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The Vanishing Mexicana/o: (Dis)Locating the Native in Ruiz de Burton's *Who Would Have Thought It?* and *The Squatter and the Don*

Tereza M. Szeghi

**Abstract:** *This article complements the existing body of Ruiz de Burton scholarship by providing the first sustained examination of her literary representations of American Indians in both Who Would Have Thought It? (1872) and The Squatter and the Don (1885), and by exploring how these representations serve her broader aims of social and political reform. American Indians' presence in the novels, however marginal, and Ruiz de Burton's rendering of them as savage, powerless, and justly shut out from the social and political life of the nation, are critical to the author's aims. Accounting for the absence and strategic appearance of American Indians in the novels reveals the complexities of Ruiz de Burton's manipulations of racial hierarchies, as well as the ways in which she connects racial identity to rightful land ownership and social status. This article assesses Ruiz de Burton's reframing of popular accounts of American Indians—including the captivity narrative and the myth of the Vanishing Indian—as a means of advancing her political aims. Ultimately, attending to the role of American Indians in the two novels allows for a better appreciation of just how interconnected Ruiz de Burton's two novelistic projects are—each serving her larger vision of social reform.*

María Amparo Ruiz de Burton (1835-1895), the first Mexican American to publish fiction in English, crafted her novels as mechanisms for social protest in the wake of the Mexican American War (1846-1848). With waning social and political power, and an eroding land base, Mexican Americans (Ruiz de Burton included) found their position in the newly reconfigured United States to be increasingly precarious. Ruiz de Burton responded by appropriating one of the few vehicles for social protest available to nineteenth-century women, the sentimental novel, and adapting the genre to bear the burden of her frequently harsh and satirical political critiques. Like her Anglo American contemporaries Harriet Beecher Stowe,

Lydia Maria Child, and Helen Hunt Jackson, she targeted her readers' hearts as a means of inspiring social change.

Ruiz de Burton's Civil War era novel, *Who Would Have Thought It?* (1872), addresses (among other things) callousness and bigotry directed towards peoples of Mexican descent, socioeconomic upheavals caused by the Civil and Mexican American Wars, political corruption, and Christian hypocrisy. With *The Squatter and the Don* (1885), she continues to concentrate on anti-Mexican biases in the United States, but focuses more acutely on Mexican American socioeconomic disenfranchisement. Don Mariano Alamar's battle to validate his land claims in U.S. courts, and thereby drive-off squatters already residing on his property, occasions several characters to detail the U.S. government's unjust treatment of Mexican Americans. However, her characters' targeted political comments underscore both novels' silences about practices with similar (though oftentimes more damaging) consequences for American Indians, whom Ruiz de Burton strategically marginalizes.

At the same time, Ruiz de Burton appropriates a narrow and politically expedient definition of native identity for Mexicana/os,<sup>1</sup> in part by referring to them as "native Spano-Americans" or, in the case of *Squatter*, "native Californios." She carefully emphasizes Mexicana/os' European ancestry (and thus equates them with Anglo Americans through shared whiteness) and simultaneously uses the term "native" to underscore Mexicana/os' prior occupancy of the U.S. Southwest (and thereby bolsters the legitimacy of their land claims). Notably, however, assigning this aspect of native identity—along with the land rights it entails—to Mexicana/os involves stripping the same from American Indians. Thus, locating the "native" or the indigenous in Ruiz de Burton's novels requires a negotiation of three interconnected, yet discordant, gestures: a claim to native identity for Mexicana/os (specifically as first *legitimate*

occupants of Mexican territory recently acquired by the U.S.), a disavowal of Mexicana/os' indigenous ancestry, and an erasure of Indians themselves as social and political actors with legitimate rights and just land claims of their own.

In short, Ruiz de Burton's novels regard American Indians as afterthoughts and render them savage, powerless, and unjustified in their grievances; nonetheless, their presence—however marginal—is significant to the author's agenda. Indeed, I will illustrate how she reframes popular accounts of Indians—including the captivity narrative and the myth of the Vanishing Indian—to suite her political aims. Not only will my analysis spotlight the importance of American Indians' roles in each novel but, by comparatively evaluating their roles in the two novels, I hope to facilitate a better understanding of their function in the author's imagined future for her people. I will argue that, in significant respects, attending to the role of American Indians in both novels allows us to appreciate how interconnected Ruiz de Burton's novelistic projects are—each serving her larger vision of social reform.

Although other critics have discussed constructions of race in Ruiz de Burton's novels, they have not made her representations (and erasures) of American Indians their central focus.<sup>2</sup> Nor have they sufficiently explicated the ways in which her treatment of American Indians influences her portrayal of the relationship between Anglo Americans and Mexicana/os. It is my contention that Ruiz de Burton's representations of Indians should not simply be noted with regret, as has been done often, but pursued relative to the substance of the sociopolitical goals she aimed to effect through narrative. I thus concur with Amelia María de la Luz Montes' argument that difficulties posed by Ruiz de Burton's writing should be engaged, not avoided (2000, 216). I will demonstrate that only by accounting for the absences and strategic appearances of Indians in the novels can one fully apprehend the complexities of Ruiz de Burton's manipulations of racial hierarchies, as well as the ways in which she connects racial

identity to rightful land ownership and social status. Further, I will place her work in a broader socio-historical context by considering her representations of both American Indians and Mexican Americans vis-à-vis contemporaneous U.S. Indian policies and public debates about the status of American Indians.

In order to fully appreciate Ruiz de Burton's rendering of American Indians relative to her larger political agenda, it is important first to frame her writing within the broader context of the late-nineteenth-century United States. During this period, following the Mexican American and Civil Wars, the nation was undergoing a period of deep anxiety regarding the racial, geographic, and economic configuration of the nation. The U.S. acquisition of nearly half of Mexico's territory (present-day Alta California, Arizona, New Mexico, Texas and parts of Nevada, Utah, and Colorado), formalized with the 1848 Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, meant not just access to homesteads for Anglo American settlers, but also the incorporation into the body politic of former Mexican citizens and Indians residing in ceded territories. Despite treaty provisions that guaranteed the integrity of Mexican American land claims in the new American West, Ruiz de Burton and many of her fellow Californios were forced to engage in protracted and expensive legal battles to secure their land claims—largely as a consequence of the 1851 Land Law (which placed the burden of proof on Mexican Americans).<sup>3</sup>

While Mexican Americans, American Indians, and newly freed African American slaves struggled for a place within U.S. society, the broader public debated what that place should be. Ruiz de Burton plays upon the anxieties that attended these complex issues in order to advocate for the social standing and land claims of the Mexicana/o elite—whose interests, as I indicate below, are her primary concern.<sup>4</sup> In a period when old social structures, particularly in the South, were being dismantled, she presents Mexicana/os as harbingers of an analogous social order: a

feudal system reliant not on African slave labor but on forced American Indian labor. Ruiz de Burton reinforces the popular Southern view that such a social order was founded on natural differences between races and, at the same time, aligns her people with Southern white elites by placing them at the top of a similar, racialized, social hierarchy. She thereby suggests that her people's decline in fortune, like that of Southern whites, is neither natural nor justified.

Ruiz de Burton clearly draws upon her own cross-cultural experience when crafting her novels—each of which aims to position Mexicana/os to maximum advantage by showcasing their most sympathetic qualities, while carefully distinguishing between Anglo Americans and U.S. laws she admires and those she does not.<sup>5</sup> She provides her readers with a safe space, out of the line of her satirical fire, in which to position themselves by drawing sympathetic, refined, and compassionate Anglo American characters with whom her readers are likely to identify. At the same time, her harsh portrayals of opportunistic Anglo Americans, unjust U.S. laws, and predatory monopolies inspire revulsion and invite readers to rally to the cause of those she presents as most impacted by them: Mexican Americans—but, as I will illustrate, at American Indians' expense.

