

THE JOURNAL OF 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.

Poems

We Belong Here

Elvia Flores

A legacy of struggle,
That's what runs through my veins.
It's not blood.
The blood lives in the earth,
Spilled by my ancestors
Who fought to retain what was taken from them
But which they never claimed.
They understood that they belong to the land,
And not the other way around.
There to protect the earth that
They would return to, that
Held their ancestors blood,
Their blood, my blood,
Reminding me that this land is ours.
Not an immigrant, not an alien,
I belong here.

Yet, I turn on the news and I
See the faces of the descendants of the colonizers
Telling me that I have to go,
That my people are rapists and drug dealers,
That Mexico sends their worst,
That families will be torn apart
With immigration policies,
That a wall has to be built to keep out the people,
The people who look like me,
Who look like my family,
Who you displaced,
Who you robbed of resources,
Who you robbed of this land,
This land that was Mexico once
And indigenous always.
We try to remind you, but
Our revolution will not be televised.
We gather in the millions at rallies
To speak up for each other,
To stand up for our right to work,
Our right to live with dignity.
When I stand there surrounded by my people chanting,
“¡Aquí estamos, y no nos vamos!”

“We are here, and we are not leaving!”
“¡El pueblo unido, jamás será vencido!”
“The people united will never be defeated!”
I am reminded,
I belong here.

You tell us to only speak English
When the language we speak isn't even ours.
Spanish robbed us of our indigenous tongue
Yet we learned and adapted,
Hid our language in yours.
You tell our children that Spanish is not allowed,
Pass laws like Prop 227,
Make bilingual education obsolete,
Make our grandmothers and babies cry for
Speaking fluent English with an accent.
But you give your children gold stars for
Saying, “¿Hola cómo está?”
In a heavier accent than ours.
Tell me to go back to my country
If I don't learn English right,
When in English I can write
Essays, and poems, and war cries,
As I translate them from the
Spanish I hear in my mind to the
English I see on the page.
My accent comes from thinking en
Dos lenguajes at the same time.
Trying to remember las palabras
Que solo me se en español,
Pero en español forgetting where
The tilde goes.
Go back to my country?
¡Vete a la fregada!
I was born here.
I belong here!

So I stand my ground,
Dry my tears,
Plant my heels,
Reconnect to the land,
To the blood that lies here.
Recognize the power of the struggle
That connects me to my ancestors.
That legacy of struggle that runs through my veins

Reminding me every step of the way
That I,
That We,
We Belong Here!

A Call to the Dead

Emily Reeves

If you call the dead,
They will come,
Maybe, overstay their welcome.
“You don’t want spiritus following you home,”
my mother would warn.
But I do.
I’m calling out,
“¡Abuela!”
I need help.
My three Hail Mary’s
Are futile,
My lit candle
Is burnt out.
I wrote my deseo
On five different pieces of brown paper
But they have crumbled.
Tell me how to be a woman,
How did you provide meals
To all your eight children
On your factory paycheck?
How did you avoid
Guilt
With every single decision
You made
As a mom
A wife
A woman?
Tell me
How you found enough humility
To be submissive
And never faulted
Against your beliefs?
How did you keep tradition alive
Without shame?
How powerful you were
To soft-heartedly demand
Respect
Because everyone requested your blessing
Upon arrival or departure:
“Bendición, abuela,”

“Dios te bendiga, hija.”

I need you.

I call out to you,

Silently screaming your name,

Requesting you to drive me

Into the direction of least confusion.

I hold on to the visions of you,

In your bata,

Cooking in your crowded second floor kitchen,

of the old Victorian house.

Quiet.

The sizzling of the oil

Radiating the room.

Solitude.

Just you.

Long black Indian hair.

Brown weathered skin.

But you were content.

How can I be content?

English

Melissa Andres

Alone in the
fitting room
I didn't know
the difference
between execution
and prosecution
when I began
to learn English.
I used to read
the posted sign
every time
I tried on clothing,
"Violators
will be prosecuted!"
My mouth opened
and gasped each time, too.
What barbarians!
Who executes
and kills someone
for stealing?
I never stole
a thing though,
not even
a paperclip,
even now
with perfect
English.

La mujer como yema

Sarah Simon

*Huelo la grasa
que se está estallando
y el blanco – a su alrededor.*

Es la grasa que me hace mujer:
Tengo tatas, los senos –
estoy sana debido a la grasa.
Así pues, que me permitas comer la grasa,
la raíz de mí,
de *la vie*, porque
me permitirá llenarte,
rodearte,
estar a tu alrededor.

*Oigo a la mujer,
que está gritando
y llorando
y sonriendo
y amando – a mi alrededor;
dentro de mí.*

Es de la yema de la vida que puedo extender
y ser mujer

Woman as yolk

(English translation of “La mujer como yema”)

*I smell the fat
that is exploding
and the white – around it.*

It is fat that makes me a woman:
I have tatas, breasts –
I am healthy due to the fat.
So, let me eat the fat,
the root of me,
of *la vie*, because
it will allow me to fill you,
surround you,
be around you.

*I hear the woman,
who is screaming
and crying
and smiling
and loving – around me,
inside of me.*

It is from the yolk of life that I can spread
and be woman

The First Death of Frida Kahlo: Some people are a part of history; others engrave it.

Jerry Bradley

Her right leg shortened by polio, she limped
long before she boarded the bus home.
And when it hit the streetcar – and then a wall –
some died; many were injured. A handrail
pierced her hip, dislocated her feet, shattered
her pelvis and back, left her as broken as Mexico.

World war was coming. Immobilized
in her blue house, she learned to paint:
blood, skulls, even death itself. She recovered alone
painting the subject she knew best.

Rivera's *Ballad of Revolution* documents
his country's history: in it we see Frida
handing weapons to peasant soldiers,
July 7, 1910, her adopted birthday.

That was before Mexico feared communism,
before he and Frida moved to California –
that sunny image of imperialism she had stood against –
before Trotsky quarreled with Diego
and was ice-axed in his Coyoacán home,
before she left the hospital without her amputated leg.

Her final painting, *Viva la Vida*,
shows sliced red-meated *sandias* bursting
from their green rinds. Immune
to the baggerment of tyrants, she knew
life was the ribbon tied around the bomb.

Edinburg, Tejas

Priscilla Luera

Hill Country Fair bread, Folgers, and store brand creamer on the table,
Catholic Jesus on the wall,
rosarios still propped on the chair,
this is my tío that passed and is now long gone.

cottage cheese container in a squeaky bird cage,
i remember when my mom couldn't afford Tupperware,
but then sold it to make ends.
baby chicks chirping,
the callero dog attacked the chickens,
now my parents sell eggs as a living.
narrative of a poor farmer,
no groceries in the kitchen,
only nine dogs to keep them company,
while the mijxs are in the city.

Gordita sentada hacienda gorditas,
the sweetest tortillas you've ever had,
made with love and a callused hand,
ella dijo hechale mas,
hechale mas manteca mijo.
Selena, Juana la Cubana y Kumbia Kings,
agua frescas, marranadas, y fruta preparada,
i counted one other gay woman.
when can i be free?

red and white Ford truck,
my abuelo crashed his in the canal rolling a Bugler cigarette,
and when he passed that's when my dad quit Marlboro reds.
their smoke still rises with los troqueros passing palm trees,
playing their Tejano music under a cotton candy sky,
the stars are our city lights.
no need to go far,
We are La Frontera, El Valle, South Texas,
y yo soy Xicanx, one foot in each borderland.

Waiting

Leo Boix

And if her voice returns, a blackbird with memories on her tail feathers
—we'll be here to receive her, looking up for her arrival.

But of course a memory is a memory is a shadow, my own, sleeping
—inside her mirror. Her hands cracked when she forgot how to play the piano.

And if an old photo disappears, I reinvent an image in my head
—of her cooking, of her driving us somewhere, of her siestas.

We don't remember dates, we collect her words, her lips moving, as stamps
—an album full, an archive of dreams turned ghosts turned empty nights.

For a loved dish (puchero) I try to recreate, for her hair turning redder, unrulier
—for a morning embrace, for a kiss goodbye, for unguarded love instead.

And if her voice returns, will I be here to listen to her? Blackbird appears
—brings nothing much today, looks around, jumps a little, disappears.

Tiny Cuts for Sisyphus

Sisyphus- King of Ephyra, punished for deceitfulness

Sylvia Ramos Cruz

Let me alter your face
so I will always see you
as you are.

I am a skillful surgeon
experienced in the cutting art.
The snips won't hurt but just a bit—
mosquito stings
without the nasty buzz.
Only one thing, there will be many
(for all the faces you've worn for me)
though not as many as the 1000 tiny
cuts etching the hands of Sisyphus
as he rolls jagged rock uphill
against eternity.

My blade is acid sharp.
Fingers, bloodless and precise.
(See? No tremor.)
A tiny slice at the corner of your eyes
drops tender curtains to mid-orb,
reveals sleepy croc along the Nile.
V-shaped snip transforms
satin tongue-tip into fork.
One more at edge of lip
turns alluring smile
to snare.

No fear.
You'll like it
at the end. You'll see
yourself, as I now see you.

A Penny for the Jukebox/A Knuckle for your Thoughts: From Gina Valdez' "Where you from"

Danielle Cooney

Soy de aquí
y soy de allá
pero
no estoy en
la pelí/culo

Drape me over your shoulders
neck
friends' egos

This *firme* lip color
wasn't bought for you
but
I like the color of blood
dripping from my lips
before the fights start

Luis
Llámame cuando quieras
incluyér las
pachucas
cholas
homegirls
quienes más de
decoration
más de las
dance partners
the only reason
anyone thinks
you're worth noticing

Nadie bought your image
until my lips
tick stains
enumerated the proper

asking price

valor

valor

valor

Creative Works

La hija de las violencias

Andrea Gómez

I took the bus to Ayacucho on a very cold night in July 2005. The bright sunlight woke me up at dawn. The Andes reflected beautiful terracotta shades, and its air, piercing and cold, had entered the bus. It was the first time I saw the mountains that shape my own country. As a Peruvian, I had learned in school that numerous civilizations had settled in those valleys. I knew that almost everything I ate, the music I listened to, even the way I braided my hair all came from there. The mythical Andes. The real *apus*, the gods of my forefathers. And there I was, 20 years old, just meeting them.

Two years before, I went to study to France. It was an enormous shock for me: I knew no one in Europe, and after two minutes in the Charles de Gaulle airport I realized nobody could understand my “French”. Those two years were tough. They were also a blow to the ego, because as a foreigner I was asked every time about Peru. How is the weather? What language do people speak? Which is the most popular place to visit? What do you recommend? Well I could not suggest a thing because I knew nothing. NOTHING. I had almost never left my house.

My parents had me in the middle of the worst civil conflict of Peru’s recent history. My childhood was marked by car bombs, curfews, and shootings. Anyone could kill you. Some neighbors did not even know I existed. I was taken to school very early and went back home hidden and always with a relative. As I grew older, I did not have any desire to go out. It was alien to me. Why go to the movies? It is dark and dangerous. Why eat at a restaurant? I can eat at home. The fear I grew up with never really left me. I kept it inside. I still cannot discern how my younger self had the audacity to go to France. I was naïve, and truly believed in the idealized version of Europe I had been taught. Europe is clean. Europe is rich. Europe is safe. I was so painfully wrong.

I ended up ditching my studies over there and graduating in my native land. However, before doing so I profited from a student exchange and a correspondent scholarship. In *soles*, the amount of money I was given in euros became a little fortune. With that amount, and financial help from my family, it was my chance to actually know my country.

Ayacucho is 8 hours from home by bus; it was cheap and known to have many archaeological sites. I was particularly interested in visiting places with a lot of history, as the travel’s purpose was some sense of belonging. Remembering that trip, I cannot help but laugh at how unprepared I was. I had completely forgotten that high altitude sickness existed, in my backpack were only a pair of T-shirts and a book, and I had naively assumed the hostel would give a free towel. The first thing to do when I got to Huamanga was to find a place to stay. A taxi driver recommended a little hostel near the centre. It neither had hot water nor TV, and it was one of the cheapest I’ve ever been to, around 3 dollars.

After leaving the hostel (and buying a towel), I went with a small tour group to the Ushpa Qoto building, a Wari complex a couple of hours from the city. My eyes wondered during the route, feeling hugged by the mountains and by the pleasant sunshine. We arrived at the site and began the visit. In 2006, there were many sections still being excavated, so the perimeter where tourists could actually walk by was limited. Watching the archaeologists working was very intriguing though, and a couple of times I got way too close to them and was told off. From what was in sight, the citadel was geometrically perfect. It was fascinating to watch something so exact, made hundreds

of years ago. The rooms and public spaces of Ushpa Qoto revealed such mathematic grandiosity, it made me want to know more. The tour guide took us into a small gallery. We gazed at terracotta pottery, some in a very poor state. They had been thrown away by *huaqueros* that vandalized the site searching for gold. Sadly, almost all of my photos of the exhibit are blurry: I still had a super cheap analogic camera glancing at those pictures. My frustration after developing the tape comes back when I look at them now.

Fig. 1 *Ushpa Qoto building, an archaeological site from the Wari civilization. This is an exposed room where pottery and food was found.* Photo courtesy of the author.



After that, we went to the town of Quinua. In my travel journal, I have kept vivid descriptions of the colors composing the landscape. “*Mustard tones that form the ground, juxtaposed with intense greens and maroons just like potato peel. They were all under the vibrant light blue of the sky and pure white clouds. Also, golden sparkles from the little stones coming from a construction site nearby.*” Well, that sounds pretentious. To be fair, the scenery justified so many rococo adjectives.

Around the historical site we were there to visit, different kinds of flowers and plants formed a natural fence around one side of the sanctuary. I loved the fresh aroma of the mole, and I later learned it was great to keep some around in case of dizziness from the altitude. I also took some *llantén* because I had heard it was good for your hair, without (I hope) anyone noticing. The huge space designated for parking and the size of the terrace told us this place was designed for bigger groups. With just ten people and me, nature was more visible, and it really seemed like the *pampas* were just for us. A huge obelisk was built just in the middle, remembering the military battle that defined the Peruvian independence in 1824. It truly caused an impression, rising in the middle of the countryside. In front of it, there was a statue of Sucre riding his horse to victory. We were all very captivated by the sight of these mythical hills where blood and gunpowder cemented the very existence of our country. Our tour guide really shined with his meticulous description of the battle and the military strategies used.

Going back, the van passed by Huamanga University. My thoughts went to the civil conflict that originated in Ayacucho and lasted for more than a decade, killing tens of thousands. It stigmatized that institution forever as among terrorist followers there were teachers and students. The blood and gunpowder scattered on the campus and in the Peruvian Andes has defined my nation, and some would say it is the reason why we are not unified. I went to sleep wondering what history really is.

The second day, half of the tour group and I went to the University museum. Near the Sanchez



Fig. 2 Statue of Antonio José de Sucre, Latin American independence leader. It is located at Quinua, where Peru's independence was fought. Photo courtesy of the author.

Carrión library, a couple of young llamas were grazing some grass. We all collectively melted and stopped to make baby noises to the *llamitas*. Inside the museum, we looked at Chavín stone statues and Wari vases. That section of my journal is full of snaps of animal-related *huacos*: guanacos, birds, and a couple of *calato* dogs. Also, I photographed some human faced ones; its wide noses and round eyes reminded me of my grandpa. There was a mummified woman in the museum and it was one of the first times I felt uncomfortable with something on display like that. Death already looked so close the day before; I did not need to lay eyes on its face.

It was the end of the tour, and I went around Huamanga looking for souvenirs and something to do. I remember clearly checking out some *retablos* in front of a church and buying a tiny one for 7 soles. I still have it with me, and even if it is not the prettiest (the faces are totally deformed, and the placement of the figurines does not make sense); it has a moving quality to it as well as being super colorful. The same happens with the round limestone earrings I bought at the same spot. I still wear them now and sometimes I rub my thumb against it to feel its weird texture.

Both objects have been with me since then. Traveling became part of my life, and the career I decided to follow takes me to new places every time. Looking back, that trip helped me to find myself. I was not aware of it at the time, but I was entering an identity crisis. I was really naïve when I went to Ayacucho, secretly hoping to find some meaning through the vestiges of yesterday. What I found in that two-day trip was orientation. Ayacucho fed my desire to know more about my past. I had forgotten how much I loved to study history when I was a child. As a result of this trip, I became obsessed (again) by the scientific knowledge reached by pre-Incan cultures: medicine by Sechín, math and geometry by Nazca, astronomy by Moche. The last ones, turns out, were my ancestors. I descend from the desert, from warriors that scalped their enemies and who believed they came from the sea.

Also, that journey helped me deal with fear. I had had anxiety attacks and paranoid episodes before returning to Peru. Fear lingered through my days, crippling me. I was terrified of my thoughts, of my own feelings. Everything inside of me was screaming how unhappy I was. I truly felt I was living for others. But every personal obstacle became ludicrous after going to Huamanga, after stepping on Quinua's soil. I mused to myself on the bus back to Lima, "*My problems are ridiculous. What can I lose? I will still be alive. I will have all my limbs. I have an education. I have a scholarship in Europe for fucks' sake*". Slowly but surely, my travel was the first step into reclaim-

ing my life, fully aware of who I am.

I understand that “who I am” was not acceptable for many. I made a total switch from the life I used to lead on those years, all the while feeling like I did not belong anywhere. My own country felt strange, as it seemed it did not accept my own personal history. This brutal past might have been overshadowed by the current political oblivion in my hometown, but they could not kill every single one of us. Even with my (still) debilitating fear, I cannot stay silent. I am a child of unvoiced violence, from a lost generation that struggles to find itself in a country that wants to forget.

All photos are property of the author.

Editor’s Note

The internal conflict in Peru was an armed conflict between Peru’s armed forces and terrorist groups. It began in 1980 and it is frequently accepted that it worn-out mid-90s, although it has not completely stopped. Around 70,000 people died in the middle of “the most intense, extended and prolonged episode of violence in all the history of the Peruvian republic,”¹ where civilians were purposely targeted and indigenous, rural and poor populations were mostly vulnerable to violence from both sides.

¹COMISIÓN DE LA VERDAD Y RECONCILIACIÓN DEL PERÚ – CVR (2003), Conclusiones generales del informe final de la CVR. Versión en línea, consultada el 20 de febrero de 2016. URL: <http://cverdad.org.pe/ifinal/conclusiones.php>

Toca, Toca: A Big Bird Border Tale

Marisela Barrera

The sunburnt skin brown, the land barren. Sotol survived along a gravel path leading to an exposed stone slab, once the plaza of Guerrero Viejo, now the center de nada. A place where dreams del otro lado come to die. The ground sacred since the night of the flood, the night Yaretzi and her mother died. The night Yaretzi's father left.

Yaretzi, the ghost wanderer and the Big Bird's keep, drank from the sotol plant each seventh day waiting for her father's return. Decades waiting.

She played a storm-filled acordeón five days without rest. On the sixth day, she slept. On the seventh day, the call of the Big Bird, flying to the dead mesquite, like a bajo sexto buried deep under el monte, would awaken her death sleep, and she cowered to the sotol plant and sucked from its roots. With ear to dirt, Yaretzi listened to the echo of the Big Bird's screech, filling the cracked ravine that was once the Rio Bravo.

Years passed, just like this. Yaretzi waited for her papá to return from el otro lado. Waiting, waiting for his return. She was not alone. The Big Bird was family, flesh and blood. The Big Bird was real.

The Big Bird knew Yaretzi's father was alive in San Antonio. His name was Falcón, an accordion player who had started a new family and had made it to Tejano stardom, never knowing that his first wife and child were dead. How did he not know? He knew. He just forgot about it until the Big Bird appeared to him one night and made him remember.

The Big Bird appeared to disappeared fathers, papás who escaped the ranchos and dirt roads to find new lives en el otro lado. Papás with dreams bigger than Guerrero Viejo.

The Big Bird had snatched Yaretzi from the flood of 1953 that destroyed the town. Yaretzi was flown to the sotol plant while her blind mother disappeared under water, through torrents of a lost husband and a lost land. Yaretzi's mother was found dead, along the banks of the Rio Bravo after the water receded. She was buried in the new pueblo, Guerrero Nuevo, with the others who had perished. The townspeople never found the body of Yaretzi to offer a proper burial. The body was lost to the waters, but Yaretzi's spirit had survived.

Cortines, the Mexican President, and Eisenhower, the American President, shook hands at the Guerrero Viejo gate seven days after the flood that had left Guerrero half-dead and under-water. Mexico and the U.S. had joined together to build a new water system, Falcon Dam, to irrigate new crops along the Rio Bravo. The Big Bird was perched high along the dam wall when this historic event took place; he witnessed a procession of politicians in vaquero hats and steel horses disrupt the land and the people, never to be the same again.

One day, the Big Bird del valle told Yaretzi: *There's a day you died. You know, you get older even after you die? Look at you, con canas y todo. You were a little esquincle when I found you and saved you.*

"Saved me. Saved me from what?" Yaretzi asked.

Caw, caw, caw.

“From the flood? 1953. I died. How did you save me? You ripped me from my mother’s arms, didn’t you? I was lost in the currents, the mad waters of the Rio Bravo rushed into our town – Guerrero Viejo– just as we prepared to leave it behind. How can you save me after I died?” Yaretzi begged to know why she wasn’t buried in the ground like her mamá.

You are like me, Yaretzi, the make believe between life and death.

“You make no sense, bird. I stand with thirst, with hatred and love. My heart beats fast when I play my acordeón.”

Like the lost histories of your antepasados, you are fiction, Yaretzi. But the crossers, they believe. You play your acordeón to guide them to safety. The crossers, they are not afraid of you. The crossers, they need you. They light candles for you. Your acordeón guides them to safety.

“No. I do not accept this fate. I grow sad when I think of Mamá and angry when I think of the man who left us.”

Your papá.

“What of this man?” Yaretzi did not know about fathers; she only knew about the howls of the land and the Big Bird who raised her to play acordeón.

You know your father. Falcón.

“Falcón,” Yaretzi repeated.

I play his music for you. The music you hear through the mesquite, it is his. The music you have come to know, come to play. The music you play for imigrantes. Your acordeón, as famous as his.

“You saved me from my father?” asked Yaretzi. “Was he a bad man? Why do I play his music?”

Toca. Toca. No te asustes, Yaretzi. One day, he will return and release you to rest in eternity with your mama. We are of the same spirit, hija, you and me. I am the Big Bird leyenda del valle, scaring kids at night when la llorona just isn’t enough. Haunting men who abandon their families. You are the sound of oppression, lulling gente to safety with your polkitas. They hear your music through the wind, all the way to San Antonio. Your father, he has heard you play.

“When will he arrive? Tell me, I beg you.”

Soon. His people think he was born in San Antonio. He wasn’t. And his people don’t know about you and your mamá.

“Mamá! Taken from me. He left her, forever, didn’t he?”

Caw, caw, caw.

The strum of the bird’s flight and the nourishment of the sotol plant gave Yaretzi hope that one day soon she would reunite with her father and kick the shit out of him.

Yaretzi had her acordeón, playing through the wind for the plants, the rocks, the big bird. She had her sotol, providing strength to endure the wait: seconds, minutes, hours, days, weeks, months, years, built upon each dusk skin-spot of pinks and purples waiting for the pinche viejo mujeriego, her father. A veces, time meant something when she soothed the lost and thirsty, immigrants from her ancestral lands heading north to find running water and linoleum floors. Otras veces, time stretched when she led narcos along paths to quick sand and hungry coyotes. Yaretzi was cursed to the land, but the wind was her friend, carrying her polkitas far north, to the lands of San Anto, inside la conciencia de Papá.

One day, with ear to dirt, Yaretzi heard the sound of a baby crying instead of the screech of the bird. She recognized the cry, a sign her father was on his way back home to his tierra.

Yaretzi hurried south along the gravel path and arrived at an old bird-watching tower along the Rio Bravo. She flew up its seven flights of steps and arrived at the top deck where she surveyed the gravel road leading to her stone slab, once the center of Guerrero Viejo. The Big Bird swooped through the tower.

Toca. Toca. Call your papa back to his tierra, hija. Andale. It is time.

“You loco bird!”

Caw, caw, caw.

“As long as I wander these lands, I will never see the face of that puto mujeriego. Left me and Mamá. Que se vaya ala chingada,” Yaretzi cursed as she played acordeón.

The Big Bird cawed atop the tower to the wind, plants and rocks as a spit-shiny troca stormed the lonely dead road leading to the old abandoned Guerrero Viejo, a town where growing-up stories died and getting-old stories were flooded away.

Este es un cuento de un viejo de Guerrero Viejo. Llego en San Antonio, mil novecientos cincuenta y tres. 1953. Crossing borders when none existed. Este es un cuento de la hija que dejó atrás. Como un hombre sin tierra, a man without a home. Caminando por vida como un fantasma! Dejo en Guerrero Viejo, la única mujer que tenía música en su corazón. Dejo en Guerrero Viejo la canción de la tierra para el sueño del otro lado.

Then, Big Bird sang:

Mal hombre...

