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“You Your Best Thing”

The Anti-Colonial Power of the Mind in Black and Chicanx American Literature

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"This land was Mexican once,

was Indian always

and is.

And will be again."

– Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera*

"Freeing yourself was one thing; claiming ownership of that freed self was another."

– Toni Morrison, *Beloved*

In the year 1987, two of the most important American writers of the twentieth century, Toni Morrison and Gloria Anzaldúa, published what many consider to be their respective magnum opuses: Morrison's *Beloved* and Anzaldúa's *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*. In these groundbreaking texts, Morrison and Anzaldúa boldly confront the complex legacies of American imperialism and slavery, examining the effect colonization has had on their respective communities, ancestors, and selves. Writing in the same year, and from within the same stringent borders of the United States, these authors put forth incredibly profound postcolonial-feminist perspectives that situate their works within a larger, global understanding of postcolonialism. Morrison and Anzaldúa emphasize the physical, tangible impact that colonialism and slavery have had on the Black and Chicanx communities, however they also shed light upon the incredible significance and power of one's inner life as an anti-colonial weapon; the success of colonialism relies heavily upon the internalization of shame and guilt, projected upon marginalized groups by the dominant culture; thus a rejection of these forced

perspectives becomes a significant avenue for resistance and decolonization. A postcolonial reading of *Beloved* and *Borderlands/La Frontera* allows us to see more clearly the empowering ways in which these authors suggest that Black and Brown communities may begin to extricate themselves from the oppressive legacy of the colonizer. By directly countering internalized colonialism with radically anti-colonial acts of love, acceptance, and self-determination, the women of *Beloved* and *Borderlands/La Frontera* are able to begin transcending the forces of colonialism that have, for centuries, attempted to control and suppress them.

I want to clarify that by discussing Black and Chicanx texts in tandem, I am by no means suggesting that the experiences of all women of color are the same, nor am I assuming what Chandra Mohanty critiques as "an ahistorical, universal unity between women based on a generalized notion of their subordination (344). My goal, instead, is to use these two seminal texts as examples of how the United States continues to colonize within its own borders, and of how this colonization may be overcome. These texts share many commonalities, as well as differences; most importantly, they work in conversation with one another as postcolonial feminist texts. Further, the canonical relevance of these texts – arguably the two most culturally important and ubiquitous to come out of the Black and Chicanx literary traditions – allows them to act as reliable templates for the ways in which postcolonialism can be understood through American literature. By using texts from both Black and Chicanx authors, I hope to illustrate the effects of the United States' unique form of colonialism, "global domination without colonies" (Lomas 6). This American colonialism reaches broadly, and is perhaps even more pernicious, than more overt occupation, including groups and communities that have not necessarily been colonized directly the way indigenous peoples were, and yet still caused them to occupy similar postcolonial positions.

The field of postcolonial studies tends to focus primarily on countries that have been more straightforwardly colonized and later, decolonized. Peter Hulme points out that in *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory,* a journal where 21 of 31 articles have some clear geocultural reference point, "eight relate to Africa, five to India, four to the Middle East, two to the US, one to the Caribbean, and one to Latin America (Hulme 117). However, this academic focus on Africa, India, and the Middle East should not be taken as an indicator of which regions are actually postcolonial. The Americas have a deeply complex colonial history, including the first European colonization and later, the global dominance of the United States over other countries, as well as its own citizens. By expanding the lens of postcolonial studies to more actively include literature of the Americas, I hope not only for a richer analysis of significant American texts, but also a more diverse range of texts and perspectives to inform a more well-rounded global understanding of colonialism's impact. I believe that *Beloved* and *Borderlands/La Frontera* are crucial texts in understanding how internal colonialism functions within the United States, both in terms of literal conquest of land as well as in the perpetuation of colonialist, white supremacist ideologies.

United States occupies a complicated positionality regarding its (post)colonial identity. As a former colony that fought a war of independence, it is, as a nation, technically postcolonial, though it is also the world's most powerful force of globalization and imperialism. In addition to its colonial projects overseas, the United States has amassed much of its overwhelming wealth and power through the genocide of millions of Native people, the kidnapping and enslavement of millions of Africans, and the colonization and exploitation of the Indigenous Chicanx/Mexican population. Black and Chicanx communities share a history of forced displacement; the ancestors of both were forcefully and violently brought into the United States, through the

Transatlantic slave trade, and through the stealing of half of Mexico's land "under the guise of the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo," when the border was literally moved over hundreds of thousands of Mexican people (Martinez 39). In *An African American and Latinx History of the United States*, Paul Ortiz argues that these violent displacements, as well as subsequent antislavery, anticolonial, pro-freedom, and pro-working class activism, place Black and Chicanx communities – women in particular – within similar positions as postcolonial figures within modern American society and culture (1).

