

The **JOURNAL** *of*
LATINA CRITICAL FEMINISM

Volume 4 • Issue 1
April 2021

The **JOURNAL** *of*
LATINA CRITICAL FEMINISM

Volume 4 • Issue 1
April 2021

THE JOURNAL OF LATINA CRITICAL FEMINISM

Volume 4, Issue 1 (2021)
The Collectiva Publishing Society
San Antonio, Texas

Published by The Collectiva Publishing Society.

© 2021 The Collectiva Publishing

All Rights Reserved.

The Journal of Latina Critical Feminism uses the Creative Commons License Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs CC BY-NC-ND. A condensed description of this license can be found here:

<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>

A detailed description of the license can be found here:

<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/legalcode>

Contents

<u>Preface: What is the Journal of Latina Critical Feminism</u>	vii
I. Poetry	
<u>Unapology</u> <i>Petra Salazar</i>	2–3
<u>De dos revoluciones</u> <i>Sandra Ovalle Martinez</i>	4–6
<u>A Place for Us</u> <i>Candace Angelica Walsh</i>	7–8
<u>Besando a mis Amigas</u> <i>Stephanie Ashley Martinez</i>	9
<u>Scared of the dentist</u> <i>Marcela Rodriguez-Campo</i>	10
<u>Agua de Colonia</u> <i>Sandra Ovalle Martinez</i>	11–12
<u>Dejar ir</u> <i>Daniela Rico Traffon</i>	13–14
<u>Going Out in Miami Wearing Higher Heels Than a Man Should</u> <i>Arnaldo Batista</i>	15
<u>Irving Park Road</u> <i>Vanessa Canibano</i>	16–17
<u>Desdemona</u> <i>Jose Guadalupe Estrada</i>	18–19

<u>La revedere</u> <i>Adela Sinclair</i>	20–21
<u>NiiAmah</u> <i>Chelsea Hernandez</i>	22
<u>what it's like to be a Mexican living in America</u> <i>Chibbi Orduña</i>	23
<u>Say My Name, Say My Name</u> <i>Alfredo Antonio Arevalo</i>	24
<u>Pleas</u> <i>Alfredo Antonio Arevalo</i>	25–26
<u>August 2011</u> <i>Arnaldo Batista</i>	27

II. Prose

<u>Blanco</u> <i>Adriana Domínguez</i>	29–31
<u>Still Life with Mexico</u> <i>Angelica Maria Barraza</i>	32–34
<u>Humberto y Soledad</u> <i>Maria Cristina Santana</i>	35–39
<u>Seventh Sister, Zero Wolf</u> <i>Rudolph Esparza</i>	40–42
<u>A Prayer to Yocahú – 1493</u> <i>Sandra Kei Chapman</i>	43–46
<u>Coatl</u> <i>Chelsea Hernandez</i>	47–59

Wanting More 60–62
Keishla Rivera-Lopez

Releyendo a Julia de Burgos en la época de
Trump y "La Promesa" 63–67
Victorio Reyes Asili

III. Scholarly Articles

Destabilizing Structures Of Power: BDSM, The Law &
Race 69–91
Melissa B. Herrera

Combating Racial Injustice: A Comparative Analysis of
Gloria E. Anzaldúa's Path of Conocimiento and Ibram X.
Kendi's Antiracism 92–103
Margaret Cantú-Sánchez

IV. Biographies of Authors 104–110

Preface

What is the Journal of Latina Critical Feminism?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Perhaps most of all, the journal will strive to exemplify the highest standards of intellectual and moral integrity and fairness. We believe that the true potential of feminism will never be realized unless these ideals are fully embraced and implemented.

Poetry

Unapology

By Petra Salazar

In the land before *Me Too*
 Unaccustomed to power, I handed mine over
 To the first white boy in shiny shoes and catalog jeans
 Carrying an air of authority

I was his pet college project
 Unsophisticated
 Uneducated

With a singsong Spanish accent
 Which he said made me sound stupid
 Making everything sound like a question

Accent or no accent
 Question marks
 Started popping up
 After all my sentences
 Eventually
 After
 Every
 Word
 I'd speak

The syntax of the meek

He was always criticizing
 My hair not to his liking
 My clothes were silly
 My thoughts pure absurdity

He'd let me speak only to correct me
 Half-bragging, half-confessing
 That he liked to test women just to see
 How stupid we could be

It was *Fifty Shades of Grey*, *My Fair Lady*
 The same story replayed
 A muse
 Abused

Stupid Anastasia Steele, Stupid Eliza Doolittle

Stupid me
Stupid, stupid me

When I finally walked away, he said
“No one rejects [Insert First Name Last Name]”
Speaking of himself in 3rd person like a king

He'd go on to become
Assistant Attorney General
While I pieced together
An artistic rendering of who I might have been
Had I not met him

Hating myself for giving him the keys
To imprison or free me as he pleased

But I am free

The Election of 2016
The Great Depression of our generation
The Ford-Kavanaugh hearings
Me Too

Released me
From that silencing toxic masculinity

From that voice that's been lording over me since college
Disapproving of my every moment
Making me speak in “I'm sorrys”

I am no longer here to please
The only one I have to ask permission from is me

De dos revoluciones

By Sandra Ovalle Martinez

To my bisabuela who fought the most insatiable wars within and outside of her. To all the comadres y madrinas who keep communities resilient and become familia. Preciosos son los pies de los que anuncian la paz y siguen pa'lante!

Corre, corre Isabel Corona
como reina del campo
escapa de día soñando
“¡Libertad y Tierra!” cantando

Sus hijos la siguen
toman provisiones, tortillas y frijoles
llenar cantimploras de agua
y rezan que no les caigan balas

Ya ha llegado la noche y avanzar han logrado
cansados su pies van reposando
un fuego alumbra el campamento

Vecinas, vecinos, comadres y madrinas
todas ahí reunidas, clamando
¡Tierra y Libertad exigimos!

Las estrellas cubren el cielo
y el silencio allana el bullicio,
más se oye en el pecho de una niña el gemido

“No ha comido bien,
la nena de Isabel”

Llora y llora sin consuelo
No se sabe que dará más vuelo
si su llanto o el grito,
¡Tierra y Libertad exigimos!

Ya es de día y aún chilla
la nena de Isabel acogida

Demacrada la reina del campo llora,
 ¿quién acallará qué llanto?
 amamantar a esta nena es sacrificar el llamado

¡Tierra y Libertad!

¡Tierra y Libertad!

¡Tierra y Libertad!

sigue llamando

Con dolor en el corazón
 pasa la noche velando
 la lucha o la niña
 sigue en su mente andando

“Respira, Isabel Corona”
 interrumpe la voz de la Sabiduría
 “Respira, hija mía,
 siente el palpitar de tu pecho
 siente la fuerza en tu sangre
 haz lo que hay que hacer por derecho”

... ahh... ahh... ahh...

“Heme aquí, envíame a mí”
 responde la reina del campo
 con certeza en su corazón soñando,
 Tierra y Libertad

Tan pronto se levanta el sol
 salen sus pies descalzos
 camino a su comadre

Fuera del campamento
 entrega a su niña envuelta
 “Ahora que se gane la guerra
 regresaré a verla”

Toma las manos de sus hijitos

y voltea su rostro al viento

Corre, corre Isabel Corona
como reina del campo
con provisión en manos
tortillas, frijoles y tiempo

Corre, corre la Reina del Campo
allá más allá va soñando
tierra y libertad esperando

Corre, corre la Reina del Campo
despojándose de ataduras
que al peón han mantenido oprimido

Corre, corre la Reina del Campo
y cuando a su mente viene
la nena de incosolable llanto
al cielo le envía una estrella
libertad y tierra clamando
y de día una azucena
que con justicia su alma sosiega.

A Place for Us

By Candace Angelica Walsh

They erased Maria with Natalie Wood
and I knew then
no one could ever choose me,
or whisper the syllables of my name,
like a prayer.

My mother singing *somewhere*
there'll be a place for us,
pounding on the chipped ivory
of her childhood piano, where
white wine sat quivering
in a stemless glass.

I wished it had the spine to tell her
no more crying.

And the notes folded inward,
like a young girl first meeting
a grown woman's pain.

If only she spoke Spanish,
and taught me too, then I could say things
that weren't just her mother's disdain
for my *gringo* father.

The shame fluttered in my blood,
pájaros de pena in my veins.

And now a pale man with slow words,
gold curls like question marks,
tells me *your look is so exotic, woman.*
where you from?

He keeps asking.

But my responses lose their tempo
when he laughs each time
I reply *here*.

Despite myself, reticent,
I join him laughing.

Remembering when my mother said
sometimes it's easier
to let them think they are in charge.

The splintered glint of
spin the bottle glass,
the relish in their eyes

before the truth or dare.
I answer again,
under my breath this time:
somewhere
 somewhere
 somewhere

Besando a mis Amigas

By Stephanie Ashley Martinez

Toda mi vida
Nunca entendí porque me gustaba besar a mis amigas.
I thought it was just an abject part of my being, my body, my soul.
I always did it in private.
Whenever I could.
Just hoping no one would ever find out.

It was a secret I learned to lie about.
I became so good at lying that I never grew out of betraying myself.
I stayed there.

And my shame grew strong enough
To dilute my own reality
And create my deepest illusions.

I was disillusioned by a linear reality,
Of who I thought I once was.

When in the end,
I never wanted any of those things.
I wanted my happiness.
My innocence.
Untainted by the condemnations of this world's expectations.

Scared of the dentist

By Marcela Rodriguez-Campo

Poverty lives in my mouth
Across my skyline you'll find
Towers of leaning coffee-tinged teeth,
With black tar covering pothole cavities
On blue-collar kids' unchecked mouths.
There are broken windows in my smile
From when pops plucked loose canines
And made pliers into dental equipment.
He says ugliness builds character
But brick by brick they tore you down
Tried to steal the sunshine from your laughter,
Those fucking bastards.

My jaw is a drawbridge
That doesn't quite meet
And at night in my new middle-class bed
In my new middle-class life
I grind my teeth
From my old working-class stress
That I won't make ends meet.
I am scared of the dentist
Because I fear that they might see
The poverty that still lives in me.

Agua de Colonia

By Sandra Ovalle Martinez

¡No tomes el agua, está contaminada!
 Pero la gente está sedienta
 Y no hay agua que les calme

¡No tomes el agua, está contaminada!
 Pero, ¿quién les abrió las puertas de la presa?
 ¿Cómo llegaron a envenenarla?

¡No tomes el agua, está contaminada!

Y la bebé llora y se deshidrata
 La madre busca pero no encuentra
 de las cascadas traer un trago fresco

Se han secado
 y lo que quedaba se ha encausado
 No hay acceso directo

Paga paga por “¡el aaaaguaaa!”
 Corre porque solo pasa una vez a la semana
 Y hoy no alcanza para comprar agua

Derecho al río y las cascadas
 se ha contenido en una cisterna helada
 ¿Sus dueños? El capitalismo, el imperio y el priismo
 Que han quitado de las manos trabajadas
 El río, el arroyo y la cascada

¡No tomes el agua, está contaminada!
 Contaminada el alma que le ha puesto precio
 A lo que la tierra libremente ofrece a sus hijitas

Con pasitos hacia adelante llegan
 Como Cuatlicue desnudas se bañan
 En los ríos donde se lavó el oro y la plata

Dejar ir

By Daniela Rico Straffon

¿Qué tengo que sea mío?

Sólo mío

Esta decisión es mía

Este hogar es mío

Aún vacío

¿Es mío?

¿Lloramos cada mes por los hijos que hubieran podido ser?

Es por la vida que no dimos

La semilla desperdiciada

El mundo derrumbado

Que se extingue

Lloramos por la muerte en vida

Porque uno de nuestros mandatos

Es prolongar la existencia

¿Estamos aquí por eso?

También lloro cada mes por quien yo hubiera podido ser

Porque sigo sin ser

Y me duele

Ser en potencia no es ser

La vida no alcanza

No me alcanza

Ni para adornar mis paredes

Ni para cumplir mi sueño

Mi cabeza no me alcanza

La limita su propio muro

De satisfacer al otro

De callar

cuando quiero gritar y

decir —No, no estoy bien

Estoy en un agujero, abrázame

Abrázame que no me reconozco

Desperté y no me gusta este cuadro vivo
Del que soy parte
Este cuadro que elegí
Que sigo eligiendo cada día
Y me quiere adormecida

Cómoda
Callada
Vacía

Silencio

Going Out in Miami Wearing Higher Heels Than a Man Should

By Arnaldo Batista

It was a sexy punk-rock take on Judy Garland's *Get Happy*,
 which I always took to mean, *be gay*, and boy,
 was I gay. Gay in the way
 that I look to see how I measure up to men
 beside me at urinals, gay in the sense
 that that night I curled my hair so the spirals would bounce
 when some dude in a pink crop top and Birkenstocks asked
Does it hurt? and my giddy, gay self would say,
Yes. A lot.

But I was tall. So tall,
 I crooked my head down like a stork
 before entering the bar, bowing
 to all the drunk men
 and giving the women a curtsy, showing my ass
 barely covered by a black lace robe
 I had purchased three hours before.
 It was glorious, it was my Titanic
I'm on top of the world
 moment. A moment

never to be obscured
 by the greasy man at the gas station
 who asked *Does it hurt?*
 but not in a happy way,
 not in a gay way, in a way
 that as soon as I got back to my car,
 I took off my high heels
 to rest my feet.

Irving Park Road

By Vanessa Canibano

I remember grandmother's teeth
behind the kitchen curtains.
The rotted-out ones she kept as
souvenirs,
and the way sunshine needles

pried through dull windows
onto their burnt edges.
An aged *molcajete* stood
as companion; its chubby thighs
nicked ashen grey.

The same color as grandmother's hair,
or maybe it was a striking white
like ruffled swan feathers.
I don't remember this well—but

I do remember her Tejano drawl,
her sailor's tongue,
a breath of fire for thieves and liars,
a true spitfire. A tattooed child of God
with empty hands she sought

salvation or maybe a handful
of pinto beans, just enough to
mimic the feeling of fullness
forgotten in her heart.

I remember how she spoke of her
mother and her mother's
mother. The basket weavers who wore
feathers in their hair.
Their bronze skin burnt by the sun.

I remember the "I ain't no goddamn
Indian," a steadfast reply to prying
eyes, mine, an inquiry
into our ancestral line. Shame rested

in the depths underneath her eyes, and

I remember the scent of Zest melting
in the tub, coffee talk Sunday
dinners, sibling sombreros hung on
the middle room door

clap clap clap clap
Deep in the Heart of Texas
(her requiem)

And how could I ever forget the
hidden palm placed underneath
her muumuu breast
to pull out a wad of rumped bills.
The paramount Five for a hot dog
and fries

or an empty hand, downturned eyes, with
her earnest gesture, "Grab an Oscar Mayer
and some white bread, *mija*."

Desdemona

By Jose Guadalupe Estrada

It is exhausting
existing alone in this city.
Labyrinthian canals,
my senses dulled
until I am equivalent
to the panting dam in the stable,
the bleating rams
demanding to rush in.

I grasped your hand
stained ochre.
Arabic script
creased into your palms.
Illiterate, I wish to study more of you
as your eyes
reveal not a veneer
lacquered in Istrian stone
but dunes and fertile silt
far from these rotting columns
suffocating in the alluvial mud.

I'm enchanted in the spray of
salt carrying
a siren's voice in yours—
the length of the room is a grand distance,
I wish to subside in the bay of your arms,
deriding these floating mausoleums
of eroded limestone.

These songs
hold the wind
whisking away the bone-white sun,
heralding the nocturnal scuttle
of long-eared bats
pollinating the quivered stigmas
of vanilla orchids.

I sign my name in blood
on the stark white linen—

the moon aligns with the open sea,
a compass blooms between our chests,
pointing northward
toward my heaven.

La revedere

By Adela Sinclair

La revedere room.

La revedere house.

La revedere green gate, no 94.

Strada Clujului.

La revedere place where I slid off my bike.

Your voice slid down my shoulder.

I wanted to catch the wind.

I swallowed a fly.

La revedere airplane flying low above our house

that shakes everything in cupboards:

cups, plates, knives and forks.

La revedere Buni.

La revedere Dedi.

I took the bicycle and rode it

on the cobblestone street to *Alimentara*.

Nothing was on the shelves

of the grocery store.

I wanted candy.

Mama wanted butter.

Tata wanted cigarettes.

Buni wanted sugar.

Dedi wanted bread.

Leftover bread from yesterday's batch

slid out of my hands

onto the kitchen table.

The train choo-chooed farewell as it left the station.

La revedere Arad.

La revedere Alina, Mihaela, Florin, Cristina, Simona, Melania and Lucky.

La revedere Dedi.

La revedere Buni.

I passed the neighbor's house on the way to school.

A boy pushed me off my bike.

I spit and got him!

La revedere.

Stoop where the neighbor sat and chewed
day old bread, making more saliva
to soften the crust.

La revedere garden where I sat and drew a flower in the grass.
The grapes were not ripe.

Goodbye on October 25, 1987.
The day I sat on Pan-Am
I flew over our house.
Buni and *Dedi* heard my roars.
The house shook.
The last *La revedere*.

NiiAmah

By Chelsea Hernandez

My grandmother left me a tapestry of yellow houses
Woven tight, spelled with strong threads.
A golden dipped mirage of walls, windows, ridge poles.
My uncle stole it.
Perhaps it lies abandoned in a Tucson goodwill.

I once walked the ridge pole of a kitchen roof,
Honey dipped-sunny little home,
Balancing foot curving soft arch to cup the
Dew slick cold metal.
I twisted my ankle, but think I could have
Broken my neck.

I threw a stone through a window,
Threw through, threw a stone through
My lover's eye sending ripples like a willow branch
Kissing the creek's glassy waters,
fracturing.
But it's my walls, my love, that still wait,
Achingly.

Say My Name, Say My Name

By Alfredo Antonio Arevalo

Puedes pronunciarlo picante? I need you
to add some sultry salt to your speech,
something sabroso como carne asada con limón;
sing it to me como Paquita on Sunday mornings,
trills trembling tiles, vibrato doing vueltas off rose vases;
whisper it with the smoothness of warm Abuelita chocolate
mid-December, when outside stings like a half-angry bee—
como espino en el pie, hielo con la piel,
corazón abandonado—quiero que me dejes
miel to soothe all roughnesses; hablame
con canela en tu voz—too many rocks have found themselves
trapped in my trachea: bring me a river
to enliven this path again, hum and hiss
we love to hear, invitation of a kiss
without the menace of a snakebite; refresh me
with all the invigoration of horchata in June humidity;
pour euphoric textures gently into my ears,
dame dulce en uno, chile en el otro—bring me a fusion
& an excitement, reason for all other burns to exist,
gift me with herbs to garnish my dirt—
season me salaciously, make me full &
make me hungry, dame un país de sabor
cuando pronuncias mi nombre con la fuerza de
mariachis cantando afuera de mi ventana abierta;
despiértame con tu cucurucucu, paloma inmortal:
I want to taste every syllable—and taste it again.

Pleas

By **Alfredo Antonio Arevalo**

I.

I ask you to uproot me
 from the sludge, scratch
 at the rash announcing itself,
 use your trophy machete
 to ambush the wound,
 dechlorinate this pool
 by adding your gutter-clutter,
 feed me your infection
 to tsunami mine out.

I am a malady myself,
 sin-borne & thorned,
 pleading for another blood,
 pleading for flood,
 a disaster not mine
 to abandon me awash,
 serve me to nature's mouth,
 crumb, crumbled,
 another fateful fumble.

I ask you to uproot me
 from the malady I am,
 filter me from my blood,
 my marrow, my mud,
 sift me free of sin, reincarnate
 me into the same husk,
 drown me in your baptism—
 baby-pink & ever-sinking,
 I seek your purification,

bleeding, pleading

II.

I ask you to uproot me,
 pluck me as a poppy—
 illegally, from California green,
 jalame de rincon como
 la mas bella de la fiesta,
 serpiente en tu boca aguila,
 bailandome like baton in twirler's
 tender grasp, fragile but
 wild, wanting whim, limpid

oceans, waves unyielding,
 verano infantil, nubes y lagrimas
 asustados, luz facil lloviendo sobre
 mis dientitos limpios, blancos,
 blanketing bruises in birdsong,
 brazos mandando miedos
 con la tormenta de ayer;
 I beg for your jazz to age me
 wrinkle-less, mature & marbled,

Malinche con miel, mellifluous
 malady & melody mashed
 in my molcajete, yo canto
 mis oraciones, my martyred
 ache-songs for your orchestra,
 your preservation—I ask you
 to fossilize & revive me,
 leave me legacied & levitating,
 levantado a la luz, poderoso,

bleeding but proceeding

August 2011

By Arnaldo Batista

I disprove the Coriolis effect of toilets:
in Brazil, shit will go down clockwise, counter-
clockwise, repeatedly, or not at all,
no matter where you sit—shit, or no shit.
Shit is now *merda*. Fuck is now *porra*.
No is a nasal *não*. Faggot is *viado*.
Being gay is a deadly sin. Portuguese
becomes a way of life, it invades me
like an Ottoman, changes the way I walk,
changes how I love, changes who I love.
In Brazilian English class, they teach me British:
colour, grey, aluminium, lift, crisps. I learn
a new way to buy bread or milk, and when
someone calls me fag, I say *Não, porra*.

Prose

Blanco

By **Adriana Domínguez**

I love my REDcard from Target. That card continually helps me justify spending too much money on stuff that I probably don't need. I can tell myself that I am saving 5% so it is okay to buy that 24-hour lipstick that I know is probably not really going to last 24 hours—it is okay, I saved 12 cents on that tube!

Target.

Now that word reminds me that I have a bullseye on my back. That someone is looking to hit that target. That someone is willing to drive HOURS to destroy lives because they believe that who and what I am is worthless. That they have the right to make life and death decisions.

On August 3, I was just about to pull out of the Target parking lot with my little one in the backseat when there were notifications on Facebook that didn't seem real: Active Shooter at Cielo Vista. I looked at those notifications and almost dismissed them; there was no way that there was an active shooter in El Paso, in MY El Paso. My safe, stunning, home...El Paso. There was absolutely no way.

While driving to miija's folklorico class from Target, the radio was running updates and my phone was going off non-stop with friends and family urgently messaging each other in hopes of finding each other alive. I wanted to hear the updates, but I was terrified and torn about my little one hearing things that she should NEVER have to hear before starting her first year of school.

My daughter asked me: "What is happening at Cielo Vista; that's where we went to Build-A-Bear on Tuesday, right Mamá?" All I could tell her was that there were some people stealing from the store and that the cops were going to get them. That was all I could say to my daughter, that was all.

I am eternally grateful that my familia y amigos were spared. Yet, something very special was taken from me that day. Yes, my feelings of safety and security were altered, but it was my arrogance that I could protect my daughter that was stripped.

I no longer feel that I am capable of giving my daughter all that she needs. Because I can't. Because someone will see that target on our backs and will...

The most important job that I have in this world is to protect and provide for my daughter and August 3 demonstrated that I very well may fail.

I still have my REDcard but I have not been able to go back to Target—and I love shopping at Target.

But what I have done, and what I will continue to do is:

Work on being kind to others no matter what—to really make an effort to show people around me that love reigns;

Wear my hoop earring and red lipstick;

Jam to my cumbias and Spanish radio;

Wear my El Paso themed t-shirts;

Not worry if what I am wearing is too “ethnic” or that it makes me look “unprofessional”;

Speak up when someone says something racist and call them out; remind them that those words hold great power;

To use my art and the skills that I have to promote truth;

Protest;

Attend vigils;

Vote. Vote. Vote.

Remind miija that she IS valuable. That she is smart and talented and a proud descendant of hardworking, immeasurably strong and giving abuelos that sacrificed so much to give the familia a real chance in life.

There may be a target on my back, but I will keep pushing forward for this beautiful community---that is what El Paso has taught me to do. Growing up in this community has taught me that comunidad and treating everyone like familia is the ONLY route to go. Cause if you don't, you know you are going to hear about from your own mamá or tía or tía that is just really a good friend of the familia!

El Paso has taught me to:

open doors for people;

give extra tips for service;

bring too much food to parties;

give hugs to everyone after you've meet them just once;

find any reason to get together and celebrate—yes my prima's choir performance demands that we all go out to dinner and have pastel;

to fight for those that are silenced.

I choose to live in El Paso.

I choose to LOVE in El Paso.

Because I LOVE El Paso.

And no man is ever going to take MY El Paso from me.

The corazón of this comunidad will not be drained.

Mija will grow up fierce.

Mija will turn that target into ambition.

Mija will not be a target.

Still Life with Mexico

By Angelica Maria Barraza

1.

His parents left him in this country when he was nine. He didn't want to stay but his father insisted, likening him to a tree. When it's small, he said, you prop it up with sticks. But then it grows and gets big, and you take the sticks away.

I don't think he ever recovered, my father. His branches never swelled with fruit. The bark of his trunk shed in excess from his body, littering the floor of so many government apartments. I don't think his parents had a choice. But also, maybe they did. They kissed his forehead and got in the car, crossing the border back into Mexico.

2.

In so many dreams I have adopted his perspective at the moment of abandonment. I have stood for so long in the same place that when I moved my knees buckled; I have wept to the sputtering of exhaust, searched the clouds for a familiar shape before the wind teased it away.

In my dreams I look down at my boy body, take inventory of my boy fingers and shins. Note how the summer asphalt breaches the soles of my sandals, holding me in its heat as I would soon learn to hold a woman.

3.

Growing up, all I knew of Mexico was the way my father looked at things for long stretches of time without actually seeing them. He took to drinking with the midnight fervor of an artist, only he never made anything beautiful. I used to lay awake in bed at night waiting for the sound of his boots coming up the stairs, for the whistle on his lips and the salt on his breath. Other times I lay awake wishing he would run after the car. Twenty years later I wanted him to chase it down, beg his parents to keep him, to prop him up just a little longer that he might one day touch the face of god.

4.

When my grandpa died, my father's father, there was a seven day funeral in the town of Talpa de Allende in his honor. My father went alone while my mother stayed back in the states to look after my sister and I. We watched syndicated episodes of Lois and Clark. We listened to the radio and ate cereal dry. We almost missed him, or we missed him

horribly. The shadow of my father's ghost thinned, then disappeared from our home altogether.

On the sixth night the phone rang. It was a collect call. My mother accepted, held the receiver to her ear and nodded. Then nodded again. She returned to the dinner table and didn't say a word.

Driving to the airport several days later her knuckles turned white where they gripped the wheel. She looked at my sister and I with the corners of her eyes. She said she had something to tell us.

It's your father, she said. There's been an accident. He was breaking a horse on the ranch but instead the horse broke him. It bucked him off, and before he could get away a hoof, with incredible force, made contact with his head. She said, We don't know how long it's going to last. She said, He doesn't remember us. He doesn't remember a thing.

My sister heaved beside me. The freeway suddenly felt like the saddest place in the world. How many times had I darkly wished that something like this would happen. That some abominable miracle would touch our family, pull it dripping from the river of Lethe. I felt like all my wanting had conspired to nurture the horse's disobedience. But I also felt like the horse had given him something, given *us* something: a way back through the mercy of forgetting.

