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Anti-Capitalist Critique and Travelling Poetry in the Works of Lorna Dee Cervantes and Rage Against the Machine

Margaret Randall states that "as we re-search our histories ... infrequently there is an exploration of an uncharted, complex terrain, and some new mapping happens" (8). Adopting Randall's statement, this paper examines travelling poetry and anti-capitalism in the poetry of Lorna Dee Cervantes and the song lyrics of Rage Against the Machine (RATM) both of whom are based in California. With reference to Randall's assertion Cervantes and RATM present complex transnational mappings of silent and silenced imperial history located within and beyond the national boundaries of the US. Cervantes is a Chicana, Feminist, activist poet. RATM is an American rap metal band, formed in 1991. The lead singer, Zack de la Rocha identifies as Chicano which is an important influence on their music in both form and style. This paper examines Cervantes's "Poem For the Young White Man Who Asked Me How I, an Intelligent, Well-Read Person Could Believe in the War Between the Races", "Coffee" and "On Why I Boycotted Cinco de Mayo." Cervantes' works are juxtaposed with RATM's "Sleep Now in the Fire" and "People of the Sun."

The poems and lyrics examined in this paper are rooted in history and politics of the Americas. To apply Adrienne Rich's assertion, the works of Cervantes and RATM reject "the dominant critical idea that the poem's text should be read as separate from the poet's everyday life in the world", thus placing "poetry in a historical continuity, not above or outside history" (180). The geopoetic works discussed here situate American imperialism in a geo-historical continuity across time and space, mapping a terrain of capitalism and ongoing imperialism that extends throughout the borders of the Americas and the globe. As Paul Jay argues, "American criticism has traditionally located its interests *within* National borders, achieving a central coherence for American literature by ignoring forms of cultural

production that take place in the liminal spaces where national borders overlap" (166-7). This paper constructs an unusual dialogue between Chicana poetry and Chicano song lyrics, both of whom are writing out of the U.S. Mexico borderlands and beyond the physical borders of the nation state. By virtue of this, the poems and lyrics discussed in this paper can be defined as travelling poetry, a term that originated with James Clifford[1].

Jahan Ramazani defines travelling poetry as "the imaginative enactment of geographic displacement" (52). Through their travelling poetry, Cervantes and RATM guide the reader through a rich and troubling landscape once indigenous, and now bearing the scars of the ongoing legacy of imperialism. A number of motifs and techniques such as the list poem and geopoetic imagery are employed in these travelling poems which enhance their transnational effect. That is to say, the use of these poetic techniques is effective in transporting the reader back and forth between territories within and outside of the Americas in order to bear witness to the damaging effects of capitalism and imperialism[2].

In "Poem For the Young White Man Who Asked Me How I, an Intelligent, Well-Read Person Could Believe in the War Between the Races" the poet tackles the issues of race, class, and gender in the US Mexico borderlands. Before the poem begins, Cervantes spells out exactly what her intentions are in writing it. Additionally, the poet indicates that the man in question accepts her as an intellectual. However, in referring to Cervantes with the neutral term of "person", the man neglects to acknowledge how her gender has influenced her border experience.

The poem opens with Cervantes constructing an imaginary continent where

> there are no distinctions.
> The barbed wire politics of oppression
> have been torn down long ago" (35).

These lines refer to the U.S-Mexico border and the physical, emotional, cultural, and political barriers that its presence continues to impose on the Americas. The "barbed wire politics" imbricate the partition that divides Mexico and the U.S. with the imperious politics of Anglo America. Thus, in her mind's eye, Cervantes wishes to escape this border reality, delineated by Gloria Anzaldúa in *Borderlands / La Frontera: The New Mestiza* as a

> 1,950 mile-long open wound
>
> dividing a *pueblo*, a culture,
>
> running down the length of my body,
>
> staking fence rods in my flesh,
>
> splits me splits me
>
> *me raja me raja* (24).

