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## Writing the Goodlife

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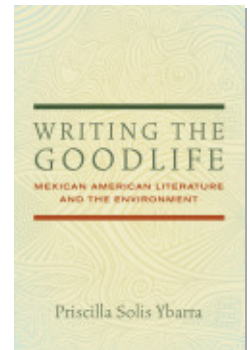
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## 2

# THE COLONIALITY OF BEING AND THE LAND

## Identity in Early Twentieth-Century Goodlife Writing

WOULD CHARACTERIZE the first literary historical period of goodlife writing as distinctly engaged with issues of material dispossession and discrimination, specifically in regard to land. The novels I discussed in the previous chapter, with their emphasis on domestic spaces, signal more intimate geographies, but public issues, such as economic and political power struggles over land possession and social position, remain their largest concerns. In this chapter, in which I loosely define the next era of goodlife writing, I explore more interior landscapes, especially coloniality's impact on human-nature relations in early twentieth-century goodlife writing.

In his essay "On the Coloniality of Being," Nelson Maldonado-Torres writes, "Colonization and racialization are not only political or social events or structures. They also have metaphysical and ontological significance" (260). These statements help elucidate a common critique of early twentieth-century Mexican American writing. Critics have accused these writers of lacking political edge and social critique, and some go as far as accusing them of selling out or romanticizing Mexican culture. These works are therefore sometimes taken to be irrelevant to the concerns of Chicana/o studies. In an essay that offers an intriguing analysis of Mexican American literary responses to the American Dream, Raymond Paredes comments on the early twentieth-century period of Mexican American literature:

Writers in English, Cristina Mena as an example, gave their readers stoical peones and fiery señoritas who lived in tightly knit communities on both sides of the border and who seldom bothered to think about such indelicate issues as material advancement. These romantic literary Mexicans looked to the past instead of the future and desired nothing so much as to be left alone. In short, they were the types of Mexicans that Anglos liked best: primitive, colorful and, most of all, unthreatening; and insofar as they understood the myth at all, they regarded the American Dream as simply another feature of a culture they steadfastly rejected. (“Mexican American Authors” 74)

This critique sounds accurate in some ways. In 1936 Nina Otero Warren published a book titled *Old Spain in Our Southwest*, where she documents traditions of Northern New Mexico Hispano culture such as “Asking for the Bride” and “Saints Days and Feasts.” Eva Wilbur Cruce and Fabiola Cabeza de Baca each wrote a memoir of her childhood on her family’s ranch. Jovita González gathered the folktales of her South Texas ancestors. Sabine Ulibarri published a short story about a man who forgets his own name and is haunted by his father’s voice. Explicit antagonism between Mexican and Anglo culture escapes mention in these works. What does merit concern is the state of the soul told through memoir, personal essay, folktale, and short story. Given the metaphysical and ontological significance of colonization and racialization, these works gather a new significance and relevance to today’s ongoing coloniality of being.

A curious shift occurs in the transition from late nineteenth-century to early twentieth-century Mexican American writings. While late nineteenth-century writers, such as María Amparo Ruiz de Burton, center their writings on the ways Mexican Americans can fit into the U.S. social landscape and power structures, and writers from the mid-twentieth century until today largely center their works on civil rights and social injustice, the early twentieth-century writers retreat into interior terrains. The first Chicana/o literary scholarship labeled the early twentieth-century period of Mexican American writing as devoid of politics, while more recent studies demonstrate radical aspects of this literature, some even arguing that the progressive politics in these works rival those published during the civil rights era.<sup>1</sup> Tey Diana Rebolledo declares that this era combines “a history of resistance and accommodation to the social, economic, and cultural hegemony of the white Anglo-Saxon people who came to dominate land and society in the Southwest” (*Women Singing* xviii). In this chapter, I argue for yet a third approach, distancing myself altogether from the need

to claim direct political relevance for these works. While Chicana/o literary scholarship focuses more time on the politics of the coloniality of knowledge, this chapter also takes into account the equally relevant coloniality of being. I, too, have been most interested in deconstructing the hierarchy of epistemology and making space for the environmental knowledge kept in the Chicana/o literary tradition. But the process of decolonization involves the inner being as much as the outer. Nor is delinking oneself from the systems of oppression and colonization at all easy.<sup>2</sup> This chapter examines early twentieth-century Mexican American writings with attention to the interior process of delinking from modernity/coloniality and asserting a unique sense of being for Mexican Americans. Chapter 1 discusses works that responded to the impact that the U.S.-Mexican War and the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo had on Mexican American land use, management, and possession. Examining a range of writers and genres from the early twentieth century, this chapter explores the way coloniality affects Mexican American identity and relation to the land.

Coloniality, as defined by Maldonado-Torres and other decolonial scholars, is the ongoing state of affairs in which the attitudes and approaches implemented during colonization remain in effect even after official colonial structures have been excised. The attitudes and approaches of colonization include treating colonial subjects as if they do not possess souls and therefore as if they do not qualify as human. This is a question that was explicitly posed during the colonization of the Americas, and its impacts are felt throughout the world today. Maldonado-Torres reminds us that the question of the Amerindian soul compelled a famous debate in Valladolid in 1551, in which Bartolomé de las Casas battled with Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda. Las Casas argued on behalf of the existence of the Amerindian soul. The Spanish Crown eventually acquiesced to the notion that Amerindians possess souls and merit treatment as humans. Nevertheless, the descendents of colonial subjugation must endure the ongoing effects of the suspicion regarding their (our) very humanity—what Maldonado-Torres calls the “racist/imperial Manichean misanthropic skepticism” (245). The question was asked, and its echoes reverberate today for both sides: Do they—do we—have souls? Early twentieth-century Mexican American writers are clearly impacted by this haunting question.

I argue that these writers assert the existence of their souls through their relation with the land and the natural environment, which preceded and persists throughout colonization. These writers assert the reality of their souls by also asserting the existence of a soul in another supposedly passive object of

colonization: the land. By giving the land a spirit with which they connect, these writers reject the colonial objectification of the Amerindian, the mestizo, and the natural environment. This is a subtle restructuring that addresses the colonized subject's inner process of decolonization—what Mignolo calls delinking—more than an external deconstruction of power, but it is no less powerful and vital a process.

The negotiation of a racial hierarchy was not a new experience for Mexican Americans. The situation was not very different from the one they found in colonial and postcolonial Mexico. Mexico, including the territories ceded to the United States in 1848, had a racial hierarchy that resulted from Spanish colonization. The difference was that Mexican Americans in the United States found themselves decidedly on the downside of a racial binary: those who might have been white or mestizo in the Mexican caste system had no choice but to be colored in the United States. As descendants of the losing side of the only war the United States has fought in territory contiguous with its own, Mexican Americans possessed little cultural capital. Their claims to large tracts of land, as discussed in the previous chapter, also put them in the sights of land-hungry settlers, contemptuous of Mexican American territorial claims, arriving from the eastern United States. These writers capture this new negotiation of identity by writing not just of themselves but of the land as well.

During this period in Mexican American history, access to any significant position of influence, and certainly any claim to land titles, entailed a strategic claim to whiteness and a corresponding denial of indigeneity. Looking at writings from this period through a decolonial goodlife lens helps to better understand how the negotiations of identity have largely been misunderstood as a betrayal of Mexican American heritage and cowardice in the face of discrimination. Goodlife writing from the early twentieth century reveals another dimension of the ongoing process of delinking from coloniality and in so doing offers readers much-needed insights into the trauma inherent in the decolonization/delinking processes.

