Introduction Staking Family Claims

> The family is the place where, for better or worse, we learn how to love.
>
> • • • Cherríe Moraga, *Loving in the War Years: Lo que nunca pasó por sus labios* (1983)

In her "Introduction" to the collection *Chicana Feminist Thought: The Basic Historical Writings*, sociologist Alma M. García notes how intersecting discourses of nationalism, family, and machismo provoked Chicana feminism in the late 1960s and 1970s, the historical moment that gave way to organized struggles for Mexican American civil rights and cultural empowerment known as the Chicano movement.

> Although many issues contributed to the development of Chicana feminist thought, the ideological critique of sexism or *machismo*, the term most frequently used within a Chicano context, contributed significantly to the formation of Chicana feminism. Chicana feminists, as active participants in the Chicano movement, experienced the immediate constraints of male domination in their daily lives. Their writings express their concern with traditional gender roles within Chicano families that relegated women into secondary roles. Chicana feminists challenged the portrait of the so-called "Ideal Chicana" drawn by Chicano cultural nationalists. (A. García 1997, 5)

Furthermore, within various movement contexts, strands of Chicano cultural nationalism tethered to machismo promoted a family ideal that, extrapolating from Christopher Lasch, García identifies as a "safe 'haven in a heartless world.'" In this romanticized haven—a "nation" defined within

Downloaded from http://read.dukeupress.edu/books/book/chapter-pdf/639765/9780822391135-001.pdf by guest on 05 October 2024

the contours of domesticity—the archetypal Chicana would necessarily provide a feminine spirit of maternal consolation (in spite of her suffering) while ensuring the procreation, hence survival, of Chicano culture.

Writing about feminine space within the context of Indian nationalism (in terms that fittingly apply to Chicano movement contexts), Partha Chatterjee argues, "the crucial requirement was to retain the inner spirituality of indigenous social life" by way of locating "the home" as "the principal site for expressing the spiritual quality of the national culture." Women "must take the main responsibility of protecting and nurturing this quality." Thus, "no matter what the changes in the external conditions of life for women, they must not lose their essentially spiritual (i.e., feminine) virtues" (Chatterjee 1990, 243). Chicana feminist criticism, upon which I will soon elaborate, unravels the threads that bind *la familia* (the family) with *la raza* (the people), an often-taken-for-granted, naturalized site, where cohesion presupposes not only the fixity of gender roles but, by extension, a continuum between male authority and heterosexual presumption.

Building on the Chicana feminist critique and extending its objectives, *Next of Kin: The Family in Chicano/a Cultural Politics* critically examines both discursive and material configurations of la familia. If there is a single issue almost always at stake in Chicano/a cultural politics since the Chicano movement of the 1960s and 1970s, it is the family in some shape, form, or fashion. Indeed, the family is a crucial symbol and organizing principle that by and large frames the history of Mexican Americans in the United States.[1] In plotting a Chicano/a cultural history that encompasses the 1960s to the present, this book examines kinship and the family as, simultaneously, ideologies adopted by heteronormative and patriarchal discourses—or what Roderick A. Ferguson (2004) has importantly termed heteropatriarchy—and as crucial sites for political struggle when informed by egalitarian possibility.[2] In the book, la familia is analyzed as framing and underscoring a genealogy of Chicano/a cultural texts—poems, manifestos, drawings, paintings, murals, music, film, video, and television—informed by the imperatives of the Chicano movement in conjunction with the influence of gender and sexuality on kinship formations. At root this project serves as an interrogation of heteropatriarchal articulations of cultural nationalism by scrutinizing who and what counts as la familia in the name of Chicano/a cultural politics.[3]

Downloaded from http://read.dukeupress.edu/books/book/chapter-pdf/639765/9780822391135-001.pdf by guest on 05 October 2024

Departing from fixed notions of family, the texts gathered and analyzed here—constituting both an archive formed by Chicano movement principles and my desire to conjoin sources that fall outside traditional disciplinary locations or historical mappings—illustrate la familia as a genealogical tradition that entails successive shifts contingent upon changing kinship discourses and formations. Extrapolating from Michel Foucault's essay "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History" (1984), the genealogy I track critiques family much as Foucault critiques "History," by interrupting and retelling a purportedly continuous process and absolute paradigm. Considering how historical "truth" reflects a process of systematic domination suppressing discrepant narratives, Foucault argues that the task of the historian is to undo History as an ideal schema, displacing the authority that assures its smooth continuity. In turn, history and genealogy are understood as sites of struggle and contestation, "a profusion of entangled events" (Foucault 1984, 89). History and its constitution, in the conventional sense, is akin to conventional kinship arrangements in that they purport to produce monumental narratives based on "the inviolable identity of their origin" (79). Emphasizing genealogy in such terms thus allows this book to construe the family as both symbol and social category whose signification is not necessarily foreordained by blood, circumstance, and monologic notions such as "History." We can thus reimagine what family has been and, especially, what it could be for those who fall outside its otherwise regulatory borders.