Peruvian sociologist Aníbal Quijano's theory of coloniality is useful in understanding the ways in which colonialist ideologies continue to plague not only *former* colonies of the United States and other Western nations, but also disenfranchised and marginalized groups within the US. Coloniality describes the ways in which colonialism manages to persist after the end of physical, political colonization; Quijano writes, "In spite of the fact that political colonialism has been eliminated, the relationship between the European – also called "Western" – culture and the others continues to be one of colonial domination" (23). The language Quijano uses here is important: he does not differentiate between a colonizing *nation* and a colonizing "culture," therefore reinforcing the notion that the power of colonialism is not necessarily limited to literal acts of conquest. Coloniality, according to Quijano, "is the most general form of domination in the world today, once colonialism as an explicit political order was destroyed" (Quijano 25). This notion of coloniality is helpful in framing how the forms of colonialism experienced by the women of 124 Bluestone Road in *Beloved* and by Anzaldúa herself in *Borderlands/La Frontera* function, and it further bolsters the argument for a postcolonial reading of these texts.

Coloniality persists in the lives of Black and Brown Americans largely through internalized colonialism, wherein the dominant culture's perspectives are projected onto the

psyches of colonized individuals and communities. Teresa Córdova writes that this "indelible mark of shame and inferiority is one of colonialism's most effective tools" (Córdova 379). In other words, colonialism's ability to function, especially in a context that no longer involves literal occupation or enslavement, depends largely on the colonized communities believing the inferiority projected onto them by the racist, colonial logic of white supremacy and Western dominance. The internalization of such ideologies can be detrimental to cultures, languages, and traditions, as well as the mental and physical wellbeing of individuals. Both Morrison and Anzaldúa suggest that one of the most significant ways colonialism can be combatted is through subverting and rejecting these internalized colonialisms. In doing so, the dominant power loses one of its most effective tools, and the possibility of decolonization and reclamation of land, culture, and self becomes possible.

Entering Into the Serpent

In the nineteenth century, the United States began expanding westward under the imperialist guise of "Manifest Destiny." During this process of expansion, the United States incited Mexico to war. In 1846, US troops "invaded and occupied Mexico, forcing her to give up almost half of her nation, what is now Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, Colorado, and California" (Anzaldúa 29). By the time of this nineteenth century colonization, Mexico, along with the rest of Latin America, had already suffered hundreds of years of Spanish genocide and colonization, during which about 65 million native inhabitants were exterminated in a period of less than fifty years (Quijano 24). And, as Quijano points out in his theory of coloniality, the power of colonialism does not simply cease to exist when formal political colonialism and occupation ends. Consequently, Anzaldúa theorizes how both of these colonial projects – first, the Spanish

and later, the "Anglo" – have harmfully impacted the bodies, minds, and spirits of the Chicanx community. She illustrates the myriad ways in which colonialism persists not only in the American Southwest, but around the country, highlighting issues such as labor rights, language, education, border violence, and racism. However, Anzaldúa ultimately argues that coloniality can and will be overpowered. She believes strongly in the power of one's inner life, suggesting that through an embrace and celebration of the mestiza within, the forces of colonialism will gradually be overcome. As she writes: "This land was Mexican once, / was Indian always / and is. / And will be again" (Anzaldúa 25, 113)

Anzaldúa emphasizes the importance of embracing what she calls the mestiza consciousness, a sense of being that results from living in the borderlands, both physically and metaphorically. In order to understand Anzaldúa's theory of mestiza consciousness, it is first necessary to understand what it means to be Chicanx. Anzaldúa provides a brief summary of Mexico's extremely tumultuous history, but, for the purpose of contextualization, we can begin in the 16th century, when the Spaniards and Hernán Cortés invaded Mexico. After the Conquest, only one-and-a-half-million pure-blooded Indians remained in Mexico, where there had once been a population of twenty-five million (Anzaldúa 27). The result of Spanish Conquest and genocide was a new hybrid race, people of mixed Indian and Spanish blood: "*En 1521, nació una nueva raza, el mestizo, el mexicano*, a race that had never existed before. Chicanos, Mexican-Americans, are the offspring of those first matings" (Anzaldúa 27). As early as the sixteenth century, Spanish, Indian, and mestizo ancestors from Central Mexico explored and settled in what is now the US Southwest: "For the Indians, this constituted a return to the place of origin, Aztlán, thus making Chicanos originally and secondarily indigenous to the Southwest" (Anzaldúa 27). When the United States colonized Mexico with the signing of the Treaty of

Guadalupe-Hidalgo in 1848, 100,000 Mexican citizens were annexed by conquest along with the land (Anzaldúa 29).[1] Later, the descendants of these 100,000 Mexican citizens would be told, ironically, to "go back to Mexico" (Anzaldúa 75). But they are *in* Mexico, many of them fifth and sixth generation Americans with roots much deeper than the Anglos who migrated there "illegally" (Anzaldúa 28). Therefore, by definition, the Chicanx identity is defined by a similar sense of nepantilism[2] that defines mestiza consciousness.

