

Cogiendo en luto

Chavela Vargas and the Erotic Politics of Grief

ABSTRACT Chavela Vargas is widely known for her unique approach to some of México's most celebrated musical genres. Though undoubtedly a queer icon within and outside of México, critical scholarship has only recently begun to focus on the way her queer migrant subjectivity and *marimacho* voice, persona, and performances reinvent Mexican sonic history and interpellate listeners queerly. Importantly, her aching vocals and tragic life story coexist with pulsating sexual energy. In this essay I argue that Chavela inaugurates a postmortem politics in which grief and the erotic are held together, instead of separated or silenced by taboo. Inspired by Chavela, I introduce the practice of *cogiendo en luto* (fucking in grief), which asks the difficult questions: What happens when Eros and Thanatos go to bed together? How can the erotic help to shape grief, and vice versa? By linking Eros to Thanatos, Chavela makes the grief she experienced throughout her life transformative, intimate, expansive, introspective, chaotic, and at certain privileged moments erotic, orgasmic, and sensual. The essay samples lyrics and performances of some of Chavela's songs, film cameos, and an obituary written about her by Pedro Almodóvar. Together, these queer performative interventions re-signify the grief of migration, addiction, heartbreak, and death, while forging an affective and fleshy relationship with listeners and spectators. As a queer and grieving listener/spectator/fan of Chavela's, I also weave my own grief into the essay, reflecting on what Chavela meant to my healing process and further underscoring her unique affective contributions to contemporary queer subjectivities and soundscapes. **KEYWORDS** queer, Mexico, ranchera, grief, migration

Mexican singer Chavela Vargas has been described in a *Guardian* obituary as a “Mexican lesbian diva who can wring your soul,” by Fidel Castro as a dangerous woman who “stirs up a hornet’s nest,”¹ and by gay Spanish filmmaker Pedro Almodóvar as “your husband, in this world, as you liked to call me.” Chicana feminist scholar Yvonne Yarbro-Bejarano further represents Chavela’s transnational appeal, writing that “Chavela’s music has seen me through good times and bad times . . . on the earphones, entre las girlfriends, and in my fantasies, she makes a cherished repertory of Mexican and Latin American music truly mine.”² “Husband” to an openly gay man, sonic therapist through the good times and the bad, soul-wringing lesbian diva, *vieja peligrosa*. To attempt to write about Chavela Vargas is to attempt to sit with these polyvalent and cacophonous resonances across languages, geographies, and genders and most importantly, to embrace the intimacy and (dis)comfort that she provokes in those who listen to her. It is not an easy task, but in Chavela’s words, “si tiene un hondo penar / piensa en mí / si tienes ganas de llorar / piensa en mí” (if you have a deep pain / think of me / if you feel like crying / think of me). And I do, because to think about Chavela Vargas is to think about a world of feeling, pain, pleasure, and possibility that is also deeply and uniquely healing.

Resonance: The Journal of Sound and Culture, Vol. 4, Number 3, pp. 275–299. Electronic ISSN: 2688-0113 © 2023 by The Regents of the University of California. All rights reserved. Please direct all requests for permission to photocopy or reproduce article content through the University of California Press’s Reprints and Permissions web page, <https://www.ucpress.edu/journals/reprints-permissions>. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1525/res.2023.4.3.275>

In this essay I argue that Chavela Vargas inaugurates a postmortem politics in which grief and the erotic are held together, instead of separated or silenced by taboo. Inspired by Chavela, I introduce the practice of *cogiendo en luto* (fucking in grief), which asks the difficult questions: What happens when Eros and Thanatos go to bed together? How can the erotic help to shape grief, and vice versa? The isolations, obsessions, abnegations, and emptinesses engendered by grief—often pathologized in Western culture—need not be the only affects that accompany grief, as Chavela herself embodies. By linking Eros to Thanatos, she also makes grief transformative, intimate, expansive, introspective, chaotic, and at certain privileged moments erotic, orgasmic, and sensual. Expanding the extensive scholarship on Chavela’s legacy, I focus on how she swirls, coheres, and queers these contradictory affects, disrupting how we have been taught to (normatively) grieve.

Following a short conceptual and methodological section about queer listening, the essay is divided into three parts. First, through an analysis of Chavela’s live performance of “No soy de aquí ni soy de allá,” I feel out her sexile from Costa Rica and her move to México, which allowed her to live a sexual life and *devenir mexicana*, or become Mexican. I argue that the song not only queers borders but celebrates the erotic potential of the interstice. This erotically charged song and performance refashions the grief of exile—which is often described as a form of social death—into a pulsating, throbbing, and wet celebration of erotic life.

In the second part I analyze two film cameos featuring Chavela, in Pedro Almodóvar’s *Dolor y gloria* and in Julie Taymor’s *Frida*. In each of these cameos Chavela represents an inflection point, using the sounds of grief and the erotic to move the films’ protagonists toward a reorientation of erotic and artistic potential, a path parallel to the “Chavelazo,” the term of endearment for Chavela’s own comeback in the later years of her life. Central to this section is a discussion of Chavela’s *caída* or fall, from renowned singer to distanced exile hiding out in Tepoztlán and battling alcoholism, “dead” to her audience. In particular, I explore the theoretical dimensions of queer sadness and grievability. Though I recognize the gravity of Chavela’s alcoholism and do not wish to romanticize the pain she endured during this period of her life, I refuse the zombification and deathliness of addiction, in which the addicted person is cast as always already dead. Following trans-feminist scholar Sayak Valencia, throughout the essay but especially in this section, I use postmortem politics to denote the nonconventional ways that Chavela grieves, signaling her livingness and recognizing how she interpellates others toward erotic life, in spite of age, addiction, disability, and victimization by gendered necropolitical structures, which, for Achille Mbembe,³ mark certain subjects for necessary death and others for life (and grievability). Postmortem politics, as Valencia sees them, are a response to the quotidian and necropolitical violence waged against cis and trans women, who “refuse to obey or transit through the circuits of conventional political claims,”⁴ especially relevant in a contemporary México marked by mass femicide and transfemicide.

Finally, I explore the idea of queer grief community. I start off with a theoretical discussion in dialogue with Douglas Crimp’s canonical essays “Mourning and Militancy” and “How to Have Promiscuity in an Epidemic,” remaining cautious of how “queer” can also be leveraged against racialized, disabled, immigrant, and other Othered subjects for

racial capitalist ends. I then move to a close reading of Almodóvar’s obituary of Chavela, who considered Almodóvar her “soulmate.” Originally drawn into Chavela’s music, Almodóvar’s erotic obituary reflects the fleshy relationality Chavela forges with her public. In other words, her voice transcends the stage and creates material and multimodal relationalities with her listeners.

Throughout the essay, I reflect on how my own queer ears and heart have been called forth, disrupted, and healed by Chavela’s voice. As a queer spectator and “audience” member to Vargas’s performances of grief and the erotic, I recognize, as Laura Gutiérrez argues, that “queer performative interventions . . . propel the spectator into a parallel process of unmasking hegemonic social and cultural systems.”⁵ As I consider what Vargas tells us about grief and the erotic, I implicate myself and my own grief. In so doing, I have tried to interrogate the “hegemonic social and cultural systems” that mediate, sanitize, and pathologize my grieving process, participating queerly, erotically, and enthusiastically in Chavela’s postmortem politics. The autoethnographic asides I include in the essay reinforce Gutiérrez’s queer performative methodology, triggering an “unsettling [of] comforts within the otherwise rigid and conventional ways of producing scholarship.”⁶

GRIEF, MADNESS, AND THE (DIS)COMFORT OF QUEER LISTENING: A BRIEF METHODOLOGICAL NOTE

In grief, as in queerness, it is impossible to separate the personal from the academic. I therefore attempt to not write *against*, but rather write *with* the forms that grief takes, much like La Marr Jurelle Bruce’s “mad methodology,” which he describes as “a mad ensemble of epistemological modes, political praxes, interpretive techniques, affective dispositions, existential orientations, and ways of life that . . . defy the grammars of Reason.”⁷ For this reason, I have chosen song/performance, film cameo, and obituary as my primary source materials, a methodological approach similar to S. de la Mora and M. S. Gaytán’s in their study of queer *ranchera* singer Lucha Reyes (whom Chavela was influenced by).⁸ Performance and sound perhaps most directly represent Chavela’s relationship with grief and the erotic. The film cameo serves a different purpose: as an interpretive and visual form that reflects how she interpellates her audience, in this case filmmakers, cameos insert Chavela’s voice into a new imaginative space, re-narrativizing the emotional thrust of her music, sometimes even becoming a structuring force within the films she inhabits. Obituary, for its part, shows how the sonic exceeds its own form and infiltrates the textual. Together, and especially for a queer listener/reader, these multiple uses of sound imbue new meaning into Chavela’s music, creating a feedback loop between the filmic, the performative, the sonic, and the textual that magnifies each one.

As most others who write about Chavela, I must also confess/embrace my own personal stakes in writing about her.⁹ The materials I am surveying in this essay, I believe, articulate Chavela’s unique approach to grief and the erotic and how it has touched her spectators. Perhaps more importantly, these were some of the songs, films, and performances that made sense of my own grief; they were the materials that opened my body

and mind back up to the possibilities of the erotic within abject pain. They thus function as a sort of multimodal playlist, sampling, or mixtape that, I hope, speaks to others as much as it spoke to me.

