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LATINA CRITICAL FEMINISM

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Preface

What is the Journal of Latina Critical Feminism?

The journal will provide a voice for the articulation of feminist and social justice concerns from a Latina perspective, broadly construed to include Latinas in the U.S., Latin America, and other countries.

The journal will be an online, open access, blind peer-reviewed academic journal that will include narrative and poetic entries as legitimate forms of scholarly feminist analyses.

The basic normative commitment of the journal is to expand the analysis of the ways gender relates to social justice in its multiple forms, including a critical examination of intersectionality, the role that men and women play in oppressing animals and the earth, and the complex connections between minority cultures and the oppression of women.

We particularly encourage submissions that draw from our indigenous values, norms, and perspectives to articulate views of sociopolitical, economic, and natural environments that promote the mutual well-being of human and nonhuman species.

The journal wants to explore the social justice implications of different forms of gender and sexual identification, including gay, lesbian, transgender, pansexual, bisexual, and other forms of sexual identity.

The journal welcomes articles that discuss ways in which feminist struggles can be systematically integrated with broader social justice issues. In particular, we believe that to achieve its true potential as a revolutionary transformational force it is important for feminism to support a planetary ethic that expresses moral concern for all inhabitants of the earth community, understood in intergenerational terms.

We construe feminism broadly to include gender analyses that examine the ways men, particularly minority men, can be oppressed by patriarchy.

Articles should as far as possible use language that is understandable and accessible to wide audiences and avoid obscurantist and convoluted terminology that conveys a false sense of profundity. Also, the journal will include poetry, experiential narrative accounts, and other forms of creative expression.

Perhaps most of all, the journal will strive to exemplify the highest standards of intellectual and moral integrity and fairness. We believe that the true potential of feminism will never be realized unless these ideals are fully embraced and implemented.
Poetry
Touring 3535 San Fernando Street, 60 years later

By Carmen Tafolla

thirty-five thirty-five San Fernando Street
has lost its pecan trees,
the juicy plums in the backyard, the tiny
phone stand cut into
the wall like a miniature arched grotto
   or a tragic retablo whose tears are hidden
   in the telephone wires

thirty-five thirty-five San Fernando Street
has lost its loose-standing garage
at the end of the driveway
where I hid in the evening darkness
reaching for calling out to
   the defenseless alley cats
   that hid under its tool shed
   electric with fright

thirty-five thirty-five San Fernando Street
has lost its terror in the night
the echo of a man’s footsteps growing closer to my room
the sweat in the static air between windows
open for cross-ventilation
where there was none

thirty-five thirty-five San Fernando street
has lost the suffocating smallness of its walls,
has lost the pale and virgin roots of yard grass,
the voices of the small fruit
plucked and stolen before their time,
the ancestral line of its alley cats,
and all of its original inhabitants except me
its only survivor

And I have lost all my baby teeth
both the smooth ones, of the body
and, more difficult to extract,
those chipped silent lost
from the spirit
Talking the Fire Out

By Carmen Tafolla

You were only a boy
in an overcrowded run-down school in the South
when the child beside you fell
against the sizzling black iron
of the open stove

Your eyes absorbed the coal white ash of his skin
the screams of his burning leg
the eyes of classmates breathless with terror
as the teacher sent for The Root Lady
the only magic they could afford

You watched this shaman of roots and spirits
lean in close, talk the fire out of his leg
out of the blooming, now-oozing blisters
out of the charred dying flesh
suck the heat of it out with guided whispers
root salve love until life returned
and slowly released
the fire

Years later your haunted eyes,
still bearing presence of that moment,
came, called by who knows whom,
and talked the fire out of my leg
out of my scorched lungs, my loss-weary gut
out of the screaming hot blisters of my heart,
    my charred flesh of memory,
    the hot white ash of the dry well in my eyes
sucked it  pulled it  convinced it  out
with guided whispers  love  root salve
until life  returned
the healing  going deep
into the heart of the bone
beyond where words
can whisper
How Will We Say Goodbye?
By Carmen Tafolla

-a love poem to my right breast-

What hue of light what shrug of breeze
will kiss the final moment shared by you and I?
Will long-remembered path to despedida be
guillotine swift? Or petal-soft release of fingertip embrace?

Will I close my eyes to night not knowing if they’ll
touch you when they open to the light?
Will I submit, all draped in sanitary greens
and waiting for the mask of gaseous fog,
the ice white bed and walls in echoed rows
accosting me, a stiff clipboard and alien pen
awaiting my forced mark, permission
to remove you with a knife?

Will I escape the institution’s grip,
walk sunny gardens’ promises, herbs, wholeness,
rays of healing re-instructing growth and purpose,
while I watch the tumor grow, distort you,
shape distressed, angry red malignancy
threatening to break through the skin, explode?

Will I defend you? Bind myself to you
till you abduct me through the very gates of death?
Will I abandon you, discard you, seek to replace you?
Will I acknowledge you, beleaguered, biopsied, beset by treatments,
poisons, rays, and shrunken into nothingness?

Will I enshrine you redefined by scars, transformed
to blessed icon of warrior shield, survival’s mark on me?
A shriveled dove wing shyly curled into the heart,
broken from the beautymold of standards and
conventions, of healthy twin, of matching anything?
Embrace you? Strange and changing, through this
baptism-immersion of chemo poisonbaths and knives,
you invisible, a part of me forever, and I of you,
a brave duality emerging from your presence,
as I rise like Aztec warrior rising with the sun
symbol of life-death, soft-strong, mother-father
Ometecuhtli and Omecihuatl, One.

On one side, breast a soft and nursing Giver, curving out.
On other, hard chestwall Warrior, protecting, curving in.
Together – mutual, complete, a new and dual being
blessed by non-symmetry. Our life an everchanging path
which we travel together, transforming,
shapeshifting, repurposing, redefining.
No limits, no normal, nothing missing, nothing lost.
Not goodbye at all,
but movement forward to new territories never traveled,
new hues and faces, forms and forces,
etheric spirit glowing firm
that no knife
    no measurement or shape
    no cancer, ray, or chemical
    can ever even threaten to
    remove.

-Carmen Tafolla, April 2013
Time imprints your body. 
Earth, this goodness, the world, 
but our roots remain inside the caves. 
Fragrance of candlewax 
and a diminishing fire, 
this is our loneliness, our origin, \textit{x-ixik}.

\textit{x-ixik} - woman

Jiñi tyamlel mi ijoχ’ majlel abäk’tyal, 
jiñi lakña’ lum jiñách iweñlel, jiñách lakpañumil. 
Iyejtyal tsa’bá käle tyi imal ch’eñ 
lotyol icha’añ iyujts’il pom 
yik’oty ixuch’il ŋichim, 
Jiñách lakbajñelil, jiñách lakajñib. X-ixik.
Coffee

By Juana Peñate Montejo

Your aroma beckons my mouth as I drink. Depth, darkness excites me. With each sip, my body fills, I was born to you.

I speak to you, my intoxicator, and stay with you in the heart of this wild land.

Awujts’il

By Juana Peñate Montejo

Atsajakñäyel mi ipäy ktyi’ cha’añ mi kjapety, awik’yuläñlel yik’oty ayulkñäyel mi ityikwesañ kbäk’tyal, tyi jujuñjajp mi ilajmäktymbeñoñ pejyelel kbäk’tyal mi iñumel k’äläl tyi imalil kcha’añbä.

Che’ mi kpejkañety, kajpe’, muk’bä iyäk-esañoñ, tsa’ k’otyiyoñ tyi atyojlel i tsa’ käleyoñ tyi juñyajlel tyi apusik’al matye’lum.
Your Birth
By Juana Peñate Montejo

The sky painted itself white.
My heart welcomed you
between pain and numbness,
tears fell from my distant eyes.
I didn’t recognize myself,
only saw you, touched you, enjoyed you.
I showed you to Ch’ujutyaty.
He held your small body.
Ch’ujutyaty blessed your spirit,
and since then, He has watched over you.

Ch’ujutyaty – sacred father

Che’ tsa’ awila pañumil
By Juana Peñate Montejo

Che’ tsa’ awila pañumil, aläl, tsa’ iboño ibä pañchañ tyi säsäk.
Ibajñelbä kpusik’al tsa’ ich’ämäyety,
tyi jk’uxel yik’oty jseñlel
tsä’ yajli iya’lel kwuty ñajtybä añ,
ma’añik tsa’ jkäñ kaña kbä,
tsä’ jk’elelyety, tsä’ ktyäläyety, tsä’ ktyiijikñesa kbä tyi atyojlel,
tsä’ kpäsäyety tyi lakch’ujutyaty,
Ch’ujutyaty tsa’ imek’e awalä bëk’tyal
Ch’ujutyaty tsa’ imoso ach’ujlel,
k’äläl che’ jiñi, Ch’ujutyaty mi ikañ iwuty.

Poetry by Juana Peñate Montejo, translated from the Ch’ol by Carol Rose Little and Charlotte Friedman. The Ch’ol poems originally appeared in Ch’ol and Spanish in the collection *Ipusik’al Matye’ lum* by Juana Peñate Montejo, published by Pluralia in 2013.
THE CARRIERS OF SHAME

By Violeta Orozco

I’ve known rivers ancient as the world and older than the flow of human blood in human veins.
My soul has grown deep like the rivers.

Langston Hughes

For so long I’d been looking for some small form of pride — just enough to stay alive — refuse to vanish into shame’s purple furnace,

the kind felt in the skin
a whining tone of a voice,
a voice like a wounded body

where you can draw your fingers over scars and craters tattoos and scabs when I closed my eyes

I flowed the wounded lilt of a mourning song — a dying river petering out into empty margins.
I felt ashamed to touch it

touch her with my voice I realized she was my mirror trying to hide behind the rocks and leaves her dry and starving bones dragging

along behind her we were the ones who carried shame across the continents women untethered to the source

of a love they rained upon unquenching shores, spilling it on stunted men too enraged to realize how much we lost in giving

them who did not give back el árbol de limones shriveling till its bark turned black tiny and waterless limes dropping off the thirsty tree unable to supply water to itself.

I used to be ashamed to love a woman that did not love herself. My mother cradled her mother’s deafness
her fear of being unheard, abuela’s voice a human void
gaping beside her mouth opening and closing
a choking fish gasping for water in a sea of sounds
drowning in the droning hum maybe her deafness stood
for the long line of unheard women trudging behind her
surviving with senses halved shielding themselves
by shutting down their touch
now numb to bodies that might hurt them.
With weary feet we crossed into the territory

of the perpetual enemy, closing our eyes
for fear of being hit by a stronger force,
our bodies at war with ourselves in a country at war with us.

She passed away on her eightieth birthday, refused to speak
to her daughter one month before she died,
withheld her final say, a mother who had barely spoken
to her daughters, her messages carried by the male sibling,
shadow-bearer Tezcatlipoca connecting Mictlán’s underworld
to three sisters mired in swamps of silence.

Sometimes I hear her groan as one would know a song
distorted by a record
and I wonder how many of us

have been distorted into shame
our pain flooding into every corner we touch
overflowing into the chambers

allotted to rejoice, forgetting
we had once known the contagious songs of bliss
ringing inside our full chest, strong-skulled, flood-tongued.

What will it take to remember
the strength of our limbs and loins? The sleek
and youthful movements of dance?

Remember,
we were once deep rivers
carrying deep joy.
SHORTLIVED LOVE

By Violeta Orozco

It’s alright, girl
if they don’t all bloom
   all the flowers
you bought at the market
   in the summer
thinking they would stay
   toward the fall.

Some of them
   are still alive.
Let them live, unhindered
   by the death of the others.

   Let the others quietly wither
      in their corner
   brush away their brown remnants
      a testimony
of their fallen bodies.
      There are no graves for this.

Only the soil
   recycling the dead
matter
molecule to molecule
   leaf to leaf.

Accept their failed struggle
   like yours
is an indicator
   of the naked beauty
of their short lives.

      Know that you gave it enough water
know that you gave it enough light.
The following are poems that are part of a series that speak to human trafficking.

Hidden

By Araceli Esparza

Her first
Then me,
We played with our new plumage
While our parents perched
Who let who run through the fence, I don’t remember.
But when we saw the lost snowflake float away
And we followed,
the wolves chased us far
from the perching, far from our parents
That’s when we began
And we held our breath and flew.
Chirp

By Araceli Esparza

We didn’t have parents anymore we had wolves
We looked at each other and saw little reflections of memories of what our parents looked like.
We saw love in each other’s faces
Eyes, beaks, feathered bodies, with human shaped bodies legs, and arms, hands and feet, but that
is where the similarities ended
We also saw things that made us turn in silence
Like the Left side of him, when he traded us
Like Right side of him, when he collected us
Him the wolf
Us his most prettiest things
We don’t like pretty
We like songs that we sing between
Breath
And
Breast
In each other’s feathered arms
Hum-Pedro-Hum

By Gabriella Gutiérrez y Muhs

(For, about, because of…Pedro Martin, Watsonville farmworker for 40+ years)

There are mountains in his nails, the earth shaped his fingerprints.
He grew corn on the side, of the strawberry milpa, frijoles, calabaza, y todo.
His father is 90-99-100-103, in the old pick up truck next to him.
He serves Don Alejandro avena for breakfast with strawberries
Washed with the potable water in milk cartons, all the workers bring from home.
Eat the gorditas Mercedes, the mother of ten prepared for them, tamales in plantain leaves, for
Don Alex to remember he is surrounded by the smell of bananas, at home.

In the afternoon, after he wakes up he inquires:
One hundred mouths to respond, “aquí con nosotros,” “aquí con Ud.”

All the young workers keep an eye on the Mexican revolucionario, who fought to have his son,
the crop sharer, Pedro, grow berries for a million hungry, dry mouths: French mouths, Belgian
mouths, ungrateful mouths, Safeway mouths, US mouths and mouths at the Salvation Army,
mouths in migrant camps making agua de fresa, water with the strawberries.

He engendered people to defend, teach, heal, feed, write about, draw, fix TV’s, patch walls,
police, build houses, sell houses, paint, serve in the Army and the Navy, sell vegetables and
fruits, collect money, report, keep an office, sing as a zoo keeper, smile…

Pedro hums an old Javier Solis song: “Payaso,” on the radio, to which all the women in the fields
sigh, and they all remember they are not machines.
Desserts or deserts?

By Gabriella Gutiérrez y Muhs

I have been to deserts of more than me.

I have been to the deserts of my own continents of misery.
No ce n’est pas la chanson des Misérables que je chante.
No es la canción de los Miserables que canto.
Autour des invalids qui peuvent encore chanter.
Alrededor de los invalidos que todaví puedan cantar.
C’est peut-être que le soleil du midi nous rend aveugles.
It’s probably the mid day sun that renders us blind.
L’Afrique nous attend avec sa clarité, son elegance, qui n’est pas encore
Africa nos espera con su claridad, su elegancia, que todavía no se recoge.
ramasé.

Nous ne mangerons pas les serpents du future
We will not eat the serpents of the future

Les deserts que j’ai touvé sont pas encore glorifiés,
Si le Chihuahua ou Desert de Sonora était en Inglaterre,
Alors là, on les aurai déjà domestiqué.
If the Sonora or Chihuahua deserts were in England,
Oh there, they would have been already domesticated.
Quand je dis désert, je ne veux pas dire qui sert le dessert?
Non, je ne veux pas rémouer ce mousse qui me taquine.

Le Colorado Plateau, Mojave, Columbia Plateau m’attendent
Atacama, Death Valley, Gredat Basin, Patagonie, m’attendent
La memoire c’est come un corps d’eau dans le quel on plonge
chaque jour, sans écrire le jour ou le minute qui nous donnerá ce corps d’eau.
La memoria es como un cuerpo de agua en el cual uno se echa un clavado
todos los días, sin escribir el día o el minuto que nos dará ese cuerpo de agua.
Comme si on allait en reverse dans un camion lourd, qui te péremet
seulement d’aller en arrière plus lentement que d’attraper le future.
As if we were reversing on a heavy semi truck, which allows you
only to go backwards slowly than to trap the future.

Je m’excuse, les cochemars n’ont pas fini.
Me disculpo, las pesadillas no han terminado.
Gravel

By Stephanie N. Rodriguez

I remember the laughter
how everyone walked past me
like currents around a stone.

Words barred behind clenched teeth
as I picked out the gravel
from my bloodied knees.

I remember staring at you,
your white teeth glistening
as you looked down at me and said

Spic.

Do you remember?

I walked home, slowly, but I got there.
Blood dripping down my pale legs
soaking into cotton socks under the summer sun.

My skinned knees pressing together like accordions
then stretching wide with each step beads
of sweat burning the raw, pink skin underneath.
Nocturne

By Stephanie N. Rodriguez

we women want worship
these whispering tongues pant
drunk on delirious death
a symphony of sweat and shadow
goddesses reveling in the
moonlight lake mist rising to
settle upon our skin

we promenade nocturnal
footpaths unencumbered
eyes electric like fireflies
inhaling stardust and luna
scales as they flutter past
sashay in starlight smiles
unfurling like luminescent

trumpets reflecting moonshine
these bell-shaped angels
evening primrose
nocturnum and
tiarella spiked
waxy petals brilliant
beneath a waxing moon

unbuttoned bouquets
of essence trailing
jasmine and citrus
auras floating untethered
fingers and faces sticky
with nectar powdered
golden with pollen

we are night sphinx
free-tailed broad-
feathered elytra
unfolding to reveal
iridescent wings
ascending into nighttide
unburdened and unafraid
Madre de humanos

By Adela McKay

Madre no solo estás en el cielo
estás en los mares,
en la lava del volcán más tenebroso.
Por encima de los cielos invisibles y tangibles.
En el desierto en calma,
y en la jungla que arrasa.

Madre, con tus dulces palabras
te muestras hablando distintas lenguas.
Te transformas en alguna de tus mil figuras
eligiendo alguno de tus nombres
para que sin temor y sin duda
tu palabra prevalezca.

Tonantzin, virgen María, madre de Dios y la naturaleza,
eres la misma para quien te invoca,
femenina, poderosa y polígloga.
El mundo te confunde con fragilidad y estereotipos,
sin saber que la suavidad no existe sin la dureza,
Y es tu amor, lección de vida, feminismo y fortaleza.

Es la búsqueda del espíritu lo que nos aguarda.
Nos mantiene conscientes
para encontrar el inconsciente,
el inconsciente que se forma de un contenido,
encontrado mas nunca perdido.

Y en la búsqueda hay cruces que representan el sacrificio de estar vivo.
En la búsqueda hay tormenta, hay guerras, hay caminos.
En la búsqueda hay ladrones de oro, de cultura, de vidas.

En la búsqueda encontramos una historia
dividida en dos seres hermanos,
y sin saber cuál nos antecede
nos vamos quedando con los brazos abiertos,
los ojos abiertos, los poros abiertos,
para inesperadamente, verte, reflejada en el espejo.
Communion

By Esperanza Cintrón

because of Alice Walker who entertains gods
and 12 insufferable months
as a subscriber to Newsweek

God is
in Michael Jackson
who mirrors the world
as he fades to white
wearing a dollar sign
at his throat
Kneeling before the shrine of Disney
he makes the sign of the cross
against his hairless chest
to ward off
the impending aura
of the artist formerly known as Prince,
sexuality in a little red bottle
Twitching, it belies republican repression
pussy control and the death of Miles
The castrato rises
he peers back at us
issuing a sweet soprano
the sound of our shame
recalling a small brown boy
as a complicit hand moves to conceal
the throat’s apple
rescinding his innocence

(refrain to be read in chorus)
God is a small black child
timidly pulling at the preacher’s coattail
his plaintive voice a whisper

God is
in Coltrane’s saxophone
Naima ommm
the notes float high overhead
communing with souls, alive and beyond
determined to cast out the incubus
before it can pass
its nocuous consciousness
on to the next century
blood sucking little demon
the image of Chupacabra
another creation of the CDC
gone awry, again
like Sam, stove-pipe and striped pants,
hobbled,
yet, still wanting you
to cleanse the world
in the name of Goebbels,
father of the modern media,
keeper of the capital flame
that consumes all who deny
the piety of its pagan lore
Naima ommm,
the infidel’s chords hover,
a fine mist that becomes a storm
seeking its own truth

(refrain to be read in chorus)
God is a small black child
timidly pulling at the preacher’s coattail
his plaintive voice a whisper

God is
in Mahalia’s throat
the rough grit and country grime
a melody of survival
Balm to sun-blackened souls
Ibo and Yoruba children
those who followed the river
and spoke through the drum
A songbath for callused hands
and ashen feet
rejoicing at the possibilities
beyond the refrain
Lulling would-be Nat Turner’s
with satin clouds, spoonfuls of ambrosia
and cathartic rhythms that expel ghosts
promising those so touched
the privileges of the chosen
Singing for the master
like the missionaries
who meant well
in delivering so many sheep
to the sword wielding conquistadors
Yet, like low-tide on a warm beach,
the Red Sea in summer,
the voice caresses the flesh,
becomes one with the blood
and seeps into the marrow.