*tan ruin es tu alma que no tiene nombre,
eres un canalla... eres un malvado...
eres un mal hombre.*

The Big Bird sang again:

*Tejas, centro del mundo,
Vivía un hombre sinvergüenza
El viejo de Guerrero
Acordeónista y mujeriego
Mexicano y ‘mericano.
Se fue de Guerrero Viejo
Dejo su familia sin naranjas
Llego en San Antonio
Para comenzar familia nueva
Para olvidar Guerrero Viejo*

Falcón’s boots were slinky new. “Smooth like a horse’s ass,” he always said onstage to his fans between songs. Boots customized by Lucchese. Customized, like all other things Falcón owns: two trocas made-to-order by Tim Duncan, a house in Castroville, tailored guayerberas stiff and crisp by Penner’s, and hats. Lots of hats. Wide brim, vato locos, vaqueros: good guy white, bad guy black. Straw, felt, lo que sea. Falcón liked to look good and liked to smell good. He sweated Drakkar Noir as he drove himself in July heat past the border checkpoint and into the heart of his past. He had GPS on the dash, Lone Star in the cooler, and his acordeón riding bitch. Falcón was home.

“GPS didn’t help, but I made it,” Falcón said as he stepped off his truck onto the crack-ridden earth. “The chingadera said route number 2 from San Antonio through the international bridge into

Nuevo Laredo and along Carretera Federal 2. Who's controlling my GPS, the cartel?"

Falcón joked to no one and popped open a cold Lone Star from his back seat. "I'm back. Pinche Mexican roads...and I just got my F-150 waxed."

Yaretzi flew to the cracked earth at the foot of the watch tower and observed her father struggle up the steps. She followed him, out of sight, but very near. She could smell his sweat and could hear his heart racing.

"Mira no mas. I don't remember this. Que chivo. I bet I can see all the way to Falcon Dam," Falcón said as he drank beer and made his way up the watch tower. Every step a struggle. Out of breath, confronting his past. Out of breath, finding regret.

"Y entonces que? Got a gig in San Antonio tonight. Sold-out concert at MexiCon. Que loco. Got Ayala opening for me. Plus had to pay los narcos. Harder getting here than leaving, but I made it!" Falcón was out of breath. "Shit. This place is leveled, man. Pinche ghost town. You didn't think I was gonna come, right? You showed me the way in mis sueños, los back-roads para llegar. Pinche loco, man, I thought I was tripping. Too much Lone Star. No, never too much Lone Star. Gonna pop a Star. No running water. What about all that water in el pinche Falcon Dam, cabrones? At least I got beer. Hijole. Que paso? Bone dry. No water for the Mexicans. So what? Crossed the Rio Bravo to get here. I'm not pinche crazy, maybe a little drunk. Got a Hohner accordion named after me, babosos, and Ayala's opening for me tonight. Dicen que this place is haunted. Pinche fantasmas. Donde estan?"

Caw, caw, caw.

"You haunted me since I left. 1953. Long time ago, babosos. What do you want? Say it. Now. That I'm here. What did you expect? I made it. I'm here. You got me here, mad big bird, flying beside my troca, I saw you. You shoveling memories at my feet."

Go, Yaretzi. Andale. Just one push over the edge. Andale. Kick his ass for good.

Yaretzi appeared from behind the mesquite. "You gotta Lone Star for me, señor?" she asked.

"Shit. You scared the shit outta me. What the hell you doing here, solita?" Falcón asked. He took a drink of beer, stared at the woman before him, and said, "There's something familiar about you, gavacha. What is it? I know you. Conjunto fan?"

"Yes," Yaretzi answered.

"What you doing here alone? Medio creepy. From the drought. It's taken over," Falcón said. The sun was setting during their reunion.

"Guerrero can't be taken over. It's run by ghosts."

"Ghosts with guns. Los Narcos. I had to pay to pass," Falcón said.

"No, the ghosts that brought you back."

"I'm playing in San Antonio tonight, gavacha. You can come," Falcón said.

"Old man, baboso, sin lágrimas para tu gente," Yaretzi whispered into her father's ear.

Caw, caw, caw.

"Calmala. Why you so mad?" Falcón asked.

Yaretzi continued gnawing at Falcón, ignoring his question: "You got a lot of huevos coming round here again, que no? What you want? Take a little bit of your soul? I'll kick your ass back to San Anto."

Caw, caw, caw.

"No one wants you back," Yaretzi hissed.

"I'm too late. There's no one here to come back to," Falcón said.

"Me," said Yaretzi aching to push him off the watch tower but holding back, fists clenched.

“We’ve met before,” Falcón said.

I see you, my Americano, in San Antonio. You have vinyl floors, like the ones her mamá always dreamed about. You have a lady from Mexico who cleans them. Your wife shops at the Dillard’s, buying clothes with your American Express. F-150 in your driveway. Tienes three bedrooms, two bathrooms and a separate kitchen. Big yard and nice neighbors. I hear your music. Always Esteban Jordan El Parche playing on a turntable, cause you like your old school. Like me. Children laughing. Fajita tacos grilling on an oil rig, and a cooler full of Lone Star. You made it. But you forgot about your dirt floors in Guerrero Viejo.

Yaretzi remembers: “When you left, the water came. We were stuck. Mama. Me in her arms. You whispered –la de malas– and said you’d be back. But that night the flood came, un fuerte río de lágrimas. It took me out of Mama’s arms. Now, you’ve come back. I knew you would. You drove your shiny troca up the dirt road. You parked on a short road leading to the river up to this watchtower. Look at the lands, nuestra tierra, you left behind.”

“You. The one I dream about.”

“I’m going to play for you.”

Falcón took a step toward his daughter. He arrived at Guerrero Viejo as he had left, drunk off his Lone Star ass seeing visions: a big bird, the ghost of his daughter, now grown.

The wind was picking up and the sky was turning grey. The big bird was circling the clouds, making them spin to a fury.

Falcón continued, “My homeland, lost. I see dirt tornadoes spinning fotos. Burros carrying books. No water. Falcon Dam is dry. I see abandoned ‘merican cars. Chingos of them. I see the mad valley big bird leading me here. There’s no place to go. I see no checkpoints, no history. I see a woman playing acordeón in a plaza with no people. Where’s my gente? Que pasó?”

“You left.”

The big bird swooped from atop the mesquite.

Un pueblo sin historia. Como un mesquite sin raiz. Guerrero cayó en la tierra. Como tu amor para tu papa.

“Take this,” Falcón said handing her his acordeón. “Play for me.”

Yaretzi took deep merciful breaths. She was not going to forgive her father. Not after a lifetime of being away. She still wanted to push him over the ledge.

“Toca. Toca. Toca,” Falcón insisted.

Yaretzi knew they weren’t alone. Her friend, the wind, was encircling the two, bringing them closer together, as it had once driven them apart. And her friend, the big bird, cawed a lonely strung-out polkita that she could not ignore.

“Play with me,” Falcón demanded.

Yaretzi opened her acordeón, bringing the two together with a gush of wind. The grey clouds crept to the tops of dead mesquite and hovered close. The two played a suspended “El Quelite.”

“Hija. Why you cry now that you play?”

“I’ve waited so long, Papá,” Yaretzi confessed.

“Forgive me,” Papá begged as he continued playing.

The big bird sat quietly atop his mesquite perch without warning.

Caw, caw, caw.

“Que miras, hija?”

“The rain, a flood will follow. You must go. There is no drainage here. The roads become merged with el río. You will be stuck,” Yaretzi said.

“No importa, hija,” said Papá. “I have an F-150.”

The cawing bird was a big cabrón and ignored the signs of flood. The father and daughter played through warning thunder, while the Big Bird told a tale to the approaching clouds.

Había una vez, un hombre -viejo- con familia, a daughter and a wife. He was dying after a life on la frontera: backaches, pesticides from the fields. Dying in his heart, and needing to get away. A man with dreams bigger than Guerrero. And with his heart filled with dreams, he had packed his acordeón and left behind his familia. With his last Mejicano breath, he had said to his wife as she slept: La de malas. He made it to Zapata, hitched to Roma, Highway 83, luego 281, Greyhound to San Anto. La de malas...

Yaretzi and her papá played together through the torrent. With each push and pull of the acordeón, the winds continued to spin. A storm was coming.

“Que miras?”

“Gente. En la calle. Trunks, furniture, animales. El padrecito taking down the flag, the last memories I have from the night I left,” Papá said.

“Mamá was there waiting in the dark. You cursed Guerrero when you left.”

“I see empty casas, la plaza sin gente, sin música. Donde está mi gente? El Parian. La Plaza. Nuestra Señora de Refugio. Tres campanas sonando fuerte.”

Caw, caw, caw.

Yaretzi begged her father, “The bells ring for the flood! RIO BRAVO! Run! Get in your troca and go!”

“I will not leave you again, hija.”

“Then we’ll leave together!”

“Ándale, vamos! A la troca!” Falcón said.

Caw, caw, caw.

Father and daughter ran to the troca. Without looking back, Falcón dug his keys from his front pocket. The truck started with a press of the remote, Yaretzi beside him. He swore she was there running with him, almost flying, opening the door and getting in. Swore they had shared a beer together. Swore they had played together. Swore, swore. Saw her through the corner of his eye. His daughter was real. The Big Bird was real. His memories were real, and so were his regrets. He would no longer block Guerrero from his thoughts. He wanted to remember until his final breath. He had left, run away and, for so many years, did not want to remember. Forced the memories away, but no more.

“Guerrero! Mi tierra! My home!” Falcón said as he drove through the rain, alone, no ghosts beside him.

Falcón left Guerrero Viejo a believer.

“The Big Bird is real! Our antepasados walk with us, through us. It’s up to us to carry their cuentos,” he would say time and again.

Yaretzi! Yaretzi! Yaretzi!

The Big Bird searched the banks of the river for Yaretzi and found her holding hands with her mamá, forever to watch over the border crossers, forever until the border is no more.

Blackout.

Take Her, She's Yours

Eva-Lynn Jagoe

My siblings crowded around my parents when they brought home the new baby. My father let them coo over me, but then he handed me to Dolores, the new Salvadorean housekeeper. He said, "Take her, she's yours."

My parents always insisted that he said it as a joke. But they didn't want more children. They were strict Catholics, so they didn't use birth control. All six pregnancies were unplanned. The two miscarriages between my siblings were a relief to my mother. She didn't want children in the first place. I imagine myself growing in her womb, an unwanted parasite that sapped her always feeble energy.

Dolores wanted me though. "Dolores" means "pains" in Spanish. She was indeed in pain. Separated from her family and country and language, she had to negotiate her position in a household that treated her as a necessary nuisance. So, I guess it is no wonder that she took my father's words literally, caring for me as if I were hers. Her own children had been raised by an older sister because Dolores was an unwed teen. Dolores lived as the poor relation in her siblings' homes, caring for and doting on their children, while her own grew up far from her. Now, 50 years old, she was making a new life for herself, sponsored by my parents to be a legal worker in the United States. She quickly proved herself to be indispensable as she kept the house immaculate, made all the meals, did the laundry, and took care of the baby.

Dolores was a disenfranchised woman who was given too much responsibility for the youngest child of the family. Her labour was waged, but the immaterial affective bond between us far exceeded her weekly earnings. Our relationship was shaped by an inchoate and possessive anxiety. She and I shared this in common: we often felt extraneous and unwanted. My mother resented Dolores' presence, even though she relied on her. My siblings were ill at ease with her and jealous of the attention that she gave me. They hated when she would swoop in and whisk me away from their rough play. Because my father insisted that they behave with her, they took out their anger on me, teasing me for my Salvadorean Spanish, and telling me stories about the good old days before my birth disrupted the order of things. "Spoiled" was the epithet most often hurled at me, as if I were food that had been rendered inedible because of some excess of flavor or temperature or time.

I probably did act spoiled, screaming in rage at them with a Spanglish string of words that caused them to taunt me more. I would hide in Dolores' arms when she came running to protect me from their fists and words, safe until the next time they caught me alone. She comforted me with her songs, stories, food, and constant physical affection. Her hovering presence reinforced my belief that I couldn't live without her protection. Simultaneously smothered and loved, I couldn't differentiate between being spoiled and being nourished.

We kids intuited that there was something wrong with our family. No one else we knew in the Washington suburbs had a live-in housekeeper. We had a non-family member who folded everyone's underwear and wiped noses and made *pupusas*. She cooked our dinners but ate in the kitchen. The pastel short-sleeved uniforms with aprons that she wore daily were bought in Spain by my mother every summer. Dolores called my parents "Señor" and "Doña Eva", which sounded like "Doñeva" when she would meekly ask her if she could clear the dishes. She called me "Mami", a Central American term of endearment. The kids in the neighborhood teased me about being the

mommy of a grown woman. For me and my siblings, perhaps it was even weirder, given that when Dolores said it, it was intimate and adoring. Our own “Mummy” was not warm or affectionate.

No wonder I so often read the Rapunzel fairy tale in which a child is given by her parents to a covetous older spinster. I was especially intrigued by the beginning, in which a married couple longs for years to have children. When the wife finally becomes pregnant, she develops a longing for a leafy rapunzel that grows in her neighbor's garden. Her husband sneaks over and gathers some of the greens, which revive her until the craving returns. She falls ill. The husband sneaks over the wall again. This time he is discovered by the witch who lives in the house. When he pleads that his wife will die without the plant, the witch tells him to take as much as he wants, as long as he gives her the baby that his wife is carrying. He agrees.

Parents are always such screw-ups in fairytales. They lose their children. They give them away. They forsake them. Maybe the parents aren't just being careless. Maybe they don't, in fact, want their children. In old wives' lore, rapunzel is thought to induce abortion. That gives a more sinister twist to the Rapunzel story. It could be that the mother wants to terminate her pregnancy. Or that she is so sick that she and her husband are willing to give the child up. Having a kid isn't everything parents imagine it will be. Rapunzel's future parents may just want to be free of that burden at whatever cost.

So, they abandon their child. She is given to the witch—“Take her, she's yours.” The witch wants her so much that she confines her to a tower so that no one else can see her beauty. Rapunzel's golden tresses are used by the lonely woman as a ladder. Rapunzel seems to have been gracious about lowering down her hair. It must have hurt, though, to have someone pull her hair like that.

When I was about 7, Dolores dressed me for church, buttoning my dress up the back and pulling up my white stockings. All that was left was to put my hair in pigtails. She loved my light brown hair. She said it was like silk with *hilos de oro*, threads of gold. I hated having it brushed though. I'd squirm and complain while she tried to untangle it. The brush snagged on yet another knot, and I grabbed the brush out of her hand. I threw it across the room, screaming at her. She knelt down to get it from under the table and I felt so much shame at my tantrum. I thought she would start trembling or crying, the way she did when my mother got angry with her. Instead, she hugged me, and said, “I know it hurts, Mamita. I'm trying not to pull.”

It is as if I was Dolores' ladder. I was the only way she could get a foothold in the house. Every morning, she was on tenterhooks when she took my mother her breakfast in bed. I would gauge my mother's temper that day by checking whether Dolores' cheeks were flushed. Sometimes her voice would shake as she said, “When I asked your mother what to make for dinner, she snapped at me.” I'd be scared then too. I wouldn't want to go say goodbye to her before the carpool picked me up. Dolores would push me to go up.

I'd peer around her bedroom door and see my mother, propped up in bed with the tray on her lap, flipping wearily through the Washington Post. Her discontent was as palpable as the satin on her dressing gown, the crumbs on the sheets as I leaned over to kiss her soft cheek. She said, “Dolores drives me crazy. She wants me to plan dinner before I've even had my first sip of orange juice.” I looked down at the Wedgewood teacup and saucer, the toast in the toast rack, the butter and marmalade, and the fluted juice glass. All untouched. It looked like this was going to be one of her unhappy days. I took a sip of the fresh-squeezed juice though I had just brushed my teeth, and said, “Mmmm, you should try it.”

I don't know how long it took me to see their unhappiness as not something that was just mu-

tually perpetrated. In her book, *The Vertical Interrogation of Strangers*, the poet Bhanu Kapil gets it right when she asks strangers, “Who was responsible for the suffering of your mother?” I think I was always aware of each of these two Hispanic women’s suffering. Both of them were foreigners in the suburbs that circumscribed their existence, resenting each other over perceived slights. I carefully calibrated my attention to each, so that neither one would feel neglected.

My mother once said that it must have been the care and love that I received from Dolores that had made me the most carefree of the four of us children. For many years, I believed what she said, that having had a surrogate mother had freed me of the weight of my mother’s postpartum depression and enabled me to flourish. I figured that Dolores had been my “good-enough mother.” That term comes from the psychoanalyst D.W. Winnicott. His theory is that children will grow up stable and independent, able to withstand the losses and separations of social life, if they are cared for by someone who is there for them and who is strong enough to be able to withstand their rage and anger without being undone by it. Dolores proved that to me when I threw the hairbrush.

Yet Dolores was not “good enough” for me because she only fulfilled the first part of Winnicott’s theory: the total responsiveness that she gave me as a baby. The next step should have been to move gradually away so that I could learn to tolerate her inattention and her absence. Instead, she stayed very close, rarely leaving me alone. Maybe she was trying to fill my yearning for attention from my biological mother. The fact that my mother sometimes cuddled me when I sat next to her on the couch or dressed me in an outfit that matched hers only raised my hopes and confused matters. Which of the two women was going to give me enough care and enough inattention to be good enough?

My mother was raised in a patriarchal bourgeois pro-Franco household in the rigid years after the Spanish Civil War. She had never lived without domestic live-in service. My father had also grown up with black domestic workers in Mississippi. With four children, they considered it essential to have a live-in housekeeper even though my mother didn’t work. Though it made us different from all our friends and neighbors, we kids believed the logic: my mother was too fragile and too elegant to clean the house; we were too much for her to handle; and our needs could only be met by someone who was hired to do so. What made it so confusing was that, despite my mother’s distance and formal use of “Usted” when she talked to her, Dolores was so integral to our family and to our home.

This dynamic was most pronounced in a country in which her language was spoken. We all went to Spain every summer, to my mother’s family country estate outside Barcelona. All winter, in the suburbs of Washington, I would count the days until we went back, imagining every moment of our arrival—Puig the chauffeur’s pomaded hair and wreath of cigar smoke as we drove past the post-war social housing towers that lined the *autopista*, the long dirt road through the woods that led up to the tall wrought iron gates, the ponderous squeak as the *masovero* opened them and the dogs swarmed the car barking, the first glimpse of the flaking stucco of the tall mansion, the hugs of my many blonde cousins in their matching bathing suits, their warm skin exuding the scent of chlorine and cologne.

At that old Catalan finca, the social order was clearly established, and implicitly accepted by everyone involved. The maids, gardeners, cooks, and nannies had their free time at siesta time. They would gather in the courtyard and smoke and tell raunchy stories. They complained about being stuck out in the country. We kids would cluster around them, learning about sex and intrigues and families so different from ours. As a young teen, I eagerly copied their slang and took puffs of their tarry dark *Ducados* cigarettes, teasing them about their beaus and doing chicken dances

around them.

Dolores never took part in those sessions. She would go to her room and rest her bunions, swollen from the summer heat. She tried to keep me with her, because she thought the Spanish maids were ordinary and crass. She didn't want me to talk like them, especially since they swore "Coño" all the time, a word that means "cunt" but is used in Spain the way "fuck" is here. I loved the word, and the emphasis with which it was said. For their part, the Spanish servants thought she was unfriendly and a snob. She was rigid in her hierarchies, disparaging cooks who were uppity, maids who didn't know how to polish silverware properly, and seamstresses who flirted with gardeners.

Dolores hated the finca. Back in the United States, she had an exceptional status in our household. In Spain the hired help were treated as employees, not family or friends. Gloria, the maid who had been working for my aunt for over twenty years would hover silently over the dining table, holding a tray of food with white gloves, her presence barely acknowledged as the adults gossiped about the Vendrell family.

Mercedes and Pilar would feed the children an early dinner, bathe them, and dress them in their matching pajamas so they could go out to the garden to kiss their parents goodnight before being tucked in by the nannies. As soon as the kids were in bed, the two women could go smoke on the back patio with the cooks and the drivers, while their employers smoked and drank wine on the front patio.

More even than back in Washington, I felt embarrassed by Dolores' solicitude and over-protectiveness. The other nannies followed the children to wipe their faces, scold them for dirtying their clothes, or march them off to the playroom for their lunch. They didn't share their secrets or break down in tears in front of them. They didn't try to get the kids on their side against the adults. So I avoided her as much as I could, hiding in the garden or in the attic and cringing when I heard her "Mami?"

At night, though, I still sought her out. In the middle of the night, I'd creep down the stairs, gripping the banister tightly. I feared my relatives' disdain at my need for her more than I feared the absolute darkness, so I never turned on a light. Enough light came in from her bedroom window to see her face and sparse hair wrapped around plastic curlers. I'd lean over and kiss her cheek, cold to my lips. For a brief instant, I imagined she was dead. I was alone with a corpse. I had lost my only ally in the household. Then she'd murmur my name and open the bedsheets so I could snuggle up to her warm body.

Other nights, she snuck up to my room to tell me stories and sing to me till I fell asleep. When we heard my father in my sister's bedroom, it meant that he had decided to check on each of us that night. She would slip into the dark bathroom as he opened the door, listening while he sang to me and stroked my back. I think he knew she was in there. He allowed us all to save face by not calling her out. I feigned sleep so that he'd leave more quickly. He was an intruder into our secret alliance. The feeling of her disapproval from the shadows was more compelling than the touch of his hand on my skin.

As Dolores hovered over even the quiet moments that I spent alone with my father, she acted as a constant reminder that I shouldn't trust my family. They hadn't wanted me. Every time my siblings complained about her, or my mother was angry with her, she must have, like Rapunzel's captor, reinforced our isolation and bond by tugging on the golden link between us. Lucky me, that there were open willing arms to catch me when my parents gave me away. Unlucky me, that my parents' ambivalence towards my birth was so fundamental a story about my existence. There was

no forgetting that my father had handed me over to her. She made sure to remind me of it often. I was hers. I was given to her.

LINDA *(Expanded version)*

Diana Burbano

A super bad ass story of finding your inner hero.
A long monologue for a young Chicana.

Cast of Characters

La Linda: A young Chicana woman dressed
in a Wonder Woman costume and carrying a guitar.

Time: Sometime in the early '80's

LA LINDA:

A young woman enters singing "Los Laureles" from Linda Ronstadt's "Canciones de Mi Padre." She ends with a loud Mariachi cry.

If mi abuelita was still here she would've answered back just as loud and we would've danced around the kitchen, using cucharas for castanets until mi papa would yell at us to quit with the tonterias, and get him a chela.

You can't go home again, que no? Que no! Especially when home is getting so gentrified, the local paletero is a 20-year-old white dude with wax in his mustache.

(As if to the paletero)

--Ay! No, I don't want a locally sourced sugar free Jasmine and Lavender! I want una de tamarindo, sour sour. Four dollars! Whatever--

(Back to the box.)

Abuelita kept all of my stuff. Look—

She picks up a moving box labeled "Mi Linda", opens it, takes out a pair of gold bracelets and admires them. Puts them on.

I thought I'd lost these!

I saved for months for these gold Wonder Woman bracelets. I sent off the coupon from the back of "Retroactive Wonder Woman" #13. The ad swore they were gold but they left big welts on my wrists. That was OK tho'. I liked the scars. They made me feel tuff.

Keeps going through the box. Takes out Linda

Ronstadt's "Living in the USA" record.

Aw. I wanted to BE Linda Ronstadt. Look at her. She's so dang pretty. Linda. Everything I'm not. Delicada. That big eyed face. Una muñequita. I was never a muñequita. Clomp, clomp, I was always the big, noisy, loud girl that yelled to get everyone to pay attention. I had to yell. I was the only girl in a family of men. Three older brothers. Antonio, Ricardo and Rogelio or Roger as he calls himself now-- he's so gringafied! They all used to sit on me and fart on my head. There's no way I would've survived to adulthood being demure and ladylike!

Linda Ronstadt. For such a tiny little thing, she had such a big sound! I LOVED her god-so-beautiful voice. I also loved her cheesy, sexy look. Remember wearing the tube socks and short shorts? I wish I had been smart and put my hair in a chignon, like hers. I cut it and tried to get it to flip into perfect Charlies Angel's waves. With my hair I looked like a poodle caught in a windstorm.

Pulls a pair of roller skates out of the box.

My skates! (Tries them on). Que patas tan grandes! I begged and begged for them for my 13th birthday, I also got a red satin jacket. I skated around and around our neighborhood that Saturday morning belting out: (Sings) "You're no good, you're no good, you're no good bay-bee you're no gooooood..." until Mr Gonzalez came out and begged me to stop. He said I was flat. I said "So was Linda!" He said "I meant your voice". "I'll say it again..."

Sings a bit more of "You're No Good" to a Mr. Gonzalez in the audience. We hear a door slam.

That man wouldn't know good music-- Linda Ronstadt sold out stadiums! Like a dude--(corrects herself.) No, like a girl. She had LOVERS. She did! I loved that. She wasn't no groupie. She had groupies. Including a Governor of California. I read in her autobiography that he was so cheap, he used to steal her flowers to give to people. Cabron, Governor Moonbeam!

Looks through the box. Pulls out a poster of Lynda Carter as Wonder Woman.

Oh my god. Wonder Woman. La Mujer Maravilla. Dang. Look at her teeny, eenie, eenie, weenie waist!

Wonder Woman was a Lynda, too. Lynda Carter! With a Y instead of an I, for fancies. You know, I never missed one minute of that TV show. Not one. I loved Lynda as Wonder Woman, but I loved her even more as Diana Prince. Hiding behind those glasses-- remember, when she would go back to the island, she'd get all soft and pretty. But in the USA she'd have to dress tough.

La Wonder Woman gave me hope. Once, in the 4th grade, I got knocked down by this boy in my class. He'd pull my braids and sit on me like I was a pony. The teachers never did nothing. When the bell rang, he whispered, "Wetback." in my ear. I knew what it meant. Even at 9 years old. It wasn't the first time I'd heard that word. I didn't tell my bros. Ricardo would have killed his ass. He had a terrible temper. But I didn't want a man fighting my fights for me. I was Wonder Woman.