Lastly, I refuse to claim emotional distance or the false security of objectivity when writing about Chavela, and, like Dau Dauder and Melissa Ruiz Trejo I am invested in the “epistemic value” of emotions.¹⁰ The power of Chavela Vargas lies in what she invokes in those who listen to her raspy voice and teary *gritos* (shouts), who witness the *guiños* (winks) that gesture toward the possibility of the erotic alongside abject pain. To write about Chavela Vargas is to be implicated in her suffering and pleasure, to admit that her voice makes you *feel* something, and then to acknowledge that that feeling is *knowledge*. This approach invariably generates discomfort, as the very tenets of knowledge and the very forms of “academic” writing are suspended. But, as Sara Ahmed reminds us with her notion of “generative discomfort,” to be in a state of discomfort is to “inhabit norms differently” and to “embrace a lack of ease with the available scripts for living and loving, along with an excitement in the face of the uncertainty of where the discomfort may take us.”¹¹ In this sense, as I think alongside Chavela Vargas, I will remain attuned to what her feelings are saying, and how I hear her queerly, understanding the sound of her feelings not as inconsequential but as theory and praxis, in line with what Tanana Athabaskan scholar Dian Million proposes through her methodology of “felt theory,” which opposes “Western science’s wet dream of detached corporeality.”¹²

I pause briefly here to explain what I mean, by returning to the “(dis)comfort” of the personal. I began to listen—to really listen—to Chavela Vargas in the weeks after the sudden and violent death of my younger sister. Soon after my sister’s death, a relationship that was important to me began to end, the other person retreating into silence and leaving me to put together the pieces of my multiply shattered heart. In Chavela’s voice, I found not light nor truth, clarity nor comfort, but a scraping, unnerving, and unsettling journey into the depths of unfathomable pain. I realize now that that was exactly where I needed to be. As everyone around me offered their advice about how to move forward and rebuild, Chavela carried me into her caverns of pain and solitude. Hers was the only voice that gave me comfort because she was the only one willing to go there, the only one willing to grieve obsessively and unflinchingly, the only one whose voice was as raspy as my own from weeks of tears and insomnia. And, in her boldest display of postmortem politics, Chavela projected her pain outward, interpellating audiences far and wide and implicating her public in the pain that, in many ways, they had inflicted on her, for daring to love and fuck women, for clearing the *ranchera* of its heteromasculinist grip on the emotions of a nation, for grieving without discarding the erotic but rather encompassing it within sadness, abandon, loss, and desire. I envied her political power as I struggled to find my own words. As a queer person, the erotic is too important to my understanding of myself and my affective habitat to leave it to the side as I navigate the other, more difficult valences of emotion. As Audre Lorde writes, “Our erotic knowledge empowers us, becomes a lens through which we scrutinize all aspects of our existence, forcing us to evaluate those aspects honestly in terms of their relative meaning in our life.”¹³ Why limit

the erotic to pleasure and ecstasy when it can equally enliven the abject, the painful, the seemingly impossible?

Therefore, as Chavela has done through her art, I hope to consider a different sonic and embodied path forward for those of us who are grieving, recognizing that, in the words of Costa Rican-American educational scholar Anna Ríos-Rojas, “perhaps our hearts must break in order for us to *feel* an otherwise, to jar us out of the lull and false security that certain seeming ‘innocent’ narratives work to reproduce . . . and move us to dig deep, to feel our struggle for greater justice.”¹⁴ In this sense, I am interested in how Chavela Vargas leaves *pistas* (hints) for a more expansive form of sonic healing, an exercise that is deeply indebted to queer-of-color, decolonial, Black feminist, disabled, and trans-feminist scholars, thinkers, friends, and creators, whose voices are in dialogue with Chavela in this essay and whose forging of different paths forward has not only made this essay possible but has also expanded my own grieving process. I propose—in dialogue with Chavela Vargas—an embrace of “*cogiendo en luto*” (fucking in grief) as a postmortem politics and a sonic healing and grieving praxis in which the erotic is not sliced away, but centralized, re-membered, and honored. “*Cogiendo en luto*” is orgasmic in all senses of the word. And yet it transcends and exceeds the physical act of “*cogiendo*.” It borrows from all the sensations of *cogiendo*, as Chavela does in her music (chaos, pain, pleasure, vulnerability, creativity) and also borrows from all the sensations of *luto* (intensity, deep sadness, empathy, obsessive melancholy, nostalgia, etc.), funneling them into a lens through which to grieve, feel, cry, embrace, and maybe resurrect. As I will show in this essay, part of this praxis is the queer grief community forged between Chavela and her audience that amplifies the possibilities for the erotic within grief. This fleshy, real-time relationality is not without its limitations, but nevertheless it allows for an affirmative, capacious, and chaotic sense of togetherness amid the isolation and abandon of grief.

SEXILE AND RESETTLEMENT IN “NO SOY DE AQUÍ NI SOY DE ALLÁ”

“Los mexicanos nacemos donde se nos da la rechingada gana” (we Mexicans are born wherever the hell we want to be)

– Chavela Vargas

Widely considered a Mexican singer (with Mexican citizenship) throughout her career, Chavela Vargas embodied and performed—while also refashioning—some of the most important legacies of sonic *mexicanidad*. Though México “claimed” Chavela and Chavela “claimed” México, it is both uncommon and important to remark on Vargas’ status as a queer migrant, or *sexiliada*, born María Isabel Anita Carmén de Jesús Vargas Lizano in Heredia, Costa Rica, to a conservative, rural family in 1919. As Latina music and performance studies scholar Lorena Alvarado writes, not only does “identifying [Chavela’s] subjectivity as a (queer) migrant oblige us to contend with histories of migration from Central America to Mexico,”¹⁵ it also obliges us to contend with the social death that Costa Rica enacted upon Chavela, which (arguably) lasted until 1975 when Chavela returned to Costa Rica for the first time to perform.¹⁶ In other words, nationality, for

Chavela, was a matter of life and death, made clearer when, as Alvarado recounts, Chavela referred to Costa Rica as “the country where she would place all suicidal people.”¹⁷

The conservative, rural milieu in which Chavela was raised, and where her *marimacho* (butch) inclinations and performances were sanctioned and chastised at a very young age, further underscore how Costa Rica “killed” her queerness, whereas México, where she arrived via Cuba in 1937, offered the possibility of (erotic) life. Therefore, as Alvarado¹⁸ and Ana Alonso-Minutti¹⁹ argue, it is important to read Chavela’s migratory subjectivity as constitutive of her musical repertoire. I would also add that Chavela’s severance from Costa Rica represents an initial and geopolitical moment of grief, which is subsequently re-signified by the erotic. As we will see in Chavela’s performance of “No soy de aquí si soy de allá,” the “loss” of home and family is always negotiated and negotiable, morphs over time, and allows for the possibility of “home” to be recovered through identificatory²⁰ and disidentificatory²¹ practices. Therefore, it is critical to strip “loss” of its psychoanalytic association with “lack,” and its popular association with negativity. While it may encompass grief, loss of the nation, for many queer people and *sexiliadxs* (sexiles), is more complicated than it is for sexual- and gender-conforming subjects.

Much of the foundational writing on the subject of exile frames it as a site for mourning. Edward Said, for example, in his essay “Reflections on Exile,” follows this melancholic approach. For him, exile is an “unhealable rift” characterized by “the crippling sorrow of estrangement.”²² In her equally important exilic essay, “We Refugees,” Hannah Arendt reflects on the loss of language, which is accompanied by a loss of the “naturalness of reactions, the simplicity of gestures, the unaffected expressions of feelings.”²³ Arendt’s and Said’s writings are deeply imbricated in the types of exile they experienced: the Jewish Holocaust and the ongoing occupation of Palestine. Pessimism as a response to mass violence, death, and attrition is not only understandable, but reflective of the psychic toll that uninhibited death-making takes on those who witness it. Nevertheless, Said and Arendt take for granted various aspects of exile: that the exilic community doesn’t also exile certain nonconforming members; that “the naturalness” of reactions, gestures, and feelings is universally natural for all exiles within an exilic community; and that exile is always about “overcoming the crippling sorrow of estrangement.”

Another, more optimistic understanding of exile glorifies and romanticizes it as a site of creativity and nomadism. In the words of Roger Bartra, the child of privileged Spanish exiles who resettled in México, exile is “liberating from the moment persecuted people succeed in arriving to a territory where they are able to elude pursuit.”²⁴ Roberto Bolaño, exiled during the Pinochet dictatorship in Chile, similarly questions the meaning of origin when even the “utopia” of origin is wrapped up in pain and trauma: “Can you be nostalgic for a land where you were at the point of dying? Can you be nostalgic about the poverty, intolerance, arrogance, of injustice? For the exiled writer their only real homeland is their library, a library that can be on a shelf or within their own memory.”²⁵ Bartra’s romanticization of exile and Bolaño’s nomadic “library,” however, assume that origin is unimportant and that the country of exile is always already accepting. This rendering of exile assumes whiteness, heteronormativity, class privilege, and an irrevocable fissure with one’s community of origin. Certain exiles may not want to abandon the

community of origin if it provides spiritual, racial, ethnic, or political belonging; similarly, many exiles will not find “liberation” in the racism, xenophobia, and homo/transphobia of the countries to which they flee.

