of Colonialism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press 2011).

The official state flag of New Mexico, created under the veil of “multiculturalism” in 1925, dually embodies a suppressed Spanish settler history and appropriates a sacred symbol belonging to the Zia Pueblo people—the Zia Sun symbol. Settler identity and



structure was materialized in the political move to consume the Zia sun symbol as a cultural and visual staple for New Mexico. The ideological merging of these symbolizations is an “absorption” tactic on behalf of the settler state of New Mexico. This is an exact replica of how the US government has—and continues to—disavow Indigenous peoples and racialized/gendered others under claims of “diversity” and absorption policies (such as Affirmative Action). Such absorption maneuvers masked under claims of “cultural representation,” disavow Indigenous life, encourage forceful forgetting of Spanish colonization and justify the ongoing genocide of Indigenous communities. This state-sanctioned act is rooted in violence as it has ultimately normalized the social death and erasure of Indigenous peoples through their very inclusion.

The University of New Mexico is constantly given its accolades as the minority-majority and Hispanic serving institution of the region. These fabricated reputations are governmental templates that US universities adopted from nation-wide initiatives to affirm and discipline minority difference and culture. Ferguson describes this absorption as a refashioning of power that “...would emerge and work with necropolitical social

formations to simultaneously activate and disenfranchise minoritized subjects and communities, forming and re-forming institutions according to the advancement and regulation of minority difference.”<sup>24</sup> Grace Hong reminds us that the notion of “difference,” which was birthed at the neoliberal turn, “both brutalizes and affirms.”<sup>25</sup> We must take into consideration the neoliberal performances of multiculturalism enacted and (re)produced by universities as corporations of capital. We also see this system of affirmation and brutalization in the “Three Peoples’ Murals,” installed in 1939 and painted by Kenneth Adams, found inside the Zimmerman Library on the UNM campus.<sup>26</sup> These racist eugenicist murals, installed in 1938, have been repeatedly protested by

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24. Roderick Ferguson, *The Reorder of Things: The University and its Pedagogies of Minority Difference* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 2012), pp.40.

25. Grace Kyungwon Hong, *Death Beyond Disavowal: The Impossible Politics of Difference* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 2015), pp 7.

26. For a historical and political perspective on the installation and ideation of these murals, see Breanne Robertson’s visiting scholar talk ([https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/greenleaf\\_scholars/12/](https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/greenleaf_scholars/12/)).

various Indigenous, Black, Chicana, and Queer student organizations as well as local and national organizations.<sup>27</sup> Soon after these murals went up, there have been two de-facings of the “racist, stereotypical, demeaning and sexist,” murals that continue to be protected under the UNM Board of Regents.<sup>28</sup> The fourth panel displays a white man in the middle of an Hispano man and an Indigenous man who are both facing the white man at the center. The eyeless brown men are oriented toward the middle and stand slightly below the white blue-eyed figure. Hues of blue, green yellow, orange, and purple form a seemingly empty landscape and take up most of the panel backdrop.

The visual and ideological discourse translated through this image materializes in



the tri-cultural myth that many communities across New Mexico embrace and claim as their own cultural, ancestral background. For example, NPR published a report on self-

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27. Samuel Sisneros, “Guest Column: ‘Three Peoples’ mural unchanged after decades of protest” *Daily Lobo Newspaper*, October 29 2017, <http://www.dailylobo.com/article/2017/10/guest-3-peoples>; Sisneros notes that the first group to protest the racist murals were Las Chicanas, a group of Mexican descendant women, in the year 1970.

28. Samuel Sisneros, “Guest Column.”

identified *genizaro* peoples who describe themselves as descendants of “Native American Slaves.”<sup>29</sup> The *genizaro* peoples are detribalized peoples, based in the Abiquiu village located in northwestern New Mexico, that rely on the tri-cultural myth to inform their own relation to indigeneity. This is a neoliberal multiculturalist relationality that, to echo Indigenous studies scholar Byrd (Chickasaw) and Deloria, reproduces “Indianness” and the act of “playing Indian” as a social normative desire. Byrd provides insight as to how the notions of Indianness and the Indians become foundational to the settler imperialist landscape:

“How we have come to know intimacy, kinship, and identity within an empire born out of settler colonialism is predicated upon discourses of indigenous displacements that remain within the present everydayness of settler colonialism, even if its constellations have been naturalized by hegemony and even as its oppressive logics are expanded to contain more and more historical experiences.”<sup>30</sup>

Visual and cultural productions, such as the Three Peoples’ Murals, become essential the settler colonial project to normalize and transit an imperial imaginary. A reclamation of indigeneity becomes the ideological foundation for the New Mexican political landscape, specifically in forming a contemporary settler identity. I assert that the Three People’s mural is casted as a visual aid of empire that performs peaceful coevalness and shadows the deep-seated settler colonial desire to erase Indigenous presence, resistance and movements.