In Cervantes' creative conception, this border lesion is removed giving way to a free flow of artistic appreciation. The poet goes on to describe this vast, cultured landscape of her imagination as a Chicana, poet, feminist, activist, traversing the boundaries of reality. She states that:

> In my land
>
> people write poems about love,
>
> full of nothing but contented childlike syllables.
>
> Everyone reads Russian short stories and weeps.
>
> There are no boundaries.
>
> There is no hunger, no
>
> complicated famine or greed (35).

The poet has transported the reader to a romantic vision of a peaceful and fulfilling landscape that is far from the "complicated" reality of the U.S Mexico borderlands. The only tears in

this fantasy world are those wept over the beauty of literature. In Cervantes' romantic vision, art is central in a world released from the restrictions of borders and discrimination.

Next, Cervantes speaks directly to the white man, asking:

> Do you think I can believe in a war between races?
> I can deny it. I can forget about it
> when I'm safe,
> living in my own continent of harmony
> and home, but I am not
> there (35).

Having confirmed to her addressee that this continent is just a dream, the poet abruptly returns to reality in the Americas, refusing to let us dwell in unrealistic fantasy:

> I believe in revolution
> because everywhere the crosses are burning,
> sharp-shooting goose-steppers round every corner,
> there are snipers in the schools (35).

Cervantes refers to the Ku Klux Klan and conservative politics as the channels for white patriarchal bigotry. Goose Steppers is a term frequently used to describe those who blindly follow a political movement with unquestionable loyalty. The reference to snipers in the schools is an allusion to the rise in student shootings, as well as a metaphorical reference to the indoctrination of certain belief systems in children under the guise of education. The poet's belief in revolution, or the "war between the races" as the poem's title suggests, stems from the discrimination confronted in these lines.

Cervantes then directly speaks to the white man once again, stating,

> [I know you don't believe this.

You think this is nothing

but faddish exaggeration. But they

are not shooting at you] (35).

Alfred Arteaga states that "in describing a situation unimaginable to the young white man, the poet acknowledges that their different world views are in conflict" (104). According to the poet, the dominant society is wilfully blind to any oppression that is suffered by Chicana/os and other ethnic communities in America. The poem is thus a heteroglossia of differing worlds and borders: the ideal, romantic world of the poet's imagination, the reality of racial discrimination and violence in the Americas, and the ignorant world that the white man inhabits. The reader is thus transported between these conflicting spaces by the poet.

Cervantes struggles to form any connections between her world and that of the white man's without encountering the violence, oppression and racial bigotry that he sees as "a faddish exaggeration." Cervantes states:

I'm marked by the colour of my skin.

The bullets are discrete and designed to kill slowly.

They are aiming at my children.

These are the facts.

Let me show you my wounds: my stumbling mind, my

'excuse me' tongue, and this

nagging preoccupation

with the feeling of not being good enough (36).

In these lines Cervantes reveals her wounds inflicted by the border lesion defined by Anzaldúa as "*una herida abierta* where the Third World grates against the first and bleeds. And before a scab forms it hemorrhages again, the lifeblood of two worlds merging to form a

third country – a border culture" (25). In showing the young white man the insecurities and inner conflicts inflicted on her by the collision of their two worlds, Cervantes expresses the border (to use Anzaldúa's definition again) as being "set up to define the places that are safe and unsafe, to distinguish *us* from *them*"…"a vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary" (25).

The poem closes with the statement:

> Every day I am deluged with reminders
> that this is not
> my land
> and this is my land.
> I do not believe in the war between the races
> but in this country
> there is war (37).

It can be argued that these lines are an allusion to Woody Guthrie's promises of a more equitable America in his iconic folk anthem "This Land is Your Land", a promise that for the poet only exists in her imaginary continent. Therefore, the wounds of imperialism are still present for Cervantes. This final statement is also a reference to Aztlán, an area located across the American Southwest that is seen as belonging to Chicana/os and Native Americans despite colonisation by white Anglo Americans, also sometimes construed as an imaginary homeland. Luis Leal states that

> As a Chicano symbol, Aztlán has two meanings: first, it represents the geographic region known as the Southwestern part of the United States, composed of the territory that Mexico ceded in 1848 with the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo; second, and more important, Aztlán symbolized the

> spiritual union of the Chicanos, something that is carried within the heart, no matter where they may live or where they may find themselves (8).