According to Anzaldúa, the Chicana is perpetually caught between cultures, due to her complex history of displacement and colonization. She writes, "Within us and within *la cultura chicana,* commonly held beliefs of the white culture attack commonly held beliefs of the Mexican culture, and both attack commonly held beliefs of the indigenous culture" (Anzaldúa 100). This results in a sense of inferiority, an internalization of colonial the beliefs of the dominant cultures, while an exclusion from other Latinx cultures, leaving "la mestiza floundering in uncharted seas" (Anzaldúa 101). In many ways, the mestiza consciousness is defined by experiences with oppression; it is "a standpoint that is flexible and inclusive, a synthesis of colliding parts, opening its arms to all and excluding none as a 'crossroads' between cultures, genders, and paradigms" (Martinez 46). However, Anzaldúa manages to find a source of empowerment through this sense of floundering, this "coming together of two self-consistent but habitually incompatible frames of reference" (Anzladúa 100). She argues that the world is moving towards a more inclusive, mixed "*raza cósmica,*" and that "from this racial, ideological,

[1] The United States has also been a colonizing power in the rest of Latin America, including more overtly economic and politic colonial forces in Cuba and Puerto Rico (Lomas 6). Again, my goal is to emphasize the nuanced ways in which the United States colonizes within its own borders; but it is important to note that the United States' imperialism and political involvement, as well as economic dependency developed through capitalism and globalization in various Latin American countries continues to exist today.

[2] "Mexica word signifying cultural in-betweenness" (Saldivar 348),

cultural, and biological cross-pollinization, an 'alien' consciousness is presently in the making – a new *mestiza* consciousness, *una conciencia de mujer*. It is a consciousness of the Borderlands" (Anzaldúa 99). When she speaks of *la nueva raza*, she emphasizes hybridity. She does not imagine a future populated by more colonizers, but by people of color, specifically women, as she very explicitly genders mestiza consciousness: *una conciencia de mujer*.

Through Anzaldúa's heavy focus on the consciousness and inner life of the mestiza, she suggests that some of the most significant anti-colonial efforts take place in the mind. Anzaldúa thus practices, and encourages her readers to practice, what Còrdova calls counter-colonialism. This form of anti-colonialism is defined by a reversal, a refusal to occupy the subordinating spaces delineated to marginalized groups by the colonizing power structure. Anzaldúa emphasizes the danger of internalized colonialism, writing, "the dominant white culture is killing us slowly with its ignorance. By taking away our self-determination, it has made us weak and empty. As a people we have resisted and we have taken expedient positions, but we have never been allowed to develop unencumbered – we have never been allowed to fully be ourselves," (Anzaldúa 108). The ability to develop a sense of self and attain subjectivity "unencumbered" remains a privilege reserved for those among the dominant culture. Anzaldúa argues that Western suppression of self-determination continues to have a harmful impact on postcolonial communities; she emphasizes that "the struggle has always been inner, and is played out in the outer terrains" and that "nothing happens in the 'real' world unless it first happens in the images in our heads" (Anzaldúa 109). Therefore, following this logic, no anti-colonial efforts can be made in the "real" world until these efforts and transgressions take place within the mind, through an abolishment of internalized colonialism. This is especially important in the case of American internal colonialism, which relies heavily upon marginalized communities remaining

subordinated mentally and psychologically, as the period of direct political colonization, and slavery, has supposedly "ended."

Anzaldúa reimagines the borderlands, and in doing so, she radically strips power away from the physical border itself. While the borderlands are technically a real, physical place – Anzaldúa writes, "This is my home / this thin edge of / barbwire" (Anzaldúa 25) – she often uses the term in a more metaphorical sense to describe the state of being perpetually in limbo between two cultures, two worlds, two selves. In the poem that opens the book, and thus sets the tone, even thesis, for the chapters that follow, Anzaldúa's description of the "thin edge of barbwire" emphasizes the arbitrary nature of the *physical* border between the United States and Mexico;[3] Anzaldúa furthers this point in the next stanza, when she writes, "But the skin of the earth is seamless. / The sea cannot be fenced, / *el mar* does not stop at borders. / To show the white man what she thought of his arrogance, / *Yemayá* blew that wire fence down" (Anzaldúa 25). Here, Anzaldúa makes it a point to emphasize the futility of the white man's attempt at a physical border; she also declares, through her evocation of Yemayá, that indigenous cultures and religions will ultimately overpower the white man's border.

Anzaldúa invokes the Santería orisha of Yemayá to immediately undercut the physical presence of the US-Mexico border with a symbol of a powerful female god overpowering the white man's "arrogance." Yemayá is "the mother of all living things, rules over motherhood and

[3] I use the word "arbitrary" to reiterate Anzaldúa's point that the "sea cannot be fenced." I do *not* mean to suggest that the border itself does not have an incredibly tangible and harmful impact on Chicanx and other Latin American immigrant communities, and Anzaldúa actively highlights the very real threat presented by the border throughout *Borderlands*; for example, she shares the story of Pedro: "In confusion, Pedro ran, terrified of being caught. He couldn't speak English, couldn't tell them he was fifth generation American… They deported him to Guadalajara by plane. The furthest he'd ever been to Mexico was Reynosa, a small border town opposite Hidalgo" (Anzaldúa 26).

owns all the waters of the Earth… Yemayá is just as much a loving mother orisha as she is a fierce warrior that kills anyone who threatens her children" (Santería Church). The fact that Anzaldúa references Yemayá – and, therefore, Santería – in the poem that opens the book bears great symbolic weight, as she later goes on to celebrate the spiritual and Indigenous religions often looked down upon by white settler colonialism and Catholicism: "Voodoo, Santería, Shamanism and other native religions are called cults and their beliefs are called mythologies" by Western cultures and religions (Anzaldúa 59). In elevating that which is suppressed by Western culture, Anzaldúa actively resists colonization. This is just one example of how her writing itself embodies the anti-colonial ideologies that she goes on to explain and encourage.