Men totally underestimated her. And whammo, pow! She'd have them in her golden lasso and they would be forced to their knees. I asked my Abuelita what a golden lasso of truth was made of, and, she said, she had some of the material in her sewing kit!

I took my lasso to school. I tried to rope him, but I ended up whipping him hard in the face with the end of the rope. He yelped like I shot him, then told on me to the playground lady. She looked at me all stern, crooked her finger to follow her. We entered the hallway. She turned to me-- and smiled! She said, "Good for you mija. Don't let no boy treat you like crap." Then she turned and walked away.

I wanted to be Linda. (pronounced Lih-n-da) Linda! (pronounced Lee-n-da) and fierce.

Sings the theme to Wonder Woman a la Linda R.'s Blue Bayou.

“Wonder Woman... Where the world is mine, where I’m fighting crime, on the BlueEEE Bay-ouooooo”

Yeah. Rockin’ the short shorts without fear.

When you got a name like Linda, people assume things about you. They assume you’re meek, because you’re “Pretty.” They assume you don’t mind being chatted up, don’t mind being touched. But you know what? If somebody said to Wonder Woman, “Girl, you’re so pretty, and the way you’re dressed? Pffftt--you’re asking for it.” She’d’ve bopped them straight in the nose. And if you wolf-whistled, you’d get a red boot (Kicks.) to the face.

Inside, I was Wonder Woman. And when my dad would yell at me ’cause I spoke my mind, or was defiant I’d go inside. I’d imagine my life as an Amazon princess, in a world of powerful women. Being Linda was my protection.

Las Lindas were fly. I put their posters all over the walls of my room. My brothers teased me a lot, for not having any boys on my wall, like a normal girl, but whatever! I wasn’t a “Normal” girl.

I was a Linda! A super-hero badass singer who could do whatever I wanted. Mujer Maravilla/La Cantadora Dorada!

She does a little bolero. Going further into the box, she pulls out a program.

Ah. Middle school. Quite possibly the worst time of any girl’s life. Lucky me. Abuelita decided that she was going to send me to the “fancy” school near her work. It had better test scores, better students, no gangs. Yeah. It was white.

I stuck out like a little brown sore thumb. Oh, Hera. I was miserable. No friends, no one who even sounded like me! (Imitates valley-style) Oh Mah Gawd Tayy-lor-- Wh-a-t did djeu djo to djou’re heeeeeiiiiiiiiirrrrr? (flips her hair vacuously)

Right before Christmas vacation, that first year, I signed up for the school talent show. I had to do

SOMETHING, you know? I needed an identity. The popular girls howled laughing when they saw that, jerks. They followed me around at recess, teasing me. Telling me to give it up, nobody wanted to see me onstage. I never cried. Never. Amazons don't cry. I was doing my chores that night and I THREW the laundry into the basket so hard it made the whole thing flip over onto the floor. 'Ita didn't yell though. She helped me pick up the basket, sat me down with a champurrado, and we watched her novelas together until I fell asleep.

That was a tough Christmas. The family mi 'Ita worked for had a lot of parties, and Abuelita was there way late every night. She would wake us up to pray the Novena with her. We'd try to sing along but Rogelio always fell asleep and snored through the villancicos. She'd let me sing "I Saw Mommy Kissing Santa Claus." all by myself. She told me I had a beautiful voice.

I don't know where she found the time, or the money but when I opened my Christmas present, Abuelita had made me a Wonder Woman costume. It was nestled in a fancy box from Nordstrom, tissue paper and everything. The fabric was so shiny and thick.

I had to wait to try it on when my brothers were outside playing a pick up game of Basketball. I put "Simple Dreams" on the record player. I took the whole outfit out of the tissue and laid it on the bed. I stripped down to my chones, and piece by piece I became la Mujer Maravilla. I put the tiara on my head and turned, (does the WW paddle turn). I got super dizzy, but looking at myself in the mirror. My brown, bossy, bighearted self. I was her. She was me. I belonged in that superhero costume. This was feminista armor.

Linda's sweet voice sang in my ear as I looked myself up and down in the mirror. And It was a sign. I knew then and there what my talent show act was going to be. I'd played guitar for years, even though my dad said the guitar was for the boys. They picked it up maybe once, pretended they were Elvis, and then dumped it in the corner. I snuck it up to my room and played along to my records.

I knew I was out of the box. Look, all the other acts were basically a bunch of cheerleaders doing stupid dance moves to canned music. Seriously. There were like 7 of those acts signed up to go. Two of them were dancing to “Play that Funky Music White Boy.” Which should tell you all you need to know about my stupid school. There was a kid signed up to beat-box. He was black and looked as out of place as me. I was sort of hoping we could team up, but he didn’t show up on the night of the talent show.

I was #12, really close to the end. AFTER the 2 “Play that Funky Music” teams. I figured that was a good sign. I was pretty damn nervous. Had to pee SO BAD, but I couldn’t get in and out of the costume in time, so I had to hold it.

My turn finally came. I rolled out onstage with my guitar. I toe-stopped, strummed my first chord and sang:

(To the tune of Blue Bayou)

“I’m going back someday, Come what may To Paradise Isle-- Where the girls are tough, And boys get roughed up, Paradise Isle--

Where I can go-- with my laa-ssoo, and I can clearly see, that familiar sunrise, through tied up guys, how happy I’d be.”

I got so into it, that at the end I twirled and fell, (*Falls*) but I played like I’d planned it. (*Plays it off with a Flashdance gesture.*) Tada!

I was in a weird DC alternate universe. I knew people were laughing. I heard them. I didn’t care. It was like something possessed me to keep going, to humiliate myself totally. I bowed like I was Linda Ronstadt herself, at a concert in the Hollywood Bowl. Mi ’Ita was clapping like crazy. I looked out, and yeah, it wasn’t like I was winning everyone over. This wasn’t no ABC Family Movie, where all of a sudden I was accepted for my differences. They were laughing in that mean way kids have. Like in relief that it wasn’t them, and in joy that they would have something new to torture me over. But. BUT. There were actually a few people who seemed to be clapping for real. A teacher I didn’t know

gave me the thumbs up. Someone's mom was whistling. A cool looking teen girl was smiling. I saw them. My fellow Amazons. In the sea of mockery I endured for the next 6 months, I remembered those genuine looks of approval and acceptance and that fanned a little flame in my soul.

I wore my bracelets to school every single day of 7th grade. The teasing never died down. Ever. That teacher though? The one that gave me the thumbs up? One day, right before school let out for the summer, I ran into her in the hall, "Hey", she said, "I wanted to give you this." She smiled and handed me this book.

Pulls Ana Castillo's, "Women Are Not Roses" out of the box. The book is dog eared and the cover is about to fall off.

I looked down to read the title, and when I looked up. The teacher was gone. (Reads)
 "Women are not roses
 they are not oceans or
 stars."

The book was used, a college course book. From a place called CSULA. When I got home that day, I showed it to my 'ita. She asked me if she could read the book, I was a little scared that she wasn't going to give it back, maybe it was too adult? I peeked into her room that night, and she was reading the books, mouthing the words, ignoring the telenovela.

The next day, she handed me the book, and told me I would be going to CSULA. "Ita, I'm 13."

"Si, pero vas a ir. Yo te voy a mandar."

No one in my family had ever gone to college. I don't know what she was thinking, but from that day on, it was a fact of life. I was going to CSULA and that was that. Mi Papi thought she was completely coccoobirds.

I thought about it. I decided it was a very good idea for a professional superheroine to have a good education. I kept my head down and my grades up.

For high school, I continued in the rich white hood school district. Things got easier, I guess. I grew, I grew out of the Wonder Woman costume. Replaced the gold bracelets with black rubber ones, started listening to Madonna, and Siouxi Sioux. Linda Ronstadt quit singing rock and roll and Wonder Woman went off the air. I had friends, finally. I played my guitar in the band. I even got bleached highlights. In the end I fit in really well. I was working hard to get good grades, so that I could get a scholarship. I graduated at the top of the class.

I got into CSULA. When I showed the acceptance letter to my 'ita, she took it like, "of course." Filling out my course schedule, I saw an elective called Xicano studies. With an X. An X! Like X-Men, X. A superhero letter if ever I saw one. A band of avengers!

My Xicano Studies class was so intimidating. Holy crap. I looked at myself, in my shoulder pads and leggings, having gone to my fancy High School. I was such a poser. It took about half of the semester for me to feel comfortable, almost till the end of the year to actually speak up in class. But I took it all in. I really did. I found out so much about myself, about my family. About where I came from, and who I was. About why so many of my friends said they were "Spanish" to white people. I felt like I had been born again.

I was doing research for a paper in my second year. The topic was, "Latinas in the Media: Spitfire sex goddesses and sexless servants." Morrissey was on the record player, I had a stack of books from the Library, but it was slow going. I was stalling, bored with the book I had in my hand, and I looked up at the wall of my dorm-room. My friend Tonatzin, who wanted to be the Aztlan Marilyn Monroe but feminist, had put up a poster, from a theatre company in Hollywood. It was a bunch of faces, tons of them, of Latinos, Hispanics, Mexicans, who had worked in the movies and TV. I had seen it before, but that day, I really looked at it. I saw Rita Moreno, Rita Hayworth, Carmen Miranda, and-- I looked closer-- there, in the middle about 3 tiny faces apart from each other-- There were Linda Ronstadt and Lynda Carter. My heart skipped a few beats.

(Quiet)

Las Lindas were Mexicanas-- my childhood totems, my guide lights. Both of them.

I ran to the library for confirmation. The librarian was as excited as I was, but she was way skeptical. It took some digging, but Wonder Woman's real name was Linda Jean Córdova Carter. Linda with an "I". Her mother Juanita was "of Mexican descent." And La Ronstadt? It was her dad's side. She was even recording an album with a Spanish title. Both from Arizona. They never hid it. The facts were there, in press releases and newspaper articles. But the wider public didn't hear it or didn't want to. Las Lindas were talented and beautiful and adored by millions of people.

Dude, Wonder Woman was the ultimate American hero, and she was MEXICAN!!! (Sings to the tune of the Wonder Woman theme song.)

"Wonder Woman! Fighting for your con-sti-tu-tional rights"

I wrote about Las Lindas for my graduate thesis on Latinidad in popular culture. When I read the paper, some jerks in my Chicano studies classes were ranking on them, 'cause they were all, like "passing". What did that mean? Passing. Was I passing in High School? Did I not embrace who I was enough? No. I never said I was "Spanish", like some people did, because I never thought being Mexican was somehow less.

I graduated with honors. First person in my family. Dad moans about the cost, but I think he's proud. Mi 'ita-- She read every book I brought home. We talked about our culture, our heritage. What it meant to be women in our culture. She used to joke that she would be the next person from our family to graduate. I never doubted it. She was going to get a GED, and go to CSULA. She wanted to focus on myth, leyendas. Her Wonder Woman was La Virgen de Guadalupe. I think she could've gotten her Masters. She was really young. I mean, at my age she had a grownup kid. She really could've blossomed.
She fights back her tears. Packs up the box and pick it up.

She was proud of me. The last thing she told me, Mija, eres la Mujer Maravilla de verdad, verdad.” And I said, “No Abuelita, La Wonder Woman? Eres tu.”

I’ve got a teaching job across the country. In Minnesota, te imaginas? Can you roller skate on a tenure track? It snows there. A lot. But I’m not scared, not at all. I’m packing up my guitar and my roller skates, my gold bracelets and my Abuelita’s love. I’m proud of who I am, proud of where I come from. I’m going to get in my invisible jet, go out over the Blue Bayou and take over the world. Soy Linda!
LIGHTS OUT

Change is Sticky

Sylvia Ramos Cruz

Maria (Concha) Concepcion Ortiz y Pino de Kleven (1910-2006)

Jesse and I head out from Albuquerque this 4th of July weekend to find the last of the historic women road markers in the high plains slice of New Mexico east of I-25, north of I-40. A radiant day. Heat almost visible in the dust waves stirred by passing cars. Above, massed clouds shuffle, herded by winds. Silky silver-tipped grasses mimic them along the asphalt shoulders.

Hard-to-believe palette of green greets our eyes—sea-green, yellow-green, emerald, aquamarine, viridian, verdigris. Mother Nature’s summer raiment, in proud display, mile after mile.

At Clines Corners we turn north on US285. Just after we cross from Torrance into San Miguel County, we find Maria (Concha) Concepcion Ortiz y Pino de Kleven. When Concha was 10, women’s vote was added to the Constitution after 72 years of struggle. Sixteen years later, she became the first female and first Hispanic majority whip of a state legislature in the country.

Indomitable champion for women, the disabled, bilingual education, abused children, Hispanic arts.

The marker stands in a graveled pull-out, defaced by graffiti and what appear to be bullet holes.

Since suffrage, women have gained a foothold in many traditionally male spaces. (When I became a surgeon 40 years ago, half a percent were women. Now, we’re 20%.) Every step forward, sticky.

We drive on. Chalk-up disfigured plaque to adolescent Saturday-night-hijinks on a lone country road.

slow as molasses
change ebbs and flows
women persevere

often unannounced
rarely by chance
“First” knocks once

Refrigerator Reflections

Suvi Mahonen

One of the hardest things about becoming a stay-at-home mum is the feeling that you've turned invisible. Once the gifts and the cards following the birth of your baby subside, the indifference to your daily grind can be depressing.

From the moment my new-born daughter woke me, my day became a litany of bodily requirements: pee, drink, change nappy, feed, burp, feed, drink, soothe, pump breasts, change nappy, feed, burp, feed, soothe, eat, drink, soothe, then panic when I realize that I hadn't even showered yet and it was nearly ten o'clock.

As for healthy living? Forget it. I sucked on spoonfuls of peanut butter for breakfast straight from the jar. Ate family-sized blocks of chocolate to help stay awake. And if I was lucky enough to snatch a yoga stretch in between bouts of colic, it was to the flashing lights and tinkling melodies of her play gym rather than mantras from the Sanskrit. My biggest daily excitement was waiting for my husband to get home, so I could pass our baby over and pass out for fifteen minutes. And every night meant bouts of after-midnight breastfeeding hell.

The only time I felt like an actual person – and not just a baby-burping milk bar on legs – was during our daily walks. There was nothing like a friendly wave to remind me that I was still alive. And it was rare that someone didn't accost us on the footpath, peek into the pram, and exclaim with delight over the only thing produced by me that didn't need an edit.

So there I was, strolling along the esplanade, steering the pram with one hand and holding a half-gulped-down churro with the other. As I pushed the pram past O'Malley's pub, a man with broad shoulders and a black crew cut leaned over the rail like a debauched, drunk, cock-fighting spectator, shouted out "We can make it another one for ya'," and raised the foaming head on a glass of frothy beer enthusiastically in my direction.

My first reaction was to squint up at him in disbelief. I mean, "Really?" In the sleep-deprived neurons of my brain I felt something akin to pity, and wondered if the idiot in question had any idea what state a woman's body was in after birthing. Does incontinence turn you on? How about stitches? Or cracked and bleeding nipples?

My second reaction – which followed the first by only a nanosecond – was more visceral. "How dare he disrespect me?" the inner feminist within me raged. I was a nursing mother of a new-born baby girl. His comment was sexual harassment. It demeaned me as a woman. It was lewd, and crude, and could even be seen by some as an act of verbal violence.

With a sense of outrage, I pulled the cover down over the pram and we kept briskly on our way.

One of my friends once said to me, "Having kids is like a drug. They heighten your experience of living but destroy you in the process". I laughed at the time. I just assumed she was joking. But now, of course, I could see that she was not.

I had no idea, when I was trying to fall pregnant, that becoming a mother was one of the hardest things I would ever do. I couldn't comprehend how my life would become consumed with rushing from one task to the next.

And that afternoon was no exception. The second we were in the door, everything was urgent. I was busting. My daughter needed changing. Not just changing, but bathing in the sink as well, since runny poo had squelched up over her nappy and trickled down her legs. She was hungry

and wailing, which meant my breasts had done their let down. Milk squirted from my nipples and soaked through my dress. I was hungry and thirsty. And the washing machine was beeping because halfway through its cycle the clothes had become unbalanced and it couldn't complete its spin.

And when I'd finally done it all, I wanted to collapse into a coma. But I didn't have time for such luxuries as comas. I still needed to hang out the laundry, empty the nappy bin and mop the milk spots off the floor. So I headed to the fridge for the next best thing: a hit of sugar. In particular, a bar of Toblerone I'd hidden from my husband under the bag of cos lettuce.

My hand was on the fridge door when I caught my distorted miniature reflection on the temperature display panel. My pudgy, pasty face which still hadn't lost its pregnancy weight. Lanky hair, long and loose because I'd had no time to style it. And my wrinkled, blue-striped cotton dress, bulging from my milk-engorged breasts.

My hand dropped from the fridge.

Now it's true that being at home with a baby can sometimes feel deadening. Like an infusion of thick sludge seeping through your veins, your limbs, your brain. Shrinking your very life to the bodily bare essentials: food, water, toilet.

But could I really have sunk so low that there was a part of me, a hidden part of me that was binging on comfort food and drowning in a hellish sea of baby, baby, baby, that could possibly feel flattered by the drunken remark of a lout?

And that's when I realized something.

Perhaps the only person disrespecting me was myself. Perhaps it was time to consider that I wasn't just the milk-stained, messy-haired, slack-thighed domestic slave that I'd become. Perhaps it was time to stop reaching for the Toblerone and choose a healthy snack instead. Perhaps it was time to have some pride in myself and my new role as a stay-at-home mother.

Motivation can come to you from a host of different sources. Reading an inspirational book, listening to your favorite tracks, accepting encouragement from women at your mothers' group, or just being open to what your inner voice is saying.

I realize the man was drunk. But his message was crystal clear. I'd been indulging in self-pity, and it was time to make a change. And since that day, I haven't looked back.

I choose to eat well (at least most of the time), dress well, and try to show up to my life as a stay-at-home mother with the same courage and the drive required from any high-powered job. Because it's about respecting yourself and being there for your baby. With the right attitude, you can feel healthier and more positive. And when you smile at your baby and they give you that wonky, gummy grin back, there's no pay check large enough to beat that.

Because if you can take inspiration from whatever comes your way, then it's only going to help you face that one person in the world who truly sees you every day. Yourself.

Working the Clay

Sylvia Ramos Cruz

Trinidad Gachupin Medina (ca. 1883-1964)

On our way to Jémez, Jesse and I pull off NM-550 to look at road marker for Trinidad Gachupin Medina. Renowned Zia potter, featured at the 1933 Chicago World's Fair. I think of my grandmother. Trinidad de la Cruz Ramos. Born in Puerto Rico when indigenous *Táinos* were more than just anthropological curiosities. Later, I discover one of the potter's grandsons, also a potter, is named Jose de la Cruz Medina!

My grandmother, nicknamed *Trina*, died almost 60 years ago *de la diabetes*, an illness common in *Puertorriqueños*. Since then, we've learned a lot about genes. They determine blood relatives, skin color, many of our maladies, and a few of our virtues. Indigenous people, wherever their origins or present homes, share some heredity. Diabetes also afflicts Zia Pueblo's people. Though born thousands of miles apart, I wonder if my *Trinidad* and this Trinidad are closer than just a name's worth.

genetic strands
keep us ever close
atoms attract

The sturdy wood marker stands off to the side on a sandy spot covered in dry grasses. Central space where the plaque honoring the potter's life and work should be, empty. Frame with no picture. Hard to know if it was removed for maintenance, taken home as memento, or just vandalized.

A sign points across the road to Zia. Squat homes, barely visible in the sun-haze, hug the mesa tight like *piñón* trees whose roots have pierced the center of the Earth. The Pueblo probably looks much as it did when Trinidad carefully scoured surrounding desert for the best ingredients to go into her wondrous polychrome pots.

black, buff, red, orange
clay, water, sand, basalt
Earth's bounty

potter's fingers
coil, shape, finish, fire
birds in flight

The Siren Call of Our Magnetic Highway Sign

Luisa Kay Reyes

When we were driving back home to the USA, after visiting my father in Morelia, Michoacan, Mexico, all of a sudden, this gargantuan metal highway sign appeared before us in its full towering splendor. Which in spite of its inanimate state, beckoned to us in a compelling manner that penetrated down to the innermost core of our collective being. My mother, my brother, and I were rendered speechless by its awesomeness. And wordlessly, we continued our journey back home for another fair piece. Until the enormous road sign revealed its glory to us once again. The printed words on the sign said simply “Mexico City”, but the message that it was deeply conveying to our innermost hearts was “Come . . . come to me.” None of us spoke to each other, so awestruck were we by the huge sign. But the question that we all realized was running through our minds was “Do we dare?”

Finally, my brother, who was acting as the family chauffeur even though not of driving age in either country, took it upon himself to pull over to the side of the road. With the magnetic pull of the gigantic road sign growing ever stronger with every breath that we took.

We had left Mexico City when I was one month shy of turning ten years old. My mother had been kidnapped off the street after dropping my brother and me off at school one day. And after coming out of that perilous situation miraculously and safely, she decided to take us all back home to the States. Since Mexico City was our childhood home, the migration presented my brother and me with quite an upheaval. And after shedding many tears during the packing and later the unpacking, the three of us ended up staying with my grandmother in Alabama for a while. My brother and I both had actually been born in Tuscaloosa, Alabama at Druid City Hospital. Yet, somehow, the Old South culture of our university town birthplace couldn't quite grasp the concept of us being Southern and having lived elsewhere at the same time.

Consequently, we always found ourselves having to defend our claim to Tuscaloosa being our home. And my grandmother dedicated herself to teaching us good ol' Southern manners with her all-encompassing phrase of “Yes ma'am, no ma'am, thank you ma'am, please. Open up the duck's bottom and give me some peas.”

At other times, we lived with my grandfather in his crumbling farmhouse in Northeast Ohio. We loved climbing the trees in the woods on his sizeable acreage. And as citified kids, we learned to overlook the fish who tried to suck on our toes while we swam in his large backyard pond. He lived in the farm village of Hartville that was seeing the last of the Old Order Amish families either pass away or migrate to the cheaper land that could be had in Tennessee. Or, oddly enough, in parts of Alabama. Although we enjoyed getting to explore the countryside surrounding my grandfather's dilapidated old house, we moved back and forth between Alabama and Ohio so much that it never quite became the home we were yearning for. But, we did learn the local custom about keeping some buckeyes in our pockets to keep from getting arthritis.

Now as we silently sat in the car on the side of the road in Mexico City trying to decide whether or not to heed the siren call of this powerful magnetic highway sign, the main hurdle we were confronted with was finances. The Mexican roads had been modernized since we had left and we were

caught by surprise by all the tolls we had to pay on the way down. We had wheedled just enough money from my father to pay for the tolls on our trip back to the USA, but a stay in Mexico City was not included in that sum. After pondering our dilemma quietly, my mother cut through the silence pervading our car and threw caution to the wind with her command of “Let’s go!”

Brimming over with excitement, we arrived in Mexico City and checked into a respectable, but moderately priced hotel. With it taking up all of our toll money, I summoned up my most helpless daughter-in-distress voice; which given the precariousness of our situation was hardly an act. And called my father to beg him for a few more funds. To our relief and much to my surprise, he immediately acquiesced to my pleas.

We then went to our godmother’s house, not knowing if she still lived there or not. And while standing in front of the familiar black wrought iron bars that marked the entrance to her fine dwelling, we paused for a moment as my mother deliberated what she would say. It ended up being unnecessary, for as soon as my mother rang the doorbell and our dear godmother heard my mother’s voice, she exclaimed that she had just been thinking about her yesterday. Immediately, she welcomed us right in. And we felt as though we had come home, at last.

Furthering our delight in our unexpected homecoming, we went to the street we had lived on as little tykes, the Avenida Coyoacan, and looked up our childhood friends. Fortunately, their mansion was still their home and we were once again welcomed in right away. Feeling as though not a moment had passed since our last childhood escapade.

At Church the next Sunday, we looked up the Church organist who was also my first piano teacher. And his effusiveness in welcoming us back was such a balm to our souls, that he has remained at the top of our list of people to see every time we go back to Mexico City.

With money running out, we returned to the USA. Still basking in the glow of having gratefully yielded to the pull of that expansive magnetic highway sign. And continuing our lifestyle of growing up back and forth between Alabama and Ohio, even including a one-year stint in Georgia in-between. Which left us with the feeling that we were nomads with several homes, yet at the same time no home at all. A feeling which in my adult years would turn out to not always be merely a figurative one. However, wherever I’m at and in whichever home I happen to be, I always remember that magical homecoming we experienced in Mexico City so many years ago. And how it was all due to our heeding of the siren call of that magnificent magnetic highway sign.