#### Manipulating National Origin Stories in *Who Would Have Thought It?*

Ruiz de Burton understood that highlighting the injustice of U.S. laws and practices was not sufficient for her aims. She had to address the prejudices many Anglo Americans held toward Mexicana/os—prejudices often used to justify Mexicana/os' disenfranchisement in the interest of Manifest Destiny (see Rivera 2006, 51-81). For example, *Who Would Have Thought It?*'s narrator reflects of Mrs. Cackle that, “as she was a good American woman, she believed firmly in ‘MANIFEST DESTINY,’ and that the Lord was *bound* to protect the Union, even if to do so

the affairs of the rest of the universe were to be laid aside for the time being” (Ruiz de Burton [1872] 1995, 159). Through such hyperbole (e.g., suggesting that the concerns of the rest of the universe be suspended in the interest of Manifest Destiny), Ruiz de Burton satirizes this conception of a “good American woman” during a time when Anglo American women were popularly regarded as the nation’s moral center (see Welter 1966).

Given its stock features and historical function in the U.S., the captivity narrative is an ideal medium through which to refute Mrs. Cackle’s view of Mexicana/os as obstacles to U.S. interests. Ruiz de Burton appropriates the genre in *WWHTI?* in order to conflate Mexicana/os with white elites while assigning negative stereotypes Anglo Americans typically deployed against both Mexicans and Indians only to the latter. Such a gesture was common among nineteenth-century Californios, for whom “Indians became a racial marker of distinction in order to distinguish themselves and thus create a normalized white peoplehood that, they believed, would, in turn, grant them citizenship” (Rivera 2006, 103). Mexican Americans’ citizenship, as I discuss in more detail below, was contingent upon their classification as white. By depicting vulnerable and morally pure Mexicanas as victims of Indian aggression, Ruiz de Burton places her people in the position traditionally occupied by white women in the earliest captivity narratives and endows them with a common enemy. Moreover, her portrayal of Mexicana virtue counters the licentious Mexicana stereotype—a stereotype that was prevalent during the lead-up to the Mexican American War (see Catañeda 1990, 222-223). As Andrea Tinnemeyer argues, “By casting a Mexican heroine into the role traditionally played by white women, Ruiz de Burton not only makes a case for the ‘whiteness’ of Mexicans but also for their status within the United States as equals, as family” (2006, xx).

Historically, captivity narratives have surged in popularity during national crises and have functioned to reaffirm a national identity premised on individual freedoms secured through frontier battles that paved the way for the establishment and expansion of the United States. The nineteenth-century was one such time. According to Tinnemeyer,

captivity narratives abounded at the time of the U.S.-Mexican War, not only as residual resurrection of anti-Indian propaganda intended to sway public opinion during Indian Removal but also as real and metaphorical forms for glossing the U.S. invasion of Mexico and the forced annexation of one third of Mexico's northern territory as liberating acts. (xii)

Ruiz de Burton appropriated the captivity narrative during this period of national resurgence to educate readers about the limitations of U.S. egalitarian ideals with regard to the incorporation of her people into its citizenry, thereby holding up a critical mirror to the nation.<sup>6</sup> At the same time, she reinforces essential components of the dominant U.S. origin story (seen as the struggle of the civilized to conquer the savage), along with prevailing racial hierarchies, in order to position her people to best advantage. During a time when racialized evolutionary progressivism was in vogue (the view that different racial groups occupied different positions on a trajectory from savage to civilized), Ruiz de Burton was anxious to make clear that Mexicana/os share a designation alongside of, if not superior to, Anglo Americans.<sup>7</sup> Peoples of African descent and American Indians usually were assigned to the savage end of the spectrum<sup>8</sup>—a view Ruiz de Burton reinforces for her own ends.<sup>9</sup> She attempts to demonstrate the “natural” parity and mutual European ancestry of Mexicana/os and Anglo Americans by highlighting the Spanish ancestry of the former—manifested through their refined manners, fair skin, and fidelity to a strict social



order. In a concise account of Doña Theresa's captivity, Dr. Norval attempts to clarify Lola's racial origins:

[S]he was carried off by Apache Indians and then sold to the Mohave Indians, and how Lolita was born five months after her capture. So you see how Lolita's blood is pure Spanish blood, her mother being of pure Spanish descent and her father the same, though an Austrian by birth. (Ruiz de Burton [1872] 1995, 28)

Dr. Norval not only vouches for Lola's "pure Spanish blood" but also attempts to correct those, like his wife and their neighbor Mrs. Cackle, who lump Mexicans and Indians into the same racial category. As Alemán contends, Lola, a Mexicana by birth residing in the U.S., arguably represents Mexican Americans who must combat the bigotry and ignorance of Anglo Americans in order to find a place in the reconfigured, post-1848, United States (2007, 10). For Ruiz de Burton, one critical means of finding such a place is by distinguishing between Mexicana/os and Indians and denying miscegenation between them—as Dr. Norval does by making clear that Lola was conceived before her mother was taken captive.

By positioning a light-skinned, "highly-born," Mexican woman in the role of captive to Indians, Ruiz de Burton invites Anglo American readers to identify with Mexican American women as they historically had with Anglo American female captives. In both cases, dark-skinned savages threaten white women's honor. Thus, Ruiz de Burton astutely places her people on the privileged side of the white-black racial binary operant in the U.S. Yet, unlike Mary Rowlandson (c. 1637-1711), author of arguably the first and most famous captivity narrative, who assures readers that she never was violated sexually by her captors ([1682] 1997, 107), Ruiz de Burton does not save Doña Theresa from such a fate, likely for multiple reasons.

First, Doña Theresa's violation serves to censure the Mexican government for its neglect of the frontier and its alleged permissiveness toward American Indians (Ruiz de Burton [1872] 1995, 194). Of course, as Alemán and José Aranda have noted, Doña Theresa's kidnapping is not random. Alemán writes, "the U.S.'s expansion into Mexico displaced Mexican landowners and made them vulnerable to Native American attacks, but indigenous groups attacked landowners such as Doña Theresa in the first place precisely because they dispossessed Native Americans of their land and resources" (2007, 11). When we view Doña Theresa's captors as victims of multiple colonizations and displacements, and Doña Theresa herself as a symbol of the Mexican elite (whose wealth is predicated on the cooptation of Indian land and labor), we can read against the grain of Ruiz de Burton's narrative and identify the Indians' attack on the Almenara hacienda, and their abduction of Doña Theresa, as forms of anticolonial resistance rather than senseless savagery. By failing to contextualize either their capture of Doña Theresa or their attacks on U.S. troops and an emigrant train (Ruiz de Burton [1872] 1995, 34), Ruiz de Burton denies American Indians' right to protest their losses in land and means of subsistence.

Second, the sexual violation of Doña Theresa functions to emphasize her virtue within the context of Mexican patriarchy; grasping the gravity of her violation, she determines that she can never again face her husband or father (35). Yet, in her fallen state she becomes a martyr (and exemplar of maternal sacrifice) by saving her daughter from a similar fate. Her martyrdom and ultimate redemption is reinforced when her father and husband imagine her, now an angel whose purity is constant because her "soul did not sin," telling them that she, in Christ-like fashion, forgives "the horrible savages" at whose hand she suffered (202).

Finally, the extremity of Doña Theresa's suffering and the power of her redemption add moral force to Ruiz de Burton's implied charge to readers to honor Doña Theresa's sacrifice by

cares for her daughter Lola (who, as noted above, functions as an allegorical figure for all Mexican Americans).

While consistently calling attention to her Mexican characters' European features and thereby reinforcing whiteness as a privileged category, Ruiz de Burton also chips away at the U.S. black-white racial binary and indicates that it is too crudely applied. By apprehending Doña Theresa's and Lola's virtues, which, in Ruiz de Burton's portrayal, go hand-in-hand with her European, moneyed upbringing, readers are also to appreciate that Anglo Americans place too much emphasis on skin color as indicative of one's refinement and social status. Simply darkening Doña Theresa's and Lola's skin with dye, for example, is adequate for their Indian captors to mask their true ancestry and social status and, consequently, prevent would-be rescuers from intervening on their behalf. Thus, with this simple subterfuge the Indians are able to exploit racialized assumptions and disturb the operant social order. Doña Theresa's blackface also communicates something significant about race and racial hierarchies to Ruiz de Burton's readers: American Indians' natural, allegedly darker coloring is suggestive of their biologically determined position at the bottom of the social hierarchy, whereas white, elite Mexicanas like Doña Theresa can only be relegated to such a position through acts of violence and subterfuge.