The impact of coloniality made it difficult indeed to forge a Mexican American identity in the early twentieth century. I implement Paula Moya's definition of "identity" here as "the nonessential and evolving product that emerges from the dialectic between how a subject of consciousness identifies herself and how others identify her" ("Who We Are" 80). This definition of identity gives both the self and the social context a role to play in the ongoing process of defining identity. Moya's understanding of identity does not privilege individuality over

community, nor does it emphasize the group over the self. Importantly, this is not only a dialectic, it is an ongoing process. Early twentieth-century Mexican Americans found themselves pulled in different directions by their own Mexican American context that allowed them space to define themselves against the still relatively new U.S. setting, which imposed a perception of Mexican Americans as undesirable, mongrel, and incompetent. At the same time, the self depicted in these works sought to maintain at least one element of continuity—relationship with the land—that could also help individuals negotiate external pressures of perception. It is here that this goodlife writing analysis of these works makes its original contribution.

Some writers, such as Adelina Otero Warren of New Mexico and Eva Wilbur-Cruce of Arizona, made strategic claims of whiteness in order to gain access to social position and land, but they also verged on reproducing the very oppression that they sought to escape. Their writings reveal an awareness of and a form of regret about their strategic adjustments to modernity/coloniality. Other writers, such as Sabine Ulibarri of New Mexico, focus more on the feelings of duplicity and betrayal produced by the pressure to claim a limited identity for the sake of power and influence. His protagonist is literally haunted by his ambivalence, constantly hearing his dead father's voice. It seems that only a few writers, such as Jovita González of Texas and Fabiola Cabeza de Baca of New Mexico, were versatile enough to claim their mestizo identities in recognition of both their American Indian and their Spanish heritage. Although by present-day standards, a claim of mestizaje may not seem to completely disengage from modernity/coloniality, their communion with the land proves their decoloniality. All of these writers communicate their ongoing adaptations of Mexican American identity and the ways that coloniality endeavors to stand between this community and the lands they had known for generations. This period of tentative delinking proves fundamental to understanding the persistent strategies Mexican Americans employed to ensure their connection with the land. In affirming their relation with the land, they deconstructed the idea of soulless subjects of coloniality, be those subjects “nature” or “native.”

Instead of delving deeply into any one or two works from this period, I offer a number of exemplary works in order to demonstrate a general pattern and a range of approaches that typify the era. I also define this period of the “early twentieth century” broadly: the beginning of the twentieth century to the Chicana/o Civil Rights Movement. I discuss two ranch memoirs together, Eva Wilbur-Cruce's *A Beautiful, Cruel Country* and Fabiola Cabeza de Baca's

*We Fed Them Cactus*. From there I will move to the introduction Adelina Otero Warren wrote for her book, *Old Spain in Our Southwest*. Another folklorist, Jovita González, offers a treasure trove of stories from South Texas that appeared in the Publications of the Texas Folklore Society. Finally, I will offer a reading of a story from Sabine Ulibarri's collection *Tierra Amarilla*, titled "The Man Without a Name." All of these writers make visible the struggle of delinking from coloniality during the time period that preceded the era of militant Chicana/o civil rights.

The connection between racial identity and the natural environment has heretofore been little explored. In his discussion of whiteness in nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Mexican American literature, B. V. Olguín argues that "the performance of Mexican American and Chicana/o mestizaje has rendered their indigeneity *sous rature* (or under erasure)" (32). Current studies in critical indigeneities insist that Chicana/o studies must examine its "nostalgic indigenismo" if it wants to remain relevant. Olguín goes as far as calling nostalgic *indigenismo* a specter. Much can be learned from this challenge of rooting out the ghost that haunts Chicana/o studies. At this critical juncture, we can learn more from the way Mexican Americans negotiated this difficult territory in the early twentieth century. These five writers in particular present part of the problem of nostalgic indigenismo at the same time that they affirm the idea that both they and the land possess souls and qualify as entities, thereby deconstructing the insidious coloniality undermining their being.

## MEXICAN AMERICAN RANCH MEMOIRS: LONELINESS WITHOUT DESPAIR

Both Fabiola Cabeza de Baca and Eva Wilbur-Cruce invoke their experiences in the rough and rural Southwest landscape during the early twentieth century. Cabeza de Baca, in *We Fed Them Cactus*, narrates her childhood on an eastern New Mexico cattle ranch, where her father let her stray from conventional feminine behavior by allowing her to ride horses and explore the ranch that spread onto the vast expanses of the llano. Wilbur-Cruce, in *A Beautiful, Cruel Country*, tells of a difficult childhood in southern Arizona, where her father expected her to contribute at least as much work as a ranch hand. She rode and wrangled with the men when she was only five years old. The narratives that emerge from these unique experiences reveal women—their voices, characters,

and careers—shaped by the extremes of the U.S. Southwest. Over the course of their lives, these women take the arid climate and threatening animals in stride as they labor, in awe of the beauty that surrounds them. Their time and place, they argue, gave them the rare opportunity to upend conventional gender roles and question the capitalist accumulation of wealth. Rather than feel alienated from the harsh environment, they felt in communion with the land, water, plants, animals, and climate that sustained their everyday lives. These memoirs honor the spirit of the places that shaped their childhoods.

Both memoirists set out to write about the place where they grew up more than about the sum of their childhood and adult experiences. This makes these memoirs more about one's relationship to place—to a particular bioregion—than they are memoirs of individual women. Cabeza de Baca opens her narrative with a lyrical description of the Llano Estacado, the Staked Plains of eastern New Mexico and western Texas: "The Llano is a great plateau. Its sixty thousand square miles tip almost imperceptibly from fifty-five hundred feet above sea level in northwest New Mexico, to two thousand feet in northwest Texas . . . [T]he vegetation includes juniper, piñon, yucca, mesquite, sagebrush, gramma and buffalo grasses, as well as lemita, prickly pear, and pitahaya" (1–2). This is where her family held land for many generations, dating back to a Spanish-era land grant, but the reader does not discover this information until after she reads an in-depth description of the place and its effect on the soul: "It is a lonely land because of its immensity, but it lacks nothing for those who enjoy Nature in her full grandeur. The colors of the skies, of the hills, the rocks, the birds and the flowers, are soothing to the most troubled heart. It is loneliness without despair. The whole world seems to be there, full of promise and gladness" (3). Here she first indicates the way one can learn from the Llano—to inhabit a sense of loneliness without despairing, but only if one cultivates a capacity to "enjoy Nature in her full grandeur."

Wilbur-Cruce also makes a point of opening her narrative with a description of the landscape's impact on her spirit: "[M]y isolation has always been only physical, not spiritual. I have never felt depressed or lonely when alone with the land. Something always happens that dazzles me and overwhelms me with amazement and wonder" (vii).

Wilbur-Cruce's narrative takes place in the southern part of Arizona, outside Tucson and near the U.S.-Mexico border at Arivaca Creek. Her family's sixteen-square-mile ranch—established by her grandfather, Wilbur, who homesteaded it in the mid-nineteenth century—reached all the way to the border.



By the time she published her memoir, Wilbur-Cruce was in her eighties, but the portion of her life that she chose to narrate were two years full of formative experiences: from age three to age five. One would not expect such a young child to have experienced so many memorable adventures, but Wilbur-Cruce is certainly an exception. The way she frames her narrative—bookended at the start with a climb up a mountain and at the finish with the government’s relocation of her Tohono O’odham friends—communicates the significance she gives these events. They are the beginning and end of her most vital experiences.