Scholarly Articles

**Daughters Reclaimed: Empowered Sisterhood in
Josie Méndez-Negrete's *Las hijas de Juan:
Daughters Betrayed***

Cristina Herrera

But what happens when a Chicana writer dares enter a room that houses Chicano “tradition” and finds herself in a house of horrors that threatens her life? When Chicana feminist writers begin to examine Chicano “tradition” and criticize wife battering, child abuse, “drunk husbands,” the misogyny that is embedded in the culture, they are branded “vendidas,” sellouts, who betray their people and contribute to the damaging stereotypes of Mexicans and Mexican Americans that Anglo America already believes. (Sonia Saldívar-Hull, *Feminism on the Border* 83-84)

Josie Méndez-Negrete prefaces her 2006 work of nonfiction, *Las hijas de Juan: Daughters Betrayed*, with a passage from Chicana historian Vicki Ruiz's study on Mexican women in the 20th century: “We must move beyond a celebration of *la familia* to address questions of power and patriarchy... [Women's] legacies of resistance reveal their resiliency, determination, and strength.” The placement of these lines prior to the opening pages that detail the horrific sexual and physical abuse the writer and narrator, Josie¹, and her sisters suffered at the hands of their father is significant. Before we begin to read the pages that document the intense violence, misogyny, and paternal hatred experienced by the sisters, we must confront the writer's critique of male dominance that will serve as the major theme throughout the work. To put it plainly, this is not a text that recounts with fondness the mythical family as the source of love and tenderness. Instead, it emphatically supports what Ruiz contends, namely that the idealization or “celebration” of the patriarchal Chicano family renders invisible unequal power structures that benefit men, with often dire consequences. As Méndez-Negrete highlights throughout her text, romantic notions of the family, in fact, only serve to hide the darkness that may lurk beneath such false representations; in the case of the author and her sisters, the story is one of unthinkable physical, sexual violence and brutality. The subtitle of the work, *Daughters Betrayed*, echoes the late Chicana theorist Gloria Anzaldúa's indictment of masculinist Chicano nationalism that casts Chicanas as transgressors/traitors, daughters of the ultimate “traitor,” La Malinche: “Not me sold out my people but they me” (43).

Like Anzaldúa, Méndez-Negrete takes Chicano nationalism to task by inverting the daugh-

ter-as-traitor label, instead arguing that it is patriarchy combined with misogyny that betrays the daughters. But as I suggest, reading this work as a testimonio of daughters betrayed who become daughters reclaimed functions as a critical gesture that underscores the empowered potential of strong bonds of sisterhood². In this light, I borrow from The Latina Feminist Group's seminal book, *Telling to Live: Latina Feminist Testimonios* (2001). The Chicana and Latina academics known as The Latina Feminist Group challenge our understanding of the testimonio genre by insisting on the right to voice, to name, and to create: "...while we were all accustomed to engaging other Latinas and /or Latin American women in giving testimony, many of us had not yet participated in public renderings of our own life stories" (2). The Latina Feminist Group thus has "reclaimed *testimonio* as a tool for Latinas to theorize oppression, resistance, and subjectivity" (19). By drawing attention to individual accounts in relation to larger community concerns, particularly the need to redefine family in ways that supports female family members, *Las hijas de Juan* has much in common with the Latina Feminist Group's efforts to collectively speak about subjects seen as taboo. I employ this framework in my reading of *Las hijas de Juan*.

In a work that by its very title points to the betrayal of daughters and delves into unflinching recollections of childhood and adolescence marked by fear of the father, Juan Méndez, what also stands out is Josie's loving, empowered bonds she cultivates with her two sisters, Mague and Felisa, also victims of incest and physical abuse. It must be noted that Méndez-Negrete does not actually begin describing the violence until almost a third of the way into the narrative; the first third largely provides reminiscent accounts of her early years as a young girl in México being lovingly cared for by her mother and great-aunts while Juan migrates to the United States. In addition, it traces the traumas associated with migrating, uprooting, and the impossibility of shaping a safe home environment because of Juan's incessant abuse. Significantly, the violence occurs in the United States, revealing the writer's critique of the myth of a "better life" supposedly afforded by U.S. migration. Indeed, while the writer tells of the harm inflicted upon the sisters' bodies and psyches, what is woven within this brutal story are recollections of the myriad ways the sisters protected and defended each other from their violent father. Méndez-Negrete demands attention to the potential destruction of the male-dominated home, which quite literally renders his daughters his possessions, but as I argue, the sisters' efforts to unite with each other, to forge an empowered bond of sisterhood, works against Juan's control. Certainly, the significance of the telling of such a horrific story within the context of Chicana writers' use of the testimonio genres must not be overlooked.

In this article, I critically examine the relationship between the sisters Josie, Mague, and Felisa as a move against the patriarchal family represented by Juan. Exploring this biologically-rooted relationship works alongside and with well-known notions of sisterhood set forth by feminists of color; thus, this article follows existing scholarship that calls for an expanded notion of "sister" beyond blood relations. As I suggest, the text's representation of positive, empowered relationships between sisters, biological or otherwise, functions in resistance and opposition to the idealization of the Chicano family unit, and their loving commitment to each other reinforces Ruiz's documentation of Chicana and Mexican women's examples of "resiliency, determination, and strength." And alongside my assertion of the agency that sisterhood enables, this article also offers a critical discussion of how Méndez-Negrete's text expands the debates on issues of testimony, patriarchy, and "la familia." While I argue that Méndez-Negrete utilizes the testimonio genre to critique gendered violence within a family structure that devalues and denigrates women, I also uncover moments of sisterly agency to support the text's call for a radical revision of family. If the patriarchal

classification of “daughters” renders female family members as paternal property, the feminist inscribing of “sister” woven within the testimonio serves as Méndez-Negrete’s critical Chicana response.

Las hijas de Juan: Testifying for a New Kind of Family

A note on *Las hijas de Juan*’s generic classification is in order. Since the publication of Méndez-Negrete’s text, Chicana novelists such as Denise Chávez and Reyna Grande have followed suit, publishing memoirs in 2006 and 2012, respectively³. The proliferation of memoirs and testimonios by Chicanas and Latinas attests to the significance of life writing for marginalized women, according to critic Lourdes Torres: “Memoirs, particularly memoirs by women of color who are multiply positioned in complex worlds, provide an alternative to mainstream masculinist conception of culture and politics” (104). As Sonia Saldívar-Hull adds, “the *testimonio* as produced by U.S. Latinas and Chicanas breathes new life into a discourse” (“Mujeres” 338). Adopting a politicized genre such as testimonio⁴ to resist and challenge gendered violence and misogyny reinforces these critiques often found in their fictional works as well. Indeed, Méndez-Negrete’s writing of a young adult life marred by extreme violence not only challenges the dynamics of the family, as this article attests; beyond that, though, writing this troubling history serves to also situate herself and her sisters as empowered survivors who have experienced trauma. Although the violence the Méndez daughters face renders them silent and passive, the text’s very possession of voice is a deliberate undoing of this silence, a call to social, collective change on behalf of victims of sexual and physical abuse. Life writing privileges the speaker as subject and agent, in contrast to the position in which Josie, her mother, and sisters are placed as targets of Juan’s violent misogyny.

As scholars Theresa Delgadillo and Sonia Saldívar-Hull have noted, Chicanas symbolize their solidarity with indigenous Latin American women such as Rigoberta Menchú and Domitila Barrios de Chungara, whose testimonios brought critical attention to the atrocities suffered by their indigenous communities at the hands of military dictatorships (Delgadillo 33, Saldívar-Hull, *Feminism* 47)⁵. While Méndez-Negrete’s text does not narrate the brutalities inflicted upon women in war-torn Latin America, it does share with the testimonio genre an insistence on voice and action; in particular, *Las hijas de Juan* is a call to enact a radical restructuring of the Chicano family through the bonds of sisterhood, what Chicana playwright and theorist Cherríe Moraga has referred to as “making familia from scratch.”⁶ Once again, I draw attention to Méndez-Negrete’s citation of Ruiz, which highlights the text’s political message that will serve as a constant refrain. The political elements of testimonio found in *Las hijas de Juan* center on the problematic defining of “familia,” or the ideological battle over who gets to define “familia” when it is rooted in hatred, misogyny, and violence against las hijas. Significantly, as I point out later in the article, it is not a blood relation who later rescues the Méndez girls from Juan’s violence, but a woman I nevertheless define as sister, which supports Méndez-Negrete’s aim to call into question the idealization of “family.” Méndez-Negrete employs the testimonio genre to point out the legal, economic, and social structures of power that fail to address violence against women, especially young, powerless female children. I will classify *Las hijas de Juan* as testimonio precisely because of the author’s political statements regarding patriarchy and misogyny, yet what also remains significant is Méndez-Negrete’s recollection of sisterly agency that works against this family structure.

Reading Sisters and Sisterhood in *Las hijas de Juan*

While I explore the text’s major focus, to challenge and reject unequal family and social

structures that make violence against women and children possible, I also point to the testimonio's simultaneous efforts to remark on the loving commitment between the Méndez sisters that sustained them amidst such dark times. The recognition of sisterly attachment and protection, I believe, does not undermine the testimonio's representation of physical, sexual, and emotional abuse the sisters experienced. Rather, documenting Josie's identity as sister and protector of Mague and Felisa (and vice versa) supports the classification of testimonio as "a narrative form that not only calls for the awareness of brutality, but also documents survival and self-determination" (Irizarry 264). It is impossible to speak of the women's experience with and survival of abuse without acknowledging the significance of the sisterly bond and its role in redeeming, protecting, and validating Josie, Mague, and Felisa as human beings. I do not limit my discussion of sisterhood to the biological relationship between female siblings, as I am aware of the potentially problematic, political undertones of "sisterhood." For the purposes of this article, I define sisterhood not only as the biological relationship between female family members based on shared blood ties, but as a committed bond between women that I read as a source of feminist protection and loving commitment.⁷ I suggest reading *Las hijas de Juan* as a testimonio that privileges blood ties between women as well as supportive networks among non-related women, and this position holds great significance to the text's generic classification.

In privileging the biological sisterhood, however, Méndez-Negrete also gives credit to a significant hermana-in-arms, Mary, later discussed in this article, who plays a key role in protecting the girls from further harm. Although Mary is not a blood-relative, Méndez-Negrete's homage to Mary signals the text's expanded notions of sisterhood rooted in Chicana feminism, a political commitment and loyalty to advocate for women of color. Much as important scholarship on early Chicana feminism has documented the radical alliances of sisterhood that Chicanas made with African-American women, as Maylei Blackwell's *¡Chicana Power! Contested Histories of Feminism in the Chicano Movement*, outlines, Méndez-Negrete similarly accounts for the need to forge empowered unions of sisterhood to combat the intersecting forces of racism, sexism, and familial violence. As George Yúdice has said of the testimonio genre, while the format implies writing from the perspective of the individual, this "personal experience, of course, is the collective struggle against oppression" (26, original italics). Situating *Las hijas de Juan* within this expanded notion of sisterhood, I believe, is a useful framework for a discussion of the writer's use of the testimonio genre to speak out against gendered violence within the family while at the same time unveiling the empowering possibilities of women's relationships to survive extreme violence.⁸

Las hijas de Juan follows in the tradition of much contemporary Chicana feminist fiction and nonfiction that challenges the family as universal, ideal, and a source of loving protectiveness for female family members.⁹ Rather than espouse the ideals of the family as necessarily a safe haven, Chicana writers complicate such problematic notions, instead drawing attention to the realities of physical, sexual, and emotional violence that may occur within the home.¹⁰ As Chicana feminist writing questions, how "safe" is the private dwelling if violence occurs hidden and tucked away from the public eye? Chicana writers do not suggest that violence is the norm, nor that such extreme violence is unique to Chicana/o culture; instead, these writers engage in drawing attention to "societies and cultures that emphasize rigid sex role differentiation [that] are believed to produce a familial context ripe for spousal and child abuse," as psychologist Yvette Flores-Ortiz explains (170). Perhaps most important, as Chicana scholar Theresa Delgadillo argues, is the overall silence that accompanies violence: "One context, however, that we ignore at great peril is the daily violence—discursive, material, and physical—directed against Chicano/as, Latino/as, and

immigrants from Latin America as well as intra-group violence against women. The fact of the violence and the history of the violence... cannot be ignored" (34-35). Speaking of and writing about violence is thus an articulation of the marginalized experiences faced by Chicanas within the dominant group and their communities. Representing violence in their works is motivated by a will to heal that the writing of such pain and trauma can afford (López 56, Socolovsky 151). Considering the number of Chicana writings, both fiction and nonfiction, that attest to such violence, it seems more and more prudent that scholars must answer Delgadillo's call to end the blatant ignoring of what occurs in our communities.

Las hijas de Juan begins with a prologue entitled *Sin padre*, without a father, a reference to the well-known Mexican expression, "Sin madre, sin padre, sin perro que me ladre" ("No mother, no father, not even a dog to bark at me"), which is often used to express loneliness or isolation from one's family, and this isolation is typically thought to be a result of the deaths of these important family figures. However, Méndez-Negrete's use of "sin padre" in the prologue sets the overall Chicana feminist tone of the testimonio; rather than suggest a form of loneliness as a result of being orphaned, the writer instead positions her fatherlessness as her own eviction of Juan Méndez from her family unit. Writing about Carla Trujillo's equally violent novel, *What Night Brings*, scholar Marivel Danielson claims that the act of disowning the patriarch by the characters in the text "positions the girls as agents" (75), which may also describe Méndez-Negrete's use of the expression. She may very well be "sin padre," but her fatherlessness is not equated with lacking something. Although the dicho is intended to invoke sympathy from an audience, Méndez-Negrete's use of the dicho overturns the popular usage of garnering sympathy to instead offer a radical revision of being "sin padre."

As Méndez-Negrete describes in the opening pages of the text, being apart from her father as a young girl was akin to freedom, happiness, and far from any reminders of the possibility of his violence. In her childhood years, Juan frequently migrated to the U.S. for extended periods of time, leaving Josie, her mother, and sisters behind in México to stay with female family members: "Without my father we lived with our mother surrounded by women—*tía abuelas, tías*, and others who had also lost their husbands to *el norte*. Those days were like living under the wings of a mother hen—warm, secure, comfortable, and loving" (23). Describing these years of paternal absence, Méndez-Negrete refutes the equation of "family" as reliant on the presence of a father. Being without father/sin padre, however, allows for the reality of being with mother/con madre. As Abarca argues in her analysis of the text, Méndez-Negrete "offer[s] sufficient cause to pause and suggest the need to reformulate this ideological position" of the family (123). Writing against this family unit, the writer recalls the protective, political implications of a maternal, female-empowered family structure. For example, Josie's great-aunts Tía Herme and Tía Chenda offer a glimpse of united sisterhood. Both of them widowed sisters, Herme and Chenda are admired by Josie for their survival and self-sufficiency. Rather than bask in martyrdom, however, the sisters use their widowhood to forge an unshakeable bond: "Their husbands' deaths united them for life. Neither married or desired to wed again" (33). Unlike Juan Méndez, whose mere presence incites fear and female submission, the sisterly bond between Herme and Chenda offers a feminist alternative to the male-dominant structure. Throughout the testimonio, in fact, Méndez-Negrete offers examples of strong bonds between women, as in the case of Herme and Chenda, the three Méndez sisters, and later, in the example of a woman named Mary, to offer empowered alternatives to the family, which is a major aim of the text. Bearing witness to the empowered relationship between her great-aunts serves as a model for Josie on which to cultivate her own sisterly bonds to survive the

horrors of Juan's abuse.

It must also be noted that the writer's organization of the testimonio reveals a before and after chronology--life before Juan's abuse, life during Juan's abuse, and life after Juan's abuse. In other words, if life before the abuse was marked by profound happiness afforded to Josie and her family because of loving matriarchy, then the writing of the testimonio, the telling of such horrors, also serves as Josie's attempts to return to the previous family structure that encouraged female bonding and empowerment. Yet even as Méndez-Negrete uses the testimonio to reclaim this bond and to "deal with my feelings, emotions, and memories" (187), she does not deny the traumatic experience that accompanies the writing process. As powerful of a reclamation of life, subjectivity, and sisterly bonding this testimonio is, she faced great difficulty completing the manuscript, referring to it as her "year of darkness" (188). In addition, Méndez-Negrete also had to expose her sisters to the trauma that recalling these memories would cause, as she describes her sister Mague's reluctance to speak of her own experiences: "...she would speak to me only about what she witnessed, not what she had experienced" (189). Méndez-Negrete may indeed find healing strength in the writing of such painful times, but for Mague, sharing her memories that she had witnessed, rather than potentially reliving her own victimization, is her mode of self-protection.

Once in the United States, Josie and her sisters must rely on their maternal history to combat their father's hatred and brutality. Most telling is the sisters' bodily sacrifices to protect each other from harm. As the eldest in her family, Méndez-Negrete narrates her tactics of placing herself within Juan's reach to spare her younger sister Felisa their father's groping hands: "I was on the edge of her mattress, having instructed her to sleep close to the wall. She was about seven, and I was about twelve. Because I grew up with Felisa and felt especially close to her, I loved her enough to put myself in her place... He found me instead of Felisa when he reached out to touch between her legs" (62). Although these sleeping arrangements place Josie in danger of her father's violation, she and her sisters commit such acts and "backed each other up" (65). Significantly, Josie teaches herself to become a late-night spy to prevent her father from abusing her younger sisters: "When I no longer feared his clawy, flaming hands that burned me inside, I learned to be a light sleeper to protect my sisters. I became their alarm, jumping at the smallest noises. Easily awoke to the buzz of a fly" (87). Living under the same roof as a violent man, sleep is a luxury denied to them, and Josie becomes adept at dissuading her father's destructive nocturnal habits, all in the name of protecting her sisters.

Seeing herself as her sisters' bodyguard, Josie adapts these survival techniques; what is more, her refusal to "allow" her father free reign over her and her sisters' bodies reveals her efforts, even at a young age, to denounce his control, which "translates to a culture of fear induced by physical cruelty and emotional manipulation" (Abarca 124). Even as a young girl, Josie refuses to submit easily to her father's lust and violence: "[I] still tried to protect my sisters by mouthing off, challenging him, daring him to take me on—short of killing him. As the *bocona*, *resongona*, *testaruda* eldest sister who thought she could take him on, I was responsible for their safety. Took it seriously. It was my job" (121). In her critiques of Juan's abuse, a major point of the text, the writer also uses this subject to recall her commitment to shield her sisters from their father. Despite Josie's strong-willed efforts to defend her sisters from their father, both Mague and Felisa are raped, and Mague becomes pregnant with Juan's child. Although Mague's pregnancy and rape by her father could very well strip her of all her former qualities, she, too sacrifices herself to protect Felisa when he demands that she go to the store with him, his coded language for leaving the house to commit rape: "But Mague often volunteered, rather than let our baby sister Felisa go with him. It

was Mague's way of undermining his despicable plans" (123). The elder sisters' efforts to protect Felisa should not be interpreted as akin to passive martyrdom, however. Instead, while sacrificial in nature, their acts are radical, though desperate symbols of sisterly devotion and protection within a family climate that holds the potential to disintegrate sisterhood. Further, the sisters' sacrificial acts reveal their valuing of each other, a selflessness that is common in their relationship with each other.

A question that readers may ask is where Josie's mother, Alejandrina, fits within this dynamic of abuse. Well aware that readers may vilify and attack the mother for "allowing" her daughters to be abused by her husband, Méndez-Negrete shields her mother from potential criticism, correctly arguing the toll that such prolonged victimization has taken on her mother: "Numbed into silence, she was a walking mute. He controlled her every move, like a hypnotist in a circus show. My mother became the unwilling partner in his act" (122). While Chicana writers such as Moraga and Anzaldúa have written of Chicana mothers' betrayal of their daughters to demonstrate their own status as "loyal" to the script of patriarchy, Méndez-Negrete recalls the tragic consequences of a mother so beaten to submission that she is unable, not unwilling, to protect her daughters from violence.¹¹ As Flores-Ortiz concurs, cultural messages of "loyalty," in fact, make it difficult for Chicanas/Latinas to leave abusive partners, particularly if there are barriers related to language, citizenship, or economics (176). Méndez-Negrete does not castigate her mother, recognizing that she, too is an abused victim. Yet though Alejandrina is initially unable to shield her daughters from her husband's brutality, it is another woman who is responsible for Juan's eventual arrest and incarceration. Méndez-Negrete recalls a time when close family friends visit the home of the Méndez family, and Juan's drunken violence catches the attention of la comadre Mary Reynaga, who is described by Josie as a pachuca (135):

"Tenga cuidado, Compadre. ¡Vállase por la sombrita!"

Watch your step, Compadre.

Be careful, she repeated in English for our benefit. She wanted him to know that she had her eye on him. She told him to walk on the shady side of the street, because the shadow he sees might be hers. She intuited that something just wasn't right.

The next day the police showed up at our high school and took Mague. The counselor took her out of class. When Mague saw the police, she knew. Instead of fear she felt thankful to know someone had told...

Mary Reynaga was our patron saint; she had interceded where no one had. (136)

Adding that "A woman freed us from my father's tyranny" (141), Méndez-Negrete pays homage to the pachuca's defense of abused sisters, supporting scholar Rosa Linda Fregoso's analysis of pachucas as symbols of "female solidarity" despite being "viewed by adults as transgressive girls who disturbed private and public patriarchy, la familia, and the Catholic church" (318). Although referring to the pachuca's transgression of the public/private dichotomy, it is important to note that Mary's commitment to the sisters' safety occurs in the private home; rather than turn a blind eye to what transpires behind closed doors because it may be perceived as "none of her business," Mary violates the machista code of Juan's domain to intercede on behalf of the sisters. In her refusal to accept the continued violation of daughters, Mary's act reveals the limitations of "family" that place female children in danger. Although not a biological sister, Mary ruptures blood ties by saving the Méndez daughters. As a Chicana, Mary refuses to allow Juan's violence to continue on her watch, and in this moment, the political, feminist aspects of comadrazgo are

evident.¹² Invoking the moral code to protect and watch out for her sisters, Mary demonstrates the unshakeable tenet of the “*pachuca*’s sense of female solidarity” (Fregoso 318). I would also add that Josie’s and Mague’s attempts to protect their younger sister, Felisa, are rooted in the same sense of female solidarity enacted by Mary. Mary’s example of protection, I suggest, serves as an empowered model on which the Méndez sisters can bond. By acting on behalf of the girls, Mary positions herself as protective older sister, and in this selfless move, Méndez-Negrete acknowledges the political implications of sisterhood and female kinship. Mary’s emphatic concern for her little sisters’ welfare demonstrates her critical belief that the lives of young Chicana girls and women matter.

However, Méndez-Negrete reveals the shortcomings of the family welfare system that undermine Mary’s radical acts of Chicana solidarity. Initially after Juan’s arrest, Josie and her sisters are removed from their mother’s care because social service workers “suspected she was an active part of our abuse. They couldn’t understand how all of it could have taken place right under her nose. All were suspicious of her” (142). During the court hearings, the judge is reluctant to incarcerate Juan, telling the girls, “I don’t want to break up your family” (144). The judge’s initial desire to “keep the family together” demonstrates “how the legal system disempowers women and children. For this particular judge, the individual suffering of three daughters at the hand of their own father should not destroy the union of family, the soul of the nation” (Abarca 125). Although eventually children and mother are reunited, the judge’s concern over the “breakup” of the family speaks volumes on the welfare system’s support of the patriarchal family, even if that family is rooted in violence. As a newly single mother, Alejandrina is perceived as “unfit” by a system that vilifies single motherhood without acknowledging the social and cultural factors that not only permit violence but allow it to continue with impunity. Méndez-Negrete thus uses the testimonio to speak out against the legal, economic, and social structures of power that fail to address violence, much less protect those who are vulnerable to this violence.

Yet even as Méndez-Negrete speaks of horrific acts of sexual and physical abuse, in sections entitled “Mague” (107) and “Felisa” (109), the writer also gives funny, warm accounts of her two closest sisters. In these loving descriptions of her sisters, Méndez-Negrete affirms her feminist commitment and devotion to them, and rather than “simply” cast them off as dehumanized by Juan’s violence, she describes their beauty, their bravery, and her admiration of them. In writing about their unique and special traits, Méndez-Negrete successfully instills a sense of humanity within them, constructing them as real, authentic beings despite their father’s attempt to deprive them of all things human. Their father’s destructive abuse is undoubtedly his attempt to reduce the sisters to unworthy, usable objects, but by also describing them apart from the realm of violence, Méndez-Negrete highlights their utmost humanity, in contrast to Juan’s lack of it. Under the newly formed family with Alejandrina as caregiver and financial supporter, “We grew with each other, with her guidance. She became her own person and taught us to have hope” (164). Contrary to the judge’s concern over how Juan’s absence would result in the deterioration of the family unit, his incarceration, in fact, allows for the creation of a new family where female siblings hold value. Under Alejandrina’s freedom from a violent husband, a safe, empowered site of sisterly bonding is cultivated and nourished.

Reclaiming Sisterhood in the Testimonio

Throughout the testimonio, Méndez-Negrete challenges disparaging views of her maternal family as inferior because of its lack of a male authority figure. Because the text underscores the

importance of creating an alternative family structure and empowered sisterly bonds amidst an abusive home environment, Méndez-Negrete takes it as her mission to write against social, cultural norms that allow such violence to take place, as she explains in the epilogue:

With *Las hijas de Juan* I did not intentionally go about exposing my father's contempt for women, something that seemed to come from his primordial self, as I had not been exposed to such violence among my kin. Rather, with this book I set out to reveal the social power vested in my father by a society that sanctions or, at best, ignores men's violence against women and children. His treatment of us remained hidden in a culture that still colludes with the reproduction of domestic and sexual violence that kills children's spirits and denigrates women even as it venerates them because of their gender. (185)

As the writer explains, the testimonio is less interested in revealing the flaws of one individual man than critiquing the family system as a whole, that encourages, tolerates, or remains silent about the realities of violence. In her repeated use of the pronouns "us" and "we" to speak not only of her own experiences with abuse, but of her sisters' survival as well, Méndez-Negrete invokes the testimonio genre's simultaneous "personal and collective" voice to challenge oppression (Yúdice 15). Rather than simply reduce the problem of violence to the individual and familial level, the writer calls for a radical undoing of unequal social systems; further, she articulates the need to speak of such violence that occurs, as silence is but one of the ills that accompanies this violence: "To change the sociocultural conditions that reproduce violence against women and girls, we must begin by stepping outside the denial, as we challenge our society to shed the secrecy and silence" (197). Méndez-Negrete's arguments support Anzaldúa's critique of what she defines as "cultural tyranny," the ways in which culture permeates our belief systems: "Culture is made by those in power—men. Males make the rules and laws; women transmit them... Though I'll defend my race and culture when they are attacked by non-mexicanos, *conozco el malestar de mi cultura*. I abhor some of my culture's ways, how it cripples its women, *como burras*, our strengths used against us, lowly *burras* bearing humility with dignity" (38,43). If such cultures define "family" as a supposed site of protection and safety, then *Las hijas* unpacks and questions this ideal throughout, in particular by testifying for a kind of family that values women and sustains sisterhood, biological or not. As older sister, it is a woman named Mary who dared to renounce patriarchy by stopping Juan's abuse, and her defense of vulnerable young girls demonstrates the ways in which a "family" built on a foundation of empowered sisterhood values the lives and bodies of Chicana girls. Through Mary's example, Josie cultivates a strong bond with her biological sisters. Speaking thoughtfully yet forcefully against her sisters' history of abuse, Méndez-Negrete, like Anzaldúa, refuses to uphold her "culture's ways."