It is crucial to problematize the visual, spatial, and cultural discourse of neoliberal multiculturalism that tailors the logics of settler colonialism. Black feminist scholar

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29. For a report on the *genizaro*, see John Burnett’s story “Descendants of Native American Slaves in New Mexico Emerge from Obscurity,” National Public Radio, December 29 2016, (<https://www.npr.org/2016/12/29/505271148/descendants-of-native-american-slaves-in-new-mexico-emerge-from-obscurity>).

30. Jodi Byrd, *The Transit of Empire*.

Nicole Fleetwood reminds of the dangers that the visual field entails and is especially critical of how we form our ways of thinking-knowing through the visual register. In her analysis of how blackness and black bodies are seen, she notes that visibility has the potential to create “truths,” produce knowledge, and affect our everyday social realities.<sup>31</sup> As such, we need to interrogate the “truths” of these visual discourses in order to complicate space, place, and sense of belonging. These imperial myths serve the structuring logics and *affects* of settler colonialism.

Following the abhorrent violence that transpired in Charlottesville in August 2017, several monuments across the nation were defaced as a way to refuse their colonial symbolizations. In their response, The Red Nation published an article where they condemned “the bigoted terror that white supremacists used against anti-racist and anti-fascist forces... in #Charlottesville.”<sup>32</sup> Also, included in their article was a screen shot of a social media response from Chairman of the Dona Ana Republican Party of Las Cruces, NM and a resident from Alamogordo NM who has held multiple community leadership positions—both individuals self-identify as Hispano.<sup>33</sup> The responses from both the chairman and the Hispano resident were not only racist, but also reveal the discursive violence that devalues antiracist efforts and aims to justify white supremacist power over those who challenge it:

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32. The Red Nation, “From Charlottesville to Santa Fe: Smash Racist Memorials, Smash White Supremacy” Therednation.org. August 15, 2017 (<https://therednation.org/2017/08/15/from-charlottesville-to-santa-fe-smash-racist-memorials-smash-white-supremacy/>).

33. Chairman Roman Jimenez later resigned from his position after several community members condemned his violent response on social media (<http://www.lcsun-news.com/story/news/local/2017/08/15/roman-jimenez-resigns-dona-ana-gop-chair-wake-controversial-statement/569656001/>).



 **Dona Ana Republican Party**  
39 mins · 🌐

These violent, leftist protesters are the brainless robots that are created by evil Soros money. The white ones have been taught to hate their color, the women are taught to hate men, black and minorities want to kill whites and police. They then have the audacity to call conservatives racist. Their own racism, hate and violence has created the divide amongst those that refuse to be bullied on anymore. They're getting exactly what they asked for. A segregated society of groups that they've created and even labeled themselves.

-Chairman Roman Jimenez



Undeniably, these responses are indicative and emblematic of the strong emotional “reaction[s] of Hispano and White elites in the Southwest to efforts [that aim to] abolish symbols that glorify and celebrate genocide.”<sup>34</sup> This is not the first time that Hispano elites are widely known to react violently to Pueblo movements—of which are primarily led by queer Pueblo/Diné femmes, women and youth—that challenge the forceful forgetting of genocide and displacement of Indigenous peoples.

The defacement and discussion of Spanish settler statues across New Mexico was revived around the same time of the Entrada Protest in 2018, which led by The Red Nation. Beyond the tensions between these communities in both the academic circles and NM land-based discourses,<sup>35</sup> it is imperative to pay close attention to the types



34. The Red Nation also discusses the settler imperial seal of the University of New Mexico, which was later abolished due to the sustained efforts of Kiva Club and The Red Nation via the #AbolishTheRacistSeal movement.

35. See *Roots of Resistance: A History of Land Tenure in New Mexico* by Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz for a historical and theoretical analysis of land-based contemporary struggles across the state of New Mexico.

of discursive violence that marks racialized and gendered Others for social and literal death. Social death is made possible through the valuation processes that ascribe value ruled by notions of “deservingness, [and] depend on and therefore support the permanent criminalization of unsympathetic racialized statuses.”<sup>36</sup> The “unsympathetic racialized status” is backed by the ongoing colonization in the form of visual discourse and culture that purportedly intends to “include” racialized non-Indigenous and Indigenous subjects in New Mexican racialized visual landscape. Social valuation processes, under a settler colonial regional regime, create criteria that is fulfilled through the subordination and capitalization of Indigenous subjects.