During Lola's stay in New England, her color becomes a Rorschach test for the novel's Anglo American characters. How they respond to Lola in her blackened state, and during her metamorphosis from black to spotted to white, is indicative of how virtuous they ultimately are. For example, Lola's darkened skin is no impediment to Dr. Norval's recognition of her European ancestry and refinement; he takes her mother's story at face value. Despite his sympathies with the South and his Democratic Party affiliation, he immediately embraces Lola as his adopted daughter. Thus, Ruiz de Burton, through Dr. Norval's discernment, indicates that skin color

should never be seen as the sole indicator of a person's innate character; rather, it is the conjunction of dark skin and a savage mind (as in the case of both Doña Theresa's Mohave captors and Southern blacks) that should determine cultural group's social status. As John-Michael Rivera argues, whereas the body "was a central discourse in defining racial peoplehood in the nineteenth-century," in *WWHTI?* "the skin is a false (and falsified) signifier; it is surface, 'phenomenal,' in Kantian terms, while blood represents depth, the 'noumenal'" (2006, 101).

The distinction Dr. Norval makes between Doña Theresa and Lola (despite their darkened skin) on one hand, and Southern blacks on the other, is validated throughout the novel by the refined behavior of the former and the "natural" servility of the latter. In a manner analogous to Doña Theresa's Mohave captors defaulting into a servile relationship with her, an African American Confederate soldier, Sar, charged with monitoring one of their Union prisoners of war, Isaac Sprig (Mrs. Norval's brother), calls Isaac "massa" and does his best to make Isaac's imprisonment as comfortable as possible (Ruiz de Burton [1872] 1995, 190). Isaac observes Sar whistling "merrily" while working; he reflects that "Providence must have made Sar's lips especially for that purpose" (190). Thus, Isaac advances a common argument made in support of slavery: that slaves were designed for menial labor (190).

In contrast to Dr. Norval, who remains above the narrator's reproach, Mrs. Norval cannot see beyond multiple color masks. Upon Lola's arrival, before fixating her gaze on Lola's dyed skin, she hones in on the "bright red shawl" that covers Lola's body. She is portrayed as almost animal-like as she fixates on this commanding color and targets the figure (the objectified "it") the shawl masks with her instinctive contempt (14-15). Indeed, the one animal present, a dog named Jack, "ran out as Mrs. Norval's champion to bark at the red shawl" (15). Yet, unlike Mrs. Norval, who calls Lola an Indian and a "nigger" throughout the novel—stubbornly deaf to

repeated accounts of Lola's origins and captivity, and despite Lola's ever-lightening skin—the dog recognizes his error almost immediately. He makes amends by sleeping next to Lola (whom Mrs. Norval sends to sleep with the unkempt and impolite Irish maids but opts instead for the floor).<sup>10</sup>

The red shawl functions as an extreme form of objectification and essentialism. Mrs. Norval responds not to Lola but to the dyed object covering her—just as she persists in doing with her dyed skin, even as the dye wears off. Thus, artifice compels Mrs. Norval, not the content of Lola's character (which, according to Ruiz de Burton, derives from her European ancestry and her family's elite status). Indeed, Ruiz de Burton highlights the considerable attention members of the Norval family pay to Lola's appearance while overlooking more telling aspects of her character. After Lola removes her shawl and enters the Norval home, the female members of the household inspect her more carefully, ostensibly to determine her ethnicity. As Tinnemeyer argues,

Close inspection of her phenotypic traits—especially her lips and hands—mimics the racist, pseudoscientific discourse prominent in the nineteenth century as 'scientists' sought to quantify racial distinctions and classes through an arithmetic of blood and taxonomy of races. [sic] Norval family's conjecture and attempts to corral and label Lola reflect national race-based preoccupations—the savagery of American Indians and the enslavement of Africans and African Americans. (2006, 12)

Although Mattie Norval attends to body parts highly racialized during this era, as Tinnemeyer notes, her inspection does cause her to question the assumption that Lola is black or Indian. She notes the whiteness of Lola's palms and the shape of her lips, thereby introducing doubt (albeit based on racialized assumptions) about the quick conclusions others have drawn about Lola.

Yet, the persistence of Mrs. Norval and other members of her New England community in referring to Lola as black or Indian—despite Mattie’s observations and, more significantly, Lola’s refinement and history—functions to indict New England provincialism, bigotry, hypocrisy, and stupidity. They are not able to differentiate between Mexicans and Indians and are proven hypocritical in their claims to being abolitionists while discriminating against a young girl due to her (artificially) dark skin. Ruiz de Burton’s task in writing the novel is to reveal the idiocy of those inclined to agree with the Norval’s neighbor, Mrs. Cackle, who asserts, “‘To me they are all alike—Indians, Mexican, or Californios—they are all horrid’” (Ruiz de Burton [1872] 1995, 11)—a statement Rivera rightly deems the novel’s “central provocation” (2006, 105). Ruiz de Burton aims to have better luck in educating her readers about the profound differences between Indians and peoples of Mexican descent than Reverend Hackwell does when explaining to Mrs. Cackle, prior to her previous comment, that “‘The people called “the natives” are mostly of Spanish descent, and are not cannibals. The wild Indians of the Colorado River were doubtless the ones who captured the doctor and tried to make a meal of him’” (Ruiz de Burton [1872] 1995, 11). This reference to Colorado River Indians specifically is significant because they commonly were believed to be especially uncivilized, as indicated by Rev. Hackwell, who implies that they, not peoples of Spanish descent, are cannibals.<sup>11</sup> Ruiz de Burton hereby creates a false and homogenous image of American Indians against which to contrast Mexicana/o refinement. Further, she reserves the “native” label for Mexicana/os, while stripping the term of its popular association with savagery, through Hackwell’s insistence that it does not apply to the “wild Indians.” Whereas the ancestral distinctions between Indians and Mexicans are emphasized throughout the novel, Ruiz de Burton has no interest in calling attention to problematic connotations of black and Indian—terms used interchangeably when describing Lola.

She makes clear that each label is applied erroneously to Lola but not that the two labels are distinct.

The gradual whitening of Lola's skin and her ongoing struggle to find acceptance within the Norval family unfold—uncoincidentally—in tandem. During the period when Lola's lightening skin remains flecked with dark spots, Mrs. Norval and Mrs. Cackle embrace the absurd rumor that she is a member of the fictional Pinto tribe. Meanwhile, Julian Norval simultaneously declares that he never gave credence to rumors of her being black or Indian and that he loves her.<sup>12</sup> Thus, their responses to Lola's skin color continue to reflect Anglo American characters' moral standing. With these two responses to Lola, Ruiz de Burton gives her readers a choice regarding how they wish to greet newly formed U.S. citizens of Mexican descent. Of course, the “correct” response is predicated on embracing Lola's underlying whiteness and the virtue it ostensibly connotes—which means adhering to a narrative of Spanish colonization that leaves elite settlers of Spanish descent untainted with the blood of the indigenous poor and working classes. As Alemán argues, through Lola's narrative,

Ruiz de Burton stretches the definition of whiteness in the U.S. to include Hispano identity. Going from black to white, and seen as Indian and Spanish, Lola passes through various stages of racial identity—black, Indian, brown, “spotted” white, and, finally, “pure” white. Lola's racial ambiguity thus draws on two competing racial codes: an Anglo American one that defines race as white or black, and a Spanish/Mexican caste system that recognizes multiple levels of hybrid racial identity. (2007, 10)

Alemán notes that, much as whiteness could be purchased from the Spanish crown by colonials in Spanish America (see Haas 1995, 31), so too Lola is able to purchase (albeit less overtly) a position within the Norval family and New England society through the wealth her mother

secured via Indian labor (10). Indeed, Mrs. Norval only relents in her opposition to taking Lola in after she learns of Lola's fortune. Of course, such inhospitableness and opportunism mark Mrs. Norval as one of the novel's villains—precisely the sort of person Ruiz de Burton hopes her readers will take pains not to emulate.

