

The Impact on Queer Identity and Futurity in Ibis Gómez-Vega's

Send My Roots Rain

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The origins of LGBTQ identities and communities in the United States posit unclear, yet thoroughly theorized, speculations. John D'Emilio, for example, explains the origins of gay and lesbian communities as a direct response to the rise of capitalism during the early 1900s. As such, D'Emilio correlates the migration of queer individuals to urbanized environments as the benchmark opportunity for these individuals to explore sexualities deemed deviant in their preceding small hometowns. He further argues, "In divesting the household of its economic independence and fostering the separation of sexuality from procreation, capitalism has created conditions that allow some men and women to organize a personal life around their erotic/emotional attraction to their own sex" (D'Emilio 470). Though D'Emilio's argument provides thought-provoking insight on the possible origins of populated queer communities emerging in urban environments (such as Greenwich Village in New York City and the Castro District in San Francisco), his argument ultimately suggests queer communities and identities derive from a perished need to necessitate family labor and support. The identity formation that D'Emilio theorizes indirectly correlates to David Halperin's speculations of a gay identity defined in part by community. To Halperin, "gay culture doesn't just happen. It has to be made to happen. It requires material support, organization, and a queer public sphere" (26). Gay culture, to Halperin, derives similarly to D'Emilio's understanding of queer communities: through publicly organized spheres. Limiting the viability of queer identities and communities to urban spaces, however, ignores contrasting rural environments which still provide opportunities for queerness (marginalization without specific classifications) to prosper. This reductive assumption dismisses queer cultures and communities that date prior to the early twentieth-century and the rise of the city¹, as well as renders invisible queerness emerging from small towns all across the U.S.

Written in 1991 after many years of established queer communities in the United States, Ibis Gómez-Vega's *Send My Roots Rain* dismisses urbanization as a necessary requirement for queerness to flourish by chronicling a lesbian artist's migration from an urban environment to a small town in Pozo Seco, Texas. Through this migration, Carole, the artist, hesitantly embraces the small-town atmosphere as an opportunity to express her intersecting queer identities. Other queer characters follow suit by also embracing queer, rather than normative, identities and ideologies in heteronormative and patriarchal environments, such as family, sexuality, and religion. Analogous to Carole's experience of marginality, these other characters are outsiders to Pozo Seco and, in turn, grapple with the many issues that they assumed would diminish with migration. Gómez-Vega defies the assumption that urbanization entices queer acceptance by instead suggesting that queer identities may indeed find realization and prosper in smaller communities, exempt from capitalist praxis structures as their foundation. With a focus on the novel's detailed attention to the environment and the many facets of queerness that challenge conservative binary oppositions, this analysis reads Gómez-Vega's novel as a feminist text that

¹ such as the queer literary culture Walt Whitman's *Calamus* poems entice that circulated as a written identity and community for queer individuals across the country

transgresses the fallacy of queerness solely occurring due to urbanization and, instead, considers small towns as environments in which queer futurity may prosper.

In the beginning of the novel, the desert environment that causes many of the characters' sense of displacement and isolation immediately provokes discomfort in Carole as she migrates from her urbanized home to the small town of Pozo Seco. While driving, she laments, "The Apaches may have called this desert home once, but I could only call it hell. It tapped within me a subconscious fear for which I had no explanation, other than the fact that it was hot and empty" (Gómez-Vega 1). Carole interprets her anxiety as a response to her departure from the normalization and comfort of the city. Her life will no longer revolve around large buildings and a multitude of strangers disconnected to each other but for their shared distaste for small town living. Instead, her life will soon revolve around a vast open space and a minimal population of individuals who cannot remain undetected. As such, the migration she forgoes challenges her environmental identity. Though many different forms of identity exist that challenge the definition of the word itself, readers may understand identity, in its general sense, "as mutable and plural—that is, the subject is the intersection of multiple identities (race/ethnicity, gender, sexuality, and so forth) that change and have salience at different moments in time and place" (Cantú 167). Environmental identity, on the other hand, magnetizes the construction of identity as a direct result of location (Clayton 47). For Carole, the challenge to her identity she initially confronts centers on her migration from an urban environment to a small town, as this puts into question her sense of home and normalcy. In turn, this shift ultimately forces her to confront certain facets of her other identities she sought to leave behind.

