Writing the Goodlife

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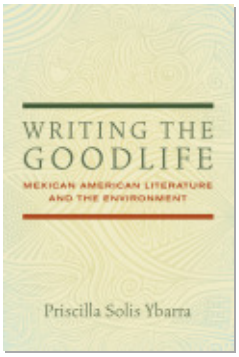

Published by University of Arizona Press

Ybarra, Priscilla S.
Writing the Goodlife: Mexican American Literature and the Environment.
University of Arizona Press, 2016.
Project MUSE.muse.jhu.edu/book/44770.

INTRODUCTION

Defining Mexican American Goodlife Writing

IN THE SUMMER OF 2013, on the heels of President Obama's speech on climate change, television host, comedian, and political commentator Bill Maher wondered aloud about the environmentalism of "Hispanics" on his long-running HBO program *Real Time*. Maher interviewed researcher Anthony Leiserowitz, who investigates the climate change attitudes of Americans and directs the Yale Project on Climate Change Communication.[1] The two discuss an intriguing result:

BILL MAHER: Some of your findings were very surprising. For example, you found that the ethnic group that was most concerned with the environment? Hispanics. Why is that?

ANTHONY LEISEROWITZ: I wish I knew the full answer to that.

BM: Well, you studied it! [*audience laughter*] That's why you're here, Doc! [*more audience laughter*]

AL: Not enough! There's always a need for another study, Bill! [*smiling*]

BM: You're throwing this back at me? [*laughing, hands in the air*]

AL: [*getting serious again*] Well, partly we know that the people who are most concerned about climate change have what we call strong egalitarian values, whereas people who are the most hostile to the issue of climate change have strong individualistic values. In other words, they're deeply suspicious of government, government needs to get out

> of our lives, out of our way, more individual freedoms and autonomy and so on.

With this exchange, Maher and Leiserowitz attest to but cannot explain what to them seems "very surprising": that Hispanics more than any other single ethnic group in the United States favor changes in current energy policies in order to address climate change.[2] Very little scholarly research or anecdotes exist to make sense of Hispanic or Latina/o and, even less so, specifically Mexican American concern for environmental issues.[3] Rather than reinforce the common belief "that global climate change is primarily a concern of only upper and middle class whites," the Yale report states that its results "strongly suggest that these assumptions are often wrong. In fact, minorities often support action to respond to this global threat at levels equal to or greater than whites" (Leiserowitz and Akerlof 18). In the two years since Maher and Leiserowitz's conversation, six more polls have revealed results similar to the Yale report.[4] Media responses to these poll results mirror Maher's: surprise and questions. Leiserowitz offers Maher an explanation by suggesting that environmentalists embrace egalitarian values while the less environmentally inclined champion individualistic values, making the vague suggestion that Hispanics might be motivated by egalitarianism. But Leiserowitz himself admits that Latina/o approaches to environmental issues cannot be fully explained by pitting egalitarianism against individualism. Meanwhile, an article in the *New York Times* suggests that Latina/o concern for climate change emerges from our disproportionate exposure to toxic contaminants (Davenport). Ultimately, these explanations still leave a lot of unanswered questions.

Writing the Goodlife dispels the mystery about Latina/o environmental views by turning to the largest part of the Latina/o population in the United States—Mexican Americans and Chicanas/os[5]—and unearthing a genealogy of values and practices maintained in Mexican American and Chicana/o culture. Media responses to poll results tend to emphasize Latina/o concern for environmental justice, but I want to expand the discussion. The Latina/o relation with the environment does not only consist of a reaction to environmental injustice. Latinas/os have sustained a reciprocal relation with the natural environment over many years and by means of unique values and practices, even in the face of environmental injustice. I look to the literature published between 1848 and 2010 to write a history of what I call "goodlife writing." Goodlife writing embraces the values of simplicity, sustenance, dignity, and respect. These are the

four values I found to be consistent over this broad expanse of literature, and together they function to preserve mutually healthy relations among individuals and communities. The values in goodlife writing implicitly integrate the natural environment as part of the community, and thus cultivate a life-sustaining ecology for humans.

This book unfolds the story of goodlife writing by starting, in chapter 1, with the crisis of identity and sovereignty that Mexican Americans experienced immediately following the U.S.-Mexican War. The ensuing chapters observe how the Mexican American culture shaped its relations as a community and with the natural environment up to the beginning of the twenty-first century. I begin with the imperialist takeover of half of Mexico's territory because it so fundamentally marks the Mexican American relationship with land, in the minds of Anglo-Americans and Mexican Americans alike. Chapter 1, which discusses the writings of María Amparo Ruiz de Burton and Jovita González, sets the stage by showing how Anglo America rejected the knowledge Mexican Americans gained through generations of experience with the land in the new southwest United States. This resulted in a literal alienation of Mexican Americans from land and the natural environment as a whole. One might even call hypocritical the mainstream bewilderment in response to the Latina/o concern for environmental issues, for it was the power brokers of Anglo America who alienated Mexican Americans from the natural environment, especially by means of land grabs. Mexican American knowledge about climate and healthy land practices in the Southwest was largely lost in the latter half of the nineteenth century, discarded for the sake of dispossessing this community of new Americans. This tragedy lays the foundation for Mexican American goodlife writing. The following four chapters detail the values, practices, and culture that Mexican Americans cultivated in their relations with one another and with the natural environment, relations which I label "the goodlife."

The first aspect of the goodlife that I explore concerns the way colonization marks Mexican Americans' relationship to the land by means of common experiences of exploitation and objectification. Chapter 2 looks to the writings of six different authors who connect the colonization of Mexican American bodies and minds to the colonization of land. By the first half of the twentieth century, writers lament that Mexican Americans' access to land and power is proportionate to the degree to which they identify with Anglo-American culture and values. These Mexican American writers show how the experience of dispossession helps them understand the destructiveness of racial hierarchy and,

important for alliance with the natural environment, the damage caused by objectifying land. This experience translates to the goodlife by instilling in Mexican Americans an ethic of sustenance in terms of natural resources, and an ethic of simplicity in overall lifestyle. After such experiences of humiliation and loss, Mexican Americans also cultivate dignity and respect with one another. These goodlife values and practices do not emerge fully formed or in a parallel fashion during this literary historical period, but chapter 2 notes their roots in these writings.

What happens in the latter half of the twentieth century is nothing short of extraordinary. Rather than conforming to the existing hierarchies and exploitations, Mexican Americans choose paths departing from mainstream values. They—especially the Chicana feminist writers—develop the idea to transcend possession, which exhibits significant intellectual and ethical independence from existing values. Rather than allowing dispossession of territories to comprise the center of their concerns, these writers reject the idea of possession itself as the bringer of misery, the practice that creates humiliation and subservience. Transcending the notion of possession sharpens the core goodlife values and characterizes one of Mexican Americans' most significant contributions to both human and natural relations today. Simplicity, sustenance, dignity, and respect all benefit from the general principle of transcending possession in regard to human-to-nature as well as human-to-human relations. In chapter 3 I delineate the concept of transcending possession as manifested in works by Chicana feminist writers and activists such as Enriqueta Vasquez and Elizabeth "Betita" Martinez, as well as writing about naturopathic healing by Rudolfo Anaya. Chapter 4 continues this thread and focuses specifically on writing about farmworkers by Tomás Rivera, Tish Hinojosa, and Helena María Viramontes. These writings range from engaging civil rights–era activism to representing the quiet power of alternative medicine and the dignity of laboring on the land.

By the beginning of the twenty-first century, Chicana feminist writers best articulate goodlife writing, including transcending possession. San Francisco Bay Area playwright, essayist, and poet Cherríe Moraga most explicitly engages ecological issues in her work, in particular a trilogy of three works I examine in chapter 5. In those three works—*The Last Generation*, *Heroes and Saints*, and *The Hungry Woman*—written and produced at the turn of the century, Moraga offers the value of care to replace destructive possession. What makes her work of stark interest is that she manifests care in a most extreme manner: she takes care for the human-nature relation to its logical conclusion by showcasing the

ultimate surrender to simplicity, sustenance, dignity, and respect in the form of human sacrifice and death. Such an image musters visions of Aztec rituals atop dramatic pyramids, but Moraga's work is decidedly contemporary and relevant to twenty-first-century racial, sexual, and ecological politics. She draws attention to the death and destruction committed for the sake of possession and hierarchy. Corporations, oil explorers, and chemical manufacturers, to name just a few, sacrifice human life on a daily basis and on a grand scale, albeit shielded by laws that govern the trade's and profits' bottom line. Moraga shows how death can be a healthy part of an ecological process as well as an effective political strategy that draws attention to the assault on human life committed by the way we live today and the exploitative values that are taken for granted under capital, modernity, and coloniality. Giving up one's life, or the life of a loved one, when not for the sake of monetary gain, represents the ultimate act of transcending possession.