Further, Méndez-Negrete exposes the ambivalent space Chicanas and Mexicanas occupy within climates of misogyny and patriarchy. On one hand, sexual, physical abuse "denigrates women" while it simultaneously "venerates them because of their gender." With this statement, the writer calls into question the virgin/whore binary that has been actively challenged by Chicana feminist writers.¹³ Passivity and virginity are equated with "goodness," and resistance to this limited view relegates Chicanas as "bad," as putas or traitors. In this light, Méndez-Negrete's attack on Chicano culture reveals the often complicated responses to testimonio, as Nance explains:

In the literatures of trauma, the restrictive force of the socially sayable is extremely strong. Those who would write about contrary events are faced not only with the difficulty of finding the right words to describe them, but also with

resisting the personal and social sanctions that will fall on their description...

By preventing speakers from speaking of injustice in ways that will inspire action, the force of the socially sayable serves to preserve the social status quo that produces the trauma. (107-108, 2006)

The speaker/writer of the testimonio, thus, risks potential backlash should she speak out against social taboos; in the case of *Las hijas de Juan*, Méndez-Negrete faces the possibility of being rendered a traitor for daring to speak against patriarchy.¹⁴ As the epigraph cited at the beginning of this article suggests, Chicana writers such as Méndez-Negrete are often vilified for writing of violence and misogyny because of how these representations question idealized notions of the family. However, speaking out against such atrocities is a radical attempt to undo the silences that make violence a possibility. Once again, by speaking of her father's horrific abuse, Méndez-Negrete challenges the misogynistic narrative of female betrayal, pointing instead to a culture that betrays them through violence.

Writing the testimonio also allows Méndez-Negrete to honor her sisters and mother, a Chicana feminist alliance based on mutual affection and a shared history of survival. As Edén Torres reminds us in *Chicana Without Apology*, the trauma suffered by Chicanas such as Méndez-Negrete and her female family members is rooted in pain and suffering that is "clearly in our history and in the reality of ongoing socioeconomic and political inequality" (16). Writing is an act of healing,¹⁵ but as Méndez-Negrete states in her epilogue, healing also rests in affirming a sisterly commitment to each other: "Depleted but victorious, we were women warriors; that's how we saw each other. In the in-between space of our ambivalence—the tension of our betrayal and survival—we found our core; *coraje y corazón* had been the link to our survival" (194). The bodies and psyches are indeed wounded by Juan's abuse, but in protecting and loving each other despite the inhumanity that surrounds them, Josie and her sisters forge a bond that remains solid and intact. Significantly, the writing of the testimonio speaks to Méndez-Negrete's insistence on documenting the sisters' collective trauma and healing. Although Torres warns that "if we avoid grieving, which necessarily includes thinking about the trauma, then we never face the injured Self" (35), *Las hijas de Juan* is a direct confrontation of trauma, a text that also celebrates the collective healing undertaken by the Méndez sisters. The bond of sisterhood becomes a catalyst for survival and undoubtedly gave the eldest sister the courage to tell the story on behalf of her sisters. Additionally, the writer's reverential account of Mary Reynaga's sisterly devotion and protection affirms the text's expansion of sisterhood to include those women who act on a moral code of female solidarity. While Juan's destructive anger is lashed out against the embodiment of his hatred, his daughters and wife, Josie and her sisters instead rely on the productive, restorative potential of *coraje* (anger) to release and find an outlet for this rage, all while maintaining a strong sense of compassion or *corazón*, the antithesis of Juan's lack of feeling. In valuing each other, the sisters shape a radical vision of family.

Angry, painful, yet uplifting, Josie Méndez-Negrete's testimonio, *Las hijas de Juan*, rejects the male-centered Chicano family for its destructive potential to breed violence and misogyny. Rather than idealize the paternal family unit, the writer exposes the harm that such romantic notions may hide. The Méndez sisters survive the horrors of incest and physical abuse through their unwavering commitment to each other. By writing of the sisters' bond, Méndez-Negrete offers a counter vision to the violence of patriarchy, and in doing so, calls for a Chicana feminist revision of family. No longer simply "*Las hijas de Juan*," the patriarch's property to do with as he wishes, Méndez-Negrete powerfully articulates the necessity of forging and reclaiming a political, feminist united bond of Chicana sisterhood.

Notes

1. I will distinguish between Josie as narrator and Méndez-Negrete as author.
2. See also Catrióna Rueda Esquibel's important chapter on lesbian relationships in Chicana fiction in her study, *With Her Machete in Her Hand* and Cristina Herrera's article on friendship in Denise Chávez's novel, *Loving Pedro Infante*, both of which call for expanded discussion of strong relationships between women. Full citations listed under works cited.
3. See also the anthology of testimonio writings by The Latina Feminist Group, *Telling to Live*.
4. While the term "testimonio" is often italicized by scholars, I have chosen not to in my efforts to normalize a term that has been extensively used in the fields of Latina Studies.
5. Many Latina/Chicana life writings have been situated within the more traditional context of Latin American testimonio, as Saldívar-Hull and Delgado explain. For a more extensive discussion of the Latin American testimonio genre, see John Beverley and Kimberly Nance.
6. See Moraga's texts, *Waiting in the Wings* and *Loving in the War Years*.
7. Chicana scholars, for several decades now, have extensively critiqued the limitations of Euro-American women's notions of sisterhood. See Saldívar-Hull and Alarcón, for example.
8. For additional work on the topic of women of color and its critiques of Euro-American feminism, see the edited volume, *Other Sisterhoods: Literary Theory and U.S. Women of Color*.
9. See, for example, Denise Chávez's novel, *Face of an Angel*; Sandra Cisneros's *Woman Hollering Creek and Other Stories*; Trujillo's *What Night Brings*; or Castillo's *The Mixquiahuala Letters*, among others.
10. See scholarship by Rosaura Sánchez, Mary Pat Brady, Sonia Saldívar-Hull, and others listed in the works cited.
11. See Moraga's *Loving in the War Years* and Anzaldúa's *Borderlands*.
12. See Herrera's analysis of comadrazgo in Chávez's *Loving Pedro Infante*, for example. Citation listed under works cited.
13. See Moraga and Anzaldúa, for example.
14. In a similar vein, some critics attacked Alice Walker's novel, *The Color Purple*, for its representations of African American men. See Jacqueline Bobo's article, listed under works cited.
15. For further reading on healing and trauma in women's writing, see Felicia Lynne Fahey and Laurie Vickroy, for example.

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Relámpago y Trueno: The Intersection of the U.S. Latina Identity Experience, Black Feminist Literature, and Response Writing: Teaching For Colored Girls who Have Considered Suicide/ When the Rainbow is Enuf

Dr. Yolanda Nieves

Synopsis

Finding personal meaning in an academic setting is crucial for Latinx academic engagement. African American women's literature, specifically Black Feminist/Womanist literature and Latinas' everyday experience lies in a unique intersection of the lived and written experience. This intersection of life, language, and text allows the researcher and Latinx students to engage in a critical examination of how Latinx students connect and make meaning of their lives through written responses. My study examines how Latinas' personal and political narratives are mirrored in Black feminist literature. The pedagogical method of response writing is a portal for self-expression and truth-telling; this portal creates a forum for Latinx feminist ideology to reveal itself. I call this revelation "relámpago y trueno." It is the sudden burst of consciousness and the thunder of understanding. This paper highlights the importance of using Black feminist literature as a literary ally to help excavate and deconstruct the historical, political, and personal experiences of Latinx students that include narratives of violence and resilience. This paper makes references to Shange's choreopoem *For Colored Girls who have Considered Suicide When the Rainbow is Enuf* as the literary source used for this study. Its literary impact is beyond moving in its content and language. Moreover, when given the opportunity to read and respond to this text, the Latinx students' written responses as narrative voices takes its rightful place right along Shange. In this way, using Black feminist literature in the classroom helps forge academic participation and success for the Latinx student in academia.

Introduction: El Relámpago y Trueno

For all of us who are committed to teaching students in culturally competent ways in majority institutions we understand that academia is an epicenter of hegemonic barriers for students of color. For this paper I will reference Latinx students specifically. Latinx students are required to navigate the intersections of institutional and systematic racism from the admissions process to the graduation "finish line." Racism and sexism are integrated into educational systems in such

a way that students may miss acknowledging the intersections of hegemony and how they play out in colleges and universities. According to Crenshaw “Intersectionality is about how structures make certain identities the consequence for the vehicle for vulnerability...what are the institutional structures that play a role in contributing to the exclusion of some people and not others?” (2016, 4:04). In other words, who can succeed or jump the hoops of the unwritten rules of academia and at what cost?

To be a Latinx student in academia is to be susceptible to classroom policies that reinforce the status quo and highlight their academic deficiencies rather than students’ strengths. My qualitative study excavates and proposes a new kind of intersection that creates a “personal meeting” between Black feminist text and the Latinxs’ lived experience through response writing. Through this textual meeting Latinx students can deconstruct their personal experiences and intuitively respond with their personal truth. This “personal meeting” of text and life for the Latinx student I call “el relámpago y trueno”/ “lightning and thunder”; it is akin to an “aha moment” but one that suddenly strikes the listener in an auditory and then in an intrinsic way; it opens the mind to new thoughts and ideas and connects the lived experience with text. The moments of “relámpago y trueno” must be reconciled by a student as the reader, the listener, and the writer. The writing is informed by the students’ language of choice. Professors can choose to accept or not accept the students’ organic responses in the manner the students choose to convey their learning and lived experiences. Regardless, the student experiences writing as “the act of making soul...a tool for piercing” (Alarcón 169).

The college level English class is dedicated to teaching students how to abide by formal composition rules while introducing students to works of literature by dominant culture authors also known as “the canon.” Of course, learning formal English and the literary works deemed essential is important; Latinx students will be delving into a world where dominant culture imprints the patterns of language, nuances, and culture. Mastering English, reading and writing it well, is a definition of success. However, these classes can be purgative-the hidden messages ingrained in what appears to be the perfunctory classroom meeting convey that Latinx lived experiences should be expunged from the learning process so that Latinx students can be receivers of Western knowledge. The message is therefore hegemonic. Hegemony, which commonly involves the act of embracing our own oppression (whether consciously or unconsciously), is multi-faceted. It is embodied in institutional and classroom practices. For instance, a Latinx student may be asked to elaborate on Latino political movements in Puerto Rico when they in fact may not identify with any political movements outside the United States. Additionally, the classroom practices initiated by a professor can suppress the unique cultural realities of students of color and that suppression can be difficult for the students to identify.

In Critical Race Theory these kinds of assumptions are defined as microaggressions. Davis defines microaggressions as “subtle, stunning, often automatic, [verbal] and non-verbal exchanges which are ‘put-downs’...by offenders” (145). One microaggression that may be easier for the Latinx student to recognize is the pre-supposition that Latinos are all one group, an offensive but pervasive assumption in academia. A microaggression that might not be so obvious is when a Latinx student is asked to represent all Latinx people and cultures in the classroom or when an assumption is made by a professor that because a student is brown s/he/they cannot make incisive contributions in class. (As an undergraduate student, I was once accused of plagiarism by an English professor who could not believe I had written original thoughts of my own in such ‘proper’ English. It was up to me to defend my essay rather than the accusing professor to provide evidence of the

‘crime’.) How can we then respond to the intersections of institutional racism and the pervasive silencing of the Latinxs’ voices in the classroom?

As an English professor I wanted to explore how Latinx students experienced and responded to Black feminist literature when hegemonic barriers of the static English class were lifted. Penalties for not using Standard English while permitting response writing in the students’ organic mode, modelled after Shange’s own writing, was allowed. This pedagogical shift is critical because it provoked the Latinx students to experience moments of “el relámpago y trueno” and create personal and academic connections between their lived experiences and the written word written by Shange.

The Text: For Colored Girls Only

Ntozake Shange’s (1977) choreopoem, a combination of poetry performed with body movement and music, was first initiated in 1974 in a bar in Berkley, California and later in New York’s Lower East Side. Shange “smitten by her own language” developed her play in conjunction with musicians and other artists. The result was a play written specifically “for colored girls” (xii). The term “women of color” is appropriate to use from here on out in this paper. Mohanty’s definition of women of color is a term I use because it “designates a political constituency, not a biological or sociological one. It is a socio-political designation for women of African, Caribbean, Asian, and Latin American descent, and natives of the U.S. ...what constitutes them as a viable oppositional alliance is a common context of struggle rather than color or racial identification (49). Thus, the term women of color highlights the lived experience of women’s marginalization and the socio-political commotions that bridge such schisms together to create common bonds among women of color.

Shange’s text is a bridge that has the power to reposition perceived differences between Black and Latinx women into a common experience. Moraga, the Latina feminist poet and essayist, at the age of thirty recounts how she “went to a concert where Ntosake Shange was reading. There everything exploded for me. She was speaking a language that I knew-in the deepest parts of me-existed...Shange’s reading agitated me because she spoke with power about a world that is both alien and common to me...” (31-32). Moraga’s experience is an example of what I call “el relámpago y trueno.” Moraga’s conscious raising experience happened in a moment and in this particular case through the listening of Black feminist literature. Moraga’s experience mirrored my Latinx students’ engagement when reading and then responding in writing to Shange’s text. As they deconstructed the text they also deconstructed their own lived experience.

The Study

In a three week unit on poetry, thirteen women were asked to write responses to Shange’s choreopoem *For Colored Girls who have Considered Suicide When the Rainbow is ENUF*. We use an open-ended writing response strategy whereby the students chose their favorite passages and responded in the way they saw appropriate for them. The questions that guided my study were the following: How can we engage Latinx students in an English composition classroom to build better reading comprehension and academic success? What can students learn and what can we, as professors, learn about our students? What types of responses are shared when we privilege the students’ lived experience and their ways of knowing? What are the depths of responses when we lift the conventions of grammar and allow them to model their writing after a Black feminist author? Could the personal and political narratives found in Shange’s text incite the Latinx students

to find an intersection with the women in the text and build an alliance with Black feminist literature? Could the Latinx students critically write about themselves while garnering a better understanding of their identity and what it means to be a Latina, a woman of color, and marginalized? What types of counter-narratives (stories written by the “Other” that we can center and privilege in opposition to dominant metanarratives) would be written? There had to be a complete shift in the traditional classroom dynamics.

I introduced Ntzeke Shange to the Latinx students as a Black feminist author; her choreopoem *For Colored Girls Only Who Have Considered Suicide When the Rainbow is Enuf* was utilized for the three weeks of coursework. When proposing the idea of responding to Shange’s text, the length of response, the grammatical rules of writing, and the format of the responses were left up to the students to develop. The topics the students could write about were not limited to the feminist themes of the book. The students were allowed to traverse and write about their own lived experiences when any poignant poem or verse nudged their memory. This was a pass/fail grade assignment; the only way to lose credit was by not doing the assignment at all.

Method

Response writing was introduced as the pedagogical mode of writing. Many educators agree that response writing provides an insight into students’ critical thinking processes. As students reflect on what they have learned through response writing, they can gain new insights on their lived experiences. This creates ways for the construction of new meaning in their academic experiences. More importantly, I shared that reflective writing for the Latinx student is a way to “talk back” to inherent academic power structures of language. In a recent study, Nieves expounded that response writing “would be a means for nudging them (the students) into excavating their thoughts and create a site for agency and praxis. Speaking truth to power entails a conscious divergence, either in thought or behavior, from the norms imposed by the culture and institutions that cling to their historical grand narratives” (16). The act of writing itself becomes an intersection for voice, power, and conscious-raising; it is in the response writing that the Latinx students’ lived experiences are centered. This becomes what Irizzary calls a culturally responsive pedagogy. A “culturally responsive pedagogy is about more than what teachers need to know about a specific group of students; it also involves who they [the teachers and students] need to be and who they need to continuously become” (27). To include the students voices and their distinct way of responding, without purgation of the Self, is a way to build upon their academic goals and dreams. The responses I share in this paper reflect six of the thirteen students’ reflections; they wrote twice a week for three weeks on the unit I created on Shange’s text.

My framework for analyzing the data is Latino Critical Race Theory, also known as LatCrit, which emerged from Critical Race Theory. It began as a concerted movement by a group of Latino legal scholars who in 1996 wanted to address the racial and ethnic discrimination experienced by Latin@s/Latinx populations. One of the strengths of LatCrit is the idea of the counter-narrative; these are the stories that are told from the perspective of the “Other” and those who are politically and socially marginalized. Delgado (2007) writes “race scholars [who] write chronicles, parables, and narratives... use them to explore ideology and mindset. We use them to examine presuppositions, the body of received wisdoms that pass as truth...” (54). As a professor I realized Shange’s text was a counter-narrative that delved deeply into the psyche of Black women; through her writing she allowed her characters to “talk back” to the marginalization they experienced. Using LatCrit’s paradigm of counter-narratives to excavate the truths of the Latinx lived experience, I

sought to understand how counter-narratives would incite written responses from my students. In that way I hoped students would engage the class more fully. Would they experience “el relámpago y trueno” that Moraga had experienced when she first encountered Black feminist literature?

The Responses

Collecting and reading the responses required me to let go of finding poignant or eternal truths about what it meant to be a Latinx woman. I entered a pedagogical shift that required me to suspend academic appraisals of the students and to accept the students’ responses without judgment of their writing or critical thinking skills. It was my moment of “relámpago y trueno.” Their responses to their chosen texts are forthright and at the same time complex. I offered no solutions to the issues of marginalization, racism, or violence; it was up to me to find an acceptance of the students’ lived experiences and to come to a new understanding of how their experiences as Latinx people in their day-to-day lives influence their work in the classroom and their academic success. Brookfield writes “Wrenching ourselves out of habitual ways of interpreting our practice, and learning new ways of acting that correspond to new ways of seeing, are difficult, tiring, and piece-meal tasks” (242). As a scholar, I wanted students to exhibit critical thinking skills. I had to probe deeply into my assumptions about my students and what they had written as well as suspend my usual ways of assessing the students.

I want to share the responses from the six students who allowed me to keep their journals for this study. The text they responded to is on the left side of the chart. The students’ responses are on the right. All the spelling, sentence syntax, and capitalization reflect Shange’s written text and the students’ writing. The responses are thematically identified by the issues that surface constantly in the students’ reflections: race, identity issues, transnationalism, and body/gender violence.

The Text	Student’s Responses
Race	
<p>p. 11- Lady in Blue “ola My papa thot he was puerto rican & we wda been cept we waz just rglar niggahs wit hints of Spanish so off i made it to this 36 hour marathn dance con salsa con ricardo...i didn’t know what anybody waz saying cept if dancin waz proof of origin i was jibarita herself that nite...”</p>	<p>Lady in blue was a mulata. I feel as though she was a little ashamed of her color, though she looked black she wasn’t she knew that she waz sprinkled with poquito espana, and in her soul she waz puertoriquena and had amor for the musica salsa and no one could tell her any different, she loved to bailar slasa especially from willy colon, and as he danced she could feel people eyeballing her but she did not give a shit, when she danced, la negra would come out in her and she would be in her own world, I feel as though the lady in blue was always looked down porque ere negra but in reality who gives a shit what color you are “that’s all it is un color” Lady in blue waz smart, the only thing waz que estava confused in this racist world we live in. -J.R.</p>

The Text	Student's Responses
Identity	
<p>p. 42 -Lady in Orange “ever since i realized there was someone callt a colored girl an evil woman a bitch or a nag i been tryin not to be that & leave the bit-terness in somebody else’s cup/come to somebody to love me without deep & nasty smellin scald from lye or bein left screamin in a street fulla lunatics/whisperin slut bitch bitch nig-gah/get outta here wit alla that/i didn’t have any of that for you...”</p>	<p>Me being a young women of color, I kno for a fact dat I am not evil, nor a bitch or a nag. Wut am I? Well ill tell you, I am a youn respectful, honest, and beautiful color girl dat has a good mind and ima be sum body important one day. Dats not rite wen u let sum body put ur hart on da bottom of their shoes, no way would I never let anybody do dat to me. -N.Z.</p>
<p>p.3- 4-Lady in Brown “dark phases of womanhood of never havin been a girl half-notes scattered without rhythm/no tune distraught laughter fallin over a black girl’s shoulder... are we ghouls? children of horror? the joke? don’t tell nobody don’t tell a soul are we animals? have we gone crazy?... she doesn’t know the sound of her own voice her infinite beauty...”</p>	<p>Dark phrase of womanhood tells of black girls struggle to be recognized and appreciated. This poem reveals the haphazard life of a a girl growing up with unresolved issues. As a result, sh is dysfunctional and lives in silence and secrecy. She tells no one of her sorrows. She keeps her dependency on alcohol a secret; she tells no one of her skin disease. Her life is without structure and formless, yet she manages to cope with discrimination. She wants to be recognized and acknowledge for her potential as an individual with possibilities. She wants her story to be told and be heard. She wants to be respected and identified as someone with intelligence. She wants her existence to come to light. -K.Q.</p>

The Text	Student's Responses
Transnationalism	
<p>p. 36-Lady in Blue “i usedta live in the world now i live in harlem & my universe is six blocks a tunnel...”</p>	<p>Woe those words are so strong. She mus like really hate harlem. For her to say that. or harlem must really hate her. when I move 2 mexico city for a lil bit man I wauz hatin it all the differences of Chicago stood out more then a piece of art infront of ur eyes. Me living in mexico was nt fun I needed to come bac n live in my own world. Lady blue dosnr wunan live in harle she cant go anywefre before getting shot! -K.L.</p>

The Text	Student's Responses
<p data-bbox="201 277 553 306">The Body/Gender Violence</p> <p data-bbox="201 319 711 352">p. 17-Ladies in Blue, Red, and Purple</p> <p data-bbox="201 357 370 390"><i>“lady in blue</i></p> <p data-bbox="201 394 704 428">a friend is hard to press charges against</p> <p data-bbox="201 432 344 466"><i>lady in red</i></p> <p data-bbox="201 470 415 504">if you know him</p> <p data-bbox="201 508 516 541">you must have wanted it</p> <p data-bbox="201 546 383 579"><i>lady in purple</i></p> <p data-bbox="201 583 451 617">a misunderstanding</p> <p data-bbox="201 621 344 655"><i>lady in red</i></p> <p data-bbox="201 659 587 693">you know these things happen</p> <p data-bbox="201 697 354 730"><i>lady in blue</i></p> <p data-bbox="201 735 613 768">are you sure you didn't suggest”</p>	<p data-bbox="818 319 1416 579">You think its hard pressing charges against ur friend. One of my sis bbf friend had 2 press charges against her mom boyfriend b cuz he raped her. Dey always say if u get rape it's by total stranger, which is not true. My sis bff got rape by her mom bf so it shouldn't be hard pressing charges on your friend.</p> <p data-bbox="818 583 896 617">-Y. E.</p> <p data-bbox="818 659 1416 1264">a friend who raped is hard to press charges against it doesn't matter that i know him he should have known better than to do this i know i didn't want this to happen i never gave him a clue i wanted it anyone can be a rapist even a member from ur family u may know him all ur life it will be hard to press charges if ppl had sen me with the rapist together they will think it was hard for me to keep my legs closed we always knew the men who we know will betray us and leave scars women have no rights when it comes to men -A.T.</p> <p data-bbox="818 1306 1416 1533">...Even if they say you dancing, kissing good bye lightly. It's hard to bring him in. These so call friends who take us out, who smile are the ones who betray us and rape us! Rapist could be found everywhere. In parties, friend even in your own FAMILY!</p> <p data-bbox="818 1537 880 1570">-I.T.</p>

The Text	Student's Responses
The Body/Gender Violence	
<p>p. 22-The Lady in Blue i cdnt have people lookin at me pregnant i cdnt have my friends see this...</p>	<p>white room with 4 walls terrible feeling on the bed with spread legs knowing ppl r looking at me and their eyes going down bad feeling no way i could have ppl look at me pregnant it hurts it hurts -A.T.</p> <p>I remember my thoughts when I found out I was pregnant. Man I hated the way people use to stare at me when I got pregnant I use to be so shamed to show ... -R.W</p>

General Findings

All of the Latinx students shared particular subjugated realities. There is no standardized manner to grade or judge their lived experiences. What is evident is that their exposure to Black feminist text, specifically Shange's text, allowed a "loosening" of their writing. What they were moved to write revealed counter-narratives that might not have been revealed in a traditional response writing assignment. Shange's text helped the students legitimize their lived experiences while the tension of being "woman" was made explicit. Freeman states "the human condition (is) intimately tied to narrative" (121). It is through their counter-narratives that we encounter their day-to-day existence and the microaggressions related to race, marginalization, and violence. Moreover, the writing of such realities is a consciousness raising act that can lead to embracing the need for success in academia. Or rather, that is my hope.

