

AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

Zandro E. Lerma for the degree of Master of Arts in Interdisciplinary Studies in Philosophy, Ethnic Studies, and Education presented on June 14, 2018

Title: Chingasos y Putasos: Examining Cultural and Structural Violence among Mexican American Youth

Abstract approved: _____
Jose-Antonio Orosco

Abstract

In this thesis, I examine Johan Galtung's theory of violence and discuss how his concepts of cultural and structural violence helps explain the problem of direct violence among Mexican American youth. I argue that cultural violence, mainly dominant narratives of colonialism and masculinity, cause some Mexican American youth to act violently. Additionally, structural violence ensures that inequality is systemically built into society, limiting the life choices of many Mexican American youth. These forces combined can result in rebellion and aggressive behavior. Using the methodology of verse, my testimonio, and theory on violence, prisons, and Mexican cultural identity, I demonstrate how overcoming violent behavior does not occur within a punitive penal system, but by becoming conscious of cultural and structural phenomena. This transformation would allow Mexican American youth the opportunity to embrace new forms of cultural identity such as peace, love, dignity, respect for self and others.

©Copyright by Zandro E. Lerma
June 14, 2018
All Rights Reserved

Chingasos y Putasos:
Examining Cultural and Structural Violence among Mexican American Youth

By
Zandro E. Lerma

A THESIS

Submitted to
Oregon State University

In partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the
degree of

Master of Arts in Interdisciplinary Studies

Presented June 14, 2018
Commencement June 2019

Master of Arts in Interdisciplinary Studies thesis of Zandro E. Lerma presented on
June 14, 2018

APPROVED:

Major Professor, representing Philosophy

Director of the Interdisciplinary Studies Program

Dean of the Graduate School

I understand that my thesis will become part of the permanent collection of Oregon State University libraries. My signature below authorizes release of my thesis to any reader upon request.

Zandro E. Lerma, Author

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I want to thank my close friends and family for their love and support through this process. You know who you are. I want to express my gratitude to my committee for their backing. Michael O'Malley, you are the man. David Bernell, thank you for always making time for me. Allison Davis-White eyes, thank you for being genuine. To my chair Jose-Antonio Orosco, gracias por tu apoyo y tu paciencia, you are an amazing human being y maestro. Gracias maestro for always making time for me. I want to recognize my other maestro Leo Rasca Hidalgo, for always believing in me. Thank you for planting la semilla de conciencia and teaching me about la cultural and obligation to give back to la comunidad. I want to acknowledge the ethnic studies faculty, si se pudo! Much appreciation to Leonora Rianda for listening to me vent and for always being reassuring. Shout out to my homie Jesus Jaime-Diaz for his guidance and encouragement. I want to take this time to remember my father Elizandro "Chando" Lerma, my sister Rosario, and a dear mentor of mine Oscar Montemayor, my carnalito Luis Jaime-Diaz, as well as other loved ones who have passed on. May you rest in power! I love you. Thank you, mom, for waking me up for school every morning when I was a chamaco, and the homemade frijoles y tortillas that fed my soul. Most importantly, thank you for your love and kindness and for always being there for me in the good and the bad. I want to show gratitude to the love of my life Lisa, and our children Emilia, Gotti, Jewels, and Lorenzo. Babe, I know it has not been easy but thank you for having my back. I could not have done this without the love and support from you and the kids. Te amo. Gracias a todos mi homeboys who kept it real en la pinta y en la calle, and to the next generation of Latinx, animo!

TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | |
|--|----|
| <i>Introduction</i> | 1 |
| <i>la Chingada</i> | 18 |
| <i>el Pelado</i> | 30 |
| <i>The Youth Control Complex</i> | 39 |
| <i>Prison Violence</i> | 50 |
| <i>Prison Label</i> | 63 |
| <i>Conclusion</i> | 74 |
| <i>Bibliography</i> | 79 |

Dedication

To the woman who gave me life, my dear mother, whom I love with my whole heart and soul.

INTRODUCTION

Verse

The first day of preschool man I ran away
I've been labeled a delinquent since the first grade
Hood-made how'd you think I would turn out
Every time I misbehaved you got the paddle out
1 2 3 licks damn what was that about
What's sad about it is it was normative
Whip that lil' brown boy I ain't conforming shit
I got older man a chip on my shoulder man
My daddy taught me to be proud to be a Mexican
Brown skin so you know I was harassed by police
Man, I was playing in the streets
Little did I know they was playin' for keeps
They wanna' lock us up and throw away the keys
Kill us in the streets after they say freeze
Home of the free but we ain't got no rights
You don't believe me look what happened to Tamir Rice.

Testimonio

Once upon a time in the barrio there was a little brown boy of Mexican descent, who was born in Kingsville, Texas and raised in the small town of Bishop, Texas before moving to Woodburn, Oregon. He was spanked with a paddle in the first grade for shooting spit wads in class. A few of his peers did the same, but the teacher only took the boy into the restroom and told him to bend over and grab his ankles. The boy scared and unsure of what to do did what he was told, and the teacher spanked him three times on his little behind. He cried not because the spanking hurt him physically, but his fragile spirit had been damaged and understandably so, as the experience was humiliating and caused him to feel shame. This ritual of discipline and punishment would continue until the boy's sophomore year of high school, only reasons became pettier, the violence normalized, quietly destroying the boy's soul.

The boy grew up not long after the Chicano movement, and he felt comfortable identifying as a Chicano, however, he was too young to comprehend the significance of the movement and the way it shifted the political landscape around race in the US. However, it would become apparent to the boy later. He was young and had little knowledge about race, but even he could not ignore the racial divide in Bishop. The boy lived on the westside of the tracks which was predominately Mexican, while the eastside was predominately white. The contrast was reflected in the cities upkeep of the eastside and its neglect of the westside. The boy had always been aware of the segregation between whites and Mexicans, but it was all he had ever known, so to him it was part of the everyday.

Due to this racial apartness and economic disparities, a pattern of harmful ideas began to take effect on boy's psyche and he began to believe white people were better, smarter, wealthier, and Mexicans were inferior. He did his best to assimilate into white culture, but his experiences only confirmed his feelings of inferiority. To make matters worse, the boy began to encounter blatant racism when he was 14 years old. He had an attraction for white girls and began dating a girl his freshman year in high school. The girl's mother was accepting of their relationship, but her father became furious when he learned that his daughter was dating a Mexican boy.

The girl's mother allowed them to see each other without the father knowing, but she began having second thoughts once he began growing suspicious. The father later found out about his daughter's secret relationship and told her to break up with the boy. At first, she refused, and that's when he personally began to harass the young boy. It started with phone calls consisting of racial epithets and violent threats. He said things like, "You stay away from my daughter wetback, or I will kill you." Though the boy felt afraid, acted valiantly telling him he loved his daughter and refused to stop seeing her. The father became more enraged and began to stalk the boy. He would drive by the boy's house trying to intimidate him. Eventually, the pressure began to take a toll and they finally decided to end their relationship.

The girl had been crying when she broke up with the boy at a school dance. She was surrounded by a group of her friends who were trying to comfort her. She returned a gold necklace the boy had given her and told him she could not see him anymore because her dad was crazy, and she feared he might do something bad. The boy was sad but knew that her father's erratic behavior and racist mindset was too much to deal with, so they split up. The boy dated two other white

girls after and though their parent's racism was subtler, it was always enough to come between their relationships. By this time the boy was a sophomore in high school and was "supposed" to be preparing for college but going to college was an unrealistic expectation for boys like him.

The boy had a 2.8 grade point average which was not bad considering the circumstances. Three of his older siblings had been pushed-out of school either because lack of support or feeling unwelcomed and misunderstood. The boy noticed the teachers and counselor's excitement when they talked to white students about their plans for college. They'd make suggestions and provided them with resources like how to apply for scholarships, but no one talked to the boy about college. These microaggressions further lowered boy's self-esteem and reinforced the notion that Mexican students were not smart enough to attend college. If it were not for his older brother Dino graduating, he would have allowed the school to successfully push him out. Dino's accomplishment inspired the boy.

Outside of school, the boy grew up in a violent environment where fighting seemed to be a frequent occurrence. The boy's dad grew up in the sixties and seventies when being tough was a prerequisite to survive in the streets of South Texas. His father taught the boy how to fight about the time he began pre-school, in fact, his first fight happened in kindergarten. Since then, the boy developed a taste for physical violence and began to rely on it to gain the respect of his peers. His two older brothers had a reputation for being great fighters, and their father wanted to put them in boxing, but their mother was against it. Instead, she wanted them to pursue an education. When the boy turned 16, he eventually got into trouble with the law for the first time. The boy had been involved in a brawl of about ten people. Several people were injured, and a couple of cars were totaled. Police were called and there was informal talk about giving the boy

probation and restitution, but it never came to that. Around the time this had happened, his father was offered a job in Oregon, and he accepted. He took the boy with him hoping for a fresh start for himself and his family. However, it was not what they had hoped for, in fact, the boy had to maneuver his way through a more hostile environment, one infested with gangs.

His cousins introduced him to the gang culture in Woodburn. Gangs in Oregon differed greatly from gangs in Texas. For example, Oregon gangs were influenced by California gangs like 18 street and Hangout Boyz (Hobz), and Texas gangs were more grass roots, clicks of families and friends, although, there were some influences of east coast gangs like the Latin Kings. Though the boy was not in a gang, by being affiliated, he became immersed in gang culture.

The boy in the story is me and shortly after my 18th birthday, I made a costly decision that would have devastating consequences for myself and those around me. I had been charged and convicted of two counts of assault in the second degree, two counts of unlawful use of a weapon, and sentenced to 140 months to Oregon Department of Corrections. My story is an unfortunate one, but it serves as an example of many who find themselves immersed in a cycle of violence. My thesis will provide answers as to why there is violence among Mexican American youth.

I want to be careful not to perpetuate stereotypes. I am not saying all Mexican American youth are prone to violence. However, for the ones that rely on violence to dominate others like I did, I hope my testimonio will challenge them to think deeper about where these ideas and urges come from. The idea is if they can identify the source, then they can control/change their behavior.

Literature Review

Why are some Mexican American youth prone to violence? In entertaining this question, my objective is not to do a comprehensive literature review but to extract certain themes from the literature. One theme I found to be threaded throughout these texts is that of white male domination. Since white men have been in control in the US for centuries, they have developed what is known as *cultural hegemony*. In his review of Antonio Gramsci's concept of cultural hegemony, Ajusti Nieto-Galan states, "Therefore, hegemony brought to the fore how the so called civil society, with its institutions ranging from education, religion, and family to the microstructures of everyday practices, contributed to the production of meaning and values, which direct and maintain the spontaneous consent of the various strata of society." (pp. 456, Antonio Gramsci Revisited). Like the ideas of Gramsci, Johan Galtung states, "The study of cultural violence highlights the way in which the act of direct violence and the fact of structural violence are legitimized and thus rendered acceptable in society. One-way cultural violence works is by changing the moral color of an act from red/wrong to green/right or at least to yellow/acceptable; an example being 'murder on behalf of the country as right, on behalf of oneself wrong' (pp.292, Cultural Violence). Other themes I encountered are: historical roots in conquest, state and structural power such as police and prisons, and sexual dominance which is a male phenomenon. These threads of violence are intersectional and should not be separated.

Violence can be interchangeable with oppression be it physical/spatial, emotional/spiritual, or verbal/psychological. I want to paint a broad picture of violence for a couple of reasons. First, to bring in other voices that have been silenced due to patriarchy/sexism, state induced violence.

Secondly, to demonstrate how these ideas coincide with those of Galtung, which you will soon

learn about and whose theory is the main framework for my thesis. However, I will taper these ideas to fit my experiences growing up as a Tejan@, Mexican American, Latinx, Chicanx youth, a prisoner in Oregon, an ex-felon, and now a community activist and academic. To make sense of the cultural phenomena that influenced my thought process, as well as my interactions with various institutions in society since childhood, I will use the theories of Octavio Paz, Samuel Ramos, Victor Rios, Levan and Berry, and Michele Alexander.

For oppression to occur there needs to be an oppressor and an oppressed person(s). Many scholars have written about the short-term and long-term effects of oppression in an individual capacity, as well as a collective capacity. In his book, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Paulo Freire, argues that the oppressed must first become conscious of their condition and work together for liberation to occur. However, if not careful, the oppressed become oppressors themselves, thus maintaining divisions among one another and warranting the continuation of this fierce cycle.

Freire explains:

But almost always, during the initial stage of the struggle, the oppressed, instead of striving for liberation, tend themselves to become oppressors, or “sub-oppressors.” The very structure of their thought has been conditioned by the contradictions of the concrete, existential situation by which they were shaped. Their ideal is to be men; but for them to be men is to be oppressors. This is their model of humanity (pp.45).

Michele Foucault talks about power and control systemically in prisons. Foucault examines the historical processes of punishment and argues that the body, physically and figuratively, has been at the center of punishment. Foucault supports his argument by providing the reader with detailed examples of public punishment and execution during 18th century. Foucault further explains how reform acts led to modern day prisons in early 19th century but that power and politics remained essential to the economy of punishment whether it was done in public or in

private. In addition, Foucault stresses the importance of a witness being present. In this case, the public is the spectator and the purpose of this grueling ritual is to instill fear in the community. This way, citizens become docile and can be used for military purposes to enhance social control. Lastly, Foucault contends that science is a tool of oppression under the guise of research to strengthen society's overreliance of the prison system.

From a sociological and gender studies perspective, it is important to understand the inner workings of violence. To do so, intersectionality must be considered. Intersectionality reveals the countless ways society oppresses people of color along the lines of race, social class, gender, and sexuality. For instance, we live in a racial/patriarchal society that supports white heteronormality. Antonio Gramsci's theory of cultural hegemony speaks to this notion. What this means is that white men have a monopoly of power and dominate various aspects of society such as family, religion, law and politics. In the US, it is *white* heterosexual men, who consume the most privilege, followed by white "straight" women. The concept of intersectionality is rigorous and complex when we consider every race, social class, gender/sexuality. Men of color, arguably are at a similar level as white woman, trailed by women of color, with black women positioned towards the bottom of the hierarchy system.