That both memoirists make a point of sharing their experiences of “loneliness without despair” or depression and the rewards of solitude might prompt one to make comparisons of these works with John Muir, Henry David Thoreau, or even Edward Abbey. The communion with the natural environment in the works by these two Mexican American ranch memoirists differs significantly from the works of these iconic American nature writers. Cabeza de Baca and Wilbur-Cruce reveal a community relation with their places, always including the local peoples as integral to the way they experience their environments. Their knowledge and experience of the Mexican American Southwest defied conventional gender roles and upended economic values. They achieved all of this through solitude in the landscape and solidarity with the land, weaving details about their individual lives with the contours of the landscape, thereby showing their readers the ways they developed personal traits from their experiences in the arid Southwest.

Fabiola Cabeza de Baca was only four years old when her mother died, and she developed an especially close relationship with her father. He let her roam the ranch and take part in physical activities, such as riding and roping, that girls did not typically perform in that time and place. Her feeling of liberation from typical gender roles led her to question conventions in off-ranch settings as well: “Food was served after the Mass, and the old custom of feeding the men first still prevailed. I always sat by Papa and the women and girls eyed me with curiosity” (134). Why should she wait to eat with the women, after the men? Her youth of crossing gender-role boundaries inspired Cabeza de Baca to lead an independent life. Wilbur-Cruce also rejected traditional gender performance. In her case, her mother helped her along by sewing custom “mini-Levis” for her in the days when “Levi Strauss did not manufacture pants for women, much less for children” (175). “Cowgirls wore divided skirts, and not without criticism. Such ugly comments as ‘I’d like to stone her to death’

were not uncommon" (175). Young Eva endured community censure for the sake of her love for the family ranch, and she eventually took over the ranch in 1928—certainly a time in which few twenty-eight-year-old Mexican American women ran ranch operations.

Both memoirs also challenge conventional economic values. Rather than seeing liquid cash or the accumulation of material goods as wealth, they both sought money and objects only on as-needed basis. Cabeza de Baca says, "All the rooms were spacious and our home had a feeling of hospitality. We had only the most necessary pieces of furniture" (10) and "We had never been poor, because those who live from the land are never really poor, but at times Papá's cash on hand must have been pretty low" (11). Here Cabeza de Baca deconstructs the category of poverty itself, declaring that intimacy with the land excludes the possibility of poverty altogether. The only poverty possible pertains to the health of the land. Given the arid settings of both memoirs, it is not surprising to discern that real wealth was to be found in rainfall. Cabeza de Baca firmly declares, "Money in our lives was not important. We never counted our money; we counted the weeks and months between rains. I could always tell anyone exactly to the day and hour since the last rain . . . Rain for us made history" (11–12). Wilbur-Cruce describes the difficulty of life in southern Arizona and the difficulty with which "abundance" was acquired: "[W]e had to blast it out and grind it and wash it, and . . . finally, the 'gold nuggets' . . . appeared, in the guise of hope, beauty, joy, love, and brotherhood, after which all things became bearable" (xii). Both writers reject the capitalist accumulation of material wealth in favor of sustenance and care for the land in a reciprocal relationship.

Both writers dedicated their lives to sustaining the land-based culture in which they were raised. Cabeza de Baca attended New Mexico State University and earned a bachelor's degree in home economics in 1927. She put her degree to practical use in a thirty-year career as an agricultural extension agent. Her work is emblematic of epistemic disobedience, as she used her government position to create institutional space for and preservation of New Mexican culture and knowledge. In addition to her memoir, *We Fed Them Cactus*, she also wrote two cookbooks that not only list recipes but also detail cultural and environmental practices that accompany the foodways she documents. But her signal contribution, overlooked until now, involves her communion with the land in a way that rejects the structure of conventional nature writing.

Wilbur-Cruce became a ranch owner—a pursuit almost exclusively occupied by men—and her ranch was famous for preserving the “rock horse” breed that she writes about in her memoir. She took up the pen only late in life, publishing *A Beautiful, Cruel Country* in 1987 and also participating in the oral histories recorded in Patricia Preciado Martin’s *Songs My Mother Sang to Me*.

## ADELINA OTERO WARREN’S NEW MEXICO AND OLD SPAIN

Adelina “Nina” Otero Warren was from northern New Mexico, a region that engenders a rich history of writing about the natural environment. Her writings at this unique place and time communicate her ambivalence about her identity via the environment. Given that Mexican Americans developed the “Spanish American” identity in part as a means to maintain control over landholdings, it cannot be considered a coincidence that Otero Warren uses the natural environment to express her reservations about the Spanish American identity. I first offer a bit of background about Otero Warren and a brief history of the development of the “Spanish American” identity as a prelude for demonstrating how her introductory essay in *Old Spain in Our Southwest* expresses her reservations about that identity and her frustration with the prospect of her culture losing its intimacy with the natural environment in New Mexico. Otero Warren shows that this transition in distancing Mexican American identity from the natural environment took its psychic toll, and her ambivalence about it reveals her own struggle with the coloniality of being.

Nina Otero Warren—prominent citizen, leading educator, and political leader in Santa Fe during the early twentieth century—published only one book in her lifetime, *Old Spain in Our Southwest*, in 1936. Her interest in the Spanish impact on New Mexican culture no doubt emerged from her heritage. She was born in 1881 in Los Lunas, New Mexico, as part of an extended family that claimed, on her mother’s Luna side, ancestry from the Spanish who colonized New Mexico in the sixteenth century and, on her father’s Otero side, from the eighteenth-century Spanish settlement of New Mexico. At the time of her birth, New Mexico had been a U.S. territory for thirty-three years, but it still was not a state. She was born and raised an American, but in the context of a traditional Mexican family that aspired to be included in the upper echelons of the changing power structure of the region.

She is most noted for successfully leading the New Mexico suffragette movement from 1915 to 1920 and for her nomination to run for the U.S. House of Representatives in 1922.<sup>3</sup> And even though she was the first woman in New Mexico to compete for this office, she lost by only 9 percent of the overall vote. She is also known for serving in the position of superintendent of schools in Santa Fe County from 1917 to 1929 and for being the first woman to serve as inspector of Indian services for the Department of the Interior from 1922 to 1924. Because she was a prominent citizen in her day, with influence over local policy and practices, her writings, although limited to one book and a few articles, can reveal a lot about the social group and class to which she belonged, and about the strategies she used to achieve her goals of preserving and protecting the Spanish American culture of her time, including the Spanish American relationship to the natural environment.

Otero Warren identified as Spanish American, as did many Mexican Americans of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century in New Mexico. This is not a simple matter of interchangeable labels. Studies by John Nieto-Phillips and Laura Gómez indicate that Mexican Americans in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century identified as “Spanish Americans” to indicate their whiteness, even as the majority of Anglo-Americans considered Mexican Americans an inferior and mongrel race. In the case of New Mexico, the Mexicans-turned-Americans attempted to blend something of their past elite status, “Spanish,” with their newfound citizenship, “American.” Still, it is an irony that Mexican Americans had to develop a strategy to claim whiteness at all once they became Americans. Under the terms of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, all Mexicans in territories acquired by the United States following the U.S.-Mexican War were eligible for U.S. citizenship, and only “whites” were allowed U.S. citizenship at the time. However, popular sentiment did not accord with the legal terms. According to Gómez, “a broad consensus existed among Euro-Americans that Mexicans were nonwhite precisely because they were racially mixed. For many Americans, it was the fact of Mexicans’ ‘mongrel’ status that most strongly signaled their racial inferiority” (83). Such negative public sentiment impacted New Mexico’s efforts to become a state. A Congressional report in opposition to New Mexico’s statehood in 1876 notes that the majority population of the territory consists of “a mixture of Spanish or Mexican and Indian in different degrees” (Nieto Phillips 69). The report further claims that “the inhabitants of this isolated region, with few exceptions, continued to sink, till now for nigh two hundred years, into a condition of ignorance, superstition,

and sloth that is unequaled by their Aztec neighbors, the Pueblo Indians” (69). In the context of such perceptions about Mexican Americans of the region, Nieto-Phillips explains the strategy of a new label:

As *Spanish* Americans, Nuevomexicanos possessed a readily understood racial identity, a documented historical lineage, and a claim to the land that dated to the very “conquest” of New Mexico, beginning in the sixteenth century. In a rhetorical sense, then, this term restored their presumed “Spanish blood” and, by implication, rendered them racially “fit” for—and deserving of—self-government and “American” civic rights and responsibilities. (82)

I would add that Otero Warren’s writings suggest that part of the “claim to the land” that the Spanish American identity offered was several centuries of knowledge, experience, and stewardship of the local environment. Yet, even when implementing such strategies that recalled a long historical presence on the land, it took the United States sixty-four years, from 1848 until 1912, to make New Mexico a state in its union.

Yet, as Gómez shows in her far-reaching study, Mexican Americans lost some valuable ground in their unilateral claim to Spanish heritage and desire for power alongside Anglo-Americans. In this regard, they played into an Anglo-American ploy to “divide and conquer.” By claiming whiteness, the Spanish Americans were also claiming superiority over local indigenous groups, including the Pueblo Indians, with whom they had worked in the past. These superiority claims, of course, kept them from the possibility of allying with Pueblo and other indigenous groups—as a majority population—in New Mexico *against* Anglo-American quests for power and land. Indeed, their claims to whiteness “legitimiz[ed] the American presence as ‘protector’ of Indians, and entrench[ed] the American legal system as a neutral, fair forum for dispute resolution and punishment” (Gómez 114). In addition to implicitly approving the American judicial system and mistreatment of Native Americans by, in essence, aspiring to whiteness, the Spanish Americans also missed an important opportunity to resist the reinforcement of a racist hierarchy at this time. As Gómez sharply observes:

The power of racism is ideological, achieving its apex when racially subordinated groups themselves help to reproduce racism . . . [T]he ability of Mexican Americans to at times succeed in claiming whiteness led them into a perverse trap. To

solidify their classification as white, they had to act like whites, especially with respect to non-white groups. Mexican American elites, in particular, acted in ways that shored up their whiteness, at the expense of every non-white group below them in the racial hierarchy. Intentionally or not, they became agents in the reproduction of racial subordination and contributed to the consolidation of a new version of white supremacy in the Southwest. (113, 115)

By the time Nina Otero Warren began her political life in 1915, at the age of thirty-four, she and her elite family were well established as Spanish Americans with some influence in the region and recognition and respect from Anglo-Americans. Her second cousin, Miguel Antonio Otero II, was territorial governor from 1897 to 1906, and Otero Warren spent her youth socializing in these powerful circles in Santa Fe. There is no denying that her families on both sides—the Lunas and the Oteros—ended up making a play for whiteness during the transition from the Mexican to the U.S. era in New Mexico. She finds herself in the second generation of Spanish American identity, and her writings in particular, along with her political and professional activities, are an attempt to make sense of what culture this identity professes to preserve and what utility it can offer. I will offer evidence that Otero Warren signals ambivalence about her Spanish American identity in her 1936 book. Perhaps Otero Warren felt and regretted the disadvantage for others that her own privilege created, and she expressed this not through a loss of connection with other peoples but through a loss of connection to her local places.

The ambivalence she shows in her introductory essay presents a paradox because the book was meant to fill the gap in educational materials available to Spanish American youth in the schools. Her experience as superintendent of schools in Santa Fe County made it clear to her that Spanish American youth could benefit from learning about their own culture in an institutional setting—until then, they only learned about the Anglo-American culture and traditions in school. *Old Spain in Our Southwest* addressed this concern. The chapters capture different aspects of hacienda life and traditions, with titles such as “An Old Spanish Hacienda,” “Asking for the Bride,” “The Harvest,” and “Spanish Place Names.” It was well received at the time, as indicated in short reviews in various publications, though the longer reviews considered it a predictable and somewhat romanticized celebration of Spanish American culture. In 1938, Otero Warren’s contemporary, A. L. Campa (a well-known folklorist and one who disputed the Spanish American label), wrote, “The book is far too

subjective and it emphasizes the spiritual life of New Mexican culture” (209). In 1978, Chicana/o literature critic Raymund Paredes found the book “profoundly disturbing” and a “literature created out of fear and intimidation, a defensive response to racial prejudice” (“Evolution” 87).

Given the context of recent colonization and the evolution of Spanish American identity as a play for political power in the Anglo-American era, both Campa’s and Paredes’s observations are apt. However, Otero Warren’s writing offers more. In 1989, Chicana literary critic Tey Diana Rebolledo notes that the book was an “early attempt to preserve in literary images a vanishing way of life” (“Las Escritoras” 202). She also notes that Otero Warren “communicates to us her growing sense of disjunction from the landscape, illustrating her feeling of alienation and isolation in a time of transition” (203). Considering these past evaluations of Otero Warren’s writings, especially Rebolledo’s suggestion that Otero Warren felt alienated from her landscape, I found myself drawn to the opening essay and wondering how the coloniality of being could produce a new or different evaluation of a seventy-nine-year-old text. How does Otero Warren make visible her ambivalence about the decline of her communion with the land?

The opening chapter of *Old Spain in Our Southwest*, “The Wind in the Mountains,” offers a rich opportunity to look at how she expresses her connection to the land and her sense of loss. This is also the part of the book that drew Rebolledo’s attention in evaluating Otero Warren’s writing.<sup>4</sup> This opening chapter remains unique in the overall work, taking a less pragmatic and descriptive tone than the rest of the chapters. Otero Warren seems to want to intrigue her readers at the outset, offering an enigmatic opening in which to contextualize the more straightforward descriptions of Spanish American life. I would even venture to say that the opening chapter is addressed to a more sophisticated audience (the teachers, reviewers, critics) while the remainder of the text is addressed to the adolescent students who have yet to learn of their own culture in school. The fact that I have found several revised drafts of this chapter—many more than for the other chapters—of the book in her manuscript collection at the New Mexico State Archives shows that Otero Warren took extra pains crafting this piece, apparently putting more work into it than into the others. It is a mere three pages of the overall book, but a close examination of its contents and revisions offers a great deal. The chapter opens with her first-person description of her natural surroundings and an experience of a storm one night in her “small adobe house in the midst of cedars on the top of a hill” (3). She is

alone in the house, but she observes a shepherd (doubtless a mestizo) and “an Indian” who weather the elements outside through the night while she remains indoors. Here is the closing paragraph, to give you a feel for the piece:

As the shepherd was extinguishing the camp fire, there appeared on the top of the hill a form with arms stretched to heaven as though offering himself to the sun. The shepherd from his camp and I from my window watched this half-clad figure that seemed to have come from the earth to greet the light. A chant, a hymn—the Indian was offering his prayer to the rising sun. The shepherd, accustomed to his Indian neighbors, went his way slowly, guiding his sheep out of the canyon. The Indian finished his offering of prayer. I, alone, seemed not in complete tune with the instruments of God. I felt a sense of loss that they were closer to nature than I, more understanding of the storm. I had shuddered at the wind as it came through the cracks of my little house; now I had to cover my eyes from the bright rays of the sun, while my neighbors, fearing nothing, welcomed with joy “another day.” (5)