Despite this long history of goodlife ethics and practices, there is a reason why Mexican American and Chicana/o environmentalism remains a mystery: we never became environmentalists in the first place. While the American project of environmentalism denotes an explicit quest to find alternatives to exploitative approaches to nature, goodlife writing shows how the Mexican American and Chicana/o culture enacts values and practices that include nature all along.[6] Goodlife values can be found in Mexican American writings published as early as the late nineteenth century, at the same time that these writings maintain a connection to pre-Columbian practices and epistemologies.

I found the name for what I call this body of work—"goodlife writing"—in a book by Fabiola Cabeza de Baca. She describes her childhood on the family ranch in her 1949 book *The Good Life: New Mexico Traditions and Food*: "Life as I grew up and as I knew it as a home economist was rich but simple. People drew their sustenance from the soil and from the spirit. Life was good but not always easy" (v).[7] The core values that Cabeza de Baca lists—not too much but just enough, wealth measured by degrees of simplicity and community rather than material accumulation, a sense of respect for the dignity of the spirit and of the land all in one breath—resonate with the lives and approaches that I find in abundance in Mexican American and Chicano/a writing from the late nineteenth century to today. The notion of "the good life" also has a lot in common with movements in Latin America that successfully challenge conventional discourses of development. For example, in 2008 both Ecuador and Bolivia enfranchised the natural environment in their respective constitutions.

As described by anthropologist Arturo Escobar, "The Constitutions introduced a novel notion of development centered on the concept of *sumak kawsay* (in Quechua), *suma qamaña* (in Aymara) or *buen vivir* (in Spanish), or 'living well'" (Escobar 138). Escobar adds that this new conceptualization "subordinates economic objectives to ecological criteria, human dignity, and social justice" at the same time that "it represents an unprecedented 'biocentric turn,' away from the anthropocentrism of modernity" (138). The Mexican American and Chicana/o goodlife writing I document in this book embraces similar values and turns away from the modernity imposed during and after colonization. Viewing Mexican American and Chicana/o writing with the goodlife lens reshapes American literary history and environmental studies in a way that gives precedence to community- and dignity-oriented values that survive and thrive despite assaults that started during the colonization process.

For example, Cabeza de Baca's *The Good Life* has received little attention within American or even Mexican American literary studies. However, another book published during the same year is considered a classic of American environmentalism: Aldo Leopold's *A Sand County Almanac*. The concurrent publication of these two books offers an opportunity to see how Mexican American views concerning the environment have been in existence for as long as, if not longer than, mainstream U.S. environmentalism. Wallace Stegner, another one of the twentieth century's most renowned American environmental writers, salutes *A Sand County Almanac*: "When this forming civilization assembles its Bible, its record of the physical and spiritual pilgrimage of the American people, the account of its stewardship in the Land of Canaan, *A Sand County Almanac* will belong in it, one of the prophetic books, the utterance of an American Isaiah" (233). Stegner originates the ongoing label for Leopold's book as the "Bible of the contemporary conservation movement." In a deceptively simple narrative, Leopold tells of the passing of each month during one year. In describing each month, he also reflects on various challenges and questions facing the contemporary human relationship with our natural environment. *A Sand County Almanac* is still being read today all over the United States and in translation across the globe, while Cabeza de Baca's writings remain largely unnoticed.

One famous, the other virtually unknown, yet both writers promote comparable approaches to the relationship between humans and nature. Stegner and many others praise Leopold's critique of consumer culture and his creation of the "land ethic." In regard to consumerism, Leopold advised: "Nothing could

be more salutary at this stage than a little healthy contempt for a plethora of material blessings" (iv). As an alternative to accumulation, he carefully argues for a different way of thinking about the relationship between humans and the natural environment. He calls his new idea "the land ethic": "Examine each question in terms of what is ethically and esthetically right, as well as what is economically expedient. A thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability, and beauty of the biotic community. It is wrong when it tends otherwise" (224–25). The core values found in Leopold's land ethic echo the core values found in goodlife writing. Not only did Leopold and Cabeza de Baca publish their books in the same year, but Leopold also spent some of his U.S. Forest Service years in Cabeza de Baca's homeland of New Mexico, where he also met and married his wife Estella Luna Bergere in 1912.

Estella hailed from a prominent Mexican American family in Santa Fe, New Mexico. Her mother's family, the Lunas, traced their heritage back to Spain and benefited from the generosity of the Crown in their acquisition of lands. They established a shepherding operation during the Spanish period and into the time of Mexican and then U.S. rule in New Mexico. The Lunas rose to prominence in the Southwest during the period following the 1846–1848 U.S.-Mexican War, and by the time of Aldo Leopold's arrival in their lives in 1911, the Lunas were an influential family at the center of political and social circles in Santa Fe. Ever since at least 2009, which was the centennial of Leopold's arrival in the Southwest, scholars have been considering the influence of Mexican and American Indian cultures on the development of his ideas.[8] Doubtless Leopold took in a great deal of the diverse approaches to the natural environment during his time in the Southwest. In *A Sand County Almanac*, Leopold's resonance with the goodlife continues: "A land ethic changes the role of *Homo sapiens* from conqueror of the land-community to plain member and citizen of it . . . it implies respect for his fellow-members, and also respect for the community as such" (204). Given some similar elements of provenance, the commonality between the land ethic and goodlife writing is not surprising. But consider the contrast in regard for the land ethic versus the almost complete lack of knowledge about a whole body of writing's (Mexican American and Chicana/o) contributions to environmental thought. Leopold's critique was timely, lyrical, and certainly deserving of its following. How much more impact could the land ethic and other approaches that challenge the domination of nature make if we bring them into the picture alongside one another? Goodlife writing advances values similar to those found in the land ethic, and it has

been doing so since at least the late nineteenth century and in conjunction with a distinct culture's literary history. For these reasons, I take Cabeza de Baca's book as a chronological midpoint and the title for this literary history. It is time to stop pretending that ideas for healing the relationship between humans and the natural environment need to be new or originate in Anglo-American writings when they can be found in the heart of a thriving culture that has stared down assault and assimilation, and won.

GOODLIFE WRITING IN ECOCRITICAL CONTEXT

Goodlife writing enriches both ecocriticism and Chicana/o studies, pushing both fields into new territory. First of all, goodlife writing questions fundamental assumptions made by ecocriticism, thereby opening up this critical inquiry for more contributions from Chicana/o and Latina/o literature. More importantly, goodlife writing rectifies some destructive ecocritical practices, challenging the field to once and for all abandon its tacit approval of settler colonialism implicit in its first wave enthusiasm for the pastoral and the biocentric. Although it seems the second wave might better account for such limitations with its implementation of poststructuralist approaches, all but the environmental justice and postcolonial areas of ecocriticism succumb to the allure of devising global-scale theories that satisfy utopic inclinations but forsake the value of knowledge found in specific cultures aligned with caring for particular places, be those long-time or ephemeral homes. A brief review of the development of ecocriticism can help put goodlife writing into context, as well as highlight its contributions to this still relatively new field of literary inquiry.

We are still within the first thirty years of the formalization of ecocriticism. It is a rapidly changing field, and it is self-conscious of its development, consistently narrating its shifts. This is partially because ecocriticism remains a fundamentally generous field in which its critics readily engage with challenges and accept a change to their approaches if given appropriate reason. Another cause for ecocriticism's changes in such a short period is that as a new field, it is still locating its identity. In this regard, it is marked by its emergence during the postmodern era. It also prides itself on being at the place where the ivory tower and the activist march meets, so it remains attuned to shifts in popular culture and the ever-receding horizon of activist concerns. Finally, ecocriticism defines itself

in relation to the science of ecology, and as knowledge shifts in that area of inquiry, ecocritics must also shift their approaches.

Generally, critics agree that there have been two initial stages of ecocriticism. We differ as to how the future will develop. Ecocriticism, simply put, is the study of the natural environment as it appears in literary and cultural productions. Scholars have been carrying out this kind of analysis for as long as literary and cultural studies have been written. However, with the establishment of the Association for the Study of Literature and Environment (ASLE), this field of study underwent a shift toward a group identity and toward professionalization. ASLE was created in 1992 during a meeting of the Western Literature Association. The typical characterization of the first era of ecocriticism describes it as emphasizing nature writing and a literal, straightforward engagement with the natural environment. In a recent joint article, critics Lawrence Buell, Ursula Heise, and Karen Thornber describe it:

> First wave scholarship of the 1990s tended to equate environment with nature; to focus on literary renditions of the natural world in poetry, fiction, and nonfiction as means of evoking and promoting contact with it; to value nature preservation and human attachment to place at a local-communitarian or bioregional level; and to affirm an ecocentric or biocentric ethics, often intensified by some conception of an innate bond . . . conjoining the individual human being and the natural world. (419)

This description emphasizes the literal interpretations and the bioregional values of early ecocriticism, and I also note the absence of a significant engagement with the performing arts and other media in early ecocriticism. The early era of ecocriticism was also absent of diversity. Where ethnic diversity appeared, it was in discussion of American Indian literatures or cultures, and usually discussed as a phenomenon of a romanticized past rather than engaging with the American Indian cultures of today. The early era also showed an epiphanic and environmental reward for independence and isolation, as well as reinforcing the false separation of humans from nature. Critic Terry Gifford puts it more simply: during ecocriticism's "first phase American nature writing, wilderness literature and experiences of individual epiphany were respectfully celebrated with assumptions of simple realism" (Gifford 16). Yet another critic, Michael Cohen, derisively calls it the "praise song school" of ecocriticism (22).