*Triangulating Racialized Settlers and Queers of Color*

Hispano elites are widely known for reacting violently to Indigenous movements and efforts that seek to challenge the forceful, or I as I argue, willful, forgetting of genocide and displacement of Indigenous peoples. The defacement of Spanish settler statues across New Mexico increased around the same time of the Entrada Protest, led by The Red Nation. Beyond the tensions between these communities in both the academic realms and NM land-based discourses,<sup>37</sup> it is imperative to pay close attention to the types of discursive violence that marks racialized and gendered Others for (social) death. Lisa Cacho reminds us of the validation procedures of value-based notions of life, rights, and political autonomy. Within the imperial myths and landscape of New Mexico, there is much at stake for Hispano elites. While paying close attention to histories of violence and narratives of the colonizer/colonized, there are structural discrepancies that must be

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36. Lisa M Cacho, “Social Death: Racialized Rightlessness and the Criminalization of the Unprotected,” New York University Press: New York and London, 2012.

37. Ibid.

reckoned with in order to understand Hispano elitism and Spanish colonization within the racialized visual landscape of New Mexico.

These structural differentiations ultimately affect how aliens or arrivants—those who are forced to migrate against their will and as people not Indigenous to the lands they inhabit—position themselves and how they are positioned in relation to the logics of settler colonialism and empire. Iyko Day’s proposal to triangulate settler colonialism, in the context of the Canadian nation-state, is especially helpful to locate these positionalities through a comparative lens. In settler societies, such as the US, the (social and literal) death of Indigenous peoples colludes with imperial projects and neoliberal imaginaries in in order to maintain power, structure, and flow. Day reminds us that the settler identity and positionality requires that non-Indigenous peoples, including racialized peoples, appropriate indigeneity. Considering the simultaneous Spanish and US colonization, New Mexico is uniquely marked under the dual colonial imposition. However, in relation to other US settler state formations and social realities, the simultaneity of empire building is not unique to New Mexico.

I would like to address the differentiation of forced migration (undocumented brown/black immigrants, African slaves, free Asian labor) and nonforced migration (white Europeans, Brown elites/settlers). As such, Day shows that these distinct migrations are matters of structure and power rather than intent. It is apparent that within the state of New Mexico, Hispano elites maintain the structural acts to settle on stolen, fit into a value-based polity, and gain economic access. State sanctioned visual art and discourse back imperial myth making and serve the settler nation-state, the state of New Mexico, and neoliberal institutions alike.

In the subsequent section, I argue that in triangulating the positionality of queer transgender Chicanxs as non-Indigenous, non-black people of color allows for a detailed investigation of how queer transgender people of color establish radical relationality with Indigenous movements/politics. I build an analytic framework informed by queer of color critique and Black, Indigenous and Women of Color feminisms to dissect the themes of religious affects as they relate to the imperial myths previously discussed. I theorize queer of color aesthetic practices that offer a basis for anti-colonial affect and relationality that work to dismember the logics and violence of empire, neoliberalism and settler colonialism. I argue that visual regimes of religion create a spatialized violence of social value that have material, physical and ideological ramifications.

### Section III Abject Devotion: Queer of Color Erotica and Worldmaking in the Art of

(J)Ade Cruz & Alma López

*“Queer futurity does not underplay desire. In fact it is all about desire, desire for both larger semiabstractions such as a better world or freedom but also, more immediately, better relations within the social that include better sex and more pleasure.”—José Esteban Muñoz “Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity”*

*“But first we imagine.  
We are in an imagination battle.”  
—adrienne maree brown*

In first coming across “Lupita y Juanita: Sacred Love,” I, and perhaps like other spectators, was enthralled with the depiction of an in-your-face erotic encounter between the religious icon, La Virgen De Guadalupe, and a naked tattooed queer of color. Given its aesthetic pleasure composed of various radiant colors and shapes, spectators might feel pulled in (and/or repulsed) by the various layers of this encounter. In the depth of the painting, we see sacred geometry as overlapping circles enclosed by bright neon colors and outsides. One’s attention might be split between a multi-colored radiance and the center of the piece, which shows an open legged, sexually stimulated Virgen de



Guadalupe as their pleasure-bringer holds onto her knees. The Virgen’s facial expression and full-body encounter reveals the jaw-dropping pleasure experienced through getting head. La Virgen is partially covered in the traditional holy blue-green robe as it is falling

away, allowing her hair line to show. Cruz published a photo of this piece on their Facebook artist page in 2015. The Facebook caption emphasizes Cruz's intention of the piece:

To me this piece represents the sacred love between two Xicana women, depicting the Virgen of Guadalupe as having a queer sexuality without shame, and shows how sexuality and spirituality are connected. This piece challenges the [traditional] ideals and notions of love, sex, gender, women's bodies, religious icons, and spirituality. But most of all this piece was created to celebrate how beautiful and sacred queer love and sexuality are!<sup>38</sup>

Based on the intention of this art piece, I ask: What does La Virgen de Guadalupe, a highly acclaimed cultural and religious icon, mean to the artist? What does it mean for Cruz to visually render their relation and devotion to this figure, as a transgender non-binary queer Chicana<sup>39</sup> living New Mexico? I take up this piece to examine how Cruz imagines and spatializes queer affect, such as erotic pleasure, at the site of La Virgen's body. I am interested in their reclamation of having "queer sexuality without shame" as well as the connection they make between sexuality and spirituality. For Cruz, queer love and sexuality can be visually expressed through the very medium of La Virgen's. This sensual act and depiction is one that is intentional on worldmaking, an idea termed by José Esteban Muñoz to describe queer of color centered and created worlds rooted in liberation.

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<https://www.facebook.com/mividajota/photos/a.362442823922976/418851148282143/?type=3&theater>.

39. Cruz identifies as "Xicana," where the second "x" complicates and deviates from biological, linguistic, and gender categories of male/female or woman/man. I also understand this to be a political decision to deviate from the traditional body politic of Chicano nationalism and heteronormativity. Cruz deviates from traditional Chicano identity and instead exemplifies what José E. Muñoz theorizes as disidentification—a political and survival strategy that queers of color take up in order to cultivate a sense of (un)belonging. Such an embodied politic foregoes the allegory of identity and thus evades the neoliberal desire for recognition, inclusion or legibility.

Writ large, traditional readings and meanings of La Virgen reveal rampant religious, categorically hegemonic affects that are deeply imbedded in dominant society. I place myself in conversation with Cruz and Alma Lopez to further delve into their personal rendering of La Virgen. Lopez's depiction of La Virgen triggered what Leticia Alvarado theorizes as negative affects among orthodox Catholic and Christian individuals. Such negative affects include uncertainty, disgust, disturbance, unbelonging, dis-ease, and disrespect.<sup>40</sup> The queer of color aesthetic practices that in Cruz's and Lopez's deploy in their art, allow us to map the affect-driven religious and political landscape of New Mexico. New Mexico is one of the many places in the US southwest and Mexico where La Virgen is widely considered a respectable icon and where her devotees affectionately behold a sacred image of who she is and who or what she represents. This meaning attachment process, or rather the affect-driven relationship made with La Virgen, is one that is classed, racialized, and gendered. Addressing this relationship allows us to explore the important question of who gets to lay claim to La Virgen's image as a sacred and religious icon and, by extension, who has access to her body as a conduit and devotional space.

Though there is extensive scholarship on Lopez's art, including her own, within the canon of Chicano/a Studies and (Queer) Chicana feminism, I wonder what it would mean to return to Lopez's (and arrive at Cruz's) artwork with a curiosity led by affect. Specifically, what would it mean to lead with Audre Lorde's concept of utilizing the erotica as power? Corresponding to the academic writers and artists like Cruz and Lopez that inform this section, I frame my approach with affect in order to explore ways of

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40. Leticia Alvarado, "Abject Performances: Aesthetic Strategies in Latino Cultural Production." (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2018), 4.

knowing-being as it takes place in the queer of color body. In leading with affect theory and queer of color critique, I hope to explore the ways in which religiosity and devotionism can be casted and utilized as liberatory tools for queer and transgender people of color. In addition to utilizing these tools for liberation, I am interested in how Cruz imagines and creates alternative worlds through the visual field and affective register. This section is concerned with how queer of color devotion and aesthetic practices, when merged together, undo the logics of imperial and colonial religion. The queer of color imaginations that are performed at the site of the highly-acclaimed bodies of religious icons in Cruz's and Lopez's art expand and go beyond existing scholarship on religion, performance, affect, and queer of color critique.

*Religious Affects and the US Global Imperial Sensorium*

“Affects are the deep, recalcitrant textures of our embodied animality.”<sup>41</sup>

To begin, I take up religious affects as they are consolidated through visual performances of devotionism. I consider how these visual performances are premised on the relationality that devotees cultivate with and to Marian apparitions, such as La Virgen de Guadalupe. Beginning with Cruz's artistic intentions and gestures, I explore religiosity, and the affective economies that it creates, i.e. religious affects, by considering devotionism through the technology of the visual. As I mentioned in the previous section, visibility is an exceedingly regulated modernized technology that re/directs and refashions power dynamics of coloniality. I understand the visual as a colonial technological apparatus given its historically and disciplined roots of the

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41. Donovan O. Schaefer. “Religious Affects: Animality, Evolution, and Power” (Duke University Press, 2015).