Thus, the closing statement encapsulates this dual symbolic power of Aztlán as defined by Leal. Amid the racial prejudice in the US that designates people of colour as second class citizens, the poet's Chicana consciousness gives the Southwest symbolic power that transcends the reality of race, class and gender divides.

In her latest collection, *Drive: The First Quartet*, the poet delves deeper into this war she believes is taking place in the Americas. For example, the poem "Coffee" uses the 1997 Acteal Massacre to expose the greed, cruelty and blood lust of white capitalism to illustrate the continuing devastation inflicted upon those perceived as minorities.

In the opening lines of the poem, the poet takes the reader south of the border fence:

> in Guatemala the black buzzard
> has replaced the quetzal
> as the national bird (9).

The black buzzard is a species of vulture that feeds mainly on dead carcasses. For the poet, a symbol of death is a more fitting national motif as the buzzard is morbidly emblematic of the encroachment and destruction of the land and people by white America for profit. The poet interposes vulture and man in the lines:

> the shadow of a man glides
> across the countryside,
> over the deforested plantations; a death
> cross burnishes history into myth
> as it scours the medicinal land into coffee (9).

Here, the reader is given a bird's-eye view of the man-made destruction of the natural, native landscape of the Americas for capitalist motives,

> while on Wall Street,
> the black sludge of a people trickles through
> cappuccino machines like hissing snakes (9).

Thus, in the opening lines of the poem, Cervantes creates an intergeographic space that allows the reader to alternate between an indigenous village south of the border in Guatemala and the North American nucleus of imperialist exploitation in New York City (NYC). This "geopoetic oscillation", a term used by Ramazani to describe the "imaginative movement back and forth between discrepant topographies", translocates two different places in the Americas to uncover a trail of violence and destruction of the indigenous landscape by white male profiteers (Ramazani 58).

In section two of "Coffee", Cervantes describes the Acteal Massacre which involved the killing of 45 indigenous villagers by paramilitary forces. The victims were mainly women, children and pregnant mothers. The poet states:

> Acteal. December 22, 1997. Bloodied
> mud sucks the plastic sandals of a child,
> velas gutter through the saged prayers
> in the little church blasted through with
> twenty-two splintered holes the size
> of a baby's tender fists. Melon heads pop
> and the hacking drum of a machete
> meeting bone counts down the hours
> of matanza (10).

This harrowing image captures the brutality of the attack on the indigenous community of Acteal. The agonizing images of children at the centre of gunfire and murder heighten the cold-blooded cruelty of the situation.

Cervantes continues to describe the bloodshed stating:

> Matted hair clings
> To the coffee plants, each green leaf,
> Another listening ear; each red seed
> Another eye dislodged from its skull (10-11).

Here, the poet juxtaposes the destruction of a community and their broken bodies with the plants that will eventually form the coffee consumed by the corporate masses in North America. The images of small, dismembered body parts like ears and eyes heighten the sense of destruction and dehumanization that occurred in Acteal. Ears and eyes connote the five senses. Their detachment from the bodies is symbolic of the senseless nature of the killings by Anglo profiteers.

In this section, Cervantes also tackles the cover-up of the events of December 22, 1997:

> I hear
> nothing happened in Acteal. And if it did
> no one knows who they were. The PRI
> press machine stands on the ridge
> of Destiny, staring Truth in the eye
> as men lie to the cameras. Twenty yards
> away, the survivors are speaking
> the names of men paid 600 dollars

American (11).

In exposing the cover-up that occurred following the Massacre Cervantes is resisting white America's denial of Acteal, condemning the brutal greed of imperialist capitalism, and placing Acteal on the map as a site of colonial terror. In particular, Cervantes uses harrowing images of women and children tortured, murdered or surviving the catastrophe to emphasise Acteal as a site of imperialist violence. For example, in the fifth section of "Coffee" the story of a young girl survivor whose mother and siblings were shot dead in the massacre is used to express the inhumane violence that could be seen as comparable to the My Lai Massacre during the Vietnam War. It also expresses a sense of transnational community and global solidarity against imperialist terror. The young girl

> testifies to anyone who will listen. How they
> stripped the dead women and sliced open their breasts,
> forced sticks between their legs, opened the wombs,
> passing the fetuses from machete to machete (17).

