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Indigenous Ecology and Chicanada Coalition Building in the dramatic works of Cherríe Moraga: “Living Models” for a Sustainable Future

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2008 NACCS Conference Presentation

Indigenous Ecology and Chicanada Coalition Building in the dramatic works of Cherríe Moraga: "Living Models" for a Sustainable Future

Without the sovereignty of Native peoples, including Chicanos, and support for our land-based struggles, the world will be lost to North American greed, and our culturas lost with it. The "last frontier" for Northern capitalists lies buried in coal-and uranium-rich reservation lands and in the remaining rainforests of the Amazon. The inhabitants of these territories – the Díne, the North Cheyenne, the Kayapó, etc. – are the very people who in 1992 offer the world community "living models" of ways to live in balance with nature and safeguard the earth as we know it. (170)

--- *The Last Generation*

For the Chicano Nationalist Movement, *Aztlán* signified its values of Chicano self-determination, unified political action, the right to land and native language and resistance to the cultural imperialism of Euro-America. In *The Last Generation* (1993), Moraga reaffirms the movement's fundamental goals, stating, 'the reacquisition, defense and protection of Native land and its natural resources is the basis for rebuilding the Chicano nation', alongside other American Indian nations (170). How is she able to make such a problematic suggestion that Chicanos, who regardless of their indigenous roots also share the blood and heritage of colonizers and oppressors due to first a Spanish then an Anglo invasion, have a right to land among other First Nations? She is careful to qualify the tenuousness of the Chicano/Indian Nations alliance as well as note the complicity of all North Americans in the global exploitation of land, resources and labor of "Third World" and Native peoples. The critical move Moraga makes in her environmentalist essays is to shift the meaning of land to encompass the body and the earth in the sense of a planet without frontiers and its resources so that the "reacquisition" of a Chicano homeland wouldn't indicate a displacement of Native or other peoples in the Southwest as it once did, but rather the securing of a certain quality of life for all peoples globally:

Land remains the common ground for all radical action. But land is more than the rocks and trees, the animal and plant life that make up the territory of Aztlán or Navajo nation or Maya Mesoamerica. For immigrant and native alike, land is also the factories where we work, the water our children drink, and the housing project where we live. For women, lesbians, and gay men, land is that physical mass called our bodies. Throughout las Américas, all these "lands" remain under occupation by an Anglocentric, patriarchal, imperialist United States. (173)

So in calling Chicanos to join the global indigenous struggle for sovereignty, she means, "the sovereign right to wholly inhabit oneself (*cuero y alma*) and one's territory (*pan y tierra*)" (173-4). This struggle asks that we not only defend remaining Indian lands but also "teach one another that our freedom as a people is mutually dependent and cannot be parceled out – class before race before sex before sexuality" and finally it requires us to "invent new ways of making culture, making tribe, to survive and flourish as members of the world community in the next millennium" (174).¹

Moraga's latest works, especially the dramatic pieces written in the same period as *The Last Generation*, draw from indigenous ecology and the historical archive of Chicano struggle that provide models for a sustainable future she envisions. The author shifts from poetry and essay – the lyrical, reflective mode of self-inquiry and expression for which she is so well known – to a collective dramatic dialogue allowing her to represent the diversity of perspectives that have always existed within and

¹ For an eloquent analysis of Moraga's *The Last Generation* in the context of environmental justice please see Priscilla Solis Ybarra's " 'Lo que quiero es tierra': Longing and Belonging in Cherríe Moraga's Ecological Vision."

around Chicano communities. Through this plurality she is able to give voice to marginalized perspectives and exhibit the ingeniousness and courage behind a long tradition of Chicano coalition building that will be necessary for global alliances of collective resistance. As Chicano activist theater originated with Luis Valdez's *Teatro Campesino* associated with United Farmer Workers Union and later with the Chicano Movement, Moraga's plays are situated within the tradition of Chicano environmental political struggle. *Heroes and Saints, Watsonville: Some Place Not Here*, and *Circle in the Dirt: El Pueblo de East Palo Alto*, are infused with the author's interpretation of indigenous ecology that conflates her interlaced political discourses on race, sexuality, gender, community, nationalism, and art with a holistic view of the earth.² Contributing to a tradition of Chicano environmental discourse and the global indigenous struggle for sovereignty, her work brings together and challenges the assumptions of ecocriticism, ecofeminism and American environmental and naturalist writing particularly in terms of race and class by prioritizing the wellbeing of those who dwell in or work the land as opposed to "pristine" open spaces perceived as untouched by human hands.³