Enlightenment period.<sup>42</sup> Indeed, this cartographic moment created the favoring preconditions of what Ronak Kapadia describes as “a new US global imperial sensorium.” In theorizing the visual, and the field of vision, my analysis attempts to probe the reliance on visual narratives and humanist aesthetics that aim to represent an outwardly universal truth or religion.

I turn to the work of various feminist of color scholars who view the body as a space of affective entanglements. I weave together strands of queer of color critique and Black, Indigenous, and Women of Color feminisms to discuss the body as a spatial and affective matter. I am particularly interested in how the body is a space and spacializes (queer) affective economies. I draw from Sara Ahmed’s queer phenomenology and what Alvarado deems as a “Muñozian camp of queer theory.” I consider how Cruz’s art and depictions of La Virgen can open up new possibilities—ones that radically challenge and potentially eradicate relations and logics of coloniality and power—once we lead with affect. In conversation with the artist, I argue that as we push against the rigidity of religious devotion we see the imbedded logics, materially constructions, and technologies of neoliberal imperialism. Cruz’s art centers the body and skin, as spaces of affective and erotic entanglements, to dismember the logics of religious affects. I understand (queer) desire to be intimately intertwined with devotionism as depicted in Cruz’s gestures disrupt religious affects circulated by and through Catholic / Christian visual narratives. Indeed, there is something utterly liberating, and unsettling to the status quo, about queer desire and worldview with its potential to conceive beyond the moral structures of

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42. See Leigh Schmidt’s, “Hearing Things: Religion, Illusion, and the American Enlightenment” to read a thorough analysis of how the visual and auditory became sites of technological discipline during the Enlightenment period. In disciplining visual and auditory senses, these methods would later serve as the foundation for establishing sensory hierarchies within imperial projects.

Catholicism / Christianity. Consequently, in an effort to theorize the queer desire and worldview of the chosen artist, I deconstruct Catholic / Christian morality through a visual and affective reading of the performances rendered in both of the featured art works by Cruz (*Juanita Y Lupita: Sacred Love*). Rooted in queerness and affect, this approach allows us to explore what exists beyond traditional representations of and devotional ties to La Virgen. As a disruptive alternative, I coalesce the “negative” religious affects associated with La Santa Muerte, a vexed cultural and religious figure, with the queer affects performed by Cruz’s through the spatialized body of La Virgen de Guadalupe. At the end of this section, I turn to a queer feminist of color genealogy to delve into what it might mean to center the racialized queer body as a channel of queer futurities. Indeed, as Cruz disrupts conventional ideals of religion and devotionism through a decidedly queer affect, they too are participating in (other)world-making. In doing so, I reveal how an invocation of queer affects presents possibilities, and futurities, that imagine world-making beyond the structures, ideals and devotional practices of religion.

In *Religious Affects*, Donovan Schaefer merges religious studies and affect theory to unravel how neoliberal ideologies of the Human and affective economies become crucial instruments of power. I am interested in the paradox of religion grounded in rigid belief and rationality, or a way of “making sense of” something, while simultaneously relying on the effects and inevitability of affect. Indeed, Schaefer proposes the possibility of rethinking religion as a formation with human exceptionalist and linguistic origins. Schaefer turns to affect so that we can “better understand human religion as animal” and ultimately advance analytics that can expose the “spiraling currents of accidents” which

ultimately invent regimes of power.<sup>43</sup> Schaefer reminds us that “affect theory offers resources for charting maps of power that are not limited to the plane of language.”<sup>44</sup> I connect Schaefer’s approach to affect to the various strands of affect theory founded within queer of color critique. Sara Ahmed understands affective economies as a matrix of “emotions [that] do things...[and] align individuals with communities—or bodily space with social space—through the very intensity of their attachments.”<sup>45</sup> Affect theory, then, is a way of mapping the (im)materiality of emotions as they traverse through—or reside in—bodily or social spaces.

I want to draw the connection between negative affects/pleasure as they are attached deviant beings, or non-human beings such as queers of color. I view queerness and queer affects to fall under the general category of the non-human given the religious exceptionalist roots of the Human. Similar to the efforts of Schaefer and Ahmed, I guide my visual analysis through the lens of affect as a tool to decipher queer desire and abject devotion as depicted in the art pieces by Cruz and Lopez. I argue that Cruz and Lopez perform two sides of the same token: queer desire, as it disrupts normative or Human affect, and queer of color devotion, as it disturbs Catholic devotion to religious icons such as La Virgen de Guadalupe. In the following section, I excavate through the religious affects, rather the affective economies, that are expressed by La Virgen’s and La Santa Muerte’ devout communities. I interlace these strands of queer of color critique with Desirée Martin’s analysis of La Santa Muerte to situate Cruz’s work in a genealogy of disruptive politics, possibilities and performances.