As you can see from these few descriptions, there is a range of cynicism regarding this first stage of ecocriticism. Although I agree that ecocriticism has moved away from its earliest practices and concerns, I resist ridiculing it or making a harsh critique of it. I cannot bring myself to reject the early stages of a field of study that "begins from the conviction that the arts of imagination and the study thereof—by virtue of their grasp of the power of word, story, and image to reinforce, enliven, and direct environmental concern—can contribute significantly to the understanding of environmental problems: the multiple forms of ecodegradation that afflict planet Earth today" (Buell, Heise, and Thornber 418). If we keep in mind these roots of ecocriticism, which emphasize the power of human imagination, then we need not introduce a divisive understanding of its beginnings.

Still, we do need to remain attentive to the critical approaches that do not include the real challenges we face. I would like to introduce the idea that the development of ecocriticism can be understood through the idea of the decolonial. I use the term decolonial as it is discussed within Latin American cultural studies. First, the decolonial is not the same as the postcolonial. Neither are these two in competition with or contradiction to one another. As decolonial theorist Walter Mignolo states in his recent book *The Darker Side of Western Modernity: Global Futures, Decolonial Options*, "Both [postcolonial and decolonial] projects strive to unveil colonial strategies promoting the reproduction of subjects whose aims and goals are to control and possess" (xxvi). However, critics such as Mignolo, Anibal Quijano, and María Lugones still saw fit to develop another theory for the response to and survival beyond the colonial project. The decolonial emphasizes the cultures and peoples that have not only survived the colonial experience, but have also persevered with their epistemologies intact, as much as possible, despite the colonial project. This too may sound similar to the postcolonial. The primary distinction lies in the foundations of each—the postcolonial is genealogically based on Western theory, taking as a point of departure a modern subject for whom "knowledge can be objective" (Mignolo, *Darker* xxiv), while the decolonial prioritizes a non-Western theoretical basis and puts the body, a body politics of knowing, at its center. The poststructural/postmodern theories, from which postcolonialism departed and with which it still holds a relationship, center on abstract ideals and to a certain extent a universal humanism, while Mignolo asserts that "it is from the body, not the mind, that questions arise and answers are explored[; w]hat calls for thinking is the body not the mind" (xxiv). In short, decoloniality is a practice

of "disengaging and delinking from Western epistemology" (xxv). Accordingly, we can trace the idea back to the Bandung Conference of 1955, where twenty-nine nations from Africa and Asia—nations that had recently taken a stand against colonization—met in Indonesia to reject the options of both capitalism and communism, as well as to resist the imposition to choose sides during the Cold War. They came up with the idea of the decolonial to describe the process they were going through toward claiming their own identity and system of governance.

In the context of the ecocritical and the environmental in general, three fundamental concepts underlie the decolonial disengagement with Western epistemology: (1) rejection of the idea of commodification, (2) refusal to pursue epistemological dominance—the decolonial is merely an option—and (3) a "geo- and body-politics of knowledge (understood as the biographic configuration of gender, religion, class, ethnicity, and language)" (Mignolo, *Darker* 9). If we consider the development of ecocriticism in relation to the decolonial, the early phase of ecocriticism would be its modern phase, when it understood nature as other than human, when it took the idea of wilderness as an undisputed good, and when it took for granted the privilege of biocentrism. Then, the ensuing developments can be categorized as occurring in at least two different branches: the poststructural/postmodern and the decolonial.

The second era of ecocriticism not only takes seriously the human relationship with the environment but also concerns itself with the way that human-to-human relations are negotiated via the natural environment and how the exploitation of humans as well as nature is often rationalized in overlapping ways. They also integrate an idea of nature as a constructed concept, rather than accepting it as fact.

In short, the second era embraces the social justice aspect of environmental studies. This means, of course, the inclusion of more racial and ethnic diversity. Diversity within ecocritical studies includes many areas such as race and ethnicity, sexuality, gender, and disability. Indeed, many scholars work to document the contributions of these various groups to environmental thought.[9] As my work is primarily concerned with racial and ethnic diversity—Mexican American literature, to be exact—I will focus my comments on that aspect, although I remain attuned to gender, sexuality, and ability as well.

In one of the earliest collections of ecocriticism (*The Ecocriticism Reader*, 1996), Cheryll Glotfelty called for ethnic and racial diversity in particular. However, this did not materialize in any substantive way until the publication

of two books: *American Indian Literature, Environmental Justice, and Ecocriticism: The Middle Place* by Joni Adamson in 2001, and *The Environmental Justice Reader: Politics, Poetics, and Pedagogy*, edited by Joni Adamson, Mei Mei Evans, and Rachel Stein in 2002. These books both emphasize environmental justice as an overlapping concern with social justice and environmental issues, the first concerning American Indian environmental writing, and the second a collection of essays on many aspects of diversity within ecocriticism. Both books made early interventions into ecocriticism's largely straight Anglo-American male-centered explorations of nature writing. For example, Adamson writes of her experiences learning from present-day American Indian student populations as well as the literatures they read together, avoiding the objectification of American Indian culture as a thing of the past. These books also clearly established that much work remains to be done to fill the gaps.

We are now in the middle of an explosion of work that responds directly to these calls to action. Books like *Race and Nature* by Paul Outka; *Black Nature: Four Centuries of African American Nature Poetry*, edited by Camille Dungy; and *Shades of Green: Visions of Nature in the Literature of American Slavery* by Ian Finseth have all been published within the past five years. There has also been a special issue of the journal *MELUS* that addresses diversity in ecocriticism, and countless articles and conference presentations that perform this work. This means that interventions are being made, and ecocriticism is slowly considering more and more diverse authors.

We are also seeing ecocriticism explicitly engaging more and more with critical theory, whereas its earlier stage emphasized primary texts, and we are seeing a growth in particular with postcolonial ecocriticism. Ursula Heise, Tim Morton, Catriona Mortimer-Sandilands, Rob Nixon, Elizabeth DeLoughrey, and George Handley are just a few of the critics who are leading these conversations. One of the more promising developments has been the argument to move away from humanism—the posthuman—from critics such as Cary Wolfe. I would like to make a distinction between the way I discuss human bodies existing as a part of nature as opposed to the humanist, the Enlightenment/modern concept of human intellect and transcendence. Posthumanist Cary Wolfe proposes we think of "humanism as a historically specific phenomenon" ("Introduction: What Is Posthumanism?"). In other words, our present way of thinking of humans has not always existed, and we are beginning to see the end of this concept's epistemological dominance. In this approach, posthumanists

put us in the position of rejecting the aspects of humanism that have proven destructive—for example, the mind/body and the human/nature dichotomies. I agree with this approach up to that point, but I tend to see a radical questioning of humanism itself as a better option, while Wolfe still holds to some aspects of humanism. In his book *What Is Posthumanism?* he says, "The point is not to reject humanism *tout court*—indeed, there are many values and aspirations to admire in humanism—but rather to show how those aspirations are undercut by the philosophical and ethical frameworks used to conceptualize them" ("Introduction: What Is Posthumanism?").

Again, I agree with the idea that not every aspect of humanism is without value, but I still want to approach our current ecological crisis with a more radical proposition of engaging the ideas and processes that have not succumbed to modern values. In a word, this approach can be called decolonial. In the remainder of this introduction, I propose the decolonial as an important new means of cultivating environmental approaches that allows us to avoid our destructive humanism. In short, the decolonial involves a rejection of Western epistemology in which we break down the dichotomy between humans and nature and make space for indigenous practices and narratives that have survived colonization and that preserve and adapt traditional environmental knowledge.