4.

Just after my 26th birthday my father asked me to go to Mexico with him. I had been before, on short day trips to Tijuana and Ensenada, but never to the place of his childhood. I didn't know what to bring, or how to prepare myself to arrive somewhere I had for so long imagined as a distant, far away place.

We boarded a flight from LAX to Puerto Vallarta. A man awaited us holding a piece of cardboard with our last name scrawled across it. He took us in his truck outside the city, down dirt roads lined with narrow trees, through plazas, across impossible bridges flanked on both sides by blue agave fields. I knew we had made it when my father rolled down his window and began greeting the people we passed, tilting his hat to their tilted hats. We pulled up a long driveway to a wooden house situated in the middle of a sprawling ranch, dotted with horses, cattle, chickens and pigs. I got out of the truck and stretched my legs. A string of people came out to kiss our cheeks, to behold us as we, in turn, beheld them.

Over the next week my father and I loosened into the daily rhythms of a lost life. At sunrise we woke to milk the cows while their calves impatiently looked on from the other side of the fence. During the day I'd walk the oxbow ravine, or squat beside the river, proselytizing to the reeds. At night we'd sit around the porch in mismatched plastic chairs. I eluded questions about boyfriends to the compositions of cricket song. Encased between two cousins, sleep coaxed me. I stirred only briefly at the weight of a beetle as it landed on my throat.

Why did he never move back? Why did he choose to remain in the states, even after he was old enough to make the return journey on his own? I asked as he leaned against a dead tree, chewing a toothpick to splinters. He said, this isn't my home anymore. And if I moved back, I'd just drink myself to death.

I leaned against the same tree and looked out over the ranch. I tried to see it as he did. I tried to feel the wind, the way it howled against his face. But I couldn't. My father walked back up the drive into the house, and I realized the longing was mine. It was me who saw Mexico in everything. A perpetual lack; a lover who leaves you nothing while claiming they're sparing you the worst.

Humberto y Soledad

By Maria Cristina Santana

Luego de Ciego de Ávila, Amado volvió a Santiago para el parto de Yolanda. Ella esperaba una niña y Amado un niño. Este sería el quinto hijo de Yolanda con Amado.

El embarazo fue todo sin problema alguno, aunque tuvo un fuerte resfriado con fiebre cuando tenía cinco meses. Justo entonces llegó una cuna azul muy moderna como encargo de Amado. Yolanda pensó que era lindo que su padre pensara en el bebé por nacer, pero también pensó que habría que pintarla de rosado por ser niña.

La ausencia de Amado fue constante hasta el octavo mes cuando llegó con tres maletas de juguetes anunciando que trasladaba su despacho a Santiago y que no volvía a Ciego de Ávila.

Yolanda lo recibió feliz aunque un poco preocupada.

Llevaba semanas sin cuidar su cabello y su cutis y se trepaba un moño atrás de la cabeza sin busca novios, ni detalle alguno. Este quinto hijo le estaba quitando su belleza de mujer—otra razón para pensar que era una niña. O así había oído hablar a las mujeres amigas de su madre al jugar canasta. “Si te sientes fea, es niña. Si te sientes bella, es varón. El bebé varón te quiere bonita y la bebé hembra fea para que no compitas con ella” solía decir Marga, la amiga de su madre. Pero nada, que salió varón y lo bautizaron Aldo.

Mi tío Aldo resultó majadero y quejón.

Todos en casa esperaban que se quejara de todo y todo el tiempo. Su pobre mujer Hilda, se afamaba en ser perfecta para que él no se quejara--Y ni eso lo consolaba. Al cabo de años y justo cuando la revolución, Aldo se fue a la Sierra Maestra detrás de Fidel. Se volvió capitán y nunca dejó a Cuba. Hilda sí lo dejó, a él y a Cuba.

Pero esta es la historia de Soledad y Humberto, a quien Aldo nunca conoció.

Cuando Aldo cumplió los dos años, Amado recibió un telegrama un martes en la tarde. Los telegramas en su mayoría portaban malas noticias o llegadas inesperadas. El telegrama venía de la United Fruit Company y era en inglés. Mi abuela no hablaba inglés pero Amado sí, aunque con un acento particular. El jefe solía decirle que hablaba inglés como si tuviera un tabaco en la boca. A lo cual Amado le comentaba sonreído, “solo es mi acento cubano”.

El telegrama hablaba de un tal Mister Rodgers y que había ingresado al hospital de momento con una trombosis en la pierna.

No se esperaba que pudiera trabajar por lo menos dos semanas. La oficina donde él era gerente,

solo tenía otra empleada y era nueva. Amado tenía que trasladarse a Camagüey lo antes posible. Por su tiempo en la United Fruit Company, Amado era el ideal para llevar este despacho mientras Mister Rodgers se recuperaba.

A Yolanda no le hizo ninguna gracia ya que trabajando en Camagüey, Amado no podría viajar a Santiago con frecuencia por la distancia.

Armó sus maletas y se marchó, pero no sin antes dejarle a Yolanda una cocinera para que la ayudara con las dietas de los niños, la comida sin sal de su madre y los antojos de dulce de Yolanda.

Los días en Santiago pasaban muy rápido. Entre niños corriendo, haciendo la tarea y dando el pecho a Aldo, se sorprendía mucho cuando llegaba el domingo. “¿Ya llego el domingo? Si parece mentira cómo se va el tiempo”. A Yolanda se le pasaron las dos semanas de la ausencia de Amado como si nada. Y de repente salió de su estado de estupefacción al darse cuenta que había que cambiar las camas, abrir las ventanas, sacudir los muebles y preparar comida para tres días porque Amado regresaba a Santiago.

Pero eso no ocurrió como se esperaba.

Ante el silencio de Yolanda, Amado se concentró en trabajar. La empleada nueva no era muy mala pero un poco lenta y muy callada. No servía como vendedora ni como contador. Amado ya estaba a punto de despedirla cuando le anunció que tenía que mudarse a la Habana a cuidar de su padre pero que le dejaba a su hermana menor, Soledad. Soledad no tenía trabajo y era muy capaz con los números. Amado, sin nada que perder, le pidió que mandara a su hermana Soledad.

Ni el cansancio, ni el aburrimiento lo prepararon. Cuando entró Soledad al despacho, Amado vio a la mujer más bella que nunca conociera. Ella, con solo 20 años, parecía una diosa griega. Le caía el pelo como en cascadas, con una frente ancha y de ojos negros, la sonrisa abierta y los ojos húmedos hacían de Soledad una visión mágica. No dijo nada, hasta que Amado se levantó de su silla. Y entonces él escucho su voz profunda y ronca y se quedó todavía más impresionado. “¿Y qué hay de nuevo Señor Amado?” El saludo fue muy informal y poco profesional pero Amado no se dio mucha cuenta porque lo único que podía hacer era mirarla.

Soledad se quedó parada por más de diez minutos, hasta que Amado la invitó a sentarse.

Al parecer, nunca nadie la había considerado bella antes que él.

Su familia la describía como una jirafa por su estatura y otros como un gorila por su voz. Nadie les vio las caderas, ni las piernas, ni los pechos como Amado los vio ese día. Soledad era astuta, inteligente, rápida en el trabajo y un poco desafiante. Después de aprender algo no quería recordatorios del jefe en cómo hacer las cosas. Su personalidad y belleza volvieron loco a mi abuelo. Lo mejor del caso era que Soledad tenía pretendiente y no le interesaba para nada ese hombre mayor de Santiago. Para ella, Amado, a los 36 años, era un anciano. Pero aquí si hay historia de amor. Como decía mi abuela, “el amor siempre llega cuando menos se espera”. Y Soledad y Amado acabaron por enamorarse. Un cariño prohibido, un toque de mano, un suspiro,

una mirada muy larga y una voz entre cortada fueron algunos de las pruebas de que el amor crecía en Amado.

Para entonces, Yolanda mantenía el hogar de Santiago de manera ejemplar.

Los niños eran la envidia de los vecinos. Se mantenían de pie y en silencio cuando había visita y sus modales eran impecables. Todo esto llenaba a Yolanda de amor y de ilusión. Con tanto trabajo de ser madre se le olvidó ser mujer. Un día se vió al espejo y se encontró vieja, con una piel amarilla y con labios secos. No reconocía ese rostro. No entendía cómo no se veía hermosa como ella se sentía por dentro. El sacrificio de servir a los demás la había secado. Y ahora cuando Amado venía a visitar una vez al mes prefería jugar naipes y beber que estar en la cama con ella. Una mañana, Yolanda se levantó dando mandos y acabó con dos recámaras- una para Amado y otra para ella. Los hijos mayores estaban un poco confundidos y los menores ni se dieron cuenta.

Soledad le hablaba a Amado como una igual. Lo retaba con preguntas, lo interrumpía y lo corregía en público, tal y como hacen los hombres con las mujeres. Amado la contemplaba, era paciente, le interesaba su opinión y hasta le preguntaba qué hacer en algunos casos. Soledad, quien todavía tenía pretendiente, comenzó a comparar a Amado con su novio. El pobre novio no sobrevivió la comparación. Amado era fuerte, decidido, inteligente, simpático, guapo y José era callado, inseguro, medio débil de carácter y un poco feo. Lo que sí tenía José era dinero y posición. Soledad no tendría que trabajar un día en su vida casada con él, mientras que con Amado, ella tendría que compartirlo con Yolanda y los cinco hijos. Amado no era una propuesta muy factible para Soledad. Pero ni el dinero de José, ni los hijos de Yolanda, ni la misma Yolanda pudieron con el amor que surgió entre Amado y Soledad. Y ese mismo cariño destapó las otras mujeres, hijos y mentiras que dejaba Amado por doquier.

Se le complicó la vida a Amado y nunca volvió a ser lo mismo en casa con Yolanda.

Yolanda por su lado, sintió el profundo dolor de la traición sin compartirlo ni con su madre ni con sus hijos. Callada, seria y muy concentrada le escribió una carta a Amado que cambiaría todo.

Amado la recibió con curiosidad y pensó que sería alguna aburrida letanía sobre los hijos o sobre su suegra.

Estimado esposo,

Le escribo para formular un contrato matrimonial.

¿Qué dice Yolanda?

*En los pasados 17 años, he mantenido el decoro de mujer casada y madre de familia. Usted, no. A mis oídos han llegado rumores de campo, que usted ha tomado una mujer en Camagüey y que mantiene amores con ella y en público. Mi fe me pide paciencia y lealtad a mi matrimonio. Lo cual estoy dispuesta a seguir siempre y cuando usted aclare esta situación. Suya,
Yolanda Cuza de García*

De momento se le abrieron los ojos a Amado y se recordó de la niña que se casó con él y lo difícil que había sido que se comportara y asumiera su puesto de esposa. Yolanda tenía solo 15 años cuando se casó con Amado. Aunque él tenía 19 años cumplidos, era serio, responsable y tenía una dote de su madrina lo cual ayudó a que se casaran con sólo seis meses de novios. El le

cantaba tangos de Carlos Gardel y a ella le gustaba llevarle flores al despacho. Comían juntos todas las noches y paseaban los viernes por la plaza del pueblo. Al cabo de dos años los hijos empezaron a llegar y Amado y Yolanda comenzaron a aislarse, pero nunca con esta seriedad.

Amado nunca se percató que los rumores le llegarían a Yolanda. Esas otras mujeres no eran su esposa y no era lo mismo.

Boberia.

¿Qué quiere decir Yolanda con un contrato matrimonial? ¿Quién le dio semejante idea? Aquí el abogado soy yo, decía Amado. Tanto habló entre dientes que Soledad levantó la cabeza y le preguntó qué acontecía.

Amado la miró y contestó, “Tengo que viajar a Santiago. Un asunto urgente”

La siguiente tarde se presentó en Santiago con dos maletas. Una llena de juguetes y otra con mantillas y manteles de hilo para Yolanda, la cual lo recibió como se recibe a un cartero- con buenos modales, pero distante. Sin ropa en las maletas, pensó que Yolanda le había conservado su cuarto y su ropero. ¡Pero qué equivocado estaba!. Acudió al tío Rogelio para que le prestara un pantalón y dos camisas. El tío Rogelio lo miró de arriba abajo y le comentó “el que juega con fuego se quema, sobrino”. Ya el pueblo entero sabía que Amado tenía otra mujer y un par de hijos con su apellido.

La dinámica de familia se volvió un poco inverosímil pero los hijos siguieron portándose bien. Yolanda fue cordial en público y silenciosa en privado. Y por privado no digo su cuarto, el cual le tomó a Amado un año más para entrar.

Amado decidió presentarse en el despacho de Santiago de la United Fruit Company con una propuesta de ampliar su campo en la Habana. Los jefes lo escucharon y le hicieron varias preguntas. En la tarde salieron a comer y a tomarse un par de cervezas y en la mesa el gerente de otra sucursal le insinuó que Habana sería su nuevo lugar de enganche, ya que Ciego de Ávila le quedaba muy cerca para tener amoríos.

Amado se dio cuenta entonces de que el asunto era muy serio.

No porque Yolanda lo supiera, no por los comentarios del tío Rogelio, ni las miradas infragantes en misa, o que sus hijos no le hablaban, sino porque el trabajo es sagrado. Miró a sus colegas y se levantó rápidamente de la mesa. Caminó cuatro cuerdas y paró para fumar un cigarrillo. Se sentía confundido, desolado y angustiado. Lo único que le venía a la mente eran las caderas de Soledad.

Soledad desnuda después del baño.

La sonrisa de Soledad al verlo entrar a la casa.

Soledad, Soledad, Soledad.

Yolanda por su lado tenía un documento formulado por el primo Juan Alberto, que era licenciado. En el se describía los pasos a tomar antes de que él pudiera contar con los beneficios de marido. ¡Nunca en su vida Amado se imaginó tan absurdo documento y con membrete de abogado de colmo!. “Ya está bueno Yolanda, que soy tu único marido” “Con esto me alejas más” le susurró Amado, porque sabía que un grito no le podía dar.

Al fin y al cabo, las presiones de la sociedad pudieron más con Amado que los recuerdos de Soledad.

Firmó el documento.

“La ciudadana Yolanda Cuza de Vargas, proveniente de Olguín y vecina de Santiago de Cuba, alerta al señor y licenciado Amado Roberto Vargas Mustelier que su condición conyugal está permitida mientras resida en su hogar de Santiago de forma permanente y bajo las condiciones de decoro de una unión Santa, Católica y Apostólica”.

El caso legal de Yolanda fue el primero en Santiago y el cuarto en la nación cubana. Mi mamá nos contaba que la escuela de Letras de la Universidad de la Habana había acudido a entrevistar a su madre varias veces.

¿Y entonces, qué pasó con Soledad?

Soledad esperó a Amado por varios años. Al fin y al cabo era joven y no había necesidad de angustiarse por un marido. El antiguo novio José se le asomó a la vida, pero seguía tan aburrido como siempre y ahora un tanto calvo. Soledad, llevó una vida tranquila y siguió trabajando en el despacho de Camagüey pero no de jefa. El jefe lo trajeron de Miami con un acento horrible en español. Más bien ella servía de intérprete porque nadie le podía comprender el español irlandés que hablaba. Se llamaba Sean pero se decía Chon. Se pasaba corrigiendo a la gente hasta que se le ocurrió que le dijeran lechón porque se parecía a Chon. De más está decir que no duró mucho en el puesto de lechón.

Soledad encontró una salida de Camagüey con una iglesia evangélica de Michigan que la auspició en los Estados Unidos antes de la época de Fidel. Lo que no supo mi abuelo, ni mi abuela, es que Soledad tuvo un hijo de Amado al cual llamó Humberto Jevin. Mi hermana mayor buscando en Ancestry.com lo encontró hace dos años. Tiene ahora 78 años y vive en Hialeah, Miami. Su madre Soledad murió a los 92 años, la misma edad de muerte de Amado. Nos cuenta Humberto que su madre tenía una foto en blanco y negro de un guapo hombre alto en guayabera con gomina en el pelo al cual ella llamaba Carlos Gardel.

La foto era de Amado en el faro de la Habana a los 25 años.

(fiction book, “48 Nombres” based loosely on a Cuban family legacy of betrayal, machismo and marianismo.)

Seventh Sister, Zero Wolf

By Rudolph Esparza

Para Linda - All ways and Always.

Tell me a story.

Yes, inquisitor—priest? Pedophile? I’ve seen your eyes hundreds of times, in dozens of different monsters—yes, I know our roles here. Just as you should know, these chains on my body will not save you if I tire of your drivel.

Cuentame una historia.

These were the words I asked my father, when I was a child, dawn of the world. I see you eyeing my skin, you’ve already violated me many times over with your gaze, but did you stop to wonder at its whiteness? *Un regalo de mi Apa*, among many; he taught me to form words out of letters, meaning out of words. A flame slayer by trade, but a storyteller in thought and mind. He loved my mother, loved her tall warrior’s body, loved her fighter’s spirit, even loved the brown of her skin, the brown you get from mixing rich chocolate with a little bit of milk. He was tolerant where most men were intolerant, his heart was pure, he never sought the warmth of my bed in the night, unlike most. If only his tolerance extended to drink; he might still be alive today.

Xinechmoluili se sasanilli.

These were the words I’d say to the Wolf, my Wolf, when our bodies touched beneath the light of the moon. He was many things—shifter, hunter, killer, beast, man—excuse me, those last two are one and the same—but he too had the song of words in his heart, he knew the sacred power of stringing them together in rhythms pleasing to the ear and soothing to the soul. Words to live, words to love; words to lie, words to kill. I learned to hate him and his words, I learned the only difference between the man and the beast is that one walked on two legs where the other walked upon four. The latter’s howls were more honest than the former’s words.

Yet when he lay dying in my arms, he was a man, and to this man I loved and loathed I said, “Tell me a story.”

Apa told me, there are only seven stories in this world. The Wolf laughed when I told him this, said to me, “If your Apa told you that, its no wonder you’re always asking for another story.” *Las historias de mi Apa y las historias de mi Lobo son lo mismo.* There is only one story, the story of men, written by men, for men, since the time when the gods squabbled over who should become the sun and usher in the next age of man. It’s all one story, all the same story, *his* story. I tire of history.

And what of her? Do not throw that name at me like it is a missile, inquisitor, you treat it as a brand upon a troublesome prisoner, to mark her for all of history: La Malinche. I call her Dona Marina. This is truth, I have no love for her, a sentiment she will return tenfold upon me when she learns of what has befallen the child. But I respect her name, one woman to another, in a world that punishes us for our very existence.

The child’s death is not the first I have borne, though this one’s blood is not upon my hands. I cannot say the same for the five *soldados* that ventured into the women’s pen last night. Tell your men to find safer diversions henceforth; I recommend the goat pen.

When they came, stinking like a pack of *ahuizotls* out of water, the sabers at their hips swinging safely free from the fleshy ones between their legs, they made for the youngest. Maybe they could smell her first woman's blood, only two nights old. I had done what I could for her, with the herbs I had sealed in the lining of my *cueitl*. She wouldn't tell me her name. She wouldn't tell me why she was here. Her pretty face was her only crime.

Three fell upon her howling like dogs upon meat as the other women scrambled back or looked away. The fourth man stumble-staggered towards me. I was already rolling onto my back, already spreading apart my legs as my lips spread apart in a smile, because men like it when a woman smiles, because it makes it easier on their minds and their cocks, as if they needed the ghost of an excuse. "A woman's smile disarms a man faster than a wolf's bite," Wolf used to tell me—

No, I say already too much about the Wolf.

The *soldado* grinned by the light of the candle he carried, breath reeking of rotten *octli* through gaps in black-edged teeth, and threw himself upon me, and as he began thrusting I drew the broken-off *tepoztopilli* head from behind my back and thrust back, into his neck, and carved, carved until the red grin in his throat grew larger than the black grin in his mouth, and his blood flowed like water upon my blouse.

He slumped, I pushed him off me and rose and the fifth man lunged out of the shadows to wrap his arms around me. I was slick with blood and sweat and my blouse tore in his hands as I twisted and sank the *tepoztopilli* head into his chest.

The other women began screaming—not a heart nor brain among them—and the three upon the girl turned and saw and began scrambling, a nest of limbs trying to stand up and draw up their trousers and draw their swords and curse me and call for help at once, and with their wasted time I bent down and drew the short sword from the fifth man's belt and drove it point first through the closest of the three, and drove him back and back until the point went through his back and he was pinned to the wall.

Hands grabbed my shoulders and slung me to the ground. This *soldado* was a prize pig, his belly smothered my breasts as his fat hands wrapped around my throat; his little worm was still hard, maybe he even liked it better this way, when they fought back. He reeked like something decaying on the jungle floor for half a moon. I rained blows upon his face and shoulders with fists and he paid no more attention than if they were drops of rain. A bolt of terror shot through me, making my nipples harden and my fingers splay. I forced three into the shape of a claw and darted into his face, into his eye, felt a warm jelly squeeze and expand and explode. He clutched his face and screamed higher than the young girl had screamed. I flattened my hand into a jaguar's paw, drove the knuckles into his throat, and his scream cut off.

The fifth was the youngest, barely more than a boy; he crouched, blubbering, in a corner, when I leveled his friend's sword at his throat. He dropped his sword belt and keys, clutched at the cross at his chest, begged me in your butchered language for mercy, for clemency, for forgiveness, for anything.

Now listen, inquisitor.

I am not a killer. Not by nature.

Once, in another life, I wanted to teach.

So I struck a blow above his temple, not hard enough to kill, but enough to cut off his cries. I used belt to bind his wrists. I bid the youngest to come close and to bring the head of the broken spear with her. I showed her how to hold it, by its broken stem, with both hands. I showed her where to aim the point above the breast. And I made sure that he was awake, eyes wide and

mouth forming screams he would never make, as she pushed the blade into his chest, over, and over, and over again.

You teach your boys young to lead with their cocks and take what they want without thought. Women should be taught young to respond accordingly.

With peace, with peace, pious inquisitor, I would hate for you to soil the silken undergarments upon your most pious rear.

I know what you wonder: why didn't the youngest do the same to me, when I came to visit her next?

Do not lie. I smelled her on your fingers from the moment you walked into this cell. Inquisitor. Priest. Pious monster.

Apa said there are only seven stories in the world.

That was one.

A Prayer to Yocahú – 1493

By Sandra Kei Chapman

The young girl's hammock swayed with her thrashing. The dream was back. *She stands in the sand with the others in her village, facing the creature appearing over the horizon. The only color she sees is white. The only sound she hears is the whipping of the wind against the water. The only feeling she has is fear, tightening itself around her throat. The closer the white creature gets to the shore, the louder the sounds of destruction. Suddenly, tentacles reach out from the white creature in the shape of pale men with vicious smiles. The young girl is momentarily distracted by the gestures of the pale men. In one hand they move around a caney, a protective statue of one of her gods. This gives the impression they mean no harm. In the other hand, they brandish a sword which they use to destroy her village. Moments before she is seized by them, she turns to look for her family. They stand firm in the soil, calling to her, reminding her that she is safe, loved, and remembered.*

Juracán was angrier than father when his fish net is snagged. This god had unleashed the worst hurricane ever. That is what **Cacique Agüeynaná** explained during the morning gathering as he assigned the day's tasks for the **yucayeque**, the village. Farming, fishing, home repairs, and canoe building, as well as repairs to the disturbed **bohíos**, conical homes, that surrounded the central plaza. Fallen trees ruined the mounds of **casabe** plants. During the storm, most of the villagers had taken shelter in caves, praying that the Cacique's home was protected. No doubt his **zemi's**, the stone, clay, wood, and gold statues of gods, would have watched over his home.

Standing by her grandmother, the girl was not sure where to steady her eyes. For this she suffered the occasional flick on the hand by her mother. It was hardly the young girl's fault. She was not fond of the job her mother and aunts were assigned. Squeezing the poisonous juice from the casabe gratings with the **metate** for the day's flat bread was hard and boring work. She allowed herself to daydream a little, recalling the story the elders sang the day before. It started out as the usual retelling of her people's migration from nearby islands to their fertile **Borinquén**. Canoes carried 100 people to Haiti, the rocky island to the east, where she and her people visited regularly. The story had just begun when suddenly, her favorite aunt took over the retelling, adding the flare she was known for. With occasional dance moves from the Harvest festival, and

sound effects she had perfected, her aunt brought to life canoe making.

The young girl snapped out of her daydream when she heard the young boys screaming nearby. Their task was to scare the birds from the ripened corn. She spotted and waved to her older sister, whose working group threaded cotton into a new **hamaca**. They had started the hammock that morning. It would be complete by the evening's story. As the sun beat down on the young girl's thick dark hair she refocused on her grandmother's song, thanking the elders for teaching them how to plant cassava in mounds to protect it from the sun so they could harvest the plant year round. Cassava, or yucca, sustained them so well it was celebrated during Harvest and religious festivals.

"What story is next?" grandmother asked the young girl, in an attempt to re-engage her.

"I would like to hear the story of our family parrot," the girl answered, hoping they would not laugh. She was interested in stories of the past, but liked parrots even more, especially the one her grandmother told about their domesticated parrot.

"I will tell your father's story, when he was a boy your size. He wanted a tamed **iguaca** and knew the method from watching the older boys acquire their parrots. One early February morning, before the gathering by the Cacique's house, your father took his father's tamed iguaca, walking off the **batey**, our courtyard, into the nearby forest. He was able to do this because the adults were too tired to hear him roaming the house. The ball game the adults played the night before was the cause of their tired bodies and loud snores.

The **alco**, the family dog, followed him. Your father found a tabonuco tree and climbed as high as he could. He placed the tamed parrot on a branch and waited on a nearby sturdy branch. The family parrot squawked for a wild parrot's attention. Your father did not have long to wait. A beautiful green bird was lured to the branch and began a duet with the family parrot. The wild parrot thought she found the perfect mate and your father was equally excited. He gripped the tree branch a few inches away from him with one hand, and prepared to seize the wild parrot with his other hand. Before he reached out for the green beauty, he had a name already picked out. Unfortunately, what your father did not know was that the family never used this particular

tamed parrot to capture wild ones. He was a jealous bird and wanted his captured mates to himself.

Just when your father had his prized bird in his hand, the family parrot pecked him in the ear and then on the one hand he used to grasp the sturdy branch. Your father reacted so quickly that he lost his grip and grabbed at the family parrot to stop his pecking. They both stumbled out of the tree and landed on the dog resting below.”

All the women began to laugh. Their sounds drowned out nearby noises, preventing them from hearing the strange men approaching from the coastal side until they were already passing the stoned edges of the courtyard. All work was temporarily suspended. The **nitainos**, the village’s most noble members, drew nearer to Cacique Agüeynaná as he exited his caney. The chief once shared that other villages were visited by strange men, but this was the first they entered the young girl’s village.

“Taino,” spoke one of the visitors, whose dark skin and hair resembled their relatives from Haiti.

“Peace in return to you and the white men. I am Cacique Agüeynaná. May we offer you **tabaco** or a meal. Come join me on these **duhos** built by our people for ceremonial sitting and conversing.”