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43. Schaefer, “Religious Affects,”16.

44. Schaefer, “Religious Affects.”

45. Sara Ahmed, “Affective Economies.” *Social Text* 22, no. 2 (Summer 2004): 117-39.

*La Santa Muerte y La Virgen: Deviant Devotionalism*

Governmental and religious institutions have attempted to associate immorality, sinfulness, illegality, and deviancy— “of both human and divine law” —to La Santa Muerte and her devotees.<sup>46</sup> The spaces that migrant devotees occupy and create through movement marks them as criminalized subjects. This criminalization of a particular group of people occurs at the same time that La Santa Muerte becomes a vexed international icon. Desirée Martin points to what subversive, or deviant economies of affect and devotionalism might look like for a vexed religious icon such as La Santa Muerte. I argue that both La Santa Muerte and a sentient La Virgen De Guadalupe become pivotal actors in the disruption of Catholic / Christian morality and its dependence on affect economies. The abject devotion practiced by devotees of both feminized figures tells us that both queer Chicaxs

During the 1960s, deep societal anxiety and fear circulated due to the blurring lines between the public and private religious spheres, especially when it came to different forms of devotionalism and, what Orsi calls, “presence.” Through their physical presence and absence, religious icons and figures traveled across time and space in the modern world. This is exemplified through the creation, circulation and tangibility of souvenirs. Orsi considers the affective trajectory of the religious icon, Mary, the Mother of God, in the 1980s and 90s when Mexican, Central and South American migrants began to reclaim her.

It is important to pay attention to the ways in which our migrant relatives carry and embody their own Catholic / Christian imaginations and relations to religious icons,

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46. Desirée A. Martín, “ILLEGAL MARGINALIZATIONS: La Santísima Muerte” In *Borderlands Saints: Secular Sanctity in Chicano/a and Mexican Culture*, 182-209. Rutgers University Press, 2014. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt5hjfgj.9>.

such as La Virgen de Guadalupe. Marian apparitions, as Orsi posits, were seen as a work of art, wherein the relationship to such apparitions “[become] a medium of presence” (59). The far-reaching presence of La Virgen is embodied and visually registered in border crossings and migratory journeys. This is explicitly present in the gestures that various devout take when re/directing themselves toward souvenirs that depict La Virgen de Guadalupe. Indeed, the visual effects of La Virgen is part of a larger economy of affect.

Orsi is probing a larger question that addresses how this affective economy circulates and operates beyond the physical presence of Marian apparitions:

Mary is called on to mediate family disputes, to judge behavior, and to listen to the most intimate sorrows and fears. This is the interpersonal ground on which Mary arises and this is what makes her presence real and emotionally resonant. In individuals' and communities' experiences of her, the Virgin draws deeply on the whole history of relationships, living and dead, present and absent. She borrows from and contributes to memories, needs, fantasies, hopes, and fears, as her dashboard statues borrow their light from other sources. To tell the story of any person's bond with Mary, it is necessary to recount the story of all his or her relationships, from childhood to adulthood, and to locate Mary in her dynamic place among them. The Marian devotional world is an interpersonally crowded one.<sup>47</sup>

I want to take into account this invitation to explore and be in conversation of one person's “bond” with Mary, specifically the bond to La Virgen performed in Cruz's art. Although Orsi gets at the question of how the Virgin “contributes to making and sustaining culture, and reinventing it,” I want to consider what it might mean for Cruz, a Queer gender non-conforming Xicanx visual artist, to center decidedly Queer affects that ultimately distorts the acclaimed image of La Virgen. I argue that this visual and performative rendering of La Virgen disrupts and untethers heteronormative desire and devotion hugged by Catholicism / Christianity. In conversation with Orsi, Sara Ahmed

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47. Orsi, 60.

poses the question, “What is the ‘direction’ of our desire?” In turning to this question, we can begin to think of affect as a primary nexus of power as it relates to contact and presence. I view affect as a model to reveal the ways in which religious devotion orients and directs certain (heteronormative) bodies through emotion that are implicated in larger affective economies of power. It is no coincidence that queerness and affect are theorized in such proximate trajectories.