The poet singles out the physical and emotional suffering and torture of women in frank and brutal detail to give voice to the most silenced and oppressed victims of imperialism. As Cervantes writes, the young girl's work like Chicana writers and poets "is to be the mouth / of a people" (17). This sense of community amongst women of colour is also expressed earlier in the poem when Cervantes describes that following the massacre,

> the women form a chain of hearts.
> They have dried the earth baked with their tears.
> Each one carries a red mud brick
> from the killing floor (11).

These mud bricks from the site of the massacre, reddened from both the sun and the bloodshed, commemorate each victim. The bricks are also emblematic of the intergeographic space created by the poet as she reveals the ongoing imperialism inflicted on indigenous communities by the dominant culture of North America.

Section three of "Coffee" is an elegy where the poet lists the names of the forty-five victims of the massacre. It can be argued that this section of the poem "resembles one of the most ancient forms of poetry: the list poem or catalog verse" (Ramazani 142). The elegiac list ends with the declaration, "we are One Spirit, One Heart and One Mind" (13). This line or epitaph constructs this section of the poem as a transnational elegy[3]. Cervantes is writing out of California commemorating a community from Acteal, south of the US Mexico border. According to Ramazani, "elegiac transnationalism in its genetic, intrageneric diversity redirects poetic mourning across national borders, building affective microcommunities that instance the possibilities of a public sphere not contained and subsumed by the nation-state" (82). However, while Ramazani links the use of the list poem to decolonised and liberated territories and peoples, Cervantes uses the list or catalogue also to reveal the continued imperialism, encroachment and subjugation of people and places in the Americas. Hence, the poet is compiling an historical, social, factual document through the medium of poetry. The list in "Coffee" also serves as an immortal epitaph honouring those who have been lost and forgotten. So, in naming the victims Cervantes is commemorating the dead, and ensuring that those whose lives were brutally ended will not be forgotten or silenced by the dominant culture.

In addition to naming those murdered in the Massacre, the poet goes on to name those who she sees as the real Anglo, North American culprits behind the murder and injustice

inflicted on Chicanas and Natives on both sides of the U.S-Mexico border. For instance, in section six we are told that

> the only end to bullets for profit is knowledge –
> knowledge that will not appear wedged between
> commercials for Taster's Choice and
> *Nobody Doesn't Like Sara Lee* like the living body of
> an indigenous child found two days after massacre
> in a bullet-ridden cave (231-6 18).

In the same section the poet states that "Néstles makes the very best...MUR...DER" (239 19). Cervantes also declares her own plan of action against the capitalist organisations she sees as responsible for oppression and murder of minorities

> I will not bank
> with assassins. I will buy crafts not Kraft,
> Néstles, Proctor & Gamble, McDonald's Sara Lee....
> I will fight this way for ever (259-262 19).

Again, the poet utilises the catalogue verse; but in this instance the list functions as an anti-capitalist critique of the multi-national companies who profit from the obliteration of indigenous people and places.

Furthermore, we find similar anti-capitalist critique, travelling texts and the use of catalogue poetry in other forms of popular culture in the Americas, most notably in the lyrics and music videos of Rage Against the Machine. In particular their song, "Sleep Now in the Fire" is exemplary of this in both the lyrics and its accompanying music video which is itself a political act of resistance against American imperialism. The title, a line repeated three

times in the song, is an ironic invitation to Americans to rest or “sleep” in land of moral decay, capitalism and globalization. “Sleep” is a dramatic monologue told through the voice of the American Empire. Dramatic monologue is also used widely in Chicano and South American male poetry with José Hernández’s “El Gaucho Martín Fierro / Martín Fierro the Gaucho” and Rodolfo “Corky” Gonzales’s “I am Joaquín” being seminal texts. These texts exhibit a singular point of view, manifesting traditional notions of machismo and masculinity as well as exhibiting issues of solidarity and revolution which characterises much of Chicana/o literature. The song inverts this use of dramatic monologue to unveil the Anglo patriarchal standpoint of the American Empire. Throughout the lyrics, the Anglo voice exercises its dominance over the American landscape and its inhabitants vocalising the mass violence and control employed in the construction of a nation. The song opens with the statement:

> the world is my expense
>
> the cost of my desire
>
> Jesus blessed me with it’s future
>
> and I protect it with fire

These lines refer to Manifest Destiny, white America’s vocation to expand westward and colonise in the name of Providence.