With a bit of shyness the young man from Haiti spoke. “I have been given a new name by the white chief as I travel the large water to see their land, called Spain. I have also traveled with the white men for many journeys through our rocky islands. We have just left **Colba**. These men are searching for something at each island. Though they are gifted many foods, parrots, copper, and cotton by our people, they seem to leave saddened,” the Haitian replied.

At the mention of the word parrots and Colba, the most decorated white man spoke sternly. “Yes, tell them that Cuba was not successful. Tell them we have lovely trinkets for their gold. Tell them to bring us their gold.”

“Taino, taino,” Cacique Agüeynaná repeats, assuring his guest that his villagers are a good and

noble people, unlike the Island Caribs. “Have they visited Haiti?”

The young man lowered his head and informed Cacique that this rocky island has been given a new name by the white chief. It is to be known as “La Isla Española.”

Cacique Agüeynaná and the white chief continued their conversation, the young man translating the words spoken by the two. The white chief pointed often to the golden plates the Tainos use as ornaments on their bodies and clothing. Before long, several of the strongest villagers were summoned. They were to travel with the white men in their large ship in search of more gold.

“Why would anyone want those useless nuggets?” the young girl asked her mother.

Her mother looked around the village before replying, “I do not know little one. Hurry, walk with me. We must alert your brothers and other kin to stay clear of the coast. I fear they may be awed by the white sails of their large canoes and the white skin on the bodies of our visitors. If they are forced to leave us, they will return with new names we cannot understand.”

That night the young girl watched from behind a tree as the men of her village inserted sticks down their throats to rid them of the food in their bodies. She knew this meant they were preparing to commune with the zemi. ‘Would they pray to Yucajú, our lord of cassava and the sea, to ensure a good harvest and a safe journey back home? Or would they pray for guidance and protection from our dead ancestors?’ the young girl wondered to herself.

The young girl watched on as the men continued with their religious ritual. She grabbed a stick from a nearby tree and began to carve the faces of her family in the dirt. For some strange reason she felt a need to remember their faces.

Coatl

By Chelsea Hernandez

After a workout one afternoon during kickboxing fight camp, I was lying on the floor of the gym massaging my cramping left ankle when another gym member, Mailen, came over to talk to me. She asked me why I was doing this. She could never do something like this. Why would I put myself through this? I asked myself the same thing every day during my thirty minute jump rope warm up. I told her I had emotional shit to deal with and figured this would be a good way to unlearn some of it. I didn't tell her about the bargain I made with Santa Muerte for my father's life. I didn't tell anyone about it until months after my fight was over. I probably should have. I carried too many secrets through fight camp. It was a heavy load.

*

Beginner Recipe:

Drink licorice tea or milk thistle tea. Poppy seeds, pomegranates, and brazil nuts are all rich in selenium. Selenium is good for the liver. Naturally detoxing. Nourish the liver and you nourish the skin. Apple cider vinegar is also good. Two shots morning and night. Ignore the heart burn. It means it's working. You get used to it. The erasing from the inside. It will make things easier at school, you'll see.

*

I was seven the first time I thought I looked fat in my school photo.

*

I was eight when I cried in a fitting room for the first time. It was the last time I would go shopping with friends. Nothing at LimitedToo would fit my widening hips and athletic shoulders.

*

I was eight when I wore a size ten shoe and wasn't able to fit into my grandmother's wedding dress when playing dress up.

*

I was eight when one of my Swanson classmates had a “Me and My Doll” tea party for her birthday. We all had to bring our favorite doll, and wear our prettiest Sunday dresses and shiniest Mary Janes. With the help of our mothers, we decorated tea hats with faux flowers, beads, and ribbons before sitting down to cucumber sandwiches and blue kool aid that was served from a floral teapot. Little girls pretending to be young ladies. Looking around the table of dolls there were multiple Kirstens, a few Samanthas, and one Josefina.

I was five when my parents let me pick out my American Girl doll for my birthday. Back then we were still living in our cozy middle class home, on Erskine Circle in Omaha, and my sister and I still went to our progressive Montessori schools. No morphea and no Westside. I loved Josefina she spoke Spanish, had a cookbook filled with my abuela’s food, wore gold hoop earrings like my aunties, and she had a horse. I used to think she was the prettiest doll in the world, but in her red ruffle skirt and embroidered Mexican blouse she stood out among the blonde heads and porcelain faces of the other dolls at the tea party.

*

I was nine when my mother asked if I really needed that extra serving of rice.

*

I was nine when I began bleaching my skin. I didn't know it at the time. Didn't have any say or understand what it meant. My mother helped rub the prescribed morphea lotion into my skin after bathtime and before she gave me my handful of immunosuppressants each night. She'd help me into my pajamas and adjust my arm brace that pulled my left fingers down, forcing them to stretch all night long. Each week the straps would be tightened. It was sometimes hard to sleep at night. The ligaments in my hand would ache, my stomach would hurt from the strong

medicines, and my skin would itch and burn. But it's what the doctors prescribed and my mother was a diligent nurse. She was going to fix me whether I wanted to or not. In Westside my weight and my morphea were perceived as a reflection of her failure as a mother and there is no more competitive sport than motherhood.

*

I was ten when my mother tried to cajole me into walking around the neighborhood with her after dinner. Not for mother bonding time, but for fitness.

*

I was ten when I begged my parents for a Truly Me American Girl doll. My dad was confused. He wondered why we didn't just cut Josefina's bangs and get her some jeans if I wanted a doll that looked like me. My mother, the only one of my friends mother's who worked outside the home, had been at the parties and she understood. She always understood. She always tried to help. She knew kids were cruel. She was just trying to make me safe. To protect her miracle baby. My new doll came with bangs, overalls, and skin whiter than mine. I named her Jenny.

*

I was eleven when I wrote my mother a letter begging for help to lose weight. I slipped it underneath her door while she slept because I could not ask her in person. I was too ashamed to look her in the eye and admit the sin I'd committed of being overweight. I knew I had let her down. My weight made her look like a bad mother and I knew it. I shattered our curated image of perfection. She would return to this letter as proof later on that she was only helping, as any mother would, to help their daughter be happy. Because to be happy you must be loved and to be loved you must be pretty and to be pretty you must be thin.

*

I was eleven when I started going bi-weekly to 5:30 am pilates classes before school with my mother.

*

I was twelve when I was put on my first diet. She was helping. She knew how cruel Nebraska was to fat women. Ugly women. Undesirable women. Unworthy women. Women. Nebraska values. The good life. Nebraska nice.

*

I was twelve when my mother stopped touching me, mainly because I stopped letting anyone touch me. I was tired of being poked and prodded at by doctors, mothers, and therapists. Morphea is so rare, especially among children, that many people wanted to examine me like a reptile in a cage. I would lie on the cold examination table, torso exposed under bright lights surrounded by doctors, residents, interns, and med students, almost all men. I wanted to hide. To disappear. Erasing became a habit, and I learned to make new recipes on my own. To protect myself.

*

Intermediate Recipe:

For Daily use: Wash your face in Kojic Acid. It's all natural. It's from a mushroom. But keep it away from sunlight. Keep yourself away from sunlight. The mushroom is possibly carcinogenic, but it gets those stubborn spots. Rinse with rice water---it's a natural toner. You can apply slices of cold potatoes to your cheeks and any scarring for overnight therapy. Some essential oils are also very potent for hyperpigmentation. Just make sure to not get the frankincense in your eyes or on any plastic facial tools. The oils melt them. I know it stings, mija. I am sorry, but I want you to be safe.

Once a week: In a bowl blend honey, yogurt, cinnamon, lemon juice, turmeric, and baking soda. Apply to the face with a small spatula or hands. It'll burn, but you can handle it, you're strong mija, you'll survive. Let it sit for twenty minutes. Rinse with cold water. Your skin will be noticeably brighter. You can use charcoal, but only as a paste. Do this once a week and you'll be fair and lovely. Lovely and safe. Safe and invisible. This might be drying so make sure to use a strong moisturizer and as always, use sunscreen.

*

I was thirteen the first time I spent the summer at a crossfit and weightlifting camp, supposedly for athlete cross training. My mother and I had different ideas. I remember exactly how much I weighed.

*

I was thirteen the first time a crush called me Bigger and was immediately embarrassed of his words. Even he knew it was a sin to point out my failure.

*

I was thirteen when a girl at my school was hospitalized for anorexia. I admired her determination and punished myself for not being committed enough. Not having a strong enough will. Another way I failed my mother. Mom had the determination of my grandmother Jo Ann and Karen Carpenter.

*

I was fourteen when I started skipping lunch. Stopped eating in front of people.

*

I was fifteen when I made sure my class schedule didn't allow me a lunch.

*

I was fifteen when I sat in the school parking lot begging my mother to tell me I was pretty. To tell me I mattered. Begging her to compliment anything besides my face. You never call my beautiful. You never tell me I am pretty. She just looked away.

*

I've tried to erase my ancestors from my body and myself from the world. My mother always said don't cut your bangs, but she never said don't cut your off your nose. She said she'd help me

shave my legs when I was ready. How was I to know not to cut off my muscular calves with the soft curly hair? She taught me to pluck my eyebrows. How was I to know not to pluck out my own dark eyes? I cut and cut and cut. I peeled my grandmother's skin color out of my cells, and tried to cut my father's nose from my face.

*

I was nineteen when I sat in our Colorado vacation rental, during a thunderstorm, silently begging for my mother to tell me I didn't need the weight loss surgery we had planned for before I went back to college. Silently begging her to tell me I was beautiful. To tell me I was worthwhile. To tell me I had value. Tesoro. She only said oh honey. I went under anesthesia a month later. She paid for it out of pocket. She was helping. She was being supportive. She would return to the cost of the uninsured elective surgery as proof of her love.

*

I was nineteen when I manipulated a therapist into signing off that I wasn't insane to want a foreign object to be placed in my body, squeezing my stomach into submission. A job my mind was never able to accomplish. My mind was too weak. Or maybe my soul was too strong. Too strong to commit to the lie.

*

I was twenty when they started tightening the gastric band.

*

I was twenty when the band slipped while I was studying abroad. I vomited for three days until I could try to explain to the ER doctor in broken German what had happened.

*

I was twenty-one and back in the states when Dr. White said the LapBand would have to surgically be repositioned, but tightened the band anyway before I returned to college for my senior year.

*

I was twenty-one when I stopped eating. I'd go for three days on water alone. Nothing seems too extreme after a point. Especially when people tell you how pretty you look and men start opening doors for you.

*

I was twenty-one when a man told me he loved me for the first time. Told me. Wrote to me at length about his enduring love. But refused to commit to an exclusive relationship with me. He slept with a woman who was half my dress size.

*

I was twenty-one and I couldn't help, but love my eating disorder. People began to see me. People treated me better. I was something precious, valued, tesoro.

*

I was twenty-one when I started throwing up what looked like coffee grounds each night at midnight for two months straight.

*

I was twenty-one when the band slipped again and I was on a spring break cruise with my college roommates. I ate ice cubes for the week. I went to the ship's onboard ER. They gave me water via a child I.V. My veins had dried up. They didn't have the equipment to loosen the band.

*

I was twenty-one when I was flown home after spring break instead of returning to school.

*

I was twenty-one when I sat on the floor of the airport on a layover, telling my mother via phone that I would never let her near my one day children. She would never get the chance to help them like she helped me.

*

I was twenty-one when I sat on a plane throwing up from dehydration and the cinch gripping my stomach.

*

I was twenty-one when I was immediately rushed into emergency surgery after my plane landed in Nebraska. Another 24 hours and parts of my stomach would have died due to lack of blood flow from the gastric band. My father stood next to me and held my hand. I wouldn't let my mother touch me.

*

I was twenty-one when I was informed it wasn't coffee grounds. It was dried blood from internal bleeding in my esophagus and stomach lining. I'd been bleeding from the inside out for two months.

*

I was twenty-one when I left the hospital, saw myself in the mirror, and thought I was the prettiest I'd ever looked. My mother agreed. I couldn't sit up because of the stitches. Now, looking back at the photos it was the sickest I ever looked. My once thick curly hair was thin and flat from malnourishment. My once naturally flushed cheeks were pale from starvation. My mother let me borrow one of her evening dresses to take back with me to school for our senior formal. Just stay focused. Try not to gain it all back by graduation.

*

I was twenty-two when I graduated college and returned to Nebraska for a Master's in Teaching. Two months into the program, after I'd gained 53 lbs since spring break, and felt Nebraska closing in again, I tried to commit suicide.

*

Advanced Recipe: Go to Sephora. Don't listen to them. Read the labels yourself. Look for the magic words: Brightening, Dull skin, Vitamin C, Alpha Hydroxy, Arbutin, Glycolic Acid, Lactic Acid, Niacinamide, Glutathione, Hydroquinone. You may only be able to find high percentages and concentrations online or through international retailers. The FDA tries to deny us. The make-up artists will say you shouldn't mix them. They cause dryness, sun sensitivity, unstable chemical reactions, etc. Don't listen. You'll be fine. Do whatever it takes. Facials. Microdermabrasion. Laser treatments. Distract and redirect the dermatologist's questions. We'll do whatever it takes to fix this. Doctors lie, they don't understand. They don't understand the safety in being invisible.

*

I was twenty-two and just wanted to go to sleep and not wake up. To slip away. To disappear. To be erased. To not hurt anymore. To breathe easy. But my body refused to be erased no matter how much I tried.

*

I was twenty-two and it was lucky that I had left my pills in Lincoln, and was staying at my mother's house. I couldn't find them. I walked downstairs and found my mother sunning on her chaise lounge drinking a diet pop. I whispered to her I needed help. She called my therapist.

*

I was twenty-three going on twenty four when I found out my eating disorder had destroyed my hormones and my body so much that I might never bear children.

*

I was twenty-three when I quit my beloved job at Montessori because I could not witness other people's happiness, couldn't let go of a future I had dreamed of. Pretty, married, pregnant, worthy, valued, happy. Couldn't shed that Nebraska good life.

*

I was twenty-four when I started yoyo dieting again. Eating only three hard boiled eggs a day. Trying to figure out how to be a mother in another way. Trying to have worth, value, meaning. I lost thirty pounds. My tips and the suggestive comments increased at the bar I worked at.

*

I was twenty-five when I started another Master's program and was again eating less than 1000 calories a day.

*

I was twenty-five when my grandfather died and I joined a kick boxing gym.

*

I was twenty-five when my coach told me to grow the fuck up and take control of my food issues and that my mother was no longer controlling me and that if I wasn't changing it was because I didn't want to change. Stop throwing this temper tantrum about life and go eat something.

*

I was twenty-six when I entered fight camp, *change your goal and the weight will come off*, and had to tell a man my weight. I cried unable to look into Stanley's eyes after I texted him my weight from the bathroom. It took all of my strength not to throw up and weigh myself again.

*

I was twenty-six and in fight camp when I broke down crying in the gym because the weight wasn't coming off. Afraid I wouldn't make weight for the fight. Afraid it would be taken away

from me. Afraid everyone would know my sin. Everyone would know my weight. I hadn't learned how to shed the weight, my shame, my skin, or Nebraska.

*

I was twenty-six and in fight camp when I went to a reading at a local bookstore. The author said you either have a relationship with your ancestors or you don't. You either are recognizing them every day or you aren't. They live in your veins, they live in your face, they live in your thoughts, they live in your skin.

*

My grandmothers' spirits have visited me since I was a child, letting me know of every birth or death in the family, yelling at me when I forget myself or drift from my path. They are as present as the wind and as strongly felt as a tornado. I thought I had a strong relationship with my ancestors, but it wasn't until fight camp tore me apart I realized I had dishonored their greatest gift.

*

I was twenty-six when I had my first and last fight. The weight didn't come off. I was fighting for the wrong reasons.

*

I was twenty-six when I accepted the idea that maybe I wasn't a consolation prize because of my weight to a man. *You'll have to work harder to get a husband, because of your morphea, and your weight. He won't want to touch you.*

*

I was twenty-six when I let a man fuck me with the lights on. Not understanding my hesitation. Not understanding my eyes that avoided his as he ran his hands over my fleshy hips. He couldn't

understand. He just wanted to see me, all of me, all at once, because he wanted to be with me, all of me, all at once.

*

I was twenty-six when I had to accept that I would be the fattest bridesmaid and the only single bridesmaid in my best friend's wedding back in Nebraska. And when I realized that neither said anything about me.

*

I was twenty-six when my mother again tearfully apologized in a parking lot for what she had done. I'd had another panic attack at Williams Sonoma. I only get them when I am back in Nebraska. The plane lands and my throat constricts. I cannot breathe.

*

I was twenty-six when for the first time since I was ten my New Year's Resolution didn't include a weight goal.

*

I was twenty-six when I let go of a future that included Nebraska and its values. Husbands are not rewards for being a good person. And being a good person isn't reliant on the number on the scale.

*

I was twenty-six when I told my coach that I don't know how to lose weight without hating myself and that for the first time in my life I didn't hate myself.

*

I was twenty-six and I'd gained forty pounds in the year since joining the gym. Not what you expect you'll gain when you train five to six days a week for two to three hours each day. But, I

lost the crazy woman in my head that hates me. And I've lost the calculator. It is blissfully quiet in there now. No spinning numbers calculating a calorie, a worth, a value, a cost, a price, calculating a word to label what cannot be labeled. Tesoro.

*

I was twenty-six and I started to forget the weight I was in each of my childhood photos. Santa Muerte in her mercy and compassion peeled the skin from my bones and the numbers from my memory.

*

I am twenty-seven and I weigh the exact same as I did before my surgery, my heaviest weight, but I've never felt lighter.

*

Why kickboxing? My body is the gift my grandmothers left to protect me when they no longer were able to gather round my bed watching and worrying. My Ortiz eyebrows, Hernandez nose, ribs, and back, my Biggs calves, my Alvarez arms, my McGrew shoulders, my Alfrey chest, my Vega hips, my Kinnison high arched feet, all form the protective rebozo that wraps over my ribs and around my soul. I didn't need to erase them. I needed to erase other people's voices and scrub the rules from my brain. I needed to erase my own hate and to erase my fear of my own strength. In my most vulnerable moments my body scaled over defending the gentle sides of my young heart, protectively filling in the empty spaces around my organs, and defensively coiling around itself. You can't be fighting an opponent and yourself in the ring, and expect to win. You won't. You can't hate something into creation. It doesn't work that way. I had to call all the parts of my body home. A snake must shed its skin to survive.

Wanting More

By Keishla Rivera-Lopez

Gina woke her younger sisters a quarter to five and they distributed the tasks of the day equally to lessen the load on their mother: cooking breakfast for Papi who was off to the finca before the hard sun settled in, sweeping and mopping the floors, cleaning the kitchen, washing laundry by hand and then hanging it to dry. The tropical sun would dry the clothes before lunchtime. The sun in Lares was reliable that way. It fed the coffee beans the nutrients to grow and it dried the González family's linens and clothes every day. When the sisters were almost finished with their tasks, their brothers would rise, and they had to make a second batch of breakfast and café. This is when they ate, too. The domestic labor fueled their appetite and finally gave them a bit of a break. Only when they were done with chores, were they allowed to enjoy the rest of their day. The twin boys, Javier and Gabriel, would go on their bikes to the small-town square to buy ice cream and drool over the middle-class girls shopping with their mothers. Though the twins were only fourteen, they were allowed to roam aimlessly as long as they had part-time jobs. They secured work a few days a week at a mechanic shop and ran around when they weren't there. Her sisters, Julia, sixteen, and Lola, thirteen, hung out in the patio soaking up the sun gossiping until it was time to help with lunch and dinner preparations. Gina usually participated, but this summer was different. Gina was more pensive and quieter.

Gina was the eldest and just shy of reaching eighteen years old. She was attending The University of Puerto Rico in the fall. Initially, she brushed off her teacher's comments about how bright she was, but she decided she was going to determine what her life would look like. Gina figured out that a college education meant job security, and that all the jobs she could get that paid well were far away from her campo town. She would need to go San Juan or los Estado Unidos. The thought of either scared her. Gina wanted to get through school first and then make her decision. No one in her family knew she was going to college. She knew her parents would stress about the money and losing out on two hands in the kitchen and the farm during harvest season. If she could make enough money to send some home, she thought, then they shouldn't be concerned.

On the patio Gina and her sisters drank passion fruit juice and ate empanadillas. The cows moored while the roosters croaked in the distance. The day's laundry was hanging on the clothesline. The clothes dripped water onto the earth in droplets that compared to the sweat beads on the girls' necks. There was no air-conditioning in their community. This was the mountainous region. In the campo you anticipated cool nights. This was nature's way of cooling you down and your Papi never let you forget it. As a father he provided what his family needed, nothing less and nothing more. And, air conditioning wasn't a need. It was un privilegio.

"Ay, it's so hot," moaned Lola.

"You'll get used to it nena. Drink a lot of water and try to stay out of the sun during the mid-afternoon heat. That's when the sun is at its strongest," Julia added.

"Ugh, I don't know why Papi makes money just to save it. He has to spend it, too. And, I think we can use an ac, right Gina? Can you talk to him?" pleaded Lola.

Gina was staring into the distance. The campo almost looked picturesque. Gina joined her thumbs and index fingers in a square and closed one eye. She looked through the box and clicked her tongue as if taking a picture. This place would make a perfect postcard: somewhere pretty you visit and leave, but don't stay.

"Hermanas, I decided I'm going to go la UP. I don't know what I'll be yet, but I know I can't stay here. This town is too small. And, besides what do I have to look forward to here? To get married and have babies? Weekends walking in the small-town square eating ice cream. Is that all? There should be more to life. I should be able to think about what I want and what I like to do," Gina sighed.

"That's not the answer I was expecting. All I want is an ac in the house," snickered Lola.

"Whoa. Gina are you sure you thought about this at all? I mean you don't even know what you want. You just said that. Plus, we're comfortable here. We don't have a hard life. We have beautiful views, plenty of land, and we have our family," added Julia.

"But, it's not the life I desire. That's what Mami and Papi want for us. I want to make my own decisions. I don't want to start a family with the next jibaro who walks through here solely because I'm a señorita. I want to find a man I love. More importantly, I want to find who I am and love myself first. I owe it to myself to take a journey, to try, to fail, and keep trying. Our brothers run around doing God knows what and Mami and Papi don't ask them to get serious about their lives. And, you know what? Mine is just starting," Gina said in a somber tone.

"Ok, I think I'm getting it a little. So, you're going to the uni, then, right? Find yourself a good job in the urban district away from the campo. You don't want to be a campesina?" Julia asked confused.

"Well... to be honest I don't think I'll stay in Puerto Rico. I'll be back someday. I have a plan though. I'll get my college degree here and I'll have to get a good job in the U.S. and after some time I'll see what else I want to do. Just know I love you two and I'll do anything for you. Please understand all of this is so I can define my own life," Gina said wholeheartedly.

"I like the sound of that. Maybe, I should think about what I want to be when I grow up," Lola smiled. "I'm going to get a refill inside."

"You should. Don't ever feel like you have to be a housewife just because Mami is one. Or, that you have to rush and get married. Find out what you want out of life and go after it," Gina advised before she entered the house.

"I hear you. If you need to do it, then I think you should it."

"Thank you, Julia. That means a lot."

At that moment, her mother danced onto the patio holding her portable radio. A salsa romántica was on and it had an energetic affect. It made you want to sing, dance, and love. "So, why does Julia support you Gina? What is going on here? Can you please inform me of your plans?" her mother asked with a puzzled look on her face.

"Well, I don't want to bore you with the details, but I'm going to enroll at the university this fall semester. I haven't figured out what career I want, but I will soon. I just need to read and see more outside of this small rural town... Haven't you ever thought 'is there more than just this'?"

"Gina, sweetheart, of course I have thought about life in grand ways. You see, I am a simple woman who has a simple life. When I was a little girl, I dreamed about being a writer and then an actress. But I never pursued those things. I wasn't allowed. So, I made the best batch of lemonade with the lemons I found. I love your father dearly. I love you kids. I love this land, the sun, and I write and read every night. I gave that to myself. I didn't need to be famous or published to be a writer. I still have passions. Both of you should. But, my darling, if you desire

to learn, do it. Don't waste your time. Find your passion and go after it. Your father will be unhappy if you quit on us. Just make sure your chores are done every morning. The lady has to maintain the home after all," her mother said tenderly.

"Yes, of course Mami," Gina obeyed.

"Uhm, Mami you write? Can you show me? That is really cool. I had no idea you have hobbies," Julia exclaimed.

"I'll show the both of you."

Gina's mother went inside to fetch her journal and folder with loose sheets containing words in an organized and scribbled manner. When she returned, she looked at Gina and said, "How are you going to get to campus every day?"

"Don't worry, Mami. I will."

Releyendo a Julia de Burgos en la época de Trump y “La Promesa”

By **Victorio Reyes Asili**

En la antología pionera *Esta Puente, Mi Espalda: Voces De Mujeres Tercermundistas En Los Estados Unidos* editores Cherrie Moraga y Gloria Anzaldúa afirmaron que querían dar un foro a los “escritos de las mujeres de color que no quieren nada menos que una revolución en las manos de las mujeres” (Moraga and Anzaldúa xxii-xxvi). Tal llamada nos devuelve a la obra de la poeta Julia de Burgos. Sus dos poemas más famosos “Rio Grande de Loiza” y “A Julia de Burgos” son excelentes ejemplos de una “revolución” en “manos de las mujeres”. Ahora que Puerto Rico se encuentra en el precipicio de un cambio drástico, mantenido como rehén por una política conocida como “La Promesa”, el feminismo revolucionario puede ser necesario para guiarnos, más que nunca. Además, a medida que los latinos se enfrentan a la era de Donald Trump, un momento en que las personas Latinx tienen que irse bajo la sombra de los posibles muros fronterizos y el espectro de deportaciones masivas, el feminismo latino puede ser llamado a inspirarnos mientras tratamos de negociar los tiempos difíciles que se avecinan. Los puertorriqueños en particular han tenido que soportar los insultos de este presidente, ya sea que esté tirando toallas de papel como si nuestras luchas hubieran sido una broma o que dijera que hemos malgastado los fondos federales asignados a la isla para el alivio de desastres. Agregando insulto a la lesión, se proclama a sí mismo como “¡lo mejor que le ha pasado a Puerto Rico!” Para sobrevivir a esta presidencia, los puertorriqueños y demás latinos en necesitarán fuentes de inspiración: entra a la poesía feminista de Julia de Burgos. Una relectura de los dos poemas más famosos de Julia de Burgos, en el espíritu de la llamada de Moraga y Anzaldúa, puede ayudarnos a desarrollar la resistencia que el pueblo latino tendrá que manifestar para afirmar nuestros derechos humanos que están ahora bajo una aguda e inmensa amenaza.