In the essay, *Art Comes for the Archbishop*, Luz Calvo presents a Queer Chicana feminist analysis of Alma Lopez’s visual art piece that depicts La Virgen de Guadalupe intimately embracing the bare body of La Sirena—a culturally resonant figure seen in the Mexican game of Lotería. Alma Lopez is a queer Chicana visual artist and professor who has extensively curated her own artwork, and arguably academic



work, with a racialized queer aesthetic. In her reading of Lopez’s art, Calvo highlights the patriarchal religious roots of institutions and ideologies that police non-heteronormative forms of religious devotion as it is enmeshed with erotica and desire. The religious devotion and erotic desire illustrated in Lopez’s art are viewed by Catholics / Christians as morally corrupt, or as one person openly expressed in an email, “a slap to Our Lady’s

face.”<sup>48</sup> This reactionary wave, as it was received in the wake of Lopez’s artistic depictions of La Virgen, as it transited through a public space of an art exhibit, is characteristic of the religious economies that shape the region and body—both as spatial matters. Calvo pays attention to the artist’s gestures that incite “all kinds of desires (sexual, political, and racial)” such that Lopez’s art creates a Queer Chicana feminist subject formation through the visual register and the body.<sup>49</sup> I argue that the visual, when presented through queerness and devotion, while it is a modern technology of coloniality, has the potential to disrupt its modern value.

5054406464A disruption occurs in the disturbance that a spectator, say a Catholic devotee, experiences upon encountering a piece like “Lupe y Juanita.” Put differently, queer and devotional performance terminate both the spectator’s agency and the non-agency of the religious subject they view and hail. Contrasting the modern technology of the visual, I argue that abject devotion opens up new ways of relating to La Virgen made possible and imaginable. Accepting Calvo’s invitation to view the work of Cruz and Lopez as an opportunity to explore the various Queer affects that “open polymorphous and perverse spaces for sexuality and desire in New Mexican imaginaries.”<sup>50</sup> Cruz’s and Lopez’s work create a visual and performative space where the cisheteronormativity, that exist in both Chicano nationalism and religion, is unsettled.

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48. See the various reactions Alma Lopez received via email upon showing the “Our Lady” digital exhibit shown in “‘Cyber Arte: Tradition Meets Technology’ at the Museum of International Folk Art in Santa Fe, New Mexico,” (<http://www.almalopez.com/ourladyemails.html>).

49. Calvo, 220.

50. Calvo, 221.

The analysis provided by Calvo is particularly useful in the discussion of identity and identification markers that constitute a colonial affective attachment to the religious icon of La Virgen De Guadalupe. I want to emphasize what this may mean within and across Mexican descendent communities, specifically among Chicax communities in the New Mexico. As briefly mentioned in the footnote section of Calvo’s article, I am interested in learning more about the Nuevomexicano relation to La Virgen as it applies to the work of Alma Lopez—and consequently Cruz’s queer theorizations and imaginations. What does this art do to disrupt (and potentially re-create) the visual landscapes of New Mexico? How can this art be used to map the entanglements of affect, trauma, and imperialism?

*Queer of Color Future-Presents: Affects and Aesthetic Practices of Liberation*

I view religious affects commonly associated with La Virgen across Latinx and Mexican descendent communities as a larger structure that uphold dominant (cisheteronormative) society. In their abject devotion to La Virgen, I place Cruz in dialogue with the art of Alma Lopez, to briefly note the strong emotional reactions that surfaced in both academic and communal spaces. As Sara Ahmed writes in *Queer Phenomenology*, Cruz becomes “the queer subject within straight culture... [which] deviates and is made socially present as deviant.”<sup>51</sup> The straight culture that Cruz

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51. Sara Ahmed, “Queer Phenomenology: Orientations





deviates from is one that is brown, Catholic / Christian, and (cis)heteronormative. Within the context of machista Chicano nationalism complimented by the rigidity of Catholic / Christian morality, Cruz's visual rendering of La Virgen and artistic gesture become grounds for deviant desires and devotionism. The social investment to the larger Chicano community, and by extension dominant religious affects, create "stress points," which are characterized by straight time. Straight time is defined as a moment or moments when (cisheteronormative) lines discipline subjects into a present *tense* and "become points that accumulate stress."<sup>52</sup> I emphasize tense to honor its meaning as emotionally overwrought *and* as materially or physically disturbed. Through this queer visual aesthetic Cruz creates new worlds and ways of relating to and knowing the highly-acclaimed Virgen. Cruz's positionality, as a queer of color visual artist, becomes capable of material *and* affect disturbance. The Munozian idea of "straight time," then, upsets the temporality of cisheteronormative structures of feeling that heavily rely on rationality.

Cruz's ability and capacity to create alternative and erotic worlds through the La Virgen's body brings up questions of what might be considered as negative, and therefore deviating from and deviant in radical relation to religious norms, valuation processes, and affects. What is perceived as negative pleasure and affect, ruptures the neoliberal desire to create a rigid rationality, morality, and valuation processes.