Norma Mogrovejo, an Ecuadorian *sexiliada* living in México, offers an approximation to the erotic and sexual dimensions of exile that are uniquely helpful when thinking about Chavela’s oeuvre and migratory subjectivity. Mogrovejo argues that “sexile presents itself as . . . the right to difference and dissidence.”²⁶ I am particularly interested in Mogrovejo’s inclusion of “the right to difference and dissidence,” because *la disidencia* is an experience foundational to queer exiles’ navigation of both their (utopic) “homes” and in their host countries. As mentioned above, the “right to difference and dissidence” is not always guaranteed for racialized migrants in white supremacist, capitalist, English-centric spaces in the Americas like Canada and the United States, to which many Latin American migrants (are forced to) flee. As an 18-year-old, Spanish-speaking, queer, brown exile without family support or job training, it is possible to speculate that if Chavela had chosen the United States over México to pursue a musical career, she would not have experienced the success she ultimately did throughout her long life. Her iconic (and dissident) relationship with Latin American musical styles would have been unlikely in a racist, homophobic, and chauvinistic midcentury US context.

As Alvarado points out,²⁷ the United States is often assumed to be the safest space for queer migrants in the Americas, and it is significant that México—perhaps unwittingly—grants Chavela the right to *disidencia*, contesting the routing of queer futurity toward the United States and the Global North. As narrated in Catherine Gund and Daresha Kyi’s biopic *Chavela*, México’s cultural and political renown captivates Chavela and urges her to move there at a time when millions were migrating further north to the United States.²⁸ It is because she is in México and not elsewhere that she is able to occupy the masculinist musical traditions of the *ranchera* and *bolero*, transforming them into overtly dissident expressions of lesbianness. Replicating the *estilo bravío* pioneered by early 20th-century queer Mexican singer Lucha Reyes, which uses a “pugnacious form and delivery” to challenge the “dominant masculine musical arrangements” that characterized most genres of post-revolutionary Mexican music,²⁹ Chavela also adds her own *toque*, or touch: she changes the pronouns in many of her songs to specify woman-to-woman contact or leaves the pronouns unmarked (which Lucha Reyes did not do), and she imbues a more exaggerated sense of *dolor* (pain) and the erotic through raspy, wailing, and shrieky vocals and sexualizing gestures and vocal inflections.

Gesture, costume, and Chavela’s off-stage image also matter here, magnifying what her voice transmits: swinging arms, swaggering, talking tough; wearing *jorongos*, or *serapes*, which were typically only worn by men; seducing the wives of Mexican politicians and cultural elites; heavy drinking, debauchery, and heartbreak are just a few examples of how Chavela extends the gender and sexual deviance of the *estilo bravío*. As she gets older and especially following the “Chavelazo,” Chavela’s voice becomes more tired, raspy, and shaky, as if singing into the melancholy hours of an all-night / all-male cantina bender or carrying, sonically, the weight of the grief she experienced throughout her life—the abandonment of her family and her separation from her home country, the death of her

close friend and *ranchera* mentor José Alfredo Jiménez in 1973, heartbreak(s), the severance from her audience during her years of solitude and alcoholism, etc. Focusing on Chavela’s “lateness” (and the fact that she became popular in her 40s and again in her 80s), Alvarado points out the ableism and ageism that Chavela’s embodied performances resist, writing that they “challenge the normativity of neglect and the denial of sexuality and sensuality to older bodies.”³⁰ For Alvarado, her choice to incorporate Indigenous auralities and instruments (such as teponatzlis, conchas, and Rarámuri drums), and her designation as a *chamana* by the Wiráxica tribe, also function as a decolonial tribute that “reimagines an ‘idyllic’ Indigenous imaginary through a catastrophic lens evoking contemporary land and ethnic conflict.”³¹ This assemblage of the sonic, the instrumental, the offstage/personal, and the performative amplifies the subversion(s) of Chavela’s already masculinizing contralto vocals, claiming space on- and offstage for butch lesbian subjectivity within genres like the *ranchera*, which “promoted aspects of idealized *mexicanidad* from a male point of view” and whose songs were written by and for men.³² Her sexilic location in México—with its musical traditions, networks, performance spaces—is thus essential to Chavela’s persona and fame.

The new meaning that Chavela imbues into *mexicanidad* and the space she claims for brown, aging, lesbian, and migrant subjectivity converts grief for the “loss” of Costa Rica into a radical sonic project oriented toward erotic futurity in México. Chavela’s post-mortem politics following the “death” of her Costa Rican self refuses the deterministic pessimism of exile-as-always-loss because the erotic is gained upon departure; nevertheless, her *sexilio* is not absent of grief. Her *devenir mexicana* granted her a new *patria* and a sense of erotic reprieve, but also became a site of grief, pain, and addiction. Because both grief and the erotic mark Chavela’s early years of *sexilio* in México, they inform her aural and gestural performances of *mexicanidad*. Nowhere is this more evident than in her song “No soy de aquí ni soy de allá,” which was a *milonga* originally written by the Argentine composer Facundo Cabral, who was exiled from Argentina in 1976 and who lived briefly in México soon thereafter.³³ Because the lyrics (reproduced below with annotations) are often changed from performance to performance—an arguably queer practice common to Chavela’s live shows—I will center my analysis on a 2004 duet version that Chavela performed, at age 85, with the Argentine singer La Negra Changa at Luna Park in Buenos Aires. It is worth noting that Chavela was invited to perform in Buenos Aires as part of an exhibition of Olmec artifacts that had recently arrived in Argentina, reflecting her popular association with *lo indígena*. Chavela accepted the invitation on the condition that the concert would be free.

I ask that the reader pause to experience this performance: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pgk_OoMh7fY

Me gusta el sol, y la mujer cuando llora
 Las golondrinas y las malas señoras
 Abrir balcones, y abrir las ventanas / Abrir balcones, y subir paredes
 Y las muchachas en abril
Me gusta el vino tanto como las flores (La Negra Changa)

Y los amantes (ay ay ay!—Chavela)

Pero no los señores

Me encanta ser amiga de los ladrones / El pan casero y la voz de dolores

Y las canciones en francés / Y el mar mojándome los pies

No soy de aquí, ni soy de allá

No tengo edad ni porvenir

Y ser feliz es mi color de identidad

No soy de aquí, ni soy de allá (ambas)

No tengo edad ni porvenir (ambas)

Y ser feliz es mi color de identidad (ambas)

Me gusta estar tirada siempre en la arena

O en bicicleta perseguir a Manuela

Con todo el tiempo para ver las estrellas

Con la María en el trigal

No soy de aquí, ni soy de allá

No tengo edad ni porvenir

Y ser feliz es mi color de identidad

No soy de aquí, ni soy de allá (ambas)

No tengo edad ni porvenir (ambas)

Y ser feliz es mi color de identidad (ambas)³⁴

There are many obvious sapphic overtones: Chavela boldly expresses her desire for “las malas señoras” (bad women); her direct reference to “sus amantes, pero no los señores” (her lovers, but not men), which was not in the original Facundo Cabral version; “ser feliz” (gay) “es mi color de identidad” (being happy is my color of identity);, etc. Sung by a *lesbiana sexiliada*, Cabral’s “No soy de aquí ni soy de allá” isn’t purely about exile and nomadism as it was in his own life, but instead denotes the placelessness of queerness, in which both *aquí y allá* (Costa Rica and México) are not necessarily home. “En bicicleta a perseguir a Manuela” (pursuing Manuela on a bike) similarly does not conjure a halcyon image of the bearded and masculine Cabral pursuing a (presumably) attractive young Manuela, but instead conjures the image of Chavela pursuing a potential lover. “No tengo edad” (I have no age) signals Alvarado’s points about Chavela’s embrace of the sensuality of older age,³⁵ and “ni porvenir” (nor future) is a lackadaisical embrace of queer love without the worry of future consequences. “Las muchachas en abril” (girls in April), a month of rain (wetness) and fertility (sexuality), can be read as an embrace of vaginal excess. Additionally, Chavela’s revision of “abrir balcones” (open balconies) to “subir paredes” (climb over walls) signifies the climbing of walls in the era of the US/México border fence, supporting Alvarado’s and Alonso-Minutti’s assertions of Chavela’s political intimacy with racialized migrants who pass through México from Centroamérica. The celebratory tone of the song is an embrace of the creative and erotic potential of the interstice: the melancholy and liminality of placelessness becomes a wet potentiality in which the border, the “not here and not there,” is not only queered but made erotic, cunnic, and sardonic. Though the idea of an erotic border would sound absurd to migrants attempting to reach the United States, Chavela nevertheless uses humor and

queerness to denaturalize and mock the rigid and arbitrary assignments of nationality that determine material resources in the racial capitalist and imperialist world-system. To be “neither from here nor there” does not signify loss of origin and destination, but rather a natural and desirable condition of liminality.

The erotic force of “No soy de aquí” lies in Chavela’s suggestive sonic and corporeal performance. If we understand queer gesture as Juana María Rodríguez does—that is, to “mark the paucity of others’ commitment to make sexuality seen, to make gender a spectacle of deliberate design”³⁶—then Chavela’s *guiños*, smiles, and corporeality exude an excess of sexuality that imbues new meaning into the song’s lyrics. At the song’s beginning, Chavela smiles suggestively and slows down “me gusta la muuuujer cuando llora” (I like a woman when she cries). She pauses as her audience applauds and cheers; I too, smile along with Chavela, my queer ears knowing what she means. After this moment of acceptance by the crowd, Chavela’s voice cracks with ecstasy, her large smile audibly affecting her singing. When she arrives at “muchachas en abril,” she holds her teeth together and extends “muchaaaachas,” imbuing it with sensuality and smiling again. When La Negra Changa sings “los amantes pero no los señores,” Chavela chimes in with an “ay ay,” queering La Negra Changa’s heterosexual presence with a *grito* usually reserved for men. When she arrives at the chorus, she points down with the index fingers of both hands as she says “no soy de aquí,” and gestures indifferently behind her when she sings “ni soy de allá,” perhaps reflecting her complicated relationship with Costa Rica. She then raises both of her arms in an iconic and priestly gesture that asks the audience to take her how she is: queer, old, and erotic. At “y ser feliz es mi color de identidad,” Chavela smiles to the sky in an all-knowing gesture toward the ecstasy of the erotic. The lower melody of Chavela’s repetition of the chorus, now accompanied by La Negra Changa in higher pitch, signals a butch-femme relationality, further queering the song.