Expanding upon this, another one of the key methods by which Anzaldúa suggests women of color living "in the borderlands" may begin to decolonize themselves is through accessing the spiritual and supernatural, as this process is denied by a Western coloniality that emphasizes "rationality." Quijano strongly reinforces the anti-colonial power of spirituality: "the imposition of the use of the rulers' own patterns of expression, and of their beliefs and images with reference to the supernatural…served… as a very efficient means of social and cultural control" (Quijano 23). By stripping indigenous cultures of their knowledge systems, and instead forcing them to embrace and strive for a "rational" European paradigm, European colonizers "turned the previously high cultures of America into illiterate, peasant subcultures" (Quijano 24). Even during the time of political colonization, mental, spiritual, and intellectual domination remained a key force of conquest. By erasing indigenous cultures, the subordinated figure essentially has no choice but to strive for a European epistemology and culture. This genocidal tactic remains in place as coloniality continues to project white Western culture as superior. Following Quijano's theory of colonial rationality and the logic that Córdova presents regarding

internalized shame and the anti-colonial power of self-love, Anzaldúa's embrace of the spiritual thus becomes inherently anti-colonial, as it directly defies the European imposition of Western thought paradigms.

Anzaldúa demonstrates one example of how colonialist mindsets are internalized, as well as how she fights against them, in the chapter "How to Tame a Wild Tongue." She writes, "we internalize how our language has been used against us by dominant culture, we use our language differences against each other" (Anzaldúa 80). The erasure of language and culture that Quijano cites as one of major imperatives of violent colonization continues to be enacted, as Anzaldúa recalls that all the Chicanx students at Pan American University were required to take two speech classes "to get rid of our accents" (Anzaldúa 76). She illustrates how believing in the dominant culture's superiority harms not only the language itself, but also the relationships within Latinx and Chicanx communities; "if a person, Chicana or Latina, has a low estimation of my native tongue, she has a low estimation of me" (Anzaldúa 80). Here, Anzaldúa reiterates the complex positionality of the Chicanx individual; facing a uniquely American postcolonial struggle, the Chicana is forced to develop her own language, as neither the English nor Spanish speaking groups accept her hybridity: "'*Pocho*, cultural traitor, you're speaking the oppressor's language by speaking English, you're ruining the Spanish language,' I have been accused by various Latinos and Latinas" (Anzaldúa 77).[4] However, Anzaldúa ultimately refuses to allow these feelings of inferiority to overpower her: "I will no longer be made to feel ashamed of existing. I will have my voice" (Anzaldúa 81). In doing so, she reinforces Córdova's ultimate

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[4] This perspective of language also illustrates how the new colonizer of Latin America is not Spain, but the United States. Spanish was once the language of the colonizer, used to erase thousands of indigenous languages. The colonial power of the US is illustrated through this shift in perspective to English as the dominant language of colonialism.

argument: "If the fundamental outcome of colonized identity is self-hatred, then the Chicana who can achieve self-love is closer to her liberation" (Córdova 387). In proudly embracing her hybrid Chicana voice, Anzaldúa begins strip power away from the hegemonic Anglo forces that benefit from her shame and sense of inferiority.

In addition to the anti-colonial themes Anzaldúa puts forth in *Borderlands/La Frontera*, the structure and language of the book itself also work to resist European systems of thought and knowledge on a metatextual level. The title itself, *Borderlands/La Frontera*, is a strong indication that the book, like similarly to the Chicana and mestiza, defies categorization into a single genre or language. It straddles the genres of history, memoir, theory, and poetry. Anzaldúa refuses to guide the reader through these generic shifts; instead, she shifts abruptly, yet somehow seamlessly, between them. For example, in Entering Into the Serpent, she takes us from a cultural and historical explanation of *las tres madres*[5] directly into a poem: "the *indio* and the *mestizo* continue to worship the old spirit entities (including *Guadalupe*) and their supernatural power, under the guise of Christian saints. *La invoco diosas mías, ustedes las indias / sumergidas en mi carne que son mis sombras. / Ustedes que persisten mudas en sus cuevas. / Ustedes Señoras que ahora, como yo, / están en desgracia*" (Anzaldúa 53). Anzaldúa transitions from informing non-Latinx readers of significant cultural symbols[6] to directly addressing the spirits of *las tres madres* in a Spanish-language poem. She offers no translation, abruptly limiting her audience to Spanish speakers. Significantly, when she switches to the Spanish poem, her tone

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[5] "Guadalupe, the virgin mother who has not abandoned us, *la Chingada (Malinche)*, the raped mother whom we have abandoned, and *la Llorona*, the mother who seeks her lost children and is a combination of the other two" (Anzaldúa 52).

