



# SHAKESPEARE AND LATINIDAD

Edited by Trevor Boffone and Carla Della Gatta

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## Staging Shakespeare for Latinx Identity and Mexican Subjectivity: *Marqués: A Narco Macbeth*

Carla Della Gatta

Eduardo Marqués ushers his wife, Amaranta, into the hospital and begs for help as she is in labour. His wife is taken to the operating room; he checks his cellphone and lights a cigarette. Doña Marqués's offstage screams turn to sobs, and a nurse (wearing scrubs and a painted skull-face) appears with dead baby in arms. A rapid scene change: a group of henchmen, another scream, a man shot in the stomach. The person in charge, David Ibarra, interrogates this bleeding man, then orders him killed. A skull-faced woman walks towards the body of the dead man. He rises, she smears blood on his forehead, and they walk away. Scene change: Marqués and his friend Paco, bare-chested and barefooted, 'their designer shirts [. . .] tied around their heads into makeshift turbans'.<sup>1</sup> As they walk through the desert heat, their exchange remains amiable and teasing. Only when Marqués says 'So foul and fair a day I have not seen'<sup>2</sup> does this play explicitly connect to its source text, Shakespeare's *Macbeth*.

*Marqués: A Narco Macbeth*, by Stephen Richter and Mónica Andrade, adapts Shakespeare's play about an eleventh-century Scottish king, setting it among narcotraficantes in contemporary Mexico. Modern-day drug lords replace Shakespeare's feudal lords, both of them warring figures, emblematic of economic systems that subjugate and harm everyone in their communities. *Marqués* was first mounted by Richter and Andrade in 2016, when they were graduate students at the University of California (UC), Santa Cruz.<sup>3</sup> This bilingual adaptation of a canonised play challenges depictions of Mexican identity and problematises American subjectivity.

Shakespeare is used for outreach and access initiatives, but often his status as the (white) canonised author – representative of coloniality and hegemony – precludes his inclusion as a possible conduit for nuanced and non-stereotyped depictions of Latinx identity. In contrast, when Shakespeare is fully adapted for Latinidad, as in the case of *Marqués*, the production enters the realm of Latinx

Shakespeares, simultaneously serving as both Shakespearean play and Latinx theatre, and integrating the Latinx culture and themes into the Shakespearean story while avoiding cultural stereotypes. In this essay, I utilise both Patricia A. Ybarra's work on the dramaturgies of neoliberalism present in Latinx theatre and Walter Mignolo's application of phagocytosis to interculturalism to illuminate how *Marqués* comments on the (post) colonial violences – economic, political, gendered – of the United States towards Mexico.

### **Adapting *Macbeth* for Latinidad: Latinx Signifiers and the (Un)natural Order**

Loosely historically based, *Macbeth* involves the clashing of feudal lords in Scotland. Unlike many of Shakespeare's other plays, it does not contain racial, cultural, religious or even national division between its primary characters. And yet, in the last one hundred years, it has often been racialised in performance, in part due to references to Blackness in the text. For example, Malcolm, the king's son, says, 'when they shall be opened, black Macbeth / Will seem as pure as snow',<sup>4</sup> associating pejorative ideas of Blackness with an immoral and threatening Macbeth. Ayanna Thompson argues that 'the play's very rhetoric of blood and staining informs – or seeps into – early American racial rhetoric as well'.<sup>5</sup> With themes of literal and figurative darkness, including many scenes set at night, the play invites transposition onto other cultures.<sup>6</sup>

Adaptations of *Macbeth* are many. The play has been transposed to various locales, from Orson Welles's 1936 'Voodoo Macbeth' for the Federal Theatre Project (which involved an all-Black cast and was set in the Caribbean), to the 1970 *Umabatha: The Zulu Macbeth* (part of Lincoln Center Festival in New York), to the 1972 *Black Macbeth* in London (set in Africa), to the 2012 film *Macbeth (The Caribbean Macbeth)* with Blair Underwood, Harry Lennix and Danny Glover, to Akira Kurosawa's *Throne of Blood* (1957), which translated the action to feudal Japan. But it also has been used to explore a gang motif, from Ken Hughes's film *Joe Macbeth* (1955), which depicted Chicago gangs, to William Reilly's film *Men of Respect* (1991), which engaged the Mafia in New York. Sande N. Johnsen's film *Teenage Gang Debs* (1966) involved New York gangs, Vishal Bhardwaj's *Maqbool* (2003) showcased the Mumbai underworld, and Geoffrey Wright's *Macbeth* (2006) depicted gangs in Melbourne.

Richter and Andrade retain the primary elements and order of the *Macbeth* storyline in their adaptation. After winning a battle, Marqués and Paco (Banquo) encounter the three brujas (witches), who prophesy about Marqués's future at the head of the cartel. When David Ibarra (Duncan) rewards Marqués for his bravery and names him Señor de los Cabos, the latter believes the prophecy to be true. He and Doña Marqués kill Ibarra, and Marqués accedes to his place, quickly launching a wave of bloodshed as he attempts to cement his

power. Comandante Mendez (Macduff) learns that his wife and children have been killed, and he joins forces with Ibarra's son Manuel (Malcolm) to kill Marqués. Doña Marqués takes her own life, and Marqués gets killed. The story ends with Marqués beheaded and Manuel belatedly taking his father's place. The bloody and violent tale remains bloody and violent, despite the many changes to characters and play. Set in contemporary Mexico, the play includes Latinx signifiers throughout, from the brujas with skull-painted Day of the Dead faces, to references to Don Julio tequila, Pacifico beer and a home altar. Marqués is a physically smaller man than his Shakespearean predecessor – an architect, not a warrior, who gets involved with violence only due to happenstance when he offers his friend Paco some help. He is humanised and given motivations not found in Shakespeare's script.