With the decolonial approach, we can also finally make sense of the perceived lack of interest in environmental issues on behalf of the culturally marginalized. For a long time, environmental activists, as well as academic studies such as ecocriticism, environmental history, and environmental philosophy, have lamented their lack of diversity. They asked themselves, and still do, how can we better appeal to the lower classes and the ethnically diverse peoples to care for the environment the same ways that we middle- and upper-class and ethnically mainstream people do? In the United States, it is the middle- and upper-class Anglo-American population that has always seen itself as taking the lead on environmental reforms and innovations, such as the establishment of national parks and the management of natural resources such as forests. Partly understanding this disconnect between environment and the marginalized, some scholars (myself included) have tried to make connections to the environmental movement with the idea of environmental justice. Environmental justice, with its central concern for human access to nontoxic living and working spaces, as well as to clean water and healthy food, has made some progress toward connecting the marginalized with environmental concerns. This is the "social justice

transformation" of the second wave of ecocriticism. But this concern for humans is still not enough.

Colonized culturally and economically, marginalized peoples like Mexican Americans do not find conventional environmentalism appealing. Scholar Randy Ontiveros sharply observes, "The reality is that while environmentalism claims to speak for all of humanity, in practice it has been rooted in the politics of race and power" (Ontiveros 90). *Writing the Goodlife* shows how Mexican American literary history best contributes to environmental literary studies by undermining the category of environmentalism itself. In assembling this literary history from 1848 to 2010, I attend to the ways that the culturally marginalized never wholly bought into the modern worldview that centers on nature/culture dichotomies. As such, they do not embrace environmentalism as moderns and even postmoderns understand it, given that the postmodern is positioned dialectically in reaction to the modern.[10] The economically impoverished, the colonized, and the culturally marginalized by necessity ensure their own survival in terms of jobs and education, food and water, but they do not define or understand their actions as "environmental." As Walter Mignolo argues in *The Darker Side of Western Modernity*, within decolonized cultures, "there was not, and there is not today, a distinction between 'nature' and 'culture' " (11). They have always been among the most exposed to environmental exploitation—manual labor, toxic contamination, sovereignty loss—but they see this as a product of modern epistemologies that justified colonization of peoples and places. As a result, they did not have to develop an environmental critique to solve the nature/culture divide: their approach is at once nonmodern and decolonial, but it still offers environmentalism an alternative set of traditions and insights with which to approach today's challenges.

Although not self-identifying as environmentalists, Mexican Americans remain the people for whom environmental degradation is most relevant because they are among the most vulnerable to the consequences of environmental destruction.[11] If we do not make visible Chicanas' and Chicanos' unique ways of negotiating environmental issues, our silences encourage misrepresentations and ultimately foster further exploitation. The advantage of learning from goodlife writing is at least twofold: because Mexican Americans trace their heritage back to the original colonial encounter, environmentalism can learn from an epistemology that has withstood colonial assault for over five hundred years, and the decoloniality of Chicana/o studies is strengthened by showing how it has also resisted environmental dispossession and degradation all along. The

perplexity evident in the exchange between Maher and Leiserowitz on *Real Time* only begins to suggest how important it is to build a bridge between Mexican American literary history and environmental studies and to expand the reach of ecocriticism.

Goodlife writing does not explicitly engage environmental issues or follow the typical sequence of events highlighted in other Chicana/o literary histories. Rather, goodlife writing offers insight into this culture's unique approaches that include fostering a healthy relationship among humans and with the natural environment. For example, goodlife writing rejects the concepts of possession and control. This is in contrast with conventional environmental and Chicana/o values. The typical genealogies for both these areas include concern for possession and control of territories—environmentalists in the name of preservation or conservation, and Chicanas/os for economic independence and continuity of settler-colonial heritage. However, the genealogy I trace for goodlife writing suggests that some Mexican American and Chicana/o writers and activists, particularly women, have detected a destructive vein in the desire for control and possession of lands.

Given that so many of these works have been penned by women, goodlife writing brings women's voices and concerns to the forefront. Mexican American women's and Chicanas' writings focus on their lived experiences that tell them how patriarchy, domination, possession, and control oppress women at the same time that they oppress the natural environment. The Chicana emphasis on experience also demystifies individualistic rights while it dignifies the many interests and concerns that make up everyday life, which they consider a legitimate and powerful site of knowledge production. This departure from individualistic rights also shifts the focus from justice based on equality and toward justice based on dignity and respect. The release of control and domination also creates a home for the full spectrum of sexualities and genders—something with which both Chicana/o and environmental studies have struggled.

EXAMPLES OF GOODLIFE WRITING

What are some specific examples of goodlife writing? In his *Black Mesa Poems*, Jimmy Santiago Baca writes an ode to the spring snowmelt that fills the *acequias* (irrigation ditches). Goodlife writing celebrates traditional and environmentally sustainable agricultural practices in northern New Mexico.[12] In

Ana Castillo's *So Far from God*, one of the upwardly mobile women dies from toxic contamination at her factory job. Goodlife writing exposes the fatal results of labor abuse and critiques consumer desire that creates the outsized U.S. ecological footprint.[13] In *Under the Feet of Jesus*, Helena María Viramontes charms us with the first love of two young migrant farmworkers, and then readers suffer alongside them when one falls victim to pesticide contamination. Goodlife writing calls attention to environmental injustices and makes readers complicit in our consumption of food provided by a vulnerable migrant labor force.[14] These celebrated scenes of agricultural practices and instances of fatal consumerism alongside environmental injustice show how Mexican American goodlife writers approach environmentalism from a unique culture and history.

However, to understand goodlife writing means taking a step back and allowing for a broader view. All of the examples above take place in the late twentieth century, but they are better understood within a broader historical and cultural context. All three examples result from transformational experiences of alterity: resistance to sixteenth-century colonization, the mid-nineteenth-century U.S.-Mexican War, the early- and mid-twentieth-century struggles for justice and civil rights, and today's fights to halt the expansion of neoliberal globalization. This intersection of present-day environmental crisis and the historical and cultural specificity of Mexican American writing calls for a new way of understanding Mexican American literary history through the lens of goodlife writing. Mexican American writing's engagement with environmental issues explicitly links environmental degradation to the larger oppressions of colonization, imperialism, modernity, and neoliberal globalization.

Consider the first example, Jimmy Santiago Baca's poetry. I have observed that Mexican American writing embraces traditional agricultural practices that support environmentally sustainable goals. Yet the question remains: how did those traditions survive the years following the imperialist U.S.-Mexican War, when so many Mexican American families lost their ranches, farms, and orchards to the greed of Manifest Destiny (Montejano 52; J. Chávez 138)? Novels written during and about this period show us how the preservation of these traditions had to endure the imperial and commercial takeover of Mexican American lands. María Amparo Ruiz de Burton published *The Squatter and the Don* in 1885, showing the rarely seen Mexican American point of view about land struggles in southern California. She also reveals priceless ecological knowledge that went along with the Mexican landownership of this time. Jovita

González and her coauthor, Margaret Eimer, take us into the domestic life of a hacienda during the 1846–1848 U.S.-Mexican War. Writing with hindsight from a 1930s South Texas perspective, their novel *Caballero* put the context of Jim Crow segregation in conversation with nineteenth-century cross-border tensions. *Caballero* shows how one man's love for his land drives him to a kind of madness when he believes he will lose his hacienda to Anglo-Americans, at once fleshing out the Mexican American passion for living with the land and the destruction that possessiveness can bring to one's own family.

The second of my above examples, Castillo's *So Far from God*, also benefits from the goodlife genealogy. If Mexican American writing critiques consumerism, how did Mexican Americans develop this value while living, after all, within the United States, a nation famous as the global worst for material overconsumption? First of all, due to racial discrimination and enduring colonial-era hierarchies following the U.S.-Mexican War, Mexican Americans shared little in the material excesses of the United States. Certainly, the Mexican American Civil Rights Movement of the mid-twentieth century took shape in response to generations of relegation to the impoverished and working classes with little access to quality education and social mobility. This movement, also known as the Chicana/o Civil Rights Movement, famously included protests as well as lawsuits to return lost lands to descendants of colonial land grant beneficiaries. The activists reasoned that renewed access to their family lands could grant them financial security within a capitalist economic system that consistently alienated them from mainstream culture and from the natural environment.

But there was more. Part of Mexican American goodlife writing concerns land dispossession, but this predicament leads to deeper insights. Consistent with their predecessor Jovita González, Chicana feminist writers such as Enriqueta Vasquez and Elizabeth "Betita" Martinez deeply identified with the movement but nonetheless articulated their activism in terms that ultimately transcended the idea of reacquiring lands. They critiqued the idea of possession itself. Chicana writers published essays and opinion columns in political newspapers that countered the desire for repossession of lands promoted by the male movement leaders such as Reies López Tijerina. This rejection of possession, control, and material accumulation has been heretofore less visible, but it is a nonetheless fundamental contribution. The Chicana feminist writings show how the anticonsumerism of the mid-twentieth century's Mexican American goodlife values emerge from gender critiques as well as from a challenge to colonialist and

capitalist modes of nature objectification. In addition, this insight shows how an environmental analysis adds a new dimension to a dominant understanding of Mexican American literary production and history. Accounts of the Chicana/o Civil Rights Movement focus on the efforts to regain control of lost lands, and to their detriment they miss other voices that were just as creative and committed to justice. We need to also attend to the ways that Chicana/o writers teach us to look beyond mere possession of territories and goods to promote anticonsumerist values (Rosales 154–70). In the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, Chicana feminist writers continue the legacy of the Civil Rights Movement's rejection of possession and seek to preserve a relationship with nature built on the values of respect and autonomy.