The term 'Indigenous ecology' refers to the particularly holistic relationship many indigenous communities have traditionally cultivated with their environments. Naturally, global indigenous cultures represent a great diversity of practices and beliefs, even within a given tribal or regional group many autochthonous communities do not live according to tradition. One thing most have in common, however, is the threat to their wellbeing and customary ways of life. Indeed, John Grim reports that globally, due to multinational interests often backed by nation-state violence, indigenous ecology, "cosmologies, and ritual practices [are] in danger of being extinguished by absorption into mainstream societies and by destruction of indigenous homelands through resource extraction." (Grim) In *The Last Generation*, Moraga uses the more elegant Spanish term, *indigenismo*, to denote the revalorization of pre-Columbian and Native American values, beliefs and ways of life. In her essay from this collection, 'Queer Aztlán: the Re-formation of the Chicano Tribe', written in 1992 – 500 years after the arrival of Columbus and the same year as the Earth Summit in Brazil, the author describes her vision of a Chicano 'tribal model':

A form of community building that can accommodate socialism, feminism, and environmental protection. In an ideal world, tribal members are responsive and responsible to one another and the natural environment. Cooperation is rewarded over competition. Acts of violence against women and children do not occur in secret and perpetrators are held accountable to the rest of the community. "Familia" is not dependent upon male-dominance or heterosexual coupling. Elders are respected and women's leadership is fostered, not feared. (166-67).

2 *The Hungry Woman: A Mexican Medea* and *Heart of the Earth: A Popol Vuh Story* are among these as well but I cannot adequately treat them here. I discussed the first in my presentation at the 2009 NACCS conference entitled, "Myth and Ritual at the Intersections of Social and Environmental Injustice in Cherríe Moraga's *The Hungry Woman*." Indeed, with the complexity of Moraga's interrelated concerns and techniques, even teasing out the environmental threads as I do here is a violation of her art. Yet, it is necessary since they have not been treated elsewhere.

³ A more thorough discussion of these theoretical overlaps is beyond the scope of this paper. However, I am indebted to the scholars who have elaborated the issues and whose knowledge provided a springboard for my analysis. For instance, Devon Peña in *Chicano Culture, Ecology, Politics: Subversive Kin* and Laura Pulido in *Environmentalism and Economic Justice: Two Chicano Struggles in the Southwest*, identify a land ethic and traditional ecological knowledge that are endemic to cultures of Mexican origin that form the basis of contemporary Chicano environmental discourse. In his, *Mexican Americans and the Environment: Tierra y Vida*, Peña elaborates the conflicts between Chicanos in the Environmental Justice movement and the two strands of American environmentalism: the anthropocentric conservationist movement that defined nature as a commodity to be exploited and rarely acknowledged people of color and the wilderness preservation movement that ignored the fact that native cultures often viewed these "open spaces" as their home. (122-3) Gwyn Kirk, in her article, "Ecofeminism and Chicano Environmental Struggles: Bridges Across Gender and Race," indicates the "interconnections, overlappings, disjunctions and gaps between ecofeminism and Chicano environmental struggles" (177) and suggests that while ecofeminists view women's liberation as integral to a "sustainable future," they need to emphasize race and class more often in their analyses. (192) Kirk calls for collaborative activism that contributes to a "broader movement for environmental justice. [...] to create an oppositional politics in the United States that radically challenges white-dominated, patriarchal, global capitalism and includes agendas and strategies for change to bring about sustainable living" (195-6). Moraga's dramatic work embodies just such a politics and represents these sorts of coalitions among groups around social and environmental justice in and beyond the Chicano community.

Moraga reminds us that, due to first a Spanish and then a Euro-American wave of colonization, many Chicanos have been denied knowledge of their tribal affiliations and have thus been only varyingly recognized as such by American Indian tribes. "Regardless of verifiable genealogy," Moraga's drama expresses a "collective longing to return to our culture's traditional Indigenous beliefs and ways of constructing community in order to find concrete solutions for the myriad problems confronting us, from the toxic dump sites in our neighborhoods to rape" (166).