Interestingly, the written language the students' used mirrored Shange's use of lower case letters; the writing "as we hear it" is a language phenomenon usually used in hip hop culture. I had not anticipated the extensive utilization of the written language in the way Shange used it. Just as Shange allowed herself to use non-hegemonic phonetic English patterns, the students did the same. The semantic ritual of proper English was shattered and a rhythm flowed in the students' writing. Their responses showed poetical nuances and heart-wrenching truths. I wondered if I would have gotten the same responses had I asked for more formal writing. hooks speaks against the hegemonic practices in classrooms and she is irked by the way the academic status quo does nothing to change inherent institutional policies (including classroom policies), racism, or societal violence against women when she states "it is apparent that one of the primary reasons we have not experienced a revolution of values is that a culture of domination necessarily promotes addiction to lying and denial" (28). In changing the institutional policy of using Standard English did I then remove a method of domination for my students? How am I in denial of what my students' gifts and talents are when seen through the prism of a traditional English classroom? As educators, we must ask ourselves if we have a responsibility to help our students succeed at the "cost" of forgo-

ing the traditional classroom rules and implementing post-colonial educational strategies. What if the “cost” of deviating from traditional forms of teaching and grading is an “investment” in the success of our students? Harris writes

“The challenge for scholars of color in the academy, like the challenge to the poet in the unjust society, is to render the invisible visible and tangible, to move what is in the background to the foreground; to tell a different story that is neither known or familiar and indeed may be disturbing, annoying, and frightening” (101).

The students’ writing transitioned beyond just being written responses. Their responses, as data, reflected an inertia and emotions that moved beyond memory retrieval; thus, the data revealed an act of praxis—a combination of thought and action. Their written responses exposed the students’ lives on a social, political, spiritual, class-ridden turntable; it was revealed by what they chose to write. The academic, political, and the personal collided within the assignment. Each and every student revealed situations of marginalization and violence. More importantly, they represented themselves; they became the Subject of their counter-narratives. Smith, when discussing decolonization methods, states “the greater project is about re-centering indigenous identities on a larger scale” (97). From the perspective of the educator it is important to remember that the student is the center of our work and that it is their needs that outweigh the needs for institutional classroom rituals.

Allowing our students to share their lived experiences in a way that empowers their understanding of race, identity, and violence has significant implications for how we create new intersections for learning and succeeding in academia. Breaking away from dominant academic teaching methods can have a critical and long-lasting effect on our students’ lives. The intersection of Black feminist literature, Latinx students’ responses, and our own instincts can be more powerful than methods learned in our own lived experiences as students.

Moreover, however difficult it might be, it matters above all that our students push us into the uncomfortable spaces of judging their critical thinking skills, grading their writing skills, and how we ultimately judge them as “competent” college students. The space of “relámpago y trueno” is exactly where we, as educators, should be. It is in our teaching spaces where we should seek to launch our ability to create intersections of revelations and understanding. Lorde wrote “in one way or another we share a commitment to language and to the power of language, and to the reclaiming of that language which has been made to work against us” (43). Helping students possess and embrace what is already theirs—their language and their experiences—is what we must do.

Implications and Conclusion

It is imperative that the hegemonic traditions of the classroom be transformed to allow for the academic success for students. This transformation is not regulated to suspending the rules of grammar or writing indefinitely. However, strategies that allow for the interruption of the status quo to assist students’ re-location of their presence in the classroom to one of being “centered” rather than marginalized is critical. Additionally, the use of non-traditional texts, such as Black feminist literature, can transform what we teach and in turn can transform what the students learn. Just like Moraga experienced a moment of illumination, Shange’s text in conjunction with a non-hegemonic response writing assignment, emboldened the Latinx students to engage the text in a way they hadn’t before.

Furthermore, the counter-narratives revealed that, except for reinforcing their tenacity and resilience, the options for the empowerment of women of color, in this case my Latinx students, are few. Their strength to persevere comes from the experience of living. Clandinin and Connelly write “Both the personal and social are always present. People are individuals and need to be understood as such, but they cannot be understood only as individuals. They are always in relation, always in social context” (2). In understanding that the personal and social are political, our creation of new intersections of knowledge are intricately tied to the future of our Latinx students. Alarcón asserts “Feminist women agree...If she is to be fully at home this external reality must reflect back to her what she actually is or would want to be. When we don’t participate in creating our own defined identity and reality as women...we may feel...the bonds are real...Without female consciousness and envisioning how as women we would like to exist in the material world, to leap into humanism without repossessing ourselves we may be exchanging one male ideology for another” (188).

The complexities of teaching and learning are made more difficult by the microaggressions both faculty of color and students of color experience in hegemonic institutions. There is Western knowledge and then there is the knowledge of the soul; the intersection of knowledge and soul is the space we must constantly interrogate.

What constitutes patterns and definitions of academic success? In conducting this study I experienced “el relámpago y trueno.” The written responses of my Latinx students continue to expose the realities of difficult lives made harsher by issues of racism and violence. I did gain a greater understanding of the need to continue to allow for anti-hegemonic practices in the classroom. Lorde expresses the importance of the need for all women of color to write and speak of their lived experiences when she wrote “where the words of women are crying to be heard, we must each of us recognize our responsibility to seek those words out, to read them and share them and examine them in their pertinence to our lives. That we not hide behind the mockeries of separations that have been imposed upon us and which so often we accept as our own” (43). Engaging students is difficult in and of itself. Yet, when we privilege Latinx students’ lives by providing relevant texts such as Black feminist literature, the students’ written responses can be a portal from which to reclaim their ability to engage academia and perhaps even themselves. As an educator I propose that we must be continually reevaluating our embedded belief systems. I also propose we work to tend our consciousness, just like we might tend our gardens, and find ways of creating new intersections that include our ability to “hear” multitude of voices, develop student empowerment through self-expression, and embrace different ways of knowing and learning. An academic purging of what it means to be Latinx will not sustain student academic success. Rather, honoring the lived experiences of our Latinx students will. Who will show us what we need to teach and who we need to be, if not our students? The students are our most mighty “relámpagos y truenos.”

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Telling Our Stories: The Cultural and Religious Insights of Sandra Cisneros

Lauren Guerra

The liberation of all creation is dependent upon our ability to create a just world. This emancipatory process begins with dismantling the patriarchal and hierarchal structures that are so deeply embedded in our society. Within the context of the Latinx community, these types of questions of liberation cannot be addressed without looking at the relationship between religion and culture. Religious affiliation remains a key marker of Latinx cultural identity and yet its importance is often overlooked or dismissed. My hope here is to begin to address this lacuna in the literature. For the purposes of this article, I focus on the feminist insights of Chicana author and cultural critic Sandra Cisneros. Her corpus serves as an excellent entry point for discussing justice issues as they relate to Latinx culture, gender, and religion. Through her storytelling, Sandra Cisneros provides an articulation of the way religion and specifically Catholicism functions in daily life from a Chicana Feminist perspective. Cisneros candidly shares her struggles to navigate her bi-cultural and bi-lingual identity, her feminism, and her Roman Catholic roots. In her novels and poetry, she problematizes the limitations of traditional gender roles especially when it comes to sexuality and embodiment.

As a Latina Feminist theologian, I find her work particularly helpful because her stories bring to life the complex intersections of culture, gender, and religion. I argue that storytelling is one way to help subvert the patriarchal narrative. In the case of Cisneros, one of the things that her stories and storytelling accomplish so well is to address the limitations of traditional gender roles. This article is divided into sections: First, I offer the work of Cisneros as an excellent interlocutor for interdisciplinary and intersectional feminist work. While she does not speak for all Latinas, she describes certain cultural realities which resonate with many Chicanas and Latinas. Her gift of storytelling brings to light the intersections of gender, sexuality, and religion as it occurs within the context of daily life. By giving voice to her own story and struggle, she empowers others to do the same. In terms of her contributions, I begin with an analysis of her classic novel *The House on Mango Street* in which she addresses her bi-cultural and bi-lingual identity. Then I look at the religious significance of her short story “Little Miracles, Kept Promises” in relation to popular Catholicism. Finally, I unpack three of the poems from her poetry collection entitled *Loose Women*. Her poems “Original Sin,” “Old Maid,” and “Loose Women” all shed light upon a broad range of issues. From sexuality, to gender, to citizenship- Cisneros speaks her truth. I then close this article

with a brief discussion as to why religion and its intersection with questions of gender must be taken more seriously within the broader context of Latina feminist discourse.

Storytelling as a Pathway to Liberation

In her article, “Breaking the Silence: Women of Color and issues of Voice and Cultural Identity,” Jennifer Jue details the importance of storytelling for women of color as a critical way of reclaiming space and agency. Jue looks at the contributions of three writers who are women of color, including Sandra Cisneros. What Jue reveals is that by speaking truth to power through storytelling, women of color writers empower others to do the same, therefore carving out a pathway towards liberation. Why is the act of storytelling so critical to feminist liberation? As Jue points out, it is through the sharing of stories that “women of color can reflect upon their experiences of racism and sexism and resist having others name their realities and tell their stories for them. They can explore and reflect upon ethnicity, gender, and class issues which affect their lives and define their cultural identity and history for themselves and their own communities” (Jue 452). In an analysis of Sandra Cisneros and her role as storyteller, Jue focuses on the main character of *The House on Mango Street*.

The House on Mango Street is a quintessential coming of age story. It is the story of a young Mexican-American woman named Esperanza growing up in the city of Chicago who struggles to find herself and navigate her bi-cultural and bi-lingual reality. In Cisneros’ novel, Esperanza observes how machismo and traditional gender roles have severely limited the women in her community. She vows to make a different choice in her own life and is emboldened by women who are their own boss. Esperanza seeks to be fiercely independent and refuses to be silent. She refuses to allow the people in her life to control her or her body. It is in the refusal to be silent or compliant that Esperanza finds her ultimate liberation. I echo Jue in her assertion that, “by breaking the ‘culture of silence’ which has historically silenced their experiences, women of color are developing their ‘liberatory voice,’ which enables them actively to confront oppression and to view the world in a new light” (453). It is Esperanza’s journey of self-discovery and the many stories contained in *The House on Mango Street* that are indicative of several underlying issues. I argue that through Cisneros’ stories we have insight into the concrete ways in which patriarchal constructions of gender and sexuality have had deleterious effects on the lives of Chicana and Latina women. However, it is impossible to understand Cisneros’ subversive storytelling efforts without addressing the role of religion in a Latinx context.

Storytelling is one important way to begin to “document” lived experience. It is through the sharing of these personal stories that we are able to unpack and then reflect upon the complex issues affecting our communities. Stories give us the unique opportunity to shed light on difficult questions of gender and sexuality as they relate to culture and religion. The continued influence of Roman Catholicism on Latinx culture is undeniable. This is perhaps most noticeable when it comes to assumptions about women’s sexuality and agency over their own bodies. For Chicanas and Latinas in particular, there remains a dangerous culture of silence in this regard. By breaking the silence and calling into question the patriarchal structures that continue to oppress, we move one step towards human flourishing and liberation. Without the gift of storytelling, much of these questions and concerns would remain unspoken. Refusing to suffer and struggle in silence, Cisneros does an excellent job of presenting these taboo topics in an honest and organic way.

In the *New Latina Narrative: The Feminine Space of Postmodern Ethnicity*, Ellen McCracken points to Cisneros’ contributions to Chicana Feminist and religious discourse because of her ability

to tease out key themes related to lived experience. By focusing on gender and sexuality, Cisneros gets to the heart of the matter of cultural and religious symbols. Through her storytelling, Cisneros reveals how Chicanas often must navigate between being perceived as one of two cultural archetypes: La Virgen de Guadalupe or La Malinche. These two archetypes are quite similar to the classic Mary/Eve or Madonna/Whore archetypes but saturated with additional cultural and religious meaning. It is in an analysis of these tropes that the intersection of culture, gender construction, and religion come to light.

While already regarded as part of the literary canon in feminist circles, the role religion plays in Cisneros' her work merits a much deeper and extensive exploration. Her corpus offers critical insight into Chicana/Latina culture and reveals the complex layers of Latinx identity. Looking at cultural critics such as Sandra Cisneros is one such way to bring to light the intersections of culture, gender, and religion. Cisneros' storytelling is able to capture and provide a snapshot of daily life. Daily life is an important space for feminists and theologians alike. For Latinx theologians, daily life is a locus of religious insight because it is in the mundane that we encounter divinity. There cannot be such a sharp distinction between sacred and secular because we do not live compartmentalized lives. Latina Feminist theologians such as Maria Pilar Aquino, Nancy Pineda-Madrid, Teresa Delgado, and Michelle Gonzalez have already addressed the need to turn to literature as one important place where women of color have been able to subversively reflect on their experiences of God with the context of daily life. In other words, Sandra Cisneros' work can serve as a cross-disciplinary tool because woven throughout her oeuvre are these images of daily life.

As a Chicana feminist storyteller, Sandra Cisneros' work highlights the place of feminism as necessary in the struggle for liberation. In her article, "Transformations of the Sacred in Contemporary Chicana Culture," Marietta Messmer points to the need for feminism within liberation movements and the vital role of authors like Cisneros. She notes how, "it was the feminist turn within *el movimiento* during the 1970s that finally sparked various attempts at negotiating new expressions of a female Mexican-American identity within, against, and beyond the constraints of patriarchal forms of orthodox Mexican Catholicism" (Messmer 260). Specifically, her article provides three examples: an analysis of artists Yolanda Lopez and Esther Hernandez's infamous interpretations of La Virgen de Guadalupe, the role of Catholic practices such as ex-votos in Sandra Cisneros' short story "Little Miracles, kept promises," and what Messmer identifies as a lesbian form of spirituality in Ana Castillo's *Massacre of the Dreamers*.

Looking more closely at religion and spirituality, we see how Chicanas and Latinas have had to be subversive in combating patriarchal and hierarchal church structures. In reclaiming space for themselves, Chicanas and Latinas have turned to Indigenous epistemologies and have focused more heavily on practical concerns for survival. Messmer points to the work of Orlando Espín. He is a noted Latino Catholic theologian whose research focuses on popular religion and highlights how syncretism in Latinx culture allows for a degree of fluidity in religious expression. I agree with Messmer in her analysis that this ambiguity has allowed Chicanas/Latinas the ability to begin deconstructing binaries and push back against patriarchy. Latinx theologians like Espín, who take popular religion very seriously, create a space where these syncretic and complex theological insights can be considered. As Messmer indicates, popular religion is the space where Chicanas/Latinas begin to reclaim spiritual agency. What these Chicana Feminists share, "is the radical intersection of gender and religion, combined with a revised –deconstructionist—understanding of the dichotomy between the physical and the spiritual in contemporary Chicana culture" (Messmer 262). In the spirit of Gloria Anzaldúa, Messmer points to the continual negotiation of life in the

borderlands.

Cisneros' "Little miracles, kept promises" is a prime example of a Chicana feminist reclaiming of space and spiritual agency. In each vignette, Messmer elaborates upon Cisneros' work merits explaining the practice of *ex-votos*. Messmer notes how, "the Catholic folk practice of offering votive prayers to Christ or to those who can intercede with him on a human being's behalf, such as the Virgin Mary or the Saints, is interlaced with practices such as the donation of *retablos* (small paintings of religious figures), *milagritos* (small replications of body parts), or *santos* (small wooden religious figures)" (262). Cisneros takes the opportunity to be subversive and the *ex-votos* in her short story are refreshingly irreverent. The *ex-votos* reflect the struggles of daily life. The most provocative of the *ex-votos* is a coded message to the Black Christ from a gay man named Benjamin asking for the protection and safety of his lover. Cisneros utilizes this *ex-voto* to reflect the complexity of lived religion. The message is quite literally encoded because of the complicated reality of being Gay and Roman Catholic. Also, we do not know the racial identity of Benjamin, however we do know that he feels more comfortable petitioning the Black Christ. Gender, race, and sexuality come to the fore in this *ex-voto* that so accurately reflects the complexity of the life of the church.

Messmer closes by saying, "what characterizes all of these transformations is that they are substantially enabled by the cultural hybridity, syncretic form of Mexican folk Catholicism that played such an important role during the Chicano/a Movement, and which combines and merges pre-Colombian and Christian cultural traditions, and in this way paves the way for new visions and radical transformations of orthodox Catholic doctrines" (277). While I would disagree with the distinction of orthodox versus unorthodox practices, I do agree syncretism is a key marker of Latinx Catholicism. Within U.S. Latinx theology, these practices fall under the umbrella of popular religion or better yet, a religion of the faithful in their daily lives. We now turn to two key images as they appear in Cisneros' work.

La Virgen de Guadalupe and La Malinche

Who are La Virgen and La Malinche, who are mentioned in Cisneros' corpus several times, and how do they continue to be perceived within Chicana/o culture? Both take us back in time to the colonial period in Sixteenth century Mexico and it is critical to understand where these tropes originated in context. Malintzin Tenepal or "La Malinche", as she is commonly known, "spoke both Nahuatl and Mayan, was given to Hernán Cortés in 1519 by the Tabascan Indians after his men defeated them. Because of her linguistic abilities and cultural savvy, Cortes soon made her his intermediary with the Aztecs as well as his mistress...in Mexico she has commonly been seen as a symbol of betrayal because of her aid to the Spaniards" (Meier and Gutierrez 234). La Malinche was a very intelligent and independent woman who fought for her survival, which is problematic in a patriarchal system. La Malinche bore Cortes a son and continues to be known in popular culture as the "Mexican Eve". She is nearly always vilified as a traitor to her people and a whore. La Virgen de Guadalupe on the other hand represents very different qualities.

La Virgen de Guadalupe, or "La Morenita" as she is affectionately known, is a Marian apparition and thus more overtly religious. In Roman Catholicism, and particularly amongst the Mexican and Mexican-American community, she is revered. Guadalupe first appeared upon the hill of Tepeyac in Mexico in 1531 to an indigenous man named Juan Diego. With great humility and kindness, La Virgen asked Juan Diego to approach the Bishop and request that a small church be built in her honor. It was only upon presenting the bishop with a tilma with La Virgen's mirac-

ulous image upon it that the bishop was convinced Juan Diego had been sent by Mary/Guadalupe, the mother of God. Today, the basilica dedicated to Our Lady of Guadalupe in Mexico City is a sacred pilgrimage site for millions of Christians. Devotion to the dark-skinned Virgin quickly spread. Guadalupe has come to epitomize the dutiful, loving mother who protects her children. Both La Virgen and Malinche have had a profound impact on the formation of Chicana identity as they are reified by patriarchal understandings of Christianity and the machismo still prevalent in the Chicana/o community.

Do these cultural archetypes and traditional gender roles still have an effect on the daily lives of Chicana and Latina women? Their appearance in Cisneros' work affirm that they still have an effect. In addition, psychological studies have proven this to be true. In a groundbreaking psychological study of Chicana and Latina girls, Jennifer Ayala reveals how this problematic binary represents a, "patriarchal continuum, situated in a framework where women are positions either as saint like good girls who wait until marriage to have sex and, even then, only for the purpose of satisfying their husband's desires, or as bad, promiscuous women who sleep with multiple partners, flaunt their sexuality, are not taken as serious relationship partners by men and suffer the scorn of society. Thrust into this binary, Latinas sexuality is controlled, held as the basis for bringing honor and shame to the family" (Denner and Guzman 42). These two outdated archetypes are then reified by misogynistic interpretations of the Christian message. Women of color, like Cisneros, offer a counter narrative through their stories. What is needed urgently is an engagement with these stories in order to begin dismantling oppressive structures for the sake of liberation.

Cisneros exposes her deep concern for the women of her community. She shares her struggle to become comfortable in her own skin and her desire to break the silence surrounding sexuality that is often grounded in religion. She addresses this sense of shame about her body and her sexuality. What she came to realize is that, "religion and our culture, our culture and religion, helped create that blur, a vagueness about what went on 'down there'" (Cisneros, "Guadalupe the Sex Goddess" 46). The female body and its natural functions still remain a mystery in a culture that prefers to ignore the human body under the guise of modesty. Speaking directly to the reader in her narrative "Guadalupe the Sex Goddess," Cisneros says, "I am overwhelmed by the silence regarding Latinas and our bodies... So much guilt, so much silence, and such a yearning to be loved" (48). She challenges the Virgin/Whore or Guadalupe/Malinche dichotomy by speaking up and learning to embrace her body.

Shrouded in mystery, many Chicana and Latina women are often left completely in the dark about their own bodies. She shares a story of being in high school and changing in the girl's locker room for gym class. She notes how, "you could always tell us Latinas. We hid when we undressed, modestly facing a wall, or, in my case, dressing in a bathroom stall" (Cisneros, "Guadalupe Sex Goddess" 48). Even in what can conceivably be considered a safe space, Cisneros did not feel comfortable enough with her body to change in front of her classmates. Her discomfort was so severe that as she says, she would go out of her way to hide in the security and enclosed walls of a bathroom stall. Like so many Chicana and Latina women, Cisneros grew up feeling ashamed of her body and sexuality. Slowly but surely, she began to realize how harmful the cultural archetypes such as Malinche and Guadalupe can be. Cisneros confronts the cultural scripts presented to her and says, "What a cultural of denial! Don't get pregnant! But no one tells you how not to. This is why I was angry for so many years every time I saw La Virgen de Guadalupe, my culture's role model for brown women like me. She was damn dangerous, an ideal so lofty and unrealistic it was laughable...[because] in my neighborhood I knew only real women, neither saints nor whores"

(“Guadalupe Sex Goddess” 48). With raw honesty, Cisneros hits at the core of the issue. She points to how cultural norms, traditional gender roles, and a patriarchal understanding of Christianity can collide in ways that are oppressive. Now as an independent adult Cisneros understands herself as, “obsessed with becoming a woman comfortable in her skin” (“Guadalupe Sex Goddess” 50). By engaging in the subversive act of storytelling, Cisneros finds her freedom and liberation.

Cisneros’ collection *Loose Woman* contains three poems that deal with the intersections of culture, gender, and religion. In particular, I’d like to point to her insights in “Original Sin,” “Old Maids,” and “Loose Women.” In “Original Sin,” Cisneros explores several very complicated aspects of Chicana identity from gender norms to claiming citizenship. Cisneros articulates the constant negotiations that happen when one inhabits the interstitial space of the borderlands as a bi-cultural and bi-lingual woman. She vividly describes a trip to Mexico to visit her relatives. Once on the airplane, she realizes much to her horror, she has forgotten to shave her armpits. Making her way to the tiny bathroom of the plane with a 69-cent razor in hand, Cisneros attempts to quickly shave and “look decent” before landing. Finally, her plane lands in Mexico City and she greets her father’s side of the family. As she steps off the plane and sees her family she opens her arms wide with, “armpits clean/as a newborn’s soul without original/sin and embrace them like the good/girl my father would have/them believe I am” (Cisneros, *Loose Woman* 8). What are some of the underlying religious themes here? Her poem reveals how influential Roman Catholicism has been on Chicana identity. Something such as Original Sin immediately evokes the Genesis account of creation and the Garden of Eden, along with the commonly held belief that Eve sinned first causing the fall of humanity and thus causing every human being after the fall to be born into the world with this stain of Original sin. It again reminds us of the highly esteemed virtue of purity and virginity in Roman Catholicism.

In this particular poem, we also gain insight into her relationship with her father’s side of the family. When Cisneros speaks about her father adamantly portraying her as a good girl to his extended family, we return to the problematic nature of a Malinche/Guadalupe binary. A “good” girl remains a virgin until she gets married while a “bad” girl doesn’t hold those imposed virtues as a priority. She allows her extended family to believe what her father tells them. In addition to the questions regarding sexuality, she brings up national identity. Cisneros mentions her citizenship as the flight attendants begin to pass out the proper declaration forms to passengers in transit prior to landing in Mexico. Initially, Cisneros receives a form meant for Mexican citizens as the flight attendant assumes she is from Mexico. She has to, “run up the aisle and ask/for a U.S. Citizen form instead because I’m well how do I explain?” (Cisneros, *Loose Woman* 7). A seemingly insignificant moment of being asked to fill out an immigration form on an airplane becomes a deeper question of personal identity. Where does she belong? To which country does she belong? She is a Mexican-American woman navigating between two worlds and living in the borderlands. She embraces her Mexican identity but was not born in Mexico. She is a United States citizen, but she is also Mexican. She is both Mexican and American all at once. As so many people with a hybrid cultural identity, she never feels completely at home in either country. This is the incredibly complex reality of living in the borderlands that comes to light through Cisneros’ stories.

Another poem in which Cisneros confronts these limiting cultural archetypes is her poem “Old Maids.” Within Latinx culture, there is a tremendous amount of pressure to get married and have children as motherhood is seen as central to a woman’s identity. Rather than be forced into marriage or caving into the cultural pressures, Cisneros resists. In fact, a few of her cousins have also not married which remains a sore subject at family gatherings. Cisneros shares a story of how she

and her cousins were deemed “far too old” for marriage by age thirty. In fact, she notes how her aunts have given up hope that she will ever be married as is expected by a good Mexican girl. Her aunts instead ask, “What happened in your childhood? Who hurt you, honey?” (Cisneros, *Loose Woman* 10). She responds that her decision not to marry has nothing to do with a particular event but rather a rejection of marriage as an institution based on her observations. Numerous women in Cisneros’ life have served as examples that marriage is not what she wants for herself. In speaking up for her cousins and for herself, Cisneros proclaims: “We’ve studied marriages too long- Aunt Ariadne, Tia Vashti, Comadre Penelope, querida Malintzin, Senora Pumpkin Shell- lessons that served us well” (Cisneros, *Loose Woman* 10). In her rejection of marriage, Cisneros pushes back against traditional gender roles. She recognizes how many women in her life have not been happy or successful in their marriages. This has made marriage utterly unattractive and has served as a cautionary tale for Cisneros. In interviews, Cisneros has mentioned that marriage and children would have ultimately gotten in the way of her writing career. She has intentionally remained single and focused her energies on birthing works of literature.