Chicanx feminist scholars Gloria Anzaldua and Ana Castillo have criticized patriarchy and heteronormality largely and within the Chicanx movement of the 60's and 70's. In her memoir *Border Lands/La Frontera*, Anzaldua uses the theory of *La Raza Cosmica*, "The Cosmic Race" by Jose Vasconcelos, as a vehicle for hybridity regarding race, social class, culture, gender and sexuality. Anzaldua's interpretation of *mestizaje*, "racial mixing," allows her to transcend oppressive categories that society tends to put us in.

According to Anzaldua:

For the lesbian of color, the ultimate rebellion she can make against her native culture is through her sexual behavior. She goes against two moral prohibitions: sexuality and homosexuality. Being lesbian and raised Catholic, indoctrinated as straight, *I made the choice to be queer* (for some it is genetically inherent). It's an interesting path, one that continually slips in and out of the white, the Catholic, the Mexican, the indigenous, the instincts. In and out of my head. It makes for *loqueria*, the crazies. It is a path of knowledge—one of knowing (and of learning) the history of oppression of our *raza*. It is a way of balancing, of mitigating duality (pp.41).

While it is true that the Aztecs preferred male deities such as Huitzilopochtli (God of War) during the 16th century, that was not always the case. Previously, Aztecs worshiped the deity Tonantsi (Goddess of harvest). Following Spanish colonization and forced assimilation of Catholicism in Mexico, indigenous people of Mexico returned to the Goddess Tonantsi who had morphed into La Virgen de Guadalupe. According to Anzaldua:

After the Conquest, the Spaniards and their Church continued to split *Tonantsi/Guadalupe*. They desexed *Guadalupe*, taking *Coatlalopeuh*, the serpent/sexuality, out of her. They completed the split begun by the Nahuas by making *la Virgen de Guadalupe/Virgen Maria* into chaste virgins and *Tlazolteotl/Coatlicue/la Chingada* into *putas*; into the Beauties and the Beasts. They went even further; they made all Indian deities and religious practiced the work of the devil (ppl 50).

In *Massacre of the Dreamers*, Castillo talks about how the Aztecs went from worshipping female deities like Tonantsi to male deities like Huitzilopochtli. In addition, she traces patriarchy to the Spanish monarchy when Kings reigned with the approval of a divine power. Furthermore, Castillo explains how Catholicism was ruled by men and further reinforced oppression of women. Next, Castillo demonstrates how the Spanish inherited a lot of their ideas surrounding masculinity from the Moors (Muslim inhabitants) who ruled Spain for approximately 700 years. According to Castillo, "Once we recognize this fact of our history we may more closely examine how this early, diehard culture has contributed to our social relations between genders and how it

has influenced the particular way in which woman has been commodified by Mexican culture. When acknowledging our kinship with the Arab world, we find uncanny similarities in our peoples' social behavior and attitudes toward women that may be traced back thousands of years to the African continent" (pp. 57).

Chicano scholar Luis Rodriguez illuminates some of the violence he and many young Mexican American youth endure daily. Rodriguez' memoir, *Always Running*, is a rich account of gang life, drugs and alcohol, and prison. Rodriguez mentions how the lack of resources in school and the indifferent treatment they received was a struggle for many Chicax students. He talks about the many encounters he had with police, jail, and street violence. Rodriguez goes beyond the kinds of racism youth experience by criticizing *la vida loca*, "crazy life," describing it to a death grip.

In his memoir, *A Place to Stand*, Baca talks about how his father was an alcoholic, and how his mother abandoned him and his brother to live a life away from the ghettos of New Mexico. Baca served time in the Southwest where he taught himself to read and write at the age of 21. Since then, he has become a renowned Chicax poet who paints a vivid portrait of life in prison. I will use Baca's insights to make sense of my involvements in prison and to demonstrate the ways in which the prison system perpetuates violence rather than curtails it.

I appreciate the breadth of knowledge these scholars provide and the reason I share their works is to show the vast scope of literature on violence. I am aware that there are many theories out there that help us explain various forms of violence. However, I want to bring in theories to explain my unique experience and use this methodology of verse, testimonio and theory. The theories I will use are provided by the following authors: Samuel Ramos, Octavio Paz, Victor Rios,

Kristine Levan and Ms Berry and Michelle Alexander. Like the work of Anzaldua and Rodriguez my work is a type of memoir, but what is unique about my work is the theoretical framing and composing of analyses in real time to make sense of each experience regarding violence. Many of the ideas mentioned above reflect the work of peace studies scholar Johan Galtung. In my methodology section I will explain the details of Galtung's theory on violence.

I have come to learn that I am the one who inherited the feelings of inferiority from the Spanish conquest and later white domination in the US by way of cultural hegemony. I was that kid influenced by the cultural foundations of *la Chingada* and *el Pelado*. The one who thought being manly was to demean women. The one who thought dominating men by threatening them or beating them up was acceptable. I was the one who was susceptible to structural violence who grew up working class poor, experienced considerable amounts of racism, and was ultimately funneled from the schoolyard to the prison yard.

Methodology

My methodology comprises of three elements. The verse is the artistic expression and aesthetic tone known as Chicano Rap (See pp.1). My testimonio will incorporate deeper insights of the phenomena of lived experiences before incarceration, during incarceration, and beyond. Lastly, the methodological process will conclude with the theoretical constructs of Paz, Ramos, Rios, Levan and Berry, and Alexander as they relate to “my” testimonio.

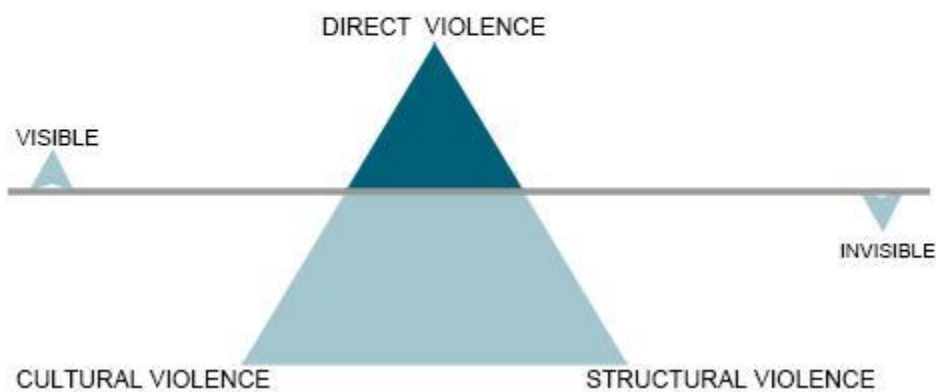
So much of this violence is what Johan Galtung calls *direct violence*. It is caused by underlying features called *cultural* and *structural* violence. According to Galtung:

At the bottom is the steady flow through time of cultural violence, a substratum from which the other two can derive their nutrient. In the next stratum the rhythms of structural violence are located. Patterns of exploitation are building up, wearing out, or torn down, with the protective accompaniment of penetration-segmentation preventing consciousness formation, and fragmentation-marginalization preventing organization against exploitation and repression. And at the top, visible to the unguided eye and to barefoot empiricism, is the stratum of direct violence with the whole record of direct cruelty perpetrated by human beings against each other and against other forms of life and nature in general (pp. 294-5)

In other words, cultural violence spreads through ideology, language, art, science, and dominant narratives that legitimize violence. For example, before the women suffrage movement, there was the idea that women should not have a right to vote. Today women continue to struggle with society’s notion that they should stay at home to take care of the children and serve their husband. Many of these ideas come from the bible, *thou shall obey thy husband*. Also, phrenology (Study of skulls) was used to justify slavery and racism towards Black people by claiming they lacked good character and had less mental capabilities. Now the president of the U.S. is telling the American people that Mexicans are rapists and drug dealers or

“Bad hombres.” This has led to a spike of hate crimes against Mexicans. However, he did not denounce the racial violence that took place in Charlottesville, VA, nor the recent school shootings in Florida and Texas. The system(s) is constructed in a manner that divides people making it difficult to organize across race, class, and gender. Direct violence is a consequence of cultural and structural violence and manifests itself many forms such as war, terrorism, genocide, slavery, domestic disputes, and gangs.

VIOLENCE TRIANGLE GALTUNG



According to Turning the Tide:

Direct Violence can take many forms. In its classic form, it involves the use of physical force, like killing or torture, rape and sexual assault, and beatings. Verbal violence, such as humiliation or put downs, is also becoming more widely recognised as violence. Peace and conflict studies scholar Johan Galtung describes direct violence as the 'avoidable impairment of fundamental human needs or life which makes it impossible or difficult for people to meet their needs or achieve their full potential. Threat to use force is also recognised as violence.'

Cultural violence is the prevailing attitudes and beliefs that we have been taught since childhood and that surround us in daily life about the power and necessity of violence.

Consider the telling of history which glorifies, records and reports wars and military victories rather than people's nonviolent rebellions or the triumphs of connections and collaboration. Nearly all cultures recognise that killing a person is murder, but killing tens, hundreds or thousands during a declared conflict is called 'war'.

Structural Violence Structural violence exists when some groups, classes, genders, nationalities, etc are assumed to have, and in fact do have, more access to goods, resources, and opportunities than other groups, classes, genders, nationalities, etc, and this unequal advantage is built into the very social, political and economic systems that govern societies, states and the world. These tendencies may be overt such as Apartheid or more subtle such as traditions or tendency to award some groups privileges over another.

Galtung's theory of violence model allows us to think of violence as a process rather than an instantaneous episode. What this model shows us is that violence is like a volcano that starts beneath the surface and slowly makes its way to the top where the eruption (Direct violence) occurs.

I will show that there is Mexican American cultural violence using the frameworks of Octavio Paz and Samuel Ramos which are ideas embedded in our culture that make us prone to act violently. Stories of *la Chingada* (Paz) and *el Pelado* (Ramos) are filled with themes of violence that will help explain Mexican American violence.

Additionally, I will show using the frameworks of Victor Rios, Levan and Berry, and Michelle Alexander, that there is structural violence that restricts the life choices of Mexican American youth and tends to push them towards violent lives. The *Youth Control Complex* (Rios), *Prison Violence* (Levan and Berry) and *Racial Castes/Prison Label* (Alexander) show the various ways institutions in our society target youth, perpetuate violence, and prevent communities of color from achieving social upward mobility. My testimonio and verse will operate as tools to help you see into the lives of Mexican American youth, as a window into this world.

I argue that by understanding the causes of this violence, Mexican American youth can learn to avoid it. This can be accomplished by developing a new praxis and cease from being trapped in this cycle of violence. By becoming conscious of social inequalities designed to keep youth in an oppressed state, Mexican American youth can become agents of change rather than victims of violence.

Going forward, I will delineate each authors' respective concepts above into two parts; *cultural violence* and *structural violence*. Chapters one and two cover cultural violence using the theoretical frameworks of Octavio Paz and Samuel Ramos. Chapters three, four, and five consider the theoretical frameworks of Victor Rios, Levan and Berry, and Michelle Alexander as they relate to structural violence.

Paz and Ramos explain that certain events throughout Mexico's History have had negative effects on the spirit and psyche of the Mexican. Both scholars claim this was brought on by Spanish colonialism and hundreds of years of social, cultural, political, and economic oppression.

In his essay, *the Sons of la Malinche*, Paz puts words to feelings I had struggled with throughout my childhood but lacked the skills to articulate. However, since reading Paz, I now understand the reasons that allowed me to feel righteous when fighting and hurting others. For one, my dad had taught me how to fight and two, my peers praised me for my violent episodes which reinforced the idea that being a *chingon* was honorable. My dad instilled in me the idea to fight to the death. He told me to think of fighting like I was swimming in the middle of a lake and If I lost, I'd essentially die. What this did was trick my mind that I would literally die, so therefore I was fierce and fought with desperation every single fight. Losing was not an option. I was drawn to Paz' theory of *chingar* and *la Chingada* because it is a story I was familiar with. I will explain

this theory in detail in chapter one, after my verse, which provides a perspective parallel to that of a *chingon*, and testimonio, which narrates the accounts that took place.

Samuel Ramos brings *el Pelado* to the forefront of Mexican culture in his book *Profile of Man and Culture in Mexico*. Ramos psychoanalyzes *el Pelado* and argues that his obsession with vulgar language and violent outbursts are due to feelings of inferiority. After reading Ramos' theory of the *Pelado*, I can say with absolute certainty that I was a *Pelado* for the first half of my life. In Chapter Two, I will describe the features of Ramos' theory following my verse of that takes you inside the mind of *el Pelado*, and testimonio, that provides the basis for my analysis.

In his book, *Punished: Policing the Lives of Black and Latino Boys*, Victor Rios argues that there are systemic policies implemented by institutions that target youth of color. and are more susceptible to racial injustice and the criminal justice system. Unfortunately, these social structures push many youths out of school and funnels them into the prison system. Rios developed a model he calls the *Youth Control Complex* that limit the life choices of Black and Brown boys which consists of schools, businesses, families, residents, media, community centers, and the criminal justice system.

In their book *Prison Violence, Causes, Consequences and Solutions*, Levan and Berry's assertion is that prison violence has detrimental consequences and exasperates violence rather than prevents it. In addition, Levan and Berry discuss how prisons are violent places with little hope for rehabilitation. If people are fortunate to make it out alive, our current penal system makes it nearly impossible for people with criminal histories to succeed in society. The authors offer a set of theories to understand reasons behind prison violence which are *Prisonization, Prison Hierarchy, The Convict Code, and Informal Economy*.

Alexander discusses how people who are branded as ex-felons continue to face social barriers such as discrimination in employment, education, housing, and other public services. She also offers her theory on the *Prison Label* who become part of a modern racial caste where prisoners are stigmatized and discriminated. According to Alexander, “Once a person is labeled a felon, he or she is ushered into a parallel universe in which discrimination, stigma, and exclusion are perfectly legal, and privileges of citizenship such as voting, and jury service are off-limits” (The New Jim Crow, pp.92).

With verse, testimonio, and theory, I will demonstrate the ways cultural violence and structural violence lead many Mexican youths to violently impose their will on others by means of direct violence without first thinking about the consequences. For myself, the steady flow of cultural violence came in the form of stories. Like an actor in a play I was given a script that I prescribed to and became prone to violent behavior. Dominant narratives such as these are common within the Mexican community and influence Mexican American youth to the point of fighting and killing one another. One of the stories I am referring to is the story of *la Chingada* Paz writes about in his book *The Labyrinth of Solitude*. Observing my participation as it pertains to *structural violence*, I thought of my situation as an isolated experience. It was not until years later that I learned that my experiences were political and issues of race as it relates to prison was a systemic one. Rios argues that the *Youth Control Complex* is a systemic process to govern youth even before entering the criminal justice system.