(refrain to be read in chorus)
God is a small black child
timidly pulling at the preacher’s coattail
his plaintive voice a whisper

God is
in the sweet
low down voice of
The Artist as he issues
the blues and resonates
the ear splitting heart
twang of a Hendrix guitar
and he sang
“Rock me baby, rock me
all night long,”
in that slow, sexy
desolate way
that would have made
Elvis cry
dreams of being
a black man
chained and free
breathing dried twigs,
stale air & sweat drips
into an intravenous tube
the chart at the foot
of the bed reads:
critical,
but still beautiful
and Chaka croons
“I will love you anyway,”
like the flutter of butterfly wings

God is a small black child
timidly pulling at the preacher's coattail
his plaintive voice a whisper
Nerves of Snakes, 1506

By Irene Villaseñor

My Lord,

they judge

and go naked.

Light but strong
Indians who live there do not serve as slaves, but
Our people took their arrows this canoe

the island.

A great number of Indians,
came to a plain,
covered with serpents and snakes and dragons, it was
marvellous a very
wonderful thing larger than a cachalote.

Intersected by a mountain, to the north to the south
these Indians pass those poisonous animals
the whole of that side.

Many houses, many Indians do them honour, they
previously predicted

life eternal.²

Watching Amá Make Buñuelos

By Estella Gonzalez

“Christmas is for the babies” Amá says
pouring hot, liquid manteca into a glass bowl filled with flour.
Her tender palms, calloused with factory work,
start an avalanche that rolls into the hot pool of fat.

Grainy sludge oozes gray through latticed fingers,
while one hand grips the rim of a golden glass bowl,
a cradle for oranges, bananas and mangoes.
Today, the bowl births buñuelos, Christmas
treats, on the Formica table with its blonde wood veneer.
Amá sprinkles a light snow of flour before slapping
down the dough’s bottom, fingers dent its smooth skin—
hard hands rip the dough into four baby balls.

She powders each face, gently, before
slapping their cheeks flat with outstretched palm.
Amá’s brown fingers stretch out the dough
like a spring coil—

Each finger massages, leaving shallow dimples.
Whenever Amá fists the soft bolita, it crawls away,
a little, before pulling back, slapped and distended.
By now Amá’s mouth curves down, an upside down U—

heavy grunts escape, as a baby tortilla forms
with gasps of lard and enriched flour breaths.
Another bolita grows wide and thin with each
spin of the rolling pin, with each rotation.

Amá scoops chunks of lard from the red and white
box, plunking white clumps into a yellow skillet
roasting on blue flames. Amá dunks the thin circles of dough in-
side a scalding oil bath—blistering, popping, browning.

Like a partera with forceps, Amá delicately tongs, rotates each disk,
pulls, then stacks gently onto a nest of white towels.
Still oily, their faces soak up her sugared cinnamon.
I snatch one from the top, bite down.
Amá nods, whispers “Feliz Navidad mijita.”
la curandera
By Xóchitl Mota-Back

i am a healer
a fortress for life;
and reverie for the dead.
god bless the men
who believe i am anything less.

i may destroy you,
sin fuerza,
wearing chanclas y Carmex
platicando con Dios y mis Abuelas,
comiendo el primer mango del verano, y
dando besos a todos los nopalitos
creciendo en la tierra de los desaparecidos.
i sing prayers and praises that only the roots know,
llamando a la lluvia de mi nacimiento.
and, i learn to heal– roots and skin;
skin with roots.

todo lo que has destruido te lo devolveré,
cuando estés listo,
envuelto en besos de los nopalitos.
La oscuridad de Covid
By Reyna Vergara

Rotunda y recargada ronda de emociones:
Odio, condena, ira, espanto, venganza, pánico, repudio, locura…

El reinante infinito infierno ahorca y acecha la vida ya estrujada de cualquier esperanza
Yaciente en una cuna-sepulcro sin pasada, ni salida, ni más allá.
Un horroroso creciente espacio vacío mordisquea los restos
Y la inmensa sombra del dios devora lo que queda por penar.

El eco del clamor por la muerte se escucha entre las paredes, “¡déjame morir!”
Un martirizador Nada responde,
Pero la repugnante fetidez de basura humana trastorna los sentidos;
Mierda.
Holy

By Marian Flores

after Benjamin Perét

my quintessence of midnight blue robe
my essence of prayer sharpened on strop
my incarnation of chocolate and pilfered garden
my embodiment of pissed-stained doll
my avatar of parrots and merengues
my veneration of unmated objects
my shrine of father folded in two
my exemplar of minaret escapades
my paragon of suicidal octaves
my archetype of the fourth mind
my epitome of machete and bandana
my incorporation of buried creek
my embracement of hydrangea desiccated by rape
my nonpareil of stethoscope and vocation denied
my apogee of militancy and teacups
my exile my revolution
my quarantine my forgetting
my caress my joy my hush
my saint my sentinel
my nebula my constellation
I love you
Papi’s Oranges

By Victoria Bañales

When Papi visits by train
He brings a plastic bag
Filled to the brim. Overflowing with orange love.
When he visits by car
He packs two, sometimes three, plastic bags.
“Navel oranges,” he says
“¡Estas son de las buenas!”

When I visit Papi, he asks about my departure date
Plucks tree branches bare. Leaves
On the porch, heaps of orange love
In sturdy plastic bags from Smart & Final
—not the flimsy ones from CVS.
“Que no se te olviden las naranjas,” he says

California orange trees give year-round
Fecund, brimming with life. They give.
Not cherry trees. Not peach trees.
Not plum trees. Not apple trees.

I’m ashamed to admit it. But—
I don’t particularly like oranges.
Berries. I prefer berries:
Strawberries, blueberries
Blackberries, raspberries

Once, when my son was little,
we picked wild blackberries
Along Pennsylvania Drive.
To reach the plump ones
I ventured into the brambles
Blackberry blood staining my legs

A farmworker peddling a bicycle
Took pity. Reached into a plastic bag
Dangling from his handlebars
“Ten,” he said in Spanish
With an outstretched caked hand
A box of raspberries in his palm

“No tengo dinero,” I stupidly replied

He shook his head and smiled
“I’m not selling them. Ten.”

Berries shaped like mini beehives
Drupelets bursting with sweetness
Like honeycombs. My son and I.
Our bellies filled with ruby-red love.

For that’s the thing with berries.
You have to eat them right away.
Refrigerated. They can last a week. Maybe.

But Papi’s oranges are different.
In bright ceramic bowls, my oranges glow,
Lounge and rest. Like blood moons. They
Sit atop kitchen counters. Like a Frida painting.

And when my golden globes
Show a hint of powdery snow
I sound the alarm
—sense the grave emergency
Work like a busy bee:

Scrub Papi’s oranges clean. Slice and juice. Golden spheres. Extract. Thick amber liquid. Elixir of

Yearning for Papi’s orange love. Taste of eternal summer. Knowing that.

Knowing that.

Even orange trees
Succumb to a winter’s end.
Y sin embargo

By Victoria Bañales

*for Gloria Anzaldúa*

¿Mujer letrada? Pero qué desgarrada
Dice Don Valentín. Eso sí que *no* es ser mexicana
Ah, pero ya veo. Tú eres chicana

¿Mujer rebelde? Pero qué indecente
Dice Doña Prudencia. Eso sí que *no* es ser mexicana
Ah, pero ya veo. Tú eres tejana

¿Mujer divorciada? Es una fracasada
Dice la Señora Inmaculada. Eso sí que *no* es ser mexicana
Ah, pero ya veo. Tú eres agabachada

¿Mujer sexual? Es un pecado mortal
Dice la tía amargada. Eso sí que *no* es ser mexicana
Ah, pero ya veo. Tú eres americana

¿Mujer lesbiana? Pero qué payasada
Dice la prima hermana. Eso sí que *no* es ser mexicana
Ah, pero ya veo. Tú eres hija de la chingada

Y sin embargo
Sor Juana
Y sin embargo
Matilde Montoya
Y sin embargo
Petra Herrera
Y sin embargo
Hermilda Galinda
Y sin embargo
Frida Kahlo
Y sin embargo
Rosario Castellanos
Y sin embargo
Chavela Vargas
Y sin embargo
Leydy Pech
Prose
Tierras embrujadas, fragmentos generacionales

By Stephany Bravo

On supposed barren land, abuelita Amelia built her home and later all who stepped inside felt the shadows roaming. Neighbors spoke of “la casa embrujada,” the haunted home. As children, my aunts remember dipping their fingers into wet earth and excavating red clay fragments. At first, los fragmentos de barro proved difficult to find, but eventually their hands began to gravitate towards hollow grounds. Each piece accumulated inside the home followed an abrupt movement, it became costumbre for items to spontaneously move or shatter into bits just like the barro fragments. Abuelita Amelia, a believer in good and bad spirits decided that these movements came from “espíritus de los buenos” and unlike her neighbors seemed uninterested in their banishment. She assured my aunts, “no les harán daño si los dejan vivir en paz.” In time, abuelita Amelia began talking to the spirits as if they were part of the family. Soon after, she was unable to differentiate physical from spiritual gestures. Meanwhile, my aunts continued to play puzzles. Until finally, their brown hands became overwhelmed with the amount of pieces found and their inability to make shapes out of fragments like the archeologist on television.

By the time that I arrived to this particular municipio in the state of Michoacán, abuelita Amelia had become fluent in the rattling of furniture. My aunts on the other hand, had given up on their backyard expedition. Now, in their early twenties, they longed to venture outside the walls of their country. I was fourteen and listening to stories of a past that proved too close to proximity as dull red fragments presented themselves among abuelita Amelia’s tocadores, assorted alongside the dusty recuerdos accumulated from festivities. Unlike recuerdos, the barro whispered curses. At night, abuelita Amelia would lay next to me, she an unknown flesh, acknowledging that there had to be more to our relationship than touch if we were to remain dispersed by borders. Even though I was never one for prayer, abuelita Amelia’s rezos became the only consolable lullabies. Her prayers called upon the spirits and walls of her home, she asked them to protect us.

My return to the United States of America after visiting abuelita Amelia’s “casa embrujada” and listening to the origin stories of our now extended spirit kin had changed something in me. I wondered if “los espíritus buenos” had followed me across the border to what I had once perceived as the unhaunted inner-city or if she had opened up my third eye. I had tapped into hauntings unlike la Llorona or el Cucuy in the land of the free that sounded constrained. I told Mom about abuelita Amelia, the cold showers, the perturbing ants on the kitchen sink, bisabuela Esperanza’s silence, the tortillas with butter and salt, and our spirit kin. Mom smirked, swept the spirit kin into the realm of fantasy. Mom spoke, abuelita Amelia concocted spirits to keep her hostage. Before Mom sneaked out of abuelita Amelia’s home to cross the US-Mexico border, she was a pink-sequenced-dancer. The spirits were tales provided to keep women in the home orderly, too scared to leave.

Bisabuela Esperanza died shortly after my return to the US and I found my dispelling of the spirit world comforting, no need to sit with bisabuela Esperanza’s silence beyond the physical
realm. However, when I saw Mom cry upon hearing the news, I wished that bisabuela Esperanza would appear sitting on the wooden chair staring intently. For better or worse, all we got was silence. Bisabuela Esperanza’s death was the first death I experienced on opposite sides of the border. I had known her, seen her face and touched her hands. Her death made me aware that not everyone gets to return home to mourn and serve as guide into the next world. Some people are forced to sit with their grief alone, huddled on the corner of the bathroom with only the cold peach tiles touch pressed upon the skin to serve as a reminder that one might possibly feel. I thought about Dad mourning his brother all those years ago. Tio José never presented himself, never moved a door or a tocador from our bathroom to signal, “Hermano, aqui estoy.” Dad, like Mom, didn’t believe in those things.

Years after bisabuela Esperanza died, Dad’s mom died. Dad’s mom or abuela Caritina was a silent woman known for her colored eyes and white skin, both of which I do not possess. I have one memory of abuela Caritina and it’s of her discreetly stashing tacos dorados into her apron as my aunts remained distracted by gossip. This was shortly after abuela Caritina’s physician suggested that she take better care of her health. She was a hungry woman, would give me pesos on the low to buy her sabritas y cacahuates from the corner store. Bisabuela Esperanza and abuela Caritina were the same in their silence and sitting, but at least abuela Caritina was able to travel to the US to see Dad. By then, she was suffering from Alzheimer’s, couldn’t remember that she had crossed the border to visit her son and was eager to leave the land of dreams turned nightmares. Her death and afterlife were also different.

Dad’s family started seeing abuela Caritina around the city of La Paz and years later, Dad the skeptic, saw her too. There was an old lady sitting on the sidewalk of our local bakery asking for food. Dad wanted to know if there was something in particular that she might want, to which she responded, “lo que sea tu voluntad.” He selected two coffees and some fresh baked goods from the plastic display. Dad walked outside to hand the stranger her items. Only for a quick second it was not the old woman he had met, but his mother Caritina. He blinked to get his eyes adjusted and abuela Caritina disappeared after a few difficult seconds of trying. Dad drove off in his truck and told no one in disbelief for years to come, but even he was relieved that abuela Caritina’s scattered mind was able to pay him a visit. I want to believe his truths.

The women in my lineage are dying, abuelita Amelia died this past year due to COVID-19. Even if Mom did have papeles to travel, the pandemic would have prevented mourning alongside family. Mom and I mourned alone, in separate rooms for hours to come. On the weekend, I guided the rosary for the first time in my life, confused as to the matter of beads. Mom said that if abuelita Amelia were here, she would scorn us both, but now in the spirit realm all we had to look forward to was “que nos jalara los pies.” Abuelita Amelia never came to pull our feet at night.

Abuelo Antonio came to visit his ailing daughter who no longer wore pink-sequenced-bottoms or danced, Mom’s tears touched abuelo Antonio’s prune skin. I thought of abuelita Amelia’s home, to the time where I stared earnestly at the ground as we were feeding the chickens. I wanted to find more barro beneath the sun-cracked dirt, solve something unknown to me. There were no fragments to be found, it was there that I had a gut feeling, our family had not grasped the lesson to be learned. “Roja,” is how my bisabuela Maria de Jesús was described to me during her son, abuelo Antonio’s visit to the US. Perhaps, I have more to hold than conceivable. I want to call for bisabuela Maria de Jesús, her rage. I want to call for bisabuela Esperanza, her silence. I want to call for abuela Caritina, her hunger. I want to call for abuelita
Amelia, her embujo.

The woman in our lineage are watching. I told abuelo Antonio, “cuando mi abuelita estaba aquí.” He didn’t let me finish and said, “tu abuelita está aquí.” He then extended his hand onto the cushion of our olive green sofa as if he were resting it onto abuelita Amelia’s palm. In the background, Julio Jaramillo played, “y si los muertos aman/después de muertos/amarnos más.” I am too blind and possibly deaf, but in my dreams walls crumble like barro, those with hunger scatter me through forests, hoofs chase me in silence, and all that is unknown resurfaces. I wake, dutifully cursed by abuelita Amelia’s spirit kin on physical terrain. I wonder about how haunted I might be for my ancestor’s wrongdoings and my refusal to open the veil, to see and hear. Wonder about all the women in my lineage serving as spectators towards something we have yet to realize about the possession of our bodies and deaths unlike ends.
Noble Women, Dead Women

By Rudy Esparza

Para Linda—All ways and Always

Khaire, Inquisitor. You flatter me. First you move me to a private cell, now you bring me papers for my reading? You must know I adore the written word. The one gift I still carry from your mission schools. I’m sure the brothers and sisters there regret teaching me. Someone who saw the gift for what it was: a weapon.

The women in my cell used words as blunt instruments. After I made meat of your men that night, they would not break bread with me. They clutched at crosses between their breasts and whispered words like slow venom: bruja, bruja, bruja...maybe I am a witch. Your men certainly seem to think so. Did they tell you of my first night in this new cell? The oil lamp that exploded and the flames that took the guards’ room, turning one into a stinking roast? Pray tell, did you dismiss their babbling stories, say it was nothing more than the wind?

But there was no wind that night, was there, Inquisitor?

To our reading:

Your Eminence,

Per your last letter, I have begun to depose the prisoner in question and take to record her testimony for your edification. To date, the process has cost me the lives of no less than five of my men—

This letter is old. We’re up to six now, aren’t we?

The prisoner is a Mestizo woman of no less than two score years whose features lean towards the fairer aspect of her caste. She has provided no name, and claims to have been educated among our mission schools, though no records matching her have been discovered. She answers to Seven, and makes all her marks as such.

Seven was apprehended upon entering our mission north of Valle de Cortes. Chief among her charges is witchcraft and consorting with devils. Her behavior in captivity has confirmed such; she speaks in many languages, Latin seemingly her favorite, to confound your humble servant’s attempts to depose her, and delights in using the language of our Lord with her blasphemous tongue.

Records indicate that Seven was among a group of mercenaries contracted by the now defunct Second Inquisition to find and retrieve a codex decreed as vital to the sanctity of the Church and our interests in the New World, in the year of our Lord Fifteen Hundred and Fifty-Five. The search took months and spanned the breadth of the Mexico Valley and beyond, and concluded with the apparent destruction of the codex in question.

Seven vanishes from our records, only to reappear four years hence, during the ongoing rebellion led by the one known as La Malinche. Seven seems to have been instrumental in a second search for the same codex, which took mere weeks, and resulted in the death of nearly all involved, including La Malinche.

Quite sporting, Inquisitor, and even accurate in places. But wrong all the same.

One.
The codex was never the mission.

Two.
I was not the only one who survived.
Three.

I despise Latin. Conjugations droning as worker bees in the hive.

I much prefer Greek.

Oh, I see your look, Inquisitor. That hate you wear can only come from a true believer, and it sings in your written word. Of course, I will co-sign them. After all, they are truths, are they not? But only by halves.

Yes, I was educated by your missions, and I have the scars upon my back and legs and buttocks to show for my restless tongue. But I was also educated by the midwives and healers and priestesses of the People of the Fifth Sun, and I carry another set of scars to show for it.

Yes, I consorted with a devil. But it was not your split-hoof variety, the kind your soldiers seem happy to consort with on moonless nights when the drink is strong in them. My devil was a wolf who wore the skin of a man and not much else, and I curse him now because I could not stand him and cannot stand to be without him.

Yes. I have been many things, Inquisitor, and a witch is not the least among them. I am a witch who has killed witches. But that part does not matter to you. You are a man of your Church and a man of your people, and you, all of you, prefer your truths as night and day, one thing or another, divided by a line that can never be crossed. My people see truth differently: there is no line. Truth is a blade and it cuts both ways. Things are two, three, four things in one.

And that, dear Inquisitor, is why there will never be peace between the people of your Old World and my people.