[6] These three figures are extremely prominent in Latin American culture, therefore any Latinx readers, even those who do not speak Spanish, would already know of their symbolic meanings. Thus, this paragraph is clearly meant to communicate with a non-Latinx reader.

becomes much more spiritual and metaphorical, as she directly addresses the mothers and implicates them in her own mestiza "disgrace." By refusing to conform to traditional Western book forms, Anzaldúa "decolonizes" herself and her audience.

Aigner-Varoz argues that, because of the book's atypical structure and use of Spanish and English, the very act of reading *Borderlands/La Frontera* is anti-colonial: "Anzaldúa asserts in her text that because metaphor has the power to restructure the collective unconscious through both linguistic and visual means, it is therefore possible for her to alter the unconscious of the reading masses with her own metaphorical constructions" (Aigner-Varoz 47). In other words, Anzaldúa's text is written so that by reading it, the audience unconsciously absorbs the ability to restructure their own colonized mind. Therefore, not only is *Borderlands/La Frontera* a powerful theoretical text that can help readers begin to understand the complexities of border consciousness and the postcolonial identity, but, as Aigner-Varoz suggests, the process of reading Anzaldúa's words alone begins to decolonize the mind of the reader. José David Saldívar similarly argues that the rhetorical, verbal power of both *Borderlands/La Frontera* and *Beloved* is a major factor in the texts' postcolonial transgression; "Morrison's task is to formulate the very possibility of a grammar of the subaltern by which the 'unspeakable' individual and collective trauma of her vision might be meaningfully communicated" (Saldívar xix). Perhaps reading these works *as* postcolonial will provide meaningful insights into how "border writers and thinkers establish the grammar and syntax proper to the expression of their particular meanings" (Saldívar xx).

Claiming Ownership of That Freed Self

Morrison's *Beloved* certainly attempts to give voice to the "unspeakable" truths of American slavery. In addition to the incredibly violent physical abuses inflicted upon Black men, women, and children, Morrison also illustrates how the external conditions of enslavement, particularly the "denial of one's status as a human subject, [have] deep repercussions in the individual's internal world" (Schapiro 194). Throughout *Beloved*, Morrison suggests that one of the most powerful emotional processes in both colonization and, therefore decolonization, is love. Love may seem inconsequential in the context of much larger, more pressing threats and hardships faced by both free and enslaved people under slavery and colonialism (Schapiro 194). However, as the anti-colonial tenets of Chicana feminism have illustrated, one of colonialism's most powerful weapons is its ability to strip the colonized individual of a sense of self-recognition, self-love, and pride in one's own culture and existence. By instilling, instead, a sense of self-hatred and shame, the projects of colonialism and slavery are able to continue, even past their official political "end." Therefore, Morrison's *Beloved* ultimately suggests the process of decolonization, in the context of slavery, necessitates unbridled acts of love, towards the self and towards others, as a means of countering internalized colonialism. As Sethe says herself: "Freeing yourself was one thing; claiming ownership of that freed self was another" (Morrison 112).[7]

Early in the novel, Sethe admits to maintaining a surprisingly nostalgic memory of the plantation on which she was enslaved: "And suddenly there was Sweet Home rolling, rolling out

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[7] This portion of the essay includes and elaborates upon ideas written about in a previous essay, "Stealing the Mother's Milk: The Implications of Slavery's Commodification of Motherhood in Toni Morrison's *Beloved*" (2019).

before her eyes, and although there was not a leaf on that farm that did not make her want to scream, it rolled itself out before her in shameless beauty. It never looked as terrible as it was and it made her wonder if hell was a pretty place too… Try as she might to make it otherwise, the sycamores beat out the [hanging] children every time and she could not forgive her memory for that" (Morrison 7). In this passage, it becomes clear that Sethe's feelings toward not only her enslaved past, but also her free present, are deeply complicated. This passage also illustrates the importance and power of her memory and inner life. The contradictory nature of Sethe's memory reflects the internalization of certain colonial rhetoric. In the introduction to *Ethics and Nostalgia in the Contemporary Novel*, John Su expands upon this passage: "Sethe's reflections demonstrate the sentimentality and selectivity characteristic of nostalgia" (2). However, Su also suggests that Sethe should not be condemned for these longings; "they constitute significant parts of her memory and experience. Who she is, how she acts, and the claims she makes upon readers cannot be understood without reference to her nostalgia" (Su 2). While Su is correct in his claim that the novel does not *condemn* Sethe for these nostalgic longings, he fails to acknowledge the ways in which these memories prevent Sethe from achieving a true sense of freedom.