There is a wistful tone here that never reappears in the sketches about traditions and customs that follow. She even betrays envy for the freedom and comfort (in nature) that her neighbors the shepherd and the Indian enjoy. Rebolledo notes that Otero Warren “remains on the edge, longing for the sense of integration denied her, in part because she is a woman, but also because she represents a culture and class undergoing a profound transition” (“Las Escritoras” 203). A woman of her class could hardly admit to envying the lower classes, for Spanish Americans sought distinction from the American Indian and the mestizo, as I have noted above. However, Otero Warren still expresses wistfulness about the passing on of intimacy with the natural environment. After all, it is around this time that writers and artists travel to New Mexico in search of authentic experiences in nature and with “natives” of the Mexican as well as of the American Indian variety. However, she does more than simply romanticize. She mourns the passing of a time that allowed for the possibility (at least) to work together with American Indians and to identify more closely with mestizos. In this mourning, she protests, if in a veiled way, the dominance of Anglo-American culture, which precipitated an irreversible separation of the Spanish American from the American Indian and the mestizo—and also from the natural environment, for, as I point out in other chapters of this book, the story of Mexican Americans is a story of strong connections with the natural environment



through goodlife work and also work in both a natural and a socioeconomic environment severely degraded by modernity/coloniality. In other words, with the brief introduction to her book that works to preserve Spanish American traditions, she laments the fashioning of the Spanish American identity precisely because it forced her to leave behind the possibility of intimacy with mestizos, Indians, and the natural environment. Even so, she is practical and continues the project of the rest of the book. But it cannot remain unrecognized that she does so with an initial expression of ambivalence, even critique.

Analysis of her drafts of this opening chapter offers evidence of her process of expressing communion with the land through her cultural identity. Her original draft incorporated Spanish words throughout, including the language of the title; the published version retains none of the Spanish from the original. The title from the draft was “El Aire en las Montañas,” but the published version is “The Wind in the Mountains.” A major debate in education at the time was, of course, about bilingual instruction. Otero Warren consistently argued in favor of bilingual education and, in the course of this essay, offers a sneaky barb at those intimidated by an unfamiliar language: “The night was alive with sounds of creatures less fearful than humans, speaking a language little understood by us yet felt by every sense” (*Old Spain* 4). This critique of those unable to “feel” with “every sense” the unfamiliar language of animals made its way into the final draft, but remains enigmatic unless one contextualizes it within her larger critique of the increasing domination of Anglo-American culture and English in New Mexico. She admires these creatures for being less fearful than humans and allows herself to “feel” with “every sense” their unfamiliar language—sounding a challenge to others facing an unfamiliar language. However, another less enigmatic warning to outsiders did not make the cut. Early in the essay, when she describes the coming of the storm, she also warns: “This great Southwest is beautiful beyond words, but it needs to be watched lest it bruise those not acquainted with its moods” (“The Wind in the Mountains”). Here she sounds a warning to outsiders about the unpredictability and force of local weather patterns, but she might be suggesting the power and will of its people as well.

Indeed, the trope of the storm itself represents the American colonization of the Southwest. Several points in the essay indicate this. First, she describes distinct feelings before and after the storm. Before the storm she had a “feeling of vastness, of solitude, but never of loneliness” (*Old Spain* 4). However, after the storm she “felt a loneliness not apparent in those more understanding

of the aftermath of the storm” (5). The onset of a feeling of loneliness comes only after the storm of colonization, when she takes up a Spanish American identity and its associated schism with Indians, mestizos, and the natural environment. Even so, she is determined to depict a persevering culture—which she likens to a candle in the storm. Before the storm, she describes “a melancholy candle . . . flicker[ing] as if gasping for breath before expiring” (4), and after the storm we find that the candle’s flame has survived: “An unmuffled candle alone illuminated the small room. It kept vigilance through the stormy night” (4). She realizes that something of her original culture, which valued at least some of the mestizo and Indian cultures, can still survive this colonization that has distanced her from them and from the natural environment. Perhaps she is signaling that it is these aspects that she attempts to preserve in her book for the coming generations.

One cannot deny the oppression that the Spanish conquistadores and their descendants enacted on the indigenous peoples of the Americas in the process of colonization, nor can one deny the strict caste system that emerged from the Spanish conquest. This also seems to be hinted at in Otero Warren’s opening chapter, in its published as well as in its draft form. In describing the effects of the storm, she wrote two versions. I present both, the published version followed by the draft version:

The wind hissed like a rattler, and as it struck the branches of the trees, it made a weird sound like a musical instrument out of tune. Trees were bowing as if in obeisance to their Master. (4)

The wind hissed like a rattler before it strikes. We arose to see the trees bowing, as if in obeisance to their Master. Down crashed the dead branches, the wind striking the tips of those more obstinate with the weird sound of a musical instrument out of tune, like the crash of drums and symbols [*sic*] emphasizing a strain of music while an idol fell to the ground. (“The Wind in the Mountains”)

In both these versions, she clearly states the way the storm controls the situation and changes the landscape, with the trees bowing to their “Master.” With the use of the word “Master,” she indicates a shift in power, both recognizing the new masters and acknowledging that another class of “Master” prevailed before, and that the trees resist the shift in power with their “out of tune” music. She notes a resistance to the American colonization of Mexico, but she also recognizes

the success of the United States. However, the unpublished version makes this point more emphatically by calling some of the tree branches “more obstinate” and observing that their fall sounded “like the crash of drums and symbols [*sic*] emphasizing a strain of music while an idol fell to the ground” (“The Wind in the Mountains”). Why does the falling of the obstinate tree branches crash like drums and “symbols”? Why do the tree branches fall to a tune that might play when an “idol” falls to the ground? In this draft version, she emphasizes the significance of the passing of Mexican power to Americans (crash and drum). I would also argue that she suggests that the Mexican era’s fall was like the fall of an idol—and she did not mean an “idyll,” because the Mexican era was far from idyllic—and in so suggesting, she is critiquing the weaknesses of that era, including its entrenched peonage/slavery system.

In *Old Spain in Our Southwest*, Otero Warren records the passage of the Mexican era, and does her best to preserve a memory of it for New Mexican students. But she also critiques the old way, calling it an “idol” in the draft version of her opening essay. If we are to take this opening essay as a context for the rest of the book, then we must read her ensuing comments in the light of her new “loneliness” and alienation from the natural environment. When, in the chapter describing life on the “Old Spanish Hacienda” she says, “Never did anyone but peones expose themselves to the sun” (9), we should remember that she laments this distance from the elements. An environmental reading of this work offers a more complex understanding of this Spanish American woman who advocated on behalf of Spanish Americans, American Indians, and mestizos in her lifetime, and who did not forget the lessons of the past. Her writings lamented the compromises of the Spanish American identity made for the sake of power under the American system, but she was unwilling to let students remain without some knowledge of past practices. In this sense, she emerges as a voice of ambivalence regarding her Spanish American identity and what it cost her in communion with the land.

## JOVITA GONZÁLEZ’S MESTIZAJE AND THE SOUTH TEXAS ECOLOGICAL REVOLUTION

While Nina Otero Warren documented life in northern New Mexico, Jovita González recorded the folktales of South Texas. Rather than communicate ambivalence, González registers a cryptic resistance found in traditional stories.