And, finally, if Mexican American writing brings attention to environmental injustice, is its point of view concerned primarily with critique rather than offering alternatives or solutions to environmental crisis and climate change? Do Chicanas/os appear in an environmental context only as victims of exploitation, or can they also be a source of knowledge and alternative approaches? A great deal of this body of work brings attention to environmental injustice, but so much of Chicana/o literature also testifies to alternative, decolonial environmentalisms evident within Mexican American culture—a treasure trove of knowledge virtually unknown to and unrecognized by environmental studies.

Not as interested in the rhetoric of rights and equality emphasized by environmental justice, these decolonial environmentalisms embrace dignity and respect as their core values. Blending the practical and the theoretical, decolonial environmentalisms range from the popular practices of *curanderismo* (folk medicine) and hybrid spirituality to backyard *milpas* (corn fields) and recycling—by necessity and convention rather than in the name of environmentalism. In order to answer the question, "What is Mexican American goodlife writing?" a long history and a whole range of genres, styles, and eras must be considered. In order to understand and value Mexican American contributions to environmental thought, and the key to this long history and literary diversity, one needs to see the interplay of land dispossession with this culture's transcendence of the ideas of control over nature and determination to preserve dignity and respect. I call this process "transcending possession," as it rejects the notion of control and it cultivates respect among humans and the natural environment. It also rejects the objectifying tendencies of rights- and private property–oriented modernity.

Indeed, transcending possession best describes the contributions made by the widely varied works of Chicana/o goodlife writings. These writings add much-needed diversity to conventional environmental approaches, while at the same time upending one of the most stereotypical ideas about what concerns Chicana/o thought. Chicana/o studies and politics assume a cultural predisposition toward taking back the lands lost after the U.S.-Mexican War, either literally or figuratively. The concept of Aztlán best exemplifies this desire. Aztlán is the imaginary homeland that young Chicana/o activists wrote about and rallied around during the Civil Rights Movement, and it still inspires both creativity and consolation today. Geographically, Aztlán consists of an area in the present-day U.S. Southwest, the original home of the Aztecs before they migrated to central Mexico in the twelfth century and established the empire that they ruled from the city engineered from a swamp, Tenochtitlán. Figuratively, Aztlán is more difficult to define. When, during the Civil Rights Movement, Mexican American youth felt themselves without a territory—not at home in either the United States or Mexico—they turned to Aztlán as an imaginary homeland, an ideal place of belonging, that has been a keystone of Chicana/o cultural production ever since. Aztlán exists wherever a Chicana/o individual or community dwells and embraces the ideals of dignity, sovereignty, freedom from prejudice, and opportunities for self-determination. Aztlán has helped many Chicanas/os feel a sense of belonging, if not to a particular territory or nation, then at least to a cultural imaginary.[15] The fact that it references a historical and physical territory can imply that Chicanas/os actually aspire to repossess lost lands. However, I argue that Chicanas/os' original trauma of alienation from their homeland eventually leads many to envision transcending actual or figurative possession of land and reclaiming their own dignity as individuals and as a community. Chicana voices have led the way toward this transformation, largely due to how they sought to create a space for themselves within the Chicana/o identity that took shape during the Civil Rights Movement.

One Chicana who leads the way is Cherríe Moraga. As Mary Pat Brady shows, Moraga transforms the significance of Aztlán for Chicanas/os who identify as biracial and/or queer and/or female: "Moraga travels from an (anti) origin in cultural nationalism that rendered her alien because of her impure status to a position within an imagined homeland in which the intersections of subjectivity might not only be taken into account but be fully explored" (150). Moraga takes the original idea of Aztlán, which was so closely tied to

repossessing the lands in the name of nationalism, and turns it into an imaginary homeland that does not require material tangibility or possession. She finds she must make this transformation because, while she identifies with the idea of Aztlán, she cannot inhabit it unchanged as a biracial lesbian who refuses to endure male dominance. The new Aztlán that Chicanas envision, empowering for the entire spectrum of sexualities and genders, by definition resists possessiveness and domination while it works toward dignity and respect.

EARLY CRITICISM OF CHICANA/O WRITING AND THE ENVIRONMENT

The earliest critics to place environmentalism alongside Chicana/o writing, Kamala Platt and María Herrera-Sobek, both center their analyses on Chicana feminist writings from the 1990s that emphatically cultivate dignity and respect while also transcending possession. These first landmark efforts toward documenting Chicana/o environmental contributions center on Chicana feminist works that best distill the Chicana/o dialectic between dispossession and the rejection of possession itself, basing their denunciation of control on a critique of patriarchy alongside racism, homophobia, and capitalism. Kamala Platt, in the earliest published ecocritical analysis of Chicana/o writings in 1996, argues that, in Ana Castillo's *So Far from God*, the ecofeminist alliances forged in resistance to capitalist attempts to control agriculture in northern New Mexico "strive to attain self-determination and sustainability and to retain a symbiotic relationship between the needs of the people and the needs of nature" (Platt 85). This echoes a real-life cooperative documented by Laura Pulido and shows how the ecofeminist Chicana ethic denounces the exploitation of both women and the natural environment as well as emphasizing communal stewardship rather than individualistic possession (Pulido 1996). María Herrera-Sobek, in another early contribution to Chicana ecocriticism in 1998, argues that Chicana writers consistently work toward "the constructions of new ethical systems for the Chicano/a population," and she shows how an antipatriarchal approach to human-nature relations is inherent in these newly designed ethical systems (Herrera-Sobek, "The Nature of Chicana Literature" 91). She further describes her approach: "My analysis posits that the Chicanas' critical discourse on ecological issues emanate from gender, ethnic, and social perspectives" (89) and

argues that "Chicana writers have been at the forefront of feminist ecological concerns since the early 1970s" (90). Thus, Herrera-Sobek shows how Chicana feminist ecological views are informed by lived experience rather than an appeal to an essentialized racial and gender identity.

More recently, critic Jorge Marcone describes Chicana feminists Gloria Anzaldúa and Cherríe Moraga as "the most influential Chicana writers at the turn of the [twenty-first] century," whose work "pays attention to the cultural construction of nature (including within environmental movements) and the marginalization or exploitation of women, gay men, lesbians, ethnic minorities, etc., that such constructs support" (Marcone 195). This analysis, resonant with those of Platt and Herrera-Sobek, points to the way Chicanas' experiences inform their critiques of discrimination, and they refuse to exclude the natural environment from the list of entities that endure invidious cultural constructions. Marcone adds that "Anzaldúa and Moraga intermesh the social and the cultural with the more-than-human world by weaving race, class, gender and sexuality, and migration with ecological issues" (195). By further unveiling Chicanas as the leaders of Mexican American environmental writing, my book participates in the current recovery of Chicanas' formative impact on the Chicana/o Movement and on how the period itself led to some of the most innovative work. Maylei Blackwell details this recovery in her book *¡Chicana Power!: Contested Histories of Gender and Feminism in the Chicano Movement* and in particular shows how "many of the theoretical innovations attributed to women of color feminisms of the 1980s, such as the concept of intersectionality or interventions regarding multiple subjectivity ascribed to the postmodern turn in feminist theory, in fact have their roots in the political views of women of color activists in social movements of the 1960s and 1970s" (Blackwell 2). These Chicana feminist concepts of intersectionality and multiple subjectivity from the 1960s still apply today and reinvigorate environmental approaches, especially in the way intersectional and multiple subjectivity contributes to transcending possession by demystifying individualistic rights and dignifying the many interests and concerns that make up all of our lived experiences.

In fact, Mexican American writers have never strayed far from confronting the environmental challenges that expand the confines of conventional environmentalism. Each era of Mexican Americans' historical struggle for recognition and autonomy since the mid-nineteenth century in fact concerns a range of environmental issues. However, Mexican American writings have rarely been

considered environmental by ecocritical literary studies because their style and content do not match conventional nature writing, or because ecocritics by and large do not specialize in Chicana/o literature and culture.[16] For its own part, Mexican American literary study has rarely considered its works environmental because the human relation to nature is so fundamental to nearly every work that it becomes impossible to distinguish from other concerns. Additionally, Mexican American literary study remains consistent with its community's alienation from conventional environmentalism. For each work that I label "environmental," one can find an alternative and appropriate category of inquiry: social justice, identity, gender, sexuality, and more. This mutual disconnect between Mexican American literary studies and ecocritical studies reveals a fundamental challenge to bringing these two fields together: to what extent can we or should we consider Mexican American writing environmental?