Carole associates her migration to the fearful unknown but also to a past she deems archaic to western civilization, a past deemed only livable to Apache natives. Her migration, however, only occurs due to her necessity of finding work. As an artist struggling to discover her aesthetic uniqueness, Carole's minimal employment opportunities in the city force her to seek employment painting murals at a church in Pozo Seco. Unfortunately for Carole, many of her difficulties along her migration involve physically enduring confrontations with the desert. As Sue Ellen Campbell et al. note, "For living things in a desert, the margin between life and death is narrow" (184). Because Carole has lived in the city her whole life, she has yet to understand the desert like many animals and Apache natives do and she therefore leans towards the margins of death, rather than life. From fainting in the beginning of the novel to getting lost at the end of the novel, Carole's journey involves her resistance against adapting to the new environment and new ways of living.

Even prior to Carole's engagement with others in the town, the environment reads her as a queer outsider, Othered from the mannerisms and ideologies dominant in Pozo Seco. She has lived her entire life in a big city, resulting in an inept ability to adapt to different environments. Surviving the desert will therefore require Carole to communicate with others who are well adapted, for "a native person is able to know more—and better—the cultural minutiae of a region than the immigrant, the late-arriving artist or observer, who is assumed to be less capable of producing a genuine regionalism in the locale precisely because she or he is a latecomer" (Behrendt 151). When situated in the town, Carole takes heed of such advice by conversing with Maria—a settled immigrant with a greater knowledge of the environment—about the desert and its vastness to obtain a better understanding of what surrounds her. Pozo Seco, Maria informs her, exists at the intersection of two deserts, one safe and one deadly due to its vast "hills and mountains" (Gómez-Vega 38). As an ignorant outsider, Carole dismisses the differences between deserts, believing any desert "makes you give up your sanity the moment you slip into the sand" (Gómez-Vega 39). As Eric Ball claims, "identity entails considering not only the fact that people can identify with a

place—that they can have a ‘sense of place’—but also that the identities of a place are socio-ecologically constructed” (241). For Carole, the urban identity she has known and constructed for herself dismisses the desert as an uninhabitable land. Maria also informs Carole that “people are free like lions” in the desert (Gómez-Vega 35). Analogous to demons, lions are integrated in the novel as subconscious fears that haunt the characters’ consciousness, terrorizing taboo identities. Carole grapples primarily with identity issues which pertain to family, her sexuality, and her inability to express emotions. Gómez-Vega’s incorporation of lions in the desert speaks volumes to the importance of the environment for these characters. Though Maria fears the desert far less than Carole, she nonetheless cowers from the thought of forgoing such a ritualistic journey into its vastness. As queer outsiders, they have a minimal sense of the environment that surrounds Pozo Seco. While an Apache native would easily find solace in the desert, the characters in the novel are not fully adapted to the environment and, more symbolically, are not yet equipped with the conscious strength to confront the lions that haunt their subconsciousness.

Though Carole’s recent employment forces her into the dark depths of the desert, she nonetheless finds solace in thinking of the town as an oasis to such darkness. As she settles into her hotel room, she claims to have immediately fallen in love with the room. “From the western window, a rather quaint and safe desert landscape spread itself before me. From both the eastern and southern windows, the sleepy town and its inhabitants composed my canvas” (Gómez-Vega 29). Carole assumes that as long as she remains in the town’s confinements, the threatening desert poses minimal risk to her. Perhaps Carole’s constant placement of safe and not safe, life and death, is what further entices her in finding solace when conversing with others in the town. Though all the characters Carole associates herself with are also outsiders, they nonetheless have a greater grasp of desert survival skills and provide Carole with insights to successfully adapt. The initial sense of community that Carole receives pertains more to the fundamentals of survival from outsiders than to the social bonding that emerges from their similarities of embodied queerness, such as their shared distaste for patriarchal structures of power.