The narrative of Lola's blackface provides insight into the complexity and hypocrisy of Ruiz de Burton's racialized worldview. New Englanders' misinterpretation of Lola's ancestry as a consequence of bigotry and ignorance is a vehicle for mocking them; on the other hand, American Indians, their darkness, and their darkening of Lola and Doña Theresa throw the "true" whiteness of these Mexicanas into sharp relief. As Alemán argues, Ruiz de Burton's novels illustrate that "whiteness is not a natural racial category but a cultural identity marker contingent on class status, labor politics, market capitalism, legality, and public performances" (2007, 23). We can understand Ruiz de Burton's negotiations of racial codes through blackface in *WWHTI?* as interventions in a complex post-1848 social order, which, as Laura Gómez argues, endowed Mexican Americans with an "off-white" status (2007, 84). This status, Gómez notes, is a consequence of *legal* indicators of whiteness (e.g., the extension of U.S. citizenship to Mexicana/os, in accordance with the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, at a time when naturalization was restricted to whites) and competing *social* perceptions of Mexicana/os as non-white. Demonstrating cultural and racial affinity with Anglo Americans was a strategy many Mexican Americans (particularly members of the elite) used to bolster their white status (Gómez 2007, 115). Through the misrecognition of a refined and naturally light-skinned Mexicana like Lola, Ruiz de Burton both critiques the rigidity of the black-white racial binary *and* reinforces common associations between whiteness and privilege—thereby molding rather than shattering dominant racial hierarchies to suit her political aims.<sup>13</sup>



### Mexicanas/os: Indigenous Entrepreneurs

In addition to positing Mexican Americans as civilized settlers, who struggled, much like Anglo Americans, to instill order on the savage frontier, Ruiz de Burton uses the captivity narrative to emphasize their entrepreneurial ingenuity—a quality particularly prized during the late nineteenth century. Industrialization and the rise of the market economy spotlighted such traits as indicators of future success and were thought by many Anglo Americans to distinguish them from less civilized peoples. Again, Ruiz de Burton took pains to illustrate that her people shared traits with the elite U.S. classes and should therefore be included among them. And again, she plugs American Indians into the categories of “savage” and “Other” as a means of setting her people apart from them and correcting Anglo American generalizations about the peoples of the West.

During her captivity, Doña Theresa identifies gold and precious gems for which her American Indian captors have little regard. “[S]eeing that she liked pretty pebbles,” they hasten to gather them for her (Ruiz de Burton [1872] 1995, 29). This thread of the novel illustrates Mexicana/o ingenuity (i.e., the ability to identify marketable natural resources) in contrast with American Indian myopia on this account (underscored by the implication that they characterize gems as pebbles) and Indians’ seemingly natural disposition for manual labor (which is particularly acute given that they voluntarily abdicate their power as captors and eagerly work the land for Doña Theresa’s gratification). The idea that American Indians do not belong in positions of power is highlighted further by the fact that they do not question Doña Theresa’s purpose in stockpiling gold and gems; of course, she goes on to free her daughter from captivity and provide for her future with this wealth. Indeed, as Rosaura Sánchez and Beatrice Pita argue,

“the wealth Doña Teresa [sic] hoards as her daughter’s ‘dowry’ is entirely naturalized and masks the plunder of Indian lands and resources” (1995, lxi). Further, as Alemán contends, by using wealth obtained through the exploitation of Indian labor to purchase her daughter’s freedom, Doña Theresa reenacts, in miniature, Spanish colonialism in the Americas (2007, 11). Thus, this portion of the novel exemplifies Aranda’s claim that Ruiz de Burton did not object to colonialism itself but to being among the colonized (1998, 554). It appears that the Indians readily acknowledge Doña Theresa’s superiority to them since even the Chief, who takes her as his wife, refers to her as *ña Hala* (“my Lady”) and all of the Indians accede to her “slightest wish” (Ruiz de Burton [1872] 1995, 35). For her part, even after living among them for ten years, Doña Theresa regards the Mohave as “savages” from whom she is desperate to free her daughter (36). These relationships further naturalize the Spanish and Mexican colonial orders and reinforce the Mexican/civilized versus American Indian/savage dichotomy Ruiz de Burton perpetuates.

Ruiz de Burton also naturalizes the exploitation of indigenous labor in *The Squatter and the Don*, wherein it is never problematized that Clarence Darrell, son of squatter William, makes millions by investing in Arizona mines (also worked by indigenous peoples). Further, given that Clarence saves the Alamares from destitution, his investments are endorsed tacitly. It is unsurprising that Ruiz de Burton, who formed the Lower California Mining Company with her husband in 1865, would feature mining in her novels as acceptable and lucrative. She hoped to supplement her own depleted finances—a result of her ongoing legal battles to secure her land claims—by attracting investment in her lands based on their promised mineral wealth.

Of course, her novelistic celebration of mining, and her personal investment in it, comes at the expense of indigenous peoples whose labor she takes for granted and whose grievances she

silences. Further, although Ruiz de Burton died before the 1940s uranium boom and the numerous ongoing lawsuits concerning health hazards faced by American Indians who work in or live near the mines, in her own time the dangers of mining were well-known. Many Indians who worked for Anglo American and Californio ranchers under the coercive provisions of the 1849 California Constitution were transferred to California gold mines (Rawls 1984, 116). Notably, hazardous mining conditions did not just affect American Indians but many working-class Anglo Americans, Californios, Asian Americans, and other peoples of Mexican descent. Ruiz de Burton's presentation of mining in purely positive terms, contrary to the interest of lower class Mexicana/os, is indicative of her primary concern for the socioeconomic standing of the Mexicana/o elite.<sup>14</sup>

In the case of *The Squatter and the Don*, it is Don Mariano who, like Doña Theresa, demonstrates business savvy that derives largely from a familiarity with the land that can only come from sustained occupancy. Through such characters, who demonstrate what I term "indigenous entrepreneurialism," Ruiz de Burton implies that Anglo Americans *need* Mexican Americans to educate them about the Western United States so they may exploit these regions to maximum profit. As John González argues, "Ruiz de Burton contests not the process of incorporation of California's economy and culture into the national core as such, but rather the social position accorded to the Californios within that capitalist order. The Californios show themselves more than willing to participate in emergent capitalist economies" (1996, 31). I would add that one important way in which Ruiz de Burton makes the case not just for her people's willingness to contribute to the nation's growing market economy but for their unique ability to do so is by depicting them as indigenous entrepreneurs—a construction of indigeneity that precludes American Indians based on the assumption that they lack *marketable* knowledge

of the land along with necessary business skills and initiative. Given the weight Ruiz de Burton places on land tenure and regionally specific knowledge, it is striking that she never accounts for the simple fact that American Indians are California's original inhabitants.

When Don Mariano laments that squatters seize his land while thousands of acres remain "vacant," he denies the existence of the indigenous inhabitants of California from whom land was taken by the peoples of Spain, Mexico, and the U.S. (Ruiz de Burton [1885] 1997, 163). By portraying American Indians in *Squatter* as laborers but not as serious contenders for land or influence, Ruiz de Burton removes them from the political and legal struggles under way in California after the Mexican American War. The subjugation of Indians as a means of advancing Californios' socioeconomic and political ends has deep historical and colonial roots. According to Sánchez,

The othering of the Indians, both neophyte and gentile, perceived by the Californios as culturally, linguistically, and ethnically different, serves therefore not only to mask the fact that a large percentage of the original colonists as well as later arrivals from Mexico shared the same Indian blood but more significantly to legitimate the conquest and exploitation of the Indians on the basis of a racial and cultural superiority. (1995, 57-8)

Not only were Indian land claims honored by the Spanish and Mexican governments abrogated by the U.S., but citizenship was stripped from Indians in the transition from Mexican to U.S. rule. While the drafters of the California Constitution were careful to stipulate that American Indians were not slaves, they also ensured that the Mexican system of Indian peonage remained intact.<sup>15</sup> In large measure, the power Californios were able to maintain, upon newly finding themselves in the United States, depended on their racial distinction from American Indians and their shared "whiteness" with Anglo Americans.<sup>16</sup> Californios' official designation as white,

granted by the 1849 California Constitutional Convention, enabled them to become U.S. citizens if they chose (as stipulated by the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo). While this designation did not protect Californios from racial discrimination, it did entitle them to certain legal rights, leaving California Indians in their previous position as mere laborers, bereft of the right to vote or testify in court. This stipulation aided Anglo American and Californio exploitation of Indian labor but also compromised some Californios whose rights were revoked based on their alleged indigenous ancestry (Pitt 1966, 132). Here again we see that Californios' classification as white was not absolute.