The American Empire orders its citizens,

> Don’t dare take what you need
>
> I’ll jail and bury those committed
>
> Crawl with me into tomorrow
>
> Or I’ll drag you to your grave

The American Empire asserts itself here as leader and aggressor who must be obeyed at all costs. Through the language of power, ownership and authority, the speaker takes command of its inhabitants. Words such as "crawl" imply the desire for submissive citizens who must follow or be consumed by the higher power.

The second verse utilises the catalogue verse or list poem as America lists its many imperialist faces:

> I am the nina, the pinta, the santa maria
>
> The noose and the rapist
>
> And the fields overseer
>
> The agents of orange
>
> The priests of Hiroshima
>
> The cost of my desire
>
> Sleep now in the fire.

The song lyrics take the reader on a transnational journey through history from the transatlantic voyage of the 15th century to the slave fields of America to the atrocities of Vietnam and Japan. The use of the word "priest" again insinuates America's belief that its imperialist acts are guided by providence, a denial of the capitalist and globalization motivations involved in such acts. Then we return to the U.S which tells us that this is "the cost of my desire / sleep now in the fire" of the American Empire. Clearly, this list depicts a continent born and nurtured through the exploitation and destruction of land and people both inside and outside of the Americas. This list verse unites a global population of victims of corporate America. Cherríe Moraga provides an exemplary discussion of this as she states: "Geopolitical borders mean little when the technological capacity of destructive weaponry available to countries [as well as the 'terrorist' discontent] ensures our shared status as a

world population of potential victims" (19). "Sleep" endorses Moraga's statement, cataloguing the technological terror inflicted by the American Empire through economic, biological and nuclear methods both within and outside the nation state.

While the song is told through the voice of the American Empire, the list has a similar effect to that which we encounter in "Coffee." Judith Butler states in *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* that grief, mourning and elegy "furnish a sense of political community" (22). Clearly the epigraph to Cervantes' elegiac list evokes this sense of community: "We are One Spirit, One Heart and One Mind" (13). For Cervantes the border between the two nations is porous and the cultural and political essence of border communities is united despite the physical barrier imposed by the dominant culture. In "Sleep" while the voice of American Empire lists imperialist acts, in doing so it traverses national borders to unite and commemorate a community of victims. These transnational lists of victims and places create new spaces of shared and transferable identity and mourning.

The music video which accompanies the song further emphasises these issues. The video was filmed on the steps of the New York Stock Exchange on Wall St. directed by Michael Moore. Like Cervantes' "Coffee" we see the positioning of Wall Street as the epicentre of American imperialism in RATM's music. The video also contains shots of a game show called "Who Wants to be Filthy F#&%ing Rich?" The censorship of the word "fucking" in the video is an ironic allusion to America's tendency to cloak or modify certain imperialist acts like those named in the list verse of "Sleep." The quiz show is modelled on the popular "Who Wants to be a Millionaire?" television programme. The questions featured in "Who Wants to be Filthy F#&%ing Rich?" focus on issues such as healthcare, gender and distribution of wealth and poverty in America. A series of well-dressed yet hapless contestants give incorrect answers to seemingly straightforward questions, highlighting not

only the disproportionate distribution of wealth and elitism in the Americas, but also the glut of ignorance that appears to run in tandem with this. The winner of the game show, a homeless black man rejects the armfuls of money handed to him and instead of seeing just one person taking all the profit the entire audience shares the wealth, a strong anti-capitalist message.