¿Por qué de Burgos? Sencillo. Ella se adelantó a de su tiempo. Sus dos poemas, escritos en la década de 1930, demuestran, aun hoy, un feminismo matizado y lleno de garganta, que no sólo afronta el patriarcado y el sexismo, sino que también aboga por la liberación de su pueblo. Los latinos siempre han tenido que luchar, sin embargo, la situación política actual presenta desafíos potencialmente nuevos para enfrentar, el tipo de desafíos que requerirá un pensamiento avanzado. La previsión que encontramos en la poesía de Burgos puede permitirnos alistarse a la poesía del pasado para ser nuestra guía para el futuro.

En su poema “Poema por una muerte que podría ser mía”, Julia escribió estas dos líneas de poesía desgarradoras: “Yo no quiero dejarte desnudo a la intemperie/De un planeta gastado, exprimido y sin fuerzas...” (de Burgos 510). Supongo que Julia estaba cuidándonos a través de estas líneas, mirando por la gente que vendría a su trabajo, sabiendo que necesitaríamos el amparo desde un planeta frío e implacable. Tal vez nos preveía enfrentarnos a una presidencia fascista y una hostil adquisición financiera de nuestra isla, tal vez sabía que sus palabras podían aportar consuelo en estas circunstancias difíciles.

Considerando su poema autodirigido “A Julia de Burgos”, como primer ejemplo del enfrentamiento a un mundo hostil, encontramos a Julia criticándose a sí misma: “Tu eres muñeca fría de mentira social.../Tú, querida cortesana de las hipocresías .../Eres como tu mundo, egoísta

...” (de Burgos 2). Ya había leído estas líneas decenas de veces, pero daba por sentado que debían haber sido escritas hacia el final de su vida, a principios de los años cincuenta. Pero después de leer la introducción de Jack Agüeros a *Una canción de la simple verdad*, se hizo evidente que estas líneas de Julia, llenas de auto crítica, fueron escritas en los años treinta (de Burgos xv). Es asombroso pensar que estas líneas tan provocativas de la poesía feminista radical, preceden a *El sueño de un lenguaje común* de Adrienne Rich por casi cuatro décadas y fueron escritas casi medio siglo antes de *Esta Puente, Mi Espalda*. Además, es instructivo que una feminista tan radical, adelantada a su tiempo, provenga de una nación, Puerto Rico, famosa por su machismo, heredada directamente del legado del paternalismo español. Pero entonces tal vez esas palabras radicales tuvieron que nacer de una tremenda opresión. Consideremos las imágenes de las fuerzas que se imponen a la mujer dentro de este poema: “Tú eres dama de casera, resignada, sumisa/Atada a los prejuicios de los hombres...Tú no mandas a ti misma no mandas, sino a ti todos te mandan.” La condena de Julia a sí misma es claramente una condena de las circunstancias impuesta por una sociedad patriarcal. Lo que es aún más convincente es cómo ella yuxtapone su ‘yo’ feminista, liberado, contra la imagen superpuesta de ella, predefinida por un mundo sexista. De Burgos utiliza dos palabras sencillas para crear esta yuxtaposición: “yo no”. Ella repite estas dos palabras en las estrofas 4-9, separando su voz sumisa de su voz más poderosa. Estas dos palabras sencillas actúan como un pivote, desplazando al lector, sutil y vigorosamente, hacia esa identidad más segura y orgullosa (de Burgos 2-4).

Podemos leer estas palabras casi como un estribillo agradable, como un amén compartido entre amigos. A la misma vez debemos imaginar el impacto de estas palabras y ‘la reacción a ellas’ en Puerto Rico en 1938. Para la mayoría de nosotros, en 2017, las nociones de liberación feminista no son nuevas. Si bien podemos apreciar las declaraciones de Burgos, ya que somos muy conscientes de cómo la estratificación de los papeles de género todavía impregna nuestras vidas, vivimos en un mundo donde es posible encontrar comunidad con otras personas que tienen una mentalidad similar: un mundo donde podemos tener consuelo en relaciones que desafían el paradigma dominante, al mismo tiempo que los marcos patriarcales globales todavía persisten. De todas maneras, en 1938 estas dos palabras “yo no” no son casualmente ofertadas.

Para una mujer que no tiene palabras, estas palabras son declaraciones que ponen en peligro la vida, pero parece que de Burgos no tenía miedo. Como ella nos informa, es una “Rocinante corriendo desbocada” que no debe “nada a nadie”. Ella recluta este *alter ego* para derrotar a la versión “sumisa” de sí misma, a quien promete dedicarse a un “duelo a muerte que se acerca fatal”. Sin embargo ella no promueve este duelo sólo para liberarse de las cadenas de la opresión sexista, sino que lo hace para vengar un legado de “injusticias quemadas”. Aquí se involucra en un pivote final importante, que encarna el llamado a la revolución “en las manos de las mujeres”. Su batalla es “contra todo lo injusto y lo inhumano”. Aquí ella deja muy claro que está comprometida en una batalla de tres frentes: su lucha es contra su “yo sumiso”, contra el sexismo y contra la injusticia social, un batalla de la que sale victoriosa con “la antorcha en su mano” (de Burgos 2-4).

La pasión de Julia resultó que fuera aclamada por su trabajo, aunque sus poemas tuvieran pocos, o ningún, pares ideológicos. Como señala Agüeros, a menudo se le conoce como el poeta más grande de Puerto Rico. Pablo Neruda, el gran poeta chileno, tomó esa afirmación un paso más allá cuando dijo que el llamado de Julia pasaría a ser la mejor poeta de las Américas (de Burgos xix). *Sabes, o sea TODAS las Américas. Eso es todo.*

A pesar de la aclamación que recibió como escritora, no existía entonces una verdadera comunidad para una mujer que desafió con vehemencia y elocuencia los principios del

esencialismo de género y Patriarcado como lo hizo Julia. Tales palabras provocativas debían de ser solitarias. Palabras solitarias que buscan una casa, buscan de apoyo.

“Río Grande de Loiza”, el poema más famoso de Julia, se basa en el gran río que corre junto al municipio de Loiza, una de las primeras comunidades de esclavos libres en el Nuevo Mundo, posiblemente la primera. Muy cerca está la ciudad de Río Grande, lugar de nacimiento de mi abuelo. Me imagino a Burgos nadando en este río, y me imagino a mi abuelo nadando allí también, tal vez incluso el mismo día. Esto es lo que hace la poesía de Burgos, le trae a lugares conocidos e imaginados.

En el poema “Río Grande”, Julia de Burgos echa un vistazo a su feminismo sexo-positivo en la primera línea de la segunda estrofa cuando escribe: “Enróscate en mis labios y deja que te beba” (8). Cuando pensamos en de Burgos-la feminista radical, pre-liberacion sexual, antes de Pussy Riot - sabemos que ella dice al Río Grande, el hombre que ella ama: Déjame darle una mamada, río querido. Casi ochenta años antes de “La partición” de Beyoncé, cuando Jay-Z famosa “Monica Lewinskies” en todo el vestido de Beyoncé, Julia de Burgos no era tímida en el uso de imágenes abiertamente sexuales en sus poemas (Beyoncé).

Por supuesto, este poema no es simplemente un poema sobre el derecho de una mujer a no tener remordimientos sobre sus deseos sexuales. Este poema provocativo es, en última instancia, un poema sobre el deseo de la revolución. El río simboliza la patria, una patria con una identidad mestiza: “desnuda carne blanca que se te vuelve negra”. El río lleno de esta identidad mestiza representa la historia racializada de su patria, Puerto Rico. Conectando patria y mestizaje, de Burgos también ayuda a volver a escribir la historia latina en una historia que es más reflexiva de la mezcla racial que creó el pueblo puertorriqueño. Sin embargo, el objetivo de Burgos no es simplemente reescribir la historia sino también apuntar hacia un futuro diferente. Ella toca este deseo en la estrofa final del poema:

Río Grande de Loiza! .. Río grande. Llanto grande.

El mas grande de todos nuestros llantos isleños,

Si no fuera mas grande que la venta

Por los ojos del alma para mi pueblo del esclavo. (de Burgos 10)

En este punto de partida del foco inicial del poema, la conexión entre el río y el pueblo, al dolor social más grande de su isla, de Burgos vocaliza los afectos de los siglos de opresión colonial. También revela su anhelo por algo más, una conciencia revolucionaria. Y en su viaje a la grandeza poética, de Burgos desafía el mito de que los mensajes políticos, debieran ser ocultos, o borrosos en la poesía. Sus poemas están llenos no sólo de discursos feministas radicales, sino también de comentarios sociales sobre el estatus de Puerto Rico y la identidad puertorriqueña.

Los últimos momentos de la vida de Julia de Burgos fueron solitarios; sus primeros momentos en la muerte lo fueron también. Y así, *hubo* una penalización para una mujer que se adelantó a su tiempo. Ella no fue asesinada por algún terrible ataque, ni apedreada hasta la muerte. No, simplemente la dejaron sola. Una luz resplandeciente dejó de arder sola, desacompañada; como muchas de las ideas evocadas en sus poemas: solitaria. La poeta más famoso de Puerto Rico, murió en una calle de Harlem y no fue identificada, enterrado en una caja de pino, y se le asignó una tumba sin marcar, finalmente, su cuerpo fue encontrado, exhumado, y volvió a Puerto Rico. ¿Qué sucede cuando una poeta feminista radical, se atreve a desafiar la norma, adelantándose a su tiempo, y se atreve a enfrentar una terrible potencia colonial? Ella muere sola. El amor que ella envió al mundo, a todos nosotros, no correspondido.

¿Cómo puede vengarse semejante injusticia? Solo hay una manera: usar las palabras de ella como estaban destinadas, como armas contra las fuerzas de la injusticia.

Mientras el pueblo puertorriqueño continúa luchando contra “La Promesa” e insiste en que Puerto Rico no se venda, recordamos la invocación de Julia de “Llanto grande. El más grande de todos nuestros llantos isleños.” (10). Y cuando escuchamos gritos de “¡construir un muro!” recordamos las “cenizas de injusticias quemadas” que Julia habló de. (4). Y cuando amenazan con quitarles el cuidado de la salud, específicamente el acceso de las mujeres y las niñas a la anticoncepción y el aborto, recordaremos las advertencias de Julia de estar “atada a los prejuicios de los hombres” y vamos a alistar su espíritu de oposición para permitir “sólo” nuestros corazones para “mandar” (2-4). En última instancia, es nuestro deber recordar a Julia, porque cuando lo hacemos, encontramos una parte que falta de nosotros mismos. Y yo diría que nuestra gente escuchó las lecciones de Julia en nuestro mayor momento de necesidad. Cuando un hombre, el gobernador de Puerto Rico, denigró a las mujeres, los homosexuales y nuestros muertos, el pueblo puertorriqueño se levantó en protesta. Estoy seguro de que Julia estaba allí en las calles de Puerto Rico, en medio de su gente, “con la tea en la mano,” (4), demostrando a todos nosotros la imagen de la “revolución en manos de las mujeres” (Moraga and Anzaldúa xxii-xxvi).

Works Cited

- Beyoncé, and Jay-Z. "Partition." *Beyoncé*, New York City, 25 Feb. 2014.
- de Burgos, Julia, and Jack Agüeros. *Song of the Simple Truth: the Complete Poems*. Curbstone Press, 1997.
- Moraga, Cherrie, and Gloria Anzaldúa. *This Bridge Called My Back Writings by Radical Women of Color*. KITCHEN TABLE: Women of Color Press, 1983.

Scholarly Articles

Destabilizing Structures Of Power: BDSM, The Law, & Race

By **Melissa B. Herrera****

Table of Contents

- I. An Introduction to BDSM: Historical Underpinnings, The Law, & Race
- II. Criminalization and Social Control of BDSM at Large
 - A. The Harm Principle
 - B. BDSM Stereotypes Versus Reality
- III. Constitutionally Protected Right to Privacy
 - A. A Brief Exegesis of Relevant Case Law
 - B. The Need for Equitable and Nuanced Legal Recourse
- IV. A Critical Race Theory Approach to the Study of BDSM
 - A. Intersecting Identities—A Summary of the Predominant Research and a Call to Action
 - B. BDSM Spaces For People Of Color & “Race Play”
 - i. Comparison of BDSM-POC Spaces: Kinky People of Color Bay Area & Black Kink Bay Area
 - ii. Race Play: Subverting Power
- V. Conclusion

**The author received her Juris Doctorate from the University of California, Hastings College of the Law in 2019 and is a member of the California State Bar. She also holds a B.A. in Political Science and Gender and Women’s Studies from the University of California, Berkeley. The author is interested in adding to the existing bodies of knowledge in the areas of feminist jurisprudence, gender and sexuality, as well as critical race studies. All opinions expressed in this article are her own.

I. An Introduction to BDSM: Historical Underpinnings, The Law, & Race

Bondage,^{*1} domination (or discipline),^{*2} sadism,^{*3} and masochism^{*4} are all unconventional erotic and sexual practices that together are commonly referred to as BDSM.⁵ While BDSM is often clustered together with other non-normative sexual behavior, like “kink” and “fetishes,” BDSM is its own category—although, there are some similarities in practices.⁶ The predominant characteristic of BDSM is the consensual exchange of power often involving consensual violence (e.g. hitting, slapping, flogging, spanking), or in other words, a bargained for exchange between consenting adults—pain for pleasure.⁷ In popular culture, BDSM is imagined to mirror the popular Rihanna song titled “S&M”—“sticks and stones may break my bones but chains and whips excite me.”⁸

From a legal perspective, there is no federal law or state statute that explicitly criminalizes BDSM per se.⁹ However, certain practices are punishable by law under various statutory provisions, such as assault and battery.¹⁰ In most states, consent is not a defense to criminal

¹ Bondage is the act of “restraining someone in a manner that restricts their movements or their freedom to resist.” DAMA DENOCHE, *THE ABC’S OF BDSM* (Crystal Bright ed., Phaze Books 2012) (ebook). “In most cases the dominant partner is restraining the submissive using ropes, handcuffs, velcro, specialty hooks, clasps, or simply a belt.” Sophie Saint Thomas, *A Very Sexy Beginner’s Guide to BDSM Words*, GQ, (Oct. 25, 2017), <https://www.gq.com/story/bdsm-a-to-z>.

² The “D” in BDSM stands for either dominance or discipline. When referencing a “B/D” relationship, the “B” stands for bondage and the “D” stands for discipline. Alternatively, when referring to a “D/S” relationship, the “D” represents dominance, and the “S” submission. In a D/S relationship, one person is a “Dom” and the other person plays the role of a “sub” (submissive).

³ Sadism is defined as “the tendency to derive pleasure, especially sexual gratification from inflicting pain, suffering, or humiliation on others.” *Sadism*, OXFORD DICTIONARY (2019).

⁴ Masochism is “usually [defined and] understood as the desire to abdicate control in exchange for sensation—pleasure, pain, or a combination thereof.” AMBER JAMILLA MUSSER, *SENSATIONAL FLESH: RACE, POWER, AND MASOCHISM*, (N.Y.U. Press, 2014) (ebook).

⁵ See Nat Townsen, *The Hidden Language of Kinksters*, VICE, (May 12, 2014), https://www.vice.com/en_us/article/3b7ap9/the-hidden-language-of-kinksters (for a more extensive glossary of BDSM terminology).

⁶ For the purposes of clarity and consistency with the literature, the terms “kink” and BDSM are used interchangeably. However, it should be noted that BDSM is characterized by power dominance and submission and is considered by practitioners to be a “consensual exchange of power.” MARGOT WEISS, *TECHNIQUES OF PLEASURE: BDSM & THE CIRCUITS OF SEXUALITY XII-IX* (DUKE UNIVERSITY PRESS: DURHAM & LONDON 2011). While kink is defined more broadly as any unconventional erotic or sexual behavior (e.g. becoming aroused at the smell of your partners sweat). See THE NOOKY BOX, *What’s the Difference? Kink v. Fetishes*, (last visited Apr. 30, 2019), <https://thenookybox.com/blog/whats-difference-kink-vs-fetishes/>. Kink and BDSM are not always collapsed into the same category, with kink being the umbrella term. Just as there are BDSM communities, individuals also organize themselves into various other kink communities and fetish communities (e.g. an interest in which the fetishist needs their specific fetish, like wearing leather for instance or touching manicured feet, for sexual fulfillment). *Id.* While all three may have racialized differences, the author focuses strictly on BDSM because at the core of BDSM practices is an explicit negotiation of power and submission. Moreover, BDSM is implicitly prohibited under criminal law, the same cannot be said of every kink and fetish.

⁷ WEISS, *supra* note 6; see also JILL D. WEINBERG, *CONSENSUAL VIOLENCE: SEX, SPORTS, AND THE POLITICS OF INJURY* 24 (UC Press, 2016).

⁸ RIHANNA, S&M (Def. Jam 2011).

⁹ See *U.S. v. Marcus*, 560 U.S. 258 (2010) (Defendant, who was engaged in BDSM relationships with several women, was charged and convicted with violating the sex trafficking and forced labor provisions of the Trafficking Victims Protection Act (TVPA)).

¹⁰ Author recognizes that not all BDSM involves injury. This article specifically examines BDSM practices which can be criminalized due to injury and the implications of this on personal liberty and autonomy.

battery. Although consent may be used as a defense in a civil case where an alleged victim knowingly and voluntarily engages in an activity that may foreseeably result in harm, the victim assumes a level of risk that may defeat a claim of battery.¹¹ And yet, despite the potential exposure to criminal or civil penalties, everyday individuals and communities of practitioners engage in consensual violence for purposes of erotic and sensual pleasure.

BDSM is not a new advent and the history of some BDSM practices date back several centuries.¹² For example, sadomasochism dates back to the seventeenth century and emerged in European brothels.¹³ Later, “[e]ighteenth century gothic novels featured whipping scenes, including books written by Marquis de Sade and Leopold von Sacher-Masoch, whose names came to inspire the terms sadism and masochism.”¹⁴ Forward, in the 19th century, psychiatrist Richard von Krafft-Ebing’s publication of *Psychopathia Sexualis, Eine Klinisch-Forensische* (Sexual Psychopathy: A Clinical-Forensic Study) medicalized and pathologized sexual “deviance,” and more specifically what we know today as BDSM, by identifying sadism and masochism as psychiatric disorders.¹⁵ This foundational “text was used as a reference guide for psychiatrists, medical doctors, and judges adjudicating criminal proceedings” and put forth the

¹¹ In California, consent is not a defense to criminal assault or battery. See CAL. PEN. CODE § 242; see also *People v. Samuels*, 58 Cal. Rptr. 439 (Cal. App. 1967) (Defendant was depicted in a film engaging in a consensual BDSM scene. He was subsequently convicted of assault. The Court held that even if the beating was consensual, the conduct still violates the law (i.e. consent is not a defense)); *California v. Febrissy*, 2006 WL 2006161* (Cal. App. Jul. 19, 2006) (the court recognized that there was very little authority on whether consent is a defense to battery and decided not to rule on the issue either way because “even if [it] were to hold that a victim can consent to a beating. . . any error would be harmless beyond a reasonable doubt” under the circumstances of the case).

New Jersey is the only state that allows for consent as a defense to simple assault. See N.J. STAT. ANN. § 2C:12-1 (West 2017). Vermont and Nebraska allow for consent to be a mitigating factor in sentencing and or reduce the offense to a misdemeanor if the assault was “committed in a fight or scuffle entered into by mutual consent.” See VT. STAT. ANN. tit. 13 § 1023; NEB. REV. STAT. ANN. § 28-310 (West 2019).

As noted above, consent may be a defense in a battery claim in a civil case. For example, a boxer who delivers the winning punch in a boxing match is not liable to the other fighter because getting hit is an inherent risk of boxing—a risk which both boxers are aware of by virtue of the nature of the sport itself and both boxers consent to assume this risk before stepping into the ring to fight. In this article, I do not discuss these parallels in depth. See JILL D. WEINBERG, *SENSUAL VIOLENCE: SEX, SPORTS, AND THE POLITICS OF INJURY* 24 (UC Press, 2016) (for an in-depth comparison on combat sports and BDSM).

¹² See generally, WEINBERG, *supra* note 7, 24-26 (In chapter 2, ‘From Acts to Legitimacy: The Path of Social Decriminalization,’ Weinberg traces both the history of the BDSM community and that of Mixed Martial Arts (MMA), both are activities that involve consensual violence and share similar histories in their rule making and community building. MMA was able to gain legitimacy because the consensual violence is for sport).

¹³ WEINBERG, *supra* note 7, at 24-25.

¹⁴ *Id.* at 24-25 (also, in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, flagellation—a common BDSM practice—appeared in medical journals as “an effective remedy for erectile dysfunction and a female’s lower libido”). Marquis de Sade was a “French nobleman known for his perverse sexual preferences and erotic writings that gave rise to the term sadism.” Maurice Nadeau, *Marquis de Sade: French Author*, ENCYCLOPEDIA BRITANNICA, (last updated Nov. 28, 2018), <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Marquis-de-Sade>.

Leopold von Sacher-Masoch was an Austrian author “who wrote extensively about the satisfaction he gained by being beaten and subjugated.” The Editors of Encyclopedia Britannica, *Masochism: Psychosexual Disorder*, ENCYCLOPEDIA BRITANNICA, (last updated Jan. 8, 2014), <https://www.britannica.com/topic/masochism#ref81361>.

¹⁵ WEINBERG, *supra* note 7, at 25 (*Psychopathia Sexualis, Eine Klinisch-Forensische* (Sexual Psychopathy: A Clinical-Forensic Study) was published in 1886).

narrative that BDSM practices were both problematic and individualized.¹⁶ Even today, according to the DSM-5, sexual masochism and sexual sadism are still diagnosable as psychiatric disorders.¹⁷ However, these behaviors are only diagnosable if they cause “clinically significant distress or impairment in social, occupational, or other important areas of functioning.”¹⁸ Through the passage of time and industrialization, BDSM practitioners have formed communities and organizations with established codes of conduct.¹⁹ The way in which BDSM communities form and organize continues to evolve with technological advances, such as the advent of the internet—which has allowed groups to organize as a community and disseminate their rule practices more efficiently.²⁰

The BDSM community is referred to as “the scene,” which is “a network of BDSM-oriented people, organizations, meeting places, dungeons, web-pages, e-mail lists, conferences, and so forth.”²¹ Practitioners meet at clubs, also known as dungeons or play spaces, these are locations where different “scenes” are negotiated.²² It is essential to note the difference between “the scene” and “a scene.” The scene refers to the community whereas “a scene” refers to a particular BDSM encounter. “BDSM practices are often called *play*, where play refers to any particular BDSM scene (“Jon and I played last night”), as well as to general categories of activities (“Sarah is really into hot wax play”).”²³

An interesting, and often ignored aspect in discussions of the BDSM community are the members themselves. In part, this is because the illegality and stigma associated with BDSM force people to practice in secret.²⁴ The limited research that exists suggests that the typical BDSM practitioner is white and well educated.²⁵ However, this is not representative of all practitioners—some practitioners are: women, disabled, trans, and people of color. Much of the existing research and academic discourse lack any mention, let alone any meaningful discussion concerning the participation of people of color within the community and in doing so inadvertently negate their experience.²⁶

Some scholars explain this gap in the literature as an effect of the stigma associated with being labeled as a deviant or pervert—people of color have less access to this community over all in part because of elitist tendencies in membership, but also because practitioners identifying as people of color may have more to lose from being labeled as perverts.²⁷ For example, the

¹⁶ WEINBERG, *supra* note 7, at 25; *see also* WEINBERG, *supra* note 7, at 22-41 (for further historical context on BDSM).

¹⁷ Steve Bressert, *Sexual Masochism & Sadism Disorder Symptoms*, PSYCHCENTRAL, (last updated: Sept. 8, 2018), <https://psychcentral.com/disorders/sexual-masochism-sadism-symptoms/>.

¹⁸ *Id.*

¹⁹ WEINBERG, *supra* note 7, at 25 (the industrial revolution and urbanization were central to the creation of the BDSM community, as cities grew, so did the exploration of sexuality).

²⁰ The advent of the internet has modernized community building; *see* Elizabeth Sheff & Corie Hammers, *The Privilege of Perversities: Race, Class & Education Among Polyamorists & Kinksters*, 2 PSYCHOL. & SEXUALITY 198, 209 (2011).

²¹ WEISS, *supra* note 6, viii.

²² WEINBERG, *supra* note 7, at 48.

²³ WEISS, *supra* note 6, viii.

²⁴ *Id.* at 48.

²⁵ Cassandra Damm et al., *Unraveling Intersecting Identities: Understanding the Lives of People who Practice BDSM*, 9 PSYCHOL. & SEXUALITY 21, 22 (2018).

²⁶ *Id.*

²⁷ Elizabeth Sheff & Corie Hammers, *The Privilege of Perversities: Race, Class & Education Among Polyamorists & Kinksters*, 2 PSYCHOL. & SEXUALITY 198, 199 (2011). A critique of scholarship generally, is that a lack of diversity in the academy results in a gap in the production of knowledge and discourse.

positionality of the practitioner can affect how they perceive the possible consequences of being found to have violated the law—in other words, practitioners who identify as people of color may fear disproportionate retribution for the same violation as that of a white practitioner.²⁸ Alternatively, the label of deviant to a practitioner who identifies as a person of color could also cause them to fear negative consequences in their personal lives, such as the loss of a job or status within the larger community to which they belong. The positionality of the individual being interviewed has a direct effect on the production of knowledge, therefore, it is important to note any differences in the way power operates for individual members in the community—both formally and informally.²⁹ So too, is it vital that the positionality of the researchers be interrogated because the positionality of the scholar may also affect the methods and structure of a study.

What follows is an exploration of power and BDSM. This examination will begin by describing the criminalization and social control exerted on BDSM practitioners. In doing so, I will also touch on some of the prevalent stereotypes. The analysis will then shift focus to examine BDSM under the constitutionally protected right to privacy and will further outline BDSM practices within the context of the legal system. I will then introduce critical race theory and connect it to the study of BDSM and race as a means to illustrate how power can be decentralized through work that is intersectional.

II. Criminalization and Social Control of BDSM at Large

“Social control is the study of the mechanisms, in the form of patterns of pressure, through which society maintains social order and cohesion.”³⁰ The purpose of these mechanisms is to both “establish and enforce a standard of behavior” for the members of society.³¹ Social control is exercised informally and formally through “individuals and institutions, ranging from the family, to peers, and to organizations such as the state, religious organizations, schools, and the workplace.”³² “Regardless of its source, the goal of social control is to maintain conformity to established norms and rules.”³³ One of the formal tools of social control is the criminalization of certain behavior. In the context of BDSM, certain practices are implicitly criminalized, for instance spanking and rope play fall squarely within assault and battery laws. As previously mentioned, there is no federal law or state statute that specifically criminalizes BDSM.³⁴ There are also informal mechanisms of social control that are used by the community, such as self-policing through word of mouth someone’s reputation in the community. This could cause a practitioner to be kicked out of a club for breaking the rules set by the club members. These informal mechanisms are discussed further in this article.

²⁸ In this article, positionality is defined and understood as “the notion that personal values, views, and location in time and space influence how one understands the world.” Luis Sánchez, *Positionality* in *ENCYCLOPEDIA OF GEOGRAPHY* 2258 (Barney Warf ed., 2010).