Consideration of the politics of race in California and the tenuous—though markedly unequal—status of Californios and California Indians during the late nineteenth century allows us to better evaluate the aims and implications of the racialized social structures Ruiz de Burton dramatizes on the Alamar estate. Let us begin with Don Mariano's desperate attempt to compromise with the squatters occupying his estate. The Don showcases his indigenous knowledge and entrepreneurial spirit in order to persuade the squatters to abandon their agricultural aims:

[I]t is a mistake to try to make San Diego County a grain-producing county. It is not so and I feel certain it never will be, to any great extent. This county is, and has been, and will always be, a good grazing county—one of the best counties for cattle-raising on this coast, and the very best for fruit-raising on the face of the earth. God intended it should be. (87)

Don Mariano bolsters his own authority regarding San Diego's prospects—authority derived from firsthand knowledge of San Diego's climate and industries—by invoking God. Ultimately, for Don Mariano, familiarity with the land is a prerequisite for correctly identifying the use for

which it was designed. In contrast to the Don, the squatters appear inept and unintelligent. Their bullheaded fidelity to agriculture, despite the arid climate, is indicative not only of their ignorance but also of their newness to California—which speaks to the tenuousness of their land claims, at least according to Don Mariano and the novel’s narrator.

By pitching an alternate model for making a living from California land—against the backdrop of the squatters’ unsuccessful wheat harvest—Don Mariano demonstrates that indigenous knowledge is the basis for a successful business model. In so doing, he refutes the stereotype of the passive Spanish American—a stereotype that Ruiz de Burton particularly disdained. In her article, “Bygone San Diego,” for example, she praises the friars who established the California missions and presents them as the region’s discoverers. She laments that the friars are not properly credited for their accomplishments due to the perception that the Spanish are not a “money-making race” (2001, 580). Of course, her celebration of the missions elides their impact on American Indians, and her positing of the Spanish friars as the discoverers of California again erases American Indians.<sup>17</sup> Yet, by contributing to an increasingly popular celebration of California’s Spanish history, as told from an Anglo American perspective, and a touristic portrayal of the state as a pre-industrial refuge (Haas 1995, 126), Ruiz de Burton risks undermining her own efforts to position her people as central to the nation’s present and future identity and success (see Goldman 2000, 39-64).

It is perhaps because of Ruiz de Burton’s assumption that American Indians are naturally designed for menial work that they are only briefly mentioned as laborers in *Squatter* and never portrayed as having an interest in the novel’s land claims disputes. Yet, although marginalized, Indians are critical to Ruiz de Burton’s nostalgic portrait of Californio life. Aranda correctly reads the novel as an elegy to a passing social order—an argument I applied above to

*WWHTI?*—and not just a protest against Californio land loss. He claims that the Alamares perceive the U.S. social order as more mechanized, ruthless, greedy, and (crucially to the Californios) less dependent on the landed gentry than their own system. Aranda writes of “the novel’s desire to return California to a previous golden age of ranchos, fruit orchards, and vineyards, all of which grew out of the repressive and coercive mission system that colonized native lands and native people into feudal labor” (2004, 21). Thus, the presence of American Indian laborers who do not resist their social position, is crucial to Ruiz de Burton’s rendering of Californio life.

Some critics contend that classification of the novel as historical fiction (or elegy) obfuscates the author’s social reform agenda (e.g., Goldman 2000 and Warford 2009). I argue that the elegiac aspects of the novel contribute to that agenda; Ruiz de Burton aims to educate her readers about Californio ancestry, history, systems of land management, and social structures in order to advance her claim that they are the equals of the Anglo American ruling class and have a background that equips them to compete in and contribute to the U.S. capitalist system. Don Mariano, for example, aims not only to retain his land but also to *sustain* the Californio system of land management and its underlying, racialized, social order by persuading the squatters to adopt it. He invites them to become members of the landed gentry, like himself, and only when prompted, acknowledges who performs the most trying labor under this system:

“I ain’t no ‘*vaquero*’ to go ‘*busquering*’ around and *lassooing* cattle. I’ll *lasso* myself; what do I know about whirling a *lariat*?” said Matthews. [...]

“You will not have to be a *vaquero*. I don’t go ‘*busquering*’ around *lassooing*, unless I wish to do so,” said the Don. “You can hire an Indian boy to do that part.

They know how to handle *la reata* and *echar el lazo* to perfection.” (Ruiz de Burton [1885] 1997, 89-90)

Matthews, the most disagreeable and violent squatter, clearly associates cattle ownership with a type of labor he is predisposed to find distasteful. Timothy Gaster argues that Matthews’ careless and jesting use of Spanish is a means of mocking both the Don and his proposal (2009, 109); I would add that Spanish also functions here to emphasize the foreignness of ranching to Matthews and his reluctance to associate with this sort of activity. By using the word “vaquero,” rather than the English, “cowboy,” Matthews assigns this sort of work to the Spanish tradition, despite the fact that many Anglo Americans engaged in this occupation with the same goal that inspires him: to acquire land and earn a living in the American West.

Don Mariano, however, does not fully claim the work that Matthews rejects as part of the Spanish tradition—at least not as part of his station at the top of the Californio social hierarchy. He makes clear that when he engages in the activities Matthews so disdains, he does so only by choice, not of necessity. For the bulk of the work, he has Indian employees and is quick to offer this alternative to the squatters. Don Mariano’s casual reference to Indian labor suggests that it is the obvious expedient and requires no rationale—a gesture reflective of the long history of Indian subordination in California. He does not hesitate to recommend Indian labor, nor does he betray any sign that it might raise moral concerns. When considered within the context of debates about American Indians’ position in the U.S. and in relation to efforts underway to locate land for California Indians during this period (see Heizer 1979), Don Mariano’s statements can be read not just as a defense of the Californio way of life but as a political stance.

While Ruiz de Burton is quite explicit in her critique of Anglo Americans creating what she calls “white slaves” out of the Californios, she has no such outrage over the institution of



slavery itself, be it formalized slavery of people of African descent in the South or the forced labor of California Indians. She naturalizes black subordination in part through the Darrells' servant Tish, whom, as Alemán points out, the family arranges with the rest of their belongings in their move to California; Tish even extends the title "Massa" to Victoriano Alamar "in what is surely a symbolic moment that signals a merger between the legacy of white privilege and slavery in the South and Southwest" (2007, 23). In the case of American Indians, Ruiz de Burton's representation of their role on the Alamar ranch suggests that they are ontologically ill-equipped for work that relies on the intellect rather than the body. Their "perfect" execution of manual labor contrasts with their limited understanding of more complex human interactions. By juxtaposing their physical adeptness and intellectual limitations, Ruiz de Burton reinforces what she sees as their natural inclination, and thus justified confinement, to manual work. She furthers this argument by dramatizing their lack of social grace during one of the novel's most climactic moments.

A confrontation ensues between William Darrell and the Alamar men after William learns that his son, Clarence, paid Don Mariano for the land on which the Darrell family resides. Feeling enraged and emasculated by what he perceives as the Don's attempt to win Clarence's loyalties, and outraged by the suggestion that he is an unlawful squatter rather than a legitimate settler, William attempts to strike Don Mariano with a leather cattle whip. At one point he claims that he cannot abide an "inferior race" being favored in a land dispute over him (205), thus predicating the justice of Don Mariano's recent legal victory on race rather than on proof of valid ownership. Gabriel Alamar defends his father by lassoing William, and thereby completes the reversal of William's assumptions: while William's effort to treat Don Mariano like one of his cattle is blocked by the Don's skilled horsemanship and the younger Alamares' defense of their

father, William is the one who is roped like an animal. When William's horse moves in pursuit of one of its kindred, Gabriel follows in order to prevent pulling William off of his horse.