We see vivid images of nuclear warfare followed by shots of a cigar being lit with a dollar by a man in an expensive suit and champagne bubbling from the neck of a magnum, interposing images of violence with symbols of affluence. These images further highlight the damaging effect of imperialist capitalism. Moreover, the images in the music video as well as the list of imperialist acts provide commentary on Anglo masculinity. The smoking cigar and foamy spray gushing from the magnum of champagne are phallic images, exhibiting white male virility through symbols of affluence. The atomic mushroom cloud explosions shown just before these images are also symbolic of white male ejaculation. Thus, RATM's lyrics and Michael Moore's video interpretation clearly merge Anglo imperialist machismo with acts of terrorism disguised as progress. Hence, it can be posited that "Sleep" in its lyrics and music video compound Anglo patriarchy and masculinity.

The band's presence shut down Wall St., a political act which further emphasises the anti-capitalist message. The video ends with a voice over by a news broadcaster stating: "A band called 'The Machine Rages On' or 'Rage Against the Machine'...That band is anti-family and pro-terrorist!" The sardonic inclusion of this statement at the close of the video is significant in a number of ways. Firstly the video links the media with capitalism and imperialism. The voice of American imperialism that delivers the lyrics is underscored by the voice of the media accusing RATM of supporting terrorism. Of course, in writing a song that

reveals and condemns the violent and hypocritical nature of American expansionism, the band actually reveals itself to be anti-terrorist.

RATM's "People of the Sun" is a tautology of anti-capitalist critique and travelling poetry. The song is inspired by the Zapatista movement in Chiapas, Mexico. Like "Sleep" the lyrics take the reader on a transnational and transtemporal journey across time and space. The song traces a history of violence from the sixteenth century to present day Mexico and America:

> Since 1516 minds attacked and overseen.
> Now crawl amidst the ruins of this empty dream
> Wit their borders and boots on top of us
> Pullin' knobs on the floor of their toxic metropolis.

In these lines, the band states that from the beginnings of colonialism in Mexico the landscape and its indigenous inhabitants have been oppressed. The border clearly refers to the physical barrier that divides the U.S. and Mexico, as well as the racial, class and gender borders imposed by the dominant culture. The "boots on top of us" is a reference to the violent tactics of the border patrol as well as police and military brutality. The "toxic metropolis" bespeaks of the noxious nature of physical partitions. Thus, in this verse RATM delineates the border as a physical and psychical barrier on the landscape and society. This is further emphasised by the mention of "Troops strippin' zoots" in the second verse of "People". This line takes the reader/listener back to the Los Angeles zoot suit riots of June 1943 when "hundreds of U.S. military personnel went on a two-week rampage in Los Angeles, California, attacking scores of Mexican American youth who wore the zoot suit style of dress" (Griswold de Castillo 367). According to Richard Griswold de Castillo "This episode in American history has been interpreted by Chicano historians as one in a long

series of anti-Mexican reactions motivated by wartime frustrations and racial stereotyping against Mexican-American youth" (367-8). The song brings the reader back to a seminal site of discrimination against Chicana/os in the Americas. Thus, the song commemorates a history of racially motivated violence from a Chicano point of view ensuring that the reader is aware of a violent event that was instigated by a largely white group of military personnel against Chicana/os, despite the disturbance being remembered as the zoot suit riots.

Moreover, "People" is a call to action addressing the Mexican and Chicana/o community. In the first verse, the lyrics urge the reader/listener to "get offensive like Tet", a reference to the Tet Offensive, a Vietnamese military operation against American troops during the Vietnam War. The call to action continues in this verse: "Tha fifth sun sets get back reclaim / Tha spirit of Cuahtemoc alive and untamed". To adopt Eduardo Matos Moctezuma's analysis of the Aztec calendar, "The Fifth Sun or Nahui Ollin, the Sun of Movement, in the middle of the sculpture, must be fed so as not to detain its movement" (63). Consequently, the reference to the fifth sun of the Aztec Calendar is a call for Chicana/os to re-ignite a metaphorical feeding of the sun through the reclamation of the indigenous culture and identity that has been silenced through centuries of Spanish and American imperialism and encroachment of indigenous territories and people. Cuahtemoc is the last ruler of the Aztecs, who was captured by Hernán Cortés, the Spanish conquistador who ordered his torture and execution, finally overthrowing the Aztec empire. Cuahtemoc is revived and immortalised as a cultural and political icon in the song. It is not uncommon for Chicana/o writers and artists to make reference to Aztec rulers and warriors. Some of the most well-known examples include Rodolfo "Corky" Gonzales's "Joaquín" and Anzaldúa's *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* which make reference to a pantheon of Aztec rulers, warriors, folk heroes and icons. RATM states that Cuahtemoc's spirit is now untamed