²⁹ See Wendy E. Roe, *Positionality* in *THE SAGE ENCYCLOPEDIA OF ACTION RESEARCH* 628 (David Coghlan & Mary Brydon-Miller eds., 2014) (for further discussion on the ways in which the positionality of the researcher may affect each stage of the research design and methodology).

³⁰ Jason Carmichael, *Social Control*, *OXFORD BIBLIOGRAPHIES*, (last reviewed Sept. 5, 2014), <https://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/view/document/obo-9780199756384/obo-9780199756384-0048.xml>.

³¹ *Id.*

³² *Id.*

³³ *Id.*

³⁴ See *Marcus*, 560 U.S. at 258.

A. The Harm Principle

The harm principle, first articulated by John Stuart Mill in *On Liberty*, is as follows: “[t]he only purpose for which power can be rightfully exercised over a member of a civilized community against his will is to prevent harm to others.”³⁵ In other words, society (the state, government) can only exert power over a person, against said person’s wishes, if they are preventing harm to others. Further, Mills asserts that this principle is composed of two maxims, “first, that the individual is not accountable to society for his actions, in so far as these concern the interest of no person but himself...secondly, that for such actions as are prejudicial to the interests of others, the individual is accountable, and may be subjected to other legal punishments if society is of opinion that the one or the other is requisite for its protection.”³⁶

The harm principle has been critiqued and interpreted by many theorists. It was initially understood, and hotly debated to stand for one of two propositions, either, 1) that morality should be enforced in order to protect society as a whole from injury (moderate thesis);³⁷ or 2) “society is entitled to enforce its morality in order to preserve its distinctive communal values and way of life”³⁸ (extreme thesis).³⁹

However, Dr. Harcourt argues that the harm principle has collapsed—it has come to work so well that both liberals and conservatives have adopted the theory and in doing so, created a “cacophony of competing harm arguments without any way to resolve them.”⁴⁰ The focus is no longer on the existence or nonexistence of harm, but rather, the types of harm, the amounts of harm, and the balance of harms.⁴¹ The harm principle is now but a threshold determination which is easily satisfied by most types of moral offenses.⁴²

“Today, the harm principle is being used increasingly by conservatives who justify laws against prostitution, pornography...as well as regulation of homosexual and heterosexual conduct, on the basis of harm to others.”⁴³ This has proven to be very effective in many different contexts and allowed conservatives to enact legislation that polices and criminalizes morality, under the guise of safety for children.

Additionally, the harm principle has been used to analyze pornography, most notably by feminist scholar, Catherine A. MacKinnon.⁴⁴ She argues that pornography causes harm to women and society at large.⁴⁵ Specifically, MacKinnon emphasizes three harms that are caused by pornography.⁴⁶ First, it inflicts direct harm on the actresses who perform in pornographic material.⁴⁷ Second, it physically harms other women who are assaulted by men who commit crimes of sexual violence against women, because pornography has a way of altering men’s mind on what is normal sexual behavior.⁴⁸ Third, “pornography supports and promotes a general

³⁵ J.S. MILL, ON LIBERTY 68 (Himmelfarb ed., Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1974).

³⁶ MILL, *supra* note 36, at 168-69.

³⁷ Bernard E. Harcourt, *The Collapse of the Harm Principle*, 90 J. OF CRIM. L. & CRIMINOLOGY 109, 114-19 (1999).

³⁸ Peter Cane, *Taking Law Seriously: Starting Points of The Hart/Devlin Debate*, 10 J. OF ETHICS 21, 23 (2006).

³⁹ *Id.*

⁴⁰ Harcourt, *supra* note 38, at 125 (this is the Lord Devlin conservative position).

⁴¹ *Id.* at 115.

⁴² *Id.*

⁴³ *Id.* at 139.

⁴⁴ Harcourt, *supra* note 38, at 140-147; *see also* Catherine A. MacKinnon, *Sexuality, Pornography, and Method: “Please under Patriarchy,”* ETHICS 99 (Jan. 1989), at 314-346.

⁴⁵ Harcourt, *supra* note 38, at 140.

⁴⁶ *Id.*

⁴⁷ *Id.*

⁴⁸ *Id.*

climate of discrimination against women.”⁴⁹ This line of thinking has been extrapolated to the context of BDSM by other feminists, such as Audre Lorde and Alice Walker. By some accounts, BDSM is harmful to women and replicates the dominant hierarchy of power. Conversely, it is also seen as being a form of sexual expression which can allow the individual a tool for subverting power. While both positions are arguable, I contend that narrowly focusing on which interpretation is more correct can detract from exploring the power dynamics that have been normalized by regulating which sex acts between consenting adults are deviant and more specifically, restrictive of autonomy.

B. BDSM Stereotypes Versus Reality

Despite the seeming popularity of BDSM in popular culture, BDSM is viewed negatively and those engaged in BDSM are often labeled as deviants. One of the most widespread misconceptions is that those “who participate in BDSM do so because they are psychologically damaged.”⁵⁰ A 2013 study on the psychological characteristics of BDSM practitioners found the opposite. In fact, there is evidence that suggests that those who engage in BDSM activities, compared with non-BDSM participants, are as a group, “less neurotic, more extraverted, more open to new experiences, more conscientious, yet less agreeable.”⁵¹ Further, this same study found that their “female participants had more confidence in their relationships, had lower need for approval, and were less anxiously attached compared to non-BDSM practitioners.”⁵² Ultimately, the researchers argue that their “findings suggest that BDSM practitioners are characterized by greater psychological and interpersonal strength and autonomy, rather than by psychological maladaptive characteristics.”⁵³ However, the version of BDSM practitioners that gets represented in the media, such as the film trilogy *50 Shades of Grey*, is the traditional stereotype. These findings cast doubt on feminist positions like Catherine MacKinnon’s which argue participation in BDSM is bad for women, when in fact there seems to be many positives for those that participate. In order to change public discourse, the narrative that is being circulated needs to reflect reality. It is important to note that the objective here is not to persuade the masses to participate, but rather to change the image and labeling of those that participate as deviants, so that our views reflect reality.

Another stereotype is that practitioners are not concerned with health and safety,⁵⁴ but research shows that these are two things the BDSM community is actively invested in.⁵⁵ Furthermore, many practitioners ascribe to the credo “safe, sane, sexual” and emphasize proper technique.⁵⁶ This credo also highlights another misconception of the BDSM community, namely that it is rife with violence and aggression. While a scene may involve violence, it is negotiated between the people in the scene, and community standards dictate what practices are implemented for the sake of safety.⁵⁷ Some people go as far as to sign contracts that stipulate the

⁴⁹ *Id.*

⁵⁰ Katerina Teft, *50 Shades of Stereotyping*, THE MANITOBAN, (Nov. 26, 2014), <http://www.themanitoban.com/2013/11/50-shades-stereotyping/17829/>.

⁵¹ Andreas A.J. Wismeijer et al., *Psychological Characteristics of BDSM Practitioners*, 10 J. SEX MED. 1943, 1949 (2013).

⁵² *Id.* at 1949.

⁵³ *Id.*

⁵⁴ Danielle J. Lindermann, *Health Discourse and Within-Group Stigma in Professional BDSM*, 99 SOCIAL SCIENCE & MEDICINE 169, 171 (2013).

⁵⁵ Lindermann, *supra* note 55, at 171; *see generally* WEINBERG, *supra* note 7.

⁵⁶ Lindermann, *supra* note 55, at 172.

⁵⁷ *Id.*

exact terms and conditions of play and informed consent.⁵⁸ Consent is a core value of the community, the same cannot be said of someone who engages in violence for the sake of violence and coercion, such as in a domestic violence situation.

III. Constitutionally Protected Right to Privacy

I argue that we have a privacy right to participate in BDSM as well as other similarly situated forms of consensual non-normative sex acts between consenting adults. I take issue with the way in which sex—through the use of the legal system—is and has been weaponized as a mechanism for control over people and bodies. This is not to say that a preferable alternative is a return to a Hobbesian state of nature. I am not of the position that less laws are necessarily better. But rather, that the system which is at all times looming over us and directly influencing our actions should be flexible enough to reflect our contemporary realities. Further, this process of labeling certain sex acts as “deviant,” and by extension acts which are diametrically opposed as being “acceptable” or “nondeviant,” operate to enforce a patriarchal status quo.

An explicit right to privacy was not etched into the American Constitution or the Bill of Rights. However, the Supreme Court has held in a series of decisions that the right to privacy against government intrusion is implied and rooted in the *penumbras* of the First, Third, Fourth, and Fifth Amendments.⁵⁹

Of particular importance to making a case for a limited exception to criminal battery is *Griswold v. Connecticut*, 381 U.S. 479, (1965). In *Griswold*, the Executive Director of the Planned Parenthood League of Connecticut and one of the licensed physicians at the center “gave information, instruction, and medical advice to *married persons* as to the means of preventing conception.”⁶⁰ All parties were found guilty of violating two state statutes that: 1) forbade the use of “any drug, medicinal article or instrument for the purpose of preventing conception”⁶¹ and 2) criminalized the medical staff and their advice by categorizing “any person who assists...counsels...or commands another to commit any offense that may be prosecuted and punished as if he were the principal offender.”⁶² At issue were the constitutionality of the statutes and the convictions, which the court overturned.⁶³ Justice Douglas famously articulated the court's position as follows:

The present case, then, concerns a relationship lying within the zone of privacy created by several fundamental constitutional guarantees...it concerns a law which...seeks to achieve its goals by means of having a maximum destructive impact upon that relationship. Such a law cannot stand in light of the familiar principle, so often applied by this Court, that a ‘governmental purpose to control or prevent activities constitutionally subject to state regulation may not be achieved by means which sweep unnecessarily broadly and thereby invade the area of protected freedoms.’ Would we allow the police to search the sacred precincts of marital bedrooms for telltale signs of the use of

⁵⁸ See WEINBERG, *supra* note 7, at 55-57 (for further discussion on the use of contracts in BDSM scene negotiations—even though the contracts are not legally enforceable).

⁵⁹ *Griswold v. Connecticut*, 381 U.S. 479, 483 (1965).

⁶⁰ *Id.* at 480.

⁶¹ *Id.*

⁶² *Griswold*, 381 U.S. 479 at 480.

⁶³ *Id.* at 486.

contraceptives? The very idea is repulsive to the notions of privacy surrounding the marriage relationship.⁶⁴

Central to this opinion is the notion that the government cannot intrude on relations and decisions between two adults—especially not when they are married. This notion was later extended to non-married persons in *Eisenstadt v. Baird*, 405 U.S. 438 (1972).

In *Eisenstadt* the Court stated, “if the right of privacy means anything, it is the right of the *individual*, married or single, to be free from unwarranted governmental intrusion into matters so fundamentally affecting a person as the decision whether to bear or beget a child.”⁶⁵ The Court’s rationale in *Eisenstadt* can also be extended to those in the BDSM community and those who engage in BDSM practices because it involves the intimate actions and decision making of individuals. While the facts of both *Griswold* and *Eisenstadt* concern the use of contraceptives, the precedents in these cases can be used to justify changing the language in the current statutes that in their plain meaning criminalize BDSM or carve out a limited exception to current assault and battery statutes. The decision to use contraceptives, like the decision to engage in sexual activity, both concern the same right of the individual to exercise agency over themselves. Thus, laws which may be used to lawfully charge and convict a BDSM practitioner for their participation in BDSM practices are an infringement on our individual liberty and more specifically, the constitutionally protected right to privacy. As previously stated, there is no statute, under federal or state laws that explicitly and specifically criminalize the practice of BDSM, nor is there evidence that law enforcement is actively targeting BDSM practitioners. However, the fact that the law allows for this to happen is both paternalistic and problematic. When the law can be interpreted to describe what types of sexual practices between consenting adults are and are not legally permissible, adults do not have the absolute authority over the autonomy of their own bodies.⁶⁶

A fundamental right to privacy is further advanced by the holding in *Lawrence v. Texas*, 539 U.S. 558 (2003). *Lawrence* involves the criminalization of sexual conduct between two people of the same sex. Two men were engaging in sexual conduct when the police barged into the home to respond to a reported weapons disturbance.⁶⁷ The men were then charged and convicted of violating a Texas statute that defined all sexual intercourse between same sex individuals as “deviant.”⁶⁸ The statute was challenged “as a violation of the Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth amendment and a like provision of the Texas Constitution,”⁶⁹ namely Texas Constitutional Article I, section 3a.

In *Lawrence* the Supreme Court considered three issues.⁷⁰ The first, whether the convictions “violate the Fourteenth Amendment guarantee of equal protection”⁷¹—considering the fact that the sexual intimacy between two people of the same sex was criminalized but the identical behavior by heterosexual couples was not. The second issue centered on “whether petitioners’

⁶⁴ *Id.* at 485-486.

⁶⁵ *Eisenstat v. Baird*, 405 U.S. 438, 453 (1972).

⁶⁶ Author acknowledges that two paradoxical realities exist in tandem with one another. The first being that the regulation of lawful and unlawful sex acts between consenting adults places limits on individual rights to privacy and autonomy. The second recognizes that on a practical level, there exists an individualized feeling of freedom of choice and agency over one’s choices in deciding to engage in sex, a feeling which exists independently of any regulations.

⁶⁷ *Lawrence v. Texas*, 539 U.S. 558, 563 (2003).

⁶⁸ *Id.* at 562.

⁶⁹ *Id.*

⁷⁰ *Id.* at 564.

⁷¹ *Id.*

criminal convictions for adult consensual sexual intimacy in the home violate their vital interests in liberty and privacy protected by the Due Process Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment.”⁷² The last issue that the court grappled with was whether to overturn a previous precedent, *Bowers v. Hardwick*, which had upheld a state sodomy law.⁷³ In the Court’s decision, they focused on the liberty interest that was ignored in *Bowers*, the right to make a choice concerning one’s personal relations “without being punished as criminals.”⁷⁴ Notably Justice Kennedy began the opinion by articulating a manifesto of freedom:

Liberty protects the person from unwarranted government intrusions into a dwelling or other private places. In our tradition the State is not omnipresent in the home. And there are other spheres of our lives and existence, outside of the home, where the State should not be a dominant presence. *Freedom extends beyond special bounds.* Liberty presumes an autonomy of self that includes freedom of thought, belief, expression, and certain intimate conduct.⁷⁵

Being part of a BDSM community and participating in BDSM practices stem from an intimate freedom of choice and Justice Kennedy’s words suggest that this decision is also constitutionally protected. That is not to say that choosing to participate in BDSM or join a BDSM community is the same as identifying as LGBTQIA, for one describes a type of non-normative sexual practice and the other is a constitutionally protected class. The liberty individuals believe they have does not exist in practice if we do not have the autonomy of self to choose what we do with our bodies.

In the *Lawrence* opinion, Justice Kennedy goes on to say that as a general rule, the government should not “define the meaning of [a] relationship or set its boundaries absent injury to a person or abuse of an institution the law protects...adults may choose to enter upon this relationship [i.e. sexual relations between two people of the same sex] in the confines of their homes and their own private lives and still retain their dignity as free persons.”⁷⁶ Thus, it follows that the freedom to choose the consensual intimate relations in one’s private life is essential to our human dignity.

The choice to engage in BDSM and the terms and roles one will enact in a scene are all choices connected to consensual intimate relations. The purpose of the discussion that has been presented has been to provide a cursory overview of some of the constitutional issues surrounding BDSM and is by no means exhaustive.⁷⁷ A notable distinction moving forward will be to differentiate between injuries that are permissible to consent to and those that are not. For example, injuries sustained in combat fighting for sport and entertainment are foreseeable “injuries” that are inherent to the activity itself. We as a society allow for batteries in this context to exist outside of the realm of criminality, except for in limited circumstances where fighters do not adhere to the agreed upon rules.⁷⁸ A detailed discussion of these differences is beyond the

⁷² *Id.*

⁷³ *Id.*, at 562; *see also* *Bowers v. Hardwick*, 478 U.S. 186 (1986) (Held that the constitution does not confer a fundamental right upon homosexuals to engage in consensual sodomy, overturned by *Lawrence*, 539 at 558).

⁷⁴ *Lawrence*, 539 U.S. at 567.

⁷⁵ *Id.* at 562 (emphasis added).

⁷⁶ *Id.* at 567.

⁷⁷ *See* Elizabeth Mincer, *Fifty Shades and Fifty States: Is BDSM a Fundamental Right? A Test for Sexual Privacy*, 26 Wm. & Mary Bill Rts. J. 865 (2018) (for a more thorough examination on BDSM and the right to privacy).

⁷⁸ *See generally* WEINBERG, *supra* note 7 (for a full comparison between combat for sport and participation in BDSM).

scope of this paper which deals more specifically with the issues of social control and power dynamics.

A case involving this type of argumentation has yet to reach the Supreme Court. In part, this can be explained by the mechanisms of control within the BDSM community. There is “no formal regulatory body that creates or enforces rules, consent becomes constitutive of the BDSM subculture where being an upstanding member of the community means knowing and having a personal investment in making the rules.”⁷⁹ This can also be explained in terms of the self-regulating nature that has come to exist within the BDSM community which stem in part, from the fact that “many of the practitioner’s activities may subject them to criminal liability and ...because of social stigma” that exists in the community at large.⁸⁰ Within the community, informal policing is used to uphold the community standards—such as, obtaining and maintaining consent and playing safely.⁸¹ Reputation and shaming also play an integral role within this informal policing structure.⁸² For example, if someone deviates from the standards and word gets out about the person who violated the community standard they may be sanctioned by being banned from other groups or events.⁸³ Calling the authorities or reporting a community member is relatively unheard of for the same reason that the community self-regulates out of necessity, some of the practices violate state criminal statutes and there is a great deal of social stigma around engaging in non-heteronormative sexual practices.

A. A Brief Exegesis of Relevant Case Law

Of note, are two cases, *Doe v. George Mason University*, 149 F. Supp. 3d. 602 (2016), and *City of New York v. Jovanovic*, 263 A.D.2d 182 (N.Y. App. Div. 1999).⁸⁴ These cases are notable because some of their key arguments were rooted in constitutional freedoms as outlined in the previous section, and also because they received national attention in news outlets such as, The Washington Post and The New York Times.⁸⁵ Public attention is a double-edged sword, on the one hand, it can shift public discourse for good, and on the other, it can sway the masses to believe falsehoods or continue to perpetuate certain stereotypes.

In *George Mason University*, the plaintiff, a former student of George Mason University, was expelled “following an administrative process that found him responsible for violating two of GMU’s student conduct regulations, one pertaining to sexual misconduct and one pertaining to threats.”⁸⁶ He then filed a suit against the university and three of their officials claiming violations to his free speech and due process.⁸⁷ Specifically, the plaintiff alleged that he had a

⁷⁹ *Lawrence*, 539 U.S. at 69.

⁸⁰ *Id.*

⁸¹ *Id.* at 70.

⁸² *Id.*

⁸³ *Id.* at 77.

⁸⁴ It is relevant to note that while the author advocates for further study of race, as it is very important to destabilizing power structures, no case involving BDSM studied analyzed race as a central feature or not did it seem to have an impact on sentencing. This can be partly explained by the way that the community self-regulates and under reports incidence of violence because of stigma. This feature does not make the study of race any less important.

⁸⁵ Eugene Volokh, *Court: George Mason University Violated Due Process When Expelling Student for Alleged BDSM-related Sex Assault*, THE WASH. POST, (Mar. 4, 2016), https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/volokh-conspiracy/wp/2016/03/04/court-george-mason-university-violated-due-process-while-expelling-student-for-alleged-bdsm-related-sex-assault/?utm_term=.db652ec0ad0a (a whole opinion blog on The Washington Post were dedicated to this case and issue).

⁸⁶ *Doe v. George Mason University*, 149 F. Supp. 3d. 602, 608 (2016).

⁸⁷ *Id.* at 608-609.

substantive due process right to sexual liberty, which was violated by the University.⁸⁸ The plaintiff argued that the University “‘disregarded’ the BDSM context of the relationship and how it ‘affected’ matters like consent and related issues’ and treated a BDSM relationship as ‘per se sexual misconduct.’”⁸⁹ His argument was heavily rooted in the Supreme Court’s holding in *Lawrence*, “which held that a state could not criminalize intimate sexual conduct between consenting adults.”⁹⁰

With regard to this line of argumentation, the district court fleshed out the reasons why BDSM is not a judicially enforceable fundamental liberty interest under Supreme Court precedent. The court stated that there are two lines of precedent that can be used when considering whether “a liberty interest is fundamental and therefore protected as judicially enforceable under the Fourteenth Amendment.”⁹¹ First, as articulated in *Planned Parenthood v. Casey* and *Obergefell*, the private interest is balanced against social needs “by reference to, not bound by, historical practice.”⁹² The second line of precedent, as articulated in *Washington v. Glucksberg*, 521 U.S. 702, 721, the Court stated that “a judicially enforceable implied fundamental liberty interest must be (i) deeply rooted in the nation’s history and traditions and (ii) implicit in the concept of ordered liberty.”⁹³ With this backdrop, the district court ultimately held that there is no constitutionally protected liberty interest in partaking in BDSM under either line of precedent. According to the court’s reading of *Obergefell*, the Supreme Court implied in their holding that “the decision to recognize an implied fundamental liberty interest as judicially enforceable turns, in part, on whether the liberty interest at issue has historically been denied on the basis of impermissible animus or, alternatively, on a legitimate basis aimed at protecting a vulnerable group.”⁹⁴ Here, according to the district court, the arguments are not viable under both lines of precedent because “there is no deeply rooted history or tradition of BDSM sexual activity that remains relevant and important to the analysis,” nor is there any history of animus as the basis for restriction.⁹⁵ Furthermore, the court states that it is permissible to regulate this type of sexual activity because “sexual activity that involves binding and gagging or the use of physical force such as spanking or choking poses certain inherent risks to personal safety not present in more traditional types of sexual activity.”⁹⁶ This court also rejected the Plaintiff’s argument under *Lawrence* using the same line of rationale.

The analysis by the district circuit is important because it can be used as persuasive authority on the other courts. It is also important because it brought together two lines of precedent in their analysis, *Obergefell* and *Glucksberg*, a case about a protected sexual freedom and one concerning assisted suicide, respectively. The district court is wrong in that there is a history of animus, and some of this history of animus has been collapsed into the history of animus of the LGBTQIA community. Additionally, one researcher found that most of the BDSM practitioners she

⁸⁸ *George Mason University*, 149 F. Supp 3d. at 608-609.

⁸⁹ *Id.* at 631.

⁹⁰ *Id.* at 631 (citing *Lawrence*, 539 U.S. at 578).

⁹¹ *Id.* at 632.

⁹² *Id.* at 632 (while this court chose to use *Obergefell* for their rationale, the author believes that this case is not good case law for this particular issue. *Obergefell* is a case about recognizing same-sex marriage and recognizing a fundamental privacy interest in *marriage*—the union of two people. This is quite different from recognizing an interest in certain sexual freedom and practices).

⁹³ *George Mason University*, 149 F. Supp 3d. at 632 (citing *Washington v. Glucksberg*, 521 U.S. 702, 721, a case where the Supreme Court held that there is no right to assisted suicide).

⁹⁴ *Id.* at 633.

⁹⁵ *Id.*

⁹⁶ *Id.* at 633-34.

interviewed viewed their membership within the BDSM community as “a way or life; it defined them, it defined their social relationships, and it structured their daily lives.”⁹⁷ While her sample size may not be representative of the entire community, this can be used as evidence to show that at least for some members of the community their membership is as important to them as their memberships in other communities, such as identifying as a person of color or LGBTQIA. Further, discrimination felt by those in the community and the label of “deviant” are also suggestive of animus. Additionally, history shows that sadomasochism and masochism were once pathologized,⁹⁸ and many people suffered as a result of this label.

Although, we don’t have a right to assisted suicide as held in *Glucksberg*, to engage in BDSM is not the same as making a permanent decision to end one’s life. This activity is more similar to choosing whether or not to use contraception. Moreover, an argument not raised in *Glucksberg*, but that should be taken up by the court is how individuals can have the capacity to consent to engage in sports that involve physical combat but do not have the capacity to consent in similarly situated activities, like BDSM, which occur in private between presumably consenting adults. I would argue that the difference can be found in analyzing institutionalized gendered differences. The law is inherently paternalistic and heteronormative; and with matters concerning sex the predominant belief is that women need protection from themselves and are not capable of deciding what is best for them. Conversely, in the context of combat sports—which are chiefly dominated by cis het presenting men and whose purpose is considered for entertainment—athletes may consent to violence without the fear of prosecution. Moreover, in sports, which are dominated by males, since there is a presumption that men are all strong, they can consent to violence in this context.

I now shift my focus to the second case, *New York v. Jovanovic*, which problematizes the concept of consent. In *Jovanovic*, the defendant, Oliver Jovanovic was convicted of kidnapping, sexual abuse and assault, and sentenced to 15 years to life.⁹⁹ Jovanovic was a doctoral candidate in molecular biology at Columbia University who met a female student, Jane Doe, at a neighboring university in a virtual chat room.¹⁰⁰ She expressed to him in many messages that she wanted to engage in BDSM.¹⁰¹ They did subsequently meet up and allegedly engaged in sex acts known to be associated with BDSM which were also previously discussed between both parties.¹⁰² Doe later accused Jovanovic of “tying her up, pouring hot candle wax on parts of her body, and sodomizing her with a baton-like object.”¹⁰³ At his trial, electronic communications sent to Jovanovic from the alleged victim were excluded as evidence of consent due to application of the Rape Shield law, Criminal Procedure Law § 60.42.¹⁰⁴ Among the repressed correspondence were emails where she described herself as a sadomasochist.¹⁰⁵ After serving almost two years of this sentence, the case was overturned due to an improper application of the Rape Shield law.¹⁰⁶ The appeals court said that the exclusion of the evidence was improper

⁹⁷ WEINBERG, *supra* note 7, at 69.

⁹⁸ *Id.* at 24-25.

⁹⁹ Maurice Possley, *Oliver Jovanovic*, THE NAT’L REGISTRY OF EXONERATIONS, (last updated Feb. 6, 2017), <https://www.law.umich.edu/special/exoneration/Pages/casedetail.aspx?caseid=4182>.

¹⁰⁰ *Id.*

¹⁰¹ *Id.*

¹⁰² *Id.*

¹⁰³ *New York v. Jovanovic*, 263 A.D.2d 182 (N.Y. App. Div. 1999).

¹⁰⁴ Jeannie Suk, *Annotated Case: People v. Jovanovic*, H2O: HARVARD, (last updated, Mar. 17, 2017), <https://h2o.law.harvard.edu/collages/40623>.

¹⁰⁵ Possley, *supra* note 104.