Morrison presents a theory of how American colonialism functions in the Black consciousness through the perspective of Stamp Paid; this theory acts as a helpful framework for understanding the anti-colonial content throughout the novel, as well as places *Beloved* among a larger postcolonial literature tradition. He explains, "Whitepeople believed that whatever the manners, under every dark skin was a jungle…The more colored people spent their strength trying to convince them how gentle they were, how clever and loving, how human, the more they used themselves up to persuade the whites of something Negroes believed could not be questioned, the deeper and more tangled the jungle grew inside" (Morrison 234). Spending their

strength trying to convince white people that they do not possess the "swift, unnavigable waters, swinging screaming baboons, sleeping snakes, red gums waiting for their sweet white blood" (Morrison 234), Stamp argues, is simply another form of colonization; Black people "used themselves up" trying to change the racist view of the colonizer, leaving little strength left for the self and the community. He literally describes internalized colonialism when he says: "It was the jungle whitefolks planted in them. And it grew. It spread" (Morrison 234). The desire to convince white people otherwise suggests a degree of acceptance of such colonial ideologies, and also necessitates dedicating valuable mental and physical energy towards the colonizing culture instead of one's own. This jungle, then, according to Stamp, grows and spreads, becoming cyclical and generational, which we see illustrated in the relationships between Sethe, Beloved, and Denver. In this passage, Morrison, through the perspective of a somewhat minor character, directly addresses issues of postcolonialism, exoticism, and internalized colonialism. She also ultimately argues that "the screaming baboon lived under their own white skin; the red gums were their own" (Morrison 234), subverting the colonial ideology and projecting it, instead, onto the colonizers themselves.

Building upon Chicana feminism's notion that one of colonialism's most powerful tools is its ability to strip its victims of their humanity, and specifically their sense of subjectivity, it becomes clear that acquiring freedom involves more than simply crossing into the North. The ability to "claim ownership of that freed self" thus becomes the ultimate goal of *Beloved*, especially for Sethe, who endures the particularly cruel hardships of motherhood under enslavement. In that sense, the postcolonial nature of *Beloved* becomes even more apparent, as Sethe faces the challenge of disentangling her once-commodified female body and mind from the forces of slavery that have forbade her from obtaining a sense of self. Ultimately, "Morrison

defines an unslaved life as a life with the freedom to develop one's own subjectivity" (Elliott 186). This requires the undoing of the harmful work of racist colonial logic ingrained in her psyche. In "Postcolonial Experience in a Domestic Context: Commodified Subjectivity in Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, Mary Jane Suero Elliott reiterates how denial and oppression of the Black identity by the larger slave-owning society can lead to an internalization of the colonizing discourse that results in an inability or struggle to develop self-empowered subjectivity (Elliott 181). As Anzaldúa illustrates in *Borderlands/La Frontera*, the ability to break from the internalizations of colonial ideologies that only benefit those among the dominant, oppressive culture becomes one of the most significant and transgressive acts of anti-colonialism.

Throughout *Beloved*, Morrison repeatedly reminds us that her characters have been forced, through the emotional trauma of slavery, to limit the ways in which they love. Again, while this consequence may seem innocuous in the context of slavery, the repercussions of such an emotional and psychological disruption are harmful and generational. Paul D explicitly draws the connection between freedom and love: "So you protected yourself and loved small… Grass blades, salamanders, spiders, wood-peckers, beetles, a kingdom of ants. Anything bigger wouldn't do. A woman, a child, a brother – a big love like that would split you wide open in Alfred, Georgia" (Morrison 191). To be enslaved, according to Paul D, means to be disconnected from the emotion of love. Therefore, freedom entails obtaining that which has been fundamentally suppressed by the enslaver: "to get to a place where you could love anything you chose – not to need permission for desire – well now, *that* was freedom" (Morrison 191). Here, Morrison presents a slightly more specific theory of freedom, elaborating upon Sethe's notion that true freedom can only come through "claiming ownership of the freed self." Now, she suggests that claiming ownership also involves claiming love, of the self and others. This act is

not only psychologically and emotionally beneficial to the individual, but it also actively fights against colonizing ideologies and systems that depend upon the internalization of self-hatred and shame.

The emotional trauma of slavery can also have an effect on the opposite end of this spectrum, resulting in a toxic love-hunger relationship. Harry Guntrip explains, “the need of a love-relationship is the fundamental thing in life, and the love-hunger and anger set up by frustration of this basic need must constitute the two primary problems of personality on an emotional level” (Schapiro 195). Slavery prevents this fundamental need from being met, thus perpetuating a cycle of love-hunger relationships. Morrison writes that, “For a used-to-be-slave woman to love anything that much was dangerous, especially if it was her children she had settled on to love. The best thing he knew was to love just a little bit; everything, just a little bit, so when they broke its back, or shoved it in a croaker sack, well, maybe you’d have a little love left over for the next one” (Morrison 54). The enslaved woman’s children, despite being biologically and fundamentally hers, are commodified by the enslaver, and, under slavery, technically not her *own*.