And, because I am of both the old and the new, that is why there will never be peace within me.

A story then, to show you this truth.

Cihuateteo. The noble women. You have heard of them, have you not? Of course you have, even if not by that name. The spirits of women who die in childbirth, who perished in the struggle to take hostage their blessed babe’s spirit in newborn flesh. A warrior’s death by any other name. Their restless teotl, the divine life force that flows through all, is sought by men of war, who will take parts of their body as adornments for their armor.

As if man could take any more than they do now from woman.

Cihuateteo. The noble women. They descend upon the earth on days of power; haunt crossroads in the night, bewailing the babes they never bore; seduce men to commit evil upon their women. You will know them by their stomachs, flat and taut as drums where a mother’s would be a round hearth for the child she bore; by their breasts, small and unmarred where a mother’s should be drooping full and flowing with milk for the child she bore; by their hair, wild and untamed as the jungle; by their eyes, jewels shining with a hunger and haunt that will never be satiated.

A village chief summoned me, many years ago. This was when I was working as a midwife, aiding warrior mothers in taking their captives. A woman, the wife of chief’s brother, was with child, and she was beset by terrors in the night. “It is said,” the chief spoke unto me, “that you have a gift for fire and healing. Use them now, witch.”

So I did.

Nothing is but one thing, Inquisitor. Bad teotl hung about the couple’s house as the death miasma one finds in Mictlan. The couple wore their wealth opulently, but had no servants to attend them, not even a poor girl-servant to help the wife prepare the meals. Their eyes avoided me when they talked, and avoided each other. But the husband’s eyes devoured me when he thought I wasn’t looking. A foolish predator is a predator nonetheless.
The village drunk spoke to me of a girl-servant who disappeared from that house near one calenderyear ago. I used earth magic to expose the bad teotl to sight. It led me far from their house into the jungle, to a mound of earth that pulsed with anger. The bones were of a girl not yet a woman. But she was woman enough to have been with child.

Here is what I did, Inquisitor.

When the cihuateotl appeared again to whisper poison in the wife’s ear, I was there. I trapped her with the fires of the Obsidian Butterfly, wrenched her name from her lips, and with it held sway over her. She told me her story, in that wailing voice cihuateteo have: how the husband used her as his plaything; how she came to be with his child; how his jealous wife took up dark magic to poison the child within her and put her into the earth; how she had returned, transformed, and crawled inside the husband to put a poison seed in the wife, and claim the child as her own.

I banished the cihuateotl and brought the couple before the village chief. But you recall, the husband was the chief’s brother. They laughed me out of the village and came for me the next night with torches and spears.

You seem surprised, Inquisitor. It’s true, I did not kill them that night. I burnt a hole in the jungle big enough for Ometeotl to see atop their thirteen heavens, but no, I did not kill them. I didn’t need to.

When I rounded back to the same village, perhaps one calenderyear later, I learned the wife had died in childbirth. The husband had disappeared shortly after; villagers found what remained of him at a crossroads, a short distance away.

Yes, I did say I banished the cihuateotl. But what is gone doesn’t always stay gone.

So tell me, Inquisitor, who was at fault here?

Dime.
Highway 70, Radium Springs, New Mexico – 2006

By Rebeca Carrillo

My childhood friend and I walk down the highway and dodge cars as they speed by.

We have a new game where we hide from the cars as they go by. We dive into the bushes as soon as we see headlights. It's stupid, really. We're preteens, and he's a white boy. These antics are peak entertainment at this point in our lives.

An SUV comes around the corner and David and I dive into the ditch next to the road, giggling furiously as we barely manage to hide by the time the vehicle approaches us. Something's wrong, though—where most cars speed by, unconcerned with us and our dumb games, this one's slowed down. Considerably. The lights shine almost directly at us, but we're hidden in a hollow by the side of the road, where the grass grows tall and obscures our bodies. No one could spot us unless they walked on us, basically. We're safe. We feel safe.

The car stops. Doors slam. A flashlight hits the road. From the corner of my eye, all I can see is boots.

“Border Patrol! Show yourselves!” A voice barks at us, and then a second one.

At this moment I freeze. David freezes. The game isn't a game anymore. I'm not sure exactly what law we're breaking, but the Border Patrol is a mythically mob-like force—the tone of their voice, the stories they tell on the playground: everything about this pair of men with guns and flashlights is suddenly creating dread and terror the way only “La Migra” can. La Llorona, El Cucuy, the goddamn Border Patrol: the villains of my childhood are searching for me on desert roads—and these seem out for blood.

“SHOW YOURSELVES! WHO’S THERE?”

The voices yell again, angry, combative. I'm shaking. All I can think about is my flip phone in the back pocket of my jeans, with a ringer like an arcade game played at max volume. Please don't go off. Please don't ring. Mom, please don't call me. I will my phone not to go off, and I'm still not quite sure why—David and I are American citizens, and he's not even Latino. Why are we scared like this? Why are we hiding? All I know is that nothing in the world would make me stand up and announce myself right now, despite all their yelling and stomping.

The voices try Spanish, try kicking around, try murmuring to each other. Eventually, after what feels like ages, they get back in their SUV. They amble off slowly, tires growling low against the asphalt. David and I stand up only after we've seen at least four other cars go by—even then, we
stick to the brush, and stay off the road. We've been spooked, but neither of us seems willing to speak it into being.

As we walk back in silence I think of the dozens of times we've seen shadows in the desert, hushed voices. The times we found footprints in the clearings by his house or seen tell-tale pathways flattened in the chaparral bushes.

We heard conversations in Spanish at night sometimes–we used to pretend the desert was haunted. Later we slowly acknowledged that it was haunted, but not by the owners of the voices, not by the death of immigrants, or the footsteps in our pathways, or the spirits who wandered in wild settings and isolation.

The ghosts at night weren't evil, just present–always out of reach. The voices in the desert were always hidden. Always there.

We'd leave water jugs sometimes. We couldn't approach; the voices hiding in the hills would run if they heard us coming.

After the night on the road, I found myself aching when I thought about this. My ghosts wanted freedom. The voices were scared in a way I could barely imagine. I wished them speed and darkness. The desert is haunted, the highway is haunted. We walk among spirits; we hide from the light.
serpents-her-skirt

By ire’ne lara silva

Live or not live. Die or not die. Die so that everyone lives. So that the darkness will not be eternal. So that the sun rises again. Live so that this is not the end of the story. Fourth fifth sixth sun, fourth fifth sixth world, every world and every sun are precarious. What do you weigh at the end and beginning of time. What is agony and what is sacrifice if your beloved world requires it.

What is the body when you are a goddess. When the light of the stars lives in your hands. When the blood roaring from your throat doesn’t mean death. When the shattered limbs do not mean helplessness. The body has known pain. The body has known death. This body does not surrender. And so the body accepted agony and the body birthed agony. Birthed itself.

Sacrifice of godflesh. It was not a spilling of light but blood and red muscle and white bone and bile and offal and weeping that was more fire than salt. Fountains and geysers and roaring oceans of blood all at once. Head taken. Limbs taken. The torso seizing, breasts laid bare. Hips convulsing and the godsex exposed. And time and no-time and before-time and after-time all collapse.

This is the moment of origin. The moment of choice. When neither the name-before or the name-after will encompass the story. Where the divine and the flesh meet implacable will. Because death is the end of effort. The end of pain. To live is infinite work. To survive is infinite struggle. To endure is an infinite cycling of pain. To transform an infinite act of creation.

The body chooses life and choosing life, fountains of blood become serpents. Seize them and two of their heads shall be your head. Two identical heads facing each other, infinitesimally close, infinitesimally distant, creating the illusion of one symmetrical serpent face. Transform or die. And your limbs now gone, also become serpent, also become talon, also become monster. What is monster in the face of the divine. Is not all the divine monster somehow to the human. Do not fear the monster within. The divine made flesh is always monstrous.

Breathe. Blood made muscle. Fists clenched and relaxed. Flesh and stone. Face and stone. The heart is never stone. The heart is an infinite volcano of blood. Breathe and the body moves. Breathe and see that the world has not ended is not ended will not end. Breathe and see this body reflected and not. Breathe and the serpent mouth the sibilant serpent tongues whisper I am the mother of myself first.

How many are there. Serpents-her-skirt and hearts-her-skirt and stars-her skirt and lightning-her-skirt and flowers-her-skirt and more. All the sisters. All the not sisters. Infinite and infinitely reflected. Tears and blood and godflesh and sweat and willing sacrifice and all the light within and the choice and the monstrous and the breathing and all the stars and all the serpents.

And this is how the world never ends.
Hospital, Street Waiting Rooms, and Choices
By Araceli Esparza

Abuelita always showed me doors, in my adulthood I felt I had seen all the doors that I needed to see.

In January, I went to Irapuato, Guanajuato to see Mi Abuelita who was not in good health, and when I thought I had seen all of Mexico, it became clear that I haven’t.

Mi Abuelita is 95 years old, a naturalized citizen, a public service worker for over 20 years for the University of Wisconsin, a former migrant worker, migrated here at the ripe age of 9 months old, and her name is Zeferina Morales Lopez.

On January 12th I landed in Irapuato, (we affectionately call our city Ira, because our people are angry people? It’s become a running joke because of the recent organized crime in our state) and the President had just issued a shut down or limit on gasoline production because the cartel had been profiting from gasoline stations.

My grandmother is very ill. She had moved to Mexico in August and I thought then she was going to pass, but when I left her she was still taking some steps and talking coherently.

My arrival was for the purpose of taking charge, to straighten things out for her passing. The typical American way, La Manda Mas as mi Abuelita calls me, the bossy one.

I was not prepared for what I encountered. First, there were miles of cars on the highway, gas was not available.
Second, my brother and sisters were coming, some of them had not been to Mexico in over 20 years. They were flying into Mexico City. Sidebar: yes they did witness a brawl fight, on the road-on the way to Irapuato, but that’s their crazy story!

Third, we only had hours to get her into a hospital. She was slipping away…

We get Abuelita into the hospital, my mom waits with her in the hallway, and they have to be there for 9 hours before they will even look at her. Once Abuelita is admitted it’s nighttime. Or when the nightmare begins.

I return to the hospital to wait outside because that is what we have to do. I’m not sure if waiting with family is required in all Mexican hospitals, but I imagine it has to do with the recent increase in crime. In this hospital it is required that a family member stay outside in the alley for the one who is in the hospital while decisions or evaluations or through the period of the stay, I saw people with tents pitched outside. It was a very real scene in sharp contrast of the privilege of healthcare in the United States that I ever known. This to me was ground zero of
healthcare and now my grandmother was in there and I had no way of just snapping my fingers and bringing her back to the United States. Her health was failing fast.

We all were given the shifts we would have to take and the probability of her living past the night was slim.

Some crazy things that I have learned while camping out at the hospital.
You can buy single cigarettes in the hospital lobby.
If it sounds like a gunshot, it probably is.
And many first generation Chicanas/Latinxs go to study medicine in Mexico, because it’s cheaper–so watch it, las doctoras do speak English!

That first night, we were outside talking and eating pan dulce and drinking atole. Then the ambulance comes rushing in and everyone is pushed back, someone starts recording, it’s the local underground Facebook news crew, my uncle informs me.

Mi Tio tells me it’s “La Tinta Negra.”

The hospital staff take the guy in the ambulance in to the ER, word spreads he’s a drug/gang/criminal type of vato.

Then, about 10 minutes later this little green car crashes in the loading dock of the ER. They pull out the gurney and take the guy in the passenger side out. I see his body slumped over, “Es el Judicial, el estuvo aquí apenas!” people whisper shout
“Que es un Judicial?” I ask.
“Like the head detective.” Tio tells me.

I tiptoe up to see, everyone does a collective “awwww,” we see his face–red and bloody!

He goes into the ER, 10-15 minutes later someone else arrives in another car… a couple seconds go by and a deep howl scream goes out to the alley, we drop our heads knowingly…

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she is his wife.

This story ends here for some, for us, we stay two more days with Abuelita. The next day, I see how her room is down the hall of the criminal for whom the Detective was killed for…He is being kept alive and now there’s two armed police guarding his room.
Como es la vida, even here Abuelita shows me another door.

After I have a heart to heart with a doctor resident, she tells me what a waste of resources the criminal is, they have to maintain him alive, and like some fake ass liberal, I say to her but ‘he will turn his ways,’
She says she doubts it. Later, my family agrees, even if he does get out, they tell me that he will surely be killed by a rival gang or even by the Detective’s family.

While I was there, another shooting happened. This time I heard it, but it was in another part of the hospital so I didn’t think too much until the military police told me to leave.

After two hours waiting outside with no money, only my phone, I had left my purse inside, I was told while going back, where’s my pass?

Pass? What?

“Si su pase, lo necesito para su entrada.” (Yes, we need it for your reentry)

“Como me iba llevar mi bolsa? En mi país, si alguien con una arma de dice que te vayas, obedeces, sino no te matan.”

The viejo security guy lets me through, the lady behind nods as well in agreement.

How was I supposed to take my purse? In my country, someone with a gun tells you to leave—you do it, because they will kill you.

I don’t know if he thought I was a newbie or what but for real, police violence is real. Everybody is on high alert, remember Sandra Bland?!

With a deep breath I march back and continue to feed Abuelita, because she was eating when I left her.

Now she touches my hand…

I tell her I’m back.

So much has changed in Mexico. Pero la violencia has been the hardest to understand or truly accept.

Don’t be scared of this beautiful area, stop by Guanajuato, see the mummies, go to Leon, get your leather goods, but donate, leave something good behind.

This last door or experience that I lived in Mexico rocked me to my core. I'm thankful that all my years of traveling served me well, not to take it personal, stay honest and be present. Be brave in the face of guns and violence, what inside of me is stronger than what is outside of me, both spiritually and physically.

I had to return, back to the United States, and that last night I spent with Abuelita I feed her spoonfuls of water for hours. It will take me another lifetime to understand all of the beautiful symbolism of that last night.

It’s not all playa, pero como Mejico no hay otro. My mom tells me that the week leading up to mi Abuelitas passing she would say this to my mother when my mother would ask Abuelita if she wanted to come back to Wisconsin.

I plan to return to her Mexico, with all of it’s drama and I still love her best.
Abuelita is there in spirit and she is still teaching me something.
Beyond Anger

By Adela Najarro

My journey back to the Catholic Church started when I began to write poems in my father’s basement after a divorce and subsequent move to San Francisco. I can’t recall the exact moment when I chose a ballpoint pen from an old flower vase used to hold the numerous giveaways my father acquired from hardware companies, travel agencies, and the other local businesses he frequented around the Mission District. But suddenly, I found myself writing every morning on a washing machine with the quintessential ritual of coffee, pen and paper, firmly established.

The amazing thing was that I couldn’t escape religious images and metaphors. I am one of the youngest in my extended family, and the rituals of attending Sunday Mass and Catholic school had gone by the wayside right after I reached second grade. Catholic school had become too expensive for my mother to afford, and on most Sundays, she was busy trying to make ends meet at her beauty salon. I’m sure she was open seven days a week, or in my child’s mind that is how it seemed. Though I have always identified as Catholic, throughout my early teens and twenties it was more a label I attached without significance. I suppose I was wary of organized religion, that the rules of what to do and what not to do would crush any independence out of my soul. There were so many other things to do instead.

Like go to Europe. In my freshman year at the University of Redlands, I signed up for an interim semester abroad, a whirlwind tour of northern Europe beginning in Amsterdam, passing quickly through Belgium, Germany, Luxembourg, and finally crossing the English Channel on our way to London, and then home. In a musty hotel room somewhere in Belgium, I confided to my roommate, a savvy upper-classman, a girl with the right mix of self-confidence and the right friends, that I did indeed believe in God and the love that Christ’s sacrifice brought to the world. I’m sure I did not use those words, but no matter, I have never forgotten the essence of that conversation since it quieted the glimmer of faith that was growing in my heart. Perhaps my roommate used logical, rational reasoning. Perhaps she recounted the atrocities committed in the name of religion. Perhaps she convinced me that the Church was a cushion for those unable to deal with reality. At that moment, it all went out the window to snow quietly falling onto the dark street of a foreign city; even so, as that glimmer of faith was silenced, it was not extinguished. Years later, I found myself scribbling in a notebook, transposing my handwriting onto a computer screen, and those poems kept referring to the Saints, to the crucifixion, to the story of Adam and Eve. This was highly disturbing. Why should Catholicism creep onto the page when the last time I had attended Mass was years before during a cousin’s wedding? I was in the middle of something I didn’t understand, so I went to the library to look up the Biblical stories that were creeping into my writing.

The stone walls and slick steps of the downtown San Francisco Public Library held the musty smell of books filtered through air conditioning. The lights were bright enough to read by, and so I settled onto a sturdy wooden chair with a pile of Bibles stacked on a rectangular table. I read Genesis, paying close attention to the story of Adam and Eve, which had recently been the obsession of numerous poems, and I was outraged. The downfall of humanity, sin, our current separation from the unity of God was the result of Eve, the first woman. From Eve’s act of
disobedience came the subjugation of all women to their husbands, the discomfort and mess of
the monthly reproductive cycle, and the pain of childbirth. There had to be some mistake, so I
read the same story in as many versions of the Bible that I could find, but there wasn’t. That was
it: woman was the cause of human suffering and patriarchy was the solution. I concocted in
my mind a group of men sitting around a table dreaming up the Adam and Eve story to keep women
cooking their meals, weaving their clothes, and having their babies. Even though the Bible is
supposed to be the written word of God, at that moment, I could only see the human writers
struggling with the cultural mores of their society.

Fortunately, the center of religion, our inherent spirituality, is more than words on a page.
Instead of atheism, which would have been a justified response, I began to see the Bible as a
metaphor instead of a literal historical account of a vengeful God and redeeming Son. By taking
into account the indeterminacy of language, the fluctuating social constructions of culture, and
our heroic, although ultimately impossible, attempts to understand God, I conceded that truth
concerning the human condition existed somewhere within the stories of the Bible, Christianity,
and Catholicism. That this truth was mysterious, fluctuating, and impossible to pin down due to
its very nature allowed something beyond anger, something more than pointing a finger of
blame. God existed, despite our human frailty. Though, of course, it took a while to let this whole
episode settle down.

Four years after standing in my father’s basement, I found myself in Michigan working
toward a doctorate in English literature and creative writing. Random acts of driving fall into the
routine of a graduate student trying to find some relief from books and a computer screen. As I
drove down a street, a stone church that fit my idea of what a church should look like appeared,
and I figured it couldn’t hurt to check it out. At St. Joseph’s Church in Kalamazoo, I discovered a
church changed from those of my childhood. There were altar girls along with altar boys.
Women participated in the Mass by reading from the scripture and dispensing the bread and wine
of communion. Blond little girls and boys held the book for Father Mike’s prayers, along with
Latino and black little girls and boys. When a holy day required a special evening Mass, it was a
bilingual Mass without translation into English. Both Spanish speakers and English speakers
equally had to make do with giving their time to another language and have faith that the parts of
the liturgy they didn’t understand, they knew. There was an equality of language and expression,
an actualization of us all being brothers and sisters.

One Sunday after Mass, as I was waiting to speak with Father Mike about nothing in
particular, I overheard a Latina woman ask if her daughter could be confirmed at St. Joseph’s.
She had been on the road for at least an hour and a half, driving from the Holland area in Central
Michigan. It wasn’t very likely that she attended weekly services or had enrolled her daughter in
afternoon or weekend religious classes, but there she was. The stressful drive, the anxiety to do
right by her daughter, the need to secure her daughter’s spiritual growth was all reflected in her
face, in the tone of voice, in her body urgently in the shadows insisting on being heard. Father
Mike spoke to them in Spanish, made them feel welcome, and all three calmly chatted on their
way to the rectory offices. This story may seem insignificant, but I saw it as an actualization of
Christianity’s call to help those in need, the marginalized, the excluded, this one woman and her
daughter searching for acceptance in a society that overwhelmingly doesn’t speak their language.