CHAPTER 1

la Chingada

Verse

They thought they could kill me they shot at my face

I'm pleading not guilty I'm fighting my case

I pace in my cell I think and I ponder

Pops told me what doesn't kill me makes me stronger

The longer I sit, my hope starts to fade

I walk through the valley though I'm not afraid

Stuck in this cage, 11 years plus

The O.G. Rick Vela is tattin' me up

Pushin' up weight I got me a routine

No one in this bitch can fuck with my team

Collecting canteen from these rapos and snitches

Getting my visits from beautiful bitches

I ain't even trippin' I'm doing my time

Shout out to the homies at E.O.C.I

Down in Snake River another man dies

Respect to the vereranos doing life.

Testimonio

It began with a Gun Shot

I parked my 1993 Chevy Berretta in front of the Quintero house on Ogle and Stark street in Woodburn one late December night. It was a cold night, so my friends and I decided to kick it in my car. I had just purchased the new Frost CD, so we listened to it while we drank beer and smoked weed. As we sat in my car, a truck pulled up in front of us and came to a complete stop. The driver suddenly turned off the headlights. In my world that usually meant a dangerous situation, so my friends and I became suspicious. A lesson my dad had taught me years before was to go with my instincts and to leave when I felt like something bad was about to happen. A part of me wanted to leave, but another part of me was curious, so I stayed. I wanted to know who they were and what they wanted.

I had a good idea who it was, because my friend Jay had been in a fight earlier that day, and we are usually together. But not this night. I stared at the truck and tried to get a better look, but there were no streetlights, which made it difficult to see anything at all. I imagine it must have been just as difficult for them to see inside my ride. Regardless of who or how many there were, my friends and I knew we were in danger.

My friends urged me to leave, but it was too late. The truck had already pulled up beside us. The assailants surrounded my car within seconds and began to bash my car with rocks and a baseball bat. My car rocked ferociously back and forth, and though I was afraid and in disbelief, it was important for me to get a look at them. I wiped the smog from the driver side window, and found myself staring into the barrel of a gun. I turned away just as the hand gun exploded avoiding the bullet. The sound was deafening and pierced the nights' peaceful silence. My life flash before

my eyes. One of my first thoughts was of my lovely sister, Rosario, who had died at the age of 30 in a car accident in South, Texas. Suddenly, I relived the heartache I felt when I first heard the news, and anger began to swell inside of me. I like to think Rosie had been watching over me and protecting me that night. Then I thought why these punks thought they could shoot me and cause more heartache and suffering for my family? My thoughts were spinning and my body was in a state of shock as I lay there in a cradled position across my seat paralyzed by terror. I laid there for what seemed like an eternity. I was bleeding from the left side of my face and neck but did not know where the blood was coming from. After several seconds but what seemed like forever, I had regained control of my body and heard my friends yelling for me to go, so I turned the car on and sped off. I went to my friend Rick's house across town and knocked on the front door. Rick and Jay came to the door wide eyed and stared at me as I bled from my face. Surely, they were upset and we instantly began talking about revenge.

Rick's sisters Olivia and Lina offered to clean me up in the bathroom. They washed the blood off of my face and neck and pulled out pieces of glass underneath my skin with a set of tweezers. They had managed to pull out most of the glass shards, and the ones that were too difficult to remove, the doctor later took out at the hospital. Shortly after, the girls cleaned me up, I called home to tell my family what had happened, and my sister Zina began screaming over the phone and called the cops even after I had told her not to. People from my community had always said involving the police would make matters worse, and that was something I lived by most of my life.

The cops showed up at Rick's to make a report but had become discouraged when I told them I had not seen anything because it was dark. The cops went to the scene of the crime and found a baseball bat with the name of a local gang and several nicknames carved in it. They came back to

ask me if I knew any of the names, and again I said no. However, I did know, but I wanted to deal with them on my own terms.

After reading police reports, I found out my attackers had used a 357 magnum. The bullet imploded my driver side window, ricocheted off the steering wheel, and exited the windshield leaving a gaping hole the size of a golf ball. I searched for them for the weeks but to no avail. Rumors began to surface that they had gone to Mexico. Whatever the case, I did not see any of them for several months and everything changed.

Theoretical Framework

The macho represents the masculine pole of life (Paz pp. 81)

Octavio Paz' critical analysis of the Spanish word *chingar* "which quite literally means to fuck, and metaphorically means to subjugate or demean" is insightful and significant to understand Mexican identity and its causes of cultural violence. Paz argues that the concept of *chingar* is rooted in the Spanish conquest, which he calls a violation of the indigenous peoples of Mexico. When thinking about the conquest as a violation, the rape of indigenous culture both metaphorically and in the very flesh of Indian women, then Mexicanos are the offspring of that abuse that resulted in the loss of power and control. The people of Mexico and its descendants therefore live with the anger and frustration that occupation created. This subjugation often leads to horizontal hostility among one another. Paz says these attitudes and behaviors come from an *open/closed dichotomy* in which Mexicanos want to inflict the action of *chingar* on others rather than be *la Chingada*, "the fucked one."

In *Labyrinth of Solitude*, Octavio Paz, argues that the word *chingar* is central to Mexican identity. First, I will talk about what *chingar* means. Second, I will explain how the word *chingar* is tied to Mexican identity, which leads many Mexican men to want to be un *gran Chingon* (A man who dominates others in various aspects of life). Third, I will talk about Paz' notion of the *open/closed dichotomy* to understand the way the Mexican views himself and others. Finally, I will tell the story of *La Malinche*, who according to Paz, is *La Chingada* to explore the origins of *chingar*.

The term chingar is common throughout Latin America, but Paz insists that Mexicans' use of the word chingar is specific to their identity, and its origins are in the Spanish conquest.

The word chingar has various meanings throughout Latin America depending on when it is used and on whom, but in Mexico; it generally means to screw someone over. Paz draws from the work of Dario Rubio and thinks the word chingar may have come from the Aztec word chingaste, which means residue, lees, and/or sediment.

Throughout Latin America, chingar is associated with drinks (Alcoholic and non-alcoholic) and/or taverns, residue from drinks, and/or implies the idea of failure and disappointment (pg. 76). Chingar then is quite common throughout Latin America, but Paz argues that chingar for Mexicans is more sinister, violent, and hurtful. According to Paz, the verb denotes violence, an emergence from oneself to penetrate another by force. It also means to injure, to lacerate, to violate—bodies, souls, objects—and to destroy (pg. 77). Paz' theory focuses on Mexicans from Mexico, but chingar and the attitude which stems from it I argue applies to Mexicans in the US as well. Mexicans in the US also use the word chingar and have share similar attitudes and views with Mexicans in Mexico even though most Mexicans in the US have never been to Mexico.

Chingar is a loaded term and communicates volumes, for example, chingada/o or chingao, the pronunciation in South Tejas, is an expression of surprise, anger, or disappointment. Ala chingada is also an expression of surprise, unless it gets used during an argument, then it means to screw yourself, hence the phrase *Vete a la chingada*. According to Paz, "The word has another, more restricted meaning. When we say, "Vete a la chingada," we send a person to a distant place. Distant, vague and indeterminate. To the country of broken and worn-out things" (pg. 79).

Chinga tu madre, “fuck your mother” is another common phrase used among Mexicans in similar ways. *Te voy chingar* is a warning, which means, “I am going to fuck you up,” unless used in a joking manner among a group of friends. No *estas chingando* or no *chinges* tells someone to “stop screwing around” when someone bothers you, and again, it depends on the situation and whom the word is directed towards, then it could be interpreted as a threat. There are many variations of the word *chingar*, but the point I want to make is that it is usually negatively charged and aimed to hurt others out of anger.

Growing up in South Tejas, people in my community who often did not say *maliciones* “bad words” substituted *chingar* as to not curse, for example, they would say *chinelas*, which in Tejas means “shoes.” The saying *son of a gun* in the US is an example of how curse words change to achieve the same effect without cursing. According to Paz:

In Mexico the word has innumerable meanings. It is a magical word: a change of tone, a change of inflection, is enough to change its meaning. It has as many tones as it has intonations, as many meanings as it has emotions. One may be a chingon, a gran chingon (in business, in politics, in crime or with women), or a chingocito. But in this plurality of meanings the ultimate meaning always contains the idea of aggression, whether it is the simple act of molesting, pricking or censoring or the violent act of wounding or killing (Paz, pg. 76).

The economic and political elite are often considered *gran chingones*, because they usually get into positions of power by screwing people over via force, manipulation, violence etc., then abuse their power by exploiting those less fortunate for their labor and resources. Paz’ theory has the potential to explain the economic and political unrest in Mexico between Mexico’s Independence Movement (1810) and the Mexican Revolution (1910).

Because *chingones* value and rely on power over others, they have eager followers, which then leads to yet another dichotomy, the strong and the weak. In sum, Paz argues that Mexican

politicians are untrustworthy and scandalous due to the implications of *chingar* within their relationships, implication ruled by violence and suspicion in a world in which no one opens out or surrenders himself (pg. 79). In other words, *chingones* have too much pride to admit when they are in the wrong and are willing to do whatever is necessary to remain on top of the economic and political hierarchy. In Paz' quote, he mentions various kinds of *chingones*. Aside from business and politics, Paz says one can be a *chingon* in relation to crime and women. This kind of *chingon* transcends class but is usually from the working class. *Chingones del barrio* is how I will refer to them, are from a lower social economic status and are usually in the drug game, have become normalized to violence, are womanizers and often glorified by other men because of it.

The framework of *chingones del barrio* operates by reputation, whether being a great drug dealer, street fighter, or a player of women. *Chingones del barrio* are at the top of the barrio hierarchy and become aggressive when they feel challenged and will go to extremes to protect their reputation. Paz' ideas regarding a *chingon* in areas of business and politics, also apply to *chingones del barrio*. Like *chingones* in business and politics, *chingones del barrio* also their have a *politica* "which is their own politics to govern" and surround themselves with eager followers. In addition, they operate within a code of conduct, the *code of the streets*.

Some of these codes are regional, others are national and transnational, but all share core principles, which are to: never snitch, never take advantage of someone within your circle, never cross another for money, drugs, women. In addition, *chingones* are expected to handle their own business even when it means to engage in criminal activity, violently hurt someone, or murder. *Chingones del barrio* who live by these codes are reputable and admired by others within their

world of *chingones*. Paz says that *chingar* is also an attitude and way of life for Mexicans. Paz associates the notion of un gran *chingon* with the open/close dichotomy.

In this way, Mexican men become suspicious of one another, so they live closed lives to avoid being screwed over and maintain their *dignidad* "Dignity." According to Paz, "To the Mexican there are only two possibilities in life: either he inflicts the actions implied by *chingar* on others, or else he suffers them himself at the hands of others" (pg. 78). Mexican men risk their reputation if they open themselves up. An example of this open and close dichotomy is the sharing of feelings or expression of emotions. Mexican men often hold in their feelings and emotions which is a sign of masculinity, while Mexican women are perceived to be passive and open both sexually and emotionally and become *la chingada* whether they consent to the act or not.

Because of this open/close dichotomy, most Mexican men view feminine qualities as something negative thus the creation of a gender divide and the perpetuation of patriarchy, which allows them to keep their power and privilege intact. Though the identity of Mexican men adheres to the *chingar* mentality and the open/close dichotomy, Paz says it is a false identity, an identity built on hundreds of years of Spanish colonialism and oppression. *chingar* then is more than a word, it is the unconscious thinking and the unconscious living due to generations of manipulation and leading to reactive mindsets.

Paz refers to the Spanish conquest as a rape and tells the story of *la Malinche* (Malintzin or Malinali) who became *la Chingada*. There are different accounts regarding the story of *la Malinche*. For instance, rather than blame the downfall of the Aztec empire on Malinali, Anzaldua talks about how the Aztecs had too many enemies who worked with Cortes to overthrow them. According to Anzaldua, "Thus the Aztec nation fell not because Malinali (*la*

Chingada) interpreted for and slept with Cortes, but because the ruling elite had subverted the solidarity between men and women and between noble and commoner” (Borderlands, pp.56). However, for this paper, I will be drawing from Paz’ version of the story. Paz says *la Malinche* was an Indian woman who willfully went with the Spanish conquistador Hernan Cortes and served as his interpreter/concubine. With the open/close dichotomy and notion of *chingar*, one can see how the story unfolds, Cortes being the strong and closed and *la Malinche*, being the passive and open. Paz thinks Cortes represents the white father figure for Mexicans, *el gran Chingon*, and *la Malinche*, represents their long suffering Indian mother who was violated, hence the phrase *la Chingada*, “the fucked one.” According to Paz, “If *la Chingada* is a representation of the violated Mother, it is appropriate to associate her with the Conquest, which is also a violation, not only in the historical sense but also in the very flesh of Indian women. The symbol of this violation is dona Malinche, the mistress of Cortes (pg. 86).

Earlier I quoted Paz talking about the distant and vague place Mexicans send people when they direct the phrase *vete a la chingada* towards someone. This place is distant but is a place that once existed; a place Mexicans would like soon to forget the trauma that took place there. For the Mexican, the battle is psychological, historical, and spiritual. In other words, *vete la chingada* is the ultimate insult and wishes for that person to relive the pain, suffering, and trauma that the Spanish conquest brought upon their people.

The origin story for Mexicans is the story of *La Malinche/la chingada* and the Spanish Conquest. It is one of genocide and turmoil, a living nightmare. Mexicans are the offspring of this violation, and they carry the burden of it day in and day out. Today, *la Malinche (la Chingada)* has become synonymous with cultural traitor, which is problematic on many levels. However, understanding

the origins of chingar and the attitudes that govern it is significant in understanding Mexican identity.

Remember when I told you about when I was shot at? Paz can help explain why I felt the way I did in that moment. I was not used to feeling afraid and vulnerable, lying there in a helpless position. I was used to winning and being on top of the situation. These guys tried to make me la Chingada, and I was not having any part of it. Since I was invested in the notion of chingar, it was obvious what I needed to do.