The folktale genre keeps the tone light, but the tales that González chooses to record ultimately communicate a critical response to modernity's interference with the Mexican American relationship with the land. González tells the story of modernity's intervention by documenting the early twentieth-century ecological revolution of South Texas. "Ecological revolutions," as defined by environmental historian Carolyn Merchant, "are major transformations in human relations with nonhuman nature. They arise from changes, tensions, and contradictions that develop between society's mode of production and its ecology, and between its modes of production and reproduction. These dynamics in turn support the acceptance of new forms of consciousness, ideas, images, and worldviews" (2). In some of her stories and in her novels, González responds to the ecological revolution in her homeland by seeking to preserve a way of life and the environmental knowledge that accompanied it, which she saw die out. Especially significant in this regard are her first published stories—folktales collected in the 1927 edition of the Publications of the Texas Folklore Society, *Texas and Southwestern Lore*, edited by J. Frank Dobie. These stories, each with its explanation of a plant or animal trait—like the dove's coo, the Texas sage's ashy color, the mockingbird's white wing feathers, the thornless thistle, and the Guadalupe vine's medicinal value—challenge readers to see the critique hidden in their message of traditional environmental knowledge. This represents a hitherto unrecognized source of environmental writing, emerging from the diligence of Chicana/o scholars to recover Mexican American writing from this historical period. Although at first glance these tales may seem simple and lighthearted, they prove to be intricately disguised and serious critiques of the large-scale cultural and agricultural changes that González and her community witnessed in the area.<sup>5</sup>

The changes that González documents were brought about by three related and powerful forces: the growing American influence after the U.S.-Mexican War, the 1904 arrival of the railroad, and the resulting shift in the region from ranching to farming. The writings of this South Texas native daughter document the transformation of the greater Rio Grande Valley in the late nineteenth century through the early twentieth century, paying close attention to the way these changes affected the human relationship with the natural environment. The shift that she witnessed meant more than a change in land use. It also meant a power shift that moved her community from a culture of land-owning Mexican American ranchers who afterward found themselves to have become landless laborers.

By the time González was an adult, the halcyon days of grand Mexican American ranchos in South Texas were mostly a memory. Her own ancestors had once been ranch *patrones*, numbering among the border aristocracy. And although she did not inherit a grand ranch, she took seriously the cultural inheritance that was available to her: stories of her ancestors and culture. González also focused her attention on the humblest population of Mexican Americans, the peones, honoring them by rooting her writings in the folktales they shared with her. She was always careful to include stories that narrated the Mexican American relationship with the natural environment. Interestingly, González introduces her stories by giving credit to “the quaintness and simplicity of the Indian myth” (“Folklore” 7). This may sound condescending to contemporary ears, but it is important to note the frankness with which González declares, many years in advance of Anzaldúa’s proud declaration of *mestizaje*, the mixed-race heritage of Mexican Americans and their cultural productions. Describing the heritage of her subject, the Texas-Mexican vaquero, she says, “On one side, he descends from the first Americans, the Indians; on the other, his ancestry can be traced to the Spanish adventurer and conquistador. From the mingling of these two races a unique type has resulted, possessing not only salient racial characteristics of both but also certain peculiar traits created by the natural environment and surroundings in which he lives” (7). González was at the time, if not the only, then one of the few members of the Texas Folklore Society who was a Mexican American woman. Nevertheless, she dared to make it absolutely clear that Mexican Americans had Indian as well as Spanish blood running in their veins. That was a bold move in times when pseudo-identifiers, such as “Spanish,” “Spanish American,” “Latin,” and “Latin American”—designed precisely to excise American Indian heritage—were the norm. Note also González’s emphasis on the coevolution of the place and its peoples; she implicitly argues for the spirit that animates both and rejects coloniality’s suspicion that “nature” and “natives” have no soul.

González’s introduction establishes from the outset two themes that she sustains in the tales that follow: cultural hybridity and the human-nature connection. Few scholars have considered these first-published tales in depth.<sup>6</sup> The cultural hybridity and human-nature connection that González foregrounds in her introductory comments play key roles in the tales and are the venues by which she sounds her critique—especially in the story of how the mockingbird got its white wing feathers. Each tale appears under subheadings, each more or less independently of the others: “El Cenizo” (Texas Sage), “The

Mocking Bird,” “El Cardo Santo” (The Thistle), “The Guadalupe Vine,” and “Legends of Ghosts and Treasures.” The story of “The Mocking Bird” comes second in the series and recounts the tale of how the mockingbird learned humility after a nasty run-in with a hawk and his ensuing rescue by a dove. The dove patches the mockingbird’s wings with her own white feathers and the mockingbird concludes that all things happen by the grace of God. His white feathers are a permanent reminder of this episode. Here is the brief tale in full:

“The Mocking Bird”

An equally interesting story tells how the mocking bird [*sic*] got the white feathers of its wings. There was a time when all the creatures of Nature talked a common language. The language was Spanish. *El zenzontle*, the mocking bird, had the sweetest voice of all. The other birds stopped their flight to listen to him; the Indian lover ceased his words of love; even the talkative arroyo hushed. He foretold the spring, and when the days grew short and his song was no longer heard, the north winds came. Although he was not a foolish bird, *el zenzontle* was getting conceited.

“I am great, indeed,” he said to his mate. “All Nature obeys me. When I sing, the blossoms hid in the trees come forth; the prairie flowers put on their gayest garments at my call and the birds begin to mate; even man, the all wise, heeds my voice and dances with joy, for the happy season draws near.”

“Hush, you are foolish and conceited like all men,” replied his wife. “They listen and wait for the voice of God, and when He calls, even you sing.”

He did not answer his wife, for you must remember he was not so foolish after all, but in his heart he knew that he was right.

That night after kissing his wife goodnight, he said to her, “Tomorrow I will give a concert to the flowers, and you shall see them sway and dance when they hear me.”

“*Con el favor de Dios*,” she replied. (“If God wills it.”)

“Whether God wills it or not I shall sing,” he replied angrily. “Have I not told you that the flowers obey me and not God?”

Early next morning *el zenzontle* could be seen perched on the highest limb of a huisache. He cleared his throat, coughed, and opened his bill to sing, but no sound came. For down with the force of a cyclone swooped a hawk and grabbed with his steel-like claws the slender body of the singer.

"*Con el favor de Dios, con el favor de Dios,*" he cried in distress, while he thought of his wise little wife. As he was being carried up in the air, he realized his foolishness and repented of it, and said, "O God, it is you who make the flowers bloom and the birds sing, not I." As he thought thus, he felt himself slipping and falling, falling, falling. He fell on a ploughed field, and what a fall it was. A white dove who had her nest near by picked him up and comforted him.

"My wings," he mourned, looking at them, "how tattered and torn they look! Whatever shall I tell my wife?"

The dove took pity on him, and plucking three of her white feathers, mended his wings.