In her essay “The Bonds of Love and the Boundaries of Self in Toni Morrison’s *Beloved*,” Barbara Schapiro emphasizes the significant disruption that occurs between mother and child under enslavement. She writes, “The infant self has an essential, primary need to be recognized and affirmed as a whole being… and the fulfillment of this need is dependent on the human environment, on other selves” (195). Schapiro explains that a lack of coherent, reliable self can be born out of the deprivation of this essential, primary need (196). If the infant is reliant upon other whole selves in order to gain subjectivity, but the parent is also deprived of this subjectivity, a cyclical, generational lack of selfhood develops. The enslaver’s violent disruption

of this fundamental and innate human emotion can be viewed as a facet of colonialism's forced internalization of shame and inferiority; it also prevents the infant self from being recognized as a "whole being," stripping from the enslaved child, and later adult, the ability to develop subjectivity, a sense of their own humanity. Slavery perpetuates this cycle by forcing mothers and children to separate, breaking the bond and resulting in future generations that are unable to develop a sense of self.

Sethe experiences this disruption as an infant herself, when she is born into slavery. When Beloved asks Sethe about her mother, Sethe explains, "I didn't see her but a few times out in the fields and when she was working indigo… She must of nursed me two or three weeks – that's the way the others did. Then she went back in rice and I sucked from another woman whose job it was" (Morrison 72). The separation of mother and child works for the enslavers not only to exploit the labor of the mother, but also to deprive the infant herself of the fundamental development of subjectivity. Without this fundamental human relationship, infant Sethe fails to receive the affirmation and recognition she craves, and, as a result, "the intense neediness of the infant's own love becomes dangerous and threatening" (Schapiro 197). Schapiro reiterates the cyclical nature of this psychological condition, writing "Sethe's mother, deprived of her authentic selfhood, her status as a human subject, cannot provide the recognition and affirmation that her child craves. The cycle is vicious, and thus Sethe's children, Beloved and Denver, will suffer the same loss" (201). Morrison dramatizes this psychological phenomenon through the deeply complicated mother-daughter dynamics of Sethe and Beloved, the infant daughter whom she is forced to murder upon the arrival of schoolteacher and the slavecatcher.[8] Sethe's slitting of

[8] Note that while Sethe's murder of Beloved bears a great deal of metaphorical and symbolic weight in the context of *Beloved*, it is not simply a fabricated event Morrison invented to dramatize the mother/daughter relationship, but a real experience some women went through.

Beloved's throat embodies the emotional trauma internalized by enslaved people beneath the violent colonization of slavery, as she is put in a physical and emotional position where she only has one option. Ultimately, however, Sethe's murder comes back to an excess the very same emotion Paul D restricts: love.

Sethe's love for her children outweighs all other emotion, a stark juxtaposition to Paul D's mentality of loving small. However, this love remains tainted by the coloniality of slavery. To Sethe, "the best thing she was, was her children. Whites might dirty *her* all right, but not her best thing, her beautiful, magical best thing – the part of her that was clean" (Morrison 296). This obsessive form of love stems from Sethe's own deprivation as an infant, and carries over into Beloved. Though the slitting of her baby's throat is, in Sethe's mind, "right because it came from true love" (Morrison 296), to Beloved, the act is a physical representation of slavery's violent disruption of the mother/child relationship. The scar, the "little curved shadow of a smile in the kootchy-kootchy-coo place under her chin" (Morrison 281), thus becomes a physical manifestation of this disruption. The cyclical nature of the colonized mother/child dynamic is poignantly symbolized as newborn Denver "took her mother's milk right along with the blood of her sister" (Morrison 179). Upon Beloved's return, eighteen years after her death, the toxic relationship that unfolds between her and Sethe further symbolizes the impact internalized colonialism can have on human relationships. She writes, "the thing was done: Beloved bending over Sethe looked the mother, Sethe the teething child" (Morrison 294). This reversal of the mother/child relationship symbolizes the fundamental disruption slavery inflicts between the

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Morrison based the character of Sethe on a woman named Margaret Garner, "a slave who, after escaping in 1856, crossed the Ohio River and attempted to gain a new life in Cincinnati. When her master caught up to her, Margaret took a butcher knife and cut the throat of her baby daughter" (Watson 160).

two. Beloved will never be fully satisfied because the relationship, while rooted in love, remains burdened by the repetitious separation enforced by the enslaver long before Beloved's birth. In order for Sethe to truly break the cycle, she must decolonize herself through acknowledging herself, not her children, as a subjective individual.

In highlighting the psychological consequences of slavery and colonialism on the Black body and mind, Morrison, like Anzaldúa, sheds light upon some of the more insidious, yet incredibly formidable, postcolonial American experiences. She also suggests, largely through the character of Baby Suggs, holy, and her sermons in the Clearing, a possibility for decolonization. Baby Suggs, holy, is the most radical anti-colonial figure in the novel. She gathers the Black community in the Clearing and acts as a religious figure, though her preaching is not associated with any singular religion, but rather with a celebration of the self: "She did not tell them to clean up their lives or to go and sin no more… She told them that the only grace they could have was the grace they could imagine. If they could not see it, they would not have it" (Morrison 103). This line almost directly parallels Anzaldúa's anti-colonial sentiment: "Nothing happens in the 'real' world unless it first happens in the images in our heads" (Anzaldúa 109). Baby Suggs, holy, goes on to say:

> "'Here,' she said, 'in this place, we flesh; flesh that weeps, laughs; flesh that dances on bare feet in grass. Love it. Love it hard. Yonder they don't love your flesh. They despise it…So love your neck; put a hand on it, grace it, stroke it and hold it up. And all your inside parts that they'd just as soon slop for hogs, you got to love them…and the beat and beating heart, love that too…More than your life-holding womb and your life-giving private parts, hear me now, love your heart. For this is the prize" (Morrison 104).