Finally, in her poem “Loose Women,” Cisneros fully embraces the liberative power of sharing her story and refusing to conform to patriarchal norms. As a single Mexican-American woman who is not married and does not have children, she poses a sexual threat. Reclaiming power over her own body and sexuality becomes problematic for those around her. Because Cisneros has decided not to marry and remains single, people automatically assume that she is a lesbian. She takes this assumption as a compliment. Cisneros knows that people talk about her behind her back and judge her decisions. She reflects on the costs of being an independent Chicana feminist in her poem “Loose Women.” She ultimately is perceived as a “hell on wheels [kind of woman], viva-la-vulva, fire and brimstone, man-hating, devastating, boogey-woman lesbian.” To her critics, she responds, “not necessarily...but I like the compliment.” (Cisneros, *Loose Woman* 112) Rather than shy away from the assumption that she is a lesbian, she welcomes this identification as empowering. Cisneros sees herself as, “a danger to society...sharp tongued, sharp thinking, fast speaking, foot loose, loose tongued, let loose, woman on the loose, loose woman. Beware honey.” (Cisneros, *Loose Woman* 114). Although one may automatically associate the term “loose woman” with a woman who is promiscuous, I argue that Cisneros finds within the term liberation and freedom. She is not afraid to speak her mind, to be herself, despite what others may say.

Through her story telling and by intentionally disrupting traditional gender roles, Cisneros has been able to free herself from the constraints of the Guadalupe/Malinche binary. The act of storytelling may not at first glance be considered revolutionary, but it is an act of profound liberation. By writing about her own body, her sexuality, her identity and struggles with Catholicism, Cisneros engages in something transformative. Cisneros’ writing pulls at our own flesh and forces us to take a closer look at our conceptions of culture and religion within the context of daily life. By subverting cultural and religious expectations, Cisneros finds freedom. She actively rejects the lies that she has been told which are rooted in misogyny. In an act of resistance and liberation, Cisneros learns to love herself and invites others to do the same.

A culture of silence is what authors like Cisneros are critiquing and breaking free from through their stories. It is an entire, “world of unheard voices... [that have been historically] silenced because of race, gender, sexual orientation, political and economic realities” (Cisneros, *Loose Woman* 70). What Sandra Cisneros and other Chicana/Latina Feminists alike have struggled against is a continued denial of women’s agency and full humanity. She has taken seriously the need to break apart the Virgin de Guadalupe/Malinche tropes. Both have been oppressive because they too

narrowly define women's roles. By denying the embodied and lived experience of women, there can be no liberation.

Where do we go from here?

Gendered violence continues to plague our world and looking at the intersections of culture, gender, and religion are absolutely urgent for the Latinx community. It is vital for these issues to be addressed. These patriarchal constructs have very serious consequences on the lives of women. The need for intersectional feminism is a pressing one and continued work across disciplinary boundaries is critical. Cisneros points us to how storytelling is one way to enter into conversation with others and one way to begin to articulate these complex dynamics. Feminist scholars across disciplines must collaborate to end the oppression of women because issues of gender are issues of social justice. Speaking out and continuing to fight against injustice is a moral obligation. As demonstrated through this article, Cisneros is one voice that opens up conversation. In her fierce commitment to Chicana feminism, she speaks for those who cannot speak for themselves.

For scholars of religion, this moral obligation to dismantle patriarchy takes a particular shape. In her book *Suffering and Salvation in Ciudad Juarez*, Latina Feminist theologian Nancy Pineda-Madrid brings to light the moral and ethical implications of theological work as it relates to decolonizing gender and sexuality. She calls for justice in the still unsolved murders of hundreds of young women and girls in the border town of Ciudad Juarez, Mexico. Pineda-Madrid utilizes the term femicide to describe the systematic rape and murder of young women and girls in Ciudad Juarez. The rape and murder of these women is deeply rooted in misogyny. The sharing of the stories of these women is critical and our collective liberation depends directly on our ability to address these issues head on. While small incremental changes towards gender equality have taken place, it is not nearly enough. Feminism is not a "women's issue" but calls for equality for all and thus liberates men from the yoke of patriarchy as well. While many may argue that the work of achieving gender equality has been accomplished, it is far from over. As we work towards greater inclusivity and work to reflect justice by embracing all of humanity, it becomes clear that issues of gender, race, and class intersect on multiple levels. One need not look far. Violence against gender non-conforming persons is further evidence that the work of liberation is nowhere near complete. This reality is magnified when looking at the lived experience of Trans women of color, who are arguably the most marginalized and disenfranchised.

The craft of storytelling as exemplified by Sandra Cisneros is one of the few ways in which we can reclaim agency and bring an end to gendered violence. Literature has the ability to reflect the lived experiences of everyday women in all its complexity. It is a way to begin difficult conversations. Stories have the ability to articulate the complex realities of culture, gender, and religion. When feminist or religious discourse remains in the realm of the theoretical, there is a danger of ignoring suffering and violence in the flesh. I am pushing for the active engagement of religion within Latina Feminism and the work of Sandra Cisneros as a great bridge for this type of dialogue. May the sharing of our stories be a pathway towards liberation and help to create peace in our world.

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A Chicana in Paris: Food as Theory in Josefina López's *Hungry Woman*

Trevor Boffone

Abstract

This article offers a discussion of *Hungry Woman*, the play by Chicana feminist playwright Josefina López. I argue that López uses food and the Parisian kitchen to decolonize the gendered paradigm of the traditional Chicano kitchen in East Los Angeles. To do this, I foreground Ardenner's Wild Zone thesis as a performance theory that allows the protagonist Canela to break down boundaries and transform herself from object to subject, from learner to knower, from passive to active agent. As this article explains, Canela finds empowerment in the Parisian kitchen and takes this knowledge back to East Los Angeles to re-write the very gendered paradigms that she has fought against throughout her life. López's play is recent, but as I discuss, much food scholarship has not comprehensively studied the contributions made by Chicana playwrights.

Keywords: Food Studies, Theatre, Josefina López, Los Angeles, France

At the top of Chicana feminist playwright Josefina López's *Hungry Woman*,¹ the stage adaptation of her semi-autobiographical debut novel *Hungry Woman in Paris*, Canela Guerrero, the protagonist, takes the stage to write herself into subjectivity amidst the world of food and the space of the kitchen. Apart from the obvious associations with food that the title of the play holds, it is impossible for a Spanish-speaking audience not to recognize the role of the protagonist's name, Canela, the Spanish word for cinnamon, as she begins her journey. In the opening monologue, in which she breaks the fourth wall and addresses the audience directly, Canela establishes the associations she has had with food since birth: "My mother named me Canela because she loved to make buñuelos and add lots of sugar and cinnamon to them, (...) With my name she spiced me up and made me brown. She gave me a Spanish name so people would ask, "What is Canela?" More importantly, I hope you ask, "Who is Canela?" Who is Canela?" (López, *Hungry Woman* 1). Thus, her name originates from an appropriate female space in patriarchal Chicano culture. Regardless of her personal (dis)connections with food, it always has been present in her life simply through being named after a common food in Chican@ and Mexican cooking: cinnamon. Moreover, the opening monologue presents one of the central themes of the play: that of transforming the protagonist, and Chicanas in general, from an object to a subject. By asking "who" instead of "what," Canela's audience grants her autonomy and further helps to exonerate her from the previously

oppressive and restricting kitchen.

López's *Hungry Woman* foregrounds the intersections between experience and place by removing the Chicana from East Los Angeles and placing her in Paris, France. *Hungry Woman* follows the story of Canela, a struggling writer living on the border between her own interests and the expectations of her family and community. After realizing that she does not want to marry her fiancé, Armando, after an argument over the menu, Canela goes on their already-paid-for honeymoon and ultimately stays in Paris, France, to attend culinary school at the world-famous Le Coq Rouge. This decision reignites her passion for life, thus filling her hunger, both physical and spiritual, for greater meaning in life as she battles depression. The idea of cooking is transformed for the protagonist as she comes to terms with food and what it has meant to her growing up in East Los Angeles. Food becomes a metaphor for spiritual hunger; traditionally, Chicana wives and mothers dedicate their lives to serving others while simultaneously starving their own individual needs. The French kitchen and food become spaces that allow the protagonist to decolonize the East Los Angeles kitchen as well as develop her positive sense of self-worth. Under these circumstances, López's *Hungry Woman* questions: What happens when women of color put their own needs in front of those of others? How can Chicanas fill their spiritual hunger? How can women decolonize their relationship with food and the highly-gendered space of the kitchen?

In the pages that follow, I explore the connection between Chicana identity, location, and food in López's *Hungry Woman*. The play, as an activist work, protests against the silencing of women of color in the kitchen space while highlighting how Chicanas create female agency and performance directly linked to their location and physical surroundings. To do this, I look to Ardener's Wild Zone thesis to better explain how Chicana feminist theory is put on stage for audiences to witness through performance. Utilizing the Wild Zone thesis as a point of departure, I examine how Canela (re)appropriates the kitchen as a physical and a metaphorical space, as well as a female-derived zone of counter performance. This is connected to the play's two kitchen spaces: in East Los Angeles and in Paris. The zones of experience, which are inaccessible to patriarchal powers, give subjectivity to women and, thus, are essential to the ways in which they (re)claim home.

First, I examine the Wild Zone thesis and its possible uses for developing strategies to reassess one's association with the kitchen and, ultimately, to take ownership of space in its many meanings. I then turn to *Hungry Woman* to demonstrate the use of the French kitchen and cuisine as zones and discourses which allow the protagonist Canela to decolonize the kitchen and establish positive self-identification in this space that was previously marginalized in her mother's Eastside kitchen. In the play, Canela (re)claims home via a distinctly female counter discourse that originates from her associations to physical and metaphorical places and spaces, both on stage and in the text.

The Wild Zone Thesis: Toward a Theory of Space

Investigating women's identity and experience as it relates to place and space is a continuing concern within Chicana studies. Indeed, one of the primary aims of Chicana playwriting and performance has been to express and assert the validity of female discourse as well as the zones of women's experience. There arises the necessity for gender-specific inquiry in the research and study of Chicanas as well as other women of color. One such theory, the Wild Zone thesis, is a useful tool to analyze the Chicana experience in the United States. Proposed by anthropologists Edwin and Shirley Ardener in their study *Perceiving Women* and applied to the study of Chicanas by feminist theorist Cordelia Candelaria in "The 'Wild Zone' Thesis as Gloss in Chicana Literary Study", the Wild Zone signifies the separate cultural and political spaces, or zones, that women inhabit in

society, which, coincidentally, are only recognized by women (Ardener 24). While not privileging gender over race, ethnicity, or class, the theory posits that women's lived experience has formulated specific female-identified subcultures marginalized within and outside of the male-centered patriarchy. Accordingly, the patriarchy, in this case traditional Chicano society, has created learned gender differences, which are linked to the acquired stereotypes of femininity and masculinity in Mexican and Mexican-American society.² Playwright Josefina López challenges, decolonizes, and redefines these gendered stereotypes through her work. By empowering her female protagonists with feminist agency, her characters hold the tools to theorize connections between their experience as women in a patriarchal society and their physical and metaphysical location.

The Wild Zone thesis, which focuses on the anthropology of gender and different ethnographic field experiences, contends that the female voice has been entirely muted, both silenced and marginalized, by the patriarchy (Ardener 22-5).³ Essentially, this authority over women creates disproportionate sociocultural effects, thus producing a larger distance between female desire and actual choice, between female identity and the capacity to actualize that identity (Candelaria 249). According to Candelaria, the Wild Zone thesis is pertinent to Chicana studies because it encourages a gender-specific analysis without nullifying the importance of racial, ethnic, or class-related factors (250). The Wild Zone theory identifies a key paradox of female identity. A distinctly female space, unregulated by pre-conceived definitions of identity, exists. However, this space is situated and defined within a patriarchal system that privileges men (Candelaria 249). The Wild Zone makes possible the analysis of gender as a discrete characteristic because its creation is linked to the recognition of distinct and plural cultures and modes of experience: race, ethnicity, gender, and class. Candelaria describes this fundamental contradiction of female identity within Chicana@ culture:

Women as politically subordinated subjects must, for survival, know and practice the dominant patriarchal discourse and conventions, but equally they must maintain an unmediated, affirmative identity of self and class. They develop an/other culture and discourse—one not required for the survival of, and therefore largely unavailable to, the empowered members of the dominant class. (249)

This is to say that woman, as an alleged subordinate being, can occupy the interstitial space between the dominant culture and her own self-identity to survive. Chicanas' compound oppression—being a woman in an ethno-racial underprivileged group—must be recognized, considering that the additional burden of gender is substantial in all patriarchal societies. Nevertheless, one must not privilege gender over race because Chicana@s themselves belong to an economically and politically subordinated class in the United States, a country which throughout its History has privileged an Anglo narrative (Candelaria 250). Still, the Chicana experience cannot be examined outside of the gendered differences she faces simply by being born female. Through the process of locating womanhood within a zone of experience and power inaccessible to those in the dominating group, the authority of Chicana artistic and literary expression, such as that of playwright Josefina López, is defined within Chicana experience (Candelaria 251).⁴

Building on Candelaria's theory, I examine how the Wild Zone is performed in contemporary Chicana feminist theater. To do this, I look at the work of Josefina López to explain how Chicanas formulate female-derived Wild Zone performances to cement their connection to place and space—in this case, East Los Angeles and the kitchen. Throughout López's work, her female protagonists use performance to decolonize specific zones—whether it is Ana in *Real Women Have Curves* decolonizing the sewing factory, Sandi in *Detained in the Desert* decolonizing the borderlands, or Canela in *Hungry Woman* decolonizing the kitchen—and assert these spaces as

home(s). These women stake claim to these spaces, but only after having cultivated specific forms of counter discourse and oppositional consciousness, notably theorized by feminist theorist Chela Sandoval. Sandoval proposes, “The differential mode of consciousness depends upon the ability to read the current situation of power and of self-consciously choosing and adopting the ideological form best suited to push against its configurations” (15). Cultivating a differential mode of oppositional consciousness operates as the foundation of concrete actions that can be implemented by the marginalized individual. Even though women may be unwelcomed into these places, developing an oppositional consciousness facilitates the legitimizing of these spaces via the zones of power women innately inhabit.

One’s associations with space alongside the processes of producing and reproducing space hold much potential on identity and subject formation, experience, and how one sees him or herself in the world. According to Mary Pat Brady:

Chicana literature argues for and examines the relevance of race, gender, and sexuality—as well as class—to the making of space. (...) Chicana literature has consistently offered alternative methods of conceptualizing space not only by noting how social change must be spatialized but also by seeing and feeling space as performative and participatory, that is, by refusing a too-rigid binary between the material and the discursive. (6)

Space inhabits a distinctly performative realm as it is a highly social process. Producing space, as well as home, affects the formation of identity and subjectivity in many ways since it requires the body to serve as a concrete example of an abstract concept. Hence, the performativity of space and home requires one to consider how categories such as gender, race, and sexuality are influenced by spatiality; particularly, identity and experience are inextricably linked through space. In light of Chela Sandoval and Mary Pat Brady’s theories, spaces such as the kitchen—given the sociality that the space facilitates—can become performative spaces that allow Chicanas to begin a process of decolonization. By specifically foregrounding the kitchen as a decolonize space from which to tap into the “wild zone,” writers such as Josefina López theorize new possibilities for the space that are free from patriarchal influences, thus giving previously marginalized Chicanas autonomy.

A Chicana in Paris

For Chicana writers, the trope of home and going back home has frequently been used to revisit and rewrite their role in history. Concerning this, the making of homes and other safe spaces is useful to women’s identity formation and survival. For example, Gloria Anzaldúa explains how she had to leave home to find herself, yet she carries her home wherever she goes:

To separate from my culture (as from my family) I had to feel competent enough to the outside and secure enough inside to live life on my own. Yet in leaving home I did not lose touch with my origins because *lo mexicano* is in my system. I am a turtle, wherever I go I carry ‘home’ on my back. (21)

Anzaldúa’s turtle metaphor illustrates one of the many ways that women have strategically established meaningful home spaces and associations with home. For Josefina López, home is often associated with food.

In speaking of her relationship with food as it relates to home, Josefina López states that after years of researching the unconscious desire for food, she uncovered that food was her buffer when she needed comfort (“RWHC”). After her sister was kidnapped and almost raped, López

felt unsafe in a thin woman's body. When López was thin, men would grab her on the street or in the pool. Therefore, she gained weight as a defense mechanism to protect her from being sexually assaulted. Moreover, when she uncovered that her father was having an affair, there was no one to comfort her, so she turned to food. These experiences of using food as a buffer led López to develop a form of magnet therapy, an alternative medicine, in which she releases the unconscious desires to constantly seek comfort through food. As a result, "This constant unconscious desire to seek comfort is gone. (...) I feel finally like I'm at home in my own body and in my soul" (López, "RWHC"). Home is being sealed and whole; nothing can penetrate or take away because there is no longer a hole or a void.

For the playwright herself, an integral part of filling her spiritual hunger is that of staging *Hungry Woman* via a performative version of the more static novel, which serves as a healing device in and of itself. By creating a world for her stories and characters to inhabit, López further heals herself while instilling positive representations of Chicana subjectivity on stage for audiences to witness. In Reed Johnson's positive review of *Hungry Woman*'s initial CASA 0101 Theater staging for the *Los Angeles Times*, López discusses the process of staging *Hungry Woman*:

After we did the first reading, I was in tears, I couldn't stop, and I felt so naked. And I'm all for being naked, but it was the most naked I had ever felt. And part of the reason I wrote this was because my greatest fear was to commit suicide. My other great fear was to end up in a mental institute, because my parents didn't understand what I had. Now, by putting it on stage I really I am bringing it into the light, because I don't want to feel that anymore. (Qtd. in Johnson, "In 'Hungry Woman'")

While López's novel *Hungry Woman in Paris* is a valuable healing process in line with other inspirational tales of self-discovery such as the more mainstream *Under the Tuscan Sun* (1997) by Frances Mayes and *Eat, Pray, Love* (2007) by Elizabeth Gilbert, it does not offer the same healing properties that theater and performance allow, a domain in which the audience is able to witness in live flesh the playwright's world. Naturally, this affects the actors as well. For instance, lead actor Rachel González, playing Canela, identifies with the feelings and emotions that the playwright inserts on stage: "I feel like (...) in terms of the sexuality and being able to express that and some of the secrets and the shame and that kind of stuff, that exists even with me has been part of a healing process for me too" (Qtd. in Johnson, "In 'Hungry Woman'").

Accordingly, the performance space is a zone that permits both playwright and actor to have a cathartic experience, not only once, but throughout the process of rehearsing and staging the play. *Hungry Woman* itself functions as a form of counter discourse that demonstrates López's intuition to produce a story defined and conceptualized by female identity and experience within the traditionally limiting Chicano kitchen. Staging Canela's battle with depression and self-fulfillment validates her experiences and reassures the audience that this story is universal. Yes, Chicanas can battle with depression and, yes, they can overcome it, too.

In *Hungry Woman*, Canela taps into the Wild Zone to forge her identity as a Chicana in Paris, a city that misunderstands this particular hybrid identity (she is frequently mistaken for a Middle-Eastern immigrant and, consequently, still discriminated against, albeit in a different manner). In this sense, Paris is the principal catalyst to develop positive feminist agency, a power which she takes back to California as a stronger and more self-reliant woman. Only after cultivating her identity in Paris is Canela able to (re)appropriate the space of East Los Angeles as a site of feminist resistance, a Wild Zone, in which she is no longer subjected to rigid definitions of gender. Given these premises, López dramatizes Canela's personal growth by utilizing the thematic contrast

between Parisian and Chicana@ cultures and values. Specifically, the playwright foregrounds the glaring disparity between both cultures in the kitchen, a decidedly gendered space in Chicana@ culture. Food and the kitchen space become the means for building theory about identity and experience, not to mention that “foodmaking itself is fully theoretical” (Abarca and Pascual Soler 2).

In light of the liberating potential of the kitchen, food studies scholar María Claudia André proposes that for contemporary writers the kitchen “is a self-empowering site where gender and sexual identities (or subjectivities) may be explored and transformed” (5-6). Along similar lines, in analyzing the role of the writer as cook, Chicana@ literary scholar Tey Diana Rebolledo asserts that “one way to express individual subjectivity (...) is by reinforcing this female identity as someone who cooks” (130). By assuming the role of cook, women are given the tools to produce multiple subjectivities through creation and authority of both food and space. In regards to the premises suggested by André and Rebolledo, the kitchen space has the potential to be transformed into a place of not only freedom but also self-gratification. This transformation is frequently seen in contemporary Chicana playwriting and performance with many women diving into the kitchen to write their own form of counter discourse: Diane Rodríguez’s *The Path to Divadom, Or How to Make Fat-Free Tamales in G Minor*; Josefina López’s *Food for the Dead*; Alicia Mena’s *Las Nuevas Tamaleras*; and Elaine Romero’s *The Fat-Free Chicana and the Snow Cap Queen*.⁵ Considering the above works, these Chicana playwrights manifest the possibilities of the kitchen as a center of female-interpretation where marginality can not only be constructed, but, more importantly, reconstructed. Hence, Josefina López’s use of the kitchen space falls into a contemporary tradition of looking toward the kitchen, as well as food itself, as an integral part of Chicana and Mexican identity formation, both positive and negative, both liberating and confining.⁶

For this reason, it is expected that in *Hungry Woman*, as well as the majority of Josefina López’s works—such as *Real Women Have Curves*, *Confessions of Women from East L.A.*, *Boyle Heights*, and *Simply María*, or *The American Dream*—East Los Angeles is associated with the traditional Chicano value system in which women are expected to adhere to the virgin/whore dichotomy and other gendered stereotypes. Part of this equation is that of female servitude to the men in their lives. Naturally, this expected unwavering servitude to men is a burden that women must overcome. According to Chicana feminist theorist Gloria Anzaldúa in *Borderlands/La Frontera*, cultures such as the one Canela finds herself in expect “women to show greater acceptance of, and commitment to, the value system than men. The culture and the Church insist that women are subservient to males” (17). For this reason, López herself chose to write instead of cook as a form of rebellion; she believed that by getting an education, she could avoid perpetuating the gendered value system (“The Chavez Family”).

In this respect, food studies scholar Meredith E. Abarca in *Voices in the Kitchen: Views of Food and the World from Working-class Mexican and Mexican American Women* proposes that the kitchen is an inherent site of female oppression, a key place that is the locus of women’s vulnerability:

As a woman’s place the kitchen can imply a site of mandatory and wifely and motherly duty to her family, culture, and even nation, a servitude that makes her financially dependent on her husband’s salary, for her life revolves around mainly performing unpaid domestic labor. In this context many feminists argue that the kitchen represents the locus of women’s emotional, physical, spiritual, and economic vulnerability. These concerns address the ideological meanings that produce the notion of *place*. (19)

For López’s protagonist, home signifies suppression under the relentless authority of her family

and male-identified values, most often, but not limited, to the kitchen.

Regarding the confining nature of conventional Chicano values in *Hungry Woman*, the death of Canela's best friend, Luna, drives Canela's decision to call off her wedding and depart for Paris. In delivering a monologue depicting Luna's backstory in front of her casket at the funeral, Canela depicts the gendered reality that she is trying to avoid in East Los Angeles:

In our story, Luna met a guy and I remained single. I was never jealous of him, but he wasn't good enough for her. He was Mr. Now, but Luna was forced to make him Mr. Forever when her parents grew concerned that "the neighbors were talking," they married her off before she "got knocked up," to this poor guy who could barely afford to support her (...) Luna couldn't go to college and had to play the housewife, a role she was never born for. She got so depressed she gained weight and developed diabetes. When she wanted to get pregnant she couldn't, because the doctors warned her it might kill her. She tried anyway but just had miscarriages, which made her even more depressed. Her world kept shrinking, but her body kept growing. Her dreams were larger than life, too big to exist in this world in a woman's body. (López, *Hungry Woman* 4)

Luna's plight demonstrates the reality that Canela attempts to alter throughout her journey of self-discovery. Battling her own demons and bouts of depression, Canela recognizes that she must fully love herself before she can commit to loving another individual. Part of this project involves placing her dreams at the forefront.