In order to represent the interconnectedness of the world from a mehicano ecological perspective, Moraga employs a network of rich imagery and metaphor that link human beings with their environment and non-human beings. Mary Pat Brady cites Norma Alarcón's term 'tropography' to discuss this aspect of Moraga's work, "The word t(r)opography indicates the interanimating relationship between places (topos) and metaphor (tropology being the study of metaphors, of words used in ways that extend past their literal meanings.) T(r)opography also incorporates geography, admitting through such wordplay the crucial battle over space (for both material control and representation) inherent to the contemporary world" (138). The dramaturge situates this tropography in time (history) as well as local making its valance of meaning even more complex.

The three plays discussed here are set in Californian towns and all based on historical and imagined Chicano environmental, social struggles. *Heroes and Saints* is based on the UFW grape boycott and protest over pesticide use in 1988; *Watsonville, Some Place Not Here* documents the Green Giant factory strike of 85-87; and *Circle in the Dirt: El Pueblo de East Palo Alto* depicts an imaginary protest around urban housing in East Palo Alto in the 90s.⁴ *Heroes and Saints*, takes place in an imaginary town, McLaughlin, (based on the real town of McFarland in the San Joaquin Valley). Moraga's set description reads:

The hundreds of miles of soil that surround the lives of Valley dwellers should not be confused with land. What was once land has become dirt, overworked dirt, overirrigated dirt, injected with deadly doses of chemicals and violated by every manner of ground- and back-breaking machinery. The people that worked the dirt do not call what was once the land their enemy. They remember what land used to be and await its second coming (91).

The second coming of the land to which Moraga alludes here can be read in the context of the play and its sequel, *Watsonville: Some place Not Here*, as a sort of territorial re-appropriation through revolutionary action or through Mexican immigration – "the re-Indianization of the state" (Moraga, 1996, vii). It can also be seen as a representation of the cyclical returns of nature, which many of the workers understand on some level. She also makes clear that the endless vineyards and orchards ought to be constantly present and "press upon the intimate life of the Valle family home" (91). This direction indicates not only the fact that the family has no way of escaping the toxic conditions that plague them, it also implies that la familia Valle cannot be separated from the valley, that by extension no one can be set apart from her environment. There are some who think they can afford to ignore the fact, like the gringo one character imagines driving by on route 99, "...it'd never occur to him that anybody lived there between those big checkerboard plots of tomatoes, strawberries, artichokes, brussels sprouts and [...] hundred of miles of grapes. He'd be headed home to his woman and TV set and sleeping kids tucked into clean sheets and he'd have a wad of bills in his pocket and he'd think he'd live forever" (114).

Though the United Farm Workers Union couldn't prove it definitively at the time, it has been established that pesticides were (and are) causing disease in the valley and the boycott continues today (Huerta 67). The event that motivated the playwright in particular was the brutal beating of Dolores Huerta during a press conference where she protested the use of pesticides. The play opens with an unforgettable spectacle: children in *calavera* masks erect a small cross in a grape field with the body of a dead child hanging silhouetted in the day's first light. Then the sun, moving above the horizon, bathes the child and the play's central character, Cerezita, in its glowing light. Cerezita is an adolescent Chicana born with a head but no body due to the pesticides to which her pregnant mother was exposed while she worked the fields. She is able to move with the help of a motorized "raite," a table-like vehicle she controls with her chin. While her visual image is startling and miraculous, even more so are her humanity and the brilliance of her mind. She is the most intellectual, courageous and

4 Some ideas dealing with the first two play are borrowed from my earlier publication entitled, "Redeeming Acts: Religious Performance and Indigenismo in Cherríe Moraga's Feminist Revision of Chicano Activist Theater." Here performance aspects and character development are discussed at length.

sensitive character in the play, a sort of visionary prophet and a poet. Cere favors indigenous values and knowledge. For instance, she is informed about traditional uses of herbs for healing and cites from memory from Rosario Castellanos' *Balun Canan*, and the Mayan texts on which the novel is based.⁵

Poison is a repeating trope in the play, not only in the ever-present effects of pesticides in the fields and the venomous waste buried under McLaughlin government subsidized housing, but also figured in the toxic relationships of the isolating patriarchal familial structure and the threat of AIDS. For instance, Mario, Cere's gay brother, is victim of both the disease and intense anger caused by his father's cheating and abandonment of his family. Amparo, a character based on Dolores Huerta, leads the protests against the pesticides, saying,