As a reminder of his foolish pride, the mocking bird to this day has the white feathers of the dove. And it is said by those who know that he never begins to sing without saying, "*con el favor de Dios.*" ("Folklore" 10–11)

This charming story contains many artful arguments. José Limón has argued that, as many of these folktales appear again in her novel, *Dew on the Thorn*, the redacted stories "are artistically implicated in a running political commentary on ethnic, gender, and class relations" ("Introduction" xxi).<sup>7</sup> The stories, told by various characters, are woven into the narrative and move the novel's plot forward. Cotera has commented that González's "writings, from the start to the end, provided arguments against scientific and popular discourses, which had sought to describe, contain, and dispossess her people" ("Jovita González Mireles" 168). It is upon these points that I build: both on Limón's observation that the folktales figure into ethnic, gender, and class critiques, and Cotera's idea that González's work "provided arguments against scientific and popular discourses" that dispossessed Mexican Americans during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Of course, on the surface, this is a plain and simple morality tale, where a hubristic bird learns humility. It is also gently feminist, with the patient wife emerging as the hero at the end, possessing more wisdom than does the brash husband by providing him with the magic line that would save his life, "*Con el favor de Dios.*"

But there is more here, too. Take, for example, an early line in the mocking-bird story: "There was a time when all the creatures of Nature talked a common language" (10). This is a widespread, if not universal, element in American Indian origin myths. But then immediately we read: "The language was Spanish." Here, she makes an outlandish claim for the ubiquity of Spanish as

the ur-language, not only of all human beings but of all other natural entities. This is not so outlandish if one considers the common spirit shared between human and nature. One can also see how she includes such a claim to show how Spanish was the language of the Rio Grande Valley before the American takeovers of 1836 and 1848, as well as before the agricultural transformation of the land in the early twentieth century. By juxtaposing a commonplace of American Indian mythology with an assertion of the primacy of the Spanish language, she reveals, in hardly more than a line of prose, the complications and contradictions, as well as pride, in the mestizo identity. Article VIII of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo guarantees Mexicans residing in territories acquired after 1848 a protection of all their rights as citizens, including the preservation of Spanish as their primary language, but González must have seen the abrogation of this right during the Jim Crow era in Texas. Also, with the use of the Spanish name for mockingbird, “el zenzontle,” she clearly juxtaposes a melodic word, “zenzontle,” alongside a significantly less flattering English name, “mockingbird.” But the Spanish word “zenzontle” was borrowed from the Aztec language, Nahuatl, and means “four hundred voices” (Karttunen 32).

Thus, right from the beginning, González establishes themes of cultural hybridity by emphasizing aspects of Mexican and indigenous cultures still influential in South Texas and human-nature connection by recording a story that communicates a close observation of and sense of commonality with animals. These two elements gain momentum as the tale unfolds. By repeatedly using this “original” name for the mockingbird, González not only venerates the Spanish and Nahuatl languages, but she also drives home that linguistic and cultural hybridity. Moreover, in addition to the magic phrase “Con el favor de Dios,” she includes two more words that, in this case, English has borrowed from the Spanish language, both denoting aspects of the natural environment. “Arroyo,” a word then well integrated into regional English conversation, comes from the Spanish language and names a small, running stream. “Huisache” was also originally a Nahuatl word that Mexicans adopted into Spanish, with Anglo-Americans following suit, to name a shrubby acacia tree with fragrant bulbs that grows in Texas, especially in the Rio Grande Valley. With the integration of these terms, she clearly shows how the traditional language and knowledge of the natural environment endure.

The early notes of Mexican hybridity resonate with the story’s resolution. For what else is the dove’s blending of white feathers with the mockingbird’s



decidedly darker tones but an instance of racial mixing and hybrid creation? Moreover, her choice of narrative structure demonstrates a blend between two worldviews, a strategy that is all too familiar for mestizos. Native American tales often involve the communication of a lesson for humans told with animal stand-ins. Concerning Ojibwe tales, scholars J. Baird Callicott and Michael P. Nelson observe, “Animals in these stories are always personified and assumed to be endowed with such capacities as volition, reason, speech, and social interaction” (102). But the recognition of God’s power over human fate—“el favor de Dios”—also signals the deep impression Spanish missionaries left in the Americas. The story’s style and characters echo the narrative structure of Native American tales, while its message of humility before “Dios” is unquestionably inspired by Christianity. With these repeated references to hybridity and *mestizaje*, González makes a distinctly Mexican, and Mexican American, claim to the mockingbird.

It must also be noted that this story was published and read aloud at a meeting of the Texas Folklore Society, during the same year that Texas adopted the mockingbird as the state bird, 1927. How did the mockingbird’s mestizo background sound to the ears of a largely Anglo-American and staunchly Texan audience? The folklorists appreciated González’s work as a collection of quaint tales that perhaps did not threaten a mainstream understanding of history on the border. However, González’s simple documentation certainly supplements the mainstream history with a deeper sense of the varieties of narratives in circulation at the time. She was, humbly enough, preserving the traditional environmental knowledge of the South Texas ranchers’ way of life—with its attention to the seasonal changes, the drought cycles, and behavior of the plants and animals. Yet she was also positioning these folktales as responses to, and stern critiques of, the ecological revolution of her lifetime in the Rio Grande Valley. Cotera details this shift by citing the arrival of the railroad to South Texas in 1904 and the ensuing impact: “Within fifteen years of the construction of the railway system, the Texas Mexican people of the border region, with a few exceptions, had lost the world that Jovita González knew, ‘the world of cattle *hacendados* and *vaqueros*,’ and would come to live in ‘a world of commercial farmers and migrant laborers’” (“Jovita González Mireles” 161).

The framework of ecological revolution offers us yet another way of making sense of these folktales. How, exactly, does this story specifically respond to this ecological revolution in the Rio Grande Valley? The mockingbird’s lesson of humility offers a critique of the transformation of South Texas lands, water,

and culture brought on by growing Anglo-American influence and land-use practices. The mockingbird learns that he cannot truly make the spring arrive, the flowers bloom, the birds sing. His early insistence on this power draws his wife's cautious remonstrance, and almost ends in fatal disaster for him. But he manages to recover, acknowledging a higher and wiser power, and acquires some hybrid elements along the way. In the South Texas of the early twentieth century, droves of farmers were arriving, answering the call of advertisements spread across the Midwest and the South. The ads told them that a fertile oasis awaited them in the Rio Grande Valley. All they had to do was find some unused land, usually part of a rancho, and take advantage of the many consecutive days of sunshine and balmy weather, but upon arrival, they understood that they would need to irrigate. In a landscape that had heretofore been ranching territory, irrigation was not common. The newly arrived farmers, largely attracted by cheap land, sunshine, and the new railroad that could deliver their crops to the world, found a way to irrigate their crops. They used the waters of the Rio Grande, and so initiated the process of making spring arrive, just as *el zenzontle* vainly claims he can do.

However, the diversion of the Rio Grande initiated by the new farming practices started a process of water depletion in the river such that now the river struggles to make its way to the Gulf of Mexico, sometimes even trickling to a standstill before reaching its destination. In one simple tale, González laments the practices of the newly arrived farmers and critiques the way they participated in the decline of traditional Texas-Mexican ranch culture by hubristically instituting their never-ending "spring" of irrigation fed by the Rio Grande. Her story begins with *el zenzontle* claiming to make the *prairie* flowers bloom, as they once did on the ranchos, and ends with the mockingbird falling "on a ploughed field," indicating the already transforming land. Nevertheless, she also indicates his acknowledgement of a higher power's control over the seasons: "O God, it is you who make the flowers bloom and the birds sing, not I" ("Folklore" 11). However, the transition to farming continued in the valley, and the acquisition of ranch land for farming purposes was not always through honorable means. According to historian David Montejano:

The impact of the farm developments on the Texas Mexican people was profound . . . Taxes, mortgage debts, legal battles, the effects of the erratic cattle and sheep market, outright coercion and fraud, as well as the cash offer of land speculators, all combined once more to reduce the number of Mexican landowners . . .

the primary sources leave little doubt on this point—the dispossession of landed Mexicans was a sweeping one. (113)

However, public opinion in the early twentieth century argued that simple market forces compelled the shift. A couple of Texas geographers made this case in the pages of the journal *Economic Geography* during the late 1920s and early 1930s. Their articles were concerned with the ranch-to-agriculture shift but in a tone—certainly reflective of the time—that celebrated the “progress” that farming brought to South Texas. In a 1932 article on “Land Utilization in the Lower Rio Grande Valley of Texas,” Southern Methodist University geography professor Edwin J. Foscue reduces the transition in land ownership to a simple tale of economics: “Lands that are today in [*sic*] irrigated farms were once the widespread pastures of the Texas-Mexican rancheros, who held clear title to the land, and refused to sell, until modern development caused the land to become so valuable that they felt forced to sell” (3). In the face of such half-truths that populated academic circles in her day, González takes heart by documenting the longstanding presence of Mexican Americans in Texas and by communicating the environmental knowledge in the tales of the “Texas-Mexican vaquero,” even as she was witnessing “one of the most phenomenal land movements in the history of the United States” (Montejano 108).