Although *Next of Kin* interrupts those discourses intimately linking nationalism and heteropatriarchy as underpinnings of a compulsory normative Chicano family romance, it does not result in its dismissal. Ultimately, the critique carried out points to a return, not transcendence. The book necessarily considers the crucial familial attachments—attachments predicated upon diverse modes of kinship by various constituencies—maintained by Chicanos and Chicanas at historical moments in which economic exploitation, racism, sexism, and homophobia persist. As Foucault does not aim to dissolve "History" but instead calls for its reconfiguration as genealogy (making it available to refashioned subjects and projects), numerous cultural workers have revised la familia as alternative kinship relations. I thus foreground these "reinventions" of family in forms and practices that displace its otherwise normatively domesticating effects.

Downloaded from http://read.dukeupress.edu/books/book/chapter-pdf/639765/9780822391135-001.pdf by guest on 05 October 2024

The connections between masculinity, nationalism, and the family are hardly exclusive to Chicanos and Chicanas. Indeed, their interlocking connections typify a broad range of historical moments, geographies, and cultural practices. When Anne McClintock (1995, 357) suggests in *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender, and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* that nationalism is "frequently figured through the iconography of familial and domestic space," for example, she is drawing from Frantz Fanon's observation in *Black Skin, White Masks* that "there are close connections between the structure of the family and the structure of the nation" (360). McClintock observes that nationalism, as Fanon similarly elaborates, is "constituted from the very beginning as a gendered discourse and cannot be understood without a theory of gender power" (355). Conversantly, in *Bananas, Beaches, and Bases: Making Feminist Sense of International Politics*, Cynthia Enloe argues that

> nationalist movements have rarely taken women's experiences as the starting point for an understanding of how a people becomes colonized or how it throws off the shackles of that material and psychological domination. Rather, nationalism typically has sprung from masculinized memory, masculinized humiliation and masculinized hope. Anger at being 'emasculated'—or turned into 'a nation of busboys'—has been presumed to be the natural fuel for igniting a nationalist movement. (1989, 44)

I take seriously these observations for understanding Chicano cultural nationalism as conceived by many thinkers whose work emerged from the movement of the 1960s and 1970s. The demand for particular monologic versions of the family by these mostly male thinkers confirms McClintock's observation of a "gender difference between women and men [that] serves to symbolically define the limits of national difference and power between men" (1995, 354). Such definitions meant keeping women from occupying positions of power in regimes of male-determined nationalism.[4]

Yet the insistence upon adhering to such family formations is not a phenomenon to be relegated to the recent past of the 1960s and 1970s but one that continues to surface in recent Chicano/a cultural politics. The metaphorization of family as a unit governed by men has been re-

Downloaded from http://read.dukeupress.edu/books/book/chapter-pdf/639765/9780822391135-001.pdf by guest on 05 October 2024

cently expressed by Ignacio M. García (1996) in his essay "Juncture in the Road: Chicano Studies since 'El Plan de Santa Barbara.' " While making important observations on the present status of Chicano studies in light of its historical development, García's overall embattled view of the discipline mirrors his frustration with the shifting terms of what counts as family (especially those articulated by lesbians). Pondering the early goals of the Chicano movement, García investigates Chicano studies in its recent manifestations and questions its impact on nonacademic communities and its overall impetus for social change. García (1996,190) laments, "The academy has become the only world for some of these [Chicana lesbian] scholars, because they have redefined the concept of community." Furthermore, he writes, "These new definitions reduce the community to single females, or single-parent families led by females, who are poor and abused. There is very little vibrancy in that community beyond the mother-daughter relationship. Their definition of community stands in stark contrast with the community most Chicano/a scholars know" (202). García asserts there is very little vibrancy in communities or families that do not include men—and perhaps, by implication, in those not controlled by them. Thus his anxiety may be over the refusal to maintain a stable family dynamic that is decidedly heterosexual, procreative, and male dominated.

García's claims are not unlike those presented in Christopher Lasch's *Haven in a Heartless World: The Family Besieged* (1977), a book widely repudiated by many feminist scholars exploring the subject of the family. Yet as I find value in García's position (that is, I agree that Chicano scholarship should speak to, and connect with, the life experiences of Chicanos and Chicanas outside the academy), I see Lasch's work as articulating important observations about the family's significance as a social institution. The stakes are especially high when one considers the importance of family in countering the subordinating forces of racism and economic exploitation. Unfortunately both García and Lasch rely upon a patriarchal order that entails a dismissal—if not vilification—of feminism, thus limiting the terms by which kinship might be understood in more socially and historically grounded ways.