Schaefer poses the following questions to question the material foundation of religion as it is contingent on a unsound structure:

How is religion made up of clustered material forms, aspects of our embodied life, such as other bodies, food, community, labor, movement, music, sex, natural landscapes, architecture, and objects? How is religion defined by the depths of our bodies—our individual and species histories that we know only by their long

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52. Sarah Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*, 17.

shadows but that shape the contours of our everyday experience?... How is religion something that carries us on its back rather than something that we think, choose or command?<sup>53</sup>

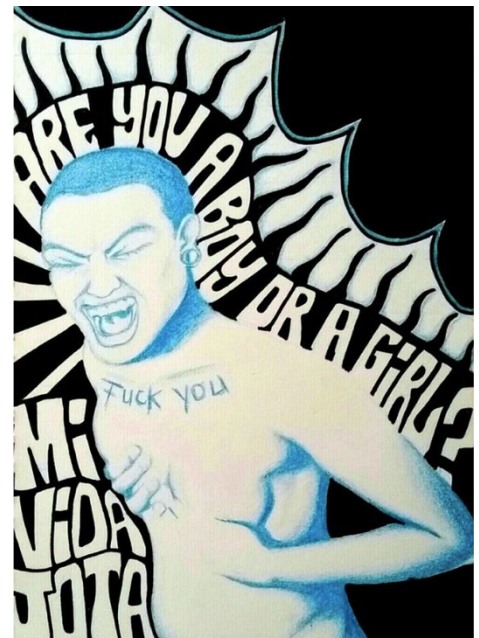
As Schaefer alludes in these set of questions, the evanescent and non-agentive twists and turns of religion falsely secures not only a moral compass that seeks to devalue ways of living outside of its institutionalized structure. I assert that “negative” affects, namely performed as queer of color erotica and devotion to the non-acclaimed religious icons of La Santa Muerte, have the potential to uproot the material foundations and ephemerality of religion. Perhaps we can think of Cruz’s and Lopez’s visual imaginations, explicitly rooted in negative affects, to have the potential of confronting religious objects and relationships. I want to place these questions into conversation with queer phenomenology and affects. Specifically, I want to consider the ways in which queer people of color create a sense of devotion and desire through the body and the visual field. As Schaefer reminds us, “affect, the flow of forces through bodies outside of, prior to, or underneath language” is a theme worthy of exploring when it comes to the flow and directions of power.<sup>54</sup> In pairing this reading of religious affect with queer phenomenology, I aim to explore the ways in which Cruz, through their artistic embodiment, disrupts heteronormative devotion and desire as major tenants of religion.

I remember having a text conversation about pronouns with Adelina. I had asked (J)Ade what pronouns were most fitting in (J)Ade’s eyes. (J)Ade pointed out the limitations and the precarious nature of

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53. Schaefer, *Religious Affects*.

54. Schaefer, *Religious Affects*.



gender pronouns. Although many who personally know (J)Ade used “she/her/hers” to refer to Ade, Ade had been contemplating the idea of gender neutral pronouns such as they/them/theirs for quite some time. Yet, Ade disclosed the uncomfortable and unfitting feeling even with gender neutral pronouns, as if gender itself was a site of contestation and dismemberment. Ade seemed to think and feel beyond the gender construct apparatus—regardless of the neutral pronouns as options. There was something about the meaning-making process that Ade disidentified with. This disidentification is made visually and affectively clear in the piece, “FUCK YOU.” The question “Are you a boy or a girl?”, then, for Ade is restricted to Western/Eurocentric gender and biological binaries and structures that cannot decipher Ade’s queer transgender expression or desires.

#### **SECTION IV: CONCLUSION**

I assert that queerness, as a methodology, unyokes religious affects from Catholic / Christian morality. I posit that as queer people of color create a sense of devotion and desire through the body and visibility, they are intent on reclaiming their relationship to La Virgen in the face of Catholic cisheteronormative desire to claim and discipline her body. I argue that the visual, when presented through racialized queerness and devotion, while it is a modern technology of coloniality, has the potential to disrupt its modern colonial value. Put differently, a queer devotional performance terminates both the spectator’s agency and the non-agency of the religious subject they view and hail. Contrasting the modern technology of the visual, I argue that abject devotion opens up new ways of relating to La Virgen made possible and imaginable. Abject devotion is a means, not an end, to the erotic liberation that is central to worldmaking art featured in

this project. The visual art of Cruz and Lopez works as a visual and performative gesture that unsettles cisheteronormativity that exists both in Chicano nationalism and religion. I deem queer of color aesthetic practices as alternative and disruptive practices that deter logics of settler colonial religion and negatively affect Hispano elitism.

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