My journey from doubt to faith, my grappling with the cultural significance of the Church
within Latina life, and with Church history as a patriarchal institution is a journey many Latina
writers share. Many incorporate secular connotations of Catholic life within the everyday
happenings depicted in their stories and poems, and some alter the patriarchy of faith into a new feminine consciousness. My faith journey is belief in the unbelievable, that we are more than just right now, that reality goes beyond the logical explanations of post-enlightenment rationalism. Joy is more than chemical interactions within the brain. Though I still think it’s a little silly, and I might even blush when stating it, I knew that Catholicism was my new center, especially when I acknowledged the influence of St. Joseph in my life. My mother has found love and joy in marriage to a man named Joseph. I was born in St. Joseph’s hospital in San Francisco. My middle name is Josefina. In one small parish, in one small city, I found we can go beyond self to community, that the church is not the building, nor the institution. Eight years ago, I moved to a new city, and around the corner, I found another St. Joseph’s Church. The doors were open and inviting.
Scholarly Articles
Building the decolonial imagination: spiritual imaginaries of linking in *This Bridge Called my Back*.

By Violeta Orozco

**Abstract**

The urgency of unearthing, re-elaborating and articulating new literary models of spiritual empowerment for restoring the split soul or psyche of victims of colonial violence—symbolized by the dismembered figure of the Aztec goddess Coyolxauhqui in Borderlands—has been argued by AnaLouise Keating on what she has termed Anzaldúa’s “spiritual activism.” This is a crucial framework that, as explained by Keating herself, has been understudied and highly questioned by hegemonic rationalist and positivist approaches in American academe. Following Emma Pérez, AnaLouise Keating, Jacqui Alexander and Enrique Dussel, I argue that metaphors, poetry and figurative language are able to mobilize strategic coalitions across women of color because they constitute powerful spiritual technologies that tap into the deep source of collective strength in the spiritual imaginaries of women of color. This idea is directly indebted to Emma Pérez’ pivotal work *The Decolonial Imaginary*, that Pérez defines as the tool that writes Chicana feminists into history: “[...] the decolonial imaginary in Chicana/o history is a theoretical tool for uncovering the hidden voices of Chicanas that have been relegated to silences, to passivity, to that third space where agency is enacted through third space feminism” (xvi). Pérez’ understanding of this “third space”—a category borrowed from Homi Bhabha’s postcolonial theory—understands the post-revolutionary Southwest as an interstitial site where Chicana feminist identities were being refashioned after the Mexican revolution.

With this argument, I will attempt to show that the spiritual politics in the metaphors of *This Bridge Called My Back* contribute to a decolonial imaginary that in turn grounds a decolonial epistemology. The importance of this research is that new imaginaries of linking proposed by Black Indigenous and People of Color (BIPOC) women in *This Bridge Called my Back* may function as a roadmap for other BIPOC women to delink from a colonial matrix that favors alienated epistemologies of self and negative and inferiorizing self-images. These artform knowledges provide a relational worldview that enables BIPOC subjects to relink to a social and
spiritual totality that had been expropriated from them by settler colonialist society. The bridge, road and web metaphors in the anthology, constitute a path toward demarginalizing, de-alienating and rehumanizing colonized and marginalized subjects, helping their fragmented selves recover a lost sense of integrity.

Keywords: spiritual activism, decolonial imaginaries, Chicana feminism

Metaphor as ideological weaponry for meta-ideologizing in *This Bridge Called my Back*

In her seminal work, *Methodology of the Oppressed* (2001), Chela Sandoval has provided one of the most thought-provoking accounts of U.S. third world feminism’s contribution to decolonial theory, connecting social struggles developed in the transition from the decolonizing period to postmodernity. The new paradigm of theory and praxis of what is oftentimes referred to as U.S. third-world or transnational feminism or the Third World Alliance united feminists from different racial backgrounds, activists, community-builders and poets among social movements from this period. Sandoval explains how this coalition-building took place among all these fronts and introduces her ground-breaking concept, “differential oppositional consciousness,” (30) defined as “a differential cognitive mapping that would engage consciousness, ideology, citizenship, and coalition as masquerade” (30). It is an “applied political technology” (201) that through its own methodology, the “methodology of the oppressed” (84) resists domination and becomes a sort of “ideological guerrilla warfare” (196) against a repressive, postmodern colonial order.

The methodology of the oppressed is the complementary foundational concept Sandoval develops, understood as “a rhetoric of resistance, an apparatus for countering neo-colonizing postmodern global formations” (Sandoval 1). These theoretical constructs provide a productive terrain for analyzing a sort of poetic and unruly “language of resistance” that Sandoval herself uses to explain the functioning of differential consciousness:

> Just as the “differential” is the gear of a car that permits a new kind of transmission of power, so too are the differential modes of social movement and the new alliances it propels, technologies for transmitting power in new ways.[…] Each mode is similar, however, insofar as it comprises one peculiar idiom of resistance, that is, a speech form particular to itself, while functioning at the same time as a linked rhetoric or language of resistance. (Sandoval 184)

Specifically, I will connect Sandoval’s framework on modes of oppositional consciousness to what I will call “imaginaries of linking,” expressed by spatial metaphors like the bridge in the influential anthology *This Bridge Called My Back* (1985), edited by Gloria Anzaldúa and Cherrie Moraga. These metaphors constitute what she terms “idioms of resistance” and form a basis for a decolonial “neorhetoric of love” (129) that unified feminists of color across the USA. This volume was a groundbreaking anthology used by Sandoval as a paradigmatic model of “mapping of consciousness organized in opposition to the dominant social order that charts the feminist histories of consciousness” (54).

I will focus on the key metaphors used by Anzaldúa in *This Bridge Called my Back* to frame this anthology by drawing on Erika Aigner’s study on Anzaldúaan metaphors in *Borderlands*, AnaLouise Keating’s work on Anzaldúa’s “activist spirituality,” as well as Sandoval’s understanding of metaphors as a “meta-ideologizing” (131), which are ways of moving beyond
ideology, or “art-form knowledges” (198) that can function to liberate forms of consciousness, describe experiences of oppression in a decolonial key, and provide a model for community-building between the dispossessed. The key metaphors analyzed in this work will be the spatial ones suggested by Anzaldúa: the bridge, “El Mundo Zurdo” and the different transformations of the bridge metaphor: drawbridge, thread, tightrope, web, crossroads, the back as bridge; to show what a coalitional consciousness and “radical interconnectedness” might look like in more visual and graspable terms. The importance of these metaphors lies also in the fact that they charted a spiritual roadmap for women of color.

The purpose of the analysis of such an oppositional mode of writing is trying to determine if metaphors can also be conceived as a mode of theorizing that is more than ideological; asking if metaphors contribute towards a decolonial epistemology in This Bridge and towards building what in psychoanalytic terms could be called a decolonial subconscious, a set of images that function as central categories structuring thought. This hypothesis aligns with Emma Pérez’ notion of the decolonial imaginary as “a rupturing space, the alternative to that which is written in history” (6). Blending Anzaldúa’s notion of Nepantla and Bhabha’s notion of an “in-between space” (310), Pérez defines the architecture of this foundational space, “an interstitial space where differential politics and social dilemmas are negotiated (6). The proposed decolonial epistemology would be located at the interstices of the colonial and the postcolonial world (127), as Pérez suggests at the conclusion of her work. In fact, Homi Bhabha’s work on postcolonial configurations of spatiality suggests a reordering of both space and time, “What must be mapped as a new international space of discontinuous historical realities is, in fact, the problem of signifying the interstitial passages and processes of cultural difference that are inscribed in the ‘in-between’, in the temporal break-up that weaves the ‘global’ text” (Bhabha 310). In a sense, Anzaldúa can be said to take up this problem by resignifying Pérez’ rupturing space and Bhabha’s interstitial and discontinuous space/time through providing a visual guide to restructure the broken postmodern totality of late capitalism.

These theoretical frameworks are key to find out how metaphorizing in terms of a differential consciousness might configure a decolonial subconscious of sorts, a repertoire of images and languages woven by women of color feminists that suggest global imaginaries of linking. Jacqui Alexander’s seminal Pedagogies of Crossing (2006) provides useful context for understanding some of the spatial metaphors in Anzaldúa in connection to spirituality, politics and decoloniality, and an argument for moving beyond the oppositional framework. In a similar vein, resistance to western hegemonic colonial languages is possible through what AnaLouise Keating called Anzaldúa’s “spiritual activism,” which constitutes a path toward repairing the split soul or psyche of victims of colonial violence, symbolized by Coyolxauhqui in Borderlands/La Frontera.

The metaphor as bridge, the bridge as metaphor, the metaphor as archetype

Chela Sandoval’s global vision on technologies of resistance and methodologies of emancipation is thus offering strategic positionings to challenge the imperialist and neocolonial effects of transnational capitalism developed at the turn of the millennium. Indeed, U.S. third world feminism’s political tactics as deployed by Gloria Anzaldúa, Audre Lorde and other feminists of color are, according to Sandoval “[…] key to the imagination of “postcoloniality” in its most utopian sense” (8). It is the utopianism of these political visions that made the
imagination of those alternative decolonial worlds available mostly through metaphors and visions that organize a spiritual imaginary.

The role of metaphors as important constituents of political speeches or instruments for mobilizing groups of people has been well documented in linguistics and semiotics, decolonial studies and Third World feminist theory. I will use Anzaldúa’s understanding of metaphors as “images that govern the perspective we have of ourselves and the world” (Aigner 49), along with the notion of metaphor borrowed from linguist George Lakoff’s seminal work *Metaphors We Live By* (1980), which in a similar vein understands metaphors as basic concepts that structure our understanding: “We draw inferences, set goals, make commitments, and execute plans, all on the bases of how we in part structure our experience consciously and unconsciously, by means of metaphor” (Lakoff 158). In fact, the author defines metaphors as concepts that configure a system, a network of concepts: “Because the metaphorical concept is systematic, the language we use to talk about that aspect of the concept is systematic” (Lakoff 7). That is, we configure our thought to fit into that conceptual system, to make sense with that system of metaphors, and exclude anything that might be inconsistent with those basic cognitive building-blocks.

In a similar manner, Lakoff explains how metaphors are susceptible to be used to direct or influence political action. In his words:

A given metaphor may be the only way to highlight and coherently organize exactly those aspects of our experience [...] Metaphors may create realities for us, especially social realities. A metaphor may thus be a guide for future action. Such actions will, of course, fit the metaphor. This will, in turn, reinforce the power of the metaphor to make experience coherent. In this sense, metaphors can be self-fulfilling prophecies. (158)

This framing, as Lakoff names it, is what is happening with the metaphor that operates as the title of the anthology *This Bridge Called my Back*. The idea of the bridge provides images of relationality, explains the purpose of putting together a multi-authored and diverse set of texts by women of color, and in doing so stimulates readers into action. The intelligibility of such multi-generic and hybrid works as the ones that conform this anthology is related to the idea of “bridging together” those testimonials/manifestos/poems that are “border-crossing” between literary genres, races, generations and identities.

In a similar way, the anthology also prompts readers into action by way of the (draw)bridge metaphor: “It is the responsibility of some of us who tap the source of spiritual/political energies to help heal others, to put down a drawbridge” (Anzaldúa and Moraga xxix). The drawbridge provides a relatively clear guide for future action: it can be let down whenever needed. As an oppositional political technology, it can be deployed whenever encountering contexts of colonial processes of alienation and dehumanization. This corresponds with Sandoval’s idea of metaphors as a technology of resistance that goes against the grain of racist and sexist colonial imperatives, which form the basis for relating to others. This is “the abyss” that Anzaldúa is trying to bridge, the gap produced between colonized subjects and societies that reject them.

Nevertheless, the figure of the bridge is neither single or monolithic, it changes throughout the whole piece, being expanded by Anzaldúa herself in different sections of the anthology, and also by Cherrie Moraga, who in her own words, lays her back down for others to use as a bridge: “For two years now, I have dreamed of a bridge [...] I will lay my body down for that vision” (Anzaldúa and Moraga xii). The relationship between the bridge and the back is also part of this conceptual network that addresses the body politics present in the book. Moraga’s “Theory in the flesh” (19) is lurking behind the idea of using the back, the spine, the backbone as a form of
connecting with other subalterns and beings that paves the way (with other metaphors as building blocks) for the configuration of a decolonial consciousness. After all, the title is a double metaphor: the back is also a kind of bridge that connects U.S. third world feminists among themselves. But if the body must be put on the line, that is, if one risks being segregated by other feminists who are not willing to commit to connection, then it can be seen why this coalition building is a responsibility that can quickly turn into a burden. This can also be understood as a spiritual burden, since it implies doing the soul-work for other Chicanx that are not necessarily working in the same direction. Moraga knows that the bridge is a vision, a dream that not every feminist group shares, and while historical and material conditions continue to separate them, being a bridge will remain a task: “How can we—this time—not use our bodies to be thrown over a river of tormented history to bridge the gap?” (Moraga xli).

Moraga’s concern in This Bridge is echoed by Barbara Smith, who warns against the dangers of exploitation by other feminists in saying “A bridge gets walked over” (xxxvii) and by Kate Rushin, who starts the anthology off with “The Bridge Poem” (xxxii), where she expresses her frustration of having to do all the political labor for everyone else: “I am sick of being the damn bridge for everybody” (xxxiii). While Anzaldúa is not blind to these claims, she tries to show that a process of self-knowledge and spiritual independence must accompany any attempts at coalition building. A lot of communal, self-reflexive and consciousness-raising labor must be done, but not so much that it hinders the individual’s development: “We are learning to depend more and more on our own sources for survival, learning not to let the weight of this burden, the bridge, break our backs” (Anzaldúa and Moraga 254). In his way, the bridge as back can be thought of in several ways, partly as the material and spiritual support of the world order that must be put to other uses, like relinking ourselves with other sentient beings. Charting the movement of the metaphor of the bridge beyond Anzaldúa’s initial elaboration is also important to see how other authors in This Bridge appropriated it to write their own feminist and coalitional imaginaries, criticizing its contradictions and modifying that technology to express their own political and spiritual ideals.

The bridge may be a spatial metaphor, but it also expresses the continuity of the slow process of liberation of women of color. The bridge also symbolizes a process. As Anzaldúa mentions in the introduction to the first edition: “We carry this bridge inside us, the struggle, the movement toward liberation. No doubt that all of us have found by now that you don’t build bridges by storming walls” (Anzaldúa and Moraga xxviii). The bridge concept is functioning here in many ways. On one hand, if we understand coalition-building as a bridge, we are using a spatial metaphor to signify a community-forming activity that might be methodological or spiritual. But the bridge is not just the anthology, nor the Third World Alliance. Saying that “the bridge is inside us,” might mean all individuals are required to work to decolonize their consciousness. All must find ways to connect beyond colonial forms of relating to one another, namely, beyond extractive and exploitative relations. The bridge is a struggle toward forming a relationship with otherness, and this connection involves a form of decolonial love that embraces all beings in the planet:

Every person, animal, plant, stone is interconnected, in a life-and-death symbiosis. We are each responsible for what is happening down the street, south of the border and across the sea [...] Touching is an act of making love, and if political touching is not made with love, no connections nor linkings happen. (Anzaldúa and Moraga xxix)
This is the relational, borderless, archipelaglic, ecocritical vision of Anzaldúa that will provide the clue for Anzaldúa’s politics of relationality that will later be described as spiritual by Keating. Along This Bridge, small hints that point toward the water are dispersed among Anzaldúa’s pages, echoing her poetic statement in Borderlands/La Frontera, that “The sea cannot be fenced, el mar does not stop at borders” (25). This can be read as an all-embracing cosmic consciousness that functions as an influential roadmap for building alliances.

**Metaphors as art-form knowledges**

Sandoval recognizes poetry as a technology of resistance, and metaphors as a way of transmitting a differential mode of consciousness: “Under the recognition of meta-ideologizing as a technology, poetry, silence and all other technologies of resistance can be viewed as ideological weaponry” (113). Poetry’s power of transmission can be surmised in the sizeable quantity of poems integrated in This Bridge Called my Back (although not all metaphors are poetry and not all poetry contains metaphors). In fact, the multiple genres and languages of resistance that oppose hegemonic ideological constructs in this anthology decenter a single dominant register and defy traditional modes of writing, hybridizing literary genres. In fact, Sandoval goes as far as describing a type of language that seems very close to the figurative one employed in poetry, one she defines as untamed and undomesticated:

Engagement with life in this locale requires emotional tolerance for that which is not easily categorized, for difficult speech out of place, for what is nonnarrative, the undomesticated, the untamed; for language, speech, and activity in this domain do not naively repeat the authoritative laws of the social order: these forms of being are, rather, guided by a purposive drive for equality. Differential consciousness, the methodology of the oppressed and the differential form of social movement are art-form knowledges, not easily scientized or narrativized, for they are in constant flux, in continual revolution. (198)

Indeed, poetry does function as a different mode of consciousness and a language of emancipation that is widely used in texts like Borderlands/La Frontera and other hybrid decolonial “autohistoria teorías” or feminists of color autoethnographic accounts like Lorde’s Sister Outsider that are written in a predominantly lyrical and figurative register and style. The description of these literary genres as “art-form knowledges” suggests that there may be something outside these metaphors beyond the purely ideological, that is, they may constitute in themselves a different epistemology, or as Dussel will suggest, a parallel discourse that goes hand in hand with an alternative epistemology.

**Theology, spirituality or proto-epistemology in This Bridge?**

Dussel’s “Las metáforas teológicas de Marx” in which Dussel is meta-ideologizing Marx’s thought—provide an insightful argument for taking metaphors seriously as proto-epistemological offshoots, stating that they configure a parallel speech with a spiritual backbone:

Estas referencias “metafóricas” si se las toma sistemáticamente en serio, producen como resultado un discurso paralelo al discurso económico-filosófico central de Marx […] No producen nuevo conocimiento filosófico o económico pero “abren” un nuevo mundo como dirá Paul Ricoeur—y justamente abren un nuevo horizonte teológico. […] Si las
metáforas tienen una lógica, entonces sí podemos hablar de una proto-teología o de una teología implícita. (Dussel 18)

The question here, would be whether Anzaldúa’s political metaphors in This Bridge—developed and strengthened over a long period of time—also configure a spiritual horizon. Is the bridge a political or a spiritual metaphor, or both? Does it constitute a theology as Dussel suggests or an implicit epistemology? Is there also a theology behind them? In fact, a slew of questions regarding spiritual metaphors in the arsenal of U.S. third world feminism open to this consideration, particularly in authors like Anzaldúa and her theoretical framework in Borderlands/La Frontera, with ground-breaking concepts like “The Coatlicue state”, “Mestiza consciousness”, “La Facultad”, and many other influential notions developed across her life.

In fact, the concept of the bridge started to be developed already in Borderlands: “Yo soy un puente tendido/del mundo gabacho al del mojado, / lo pasado me estira pa’ atrás/ y lo presente pa’ Adelante” (Anzaldúa 25). Erika Aigner’s study “Metaphors of a Mestiza consciousness in Borderlands/La Frontera” recognizes the mythical horizon opened by Azaldúa’s metaphors of appropriation and resistance to dualistic hegemonic paradigms. Aigner reveals the role of Anzaldúan metaphors in creating a new system of values that rewrite the hegemonic archetypes: “Metaphors in Borderlands serve, in Anzaldúa’s own words, as “dominant paradigms that are transmitted to use through the culture made by those in power” (Anzaldúa quoted in Aigner 49).