The lives that comprise those women's families García condemns are often based on common kinship networks, patterns of connection imposed perhaps by choice, perhaps by circumstance. These families,

Downloaded from http://read.dukeupress.edu/books/book/chapter-pdf/639765/9780822391135-001.pdf by guest on 05 October 2024

however, are not merely "academically" redefined communities but also reflect the material realities of many working-class women. An abundance of historical documentation fortifies this point. In fact, the social and historical significance of divergent kinship networks encompasses an extensive time frame that predates and exceeds narrow renditions of la familia in the movement era. Take, for example, Vicki L. Ruíz's study on California Chicana cannery workers from the 1930s to the 1950s that details the "extended kin networks within the [cannery] plants [that] reaffirmed a sense of family and cultural traditions" (1987, 19). According to Ruíz, such networks "nurtured the development of a closely knit work environment, one which eased [women's] adjustment to the routines and conditions of labor particular to canneries and packing houses" (20). In another premovement context, consider the groundbreaking historical work of George J. Sánchez that reveals how, in the 1920s, "Family life in the barrios of Los Angeles ranged from conventional to experimental" (1993, 143). "Rigid gender roles," he writes, "could hardly be maintained under [particular] circumstances" since "female-headed households . . . were not uncommon at the turn of the century" (132). In short, both Ruíz and Sánchez provide images of nonstandard, effective, family structures that defy the "nuclear" norm inscribed within many movement scripts. One might find it revealing that Ignacio García (1996, 202) berates such woman-dominant families, families who cannot move beyond "the mother-daughter relationship," for not being "the community most Chicano/a scholars know," a middle-class contingent at the very least. Thus García's quest to unveil elitism in Chican*a* studies becomes more of a confirmation of his struggle to keep the "o" in Chicano studies—maintaining a presumed family "most Chicano/a scholars know" (202)—firmly intact. To be sure, García's concept of la familia is a normative gesture that simplifies and disciplines a wider range of possibilities and strategies for imagining alliances and constituting a more elaborate genealogical enterprise. In charging Chicana lesbians with the creation of narrow kinship networks, he unveils a restricted understanding of la familia that is hopelessly romantic on the one hand and heteropatriarchal on the other. Quite similar to opponents of gay marriage, García's logic conforms to the belief that, in the words of Judith Butler (2004, 102), "kinship does not work, or does not qualify as kinship, unless it assumes a recognizable family form."

Downloaded from http://read.dukeupress.edu/books/book/chapter-pdf/639765/9780822391135-001.pdf by guest on 05 October 2024

From *Loving in the War Years* (1983) to *Waiting in the Wings: Portrait of a Queer Motherhood* (1997), Chicana lesbian writer Cherríe Moraga's work attempts to establish la familia as a site of resistance to power, namely community fragmentation vis-à-vis racial discrimination, economic disenfranchisement, and the subordination of gender and sexual difference. In Moraga's estimation, the family is a collective consciousness premised on a shared opposition to such oppressions all the while contesting heteropatriarchal kinship relations. She does not desire the repudiation of masculinist nationalisms simply to appeal to a prescriptive antiessentialism that makes all community traditions suspect. On the contrary, Moraga's alternative rendering of la familia strives toward a utopian space that is able to critique yet sustain Chicano/a community formation.

Concerned as I am with the specific politics and functions (ranging from the pitfalls and affirmative moments) of Chicano cultural nationalism and its familial ties, it is essential to distinguish between subaltern (a category under which I situate Chicano cultural politics) and state-marshaled nationalisms.[5] Along with disseminating a rhetoric of "family values" that passes as truth in narratives transmitted by the dominant culture, official nationalisms also articulate with and against subaltern forms in the struggle for a hegemonic "common sense." Indeed, it is imperative to comprehend the existence of nationalisms that rail against the state, for example, while recognizing that many brands of nationalism—be they minor or major—adhere to similar ideologies around gender and sexuality.

I maintain, then, that if minority nationalisms endeavor to liberate their purported constituencies from the subordinating forces of the state, they must relinquish their dependency on exclusionary kinship relations. Furthermore, unlike the now-common move in Chicano/a and other ethnic studies scholarship to heavy-handedly render cultural nationalism the enemy that inherently generates sexism and homophobia, the project registers the political import it may serve for potentially inclusive orchestrations. As Moraga (1993b, 148–49) succinctly puts it, "What was right about Chicano Nationalism was its commitment to preserving the integrity of the Chicano people. A generation ago, there were cultural, economic, and political programs to develop Chicano consciousness, autonomy, and self-determination. What was wrong about Chicano

Downloaded from http://read.dukeupress.edu/books/book/chapter-pdf/639765/9780822391135-001.pdf by guest on 05 October 2024

Nationalism was its institutionalized heterosexism, its inbred machismo, and its lack of a cohesive national political strategy." In keeping with this assessment, she formulates the idea of "Queer Aztlán," a "progressive" cultural nationalist strategy that embraces all Chicanos and Chicanas, especially women and queers. Moraga (150) "cling[s] to the word 'nation' because without the specific naming of the nation, the nation will be lost (as when feminism is reduced to humanism, the woman is subsumed). Let us retain our radical naming but expand it to meet a broader and wiser revolution."