Arguably one of the most powerfully erotic images transmitted by Chavela appears when she sings “me gusta estar tirada en la arena” (I like to be splayed out on the sand). Chavela suggestively raises her eyebrows multiple times, appears to flip her hair in an atypical display of femme-ininity, and silently giggles, bringing her hand to her mouth flirtatiously. These gestures invoke in “those who know” the collapsed boundaries of sex; Chavela’s (stone?) butch walls are let down and we imagine her on a moonlit beach vulnerably embracing another woman, giggling as she is seduced. Toward the end of the song, Chavela lowers her voice and, with her hands, asks the audience to sing along. Here, she is implicating her audience in her queer ecstasy, enveloping them in the queerness of placelessness. The song ends with voracious applause—Chavela has seduced Luna Park, transforming Cabral’s heteronormative *milonga* into a celebration of queer *sexilio*.

Similar to Chavela’s placing of her hands over her vagina when she sings “Ponme la mano aquí, Macorina” in her performance of “Macorina,”³⁷ gesture functions in her music as a way of speaking wordlessly, allowing her to exude excessively queer sensuality while avoiding the restrictive language of “coming out” (which Chavela didn’t “officially” do until the later years of her life). However, unlike “Macorina,” “No soy de aquí” considers geography alongside the erotic, vocalizing and performing Chavela’s own *sexilio*. Furthermore, because “No soy de aquí,” along with many of her other songs, draws on

folkloric music traditions beyond México and across Latinoamérica, Chavela transforms both *mexicanidad* and *latinidad*, reclaiming them as her own in spite of their lesbophobia. The applause, interaction, laughter, and ecstasy of her public during her performance of “No soy de aquí” are evidence of the success of this daring queer performative intervention.

POSTMORTEM POLITICS OF THE CHAVELAZO: QUEER FAILURE AND CAÍDAS

The celebratory tone of “No soy de aquí ni soy de allá,” and Chavela’s erotic recovery of nationhood, represent a divergence from the more yearning and aching affects for which she is most known. The outspoken lyrical melancholy of the *ranchera*, and her raspy, wailing, and weeping appropriations of the genre, sometimes accompanied only by a guitar, displays an atmosphere of painful and solitary grief. The lighting on stage during Chavela’s performances tends to magnify this intense sonic grief to communicate a visual code of isolation: Chavela is often alone, her band relegated to the background, the rest of the stage submerged in darkness, except for a tender spotlighting of Chavela. Once described as the “eternal lament of the South American plateau,” Chavela’s performative interventions project a deep sadness that, when understood within the biographical context of her own life, explains why, as Alonso-Minutti contends, Chavela’s “voice has been perceived as a symbol of her authentic feelings.”³⁸

Given that heavy drinking by women was taboo in 20th-century México, it was transgressive for Chavela to incorporate alcohol use into her music and performances. However, as the grief and loss narrated in her songs became her lived reality, her use of alcohol shifted in valence: originally a queer gesture and act of performative transgression similar to her foremother Lucha Reyes who also incorporated alcohol into her performances and music, alcohol, for Chavela, became a barrier to her ability to perform in the ways her audience and agents demanded. As narrated in *Chavela*, starting in the 1970s—following the death of her mentor, the popular *ranchera* singer José Alfredo Jiménez, and after many years of minor fame—Chavela slipped further and further away from the public’s gaze.³⁹ She performed less and “fell” deeper into alcoholism. In her own words, Chavela remarked: “I lost 12 years to alcohol. I was separated from everything and immersed in a terrifying world.”⁴⁰ As her alcoholism began to affect her personal relationships, such as with her partner Alicia Pérez Duarte, she was thrust into a period of deep sadness. However, I believe that Chavela’s *caída*—understood by her public to be a form of death—was, in reality, a period of intense creativity and alive-ness. Though I do argue that her return to fame—el Chavelazo—represents a postmortem politics in large part because both Chavela and her public considered her “dead,”⁴¹ I want to think critically and generously about the association of substance abuse and mental health crises with death. On the other hand, following La Marr Jurelle Bruce, it is also important to refuse both the blithe romanticization of substance abuse and its “flattening into mere metaphor for resistance.”⁴² Substance (ab)use obviously can have substantial corporeal and psychic impacts on its victims. Nevertheless, to associate death with living subjects who are

struggling, loving, creating, fucking, and feeling while they are using negates their humanity.

My understanding of this is personal. Though I did not struggle with substance abuse, and thus cannot speak to some of the particularities of Chavela's experience, my grief-induced "caída" and retreat into solitude, though painful, became a period of profound contemplation, reflection, and eroticism. What may have appeared on the outside to be a type of "social death" by my friends and family was a period of interior alive-ness. Listening queerly to her voice and witnessing her gestures and vocals in post-Chavelazo performances, I suspect and speculate that Chavela may have experienced at least a degree of what I experienced, during her 12 years of alcoholism and depression: a capacious erotic alive-ness within states of alone-ness and grief that would operate as a source of inspiration and creativity in an unfolding future.

It is worth noting that Chavela's retreat from the stage, and the ways in which the nation and its public abandoned and forgot about her, reflect a logic of consumption in which women celebrities are discarded as soon as their value is extracted. This is reflected in the many popular accounts of Chavela's public believing her to be literally dead during her years of alcoholism and solitude.⁴³ More importantly, Chavela's expression of grief was unrecognized and uncared for by her public, and by her nation, because alcoholism, queerness, and butch-ness represented behaviors antithetical to national womanhood (even despite her popularity within México). Chavela was "dead," but not grievable.

This dynamic of "grievability" is wonderfully explicated by Judith Butler in their book *Frames of War: When Is Life Grievable?* For Butler, public grief is reserved for those whose lives matter, which is often determined by the state. If grievability "precedes and makes possible the apprehension of the living being as living," then those who are "ungrievable" were never living in the first place, cast outside the state or seen as antithetical to its political futurity.⁴⁴ The result is a hierarchy of grief: those at the bottom—or excluded altogether from the nation-state—are tasked with creating different forms of grief that occur outside of the timescales, governing logics, and sexual politics of nation-states, or other repressive entities that Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari would refer to as "Despotic signifiers."⁴⁵ Though *Frames of War* is primarily focused on the politics of grief after 9/11 in the United States, it is instructive for understanding Chavela's "ungrievability." While it is true that in the later years of her life México claimed Chavela and publicly mourned her death, at this critical earlier period in her life, she was abandoned: the lesbophobic, masculinist state was unwilling to incorporate Chavela's *disidencias*, unwilling to grieve her, or grieve alongside her, in the same way that Middle Eastern, Palestinian, and immigrant lives were "ungrievable" during the United States' so-called War on Terror, or even in the way that migrant lives and femicide and transfemicide victims' lives are "ungrievable" in contemporary México.

Feeling, loving, fucking, grieving, and existing outside of state-sanctioned "grievability" requires a different and dissident postmortem politics. As Ahmed argues, a "queer politics of grief needs to allow others, those whose losses are not recognized by the nation, to have the space and time to grieve, rather than grieving for those others, or even asking the nation to grieve for them."⁴⁶ Ahmed's queer feelings and queer politics of grief ask for

a disruption of the timescale of capitalist productivity in order to sit with the spacetime of grief. Writing about Nina Simone, a contemporary of Chavela whose status as a Black, radical popular singer⁴⁷ made her equally ungrievable in the eyes of the white supremacist US nation-state, La Marr Jurelle Bruce introduces the concept of “depressive time.” Bruce argues that “depressive temporality . . . opens up a nook and makes precious time for resting in sadness . . . that allows aggrieved subjects to mobilize their sorrow, ironically loitering within it.”⁴⁸ Through her “lateness,” Chavela inhabits the norms of age, beauty, and femininity differently than others. Her slower, sadder, and more sorrowful “depressive time” produces provocative and forceful acts of creation late in life that refuse both the logic of constant production under capitalism and the heteronormative and ableist sexual politics of adulthood.⁴⁹ Furthermore, for disability scholars Robert McCruer and Anna Mollow “disability . . . has the potential to transform sex, creating confusions about what and who is sexy and sexualizable, what counts as sex, what desire ‘is.’”⁵⁰ Performing the same erotic melodies and gestures in a wheelchair in the latter years of her life, and singing about depression and alcoholism, Chavela “transforms sex” and reclaims sexuality and the erotic for the old, the brown, the disabled, the queer, the grieving, the sad.