¹⁰⁶ *Jovanovic v. City of New York*, 486 Fed. Appx. 149, 151 (2d Cir. 2012).

because “Jovanovic was precluded not only [from] bringing out the degree which the (victim) seemed to be inviting sadomasochism...but [also] from examining whether she was a less-reliable narrator of events than she appeared to be at trial.”¹⁰⁷ The state of New York declined to prosecute or retry Jovanovic because the victim did not want to testify again.¹⁰⁸

In *Jovanovic* consent was a legally viable defense because the convicted act was rape and not criminal battery or assault. Moreover, the language and decision by the appeals court to discuss the victim’s reluctance to testify in a new trial implies that engaging in BDSM, or similar nonconventional sex acts, make a person less credible and reliable than someone who does not. This stance is harmful to women and more broadly to all people because this discourse legitimizes the label of “deviant” and in doing so leaves individuals with fewer protections and legal recourse than those who do not engage in such acts—this runs counter to the belief that everyone is “equal under the law.”

B. The Need for Equitable and Nuanced Legal Recourse

Even if practicing BDSM is not a fundamental right, our legal system should allow for equitable and nuanced legal recourse for all. Some scholars have argued that the Model Penal Code (MPC) already contains exceptions for BDSM.¹⁰⁹ For example, in section 2.11(2)(a), which “recognizes consent as a defense to assault when the injury is ‘not serious.’”¹¹⁰ “MPC § 210.0(3) defines a serious bodily injury as an injury that “creates a substantial risk of death...causes serious, permanent disfigurement, or protracted loss or impairment of the function of any bodily member or organ.”¹¹¹ In many cases, injuries incurred as a result of BDSM activities do not meet the MPC’s definition for serious injury because they result only in bruising and minor abrasions.¹¹² The language in the MPC is broad enough that it does not criminalize BDSM practices.

The interests here are vast, there should be protection for potential victims wherein perpetrators of non-consensual battery should be stopped from claiming that they are BDSM practitioners to evade punishment. However, our laws should not be so paternalistic that they dictate which sexual acts are permissible when *real* consent is present.¹¹³ Consent that is not unequivocal is not consent. A one size fits all statute in this context is not capable of balancing the interests of society and of the individual. The more limiting language we use, the less autonomy we have over our bodies. Victims should be protected under the law, but not every person who consents to be a submissive is a victim.

Our criminal justice system should adopt Professor Vera Bergeson’s definition of consent, wherein people are “allowed to consent to his or her own harm, providing that the harm does not set back the dignity of the victim.”¹¹⁴ Dignity should be understood as the “basic respect to which every person is entitled just by virtue of being a human being, no matter where he lives or to

¹⁰⁷ Possley, *supra* note 104.

¹⁰⁸ *Id.*

¹⁰⁹ See Daniel Haley, *Bound by Law: A Roadmap for the Practical Legalization of BDSM*, 21 CARDOZO J. OF L. & GENDER 631(2015); see also Vera Burgelson, *The Right to be Hurt*, 75 GEORGE WASH. L. REV. 165 (2007).

¹¹⁰ Haley, *supra* note 114, at 650.

¹¹¹ *Id.* at 650 (quoting the MPC).

¹¹² *Id.* at 650.

¹¹³ What the author means by “real consent” is consent by a legal adult who is engaging in sex with another legally consenting adult. A child cannot give meaningful consent to engage in sexual activity with an adult and neither can an individual who is being coerced. This line of argumentation is not applicable to all sexual fetishes, like pedophilia or cannibalism for example. Some acts should be criminalized, with respect to criminalizing sex acts, the penal system should be centered on human dignity.

¹¹⁴ Haley, *supra* note 114, at 651.

what cultural group he belongs.”¹¹⁵ Just as with the harm principle, when we regulate dignity there is a danger that the system overrides an individual’s liberty. As such, “as with any imposition on individual liberty, the threat to society should be serious enough to warrant the use of criminal sanctions.”¹¹⁶ This would fundamentally shift the way in which laws protect physical autonomy, human dignity, and promote sex positivity. For example, in *Jovanovic*, in an ideal world in which sex positivity was normalized, some of the reasons that potentially acted to deter the victim from seeking legal recourse would not have operated as barriers to obtaining justice under the law. Moreover, the judge in the *Jovanovic* appeal would not have seen it as necessary or appropriate to tie the victim’s reluctance to cooperate in a new trial with her perceived trustworthiness.

In the following sections I develop the need for a critical race theory approach to the study of BDSM. Current scholarship fails to include the experience of BDSM practitioners who identify as people of color or examine their lack of presence in certain spaces. In doing so, the experiences of practitioners who identify as people of color are not only erased but the relationship between power and positionality is not explored. Studies not inclusive of the ways in which gender, sex, and race intersect fail in assisting in the radical project of destabilizing the coercive hierarchy that weaponizes difference.

IV. A Critical Race Theory Approach to the Study of BDSM

Critical Race Theory (CRT) refers to both a political movement by leftist scholars and a radical body of scholarship that “challenges the ways in which race and racial power are constructed and represented in American legal culture and, more generally, in American society as a whole.”¹¹⁷ In our society, we are socialized to believe that racial difference is “stable” when in fact, it is the opposite—“ ‘the lie of difference,’ masquerading as a fundamental marker of difference and separation.”¹¹⁸ CRT scholarship differs from other disciplines because “there is no canonical set of doctrines or methodologies to which [all CRT scholars] subscribe.”¹¹⁹ Nevertheless, this body of work is unified by two common interests.¹²⁰ “The first is to understand how a regime of white supremacy and its subordination of people of color have been created and in particular, to examine the relationship between that social structure and professed ideals such as ‘the rule of law’ and ‘equal protection.’”¹²¹ “The second is not merely to understand the vexed bond between law and racial power but to *change* it.”¹²²

The study of BDSM communities and how race and racism operate within these organized institutions is ripe for CRT research and scholarship because race is all but erased from predominant research on BDSM.¹²³ Author Sharon P. Holland, in her book titled, *The Erotic Life of Racism*, employs a CRT lens to her work on the importance of the erotic in our everyday lives,

¹¹⁵ Vera Burgelson, *The Right to be Hurt*, 75 GEORGE WASH. L. REV. 165, 218 (2007).

¹¹⁶ *Id.* at 218.

¹¹⁷ Introduction to CRITICAL RACE THEORY: THE KEY WRITINGS THAT FORMED THE MOVEMENT xiii (Kimberlé Crenshaw, Neil Gotanda, Gary Peller, and Kendall Thomas eds., The New Press, 1995).

¹¹⁸ Ariane Cruz, *Beyond Black and Blue: BDSM, Internet Pornography, and Black Female Sexuality*, 41 FEMINIST STUDIES 409, 430 (2015).

¹¹⁹ *Id.*

¹²⁰ *Id.*

¹²¹ *Id.*

¹²² *Id.* (italics appear in the original text).

¹²³ See discussions *infra*. Section IV. A. and Section IV. B.

as well as the importance of theorizing non-normative sexual behavior, but her focus is not BDSM or kink but rather queer theory.¹²⁴ One of the key contradictions of the study of people of color engaging in BDSM, is that their bodies are saturated with meaning, yet the physical body, the flesh, is often not acknowledged in contemporary research.¹²⁵ “To ignore flesh is to ignore how bodies have been made to speak of difference.”¹²⁶

This research is important because without understanding the ways in which other identities collide with being labeled as a BDSM practitioner, such as the experience of additional stigma for being a woman of color, we cannot build a movement which destabilizes a system of power where even if certain acts are deemed criminal, they are being adjudicated proportionate to the crime and free from bias. Furthermore, I contend that in order to understand the different ways that power and social control operate across different groups within BDSM, and the implications of any differences, it is vital that researchers examine race.

A. **Intersecting Identities—A Summary of the Predominant Research and a Call to Action**

Professors Elizabeth Sheff and Corie Hammers, in their widely cited article, *The Privilege of Perversities: Race, Class, and Education among Polyamorists and Kinksters*, attempts to bridge the gap between much of the research that has been done on kink and polyamorous communities, including BDSM.¹²⁷ They characterize the predominant research, including their own previous work in the field, as being focused on the implications for an overwhelmingly white population.¹²⁸ As an initial premise, Sheff and Hammers contend that people who engage in *kinkster* lifestyles, including those individuals who practice BDSM, are labeled by society as “perverts.”¹²⁹ This label carries with it an inherent stigma of deviance with very real personal consequences, even “being accused of being a pervert can have detrimental consequences such as: alienation from family and friends, harassment, loss of a job, custody of a child, physical attack, public excoriation and incarceration.”¹³⁰ Sheff and Hammers theorize that, “[a]lthough everybody involved in ‘perverted’ sex risks social censure, people unprotected by social advantages are more vulnerable to the discriminatory impacts of this sexual stigma than are those shielded by racial and/or class privileges.”¹³¹ “This insulation provides greater social latitude to engage in and redefine sexual or relational ‘deviance’ than that available to those burdened by racism, poverty, inadequate education, limited job prospects and other forms of discrimination.” Sheff and Hammers tie together one other feature of BDSM—the monetary aspect to this “perversion”—since it costs money to be part of the scene, much like any other hobby. They suggest that people of color may not be as active as their white counterparts because “members of disadvantaged populations might well be reluctant to invest scarce resources in relational forms that can threaten conventional family structures and have the potential to increase surveillance from authorities, be they mothers-in-law, employers or child protective services.”¹³²

¹²⁴ SHARON P. HOLLAND, *THE EROTIC LIFE OF RACISM* (Duke University Press, 2012).

¹²⁵ AMBER JAMILLA MUSSER, *SENSATIONAL FLESH: RACE, POWER, AND MASOCHISM 20* (SEXUAL CULTURES) (NYU PRESS, 2014).

¹²⁶ *Id.*

¹²⁷ Sheff and Hammers use “kinksters” as an umbrella term that includes those who practice BDSM.

¹²⁸ Sheff & Hammers, *supra* note 28, at 199.

¹²⁹ *Id.* at 199.

¹³⁰ *Id.*

¹³¹ *Id.*

¹³² *Id.*

In an initial longitudinal study conducted by Sheff, where she “examin[ed] the overlap between polyamorists, swingers, people with fetishes and those who practice BDSM,” of 64 respondents, 58 of them identified as white (which correlates to 90% of the sample size).¹³³ The breakdown of the other 6 respondents is as follows: two African Americans, one Filipina, two people of multiracial heritage and one who identified as other.¹³⁴ Respondents were highly educated, with 61 of the 64 respondents (95%) having completed or currently enrolled in an undergraduate program, and 48 of these respondents had at least some graduate school.¹³⁵ Sheff’s research confirmed previous studies that found that the typical person within the community is white and highly educated.

Through a new meta-analysis focusing on race, Sheff and Hammers’ findings confirmed the previous profile of a typical kinkster—white well-educated participants are the norm in this community.¹³⁶ Their meta-analysis analyzes and explains the findings of 36 different studies.¹³⁷

From their study, they surmise that while it is unlikely that their findings are representative of the actual range of kink and poly people, they are representative of the people involved in the mainstream communities.¹³⁸ Sheff and Hammers provide several reasons for these findings.¹³⁹ The pervasiveness and invisibility of white privilege within the community and society at large are significant factors. Citing Robin Bauer’s 2008 study and his analysis for support,¹⁴⁰ Sheff and Hammers point out that the members of the kink (including BDSM) and polyamorous communities studied tend to hold liberal ideals of equality and celebrate diversity. “Rather than active racism, white privilege constructs a social environment in which ‘[g]ender and sexuality (and to a lesser extent age and class) are highly visible and consciously negotiated...while racialization of the white majority remains invisible and unexplored and functions as a nontransgressable.’¹⁴¹ ”¹⁴² Thus, pervasive whiteness and white privilege not only heavily influence the practice, but they do so without being questioned.

Sheff and Hammers also contend that socio-economic status buffers kinksters from some of the negative impacts people risk when they are associated with non-conformity.¹⁴³ For example, those with high levels of education tend to have occupations that are generally highly skilled and with that comes “greater job security than low-skill, low-paying jobs, where employees are far more easily replaced and often subject to greater surveillance and less autonomy.”¹⁴⁴ This increased surveillance makes “non-conformity riskier than it would be for others with greater resources.”¹⁴⁵ “‘Perversity’ then becomes another luxury more readily available to those who are already members of dominant groups.”¹⁴⁶ Other deterrents to participation of people of color

¹³³ *Id.* (also of interest, the gender breakdown of the study was as follows: 31 men, 27 women and 6 others).

¹³⁴ Sheff & Hammers, *supra* note 28, at 199.

¹³⁵ *Id.*

¹³⁶ *Id.* at 209.

¹³⁷ *Id.* at 204.

¹³⁸ *Id.* at 209.

¹³⁹ *Id.*

¹⁴⁰ See Robin Bauer, *Transgressive and Transformative Gendered Sexual Practices and White Privileges: The Case of the Dyke/Trans BDSM Communities*, 36 *WOMEN’S STUDIES Q.* 233 (2008).

¹⁴¹ Bauer, *supra* note 148, at 247.

¹⁴² Sheff & Hammers, *supra* note 28, at 209.

¹⁴³ *Id.* at 209.

¹⁴⁴ *Id.* at 210.

¹⁴⁵ *Id.*

¹⁴⁶ *Id.*

“include expense, discomfort with being a numerical minority, the potential for discrimination, communities of color’s’ negative assessments of sexual minorities and issues of identity.”¹⁴⁷

To both explain and highlight some of the difficulty of being a person of color in a mainstream kink community, Sheff and Hammers give an example. “Yansa, a 29-year-old kink-and poly-identified African American health-care provider who reported discomfort when attending a poly pool party in the San Francisco Bay Area.”¹⁴⁸ Part of Yansa’s discomfort stemmed from “feeling vulnerable at work because of race and fearing that being a known polyamorist would mean termination.”¹⁴⁹ As a person of color, Yansa reports being hyper aware of her race and a hypervigilant at work. When describing her employers, Yansa reports that,

[They are] executives who went to Wharton and Harvard and were Republicans and assholes...very, very closed minded. And I got the impression that they were already not comfortable with me being a person of color. To throw in the other stuff that I did may confirm their stereotypes about Black people or they may have just thought she’s the weirdest shit on the planet, I don’t trust her...We don’t want her on this job anymore, someone may find her out.¹⁵⁰

Yansa’s description of her feelings of job insecurity and enhanced supervision is similar to the working conditions that the researchers ascribed to individuals who were less educated and in low-skilled work. Despite being educated and in a skilled position,¹⁵¹ her race and racialized body makes it so that she does not benefit from the same privileges as white people who are similarly situated.

Sheff and Hammers conclude their article by discussing seven recommendations for future research. Their first, and perhaps most obvious recommendation, is a call to action. Not only must further research be done that studies race in this context, but “[m]easuring class and race/ethnicity should be a standard research practice, on par with measuring gender.”¹⁵² The remaining recommendations are all similar in tenor to the first recommendation:

- researchers need to do more research on race by shifting their recruitment and sampling methods (such as directly targeting people of color);
- increase the number of researchers of color (the idea being that they will make kinksters of color more comfortable to participate in studies);
- study sexuality and identity, not just sexuality;
- researchers should also conduct broader examinations into reasons why individuals do not identify with particular alternative sexual communities, despite participating in those behaviors and;
- conduct examinations into how race impacts the ways in which people do sexuality.¹⁵³

Based on my interpretation of the findings, I am in agreement that more research examining race needs to be produced. I would argue that this research needs to be informed by a critical race theoretical framework because racial hierarchies and the power that flows from them organize

¹⁴⁷ *Id.* at 211.

¹⁴⁸ *Id.*

¹⁴⁹ Sheff & Hammers, *supra* note 28, at 211.

¹⁵⁰ *Id.* at 212.

¹⁵¹ This is assumed because she is described as a health care provider and “under federal regulations, a ‘health care provider’ is defined as: a doctor of medicine or osteopathy, podiatrist, dentist, chiropractor, clinical psychologist, optometrist, nurse practitioner, nurse-midwife, or clinical social worker who is authorized to practice by the state.” 29 CFR § 825.125 (definition of health care provider).

¹⁵² Sheff & Hammers, *supra* note 28, at 216.

¹⁵³ *Id.* at 217.

the world around us and have real effects on everyone in society. What Sheff and Hammers' findings, and Yansa's experience, underscore is that kinksters (BDSM practitioners) are more than a community with whiteness and privilege but also operate as a power structure within a power structure that need to be examined in a similar fashion to other institutions of power. Yansa's racialized identity and body are inseparable. Further, the meaning ascribed to her body, the feelings of alienation within the institution and hierarchy of her employment are also inseparable—even in a liberal space—at least in part) because of the stigma and stereotypes associated with the interplay of race and non-normative sexual practices.¹⁵⁴

B. BDSM Spaces for People Of Color & “Race Play”

As the predominant research points out, there are few practitioners of color within mainstream BDSM communities. A variety of factors may account for this, for example, an anxiety and discomfort with being a numerical minority in a predominantly white space, the potential for discrimination, negative assessments of sexual minorities and issues of identity existing within communities of color. However, in my research I have found that there are spaces that BDSM practitioners of color have carved out for themselves.¹⁵⁵ It is important to study these spaces as well to understand the nuances of power within this community and how race can affect the mechanisms of social control.

i. Comparison of BDSM-POC Spaces: Kinky People of Color Bay Area & Black Kink Bay Area

Kinky People of Color Bay Area (KPOC-BA) is a BDSM community created by people of color for practitioners of color and their allies. According to their mission statement this group was created to provide a fun, safe, social space for people of color and their allies.¹⁵⁶ The group defines “people of color” as,

¹⁵⁴ I will note that a new study by Cassandra Damm, Michael P. Dentato, and Nicki Busch, attempts to engage in the type of research recommended by Sheff & Hammers. This article is appropriately titled, *Unravelling Intersecting Identities: Understanding the Lives of People who Practice BDSM*, and the scholars do attempt to be inclusive in their analysis regarding differences, including racial differences. Damm and her colleagues cite to Sheff & Hammer's reasons why the racial demographic is predominately white, namely, scarce resources, and perceived discrimination within the community as well as in their own community if labeled a deviant. They also highlight some of the tensions between the role that the intersection of different identities can have on play and overall participation. Damm, Dentato, and Bush, also include a cursory discussion of race. See Damm et al., *supra* note 22.

¹⁵⁵ Author acknowledges that the Bay Area is a liberal, densely populated city with more racial and ethnic diversity than many other places in the United States. These characteristics make the Bay Area a place in which sexuality can be explored and organized in ways that are not possible in small towns (there is evidence that similar groups exist in smaller towns, but I could not find data on the subject). For example, in my research I stumbled across a Bay Area BDSM group that was created by kinksters of color for other kinksters of color named Kinky People of Color. They describe themselves as a BDSM social group specifically for people of color in the Bay Area who are kinky or kink-curious. They host events such as happy hours and panels for newcomers. My research indicates that they have been on the most widely known fetish social networking site, FetLife, since 2016. They have since expanded their online presence to social media, which includes public accounts on twitter and Instagram. Their twitter was started in May of 2018 and their Instagram dates back to June 28, 2018. See @KinkyPOCBayArea, TWITTER, <https://twitter.com/kinkypocbayarea?lang=en>; see also @kinkypocbayarea, INSTAGRAM, <https://www.instagram.com/kinkypocbayarea/>.

Additionally, there is another group for black people between the ages of 21 and 40 who are either involved in or curious about kink and BDSM, this group is called BKBA (Black Kink Bay Area). See @blackkinkbayarea, INSTAGRAM, <https://www.instagram.com/blackkinkbayarea/>.

¹⁵⁶ @KinkyPOCBayArea, Biography, TWITTER, (last visited May 1, 2019), <https://twitter.com/kinkypocbayarea?lang=e>.

People of color explicitly suggests a social relationship among racial and ethnic minority groups...[It is] a term most often used outside of traditional academic circles, often infused by activist frameworks but it is slowly replacing terms such as ethnic minorities...In the United States in particular, there is a trajectory to the term—from more derogatory terms such as negroes, to colored, to people of color...People of color is, however it is viewed, a political term, but it also a term that allows for a more complex set of identity for the individual—a relational one that is in constant flux.¹⁵⁷

Events hosted by the organization are primarily for people of color, but they welcome all allies, including those that are white. KPOC-BA defines allies as “people who understand the importance of safe spaces for underrepresented groups within a community.”¹⁵⁸

A second example of a Bay Area BDSM group for people of color, created by people of color, is Black Kink Bay Area (BKBA).¹⁵⁹ According to the group’s description, BKBA “is a

¹⁵⁷ Kinky People of Color: Bay Area, *Mission Statement & FAQ: Who are People of Color (POC) and Their Allies?*, FETLIFE (June, 17, 2018), https://fetlife.com/groups/144564/group_posts/12489630 (for their definition of “people of color,” the group cites an NPR article that traces the history of the term people of color. The article ends with their stated definition from Professor Salvador Vidal-Ortiz in the Encyclopedia of Race, Ethnicity and Society); *see also* Kee Malesky, *The Journey from ‘Colored’ To ‘Minorities’ To ‘People of Color,’* NPR (Mar. 30, 2014), <https://www.npr.org/sections/codeswitch/2014/03/30/295931070/the-journey-from-colored-to-minorities-to-people-of-color>).

¹⁵⁸ *Id.*

¹⁵⁹ Black Kink Bay Area, *About & Rules*, FETLIFE, (June 27, 2018), <https://fetlife.com/groups/173721/about> (Black Kink Bay Area became an official group on FetLife on June 27, 2018). BKBA’s social media seems to be limited to Instagram and this account was started shortly after starting their group on FetLife in November of 2018. BKBA is active on Instagram and as of November 4, 2020, this account has been live for 23 with a total of 185 posts. This amounts to about 8 posts a month, and approximately 2 posts a week. They have 249 followers. *See* @blackkinkbayarea, INSTAGRAM. Conversely, KPOC-BA, who began their Instagram account five months before BKBA in June of 2018, has almost four times the number of followers of BKBA with a total of 989 followers as of November 4, 2020. KPOC-BA has significantly less posts than BKBA with a total of 39 posts as of November 4, 2020. On average, KPOC-BA posts about once a month on their Instagram and about 5 times a twice a month on their Twitter. *See* @kinkypocbayarea, INSTAGRAM, <https://www.instagram.com/kinkypocbayarea/>; c.f. @KinkyPOCBayArea, TWITTER, <https://twitter.com/kinkypocbayarea?lang=en>.

Comparing and contrasting the Instagram posts of BKBA and KPOC-BA, KPOC-BA limits their posts to promoting events or engaging in what I would call “political speech,” wherein they post imagery political in tenor, such as the brown raised fist, which is a symbol of solidarity and resistance. @kinkypocbayarea, INSTAGRAM, (Jan. 27. 2019), https://www.instagram.com/p/BtJ_BbWhCiB/ (photo of colored raised fists). BKBA’s Instagram is more dynamic in that they also promote events, engage in “political speech,” and also post curated and “conventionally” aesthetically appealing photos of non-conventional items or educational posts about terminology. *See generally* @blackkinkbayarea, INSTAGRAM, <https://www.instagram.com/blackkinkbayarea/>. In May of 2019, BKBA’s most recent post, was of a photo of two fuschia, mother of pearl, and gold colored floggers purposefully displayed across decorative pillows—one the color of bubblegum and the other black with a white colored minimalist arrow pattern. At first glance the carefully curated photo appears to be two long tassels over pillows, the nature of the object is not readily apparent. @blackkinkbayarea, Instagram, (May 2, 2019), <https://www.instagram.com/p/Bw-FuE7hyUd/>. *See also*, Sophia Saint Thomas, *How to Find the Right Whip For Your BDSM Play*, REFINERY29, (last updated Nov. 14, 2018), <https://www.refinery29.com/en-us/best-sex-whips> (for further information on floggers and other BDSM tools).

It is also worth mentioning that the text accompanying the image “tags” “@firebirdleather.” This generally implies that the merchant tagged was where the merchandise was purchased or provided to the account by the merchant. Firebird Leather is a leatherworker and costume designer based in Los Angeles who in May of 2019 had a following just shy of 4,000 people (approximately 3,988). None of the 1, 517 posts featured the same floggers posted by

social group for young, black professionals who wish to promote sex-positivity.”¹⁶⁰ Their mission is to “diversify kinky and queer spaces and to combat the sexual objectification of black bodies...[they] seek to correct misinformation about sex in the black community and to demystify sex for black people in an effort to promote and maintain healthy sex lives.”¹⁶¹

Unlike KPOC-BA, which is silent as to whether their group allows race fetishists, BKBA explicitly excludes them from their group.¹⁶² In researching these groups, I found that KPOC-BA and BKBA are interconnected. KPOC-BA promotes events by BKBA by creating an original post with the event information or re-tweeting/re-posting a photo with the information on their Instagram.¹⁶³ This promotion could be read as being an act of 1) community building, the older group helping the newer group gain momentum, and/or 2) solidarity with the overall mission of maintaining an inclusive space for POC BDSM practitioners to safely explore their sexuality and take part in a community. I cannot make a determination about how power and social control operate in this sphere as opposed to the predominant community, but I encourage other scholars to take on this work.

ii. Race Play: Subverting Power

Published research on POC BDSM communities as the ones I have described are currently nonexistent. However, there is research regarding the interplay between, race, dominance, and black female sexuality. One example of such research is an essay titled, “*Beyond Black & Blue: BDSM, Internet Pornography, and Black female Sexuality*,” by Black feminist scholar, Ariane

BKBA. See @firebirdleather, INSTAGRAM, (May 4, 2019), <https://www.instagram.com/p/jPwpKmm8TL/> (this account was opened over five years ago on January 14, 2014). Additional review of Firebird Leather’s website and their current merchandise similarly reveals that the pictured floggers are not for sale, unless they were custom ordered. See FIREBIRD LEATHER, In Stock, FIREBIRDLEATHER.COM, (last visited on May 4, 2019) <https://firebirdleather.com/collections/in-stock>. The closest floggers to the ones featured in BKBA’s is priced between \$140 and \$380 for the pair. *Id.*

Further comparison of BKBA and KPOC-BA’s Fetlife pages reveals that KPOC-BA’s page is more organized and stylized than BKBA’s. There is generally more information on KPOC-BA’s page. KPOC-BA has information about their organizers, while BKBA does not. Another difference between the two groups is that BKBA explicitly states in their description that their group is for “black professionals.” KPOC-BA’s site does not mention this—nor does their Instagram tag expensive merchants, while BKBA does, as previously discussed. The language in KPOC-BA’s rules are explicitly trying to avoid discrimination and further marginalization in their space, this is evidenced by their neutral language and their fourth rule which states that: “[i]f your words or actions convey even a hint of transphobia, homophobia, racism, sexism, ableism, or any other form of discrimination then you will be banned without notification.” Kinky People of Color: Bay Area: About & Rules, FETLIFE, (last updated May 13, 2018), <https://fetlife.com/groups/144564/about> (KPOC-BA has nine rules in total).

Despite their stated differences, both group pages share several commonalities. For example, both pages articulate a set of rules and a statement of what is appropriate consent. This is unsurprising considering that consent and following an established code of rules are core tenants and characteristics of the BDSM community at large. This analysis of the online presence of both groups underscores the importance of the internet for community building, especially in this context, but also that they are reproducing the same organizational pattern of mainstream kink/BDSM communities. Additionally, BKBA’s group description (calling for black professionals)

¹⁶⁰ Black Kink Bay Area, *About & Rules*, FETLIFE, (June 27, 2018), <https://fetlife.com/groups/173721/about>.