Another way of asking the same question: to what extent can colonized peoples and places and the resulting hybridized Western/indigenous cultures make reference to "the environment" in the same way that the colonizing, dominant, and putatively unitary cultures do? How useful is the idea of "environment" in a Mexican American context? On one hand the relevance of environmentalism to Chicana/o literature is clear. Take, for example, Cherríe Moraga's environmental justice writings, or the way Jovita González's folklore redefines "nature writing," or the environmental history that María Amparo Ruiz de Burton's novels teach us. On the other hand, for these works to make sense environmentally means a transformation of each field. Ecocriticism must take a hard look at its elitist history and factor the legacy of colonization and racism into its selection of texts for analysis and critical stances toward those texts. Kimberly N. Ruffin makes a similar observation as she documents African American environmental voices in her recent study, *Black on Earth*: "Critical guideposts based solely on the experiences of European Americans neglect the experiences of negatively racialized Americans who also have struggled for connection with nonhuman nature and are therefore insufficient in illuminating African American ecological perspectives" (13). As Ruffin says, we need an alternative genealogy in order to appreciate the contributions of "negatively racialized Americans." At the same time, ethnic American literary studies can no longer relinquish environmental concerns to the limited sphere of the way it has been studied in the past. Ethnic American literary studies must begin to take full advantage of the way an environmental lens calls attention to new ways of historicizing and

contextualizing both the losses that our cultures suffered as well as the knowledge we have preserved in the realm of human and ecological relations. In their introduction to the 2005 collection *Caribbean Literature and the Environment*, Elizabeth DeLoughrey, Renée Gosson, and George Handley observe, "Unlike the white settler production of nature writing, Caribbean writers refuse to depict the natural world in terms that erase the relationship between landscape and power" (4). In order to understand and appreciate the views of writers that emerge from colonial histories and colonized places, power dynamics must factor into the equation, and these editors make the point that for nature writing, landscape in the context of environmentalism has not historically been understood in terms of the full range of human-to-human power hierarchies.

If we really want to make evident the dynamics of human-to-human hierarchical power, such as race, class, gender, and sexuality, which impact our relationship with the natural environment, should we use the term "environment" in our studies of the views of colonized peoples and places? Or, do we understand nature in such a different way that we merit a different term? Once we consider Chicana and Chicano literary works and the insights they offer as strategically decolonial, to what extent does the term "environment" remain relevant? What does this tension between decoloniality and environmentalism produce? Something I call "goodlife writing."

DECOLONIALITY AND GOODLIFE WRITING

In fact, one benefits most by seeing the ecological lessons of Chicana/o cultural productions through a decolonial lens, which *Writing the Goodlife* implements. The decolonial, according to Walter Mignolo, is the response and alternative to the European modernity that went hand-in-hand with colonization. The decolonial claims Latin America's locus of knowledge in its own geography, place-time, and peoples (indigenous and mestizo/hybrid) as an alternative to "the idea that European modernity was the point of arrival of human history and the model for the entire planet" (Mignolo, *Darker* xiv). Mignolo further explains that the "darker side of modernity materialized in this belief. I explain it as 'the logic of coloniality'" (xiv). I describe goodlife writing as decolonial because it embodies two core values of decoloniality: (1) a consistent rejection of the modern ideology of universal humanism and linear progress, and (2) a

deviation from chronological and single-dimensional approaches to time and place. Certainly environmentalism can learn a lot from the decolonial epistemologies that have endured in the pages of Chicana/o goodlife writing and survived the processes of colonization and its ensuing transformations. But to what extent is it appropriate to say that Chicana/o writings offer us environmental insights? We should instead argue that Chicana/o writings offer ways of thinking that do not require the legacy of modernity that accompanies coloniality and brought about the destruction that called for environmentalism in the first place.

Despite the rapid growth of both the field of ecocriticism and the field of Chicana/o literary studies, a dissonance has persisted between Chicana/o literature and ecocriticism that has kept us from developing a robust collection of Chicana/o ecocritical studies. This dissonance has to do with a problem of contrasting genealogies for Chicana/o studies and ecocriticism, both of which emerged from social justice movements. Put into the context of coloniality, the challenge of contrasting genealogies becomes clearer. This literary history of Mexican American goodlife writing brings together two disparate fields: Chicana/o studies and environmental studies. It would seem to be an easy connection to make; both fields work on behalf of disenfranchised, disempowered entities: ethnic minorities and the natural environment. Still, this is a seemingly unlikely book.

I initially ask the question, "What is Mexican American goodlife writing?" for the simple reason that I have had to answer that question many times, with the inquirer often implying that I will have a hard time convincing him or her that such a thing exists, and that a literary history of Mexican American writing about the environment sounds particularly fishy coming from someone as urban as I am and writing about a literature consistently discussed under the rubric of social justice, civil rights, and ethnic identity. The literature historically associated with environmentalism concerns a genre called "nature writing." Works that fall under the category of nature writing often tell of an individual's lonesome and reflective retreat to live in a cabin, hike in the mountains, or raft down a river. Think of such classics as Henry David Thoreau's *Walden; or, Life in the Woods*, John Muir's *My First Summer in the Sierra*, or Henry Beston's *The Outermost House*. These works offer many valuable lessons for healing the human relationship with the natural environment. However, having limited our understanding of environmental literature to this category of works makes it difficult to see how Mexican American literature fits in. Mexican American

writings usually concern the everyday, where we live, where we work, and often include a crowded array of characters rather than a solitary soul on an isolated retreat. The urgency of our current climate crisis requires that we all consider as many ways of thinking about the environment as possible. Taking account of Mexican American goodlife writing does not just offer an expanded reading list and new insights, it also requires ecocritics to proactively regrind the lens through which we examine literature in order to discern its contributions to environmental debates. It also asks Chicana/o studies to reexamine its genealogy, especially in regard to the idea of transcending possession and the centrality of Chicana thought in developing this concept.

Why has it been so difficult to make this connection? What gets in the way? My response to this question speaks to a specifically U.S. context. In the United States, the popular representation of the Civil Rights Movement's arguments against racial denigration are understood to appeal to the values of universal humanism that emphasize our commonalities across difference. This popular understanding of racial equality has motivated generations of activists and prompted improvements in racial relations in the United States. Even so, we can benefit from putting humanistic values into a global historical context. These supposed universal values emerge from the modernity that coconstituted colonization. In other words, working against racial denigration succeeds in exposing the racism inherent in colonization but falls short of a robust critique of modernity. This leaves the Civil Rights Movement operating from an internally conflictive frame of reference; humanism never meant to recognize peoples of color as human. On the other hand, U.S. environmentalism has deconstructed the exploitation of nature by looking to and rejecting modernity (the human/nature, culture/nature, mind/body false dichotomies), but U.S. environmentalism has largely ignored the coloniality that accompanied modernity.[17] Without recognizing coloniality, environmentalism misses a major force that works to objectify nature. At the same time, popular U.S. environmentalism tends to emphasize universal humanism in its efforts to convince Americans to see our common plight of environmental crisis, too easily ignoring the fact that toxic contamination and other environmental assaults disproportionately impact populations of color and low income. And in response civil rights activists demand environmental justice. Once again, another major social movement of the twentieth century, environmentalism, operates from an internally conflictive frame of reference. These popular notions of civil rights and environmentalism undermine an awareness of the interdependence of

coloniality and modernity in both the creation and continuation of racism as well as the concomitant degradation of the natural environment.

Although ethnic studies and environmental studies have developed more nuanced understandings of each of these dynamics, the initial disidentification still impacts the ways these two fields understand one another. This book is an effort to bring them into conversation. If each field recognizes the destructive roles of coloniality along with modernity today in terms of racial hierarchies alongside environmental exploitation, then this inquiry can dig down to a more fundamental level of understanding. Simply put, this means entering the intimidating territory of affirming differences rather than commonalities, but the time is right to move away from the utopian ideal of a universal humanism, especially within environmental thought that so easily lends itself to the global scale at the expense of local peoples and places. This is why I call the writings about nature by Mexican Americans "goodlife writing" rather than environmental writing. These goodlife writers affirm a decolonial disengagement from a conventional understanding of environmentalism.