According to Aigner, Anzaldúa’s own system of metaphors in Borderlands/La Frontera reveals a knowledge of the deep workings of the mind, influenced by her readings of Jungian psychoanalysis in which archetypes tend to be metaphors that influence the collective unconscious, which can also be conceived as a spiritual unconscious. That is what enables Anzaldúa to enact an ideological distancing:

A conscious rupture with all oppressive traditions of all cultures and religions and a reinterpretation of history…using new symbols…creating new myths…adopting new perspectives toward the dark-skinned, women and queers” (82). By subverting and transforming the old symbols that embody the conceptual metaphors fashioning racism and sexism, Anzaldúa hopes to empower the “outcasts” including herself.” (Aigner 51)

Indeed, there seems to be an important link between the images that govern a collective unconscious, which might belong to a spiritual or religious system of thought and are thus also able to subtly manipulate the individual conscience because of their subconscious nature. Therefore, evaluating how Anzaldúa’s metaphors might compare to the theological metaphors that Dussel identified in Marx’s writings might be a productive question that enables understanding the theological and spiritual dimension that seems to be the symbolic substrate behind spatial metaphors in This Bridge. The hypothesis suggested by Dussel’s analysis of Marx suggests that metaphors are grounded on deeper sources governed by an implicit theology.

Perhaps some of the metaphors of coloniality are learned subconsciously from exposure to Judeo-Christian mythologies and colonial hegemonic systems of belief, many of which Anzaldúa is actively working against in This Bridge. Jacqui Alexander explains how the Judeo-Christian imaginary enforced a splitting of the psyche that women of color feminists like Anzaldúa and Lorde tried to restore by proposing alternative relational imaginaries and worldviews:

The Judeo-Cristian church operated as an instrument of colonization in historical ways by enforcing heterosexuality and the nuclear family as the moral norm; attempting to erase the connection between sexuality and land, splitting apart mind, body and spirit into the
particularities of (white) manliness, colonized other and Christian religion respectively (Alexander 305).

This theology also operates as an ontology, since it frames the main categories of existence in an exclusive binary system (body/spirit, white/black, man/woman, gay/straight, etc.) that allows for no middle ground, no in-between, no possibility of integrating our bodies and psyches to the cosmos. In turn, this dualist ontology may also frame a dualist epistemology, for this is also the way of knowing other subjects in that framework.

**Spatial metaphors and cartographies of struggle in *This Bridge Called my Back***

Dussel’s analysis helps us see how, in a way, Anzaldúa is using new metaphors as a decolonizing strategy, rewriting demonized symbols in the Christian mythology like the snake, in order to uplift devalued indigenous ontologies, theologies and epistemologies: “She consciously attempts to change her unconscious by reappropriating and subverting the serpent metaphors within Borderlands, thus suggesting her conceptual modifications to be readers and possibly influencing their unconscious” (Aigner 49). In her revisionist version, the formerly negative symbol of the serpent is now the Olmec Cóatl. She is no longer masculine or evil like the serpent of Eden, but instead represents female ctonic power and the source of life and energy. Throughout *Borderlands/La Frontera*, Anzaldúa goes back and forth between symbols, archetypes and metaphors, rewriting and empowering figures like Coyolxauhqui, Coatlicue and La Virgen de Guadalupe-Tonantzin, resignifying them positively.

The former is the same methodological strategy described by Sandoval, “the methodology of the oppressed” that enables Anzaldúa’s selective engaging and disengaging with different ideological systems that transmit power: “It is in the activity of what Anzaldúa calls weaving between and among oppositional ideologies as conceived in this new topographical space, where oppositional consciousness is found” (Sandoval 57). This observation is central for understanding the bridge metaphor and the abundance of spatial metaphors in *This Bridge*, since these new empowering concepts involve creating a different topographical space, one that is more fluid and interrelated. In this “field for mobile and transformable subjectivity” (Sandoval 180), the relations between the basic elements are altered, the hierarchies rewritten; the space itself is pregnant with possibilities, for it represents an alternative topography where differential social movements can be articulated: “The differential can be thus thought of as a constant reapportionment of space, of boundaries, of horizontal and vertical realignments of oppositional powers” (Sandoval 180).

Along these lines, the first section of the anthology, “Acts of healing” implies a revision of traditional theological cartographies like the valley of tears and the thorns in the Christian imagination: “This land of thorns is not habitable” (Anzaldúa and Moraga xxvii), re-elaborating metaphors that are not usually productive for the international feminist struggle. These old structures are be substituted by new ones: “Before turning our eyes forward, let’s cast a look at the roads that led us here. The paths we’ve traveled on have been rocky and thorny…but instead of the rocks and the thorns, we want to concentrate on the rain and the sunlight and the spider webs glistening on both” (Anzaldúa and Moraga xxvii). What Anzaldúa seems to be implying with the spider webs is that, more than the painful historical journey of third world feminists, what matters is the coalition that was formed, the network of women in solidarity: “the crossing network of consciousness” (180) in Sandoval’s terms. This metaphor will appear later in the text.
The notion of cartography is important in this conceptual system, for it carries the idea of what Jacqui Alexander calls “charting the journey” (287) of all sorts of subaltern subjects, such as refugees, immigrants, Black and Chicanx women and their struggles. Cartographies ultimately chart a different kind of journey, spiritual inasmuch as there is a healing process involved, what Anzaldúa will call a healing of the soul. The knowledge of these maps is a knowledge of the self and one’s fragmented and hybrid cultural histories. As Jacqui Alexander explains:

These metaphors of links, charts, journeys, bridges, and borders are neither idle nor incidental, however, as we come to terms with the different cartographies of feminist struggle in different parts of the world; our different histories; where they change course and how they diverge (287).

For this reason, Alexander, following Chandra Mohanty, groups this system of metaphors as cartographies of feminist struggle that include the struggles of immigrants, refugees and anticolonial struggles throughout the world. These are also metaphors that serve to indicate an alternative journey that is also political at its core because it implies a re-linking with the whole cosmos, an operation that Keating will describe as spiritual.

**The role of the spiritual as a road towards a decolonial reconstruction of the psyche**

The role of the spiritual and the sacred in women-of-color feminist theories is one of the central categories embraced by decolonial theory. Positing the wholeness of the body/psyche western split has been one of the major modes of resistance in Anzaldúa’s “autohistoria-teoría” (Pitts 357) and serves the political function of reintegration to a world that had devalued and dehumanized subjects it had conceptually constructed as inferior. As explained by Alexander: “Since colonization has produced fragmentation and dismemberment at both the material and psychic levels, the work of decolonization has to make room for the deep yearning for wholeness” (Alexander 306).

As Alexander explains, it is not enough to re-link and form coalitions with other marginalized groups to feel reintegrated to humanity. The colonial experience of marginalization and segregation has also broken the bond between the colonized individual and the cosmos, her idea of belonging to a greater whole, which is a connection we perceive as sacred:

As human beings, we have a sacred connection to one another, and this is why enforced separations wreak havoc on our Souls. There is great danger, then, in living lives of segregation. What we have devised as an oppositional politic has been necessary, but will never sustain us, it can never ultimately feed that deep place inside us: that space of the erotic, that space of the Soul, that space of the Divine. (Alexander 306)

Alexander is raising an important point shared with Keating, about the necessity of moving beyond Sandoval’s oppositional framework into an all-inclusive form of consciousness that repairs the fragmented subjectivities of the colonized, her relation with herself, her society, and the totality. The “belief in the interrelatedness of all life forms” (Keating 60) is the spiritual politics behind Anzaldúa’s spiritual and political vision, what AnaLouise Keating calls a “metaphysics of interconnectedness” (30), an interconnectedness that is also symbolized by Anzaldúa’s metaphor of the web.

In fact, the notion of the web is another metaphor that is going to appear throughout Anzaldúa’s introductory texts in *This Bridge* as another version of the bridge, for it symbolizes the new network of alliances that is being created by third world feminists:
Think of me as Shiva, a many armed and legged body with one foot on brown soil, one on white, one in straight society, one in the gay world, the man’s world, the women’s, one limb in the literary world, another in the working class, the socialist, and the occult worlds. A sort of spider woman hanging by one strand of web (Anzaldúa and Moraga 205).

The bridge now becomes a strand of web, an important alteration of the concept of bridge, for it shows that the differential form of consciousness should also be flexible enough to negotiate the meaning of the dominant terms and the identity politics present in them. The spider metaphor is also a form of awareness of the multiple positionalities occupied by a single person that refuses to be reduced to a single reductive categorization: “Who, me? confused? Ambivalent? Not so, only your labels split me” (Anzaldúa 205). This is the heart of the “politics of interconnectivity” (Keating 30) that Anzaldúa deployed to claim an identity that had been strategically fragmented by coloniality. The spider woman is hanging from a mere thread because the psychic balance that she achieves, divided between all those identity tags is precarious.

The idea of spiritual balance is another component of Anzaldúa’s spiritual politics, hence the concept of the thread shifts into the concept of the tightrope: “I walk the tightrope with ease and grace. I span abysses. I walk the rope—an acrobat in equipoise, expert at the Balancing Act.” (Anzaldúa 209). Anzaldúa is no longer just a spider weaving a web, but an elegant acrobat creating equilibrium in a system of oppression that seeks to destabilize the psyche and material conditions of the colonized. The act of balancing is, as Sandoval had described her own concept of technology of resistance symbolized by the gear metaphor, shifting, balancing and redistributing power differentials: “The rational, the patriarchal and the heterosexual have held sway and legal tender for too long. Third world women, lesbians, feminists, and feminist-oriented men of all colors are banding and bonding together to right that balance. Only together can we be a force. I see us as a network of kindred spirits, a kind of family” (Anzaldúa 200). Again, the idea of flexibility behind the bridge metaphor is essential to understand that this is not a static concept, but a moving framework that like Sandoval’s political technologies, adapts to different contexts of resistance.

This flexible resistance is also expressed by the idea of the swaying bridge, a bridge that is in movement, and also in a permanent state of transition: “I am a wind-swayed bridge, a crossroads inhabited by whirlwinds. Gloria the facilitator, Gloria the mediator, straddling the walls between abysses” (205). This directly connects with Anzaldúa’s idea of Nepantla and nepantleras, mediators between the colonial and post-colonial worlds. The bridge is also a crossroads, a liminal, contradictory space, or, as she formulates it in This Bridge, the Left-Handed World: “El Mundo Zurdo” (209).

The metaphor of El Mundo Zurdo as a liminal site for decoloniality

As shown by the former systems of metaphors, for Anzaldúa the construction of a decolonial imaginary includes conceptually building the world of in-between, a space of liminality: “Both cultures deny me a place in their universe. Between them and among others, I build my own universe, El Mundo Zurdo” (Anzaldúa 209). Keating describes this metaphor as Anzaldúa’s oldest concept, for it represents an alternative kind of spiritual journey that involves building self-awareness and bringing about social change at the same time: “I believe that by changing ourselves we change the world, that Traveling El Mundo Zurdo path is the path of a two-way
movement—a going deep into the self and an expanding out into the world, a simultaneous recreation of the self and a reconstruction of society” (Anzaldúa and Moraga 208).

This view also represents a subversion of the sinister left-handed association in the Judeo-Christian mythology, where the left is related to evil and to the devil. In contrast, for Anzaldúa, the metaphor of the Left-Handed world has a positive connotation, it is her own universe, a space where she can freely link with the marginalized, dispossessed and subalternized peoples of the earth: “In El Mundo Zurdo I with my own affinities and my people with theirs can live together and transform the planet” (Anzaldúa and Moraga 208).

An attitude directed toward inner and collective transformation at the same time is what Keating calls Anzaldúa’s spiritual activism: “Spiritual activism begins within the individual but moves outward as these individuals expose, challenge and work to transform unjust social structures… spiritual activists can work simultaneously for individual and collective change by developing holistic epistemologies enabling them to expose social injustice” (Keating 58). “El Mundo Zurdo” is one of Anzaldúa’s most complex and fascinating metaphors, since it involves, like the bridge, a movement toward liberation that is also based on coalition-building but goes beyond intersectionality and points toward Sandoval’s “hermeneutics of love in the postmodern world” (180). The bridge becomes a tightrope and then “a network of kindred spirits” (Anzaldúa 209).

El Mundo Zurdo is the basis for spiritual activism because, like the bridge, it represents “The pull between what is and what should be” (Anzaldúa 208). The bridge is the shifting tension between the self and the collective, the movement toward decoloniality and the utopian universe Anzaldúa wants to build by empowering all the outcasts of coloniality and providing an imaginary home for them. This unbounded, decentralized, unhierarchized world between dominant cultures is the space of the decolonial unconscious that Anzaldúa wants to bring about in This Bridge, a space of liminality and points toward Sandoval’s “hermeneutics of love in the postmodern world” (180). The bridge becomes a tightrope and then “a network of kindred spirits” (Anzaldúa 209).

Paving the road toward a decolonial epistemology in This Bridge

It now becomes more evident that there are systematic connections between the spatial metaphors in This Bridge. The concept of the Bridge is related to the concept of “El Mundo Zurdo,” since both are liminal spaces that allow the spiritual activist to mediate and negotiate between different subjectivities that are divided by racial, ethnic, class divisions established by coloniality:

These categories do not reflect the realities we live in, and are not true to our multicultural roots. Liminality, the in-between space of Nepantla, in the space most of us occupy. We do not inhabit un mundo but many, and we need to allow these other people to join the feminist-of-color dialogue… We must become nepantleras and build bridges between all these worlds as we traffic back and forth between them, detribalizing and retribalizing in different and various communities (Anzaldúa 264).

The bridge and El Mundo Zurdo are thus related to “Nepantla,” a concept Anzaldúa had developed in Borderlands, signifying the space in between, the border that contained the outcasts, but also a space for infinite possibilities of linking and delinking from toxic spaces of
power and their hurtful imaginaries. The possibility of crossing over is what brings about the possibility of going back and forth between dominant western epistemologies and their reified symbols, borrowing them in order to reinscribe them into a different system.

As understood by Dussel, Anzaldua’s spatial metaphors possibly pave the way toward an alternative decolonial epistemology, which would be based on a different theology that does not privilege one category over another, i.e., the white over the black, the masculine over the feminine, etc; but are instead “relational forms of knowing” (Pitts 357). As Andrea Pitts suggests “self-knowledge practices are forms of social knowledge” (357) and thus, one alternative possibility is that these decolonizing metaphors also set the path toward a non-binary ontology where these are the foundational categories of being, and thus, the fundamental ways of knowing. Jacqui Alexander describes how this change of paradigm would have to take place, how a new system of knowledge would have to be woven into the old colonial mythologies:

In order to become women of color, we would need to become fluent in each other's histories, to unlearn an impulse that allows mythologies about each other to replace knowing about one another, to cultivate a way of knowing in which we direct our social, cultural, psychic, and spiritually marked attention on each other (Alexander 294).

Becoming women of color here has the sense of becoming more aware intersectional feminists, able to see beyond the stereotypes created by gender, race and other reified underlying conceptual metaphors that structure our understanding of identity and self. Becoming fluent in each other’s histories would mean debunking the myths behind those histories, whether they be blackness, brownness, lesbianism, womanhood, among other dominant systems of differentiation. Nevertheless, these principles do not just extend to women. According to Anzaldúa’s planetary politics, and Sandoval’s charting of cartographies of struggle, becoming fluent in each other’s histories might also mean being able to bridge the gap between all sorts of outsiders to the colonial matrix.

But this gap cannot be bridged without the adequate language, a common insurrectional language of the imagination that has the liberating instinct of poetry and metaphor. The function of metaphors within a differential mode of consciousness is key to reappropriating a colonized space that was fixed by dehumanizing categories such as race, gender or social class, that only served to inferiorize and marginalize individuals by situating them at the bottom of the social order. Rewriting space through metaphors of linking like bridges, webs and ropes also implies refusing reductionist accounts of humanity that intend to define someone through their race, nationality, sexuality, gender, age, etc. It also means rewriting the self into an imaginary space: “El Mundo Zurdo” or “nepantla” where the bonds between people are determined by themselves, inclusive spaces where there are no hierarchies, and thus, no modes of exclusion through language, race, class, gender or capital.

Conclusion: the road toward the decolonial imagination

An anthology that evidenced its coalitional power bringing together woman writers of color outside dominant currents of feminism in the USA, This Bridge Called my Back functioned as a manual for insurrection, a mechanism for mobilizing the power of all kinds of subalternized women in the USA and also a political technology capable of being appropriated by any group of oppressed peoples, a “methodology of the oppressed” in Sandoval’s understanding. The compilation’s unruly language, full of spatial metaphors that suggest strategic linkings, was built
to create bonds between people that would have been unlikely in the framework of coloniality and globalized capitalism. And yet, as Sandoval describes in the Methodology of the Oppressed, third world feminists created a language that would connect oppressed peoples beyond hegemonic hierarchies and forms of division.

This insurrectional language is what Sandoval called the differential consciousness mode, a way to resist domination by changing the terms of the conversation, the basic categories of thought, that were at the same time the categories of being, and thus, the modes of knowing other subjects. In Sandoval’s terms, these metaphors would provide a way to go beyond ideology. My suggestion in this essay—following Enrique Dussel’s analysis—is that they also suggest alternative ways of knowing, spiritual proto-epistemologies that structure thought and behavior in alternative ways through building images that influence the deepest parts of our psyche. What Dussel’s analysis of Marx’s theological metaphors postulates is that there is a parallel discourse, a deeper symbolic lodged in a religious system that mirrors the arguments he is trying to prove with western logic. Anzaldúa’s metaphor of the bridge and “El Mundo Zurdo” seem to provide an alternative theology that does not segregate people into different universes (heaven and hell, racialized and white people), but that is a liminal space that integrates all types of outcasts. This is a space similar to the interstitial space identified by Emma Pérez in the work of Anzaldúa and other Chicana and Mexican feminists writing themselves into history.

Liminal spaces such as “El Mundo Zurdo,” according to Keating, encapsulate Anzaldúa’s spiritual activism, which involved her desire to change herself and her community. The political and the spiritual go hand in hand in Anzaldúa’s metaphysics, for they both involve working toward social justice, and at the same time, working on freeing one’s spirit or psyche from the fragmentation of coloniality, which alienates the subject from herself, her community and the idea of totality. This is where Anzaldúa’s epistemology becomes evident, for working on the self involves, as Andrea Pitts states, an (implicit) epistemology of self. The former can be labeled an activist stance, for it involves trying to redress the balance in a self that has been psychologically terrorized into imbalance. It involves bringing about material change. Nevertheless, only through a spiritual reintegration into the cosmos, a radical relationality, can a colonized individual forge commonality in a violently hierarchized and segregated world. The bridge is the symbol of this vision, a vision of wholeness. The bridge is something that can be woven, as dreams and visions can be woven. It is a web, a flexible network of people and relations, what Sandoval calls “a crossing network of consciousness or mapping of consciousness” (53). The interstitial space it occupies is why Pérez names it “Third space feminism” (33) after Homi Bhabha.

Indeed, Anzaldúa’s spatial metaphors in This Bridge are numerous because she is constantly reterritorializing colonized spaces, spaces that had already been apportioned, defined and expropriated. By overturning the old categories of thought, Anzaldúa is effectuating a symbolic reappropriation of space. Consequently, Sandoval insists on the modifications in the cultural topographies and cartographies that derive from the differential mode of consciousness, that reorganize the boundaries of consciousness and of the political world. Metaphors have a privileged way to do this because of their connection to what Jung called the “collective subconscious,” the symbols that most appeal to our imagination as humans, the archetypes out of which myths and religions spring from. Anzaldúa’s knowledge of the functioning of the psyche enabled her to intentionally rewrite and subvert metaphors that inferiorized aspects of herself, like gender and race, both in Borderlands/La Frontera and in This Bridge Called My Back.
In this way, *This Bridge* invites readers to think outside the excluding binaries of coloniality and brings out the pivotal role of imagination in social struggles. Jacqui Alexander’s charting of the different cartographies of feminist struggle. Anzaldúa calls out to map the “paths that have led us here,” the journey from a colonized mindset into a decolonized mind. Acknowledging the transition is fundamental for the long process of decolonization, for as long as coloniality and the postmodern capitalist modes of domination may last. This implies being able to see what Anzaldúa calls the contradiction in being a bridge. The bridge is a tension between two contradictory world orders articulated by the subordinated and by the hegemonic segments of society. A bridge will have to be created wherever there is a gap between those in power and the powerless. The bridge image cannot exist without coloniality, without having one part of our subjectivities colonized, without the struggle to end a domination that structural, pervasive and ongoing.