¿Qué significa que the three things in life – el aire, el agua, y la tierra – que we always had enough of, even in our pueblitos en México, ya no tenemos? Sí, parece que tenemos all that we need. In the morning the air is cool y fresco, the ground stretches for miles, and all that the ranchero puts into it grows big and bright and the water pours from our faucets sin término. Pero, todo es mentira. Look into your children's faces. They tell you the truth. They are our future. Pero no tendremos ningún futuro si seguimos siendo víctimas. (111)

The children, who see their friends and siblings dying, become active in the protests, placing the crosses in the fields under Cere's leadership. Moraga associates the McLaughlin children with animal and plant metaphors to demonstrate the connection of human beings and their environment. The images proceed from birth (inside the womb) to death and, rather than essentialize the human - non-human connection, they emphasize their common threat. From her window Cere observes, "The sheep drink the same water we do from troughs outside my window. Today it is an orange-yellow color. The mothers dip their heads into the long rusty buckets and drink and drink while their babies deform inside them. Innocent, they sleep inside the same poison water and are born broken like me, their lamb limbs curling under them." (99) Here we cannot miss the allusion to the girl as a sacrificial lamb. Echoing Amparo, Cere's brother, Mario, says the children are like canaries in mine shafts. Cere refers to herself in this way, more directly foreshadowing her own fate, saying, "...just throw a towel over my cage like the canaries. Martyrs don't survive." (125) Poetically and prophetically, Cere envisions the vineyard as a cemetery,

The trunk of each of the plants is a little gnarled body of Christ writhing in agony. [...] See how the branches look like arms with the bulging veins of suffering. Each arm intertwined with the other little crucified Christs next to it. Thousands of them in neat orderly rows of despair. [...] I see it all. A chain gang of Mexican Christs. Their grey wintered skin, their feet taking root into the trenches the machines have made. (134)

This ecological vision inspires her protest with the child crucifixions. In the final act of the play, she leads the whole community in a revolt, wearing her blue starred mantle, her *raite* decorated like an altar, Cereza invokes the Virgin of Guadalupe and speaks her apocalyptic prophesy,

Put your hand inside my wound. Inside the valley of my wound, there is a people. A miracle people... You are Guatemala, El Salvador. You are the Kuna y Tarahumara. You are the miracle people too, for like them the same blood runs through your veins. The same memory of a time when your deaths were cause for reverence and celebration, not shock and mourning... today... that red memory will spill out from inside you and flood this valley con coraje. And you will be free. Free to name this land *Madre*. Madre Tierra. Madre Sagrada. Madre. . .Libertad. The radiant red mother...rising" (148).

⁵ For a wonderful analysis of Cere's and other characters in the play, see Yvonne Yarbrow-Bejarano's "'The Miracle People': *Heroes and Saints* and Contemporary Chicano Theater" where the scholar explores the profound subversions of Chicana/o subjectivity and sexuality that are weaved in with the play's more conventional representations of community activism and situates the play among works of Moraga's contemporary peers. Yarbrow-Bejarano cites the sources that inspired Cerezita's characters: an image of a limbless child in the 1986 film *The Wrath of Grapes* and the character of Belarmino in Luis Valdez's 1964 play *The Shrunken Head of Pancho Villa*. (73)

Amidst helicopter noise and police gunfire the McFarland people burn the fields in protest. Jorge Huerta describes this final climax as an act of expiation, "cleansing through fire, just as indigenous cultures practice ritual fires to cleanse their lives and signify a new beginning" (167). Moraga's words, the "red memory" spilling over the land like blood, evoke the ancient notion of human sacrifice as a means of establishing equilibrium between nature, the gods, and humankind. The real message here, though, is a call to revolt – the people's memory will fill the valley not with blood, but with *coraje*, the rage they will need to fight the growers. Cere's idea to invoke the Virgin to unite her people is a stroke of genius since Guadalupe appeals to the Catholic believer, the secular activist who will recall her as a banner for the Mexican revolution, and the worshippers of *Tonantzin*, the Aztec fertility goddess. Throughout the play the divisions between key characters makes unified action difficult. In *Heroes and Saints*, Moraga pays homage not only to the victims of environmental racism and martyrs to corporate greed, but also to the faith, skill and courage of the diverse organizers involved in the UFW collective action of this period.