Consider Gloria Anzaldúa's statement in *Borderlands*: "this land was Mexican once, / was Indian always, / and is. / And will be again" (113). In this statement she claims a Chicana/mestiza alliance with the land, speaking of its "identity" as she does her own identity in other portions of the book, emphasizing her shared fate with the land rather than an idea of her domination over it or even submission to it. In this quote we might consider "land" an equivalent concept to environment—both terms emphasize the "outsideness" of humans from our surroundings. Anzaldúa insists that not all peoples accept the human/nature dichotomy introduced to Western ideology during the Enlightenment. Taking just this statement into account, one can begin to see that no matter how much environmentalism struggles to reunite humans with our natural environment—to undo Western modern epistemology, to heal the false dichotomy between humans and nature—the term "environment" itself reifies this separation. In short, one of the most significant things that environmentalism can learn from the decolonial writings of Chicanas and Chicanos (among other peoples of color) is the fact that we never needed to become environmentalists in the first place, and we therefore have an array of strategies at our disposal for how to live well with Earth.

Lamentation over the paradigm of modernity is a familiar refrain within environmental studies. Still, some dispute this outright indictment of modernity.

Political theorist Andrew R. Murphy explains, "The antimodern narrative of environmental decline views instrumental rationality (the Hobbesian view of human reason as concerned only with means to ends) and mechanical philosophy (the Cartesian view of nature as passive matter in motion) as the enduring legacies of the scientific revolution" (86). Murphy argues against the idea that modernity is responsible for environmental decline by offering exceptions and alternatives to the above-described purely instrumentalist and rationalist legacies of the Enlightenment, and he does this using Western intellectual history. For example, he explains that "Ernst Haeckel called for an accurate understanding of 'the true place of man in nature,' deriding the Christian and anthropocentric traditions of his day" (88).

In the same vein, Timothy Morton, in *Ecology Without Nature*, notes that "[Theodor] Adorno based much of his work on the idea that modern society engages in a process of domination that establishes and exploits some thing 'over there' called nature" (8). Morton's much-cited book goes about a systematic deconstruction of the concept of nature in the name of advancing ecocritical thought. He attempts to keep ecocriticism honest, so to speak, and to advance it beyond its nature-writing focus. He aims to keep ecocriticism from reifying the very structures it works to transcend. Still, he does not see the full potential of decolonial goodlife values, which include valuing a relationship with the local:

> "Third World" environmentalisms are often passionate defenses of the local against globalization. Simply lauding location in the abstract or in the aesthetic, however—praising localist poetics, for example, just because it is localist, or proclaiming a "small is beautiful" aestheticized ethics—is in greater measure part of the problem than part of the solution. Our notions of place are retroactive fantasy constructs determined precisely by the corrosive effects of modernity. Place is not lost . . . We would be unable to cope with modernity unless we had a few pockets of place in which to store our hope. (11)

I agree with Morton's conclusion here—place is not lost—but I cannot embrace the reasoning that gets him to this conclusion. His reasoning includes the negation of any positive contributions by decolonial (or, as he puts it, "Third World") environmentalisms, calling their localism a "retroactive fantasy" (11) invented by modernity. He remains blind to the fact that some peoples never

lost place at all, and it is for this reason that one can be appreciative rather than derisive of decolonial environmentalisms.

In the same vein, scholar Greg Garrard observes that environmentalism's much-lauded "Ecological Indian" is an invention of the West more than it is based on an actual past. In his book *Ecocriticism*, Garrard warns against looking to a colonized culture for its wisdom concerning how to dwell in place because "many of the indigenous societies whose knowledge and lococentric values bioregionalists admire are already thoroughly deracinated" (119). This argument verges on a second colonization that erases the knowledges that indigenous peoples have kept alive and adapted to the contemporary world. Garrard goes on to argue that any environmental knowledge found in indigenous cultures is more an invention of the West than authentic to the Americas: "Yet the idealization that would make Indians and other indigenous people models of ecological dwelling arguably derives primarily from [Euro-American culture], not the [Native American] culture" (123). He argues that the image of a Native American's proximity to nature owes more to eighteenth-century primitivist theories out of Europe than from anything based on historical reality (124). Again, I do not disagree that colonization led to a thorough attack on indigenous ways of being and knowing, but recognition of this history cannot then lead us to reject the environmental knowledge of indigenous peoples who survived the colonial assault. Both Morton and Garrard get this wrong because they allow a Western approach to chronology and epistemology to blind them. They refuse to see the still-living indigenous cultures that have so creatively coexisted with, but still defied takeover by, Western ways of knowing. Place is not lost because Morton recovers it or because Garrard credits Rousseau with inventing it, but because decolonial thinkers, dwellers, and activists have maintained and adapted their sense of place from the earliest days of colonization to the present day. They do this not by global means of a nostalgic response to "the corrosive effects of modernity" but through hard-won, day-to-day battles to keep up their knowledge practices. We need only look at some of their cultural productions to see their strategies and insights. Just as critic Theresa Delgadillo argues about hybrid spirituality in contemporary Chicana narratives, the goodlife writings that tell a story about human-nature relations apart from the colonial/modern version do so to "enact an imaginative partial recovery and recirculation of indigenous knowledge that function as countermeasures to hegemonic interpellation rather than as a nostalgic yearning for premodern simplicity" (Delgadillo, *Spiritual Mestizaje* 43).

I support Murphy's and Morton's, and in some ways Garrard's, investigation into alternatives to the instrumental and rationalist modernity within the Western tradition. Still, any alternative that emerges within Western modernity does not in any way challenge the decolonial analysis that supports Latin America's own geopolitics of knowledge. The decolonial is a parallel and fundamentally different narrative from the destructiveness of modernity and coloniality that sought to uproot the local ways of knowing beginning in the sixteenth century and that continue today. Ecocritic Patrick Murphy makes the point that current critiques of modernity from the perspective of postmodernity is a totalizing narrative that ignores those who never opted into modernity in the first place. He offers many ecofeminist writers as examples of this argument, including Chicanas Anzaldúa and Pat Mora, and he calls this approach "nonmodernity":

> What is ignored by such oppositions [of modernity with postmodernity] is the continuation of a nonmodernity—including various paramodern formations—that cannot be defined by the parameters of postmodernism . . . [M]any cultures in former colonies and current colonies refuse to accept *modernity* according to the economic, political, and cultural models used by the United States and the former colonial powers of Europe. They also resist the teleological conception of progress that models of modernity embody. As a result, they may prefer to be nonmodern on their own terms rather than modern on someone else's terms. (90)

The dispute is not with the whole of Enlightenment epistemology, but with the ways that any totalizing ideology threatens the persistence of local and disempowered ways of knowing. This book makes a humble attempt to document one strain of knowing: Mexican American and Chicana/o goodlife writing.

CHAPTER DESCRIPTIONS

This study begins in the second half of the nineteenth century to show how Mexican American culture before the U.S.-Mexican War sustained a cooperative and sustainable relationship with the natural environment in ways that were nearly destroyed during the transition to U.S. political, social, and cultural dominance in the newly acquired Mexican territories. Chapter 1, "Epistemological Hierarchy and the Environment: Erasure of Mexican American Knowledge in Three Nineteenth-Century Novels," looks at two works by María

Amparo Ruiz de Burton and one work by Jovita González. These writers depict the power transition in California and Texas, respectively. Ruiz de Burton's 1872 novel *Who Would Have Thought It?* satirizes the abolitionists in the North during the U.S. Civil War and critiques U.S. ignorance of Mexican American culture in the newly acquired West. Her 1885 novel *The Squatter and the Don* shows the rarely seen Mexican American point of view amid the struggles over land possession that followed the U.S.-Mexican War (1846–1848) in southern California. Along the same lines, Jovita González takes us into the domestic life of an hacienda during the U.S.-Mexican War, writing in hindsight from her 1930s South Texas perspective and offering an interpretation of nineteenth-century prejudices through the lens of her own experiences with Jim Crow segregation. Her novel *Caballero* shows us how one man's love for his land drives him to increasing degrees of madness when he believes he will lose his hacienda to Anglo-Americans, at once showing the Mexican American passion for land and the contradictory destruction that possessiveness can bring. This chapter sets out the original trauma that defines Mexican American goodlife writing—land loss—and anticipates how this experience leads to the eventual rejection of the idea of possession itself.