Being a bridge also implies accepting the contradictions of coloniality. That is why the bridge is also a road, it is the intersection of many contradicting identities that must be negotiated. The figure of the spider woman, hanging from one thread, with one foot in each different world is a metaphor as strange and evocative as that of the acrobat, balancing on a tightrope between two cliffs. Perhaps with these two metaphors, Anzaldúa is pointing toward a crucial fact: The balance of this counterpower, the one that the differential consciousness may achieve is precarious as well. As Alexander and Keating suggest, it is necessary to move beyond the oppositional framework and achieve a more permanent sense of balance within the universe and all the beings in it. That is the urgency of the spiritual framework, one that will not only demarginalize and dealienate but also rehumanize and restore colonized subjectivities.

The spatial metaphors in *This Bridge Called my Back*, especially the metaphor of the bridge and all its iterations as drawbridge, swaying bridge, tightrope and web spanning over the abyss contribute to configure a decolonial imagination where linking is the main mode of relation, or as Keating would call it, radical interconnectedness. The bridge is one out of many metaphors used by Anzaldúa in the anthology she edited with Moraga, but it is the most used because it expresses with great effectiveness the rhetoric of decolonial love that Sandoval highlights in *Methodology of the Oppressed*. As Pérez articulated, the bridge is a tension between the colonial and the decolonial worlds. In Anzaldúa and Moraga’s words “a pull between what is and what should be” (208). It is a process of change, a movement toward liberation and emancipation. It is at the same time, a technology flexible enough to adapt to different subaltern groups and flexible enough to bring about change in the self and in society. It is not just a political technology, but a tightrope that helps the soul achieve balance in a disbalanced world, a system of thought that seeks to redress power to the dispossessed and the disempowered. Finally, the bridge is also a back, our back, the back that all those of who want to engage in laboring together for a common idea: the dream of a common decolonial project where hierarchies do not exist, where language does not divide us but helps us form a commonality. Perhaps the new decolonial imaginary are the cartographies of linking. Maybe, as Anzaldúa has suggested, once space is decolonized, it looks like the ocean, a borderless and boundless expanse of interlinked beings, a vast network reaching out into the universe.
Works cited


“Living in a state of psychic unrest, in a Borderland, is what makes poets write and artists create.”

Since its publication, Gloria Anzaldúa’s Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza has had an undeniable influence on many minoritized communities. For Latinxs in general and Chicanxs in particular, this canonical text has been utilized—and continues to be utilized—as a resource from which identity formation can be gleaned and from which subversive resistance can be forged. Lara Medina is but just one of the many individuals for whom Anzaldúa’s work has proven influential; Medina, a Chicana theologian, historian, and activist, credits much of her scholarship and activism to Anzaldúa’s Borderlands/La Frontera. Published during her time as a graduate student, Medina “considered the book to be ‘a new Chicana bible’” (Medina 248). Pertinent to this essay is Medina’s understanding of Anzaldúa’s interpretation and usage of the Nahua concept of nepantla. Medina’s reading of this concept differs significantly from previous scholarship; while most scholars argue that great confusion abounds in this in-between space, Medina argues that this space of duality and complementary opposites may provide the

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1. Gloria Anzaldúa, Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza (San Francisco, CA: Aunt Lute Books, 1999), 95. I am indebted to the Hispanic Summer Program and to Dr. Rev. Cristian de la Rosa, whose summer course served as the genesis to the ideas presented in this essay. I am also grateful to the participants’ feedback during the 2019 Forms of Justice: Reflections on Writing, Creativity, and Social Change Graduate Student Conference at St. John’s University in Queens, New York, where I presented these ideas. Lastly, I owe a great deal of gratitude to the undergraduate theology students at Dominican University, where I most recently presented portions of this essay.
possibility for meaning-making, identity formation, and healing to occur. By way of their creative imagination, Latinx can find empowerment in this middle space, this *nepantla*.

Still remembered today, one of the most famous Chicanas in recent history is Selena Quintanilla-Perez, *la reina de la música tejana*. Selena undoubtedly lived in this liminal space, straddling a life between geographic, cultural, gender, and economic borders yet traversing them. Ultimately, Selena thrived in *nepantla*, and through her music, she was able to touch the lives of Mexicans, Mexican Americans, Latinx, and many others around the globe. In a time filled with harsh anti-immigrant and political rhetoric, Selena’s music became a source of power and hope and provided agency to many people on either side of the Mexico-U.S. border. Janet Muniz describes this new found hope and agency as a utopian-like experience, what she calls an *audiotopia*, a term borrowed from Josh Kun. The tragic shooting of Selena on March 31, 1995 brought national and international attention to the young artist—attention that she had not garnered heretofore. As a result, testimonies became prominent on websites and blogs dedicated to the young musician, flowering like Texas bluebonnets at the height of the spring season. Muniz argues that these testimonies allowed Selena’s fans to merge their spirituality, religious devotion, and their love for Selena and her music. These testimonies, Muniz claims, became a type of public ritual, a popular religious devotion. As demonstrated below, other scholars have argued that these devotions are, in many ways, similar to the—often public—rituals dedicated to Our Lady of Guadalupe and other depictions of Mary, the Blessed Virgin in Latinx Catholic communities.

Placing Lara Medina and Janet Muniz in conversation with one another, this essay will: 1) identify Medina’s understanding of the meaning and function of *nepantla*; 2) outline the historical and contextual dynamics of Selena Quintanilla-Perez and at the same time argue that she lived, wrote, and performed in *nepantla*; 3) argue that Selena’s artistic expressions became a source of hope and empowerment, while bringing her fans into a space of *audiotopia*, proving that in this space, religious and spiritual devotion became interwoven with fandom; 4) this essay will examine the contextual deployment of such a spirituality. Our current political climate is infected with xenophobia, sexism, and racism. Is this country in need of another *audiotopia*? How can Selena, a young artist from *nepantla*, help one to make meaning in today’s hostile sociopolitical and sociocultural environment? How can one foster a spirituality of the creative imagination?

**A New Understanding of Nepantla**

In her groundbreaking work, Gloria Anzaldúa identifies the “new mestiza consciousness,” a consciousness which emerges from the borderlands. The borderlands, for Anzaldúa, represent much more than the physical yet arbitrary borders of Mexico and the United States. “In fact,” Anzaldúa explains, “the Borderlands are physically present wherever two or more cultures edge each other, where people of different races occupy the same territory, where under, lower, middle and upper classes touch...” (19). It is in these re-defined borderlands that the *mestiza* is situated; the *mestiza* finds herself “in a state of mental nepantilism” (100). *Nepantla* comes from the Nahuatl language, and is reclaimed by Anzaldúa to argue for a space in which the mestiza can flourish. Yes, *nepantla* can be a space of confusion and stark contradiction (as many have argued), but it can also serve as a space of convergence and coming together, a space for creativity and, more importantly, identity formation.
Lara Medina points to the fact that since the first time this concept appears in print, a negative connotation is attached to the term *nepantla*. For example, Diego Durán, a sixteenth century Dominican Friar, misinterprets the term in his interaction with a Nahua elder. The elder uses this term to describe his situation, being in the middle of two cultures (i.e., the Spanish and the Aztec) and two different religious traditions; while the elder does not fully understand Christianity, he does not completely reject the Christian values altogether, and, therefore, he and his community practice both their indigenous religion and Spanish Catholicism. Medina affirms, “My use of nepantla differs from the concept of syncretism that refers to the blending of diverse beliefs and practices into new and distinct forms” (255). Elsewhere, Medina further explains, “This coexistence of Catholic and Mesoamerican symbols reflects as aspect of nepantla spirituality, a spirituality where diverse biological and cultural elements converge, at times in great tension and at other times in cohesion,” (Medina and Cadena 88). According to Medina, Durán finds the elder’s actions and “behavior to be an ‘evil thing’ and condemn[s] the actions” (252). In this particular instance, *nepantla* is too ambiguous for the Dominican friar; therefore, it is somehow problematic. Evil. Demonic. It is not possible, in the friar’s mind, to maintain native, indigenous religious practices and at the same time fully embrace a Judeo-Christian spirituality.

Medina continues her scholarship by criticizing Miguel León-Portilla, a historian familiar with indigenous populations and also familiar with Friar Durán’s journal entries. Medina states, “León-Portilla’s often quoted interpretation of the exchange of words between the friar and the ‘wise old native’ presumes indecisiveness on the elder’s part. His use of the term *nepantla* is assumed to mean confusion and conflict, the result of imposed change” (253). Scholars, such as Medina and Clara Román-Odio, argue that these interpretations of the concept are gross misunderstandings of the term that do not allow for the many rich and positive possibilities that this concept can provide.

Weighing in on the ongoing *nepantla* debate, Román-Odio sides wholeheartedly with Medina. This becomes clear in a chapter titled, “Nepantlismo, Chicana Approach to Colonial Ideology.” Here, Román-Odio states, “For Medina, *nepantla* presumes agency, not confusion…Hence [Medina] interprets *nepantla* as a way of healing…and as a tool to reconcile” (54). In her own words, Medina asserts, “The confusion of *nepantla* must be embraced and worked through in order to reach a balanced state of clarity on the opposite pole within *nepantla*” (254). In no way does Medina deny the fact that confusion persists in this middle space. What sets Medina apart from previous scholars and their use of *nepantla* is the fact that Medina is willing to grapple with the confusion—the ambiguity—that lies prominently within *nepantla*. Afraid of such confusion, other scholars, like Friar Durán, would rather deride its usage; Medina, however, urges one to embrace liminality. The last part of her previous comment is just as important as the first. She speaks of a balance and of duality, of complementary opposites or poles. On this matter, she expounds, “As duality or complementary opposites exist in all things, *nepantla* itself is comprised of the shadow side or the bewildering state of uncertainty, and the transparent side or the state of clarity and meaning making” (254). Both the states of uncertainty and of clarity are present in this borderlands space. Only by embracing the uncertainty within this liminal space can one begin to construct meaning.

How exactly does one begin this process of meaning-making? Medina answers this question in the following way:

As in any relationship coexistence is not always easy, but once the tensions of *nepantla* are understood and confronted, and the native-Self is recovered and continuously healed,
Nepantla, or the middle space, becomes a psychological, spiritual, and political space that Latinos/as transform as a site of meaning making and healing (257).

Similar to Anzaldúa’s “new mestiza consciousness,” Medina also claims that when one becomes aware of and is able to retrieve and reclaim one’s past, transformation is possible; healing is possible.

Medina refers back to her master’s thesis, in which she argues that “[the reinterpretation and reclamation of Indigenous epistemologies] is the deepest source for our [Chicanos/as] valuing communal responsibility, interdependence, reciprocity, sacrifice, truth in artistic expression” (249, emphasis added). This phrase is italicized because of its importance and centrality to the rest of this paper. It is evident that Medina believes that indigenous, ancestral, and cultural values are often depicted through the different mediums of artistic expression. She not only makes this the focus of her master’s thesis, but she advances this central idea as her career in academia continues. Horizons of the Sacred: Mexican Traditions in U.S. Catholicism includes Medina’s co-written chapter titled, “Días de los Muertos: Public Ritual, Community Renewal, and Popular Religion in Los Angeles.” This essay will not discuss this particular celebration and memorial rite in detail; nevertheless, much can be gleaned from Medina’s co-written chapter. Of particular interest is Medina’s expansion of the concept nepantla and its significance to aesthetics, and particularly Latinx theological aesthetics. El día de los muertos, she argues, is an artistic expression of nepantla spirituality (88).

In celebrating el día de los muertos, one incorporates elements of indigenous spirituality alongside and in addition to traditional Roman Catholic practices and images; this convergence, therefore, can be understood as a spirituality of nepantla. To be clear, “Nepantla is not syncretism in the traditional sense, but an example of ‘transculturation,’ or a continuous encounter of two or more divergent worldviews” (Medina and Cadena 88). Unlike syncretism which hinges on a hierarchy of cultural and religious values, where one gives way to the other, nepantla, as an in-between space, not only recovers indigenous ways of knowing and being but allows for indigenous and Christian traditions to convivir (coexist) on equal playing fields, as often seen in artistic expressions during el día de los muertos celebrations.

Medina and Cadena affirm that “[a]rt expressing a nepantla spirituality reflects the intersections of politics and spirituality for a people committed to justice and self-determination; it is art that expresses joy, pain, and a people’s resolve to survive and prosper, not as individuals but as a collective” (88-89). When this quote is read alongside Medina’s previous quote about truth in artistic expression, these quotes reveal the significance of art—in all its forms—in the construction of meaning and in the healing process.

Furthermore, these quotes reveal Anzaldúa’s greater influence on Medina. Anzaldúa declares, “In the ethno-poetics and performance of the shaman, my people, the Indians, did not split the artistic from the functional, the sacred from the secular, art from everyday life” (88). In the same paragraph, Anzaldúa also proclaims, “The ability of story (prose and poetry) to transform the storyteller and listener into something or someone else is shamanistic. The writer, as shape-changer, is a nahual, a shaman” (88.) In the process of identity formation, artistic expressions become a vehicle for ethical formation. Art is not separate from the everyday experiences of indigenous peoples, and, I would argue, art is not separate from the everyday experiences of contemporary Chicanx or U.S. Latinx communities.
In many instances, art has become not only a tool for meaning-making, but it also has become a tool for resistance, subversive and sometimes not so subversive. Román-Odio picks up on this when she writes, “Hence, for Chicanas, art and writing become methods to explore this process of reformulation and a significant tool in the creation of oppositional agency” (56). The process of reformulation takes place as one begins to utilize a hermeneutics of retrieval, thereby retrieving and reclaiming bits and pieces of one’s ancestral history and cultural traditions. This process should not be done, however, without a hermeneutics of suspicion and what Mary Elizabeth Moore calls a hermeneutic of nurture, wherein one seeks and analyzes the “seeds of life in sacred texts and ordinary life events” (168). Together, these varying hermeneutics allow one to reclaim the agency and subjectivity that is often times taken away through different colonial and neo-colonial processes, such as the colonizing mindsets and the extreme nationalistic tendencies embedded in this nation’s public education system.

Selena, from Nepantla?

Selena was born a third-generation Texan, born to the Quintanilla family on Easter Sunday (April 16, 1971) in Lake Jackson, Texas, but her family also lived in Corpus Christi, Texas, only a couple hours’ drive from the Mexico/United States border. Joe Nick Patoski, who according to José E. Limón, is the journalist who “has written the most extended treatment of Selena” in a “detailed biographical account of her life” (96). Although Patoski never uses the terms bicultural or dual epistemological environment—nor does he ever use the term nepantla—his biography of Selena clearly reveals that Selena lived in this middle space of liminality.

In Lake Jackson, Selena begins school and is reared in a predominantly white environment. In Selena, Como la Flor, Patoski states, “[Selena] neither spoke Spanish nor was encouraged to learn it, because Mexican culture was practically nonexistent” in this small Texan city (34). This statement compounds the Spanish language and Mexican culture, and while Spanish is central to the Mexican culture, it is not its sole indicator; there are many other forms by which one can express one’s cultural heritage, and these forms of expressions seem to escape Patoski. Still, when one reads Patoski’s statement within the Lake Jackson context of Selena’s early years and when one disregards Patoski ignorance of multicultural communities, one can sort of understand where Patoski is going with this statement. Spanish is not Selena’s primary focus as a child; it is not until she begins singing music in Spanish and is thrust into a Spanish-speaking atmosphere that she takes it upon herself to learn the Spanish language. Patoski explains, “For all her life, [Selena had] cruised along singing phonetically, but the demands of the fans, the radio, and the press necessitated a better command of español” (89). Total command is never achieved, however; as Cat Cardenas states in her online article “We Need to Talk about Selena,” when she “fumbles her Spanish,” Selena laughs it off, taking it in stride. The demands of the fans and the press do in fact contribute to Selena’s eagerness to speak Spanish. Contrary to Patoski’s suggestion, however, Selena does not only learn Spanish as a publicity stunt and for a better self-image. Selena, herself, explains this in a quote included in Patoski’s book: “It only makes you a better person or even smarter to know two languages. If that barrier is not there you can cross both lines, talk to English- and Spanish- [speaking] people” (89). Reclaiming the Spanish language (as well as other aspects of Mexican and Mexican American culture) became a crucial component in Selena’s identity formation process. As mentioned above, this hermeneutic of retrieval is a significant component of the healing process for individuals living in nepantla.
Patoski’s previous statement, in which he equates language with culture, needs further analysis. Maybe Selena does not speak the Spanish language at first; this fact does not diminish or belittle her latinidad. In fact, Selena’s cultural heritage is expressed in a multiplicity of ways. Patoski writes, “Both Matt and David Read, neighbors of Selena’s, were in awe at how tightly knit the Quintanilla family was” (35). Much later, he also writes, “She was pura Latina, from her morena features to her embrace of family values” (89). Disregarding Patoski’s sexist—and borderline racist—connotations, one can focus on the last part of this quote: family values. Although not specific to the Mexican culture, family values and a tight-knit familial bond are significant elements of non-Euro-American ways of being. As Selena and her family maneuver through a predominantly white space, they hold firmly to a nepantla epistemology, in which familial bonds are significant. In other words, though fully immersed in a Eurocentric worldview, which tends to value individualism, the Quintanilla family maintains a strong commitment to the communal dimensions of their cultural heritage. In her article in Texas Monthly, Cardenas affirms, “Selena’s family was always her priority.” Though little scholarship has addressed Selena’s own religious background, the importance of family may also stem from the fact that her parents were Jehovah’s witnesses.

Another way in which the family is able to retain their cultural heritage, while at the same time incorporating outside influences, is through music. Selena, referred to as the “Queen of Tejano Music,” holds onto many elements of this traditional genre of music, which is itself a borderlands creation. Deborah Paredez explains:

Within the rhythms of Tejano music, one can trace the legacy of power occupations and negotiations that have marked South Texas; Mexican rancheras and cumbias collide with German polkas, Afro-Caribbean rhythms and mainstream US pop, hip hop, and country western influences often all within the same song (64).

In the end, Selena and the Quintanilla family initiate a significant transformation to this regional North Mexican and South Texan style of music. Román-Odio says, “Through the concept of nepantla, border artists are able to rethink and reformulate their experiences in the borderlands” (73). Much like the corridos “narrated one hundred years of border history” during the time of Anzaldúa (Anzaldúa 83), Selena’s tejano music narrates the struggles of nepantleros of her time. This new transformation resonates with Latinxs on both sides of the border and beyond. Janet Muniz, a sociologist, beautifully articulates that “The music of icon Selena transcends not only the physical borderlands of the U.S. and Mexico but speaks to the struggles embodied by her fans that belong to multiple communities and identities” (2). One could easily substitute the last part of Muniz’s sentence with nepantla. Selena’s music speaks to those from nepantla, their struggles, their multiple communities, their hybrid identities.

What exactly are some of the struggles facing borderland communities? Muniz answers, “This time period in the early to mid-1990’s in the United States not only saw an increase in a migrant Latino/a population but also anti-immigrant legislation and fear of an ‘other’” (5). As these “hegemonic anti-immigrant xenophobic and nativist discourses” prevailed, the communities most affected were the Latinx communities on and/or near the Mexico-U.S. borderlands. Migrant farm labor, Nixon’s Immigrant Reform and Control Act of 1986, and the Immigration Act of 1990 signed by George H. W. Bush are only a few of the immigrant/migrant-related issues facing Latinx populations during this time.