Here Moraga is understood as arguing that the movement and the cultural nationalist sentiment emanating from it played a crucial role for consciousness raising and mobilization efforts around the multilayered issues impacting Chicano/a communities. Seizing the radical actions and potentials offered by it while insisting upon a critique of the sexism and heteronormative thinking wielded in its name, Moraga disputes the belief that the movement did more damage than good and thus calls into question its status as a monolithic entity away from which progressive thought has moved. Indeed, as Jorge Mariscal (2002, 59) writes, "By misrepresenting the multiple ideologies that informed the Chicano movement as a single current of reactionary cultural nationalism or 'identity politics' riddled by sexism, internal dissension, 'anti-Americanism,' and 'reverse racism,' revisionist historians (some of Mexican American descent) have deprived future generations of a complete portrayal of Chicano/a activism in one of the most revolutionary periods in American history."[6]

Moraga would no doubt concur with Mariscal, especially in light of conservative politicians like Patrick J. Buchanan who have identified Chicano cultural nationalism not only as anti-American but also (along with homosexuality and feminism) a threat to the family values that he and others of his ilk promote. In his books *The Death of the West: How Dying Populations and Immigrant Invasions Imperil Our Country and Civilization* (2002) and *State of Emergency: The Third World Invasion and Conquest of America*, Buchanan (2006, 109) cites passages from the movement manifesto *El Plan Espiritual de Aztlán* (misnamed *El Plan de Aztlan* and further discussed in chapter 1) to argue that the student organization MEChA (Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlán) "is the Chicano version of the white-supremacist Aryan Nation." Most revealing for the context at hand is Buchanan's quotation of the following passage

Downloaded from http://read.dukeupress.edu/books/book/chapter-pdf/639765/9780822391135-001.pdf by guest on 05 October 2024

from *El Plan*: "Political Liberation . . . can only come through independent action on our part, since the two-party system is the same animal with two heads that feed from the same trough. Where we are a majority we will control; where we are a minority we will represent a pressure group; nationally we represent one party: *La Familia de La Raza*." Here the articulation of Chicano cultural nationalism vis-à-vis la familia that inspires Buchanan's anxiety is two-pronged: not only does it serve to generate—as he would put it—a dying West in light of immigration (not recognizing that Chicanos are not always immigrants) but it also threatens an idealized "American" family that must fundamentally be white and heteropatriarchal.[7]

CHICANO/A STUDIES, CULTURAL STUDIES

To fulfill its goals this book utilizes cultural studies paradigms, many of which are formed as a result of transnational scholarly exchange. Since cultural studies is a broad field of inquiry that evokes manifold meanings, let me identify more specifically what I mean when I make reference to it. For Stuart Hall (1990, 11), "Cultural studies is not one thing, it has never been one thing." In the introduction to their foundational anthology (appropriately titled *Cultural Studies*), Lawrence Grossberg, Cary Nelson, and Paula Treichler draw from Hall to argue:

> Even when cultural studies is identified with a specific national tradition like British cultural studies, it remains a diverse and often contentious enterprise, encompassing different positions and trajectories in specific contexts, addressing many questions, drawing nourishment from multiple roots, and shaping itself within different institutions and locations. The passage of time, encounters with new historical events, and the very extension of cultural studies into new disciplines and national contexts will inevitably change its meanings and uses. Cultural studies needs to remain open to unexpected, unimagined, even uninvited possibilities. No one can hope to control these developments. (1992, 3)

Cultural studies makes no particular claims to belonging to, or developing from, any particular discipline. Although some would stress cultural studies' anchoring in sociology or literary studies, it also folds into, among other fields, media studies, history, women's studies, anthropology, and ethnic studies. Cultural studies, as I see it, enables the space for

Downloaded from http://read.dukeupress.edu/books/book/chapter-pdf/639765/9780822391135-001.pdf by guest on 05 October 2024

addressing various social phenomena by employing multiple disciplines, methodologies, and discourses that speak to specific issues or concerns. Indeed, "it is interdisciplinary in the sense that it recognises that questions of culture and power must lead one beyond the realm of culture into fields of inquiry normally constitutive of a number of other disciplines" (Grossberg 1997, 7).[8]

One influential genealogy of cultural studies begins with the class-based cultural analysis of the "founding fathers" Richard Hoggart, E. P. Thompson, and Raymond Williams (Turner 1992). Stuart Hall extends these approaches into sociological studies of race and ethnicity. As director of the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies at Birmingham during the 1970s, he facilitated the creation of a context for the emergence of what is loosely known as "Black Cultural Studies," exemplified by the work of his former students Hazel Carby, Kobena Mercer, and Paul Gilroy. The critical interventions of these three scholars, among others, stake their claims at the crossroads of race, class, gender, and sexuality. This is the strand of cultural studies upon which I most consistently draw. So while some would stress its indebtedness to history (Thompson), literary studies (Williams), or sociology (Hall), this project hinges on cultural studies' overall consideration of multiple, overlapping discourses that enable fleshing out the theoretical and material impulses uncontainable by disciplinary boundaries.