By this time, I had internalized the story of *la chingada*, subconsciously mimicking the *gran chingon* Hernan Cortez which allowed me to wreak havoc on my own people in the violent ritual of street violence. I had made up my mind and was willing to put my life on the line. My mission then was to make them feel the way I did or worse, because if anyone was going to do the chingando and remain on top, it was going to be me, *el Gran Chingon*.

All that remain *fue una herida abierta*, “An open wound,” and the only remedy that could undo the pain was revenge. How dare they, “the bad Mexicans,” put me in a submissive position. The idea that those men tried to open me up, as Paz points out in his open/closed example sent me over the top. However, the revenge had to be done myself or I would feel inadequate. As a man I should defend my own honor and not let someone else fight my battles.

The words herida abiererta recall a passage from the book *Borderlands, La Frontera*, when Gloria Anzaldua says, “The U.S.-Mexican border es una herida abierta where the Third World grates against the first and bleeds. And before a scab forms it hemorrhages again, the life blood of two worlds merging to form a third country—border culture” (pp.25). Due to being treated like

second-class citizens for being of Mexican descent, frustrations build, and unfortunately, we lash out at each other because of it.

CHAPTER 2

el Pelado

Verse

One day at a time, un dia la vez
One lyric one rhyme I give it my best
Til' the day I die they wanna contest
But I manage to rise above all the rest
Suppressed since the beginning of time
Hoping that I won't get left behind
I carry my nine protecting myself
My fam' my boys, my pride, and my wealth
I'm bad for your health like cancer sticks
Empty my clip then transfer quick
Before you can blink, I'm sinking these things
Inside of your spleen making you bleed
Fleeing the scene not to be seen
It pays to be clean, know what I mean
It's not what it seems I'm not a bad person
Living this life, that I've been cursed in
Flirtin' with death every chance that I get
As if I had eternal breath
Angels still linger but demons are eager
My soul is vexed, but I'm a believer.

Testimonio

One day me and a friend went to Lancaster Mall (Salem, OR), so he could be fitted for a tuxedo. While we were there, I saw six guys who were there the night I was attacked. There was instant tension once we saw each other. We followed them as they walked out of the store. The group glanced back several times laughing amongst themselves. I took it like they were mocking me, and felt disrespected. Anger started to simmer inside of me. I couldn't believe they were laughing as if trying to blow my head off was some kind of sick joke. My friend noticed a change in my behavior and became nervous. He asked me what I was going to do, but I did not have a plan. However, *I knew one thing for certain, they were not leaving the mall without me doing something to them.*

After walking in silence for a minute or so still following the group, my friend suggested I buy a baseball bat. His idea sounded like a great idea at the time, and the plotting began. I watched carefully as the six walked and turned towards a side corridor where the restrooms were. I continued walking straight towards the parking lot then went into Anderson's Sporting Goods, which was located next to the main entrance. I hurried and glanced at the baseball bats looking for one I could afford. All kinds of thoughts and emotions were rushing through me. I was excited, I was nervous, I was afraid. However, my fear was a motivating factor as I worried about weapons they may have. Perhaps the gun they used the night of the shooting or maybe a knife. I wasn't thinking clearly, my adrenaline was pumping, my heart racing, but at the time, I thought that by having my revenge justice would be done. I decided to deal with the situation the only way I knew how to, *an eye for an eye*. Though, it was more than an eye for an eye, it was a penetrating force that had a grip on my soul.

My instincts told me they would soon be rushing into the parking lot in hopes of catching up to me, and they were right. I imagined them salivating at the opportunity to catch me slipping. Only they did not expect what happened next.

They sped-walk passed me and continued towards the parking lot where they presumed me to be and I caught them by surprise and began desperately swinging the bat. I injured two of them and the others scattered into the shadows of the night. It all happened so fast. I chased them and was a step behind some of them but couldn't catch them, and I am glad, because lord only knows what I would have done. Instead, I gave up chasing after them, returned to my car, and drove off.

I did not tell my parents what I had done for fear of worrying them. However, I told my sister Zina but made her promise not to say anything. A few days later, I was having dinner with my family and while at the dinner table, I heard a loud knock. My heart dropped to my stomach, because I knew only cops knocked like that, and sure enough, there were two police officers in uniform at the door. I took my mom into my room and told her what had happened. She started crying and all I could do was apologize to her and hug her. I repeatedly told her that I loved her. *Mi querida jefita*, "My lovely mother," she had been through so much heartache, first the loss of her oldest daughter and now her youngest was about to go to prison for a very long time.

I could hear the cops threatening to take my sister's kids from her if she did not open the door. Not wanting to put my sister or her kids in jeopardy, I snuck out the back door. I was terrified but gathered up the courage to look around the corner. The cops had my house surrounded, and they were aiming assault rifles at nearly every window in the house. I realized my chances of escaping were slim, so I decided to sneak back into the house. I knocked over an empty beer bottle and in the process, I heard FREEZE! Startled, I ran into the corn fields surrounding our house but was quickly to the ground by a cop. For a second, I thought they were going to shoot.

I found myself squinting into several high beam flash lights along with the many high-powered rifles and handguns.

My dad was working at the time but if only he had been there to tell me what to do like he had in the past. Perhaps he would have given me *consejos* “advice” about what to say to avoid incriminating myself. Turns out I was charged with two counts of assault in the second degree and two counts of unlawful use of a weapon and sent to Marion County jail where I awaited my arraignment. The seriousness of what I had done did not dawn on me until the next morning when I woke up and sat down in the day room and watched a film about Measure 11.

Unfortunately for me Measure 11 went into effect the year before my arrest. I was looking at an extensive prison sentence, and a sense of hopelessness came over me. The fact that I was young, brown, and from the working class made me the perfect Measure 11 candidate.

The newly acquired law had been passed by 70% of Oregon voters in 1994 and went into effect April of 1995. During the 1990s, Oregon, like the rest of the country, bought into the idea that longer sentences for young people was the best solution for public safety, a notion that had been misleading to say the least. Measure 11’s statute is below:

The measure would set mandatory sentences for listed felonies. A court could impose a longer sentence if allowed by law. The measure would bar early release, leave, or a reduced sentence for any reason. It would cover murder and listed forms of manslaughter, assault, kidnapping, rape, sodomy, unlawful sexual penetration, sexual abuse, robbery. All person 15 and up when charged with these crimes would have to be tried as adults. It would apply to crimes committed on or after April 1, 1995.

Measure 11 had been created to deter people from committing violent crimes though research shows violent crime had been declining at the time. Measure 11 changed prior sentencing guidelines and gave judges less discretion over each case by standardizing mandatory minimum

sentencing. Minimum sentences for measure 11 offenses begin at 70 months for class B felonies, 90 months for class A felonies, and 25 years for murder. DA's can ask for upper departures depending on the crime and record of the accused.

Theoretical Framework

Tell me who you are with, and I will tell you who you are
(Mexican Saying)

In *Profile of Man and Culture in Mexico*, Samuel Ramos, argues that there is a type of Mexican who suffers from a kind of neurosis that results in a *sense of inferiority*. There are many factors that cause these feelings of lowliness. Consequently, these insecurities lead to violent and destructive behavior. Ramos supports his argument with the methodical application of Adler's psychological theory. Ramos says, "Adler states that the inferiority complex appears in a child as soon as he recognizes the insignificance of his own strength compared to the strength of his parents" (pp56). Ramos compares Mexico's formative years under the subjugation of the Spanish to a child's youthfulness. During this time Mexicans endured hundreds of years of racial and social inequalities. Ramos states, "this disadvantageous circumstance induced the sense of inferiority that was aggravated by conquest, racial commingling, and even the disproportionate magnitude of nature" (pp56).

Ramos' perspective is important because it is telling of Mexican culture. Mexico has a beautiful culture indeed, but there is culture in the real sense then there is the culture that we tend to imagine, because we are ashamed. According to Ramos:

Mexicans have not lived naturally; their history has always lacked candor. That is why they now should quickly heed that voice, which demands a life of sincerity. We must have the courage to be ourselves and the humility to accept the life that fate bestowed upon us without being ashamed of its poverty. All the ills that have outlived us are due to our failure to practice these simple rules of austerity; we have chosen to feign a situation which is very superior to that in which we actually live. Many of the sufferings which now afflict us will disappear the day we cure ourselves of our vanity (pp. 103)

The catastrophic events Ramos believes had the most significant effects on culture were Mexico's Independence from Spain in 1810 followed by the Mexican Revolution in 1910. It is within those 100 years that Ramos thinks the sense of inferiority had reached its zenith. As a result, Mexico became obsessed with imitating other European countries rather than build its national identity from the ground up. Spain's dominance over the Indio and Afro-Mexican twisted the imagination in the minds of Mexicans so much, they took comfort in imitating Spanish culture rather than be original and develop their own. According to Ramos, “

In his own country he imitates modes of European civilization in order to feel that he is equal to the European, and in order to establish in his cities a privileged group which considers itself superior to all those Mexicans who live beyond the borders of civilization. But this fictional process does not end with exterior things, nor is it enough to restore the psychological equilibrium that the inferiority complex has destroyed. The same process is also applicable to the individual and falsifies his own idea of himself (pp. 58).

For Ramos, feigning a culture is harmful to the identity of Mexico and its denizens, because it lacks sincerity and authenticity. He is convinced that many of the problems Mexicans face like feeling less than others is due to the harmful narratives about masculinity we tell ourselves. We are filled with ideas that do not have a foundation, because we are too busy trying to imitate other countries and other cultures.

For Chicanos like myself who inherited these false notions from our decedents that developed under Spanish colonialism, are susceptible to the same sufferings Ramos mentions. However, Chicanos had to endure yet another occupation, this time by the US which became known as the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo. Once more Mexicans were further removed from their Indian-ness and blackness with all its beautiful cultural significance. Chicanos were forced to learn English and were discouraged to speak Spanish, though both are colonizing languages. In addition, they

were required to adopt US culture, with its dominant ideologies rooted in a white Anglo Saxon, and protestant ethos. Mexicans were more of a communal people and shared land with other families. Whites introduced concepts that did not make sense to Mexicans living in the Southwest. Whites made private property laws to protect their lands after stealing it or coercing it from the Mexicans. Whites stole, extorted, and squatted on Mexican lands often ignoring land titles that had been granted by the Spanish monarch. This displacement of hundreds of thousands of Mexicans resulted in wandering on their own lands, homeless, hungry and poor. According to Gloria Anzaldua,

The Gringo, locked into the fiction of white superiority, seized complete political power, stripping Indians and Mexicans of their land while their feet were still rooted in it. Con el destierro y el exilio fuimos desunados, destroncados, destripados—we were jerked out by the roots, truncated, disemboweled, dispossessed, and separated from our identity and our history. Many under the threat of Anglo terrorism, abandoned homes and ranches and went to Mexico. Some stayed and protested. But as the courts, law enforcement officials, and government officials not only ignored their pleas but penalized them for their efforts, tejanos had no other recourse but armed retaliation (pp.29).

If la chingada is Mexico's mother as Paz would have us believe, then the pelado is her prodigal son. Anzaldua's description of how the people were stripped of their land while their feet were still rooted speaks to the definition of the pelado. The word pelado means peeled, stripped, and bare. Ramos says, "We shall say nothing of his picturesque aspect, which has been represented to the point of tedium in the popular theater, in the novel, and in painting. Our only interest here is his *inner self* and the *elemental forces* that determine his character" (pp58). We will now examine some of his characteristics.

El Pelado is sensitive to insult and becomes aggressive when challenged. Ramos also classifies his personality as an introvert, describing him as passive but becomes explosive when angered.

The pelado's obsession with masculinity and vulgar language (Often sexualized) gives him a sense of dominance over both men and women. According to Ramos, "The most destitute of Mexican pelados consoles himself by shouting at everyone that "he's got balls" (*muchos huevos*) with reference to his testicles. It is important to note that he attributes to the reproductive organ not only one kind of potency, the sexual, but every kind of human power." In the pelado a man who triumphs in any activity, anywhere, owes his success to his "balls" (Ramos, pg60).

Ramos' theory can help explain why I did what I did in the mall. According to Ramos, "The pelado seeks out quarrels as a stimulus, to renew the vigor of his downtrodden ego. He needs a support for recovering faith in himself, but since his support is devoid of all real value, he has to replace it with a fictitious one" (pp.59). I identify with *el Pelado*. I too lived a hard life, I grew up landless, hungry, and my identity was barely intact. Let's go back to the part in my testimonio where I decided to hit those people with a bat. No one forced me to do it, so why did I? The short answer is I felt inferior for all the reasons I stated thus far, and though I thought it was courage motivating my actions, I was acting out of weakness. The more I learned about the pelado, the more I felt an air of familiarity, a sense of nostalgia. I hid behind a masculine façade which shielded me from being discovered. I thought I was brave when really, I was fearful of everything. I thought I was strong, but I was weak in many aspects of my life.

Ramos' theory supports the idea that these violent episodes are influenced by cultural phenomena that affect the collective and individual consciousness of the Mexican. Though I had always been aware of these negative attributes, I thought that way of thinking and living was normal. I did not know the source until recently. Ramos' theory confirms who I was back then, and the fact that he wrote about this before I was born is uncanny. These ideas have been part of our culture for centuries.

CHAPTER 3

The Youth Control Complex

Verse

Lord I'm slippin' I'm fallin' I can't get up
Lord I'm slippin' I'm fallin' I gots to get up
Everybody's set-trippin' and throwin' they hoods up
Being good is tough, Its sinning that's easy
Everybody wanna' do what they see on the TV
Everything so misleading 'cause the devil's deceiving
Death on every corner the grim reaper is reapin'
And see demons come around when I'm sleepin'
I don't know if I'm dreamin' but they seem so real
Everybody's killin' and robbin' over themdollar bills
Gettin' loaded everyday smokin' and poppin' pills
Hella' paranoid peepin' out they fuckin' window sills
Ain't got no people skills 'cause we all drugged up
The system don't give a fuck, they lockin' us up
See it's time to come up, but it's hard when we're down
So at night this is what I as when no one's around.