In researching this topic, another issue facing Latino—or rather Latina—populations comes to bear: the prevalence of sexist and misogynistic rhetoric. A quick reading of Joe Nick Patoski’s
book *Selena: Como la Flor*, published in 1996, and José E. Limón’s 1997 article, “Sexuality, Greater Mexico and the Song-and-Dance with Hegemony” proves this point. Patoski cannot seem to make up his mind; is Selena a princess “with Aztec facial features” or a “Mayan princess” (80-82)? Either way, he argues, men viewed Selena as a “sexual animal” who “pranced around the stage in clothes that were provocative and revealing” (97, 138). Limón, having read and cited Patoski, expresses his own sexist views, but in a much louder fashion. Selena’s rise to stardom is due, in large part, to her ostentatious sexuality: “[Selena] expressed her bodily sexuality as no other such singer-dancer had ever quite done before for a mass public audience, an expression, as I have suggested, always done at great risk—the risk of the stigma of illicit prostitutional sexuality” (100). These and similar sentiments are highlighted in the work of Jennifer Willis and Alberto Gonzalez, as they highlight the many ways in which Selena’s stage presence and personal life were misunderstood by non-tejanos. Originally labeled the Tex-Mex Madonna, due to her creative costumes, by white audiences, Selena’s image was re-conceptualized by members of the Latinx community: “Through [Selena’s] death, and through the centering of tejano voices in the media, this conception was challenged. The image of the sexily dressed woman was reconceptualized for non-tejano audiences by supplying a Tejano-centered understanding” (Willis and Gonzalez 11).

The many issues related to immigration and the sexist language of the late 1980s and the 1990s are only two of the many concerns facing already marginalized communities, the communities of Latinxs living in the borderlands. According to Muniz these borderlands people utilize music as a way to formulate and re-formulate their identity, build community, and mobilize politically (1). In so doing, moreover, they escape into an *audiotopia*. For others who are not able to fully reach *audiotopia*, she argues, music gives them a glimpse of this utopian auditory experience. She gives examples of such instances:

The *audiotopic* potential of Selena’s music can serve as an escape from the xenophobia in anti-immigrant discourse faced by an undocumented person and/or the patriarchal cultural values stressed upon a young teen in Mexico. The role of Selena’s music as *audiotopias* for her fans across the U.S. and Mexico in an ideal borderless America has various political implications that are derived from her fan base and significance of her work after her death. These include the potential music holds for self-discovery, agency and empowerment (2).

Muniz’s comment further shows the potentiality of artistic expressions from within the state of *nepantla* in the process of identity formation. As Laura Medina reminds us, “The state of *nepantla*...can become a site of transformative struggle and creativity, a state of inherent being and meaning-making” (88). Muniz proves that Selena’s life and music provide this state of *nepantla*, which allows for meaning-making, personal agency, and empowerment. This empowerment is not only an individual/personal empowerment. Muniz also demonstrates the ways in which Latinx communities have utilized Selena’s life and music to engage the political and cultural spheres (Muniz 5-9). Paredez illustrates the “purchasing power” of the Latinx community, thereby showcasing Latinx contributions to the economic sphere (65). As I will demonstrate below, Selena’s music and legacy also allows for spiritual and religious empowerment.

Undoubtedly, all of this is at work during Selena’s lifetime, especially during the height of the young musician’s career; however, Muniz emphasizes that after Selena’s death *audiotopias* increase in dramatic proportions. Yolanda Saldivar shoots and kills Selena just a few short weeks
before her twenty-fourth birthday on March 31, 1995. Soon after, ofrendas, memorial sites, webpages, and blogging sites are created in dedication to the young star and her music. As Muniz shows, these aesthetic expressions of remembrance are not solely about the music and the lyrics. She writes, “Remembering Selena has not simply been about the music, rather it has been about the celebration of Latinidad, empowerment, and the message that Selena sent to her fans about unifying together, helping each other and building community” (7). Paredez’s work recounts many of the ensuing performances dedicated to Selena, such as plays, musicals, movies, and imitations; these performances, she argues, have provided much more than an opportunity for mourning. She states, “[T]he act of mourning Selena constituted one of the most provocative and generative ways in which Latinas/os in the US articulated a critical formulation of latinitad during the 1990s” and well into the twenty-first century (67). Similarly, Gastón Espinosa, a leading Latino theologian, opines, “Mexican Americans and other Latinos have reimagined, reconstructed, and transformed Selena’s life and tragic death into a collective symbol of cultural and political resistance in order to help redeem their subcultural minority status in mainstream Anglo-America” (359). Lastly, in his biography of Selena, Patoski adds that Selena’s image “was a touchstone for salvation, hope, and redemption, hence the Selena shrines, the Selena votive candles, and the Selena veneration throughout the Latin world” (267). A sense of empowerment, community, hope, and salvation: these are only a few of the sentiments shared by the nepantleros who listened—and continue to listen—to Selena’s music and view her as an inspiration, a leader, and a unifying voice. And while one must take into consideration the many ways in which Selena’s image has been exploited and commodified, Selena’s image, music, and legacy serves both as a source of inspiration for many marginalized Latinx individuals and as a tool for subversive resistance, redefining cultural and national identities.

For someone like Patoski, who may not be familiar with a nepantla spirituality, the religious devotion to Selena may appear odd at best, sacrilegious at worst. His view might be similar to the aforementioned Dominican friar who frowned upon the Christianity practiced by the Nahua people. As a Chicana from California, Muniz, is no stranger to Selena-themed votive candles or ofrendas, and her writing focuses on the testimonies found on Selena-dedicated blogging sites. Muniz states, “These posts touch into a spirituality and religious aspect of Latino/a immigrant communities who have found sanctuary for salvation from their daily struggles as working class people” (8). After a brief investigation on popular internet sites, the devotional intermixing of the secular and spiritual becomes evident, she argues. Rather than finding the spiritual and the secular as confusing and oppositional dualities, it is clear that communities in nepantla work through the complementary opposites found within this liminal space, thereby offering a borderlands spirituality. An example of this can be found in an article by Jeff Winkler in Texas Monthly. Before arriving at a Selena-inspired commemoration and celebration, Winkler and his friends decide to eat at Selena’s favorite fast-food burger joint, Whataburger. As Selena fans, this meal becomes much more than a lunch for Winkler and his friends. He explains, “[I]t seemed fitting for our small congregation to partake in the daily bread of the Queen of Tejano, a down-home girl with talent and drive” (108). This Whataburger experience is likened to a Eucharistic, a feast of giving thanks, and Winkler and his friends are the welcomed members of the congregation. While it may be easy to dismiss Winkler’s comment as an exaggerated—or even heretical—statement, the image he provides clearly demonstrates a nepantla spirituality. As a religious educator, I read this not so much as a comment on the
Eucharist, but a comment on community and the way this particular celebration made Winkler and his friends feel welcomed.

Gaston Espinosa argues that Selena’s fans—devotees rather—have reconstructed a new and more functional image for their daily lives, an image that grants salvific-like powers. He suggests that devotees see a “‘Santa Selena,’ a new symbolic mestiza Guadalupe for the modern Latina,” and others have constructed a “beatific vision” of Selena “linked in some way or another to Our Lady of Guadalupe” (369). Essayist, Ilan Stavans also shares similar sentiments in his article titled, “Santa Selena.” He states, “Since her tragic death, Selena has become omnipresent in la frontera, the focal point of a collective suffering—a patron saint, of sorts” (38). Moreover, he adds, like the Holy Land and other religious sites, “pilgrims come to weep at [Selena’s] birthplace and to pay homage at the places she graced with her presence” (38).

Winkler, Espinosa, and Stavans are in no way arguing that Selena grants salvation or that she is the Guadalupe. What they are saying is that this nepantla spirituality holds significant transformative power for people within the borderlands. As we see through Muniz’s use of audiotaopia, “Selena represented hope, empowerment, working towards a dream, and hard work” (7). Stavans agrees, as he states that Selena’s voice “gives voice to the silenced and the oppressed” (38). Secondly, Espinosa affirms that Santa Selena redeemed the Latinx community’s “cultural hybridity and mestizaje,” but more importantly, “Selena’s life and music redeemed the U.S.-Mexico borderlands as a creative and even beautiful cultural space and place” (375). This beautiful cultural space allows for a creative and much needed reconfiguration of personal, communal, cultural, and political identity. More importantly, it is this same place that allows for meaning-making to happen and healing to take place.

During a time of much xenophobia, racism, and sexism, the creative artistic expressions of one nepantlera from Corpus Christi traversed borders and empowered people on both sides of the border. Nearly a quarter of a century later, this country is still facing many of these same issues. Can Selena Quintanilla-Perez’s music and life inform today’s political climate? Will someone else from nepantla come along and provide borderland communities with the power and agency needed for meaning-making? How do we, in our respective fields, foster aesthetical practices that lead communities to unity rather than divisiveness? In Selena, a great example of a spirituality that is rooted in the lives and experiences of the borderland peoples is made manifest. May spiritualties of the creative imagination continue to guide individuals and communities through meaning-making and healing processes.
Works Cited


Conocimientos: Disrupting the Colonial God-in-the-Box, Affirmations, and Writing Exercises

By Yolanda Nieves

Abstract

Latina spirituality is part of what Anzaldúa refers to as conocimiento. In this essay I share feminist ideas about Latina spirituality and how rejecting organized religion can lead to the wholeness of the Self and the transformation of communities. Drawing from feminist writers’ ideology (Gloria Anzaldúa, Maria Yellow Horse Braveheart, Irene Lara) and from trauma experts (Susan Dwyer, Janina Fisher) my perspective explores the question “How can we better understand the importance of Latina/feminist spirituality?” and “What does it mean to have a radical presence in the world?” I challenge the “God-in-the Box” concept that institutionalized religions use to bind us to colonial practices. The importance of spirituality that transgresses imposed colonial boundaries and works toward healing historical and intergenerational trauma guides the discussion. Highlighting the power of what the author calls “radical presence” affirmations and writing exercises uniquely designed for Latinas and all people of color are offered to enhance Latina spirituality.

Key words: Latina, spiritual, spirituality, spiritual activism, decolonization, conocimiento, healing, affirmations, writing exercises, religiosity.

I am here: alma desnuda. When I was growing up, I was taught to equate spirituality with religiosity. Having been raised as a Vatican I católica in the 1960s, my childhood perceptions of the majestic rituals of the Catholic church infiltrated my essence. Baptism, catechism, la primera comunión, and confirmation gave me all the rights and privileges of being called pious. There was nothing more prestigious than being a religious member of the church in good standing. My family, clutched at the throat by Vatican II changes, twirled away from the pews. In early 1970s we stopped attending Saint Mark’s parish in Humboldt Park, Chicago. I did, however, continue to seek spirituality through other religious venues. After years of attending all sorts of Latino and
Black churches – as well as Catholic, Pentecostal, Methodist, and other Protestant churches – I recognized how institutionalized religion is a power horse for the continued colonization of people. Thus, I consider myself a “nothing,” but that does not equate my being a non-spiritual person. In choosing to identify myself as “nothing,” I disturb the colonial and patriarchal claim to my spirituality, not as an inferior being. I have “taken back” who I am. I am done with washing the feet of colonialism and drying it with my hair. Exploring the multitude of ways spirituality can manifest itself, decolonizing my Self has been a tug-of-war at times. Nye (2019) refers to decolonization as “a challenge to these assumptions of power and the structures that are formed to maintain them” (p. 43). As I continue to work at decolonizing myself, I also seek to exorcise “the whiteness” of the colonial philosophical and theological ideals embedded in me. Thus, decolonization is a lifelong act for liberation. Claiming my spirituality has been stormy and passionate work.

Affirmation 1: I release the rosary and prayer book to the seas and connect my spirit to the clouds, to the drop of water lingering on a leaf of my potted plant, in the eyes of the homeless woman who sits on the park bench. With every breath I am born into a new moment. Your energy is my energy. Your wonder is my wonder. Your pain is my pain. Like the roots of trees intertwined in the uterus of the soil, dark and moist, we embrace this moment together.

Writing Exercise 1: Find a religious object in your home. Look at it and consider its meaning deeply. What memories emerge for you from this object? Why do you still have it? How has this item helped your spirituality? How has it stifled your spiritual development? What mental religious image do you want to release?

Now here is my disclaimer: I am not a theologian and I no longer raise my banner as a Christian. After my husband, a United Methodist minister died, the religious person in me packed her bags and jumped into a pickup truck headed for another border. You can call me anything you want: infidel, sinner, agnostic, sacrilegious, a lost soul, unpatriotic, or a religious adulterer. ¿El grito mio? Unapologetically refusing to categorize myself. Personally, I like the noun bruja, or witch. We must note that colonialism’s cauldron tries to fermentate an exoticism with the term “witch”; she is either good or evil, enchants or curses. I repudiate those images. In indigenous non-Western cultures, a bruja is the stoic tree of her community, working in solitude and collectively with her community as a healer to sustain their connection to earth and the cosmos. Lara (2005) writes that brujas “work toward being in harmony with their whole selves, their bodyminds, as part of the natural sacred world, and as resources of knowledge for personal and social change” (p. 16). This conocimiento – this “knowing” – grounds my spirituality.

Today, I reject the polite grin of a God-in-the-Box concept of spirituality – the idea that colonial religious institutions hold the absolute truth of God in a tidy box and within that box hold the absolute rule book of who God is, what God wants, and how God manifests Himself in the patriarchal world. Many who hold religious power place people within the confines of this box in a web-like spell – a tidy prison of beliefs. What is in question is the theological know-it-alls who offer simplistic answers to profound spiritual questions on gold-plated dishes. Representing the Imperialistic God, a God that steals from the poor but gives nothing back to His/Her creation, they repeat things that bubble and rise, but sicken our spirits afterward.
Preaching Hell as a place for those who do not follow the rules is common. Some of those same religious leaders will think of this as a blasphemous essay or, in other words, dirty writing. But dirty writing can be truthful writing – it is a light and a music of spirituality. And I will rub the shiny pennies of pensamientos y conocimientos I have discovered through my life’s journey about spirituality with you.

**Affirmation 2:** I integrate my bodymindspirit in search of myself, in search for the richness of spirit that exists in me and in all of Creation’s beings that I touch and touch me. I understand that at times there are no clear answers, but those answers exist and are revealed as I continue to seek light, goodness, and compassion for myself and all living beings.

**Writing Exercise 2:** Imagine you have no religion. Imagine that the idea of institutional religious no longer exists. What would you believe in? Tap into your conocimiento. 

Religions and rules have the happiest of marriages. Their pre-nuptial agreement consists in corralling the human spirit by controlling the mind. Religions also have a backdrop of violence and war – mostly against women. The mandatory rules and rituals of religious institutions always enflamed questions in me as to why women were burned, lynched, or drowned as witches, or stoned for being polyamorous. Girls had to wear veils but were barred from being altar boys. Nail polish, big jewelry, bare shoulders, or dancing until dawn – such wickedness! All excuses to slap us, split our lips and make them bleed. I wondered why the liturgies entrenched in a colonial past could not reflect the wonder of the human spirit. Shouldn’t there be another way to connect with my spirituality aside from sitting in pews, looking at my watch, and yawning?

Moreover, when I stared at the institutional representations of God – mostly male – I didn’t see them reflect me or most women I know. I have dis-identified with all religions that force me to have an imaginary intimacy with ghostly figures in the sky, statues nailed on the cross, or the spirits that walk the earth. I am not dismissing the existence of spirits or energies that create and sustain life, and manifest in various ways in our lives. But those creative life-enhancing energies and life-quickening tensions powerfully exist afuera – outside the confines of institutional religions where the huddled whispering stifle spirituality. In institutional religions creative energies are considered highly irreverent. Disrupting the God-in-the Box concept of spirituality, especially in its feminine and feminist form, is considered heretical, but it is the spiritual ripening we need. When our spirituality becomes a shout, oppressive structures tremble.

Just by having been born and being alive we have a radical spiritual presence on this earth, just like a blade of grass, a drop of water, or a grain of sand have radical spiritual existences. That radicalness, however, has been compromised and politized by skin color, sexual and gender identity/orientation, the geography of the places where we were born, the languages we speak, the time we live in, the quality of the food and water we can or cannot afford, the air we breathe, the traumas we experience. Yet I have surmised that spirituality is the conscious knowing that the manifestation of life – all kinds of life – is the true miracle, and no matter where we exist, somos the center of that miracle. Our bodies are the bicycles, pickup trucks, and rockets whereby our energies travel through time and space. Anzaldúa (2015) reflects: “It dawns on you that you’re not contained by your skin – you exist outside your body and outside your dream body, as well. If the body is energy, is spirit – it doesn’t have boundaries … it follows that if you’re not contained by your race, class, gender, or sexual identity, the body must be more than the
categories that mark you” (p. 134-135). Thus, our radical presence transcends all imposed colonial categories assigned to us.

Every day we have cells that die and are reborn in ways that are invisible to us. Our physical existence is temporal, and no one really knows how or in what ways our spirit-energy will transcend death. I want to believe our spirit-energy is permeable and will transcend the material reality. We can only speculate and hope, at the very least, that we can survive the logistics of our day-to-day existence with some truth, beauty, and goodness leading us like the sunrise into the day.

Affirmation 3: As I release the colonial concepts of God, I give myself permission to imagine a new and holistic way of living and believing. I am woman, I am man, I am child, I am Crone, I am Spirit, I am energy, I am body; my roots connect me to my ancestors, and my branches to those who come after me. I am connected to eternity.

Writing Exercise 3: Consider how your body and spirit belong to you. Consider how your body and spirit also belong to your community. Describe yourself as a divine being. Give yourself a new name. What special gifts or knowledge would you share with your family, your community, and/or the world? How would you honor yourself?

Colonialism and institutional religions encourage fragmented selves. For example, it has been well documented how the history of slavery is tightly intertwined with systemic racism and political disenfranchisement practiced on various levels in organized religions in the U.S. It is common knowledge that Article 1, Section 2, Clause 3 of the Constitution proclaimed that enslaved people were regulated to being 3/5ths of a human. Enslaved human beings, deemed less than human, sat or stood in the back of churches. Enslaved people, legally prohibited from learning to read and write in the Jim Crow south could not preach or teach in churches. Nor, for that matter, could women. Full participation of anyone other than male and white in political, social, and organized religious institutions was stamped null and void. One example of enslavement’s legacy of spirit injury manifests itself today in for-profit prisons that incarcerate people of color at much higher rates than whites. Prisons do not rehabilitate or restore humanity. Prisons reflect our alienation from one another and the need for conocimiento. As spiritual beings, we must not tire of our weeping or our work.

The United States has had a history of legitimizing the torture, rape, removal and murder/lynching of enslaved, indentured, and indigenous populations; the 1830 Indian Removal Act, the 1850 Fugitive Slave Law and the Chinese Exclusion Act hideously mark the past. Crimes against these populations routinely went unpunished. Unabashedly, the Bible was one of the strongest tools to encourage obedience to all types of injustices. Thus, fragmentation of the self, legitimized by political and organized religions, is a historical and ongoing microaggression that traumatized all of us physically, emotionally, and spiritually – and continues to do so. The Native American Hunkpapa/Oglala Lakota psychiatrist, Braveheart (2021) uncovered that “Historical trauma is understood as: cumulative emotional and psychological wounding, over the lifespan and across generations, emanating from massive group trauma experiences. …” (p. 1). The Jewish psychotherapist Fisher (2017) shares “survivors of abuse, neglect, and other traumatic experiences … suffer from feelings of fraudulence or pretending, not realizing that each side of 1850 the personality is equally real and necessary … (p. 5). To re-integrate the Self
requires a spirituality that embraces all parts of us, the darkness, the light, our historical past, our connections to our ancestors, their works, and their lives. Firestone (2019) writes “The residue of our ancestors’ unresolved injury does not simply disappear. In fact, it often weighs most heavily on the introspective, sensitive members of the next generation” (p. 14). Historical and intergenerational trauma are not scrapes on knees that can quickly heal. It will take decades or centuries to achieve wholeness. Consequently, our thirst for the sacred can expel the compartmentalization of our lives and for future generations, too.