The safe and not safe, life and death, binary within the environment poses just one of the many binary oppositions throughout the novel, with other oppositions primarily occurring through characters’ differing views and identity issues. Carole, for one, grapples with identity issues pertaining to her family, sexuality, and her inability to express emotion to others. Carole’s intention to understand the other characters poses challenges throughout the novel, especially since she is the last to arrive. Thus, the exploration she must forego in understanding others—and ultimately herself—requires her to investigate the past. Such an exploration initially provokes resistance, for, as Carole claims, “I didn’t want to face having to put my life in order all over again. I thought I’d be done with that by this stage of my life, and it always depressed me to find out I wasn’t” (Gómez-Vega 32). She believes that aging should relinquish one’s uncertainties by having already interrogated a past of unsettled anxieties, lions. Carole discovers, however, that the past—for herself and others in Pozo Seco—has yet to emerge. As lesbian critic Julia Penelope notes, “Both our individual relationships as Lesbians and our community are premised on the same sharing, our willingness to tell our Selves, our stories, our fears, and our imaginings” (98). Four of the characters in the novel are lesbians, but it is all characters who must nonetheless share the past that haunts them so that they may one day establish an inviting and queer community. Migrating to a new environment with new people requires Carole to reconstruct her queer identities in opposition to the other queer characters.

In terms of family dynamics, Carole ironically reproduces the conservative binary opposition throughout the novel. Because Carole’s father never accepted her for her queerness,

she has a low opinion of the family structure. Perhaps because of patriarchal oppression towards women, Carole cannot conceive of ever procreating and recreating the paradigm that she knows as a normative family. When conversing with Maria, Carole admits that her father is the primary cause for her separation from her family. Though her mother secretly supported her regardless of her sexuality, Carole's father was adamant on removing Carole from the family sphere. She further admits to hating her father due to his patriarchal privilege, claiming, "I remember his presence by all the prohibitions associated with his being there. When he was home, we were supposed to be quiet. When he wasn't we could be ourselves again, and that usually involved a lot of screaming and yelling" (Gómez-Vega 157-8). Carole's father, though not being outright abusive, has always enticed a dismal atmosphere when among the family, even prior to learning about Carole's sexuality. Though the rest of the family still speaks to Carole, her father's inability to provide happiness for the entire family and accept Carole's sexuality influences Carole into having a negative view of the traditional family. Thus, Carole's father contradicts her expectations of fatherhood that associates the paternal figure with socially constructed expectations of positive nurturing, and, instead, fulfills the Lacanian notion of paternal authority. In contrast to Carole's father, her mother fulfills her expectations of motherhood by having "been our light, and not having her with us left us in darkness" (Gómez-Vega 29). The last parental figure alive in Carole's life thus happens to be the one she wishes to disassociate herself from, the one who has greatly influenced Carole into feeling like an outsider within her own biological family.

Carole's issues with her family further enhance her distaste for the desert and, in turn, transforms her physical response into a socio-physical response that rejects the vastly arid and empty environment. Though Carole claims her father no longer impacts her life, Maria realizes that Carole's father influences Carole and acts as one of the many lions intruding in her life. Carole reluctantly agrees, noting her father used to hunt lions and that Carole too was metaphorically hunted by her father. Her negative association with her father sheds light on why she detests the desert. She recalls, "I think I've come to respect it, but I don't love it. It's too much like my father's landscape, I guess. We used to get postcards from him when he went hunting, and he used to send us stupid cards of the desert" (Gómez-Vega 151). The desert, in other words, transcends representations of a frightening and unknown land through its additional association with her father, whom she wishes to ignore. The solace she finds in the town may therefore represent her disassociation from family and patriarchal oppression. Avoiding the desert is not simply a means of avoiding a possible death from dehydration, but a confrontation with the lions attributed to the family that disowned her.

The opposition to Carole's views on family comes from a few members in Pozo Seco, especially from Maria. As Maria reluctantly exposes her past, she reveals to Carole that her mother was removed from her family for not marrying the man who impregnated her. As a result, Maria's mother resorted to sex work in a brothel to raise Maria. The associations Maria holds with the figure of her mother oppose Carole's views of family for Maria speaks of her mother with high regard and gratitude. Not only does Maria's mother raise her in a loving community consisting entirely of women, but her liberated mindset further paves the way for Maria to understand that family may exist outside structures of patriarchy. Maria then raises her daughter, Zemi, alone without any desire to find a husband. As rumored by Cora, Zemi's conception occurs through rape by a coyote who was guiding Maria across the border from Mexico to the United States. And while Carole receives the news with shock, Cora casually expresses that "It's the price you pay for taking the chance" (Gómez-Vega 136). By digging into Maria's past, Carole amplifies her distaste for an

oppressive structure dominated by men and understands why Maria does not seek a husband. Maria's traumatized past, however, only partially explains why she raises Zemi alone.