*Marqués* foregrounds Mexico and brings the audience into the world of Latinx subjectivity. Latinx Shakespeares are part of American theatre, and the American theatre writ large has a disproportionately small number of plays and productions that centre Mexico.<sup>7</sup> The action takes place mostly in Baja California Sur, shifting from Cabo San Lucas at the southern tip of Baja California by the Sea of Cortez, to Todos Santos and the La Paz ferry station to the north, and Ánimas Bajas to the east. The 'merciless Guaymas' whom Marqués and Paco best in battle at the beginning of the play (the battle that results in the wounded man's story in the second scene and in Ibarra's rewarding of Marqués) are from Sonora.<sup>8</sup> They are outsiders, northerners and mainlanders – but they are Mexican. By not placing Mexico in opposition to the United States, or Latinxs in opposition to whiteness, the play's authors make Latinx subjectivity the story rather than a point of division that forces the audience to identify or objectify opposing sides.

The premiere production of *Marqués* used set design to immerse the audience in the world of the play. The production was staged in the Experimental Theater, a black box theatre at UC Santa Cruz. The stage consisted of two intersecting thrusts so that the audience sat in four segmented quadrants looking up at the actors on stage. As leader, Marqués (like Ibarra before him) spoke directly to the audience, looking and motioning downward to them, exuding an intimate confidence, and never needing to project to distant, elevated spectators. Numerous asides in the text allowed the audience to gain insight into Marqués and empathise with his struggles.

Several devices in the play and the performance fostered audience engagement in the action. In a number of scenes, two female actors wearing pink sweaters and bullet belts stood on the sides of the stage, against the wall. Modern iterations of Shakespeare's First and Second Murderers, they killed Don Julio (the man who betrays David Ibarra and is shot in the stomach in the second scene) and later Banquo, but otherwise their role was largely a detached witnessing of the events onstage. These henchwomen functioned

similarly to a Greek chorus, modelling a moral passivity for the audience and thereby making the audience complicit in the action. Video projections on the two walls of the intersecting thrusts denoted locations and permitted a quick change in setting. *Macbeth* is noted for its fast pace, especially in the first half of the play, and *Marqués* followed suit with rapid scene changes aided by a lack of set pieces.

Both on the page and in performance, *Marqués* made use of several conventions that are common to the theatrical construction of Latinidad: it involved a mostly Latinx cast, all of the characters were bilingual or semi-bilingual, and several signifiers of Latinx culture were invoked. All of these elements worked together to suggest a more holistic – and therefore realistic – subjectivity among the depicted Mexicans. *Marqués* included contemporary English, Shakespearean English, contemporary Spanish, variations of ‘Spanglish’ and a variety of accents spoken by the characters. In addition to spoken language, the soundscape included diverse musical genres with vocals in both English and Spanish, including songs by Shakira, Louis Armstrong, the Eagles, Vicente Fernandez and the Colombian band Grupo Niche, as well as music by French pianist Erik Satie and traditional chamber music.

Along with the aural soundscape that was developed in performance, *Marqués* relies on another primary theatrical signifier of Latinidad: religion. The play uses multiple religious figures to challenge the notion of a singular religion associated with Mexican culture and, in so doing, theatricalises both indigeneity and Catholicism. The home altar of Doña Marqués has an image of the Virgen de Guadalupe, but that is the extent of positive Catholic imagery in the play. Rather, this play focuses on a society that keeps company with the devil. Seyton (Macbeth’s porter) becomes Satán, played in the original production by a female actor in little make-up, khaki pants, a white collared shirt and later a black blazer. Satán has a much larger role in the play than does Seyton in *Macbeth*. Leaning ‘against the guard shack, rolling a joint’, he takes the place of Shakespeare’s Old Man, who talks to Ross (Macbeth’s cousin) outside the castle after the regicide.<sup>9</sup> Satán is porter at the Gates of Hell, and he is both attaché to Marqués and mirror of what Marqués will become, doing drugs and providing them for others. After Marqués views video tapes of Paco and others doing deals behind his back – proof of their disloyalty to him – Satán gives him a vial of concentrated crystal meth that he snorts before hiring the killers to go after Paco and Felipe (Fleance).<sup>10</sup> In the battle at the end, when Marqués knows he will fight to the death, Satán remains with him. They both don bulletproof vests, and they ‘look at one another and smile’.<sup>11</sup> They are in this together. Satán accompanies Marqués as, ‘with a calm finality’, they watch the men coming to attack them.<sup>12</sup>

*Macbeth*’s three witches are the prophets referred to as the ‘weird sisters’ and ‘hags’.<sup>13</sup> They are largely indistinguishable in Shakespeare’s play, although the

First Witch has more lines. In their place, Richter and Andrade offer three witches/brujas. These women chant in Spanish to perform their incantations, but they also speak English. In performance, they were dressed in black with Indigenous Aztec Calavera Catrina-painted faces. Each woman wore black clothes and a black hat rimmed with brightly coloured flowers. Bruja 1 exemplified sexuality, Bruja 2 was blonde, graceful and had animal horns coming out of her hat, and Bruja 3 embodied masculinity, wearing pants and unembellished painted make-up.<sup>14</sup> They were individualised, each with their own style.