For example, in his pioneering book *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*, Paul Gilroy (1993a) provides a historical mapping of black diaspora culture in the advent of modernism by simultaneously harmonizing fiction, music, and philosophy. With Gilroy as conductor, they speak in concert about the theme of the "history of the black Atlantic" that "yields a course of lessons as to the instability and mutabilities of identities which are always unfinished, always being made" (Gilroy 1993a, xi). On one level, I see the *The Black Atlantic* operating from an interdisciplinary base that enables a project acutely organized around a particular theme while drawing upon a variety of cultural forms and critical frameworks. On another level, Gilroy's black Atlantic diaspora, according to James Clifford (1997, 267), "tactically defines a map/history in ways that may best be seen as 'anti-antiessentialist,' the double negative not reducible to a positive." The anti-antiessentialist position, however, has been met with criticism by scholars such as Kobena Mercer who, in

Downloaded from http://read.dukeupress.edu/books/book/chapter-pdf/639765/9780822391135-001.pdf by guest on 05 October 2024

his critique of it in “Black Art and the Burden of Representation” (1990), accuses Gilroy of resituating blackness within foundationalist frames of reference. While I appreciate Mercer’s critique—especially in view of his explicit concern with issues of sexuality and gender, issues that are largely absent from Gilroy’s analyses—the antiessentialist position might too easily consign anything historical that smells of essentialism to the graveyard of bad essences, a move that, Clifford (1997, 266) notes, represents a “premature pluralism.”

In this sense I understand this project on the contested site of the family for Chicanas and Chicanos as necessarily guided by an anti-antiessentialist impulse. For if the family “is to be something about which one could write a history—and this is Gilroy’s politically pointed goal—it must be something more than the name for a site of multiple displacements and reconstitutions of identity” (Clifford 1997, 267). Establishing a family politic, in ways similar to the formation of a racialized diaspora, allows for persistence of memory, tradition, and collective consciousness in the very process of transformation and hybridity. But since la familia seems so consistently to invoke masculinist identity politics and heterosexual imperatives, I struggle for “something more” than either an essentialist or an antiessentialist vision of family.

Like Gilroy’s take on “black” culture, I envision a complex genealogy that hinges on historical disjuncture and cultural difference for at stake is a genealogy of Chicana/o cultural production that is both enduring and potentially transformative. As Foucault (1984, 81) notes, “Genealogy does not pretend to go back in time to restore an unbroken continuity that operates beyond the dispersion of forgotten things”; rather, its task is to “follow the complex course of descent . . . to maintain passing events in their proper dispersion; it is to identify the accidents, the minute deviations—or conversely, the complete reversals—the errors, the false appraisals, and the faulty calculations that gave birth to those things that continue to exist and have value for us.” Recognizing the reality and importance of such “continuities” without seeing them as homogeneous, uncontested, or finished is precisely the basis of the anti-antiessentialist project. In this sense we might also tease out the correlation between the family in such terms and Michael Omi’s and Howard Winant’s illuminating conceptualization of race. For Omi and Winant, “despite its uncertainties and contradictions, the concept of race continues to play a fundamental role in

Downloaded from http://read.dukeupress.edu/books/book/chapter-pdf/639765/9780822391135-001.pdf by guest on 05 October 2024

structuring and representing the social world" (1994, 55). As perspectives informing their theorization of "racial formation," the two sociologists maintain that understanding race in such a way—fitting for understanding la familia in terms put forward here—"is to avoid both the utopian framework which sees race as an illusion we can somehow 'get beyond,' and also the essentialist formulation which sees race as something objective and fixed, a biological datum" (55). In turn we might therefore begin to see the various social constitutions of family that do not adhere to heteropatriarchal demands that in turn establish critical attachments that fall outside the boundaries of normative kinship models.

Gilroy's essay "It's a Family Affair: Black Culture and the Trope of Kinship" (1993b) is exemplary for unmasking ideologies of the family as they fuel the heteropatriarchal impulse of black cultural nationalism vis-à-vis racialized community. His essay helps tease out shared historical and ideological practices between Chicano and Black communities in their need and desire to cling to kinship discourse as a means for empowerment. Indeed, Gilroy (1993b, 194) puts his finger on the impulse within Black cultural productions that binds the family with nationalism in the service of patriarchal authority:

> I want to focus on the trope of the family and bio-political kinship and explore the possibility that the growing centrality of this trope within black political discourse points to the emergence of a distinctive and emphatically post-national variety of essentialism. The appeal to family is both the symptom and the signature of this flexible essentialism. The relationship between the ideal, imaginary and pastoral black family and utopian as well as authoritarian representations of blackness is something else that I think we should consider.