At this precarious moment, two Indian vaqueros arrive, seeking orders from their employers:

[S]eeing the race going on, they thought they could join in, too. So, putting spurs to their horses, they began to run and shout in high glee. Noticing that the *patrón*, Don Gabriel, held a *reata* in his hands, the *lazo* end of which was attached to Darrell, they thought that for sport Don Gabriel had thrown the *lazo* on the old squatter. Having come to this conclusion, they began to shout and hurrah with renewed vigor. (231)

By assuming that another person might be treated like an animal for sport, the vaqueros position themselves closer to William Darrell than to the Alamares. The former felt justified in subjecting another man to his whip without first obtaining complete information about the events that sparked his anger; the latter react in like manner only out of loyalty to their father. The Indians, like William, do not inquire first about the nature of the scene they but take it as an occasion for a free display of emotion—though theirs takes the form of sport, not revenge.

The narrator furthers the idea that the Indian vaqueros are incapable of properly reading a situation through the following characterization of the Indians' response to the reprimand Victoriano Alamar gives them:

“¿Qué es eso? ¿A qué vienen acá? ¿Quién los convida? ¡Cállense la boca, no sean malcriados, váyanse! said Victoriano, turning to them in great indignation.

This rebuke and imperative order silenced them immediately, and not understanding why these gentlemen were having all that fun, and did not laugh, nor wished any one else to laugh, quietly turned and went home. (231)

Victoriano makes no effort to enlighten the Indians about the scene before them. He clearly views their arrival at this moment, not just their behavior, as impudent. The fact that they come to inquire about their next assignment does not mitigate their transgression, nor, in light of this fact, does the novel's outspoken narrator suggest that Victoriano treats them harshly. Rather, their behavior illustrates their inability to be anything other than subordinates to more refined and perceptive people, like the Alamares. They are unable to assess an unexpected scene accurately for themselves and must be ordered away by Victoriano to prevent exacerbating a tense moment.

The racial hierarchy Ruiz de Burton constructs here is illustrated partly through the Alamares' manners when engaging William and the contrast between their courtesy toward him and their callous treatment of their Indian employees. The narrator's explication of the Indians' response to the situation suggests an irreconcilable cultural divide, with American Indians on one side, and Californios and Anglo Americans, more or less, on the other. Whereas William and the Alamares share an emotional encounter—although they are, admittedly, on opposing sides of the dispute—the Indians are entirely excluded due to their inability to interpret the situation and Victoriano's refusal to explain. When Victoriano asks, “*¿A qué vienen acá? ¿Quién los convida?*” he suggests that they have transgressed a line defined by culture and social status. Lacking either, the Indians have no place partaking (even through understanding) in the personal matters of their superiors.

The Indians, by contrast, align themselves with the Alamares and take a combative stance toward the squatters. They assume that the Alamares have roped a squatter for fun—an act that would place squatters on the lowest level of California’s social hierarchy—and are eager to share in what they take to be sport. This assumption suggests a shared contempt for squatters and anticipates a shared response. Given the fact that the intrusion of Anglo Americans on California soil led to the dispossession of both American Indians and Californios, the Indians’ assumption is not without justification. Further, whereas Anglo Americans were newcomers to California in the late nineteenth century, Californios and California Indians shared a much longer history. If legitimate land claims in California were determined simply by length of residency, Anglo Americans certainly had the weakest case.

Nonetheless, the Alamares generally reject aligning themselves with American Indians and insist that Indians belong on the lowest level of the social hierarchy. The Alamares are forced to deal with Anglo Americans, as Anglo Americans have the power to dispossess the Californios of their lands, culture, and social standing. Because Anglo Americans are at an advantage, it is arguably in the interest of the Alamares, and Californios in general, to try to deal with them respectfully. Interestingly, when Don Mariano does present Indians in a more favorable light, he does so in order to highlight the corruption and lack of humanity that attends Anglo American political and economic power. Such an occasion comes when Don Mariano attempts to persuade California Governor Leland Stanford to save the Texas Pacific Railroad and its plans for San Diego to be its western terminus. Acting as a double agent (as California governor and President of the Central Pacific Railroad), Stanford was part of a collusion between government agents and Southern Pacific railroad officials to stifle this plan and thereby secure the Southern Pacific’s monopoly. For Don Mariano, who had invested heavily in San Diego,

losing the railroad means financial ruin. He explains the compromised state of his ranch after Stanford suggests that it will surely secure his livelihood, despite the loss of the railroad:

“The squatters at my rancho shot and killed my cattle, so that I was obliged to send off those that I had left, and in doing this a snow-storm overtook us, and nearly all my animals perished then. The Indians will finish those which survived the snow.”

“Those Indians are great thieves, I suppose?” [Stanford asks.]

“Yes, sir; but not so bad to me as the squatters. The Indians kill my cattle to eat them, whereas the squatters did so to ruin me.” (292)

The governor does not address the squatters’ behavior but eagerly commiserates about the Indians, then widely assumed in California to be thieves, and often tried falsely for theft as a punishment for lesser transgressions, such as leaving the limits of the town in which they were employed without a pass (Rawls 1984, 85). Don Mariano validates Stanford’s assumption but quickly distinguishes the Indians from the squatters by presenting the Indians’ motives for killing his cattle as better justified than those of the squatters. He thus implies that he and the Indians find themselves in the same position; i.e., both are trying to survive. The squatters, by contrast, kill out of spite and to secure their own livelihood at others’ expense.

That Don Mariano suggests this measured alignment with American Indians while in the office of a corrupt politician is significant. Stanford represents the sort of Yankee greed that Ruiz de Burton often lamented—greed that leads many of the novel’s key characters to ruin. Therefore, Don Mariano’s suggestion of affinity with Indians can be read as a calculated political move meant to distance him from Anglo American political corruption and place him on the side of its victims. By contrast, Indian aggression in *WWHTI?* is directed at the Mexicana/o elite,

arguably in opposition to Mexicana/o colonization, and is therefore treated as savage and irrational.

Because of her privileging of the Spanish and Mexican feudal systems as the ideal method of working California land and structuring the racial and social classes, Ruiz de Burton can only ever partially align Californios with American Indians. She has no interest in protesting unequal distributions in land as a general principle but in protesting Californios' displacement as landowners and members of the ruling class. Therefore, she eschews making common cause with American Indians, also displaced by Anglo American squatters and settlers, and instead repeatedly argues for the common aims and values of Californios and the Anglo American elite—all with an eye toward reclaiming, as Aranda puts it, “the privileges of a colonialist” (1998, 554).

Don Mariano defends the allocation of large estates to elite Californios against Anglo American charges of wastefulness and unfairness in part by noting the rationale of the Spanish and Mexican governments: “to give large tracts of land as an inducement to those citizens who would utilize the wilderness of the government domain—utilize it by starting ranchos which afterwards would originate pueblos or villages” (Ruiz de Burton [1885] 1997, 163). He is also certain to point out that, in attempting to tame the wilderness in this fashion, the Spanish, Mexican, and U.S. governments shared a common goal—the implication being that Californio estates should be seen as part of, not obstacles to, U.S. settlement of its western territories. At the same time, Don Mariano, in service to Ruiz de Burton's larger political agenda, is careful to highlight ethical distinctions between his people and Anglo Americans. Having just noted that the U.S. provides railroad companies large land tracts, Don Mariano goes on to argue that recipients of Spanish and Mexican land grants aided in the founding of the missions, employed

Indians “who thus began to be less wild,” and defended nascent frontier settlements against hostile Indians (163). References to Indian aggression against Mexicana/os in the two novels can be understood as before and after shots of the frontier vis-à-vis Spanish and Mexican colonization; Doña Theresa’s kidnapping functions as evidence of the need to suppress Indians, whereas the ordered life of the Alamar ranch (fueled by Indian labor) functions as evidence of the success of these colonial efforts. Thus, to threaten the stability of the Alamar estate is to threaten civilization itself.