By making the three brujas Indigenous and individuated, *Marqués* offers more stage time and diverse representation of Aztec religiosity than Catholicism. In Shakespeare's play, the three witches call on Hecate, the Greek goddess of witchcraft. Here they call on Tonantzin, the Aztec mother goddess, who appears as a 'beautiful woman with bare feet and long hair [that] rises from beneath the sand [. . .] [in] a white flowing linen dress', and they address her as 'mother'.<sup>15</sup> The shift in female authority from a Western goddess of witchcraft to an Indigenous goddess of the earth reinstates the power of Tonantzin, whose temple was destroyed in the Spanish conquest and replaced with a chapel to the Virgen de Guadalupe. In this sense, *Marqués* recovers the importance of indigeneity to Mexican identity.

Another way that *Marqués* complicates the stereotypical representation of Mexican culture for an American audience is its handling of violence. This twenty-first-century adaptation involves less staged violence than does Shakespeare's play, and it displaces and remediates much of the remaining violence. In Shakespeare's play, we see the wife and children of Macduff as their murderers approach, and the scene conveys their fear and knowledge that they will be killed. In *Marqués*, in contrast, Major Burns succinctly states that Mendez's family was 'savagely murdered'.<sup>16</sup> Further, the torture of Ramón and the killing of Don Julio are seen by the audience through prerecorded video. This device displaces the violence from the 'live action' and removes it from the physical stage. Patricia A. Ybarra examines the economic violence of neoliberal policies and concludes that 'Latinx artists' concerns with these conditions in the Americas have encouraged them to develop innovative theatrical modes of representation to address this violence'.<sup>17</sup> The use of video to theatricalise violence in the live theatre, in an adaptation of a violent play, establishes a necessary distance from this representation of Mexican culture. Bruja 3 smears red blood on the forehead of a character to signal death, and Brujas 1 and 2 walk the actor offstage. Although the warring feudal lords are transposed to drug cartels, the adaptation does not devolve into 'gangsploitation'. The drug trade serves as background, not foreground, to the story, and both the violence and the drug trade itself are largely relegated to offstage.

Mexico has always been subordinate in the American conceptualisation



of the world, emblematic of what Walter Mignolo describes as a 'Third World [that] was economically and technologically underdeveloped, with the traditional mentality obscuring the possibility of utilitarian and scientific thinking'.<sup>18</sup> Much of the language and politics around immigration, border detention and anti-Latinx racism in the United States derive from the desire to limit Mexico to an abject Third World position. The Mexico of *Marqués* reveals advanced technology, money, guns and expensive name brands. In its focus on the wealthy elite, *Marqués* counters the perception of Mexico as belonging to the Third World. The story revolves around successful businessmen; Ibarra and his men are dressed with high technology and material signs of wealth, 'in cowboy chic: dark sunglasses, jeans, boots, bluetooth earpieces, black blazers, Rolex watches, and cowboy hats'.<sup>19</sup> *Marqués* is an architect with a seaside palace outfitted with 'White couches, divans, [and] marble tables'.<sup>20</sup> Luxury hotels figure prominently, in both Coronado and Cabo San Lucas, and characters at the Marquis Los Cabos Resort and Spa are described as wearing 'white linen, raw silk, and Tommy Bahama'.<sup>21</sup> Everyone in the play wears expensive clothing, and money is not a concern or even a point of discussion.

Mexican subjectivity dominates, and only towards the end does the play offer an outside vantage point, something with which the audience could identify: the action shifts to San Diego, California. In Shakespeare's play, Macduff and Malcom escape from Scotland to England and there join forces against Macbeth. In *Marqués*, Comandante Mendez escapes to Coronado Island in San Diego, the site of a US military base. The marines chant and run, and Mendez sees Manuel and talks with him of Mexico's beauty. Here, Macduff's 'Bleed, bleed, poor country!'<sup>22</sup> refers not to Scotland but to Mexico. He regrets what has come of it: 'México lindo y querido . . . when will you ever see your wholesome days again?'<sup>23</sup> Just then, a female marine, Major Burns, approaches and speaks to Mendez, mistaking him for a waiter:

MAJOR BURNS: Excuse me . . . señor?

COMANDANTE MENDEZ: Yes?

MAJOR BURNS: A vodka martini, neat.

(Mendez flags down a waiter.)