It is important to acknowledge colonized perspectives we harbor. Many religious institutional teachings propt that animals, plant life, earth’s sacred resources, and “Others” who are economically and politically marginalized exist to be dominated and serve colonial and racist systems. We should work in collaboration with each other to acknowledge this type of fragmentation. Organized and institutionalized religions encourage us to find inspiration outside ourselves in the flawed saints, canonized or not, who are secured and welded to religious pedestals all over the world. We are taught to sing the metanarratives of the heroic dead – heroes often defined by those in power who manipulate history through mental and emotional occupation and lies. It is not a bad idea to seek inspiration in others, including the dead, but spiritual enlightenment can also be found in a breath, a piece of bread, or a seed we plant. The magic we create stems from our spiritual discernment of how to create wholeness.

Notwithstanding, institutional religions discouraged us to co-create with other living beings. Ignoring and erasing the complexities of our relationships with others and with our earth by judging things absolutely “right” or absolutely “evil” is also a type of colonization. A retrieval of our spirituality allows us conocimiento – to “see” the incoherent ways we exist and treat each other; let’s rip off the robes of the God-in-the-Box mandates.

It follows that one of the most difficult journeys of a spiritual life is the reconciliation of the past with the present. Kindled by compassion for oneself, a spiritual journey entails reconciliation with re-membering and integrating past experiences with the present. Dwyer (n.d.) shares that “reconciliation is fundamentally a process whose aim is to … make sense of injuries, new beliefs, [and] attitudes in the overall narrative context of a personal or national life” (p. 96). Reconciliation is a coming to terms with difficult truths about the self, others, and historical events that overtook and diminished us. To accept a disruption of our own narratives – or the ones instilled in us by organized religion or patriarchal culture – is to sit in a sacred time and space. It means learning to live with unwanted memories, but it is also about permission to move forward in our lives. Self-compassion is a steppingstone for spirituality.

Affirmation 4: My emotions and thoughts that lead me to question authority are holy and justifiable. My questions hold immense power. The silence I receive in response to those questions point me toward my truth. I am unafraid of my questions. I am brave and strong amid silence and disdain from those who seek to bind me to colonial authorities. The answers are coming. The answers are here. I am brave.

Writing Exercise 4: Consider allowing yourself to sit with the idea of reconciliation. Be your own spokesperson on behalf of your spirituality. As an advocate for a reconciliation with yourself or with past events that you felt you had no control over, what does this spokesperson/representative say on behalf of yourself, your spirituality, and the ways you desire and work toward wholeness? In what ways can you be compassionate to yourself?
Regarding evil: Evil does exist. For example, no one can deny the evil and trauma inflicted upon women and children when they are raped, tortured, and who are sold to the highest bidder in the global sex trafficking subculture. Nor can we ignore the evil that greed engenders and how uncontrolled power inflicts physical, mental, and spiritual pain on the poor and marginalized of the world. Our pre-coded and bland responses to evil, our neutral stances on poverty, invasions, war, atrocities, conquest, and the disregard of the spirituality of our flesh and blood is also evil. Evil howls from the rooftops with physical acts of hatred, racism, misogyny, and apathy. Evil is the enemy of the people – and so is blind religiosity. To live in oblivion of the imploding planet and our passiveness to its demise is a spiritual aberration. Perhaps the embodiment of evil is the way we accept our lives without questioning the status quo and how we allow ourselves to exist in a ridiculously linear fashion. Evil encourages linear dialogues that skim the surface of existence. Excavating what we all really mean to each other so we can thereby formulate healthy co-dependencies is critical goodness.

Our spirit uses evil as a compass to claim our goodness. Goodness points the finger at evil and calls it out. The human and difficult part of our spirituality is to recognize the aberrations committed against our collective humanity and overcome them through praxis. Freire (2006) argues “oppressive reality absorbs those within it and thereby acts to submerge human beings’ consciousness … to no longer be prey to this force, one must emerge from it … by means of the praxis: reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it” (p. 51). Spiritual praxis entails self-reflection and thereby opening doors for all kinds of liberation. Self-reflection is profound spiritual work. It wakes us up from the daze of apathy. It nurtures and refines our minds. The knots of oppressive religiosity can be discarded, freeing our consciousness and subconsciousness for the liberatory work that must be done.

As we move instinctively into our true selves, we strengthen connections with those we love, those we have difficulty loving, and those who are different from us. Spiritual work stands in direct opposition to evil; we embrace the divine humanness in ourselves as we welcome each other home from spiritual exile. Spiritual praxis means we intentionally and fiercely stand with what is just and right for our world and our neighbors. That intentionality is also conocimiento.

Affirmation 5: I welcome all I am. I embrace all I am. I trust all that I am. I am valiant and work for understanding, compassion, and love. As my spirit discovers difficult truths, I dismantle untruths about myself and others. My spirituality is reflected in my thoughts and deeds, and my thoughts and deeds reflect my spirit.

Writing Exercise 5: Write about a time when you challenged yourself to move beyond an oppressive or unjust situation. What happened? Were you were able to move forward or find that the time to move forward was not right? What did you learn about yourself? How did the experience enhance your spirituality?

Radical presence has been a rarely touched/discussed subject and at times an ignored and/or unspeakable topic. School curriculums, both public and private, are not designed to affirm children’s radical presence in the world. It is too dangerous a thing because it can disrupt the capitalist systems that handcuff us to an imperialist agenda. Churches and institutions are
systematically teaching the opposite by encoding colonial values, touting imperialist cultural rituals, and endorsing binary institutionalized religions and political systems.

To have a radical presence means to embrace fluidity, to sing about how we are never just one thing in existence in a stagnant world. Radical presence engages a dance with many world views while we accept dying to some beliefs and giving life to new ones in an ongoing spiral of spiritual growth. In our radical presence we are “napantleras.” Anzaldúa (2015) writes “… las napantleras construct alternative roads, creating new topographies and geographies of hybrid selves who transcend binaries and de-polarize potential allies. Nepantleras are not constrained by one culture or world but experience multiple realities” (p. 82). Thus, spirituality and spiritual work urges us to create alternative visions for ourselves, our communities, and our world. These are serious yet beautiful duties with which to forge ahead in our ever-evolving spirituality while understanding that religiosity and the “God-in-the Box” concept undermines the most human aspects of our lives.

Spirituality blossoms with conocimiento – a deep mystical knowing that comes with self-reflection, self-love, and singular or collective practice: drawing, painting, dancing, sewing, singing, playing instruments, and any creation activity that flows from our energy/energy source. “To be in conocimiento with another person or group is to share knowledge, pool resources, meet each other, compare liberation struggles … we seek input from communities so as not to fall into elite collective, isolated cells … [it] enables us to close the gaps, bridge the abysses” (Anzaldúa, 2015, p. 91-92). Finally, it will be women’s spiritual activism, and not religiosity, that will help overturn patriarchy, capitalism, racism, misogyny, hatred of others, and the fragmentation of our world.

Affirmation 6: My radical presence is vital to myself, my family, my community, and my world. My vision for myself is important to my spiritual growth. As my conocimiento continues to evolve, so will everything else. I am not alone. Together with others who also seek spiritual growth through venues known and unknown to me, I am stronger, more beautiful, more aware, more alive. I am willing to give. I am willing to receive. I am willing to evolve. I am willing to go inward. I am willing to rest.

Writing Exercise 6: Imagine a different reality for yourself, your family, your community, and our world. What does that alternative reality look like? What needs to be discarded? What needs to be uplifted or created? Who will benefit from this new and life-affirming reality? What is your role in this act of praxis? How will you use your conocimiento?
References


ABOUT THE AUTHORS

**Victoria Bañales**

Victoria (Vicky) Bañales holds a Ph.D. in Literature and Feminist Studies from the University of California, Santa Cruz. A Chicanx writer, teacher, and activist, she teaches English at Cabrillo College and is the founder and editor of Cabrillo’s Xinachtli Journal—*Journal X*. She is a member of the Hive Poetry Collective, which produces poetry radio shows and podcasts, and a member of the Writers of Color Collective-Santa Cruz County. Her writing has appeared in various anthologies and journals, including *Translocalities/Translocalidades: Feminist Politics of Translation in the Latin/a Américas*, *Beyond the Frame: Women of Color and Visual Representations*, *North Dakota Quarterly*, *The Acentos Review*, *Cloud Women’s Quarterly Journal*, and more. A Macondo Fellow, she is the recipient of a Porter Gulch Review Best Poetry Award and Cabrillo EOPS Instructor of the Year Award.

“Papi’s Oranges” is a piece about her elderly Mexican immigrant father whose orange offerings have acquired renewed significance over the years. Inspired by Gloria Anzaldúa’s writing, “Y sin embargo” is a poem she wrote in Spanish about Chicanx/Mexican feminist resistance and how patriarchy/sexism/machismo attempts to distort, dismiss, or deny our long history of Chicanx/Mexican feminist traditions.

**Stephany Bravo**

Stephany Bravo was born in Los Angeles and raised in Compton, CA. to parents of Mexican descent. She is pursuing a dual doctoral degree in Chicano/Latino Studies and English at Michigan State University where she studies community-based archival practices and crafts testimonios. Stephany is an inaugural MUSE Scholar, member of the GLAM WOCollective, curator of The Hub City Photo Archive, and one of the assistant editors for Taller Electric Marronage.

“Tierras embrujadas, fragmentos generacionales” covers Indigenous dispossession across the United States of America and México—focusing on accountability through hauntings and abuela’s wisdom.

**Rebeca Carrillo**

Rebeca Carrillo is a Mexican-American polyglot and a child of the Frontera. After leaving the borderlands, she studied crime networks at the University of Chicago, where the bulk of her
research focused on the network structure of Mexican Drug Trafficking Cartels. Rebeca is the founder of Ganas Magazine, a publication centered around effort, will, desire and attempt. She is also a cofounder of Magic (Magic.co), an open-source software framework that tackles decentralized internet access. In her free time, Rebeca wrestles as “Ruth Bader Pinsburg” for the Chicago Mudqueens.

Esperanza Cintrón

Esperanza Cintrón is the author of Shades, Detroit Love Stories, a collection of intertwined short stories published by Wayne State University Press. Shades was a 2020 Michigan Notable Book and was a finalist in the 2020 Midwest Book Awards. Cintrón’s books of poetry include Visions of a Post-Apocalyptic Sunrise (2014), the Naomi Long Madgett Award winner, What Keeps Me Sane (2013), and Chocolate City Latina (2005). Her work is anthologized in Manteca! An Anthology of Afro-Latin@ Poets, Abandoned Automobile, Of Burgers & Barrooms, Double Stitch: Black Women Write about Mothers & Daughters and others. She was a Callaloo Writing Fellow at Brown and Oxford Universities, earned a Michigan Council for the Arts Individual Artist Grant and a Metro Times Poetry Prize. A co-founder of The Sisters of Color Writers Collective, she created and served as the editor of its literary journal. Cintrón holds a doctorate in English Literature and taught at WCCCD in downtown Detroit. Her websites are: esperanzacintron.com and alegraverde.com. Facebook: Alegra Verde, Esperanza Cintrón; Twitter: EsperanzaCintron@alegra.verde; Instagram: Alegra.verde

Araceli Esparza

Araceli Esparza is a teaching artist, writer, poet, entrepreneur, and Latina activist. Esparza has been a featured poet at various events throughout Wisconsin, co-edited a book called Very Edge Poems and performed in the all-woman spoken word show titled “Listen To Your Mother” at the Barrymore Theatre in Madison, Wisconsin. Her work can be found in I Didn’t Know There Were Latinos in Wisconsin, an Anthology edited by Morales and printed by Cowfeather Press. Basta. 100 Latinas Write on Violence Against Women is edited by Emma Sepúlveda and printed by The University of Nevada Reno anthology. Araceli Esparza is also the owner of a successful social engagement company, Wisconsin Mujer, and a podcast host of a short series called Midwest Mujeres. To her, being a Latinx writer means to be able to catch fires, to bring forth something from labor and sweat, to have enough when there’s not a lot. She feels that her work speaks to the spirit of this project from a place of intersectionality and discovery.

Rudy Esparza

A native of San Antonio, Texas, Rudy Esparza is now too old to die young and has committed with zeal to the struggle of life as an itinerant writer. He graduated from the University of Texas at San Antonio and is currently pursuing an MFA in Creative Writing at Stetson University.
Armando Guerrero Estrada

Armando Guerrero Estrada is doctoral candidate at Boston College, where his scholarship examines the interlacing of religion, literature, and migration. He holds a Master of Theological Studies from Vanderbilt University’s Divinity School, where he also earned graduate certificates in Latin American Studies and Religion and the Arts in Contemporary Culture, with an emphasis in Latinx literature. He holds a B.A. from St. Joseph College and a B.A. from Lamar University.

Marian Flores

Marian Flores is a writer and nationally recognized leadership coach with a long history of working in U.S. communities of color on issues of social and economic justice. Her writing is rooted in that experience and explores the intersection of exile, spirituality, and identity. She is an alum of the Kearney Street Interdisciplinary Writers Lab, the Napa Valley Writer’s Conference, and the Highlights Foundation's Whole Novel Workshop. A Salvadoran immigrant, she and her wife live in California's East Bay.

Estella Gonzalez

Estella Gonzalez was born and raised in East Los Angeles, which inspires her writing. Her poetry and short stories have appeared in Puerto del Sol and Huizache and have been anthologized in Latinos in Lotusland: An Anthology of Contemporary Southern California Literature by Bilingual Press and Nasty Women Poets: An Unapologetic Anthology of Subversive Verse by Lost Horse Press. Her short story collection Chola Salvation was published April 30, 2021 by Arte Público Press.

Gabriella Gutiérrez y Muhs

Dr. Gabriella Gutiérrez y Muhs is a poet and professor in Modern Languages and Women and Gender Studies at Seattle University. She has served as former Director for various programs and been honored with two Chairs. She is a polylingual poet, critic, cultural worker. Gabriella is the author/editor of eight books of poetry, criticism and culture, and multiple articles, encyclopedia entries, opinion pieces. She received her MA and PhD from Stanford University. She is first editor of Presumed Incompetent: The Intersections of Race and Class for Women in Academia, and single editor of various other books on Chicana criticism, (University of Arizona Press, Lexington Books). She also authored the published and forthcoming poetry collections: Kneading Words: Amasando palabras: Intersectionality, Goodnesss and Beyond and How Many Indians Can We Be? (Flowersong Press) She is the author of A Most Improbable Life, The Runaway Poems, (Finishing Line Press) and The Plastic Book. In Xochitl, In Cuicatl, a bilingual poetry anthology of Chicanx/Latinx poetry is forthcoming this year in Madrid, Spain, including more than 50 poets, and another multigenre Latinx women’s anthology Indomitable/Indomables is also forthcoming this year with San Diego State University Press. Her second volume of Presumed Incompetent: Race, Class, Power and
Resistance of Women in Academia, for which she is known for having contributed in changing the climate in academia came out from Colorado University Press, in 2020.

Adela McKay

Adela McKay es una escritora de poesía 28 años de edad, nacida en Tijuana, B.C. México. También, estoy interesada en la literatura hispana feminista de los siglos XVII y XVIII tanto en Europa como en América. Estudié la licenciatura de Spanish en UCLA, donde hice un minor en Linguistics, y actualmente soy estudiante de maestría de Hispanic Literature en la universidad de UCR.

“Madre de humanos” fue escrita pensando en Tonantzin, y en la virgen María introducida por la religión católica, la cual ha sido culpada por ser la causante del machismo en México, al verse a la virgen como la mujer sumisa e ideal. Sin embargo, en este poema se busca no culpar a la virgen, o la "Madre de humanos", sino a los mismos humanos que no han sabido respetar la tierra ni el feminismo, y ven reflejadas sus fallas en ella.

Juana Peñate Montejo

Juana Peñate Montejo (previously published as Juana Karen), a lawyer by training, is a Ch’ol poet, writer, translator, and educator and cultural promoter from Emiliano Zapata, Tumbalá, Chiapas, Mexico. She has authored several books of poetry in Ch’ol with self-translations in Spanish including Mi nombre ya no es silencio (CONCULTA 2002), Ipusik’al Matye’lum, first published by Pluralia in 2013, and most recently Isoñil Ja’al/Dance of the Rain, which won the 2020 Premio de Literaturas Indígenas de América and will be published this year by the University of Guadalajara as well as Tsa’ Kñaajle…Jump’ej K’iň, Jump’ej K’iň…/One Day, One Day…I Dreamed… to be co-published this year by Oralibrura and Lakniichimal.

Peñate Montejo’s poems are rooted in the landscape of the southern state of Chiapas, Mexico and the traditions and identity of the Ch’ol people, particularly Ch’ol women. Poetry of Juana Peñate Montejo translated from the Ch’ol by Carol Rose Little and Charlotte Friedman. The Ch’ol poems originally appeared in Ch’ol and Spanish in the collection Ipusik’al Matye’lum by Juana Peñate Montejo, published by Pluralia in 2013.

Xóchitl Mota-Back

Dr. Xóchitl Mota-Back joined the faculty at UH-West O’ahu in 2017 as an Assistant Professor of Sociology. Dr. Mota-Back's teaching and research interests lie at the intersection of gender, reproductive justice, sexuality, science and technology studies (STS), and liberatory epistemology.

Adela Najarro

Adela has published numerous essays, including “The Multiplicity of Language, Thought, and Experience” in Imaninam: Poets Writing in the Anzaldúan Borderlands, edited by ire’ne lara
ire'ne lara silva is the author of three poetry collections, *furia*, *Blood Sugar Canto*, and *CUICACALLI/House of Song*, an e-chapbook, *Enduring Azucares*, and a short story collection, *flesh to bone*, which won the Premio Aztlan. She and poet Dan Vera are also the co-editors of *Imaniman: Poets Writing in the Anzaldúan Borderlands*, a collection of poetry and essays. ire'ne is the recipient of a 2017 NALAC Fund for the Arts Grant, the final recipient of the Alfredo Cisneros del Moral Award, and was the Fiction Finalist for AROHO’s 2013 Gift of Freedom...
Award. Most recently, ire’ne was awarded the 2021 Texas Institute of Letters Shrage Award for Best Short Nonfiction. ire’ne is currently working on her first novel, *Naci*, and a second collection of short stories titled, *the light of your body*.

Carmen Tafolla

Carmen Tafolla, author of *New & Selected Works (Texas Poet Laureate Series)*, *This River Here, Rebozos, The Holy Tortilla & A Pot of Beans: A Feast of Short Fiction*, and 30 other books, was the first City Poet Laureate of San Antonio and the 2015 State Poet Laureate of Texas. A co-founder of CantoMundo, a Latinx poetry space, and recipient of numerous awards, including five International Latino Book Awards and the Américas Award, she has been recognized by the National Association of Chicana & Chicano Studies for work which “gives voice to the peoples and cultures of this land.” In 2018, she became the first Latina to be elected President of the Texas Institute of Letters. In 2023, Penguin will release her novel-in-verse, *Guerrera Warrior*.

Reyna Vergara

Reyna Vergara is an Assistant Professor of Spanish at Mississippi University for Women. Her research focuses on the struggle for redemption of the colonial subject. As a woman of color, creative work has been for her a tool of empowerment and healing. Her pieces have appeared in *Ambitos Feministas, Confluencia*, and the *Modern Language Studies* journal.

Irene Villaseñor


“Nerves of Snakes, 1506” is part of a manuscript of erasure poems that are created out of texts written by explorer-colonizers like Christopher Columbus, Captain James Cook, Jules Sébastien César Dumont D'Urville, and others. *The Santa Fe Writers Project's Quarterly Journal* recently published other pieces from this manuscript in their 26th issue.