Depressive time, then, permits the public acts of eroticism that Chavela continues to perform up until her death at age 93. By embracing grief and the erotic in her music and “slowing down” the timescale of her fame, Chavela “mobilizes her sorrow” and “ironically loiters in it.”⁵¹ Chavela’s years of “death” were, in fact, fundamental to her postmortem politics because upon her return she mobilized her sadness into an erotic politics of grief. The “failure” of alcoholism and lack of production in the eyes of capitalism, her “failure” to be a biological mother and an *abuelita* in late life, and her erotic return to the stage at an age when women, if they had careers, were supposed to retire into domesticity, is what Jack Halberstam calls a “queer failure,” a complicated but often joyous experience in which “gender failure . . . means being relieved of the pressure to measure up to patriarchal ideals . . . [offering] unexpected pleasures.”⁵² Chavela’s “failure” and her direct experience with the subjects she sings about imbue forceful meaning into her erotic politics of grief once she returns to the stage and challenges what it means to “die”, grieve, and be grieved. As Alvarado writes, “Posthumous and living, not dead in life, [Chavela’s] catastrophe is not a tragedy but a call to turn and notice what we’ve presumed to be gone, dead, or disappeared.”⁵³ I ask us to turn away from Chavela’s *caída* and her addiction as a spectacle to laugh at, pity, or mourn, and instead to view these years as deeply, painfully, creatively, and erotically alive, and as a challenge to the capitalist and gendered mandates of time. Operating at once on crip time,⁵⁴ mad (melancholic, depressive) time,⁵⁵ and queer time,⁵⁶ Chavela’s queer performative interventions extend and unsettle our sense of grief and its temporalities, charting a deviant route away from the stultifying and unattainable conventions of linear, progressive, and “*caída*-less” ascent associated with what Bruce calls Western Standard Time.

Chavela’s appearances in film cameos reflect her queer performative interventions on stage while also drawing out and embellishing the meaning of her persona. In Julie Taymor’s *Frida* (2002) and Pedro Almodóvar’s autobiographical *Dolor y gloria*

(2019), Chavela’s music enters as the protagonists are experiencing a *caída* of their own. Importantly, Chavela’s voice represents an inflection point in both films’ narratives, pulling the protagonists out of their grief and pushing them toward a resurgence of eroticism. When 83-year-old Chavela, well into her Chavelazo, appears in *Frida*, Diego Rivera has just told Frida (played by Salma Hayek) he wants a divorce, after which she goes to a cantina to drink tequila in sorrow. The bar darkens as the guitar intro to “La Llorona” plays, a Mexican folk song about an Indigenous woman abandoned by a Spanish conquistador. Chavela Vargas appears first as a masked “llorona” and then in a somber black dress, aging, wrinkled, old, and wise, her voice cracking with the effects of age (wisdom?) yet not any less powerful or biting. She pours Frida (but not herself) a glass of tequila and begins to sing a harrowing and livening rendition of “La Llorona,” the lyrics of which are reproduced below.

I ask the reader to pause and watch a clip from the film: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kqUSiM-BU_4

Todos me dicen el negro Llorona
 Negro, pero cariñoso
 Todos me dicen el negro Llorona
 Negro, pero cariñoso
 Yo soy como el chile verde llorona
 Picante pero sabroso
 Yo soy como el chile verde, llorona
 Picante pero sabroso
 Ay de mí llorona, llorona
 Llorona, llévame al río
 Tápame con tu rebozo llorona
 Porque me muero de frío
 Si porque te quiero, quieres, llorona
 Quieres que te quiera más,
 Si ya te he dado la vida, llorona
 Qué más quieres, quieres más

It is worth pointing out, as Latin American film and literary critic Sofía Ruiz-Alfaro cogently argues, that US-born (and heterosexual) Taymor’s *Frida* imposes a compulsory heterosexuality on Frida’s character—and by virtue, Chavela’s—by revolving the plot around Frida’s male lovers. The film relegates homoeroticism to the margin and erases the five-year romantic, emotional, and artistic relationship that Chavela shared with Frida as narrated in Chavela’s autobiography, as well as Frida’s other lesbian relationships.⁵⁷ Though Taymor pushes their relationship to the margins, the margin can still be a ripe site for the imagining of lesbian desire in the film. For the queer viewer who is “in the know” about Chavela and Frida’s romance, Chavela’s performance of “La Llorona” is laden with both Eros and Thanatos and exudes powerful homoerotic meaning that operates against the film’s malestream Hollywood gaze. I concur with Alonso-Minutti, who writes that in this cameo “Chavela is affirming Frida as La Llorona: a weeping woman, unapologetically sexual, meandering in solitude, enduring exorbitant pain, yet

resolute and determined to remain standing.”⁵⁸ Chavela’s gestures in the performance lend credence to Alonso-Minutti’s analysis and serve to remind the fictionalized Frida that Chavela “le ha dado la vida” (has given her life). I interpret “life” here as erotic life, or erotic sustenance in grief, given to Frida while the two were lovers.

In the buildup to the powerful final lines of the song, Chavela shouts and her voice cracks with emotion. When she sings “ay de mí, llorona, llorona,” (oh my, llorona, llorona), she smiles knowingly, as if remembering her assignations with Frida when she was younger. When she sings “llévame al río” (bring me to the river), her voice softens and sexualizes “río,” signaling a wet site, ripe for the erotic. Chavela’s tonality shifts after this and Frida crushes a glass picture of Diego, symbolically severing her tie with him and, effectively, taking Chavela’s advice to move on, erotically and creatively. A tear runs down Frida’s face when Chavela sings “si porque te quiero, quieres, llorona, quieres que te quiera más” (if, because I love you, you want, llorona, you want me to love you more). As the song ends with the murder-by-ice-pick of León Trotsky, the film transitions into an image of Frida having just finished her famous painting *Las dos Fridas* (1939).

The remaining scenes in the film document Frida’s final years of immense creativity and pain. Though Chavela’s presence is undoubtedly sexual, I also want to understand the erotic as Audre Lorde does—as not always “sexual,” but also creative and liberating: “For, as we begin to recognize our deepest feelings, we begin to give up, of necessity, being satisfied with our suffering and self-negation.”⁵⁹ The “creative power” that Lorde associates with the erotic is what a now older and wiser Chavela transmits to a young Frida, urging her away from the asceticism of self-abnegation and toward an excess of the erotic, a move she performs through voice, gesture, and sound.

Interestingly, Chavela plays a similar role in another film addressing grief, queerness, and the erotic: though she appears only briefly, Chavela’s cameo in Spanish filmmaker Pedro Almodóvar’s *Dolor y gloria* is laden with meaning and reflects Almodóvar’s strong kinship with her. In an interview for Gund and Kyi’s *Chavela*, Almodóvar reflects on the many Chavela cameos in his world-renowned films (*La flor de mi secreto*, *Kika*, *Julietta*): “It’s as if the character were still speaking... her lyrics reflect the essence of what’s happening in the film.” After meeting Chavela in Spain in 1992 while she was on tour, Almodóvar played a significant role in facilitating her resurgence.⁶⁰ He organized Chavela’s performance at the Olympia in Paris and introduced her at Bellas Artes in México in the 1990s and early 2000s, two venues that Chavela had wanted (but was never able) to perform at. It is unsurprising, then, that Almodóvar’s films, of which the autobiographic *Dolor y gloria* is an especially prime example, reflect what was ultimately a close and erotic relationship between the two (a point I will return to in this essay’s final section).

Dolor y gloria, premiering in 2019, seven years after Chavela’s death at age 93, follows the renowned filmmaker Salvador Mallo (loosely a stand-in for Almodóvar himself) played by Antonio Banderas as he struggles with addiction in the present and reflects on his past, grieving both his recently dead mother and his inability to create. Aesthetically, it operates on “depressive time,” in Bruce’s terms,⁶¹ with subdued, pastel colors, melancholic dialogue, and a lack of the melodrama and action that characterize many of

Almodóvar's other films. Toward the end of the film *Salvador*, struggling to recover his creativity and in emotional flux, writes an autobiographical screenplay called "Adicción" that an actor with whom he had previously worked performs (excising any reference to Mallo from the performance so that it is "anonymous" to a public that would otherwise be familiar with the filmmaker). The play narrates a queer relationship with "Marcelo," who struggled with addiction to *caballo* (heroin) as Salvador became a famous filmmaker. In the play, the actor performs a monologue recounting Salvador and Marcelo's travels to the Ivory Coast, Cuba, and México, his eyes filling with tears as he remembers "México DF,⁶² Marcelo and I drunk, listening to Chavela Vargas singing 'La noche de mi amor.'" Chavela's voice suddenly fills the theatre, wavering and powerful: "Quieeero la alegría de un barco volviendo, mil campaaanas de gloria tañendo" (I want the happiness of a boat returning, a thousand glorious bells clanging). She is shouting, as she usually does in the song, but inserted into the narrative as an affective memory of México DF, her voice—its melancholy and nostalgia alongside the happy and erotic images of "a thousand glorious bells clanging"—captures visually and sonically the emotional register of a relationship marked by addiction.

I ask the reader to pause and watch the clip from the film (Chavela's voice enters at around 3:47–4:17): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A8qfMj6igFE>

In the film, the real-life Marcelo—an ex-partner of Salvador named Federico—is filmed attending the play, happening by chance on an advertisement for it while on a short trip to Madrid from Argentina. His eyes water forcefully as the actor narrates the play, experiencing the grief of a bygone relationship, the pain of addiction remembered, and the recognition of his addiction's impact on Salvador, as a source of both grief and creativity: "Fleeing from heroin became my best school . . . in those trips, I found the inspiration to write the stories that years later I would tell . . . and the colors that illuminated them . . . I believed that the force of my love would conquer Marcelo's addiction."

This serendipitous encounter compels Federico to call Salvador, and the two agree to meet up in Salvador's apartment. Deciding what to drink, Salvador suggests tequila: "In honor of Chavela." Federico responds: "When you mentioned it in the monologue I couldn't contain my tears" Salvador: "Tequila for Chavela to celebrate our reunion."

The profoundly erotic scene of the two, alone in Salvador's apartment, continues as they reconnect and reminisce about their relationship. Federico is now married (to a woman), with kids. Salvador is single, and a renowned filmmaker, but sad, addicted to heroin, and distraught. At the end of the scene, Federico and Salvador kiss. Federico proposes that they fuck. Salvador hesitates and denies the proposal, telling Federico, "In whatever case, I'm happy that I still arouse you."