COMANDANTE MENDEZ: Un vodka martini sin hielo para esta vieja y una Heineken para mi por favor. Keep the change.<sup>24</sup>

In the production, Major Burns was a white American, with a thick southern accent. The waiter that Mendez flagged down was also white, in khakis and a traditional white Havana waiter shirt. Mendez is unfazed by the racism that governs Burns's error, and Burns does not apologise for the mistake. Instead, she tries to recruit Manuel and Mendez to fight against *Marqués*. When

Manuel says that he is not fit to lead, Major Burns replies, ‘Well, hell, son we don’t need no Benito Juarez. We just need someone to play ball. This ain’t about right and wrong. It’s about restoring order, the natural order of things.’<sup>25</sup>

This issue of natural order is at the heart of *Marqués*, just as it is in *Macbeth*. In Shakespeare’s play, natural order is subverted through the non-normative gendered appearance of the witches. The witches play a similar role in *Marqués*, where the natural order is also disrupted by the apparitions who are powerful, beautiful and connected to the earth mother yet live in the municipal dump. Although Marqués immediately greets the sisters as ‘Señoritas’, only after one of them caresses Marqués’s hair does he say, ‘So, you’re women . . . But I don’t care how pretty you are.’ They dance circles around Marqués, upsetting him, and he calls them ‘Malditas güeras mugrosas’.<sup>26</sup> – wicked, fair-headed and filthy. Marqués cannot place them within any traditional standards of femininity, morality or status.

The black magic that Shakespeare’s witches conjure with ‘Double, double, toil and trouble; / Fire burn, and cauldron bubble’<sup>27</sup> is transformed into a segment with erotic male dancers. The action takes place at Club Heat (whose sign would read ‘Heath’ but for a burnt-out final H). Seeking the three witches in order to reaffirm their prophecy, Marqués asks for ‘the three fatal güeras’. The voice behind the door asks, ‘Men or women?’ and Marqués names the latter only to have the door shut in his face. He knocks again and says, ‘I meant . . . men’, and the bouncer permits him to enter.<sup>28</sup> As Marqués enters the club, the song ‘I Can’t Get No Sleep (Insomnia)’ by Faithless plays, alluding to Shakespeare’s theme of ‘Sleep no more!’<sup>29</sup> Inside the swanky nightclub, the güeras – the brujas – stuff large bills into male dancers’ thongs. The bartender brings a bottle of liquor, which the brujas mix with ‘peyote, mescal, y hongos, fermented nine months in the Jalisco sun’,<sup>30</sup> and Marqués drinks the liquid.

Marqués gags, his eyes dilate and he falls into ‘a mescaline-induced stupor’.<sup>31</sup> The apparitions begin to appear: first, a male dancer in a G-string and a Trojan helmet, then another who breakdances, and then another who moonwalks; the brujas tip them well. One apparition does a Pina Bausch-inspired dance.<sup>32</sup> Shakespeare’s Eight Kings become here the Cabo Kings, male dancers in thongs, each wearing a crown on his head. The last king holds a mirror in his hand and is revealed to be Paco, with his still-bloody head.<sup>33</sup> The almost-nude dancers form a male conga line.

The showcase of male exotic dancers disrupts gender expectations. Marqués’s enjoyment of a lap dance from one of them disrupts expectations of sexuality categories, as well as Latinx masculinity. Conversely, the normalising of genderqueer identity amplifies all other instances of gender play and gender subversion in the play. Donalbino, for example, is referenced variously with

both male and female pronouns – as David’s daughter, as Doña Marqués’s ‘favorite godson’ and as ‘Manuel’s Little sister’.<sup>34</sup> Comandante Mendez refers to Donalbino as los Marqués’ ‘new daughter, el niño Donalbino’.<sup>35</sup> Donalbino’s gender fluidity is a priori to the story.<sup>36</sup>

In *Marqués*, the confrontations with things most unnatural – weird sisters, gender play, video truths and violent economic models – all converge when Mendez asks Burns what she means by ‘natural order’. She responds, ‘The way things were before this Marqués stepped in and screwed everything up. He must be stopped gentlemen. People start getting the wrong ideas, next thing you know we got bodies hangin’ over the 405. You understand where this sort of thing leads to.’ The United States, via Major Burns, cares only about the status quo. In a faux extension of empowerment, Burns offers to ‘help’ Mendez and frames the murder of Marqués as obligatory, saying, ‘It is your responsibility to lead your people, son, and we’re gonna help you do it!’<sup>37</sup>

In *Macbeth*, Macduff – who kills Macbeth to avenge his family – possesses the quality that the witches state is necessary to defeat the tyrant: ‘The power of man, for none of woman born / Shall harm Macbeth.’<sup>38</sup> But Mendez does not have a special quality that will save him. And Marqués is more representative of the average man than is Macbeth: the twenty-first-century character ultimately fails because he trusts the system, trusts the United States, and believes in the natural order when he perceives it to be convenient for him. He – like the audience of this play – had thought that Mexico was central, when in fact it is locked into an inferior position vis-à-vis its northern neighbour. This becomes evident in the killing of Marqués. Marqués wounds Mendez in the arm. Mendez kills Satán, and Marqués puts down his gun so that he and Mendez can grapple. The witches enter. Mendez handcuffs Marqués, and Major Burns exclaims, ‘What the hell are you doing, Mendez?’ He responds that he will bring Marqués to justice. She cautions Mendez to step away, then ‘unloads her entire magazine into Mendez’. Marqués awakens and says, ‘I thought the United States was supposed to help the Mexican people.’ Burns replies, ‘We are helping the Mexican people’,<sup>39</sup> and then she shoots Marqués dead. Mendez (Macduff) does not survive the story, and he does not kill Marqués (Macbeth). Burns (the United States) kills them both.