### The Stakes for American Indians

We can better appreciate the significance of Ruiz de Burton’s emphasis on social order maintained through proper land management and containment—and, specifically, the implications of her references to American Indians—when we attend to contemporaneous debates over U.S. Indian policy. In this context we can read her novels as dialectically opposed to the assimilationist discourse of many late-nineteenth-century Indian rights advocates who argued that the only way to save American Indians from extinction was to bring them into the mainstream of U.S. society—a goal they believed might be accomplished by introducing the ethic of private property to American Indians, breaking up tribal governments (thought to be havens of barbarism), and making them citizens.<sup>18</sup> Others maintained that Indians’ alleged savagery was an impermeable barrier to their assimilation and that their extinction was an inevitable consequence of being conquered by a more advanced society. Both views have some correspondence to the myth of the Vanishing Indian, according to which American Indians are fated to disappear, through assimilation or extinction.

Given that American Indians are essential to the racialized social order Ruiz de Burton advocates in her novels, it is safe to say that her position lies somewhere between the pro- and anti-assimilationist approaches to U.S. Indian policy I have outlined. Ruiz de Burton's portrayal of Indians as intractably savage, dim-witted, and uncouth can be read as a rejection of assimilationism. Her suggestion that they are incapable of managing land of their own—but function, rather, as the threat that must be contained through proper land management, dependent on biologically-based racial hierarchies—is a further rejection of extending the ethos of private property to American Indians. She suggests that Indians can be tamed and utilized as menial laborers in a properly organized society; thus, in her view, they need not have access to the levers of power, nor should their extinction be a foregone conclusion. Such representations, contained in novels intended for a broad and influential Anglo American readership, contribute dangerously to popular assumptions about Indians used to justify abrogating their sovereignty. Ruiz de Burton denies their agency during a period when many of her American Indian contemporaries were fighting to retain their lands, preserve their cultures, and secure their essential survival. She thereby plays a role analogous to that which she accuses Anglo Americans of playing with respect to her own people.

### The Vanishing Mexicana/o

Considering the degree to which Ruiz de Burton articulates Mexican American identity in opposition to a savage, American Indian Other—despite their many common struggles—it is striking that her portrayal of Mexicana/os falls prey to the vanishing mythology (as it has been applied to American Indians). It would seem that embracing the idea that her people are fated to pass away as a consequence of U.S. expansion and governmental corruption undercuts her



political goals. Nonetheless, her characters' arguments for Mexican American inclusion among the U.S. elite are counterbalanced somewhat by the resignation some express to socioeconomic decline and political marginalization. Such resignation can be read as a sentimental strategy, that is, an attempt to pull on readers' heartstrings and inspire them to act on behalf of a wronged minority group before it is too late. At the same time, this tactic runs the risk of backfiring by confirming the presuppositions of Anglo American readers and essentially excusing them from taking action.

Articulation of what I term the Vanishing Mexicana/o mythology comes most explicitly from Don Mariano. He resigns himself to the passing away of Californios and Californio culture, using language commonly used to describe the Vanishing Indian and, notably, language much the same as Ruiz de Burton employs in her personal correspondence (Ruiz de Burton 2001). No longer believing in "the power of the people" to impact the government, Don Mariano sees no possibility of Californios retaining their status. He says:

I am afraid there is no help for us native Californios. We must sadly fade and pass away. The weak and the helpless are always trampled in the throng. We must sink, go under, never to rise. If the Americans had been friendly to us, and helped us with good, protective laws, our fate would have been different. But to legislate us into poverty is to legislate us into our graves. (164-165)

Don Mariano contends that poverty and death are one and the same for Californios—a statement validated by injuries his sons suffer almost the moment they take up manual labor out of financial desperation. Thus, vanishing in this case comes by way of economic decline, not assimilation or extermination. Of course, the suggestion that Californios are physically incapable

of manual labor elides the majority of nineteenth-century Californios (who *already* performed such labor before 1848).

Given that Californios were indeed edged out of political offices, lost most of their lands, and declined in social status, we might regard Don Mariano's words as prophetic. However, in a novel that often reads more as a political treatise and call for social action than mere entertainment, these words seem counterproductive. Nevertheless, what Don Mariano accomplishes here is to shift blame from Californios to the U.S. government and Anglo American politicians during a time when it was popularly thought that the Californios' decline was a result of their passivity (Pitt 1966, 277)—something Ruiz de Burton counters through her representations of Californio entrepreneurialism and activism.<sup>19</sup>

The vanishing mythology takes a different but no less politically risky turn in *WWHTI?* when Lola, reunited with her father and grandfather, returns to Mexico. If we read Lola as symbolic of the United States' new, post-1848, Mexican American citizenry, and the poor treatment she receives at the hands of most New Englanders as an indictment of the reception most Mexicana/os received in the U.S., then Lola's departure for Mexico can be interpreted as a form of surrender. The majority of the Anglo American characters who treat Lola well are also driven from the U.S., due primarily to political hostilities and corruption. Thus, it seems there is no place for Lola in the U.S. where she will be accepted and treated as her ancestry, in Ruiz de Burton's view, should dictate. Whereas, on the level of narrative, Lola's return to Mexico with her family may seem like a natural step and a cause for celebration, in light of the novel's political aims, it also reads as a residual colonial victory for the U.S., which not only appropriates Mexican land but also drives away Mexicana/os. Although Mexico itself comes off as the superior nation, as its culture and refinement contrast markedly with the provincialism,

bigotry, and ignorance of most of the Anglo American characters, it seems the U.S. achieves its Manifest Destiny in the manner Mrs. Cackle imagines (i.e., at the expense of the colonized).

### Ruiz de Burton and the Chicana/o Canon

Due principally to the elitism and racism manifest in Ruiz de Burton's novels, contemporary scholars have struggled to position her in the Chicana/o literary and cultural traditions. Arguably every analysis of her life and work grapples to some degree with her complex subject position. Her privilege as a member of the Californio elite, connections to powerful Anglo Americans, erasure of working-class Mexicana/os and mestizas/os, and denigration of American Indians are cited frequently as counterevidence to Sánchez and Pita's now controversial claim that Ruiz de Burton articulates a subaltern perspective (1997, 7).<sup>20</sup> In the context of my discussion, it is her placement of American Indians outside vectors of power, her sealing of them in darker skins and savage behaviors—against which she constructs the whiteness and refinement of her own people—and what Montes describes as her “failure to recognize the Indígena, the brown skin, as her own” (2000, 215) that most complicates categorizing her as precursor to the Chicano Movement (given its focus on indigeneity, mestizaje, and the working-class). At the same time, scholars (such as Rodríguez 1996, Aranda 1998, Montes 2000, and myself) generally agree that Ruiz de Burton disrupts homogenous portrayals of Mexican Americans/Chicanas/os, and that her work does much to correct the erasure of nineteenth-century Mexican Americans (see Alemán 2007, 4).

A comparative look at Ruiz de Burton's strategic representations and erasures of American Indians in *WWHTI?* and *Squatter*, considered in relation to her selective ascription of a narrowly defined native identity for Mexicana/os and her own political aims, certainly does

nothing to bring her into closer affinity with the Chicano movement. Although she adapts her specific representations of the Indian Other to the particular setting of each novel, Ruiz de Burton's Indian is inherently and irretrievably savage. In *WWHTI?*, set during the Civil War, shortly after the conclusion of the Mexican American war, and during a time when Anglo Americans were just becoming acquainted with the United States' newly acquired territories and their inhabitants, Indians are presented as war-like and aggressive, and thus as threats to the U.S. social order. During a time of national flux, conflict, and anxiety, Ruiz de Burton utilizes the imagery and language of war and captivity (through her portrayal of Doña Theresa's captivity) to make clear to Anglo Americans that Mexicana/os are agents of civilization, like themselves, and that Indians are a shared external threat to be contained.