The fact that la familia is not a "post-national" phenomenon in the contexts I address marks a possible difference in Chicano and Black cultural and historical situations. Yet in what follows, I will extrapolate from Gilroy's analysis of the family trope as a double-edged sword, a signifier with many meanings that both troubles *and* assists in the struggle for communitarian politics.

Extending and translating the work of Gilroy and his colleagues, my project also situates itself within the trajectory of an emergent field called Chicano/a cultural studies.[9] Chicano/a cultural studies borrows from the aforementioned thinkers by drawing upon their critical insights and

Downloaded from http://read.dukeupress.edu/books/book/chapter-pdf/639765/9780822391135-001.pdf by guest on 05 October 2024

theoretical approaches in focusing on Mexican American communities in the United States. Although early Chicano/a scholarship did adopt certain anticipatory methodologies and interpretive strategies, I would argue that the years of 1989 and 1990 mark an important historical moment in which Chicano studies begins seriously to dialogue with cultural studies in its British traditions, black and otherwise.

Renato Rosaldo's *Culture and Truth: The Remaking of Social Analysis* (1989), José David Saldvíar's "The Limits of Cultural Studies" (1990), and Angie Chabram's and Rosa Linda Fregoso's edited special issue of the British journal *Cultural Studies* entitled "Chicana/o Cultural Representations: Reframing Alternative Critical Discourses" (1990) draw upon the work of British cultural studies scholars Raymond Williams, E. P. Thompson, Stuart Hall, Kobena Mercer, and Paul Willis to put cultural studies in conversation with Chicano/a studies. Chabram, who would soon after the special issue write under the name Angie Chabram-Dernersesian, could very well be credited for single-handedly working toward the establishment of an enterprise marked as "Chicana/o cultural studies" in her role as editor for a subsequent issue of *Cultural Studies* entitled "Chicana/o Latina/o Transnational and Transdisciplinary Movements" (1999); an anthology of field-defining essays, *The Chicana/o Cultural Studies Reader* (2006); and *The Chicana/o Cultural Studies Forum: Critical and Ethnographic Practices* (2007), a book consisting of interviews with, and conversational interventions by, scholars mapping the ties between Chicano/a studies and cultural studies. These connections have also come to be relocated under the rubric of "border studies," successfully executed in José David Saldívar's *Border Matters: Remapping American Cultural Studies* (1997). According to Saldívar (1997, 25), "What Chicano/a Cultural Studies offers the loose group of tendencies, issues, and questions in the larger cultural studies orbits in Britain and the United States is the theorization of the U.S.-Mexico borderlands—literal, figurative, material, and militarized—and the deconstruction of the discourse of boundaries." Other integral texts—Arturo J. Aldama's and Naomi Helena Quiñonez's anthology *Decolonial Voices: Chicana and Chicano Cultural Studies in the 21st Century* (2002) and Edén Torres's *Chicana without Apology: The New Chicana Cultural Studies* (2003), for example—have also added to the Chicano/a cultural studies project that works toward dismantling disciplinary and ideological boundaries in order to intervene in the social

Downloaded from http://read.dukeupress.edu/books/book/chapter-pdf/639765/9780822391135-001.pdf by guest on 05 October 2024

and political discourses that generate Chicano/a cultural politics. *Next of Kin* therefore endeavors to establish a critical kinship with the aforementioned practitioners of Chicano/a cultural studies, many of whom will be engaged in dialogue and debate.

BONDING ACROSS DIFFERENCE

Admittedly focusing on the work of Chicano men, this book is, however, guided by the critical efforts of Chicana feminists. Highly cognizant that scholarship that emphasizes male subjectivities—even on those which might be called "marginal"—often sidesteps feminist critiques only to situate men, yet again, center stage (see Modleski 1991), my book's approach parts ways with such undertakings by emphasizing masculinity *as a problem*, tracing the damage it does to both women and gay men under the cultural and historical sign "Chicano." Indeed, to carry out this kind of approach necessarily calls for an engagement with works produced by men and the means by which they circumscribe gender and sexuality. Moreover, given the fact that dominant masculinities have typically managed the way the family is constituted and enacted, if women and queers are to retain la familia and other kinship-based bonds as useful organizational categories, the normative codes with which communitarian politics are chiefly saturated demand critical scrutiny. A caveat, however, is in order. In no way does the book wish or intend to collapse gender with sexuality or advocate for a symmetrical understanding of the two categories; rather their often simultaneous mention signals the dual impact of heteropatriarchy as hinging upon heterosexual demands and patriarchal authority. Also discussed is how gender and sexuality require distinction in light of, for example, gay male misogyny.