and calls upon Chicana/os to claim the Aztec warrior spirit as their rightful inheritance because “Tha vulture came ta try and steal ya name / But now you got a gun, yeah this is for the people of the sun”. Here, similar to the opening lines of Cervantes’s “Coffee”, the vulture symbolises Euro and Anglo colonialism and its overthrowing of the Aztec Empire as well as their theft and murder of a culture. The gun represents the Zapatista movement and the people of the sun denote the Aztecs as well as their contemporary descendants, Mexicans and Chicana/os. “Sleep” conjures the warrior spirit of Aztec ancestors in order to encourage readers to resist the imperialism that RATM believes is ongoing in the Americas.

In the second verse of “People” RATM indicts the violence of Anglo imperialism, linking it to capitalism:

> Yeah, neva forget that tha whip snapped ya back,
> Ya spine cracked for tobacco, oh I’m the Marlboro man, uh
> Our past blastin’ on through the verses
> Brigades of taxi cabs rollin’ Broadway like hearses.

The song invokes a historical continuum of racial and capitalist motivated slavery, abuse and exploitation at the hands of the Anglo imperialists, again taking the reader on a journey across time a space to the tobacco plantations that were formed in Mexico by the European colonists from the sixteenth century using indigenous slave labour. This mass industry gave rise to the Marlboro man, the iconic Anglo cowboy figure featured in a highly successful advertising campaign for the Marlboro cigarette company in the mid-twentieth century. The campaign led to a huge surge in the popularity of smoking in both men and women which in turn caused an increase in cancer and respiratory illnesses. Hence, the song connects the dominant culture to murder via capitalism in contemporary America. This troubled history blasting through the verses of “People” is juxtaposed with the stagnant resultant culture of

white America symbolised by taxis moving through the streets of NYC like a funeral parade. “Sleep” creates a morbid and monotonous topography, and again, like Cervantes, RATM locates NYC as the epicentre of imperialist capitalism and cultural decay.

To conclude, Wai Chee Dimock describes the American nation as “a set of erasable lines on the face of the earth” (1). The works examined in this paper endorse this statement. Cervantes as RATM provide a rich geopoetic mapping of American imperialism, exhibiting the malleable, moveable nature of borders in the Americas and across the globe. Evidently, Cervantes and RATM correlate this translocal and transnational movement with capitalism and expansionism. The elegiac and condemnatory lists employed in the poems and lyrics discussed are cartographic records of the history of capitalist-motivated violence that that is inherent in American imperialism. Clearly, the travelling poetry of Cervantes and RATM adopt techniques such as geopoetic imagery and lists to provide a transnational critique of capitalism in the U.S., challenging what Adrienne Rich calls “the white noise of the media” (167).

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Endnotes

[1] Refer especially the section entitled, “Travels” in Clifford’s *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century.*

[2] In American literature the list poem is primarily associated with Walt Whitman. However, the poems and lyrics examined in this paper demonstrate that the use of the list or catalogue is prominent in poetry outside of the Eurocentric American literary canon.

[3]This act of naming the dead is certainly reminiscent of other postcolonial writers. For instance, W. B. Yeats names and commemorates the patriots of the 1916 Easter Rising in “Easter, 1916”:

> I write it out in verse –
> MacDonagh and MacBride
> And Connolly and Pearse
> Now and in time to be,
> Wherever green is worn,
> Are changed, changed utterly:
> A terrible beauty is born (153-4).