### **Abjection and Indigeneity**

The United States and Mexico have different customs and primary languages, but the mechanisms of retaining order are the same: violence and manipulation. When coercing Mendez and Manuel to aid in killing Marqués, Major Burns says, ‘Hell, everybody has a choice. [. . .] It’s either gonna be bad or worse. It’s up to you.’<sup>40</sup> There is no way out for them. But this attitude has already been absorbed by the narco traffickers. Los Marqués repeat the refrain:

one must 'do a great wrong for the sake of a much greater right'.<sup>41</sup> Doña Marqués says it to him first, about killing Ibarra, and he repeats this phrase to her when referring to his order to execute Paco and Felipe. It even imbues his friendships. For example, Paco and Marqués are close friends (Paco is the only one who addresses Marqués by his nickname, Lalo),<sup>42</sup> yet Marqués still orders his murder. Likewise, los Marqués love and care for Donalbino, yet they do not hesitate to kill her father.

As the audience begins to realise that Mexico is not the subject position within this theatrical tale of economic, political and physical violence, the American abjection of Mexico becomes clear. Indigeneity – most notably represented in the three brujas – is displaced, from a respected position within Mexican culture to an abject position at the hand of American (white) order. The weird sisters are first seen in the municipal dump, where they are described as 'beautiful skull-faced women with wild hair'<sup>43</sup> who play with plastic grocery bags among the manufactured waste.

The brujas come from human-made trash yet worship their Indigenous mother earth; they represent how people have treated the earth, and they are the trash of economic exploitation. Despite the fact that they (like everyone else in the play) are bilingual, those in power question their ability to communicate. Paco speaks to them in English and then, when they don't respond, he says, 'Me entienden?'<sup>44</sup> No one else in the play is queried in such a manner. They have a questionable language, gender and relationship to the earth. They live outside of the city, interact with no one but Marqués and Paco, and remove the dead bodies from the stage.

Yet, later in the play, in the dance club and apparition scene, the brujas integrate into society. Marqués sees both the brujas and the male apparitions in this public place while on the drugs that the brujas give him. The strobe lights intensify and the music blares. Satán appears as the drugs wear off, and when Marqués asks Satán about the güeras, who have exited the stage as the music and drugs began to fade, Satán doesn't understand who he is referring to. But the audience has just seen them, and they are as real as the male apparitions. Their presence in the club, just like the male lap dancers, disrupts the natural order: the integration of precolonial indigeneity into society proves horrific to Marqués and imperceptible to Satán.

Once Americans and the geographic space of the United States are introduced into the play, the brujas lose their power and presence. They speak only one more word, 'No', to protect Marqués from being killed by Major Burns. And they fail.

MAJOR BURNS: This country don't need another revolution, it needs order.

(She walks toward Marqués. The brujas watch her.)

MARQUÉS: Who's [*sic*] order? Yours?

(Burns looks at the brujas and smiles. She looks back at Marqués.)

MAJOR BURNS: Naturally. This thing of darkness I acknowledge mine.

[Points pistol]

MARQUÉS: Güeras malditas . . .

LAS BRUJAS: No!

(The brujas run towards Marqués. HEAR a gunshot.)<sup>45</sup>

Burns uses Prospero's racist slur about Caliban against Marqués, reinforcing legacies of coloniality and violence against people of colour.<sup>46</sup> Even as the white American marine points a gun to his head, Marqués blames the (abject) Indigenous women for his plight.

The brujas, though seen in this moment by white American culture, are powerless to help one of their own community. Although Tonantzin called for peace and to 'Remove this thorn [Marqués]. Restore the state',<sup>47</sup> the brujas scream to protect Marqués from the hands of the Americans who remove him for their own reasons and in their desired manner.

The US government positions Latin America in the same space as the Indigenous brujas, and the movement towards the recognition of Mexican subjecthood threatens gender, economic, political and societal structures. Although Marqués is Mexican, his disgust for and derision towards the brujas stem from his failed interpretation of their prophecy, which he understood as an alternative version of the American Dream. He complies with violent business and subjugation to sustain his well-being. The play exemplifies what Mignolo identifies as phagocytosis: 'precisely that moment in which the reason of the master is absorbed by the slave'.<sup>48</sup> In *Marqués*, the transition of power is disrupted and later restored; the natural order in *Marqués* is not hereditary governance, but regulated neoliberalism that must include both economic and social violence. The characters in *Marqués* cannot escape from this ideology.

### Mediatised Equivocation

Setting the stage for the play that follows is an opening video of Donald Trump on the campaign trail in 2015, announcing his presidential platform by demonising Mexico:

And now they are beating us economically. They are not our friend. [. . .] When Mexico sends its people, they're not sending their best. They're not sending you. They're not sending you. [. . .] They're bringing drugs. They're bringing crime. They're rapists. And some, I assume, are good people.<sup>49</sup>

The segment cuts out and is followed by a black-and-white television clip, in English but with Spanish subtitles, of a woman reading a famous line from *Twelfth Night*: ‘Some are born great, some achieve greatness, and some have greatness thrust upon ’em.’<sup>50</sup> The title slide cuts her off, and the live production begins. The video projections not only establish the setting and maintain a quick pace, they also represent mediated equivocation, a rhetorical device and theme that marks Shakespeare’s *Macbeth*. Here, equivocation – ‘The use of words or expressions that are susceptible of a double signification, with a view to mislead; *esp.* the expression of a virtual falsehood in the form of a proposition which (in order to satisfy the speaker’s conscience) is verbally true’<sup>51</sup> – transposes to the language of the media.