The novel suggests that Carole's alienation from the idea of family centers on families governed by men; whereas Maria's strong connection to family centers on untraditional families exempt from hierarchies organized by gender. Carole's distaste for inflexible gender roles prohibits her from envisioning an undefined spectrum of queerness. When Maria cooks, Carole negatively notes, "The women in my house spent most of their time in the kitchen cooking" (Gómez-Vega 65). Carole infers that women are forced into kitchens which, in turn, prohibit and limit them to tasks concerning nurturing children and taking care of husbands. Maria, on the other hand, does not view cooking in such a negative light and retorts positively, assuming that "they probably enjoyed it, [for] women who don't like to cook find a way to stay out of the kitchen" (Gómez-Vega 65). The ideologies derived from both characters in this instance expose the binary opposition of heteronormativity (as rooted in patriarchal structures) and queerness (as rooted in individualism). While Carole views the family in rigid performative roles, Maria views the family with untraditional and queer opportunities defined by individuals, rather than gender. To Maria, women may avoid cooking and other gendered roles, but may also embrace these roles. Carole refrains from embracing queerness within the family due to her persistence in defining gender roles in a traditional rigid manner. Jean Troy-Smith differs, arguing, "Carole is on the kind of journey that seems contradictory; it is a journey to find meaning in her life as a woman in the patriarchy as well as a journey to find her power as a woman through discovering the missing piece to herself by searching for her paternal ancestral roots. It is a journey to discover how to do both in a culture that does not support the quest" (144). Attributing Carole's journey to the paradoxes of patriarchy neglects the ending of the novel, for such a journey would entail Carole negotiating her identity within—rather than outside—patriarchy. The binary between both characters therefore exists to guide Carole into dismissing patriarchal oppression within the family and to embrace queerness as an alternative future.

The fact that both Carole and Maria sexually identify themselves as lesbians further enforces the binary opposition between socially progressive and conservative in terms of how each confront their sexuality amongst the public. In this instance, Carole's sexuality and understanding of her identity represents a progressive and publicly open mindset, whereas Maria's inability to accept her lesbian identity signifies a conservative mentality, incapable of confronting potential public judgment. While sexual tension persists between the two throughout the novel, Carole refrains from approaching Maria, for Maria does not freely express her sexuality. As D'Emilio claims, gay and lesbian individuals outwardly enacted their sexuality upon moving to urban communities, for small towns that are primarily based with familiar faces prevent these individuals from enacting their sexuality without judgement. And while Pozo Seco refrains from encompassing such a progressive environment—as exemplified by the few characters, like Gloria, who oppose same sex public affection—other characters, such as Miriam, have always resisted heteronormativity through their sexually queer openness, thus providing representation within the town. Maria's lions, which encompass her anxieties and past issues, are therefore not persistent due to a lack in urbanization, but rather a lack in willpower to approach such a confrontation. When Maria and Carole finally speak about the sexual tension that looms every time they converse, Maria admits to fearing the feelings she has for Carole. As she justifies, "The last thing I'm looking for is any kind of involvement, and this is all very new to me" (Gómez-Vega 126). She then proceeds to claim that her fears pertain not only to her sexual attraction to Carole, but also her maternal

need to consider her daughter's reaction to her recently discovered sexuality. Thus, the fears Maria grapples with throughout the novel center on her resistance for change.

Carole, on the other hand, arrives in Pozo Seco fully understanding her identity as a lesbian. The challenges she faces instead pertain to revealing her emotions to others she adores. Much like Maria, Carole fears the private to public perception others will exert towards her once revealing the lions that persist to haunt her subconsciousness. The move from an urban to small town environment forces Carole into revealing her emotions. The binary, in this instance, relates to the necessity to communicate with them. In an urban environment, one may live among strangers and never need to converse with others. But in a small-town environment, one may find it more difficult to maintain a private life, exempt from questions by those who yearn to demystify the outsider. Because of the encounters from others and Maria's introverted nature, Carole must emerge from her private sphere to initiate a publicly recognized relationship with Maria. The difficulty lies within Maria's inability to fully express her sexuality. In turn, Carole's frustration lies within her inability to express her emotions. She laments, "I'd fallen in love with a woman who had no use for me. I liked the way she looked, the way she acted, and the way she treated her daughter but was beginning to dislike the way she held her distance when she was with me" (Gómez-Vega 79). Because of Maria's resistance, Carole then questions Maria's sexuality, wondering whether Maria actually finds women attractive. Carole's insecurities then enforce blame onto herself for falling in love with a supposed heterosexual woman.