This humanizing, grounding, validating sermon instills the emotions of love, acceptance, empowerment, and subjectivity among the free Black community of Cincinnati, most of whom are formerly enslaved people. By embracing and actively loving their once-enslaved and commodified Black bodies, they are directly opposing the colonial ideologies that benefit from their self-hatred and shame. To reiterate – and slightly tweak – Córdova: "If the fundamental outcome of colonized identity is self-hatred, then the [Black woman] who can achieve self-love is closer to her liberation" (387). Both postcolonial figures – Anzaldúa and Baby Suggs, holy – insist on the importance of real change first taking place in the *mind*.

Finally, at the very end of the novel, Morrison provides hope for Sethe, while also portraying a powerfully anti-colonial image of Black female solidarity. Sethe, upon seeing Mr. Bodwin arriving to bring Denver to her new job, is transported back to the beginning, "when she saw them coming and recognized schoolteacher's hat, she heard wings…And if she thought anything, it was No. No. Nono. Nonono" (Morrison 192). Again, she "hears wings…And if she thinks anything it is no. No no…" (Morrison 309). The cycle repeats itself, only this time, Sethe is not alone in her violent reaction: "They make a hill. A hill of black people, falling. And above them all, rising from his place with a whip in his hand, the man without skin" (Morrison 309). Now, she has the solidarity of her community – specifically, a community comprised entirely of *women*. The cycle repeats because Sethe has yet to make the anti-colonial image of a radical, defiant self-love in her own mind. The narrative arc of the novel essentially ends with this final transgressive realization, which Paul D facilitates, and therefore ends on hope for decolonization and rehabilitation. Paul D tells her, "'You your best thing Sethe. You are. His fingers are holding hers. 'Me? Me?'" (Morrison 322). Ending the chapter on this question, Morrison suggests that Sethe will finally begin moving towards an inner acceptance that directly refutes the racist,

colonizing logic of slavery that has traumatized and abused her, both physically and psychologically, her entire life. To be decolonized is to be her own best thing.

Conclusion

Morrison and Anzaldúa both present compelling arguments for the significance of self-acceptance and self-love in the face of a hegemonic, colonizing culture that functions based upon the self-hatred and self-doubt inflected upon marginalized groups by colonial ideologies. It is largely through this reinforced and internalized self-hatred that coloniality manages to persist (Córdova 379), therefore, Morrison and Anzaldúa, in their embrace of their Black, Chicanx, and Indigenous cultures, religions, ancestors, and physical selves, fundamentally oppose and fight against the coloniality of the United States. In studying their texts as primary examples of postcolonial American literature, we are able to glean these messages of empowerment, as well as broaden the scope of understanding of what postcolonialism; what it means and what it looks like, here and around the world, now and throughout history.

Under enslavement, love is forbidden and fundamental human relationships are violently disrupted. Throughout the novel, Morrison reiterates the minimization of love ingrained by the racist colonial logic of slavery, emphasizing especially the danger of "motherlove." This is just one example of many instances in which various characters stress the importance of restricting love. What begins as a survival tactic ultimately becomes one of the internalized forces of slavery that prevents formerly enslaved people from being truly free. If the racist, colonialist ideologies of enslavement results in the internalization of a need to only love small, if at all, then being able to achieve the opposite becomes an act of anti-colonialism. We see this unfold in the final moments of hope between Sethe, who has loved too big, and Paul D, who has loved too

small. Morrison gives these two formerly enslaved people something that white hegemony fundamentally tries to suppress: a future. He says, “me and you, we got more yesterday than anybody. We need some kind of tomorrow” (Morrison 322).

Similarly, Anzaldúa ends *Borderlands/La Frontera* on a hopeful note that looks towards a promising tomorrow. Addressing a young Chicana girl, symbolic of the mestiza future, Anzaldúa’s final poem, entitled “Don’t Give In, *Chicanita*” emanates a transgressive sense of hope and reclamation. She writes, “But they will never take the pride / of being *mexicana*-Chicana-*tejana* / nor our Indian woman’s spirit” and “Yes, in a few years or centuries / *la Raza* will rise up, tongue intact / carrying the best of all the cultures / That sleeping serpent, / rebellion-(r)evolution, will spring up / Like old skin will fall the slave ways of / obedience, acceptance, silence. / Like serpent lightning we’ll move, little woman. / You’ll see.” (Anzaldúa 225). Here, Anzaldúa again emphasizes the importance of cultural pride. The opposite of pride, shame, is the goal of internalized colonialism; Anzaldúa not only directly opposes this, but goes further to claim that eventually, *la Raza* – the new mestiza, the “new species / skin tone between black and bronze (Anzaldúa 224) – will rise up and reclaim the land. As she states in the opening poem: “This land was Mexican once, / was Indian always / and is. / And will be again.”

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