¹⁶¹ *Id.*

¹⁶² *Id.*

¹⁶³ See @KinkyPOCBayArea, *Biography*, TWITTER, (Mar. 12, 19 at 8:33 a.m.), <https://twitter.com/KinkyPOCBayArea/status/1105491934359957506> (for an example of an original tweet by KPOC-BA promoting a happy hour hosted by BKBA); see also @kinkypocbayarea, INSTAGRAM (Mar. 3, 2019) <https://www.instagram.com/p/BukiTvqBai9/> (re-post of BKBA of a list of “10 things to Keep in Mind When Discussing Race by CoCo”).

Cruz.¹⁶⁴ Cruz shifts her focus away from the BDSM community at large (and the representation of people of color within the mainstream) and instead studies what many feminist scholars consider a problematic contradiction in light of the history of slavery and domination—Black women practicing BDSM, and more specifically, “race play.” Her findings are supported through personal interviews, archival research, and textual analysis.¹⁶⁵

Race play is defined as “erotic play that explores power exchange within the dynamics of cultural, ethnic, socio-economic, religious and/or racial differences.”¹⁶⁶ “Like other BDSM practices, race play relies on the simultaneous observance and violation of conventional sociocultural imagined racial difference in which the color line between Black and white is itself played with—constantly smudged, redelinated, and traversed.”¹⁶⁷

Cruz introduces a new term to the discourse in connection to race play, “racial sexual alterity.”¹⁶⁸ This term was created to “describe the perceived entangled racial and sexual otherness that characterizes the lived experience of Black womanhood.”¹⁶⁹ “Racial sexual alterity signifies the ways Black womanhood is constituted, *not* produced solely, via a dynamic invention of racial and sexual otherness.”¹⁷⁰ Using this as a lens to study race play, Cruz describes several ways in which the Black women she interviewed navigate and use race play both to gain erotic pleasure but also as a way to unsettle dichotomies, such as those of black/white and subversion/reproduction. This “unsettling” is achieved by reconceptualizing race through a narrative they choose to re-work, and for some, they describe this process as also involving a disassociation between what is fantasy and play and that which our mind knows “better.” For example, in life, it is not ok to shout racial epithets, but during race play, this is acceptable and can be arousing because it is a fantasy.¹⁷¹

Cruz begins her analysis by introducing the divergent black feminist views on BDSM. For example, Audre Lorde, one of the pioneering voices in black feminist scholarship and sexual politics, argues that,

Sadomasochism is an institutionalized celebration of dominant/subordinate relationships. And, it prepares us to either accept subordination or dominance. Even in play, to affirm that the exertion of power over powerlessness is erotic, is empowering, is to set the emotional and social state for the continuation of that relationship, politically, social, and economically.¹⁷²

Lorde further states her anti-BDSM position as follows, “[a]s a minority woman, I know dominance and subordination are not bedroom issues. In the same way rape is not about sex, s/m

¹⁶⁴ See also ARIANE CRUZ, *THE COLOR OF KINK: BLACK WOMEN, BDSM, AND PORNOGRAPHY* (NYU Press, 2016) (in her book, Cruz further elaborates on her study, findings, and analysis).

¹⁶⁵ Ariane Cruz, *Beyond Black and Blue: BDSM, Internet Pornography, and Black Female Sexuality*, 41 *FEMINIST STUDIES* 409, 411 (2015).

¹⁶⁶ *Id.* at 423 (the definition of “race play” is quoted from columnist of *Leather Bound for Edge Magazine*, Scott Daddy).

¹⁶⁷ *Id.*

¹⁶⁸ *Id.* at 411.

¹⁶⁹ *Id.*

¹⁷⁰ *Id.*

¹⁷¹ Cruz, *supra* note 172, at 411.

¹⁷² *Id.* at 412 (quoting Audre Lorde from Audre Lorde and Susan Leigh Star, Interview with Audre Lorde in *AGAINST SADMASOCHISM: A RADICAL FEMINIST ANALYSIS* 68 (Robin Ruth Linden et al. ed. Frog in the Well, 1982)).

is not about sex but about how we use power.”¹⁷³ For Lorde, BDSM “operates in tandem with and perpetuates social patterns of domination and submission.”¹⁷⁴

Unlike Lorde, Cruz argues that BDSM is not only productive but also a critical site from which the historical enmeshment of black female sexuality and violence can be reimagined.¹⁷⁵ For example, violence reimagined is both a means to obtain pleasure but also assessing and contesting power.¹⁷⁶ Further, we should be tolerant of the ways in which marginalized people can subvert power, for this assists in the greater project of destabilizing the panoptic power structures in our society—which is important to lifting the veil on the myth of difference between groups of people as natural.

V. Conclusion

BDSM practices and practitioners are commonly viewed as deviants—a label which can carry more or less social, and potential legal consequences for the BDSM practitioner. However, being labeled a deviant is not the same for all practitioners. The academic literature highlights that for a racialized body, which is already perceived as “other,” the further labeling of these bodies as deviant can put them at greater risk than their white counterparts who are similarly situated in education and profession. White practitioners may use their privilege to negate the role that race plays in their perceived and experienced discrimination. Because these lived experiences bleed into all facets of life, research on non-normative sexual practices needs to account for race and critically analyze it.

Situating BDSM within our legal system highlights how the concept of sexual deviance implicitly criminalizes certain BDSM practices. The danger for this type of application of the law is rooted in language and the enforcement of “traditional” norms that reinforce difference as a mechanism for control and oppression. I argue from a pro-sex feminist perspective that calls for the destigmatization of sex and sex practices between consenting adults. This perspective recognizes the importance of advancing sexual freedoms and individual liberty within our society, and for destabilizing oppressive structures of power—including sexism. The power and pervasiveness of the myth of inherent difference, which aids in sustaining a particularized and dangerous hierarchy, can be changed. However, this work cannot be done if it is not multifaceted and intersectional.

¹⁷³ *Id.*

¹⁷⁴ *Id.* at 412.

¹⁷⁵ *Id.* at 435.

¹⁷⁶ *Id.*

Combating Racial Injustice: A Comparative Analysis of Gloria E. Anzaldúa's Path of Conocimiento and Ibram X. Kendi's Antiracism

By Margaret Cantú-Sánchez

Abstract

In the wake of the second wave of the Black Lives Matter movement, the masses have reached a sudden awakening to the fact that systemic racism pervades every aspect of our lives in America. Race and racism have always informed our ways of thinking, especially in academia, but with the emergence of a worldwide pandemic, the racial disparities have become glaringly apparent to those beyond the ivory tower. In particular, the writings of Gloria Anzaldúa, Chicana scholar, feminist, and philosopher are well-known for expressing the hardship and discrimination she endured as a queer, Mexican American woman living in the Rio Grande Valley during the fifties, sixties, and seventies. It is through her haunting experiences as articulated in many of her writings, especially the essay “Now let us shift...,” that Anzaldúa develops her notion of the path of *conocimiento*. She describes this path as a journey one must undergo in order to come into consciousness about their positionality in the world and use this newfound knowledge to contest problematic ideologies like systemic racism. Similarly, Ibram X. Kendi uses his most-recent book, *How to be an Antiracist*, to articulate his experiences with racism through what he defines as antiracism. I argue that Anzaldúa's path of *conocimiento* helps to forge the beginning of a pathway toward Kendi's antiracism through consciousness-raising and spiritual activism, both elements needed to help further the objectives of the Black Lives Matter movement, which calls for the recognition and eradication of systemic racism. Both Anzaldúa's path of *conocimiento* and Kendi's antiracism are necessary components to eradicating the systemic racism that many people realize dominates American ideology. Of particular importance is the understanding of Anzaldúa's spiritual activism, which is needed to engage in meaningful action to alter our ways of thinking and acting when it comes to race and racism.

Keywords: Antiracism, *conocimiento*, racism, *mestiza* consciousness, spiritual activism

“Antiracism”—a term of current prominence in academia, has crossed the border into the realm of mainstream social media in recent months given the waves of protests and demonstrations in opposition to systemic racism. Given the recent increases in Black Lives Matter¹ protests and the impact of COVID-19,² it is not surprising that institutions, businesses, individuals, and communities are suddenly examining the ideas of antiracism³, white privilege⁴, white fragility⁵, systemic racism⁶, and defunding the police.⁷ It is also worth mentioning that many of these issues have long existed in the United States but have become exacerbated by the current Trump administration. Trump’s divisive and violent rhetoric concerning Black and Latinx peoples, his refusal to disavow white supremacists, and his lack of response to the COVID pandemic has opened the doors to more harm and violence against people of color. These developments have resulted in increased protests against systemic racism and racist ideologies. Issues regarding race have long been discussed by academics engaged in Race, Ethnic, and White Studies. The difference today is that people suddenly feel the need to not only understand these issues, but to also develop perspectives that can be applied to our everyday lives and our society.

The emergence of COVID-19 in many ways has led to this “sudden” awakening of the masses to systemic racism. This worldwide pandemic has made it necessary to implement nationwide shutdowns of communities, businesses, schools, and to change our lives as we formerly knew them prior to COVID-19. With such massive shutdowns, society has started to notice the importance of what has become known as “essential workers,” such as teachers, mailmen, grocery store workers, gas stations, delivery men and women. These laborers essentially comprise the working class. While we as a society began to notice the importance of such figures to maintain our safety and those of our communities and family, it also became glaringly apparent that such shutdowns and COVID-19 are disproportionately impacting people of color. CDC data indicates that “...Black and Latinx people are three times as likely to contract the virus as white people. They are also nearly twice as likely to die from it” (Ryan, “How Systemic Racism”). This does not come as a surprise to those of who have consistently called out

¹ The Black Lives Matter movement was initiated as a #BlackLivesMatter in response to the acquittal of George Zimmerman after he murdered Trayvon Martin and following the murders (by police officers) of Michael Brown and Eric Garner, protests followed in Ferguson, Missouri. The second revival of Black Lives Matter began when a video surfaced of the murder of George Floyd at the hands of police officers. Subsequent protesting began in major cities throughout the world in May and continue.

² COVID-19 or the coronavirus pandemic hit the United States in early February, late March in New York city, the pandemic to date has killed roughly 148,000 Americans and affected 4.2 million. Most of those impacted have been people of color.

³ I use Ibram X. Kendi’s definition of antiracism to refer to actions, thinking and policy which attempts to bring to light antiracist policies.

⁴ The privileges afforded to Anglo people because of their white skin, including never having to experience systemic racism.

⁵ Robin DiAngelo refers to this term as something white people encounter when they are faced with the having to discuss or confront race or racism—it is their defensive reaction, often demonstrated by anger, crying, or becoming upset.

⁶ Also referred to as systematic racism or institutional racism-this refers to the racism embedded in our institutions like education, the justice system, workplace, etc.

⁷ Activists are currently using the term “defund the police” to indicate a need to cut some funding to police and instead funnel it to education programs, peace initiatives, social workers, afterschool activities and organizations, etc.

such disparities in higher education, activism, and scholarship. The racial disparities in the United States have long been a part of our society since its “inception.”⁸ It has simply become glaringly obvious that systemic racism is a part of American society since the COVID-19 pandemic hit in March of 2020. The arrival of COVID-19 exposed the underpinnings of American society, namely, systemic racism, and the masses began to become conscious of the fact that those essential workers we desperately need while we shelter in place are people of color.

Further research reveals that BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color) “...might be more likely to live in places where physical distancing is not an option” (Ryan, “How Systemic Racism”). In addition to the need to work despite pandemic conditions, many people of color in our communities already encounter less access to healthy food, exhibit more health problems like obesity, hypertension, and diabetes, and have little access to proper healthcare. This is particularly true for many of those who identify as Latinx. Research shows that members of the Latinx community are three times more likely to suffer from COVID-19 in contrast to other ethnic or racial groups due to multigenerational living, lack of access to healthcare, and underlying health conditions. All of these elements have always existed among communities of color, especially Latinx ones. The pandemic has revealed racist policies and glaring racial disparities that have created serious problems for Latinx communities. COVID-19 has brought to light racial disparities long encountered by people of color.

As a Professor of Latinx Literature and Cultural Studies, I have spent more than a decade discussing historical and contemporary racial disparities and have challenged them through literature, knowledge, and counter narratives. Even though I employ the works of Robin Di Angelo’s *White Fragility*, Peggy McIntosh’s “The Invisible Knapsack,” and most recently Ibram X. Kendi’s *How to be an Antiracist*, which focus specifically on the racial inequities between black and white, these works can be applied to the analysis of racist issues as well. While I applaud and agree that we must have these conversations concerning racism and discrimination against black people, I must also stress the importance of examining the racist ideas which persist against Latinx and Chicana persons. In discussing notions of systemic racism, we must note that it impacts all people of color. I address the racial disparities present in the racist ideologies which target Latinx, Native American, and Black communities and peoples through a focus on the aforementioned readings alongside prominent Chicana theorist, philosopher, feminist, activist, and writer, Gloria Anzaldúa. The theories of Anzaldúa, especially her ideas of mestiza consciousness and the path of *conocimiento*, focus on her experiences as a queer, Mexican American woman. Yet elements of what she describes coincide with the antiracist ideologies being publicized today by Ibram X. Kendi. Through an examination of Anzaldúa’s theories, alongside Kendi’s exploration of antiracism, we can begin to challenge the systemic racism encountered by all peoples of color and begin to reach consciousness and transform our world into an antiracist one.

Intersections of Kendi’s Antiracism and Anzaldúa’s Consciousness

Ibram X. Kendi, the author of *How to be an Antiracist*, has attained celebrity status due to his scholarship pertaining to antiracism. Kendi defines the term antiracism in contrast to the concept of racist. He explains that an antiracist is “one who is supporting an antiracist policy through their actions or expressing an antiracist idea,” while a racist is “one who is supporting a racist

⁸ I place the term “inception” in quotation marks to question the narrative that proposes the United States was founded and became the country we know today in 1776.

policy through their actions or inaction or expressing a racist idea” (Kendi 13). Kendi understands antiracist practices as locating equality at the forefront, while racist actions and thoughts establish an inferior/superior binary in regard to black and white peoples. Further, Kendi argues that antiracism seeks to actively dismantle the racist policies which persist in our world and counteract what he considers racist ideologies, such as color blindness, reverse discrimination, post-race, and race neutrality. In order to actively attack racist policies, Kendi, alongside other antiracist scholars, argues that we must first become conscious of the driving force behind racism—self-interest. Once that consciousness is achieved and one begins to actively fight against racism through action, the struggle will continue and promote knowledge-building, self-evaluation, and greater racial awareness.

Similarly, the theories of Gloria Anzaldúa call for a certain consciousness and action. She refers to these ideas using the terms *mestiza consciousness*, *conocimiento*, and *spiritual activism*. Like Kendi’s *How to be An Antiracist*, Anzaldúa’s *Borderlands* and her seminal essay “Now let us shift...”, also uses personal and communal experiences to relay experiences of racist oppression. These particular experiences allowed Kendi and Anzaldúa to come into consciousness regarding the role of systemic racism in our world. While Kendi’s experiences highlight the racism he encountered as a black man, Anzaldúa’s experiences emphasize the racist and homophobic oppression she faced as a self-identifying, queer Mexican American. Both begin their texts with familial and personal histories, describing moments that helped to shape their subsequent theories of antiracism and *conocimiento*. Kendi begins his text with a section titled “My Racist Introduction,” which details what he now describes as a highly racist oration he presented at a competition. In contrast, Anzaldúa tells the story of her and her family’s work in fields that once belonged to her family and were stolen from them during the Mexican American War. These experiences are important for each author to highlight because they signal the beginnings of a coming into consciousness and conceptualization of their place in society. Further, the authors ground their ideas in indigenous and black histories.

The First Stage of *Conocimiento*-El Arrebato/The Rupture and Shifting into *Nepantla*⁹

Anzaldúa thoroughly explores this notion of *conocimiento*, coming into consciousness, in her essay “Now let us shift...” In this essay, Anzaldúa describes what she calls the path of *conocimiento*, which involves various stages within a process that can lead one to consciousness regarding his/her/their identity and positionality in society. Anzaldúa describes this path as having seven stages in which one may encounter some stages multiple times without a seemingly concrete beginning or ending because our identities and experiences are in constant flux. In order to achieve some semblance of *conocimiento*, Anzaldúa explains that the following stages are encountered in the path *conocimiento*: *el Arrebato*/the rupture, *Nepantla*, *Coatlicue*, the Crossing, questioning/re-envisioning, taking your story to the world, and the point of transformation where one can engage in spiritual activism.

Anzaldúa begins her discussion by explaining that attaining consciousness is a journey and that the path of *conocimiento* emerges after some sort of trauma or *arrebato* is experienced. This *arrebato* jolts one out of the life and world they knew prior to the trauma and shifts them into an in-between space, which she refers to as *Nepantla*.

In this liminal, transitional space, suspended between shifts, you’re two people, split between before and after. *Nepantla*, where the outer boundaries of the mind’s inner life

⁹ I purposefully capitalize the term *Nepantla* in order to demonstrate its significance and mark it as a significant Anzaldúan concept.

meet the outer world of reality, is a zone of possibility. You experience reality as fluid, expanding and contracting. In Nepantla you are exposed, open to other perspectives, more readily able to access knowledge derived from inner feelings, imaginal states, and outer events, and to ‘see through’ them with a mindful, holistic awareness. (Anzaldúa, “Path” 544)

This second stage, Nepantla, is one of the more important stages because it signals a great shift in thinking, in consciousness, moving one beyond the prior ways of knowing and understanding the world before the traumatizing experience. What is important to note here, is that Nepantla forces one to contemplate their position in the world, to stop and reflect, in a world which does not allow us the time to do such a thing. Further, the emergence into such a consciousness-raising state emerges through the trauma of racism, sexism, homophobia, etc. Such traumas are often experienced by people of color or those deemed “different” from mainstream society and thus this consciousness emerges out of necessity. Anzaldúa further argues that the stage of Nepantla allows one to “[see] through human acts both individual and collective [which] allows you to examine the ways you construct knowledge, identity, and reality, and explore how some of your/others’ constructions violate other people’s ways of knowing and living” (544). Both Anzaldúa and Kendi describe multiple traumatic experiences which shift their consciousness.

In “How to Tame a Wild Tongue,” Anzaldúa describes a situation in which her dentist becomes frustrated with her tongue because it continues to get in his way as he works. He responds with “[w]e’re going to have to do something about your tongue” (Anzaldúa, *Borderlands* 76). This dentist visit leads to Anzaldúa’s description of the various moments in her life when she was punished for speaking Spanish in school or speaking English with an accent. These experiences stayed with Anzaldúa throughout her life and encourages her to contemplate how Mexican Americans have been and continue to be silenced in their own communities and beyond. Kendi describes the traumatizing experience of watching a fellow black student ignored by a white teacher when asked a question. He explains that this is one of the many moments in which he recognized how racist policies were working against him and other black students. Both cases serve as catalysts for addressing the problems of systemic racism encountered by Anzaldúa and Kendi in their personal lives and communities, thus leading the way for consciousness-raising.

Coatlicue: Facing the “depths of despair, self-loathing, and hopelessness”

Arguably the most difficult stage in Anzaldúa’s path of *conocimiento*, Coatlicue, emerges after Nepantla. Anzaldúa explains that one shifts into the Coatlicue stage “[w]hen overwhelmed by the chaos caused by living between stories, you break down, descend into the third space, the Coatlicue depths of despair, self-loathing, and hopelessness” (545). After dealing with trauma and this attempt to engage in consciousness-raising comes the difficult stage of figuring out what to do next, acknowledging the positionality one has existed in prior to an enlightening event. For Kendi, his chapter titled “Failure” encapsulates Anzaldúa’s ideas of Coatlicue. After failing to convince the Black Student Union to engage in demonstrations and protests to free the Jena 6, a group of black students who were arrested and jailed after being accused of beating a white student, Kendi questions the probability of freeing the accused. At this point Kendi questions the point of demonstrations,

After all, when we attend or organize demonstrations thinking they are protests, thinking they can change power and policy, and see no change happening, it is hard not to become

cynical. It is hard not to think the Goliath of racism can never be defeated. It is hard to think of strategies and solutions and ideologies and feelings as the true failures. It is hard to think we actually have all the tools for success. (Kendi 216)

As Kendi attempts to resist racism in an active way, he is met with failure and resistance. He initially believes the failure lies in his inability to persuade others to engage in radical activism, rather than the fact that such demonstrations will rarely lead to actual changes in racist policy.

Similarly, Anzaldúa describes this sense of always feeling like an outsider in her own community because she believed she was different and could not quite fit in. Despite these everyday rejections, Anzaldúa explains they helped her to move forward in her consciousness-raising, "...every step forward is a *travesía*, a crossing" (Anzaldúa, *Borderlands* 70). Further, the act of taking part in this crossing allows one to encounter more knowledge, which "...makes me more aware, it makes me more conscious. 'Knowing is painful because after 'it' happens I can't stay in the same place and be comfortable. I am no longer the same person I was before'" (Anzaldúa 70). For Anzaldúa, this knowledge, this consciousness of being a woman in a patriarchal culture which treats females as second-class citizens—while her identity as a Mexican American labels her as lazy because of racist stereotypes—is unacceptable. Instead, she chooses to contest such forced social constructs of female and Mexican identities by "crossing" over into a new space where these constructs are rejected and subverted. Similarly, Kendi reaches the point where he too "crosses" into a space where he no longer wishes to engage in racist ideologies and false understandings of how to contest them. Instead, Kendi engages in knowledge-raising and self-evaluation. He asks, "[w]hat if antiracists constantly self-critiqued our own ideas? What if we blamed our ideologies and methods, studied our ideologies and methods, refined our ideologies and methods again and again until they worked?" (Kendi 214). It is finally when each person has worked through this difficult "crossing" stage that the real work of transformation can begin.

"The Crossing," Being Called to Action

Despite the difficulty of the Coatlicue stage it is a necessary one if an individual wants to engage in consciousness-raising and action. In going through the difficulty of understanding and coming to terms with the problems of society, like racism, systemic racism, colorism, and other issues one becomes better equipped to enter the next stage, "The Crossing." This new stage calls for you to act and move beyond the reflecting and wallowing in depression which you have previously engaged in. For Anzaldúa, this fourth space encourages "[y]ou to break free from your habitual coping strategies of escaping from your realities you are reluctant to face, reconnect with spirit, and undergo a conversion" ("Now" 545). Rather than attempt to escape the reality of a world full of racism and sexism, spaces where Anzaldúa is not welcomed or feels she does not belong, she attempts to move beyond these things especially through what she refers to as "mestiza consciousness." The concept of "mestiza consciousness" functions for Anzaldúa as a way to "...break down the subject-object duality that keeps her a prisoner and to show in the flesh and through the images in her work how duality is transcended" (Anzaldúa 102). Rather than accept binary ways of thinking, placing us against them, white against people of color, men against women, Anzaldúa questions why such modes of thinking still persist in the first place.

In a similar way, Kendi also enters into this Crossing stage through the act of questioning. As Kendi attempts to better formulate his notion of antiracism, he realizes along the way that he must re-evaluate his own ideas of racism and his participation in systemic racism as well. After hearing a lecture on antiracism and the description of racism as a disease, Kendi dismisses this

notion in favor of his own view that racism is more like an organ. This assertion, which differs from the speaker's definition of racism, forces Kendi to question and evaluate himself. He asks "[h]ow can antiracists ask racists to open their minds and change when we are closed-minded and unwilling to change?" (Kendi 219). Both Anzaldúa and Kendi admit that their prior ways of knowing and defining the world come into direct opposition with their own experiences. Anzaldúa refuses to utilize binary ways of thinking to explain why she does not feel accepted by her racial community or her national community. Kendi acknowledges the hypocrisy of rejecting one person's definition of antiracism in lieu of his own understanding of it because it forces him to acknowledge the part he may have played in racist policies and practices. Thus, for both writers the Crossing segues into the next stage of Questioning/Re-envisioning their identities and positionalities in the world.

Questioning and Re-envisioning Systemic Racism

In the Questioning/Re-envisioning stage Anzaldúa continues to engage in the work of mestiza consciousness, while Kendi attempts to better formulate his notion of antiracism.

Kendi begins to acknowledge that his lifelong mission "...to uncover and critique America's life of racist ideas turned into a mission to uncover and critique my life of racist ideas, which turned into a lifelong mission to be antiracist" (226). Kendi's path of *conocimiento* leads him to the discovery that all along he has rejected his participation in the racist policies and practices he vehemently rejects. Similarly, Anzaldúa's mestiza consciousness helps her to develop a tolerance for ambiguity. She explains that as a mestiza, she copes with her world by

...developing a tolerance for contradictions, a tolerance for ambiguity. She learns to be an Indian in Mexican culture, to be Mexican from an Anglo point of view. She learns to juggle cultures. She has a plural personality, she operates in a pluralistic mode—nothing is thrust out, the good, the bad and the ugly, nothing rejected, nothing abandoned. Not only does she sustain contradictions, she turns the ambivalence into something else" (101).

Through the Questioning/Re-envisioning stage, Anzaldúa begins to realize she need not reject part of herself nor attempt to change who she is, rather she understands and accepts the need for ambiguity especially because she is a Mexican American woman. It is impossible for her to ignore her indigenous roots, Mexican culture, Spanish language, American nationality, or female gender cemented in two patriarchal societies. Anzaldúa further argues that in this stage of questioning "[y]ou scrutinize and question dominant and ethnic ideologies and the mind-sets their cultures induce in others. And, putting all the pieces together, you reenvision the map of the known world, creating a new description of reality and scripting a new story" ("Now" 545). Once this critique of self and the world emerges, Anzaldúa argues that the ambivalence can be used to rewrite a new story, one that rejects the former ways of thinking about the world of racist policies and instead injects antiracist ideologies meant to support and encourage all people.

The Counter-Narrative, Resisting Antiracist Ideology

Systemic racism, according to Anzaldúa can be resisted and replaced with antiracist ideologies through the power of storytelling and more specifically through writing. Anzaldúa extols writing as a process that heals. She explains, "I survived all the racism and oppression by processing it through the writing. It's a way of healing. I put all the positive and negative feelings, emotions, and experiences into the writing and try to make sense of them" (Anzaldúa, "Writing a Way of Life" 248). In this sixth space of the path of *conocimiento*, Anzaldúa explains

the necessity of going out into the world with one's story. It is especially important for people of color to share their stories of oppression and, more importantly, to reveal how they survived. In sharing her own story about being excluded from the decision-making process in a woman's organization, Anzaldúa reveals the deep-seated pain experienced by women of color. Anzaldúa further notes that the white women present and doing the excluding refuse to think about race. Such a refusal is also a form of racism and "white" privilege, one they do not recognize. In fact, the refusal to acknowledge such systemic racism and privilege among white women marks a lack of understanding that "...racism [is] inherent in their identities, in their cultures' stories. They can't see that racism harms them as well as people of color, itself a racially superior attitude" (Anzaldúa, "Now" 564). Through sharing such a story, Anzaldúa reveals the many ways that systemic racism affects even those who believe themselves to be seemingly conscious of the oppressions of the world.