As exemplified through the binary opposition in sexual awareness, Gómez-Vega presents the closeted and out lesbian, the private and public queer. The issue for Maria pertains to her inability to seek change in her life. As many individuals in Pozo Seco believe, migrating allows people to avoid the lions in their lives. Maria attributes her reluctance to embrace her lesbian identity as a factor when considering raising Zemi with another woman and, as a result, imagines a future in Brazil, away from these issues. It is this exact dream of freedom in migration that Carole has already followed and endured. Through her migration from an urban to a small-town environment, Carole realizes that one cannot escape one's unresolved issues—lions—by simply migrating elsewhere. In this case, the binary opposition expressed through Carole slowly sheds light onto Maria's insecurities. Gómez-Vega creates such binary to exhibit the transformation that closeted lesbians may experience within an environment with few secrets. According to Nett Hart, "to be Lesbian is elemental social action, not a metaphor, not an example, but social change itself" (295-6). Carole's sexually progressive persistence therefore paves the way for Maria to confront her sexuality for Carole's public embodiment of a lesbian identity provokes the social change already flourishing in Pozo Seco in characters like Miriam.

The binary contrast between Catholicism and native spiritualism further challenges the notion of queerness as embraced by the environment in the characters of Father Arroyo and Miriam. Father Arroyo, an outsider who arrives in Pozo Seco around the same time as Maria, embodies the same patriarchal ideologies that Carole seeks to avoid. Ironically, however, Father Arroyo commissions Carole to paint the town's church which has yet to be constructed. According to Father Arroyo, "The church gives the community a core, a center for unity" (Gómez-Vega 21). The issue, however, centers on his inability to bring the community together. Though he arrives in Pozo Seco with visions of unifying the town, his past exempts a clear methodology to connect people together whose identities differ from his. The problem, according to Maria, pertains to ethnicity: "We're too Latin for him, too uncontrollable" (Gómez-Vega 73). Though Father Arroyo has a Spanish name and speaks the language, a cultural barrier nonetheless prohibits him from transitioning from outsider to insider. Gender also appears to influence Father Arroyo's inability

to connect to his parish. As a town dominated by women, his stringent views of male dominance are exposed and criticized. Because Father Arroyo's profession invokes fear among his following, they cannot outrightly express the reasons for his disconnect with the community, thus instilling a halt in a futurity of queerness, free from patriarchal violence and abuse. After the first church burned down with a child caught inside, his inability to console his parish further enforces him as an outsider, unable to instill unity. As Maria claims, "He couldn't get the faithful to put their faith in him. Everyone in town was shaken by the fire and Luz's death" (Gómez-Vega 74). Thus, to instill unity, the priest believes a new church with the first service memorializing the child will restore what was lost in the fire.

Even without a unified church, members inside and outside of the town arrive to help build the new church. From artisans to bricklayers, "everyone wanted to contribute. Since most of them had no money, their own sweat was all they could afford to give. They came to sweat, as if their very salvation depended on how hard they worked" (Gómez-Vega 55). Father Arroyo also helps with the church's construction, in which Carole witnesses a new person, stripped from religious righteousness. In this observation, Carole claims, "As a man he didn't seem to be a bad sort. As a priest, however, he lacked something she couldn't quite describe. He was too distant, too intellectual, too unlike the people whom he sought to minister. He was just not one of them" (Gómez-Vega 71). Correlating to Maria's observations, Carole observes the disconnect the priest has with others around him. As people help, Father Arroyo neglects to thank them, as a respectable priest within a community should. Instead, "he simply looked in their direction, sometimes waved hello, and continued what he was doing [when a group arrived]. Whatever the reason that brought them to Pozo Seco, he was uninterested and didn't question. It was building him a church" (Gómez-Vega 56). Through these observations, one may assume the help he receives is reassurance that they have not lost faith in their religion, but rather they have lost faith in Father Arroyo. Perhaps the only reason why they help build the church relies on the "salvation" they believe he can grant them. Father Arroyo's disconnect with the community, however, prohibits him from freely speaking to them. Through his cultural barriers on language, Chicana/o culture, and patriarchal/gendered ideologies, Father Arroyo appears to have very little interest in associating himself with the same people who help him achieve his goal to build a new church.