Chapter 2 takes up the writings of Mexican Americans who gained access to positions of privilege during the early twentieth century by means of claiming varying degrees of "whiteness," and in their writings reveal their turmoil in this process. This chapter, titled "The Coloniality of Being and the Land: Identity in Early Twentieth-Century Goodlife Writing," details how writers Fabiola Cabeza de Baca, Eva Wilbur Cruce, Nina Otero Warren, Jovita González, and Sabine Ulibarrí show the ways Mexican Americans lamented their loss of connection to the land in proportion to the degree to which they gained access to white privilege. These writers show the inner trauma caused when individuals choose not to delink from colonial/modern structures that alienate them from the land and from one another. Otero Warren, who claimed a Hispano identity, writes nostalgically about the Indian and the mestizo proximity to the natural environment, and also signals the ways in which she remains wistful regarding those times but not necessarily apt to trade her privilege for those close-to-nature experiences. Ulibarrí takes a different approach. His story "The Man Without a Name" concerns a man's gradual insanity at being distanced from his family's ancestral lands, which includes his father's voice haunting his every moment. Finally, Cabeza de Baca, Wilbur Cruce, and González use different

genres—two memoirs and folktales, respectively—to show how claiming Mexican American mestizo identity offers the best approach to one's sense of self, access to the broadest cultural wisdom, and maintenance of a positive relationship with the land. Of the writers in this chapter, these three are the only ones who present narratives with evidence of delinking from colonial/modern structures. Until very recently, early twentieth-century Mexican American writings received little critical attention, perhaps precisely for the reasons this chapter finds them relevant and rewarding to examine: their preoccupation with racial hierarchy and privilege, as well as the psychic trauma they generate. The continuing influence of ethnic hierarchy has a lot to teach environmentalism, even today, so long after the Civil Rights Movement, and as we find ourselves in a new moment of ethnic backlash, with the power of civil rights landmarks such as the Voting Rights Act seriously curtailed as just one example.[18]

Chapter 3, "'La Santa Tierra': Chicana/o Writers Transcending Possession in the Late Twentieth Century," takes a look at the goodlife writings from the last half of the twentieth century, when Mexican Americans joined the Civil Rights Movement and changed their identity to Chicana/o in order to stand up against the elitism that oversimplified their ethnic identity and attempted to assimilate their culture. The Chicana/o Civil Rights Movement famously included protests as well as lawsuits to return lost lands to descendants of colonial land grant beneficiaries. Despite the popular understanding of this era's concern with land repossession, chapter 3 shows the decolonial transition to explicit expressions of disdain for possession. Specifically, Chicana feminist writers published essays and opinion columns in political newspapers that fundamentally challenged the desire for repossession of lands promoted by movement leaders such as Reies López Tijerina. This contests a major aspect of Chicana/o civil rights history. Informed by the desire to heal the trauma of dispossession and by their own experiences of domination due to their ethnicity and their gender, the Chicana feminists sought to respect nature's autonomy rather than further restrict it by enforcing ownership. I use political movement newspapers from the archive to support this claim, especially from the northern New Mexico newspaper *El Grito del Norte* (1968–1973) and the writings published there by Elizabeth "Betita" Martinez and Enriqueta Vasquez. I also include a reading of *Bless Me, Ultima* by Rudolfo Anaya that allows for what has heretofore been considered an anomalous appearance during the Civil

Rights Movement, given its lack of explicit political protest. Ultima's organic approaches to life and healing better fit into the goodlife writing genealogy.

Chapter 4, "Active Subjectivity in Migrant Farmworker Fiction: Rejecting Alienation from the Land," takes up Tomas Rivera's *And the Earth Did Not Devour Him*, Helena María Viramontes's *Under the Feet of Jesus*, and singer-songwriter Tish Hinojosa's folk tune "Something in the Rain." I read these works about the migrant farmworker experience to portray capital's attempt to alienate Mexican Americans from the land alongside the persistent goodlife communion with the natural environment, even in the harshest conditions. The decolonial concept of "active subjectivity," developed by theorist María Lugones, helps to reveal a farmworker subjectivity that is neither passive nor overtly activist. The works by Rivera and Viramontes have long been associated with a nascent activism, but I read these writings alongside the little-known song by Hinojosa to show a decolonial ability to critique oppression in a useful way that does not always mean one marches in the streets or runs for political office. Decoloniality requires the act of delinking from the dominant hierarchies of power, and these works show this subtle process in action in one of the most politically, socially, and economically vulnerable populations in the United States.

Finally, chapter 5, "Ecology and Chicana/o Cultural Nationalism: Humility Before Death in Cherríe Moraga's Millennial Writings," considers more recent writings that also make the most explicit references to environmental issues. Contemporary writer Cherríe Moraga directly challenges phenomena such as farmworker abuse, gentrification, and consumerism that combine to show the ways that the ongoing tradition of goodlife writing offers parallel and non-destructive practices. A discussion of three specific works by Moraga rounds out this study's literary history of Chicana/o environmental writing. *Heroes and Saints*, one of her early plays; *The Last Generation*, a strong collection of poetry and prose; and *The Hungry Woman: A Mexican Medea*, a haunting play set in a dystopic future, all put Chicana/o cultural production into conversation with the ecological circumstances of the late twentieth century. All three works betray a strong analysis of transnational dynamics and the global currents of politics and capital that put Chicanas/os and other peoples of color in the position of paying the world's ecological debt. *Heroes and Saints* is Moraga's most overtly ecological work, and her best-known theater piece. It is a play that reveals the injuries, literal and figurative, that toxic environments inflict on a small agricultural community in the central San Joaquin Valley of California. In her

collection titled *The Last Generation*—a title that challenges future generations to continue the political struggles of their ancestors—Moraga delivers some of her most impassioned pleas on behalf of a reciprocal and sustenance-oriented human relationship with the environment. These poems and essays reveal a writer who cares deeply for both her culture and the natural environment that sustains it. *The Hungry Woman* (2001) reinvents key myths from both Western and indigenous traditions to show that legendary women throughout history sought to deconstruct hierarchy and exploitation. She invokes the past in order to instruct the present, and, in so doing, she educates the contemporary Chicana/o generation about the errors committed in the early movement, especially in regard to stringent nationalism. In these days of growing struggles to forge viable relationships between the local and the global, Moraga's consistent engagement with the theme of nationalism becomes particularly relevant. Indeed, nationalism has been a recurring theme for Chicana/o writing ever since the 1960s. Moraga makes sense of this nationalism in relationship with environmental issues, reinventing the Chicana/o relationship to territory.

CONCLUSION

Mexican American goodlife writing preserves an approach to the natural environment that has resisted and continues to work against the destructive practices that brought us to our current environmental crisis. Mexican American approaches survive at the margins and therefore make little impact on large-scale environmental policy and practices, but, importantly, they survived up to today, when we can perhaps begin to heed them again. Such hardy ideas deserve attention. While environmentalism sometimes looks to scientific research for ways to address environmental problems, we cannot solely rely on technological fixes for looming crises like climate change, water shortage, and toxic contamination. Even if scientists develop strategies, it still remains for humans to put them into practice. Everyday human culture must play its role and establish practices that sustain a healthy and livable environment. Sometimes this means participating in new practices, like the passive harnessing of energy by means of solar panels on rooftops. But we can also look to the past in order to access sustainable environmental cultures. In the Mexican American past we can find, for example, adobe homes that were built with nearby materials that blend in with the local landscape and work to keep indoor temperatures cool in the

summer and warm in the winter.[19] By looking to the past, we can access intuitive practices that are already part of an established culture—so that it is less of a challenge to integrate into everyday lives. Practically speaking, it is to our advantage to implement both the new and the old practices to meet environmental challenges—a landscape of adobe homes topped with solar-paneled roofs.

Patricia Preciado Martin's short story "Earth to Earth," in the collection *Days of Plenty, Days of Want* (1999), shows how reading Chicana/o goodlife writing relies on an understanding of the decolonial. Martín's touching story about the lifespan of an adobe home in Tucson, Arizona, shows how the Mexican American family who built the home with love and a sense of intimacy and respect for the local landscape in the 1910s eventually loses the home due to the assault of progress and economic development in the 1970s. She makes her point plain with a stroke of irony: the city demolishes the adobe home in order to build a "Mexican style village" that will draw tourism to the city center (Martín, *Days of Plenty* 37). This story and many other works that this book discusses show how modernity and a history of colonization correlate to destroy traditional and organic approaches to the environment and exploits peoples of color, leaving them exposed to the harshest aspects of the natural environment—shelter loss, manual labor, toxic environments, and weather extremes. Yet peoples of color staunchly refuse to alienate themselves from nature, continuing to work with the natural environment as an ally rather than an enemy in need of domination.

At this point, my reading of Mexican American goodlife writing might appear to approach essentialism. Let me emphasize that what I include and assess here is a practice that does not depend upon an essential human nature of any one sort. To begin with, Mexican American identity builds upon its mixture, not an essentialized purity, and draws strength from its history of *mestizaje*. Also, this is a literature of great beauty and poignancy that records a long history of active resistance to epistemic assault, preserving and generating a depth of connection and cooperation between humans and nature while it also challenges readers to move beyond the modern/colonial paradigms and toward decolonized knowledges. Our current ecological crisis requires the radical proposition that we engage the ideas and processes that have not succumbed to modern and colonial ideals and values.