In *Squatter*, Indians still function to offset Mexicana/o civility (and related affinity with Anglo Americans), but here in the context of encroachments on Californio lands (now that Anglo Americans heavily populate the region). No longer are we in a nation at war but in one fixed on continued economic and geographic expansion—expansion that threatens Californios. In this context, Ruiz de Burton is motivated to accord a modest degree of civilization to Indians—a degree carefully calibrated to underscore that Mexicana/os are partners in the civilizing mission, as indicated by the incorporation of Indian laborers on their estates, but, significantly, laborers whose savagery lies just under the surface.

When considered in relation to the long history of Mexican Americans, particularly the elite, attempting to bolster their social status by differentiating themselves from American Indians, Ruiz de Burton's literary representations of Indians can be understood as a politically motivated tactic representative of her era in Mexican American history. While she therefore is

not a *precursor* to the Chicano movement, she is most certainly a key figure in the dialectic of the movement vis-à-vis indigeneity.

Further, despite Ruiz de Burton's efforts to dislocate the Indian Other and eschew shared ancestry or sociopolitical struggle, by reading against the grain of her novels, I have aimed to supplement prior scholarship on the racial dimensions of her writing and contribute to a broader narrative of late nineteenth-century racial codes, land grabs, and power struggles. This reading is achieved not only by attending to the marginalized Indians of her novels and their functions therein, but also by considering her novelistic interventions in the political scene relative to contemporaneous discussions about American Indians' social status. Thus, my location of the native within Ruiz de Burton's novels is intended not only to offer a fuller explication of her representations of American Indians in advance of her political agenda but also to spur further evaluation of the implications of her writing for those whom she strategically silenced.

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 Notes:

<sup>1</sup> I use the term Mexicana/o to refer to individuals of Mexican descent generally, whether residents of Mexico or the U.S.

<sup>2</sup> For the most extensive treatment representations of American Indians in *Squatter* prior to mine, see Chvny (2002).

<sup>3</sup> The Land Law, “by implication, challenged the legality of Mexican land titles. It told land-hungry Anglo-Americans that there was a chance that Californios did not own the land. The squatters then treated the ranchos as public land on which they had a right to homestead. They knew that local authorities would not or could not do anything about it. They swarmed over the land, harassing and intimidating many landowners” (Acuña 1998, 115).

<sup>4</sup> I do, nonetheless, concur with Marcial González’s assertion in response to critiques of *Squatter* as *either* a subaltern *or* an elitist text: “Differing with both positions, I argue that the ideological views of the author do not necessarily minimize the social critique in the novel, but rather, the novel surpasses the class interests of the author, whether subaltern or hegemonic” (2009, 4).

<sup>5</sup> Ruiz de Burton had a history of cross-cultural negotiations. She was born in Baja California, backed the U.S. invasion of Mexico, moved with her family to Alta California after the war, and married an Anglo American military captain. See Pita (1998, 130-1).

<sup>6</sup> Tinnemeyer notes that captivity narratives also have functioned oppositionally: “The captivity narrative, as a genre fashioned to imperial purpose, serves as a dynamic register for national dissonance, for resistance against Manifest Destiny, and for cautionary tales of unchecked territorial expansion and genocide” (2006. xiii).

<sup>7</sup> Philosopher Herbert Spencer (1820-1903), referenced repeatedly in *The Squatter and the Don*, coined the term “evolutionary progressivism.”

<sup>8</sup> Edward Taylor introduced this idea in 1870. According to Deloria, “There was one culture, and the world’s various societies represented stages in an evolutionary hierarchy that featured white, Western society at its pinnacle and any number of so-called primitive societies below. In order to account for the wide distribution of societies along this scale, theorists of the Taylorean school invoked the biological idea of race. Racial character or temperament, they thought, determined the values, beliefs, and practices of a society. These qualities were believed to be genetic” (1998, 133).

<sup>9</sup> African Americans, like American Indians, function in Ruiz de Burton’s novels as savage racial others against whom she contrasts Mexicans. See Alemán (2007), Chvany (2002), and Rivera (2006).

<sup>10</sup> Ruiz de Burton again denigrates another marginalized group in the interest of demonstrating Lola’s refinement. As Fisher argues, Lola’s decision to sleep as far as possible from the Irish maids “simultaneously demonstrates her marginalized position within the home managed by Jemima [Mrs. Norval] and establishes her racial and social superiority over the Irish women” (1999, 62). Ruiz de Burton also counters those who would align Irish and Mexican peoples due to their shared Catholicism; see Alemán (2004, 100) and Goldman (2000, 33).

<sup>11</sup> The Mohave are the only tribe with ancestral homelands in the border regions of Nevada, Colorado, Arizona, and California; they were remote from Spanish influence and retained their independence throughout the Spanish colonial period (Stewart 1979, 55).

<sup>12</sup> The simultaneous whitening and sexualizing of Lola's body also is uncoincidental (Rivera, 2006, 105). By emphasizing the whiteness of her Mexicana characters (as she also does in *Squatter*) Ruiz de Burton presents them as potential mates to Anglo Americans while allaying fears of miscegenation. For discussion of miscegenation in *Squatter*, see Luis-Brown (1997).

<sup>13</sup> Thus, Ruiz de Burton expands conceptions of whiteness to accommodate Mexicana/os in *WWHTI?* much as Luis-Brown's argues that she does in *Squatter* (1997). He notes that making common cause between Anglo Americans (specifically Southerners) and Californios in *Squatter* is achieved partially by deeming both groups slaves who suffer at the hands of monopoly capitalism and a post-Civil War power structure that threatens their elite status. Of course, as he observes, restoring the previous social order would lead to sustained enslavement of Indians (by Californios) and African Americans (by Anglo Southerners) (818).

<sup>14</sup> Ruiz de Burton omits not only Californio miners from her novels but curiously, despite her general indictment of U.S. laws detrimental to Californios, overlooks the 1850 Foreign Miners' Tax, which aimed to drive non-Anglos out of the mines by charging them for mining privileges. Although Californios were citizens, they were affected by the law due to a tendency to lump all "Hispanics" together. Despite the tax's repeal in 1851, it had enduring effects in discouraging mining by non-Anglos and inciting aggression against them (Acuña 1988, 114).

<sup>15</sup> The 1850 Indenture Act allowed the involuntary bonding of Indians to U.S. citizens for at least a decade with only subsistence as compensation. According to Rawls, this act "reminds us of the abiding strength of the image of the California Indians as a useful class, as a resource that should be controlled and properly exploited" (1984, 87). Notably, Californios were targeted with similar legislation shortly thereafter with the 1855 Vagrancy Act, which forced "idle" Mexicans to pay a fine in cash or indentured labor (Alemán 2007, 6).

<sup>16</sup> At the California Constitutional Convention, Californios (who made up 8 of the 48 delegates) had the opportunity, if they voted together, "to champion the rights of the masses. However, like elites in other colonial situations, they attempted to ally themselves with colonizers to promote their own class interests" (Acuña 1988, 111).

<sup>17</sup> Mission Indians were relocated, corporally punished, forcibly converted to Catholicism, and vulnerable to disease (Limerick 1987, 256). The death toll of missionization was great; there were approximately 30,000 California Indians in 1769 and only 1,250 by 1910 (Sánchez 1995, 63).

<sup>18</sup> The 1887 Dawes Act was designed to achieve these measures. It undermined American Indian systems of government and land management and resulted in transferring roughly two-thirds of remaining tribal lands to Anglo Americans. Land remaining after tribal members received their allotments was deemed surplus and made available to outside settlers and investors (O'Brien 1989, 77-78). In the case of the California Indians, implementation of the act was frustrated by the fact that they were essentially landless (Heizer 1979, 46).

<sup>19</sup> Yet Ruiz de Burton sometimes reinforced this stereotype herself; see, e.g., her July 21, 1871 letter to Mariano Vallejo (2001, 429-30)

<sup>20</sup> For additional assessment of Ruiz de Burton's classification as "subaltern," see Aranda (1998).

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