Miriam, in contrast to Father Arroyo, embodies a queerness opposed by western religions. Often referred to as a bruja by Father Arroyo, Miriam seeks religion through spiritual means, such as appreciating the environment and using herbs for medicine. Perhaps what makes the priest especially angry at Miriam is his jealousy towards her. While he has difficulty communicating with others in the community, Miriam does so effortlessly. Though an outsider to western religions, Miriam is instead viewed as an insider to those in Pozo Seco, for she has lived on the land for years and embodies the native nature of an Apache. Carmen Lydia Fys Junquera notes, "the Spanish version of sense of place, or *arraigo*, emphasizes the rootedness in both the land and the community, the close intertwining of landscape and the humans who inhabit it" (140). The community gravitates towards Miriam simply for this rootedness she embodies in her demeanor. When Maria grapples with her sexuality, she goes to Miriam instead of Father Arroyo. Through this dialogue, Miriam provides Maria with spiritual, rather than religiously organized, advice. And, as a later reflection, Maria claims that "the thought of Miriam's love for Maria and their own conversation just now made her feel warm" (Gómez-Vega 169). Miriam speaks to others within the community without religious terminology and instead converses with them through the language and terminology they have always understood from living in Pozo Seco. As Maria notes early in the novel, "Somehow Miriam knew. Nobody had to tell her much of anything. She could

see it all written on their faces, or maybe she just sensed it” (Gómez-Vega 9). Considered a witch by some and a curandera by others, Miriam nonetheless encompasses the persona of a leader who listens and guides others with ease.

The contrast between Father Arroyo and Miriam goes beyond their religious differences to their responses when communicating with others. Father Arroyo represents the stringent religious figure who seeks to instill patriarchal privilege to men without any interest towards women, while Miriam represents the spiritual figure who listens and properly guides others. As he believes, “The word of God isn’t flexible. It doesn’t change with every congregation” (Gómez-Vega 112). Connecting to the people in Pozo Seco therefore requires Father Arroyo to emulate Miriam’s ability to adjust to others. If he desires a full congregation, he must translate the word of God from his understanding to the understanding of others. It is not simply a Chicana/o or language barrier that forbids him from reaching a broad audience, but rather his inability to expand his understanding of priesthood. Much like Carole and her views of the family, Father Arroyo’s conservative views of religion experience a rebuttal challenged by an opposition. Though Father Arroyo embodies queerness when viewed as an outsider, his views pertaining to religion situate him as the conservative binary to Miriam’s spiritual queerness.

Surely additional binaries exist in the novel that challenge queerness, though interrogating the binaries surrounding traditional/untraditional family, heterosexual/homosexual, and Catholic/spiritual sufficiently exposes the contrasting forces working against queerness in the novel. Although primarily theorizing binaries in relation to sexuality, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick deconstructs binary oppositions as subsistent “in a more unsettled and dynamic tacit relation according to which, first, term B is not symmetrical with but subordinated to term A; but, second, the ontologically valorized term A actually depends for its meaning on the simultaneous subsumption and exclusion of term B” (10). That is, the socially constructed norm of term A relies on ostracizing term B for sociopolitical power. In terms of family dynamics, Carole associates the family with embodying patriarchal rules in which the man controls the family. For sexuality, Maria correlates lesbianism to public ostracization that, in turn, may challenge the way she raises her daughter. Father Arroyo, as well, fears transforming his religious views and practice, believing God’s message detests change. These assumptions of normalcy and yearning for power expel queerness, a queerness as represented by Maria’s untraditional views of the family, Carole’s acceptance of her sexuality, and Miriam’s spiritual roots to Poco Seco. Interestingly enough, the characters in the novel are at the same time paradoxically queer and not queer, insider and outsider, depending on the form of identity in question.