Testimonio

My experience in my last school had not been very positive, because of the way adults, teachers, and police viewed me. I was a young Mexican boy from the lower class so I was often labeled a thug. I was hoping things would change when I got the Woodburn, then this happened. Fighting was a way for me to deal with problems. That was the way my dad raised me. Maybe society was right. Maybe I was a thug that was not going to amount to anything. The school administration did not want me on school grounds for fear of retaliation, so I had to take a nontraditional route. Instead, I was assigned a teacher/counselor, Larry Connelly, whom I met with three days a week at the Woodburn Public Library. I was a senior at Woodburn high school when all this chaos was happening in my life but thankfully with the support of family, friends, and Connelly who believed in me, I managed to graduate.

I am grateful for Connelly's support and encouragement to this day. I had plans to go to college however, my graduation celebration was short lived. My trial date had been set and was less than a month away. My charges were assault in the first degree, assault in the second degree and two counts of unlawful use of a weapon. At the time, the possibility of my charges being ran consecutive (back to back) had never occurred to me. My parents managed to scrounge up some money to hire a lawyer, Allan Gallagher. Surprisingly, Gallagher convinced the court to release me on my own recognizance which was uncommon for Measure 11 offenders. However, I was not out very long, because I went to the workplace of one of the victims and got a tampering with a witness charge. I had been desperate to make my charges go away and tried to discourage him from testifying which was a major fail. I was arrested and taken to jail a second time. My only chance to get out was to post bail and again my family magically put up the money for my bail.

My folks must have borrowed money for my lawyer and my bail, because they did not have that kind of money lying around.

Judge West presided over my case, and I will refer to him as *West* in the following paragraphs. I entered a not guilty plea on the grounds of self-defense. However, I had not known a self-defense claim was nearly impossible to prove in Oregon. Part of our defense strategy was to include the shooting that took place four months prior but were disappointed to learn that West did not allow it into evidence. His reasoning was I had never given a formal statement which was true because I was no snitch. That made it as if that shooting had never happened and I had just decided to assault them for no apparent reason.

Trial was nerve racking and lasted three days. The DA portrayed me out to be a monster, playing on my age and ethnicity and convincingly so ten out of the 12 jurors found me guilty of all offenses except for a lesser included offense of assault II rather than assault I. I was heartbroken and disappointed. Aside from the death of my sister Rosario, being convicted of those charges was the saddest point in my life. Certainly, my family and friends were devastated, especially my parents and my girlfriend, Lisa. Me and Lisa met one day in Woodburn while I'd been looking for my attackers. Her auburn curly hair, fair complexion and big green eyes stopped me in my tracks, and I just had to pull over. Me and a few of my friends of mine walked to the group of girls and talked to them for a bit and exchanged numbers. Lisa called me the next day and we hit it off. We had fallen in love over the next several months but at that moment, we felt scared and helpless. Uncertain of what would become of us. My heart ached profoundly and it took everything in my power to hold it together. As sincere as I could, I turned and told my loved ones' that everything would be OK, although I did not believe it myself. The plump white middle-aged bailiff cuffed me and escorted me to the back of the courthouse where Salem police

were waiting to take me back to Marion county jail to await sentencing. At my sentencing hearing my lawyer Gallagher, asked West to consider sentencing me outside of Measure 11 guidelines, and to our surprise the judge agreed.

Emotions in the room were intense as friends and family spoke their piece attempting to convince the judge to give me a lighter sentence and give me an opportunity to learn from my crucial mistake, considering it was my first offense and had just graduated. My mom's testimony was the most gut wrenching to listen to. Her words and her pleas for mercy broke my heart. She talked about how our family was still mourning the loss of my sister Rosario who was survived by her husband Abel and my two nephews Ben and Brandon. My mother went on to say that I was her youngest and blamed herself for working too much and not being there for me when it counted. Perhaps she imagined this all could have been prevented if only she had spent more time at home. Although she may have felt that way, her comments could not have been further from the truth. My mother gave me more love than any child could ever ask for. She may have worked a lot, but she always managed to fix us hot plates and she was the most influential person in my life. She was my hero who always had my back and made the bad people go away. This time even she couldn't fix the damage I managed to get myself in. Upon reflection, that day my mom's whole being was one of powerlessness.

My father blamed himself, because he had taught me to how to fight and to stand up for myself. He failed to realize that he only taught me what his parents had taught him, a version of *el Pelado and la Chingada* which distorted his definition of what it was to be a man. I imagine it was difficult for my dad to have had to ask the judge for mercy. After all, West was a man with flaws like the rest of us, but because of the powers given to him by the state, my fate rested in his hands.

In addition to the various pleas of compassion, my lawyer submitted a binder with over forty letters from friends, family members, and people in the community like the pastor of my church and my school counselor. Each of people who wrote the letters asked the judge for leniency. However, West ignored the pile of letters, and it was obvious that he had made up his mind before stepping into the courtroom that day. The judge asked me if I had anything to say, and I told him I felt remorse. I apologized to the victims and their families as well. I said I had learned from my mistake and was willing to do community service, pay restitution or do whatever it took to make it right.

I had been a bit a naïve and hopeful West would give me a second chance but in the end, none of that seemed to matter. In fact, West told me I had everyone in that courtroom fooled but him and though we had never met, he claimed to know “my kind.” He said I had been living a double life and used a day and night analogy to say that I acted one way with my family (Day) and another way when I was with friends (Night). He told me I was a gang member and unwilling to hear me out when I tried telling him that was not the case. It was true that I had often associated with people in gangs, but I was never formally in a gang. West labeled me an 18 Streeter on the spot, a label that followed me to prison. In all his greatness from the powers bestowed to him, he silenced me and proceeded with his delusional tirade.

He continued his rant by telling me I tried killing my victims because I had aimed for their heads and not their bodies. Of course, only I know I had zero intentions of committing murder. Hurt them? Absolutely. I wanted to wound them like they did me and wanted to do it in a way that would better my chances to survive, but trying to tell the judge was pointless.

West only displayed hate and contempt when he sentenced me to 70 months for each count (consecutively) for a total of 140 months (11 years, 8months). I did not want to show any sign of

weakness in front of my loved ones, so I did my best to appear strong. However, thinking back on it now, I felt afraid and alone. Emotions I was not used to feeling. I was handcuffed yet again only this time I would be going to the intake center then eventually end up at one of the many prisons peppered throughout the state. The next time I'd see my family as a free man would be nearly 12 years later, all but my father who passed away November 2000 while I was behind the walls at Oregon State Penitentiary (OSP).

When my dad passed away, I must have been in three fights that week. I did not want to come out of my cell because I was hurt and angry, and when I did, I looked for any excuse to fight. Fighting was the only coping skill I had in my tool box at the time. Also, I stopped going to church, a place I'd go to on a regular basis. I stopped because I felt God had let me down. However, my relationship with God continued over the next five years despite not being in church.

I am just thankful I got to see my dad before he died. My family had paid several hundred dollars for me to be transported to the hospital. Shackled from my wrist, waste, and ankles, I shuffled my feet to his bedside, held his swollen hands and cried like a baby. He had tubes going in and out of his nose and mouth. He was heavily sedated, but I told him I loved him and for him to let go of the guilt he had regarding his role in me going to prison. He opened his eyes and tried to sit up and talk, but couldn't because of the mouth guard he had to wear to prevent him from biting his tongue. I told him to save his energy and told him I loved him one last time and kissed him on his cheek.

Theoretical Framework

In *Punished, Policing the Lives of Black and Latino Youth*, Victor Rios argues that there are institutions throughout various aspects of society that control youth. He supports his argument with a theory he calls the *youth control complex*. According to Rios, “This complex is the combined effect of the web of institutions, schools, families, businesses, residents, media, community centers, and the criminal justice system” (pp 40). The latter is notorious for locking up Black and Latino youth at alarming rates. These youths of color often receive harsher sentences when compared to white youth who commit similar crimes.

The problem with the criminal justice system is that in its attempt to dissuade youth from committing future crime is that the punishment further aggravates underlying issues. By underlying issues, I mean poverty, abuse, racism, sexism or mental health problems. Many deterrence practices are dehumanizing, a dominant feature that lingers long after incarceration. According to Giroux, “Such youth, already facing forms of racial and class-based exclusion, now experience as kind of social death as they are pushed out of schools, denied job training opportunities, subjected to rigorous modes of surveillance and criminal sanctions, and viewed less as a chronically disadvantaged than as flawed consumers and civic felons. Some young people, such as Trayvon Martin and Rekia Boyd (shot and killed in 2012 by an off-duty Chicago policeman), experience something more ominous: death by homicide” (pp.111).

Take the labeling hype for instance. Labeling youth is a method that may seem harmless on the surface but causes adverse effects, more so if the labels are false. For example, Rios points out that calling young people “thugs” because of the way they look, or style of dress is not only inaccurate and inadequate but harmful to their self-esteem. Rios sheds light on the negative

effects of labeling youth by saying, “While being called a “thug” by a random adult may seem trivial to some people, when a young person is called a “thug” by a random adult, told by a teacher that he or she will never amount to anything, and frisked by a police officer, all in the same day, this combination becomes greater than the sum of its parts. It becomes a unique formation- the youth control complex- taking a toll on the mind and future outcomes of this young person” (pp.40). Rios’ theory explains the structural I experienced in school and by the police. West, put me into the thug category the day of my sentencing calling me a gang member and refusing to believe otherwise. Instead he made an example out of me.

When the West asked me why I hadn’t gone to the police, from el Pelado’s perspective, the answer is quite simple, I didn’t trust the police. Distrust is a dominant feature in Ramos’ el Pelado model. Historically, they have been tools of oppression and today, they continue to target and terrorize communities of color. In addition, my ego was too big to let someone else handle my problems. During my sentencing hearing, the judge struggled to understand my thought process, nor did I expect him to. His privilege prevented him from seeing the perspectives of others. We were worlds apart, and it was impossible for him to see where I was coming from. He was an older white man who held a title highly regarded by society, and I was a young Mexican from a working-class family that society frowned upon. Though he did not understand me, he felt the need to lecture me by saying I had options besides causing physical harm.

I can honestly say none of that possibility never occurred to me. In fact, I considered it to be coward-like. For me it was clear what needed to be done, either I was going to hurt them, or they were going to hurt me. This is what Paz was getting at with his *chingada* theory. In hindsight, it makes sense why I did not think about other options.

Regarding police and constant scrutiny, Rios says surveillance for Black and Latino youth is more prevalent. This is something I can attest to as my friends and I were constantly stopped and questioned by police without probable cause. I had been naïve when it came to our names being put into the police data base, a routine procedure that was used to label us and monitor us well into adulthood. I also remember 9 O'clock curfews that were enforced by police. Cops regularly patrolled the Westside and busted youth, handing out fines (\$100-\$200) each time. Petty policies such as these put an economic and mental stain on a Tejano community that had been doing its best to make ends meet.

Family is yet another institution that has a contributing influence on youth. While youth often learn traits from their parents and siblings, many are misguided and taught to live in a world of ideas inconsistent with those of greater society. For example, a punitive society like ours thinks youth should be disciplined to the point of perfection which is an unrealistic. Consider fighting in the physical sense, generally society has a zero tolerance when it comes to fighting, but many parents tell their children it is OK to fight if they are defending themselves.

These contrasting points of view may have grave consequences when fights occur on school grounds. Most schools have zero tolerance policies for fighting and often call the police to investigate. Whether police make an arrest is beside the fact, the youths involved will be labeled delinquents or at the very least, gets their names entered into the police database. This way when young people makes mistakes in the future, they have prior reports working against them and can be used in the court of law. I often fought in school and had police reports filed against me on a regular basis. I later learned that those could be used against me in court, because they were considered official documents.

Like Galtung's pyramid of cultural violence and structural violence, Rios separates the youth control complex into *symbolic criminalization* and *material criminalization*. According to Rios "Symbolic criminalization includes the surveillance, profiling, stigma, and degrading interactions that young people regularly endure. *Material criminalization* includes police harassment, exclusion of businesses and public recreation spaces, and the enforcement of zero-tolerance policies that lead to detention rooms, school suspensions, and incarceration" (pp. 40).

Consequently, many young people encounter physical, emotional, and psychological abuse in the school system from a young age leaving them to wonder if they belong, are smart enough, or whether their lives are valued enough for others to love and care for them.

Anzaldua recalls instances in which she had been punished in school basically for being Mexican. Anzaldua says, "I remember being caught speaking Spanish at recess—that was good for three licks on the knuckles with a sharp ruler. I remember being sent to the corner of the classroom for "talking back" to the Anglo teacher when all I was trying to do was tell her how to pronounce my name. "If you want to be American, speak 'American.' If you don't like it, go back to Mexico where you belong" (Borderlands, pp.75).

It is ironic that the teacher would say that considering Tejas had been *Mexico* before the *Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo* (1848). These types of speak English only policies, corporal punishment, and biased attitudes teachers had towards Tejana/o students had devastating effects in terms of graduation rates and cultural identity. As you recall from what I shared in my introduction, I had been severely disciplined by teachers, and paddled until I was a sophomore in highschool. I had been racially profiled by police, and had been susceptible to mandatory minimum laws that were being implemented across the country. Many of them targeting youth of color.

I often replay the incidents that led me to prison. I made a grave decision and would take it back if I could. I am fortunate to now be aware of the structural violence which limited my life choices, however those forces that were suppressing me felt as though they were beyond my control. Had I known I was being overwhelmed by social inequalities, I may have had a chance to avoid prison.

Unfortunately, many Black and Latino youth will continue to be funneled into the prison system.

In the article *The School-to-Prison Pipeline: The Business Side of Incarcerating, Not Educating, Students in Public Schools*, Tracie R. Porter says:

For African American and Latino students in particular, going to school and violating school rules can land them in prison. A recent report issued by the Department of Education Office for Civil Rights indicated that school administrators expelled, and law enforcement arrested, African American students in staggeringly disproportionate numbers compared to white students and other students of color. The likelihood these students will end up in prison is also disproportionately high. Without question, the rise in punitive discipline in our public schools contributes to the country's astonishing incarceration rate—currently the highest in the world (pp.57).