The sequel to *Heroes and Saints*, *Watsonville: Some Place Not Here*, is a fictional drama based on three historical events: the women's strikes against Green Giant cannery in Watsonville, California of 1985-87; the appearance of the Virgin of Guadalupe on the face of an oak tree in Pinto Lake County Park in 1992; and the 1989 earthquake that registered 7.1 on the Richter scale. Sequentially and thematically these two plays are parts of a whole in that Cerezita's prophetic vision and martyrdom in *Heroes and Saints* initiates a transformation in other characters that, in *Watsonville...*, sustains them and their continued social and spiritual liberation. We come to know what has happened to individuals after the riot in *Heroes and Saints* and also that the revolt brought no material change for the members of the community. Rather, their transformations are internal, intellectual and spiritual, and in their relationships to one another and to the earth. Based on *Indigenismo* - traditional values applied to contemporary needs, both plays link Catholic beliefs and practices to the Pre-Colombian past. Catholic practices of fasting and pilgrimage are recast as indigenous oppositional political action.⁶ Chicano performance of Indian memory thus becomes a decolonizing ritual, a catalyst for individual and communal social liberation.

Along with a rich topography of arboreal images, the set reflects Moraga's indigenous ecology by housing all the action of the play within a circle of oaks, which provides a sort of sacred space for transformation to occur:

... private property is the land on which [Mexican immigrants] work, represented by chain-linked and barbed wire fences and corrugated aluminum walls. Still as Mexicans of Indian descent, *el pueblo* remembers the land as belonging to no one but the earth itself. To that end, the cannery, the kitchen, the union hall, the picket line, the park, the hospital, the warehouse – in short, all the action of the play – is housed within the circle of a grove of aging oaks. The central image of the play is Dolores' altar, always candle-lit and sainted, which opens through a window to the oldest and tallest oak of the grove. Here, miracles take place. (6)

Watsonville... opens with Dolores, whose children have all either died or left home, working in a cannery with other Chicana women. A strike over working conditions lingers on over months, draining the community's already limited resources. Outside pressure in the form of a new law threatens to divide the Chicano community into those with legal working papers and those without. The law prohibits undocumented "immigrants and their children from obtaining employment, education, and social services, including non-emergency health care" (*Watsonville...* 84).⁷ Just when it looks as if the strike might fall apart, Dolores has a vision of the Virgin of Guadalupe whose image later appears on an oak tree. The vision is a conflation of recent Chicano and Pre-Hispanic imagery. The Church refuses to sanction the image and calls Dolores's vision a "personal revelation" that they interpret as a call for her to forgive her husband's cheating ways. For probably the first time, she does not accept the Church's version and interprets it instead as a call for her participation in the strike, which she had resisted since the protests depicted in *Heroes and Saints*. Dolores's vision is a sign of her developing awareness, of the channeling of her religious faith into the cause of social liberation. In *Heroes and Saints*, she is the most religious and alienated from the community. Rather than bringing her closer to her community, her religious faith kept her from fully participating in the

⁶ Please see my article mentioned earlier for a detailed interpretation of these practices.

⁷ This is a reference to California's proposition 187 that became a law through a vote on a 1994 ballot and was later found to be unconstitutional.

strike or letting her daughter do so. Now, like Juan who has shed his priest's frock, Dolores's faith is transferred from an other-worldly icon on an altar, to one anchored in her reality and to the Chicano revolutionary struggle. The vision inspires her to act; she begins a private hunger strike and enlists other women so they can make it a public protest.

The church officials refuse to authenticate the images of Our Lady of Guadalupe on the sequoia trunk because there are multiple images. (172) This claim, that there should only be one saintly image, echoes the early church's indictment of indigenous religion as pagan, principally due to its multiple gods as opposed to the "civilized" Catholic monotheism. Moraga uses this multiple characteristic, like the thousands of Christs in *Heroes and Saints*, to drive home her vision of a Chicano Movement that is more tolerant of the plurality of its community. We see one aspect of this plurality in the tension between faith and performance played out among the workers. There are many views regarding the apparition; many place prayers, photos, and candles at its base, while others feel it is a distraction to their work. Some suggest that they use the Virgin's appearance to inspire the workers, but the reverent and those non-believers who respect it cannot accept this idea. The strike negotiations create further divisiveness. The company will not stand up against the new law. The strikers argue amongst themselves and cannot seem to resolve their differences, when Dolores suggests the idea of joining with the fieldworkers in a pilgrimage to the tree, affirming their solidarity in protest of the new law. She convinces Father Juan to join by reminding him that the tree is the source, in paper, of all his political books and the Bible he totes. He recalls the Indians called the Bible 'La Piel de Dios' when they first saw it and she claims the tree bled when a woman pulled away a piece of bark from the tree - yet another trope binding human and non-human relationships linked to indigenous tradition.