Federico leaves, and in the final scenes of the movie, Salvador recovers his creativity—the play and Federico's presence being the catalyst—and begins to reconsider his relationship with his past as well as his grief over his mother's death. Federico's erotic appearance is catalyzed and supervised by Chavela Vargas and becomes the inflection point for Salvador's personal and artistic journey, signaling Chavela's presence as a figure both of grief and the erotic within Almodóvar's perspicacious understanding of Chavela's

persona. The encounter with Federico encapsulates many of the points I have made thus far in this essay: the “alive-ness” of Federico and Salvador’s relationship while Federico was struggling with a heroin addiction, like Chavela’s relationship with alcohol, signifies erotic possibility within addiction by alluding to the fact that during such a difficult time, not only were Federico and Salvador “cogiendo en luto,” but Salvador was also creating; the binding of grief with the erotic, which, even if Federico and Salvador’s *reencuentro* didn’t end in sex, shows how the erotic is a creative resource in grief; and lastly, Almodóvar creates in this scene a micro-community forged around grief and the erotic that links Federico, Salvador, Chavela, and, non-diegetically, Almodóvar and the viewer together in a healing embrace.

In these cameos, the specter of Chavela is summoned in moments that feel like death. Chavela reminds her queer interlocutors to cultivate the erotic in times of pain and suffering, to not be afraid to *coger en luto*, and to embrace the affects and epistemology of “un cuerpo cogiendo” (a body fucking): openness, intimacy, creativity, passion, flux, adaptation, performance, pleasure, orgasm, etc. In the films, Frida and Salvador experience “Chavelazos” of their own, following in the queer footsteps of their foremother and prophet. It is also worth noting that in Almodóvar’s *La flor de mi secreto* (1995), Chavela is similarly summoned to resuscitate an alcoholic and grieving woman protagonist: after her cameo, the film’s protagonist recovers erotic and creative energy in much the same way that Frida and Salvador do. Though I have chosen to analyze *Frida* and *Dolor y gloria* in depth because of their focus on queer characters, *La flor de mi secreto* also shows how a heterosexual, Spanish woman can be interpellated by Chavela’s practice of *cogiendo en luto*, an intervention that bespeaks Chavela’s ability to intervene in heteronormative spaces. The sound of Chavela’s voice—its sadness, sensuality, and scraping emotion—activates the erotic without discarding grief. That Taymor and Almodóvar both include Chavela at similar moments in their protagonists’ emotional lives is evidence of the transformative possibilities that accompany a sonic wedding of grief and the erotic.

As a queer grieving spectator, the films, for me, offered a new visual life for Chavela’s poignant sounds and performances. Identifying with Frida and Salvador—and with Chavela herself—I felt myself move away from the abjection and abnegation of intense grief, toward transformation, vulnerability, and intimacy. Renarrativized in these two films, Chavela’s music accrued new meaning and, I think, a sense of queer, grieving community, a sensation that I was not alone in wanting to cherish erotic subjectivity amid scraping pain.

QUEER COMMUNITIES OF GRIEF: LIMITS AND POSSIBILITIES

Writing at the peak of the AIDS crisis in 1987, in his essay “How to Have Promiscuity in an Epidemic,” art historian and AIDS activist Douglas Crimp highlights how many (but not all) activist responses to the AIDS epidemic refused to sacrifice the erotic even in the face of the necropolitical, moralizing, and abstinence-centered institutional and public responses to the crisis. While politicians, the media, and advertising agencies preached no sex and animalized gay men and IV drug users, AIDS activists understood not only how

important the erotic is to queer subjectivities, but also how healing and fortifying pleasure can be within grief. Similar to Audre Lorde's understanding of the erotic as a life force, Crimp centralizes pleasure and promiscuity as a source of knowledge of the self and community: "Our promiscuity taught us many things, not only about the pleasures of sex, but about the great multiplicity of those pleasures."⁶³ Importantly, Crimp includes queer women and IV drug users within his understanding of pleasure and grief, who were both ignored due to misogyny and the devaluation of drug users' lives.

Crimp's 1989 essay "Mourning and Militancy" makes similar interventions into the relationship between Eros and Thanatos and how they might engender a sense of community. "Mourning and Militancy" names the loss of a "culture of sexual possibility": "alongside the dismal toll of death," queer men, IV drug users, and other sexual subjects lost "back rooms, tea rooms, bookstores, movie houses, and baths; the trucks, the pier, the rambles, the dunes. Sex was everywhere for us, and everything we wanted to venture: golden showers and water sports, cocksucking and rimming, fucking and fist fucking. Now our untamed impulses are either proscribed once again or shielded from us by latex."⁶⁴ Against the stultifying narratives of ACT-UP, a US-based AIDS awareness and activist group, which excised mourning from activist militancy, Crimp proposes community action that funnels grief into militancy and sexual possibility: "If we understand that violence is able to reap its horrible rewards through the very psychic mechanisms that make us part of this society, then we may also be able to recognize—along with our rage—our terror, our guilt, and our *profound sadness*. Militancy, of course, then, but mourning too: mourning *and* militancy."⁶⁵ Together, these essays see pleasure (the erotic, *cogiendo*, kink, etc.) as fundamental to the queer community. They refuse the mutual exclusivity of mourning and militancy, and vociferously defend the erotic and acknowledge the loss of sexual possibility as grievable. They include lesbians, IV drug users, and trans people as fellow grievers during the AIDS epidemic—and they posit the erotic as a part of the necessary emotional work of mourning.

It should be clear by now that I believe Chavela Vargas should be included in these critical understandings of the relationship between grief and the erotic. As a brown, lesbian woman most associated with *mexicanidad*, Vargas offers a supportive counterexample of queer and erotic community in grief, expanding this small but resolute archive beyond the Global North, where white, gay men held much control over narratives of grief—and thus grievability—during the AIDS epidemic.⁶⁶ As Jafari S. Allen writes, Black queers, for whom "death and nonbeing are imminent realities and not profound theorizations,"⁶⁷ found/find themselves discarded from the "grievability" afforded to homo-normative/nationalist (white) gay men who, now conditionally accepted by the state,⁶⁸ embrace the bourgeois gender and class norms that once excluded them, at the expense of poor, nonconforming, disabled, anti-imperial queers and trans people of color. Rejecting the necropolitical determinism of what he calls a "posthumous futurity," Allen proposes instead for Black queers to "feel deeply. Fight to be seen for the future. And love fuck hate rage laugh work and twirl, alively, in the present."⁶⁹ Chavela interpellates a different audience (sexiliadxs, exiles, migrants, lesbians, *marimachos*, and non-USians), and uses a different (body) language, but ultimately advocates for a similar erotic and celebratory

politics. Women, migrants, and others who identify with Chavela can look to her for erotic guidance in grief, as an alternative to the US-based, white, Anglo communities detailed above.

Nevertheless, as with Crimp's US-centrism, there are limits to whom Chavela's queer and erotic grieving extends. Chavela's frequent references to and appropriations of Indigenous cultures and folklore, her famous use of *jorongos* and *huaraches* on stage and in photographs, and her visual association with Indigeneity arguably romanticize Indigenous Mexican cultures in much the same way that the Mexican government and elites have historically, through a politics of *mestizaje* alongside ongoing dispossession of Indigenous territories and livelihoods. I agree in many ways with Alvarado and Alonso-Minutti, who argue that Chavela does not promote a "racist agenda or an exploitative cultural economy"⁷⁰ and instead "subverts the colonial paradigm of gendered subjecthood by drawing on pre-Columbian epistemologies and by projecting nonbinary gender and sexual practices."⁷¹ However, I do not believe that the absence of a racist agenda or an ostensibly exploitative cultural economy necessarily mean that cultural violence isn't being done. Though writing from the perspective of the United States, Dakota historian Philip Deloria argues that the appropriation of Indigenous cultural customs by outsiders blurs the boundaries between Indigenous communities and the settlers who have foundationally displaced them. Not only do "symbols begin to lose their collective significance," but "symbolic border-crossings of culture and race become so painless that the meanings defined by those boundaries began to disintegrate,"⁷² which becomes especially problematic within capitalist markets where questions of cultural use are "divorced from Indian oversight." Though Chavela Vargas was granted the title of *chamana* by the Wiráxaca, publicly spoke of how Indigenous healers in Costa Rica had saved her life, and included Indigenous auralities in her music at a time when the EZLN was receiving international media attention,⁷³ I hesitate to absolve Chavela entirely of accountability to legacies of cultural appropriation.⁷⁴

Nevertheless, in her book *The Black Shoals*, Black feminist scholar Tiffany Lethabo-King argues for the possibility of the erotic as a mechanism for expanding how we understand decolonization: "Conversations about coalition in the contemporary moment often happen in the abstract and avoid embodied and particular conversations about who people choose to love, have sex with/fuck, build a life with, and bring into the work toward a decolonial future."⁷⁵ I would add: Whom we choose to grieve and cry with, whom we choose to embrace and open up our sadness to, whom we choose to organize (militantly) with against the hierarchies of grievability, and whom we choose to be intimate with in times of grief. This means acknowledging that grief is deeply personal and not always universal; the grief(s) of the Middle Passage, of settler colonialism, of transphobia, of the death of a loved one, of war, imperialism, etc. may well be incommensurable with one another. However, if the erotic is, as Lorde and Lethabo-King assert, ultimately about chaos, it may be possible to hold multiple truths together at some times, and separate at other times, connected by grief, united by the erotic, but wary of the importance of difference and community autonomy.⁷⁶ A queer community of erotic grief must be chaotic in and of itself.