For example, during the party at los Marqués, ‘Lilia [Ibarra’s wife] and Manuel glance across the room at each other, mischievously, then return to their texting.’<sup>52</sup> After everyone wakes to find Ibarra and Lilia murdered, Comandante Mendez’s men discover text messages on Lilia’s phone from Manuel. Manuel flees because he had been having an affair with his step-mother, and he is seemingly implicated in the deaths of his father and her. Technology reveals a truth (the affair) and a lie (the murderer) at the same time.

Further, Marqués learns of Paco’s suspicion of him by watching security camera recordings. He sees Paco give a suitcase of money to Comandante Mendez, and he sees ‘business partners and “friends” making deals and doing business behind his back’. Watching this footage, he feels ‘exhausted and heartbroken’.<sup>53</sup> The surveillance videos become the ocular proof that Marqués needs to authorise the killing of Paco and Felipe, even though Marqués had no actual proof of a threat, and the consequences of Marqués’s command to kill Paco harm him greatly and lead to his own death.

In this way, media serves as a seeming truth-teller, a double-sided news delivery system. Similar to the show opening, with the back-to-back Trump and Shakespeare clips, the opening of the second act juxtaposes video footage of the drug war in Mexico with mariachi-style music. When these lights go out, the videos switch abruptly to a ‘Noticias: Special Report’ news show on the ‘Azteca station’. The three news anchors, one Latina and two white men, show brutal images of hanged people and decapitated heads, all resulting from Marqués’s drug wars. There are two sides to all of these situations, two versions of Mexico projected to the outside public. The Shakespearean rhetorical tool that caused confusion and mistrust becomes the media today, and we clearly see the repercussions of trusting this outlet.

But nobody in *Marqués* can be trusted, which proves the violence necessary to retain the status quo or, rather, the violence *of* the status quo. After Marqués’s death, the audience learns that Lupita, Doña Marqués’s maid, is a member of the CIA. This revelation changes the meaning of an earlier

moment, in which Lupita leaves pills behind for Doña Marqués to kill herself. No longer an act of kindness by a trustworthy companion to relieve her from pain, the gift of the pills is revealed to be a betrayal. Likewise, Ibarra describes Don Julio as 'a man in whom I built an absolute trust',<sup>54</sup> yet Ibarra has slept with multiple women in the latter's family (from his daughter to his grandmother) and then kills him.

The 'natural order' that Major Burns desires and achieves includes the restoration of primogeniture, but only because it is economically better for everyone. The 'natural order' has nothing to do with moral order: Manuel, who ultimately takes Ibarra's place in the cartel, is a sexual predator. He tells Burns:

there is no bottom to my voluptuousness, major, none. There is absolutely no end to my . . . to my sexual desires, me explico? Neither you, your sisters, your daughters, your old women, and your young maids together could not satisfy my lust. My desire would overpower anyone who stood in my way. It would be better for Marqués to rule than someone like me.<sup>55</sup>

But Manuel has exactly the qualifications that the United States seeks in a cartel leader. He is incompetent, more interested in sex than business. Moral corruption is not a disqualifier; indeed, it may even be a prerequisite for the job. Further, in performance, he was played by a white, blond actor with a higher-pitched voice and dressed in a white blazer and bright turquoise shirt. His ethnic outsidership (whiteness) to the majority Latinx cast, coupled with his sexual predator behaviour, conveyed another equivocation of norms, embodied in the actor-character of Manuel. Ybarra discusses how being gay 'is conflated to perform narco-masculinity',<sup>56</sup> and Marqués offers a heterosexual, blond, white predator as the inheritor of the narco business. Manuel, and the genderfluid Donalbino, are the future of the narcotics trade.

Mignolo writes, 'Neoliberalism, with its emphasis on the market and consumption, is not just a question of economy but a new form of civilization.'<sup>57</sup> Drugs are both the product and the means for survival, Marqués's business is the drug trade, and he loses his wife to a prescription pill overdose, while he, Manuel and Satán take illegal drugs that do not appear to permanently harm them. The 'natural order' includes a fraught capitalist consumer system, where violence permeates business transactions, and where consumer culture is anti-subaltern violence.

This new form of civilisation is impossible to escape; one cannot live outside of it. Marqués is an architect who got involved with the cartel 'because I had to be a decent person and pull over to see if you [Paco] were in trouble'.<sup>58</sup> Once he becomes Señor de los Cabos, he realises that he is trapped. He says, 'I must decline and tell David [Ibarra] I cannot accept this. I'm an architect, not a criminal. But if I offend him I am dead. Everyone I care about will be

dead.<sup>59</sup> These fears are exacerbated by a suggestion from Doña Marqués that Ibarra had her father killed. But it is not just the fear of death that motivates him to kill Ibarra; he is also driven by jealousy, after he sees Ibarra give Doña Marqués a piece of diamond jewellery and try to fondle her.