In *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, Anzaldúa (1987, 17) interrogates the images of the family that underscore Chicano/Mexicano "culture's 'protection' of women" that keeps "women in rigidly defined roles." Yet her theory of the borderlands, a utopian space encompassing *los atravesados* (the border crossers) (which include, for example, the queer, the half dead, those who cross over), also insists upon reconfigured family ties. "Men," she writes, "even more than women, are fettered to gender roles" (84). Anzaldúa thus locates men as both perpetrators and recipients of gender violence within family institutions. *Next of Kin*'s efforts echo Anzaldúa's call for "a new masculinity" (84), simultaneously

Downloaded from http://read.dukeupress.edu/books/book/chapter-pdf/639765/9780822391135-001.pdf by guest on 05 October 2024

entailing a feminist revision of kinship relations around the politics of gender and sexuality and remaining cautious of how patriarchy might be reinscribed even in relations that may be nonheteronormative.

Chapter 1, “Reappraising the Archive,” begins by laying down the historical premises that establish Chicano articulations of family, nation, and masculinity. Divided into four sections, the chapter engages with the cultural forms and critical discourses that have provided the foundation on which la familia became adopted as an organizing strategy for communitarian politics. The chapter’s first two sections unveil the call for a family-based network in Chicano movement contexts ranging from the manifestos *El Plan Espiritual de Aztlán* and *La Familia de La Raza*, written respectively by members of the Chicano Liberation Youth Conference and José Armas, and Rodolfo “Corky” Gonzales’s epic poem “I am Joaquín” to the family discourse emanating from the organizations that have come to define the movement itself. Providing an understanding of why la familia was of fundamental importance to movement intellectuals and writers, these sections critically foreground the emergent nationalist consciousness adopted by Chicanos in relation to the U.S. nation-state. Taking seriously the visual impact of la familia, the third section carefully reads a number of “family portraits”—drawings and paintings, sometimes taking the form of posters, periodical and book covers and illustrations, murals, and postcards—that continue to proliferate into the new millennium. Quite often these images are analogous to literary and textual interpretations of the family in their heteronormative, nuclear visions. While closing on a note that demands a critical view of masculinity as a heteropatriarchal force by unpacking the deployment of machismo and its attachment to la familia for organizing gender roles, the section also registers feminist and queer responses to, and rearticulations of, the meaning of macho.

Addressing the means by which artists embrace visual media—particularly film, video, and television—to delineate strategies crucial for contesting stereotypes and Latino/a invisibility as well as illustrating the high stakes of family representation is the subject of chapter 2, “Shooting the Patriarch.” It begins by tracing the development of Chicano/a-produced film and television in conjunction with movement activism. In considering films such as *I Am Joaquín* (Luis Valdez, 1969), *Yo Soy Chicano* (Jesús Salvador Treviño, 1972), *Chicana* (Sylvia Morales, 1979), and the public

Downloaded from http://read.dukeupress.edu/books/book/chapter-pdf/639765/9780822391135-001.pdf by guest on 05 October 2024

affairs television series *¡Ahora!* (spearheaded by Treviño and running from 1969 to 1970 on KCET-TV in Los Angeles), it becomes clear that Chicano and Chicana media artists also grappled with family principles for constituting community. The section serves to interrogate the need to shoot the patriarch in Valdez's and Trevino's work while signaling Morales's critical intervention that shoots back at patriarchal governance. Moving from these works to a more recent film that relies upon the bonds of consanguinity, the chapter critically engages with Gregory Nava's *Mi Familia/My Family* (1995). While Nava's film embraces pre-Columbian tropes that surface in numerous movement productions, it diverges from earlier films by favoring a more assimilative than cultural nationalist narrative. My critique of the film is less concerned with the desire to identify as American than with its advocacy of a heteropatriarchal vision of la familia that aims to appease authoritarian ideologies coded as American. Moving beyond the paradigms presented in the aforementioned media works, the following section considers the experimental video work of Harry Gamboa Jr., an artist-activist who participated in movement struggles, namely the high school walkouts to protest educational inequality, in the late 1960s in East Los Angeles. Gamboa's collaborations with the art group Asco and his solo work offer an alternative view of family dynamics by highlighting the limitations of kinship discourse that hinges upon nationalism and patriarchal authority. Videos such as *Baby Kake* (1984) and *L.A. Familia* (1993)—standing in sharp contrast to other Chicano films and videos given their thematic approaches and homegrown production values—importantly resituates community politics for Chicanas and Chicanos in the midst of urban turmoil. The final section turns to more recent media productions—all of which have at root a concern for la familia—in order to assess how heteropatriarchal authority within the Chicano family is both upheld and destabilized in contemporary film and television.