I now turn to Almodóvar to illustrate one example of what this coalitionality could look and sound like (acknowledging that Chavela's brown lesbian subjectivity and Almodóvar's white Spanish subjectivity are different from Lethabo-King's envisioned racial and ethnic points of erotic convergence). It is my contention that Almodóvar's obituary of Chavela Vargas—reflective of his erotic relationship with her—shows how Chavela's queer sonic and performative interventions can create material and fleshy relationalities around grief and the erotic. Friends, "lovers," and co-conspirators in real time, Chavela and Almodóvar's relationship exceeds the stage and the screen and becomes embodied, helping to feel out the possibilities (and limitations) of erotic coalition in grief.

Almodóvar's obituary of Chavela Vargas, "Adiós volcán," intervenes queerly into hierarchies of grievability, proposing the rich possibility of queer kinship around grief and the erotic. Published in 2012 after Chavela's death, Almodóvar writes:

I presented her in dozens of cities, I remember every one of them . . . she had stopped drinking and I had stopped smoking and in those moments experiencing withdrawals together, she told me how much she wanted a shot of tequila, to warm up her voice, and I told her I would eat a whole pack of cigarettes to combat my anxiety, and we would laugh, holding hands, kissing each other. We have kissed each other a lot, I know her skin very well.⁷⁷

In this passage, Almodóvar and Chavela are not only linked by their addiction, but also erotically: they kiss each other all the time, they know each other's skin. Between a gay man and a lesbian woman, this skin-to-skin contact is as much sexual as it is emotional; kissing is a metaphor for some other type of intimacy that is, perhaps, more powerful, more erotic, than the sexual act itself. This is clear in the way that Almodóvar explains his emotional intimacy with Chavela as a spectator: "One is not accustomed to a mirror being placed so close to your eyes, the final tear (*desgarro*) literally pulled me apart." Here, it is clear that Chavela's music—and the emotional intimacy that it engenders—was what brought Almodóvar so erotically close to her. The pain, sadness, and erotic triumph in Chavela's music forcefully interpellates Almodóvar, who, it must be noted, lived/created through the AIDS epidemic. This profound, transatlantic connection mimics a life partnership; it is perhaps unsurprising, then, that Almodóvar signs the obituary, "Your husband in this world, as you liked to call me." While this may seem simply to be a mockery of the institution of marriage, I argue that the two forged a connection and a micro-community of grief and the erotic that exceeded the bounds of heteronormativity, and, arguably, the bounds of "chosen family." Only those who have both grieved and fucked under the oppression of national homophobia can be linked in this way.

It is important to briefly consider the form of Almodóvar's elegy. As Judith Butler writes, "The obituary functions as the instrument by which grievability is publicly distributed."⁷⁸ Writing a (political) obituary that inserts these intimate possibilities into the "grievability" of Chavela's public persona disrupts the heteronormativity of obituaries written by the state—and its media affiliates—or the (biological) family. Published as a blog post in which he had full creative license, Almodóvar honors the (dis)comfort that Chavela embodies in her music: pain and pleasure, grief and the erotic, disability and

vitality, etc. These affects are injected into Chavela's legacy in a way that a conventional obituary or nation-state-sanctioned grievability disallows.

Almodóvar also poetically displays the depths of his love for Chavela through a reference to one of her songs, "La noche de mi amor." Almodóvar writes:

In her second life, when she was over 70 years old, time and Chavela walked hand in hand, in Spain she found the complicity that Méjico [sic] denied her. And in the breast of this complicity, Chavela reached a serene fullness, her songs increased in sweetness, and she developed all of the love that is also found in her repertoire: "Listen, I want the star in its eternal shine, I want the most fine cup of crystal, to celebrate the night of my love. I want the happiness of a ship returning, and a thousand glory bells clanging, to celebrate the night of my love." In the 90s, Chavela lived that night of love, eternal and happy, with our country, like every spectator, I feel that that night was lived exclusively with me.

Though there is much to remark on when it comes to the coloniality of Spain providing "the complicity that Méjico denied her," when it was Spanish colonial politics that Othered "queer" Indigenous Mexicans in the first place,⁷⁹ it is worth noting that this 2012 obituary references the song that was featured as the Chavela cameo in Almodóvar's 2019 *Dolor y gloria*, his most personal film. Almodóvar, in a filmic display of erotic grief, helps to construct an afterlife for Chavela, alive and pulsating, loud and instructive in her "deathliness." "Adios volcán" magnifies the meaning of the sound of Chavela, reminding us that she lives on in her audience through the forceful emotional community she engenders that makes all of us feel as if "that night was lived exclusively with us." Her sound forever reverberates in our hearts and souls, in the words we write, the tears we cry, and the people we are intimate with. Though imperfect, and only one example of who Chavela forged relationships with, "Adiós volcán" uses/reinvents the often stilted form of the obituary to show that intense and embodied relationalities are made possible (spanning hearts, minds, ears, screens, and souls) when grief and the erotic are displayed, embraced, and named unabashedly.

CONCLUSION

In my own grieving process, at times, I embodied the more literal meaning of *cogiendo en luto*, searching for answers in the body of another, and usually finding something. Often, I became aware that to "coger" is not about the sexual act itself, although that is certainly an important part of it, and never something to shy away from. Rather, what I understood while "cogiendo" was the power of vulnerability, the chaos of coalition, the limits and possibilities of my own desires, the beauty of giving and receiving pleasure, and the political power of allowing someone into my grief, as terrifying as it might have felt. It is because of the affective relationship that I forged with Chavela through the forceful sound of her voice that I have been able to come to these conclusions. I owe my thoughts to her, and to the community of people who have held me, written to me, cooked for me, sung to me, kissed me, and loved me as I make sense of the most profound transformation in my life. José Esteban Muñoz writes that hope—and by extension, queerness—is

“a backward glance that enacts a future vision.”⁸⁰ Grief, I think, is also a backward glance that is oriented toward some future; a future of uncertainty, of pain, and of nostalgia, but a future that will also contain pleasure, creativity, and the afterlives of those we have lost and will lose. To move forward on capitalist time fails to “center and honor sorrow.”⁸¹ To strip our bodies of pleasure in times of pain, to close up and shut down, is sometimes unavoidable. Nevertheless, in continuing to do so, we risk succumbing to the heteronormative and hierarchical structures of grief and grievability, in which we are compelled to “separate the erotic demand from most vital areas of our lives other than sex.”⁸²

“Cogiendo en luto,” as Chavela shows, is gestural. It may be moving our hands to our vaginas in a display of the pleasures of eroticism; it may be smiling and flipping our hair as we imagine ourselves splayed on the sand, pleasuring or being pleased. It is sonic as well, especially for queer ears. It is the ephemerality of a wink, the elongating of “muuuujer,” alongside the raspy wailing that transmits the reality that love is, eventually, also going to mean loss. But at the core it is an embrace of creativity, passion, vulnerability, longing, pain, pleasure, chaos, and release. As a postmortem politics, *cogiendo en luto* is an affront to heteronormative respectability and grievability. Still, as Jafari Allen reminds us, “the erotic is certainly constituting but it can also breed deeply consequential exclusions.”⁸³ Following Lethabo-King it must also be a decolonial and antiracist praxis,⁸⁴ capacious and rejecting the ableist, ageist, sizeist, racist, colonialist, and misogynistic structures that limit desire to the service of global racial capitalism.

“Si tiene un hondo penar / piensa en mí / si tienes ganas de llorar / piensa en mí.” En ti pienso Chavela, siempre. To you we owe this *mundo raro* of possibility. ■

ALEX VOISINE (he/they) is a PhD student at the University of Texas at Austin. Their research focuses on queer and feminist exile and refugee writers, artists, filmmakers, and activists who resettled in México from the 20th to the 21st centuries. Alex’s most recent article “Trouble In/Troubling the Contact Zone: Representations of Mexico’s Article 33 in Jordi Soler’s *La última hora del último día* and *los rojos de ultramar*” was published in *Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies*.

NOTES

1. Ana Alonso-Minutti, “Chavela’s Frida: Decolonial Performativity of the Queer Llorona,” in *Decentering the Nation: Music, Mexicanidad, and Globalization*, ed. Jesús A. Ramos-Kittrell (New York: Lexington Books, 2020), 47–76.
2. Yvonne Yarbro Bejarana, “Crossing the Border with Chabela Vargas,” in *Sex and Sexuality in Latin America*, ed. Daniel Balderston and Donna J. Guy (New York: New York University Press, 1997), 33–43.
3. Achille Mbembe, “Necropolitics,” in *Biopolitics: A Reader*, ed. Timothy Campbell and Adam Sitze (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2013), 161–92.
4. Sayak Valencia, “Necropolitics, Postmortem/Transmortem Politics, and Transfeminisms in the Sexual Economies of Death,” *TSQ: Transgender Studies Quarterly* 6, no. 2 (2019): 180–93, <https://doi.org/10.1215/23289252-7348468>.
5. Laura G. Gutierrez, *Performing Mexicanidad: Vendidas y Cabareteras on the Transnational Stage* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2010), 137.
6. Gutiérrez, *Performing Mexicanidad*, 16.
7. La Marr Jurelle Bruce, *How to Go Mad without Losing Your Mind: Madness and Black Radical Creativity*, (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2021), 9.