Likewise, Kendi makes a conscious decision to share his individual and his family's stories of survival and in doing so facilitates a better understanding of how to confront systemic racism at various levels. Kendi's chapter titled "Survival" chronicles his wife's and mother's survival from breast cancer and his own bout with colon cancer. Through these experiences of surviving cancer, Kendi connects this understanding with his attempts to establish his Antiracist Research and Policy Center. In fighting these battles with cancer, Kendi begins to see racism as a type of cancer. He explains "I still could not separate racism and cancer. I sat in the waiting rooms, between medical meetings, tests, and procedures, writing an essay arguing that the heartbeat of racism is denial, the heartbeat of antiracism is confession" (234). Through his own struggle and story, Kendi comes to several realizations, "*My society has racism. The most serious stage. Racism is likely to kill my society. My society can survive racism against all odds*" (Kendi 235). With these thoughts in mind, Kendi makes the conscious decision to fight and defeat both his cancer and racism not only by sharing his stories and insight but through the establishment of his Antiracism Research and Policy Center at American University.

Shifting Realities Beyond Racist Ideology Through Spiritual Activism

Kendi's Policy Center signals a shift into what Anzaldúa refers to as the final stage in the path of *conocimiento*, namely, the point of transformation where shifting realities occur, and one acts out the vision of spiritual activism. Anzaldúa explains that this point of transformation happens

[w]hen a change occurs [in] your consciousness (awareness of your sense of self and your response to self, others, and surroundings) becomes cognizant that it has a point of view, and the ability to act from choice. This knowing/knower is always with you but is displaced by the ego and its perspectives. ("Now" 569).

For Kendi, his wife's and his own encounters with cancer propel him to really seek a transformational reality, one where he takes his words and story out into the world to engage in meaningful action by means of his Antiracism Research and Policy Center. Kendi's decision to create the policy center is only the first step to enact real change. The objectives of the Center are at the heart of his spiritual activism. Kendi argues that the Center's purpose is to

Admit racial inequity is a problem of bad policy, not bad people.

Identify racial inequity in all its intersections and manifestations.

Investigate and uncover the racist policies causing racial inequity.

Invent or find antiracist policy that can eliminate racial inequity.

Figure out who or what group has the power to institute antiracist policy...(232).

With these very specific objectives in mind, Kendi finally realizes that his true purpose in examining race and racism through his own lived experiences and those of his fellow black community members was to initiate a new approach to racism. It is this kind of approach that can help us move forward in an era where the definition of racist is no longer discernible and often ignored or denied by racists themselves. What Kendi demonstrates for us here through his path of *conocimiento*, is that we too must embark on our own journeys of transformation and spiritual activism.

For Anzaldúa spiritual activism begins with *conocimiento* and relates back to the experiences of racism and sexism she encountered growing up and living in the Rio Grande Valley of South Texas. She likens the idea of coming to consciousness as a necessary, like taking care of “growing things and the land” (*Borderlands* 113). In the same way, one must take care of themselves to move to the next stage of transformation. Such transformations regarding identity and systemic racism emerge

[w]hen you relate to others, not as parts, problems, or useful commodities, but from a connectionist view compassion triggers transformation. This shift occurs when you give up investment in your point of view and recognize the real situation free of projections—not filtered through your habitual defensive preoccupations. (Anzaldúa, “Now” 569)

In the case of systemic racism and the experience of racial discrimination, Anzaldúa notes that one of the first steps to addressing these issues is to seek out empathy, understanding, and compassion. To consider another person’s perspective, their opinion, and how their history has impacted why they have formed such opinions and developed such ideologies allows for a better connection to others and room for transformation. Just as Kendi recognizes that sometimes he too adheres to racist assumptions, Anzaldúa also recognizes the fallibility she and all of us have when it comes to systemic racism because it has become embedded in our everyday institutions and reality. So then, the only way to reject the former ways of knowing is to move outside of those narratives, beyond them. Karina Céspedes’s critique of Anzaldúa’s spiritual activism notes this call to move beyond the boundaries of former ways of knowing our world. She explains that healing the split between dualistic thinking involves “...facing up to the real effects such identities produce, the personal privileges one may gain from them alongside the tragic limitations these categories create. To disidentify from either side is to question the privileges we take for granted and the power, which is carelessly given away in order to stand on one side or the other” (Céspedes 76). This notion of disidentification as a part of spiritual activism and *conocimiento* aligns with Kendi’s concept of antiracism which calls on us to do the same, to disidentify with our previous notions of race and racist ideology and instead create new ideas about race that are focused on equitable antiracist policies.

Raising Consciousness and Spiritual Activism through Black Lives Matter and Beyond...

After careful scrutiny of both Kendi’s antiracism concept and Anzaldúa’s path of *conocimiento*, the question remains, how do we enact their ideas to establish antiracist policies within institutions and society, especially given the current racist climate?¹⁰ Today as I write this

¹⁰ As I revise this paper, the Trump administration has made the decision to exclude training regarding discrimination against race and sex within government entities. Some people are extending this idea to public

essay, the city of Portland, Oregon is under siege by federal “police” as they attempt to intimidate and eliminate peaceful protesters in support of the Black Lives Matter movement. In the Rio Grande Valley, the home of Gloria Anzaldúa, the people there are under siege by the COVID-19 pandemic and Hurricane Hanna. The Valley, as people from there are wont to call it, is now the main hotspot for COVID-19 in the world. The question as to why this area of the United States has been hit so hard lies in systemic racism and the experiences both Anzaldúa and Kendi have relayed in their storytelling and analysis. The Valley encompasses Hidalgo and Cameron counties, both of which top the charts as having the highest levels of poverty, obesity, and healthcare problems in the entire United States. The New York Times notes that “[i]n the Rio Grande Valley, more than a third of families live in poverty. Up to half of residents have no health insurance, including at least 100,00 undocumented people, who often rely on under-resourced community clinics or emergency rooms for care” (Dickerson “Vulnerable Border Community...”). Couple these elements of poverty and disease with racism against Mexican Americans, Mexicans, and immigrants and you have the reasons why COVID has hit this area of the country in a particularly devastating way.

Systemic racism is to blame for the problems the Valley is currently encountering because of the COVID-19 pandemic. The solution to combatting COVID-19, at least in the Valley, cannot focus solely on medicine, rather we must get to the heart of the problem by addressing the glaring systemic disparities that have long existed in that area. The egregious systematic racial inequalities highlighted by the COVID-19 crisis have also drawn attention to how systemic racism continues to be responsible for the disproportionate policing and killing of black men. In response to this fact, massive Black Lives Matter protests have erupted throughout the country and continue in major cities like Austin, Louisville, Oregon, Chicago, and many others. While Kendi notes the importance of protests and demonstrations to bring to light the inequities present in our world, this is only the first step in enacting real changes. To truly engage in spiritual activism, it is necessary to make certain demands which will challenge, disrupt, and transform our racist world to an antiracist one. Some of the demands being made include defunding the police, racial education (at home and school), voting, donating time and money to racial justice organizations, self-reflection, and opposing anti-blackness in our own cultures and communities through dialogue.

With these goals in mind, some changes have indeed come to fruition thanks to the protesting and demonstrations supporting Black Lives Matter. The resurgence of the Black Lives Matter protests began in response to the murder of George Floyd by four white police officers in Minneapolis. Though it took days, all four officers were eventually charged and arrested. Minneapolis officials and other cities instituted the ban of chokeholds by police officers. The mayor of Los Angeles, Eric Garcetti, has pledged to redirect \$150 million from the LAPD budget to youth jobs, peace centers, and health initiatives, and other mayors have pledged to do the same. Moreover, many major cities have begun the process of dismissing police resource officers from public schools.

While many great changes have come about from the Black Lives Matter movement, there continues to be more work to do as both Anzaldúa and Kendi point out. Dismantling the systemic racism that has long informed our ideologies is work that we must do as individuals and communities. Part of that work lies in directly confronting the systemic racism present in the current Trump administration. In order to truly dismantle systemic racism, people of color must

entities like Universities (which receive government funding) and have cancelled events like Hispanic Heritage month lectures and activities.

unite and take actions like voting, continually protesting, and calling out oppression when we recognize it even if our governments and institutions are the ones engaging in such practices. For now we focus on Black lives because they are under siege, but as Anzaldúa and more recent activists point out, systemic racism is widespread and is impacting immigrant, Latinx, and indigenous communities. Latinx and indigenous communities have also experienced disproportionate violence against them by police and will continue to do so until we all engage in spiritual activism. If Anzaldúa were around today I believe she would indicate that spiritual activism can occur through “bridging.” According to Anzaldúa “[t]o bridge means loosening our borders, not closing off to others. Bridging is the work of opening the gate to the stranger, within and without...To bridge is to attempt community, and for that we must risk being open to personal, political, and spiritual intimacy, to risk being wounded.” (Anzaldúa, *This Bridge We call Home*, 1). Similarly, Kendi advocates for hope and belief that we as a society can change. Despite the discrimination and systemic racism both authors faced, what helped them to rise above and consider all possibilities is the notion of hope. In a time of political unrest, violence and division, those who still cling to hope are the bridge-makers. People like Anzaldúa and Kendi, who were and are willing to shoulder the work of antiracism and *conocimiento* can help lead us to a path of redemption where we both remember the errors of our past, learn from them, and work to remedy them through action.

Works Cited

- Anzaldúa, Gloria. *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*. San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 1999. Print.
- . "Writing: A Way of Life." *Interview/Entrevistas*. Ed. AnaLouise Keating. New York: Routledge, 2000. 235-250. Print.
- . "Now Let us Shift...the path of conocimiento...inner work, public acts." *This Bridge We Call Home: Radical Visions for Transformation*. Eds. Gloria E. Anzaldúa and AnaLouise Keating. New York: Routledge, 2002. 540-576. Print.
- . "Preface." *This Bridge We Call Home: Radical Visions for Transformations*. Eds. Gloria Anzaldúa and AnaLouise Keating. New York: Routledge, 2002. 1-20. Print.
- Céspedes, Karina L. "A Call to Action: Spiritual Activism...an Inevitable Unfolding." *Bridging: How Gloria Anzaldúa's Life and Work Transformed our Own*. Eds. AnaLouise Keating and Gloria González-López. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2011. 74-79. Print.
- Dickerson, Caitlin. "Vulnerable Border Community Battles Virus on 'A Straight Up Trajectory.'" *The New York Times*. July 19, 2020.
<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/07/19/us/coronavirus-texas-rio-grande-valley.html>. Accessed July 27, 2020.
- Kendi, Ibram X. *How to Be an Antiracist*. New York: One World, 2019. Print.
- Ryan, Maggie. "How Systemic Racism is Causing a COVID-19 Crisis In Black, Latinx, and Indigenous Communities." *Popsugar*. July 27, 2020.
<https://www.popsugar.com/fitness/how-covid-19-impacts-black-latinx-indigenous-communities-47622659>. Accessed July 16, 2020.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Alfredo Antonio Arevalo

Alfredo Antonio Arevalo is a queer Chicano writer from Fresno, California. He earned his BA in English (Creative Writing) from the University of Southern California in 2018, where he received the Jimmy Gauntt Memorial Award. He will attend the University of Alabama beginning this fall as a McNair Fellow in the MFA Create Writing program. He loves to explore different genres and styles and, beyond writing, loves to dance, cook, and act.

Angelica Maria Barraza

Angelica Maria Barraza holds an MFA in creative writing from Naropa University and is currently a PhD candidate at UC Riverside where Angelica studies experimental, interdisciplinary women of color poets. Angelica strongly believes that the personal is political, is critical. “Still Life with Mexico” is somewhat of a creative counterpart to her academic work; an ode, perhaps, to xicanisma and her younger understanding of the term.

Arnaldo Batista

Arnaldo Batista graduated Florida International University with a degree in Interdisciplinary Studies and Physics, with a certificate in National Security. He is a queer, polyglot, Gen Z South Floridian poet with a passion for language. Arnaldo has been published in Lucky Jefferson’s literary journal and Florida State Poet’s Association 2020 anthology, and is a finalist for Gival Press’s Oscar Wilde Poetry Prize of 2020. Arnaldo plans to take on the MFA Creative Writing program at FIU in the Fall of 2021 in order to hone his craft to amplify voices this country needs during these times.

Vanessa Canibano

Vanessa Canibano is a working-class poet with a BA in English: Writing and Philosophy from Lake Forest College. She was born and raised in Chicago, Illinois, and currently resides there with her two cats.

Margaret Cantú-Sánchez

Margaret Cantú-Sánchez is an Instructor of English at St. Mary's University where she teaches various composition and literature courses with a focus on Latinx theory and literature. Her research focuses on the identity conflict which Anglocentric institutions of learning impose upon Latinx students. As an instructor at a Hispanic Serving Institution, she strives to include multicultural texts in all courses, especially those within the core curriculum. Her various publications include explorations of how to approach the teaching of Latinx literature and theory. Her most recent book, *Teaching Gloria E. Anzaldúa: Pedagogy and Practice for Our Classrooms and Communities* includes interdisciplinary pedagogical strategies used by faculty and community members as they implement the theories of Gloria Anzaldúa in the classroom and beyond.

Sandra Chapman

Sandra Chapman is the Founder of Sandra Chapman Consulting, an organization rooted in the belief that, through teamwork, we can learn more about ourselves and others; discuss and discover the foundational research needed to address the needs in a community; create conversations that support individuals where they are and confront barrier issues; and create actionable steps towards building stronger educational communities. Sandra is also the co-facilitator of a grassroots organization that supports Latinx identified educators, families and students called Latinx Educators in New York Independent Schools (LENYIS). You can learn more about this organization by visiting www.lenyis.org and more about her by visiting her website at www.chapequity.com.

Sandra is a native New Yorker, born and raised in El Barrio, or Spanish Harlem, in New York City. Her mother migrated from Puerto Rico and her father immigrated from the Dominican Republic. All of her formal educational experiences occurred in New York City, from her early childhood days in Head Start and elementary school in Spanish Harlem, to college at Fordham University in Lincoln Center, to Bank Street College of Education for her Masters in Education. In December 2015 Sandra completed her Educational Doctorate in Executive Leadership from St. John Fisher College.

Her piece is the first chapter of a children's chapter book she is considering writing. In it she attempts to use words from the Taino people of Puerto Rico, prior to European invasion.

Adriana Domínguez

Adriana Domínguez is an Assistant Professor and serves as the Director of BA/BFA Theatre Programs at the Department of Theatre & Dance at UTEP. She received her BA in Theatre Arts with a Minor in Secondary Education from the University of Texas at El Paso, her MA in Performing Arts Administration from New York University, and her PhD in Curriculum & Instruction from New Mexico State University. Adriana has participated in theatre as an actress, director, producer, designer, and teacher at the elementary school, middle school, high school and college levels. She is the co-founder of both the Chicax/Latinx Theatre Series and the

Children's Traveling Troupe which serve to promote artistic connections with the community at no cost. Recent/upcoming projects include: *Real Women Have Curves* (Director), *Luna* (Director), *A Christmas Carol, en la Frontera* (co-adapter), and *Into the Beautiful North* NEA Big Read Grant (Principal Investigator). She lives in El Paso, TX; a beautiful border community that knows no borders. Her story was written in response to the massacre in El Paso, TX on August 3, 2019. That event forever changed her position in the world as a mother and a human being. She maintains that we cannot allow these horrific events to continue and must remind ourselves of the very real trauma that occurs and find ways to empower ourselves and fellow human beings.

Rudolph Esparza

Rudolph Esparza obtained in 2020 a Bachelor's of English with concentration in Creative Writing from the University of Texas at San Antonio. Rudolph is a South Texas native and has published work pending in UTSA's Sagebrush Review.

Jose Guadalupe Estrada

Jose Guadalupe Estrada is a lifelong resident of the Texas-Mexican border, with a two-year self-exile in Imperial Valley, California and Yakima, Washington. Originally a cosmetologist by trade, they found their hands often handled clippers and shears more than pen and paper, yet their hand quivered more profoundly with the desire to write. Their focus were on the communities of the South Texas Region, specifically queer spaces established by the sociopolitical powers that marginalize and or empower Latinx groups.

They believe the stories that matter are often hidden from view, and it is important, when possible, to overturn the stones and rotten logs to showcase the vernal vibrancy of life. After obtaining their bachelor degree in English at Texas A&M University- San Antonio, they have relocated to Milwaukee, Wisconsin and is currently employed by Lutheran Social Services of Wisconsin and Upper Michigan.

Chelsea Hernandez

Chelsea Hernandez is a Xicana writer and artist from Nebraska. Chelsea is a recent graduate from the University of Washington's MFA program. In 2019 she was published in *So to Speak*, nominated for a Pushcart Prize, received a scholarship for the Can Serrat international summer residency 2020, and for the Atlantic Center of the Arts residency #178. Her story is from a collection of collage memoir essays that use my training for an amateur kickboxing match to investigate issues of body, culture, erasure, colorism, gender roles, racism, and grief.

Melissa Herrera

Melissa Herrera received her Juris Doctorate from the University of California, Hastings College of the Law in 2019. She also holds a B.A. in Political Science and Gender and Women's Studies from the University of California, Berkeley. Melissa is interested in adding to the existing bodies

of knowledge in the areas of feminist jurisprudence, gender and sexuality, as well as critical race studies. The aim of her contribution is to reignite an avenue for destabilizing power structures; through the de-stigmatization of erotic experience and pleasure we can inch closer to a better society.

Stephanie Ashley Martinez

Stephanie Ashley Martinez is a queer Latina, born and raised in El Paso, Texas. Stephanie graduated from Our Lady of the Lake University with a bachelor's degree in social work in December 2018. Her pronouns are she/her/hers, and she is currently pursuing a master's degree in social work at the University of Michigan - Ann Arbor.

Chibbi Orduña

Chibbi Orduña is a Mexican-born, Texas-raised queer poet and actor. He is the founder of Laredo BorderSlam, and a founding member of Write About Now. He has self-published 2 books and his work has been featured online on Are Mitu, George Takei, SlamFind, Poetry Slam Inc, and Write About Now. Chibbi indicates that even though his point of view is only his, he would like to think that it is unique, insightful, and broadly understood. In his writing, he tries to present his experiences as a way to connect with readers to understand that despite our differences, we are all more similar than we give ourselves credit: the human experience is uniquely, universally, and collectively ours, despite any difference in race, age, religion, sex, orientation, or identity.

Sandra Ovalle Martínez

Sandra Ovalle Martínez is a native of Mexico City, a city-dweller, people-lover bailarina. She is intrigued by the deep lazos of comadrazgo that have tied Latinx communities over time. Sandra enjoys creating new co-madre communities to give birth and nourish the vision of mujerx. Much like her life, her poems move from ancestral narrative in her tierra natal of Tenochtitlán to her current explorations as a queer immigrant Latina organizer in faith spaces.

Sandra loves gathering people around her table to enjoy home-made pozole. She holds an MA in Theology from Fuller Theological Seminary. Currently, she serves as the Director of Campaigns and Mobilizing for Sojourners. She has worked in immigration advocacy and church mobilization in Southern California and Texas.

Victorio Reyes Asili

Victorio Reyes Asili is an activist and artist living in Albany, NY. Victorio holds an MFA in creative writing from The Vermont College of Fine Arts. Reyes Asili is currently pursuing a PhD in English at the University at Albany where he is working on his dissertation currently entitled *Mic Check: Finding Hip Hop's Place in the Literary Milieu*. His poems have been published in *The Acentos Review*, *The Mandala Journal*, *Pilgrimage Magazine*, *Mobius*, *Word Riot*, and

Obsidian. His work has been anthologized in *Chorus--A Literary Mixtape*, *It Was Written: Poetry Inspired by Hip Hop*, *Black Lives Have Always Mattered*, and the forthcoming *Boricua en la Luna: An Anthology of Puerto Rican Voices* as well as *Erase the Patriarchy*. Reyes has served on several panels regarding Hip Hop and poetry at the annual AWP Conference, including “Uncovering Hip Hop Poetry,” “A World Turned Upside Down--Hamilton, An American Musical,” and “The Written Orality of Hip Hop Lyricism.” Reyes Asili is also an essayist and has published work discussing activism and literature, exploring the writings of Adrienne Rich, Justin Torres, and Frantz Fanon. His essays can be found at Awst Press and She Breathes. Blending his writing and activism, Reyes Asili served as the executive director of The Social Justice Center of Albany for 11 years.

Daniela Rico Straffon

Daniela Rico Straffon (Mexico City, 1990) has a degree in Modern French Language and Literature in the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM). She is a writer, translator and editor for various institutions and publishing groups. Her areas of interest include feminism and world literature.

Keishla Rivera-Lopez

Keishla Rivera-Lopez is a writer and scholar who has spent her life bridging her affinity for literature, cultural studies, feminist studies, and Latinx culture in creative and intellectual ways. Writing is personal to her. She writes her mother’s stories, her mother’s mother’s stories, and her own. Keishla writes as part of a generation with the privilege of choice. She received her PhD in American Studies at Rutgers University, Newark in May 2020. As an interdisciplinary trained scholar in Cultural Studies, Latinx Studies, Caribbean Studies, and American Studies, Keishla specializes in culture, race, identity, gender, and diaspora literature. Broadly speaking, her interests include: Afro-Latinx and Afro-Caribbean diasporic literature, feminist theory and poetics, and postcolonial and decolonial thought.

Bridging her research interests with public scholarship and social justice work is central to her work as a scholar. She has participated in public scholarship projects and community poetry events in Newark and is most proud of her work with the intercollegiate research group #ProyectoPalabrasPR, which traveled to Puerto Rico in the wake of Hurricane Maria to conduct interviews and document the experiences of Afro-Puerto Rican women and community organizers in towns that the mainstream media or government did not reach. The group interviewed over thirty people and Keishla transcribed and translated the interviews, which are to be published in an edited volume. Her work with this team of scholars based in Michigan State University led to her being hired as a graduate coordinator where she was tasked with organizing and assisting with the inaugural Puerto Rico study-away program. The goal of the program was to assist community recovery efforts while also exposing students to the organizing efforts of community members in areas such as ecology, art, music, and education. As a first-generation scholar and organizer, Keishla is committed to sharing her works with a wide audience. She has published poetry in *The Acentos Review* and has been asked to perform poetry at community

events. In 2019 her play “Puerto Rican Kitchen” was selected for the Nuyorican Poets Cafe Short Play and Monologue Theatre Festival and won second place for the “Best of the Fest” Award. Keishla was also invited for an encore performance in addition to the opportunity of elongating her one-act play into a full-length play. She hopes to contribute to Women’s Studies, Caribbean Diasporic Studies, and Puerto Rican Studies scholarship and literature in ways that are meaningful but also enjoyable for readers.

Marcela Rodriguez-Campo

Marcela Rodriguez-Campo is currently a Doctoral Candidate at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas and focuses on Multicultural Education with research interests in the intersections of race, identity, and education in Latinx communities. Marcela, whose work has been featured in *Huizache*, *The Latino Book Review*, *Awakening and Awakened Voices*, *The Journal of Latina Critical Feminism*, and *Medium*, is an immigrant from Colombia and a first generation American. Marcela was previously a high school teacher and debate coach in the Las Vegas Valley.

Petra Salazar

Petra Salazar, raised in Española, New Mexico, is the Poetry Editor for *Snapdragon Journal* and an MFA Candidate in Poetry at UNC-G. They are the founder of TMI Open Mic Incubator and *Others Ink*, and have been published in *The Southampton Review*, *The Acentos Review*, *Open Minds Quarterly*, and *The Grief Diaries*, with work forthcoming in *Sonora Review* and *Latin American Literature Today*.

Maria Cristina Santana

Dr. Maria Cristina Santana is an Associate Professor and Director of the Women’s and Gender Studies program at the University of Central Florida. Santana’s research deals with global women’s issues under crisis and women’s history in the US. She is the Director of a Fulbright Hays GPA to Argentina 2021-2022, a Fellow of the Center for Global Economic and Environmental Opportunity, the Center for the Study of Human Trafficking & Modern Slavery and a partner with the Puerto Rico Research Hub. Her teaching conferred her four teaching excellence awards in the last decade. She is an activist with social justice organizations in Orlando, Florida.

Adela Sinclair

Adela Sinclair is a Romanian-American poet, translator, and teacher. Fluent in English, French, and Romanian, poetry is her primary, though not exclusive, medium. She is inspired by the Romanian poets and intellectuals of the ‘70s and ‘80s, such as Nina Cassian, Ana Blandiana and Nichita Stănescu, as well as the New York City School of Poets like John Ashbery and Frank O’Hara. Her poetry explores themes of cultural identity, memory, loss, trauma, and desire. Her

work appears on *The Bridge*, published by Brooklyn Poets, and Tupelo Press' 30/30 Project. Adela is currently working with an editor on her first full-length poetry collection, *The Butcher's Granddaughter*, a lyrical memoir of her childhood in Romania. She has performed her poetry all over New York City including the Yale Club, 92nd Street Y, Bowery Poetry Club, Poet's House, Brooklyn Poets, Books are Magic, KGB Bar, Saint Francis College, and Writer's Voice at the JCC. She is a founding member and poetry editor of the emerging literary magazine, *Unbound Brooklyn*, and volunteers with *Ugly Duckling Presse* in Brooklyn.

Adela was a poet-in-residence at Gallery RIVAA, a New York City art gallery, where she led poetry workshops.

She has 20 years of experience as a teacher in the New York City public and private school systems. As a writing teacher at *The École*, an independent, French-American bilingual school, Adela led groups of elementary and middle school students to share their original poems, in French and English, for four years at the annual "Poem in Your Pocket Day" in the Bryant Park Reading Room during National Poetry Month. Adela is a member and supporter of Poetry Forge, Writers Without Borders, Poet's House, Pen America, Author's Guild, Poetry Society of America, and Poetry Society of New York. Adela holds a BA in French Culture and Civilization from SUNY Albany, with additional coursework at the Sorbonne University of Paris, an MA in Education from Hunter College (NYC), and an MFA in Creative Writing/Poetry from St. Francis College (Brooklyn). A Reiki Master, she also offers private healing sessions. In a prior life, Adela managed two Indie Rock bands, *The Apartment Years* and *Via Wireless*, and produced the music video "Ativan Day" for *Via Wireless*. She lives in New York City.

Candace Angelica Walsh

Candace Angelica Walsh is a poet and non-fiction writer of Mexican, Filipino, and Irish descent originally from Los Angeles, California. She lived in Jordan, Taiwan, and Kazakhstan while she was still chasing dreams of Foreign Service, and after years of traveling the world and climbing the international business corporate ladder, she decided to go back to the start two years ago and to honor the poet and writer that she was born to be. Currently, she lives and writes in Phoenix, Arizona.

Candace Angelica's work has been published by Cathexis Northwest Press, Ming Chuan University Press in Taiwan, and others. She holds degrees in Mandarin, Political Science, and International Studies from California State University, Long Beach. She is currently working on her first full length work of Non-fiction based on her time in Havana, Cuba and was recently accepted to the New York Pitch Conference.