Chapter 3, which rejoins and extends my earlier discussion on the historical formation of a poetic consciousness, examines Chicano rap music and hip hop culture to inquire into the ways la familia is articulated in calls for collective struggle. While there are clear-cut differences between Chicano poetry and Chicano rap, both forms ultimately convey a shared desire for "Chicanismo," that is, "community autonomy, individual self-worth, cultural pride, and political and economic equity" (Gómez-

Downloaded from http://read.dukeupress.edu/books/book/chapter-pdf/639765/9780822391135-001.pdf by guest on 05 October 2024

Quiñones 1990, 189). Fundamentally concerned with Chicano rap as an empowering cultural practice grasped by young, working-class Chicano men, "The Verse of the Godfather" also unveils the way rap is frequently influenced by masculinist and heteronormative protocols. While Chicano rap may challenge state violence around issues of racism and police hostility and unite disenfranchised youths, it often relies upon articulations of community as dominated by men. Indeed, the flirtation with, and outright declaration of gang affiliation, makes clear that "rhymes for *la raza*" have tended to be limited in scope. Not wanting to dismiss the music's radical potential, however, the chapter ends by charting the evolution of "homo-hop" in which many queer Chicano/a and Latino/a rappers participate as well as acknowledging rap's critical quotidian import.

Beginning with a discussion of the role of Chicano gay men in Chicano/a critical and cultural production, chapter 4, "*Carnal* Knowledge," proceeds by illustrating the particular ways male homosexuality has been cast in antifamily terms. Starting with critical readings of texts like Joe Olvera's poem "Gay Ghetto District" and José Armas's 1975 essay "Machismo," the chapter shifts gears to locate the Chicano gay male subject in an unlikely space: the popular culture arena of car customization saturated with the discourse of Chicanismo. In 1981, *Firme Magazine*, comparable to the more famous *Low Rider Magazine*, published an interview with a young Chicano gay man named Victor. Entitled "A Gay Life Style (Only if La Familia Approves)," the interview stands as a remarkable document that both challenges the way Chicano gay men have been rendered "closeted" about their sexuality and maps the complex relations between heterosexual and nonheterosexual men around nationalism and la familia. "*Carnal* Knowledge" concludes by examining an array of Chicano gay male cultural productions, including Al Lujan's video *S&M in the Hood*, the paintings of Eugene Rodríguez, and a poem by the late Chicano gay activist Rodrigo Reyes, to demonstrate how the terms of kinship are expanded by Chicano gay men in the recasting of *carnalismo* (brotherhood) on the stage of desire.

The book's afterword, "Making Queer *Familia*," draws on the influential work of Cherríe Moraga to query the usefulness of kinship and the family for Chicano/a queer contingencies. It shows how Moraga's work does not campaign for a wholesale dismissal of family or nationalism despite their heteropatriarchal attachments. In fact, the reclamation of la

Downloaded from http://read.dukeupress.edu/books/book/chapter-pdf/639765/9780822391135-001.pdf by guest on 05 October 2024

familia by Chicano gay men and Chicana lesbians often functions in the service of reimagining new communities while maintaining biological kinship ties. By doing so they enact what anthropologist Kath Weston has called "chosen families."[10] Reading Augie Robles and Valentín Aguirre's 1994 video documentary *¡Viva 16!* and Ramón García's poem "Miss Primavera Contest" (1994) in light of the history and cultural contexts they represent, the book ends by communicating the complex ways queers have attempted to forge alternative kinship networks that also incorporate the families into which they are born. Moreover, by extending the family beyond private, domestic space in order to situate it in the public sphere, we see how queers shift the terms of kinship that enable queer models of cultural citizenship. Yet given the complexities and contradictions in such networks, we see how even queer communities—especially those dominated by men—can reproduce the gender inequalities that surfaced in the heteropatriarchal organizations of the movement era. I therefore call for a provisional embrace of queer kinship given how resolving gender discrepancies are never guaranteed in its constitution.

The artists, writers, and thinkers whose work this book engages provide crucial insight for interrogating kinship configurations wedded to masculinity, nationalism, and heteropatriarchy. Working from the fact that what counts as family is hotly contested today in both the arena of Chicano/a-Latino/a studies and in the U.S. public sphere, my examination of diverse cultural productions and practices, a Chicano/a cultural studies project to be sure, takes up the work of Chicana feminists, queer theorists, and cultural studies scholars to specifically unravel these often bound and yet always disputed terms. And just as the book endeavors to show how claims to normative kinship networks that in turn generate limited configurations of la familia circulate within Chicano/a communities, it is also adamant in demonstrating that within these same communities such claims have been disputed by those invested in extending the bonds of belonging.

Downloaded from http://read.dukeupress.edu/books/book/chapter-pdf/639765/9780822391135-001.pdf by guest on 05 October 2024