8. M. S. Gaytán and S. De La Mora, "Queening/Queering Mexicanidad: Lucha Reyes and the Canción Ranchera," *Feminist Formations* 28, no. 3 (January 2016): 196–221, <https://doi.org/10.1353/ff.2016.0049>
9. Gutiérrez's attention to the (queer, mad, sad) spectator's intimacy with the singer/performer is a central part of this essay; see Gutiérrez, *Performing Mexicanidad*.
10. Dau García Dauder and Marisa G. Ruiz Trejo, "Un Viaje por las Emociones en Procesos de Investigación Feminista," *Empiria: Revista de Metodología de Ciencias Sociales*, no. 50 (2021): 21–41, <https://doi.org/10.5944/empiria.50.2021.30370>.
11. Sara Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 155.
12. Dian Million, "Felt Theory: An Indigenous Feminist Approach to Affect and History," *Wicazo Sa Review* 24, no. 2 (2009): 53–76., <https://doi.org/10.1353/wic.0.0043>.
13. Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider* (Berkeley, CA: Crossing Press, 1984).
14. Anna Ríos-Rojas, "'Pedagogies of the Broken-Hearted': Notes on a Pedagogy of Breakage, Women of Color Feminist Decolonial Movidas, and Armed Love in the Classroom/Academy," *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies* 41, no. 1 (2020): 161–78, <https://doi.org/10.5250/fronjwomestud.41.1.0161>.
15. Lorena Alvarado, "Never Late: Unwelcome Desires and Diasporas in Chavela Vargas' Last Works," *Women & Performance: A Journal of Feminist Theory* 26, no. 1 (2016): 17–35, <https://doi.org/10.1080/0740770x.2016.1183976>.
16. Roberto Le Franc, "Chavela Vargas: La Ídola," *Revista Herencia* 22, no. 2 (2009): 29–33.
17. Alvarado, "Never Late," 18.
18. Alvarado, "Never Late."
19. Alonso-Minutti, "Chavela's Frida."
20. Stephanie Nohelani Teves, *Defiant Indigeneity: The Politics of Hawaiian Performance* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2018).
21. José Esteban Muñoz, *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015).
22. Edward W. Said, *Reflections on Exile and Other Essays* (London: Granta, 2012).
23. Hannah Arendt, "We Refugees," *International Refugee Law* (2017): 3–12, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315092478-1>.
24. Mari Paz Balibrea, "Interview with Roger Bartra," *Journal of Spanish Cultural Studies* 6, no. 1 (2005): 123–31., <https://doi.org/10.1080/1463620042000336947>.
25. Roberto Bolaño, *Between Parentheses: Essays, Articles and Speeches, 1998–2003* (New York: Picador, 2016).
26. Norma Mogrovejo, *Del Sexilio Al Matrimonio: Ciudadanía Sexual en la Era del Consumo Neoliberal* (Bilbao, Spain: DDT Liburuak, 2018).
27. Alvarado, "Never Late."
28. C. Gund and D. Kyi, directors, *Chavela* (Netflix, 2017).
29. Gaytán and De La Mora, "Queening/Queering Mexicanidad," 205.
30. Alvarado, "Never Late," 19.
31. Alvarado, "Never Late," 19. This is especially significant considering that Chavela was performing in the years after the Indigenous uprising led by the Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional.
32. Gaytán and De La Mora, "Queening/Queering Mexicanidad," 212; Yarbrow Bejarana, "Crossing the Border with Chavela Vargas."
33. Chavela and Cabral collaborated on the 1997 album *Canto al pueblo*; however, Cabral sang "No soy de aquí." It's unclear when Chavela first recorded her version, but it was likely well into her Chavelazo, which means it was many decades after she first arrived in México.
34. Lyrics from the album *Chavela Vargas: Gracias a la Vida*; lines 3, 8, and 9 show adaptations made to the song during the 2004 Buenos Aires performance. Parts in italics are sung by La

- Negra Changa. La Negra Changa's revision of "Me encanta ser amiga de los ladrones" to "El pan casero y la voz de los dolores / y el mar mojándome los pies" is a gesture to Facundo Cabral, who included the latter in his original *milonga*.
35. Alvarado, "Never Late."
 36. Juana María Rodríguez, *Sexual Futures, Queer Gestures, and Other Latina Longings*, (New York: New York University Press, 2014), 3.
 37. Yarbrow Bejarana, "Crossing the Border with Chabela Vargas," 39.
 38. Alonso-Minutti, "Chabela's Frida," 65.
 39. Gund and Kyi, *Chabela*.
 40. Le Franc, "Chabela Vargas: La Ídola," 30.
 41. As Alvarado notes in "Never Late," Chabela's first performance after many years of silence took place at El Hábito in Mexico City, the queer performance space run by lesbian partners and artists Liliana Felipe and Jesusa Rodríguez; when Chabela stepped on stage, she declared "yo soy la occisa," (I'm the dead woman), humorously marking her alcoholism as a form of death.
 42. La Marr Jurelle Bruce, "Interludes in Madtime," *Social Text*, 35, no.4, (2017): 1–31. <https://doi.org/10.1215/01642472-223369>
 43. Alvarado, "Never Late"; Gund and Kyi, *Chabela*.
 44. Judith Butler, *Frames of War: When Is Life Grievable?* (Brooklyn, NY: Verso Books, 2016), 15.
 45. Gilles Deleuze, and Félix Guattari, *Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983).
 46. Gilles Deleuze, and Félix Guattari, *Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983).
 47. It is worth noting the further parallels between Chabela and Nina Simone that help to link Bruce's US-based scholarship with Chabela's life in a Latin American context: Simone also experienced alcoholism, heartbreak, and "madness" that resulted in her retreat from the stage, exile in Africa, and then a "comeback" in Europe, which mirrored the death/resurrection characteristic of narratives of Chabela's life.
 48. Bruce, *How to Go Mad without Losing Your Mind*, 212.
 49. Alvarado, "Never Late."
 50. Robert McRuer and Anna Mollow, eds., *Sex and Disability* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012), 32.
 51. Bruce, *How to Go Mad without Losing Your Mind*.
 52. Jack Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011), 4.
 53. Alvarado, "Never Late," 31.
 54. Alison Kafer, *Feminist, Queer, Crip* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2013); E. Samuels, "Six Ways of Looking at Crip Time," *Disability Studies Quarterly* 37, no.3 (2017), <https://doi.org/10.18061/dsq.v37i3.5824>
 55. Bruce, "Interludes in Madtime."
 56. E. Freeman, *Time Binds: Queer Temporalities, Queer Histories* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2013).
 57. S. Ruiz-Alfaro, "From Chabela to Frida: Loving from the Margins," *Journal of Homosexuality* 59, no. 8 (2012): 1131–44, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00918369.2012.712818>. It is also worth pointing out that *Frida* fails to question Frida's appropriations of Indigenous cultures and archives, leaving the ongoing coloniality of the Mexican state and its elites unproblematized; this romanticization of Frida—and her association with Chabela—fails to acknowledge how certain forms of cultural "queerness" can also be complicit with "settler homonationalism." Scott Morgensen, "Settler Homonationalism: Theorizing Settler Colonialism within Queer Modernities," *GLQ* 16, no.1–2 (2010): 105–31.
 58. Alonso-Minutti, "Chabela's Frida," 59.
 59. Lorde, *Sister Outsider*, 58.

60. The “Chavelazo” undoubtedly began in México, when the lesbian performance artists Jesusa Rodríguez and Liliana Felipe re-debuted Chavela in 1991 at their Mexico City cabaret “El Hábito.”
61. Bruce, *How to Go Mad without Losing Your Mind*, 209.
62. Mexico City
63. Douglas Crimp, “How to Have Promiscuity in an Epidemic,” *October* 43 (1987): 237–71, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3397576>.
64. Douglas Crimp, “Mourning and Militancy,” *October* 51, (1989): 3–18, <https://doi.org/10.2307/778889>.
65. Crimp, “Mourning and Militancy,” 18.
66. Karma R. Chávez, *The Borders of AIDS: Race, Quarantine, and Resistance* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2021).
67. J. S. Allen, *There’s a Disco Ball Between Us: A Theory of Black Gay Life* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2022).
68. Jasbir K. Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007).
69. Allen, *There’s a Disco Ball Between Us*, 72.
70. Alvarado, “Never Late,” 33.
71. Alonso-Minutti, “Chavela’s Frida,” 48.
72. Philip J. Deloria, *Playing Indian* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1998).
73. Alvarado, “Never Late.”
74. Like Alvarado, I leave this query open, especially for others with more expertise and/or who are members of Mexican Indigenous communities; I recognize my own status as an outsider to Mexican Indigenous communities and prefer these important discussions around appropriation to be done by others.
75. Tiffany Lethabo King, *The Black Shoals: Offshore Formations of Black and Native Studies* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2019), 148.
76. J. M. Pierce, M. A. Viteri, D. Falconí Trávez, S. Vidal-Ortiz, and L. Martínez-Echázabal, “Introduction: Cuir /Queer Américas: Translation, Decoloniality, and the Incommensurable,” *GLQ* 27, no.3 (2021), 321–29.
77. Pedro Almodóvar, “Adiós, volcán,” *Ochoymedio* (blog), <https://www.ochoymedio.net/adios-volcan/> (accessed July 10, 2018).
78. Judith Butler, *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (Brooklyn, NY: Verso Books, 2020).
79. Zeb Tortorici, *Sins against Nature: Sex and Archives in Colonial New Spain* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2018).
80. José Esteban Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (New York: New York University Press, 2009), 4.
81. Bruce, *How to Go Mad without Losing Your Mind*, 213.
82. Lorde, *Sister Outsider*, 55.
83. Allen, *There’s a Disco Ball Between Us*, 77.
84. King, *The Black Shoals*.