Another tale in her 1927 article also provides an artfully delivered critique of the newly arrived farmers’ takeover of Texas-Mexican land, as well as further contextualizing the centerpiece mockingbird tale. The story about the origin of “El Cenizo,” or the Texas sage tree, tells how this native Texas bush was a “gift of the Virgin” to the “cowmen” who had “gathered together and reverently knelt on the plain to beg for help” after a long drought (González, “Folklore” 9). The day after the people had prayed, they awoke to rainfall, and “as far as the eye could see, the plain was covered with silvery shrubs, sparkling with raindrops and covered with flowers, pink, lavender, and white” (10). They named the bush *cenizo* (ash) because the day was Ash Wednesday. Considered alongside the tale of the mockingbird’s foolish pride, this example of the Texas-Mexicans’ respect for a higher order’s influence over rainfall shows the contradistinction between the farmers and the ranchers. Moreover, the tale concerns the Texas-Mexicans’ integration of the *cenizo*, a native species, into a treasured cultural tale and further indicates their intimacy with the land and its ecological rhythms, even if such respect sometimes landed them in desperate

situations. However, the arrival of farm agriculture threatened Texas-Mexican ranchers more than any drought. Foscue, one of the 1930s Texas geographers, documented the transitions for the ranchers in South Texas: "Cattle ranching which had been supreme in the area for more than 150 years was suddenly dislodged from its monopoly upon river lands, and driven into the back country, or out on the coastal prairie that was too wet to cultivate" (3). At the same time, these geographers also documented the ranchers' coexistence with native species, here described as the last remnants of the once dominant ranching culture:

Areas unsuited to [farming] uses have been avoided by agricultural settlers and are chiefly useful for cattle raising. Extensive areas in the northern part of the region, coastal flats bordering the Gulf of Mexico, and marshy depressions between intermittent distributaries of the Rio Grande are of this sort. Much of this land will be cleared and drained ultimately for use in farming; but at present it is occupied by native grasses and thorny shrubs, and is suitable only for use as pasture. (Chambers 371)

The transformation of the land continued and dominated most of the valley, and in this 1930 article, geographer William T. Chambers recommends enterprise in South Texas due to its booming agricultural growth, its temperate weather, its "picturesque Spanish architecture" and its population: "The population consists of prosperous Americans and many Mexicans, the latter constituting a cheap and efficient labor supply" (373). With such rhetoric circulating about her native South Texas, one cannot deny the skill and passion with which González documents her community's experience. As early as 1927, González was making sure that this transition was recorded by means of the *vaquero* folktales. González's writing shows how reciprocal relations with the local environment lead to a better and more stable sense of identity in this period. However, by 1964, when the next author in this chapter publishes his short story, "Man Without a Name," the Anglo-American establishment's interference in the relationship between Mexican Americans and the land created such confusion and destruction that the Chicana/o civil rights era rose up to create changes in the power structures to give Chicanas/os access to self-determination and freedom from oppression. Sabine Ulibarri's story sets the tone for the crisis of being and of materiality that leads to outright political action.

## CONCLUSION: SABINE ULIBARRÍ AND THE NEXT ERA OF CHICANA/O POLITICS

Sabine Ulibarrí, from northern New Mexico, wrote a story of the Mexican American struggle with identity and power: should one embrace or reject whiteness? Is the possession of land and access to power at the cost of integrity about one's identity worthwhile? This story indicates the psychic toll of denying indigeneity, and thus serves as a transition from the ambivalent identities in the early twentieth century to the strong identity claimed during the movement. Titled "Man Without a Name," the story concerns a young man who has written a book about his father. His father, the patriarch of their northern New Mexico clan, the Turriagas, is recently deceased and the son's attempt to write a book about him is much anticipated by the family.

On the night when the family gathers to celebrate his book, the young man finds himself haunted by the ghost of his deceased father. Presumably, his father visits him because the book the young man wrote critiques his father's life rather than just celebrates it. When he reads portions aloud to his family, they "began to perceive the reality behind outward appearances" (8). The ghost does more and more to drive the young man crazy, convincing him that he is no longer himself but his father reincarnate. The family helps in this process: "They had decided that I was no longer I! That I was my father!" (14). The centrality of identity and the impact upon it from external forces is undeniable in this story.

One important scene in the haunting of the young man by his father occurs on the family's ancestral land. His father represents an identity that affirmed whiteness and denied indigeneity as a strategy to retain claim to their land grant. However, that land is now "violated": it is fenced off, owned by someone else, and it even has a "no trespassing" sign installed. The young man goes there to fish, trespassing despite the sign, and tries to forget that his father inhabits his every thought. However, his father continues to haunt him, telling him where to go and where to cast his line to catch a big fish. The young man tries to resist his father's commands, determined that he would "go his own independent way" (42). However, his "own independent" fishing strategies get him nowhere, and despite himself, he casts his line exactly where his father had been insisting: next to a big rock, in a spot of sunshine. He immediately catches a big fish, and even unwittingly yelps for joy. Yet his joy is short-lived,

as he realizes that his success is only due to his father's instruction: "How bitter is the taste of humiliation! In the excitement of gaining a bagatelle, I had lost a soul, I had bartered my integrity, I had allowed myself to be manipulated by alien forces—and for a moment I had enjoyed my own defeat!" (44). He throws the fish back into the water, refusing to profit from the ghost's advice, and he feels humiliated, especially in the presence of the fish whose "white belly, undulating on the water, accused" him (44).

Ulibarrí published this story in 1964, in contrast to the earlier dates of the other works in this chapter, and therefore Ulibarrí has more distance from the Spanish American identity. Yet he still endeavors in his writings to document the life and culture of his northern New Mexican family in the face of a growing trend of assimilation. His young protagonist, who remains the "man without a name," must choose whether to inherit his father's identity whole, as the story suggests, or if he will persevere with his plan to "go his own independent way." However, he is in perhaps a worse position than was his father: at least his father still owned land when he was young. Now a member of the next generation, the young man must contend with finding his own identity in a condition of separation from his ancestral landscape (the young man lives in Albuquerque). He also feels he must reject the privilege of whiteness (as represented by the white belly of the big fish). By the end of the story, we see him completely consumed with confusion and alienation, yet with his wife by his side as a hope for a future recovery of himself. The ambivalent ending challenges readers to struggle with the man's identity: should he work to reclaim himself even if he has no clear direction, or should he give in to his father's image and therefore gain the privilege of whiteness but lose his independence and his integrity?

Considering the coloniality of being in relation to these five writers gives Chicana/o literary history a new way to appreciate and value this period of writing. This analytic frees Chicana/o criticism from consistently evaluating our works only in terms of explicit social justice agendas that work to reform or revolutionize ideological or institutional structures. Decolonizing the human spirit and its relation with the natural environment ranks just as high as these agendas.