Given the smothering quality of East Los Angeles for Canela, her journey to Paris and the culinary world of Le Coq Rouge represents freedom. They serve as worlds in which the protagonist can seek the positive self-identifying powers of her previously suppressed eroticism and independence. In terms of stereotypes, it is noteworthy that Canela decides to go to a cooking school. López does this to decolonize her opinions of the kitchen as a restricting space for the female. In the Parisian kitchen, Canela's teachers are all male, flipping the gendered narrative of the Chicano kitchen as an inherently female-identified space focused on serving men. Effectively, this disrupts the gendered paradigm of the kitchen in which knowledge is passed on from mother to daughter across generations.⁷

Hence, Le Coq Rouge grants Canela the opportunity to develop positive self-identification with the physical space of the kitchen. Her time at the cooking school is a liberating experience, the antithesis to the patriarchal Chicano kitchen to which her mother is confined. Canela tells us on multiple occasions of her mother's confinement to the kitchen and the bedroom, thus serving as a faithful wife to her philandering husband. According to Tey Diana Rebolledo, writing the Chicana as a cook in the kitchen functions as a strategy to claim authority over gendered space and self-representation (132-3). Canela's restructuring of Chicano gender roles and gendered spaces is made possible precisely through the positive qualities of the French kitchen and the Wild Zone. In a flashback scene, Canela questions the Chicano male/female dichotomy of this space: "How come the men aren't in the kitchen? How come they're drinking beer and laughing and we are in this hot kitchen doing all the work? ... We are not in Mexico anymore" (López, *Hungry Woman* 26). The last words especially hold value to a full understanding of López's work; she identifies Mexico with patriarchy and women's subjugation. According to López's playscript, if Dalia's family emigrated from Mexico to the United States, then why are they still adhering to traditional family values that subjugate women? Why does her family acculturate to some aspects of United States culture, but not to others that would inarguably benefit women? Canela, both as a child and an

adult, questions why things are the way they are, refusing to accept that they are this way solely because they always have been.

Therefore, as a result of her experience(s), Canela decides to never go into a kitchen to cook for a man: “I swore after that experience that I would not go into a kitchen to cook for a man. I swore I would someday marry a man who would love me for my mind and not for how I reminded him of his mother or for the cooking and cleaning services I provided” (López, *Hungry Woman* 27). All of her memories of the kitchen are associated with female suppression and unwavering faithfulness to men, and when she leaves the kitchen to sit in the living room with the men, they do not acknowledge her presence, their silence serving as a restrained protest to her being in the “wrong” gendered space. These negative associations are reversed in the physical space of Le Coq Rouge, a space that can fill her hunger for a world that allows her to perform the Wild Zone, have positive female agency, and not be equal to a “piece of meat” (López, *Hungry Woman* 28). Canela’s reconstruction of positive associations with food and cooking is symbolically affirmed when Henry, her love interest while in Paris, not only fills her erotic desires, but cooks a meal for her after she graduates from Le Coq Rouge. While Chicano gender roles are flipped in this scene, Henry, an Englishman, is surprised: “You’re joking. None of your lovers ever cooked for you?” (López, *Hungry Woman* 53), thus reinforcing the East Los Angeles/Paris dichotomy of gendered experiences and spaces.

As a final test to pass Superior Cuisine at Le Coq Rouge, Canela must create and execute an original dish utilizing the skills that she has learned throughout her culinary training. Canela’s dish, *Agneau à la Mexicaine-Américaine* (Lamb Mexican-American Style), establishes the protagonist as the knower, holding knowledge of how to put together the distinct parts of her identity into one dish that represents her journey. She must transform the traditional French ingredients into a dish that sufficiently represents the convergence of her multiple identities: in the United States and France, and in East Los Angeles and Paris. She is a Mexican-American in Paris. By naming the dish after her own hybridity, the dish is iconic of her life and journey.

In reference to the symbolic nature of cuisine, Roland Barthes in “Toward a Psychosociology of Contemporary Food Consumption” states that food is “not only a collection of products that can be used for statistical and nutritional studies. It is also, and at the same time, a system of communication, a body of images, a protocol of usages, situations, and behavior” (24). In other words, food is not just something we eat in order to survive, but a key cultural object which can inform and transform one’s identity. The synthesis of Canela’s *Agneau à la Mexicaine-Américaine* represents all of her cultures in one dish that liberates her from the kitchen and symbolizes the end of her decolonizing the space during her time at culinary school. In this way, the dish is an outward manifestation of her inner change. Rather than an epiphany, the dish represents Canela’s journey of self-discovery and decolonization of the previously limiting East LA kitchen. Once in the Wild Zone, she understands how she can become the author of her own story, made possible by the Parisian kitchen space. Notably, the psychosociology of being in Paris affects López’s protagonist. According to Barthes, psychosociology involves the ways in which individuals are influenced by their surroundings or groups to which they belong. Canela, therefore, takes on the empowering characteristics of her French surroundings, thus acquiring a culinary identity that facilitates her new brand of Chicana feminism that take aspects of Paris and fuses them into the knowledges that Canela has grown up with in East Los Angeles. The result is knowledge in the form of recipes, ones to fill both her literal and spiritual hunger.

Canela’s recipe becomes the central narrative structure which embodies the knowledge she has gained from the Parisian kitchen. The recipe becomes symbolic for knowing and freedom as it is

a synthesis of the meaning and authority she has gained alongside their transnational context(s). After finishing her final test at Le Coq Rouge, Henry tells Canela that her “filling was quite original” (López, *Hungry Woman* 52), thus reaffirming her advancement as a knower and creator of knowledge (recipes). In fact, Henry affirms that Canela has earned her diploma:

CANELA: No, I’m just somebody who has a diploma that says I graduated from Le Coq Rouge. I’m not a chef.

HENRY: Of course you are a chef now. You can cook just like the rest of us.

(...)

CANELA: Hmmm... I don’t know... Maybe... But I’m not a good cook.

HENRY: Of course you are. Now you’re a perfectionist, but you can cook. I know you can. Your sauce and stuffing today were delicious, actually. (...) Canela, you have the talent to be a chef, and a good one. Now it’s up to you to decide whether you want to work to be a great one. (López, *Hungry Woman* 53-4).

Henry’s words reiterate a central tenet of the Parisian kitchen: Canela is granted the ability to become a chef, not just a cook as seen in her mother’s East Los Angeles kitchen. Whereas a cook is someone who cooks and/or prepares meals, the word chef, as the English “chief,” refers to the traditional French kitchen hierarchy in which one must work their way up the ranks to achieve the highest title. Chef is a higher ranking than cook and further establishes Canela as a leader in the kitchen and culinary world with the knowledge to create and actualize dishes and menus.

Similar to Canela’s decolonizing experience in the kitchen, Argentine feminist theorist Josefina Ludmer suggests that even though the kitchen and other domestic and gendered spaces are subjugated places of silence for women, they are also spaces that permit and encourage female creation (53). Canela’s ability to not only cook, but to create a sophisticated dish of French cuisine indicates her freshly-acquired power and positive association with a space that previously served as a site of subjugation. As such, Canela’s *Agneau à la Mexicaine-Américaine* functions as counter discourse, her own female-identified Wild Zone performance that challenges the restrictive properties of Chicano-enforced gendered paradigms and spaces.

Ultimately, the fictional Canela, just as Josefina López herself did, returns to the United States once she graduates from culinary school. Speaking of her experiences and decision to leave France, López states: “I just didn’t feel at home and maybe I’ll never feel like I’m at home anywhere” (Qtd. in Johnson, “In ‘*Hungry Woman*’”). Regardless of Canela’s intentions to forge a home in Paris, it is not home; she remains hungry and must return to East Los Angeles to satiate her spiritual hunger and need to make peace with both her family and neighborhood. More importantly, Canela returns home as a revitalized woman: “Henry and Le Coq Rouge had revived me and awakened my senses. I was alive again” (López, *Hungry Woman* 57). Indeed, the psychosocial aspects of Canela’s time in Paris change her. Her positive Wild Zone experiences in Paris allows her to take this newly acquired positive self-association with place and carry that feminine power to East Los Angeles, thus returning with a positive connection with home.

In an empowering act that demonstrates the outward manifestation of her inner change, Canela prepares a French meal for her family, complete with a much-improved version of *Agneau à la Mexicaine-Américaine* alongside tomato confit, bell pepper *tian*, and chocolate soufflé with Chantilly cream, demonstrating mastery of the techniques and skills she has learned. She further gains authority and autonomy when she cooks the fancy French meal for her family; the meal metaphorizes her transformation. In light of psychosociology, the Parisian kitchen changes the way Canela thinks of herself as well as the people around her. Canela’s psychosociological thought process

allows her to analyze East Los Angeles in a different way which she demonstrates through cooking for her family. Not only does she experience this psychosociological shift, but her family bears witness to the decolonized Canela. In the novel, Canela claims: “I felt like an artist. Like in some small way I had contributed to enriching my family’s life. I danced around victoriously...” (López, *Hungry Woman in Paris* 244). Whereas she lacked confidence in her execution of the dish during her final exam, this is the first positive experience she has had in a Chican@ kitchen. Here, López demonstrates how Canela decolonizes the East LA kitchen, navigating the familiar-yet-new space through a nuanced understanding of food. In this way, navigating both identity and food resolve conflict for López’s protagonist. While the space remains the same highly gendered kitchen that subjugated the women in her family, Canela re-enters the space with a new understanding that she can become the author of her own story or, better said, the chef of her own menu. After Canela feeds her family, one thing is clear: she will not return to the patriarchal kitchen in which she was raised.

The above indicates that the kitchen is a performative space that women can utilize to transform their identity and create new culture and positive discourse. Food studies scholar Viviana Rangil proposes that “even though society’s notion of space and the particularities of the representations assigned to certain places [like the kitchen] are gendered, Latinas use spaces/places in order to subvert traditional representations and thus create new approaches to the process of constituting a space” (112). Thus, when Canela uses the Parisian kitchen as a space to study cuisine and become a chef, she is using it as a performance space that allows her to develop positive feminist agency. When she returns home, Canela appropriates her mother’s kitchen and eliminates her bad memories of the space as a negatively gendered space; Canela’s performance as a full-fledged French-trained chef is as much a political statement as it is a social one in which she establishes a new identity for herself as well as a new sociocultural reality for herself and any woman who so chooses to follow her lead. Consequently, when she becomes engaged again to Armando, she now has the power to decide what is best for her; she calls off the wedding, reinforcing her independence. The play ends with Canela at peace with herself, all enabled from occupying the positive spaces of Paris. She creates her own counter discourse, through food, that makes possible the filling of her spiritual hunger.

Conclusion

Josefina López’s *Hungry Woman* is a significant contribution to the growing field of contemporary Chicana cultural production centered on food and kitchen space. While previous works by Chicana playwrights such as Diane Rodriguez, Alicia Mena, and Elaine Romero have tackled food and the kitchen, these works have been few and far between in recent years. Theorizing place and space in relation to food and the kitchen, López’s play embraces certain female-derived forms of counter performances, what I call Wild Zone performances, which originate from women’s connections with place and space. These Wild Zone performances are distinct from the hegemonic culture and are inaccessible to the patriarchal powers in question as evidenced in the dichotomy between East Los Angeles and Paris as seen in López’s play. As depicted in López’s *Hungry Woman*, these counter performances grant subjectivity to women and assist in the process of their decolonization. *Hungry Woman* depicts Canela’s reassessment of her relationship with food and claiming of the kitchen space, a highly gendered space in Chican@ culture, that are made possible in Paris, France. In both East Los Angeles and Paris, Canela uses food to resolve conflict. The connections between space and identity enable López’s protagonist to decolonize the previously oppressive

kitchen in California while she embraces a newfound identity rooted in positive self-expression. In regards to this play, there is, therefore, a definite zone which permits marginalized women the opportunity to develop forms of autonomy and counter discourse which help them to maneuver the dominant, patriarchal culture. *Hungry Woman* presents how the Wild Zone—and Chicana feminist theory—is performed, demonstrating how women can (re)claim both food and the kitchen.

Notes

1. *Hungry Woman* received its world premiere at CASA 0101 Theater in Los Angeles from June 7-30, 2013.
2. In the case of Chicana womanhood, the age-old triad of La Virgen de Guadalupe, La Llorona, and La Malinche (or, virgin, mother, and whore) exemplifies this cultural stereotypification.
3. The fundamental components of the Wild Zone thesis are that of zone and wild. Wild suggests a female identity unrestrained by the mandated definitions and assumptions of traditional patriarchal Chicano society. Zone, on the other hand, implies both the physiologically-derived space (social structures limiting women due to biological distinctions) and the stereotypically-derived space.
4. Moreover, the Wild Zone thesis is in conversation with other more well-known theories centered on Latin@ identity formation, most notably José Esteban Muñoz's notion of disidentification: a theory to explain how racial outsiders mediate the dominant culture by transforming it for their own benefit rather than adhere to the dominant culture's mandates for appropriate forms of Latino identity. The Wild Zone precedes disidentification through its focus on developing forms of counter discourse inaccessible to the dominant narrative. Muñoz states that disidentification "is about cultural, material, and psychic survival. It is a response to state and global power apparatuses that employ systems of racial, sexual, and national subjugation. (...) Disidentification is about managing and negotiating historical trauma and systemic violence" (161). In this way, the marginalized individual can utilize processes such as disidentification and the Wild Zone to navigate systems of power and enter into the mainstream as a strategy and act of survival.
5. Josefina López's *Food for the Dead* centers on a Día de los muertos celebration in which the family dines over a traditional Mexican meal to mourn the death of the father, Ruben, for the last time. Subsequently, food serves as the catalyst to further differentiate Jesus's Anglo boyfriend, Fernando, from his Chican@ family as he is unfamiliar with the food items and mispronounces the Spanish words. Food is a signifier of Mexican-American culture and those on the outside, such as Fernando, do not fully comprehend it. Similarly, Alicia Mena's *Las Nuevas Tamaleras* centers on food as it offers us insight into the tamalada, an event when women of all ages come together to prepare and cook tamales. Mena's work proposes that traditions are passed along from one generation to the next and, even though each person's individuality influences these traditions, they remain recognizable (Kessler). Each woman can project her own subjectivity and individuality via the tamales while still partaking in the traditional practice, thus perpetuating culture. Diane Rodríguez's performance piece *The Path to Divadom, Or How to Make Fat-Free Tamales in G Minor* also centers on a tamalada in which the narrator's cousin, Rachel, tries to alter the family tamale to make it healthier. This work also transmits the central message of *Las Nuevas Tamaleras* that culture is alive and always changing and it is important to challenge and question traditions.

6. Latin@ theater scholars Roberto Sandoval-Sánchez and Nancy Saporta Sternbach argue that these women use the kitchen as “a public domain where agency is developed and identity is established, and, most importantly, where hybrid subjectivities result from new historical positionalities, where a new combination of ingredients conflates” (129).
7. Tey Diana Rebolledo affirms that because cooking knowledge is passed down through the female line, cooking allows female writers “to claim that voice of authority found in the cooking or ‘recipes’ of their mothers and grandmothers” (133).

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Biographies of Authors

Elvia Flores - Flores is a Chicana, daughter of formerly undocumented immigrants from Mexico, and has been a teacher in East Los Angeles for 13 years. She was the first in her family to earn a college degree, even though she became a mother at the age of 16, and she is currently working on her PhD in Education at CGU. This poem is part of a paper she wrote for one of her doctoral classes.

Emily Reeves - Reeves is a Puerto Rican born and raised in Queens, New York; but has called San Antonio, Texas her home for the last decade. She has a bachelor's degree in English with an emphasis on creative writing, and currently is completing her MA/MFA in literature, social justice, and poetry. She has spent the last 4 years teaching high school English in San Antonio and is currently the ESL teacher at her current high school. She has been published in the Sagebrush Review and The Thing Itself; and has served as the 2015 poetry editor of Our Lady of The Lake University's writing journal. She continues to volunteer her time doing poetry readings around the San Antonio area. Most of her poetry is about her survival from abuse, being a marginalized Latina, motherhood, and mental illness..

Melissa Andres - Andres has attended workshops with Thomas Lux, James Galvin, and Martha Rhodes. In addition to attending conferences, she takes online creative writing courses and studies poetry craft books on her own. Her poem, "The Buck," was published in Di-Vêrsé-City Anthology, 2016.

Sarah Simon - Simon is post-undergrad pre-bakingbread.

Jerry Bradley - Bradley is a University Professor of English at Lamar University and poetry editor of Concho River Review. His eighth book, *South of the Boredom*, a collection of poems about Mexico, will appear late this year from Angelina River Press. My works have appeared in Poetry magazine, New England Review, Chachalaca Review, Writing Texas, and other magazines and have been anthologized in *Goodbye, Mexico* and elsewhere. I am a member of the Texas Institute of Letters.

Priscilla Luera - A millennium's guide to creating space, spirituality, and a sense of true authentic power. By relentlessly pursuing dreams through fearless passion and fruitful purpose, we can awaken and begin the path of consciousness. Listening to our ancestors and following the sound of our tlalpanhuehuetl, this is how we rise above and become one.

This a personal collection of poems that connect the intersections of being a Tejana from The Rio Grande Valley, a recent alumnus from the McCombs School of Business at UT Austin, and the spiritual transformation of becoming a social entrepreneur/queer creative.

Leo Boix -Boix is the first Latino-British poet to be selected for the Complete Works Poetry (mentored by Michael Schmidt), the UK national program and is the only Latino-British poet included in the Breaking Ground list of significant UK writers of color. His poetry will be published in the next *Carcanet New Poetries* anthology as well as a Bloodaxe anthology *Ten: Poets of the New Generation*. He has published in *Modern Poetry in Translation*, *the Rialto*, *Magma Poetry*, *Minor Literature [s]*, *The Morning Star*, *Ink*, *Sweat and Tears*, *An Other Poem*, *Under the Radar*, and *Panoplzyne*, and has read at The Poetry Cafe, Royal Academy of Dramatic Arts, Unison, SOAS, Rich Mix and Lewisham Library. Leo explores multiple identities, the complexities of creative/cultural translations, and issues of gender, identity and politics in ways inspired by growing up in Buenos Aires as a young, gay man. He is working with the Argentinean artist Pablo Bronstein and writing a collection inspired by Hieronymus Bosch. Boix's Spanish language publications include two successful collections and inclusion in many anthologies. He is a journalist published in *The Guardian*, *The Morning Star*, and Latin American journals and newspapers, and is the first Latino British writer in residence at a London school (St. Gabriel's College) and is working with the Director of The Complete Works Poetry to develop and nurture new young voices of Latinos in the UK.

Sylvia Ramos Cruz - Cruz writes poems eclectic in form and content. Most are inspired by works of art in all its forms, women's lives, and every-day injustices. She retired in 2016 after a long career in general and breast surgery, in private and academic settings, in New York and New Mexico. Her life is full—mother, grandmother, surgeon, women's rights activist, gardener, world traveler, friend and lover. And, of course, writer. Her work has appeared in, among others, *Persimmon Tree*, *Malpais Review*, *Small Canyons Haiku Anthology*, and *Being a Woman Surgeon: 60 Women Share Their Stories*. Her poem, Memorial Day 2016, appears in the National Federation of State Poetry Societies' anthology, *Encore: Prize Poems 2017*.

Ongoing writing—Haibun about her journeys to visit Historic NM Women road markers—combines three of her passions: feminism, poetry and the open road.

Danielle Cooney - The poem, "A Penny for the Jukebox/A Knuckle for Your Thoughts" refers to Luis Valdez' play, *Zoot Suit*. The intermixing of Chicano Spanish in the English play is a tactic mimicked by the poem. The key difference is the female speaker which is a stark divergence from the male-dominated play written by a male playwright with a predominantly male cast and an all-male zoot suit gang. The imagery of the female draped over male shoulders in the second stanza is a direct reference to one of the only ways that the female Pachucas are used in the play: as decoration to legitimize the importance, or the "cool factor," of the male zoot suiters. The speaker of the poem uses a direct address of Luis Valdez to give voice to the female Pachuca as well as future generations of this persona. These strong women would in no way logically play such passive and insignificant roles in the societal construct of zoot suit gangs and future replications of those social spheres. The product here is a specific desired image of strength that the females are left out of. The manipulation of the female to enhance the male ego and image or to legitimize the male via female approval is given a platform for objection to objectification through a voice demanding to be heard. The vivid red imagery symbolizes the struggle to be noticed for more than physical reasons. The product of a strong physical image representative of a strong physical presence is desired by both the male and female characters but seems to be only attainable for the males; this poem

openly combats this idea and gives agency to the role of the female in this social sphere.

Ximena Keogh Serrano - Serrano is a PhD candidate in the department of Spanish and Portuguese at the University of Colorado at Boulder, where she also teaches. A selection of her poems appear or are forthcoming from the *Chiricú Journal on Latina/o Literatures, Arts, and Cultures*, Le Petit Press's *Mo(u)rning/Morning Anthology* and Kórima Press's *Anthology of Queer Latina Voices*.

Andrea Gómez - Gómez is a Peruvian anthropologist and a PhD student currently residing in Mexico City. She is a feminist and activist for sexual and reproductive rights, and the creator of the A versus A podcast, dedicated to pop culture analysis.

Marisela Barrera - Barrera received her MA/MFA in Creative Writing, Literature, and Social Justice from Our Lady of the Lake University in May 2017. As a cultural journalist, her community profiles, book reviews, and commentaries have appeared in *The Rivard Report*, *Out in SA*, *Texas Matters*, *The San Antonio Current*, *HowlRound*, and *TheaterJones*, among others. She is a member of the Macondo Writers' Workshop and a professional theater director with credits at the Tobin Center, the Guadalupe Cultural Arts Center, the Dallas Latino Cultural Center, The San Antonio Playhouse, and Jump-Start Theater. Marisela was recently awarded the National Association for Latino Arts & Culture's Fund for the Arts Award for "Ruby Reds, Big Birds y Burras," a linked story collection and source material for two upcoming plays.

Eva-Lynn Jagoe - Jagoe is a professor of Latin American Literature and Culture at the University of Toronto. She has written essays and a book of creative non-fiction memoir, *Take Her, She's Yours*, from which this essay is taken. She is also the author of a book of cultural and literary analysis entitled *The End of the World as They Knew It: Writing Experiences of the Argentine South*. She has written numerous articles on feminism, Latin American literature, film, and visual culture.

Diana Burbano - Burbano is a Colombian immigrant, an actor, a nerd, and a playwright. She came to the US as a young girl, but still lisp. Works: *Linda*, *CTGLA Community*, 2017. *Policarpa*, *The Drama League*, 2017. *Fabulous Monsters*, *Festival51*, *Picture Me Rollin'* William Inge Festival 2016, *Silueta*, with Tom and Chris Shelton, *Teatro Tercera Llamada* 2016. *Caliban's Island*, winner Headwater New Play Fest, Creede, CO, published by YouthPLAYS.

Suvi Mahonen - Mahonen is a freelance writer based in Surfers Paradise on Australia's Gold Coast. Her non-fiction appears on many platforms including *The Huffington Post*, *The Australian* and *The Establishment*. Her fiction has been widely published in literary journals and anthologies including in *The Best Australian Stories* and *Griffith Review*. A portion of a longer work-in-progress was nominated for a Pushcart Prize. For more from Suvi visit her page here: <http://www.redbubble.com/people/suvmahonen>

Luisa Kay Reyes - Reyes has had pieces featured in the *Fire in Machines*, Hofstra University's *The Windmill*, *Halcyon Days*, *Fellowship of the King*, *Enchanted Conversation: A Fairy Tale Magazine*, *The Eastern Iowa Review*, and other literary magazines. Her piece, "Thank You", is the winner of the April 2017 memoir contest of *The Dead Mule School of Southern Literature*. And her

Christmas poem was a first-place winner in the 16th Annual Stark County District Library Poetry Contest.

Cristina Herrera - Cristina earned her PhD in English from Claremont Graduate University and is Associate Professor and Chair of Chicano and Latin American Studies at California State University, Fresno. She is the author of the 2014 study, *Contemporary Chicana Literature: (Re)Writing the Maternal Script*, the only book-length text that examines maternal relationships in Chicana writing. She is co-editor of *(Re)Mapping the Latina/o Literary Landscape: New Works and New Directions* (2016) and *Reading/Speaking/Writing the Mother Text: Essays on Caribbean Women's Writing* (2015). Cristina has published articles in *Chicana/Latina Studies*, *Women's Studies: An Interdisciplinary Journal*, *Children's Literature*, and other journals. She is currently working on a number of projects related to Chicana and Latina young adult literature.

Yoland Nieves - Dr. Nieves, born and raised in Chicago's Humboldt Park neighborhood, is an award-winning poet, playwright, director, educator, actress, and founder of The Vida Bella Ensemble. Her award-winning play *The Brown Girls' Chronicles: Puerto Rican Women and Resilience* was performed coast-to-coast and ran off Broadway. Dr. Nieves is the winner of the NCCLA Andrew Krischner Award for Teaching, 2016.

Author of two highly acclaimed poetry books, *Dove over Clouds* and *The Spoken Body*, her research, plays, and poetry have been widely published. Her research and poetry have also been featured in DePaul University's *Diálogo* Center for Latino Research Journal, the *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education* journal, and the *Journal of Vocational Education and Technology*. Dr. Nieves has presented her research globally, including at the University of Manchester, the University of Guanajuato, the University of Bucharest, and the University of Puerto Rico.

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Trevor Boffone - Trevor is a Houston-based scholar, educator, writer, dramaturg, producer, and the founder of the 50 Playwrights Project. He is a member of the National Steering Committee for the Latinx Theatre Commons and the *Café Onda* Editorial Board. He has a Ph.D. in Latin@ Theatre and Literature from the Department of Hispanic Studies at the University of Houston, a Graduate Certificate in Women's, Gender, & Sexuality Studies, an MA in Hispanic Studies from Villanova University, and a BA in Spanish from Loyola University. Trevor researches the intersections of race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, and community in Chican@ and Latin@ theater and performance. He has authored a book, *Eastside Latinidad: Josefina López, Community, and Social Change in Los Angeles*, is co-editing with Teresa Marrero and Chantal Rodriguez an anthology of Latinx plays from the Los Angeles Theatre Center's Encuentro 2014, has published on contemporary Latin@ literature, Chicana feminist theater and other subjects, and has served as a Research Fellow at the University of Texas at Austin.