Susana, a Chicana lesbian helping with the strike, sees the historical continuity the tree represents. Of it she says:

Así que this acorn is the future, a future you and I will never see. In the same way...this old tree is our history. The very acorn that birthed this tree spilled off of some momma oak the Ohlones were worshipping five hundred years ago. Do you have any idea what this place looked like when all it knew was indios? [...] Paradise, [...] true paradise. [...] There were marshes, savannah, redwood forests for days. Elk, antelope, deer, coyotes. And every kind of sea bird imaginable. You put your faith in the workers y bueno, I do, too, pero creo en algo más también. I'm praying to this old oak cuz it's the only thing that seems right to do right now. Call her Tonantzín, Guadalupe, call her whatever you want. This is as close to a God as its gets for me" (89)

Susana voices the desire for lost indigenous tradition and knowledge, ecological knowledge in particular, and a deeper sense of connection with a pre-Columbian past, before California was even Mexico, a time when the land was not over developed. The strikers agree to participate in the pilgrimage, some on their knees, others not, some with Guadalupe in their hearts, some *Tonantzín*, others in a secular revolutionary spirit. The strikers, of almost entirely indigenous descent, are performing the pilgrimage of their Pre-Colombian ancestors. When they reach the tree, Dolores addresses the massive gathering, "Plant yourself here," she says, "... Like that holy tree, *tan fuerte, tan Viejo, tan sagrado, ustedes tienen raíces* that spread all the way to México. [...] Seguimos siendo americanos whether we got papeles or not. This land is the same land as México. *Todo es América[...] una América unida*" (98). Dolores' ecological topography highlights the artificiality of borders that separate nations and peoples. By likening the community gathered to the tree, amidst such divisive times, she asserts their unity and equality as human beings and their right to a place on earth. The terrific earthquake decimates its epicenter, Watsonville, and devastates much of San Francisco, but the people gathered in the oak grove, some 10,000, are saved. Here the earth appears to respond to their protest. As Father Juan, who had lost God and finds Him in their collective act says: "I lived always in my head, separate. . . apart. But just days ago, I stood in the midst of a moving crowd and I could not be spotted apart from it. I found God, [...] in the dissolution of self. God in the disappearance of me into a we so profound, the earth shook open to embrace us" (101). *Watsonville...* celebrates the courageous self-reflection and sacrifice and the brilliant coalition building exhibited in Chicano non-violent political action that Moraga represents as models for us as we organize to resist the social and environmental threats that plague us today.

Of the three plays, Moraga's *Circle in the Dirt: El Pueblo of East Palo Alto* is the most direct in its environmental justice discourse. East Palo Alto is a struggling community located at the 'borderlands' of Palo Alto's affluent Stanford University community. The author describes it this way:

East Palo Alto consists of two-and-a-half square miles of some of the richest coastal lands in Northern California. It still contains pockets of undeveloped acreage, much of which was once used for raising chickens and small family farming. Predominantly African-American and Mexican-immigrant, with Pacific Islander, Vietnamese, Japanese and Anglo-American residents, EPA is very much the microcosm of the changing face of 21st-century California. With a history that has witnessed everything from the paradise-like conditions of its earliest Ohlone Muwekma inhabitants to the urban trauma of gang violence, EPA is a community committed to political autonomy, economic independence, and peaceful cultural co-existence. All three remain difficult to achieve. (110)

The play opens in a Buddhist temple where community members are celebrating Tet, Vietnamese New Year, a time to honor their ancestors. A Mexican woman, Señora Talamantes, enters and notes its similarity with Día de los muertos. She comments to a Vietnamese woman on the diversity of the faces in the images of the ancestors on the altar, which include a line drawing of an indigenous Muwekma, a 19th-century Californio rancher, a Spanish missionary friar, a Samoan great-grandmother, a Japanese flower-grower, and Irish-American farmer, a 60s style Black radical, a gangster, a Chicano rapper, etc. Mrs. Mai, a Vietnamese woman explains to her that all these people once lived in EPA. An empty frame is also depicted, perhaps so practitioners can contemplate their own death. Mr. Matsamuros, a Japanese flower-grower, greets them. The three of them lament the demolition scheduled for their homes in Cooley Apartments and share their stories of how they arrived in the U. S.. Mrs. Mai came through a sponsor, Talamantes came via coyote, and Matsamuros, in spite of the fact that he was born in the U. S., was placed in an internment camp during WWII.