As an architect, Marqués does not have (or know how to wield) the weapons of a warrior. He looks at a block of knives on the bar at the party and says, 'Is this a dagger I see before me, the handle toward my hand?'<sup>60</sup> In the scenes with his wife, he is humanised, portrayed as a good and decent husband. We see his pain in the opening scene when his wife is in labour and then loses the baby; and when los Marqués greet each other, they always do so with love. When Marqués plots to kill Paco and Felipe, he doesn't tell Doña Marqués his plans: 'Be innocent of the knowledge, mi amor.'<sup>61</sup> He attempts to protect his wife, not just from violence but also from knowledge of the violence he must commit in order to maintain their lives.

There are no heroes in *Macbeth*. And despite the humanising of Marqués, this adaptation takes soullessness one step further through the character of Doña Marqués. When she kneels to pray at her home altar before the arrival of Ibarra and her husband, 'she turns the statue of the virgin [of Guadalupe] away and instead addresses the photo of her father, "Papá . . . ayúdame, por favor. . . . Give me the strength to be like you tonight, to do a great wrong for the sake of a much greater right."<sup>62</sup> According to Ybarra, in Latinx plays about narcotraficantes, women typically function as the moral centre of the play.<sup>63</sup> Major Burns is racist and a killer, Lupita is a double agent and killer, and Doña Marqués, also a killer, does not embody nor look to a moral or spiritual guide. She does not pray to the Virgen or interact with the brujas or Satán. She has no relationship to the earth or religion, and she is never seen outside of her home. She prays to her father, who was killed as part of the same violent system. The deaths in *Marqués* serve to maintain an economic system that dehumanises people south of the American border, an economic system that depends on that subjugation to maintain a dominant subject position. This superiority is (white) supremacy and cousin to the economic superiority that results (and requires) compliance and death of people of colour.

Just like the feudalistic *Macbeth*, *Marqués* – with its violent hyper-capitalism as natural order – offers no redemption in the end. Advancements in technology do not further knowledge or public happiness if they are not rooted in ethics, morals or humanity. What *Marqués* showcases is that everything crosses borders and languages, from Shakespeare to violence to coloniality to culture. The first time David greets Marqués, he says, 'Welcome to the Hotel California, compadre.' Marqués responds, 'It's a lovely place', and David 'roars with laughter' and continues the verse.<sup>64</sup> The song, by the American band The Eagles, reflects the high life of Los Angeles in the 1960s and 1970s. But the characters sing it at the hotel of the same name in Todos Santos,



Mexico, founded in 1947 by a Chinese immigrant. Mignolo argues that ‘coloniality is the logic of domination in the modern/colonial world’, and that this logic persists beyond the context at hand, whether the ‘imperial/colonial country’ is England or Spain or (now) the United States.<sup>65</sup> Just as Mr Wong, the Chinese immigrant who founded the Hotel California, changed his name to Don Antonio Tabasco to fit into the Mexican culture around him,<sup>66</sup> culture adapts and crosses borders when capitalism and profit can find a home.

According to Patricia A. Ybarra,

Latinx writers’ most recent foray into intellectual transnationalism has sometimes come with what for some critics and readers is a more difficult intervention into U.S. dramaturgy: the choice to interrogate, deemphasise and/or dispense with U.S. liberal subject formation as the primary mode with which to narrate Latinx experience and identity.<sup>67</sup>

We see these processes at play in *Marqués*, which ends with Major Burns pulling in everyone alive (and Marqués’s decapitated head) for a selfie:

(Major Burns attaches her iPhone to a selfie stick then squeezes in with the group.) Come on, closer . . . One . . . two . . . (The camera clicks. Projection of the picture overhead. Shakira’s ‘La Despedida’ plays.) LIGHTS FADE.<sup>68</sup>

Here, the displaced media image conveys a positive outcome, despite the decapitation, multiple killings, and an incompetent leader put into power. As Latinx theatre, *Marqués* critiques the political and economic systems of oppression and of the points of positionality, including both the United States’ and Mexico’s active roles and complicity in it. Ybarra argues, ‘we are evinced to act as neoliberal subjects not only in our actions in response to the employment conditions and shifts in social welfare policy, but in all aspects of our lives, including through our quotidian utterances and practices’.<sup>69</sup> The last spoken words we hear are those of Major Burns, the dominant, English-speaking, southern-inflected marine. The last sounds we hear are the click of the camera, distancing the audience from the violence we just witnessed. The last music is by the Colombian singer Shakira, a song she composed for the 2007 film adaptation of Gabriel García Márquez’s *Love in the Time of Cholera*. The song and the story it lyricises are about loss. The final words are these in Spanish, ‘No hay más vida, no hay . . .’<sup>70</sup>

## Notes

1. Stephen Richter and Mónica Andrade, *Marqués: A Narco Macbeth* (CreateSpace, 2016), 14. All citations of *Marqués* are from this script,