Rather than our young people growing up to be silly and worry-free like those from privileged families, they are constantly threatened by the criminal justice system which is like a sinister rain cloud overhead threatening to pour down on them at any moment. Due to this feeling of vulnerability, understanding how to live in their Black and Brown bodies is vital in a society built on slavery, genocide, which operates through perpetual racism. One wrong move and it is over. We have witnessed over and again the senseless murders at the hands of police and although many young people feel hopeless, they are also resilient.

Chapter 4

Prison Violence

Verse

I'm the tear drop on the faces of convicted murderers

Razor wire fences, the watch tower observing ya'

Prison walls buried ya', the clown cries in agony

Traumatized by tragedy, the joker laughs happily

The cracks in the hour glass, the sand spills out

The demons face in the smoke quietly tries to shout

I'm everything you're about, culture and identity

Portraits of your family with halos and angel wings

With you for eternity, prayers and blessings

A stained image of the Virgen Mary offers protection

Your confessions, help get rid of the bad deeds

I'm the praying hands clutched around rosary beads

The untold history, the fight for liberty

Pictures of Zapata I display with dignity

Beautiful symmetry on Aztec pyramids

The Gods and Goddesses, the sacred hieroglyphs.

Testimonio

Prisoners have a hierarchy system which I had to familiarize myself with. Prisoners labeled each other according to their jackets. Prisoners use the term “jacket” to distinguish a good reputation from a bad one. Just as there are governing bodies in our society, prisoners have systems of governments known as *prison politics*. Violence reigned in prison, and prison gangs controlled most of it through *la politica*, “the politics.”

Fortunately, I had a clean jacket, so I did not have worry about cons extorting me or beating me up. However, not everyone enjoyed that status. Suppose I wanted, to find out what someone’s crime was or whether they had snitched, all I had to do was have someone in the community obtain that information, since it is public record, and mail it to me. There were many times when I witnessed weaker prisoners endure some of the most humiliating treatment imaginable. I had to look the other way per the convict code. I did so not because I agreed with the process, but it was best I minded my own business, or I would have been the next target.

Asking newbies where they are from is daily routine in prison, and the reason being is to find out if they are cool. They could be suspect, meaning they may be a snitch or a sex offender, which is critical information, or they may be from a rival gang. In Oregon like most west coast *pintas*, “prisons,” surenos, “southerners,” run the all prisons but one. Two-Rivers Correctional Institution in Umatilla County is reserved for nortenos, “northerners.”

A laundry worker hit me up immediately since they usually are the first to see the new arrivals. He was a Sureno who went by Smokey. Smokey was maybe 20 years old. He had a thin build, wore loc’s, (Preferred sunglasses of gangsters) on to block the sun, and sported a rosary. His clothes were baggy, prison blue jeans, white tee, and a pair of white Nike Cortez.

He asked me where I was from. I told him I did not bang, "I was not from a gang," I followed up by saying I was a Tejano who had moved to Woodburn where I went to high school. He was cool with it, so he hooked me up with brand-new state issued tennis shoes, white tee-shirts, light blue long sleeve button up shirts and red shorts, and towels.

California gangs south of Fresno are southerners and clicks north from there are northerners.

These two gangs are by far the largest in California and Oregon. Luckily, gang members respected many of standards. For instance, they appreciated the fact that I held firm to my spiritual beliefs but fought when I had to. However, if I wanted to fight someone from a *barrio* "neighborhood/gang" I had to get the OK from the *mero mero* "gang leader."

In the early nineties, many members of those two gangs moved to Woodburn, Hillsboro, and Portland. It did not take long for OGs, (High-ranking members) to recruit and before you knew it, these areas became hot beds of violence among Mexican American youth. I was right in the mix and had to navigate my identity. Toeing the line among many gangs in the area worked for a while but eventually caught up with me. However, negotiating my character in was a skill that was significant during my time in prison.

Like the street code, prison has a convict code and determined by factors below:

- Reputable crime- Crimes other prisoners respected
- No snitching- Snitches get stitches and status is not much higher than a sex offender
- No sex crimes- Sex offenders get extorted and beaten up regularly

One day I was playing basketball, and the game got a little rough as one could imagine. We exchanged words, and I punched a con named Ty square on his jaw. Surenos gave me *esquina*

“had my back.” Ty happened to be Native American, and my shenanigans nearly incited a race riot between the Native Americans and the Surenos. After talking with one of the Native American leaders, we had come to an agreement that would not involve a huge brawl between the two groups.

The point of the fight was so he would save face with his homies and other prisoners who had witnessed the exchange on the basketball court. I was glad we had worked it out amongst ourselves and prevented a tense situation from escalating further. We decided that Ty and I would fight “one on one” before dinner in C Block on the third tier. We began fighting the moment we walked out of our cells. He came forward with a looping right hand, but I was quicker and hit him with a straight right. One shot K.O. That was it. I helped him to his feet, stared into his dancing eyeballs; we shook hands and went on our way.

Once I established a dominant reputation, I had to work to maintain it. There came a time when I had a disagreement with a fellow prisoner, and he called me out. A “call out” is a direct challenge to fight, and I accepted of course. We arranged it so that the fight would take place in my cell (since his cell was next door). He ran out of his cell and into mine when the doors opened for yard line. He charged swinging wildly hitting me a couple of times on the sides of my head. I hung in there never taking my eyes off him and caught him with flurry of punches giving him a swollen eye and a busted lip. He gave up and dropped to one knee. The fight lasted less than a minute with me coming out on top once again.

I share these examples not to brag about my fighting abilities but to demonstrate how prison not only exacerbates violence but also spreads and glorifies it. Although those ideas and behaviors were what I have strived to steer clear of, there were instances when they were advantageous. Were there other choices? Perhaps, but most would have resulted in being ostracized or me being

injured. Opting to do the right thing in prison could be risk since prison is about doing whatever it takes to earn the veneration of your peers. Some might think you are soft for wanting to better yourself. There were times people questioned some of the choices I made. It appeared the more I tried to distance myself from negative behavior, the more the environment tried to pull me back in.

I had been asked by some high-ranking members of gangs to formally join their sets. I respectfully let them know I was honored but had to decline. I was in my late twenties and would not have felt right had I started gang banging that late in the game. Now if I had been asked when I was eighteen I might've accepted. By the time this began to happen I had served more than half my sentence. I knew I wanted to earn the privilege to go to a minimum-security facility once I was down to 36 months. I stopped fighting and began focusing my energies elsewhere like education and working with the Latino community both inside the walls and out.

Most prisons offer classes like cognitive self-change, Alcoholics Anonymous, and Narcotics Anonymous. Not everything about the classes were helpful, but I took ideas from each and applied them to my situation. The problem with these classes occur when class material is superficial, meaning it only scratches the surface, lacking substance and/or critical thinking. Nevertheless, I was self-motivated and determined to change for the better, and that's what made the difference for me. The *Chicano Culture Club* was my sanctuary and the *Los Hermanos* provided a platform where I could be proactive in terms of community building and identity.

Cultural clubs were way to stay positive and active. The clubs provided a feeling of comradery as well as a sense of solidarity among the fellow prisoners. For example, the Chicano Club celebrated Mexican holidays like Dia de Independencia, La Virgen de Guadalupe, and Dia de los

Muertos. Visitors and volunteers would often come celebrate with us where we'd socialize over Mexican food and music. Other times members of the club utilized the space to discuss important social issues like police brutality and immigration. It was a space where prisoners could have their voices heard and had an incentive to stay out of trouble.

Los Hermanos, "the brothers," was developed by four lifers (prisoners serving a life sentence) John Castro, Tony Palacios, Miguel Tellez, and Reyes Miranda. The program was created for at risk youth, and offered an alternative to scared straight programs. *Los Hermanos* had a 9 month long curriculum and covered various topics such as cultural identity, choices and consequences, gangs, prison life, and drugs and alcohol. I was fortunate enough to have been a facilitator and was able to share my story with many young people. I encouraged them to do good by their families, communities, and not make the same mistakes I'd made. For the first time I felt as though I had a purpose in life and was making a difference.

Theoretical Framework

In *Prison Violence: Causes, Consequences and Solutions*, Kristine Levan and Ms. Berry argue that prisons make offenders more violent. According to the authors, “The purpose of this book is to provide a comprehensive look at prison violence” (pp 7). Levan and Berry draw from various theories to explain possible reasons behind prison violence. The first is *prisonization* which explains the ways prisoners adopt everyday norms and behaviors of prison culture. Next is *prison hierarchy* where there are those who are aggressive, those who are passive, and those who are weakest and get victimized. The *convict code* idea is that there are informal rules and procedures that cons abide by such as no snitching. Then we have the *informal economy* notion which are goods being bought and sold in the black market. These are the structures that they say help explain prison violence. I saw these structures in my own experience, and Jimmy Santiago Baca saw these structures in his own experience. What this adds up to is prison does not rehabilitate.

Levan and Berry explain the concept of prisonization as, “Inmates live in an environment that is far different than in the free community. Over time, inmates often assimilate into a world of violence and fear, where norms, values and beliefs counter those that people in the general population find acceptable” (pp.46). Degrees of prisonization are dependent on factors such as length of time, whether prisoners have support systems, or whether they are attending educational classes. The authors’ assertion is that prisoners who have more positive experiences and outside support are less likely to become antisocial or institutionalized (pp.46). If you remember what I said above about having to learn the ins and outs of prison, this theory helps explain how I immersed prison behavior which was a main contributor to altercations with other cons.

In addition to prisonization, the authors talk about how there are hierarchy systems in prison. Per the authors there are roles among prisoners, the wolves (dominant prisoners), punks (weak prisoners), and the submissive (feminine types). According to Levan and Berry, “The prison hierarchy would suggest that there is a “pecking order” among inmates. The likelihood of an individual being either the perpetrator or the victim of a violent offense may be partially determined by his or her place on the prison hierarchy (pp47). I talked about this in my testimonio. Prisoners who found themselves towards the bottom of the hierarchy were extorted for money, goods, and sex.

Next, Levan and Berry consider the *convict code*. This code is like the street code only the circumstances are different. Drawing from the works of Gresham Sykes, the authors describe the convict code as no snitching, showing loyalty to each other rather than the guards, and not showing any signs of weakness. The authors wonder if there is a real convict code. This is when the perspective of someone who has been in prison can be of value. If you remember, I talk about the convict code in my testimonio when I mention the significance of having what cons consider being a reputable crime, no snitching, no associating with sex offenders, and doing your own time.

Levan and Berry speak of the informal economy. This is where drugs, cigarettes, tennis shoes, and 100-dollar bills get passed during visits. Although these items are considered contraband, much of it gets into prisons by the guards and other staff. According to the authors, “Once an item is labeled as contraband, it is likely to become a commodity and increase in value on the black market” (pp 50). Although I did not talk about informal economy in my testimonio, I did take part in it by selling tobacco. I had other cons smuggle cans of tobacco during visits. A couple of methods used were putting up their keister or underneath the insoles of their tennis

shoes. I made good money doing it too. I sold ounces for \$100 and packs of smokes for \$200. I used the money to buy bags of coffee and envelopes, and hygiene products, because those were other forms of currency in the informal economy.

In my testimonio I talked about never backing down. Prison life revolves around the notion of respect. I earned the respect of my peers, but there were times when I had to demand it by fighting. I fought for pride, for culture, for dignitary and respect. I fought to uphold my reputation. I fought for my life.

Likewise, Baca recounts a time when a Black porter orderly wanted to make him his bitch. Per the advice of Macaron, a *veterano* “experienced convict,” Baca decided to fight to teach the con a lesson.

According to Baca:

Before he knew it, I was beside him. Startled by seeing me, he dropped the pipe he was shaving on the grinder. He crouched to pick it up but I quickly picked a piece of angle iron from the trashcan between us and hit him on the head. Stunned, he staggered back and turned his face right into the whirring grinding wheel. The blade ripped his goggles in half and cut into his cheek and eye. Blood squirted across the air in thick sprays and he cried out. A part of his eye and a chunk of cut cheek flesh dangled as he tripped back, covering his face. I hit him again and he fell to his knees, his muscled arms, broad shoulders, and thick legs squirming to escape. I planted my feet firmly apart and hit him until he sprawled out on the concrete floor. A voice inside my head kept yelling the whole time I was hitting him that I was doing this for Teresa, whose father had raped her, and for my brother, who’d been raped by those two white guys (pp122-123).

We hear about horrific stories put out frequently by media outlets. Less than a month ago there was a prison riot in a maximum-security prison in South Carolina that left seven inmates dead.

According to the *New York Times* article, *Guards Waited Hours to Stop a Prison Riot That Left 7 Inmates Dead*, Richard Fausset writes, “The riot, sparked by gangs within the prison who were

warring over territory, money and contraband, left seven inmates dead and 17 injured, many of them stabbed or slashed by improvised blades.” Republican Gov. Henry McMaster chimed in nonchalantly saying that “the riot was “unfortunate” but that flare-ups among criminals were inevitable. Inevitable? McMaster goes on to say, “We know that prisons are places where people who have misbehaved on the outside go for rehabilitation, and also to take them from the general population. It is not a surprise when we have violent events take place inside prison.” Here is a clear-cut example of the structural element that perpetuates prison violence. Here we have a high-ranking politician with the authority to make changes that would reduce prison violence but chooses not to. What he essentially means is let’s stand by while these criminals kill themselves off.

In a *USA Today* article, *His 911 call as ‘Jesus Christ’ went viral after Pizza Hut break-in; story since is tragic*, Jayne O’Donnell reports that a Richard Lee Quintero from North Carolina suffers from chronic paranoid schizophrenia. This should have been obvious from the 911 call that Quintero made saying he was Jesus Christ and rather than take him to a psychiatric hospital where he would have received the medical treatment he needed, he was arrested and taken to jail. According to O’Donnell, “The story since then for the Greensboro N.C., man is far from funny. Quintero, who suffers from chronic paranoid schizophrenia, amputated his own tongue after spending three weeks in jail. That got him hospitalized for about a week until he was sent to Raleigh’s maximum security Central Prison, where he was under what’s known a “safekeeping” until an expected May 18 court date. Only having spent 48 days behind bars was he found incompetent and his charges dismissed. It is unfortunate that what Quintero needed was critical medical care and support of his family and loved ones and instead he was violated, demeaned,

humiliated, abused by a broken, unforgiving, very violent and racialized prison system. This is yet another tragic example of structural violence.