The next scene finds other Cooley residents conversing: a 40-something, African-American, gay, man, Reginald, talking with the 'Professor', an elderly, African-American, once-Stanford Professor who is Moraga's spokesperson for returning to an indigenous holistic way of life. The two reminisce about the radical days of the civil rights movement and Black Power resistance until Gwendolyn, an elderly, African-American woman arrives and accuses them of romanticizing and "macho nostalgia" about such dangerous times. They also lament the development project. The Professor wishes for holistic development that "takes in the whole of this place...the children, the trees...the breeze in the summertime. One that has a sense of what is being lost, with every growth spurt... Why can't they build a parking lot around [those Orange trees]? Why does development always mean cutting down every living thing and pouring cement over it? [...] Balance, that's all I'm after,..." (134)

The diverse characters are often at odds, hurling their prejudices at one another, yet they muddle through their common situation of imminent displacement together. In this way, EPA can be read as a microcosm of our endangered planet. The Professor provides an ecological discourse that unites people and the earth. True to his character, the Professor runs a community garden and saves seeds. In a key scene he plants some Indian corn in a circle: "Cherokee Red, Black Aztec, Hopi Blue Corn and Navajo rainbow." He explains, "I'm planting this circle here for the American Indians. I guess you'd say because I believe they had things right. Don't abuse anything and do not take more than you are prepared to give back." (141) This gesture symbolically brings together the world's peoples of many colors and places them in the earth. Planted in a circle, no one race is more important than the other. This is a reference to the Quiché Mayan creation story, the *Popol Vuh*, where human beings are created from variously colored corn. The playwright employs agricultural imagery to drive at not only the equality and mutual destiny of diverse peoples, but also what can be learned from indigenous agricultural practices about the vital connection we must cultivate with the earth.

His action magically summons an elderly Native California woman who tells them that she is what is referred to in state legislature as a "Most Likely Descendent" of Native people from the region and thus heir to any indigenous artifacts in the area. She recounts how Stanford anthropologists showed her the hundreds of boxes of unmarked bones of her ancestors that were in a basement on campus. She says, "I been returning our story back to the earth" (161). She walks out in front of a bulldozer to place the bones in the earth and stops the demolition. This agricultural trope figures human regeneration and liberation through the farming of memory, of the ancestral story, discarded in the dusty basement of the American culture of forgetting. Everyone knows the bulldozers will return, but the Professor says, "... today, we re-planted some memory. Maybe we can use it, to try and grow ourselves a future....Nothing is supposed to last forever. One day, we'll all dissolve right back into this basis thing called earth... A circle drawn in the dirt" (164-5). With this Buddhist circle, the professor puts human beings in a more balanced relation to the earth and other living things

alluding to the indigenous and Eastern belief in the eternal return of all of life, its continual change, its seasonal, cyclical nature.

If, as philosopher Lawrence Buell claims, the environmental crisis is one of imagination ameliorated only by "finding better ways of imagining nature and humanity's relation to it," then Moraga's work and that of many Chicana/o writers will serve this cause greatly and ought to be considered integral to a canon of American environmentalist writing. (Cited in Adamson 3) Anchored in specific locals, historical moments and a Mechicano land ethic ripe with ecological knowledge, Moraga's plays refuse to essentialize or mystify indigenous ecology or nature itself as environmentalist or naturalist writings are prone to do. In these works, she highlights successful Chicano activism and indicates how we can use and adapt them to resist today's global threats. The plays are documents to Chicano history and yet they resist documenting the "bitter end" of these stories in favor of more triumphant telling, Moraga explains. The grape boycott continues, the pesticides still poisoning McFarland people through their work and water. East Palo Alto's community landmarks have been almost entirely developed. Watsonville is for the time being protected by agricultural industry's need for farmable land, but that does not guarantee "safe and affordable housing, healthcare, or environmental protection for the industry's [...] workers" (viii). Each of these plays ends in collective, and often bloody, protest. As such, we must read them as urgent calls to action, on behalf of Mother Earth and all of us who depend on her, in particular, the ever-increasing number of Native peoples who fall prey to North American greed around the globe who may hold keys to our survival.

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