- and references to the production are from the filmed version of the stage production directed by Erik Pearson at the University of California, Santa Cruz, in 2016.
2. Richter and Andrade, *Marqués*, 16.
  3. Richter and Andrade also adapted *Oedipus at Colonus* as *Dos(e): A Neo Noir for the Stage* (2015), and Richter adapted *Medea* as *Maria, a Telenovela for the Stage* (2015). Richter's *Moore: A Pacific Island Othello* (written under the name Kepano Luna Kanawai Richter) is forthcoming in 2020. Andrade is an award-winning film-maker.
  4. William Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, in *The Norton Shakespeare*, 3rd edn, ed. Stephen Greenblatt, Walter Cohen, Suzanne Gossett, Jean E. Howard, Katharine Eisaman Maus and Gordon McMullan (New York: W. W. Norton, 2016), IV.iii.52–3.
  5. Ayanna Thompson, 'What Is a "Weyward" *Macbeth*?' in *Weyward Macbeth: Intersections of Race and Performance*, ed. Scott L. Newstok and Ayanna Thompson (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 4.
  6. See Newstok and Thompson's *Weyward Macbeth* for a thorough discussion of this topic.
  7. *The Bad Man* (1920) by Porter Emerson Browne, *The Night of the Iguana* (1961) by Tennessee Williams and *La Turista* (1967) by Sam Shephard all feature American characters in a Mexican setting. More recently, a few Latinx playwrights have featured Mexican characters and set the action in Mexico. These include *Nowhere on the Border* (Carlos Lacamara, 2005), *El Nogalar* (Tanya Saracho, 2017) and *Into the Beautiful North* (Karen Zacarías, 2017).
  8. Richter and Andrade, *Marqués*, 11.
  9. *Ibid.* 51.
  10. *Ibid.* 62.
  11. *Ibid.* 99.
  12. *Ibid.* 100.
  13. In the First Folio, 'weird sisters' is instead 'wayward sisters' (Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, I.iii.33).
  14. Elysia Summer Mandolin Ellis, 'The Eternal *Macbeth*: A Tale of Wicked Transformation', MA thesis, University of California, Santa Cruz, 2016, 29–37.
  15. Richter and Andrade, *Marqués*, 77, 78.
  16. *Ibid.* 90.
  17. Patricia A. Ybarra, *Latinx Theater in the Times of Neoliberalism* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2018), x.
  18. Walter D. Mignolo, *Local Histories / Global Designs: Coloniality, Subaltern Knowledges, and Border Thinking* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000), 113.

19. Richter and Andrade, *Marqués*, 10.
20. Ibid. 57.
21. Ibid. 58.
22. Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, IV.iii.31.
23. Richter and Andrade, *Marqués*, 87.
24. Ibid. 87–8. ‘A vodka martini without ice for this old lady and a Heineken for me please’ (All translations my own).
25. Ibid. 88.
26. Ibid. 19, 20, 21.
27. Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, IV.i.10–11.
28. Richter and Andrade, *Marqués*, 79, 80.
29. Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, II.ii.38, 44, 47.
30. Richter and Andrade, *Marqués*, 81.
31. Ibid. 82.
32. Ibid. 83.
33. Ibid. 85.
34. Ibid. 31, 33, 34, 94.
35. Ibid. 52.
36. In performance, the role was played by Emiliano Montoya, an actor with shoulder-length hair.
37. Richter and Andrade, *Marqués*, 88, 89.
38. Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, IV.i.79–80.
39. Richter and Andrade, *Marqués*, 102.
40. Ibid. 89.
41. Ibid. 31, 67.
42. Ibid. 14, 39.
43. Ibid. 17.
44. Ibid. 19. ‘Do you understand me?’
45. Ibid. 103.
46. ‘this thing of darkness I / Acknowledge mine’, *The Tempest*, V.i.278–9.
47. Richter and Andrade, *Marqués*, 79.
48. Mignolo, *Local Histories*, 157.
49. Donald Trump, presidential announcement speech, 16 June 2015, Trump Tower, New York.
50. Shakespeare, *Twelfth Night*, in *The Norton Shakespeare*, 3rd edn, II.v.126–8.
51. *OED*, s.v. ‘equivocation’, 2a (accessed 11 May 2020).
52. Richter and Andrade, *Marqués*, 34.
53. Ibid. 61.
54. Ibid. 26.
55. Ibid. 89.
56. Ybarra, *Latinx Theater*, 158.
57. Mignolo, *Local Histories*, 22.

58. Richter and Andrade, *Marqués*, 16.
59. Ibid. 24.
60. Ibid. 42.
61. Ibid. 66.
62. Ibid. 31. 'ayúdame, por favor': 'help me, please'.
63. Ybarra, *Latinx Theater*, 149.
64. Richter and Andrade, *Marqués*, 26.
65. Mignolo, *Local Histories*, 7.
66. 'History', Hotel California Baja, [www.hotelcaliforniabaja.com](http://www.hotelcaliforniabaja.com) (last accessed 11 November 2020). Since 2001, the Hotel California has been owned by a Canadian couple.
67. Ybarra, *Latinx Theater*, 11.
68. Richter and Andrade, *Marqués*, 104.
69. Ybarra, *Latinx Theater*, 5.
70. Shakira and Pedro Aznar, 'La Despedida' (Epic Records, 2007). 'There is no more life, there is . . .'