For many, prison is a very violent and traumatic experience. Most of the shock trauma I am referring to comes from the harm done to others and me either by prisoner-to-prisoner, by staff to prisoner, or solitary confinement. Structural violence also comes in the form of poor food quality and medical neglect. As far as prisoner to prisoner which is a consequence of *structural violence*, there are fist fights, stabbings, murders and suicides. Prison guards quite frequently participate in this cycle of violence physically beating prisoners, abusing them psychologically, or instigating fights among prisoners to divide and conquer them. Poor food quality also a tendency to lead to prison riots. However, most of the time prisoners begin their protests peacefully by participating in “sit-ins.” Sit ins are when prisoners collectively sit in the chow hall and refuse to return to their cells once chow time is over. This strategy is preferable to begin a dialogue between prisoners, administrators, and the warden. Riots follow suit if an agreement is not met between the parties. Medical neglect or maltreatment is another catalyst for prison riots. A common medical solution for patients is drink plenty of water and take Tylenol despite the variety of diagnosis and/or severity of the symptoms. All too often prisoners get sick and die in the prison infirmary like my homie Huero (22) who died of cancer, my good friend Joe (in his 50s) who died of Hepatitis C, and Tuk (in his 30s) my Vietnamese homie who died of stomach issues. May they rest in peace.

Prison is where violence is concentrated and manifests in different ways. Prison is where having traits of el Pelado and la Chingada would be beneficial. Fights breakout daily with a stabbing here and there. Prisoners are pissed off, because they miss their families. They are highly stressed because they are caged in like animals. Most people would not feed their pets prison

food, because it is often dated and tastes stale. The water stinks and has a rusty yellow tint to it. Despite these structures that maintain and intensify violence in many forms, prisoners are expected to magically become model citizens and contribute to a society that views them in an indifferent manner. Many prisoners adopt a hobby, work, or attend classes to escape even for an hour or two. For me, music became an outlet for structural violence and cultural violence. I must give a shout out to my good friend Tobias (Native American brother) who first taught me how to write bars when we were cellies at Oregon State Correctional Institution in 1997. My artist name, Sonny Gunz, represented both my skills as a fighter and a Chicano Hip Hop artist. As you may have noticed a lot of my raps are dark and exhume masculinity, power, and dominance. I chose to include my verses to begin each chapter to demonstrate how cultural and structural violence can be reinforced through Hip Hop as well.

Reflecting on my time in prison, I have come to learn that I did not change because of the penal system. The change came to me from my culture and self-determination. I strongly believe that family, cultural values and self-actualization are what kept me going in a penal system designed to keep people thinking like a criminal. I felt I had learned my lesson and was ready to lead a positive role in society. One, I was beginning to wake up to some values that were grounded in my culture, love, compassion and *comunidad* “community. “Two, I wanted to change for my family. With their support, I could keep a positive attitude, because I knew they were counting on me.

Systems of domination, control, and power do not cure but reinforce violent behavior. The idea that the penal system rehabilitates people is a myth. The examples I shared with you of punching Ty on the basketball court and fighting another con in my cell over a disagreement along with Baca’s example above, are evidence that show how prisons promote and escalate violence rather

than deters it. In fact, prisons teach people how to become better criminals. From my perspective, after having been in prison for 12 years, prison compounds negative behaviors by intensifying ideas of violence and by generating hyper masculinity. Society may shun this type of behavior. However, for many incarcerated people, gaining the respect of your peers and maintaining it is often a matter of life or death. I managed to maintain a position towards the top of the hierarchy. I had been successful in negotiating my identity regarding gangs, but I was also effective with my time by embracing new forms of cultural identity.

CHAPTER 5

The Prison Label

Verse

Society is sick I'm looking for a remedy
It's trying to box me in, but I got multiple identities
Mexica, Chicano, Latino, Mulatto
Espanol, Criollo, Pachuco speaking Calo'
Yo soy de otro lado tambien yo soy de aqui
Soy Cortes y Moctezuma tambien yo soy Joaquin
Tonatzin no es la virgin es la madre celestial
Nos bendiga con comida en los tiempos de piscar
I look into tezcal, to make sure my path is clear
And I offer up copal, for the ones who aren't here
We're fighting with an enemy that's distant and invisible
The battle psychological, historical, and spiritual
Mejicanos are ridiculed, exploited for their labor
La cosa es politico it's all about that paper
Mejicanos offer prayers to La Virgen for protection
And faithfully anticipate Cuauhtémoc's resurrection

Testimonio

Supposedly, I had paid my debt to society, but I returned to the community owing thousands of dollars in restitution. I was required to take anger management and drug and alcohol classes that were not affordable, thankfully I had certificates for classes I completed while in prison or it would have been more. In addition, I was required to pay \$55 dollars a month over the span of three years under post-prison supervision. Aside from that, I applied for several jobs and didn't land any of them do my criminal history. How was I supposed to succeed amidst all the hinderances of being an ex-felon? The gloom reality is about 68% of formerly incarcerated people recidivate, because the odds are stacked against them and by no coincidence.

My second day out, I was in the passenger seat of my mom's car wearing a fedora style hat, the kind pachucos wore in the forties, and a cop pulled us over. The cop was a white man around the age of 30. He came to the driver's side window and rather than ask my mom for her license and registration, he looked directly at me and asked me for my ID. The reason? He said a "back taillight" was out. Of course, I did not have my ID since I'd just paroled, but he persisted. He wanted to know why I did not have ID, but something told me he already knew the answer and this was no routine stop. I explained I was in the process of getting ID, and he smirked and said, "I know who you are, we heard you were getting out. You better watch yourself." By "we" he meant the Woodburn Police Department which was later confirmed through a friend of mine who worked there. The department had been given a heads up that I'd be paroling to Woodburn along with my mug shot.

About a week after the intimidation fail, I ran into a cousin of mine at the local Safeway. I told him I was fresh out and looking for work and asked if he knew anyone hiring. It just so happened

that he owned a small moving company and said I could work for him under the table. I began work the following week and was content to be working and earning around \$100 a day. He'd pick me up every morning since I did not have my driver's license. The process of getting one a license was grueling. I worked with my cousin for several months and managed to save some cash. The irony is while I was awaiting my driving privileges, my cousin's privileges were taken away due to a DUI resulting in him losing his business license. The DMV wanted my original my social security card and birth certificate which I had to locate in Texas and have my brother mail it to me. It took two months to finally have my Oregon's driver's license.

Shortly after my moving job, my friend Pedro, who was still serving time in OSP, talked to his wife Brenda who was a manager at a McDonalds in South Salem. Although I was 30 years old my options were slim so I swallowed my pride and worked at Micky Ds. There was a bit of urgency to find work, because my PO said he'd revoke my parole if I didn't maintain a steady job. I had to abide by the guidelines set by my parole officer. He was a white middle man with a blonde crew cut. He tried to be a hard ass the first day we'd met but I was used to assholes like him. I knew the whole tough guy routine was part of his job, but I would have had a more respect for him had he just been genuine with me.

Brenda hired me as a maintenance man which ended up being harder than I anticipated. I am convinced one of the managers, Cindy, had it out for me and tried to break me and force me to quit. My shift began at 4am, and I'd begin with cleaning the bathrooms/lobby, take out the trash, swept/mopped the kitchen area, made sure the fryers had clean grease, broke down card board boxes, washed windows, and polished stainless-steel equipment. I worked there for about six months then started college classes at Chemeketa Community College that Fall.

Currently I work as an interpreter contractor both in the medical field and the legal field. One of the requirements of the job application was write a letter to the people in charge explaining the details of my crime. In addition, they wanted to know what I had done to correct that type of behavior. This was not the first time I had to do this and it will not be my last, but it gets more difficult each time, because I am constantly having to relive those terrible memories from that night. I enjoy what I do, because I can work with a portion of the Latinx community who have mental disabilities and provide them an important service. Some of my work takes place within secured facilities, and I first had to get security clearance. Though I enjoy being an interpreter contractor I was pushed into it because I was unable to get hired elsewhere. As an interpreter contractor I have no benefits, so I get penalized annually because I cannot afford health insurance. Another issue is that agencies I work with are not required to pay overtime or vacation time, so I often find myself being exploited. As an interpreter contractor I live pay check to pay check and have no financial stability.

Though I managed to get along OK in society, I had a lot of psychological trauma some of which remains to this day. For instance, I get anxious in crowded places like grocery stores. I constantly searched for cameras, because I was used to being monitored 24/7. The soap Irish Spring instantly transports me to Marion County Jail where I fought my case, because the jail gave it to new arrivals. The scent activates memories of being young, and feeling alone and afraid. To this day, night terrors awaken me in the wee hours of the night thinking I am still in prison dealing with the everyday violence it breeds.

Prison had harmed me in such a way that I felt more like a monster than a human initially. It takes a lot of violence to make people feel that way. The numerous strip searches I underwent forced me to feel vulnerable and violated. Guards rummaged through my cell whenever they felt

like it. I would return to my cell only to find my property in disarray. At random, guards would wake me up at 3am telling me to pack up my belongings, because they were transferring me across the state hundreds of miles away from family and friends. I was 11862021, a number, an object, property of the state. I was made to feel like an animal locked in a cage. I had little control over my life.

I paroled to my mom's house where she had my room ready with a brand-new bed set and new clothes in the closet. Family and friends had pitched in and rented a stretched Lincoln Navigator to pick me up in front of Santiam Correctional Institution in Salem. My mom was there, my nephew and niece, my sister, my two brothers, my homies Slim, Rico, Jimmy, and George who I'd met in prison. They all had gifts for me, money, shoes and clothes. It was like my birthday. It was one of the happiest moments in my life. We drove around Salem listening to my niece's (Mizz Kristique) music. We toasted to new beginnings with sparkling cider (I couldn't be around alcohol) in champagne glasses. We had breakfast at Aibertos Mexican Restaurant where I ate chorizo for the first time in nearly 12 years. Next, we went to my mom's house where the rest of my familia were waiting to greet me and celebrate with the biggest *mil ojas* (Thousand layers) cake I had ever seen. I wish my dad could have been there to see me as a free man. He'd worked rigorously with the Western Prison Project and other organizations to try to overturn measure 11 but a repeal requires two-thirds vote which is nearly impossible. I miss you *jefito*, (dad).

To go from a dark depressing and frightening place to a dwelling of love, hope, and unwavering support was the greatest feeling in the world. There I was, a 30-year-old Mexican American man starting from scratch. Well not completely because I had the support of my family and friends. A lot of ex-cons do not have that so I am grateful I did. The penal system failed me as it does so many Mexican American youth. Our punitive system is ruining so many lives. The courts missed

an opportunity to hold me accountable and allow me to learn from my mistake without having do an extensive prison sentence, which just added to the structural violence I was trying to escape. Perhaps the judge could have opted for me to undergo anger management classes or get me professional help. Unfortunately, those opportunities are rare for Mexican American youth from working class families like myself.

Theoretical Framework

In the *New Jim Crow, Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*, Michelle Alexander argues that locking people up has little to do with crime and more to do with racial injustice and social control. Alexander supports her argument, by providing a historical analysis of racialized social control in the US, and compares it to our present time, an era she refers to as the age of mass incarceration. According to Alexander:

As we shall see, there is a certain pattern to the births and deaths of racial castes in America. Time and again, the most ardent proponents of racial hierarchy have succeeded in creating new caste systems by triggering a collapse of resistance across the political spectrum. This feat has been achieved largely by appealing to the racism and vulnerability of lower-class whites, a group of people who are understandably eager to ensure that they never find themselves trapped at the bottom of the American totem pole. This pattern, dating back to slavery, has birthed yet another racial caste system in the United States: mass incarceration (pp.16).

These lower-class whites Alexander talks about are the Trump supporters of today who are emboldened to up the racial violence towards people of color.

Alexander makes a striking connection between slavery and the prison industrial complex when she talks about Jarvis Cotton's inability to vote due to his status as an ex-felon. She points out how the men in his family could not vote due to racial violence and voter suppression. According to Alexander:

Cotton's great-great grandfather could not vote as a slave. His great grandfather was beaten to death by the Ku Klux Klan for attempting to vote. His grandfather was prevented from voting by Klan intimidation. His father was barred from voting by poll taxes and literacy tests. Today, Jarvis Cotton cannot vote because he, like many black men in the United States, has been labeled a felon and is currently on parole.

Alexander is convinced that the prison industrial complex is responsible for what she calls a *racial caste*. Alexander quotes an Alabama planter after the civil war, “We have the power to pass stringent police laws to govern the Negroes--this is a blessing--for they must be controlled in some way or white people cannot live among them” (Alexander, pg28). And pass laws they did beginning with the *War on Drugs*, California’s *Three Strike Law*, followed by a wave of *mandatory minimum laws* across the U.S. Most recently, we have witnessed *immigration laws* regarding border crossings that have gone from a civil matter to criminalization, which has resulted in the separation of families. The system is forcing the separation of families by imprisoning the parents, and babies as young as 53 weeks are being detained because they are being deemed unaccompanied minors. The system is discriminating against people based on their immigration status and is a clear example of systemic (Structural) racism. Alexander would consider them as part of a racial caste, an underclass, who the system legal discriminates against so that they remain at the bottom of the racial hierarchy.

The criminal justice system continues to disproportionately punish, surveil, and control people of color. Moreover, Blacks are six times and Latinos/as are 3 times more likely to go to prison than whites. This is not a mere coincidence but rather a strategy to suppress their voices and visibility in within society. In addition to the inability to vote for most who make it out of prison, there are many ways discrimination becomes legalized and upheld. Fortunately for me, Oregon allows ex-felons to vote which is not the case for most states.

Such procedures such as surveilling and targeting people of color ensure that prisons remain overwhelmingly Black and Latino. Alexander makes her case by illuminating the stigma associated with ex-felons, such as losing their rights to vote, no access to social services, housing, and no funding for higher education.

According to Alexander:

Once you're labeled a felon, the old forms of discrimination—employment discrimination, housing discrimination, denial of the right to vote, denial of educational opportunity, denial of food stamps and other public benefits, and exclusion from jury service—are suddenly legal. As a criminal, you have scarcely more rights, and arguably less respect, than a black man living in Alabama at the height of Jim Crow. We have not ended racial caste in America; we have merely redesigned it (pp.2).