As the novel concludes, the characters’ placement within the margins of various binaries is what ultimately entices a future of queerness. Carole, for one, wanders into the desert to face her lions and refuses to cower, claiming, “I wanted to conquer him, not kill him” (Gómez-Vega 191). During these confrontations with the lion, Carole realizes that she must accept her father’s oppressive demeanor as a fault on his own, rather than a fault on men and the family. She further realizes the necessity to transparently express her emotions to Maria for a relationship to develop. During Carole’s revelation in the desert, Maria grasps the importance of publicizing her sexuality, regardless of repercussions, for she realizes the value that Carole brings to her life. Father Arroyo, as well, learns to transform his practice after a heated conversation with Maria in which Maria exposes his oppressive and patriarchal views on female subordination. It is through these confrontations that the characters are exposed for their constricting and often oppressive insecurities that prevent them from embracing change and queerness.

Through an analysis of the characters presented in Gómez-Vega's novel, one may consider the progression of character development as a model for queer futurity. The exemplified futurity, however, disengages from a future of sterile queerness, for such a future would refuse to consider parenthood as a factor when envisioning queerness. As theorized by Lee Edelman, "queerness insists that the drive toward that end, which liberalism refuses to imagine, can never be excluded from the structuring fantasy of the social order itself. The sacralization of the Child thus necessitates the sacrifice of the queer" (28). That is, Edelman speculates on the oppression of queer individuals as a direct response to prioritizing hetero/homo-normative ideologies in the name of the Child. Maria complicates Edelman's vision of a queer future without reproductive concerns by revolutionizing the traditional family. As such, Zemi's presence and acceptance within the community offers a queer futurity proposed by José Esteban Muñoz, a future "that is attentive to the past for the purposes of critiquing the present" (18). Carla Dye agrees, claiming the characters in the novel "meld their past and their present to create a more hopeful future" (53). The critique of the past, however, requires the characters within the community to challenge the conservative ideologies that prevent them from embracing queerness. Muñoz further expresses queerness as an unobtainable ideality that cannot fully achieve its goals. Rather, queerness offers an ideality that should persistently be idolized by others and challenged by stringent oppositions. As a result of the characters' newly discovered ideologies, the queerness embraced in Pozo Seco will always face unheard of oppositions that will continue to challenge queerness, for queerness cannot truly be defined nor fixed.

By creating an environment in which migrant characters of various backgrounds are forced within the confines of a small town surrounded by desert land, Gómez-Vega ultimately suggests that queerness may flourish in unlikely environments, regardless of urban influence. The ideal signs of futurity exemplified at the end of the novel, however, require more than just mere confrontations of opposing ideologies. Sabiha Sorgun claims, "The interaction of a strong and persistent group of females in the novel gives rise to a change in the rest of the community, starting with the official spiritual leader of the Church" (190). Even if this may be true, reading the progressive transformations as a direct result of gender imbalance directs too much attention to gender and not enough attention to power dynamics. As Sedgwick notes, binaries exist to oppress those who reside outside term A's definition of normalcy. Claiming the binary exists between females and males encourages a community that works within patriarchal oppression. Though such a structure exists and is rooted within many parts of the novel, the characters are ultimately challenged by power hierarchies, rather than gender roles. Carole flees from her family due to her urge to resist a controlling father; Maria cowers from her sexuality due to the societal gaze that would belittle her as a woman and mother; Father Arroyo resists transforming the church in fear of losing control over his parish. The problem centers on these characters' urge to consider power as "domination and control over people or things" (hooks 83). By embracing queerness, the characters in the novel transform archaic assumptions of power and ultimately obtain the queer agency and power required to halt their constant migration.

The characters' transformations exemplify an anomaly in which the environment truly exposes the lions engrained deep within their subconscious minds. The town was already on the margins of queerness before Carole's migration, given Miriam has always challenged Father Arroyo's assumptions of religion and the town's heteronormative views of sexuality. However, Carole may be viewed as the conduit for change, for Carole's paradoxical queerness entices various other forms of queerness to overpower constricted views of normalcy. Gómez-Vega therefore pushes against urbanization as the sole origins and placement for queer futurity, and

against the “many narratives of late modern queer urbanity [that] continue to rely on these earlier formations as they conjure a sense of continuity and historical inevitability that helps glue ‘metropolitan’ to ‘queer’ across the decades” (Herring 32). Rather, Gómez-Vega depicts a queer futurity as influenced by identity binaries that challenge the notion of queer urbanization.

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