According to Alexander, the way it works is:

The first stage is the round up. Vast numbers of people are swept into the criminal justice system by the police, who conduct drug operations primarily in poor communities of color.

The conviction marks the beginning of the *second phase*: the period of formal control. Once arrested, defendants are generally denied meaningful legal representation and pressured to plead guilty whether they are or not.

The final stage has been dubbed by some advocates as the period of invisible punishment. This term first coined by Jeremy Travis, is meant to describe the unique set of criminal sanctions that are imposed on individuals after they step outside the prison gates, a form of punishment that largely operates outside of public view and takes effect outside the traditional sentencing framework (pp.180-181).

For example, the housing industry often refuses to rent to a tenant with a criminal history, forcing many people into shelters or the streets. Likewise, business owners, managers, and supervisors run criminal background checks and often deny them employment. Alexander's theory helps explain why I had such a difficult time providing for myself and my family. Though I was fortunate enough to have had a cousin hook me up with a job right away, after working for him, I was repeatedly denied work due to my criminal background. My only other option was to work at McDonalds, so I took it.

Unfortunately, these discriminatory but legal practices encourage ex-felons to rely on crime by reducing their options to criminal activity such as theft, robbery, and drug dealing to provide for

their families. If that were not enough, men and women who get caught up in the criminal justice system are required to report to their parole officers and pay additional fees, restitution, as well as programs like drug and alcohol, anger management and parenting classes if ordered by the courts. According to Alexander, “Upon release from prison, ex-offenders are typically saddled with large debts—financial shackles that hobble them as they struggle to build a new life” (pp150). Furthermore, Alexander’s theory describes why I paroled owing thousands of dollars in restitution, parole fees, as well as having to pay for expensive drug and alcohol classes, and anger management classes.

Another matter is class differences. Many of us rely on public defenders who are often overworked and underpaid, which often translates into more convictions and longer sentences. In contrast, many middle/upper class whites can afford private lawyers which usually leads to lesser included offenses and lighter sentences. The disparity in sentencing between whites and people of color is conspicuous. In my case, my family hired a lawyer who was an alcoholic and hurting for money to support his habit. I know this because he reeked of booze and dressed like a bum. Therefore, we got what we paid for, so the saying goes. This is how the system works against the working class.

Lastly, people previously incarcerated rarely resolve the issue(s) that caused them to commit their crime(s) to begin with. In fact, many times, underlying issues not only go undetected most of the time but become complicated and compounded to the point where they become unmanageable. By underlying issues, I mean those who suffer from mental disabilities, drugs and alcohol addiction, and anger. While it is true that most institutions offer programs to address some of the problems, they are superficial and lack substance to treat their frailties. Like I mentioned in my testimonio, I had to work to find ideas relating to my situation, but my

rehabilitation came from me wanting a better life for me and my family and not from being imprisoned.

Alexander covers a wide range of racial injustice and various forms of social control that speak to my experiences after prison. Alexander's theory explains why it was so difficult for me to adjust to the free world. I'd been harassed by police. I was swimming in debt. I was labeled as part of a Security Threat Group (STG) because of my supposed gang status. Being STG came with extra restrictions like a 9 O'clock curfew, zero tolerance regarding gangs meaning if I was caught associating with a known gang member in anyway my parole would be revoked. In addition, I could not be anywhere near my victims which makes sense, but if we'd happen to run into each other at a store or a restaurant I'd be the one who'd have to leave. The list went on, I could not own a pit bull because they are considered a dangerous weapon, guns, or use drugs or alcohol. The most crippling effect, socially speaking, was the inability to find a steady job with good pay, benefits and a 401 due to my criminal background. To this day my livelihood and my health are constantly at risk.

CONCLUSION

In this thesis what I have shown is that violence among Mexican American youth happens because of cultural and structural violence. As Galtung explains, cultural violence are the dominant attitudes, beliefs, and stories we are taught from a young age. These stories often create and perpetuate social inequalities and legitimize violence towards some individuals or groups based on race, nationality, class, gender, sexuality, politics and religion. Structural violence is when institutions privilege some and construct inequalities systemically for others. For example, small percentage of people of color/ women are in leadership roles across the board and youth of color are heavily monitored and disciplined in school, society, and unfortunately, prison.

Using the bases of Paz and Ramos I have shown that the stories *la Chingada* and *el Pelado* make Mexican American youth susceptible to aggressive behavior. Paz argues that Spanish colonization has led to cultural violence among Mexican men and women. However, the men have developed a *te chingo o me chingas*, “fuck or be fucked” way of thinking which leads to senseless acts of violence. Like Paz’ notion, Ramos explains that Mexican men feel inferior to their white Spanish counterparts therefore rely on their *huevos*, their manhood to compensate for their low social status and poor intellect.

Furthermore, with the works of Rios, Levan and Berry, and Alexander, I have demonstrated how structural violence pushes Mexican American youth towards violent lives by creating unequal advantages. Rios’ youth control complex theory, explains that a web of institutions, Teachers, counselors, parents, police officers etc. works to control youth and limit their ability to succeed. As a result, youth feel smothered, misunderstood, and act out violently. Unfortunately, many youths end up being harshly disciplined in schools and later punished further by an unrelenting,

unforgiving, racist criminal justice system. Levan and Berry contend that prisons do not rehabilitate but provoke violence. The theory *Prisonization* explains how people conform to the daily demands of prison life where much of the expectations and behaviors are negative. Prison Hierarchy is about the strong and the weak. Informal Economy is how contraband gets inside prisons for cash and goods. In a nut shell, criminals learn how to be better criminals, and violent offenders become more violent. Alexander contends that mass incarceration is the new Jim Crow meaning people of color are having their rights taken away. The Prison Label hangs over formerly incarcerated people resulting in legal discrimination in housing, education, voting etc.

I used verse, testimonio, and theory as a methodology, because I needed a rich mixture of material that would allow me to explain the *direct violence* that had become a regular occurrence in my life. Many people commit violent crimes and go to prison, and like them, I could have gone on with my life without giving a second thought to the cultural and structural phenomena behind my actions, but I did not. It was important for me find to out why me and so many others participate in these rituals of violence. This research is significant because it provides visibility to the ideas that justify acts of violence and the impulses to want to harm others. For example, I was at the same mall where I had done my crime, and I was with my family. I saw some young Mexican American men in their twenties glare at me. Rather than lash out at them like I would have done in the past for thinking it was disrespectful, I thought about Ramos' description of *el Pelado* and was able analyze myself and the situation. It was as though I was looking at myself 20 years ago, only I understood where the urge of wanting to act violently came from and could suppress it.

I said in my testimonio that prison did not change me for the better. Levan and Berry back up the idea that prison causes more violence rather than deters it. I changed because I was given

consejos, “advice” from veteranos who were all about *la Raza*, “the Mexican people/Chicanx,” and giving back to the community. John Castro and Antonio Palacios were mentors of mine in prison and gave me leadership roles in both the *Chicanx Culture Club* and *Los Hermanos Youth Program*. They provided something positive in a place that was mostly hostile, and I am very grateful for everything they did for me.

The support of my family was another reason I changed. I was tired of seeing them suffer along side of me. It seemed like everywhere we turned there were trials and heartache. I realized that we deserved better. I appreciated every letter I got from my girlfriend Lisa. I looked forward to her visiting me every week as well. My mom went to visit me weekly. My mom, dad, and Lisa drove 8 hours across the state to Snake River to visit me. They’d stay in a hotel room so they could see me that evening visit then the morning visit. She sent me \$50 a month so I could buy ramen, chips, ice-cream, envelopes, coffee, tennis shoes, whatever I needed. I never went without thanks to her. I felt her love and prayers over me the 12 years I was down. The hermanos “brothers and sisters,” at Centro Cristiano in Woodburn prayed for me also, and I am convinced their prayers kept me safe.

Since then I have been paying it forward by working with the younger Mexican American generation. One of the first things I did when I got out was visit the young men at McLaren Youth Correctional Facility (Woodburn) and Hillcrest Youth Correctional Facility. I could reach them with my Chicano rap. I performed for them then we sat around and talked. I had the privilege of listening to them rap and gave them pointers like how to count bars and write *hooks*, “choruses.” Mostly, I just wanted to be there to for them and give them support like my older homies gave me. I know all too well, the feeling of invisibility, and I did not want them to feel that way. All too often our people locked up get forgotten. Out of sight out of mind.

This paper is just another effort to reach out to our young people to tell them they are loved and valued. It is my hope that my story will help society see passed their exterior features like skin color, mannerisms, baggy clothes. I want them to understand that our young people need to be cared for and appreciated despite their many flaws. I am confident many young people will understand the concepts of cultural and structural violence that contribute to their frustrations and regain control over their lives.

There is much more research to be done. For instance, do these theories help explain violence among Native Americans, Blacks, Asians etc. Can it be useful to investigate violence among women in prison, or gender violence in general? I would say so, because all share a commonality of being oppressed peoples. It makes sense that after having been dehumanized, dominated, exploited, subjugated, enslaved and so on, that people go from being defensive to offensive. It is unfortunate that the ones we hurt most are usually ones closest to us or from our communities. The researcher will need to consider the calamity, the source, the spring from which the violence first began to flow. For the Native Americans that could be the day they were betrayed by the pilgrims, for the Blacks it may be the Atlantic Slave Trade. Women of the world have struggled and have endured much oppression and continue to do so. They have suffered alongside men and yet were the recipients of violence from the very men they have agonized with. The task of researcher will need to analyze the effects of the catastrophic event to identify ways in which the violence manifests.

This research has been a process of liberation of the mind, body, and spirit for me. This is my *Praxis* which is action of reflection. In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Paulo Freire says, “But human activity consists of action and reflection: it is praxis; it is transformation of the world. And as praxis, it requires theory to illuminate it. Human activity is theory and practice: it is

reflection and action (Pedagogy, pp.125). It is my position to speak out for sake of the youth and young adults, so they can one, not a make the same mistakes I made, and two, provide them with a map of reflection to analyze their own experiences and become conscious of the cultural violence and structural violence they are being subjected to. I am no longer a prisoner of my past, I am no longer a citizen of a caste system, right now I am in solidarity with humanity. Before I was against them, now I am me, and they are them, and we must get along with each other.

To the youth reading this, I am telling you where I have been and what I have done, because I care about you. Just know that you do not have to go through what I went through. Many of you do not know the roots of your culture. Too many of you are going to juvenile hall, getting caught in the school to prison pipeline. Unfortunately, many of you will end up on at Oregon State Penitentiary where there are criminals. I have been there done that. My heartfelt intention is to ruffle feathers and might make you feel uncomfortable, because I care. Change must first come from within. I believe in you, I believe in us.

In Lak'ech
Tu eres mi otro yo
Si te hago dano a ti
Me hago dano a mi mismo
Si te amo y respeto
Me amo y respeto yo

-Luis Valdez

Bibliography

- Alexander, Michelle. *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*. The New Press. New York. 2010. Print.
- Baca, Jimmy Santiago. *A Place to Stand*. Grove Press. New York. 2001. Print.
- Castillo, Ana. *Massacre of the Dreamers : Essays on Xicanisma*. 20th Anniversary Updated Edition., University of New Mexico Press, 2014. ProQuest Ebook Central, <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/osu/detail.action?docID=1794563>.
- Cavanagh T, Vigil P, Garcia E. *A Story Legitimating the Voices of Latino/Hispanic Students and their Parents: Creating a Restorative Justice Response to Wrongdoing and Conflict in Schools*. *Equity & Excellence In Education* [serial on the internet]. (2014, Nov), March 2, 2018; 47(4): 565-579. Available from: Academic Search Premier
- Fausset, Richard. *Guards Waited Hours to Stop a Prison Riot That Left 7 Inmates Dead*. New York Times. April 16, 2018.
- Foucault, Michel. *Discipline & Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. Vintage Books. Second Vintage Books Edition. 1995. Print.
- Freire, P., Ramos, Myra Bergman, & Macedo, Donald P. (2014). *Pedagogy of the oppressed* (30th anniversary ed.). New York: Bloomsbury Academic. Print.
- Galtung, J. (1969). *Violence, Peace, and Peace Research*. *Journal of Peace Research*, 6(3), 167-191.
- Galtung, J. *Cultural Violence*. *Journal of Peace Research*, vol. 27. no. 3. 1990. pp. 291-305
JOHAN GALTUNG College of Social Sciences, University of Hawaii, Manoa.
- Giroux, Henry A. *America's Education Deficit and the War on Youth*. Monthly Review Press. New York. 2013. Print.
- Gunnz, Sonny. *Barrio Child*. A Broken Homes Product. CD Baby. Music. 2011.
- Irizarry, Jason G. and John Raible. *A Hidden Part of Me: Latino/A Students, Silencing, and the Epidermalization of Inferiority*. *Equity & Excellence in Education*, vol. 47, no. 4, Nov. 2014, pp. 430-444. EBSOhost, doi:10.1080/10665684.2014.958970.
- Levan, Kristine. *Prison Violence : Causes, Consequences and Solutions*, Taylor & Francis Group, 2012. ProQuest Ebook Central, <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/osu/detail.action?docID=1028880>.
- Paz, Octavio. *Labyrinth of Solitude: Life and Thought in Mexico*. Grove Press Inc. New York. 1961. Print.
- O'Donnell, Jayne. *His 911 call as 'Jesus Christ' went viral after Pizza Hut break-in; story since is tragic*. USA, Today. May 10, 13 2018.

Porter T. The School-to-Prison Pipeline: *The Business Side of Incarcerating, Not Educating, Students in Public Schools*. *Arkansa Law Review* (1968-Present) [serial online]. March 2015;68(1):55-81. Available from: Academic Search Premier, Ipswich, MA. Accessed March2,2018.

Ramos Samuel. *The Profile of Man and Culture in Mexico*. Third Printing, 1968. Library of Congress Catalog Card 62-9792. Print.

Rios, Victor M. *Punished: Policing the Lives of Black and Latino Boys*. NYU Press. 27 June, 2011. Print.

Rodriguez, Luis J. *Always Running. La Vida Loca:Gang Days in L.A.* TouchStone. 1993,2005. Print.

Turning the Tide, Structural/Cultural/Direct Violence-Johan Galtung Hand-out. Active Nonviolence. www.turning-the-tide.org Web.